

Abstracts in Alphabetical order

Jennifer Barrett

Situating the public museum: between the state and the people

Museums are highly visible institutions in social life and are increasingly justified on the basis of their relevance to society. At the centre of the debate about relevance is the notion of the 'public'. Within the museum context the term public is often used universally to mean a generalized body of people such as an audience, community and non-visitors. Implicit in the use of the term 'public' is that the museum is a democratic institution for 'the people'. Yet, it is unclear how the museum is understood as a critical sphere of public debate.

This paper examines the above problem by employing the notion of the public sphere and its historical, empirical and subsequently philosophical underpinnings, as developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* [1962] 1989. Importantly, Habermas notes that the public sphere is a critical sphere between the state and the people.

This paper considers whether the museum can effectively function as a critical sphere and argues for an understanding of the public sphere that is 'situated', rather than generalized. A better understanding of the notion of public will assist museums to engage differently with the public than museums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to become more responsive, accountable and relevant.

Biography:

Dr Jennifer Barrett is the Director of Museum Studies and co-ordinator of Dissertations, Research, The Museum Context and Artefact Studies. She has previously lectured in the School of Cultural Histories and Futures at the University of Western Sydney. Material culture, its production, understanding and display are the focus of her research and lecturing. For the past ten years, she has taught subjects that focus on the production of material culture, public culture and the concept of "the public" and its relation to space. Her teaching experience has covered areas such as Australian art and culture, the art museum, post colonial theories, Indigenous art and culture, art and community culture, urbanism and public space.

Her recent writings have considered the concept of 'public' and how it is used in discussions on public space and public culture. She has also curated exhibitions on this theme in both public and community contexts. Her Doctorate examines public space and theories of the public sphere. The empirical aspect of the research investigates the history and contemporary uses of the site of Port Jackson, Sydney. Her Masters thesis from UNSW considered the histories of community arts in cultural policy and political visual arts practice. Before pursuing an academic career, Jennifer had extensive experience as an Arts Officer in local government, and as Executive Officer of the New South Wales Community Arts Association.

Chris Blackall
Harvesting the public domain

The Research Library Group in the USA has created a networked information service named RLG Cultural Materials [<http://culturalmaterials.rig.org>]. RLG describes the service as a 'dynamic, multimedia collection of digital versions of manuscripts, photos, art, historical documents and memorabilia, and much more, brought together from around the world'. RLG Cultural Materials is undoubtedly a valuable museum resource – if only the general public could access it. RLG currently restricts access to Cultural Materials to fee-paying institutional subscribers; nevertheless, it includes programmatically 'harvested' museum resources from the public domain. In this paper I discuss the 'backdoor' commercialisation of museum resources in the public domain as exemplified by RLG Cultural Materials, and suggest how the integrity of the public domain can be protected through the widespread adoption of Creative Commons licences [<http://creativecommons.org>].

Biography:

Chris Blackall is currently a PhD candidate in the Graduate Studies Program in Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Research Program at ANU. His research topic is titled 'A new age of the book? A critical evaluation of digital scholarship in history.' This study deals with scholarly and technological implications of digital scholarship initiatives designed to overcome the problems associated with publishing traditional scholarly monographs.

Chris Blackall has also been a Senior ARC Research Associate at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research working under the direction of Professor Paul Turnbull on the South Seas Project, a web-based hypermedia companion to James Cook's first Pacific voyage (1768 – 1771).

Chris has an academic background in cultural studies, education, art history and curatorship. This background is complemented by extensive professional experience in the Australian higher education sector working as an IT and information specialist.

Edward Colless

Shock and awe: the aesthetics of 9/11

In the wake of the attacks on the US of September 11, the distinguished vanguard composer Karlheinz Stockhausen scandalised the German and international press with a triumphant remark to the effect that 9/11 was the greatest work of art ever made. Several months ago in Melbourne, a large wall text referring to Israeli settler policy was pulled down halfway through its installation in a shop-front artist run space on Flinders Street. The intervention was by order of the Melbourne City Council, who fund the space. Victorian State Premier Steve Bracks and opposition leader Robert Doyle both eagerly voiced their opinion that the offending object was definitely not a work of art and had no aesthetic privilege. On one hand an aesthetic sublimity eclipsing ethics; and on the other, an ethical and legal delimitation of aesthetic license. Not exactly novel when put that way, but if we consider the extremism implied in both arguments (and from which the proponents themselves recoil), we may be able to outline a new aesthetics of terrorism.

Biography:

Edward Colless's art criticism has been published in numerous journals, newspapers, catalogues and anthologies, within Australia and internationally. A selection of his critical writing, titled *The Error of My Ways*, was published in 1995 by the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane and was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Award. Colless has taught art history, film studies, performance and art theory in several tertiary institutions, is a filmmaker and has also worked as a theater director. He has curated a number of art exhibitions and has worked for the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. He is Head of Art History Studies at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Michael Desmond

Case History: Searching for a Sensation

In November 1999 the National Gallery of Australia announced that it had cancelled 'Sensation', the exhibition of contemporary British art, creating a sensation in its own right. The exhibition had generated considerable controversy when first shown at the Royal Academy in London and again when displayed at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York. Family life, the Catholic 'current affairs radio program devoted to Traditional and Family values' described the exhibition on 24 November 1999 as: *'having attracted controversy in both London and New York for several of its outrageous and offensive pieces. Nigerian artist Chris Ofili's "Holy Virgin Mary" features a breast made out of elephant dung. The painting of the Virgin Mary is surrounded by pictures of anuses and vaginas cut out from pornographic magazines. New York's Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has led the criticism of the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, cancelling the City's regular subsidy which totals \$7 million per annum. Giuliani has described the painting as "sick" and insisted that the City of New York has no obligation to fund material offensive to religious believers.'* While certain works in the Sensation exhibition were singled out as scandalizing public opinion, at each venue local issues spurred the public debate. In the Australian version of the Sensation controversy, there was no display of works to outrage or to defend. The idea of avoiding scandal (and the attendant implications of censorship) became just as much a provocation. This paper will examine the reasons why Australia had the scandal without the exhibition and consider the legacy of that decision.

Biography:

Michael Desmond is the Manager of Collection Development and Research at the Powerhouse Museum. Before that he worked as the Manager of the Drill Hall Gallery in Canberra and at the National Gallery of Australia as the Coordinator of International Art. He is the author of 'Leonardo da Vinci: The Codex Leicester' 2001, 'Love Hotel' 1997, 'Islands: Contemporary installation from Europe', America, Asia and Australia' 1996 (exhibition catalogue with Kate Davidson), '1968'. 1995 (exhibition catalogue with Christine Dixon) and 'European and American Paintings and Sculpture 1870 – 1970 in the Australian National Gallery' 1992 (with Michael Lloyd), as well as many articles and reviews.

Stephen Foster

Two cultures and the management of museums

Stephen Foster will explore some aspects of curatorial and managerial cultures in museums, with some suggestions about how they might converge in relation to knowledge management.

Biography:

Professor Stephen Foster has had many years experience of museums, looking from within and without. He was General Manager in charge of content development at the National Museum of Australia and currently teaches courses in Museums and Collections at the ANU.

Amareswar Galla

Is the museum public a mosaic or a fabric?

This is a timely conference relevant to the Santiago de Chile declaration of 1974 that led to re-defining the museum as an institution 'in the service of society' by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The last two decades have witnessed several experiments by museums in Australia and elsewhere to understand, accept and accommodate this 'service' orientation. The question of service 'to whom' has been dealt with sporadically in response to the imperatives of equity and access public policy evolution. However, the polarization of the museum discourse into binary oppositions has marginalized the location of the multicultural paradigm. The convergence of multiple stakeholder interests and the location of the museum as an institution of civil society have become far more critical to building livable communities, especially in the post-September 11 global environment.

The aim of this paper is to provide a critique of the continuing struggle of the museum governing structures to come to terms with their responsibility and relevance to linguistically and culturally diverse communities in Australia and elsewhere. It will also provide a review of the achievements and challenges of the past two decades. These will be contextualized within the framework of the Cross Cultural Taskforce of ICOM. The argument is that until we decolonize the museum from the discourse of binaries and accept the non-duality and holistic nature of an inclusive museum, the notion of the cross-cultural remains marginal and at best a means to reposition the establishment agenda and power relations. This begs several questions. Is the museum public a mosaic or a fabric? Does the museum reflect the profile of its constituency? What are the models to further the museum as an institution 'in the service of society'? International case studies based on the first hand knowledge of the presenter will be used to illustrate the paper.

Biography:

Professor Amareswar Galla was born and educated in India, Amar is the Director of Studies, Graduate Programs for Sustainable Heritage Development, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies and Visiting Fellow in the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University, Canberra, and the International Technical Adviser for the Implementation of Museums and Cultural Diversity Promotion at the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden. He is also the Convener of the UNESCO Pacific Asia Observatory for Cultural Diversity and Development. A Director on the Board of SBS Radio and TV in Australia until the end of 2000, Amar is also the first Australian to be elected as the President of the Asia Pacific Executive Board and the founding Chairperson of the Cross Cultural Taskforce of the International Council of Museums, Paris. Between 1985–1992 he founded and directed the National Affirmative Action program for the participation of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in museums, galleries national parks and World Heritage Areas in Australia. Between 1994 – 99, Amar was the international technical adviser to the World Commission for Culture and Development and the Stockholm Action Plan for the Inter Governmental Conference on Cultural Policies in 1998. More recently he worked with UNESCO in the establishment of World Heritage Areas as culture in development and poverty alleviation projects at Ha Long Bay and Hoi An in Vietnam and Darjeeling in India. In 2001, the Vietnamese Government and the Quang Ninh Provincial Peoples Committee awarded him the medal for outstanding service to the sustainable development of Ha Long Bay. In May 2003, he gave a keynote speech to the Stockholm+5 UNESCO Inter Governmental Meeting where he brought together global case studies dealing with culture, well-being and sustainable development focussing on poverty alleviation. A recognized champion of cultural democracy and governance in sustainable development, he has been invited as a keynote speaker at both the Universal Forum of Culture Congress on Cultural Rights and Human Development, Barcelona (August 2004) and the opening forum of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (September 2004).

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Guy Hansen

About the House: politics and history at Old Parliament House

While political history is alive and well in the academy there are very few examples of the presentation of political history in a museum context. In the United States there are a number of institutions, which deal either tangentially or directly with political history. These include the various presidential libraries and house museums associated with key political personalities. In the United Kingdom there is the Cabinet War Room in which visitors can wander through the command bunker used by the British Cabinet during World War Two. In Australia there is Old Parliament House, Canberra, which was redeveloped as a political history museum in the 1990s. From 1992 – 1997 I had the great pleasure of being the National Museum's curator of political history based in Old Parliament House. This position provided wonderful opportunities and challenges for doing political history. How the site came to be reopened to the public, and how it has developed since, provides many lessons for the public historian and curator. Its development as a museum and tourist destination charts both the limitations and possibilities of site interpretation.

Biography:

Guy Hansen is a Senior Curator in the Australian Society and Culture Program at the National Museum of Australia. He joined the Museum in 1991. Guy was part of the original interpretative team which helped reopen Old Parliament House in 1992. After working at Old Parliament House Guy became Curatorial team leader for *Nation: Symbols of Australia*, one of the permanent exhibitions at the Museum. Guy has also curated a number of major retrospectives of Australian political cartooning.

Dianne McGowan

“The greatest show on earth”. Or so it was billed. Have museums become the contemporary circus? What is the agenda of today’s museums? Who are they representing?

This paper uses the Himalayan art blockbuster ‘An Aesthetic Adventure’ held at The Art Institute of Chicago in 2003 to explore relationships between museums and the public sphere by examining the above question.

The spiritual subtext of Himalayan art continues to guarantee healthy box office receipts and positive corporate exposure. Except for the occasional anti-Chinese demonstrations, Himalayan art is not prone to *out there* controversies such as ‘Piss Christ’. But, while all may seem peaceful and sublime on the surface, the above questions expose a murky interior of commercialism, self-interest and disinformation.

Biography:

Dianne McGowan is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University. She is researching the western creation of the category ‘Tibetan art’.

Bernice Murphy

Mapplethorpe Moments: museums, controversy, rights and the public domain

This paper will address art museums (in particular) and the issues that arise around museums' presentation of controversial material in the public domain. The paper will take up a short case-study review of how the presentation of the exhibition Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1995), activated a range of issues that needed to be canvassed in preparing for the exhibition's showing in Sydney. Brief mention will be made of the controversy surrounding the opening (and precipitate closing) of the Andres Serrano exhibition in Melbourne (October 1997), some time after the Mapplethorpe presentation in Sydney. Ongoing connections between Melbourne events and reactions to the Pictura Britannica exhibition at the MCA Sydney (1997), when a small work was stolen (Tania Kovats' *Virgin in a Condom*) from an exhibition of British art, will be explored. It will be argued that no-one can securely predict public contexts or second-guess community attitudes in advance of actual events. Nevertheless museums should give thorough consideration to their position in advance of showing controversial material; furthermore they should searchingly examine issues of cultural diversity, public responsibility and audience rights, so that they may not be unnecessarily confused or weakened

Biography:

Bernice Murphy was Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, from 1979 – 1983; then Chief Curator, and finally Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, having worked on the development of Australia's only museum of contemporary art over a 14-year period. Since leaving the MCA, Sydney, she has continued to write and curate projects on contemporary art, and pursue projects with museums of various disciplines, often working outside Australia. For six years she has been Vice-President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), headquartered in Paris, and a chair/member of various ICOM specialist committees. She received the Australia Council's Visual Arts/Craft Emeritus Medal 1999, for service to museums, curatorship and contemporary visual arts in Australia; an honorary Doctor of Letters, University of New South Wales, 2004; and is currently pursuing a PhD program through the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University.

Jason Smith

Dangerous Tastes: sex, subversion and social responsibility in the art museum

Jason Smith will talk about controversies in art museum exhibitions, including the exhibition of Andres Serrano's 'Piss Christ' at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1997.

Biography:

Jason Smith has worked at the National Gallery of Victoria since 1993, and was appointed Curator of Contemporary Art in 1997. Since 1995 he has been the curator for 26 exhibition of contemporary Australian and international art including: Louise Bourgeois; Rosslynd Pigott – Suspended Breath; The 1999 and 2003 Clemenger Contemporary Art Awards; Patricia Piccinini: Sandman; Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968 – 2002 (the inaugural exhibition for the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia); Peter Booth: Huamn/Nature (the major survey of Booth's work); and World_Rush: 4 artists (the inaugural special exhibition for the reopening of NGV International). Jason Smith is a regular contributor to a range of contemporary art journals, and he is currently curator of a series of major exhibitions for the NGV's future program including retrospectives of the work of Gwyn Hanssen Piggott and Howard Arkley