"Generally Dissatisfied": Hidden Pedagogy in the Postcolonial Museum

« Généralement insatisfaits » : La pédagogie cachée du musée postcolonial

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"GENERALLY DISSATISFIED":
HIDDEN PEDAGOGY IN THE POSTCOLONIAL MUSEUM

BERNADETTE LYNCH*

Abstract

This paper argues that residues of the colonial past continue to haunt the realities of the postcolonial present deep inside even the most progressive curatorial and public engagement practices in museums. We carry legacies of resistance to change and prejudice towards others from diverse communities (including originating and diaspora) that are embedded in the bricks and mortar of the museum. Examining case studies of committed and socially engaged museum practice, the paper argues that the continuing evidence of dissatisfaction by both those on the delivery and receiving end of museum engagement and participation practices has its roots in the museum's identity as an educational institution. The paper will show that a central weakness of postcolonial museum practice lies in the centre/periphery role of museum pedagogy. Examining the lack of understanding of the "critical", in the critical pedagogy of the museum that undermines well-meaning partnerships and participation with communities near and far, the paper also argues for a thorough review of engagement practices that may fundamentally challenge the "learning" role of the museum and lead to a liberatory rather than conciliatory postcolonialism in museum practice.

Keywords: postcolonial practice; critical pedagogy; active agency; reflexivity, change

INTRODUCTION

"When was the post-colonial?" (Stuart Hall 1996)

I was recently asked the following question by a senior museum colleague from a large UK-based museum service, "How do museums nurture trust to develop a relationship of reciprocity with originating communities?" Despite the well-meaning efforts of experienced museum professionals such as this individual, it seems that developing trust between museums and any communities remains largely elusive. In the course of recent research, numerous instances can be cited that epitomise the pitfalls within genuine attempts at fostering a postcolonial practice in museums, one that is ethical, democratic, participatory and reciprocal (Chambers et al. 2014; Lynch 2010, 2011a,b,c).[1] These obstacles to genuine partnerships are inadvertently created by the institution itself and are very often invisible to those most involved.

The participatory turn in museology is best understood from within the context of the new focus on museum ethics (Marstine 2011), and preceding that, the larger movement to make museums more socially

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inclusive and responsible as well as engaged as civil society institutions (Sandell 2003, 2011). For the past few decades, through the widespread move towards establishing a "collaborative museology", museums have been attempting to open up knowledge and the participatory interpretation of their ethnographic collections through developing and maintaining relationships with communities near and far (Marstine 2011; Kreps 2009; Simon 2010; see also Conaty and Janes 2006).

Yet much participatory practice with local and originating communities has been criticised as essentially flawed, providing an illusion of participation while in reality, consensual decisions tend to be coerced, or rushed through on the basis of the institution's control of knowledge production and its dissemination, or on the basis of its institutional agenda and strategic plan, thereby manipulating a group consensus on what is inevitable, usual or expected (Graham, Mason and Nayling 2013; Lynch 2010, 2011c; Marstine 2011; Sandell 2002, 2003, 2011). Recent debates have questioned the effectiveness of participatory practice in museums, in particular, its failures to overcome institutional power (Crooke 2007; Lynch and Alberti 2009; Peers and Brown 2003). Despite well-meaning intentions, participation is not always the democratic process it sets out to be; rather, it more frequently reflects the agendas of the institution where the processes, such as the final right to edit content, are tightly controlled by the museum (Fouseki 2010; Lynch 2011a).

Of course, as Robert Chambers (coming from an international development perspective on participation) reminds us, we should not be surprised at the institutional fear of losing control that this displays, reminding us that "any professionals need the solid structures of their realities, their prisons". These structures and rules are not necessarily explicit; power is frequently expressed through the implicit understanding of "how things work" (Chambers 1997:234).

Over the past four years, on behalf of government foundations, funding agencies and arts/heritage institutions, the author has conducted action research throughout the UK, looking at the effectiveness of public engagement in museums, from the point of view of both those on the delivery and the receiving end (Lynch 2011a). The questions asked in this research were inspired by previous examples of collaboration (Lynch 2010) which found that the legacies of prejudice remained within museum/community relations. Through an examination of museum community engagement projects, this paper argues for a thorough review of engagement practices that may fundamentally challenge the "learning" role of the museum and lead to a liberatory rather than conciliatory postcolonialism in museum practice.

WHERE TO FIND A POSTCOLONIAL MUSEUM PRACTICE?

Largely influenced by Clifford's work on the "contact zone" (Clifford 1997) a postcolonial museum practice has been consciously pursued by many museums. Ruth Phillips notes for example, that the "new models of partnership and collaboration …are creating ever more opportunities for Aboriginal intervention into the traditional orientation of the Western museum" (Phillips 2005:96-97).

Yet, the contact zone is always, according to Boast, "an asymmetric space where the periphery comes to gain some small, momentary and strategic advantage, but where the centre ultimately gains…" (Boast 2011:66). Clifford had warned us in the central sections of his original contact zone essay that "Contact work in a museum thus goes beyond consultation and sensitivity, though these are very important. It becomes active collaboration and a sharing of authority" (Clifford 1997:210). Yet there has since been a misappropriation of the contact zone perspective in museums that neglects these crucial elements, as well as the central issues of conflict and resistance. For Clifford, the contact zone is a place of conflict between different and frequently unequal constituencies of interests and experiences. Furthermore, it involves recognition of implicit or explicit struggle. Clifford noted the "push and pull", emphasizing the fact that the two "sides" engaged in the "exchange" are plainly not equal (Clifford 1997).

Ruth Phillips (2007), Tony Bennett (1998), Ami Lonetree (2006), Nancy Marie Mithlo (2004) and Susan Ashley (2005) all demonstrate that the museum as contact zone continues to be used as a means of masking fundamental asymmetries, appropriations and biases. Boast concludes that the museum has to learn to let go of its resources, even of its objects, for the benefit and use of communities and agendas far beyond its knowledge and control (Boast 2011).

STORIES OF THE WORLD: A DEMOCRATIC, POSTCOLONIAL PEDAGOGY?

Museums occupy the contested terrain where postcolonialism and education intersect, a terrain in which it seems that "post-colonialism has effectively become a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category" (Rizvia et al. 2006:255). Meanwhile, pursuing a contact zone agenda, museums have recently been actively attempting to link their local participatory work with their curatorial research (and partnerships) with originating cultures around the world. Similarly, museums have been trying to create space for young people to make choices and have the freedom to conduct their own research and curate their own exhibitions.

Thus, museums are now seen to be attempting to bring these three "communities" together into a dialogue mediated by the museum: local diaspora and overseas originating communities, with young people attempting to act in a curatorial role.[2] Thus we have a three-legged stool, and a rather unsteady one at that. It quickly becomes evident that when the museum is itself unclear about the ethics and efficacy of any one of these particular practices, it makes it very difficult to mentor and support others (e.g., young people) in taking the responsibility for the consequences of such a complex and sensitive interchange.

A recent example of the "postcolonial" in action through youth engagement with contested collections and diverse communities in museums was the *Stories of the World* project, the UK's largest ever museum/youth collaboration. It was aimed to use the nation's ethnographic (world) collections to open up dialogue and participation with young people. *Stories of the World* was the museum strand of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: the Cultural Olympiad. As a national government initiative of London and regional museum partnerships, it aimed to engage young people, 14 to 24 years old, working with curators and originating communities to explore and reinterpret world cultures collections. Beginning in 2009, the three year programme culminated in a series of youth led, co-produced exhibitions across UK museums in 2012. Each regional partnership was based on a broad theme relating to the region's collections.

Thus, *Stories of the World* brought together young people acting in a curatorial role, in "consultation" and "collaboration" with local and originating communities. However, as one staff member involved in delivering the project in one part of the UK reported, there was "a power problem,"[3] so that those involved felt ill-equipped and powerless to challenge the existing museum hegemony, and the young people were sometimes left somewhat adrift.

At the end of the project (following the production of the co-produced *Stories of the World* exhibitions – a requirement of the funding), in some areas of the country, the young people engaged in the project expressed that they always felt the museum's presence in their decision making. In a deeply reflective, self-critical paper by Morse, Macpherson and Robinson (who led a *Stories of the World* project in England's northeaster museums), noted:

> Having worked through this process, we consider …the central *Stories of the World* concept
> [to have been] fatally flawed from the start, in that contact with originating communities
> for institutions which hold their heritage has to be a process based on longevity of
> contact… However, the window of opportunity to achieve this was fixed and short term
> given that it involved working with young people [and producing a "product", an exhibition

to the funder's deadline, *author's note*] we have raised a number of important questions for ourselves. First, about who participates and who takes the lead in making decisions, and fundamentally, whose participation is legitimate. (Morse, Macpherson and Robinson 2013:99)

Throughout the *Stories of the World* project, as Helen Graham put it, "what looked democratic when only thought about locally (giving control to young people) appears much less democratic when looked at in a bigger geographical and cultural frame" (Graham 2013). There was throughout a process of what Gaventa calls, "false consensus" (Gaventa 2004), the museum's sense of pedagogical responsibility not always allowing it to step away from leading the young people towards what Giroux calls "correct" thinking, thus subtly following the dictates of institutional authority (Giroux 2009).

The experience of *Stories of the World* and other recent participation projects (Lynch 2011a) raise the question: is there always a hidden pedagogy within the processes of public participation in the museum? Susan Ashley reminds us that while there has been great anxiety over the new, postcolonial role for the museum and how it functions as a place of representation, socialization and commodification (Hallam and Street 2000; Hein 2000, Karp and Levine 1991) and much has been made of how to ensure participation and inclusion with the aim of creating unbiased cultural representations and developing new, non-white, audiences (Sandell 2002), at their core, museums continue to retain the two basic competencies left over from colonial times – they collect and they exhibit (Ashley 2005:31). And as Boast importantly reminds us, they also educate – a further leftover from colonial times, and for the past decades a core goal of the new museology (Boast 2011). Meanwhile, contemporary educational practices and systems remain saturated with colonial and neo-colonial ideologies, expressed in subjugated knowledges and representational practices. (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods 2004; see also Willinsky 1998).

Yet, for the past decades, museum education took much of its inspiration from "critical pedagogy", inspired by the progressive education theories of the 1970s (e.g., Freire 1972) as taken up by educational theorists such as Henry Giroux (1988, 2001, 2009, 2011a, b, 2012; Giroux and Witkowski 2011) and museum education theorists, most notably Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1994). Museum community engagement (such as the *Stories of the World* project), emerged largely as an off-shoot of museum Learning departments, more traditionally known as "Education Departments".

But just as the complexity of Clifford's notion of the museum as contact zone may have been misunderstood and therefore misappropriated by the museum, it appears that the inspiration of Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire 1985, Freire and Faundez 1989; Freire and Macedo 1987) as applied to museums may also have been misunderstood and misapplied in terms of the entirety of its postcolonialist, democratic and "activist" message. This is nothing new – as Young reminds us – Freire's work is often appropriated and taught "without any consideration of imperialism and its cultural representation. This lacuna itself suggests the continuing ideological dissimulation of imperialism today" (Young 1990:158).

In a similar way to the museum-as-contact-zone, with its forgotten element of conflict and resistance, what appears to be lost to memory within critical pedagogical practice in museums is that it was never only a theory and a philosophy of education but was also a *praxis-oriented social movement* (emphasis added) (Shor 1992:129). Based in Marxist theory, critical pedagogy draws on radical democracy, anarchism, feminism, and other movements that strive for what they describe as social justice. Critical pedagogue Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as: "Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse" (Shor1992:129). For Giroux, critical pedagogy must always draw attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions

for the production of knowledge, values, and skills, and it illuminates how knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed within particular sets of social relations (Giroux 2011a). Philosopher John Searle characterizes the goal of Giroux's form of critical pedagogy as "to create political radicals," thus highlighting the contestable and antagonistic moral and political grounds of the ideals of citizenship and "public wisdom" (Searle 1990). Thus, while inter-cultural dialogue was, from the start, stated to be a central part of the *Stories of the World* project, the value of making contact with originating cultures was underplayed by the institutions, with some staff members voicing scepticism. This in turn influenced many of the young people to question its value: "Contacting source communities [is] challenging because the majority of their objects come from "dead" or ancient communities so we can only really talk to the descendants" (anonymous young *Stories of the World* project participant).

Meanwhile, in one of the *Stories of the World* projects in the northeast of the UK, consulting Diaspora communities also came to be seen by some of the young people to be of limited use-value: "One person felt that the group hadn't built much upon the information about the objects from the Chinese community because there was already quite a lot of information held by the museum" (anonymous young *Stories of the World* project participant).

Initially there were high expectations by many of the young people that inter-cultural dialogue would be the strength of the project (Figure 1). However, as one young person summarised their experience of attempting to work with originating and diaspora communities, "I feel disappointed that I did not manage to gain from such an experience" (anonymous young *Stories of the World* project participant).[4] The prevailing authority of the museum in this way overrode the need for much other than, at best, superficial "consultation".

Figure 1. Members of the Middlesbrough *Stories of the World* project working with Maori artist George Nuku, 2012.
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George Lukács (1923) outlined the ways in which the state and its representative organisations hegemonise in these subtle ways. This power is very often invisible to the institution and its members, particularly if there's little chance for open reflection. As Mary Louise Pratt points out to us, in the

school a classroom is a social world unified and homogenized with respect to the teacher (Pratt 1991). In the case of *Stories of the World*, the museum-as-teacher may have been out of the room but was ever present.

Is it the case that, in fact, the pedagogical impulse of the museum is preventing the genuinely democratic, reciprocal and co-productive mission of the museum from being realised within such attempts at building relations with diverse communities, near and far? With such a hidden pedagogy at play, was it simply that the young people had come to understand the currency of most interest to the museum – that of producing an end product, the co-produced exhibitions created by the young people (as mentored by museum staff), that were a requirement of the *Stories of the World* funding. Thus, in the course of working with the museum, had the young people become, what Rabinow long ago termed, "the good informant" (Rabinow 1977)?

While the *Stories of the World* project was genuinely situated within the language of radical, dialogical inclusivity, inter-cultural dialogue was plainly a weakness. Thus, the postcolonial use-value of the *Stories of the World* project in relation to any notion of active, global citizenship through a process of inter-cultural partnership and critical dialogue appears to have been lost.

ENGAGING CURATORS

"... knowledge production is imbricated with power associated with the contemporary admixture of globalization, the colonial past and the aspired-for postcolonial future." (Appadurai 1998)[5]

One group of museum professionals – ethnography curators – found themselves affronted by the questions arising from the *Stories of the World* youth project, feeling that they were more equipped to answer these questions, if only they'd been asked. The *Engaging Curators* project was developed by the UK's Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG) as a direct response to *Stories of the World* project.[6] Ethnography curators reacted with dismay to the *Stories of the World* national programme, feeling that professional curators had been excluded from the design of the national programme from the outset, and concluding that subsequent problems were a direct result of curatorial expertise not being drawn upon, including the knowledge of how to "manage intercultural relations."

MEG asked if initiatives such as *Stories of the World* inevitably result in the marginalisation of the curator's role, and challenged the implications of such a trend. MEG further used the example of *Stories of the World* to ask how museum curators might, on the one hand, deliver on their responsibility to research and display sensitive collections and subject matter, and on the other, collaborate with both originating cultures and local communities – while, as in the case of *Stories of the World*, facilitating young people taking the lead.

MEG subsequently asked the author to lead a project, *Engaging Curators*, that would learn from the *Stories of the World* experience through a series of workshops and the reviewing of selected international case-studies. The project further asked whether these individually complex elements mentioned above could be brought together comfortably and confidently in contemporary curatorial practice, and if so, by what means? And how might the museum support such an expanded curatorial role?

The aim was to share new and sustainable "ways of working" that bring together collections as well as existing and emerging museum expertise and skillsets, with people, near and far, as participants and "co-producers", while also emphasising the need for institutional recognition and support for curators'

further engagement in this type of work. The question of the museum educators/public programming staff's continuing role was left somewhat in the air.

Furthermore, based on the tensions that arose with the *Stories of the World* experience, the *Engaging Curators* project asked how museums might balance the delivery expectations of public participation agendas for specific funded projects (e.g., national initiatives, such as *Stories of the World*) with long-term, ethical, sustainable community relations which often require a longer investment of time. It asked if these elements can be compatible or do they inevitably create tensions, often between outreach/public programming, and the collections' departments of museums? Do they inevitably result in the marginalisation of the curator's role? Finally, it asked the international museum professionals and academics participating in the two *Engaging Curators* workshops, is it possible for ethnography curators to be engaged with these multiple agendas, developing an ethical practice that effectively serves all?

However, very quickly what transpired in the *Engaging Curators* workshops was the emergence of deeper questions on the ethics and efficacy of inter-cultural collaboration as a whole. MEG members and other workshop participants found themselves asking questions that went to the heart of the museum's understanding of its postcolonial practice; questions such as: What are the limits and possibilities of such a collaborative museology? How do museums face up to the complexity of these encounters, these relationships, specifically in terms of the museum's work with ethnographic collections? Who benefits from this work? And who has responsibility for these relationships?

Within the project's two national workshops, it was evident how much the language of the commitment to collaboration in museums still situates the institution at the centre, conferring suitability, or "legitimacy" on "informants" when working, in "partnership" for example, with originating or diaspora/local communities on the "shared" interpretation of collections. Once again, within the profession's internal battle for authority (in this case, inspired by *Stories of the World*), the value of shared authority and co-production with external partners/participants/communities, near and far, was subtly underplayed. Once again the institution evidently continued to be operating within a centre/periphery model, and, as one workshop participant put it, found itself "tied up in knots" (anonymous *Engaging Curators* workshop participant).

While reacting to the *Stories of the World* project by re-stating curatorial expertise, and challenging the authority given to "Learning" and "Community Outreach" colleagues to lead on such national projects, the *Engaging Curators* project inadvertently unearthed as many uncertainties in "postcolonial" practice as those of their colleagues in "Learning" and "Community Outreach"[7] (in addition to the two workshops, the *Engaging Curators* project looked at particular case studies that, it was felt, might usefully address some of these issues).

Why is it that there were so many questions left unanswered at the conclusion of both *Stories of the World* and the *Engaging Curators* projects? What is at the heart of the museum's uncertainties in relation to this work? Robert Young argues that such radical theories (e.g., collaboration and co-production) "have themselves been implicated in the long history of European colonialism and …continue to determine both the institutional conditions of knowledge as well as the terms of contemporary institutional practices" (Young 1990: viii). Collaboration, appropriateness and legitimacy are still framed from the point of view of the party in authority, as Pratt puts it, "regardless of what other parties might see themselves as doing" (Pratt 1991:38). Thus maintaining such a position of centralised authority allows the institution to continue to maintain the active agency, while those others "participating" remain the passive beneficiaries.

Some of the museum professionals attending the first *Engaging Curators* workshops suggested that the problem is that notion of "us" and "them" still exists within many institutions, and it continues to undermine the collaborative and participatory efforts of these well-meaning museums. They posed the

following questions: "Who are 'we'? – individuals? – institutions? What about thinking of the museum as part of community, or an emanation of community – not as needing to connect to 'it' " (anonymous *Engaging Curators* workshop participant).

Throughout the MEG project, one was struck by how the museum continues to define the rules of engagement. As Boast puts it, "No matter how much museum studies have argued for a pluralistic approach to interpretation and presentation, the intellectual control has largely remained in the hands of the museum" (Boast 2011:60). In spite of itself, from the comforting perspective of the colonizing gaze, the museum's perspective is largely "panoptic and thus dominating" (JanMohamed 1992:10). Perhaps we in museums have to, to borrow from Borsa, take leave of the cultural, theoretical, and ideological borders that enclose us within the safety of "those places and spaces we inherit and occupy, which frame our lives in very specific and concrete ways" (Borsa 1990:36).

CONCLUSION – MUSEUM "CONSCIENTIZATION" AND POSTCOLONIAL STRUGGLE

"We are always negotiating with compromised language." (Clifford 2013)

Postcolonialism is about negotiating the immense challenges of cultural translation in a world changed by struggle and which it is to be hoped, may be further transformed. Postcolonialism cannot be divorced from postcolonial politics that looks to bring about global justice. It is about empowerment rather than exploitation, through sustainable social change developed from local knowledge systems and resources (see Young 2003). In museums, there is thus a need for a more liberatory rather than conciliatory postcolonialism. As these examples have shown, there is also an urgent need for a thorough review of what postcolonial practice actually means in the museum, so that, in our well-meaning practice, as one curator put it, "At least we may not do harm."[8]

Such a review necessarily challenges the notion of curatorship as encompassing a wider range of social and cultural responsibilities, in which "partnerships" are central in negotiating what is often difficult, complex terrain. It also means that within the museum's learning and public engagement strategies, we must revisit notions of the pedagogical to reinvent traditions not within the discourse of submission, reverence, and repetition, but "as transformation and critique" (Borsa 1990:36). If the museum is to consider what change it is trying to effect in society, spaces for self-critique must be established in museums, including open analysis of the museum's own methods.

A such example of this is the work of Adriana Muñoz at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, an institution well known for its collaborative practices, which shows how, despite the postcolonial rhetoric, even the more progressive museum can inadvertently replicate discriminatory ways of operating with regards to collections, as was evident with the many "progressive" museums involved in the *Stories of the World* project. The Museum of World Culture's project's title was "The State of Things" and built upon a previous project called "The Power of Labelling", where categorization of objects and people was examined (Muñoz 2009). "The Power of Labelling" started at the Museum of World Culture in connection with a request for repatriation from the Bolivian Government in 2007. Muñoz explains:

> The dialogue between the museum, the Bolivian embassy and the Bolivian government was not satisfactory… After a couple of years, however, the claim for the repatriation of objects is no more in existence. We can only speculate about what happened, but something that could be observed during the period of dialogue was the patronizing attitude in the dialogue.[9]

They began to understand that there is an extremely close relationship between ethnography and social exclusion, not only in the past but also in the present. As Muñoz put it, "we started to see that categories and exclusion are reproduced daily in our bodily museological practice… It is easier to continue reproducing categorizations and exclusions through our practices than we are aware of."[10]

The follow-up project, "The State of Things" was funded by the Swedish Art Council, and aimed to study these practices embedded within the museum's work; as Muñoz put it, "examining the construction and reproduction of museological practices … to see how we can be conscious about our practices when challenged with implementing new practices, and how changing practices is a long, sometimes painful, however enriching process."[11] Muñoz adds, "The project opened the possibility of having a new form of dialogue with partners outside Sweden. However the biggest surprise was in observing how, after a couple of days, the place, the people, and the atmosphere opened up the possibility to share the most intimate feelings among all of us. It was confirmation that changing clinical practices is possible in museums..."[12]

Theirs is a fascinating challenge not only to the language but to the habits of the museum that can so often undermine the museum's sincere commitment to collaboration (see other interesting examples in the MEG project that are also trying to come to terms with some of these issues, both with local communities in the UK and with indigenous communities elsewhere). Like Gothenburg, the *Yesterday's Knowledge, Tomorrow's Future. Learning from the Elders'* project at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden is thinking about how to shift their collaborative projects from simply running alongside mainstream museum work, so that they become integral to the museum's conscious working practices – challenging and possibly changing them.

The public participation and intercultural dialogue practice discussed in this paper point to the need for more institutional reflection and awareness of the effects of our working practices, with the development of (as in the Swedish example above) a conscious, and ethical, praxis, that focuses on how best to make use of world collections for a changing world – a world in which the museum itself may have to change. The overwhelming conclusion was that even with the best of intentions, the museum creates its own obstacles to the work of public engagement and participation. A radical transparency is recommended (Marstine 2011) and that the development of a fundamentally reflective practice be embedded within and across the museum (Lynch 2010, 2011b, 2013).

As Laura van Broekhoven from the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden puts it, "to be successful, co-creative knowledge production should be an institutionalized praxis… We [will] just have to try, fail quickly, evaluate...".[13] This means problematizing a politics of museum community engagement and curatorial practices that continue to be situated within Western institutional power and privilege, and developing a process of what Freire refers to as "conscientization" allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions within the museum's own practice (Freire 1972).

It means constantly asking, as museum professionals, how the ideological weight of occupying such a privileged position influences our reading of critical pedagogy/postcolonial practice. It means holding up to critical scrutiny our own complicity in producing and maintaining specific injustices, practices, and forms of oppression that deeply inscribe the legacy and heritage of colonialism. It means consciously creating a space in which those dominant social relations, ideologies, and practices that make us immune to the (sometimes protesting) voice of the other might finally be effectively challenged and overcome (see Figure 2 – this Occupy London sign is evocative of the general dissatisfaction expressed with state institutions, such as museums, in this context). There is urgency for museums to develop an ability to face up to such dissatisfaction, as part of an honest, reflective, open practice in order which they can more effectively deliver on their social responsibilities as global, public institutions.
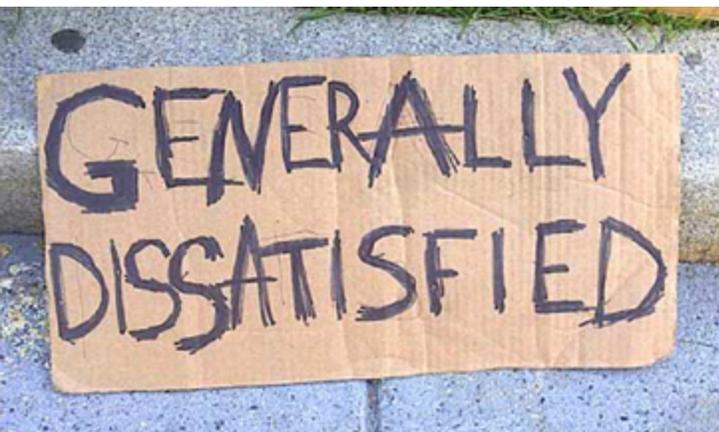
Figure 2. Hand-made sign for Occupy London protest, 2012.
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Such an ongoing reflective process must help the museum face up to its global, social responsibility right across the museum institution. This requires a thorough review not only of curatorial responsibilities in this regard, but of the museum's "educational" processes, with a necessary re-emphasis on the "critical" within the pedagogical throughout the museum's work with the public. Critical pedagogy aims to reconfigure education as a form of social activism, emphasising the partiality of all knowledge claims and the validity of different voices and viewpoints, entirely of relevance to all museum learning and public engagement processes. Museum education can thus be conceptualised as a cultural practice that attempts to empower and to interrogate taken for granted aspects of society as a step toward creating more just and egalitarian democratic communities – a suitable task for curators and learning / public engagement staff to work on together. To achieve this, the museum's pedagogical impulse must be radically interrogated, not to dismiss its pedagogical role but to re-invest in the "critical" nature of that role so that the museum can help fulfil its civil society promise. Thus, rather than presenting a continuing obstacle to change, the museum can help others to make change happen.

Recently James Clifford (2013) noted in person, that the museum's main role is in understanding how people get along with each other in the world. "This work is precious," he declared, "…and if we don't do it, who will?"

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NOTES

1 The hyphenated version of the word, "post-colonial", is the older of the two spellings, the prefix literally referring to the period after colonialism (Tilley et al. 2006). Postcolonial (i.e., without hyphen) signals "an endeavour to go beyond colonialism" (van Dommelen 2006:104). Postcolonialism is a field of academic study that takes for its object the European colonisation of much of the world and how colonial encounters – and their legacies – were experienced by the colonised and may still be experienced by the formerly colonised. A critical aspect of postcolonial scholarship and literature is the examination of the theoretical and intellectual underpinnings of the colonial project, which were often derived from racist ideas. The central argument of postcolonialism is that the effects of colonialism and imperialism are still being felt today among those countries that were colonised. Postcolonial theory is most often used "as a critical idiom; through which to analyse discursively the continuing legacy of European imperialism and colonialism and to uncover the oppositional discourses of those who have struggled against its lingering effects" (Tikly 2004:173). Hickling-Hudson et al. (2004:290) describe the postcolonial perspective as one which is "concerned with how cultures have been influenced by the legacies of colonialism, the culture wars that result from challenges being made to those legacies and the difficulties and ambivalence involved in change".

2 In the north east region of the UK (the particular area of the author's study) all of these elements were attempted by the partnership of three museums (Captain Cooke Museum, Middlesbrough; Oriental Museum, Durham and the Hancock Museum, Newcastle). Together they developed a programme funded by the HLF for the *Stories of the World* national programme which they called "Journeys of Discovery": http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/geisha/assets/files/Journeys%20of%20Discovery%20evaluation.pdf

3 These comments were made by staff members and young participants who chose to remain anonymous.

4 There was a sense that this "source" should be available to the young people at the other end of a telephone line. There remained a danger throughout of treating "originating communities," (a much better term than "source communities," for obvious reasons) as exploitable data banks, and rather disappointing ones at that.

5 Arjun Appadurai (1998), quoted in Fazal et al. 2006:257.

6   See MEG Website: http://www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk

7   This term itself of course reveals a centre-periphery model. "Public Engagement and Participation" as a title has replaced this in many museums.

8   Anonymous curator's comment made to author at a large London museum in process of researching the Hamlyn study (see also Lynch 2010).

9   Adriana Muñoz is here quoted in a statement on *The State of Things* project for the international Case Studies collected by MEG's *Engaging Curators* project. This and other case studies to be outlined as part of the outcome of the *Engaging Curators* project on the MEG website in spring 2014. Forthcoming on MEG website: http://www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk. For further information on *The State of Things* project, see https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/research-collections/research/published-research/the-state-of-things/

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 From an interview with Laura van Broekhoven at the MEG *Engaging Curators* workshop in Newcastle, June 2013.

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