

## Community-Based Museum Ecologies: Public Doors and Windows and *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* ('The New Patrons')

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### Abstract

A growing number of artist-led initiatives and para-institutional organizations are creating community-based projects that signal the emergence of alternative museum ecologies. This article will examine two initiatives, Public Doors and Windows (PDW) and *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* (NC) ('The New Patrons') that reflect a diverse range of practices that contribute to, or create, museum ecologies outside the physical and conceptual spaces of museums. These museum ecologies also contribute to discourses on the participatory museum and intersect with experiments in community engagement and social practice. Although they may have distinct conceptual points of departure, the diverse institutional platforms and initiatives of PDW and NC demonstrate the ways in which emerging museum ecologies are challenging museums to rethink their relations to communities.

**Key words:** museum ecologies, museums and social practice, community-based art, *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires*, Public Doors and Windows

### Overview

Museums have been seeking new models and platforms for community engagement and participation, not only in order to sustain funding (by demonstrating their value to the public), but also to establish new collaborations that more fully empower communities (Simon 2010; Boast 2011; Lynch 2013; Message 2015; Barrett 2015).<sup>1</sup> This article will argue that a growing number of community-based projects are creating museum ecologies that might inform relations between museums and communities by creating and negotiating a commons for dialogue and social practice. Artist-led initiatives and para-institutional organizations such as Public Doors and Windows (PDW) and *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* (NC) ('The New Patrons') have facilitated a range of emerging museum ecologies outside the physical and conceptual spaces of museums. These initiatives reflect the ongoing deterritorialization of museums and a temporal recalibration in the production of artworks, exhibitions, and displays, e.g., as forms of 'durational public art' (O'Neill 2017; Smith 2012).

I will argue that *alternative* museum ecologies are realized outside the conceptual and physical spaces of museums in contradistinction to ecologies within museums. These alternative museum ecologies are shaped through relational, processual, performative, and para-curatorial practices and strategies that are mobilized in order to create a collaborative space (conceptual and physical) in which art and socio-cultural projects unfold. While museums may also enact processes that create ecologies within museums (e.g., by curating, commissioning, mediating, exhibiting, and engaging visitors), PDW and NC are indicative of a range of emerging ecologies that reimagine these processes and relations beyond the museum rather than only shifting them or expanding them from the institutional site of the museum.

Para-curatorial experiments (O'Neill 2017) in co-curating and co-creation that foster exchanges of knowledge, expertise, and experience are particularly significant aspects of museum ecologies. Hans Ulrich Obrist has observed that, 'the curator has to build bridges between artists, publics, institutions, and other types of communities. The crux of this work is building temporary communities, by connecting different people and practices and causing the conditions for triggering sparks between them' (George 2015: 11). PDW and NC have become mediators who connect communities and artists, create these 'sparks between them', and empower community voices and interests. Yet, their projects also go beyond para-curatorial

practices by embracing multiple levels of collaboration that position communities as agents who generate ideas, initiate new community-based projects, and participate in their development and realization.

PDW and NC do not define notions of community at the outset of their projects. They emerge during collaborative, para-curatorial processes as communities articulate their own sense of community and then negotiate their projects. 'Community' is context- and site-specific, i.e., reflecting a sense of shared communal identity, relations, and spaces, as well as a shared process of reimagining those spaces. Thus, PDW and NC facilitate a sense of collective agency that is actualized through the community-based projects. This perspective intersects with the notion of a community museum 'as a tool for the construction of collective subjects; communities may *appropriate* the museum to enrich their relations, to develop awareness of their history, to foster reflection and critical analysis and to create projects to transform their collective future' (Ocampo and Lersch 2013: 122, [emphasis added]).

While PDW and NC reflect a shared vision of empowering communities, there are also critical distinctions in their processes, practices, and strategies, as the discussion of their respective projects will demonstrate. PDW is indicative of many *artist-led* collaboratives that work independently or collectively with communities. In contrast, NC is a *para-institutional* organization that provides a framework and protocol for community-based projects that are negotiated in dialogue with curators, artists, and other agents, and are subsequently realized by artists, but are not artist-led or initiated. There are also differences in their scale and organizational forms. PDW is a small artist-led collaborative, while NC is an umbrella organization that has facilitated a different group of collaborators for each project, now numbering over 300.

After introducing PDW and NC, I will situate them within the context of artist-led initiatives, para-institutional organizations, and collaborative experiments in social practice. I will then explore the extent to which alternative museum ecologies intersect with existing notions of museum ecologies inside museums, and related discourses in museum studies, before turning to a discussion of specific projects by PDW and NC. In a concluding section, I will briefly discuss how museum ecologies might contribute to rethinking the relations between museums and communities in terms of a commons.

Public Doors and Windows (Molly Sherman, Harrell Fletcher, and Nolan Calisch) is an artist-led initiative that, in part, emerged from projects and collaborations in the Art and Social Practice program that Fletcher launched at Portland State University (PSU), Portland, Oregon in 2007. While PDW reflects the broader objectives of artist-led initiatives that aim to engage local communities, the genealogy of PDW and many of its projects have been informed by community-supported agriculture (CSA) that 'values collaboration, reciprocal relationships, and a sense of investment with the people and places where they work'.<sup>2</sup> Two projects developed by PDW underscore this sense of 'investment' that enriches and empowers communities by enabling them to reimagine their shared spaces: *Collective Museum* (at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC)) and King School Museum of Contemporary Art (KSMoCA) at the King School in Portland, Oregon.

The concept for *Collective Museum* resulted from discussions between Fletcher and Rachel Nelson (Curator and Program Manager, Institute of the Arts and Sciences (IAS), UCSC) in 2013, and subsequently with John Weber (Director of the IAS), who invited PDW to develop the project as part of an artist residency on campus. At the beginning of the residency, PDW initiated conversations with the campus community and took exploratory walks across the 2001-acre campus. The artists then invited 50 collaborators to curate a campus site that held a particular significance for them. These sites formed a *Collective Museum* for the campus, which had no existing museum. The project was launched with an exhibition (2016-2020) at UCSC and a website documents each of the curated sites.

In a collaboration with faculty and students at the King School in Portland, Oregon, Harrell Fletcher, PSU faculty member Lisa Jarrett, and students at PSU facilitated the development of KSMoCA as a contemporary art museum at this pre-K-8 public school in Northeast Portland. Members of PDW and students from PSU developed a collaborative platform for students to create their own museum, not only by learning about curating, but also by co-curating with artists, initiating their own projects and exhibitions, creating catalogues, organizing their own art fair, and participating in studio residencies.

*Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* also contributes to discourses and debates on participatory art and social practice (Hudson 2017; Nagel 2017; Thompson 2017) by prioritizing communities (rather than museums or patrons) as creative agents who initiate projects and commission artworks. As Alexander Nagel points out, the translation of *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* as 'The New Patrons' is misleading in that the historical associations with 'patronage' cannot capture the central role of local communities in all NC projects (Nagel 2017: 75). The concept of the NC was developed by François Hers in 1990 in France with the support of the Fondation de France, which operates as an 'umbrella' for approximately 690 private philanthropic foundations that fund many of the projects (Hers 2013: 17-8, 28n9). Hers' experience as an artist and administrator provided the impetus for a manifesto that evolved into 'The New Patrons Protocol'. Following the Protocol, the community takes responsibility for the commission of the artwork, agrees to participate in a process of negotiation with artists and mediators, and assumes collective responsibility for its realization in the community (Hers 2013: 19-20). Since the launch of the NC Protocol in 1991, over 300 NC projects have been commissioned throughout Europe and, more recently, in the USA and Cameroun (Mengual 2017: 13-14). In addition to a discussion of two community-based projects, I will also examine how the NC inspired the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) to adapt the Protocol as a framework for rethinking the ways in which MACBA could more fully engage communities.

### Contexts of Museum Ecologies

Museum studies has increasingly interrogated (and revisited) notions of social engagement, outreach to communities, the participatory museum, and the museum as contact zone and conflict zone (Simon 2010; Boast 2011; Lynch 2013; Message 2015; Barrett 2015).<sup>3</sup> Robin Boast problematizes the trajectory and uses of 'the museum as contact zone' in museological discourses - underscoring the systemic asymmetries of power relations between communities and museums: 'They are determined by our funding regimes, by our proscribed professional practices, and in museums, by the very roles that we fulfill - collecting documenting, and displaying....' (2011: 66). Moreover, forms of resistance and activism are also manifest in debates regarding the decolonization of museums, which has emerged as a critical issue in museum studies, art criticism, and curatorial studies (Richter and Kolb 2017). Drawing on the experience of working with migrant communities, Bernadette Lynch has suggested that museums embrace the productive potential of conflict in their approach to social justice and 'a **rights-based practice**, including people's right to *resist the museum itself* (2013: 1, 12, 15).<sup>4</sup> Although neither the PDW nor the NC represent overt resistance to museums, they do suggest alternative forms of museum making in the ways that they create museum ecologies. While research in museum studies and new museology have interrogated how museums are positioned with respect to their social relations (Message and Witcomb 2015), sociomuseology has also addressed the theoretical interventions of new museology by linking them to applied museum practices, e.g., by exposing the legacies of neocolonialism and the forces of globalization within regional contexts such as Latin America (dos Santos and Primo 2013a: 7-8).

These discourses intersect with an increasingly complex socio-cultural terrain of transborder, artist-led organizations.<sup>5</sup> Some of the frequently cited initiatives that focus on socially engaged projects include Creative Time (New York City), Casco Art Institute (CAI): Working for the Commons (Utrecht), the Raqs Media Collective (India) and the Chronus Art Center (Shanghai). The organizational and conceptual development of PDW and NC have been informed by the experiential knowledge base that their members have acquired through participation in social movements and cultural institutions. In the case of PDW, the pivotal role of the community-supported agriculture movement provided a point of departure for social practice, e.g., for the *Collective Museum* project. Hers launched the NC in response to his experience in dealing with the cultural politics of arts administration and management in France, but also in response to community-based engagement with cultural organizations such as the Fondation de France.

Many museums have developed collaborations with artist-led organizations that focus on socially engaged art and social practice, including the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, SALT Istanbul, Moderna Galeria Lubijana, Reina Sofia Madrid, MKHAAntwerp, and Queens Museum (USA). During his tenure as Director of the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima) Alistair

Hudson envisioned a 'new aesthetics that supports and empowers' the community, based on the notion of a 'useful museum'. This concept emerged from Hudson's collaborations with Tania Bruguera (Director of the Asociación de Arte Útil) and the notion of 'useful art' (*arte útil*) (Hudson 2017: 51).<sup>6</sup> Mima's vision statement for a Museum 3.0 imagines a 'useful museum' that redefines the participatory museum and community participation as *social practice*. The museum becomes a shared network in which the 'users' might be remunerated for their contribution to teaching, making, or co-creating, in a process of 'generating resources and skills [rather than] consuming them.'<sup>7</sup> Museum 3.0 focused on mobilizing individuals and communities in improving the quality of everyday life through 'projects that matter to people - housing, food, education, employment, popular culture, technology, ecology, politics, identity, religion, industry'.<sup>8</sup> Rather than prioritizing projects that commissioned or exhibited art within the context of the museum gallery, Museum 3.0 sought to realign the relations among artists, art, and communities, and how art might be reconceptualized as a process and experience that is socially useful.

### Mapping Museum Ecologies

Although the conceptual and spatial boundaries among museums, communities, and artist organizations have become increasingly fluid (Cameron 2015), museum ecologies have been defined primarily in terms of exhibitions, design, conservation, and public engagement *inside* museums. For example, Wakkary and Evernden (2005) draw on the concepts of a 'cultural ecology' in science museums (Bell 2002) and 'information ecology' in technology exhibitions (Nardi and O'Day 1999) for their research on an ambient intelligent museum guide for the *Finders and Keepers* exhibition (2000) at the Canadian Museum of Nature. They conclude 'that an ecology framework is highly appropriate for representing the complexities of activities, relationships, technologies and people connected to museums' (2005). Digital and virtual technologies that extend visitor experiences into virtual spaces, including crowdsourcing and virtual communities, may also be considered *virtual* museum ecologies (Vermeeren et al. 2018). However, the contexts of these studies focus largely on the museum as initiator and facilitator of projects, rather than ecologies outside of museums and museum networks that are instigated by cultural organizations or artist-led initiatives.

The concept of museum ecologies also intersects with ecomuseums, not only with respect to the more literal references to their representation and mediation of nature and the environment, but also with regard to their relations to heritage sites, and their engagement of visitors that extends beyond museum spaces and are 'community driven' (Davis 2007: 199). Montanari notes that the convergence of museum outreach activities and environmental issues indicates a significant shift to inclusive, community-based practices among many ecomuseums (2015: 375). However, ecomuseums intersect most clearly with the emergence of alternative museum ecologies by creating an aperture for collective self-actualization within *delimited or deterritorialized museum spaces* outside the museum. This was evident in Fletcher's art project for the San Francisco Exploratorium, *The Windows* (2013), which invited visitors to participate in walks and workshops in the countryside beyond the museum.<sup>9</sup> This performative engagement outside museum spaces suggests a conceptual and spatial *re-mapping* of the museum that encourages visitors to reimagine museum boundaries. While ecomuseums may share certain associative links with museum ecologies through the signification of 'eco' (e.g., by supporting collaborations outside the museum in parks and heritage sites), museum ecologies are not synonymous with ecomuseums, nor are they limited to a focus on the environment and nature.

As the preceding discussion indicates, this article will depart from notions of museum ecologies that emanate from or unfold within museums, while recognizing that artist-led or para-organizational initiatives such as PDW and NC may engage in strategic collaborations with museums and cultural institutions. More important, the projects developed by PDW or NC create museum ecologies that are not museum-centric in terms of their interactions with communities. They provide an aperture for a fundamental shift that de-centers the museum, most notably by including it as one potential collaborator, rather than as the initiator or organizer - or by not including it at all. This is a critical aspect that defines *alternative* museum ecologies as unfolding within a diverse range of discourses, projects, or participatory fields that are not

determined by museums. Moreover, museum ecologies do not merely shift the (curatorial) functions of 'museum-making' from inside the museum to outside. They are co-created with communities, neighborhoods, heritage sites, and across natural environments that become the locus for site-specific interventions, experiential learning, and knowledge sharing. Alternative museum ecologies also generate conceptual spaces, ideas, or projects that move *transversally*, i.e., across sites, spaces, and natural environments (e.g., in PDW's *Collective Museum* that includes 50 sites across a university campus).

As noted at the outset, the museum ecologies that are explored in this article are shaped by relational, processual, performative, and para-curatorial interactions. They are *relational* with respect to social networks of museums, artists, curators, communities, and donors. As Andrea Fraser observes, the notion of 'relational thinking' suggests that individual interactions may leave structures (and institutional) hierarchies in place rather than transforming them, whereas 'relational art' or 'relational aesthetics' indicate the ways in which social interactions and relations among individuals are foregrounded through art and expose values within a (site-specific) field.<sup>10</sup> This perspective indicates a shift from social consciousness or awareness ('relational thinking') to performative modes of art and participatory action (the production of 'relational art') that may disrupt or challenge institutional relations (e.g., of museums). PDW and NC aim to shift the relations among individuals, collectives, or institutions that commission, contribute to, facilitate, mediate, or guide projects. Many artist-led organizations, such as the Asociación de Arte Útil or Casco/CAI (noted above) seek transformative social change through active engagement in collaborative social practice that fosters forms of empowerment. This relational dimension is closely linked to *processual and performative* perspectives, i.e., the genealogies of projects and how they are implemented or enacted. Empowerment is facilitated through processes of collaborative co-curating and para-curatorial frameworks that shift authority to multiple agents (communities, artists, curators, facilitators) who *negotiate* collective projects. The performative dimension involves the *embodied enactment* of the processes of conceptualization, development, collaboration, and realization of projects, by multiple agents, that also have a durational aspect (Robinson 2017: 109), e.g., in PDW's *Collective Museum* project that involved performative dimensions of walking and mapping. Thus, the relational, processual, and performative are also inextricably bound to the places and spaces where they intervene and unfold, e.g., perceptions of a particular space and who determines how it is defined and used.

As Paul O'Neill observes, the current state of *para-curatorial* practice indicates that 'the borders between the author-producer and the participant-receiver of public art are no longer so clearly attributed. Instead, the end work is produced by fields of interaction between multiple actors and agencies with durationally specific public art praxis' (O'Neill 2017: 191). While such multiple fields of interaction also include museums as a pivotal, institutional actor, they signal transversal relations among museums and communities that play out across participatory fields rather than as independent nodes. Thus, many museums have shifted from 'monocultures', characterized by institutional functions (such as curating) that are performed largely within museums, to collaborative networks with independent curators, designers, artists, scientists, researchers, and universities that suggest more diverse voices and perspectives from 'outside' the museum (Choi and von Osten 2014: 383-4). At the same time, however, museums remain closely linked to 'outside' networks of financial support (government, foundations, sponsors, patrons) that often shape or frame their relations with communities through asymmetrical relations and hierarchies that are market-driven (Boast 2011: 66; Lord and Blankenberg 2015).

### **PDW: *Collective Museum***

The following collaborations illustrate how PDW's self-reflexive engagement with the environment has informed their projects as museum ecologies, but also indicate a process of collective learning and knowledge sharing that is grounded in communal relations to the land (and more literal associations with (natural) ecologies). In 'Cultivating a Collective Museum', John Weber and Rachel Nelson observe that PDW's experience in the organic farming movement provided a conceptual point of departure for a *Collective Museum*.<sup>11</sup> The project was based on the principle that 'The health of the land and the health of the community are ultimately of equal and intertwined concern' (Weber and Nelson 2016: 21). This perspective not only



foregrounds links across multiple ecologies such as farming, the environment, and communities (e.g., a university campus), but also the genealogy of the project that rethinks the relations among the environment, social justice, and museums. From the outset, PDW interrogated this nexus by asking:

How do the artists imagine localizing *art* to produce more equitable relationships?  
How do they promote ecological thinking in their art practice? Finally, how do they suggest this farm model might have further applications in institutional practice, particularly in the *Collective Museum* project undertaken across the UC Santa Cruz campus? (Weber and Nelson 2016: 21)

As noted above, PDW launched the project by conducting interviews and conversations with members of the campus community and exploring the natural environment of the extensive campus. PDW then identified 50 collaborators to curate a campus site that held a particular significance for them. The co-curators conceptually framed a site and developed signage, labels, displays, and interpretations (e.g., in audio/visual statements) that were also shared online and via GPS-enabled mapping. These sites collectively reimaged the campus, which had no existing museum, as a museum by installing texts, images, displays, and web links created by members of the university community at sites across campus.

PDW's experience in collective agriculture created a heightened sense of 'things that are specific to a place', e.g., crops that can only be grown in a particular region, microclimates, or wildlife (Weber and Nelson 2016: 24). PDW translated this consciousness to the *Collective Museum* project by asking each of the co-curators to interrogate the notion of site-specificity in diverse contexts across the campus and to unravel the links between objects, events, people, and spaces. For example, a sign at the Crown College Clock Tower indicates a conference room where Professor Harry Noller met with scientists to discuss the human genome project in 1985. Another sign designates the previous site of the Whole Earth Restaurant at the Quarry Plaza. On the museum website, Joel Alexander Escobedo elucidates the significance of signs and stickers on a gender-neutral bathroom door at the Cantú Queer Center in the context of campus discourse on transgender issues. Erin Gray discusses the impact of Angela Davis' activist work and writing on Gray's evolution as a scholar, including how Davis' library in their shared office space provided a source of intellectual and personal stimulation. Many other sites, such as *John Cage Mushroom Walk*, which documents Cage's mushroom-hunting excursion while visiting the campus, explicitly address an experiential and performative nexus between people and the ecology (Weber and Nelson 2016: 24).<sup>12</sup> Thus, the project went beyond transferring or facilitating the curatorial tools for 'constructing' the museum. The *Collective Museum* engaged the collaborators in a process of performative co-curating and social practice that fostered a collective ecology:

The blend of stories, idiosyncratically informative and uniquely wide-ranging, forms a collaborative voice that weaves academic and student life on campus together with the natural environment .... Social relations and environmental concerns intertwine, emphasizing the importance of thinking holistically and collaboratively - and not only between people, but also with the landscapes that sustains us (Weber and Nelson 2016: 25).

By revealing the *relational* links among the co-curators, their projects, the community, and the land, the *process* of creating and 'performing' a *Collective Museum* enabled the university community and visitors to (re-)discover connections and affinities among the sites, and the voices that they present, through a process of experiential learning. While Fletcher remarks that PDW is 'making a claim that that a museum exists within a place',<sup>13</sup> *Collective Museum* also delimits the site-specificity associated with the built environment of the museum - dispersing it across 50 locations on campus that individuals traverse as they visit the sites. This process reflects a productive tension between the museum's site-specific events, artefacts, and voices, and their relations to other sites, creating micro-ecologies within the overarching ecology of the *Collective Museum*.

PDW initially explored, and became acquainted with, the campus and the community through a series of cross-campus walks. The project was subsequently launched with a durational

walk to all 50 sites that included presentations by many of the co-curators who discussed the significance of their site (PDW 2016: 13). O'Neill describes the durational dimensions of para-curatorial collaborations, time-based art, and participatory projects as 'doing time together', which also signals the potential for collective social practice as a significant aspect of museum ecologies (2017: 197). Walking becomes an artistic, participatory, and performative process that indicates a relational nexus among individuals, communities, environments, and the land (O'Rourke 2013). In discussing the project, James Clifford (a faculty member at UCSC) refers to the experience of non-linear walking, 'as a kind of de-flattening, or roughing, [that] multiplies the perspectives possible within the institutionalized campus structure' (PDW 2016: 12).<sup>14</sup> Clifford frames the processual and performative dimensions of walking as constitutive aspects of ecologies that make individual and collective relations to the land more visible:

It's interesting to relate your project and this kind of topological or topographic thinking to the notion of ecology. In the modern sense, ecology is historicized, not about some kind of pre-given natural environment, but about the way that different populations, animal, vegetable, coexist in a changing site full of invasions, parasitic relationships of dependency, etc. What Gregory Bateson, who had his Santa Cruz moment in the mid-seventies, might call an 'ecology of mind': thinking relationally about humans, animals, plants, geologies... (PDW 2016: 13).

Thus, *Collective Museum* not only creates a 'place-based' social ecology for collective knowledge sharing (that is frequently associated with universities), it gives voice to a community of participants who individually and collectively mobilize their communal agency as a form of social practice that foregrounds a heightened consciousness of the land (Weber and Nelson 2016: 25; PDW 2016: 11-12). In doing so, the participants shift from co-curators to curator-practitioners who co-construct an experimental museum ecology that shifts perceptions and create knowledge about the spaces that communities inhabit and traverse.

### PDW: King School Museum of Contemporary Art (KSMoCA)

Like the *Collective Museum*, the early stages of the collaborative process at the King School in Portland, Oregon involved listening to the community. Teachers and students were engaged in a dialogue about their interest in art and started thinking about the school's relation to art and artists. Unlike previous museum outreach programs for Portland schools that offered occasional class visits to the museums, PDW developed a collaborative platform for students to create their own museum. The emergence of the KSMoCA occurred in multiple, processual and performative modes that included curatorial work and direct engagement with artists, who lent their work for exhibitions at the KSMoCA:

Students at the school learn through experience about museum practice and careers as they are facilitated through the roles of curators, installers, publicists, copywriters, registrars and docents. KSMoCAre-imagines the way museums, public schools, and universities shape people, culture, and perspectives by cultivating a space for art to educate within and beyond the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

The first project with the King School was an exhibition of images by Magnum photographers, *Postcards From America* (2011), which Fletcher and his students and colleagues at Portland State University facilitated.<sup>16</sup> The collection included photos from Portland and other cities, which were made available to the students who curated their own exhibition. The students selected the images, composed the labels, developed their own interpretation of the photos, and served as docents. KSMoCA then expanded and developed subsequent collaborations with other artists. For example, in the KSMoCA Artist Mentorship program an artist mentor works one hour each week with a student 'in an open studio, that is designed to foster, model, and support the development of individual creative practice'.<sup>17</sup> Another project, *Let's Go Inside the Paper to Go Inside the Museum*, asked students to imagine and illustrate ideas for a museum, which were presented on posters and displayed at the school and in the local community as part of a neighborhood public art project.<sup>18</sup> Students also produced a catalog for an exhibition, *Introduction to Galactic Alienology* (2017), with artists Carson Ellis and Hank Meloy.<sup>19</sup> For the

first KSMoCA International Art Fair in 2017, a group of students received training on commercial art fairs in order to organize their own international art fair. Seventeen international exhibitors were paired with students, who worked as gallerists and curatorial and sales assistants.<sup>20</sup> These projects indicate that the KSMoCA has developed its own community-based museum ecology that has not only empowered students to engage more directly with artists and art, as curator-practitioners, but also empowered them to shape their own museum and imagine what it might become in the future.

The museum ecologies facilitated by PDW intersect with Édouard Glissant's vision of his own museum as an archipelago. Such a museum would become a laboratory for investigating networks and creating dialogues across communities and traditions: 'the idea [of a museum] today is to bring the world into contact with the world, to bring some of the world's places into contact with other of the world's places... We must multiply the number of worlds inside museums' (Obirst and Glissant 2017: 109-10). The sites that constitute the *Collective Museum* and KSMoCA (e.g., exhibitions, curating, and studio work) might also be imagined as archipelagos. Like archipelagos, they provide *sheltered territories or spaces* (e.g., within the environment of the university or school - both as campuses and communities) while also linking to other cultural spaces, neighborhoods, and collectives, much like a chain of islands. At KSMoCA the notion of sheltering suggests a 'safe space' for conversations about art, culture, and community.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on Glissant's notion of the archipelago, Anna-Sophie Springer points to contemporary para-curatorial practices as spatial and conceptual cartographies and forms of re-mapping (2013). *Collective Museum* and KSMoCA not only engage communities in developing cartographies of their own spaces, but also make their collective projects visible to other communities. The KSMoCA project enables students to chart the relations of the people in the school (students, teachers, and staff) to art and life, through the process of curating. This curatorial work creates an aperture for exploring new narratives that may also ask students to reflect upon their own relation to worlds that are imagined in art, be it the cityscapes in *Postcards From America* or the imagined territories of *Galactic Alienology*. In KSMoCA students navigate the 'geographies' of art and the art world through a process of learning, mediating, and discovery that connects their own lives and communities.

### Les Nouveaux Commanditaires

As noted above, the NC Protocol provides a map for the commissioning an artwork or cultural project that realigns the relations among communities, artists, and cultural institutions by defining the roles of the participants, i.e., communities, mediators, artists, researchers, and local politicians. Rather than museums or patrons commissioning art *for communities*, the NC Protocol inverts traditional processes and practices by empowering communities to generate concepts for art *from the community*. NC projects can originate from individuals or communities who have an idea or express a specific need for a work and 'it is up to the person in question to understand and to state a reason for which art is meant to be and for the investment of the collectivity in the artwork'.<sup>22</sup> The community is matched with a mediator, based on the NC's extensive network of contacts, who also constitute an International Society of Nouveaux Commanditaires. The mediators perform a para-curatorial role by identifying a potential artist, making introductions, clarifying expectations and technical requirements, fostering a dialogue, and mediating subsequent negotiations between the artist and the community. The mediator is also tasked with identifying public and private funding sources and developing a proposal for the project.

The NC Protocol and process not only require that the 'New Patrons' and their community learn about the production of art and the art world, but also that the artists respond to the vision of the community, as they negotiate their shared responsibility. The process of negotiation may lead to an artwork or outcome that may be significantly different than what the community or artist initially envisioned. Moreover, the NC Protocol shifts the process for initiating an artwork from cultural institutions (and patrons, governments, or sponsors) to communities. In this regard, Nagel observes:

Rather than beginning with the idea of what might be beneficial to society and then trying to introduce that idea into the world, the social and political operativity



of the NC inheres in the structure of the protocol itself, which makes it necessary for all parties to operate outside their normal zones of practice, and as a result opens up a new space of dialogue between art and the wider world (2017: 75-76).

The NC welcomes a wide range of ideas, including those that expand traditional perceptions of the artwork (e.g., an installation on botanical medicine in a hospital, silk-screen flags that mediate the role of sports at a university, or the *Curtain of Rain* installed at a nineteenth century washhouse in France). The projects begin as rough concepts or proposals and then take shape as the Protocol proceeds and the work is created through a collaborative process of negotiation and mediation between the community and artists. The following examples illustrate the range of approaches that have been facilitated by NC.

A commission proposed by Thomas Dardar, Principal Chief of the United Houma Nation (UHN) in Terrebonne, Louisiana (USA) started in 2014 with a sketch of a bayou crawfish (the Nation's emblem), as a design for a new building which would house an immersion school, museum, and cultural center (in the shape of a crawfish). The center was intended to preserve and revitalize the community's culture and language (French Mobilian Choctaw) (Mengual 2017: 11-12) and provide a locus for cultural events. Working only with the crawfish sketch and the background information on the UHN's vision, NC mediator Sophie Claudel contacted artist-architect Rudy Ricciotti who enthusiastically embraced the concept and the project, which was announced in 2016. In addition to support from the Fondation de France and the United Houma Nation, Claudel was able to garner funding for *L'Crevisse - United Houma Nation Cultural Center* from the French Embassy in the United States, the Consulate General of France in Louisiana, as well as other donors.<sup>23</sup> However, this support marked only the beginning of an ongoing funding process to raise \$20 million for the building.<sup>24</sup> While the NC mediators provide assistance in identifying potential funders, *L'Crevisse* underscores the economic challenges that some communities may encounter in securing funding for larger projects. NC projects require a collective commitment to the project and community mobilization at the grassroots level that literally involves 'buy in'. This commitment may also be seen, longer term, as a form of community ownership. The developmental phase represents an aesthetic and social process that shapes the project by building community-mobilization activities in support of collective ownership, i.e., these activities become a conceptual dimension of an artwork or cultural project. *L'Crevisse* indicates that notions of community ownership are also inextricably linked to the challenges of economic empowerment. The lack of community-based capital resources is particularly acute for communities that have limited access to significant government or corporate funding, or that work outside the existing funding models of local cultural institutions.

The public reception of NC projects and their uses often shift perceptions of the site, as they become durational artworks. One frequently cited example is Xavier Veilhan's sculpture *Le monstre* (*The Monster*, 2004), located in the city center of Tours, France. The project began with shopkeepers in Tours who were interested in how they might bring an art project into the old city center. The negotiation with Veilhan resulted in a work that initially shocked some residents. The polyurethane sculpture resembles an abstract comic-book action figure (16 x 15 x 11 feet) that has been described as 'both endearing and mysterious, protective and threatening'.<sup>25</sup> While *The Monster* was subsequently embraced by the city, the work may have gradually lost its initial impact that challenged the community to consider how it related to the city (Nagel 2017: 76; Groys 2017: 189). One example of this appropriation is highlighted on a tourism website, which describes how 'some students came up with a "street knitting" project where they dressed the monster up in a g-string and tie, hand-knitted by some retirement home residents no less!'<sup>26</sup> As the NC concludes, '*The Monster* has now been part and parcel of the life of the Place du Grand Marché in Tours for ten years. People like it, or they don't like it, but it is much talked about, people write about it, people take photos of it, and the square is even sometimes called "La Place du Monstre"'.<sup>27</sup> Here, Nagel suggests that the work 'isn't a sculpture but a node of civic discussion that it both generates and inhabits' (2017: 76).

Boris Groys offers an assessment and critique of NC projects, by shifting the perspective of 'useful art' from notions of community empowerment back to the artwork itself, i.e., as a 'participant' that usefully contributes to the life of the community. Here, the artwork can become a metaphorical seismograph that registers and reflects changes in the life of the community:

Indeed the artworks commissioned by the community are not protected by the museum walls and not isolated from everyday use. They are used, exposed to the weather, delivered to the destructive flow of time. Thus, the new artworks share the common fate of all the other things that surround the community and are used by it. And they also share [the] fate of the members of this community - their slow aging and death. In this sense, one can really speak here about participation - not only about the participation of the public in the creation of the new artworks but, rather, about the participation of these artworks in the fate of the community, as determined by the flow of time (2017: 189).

Groys' reference to the participation of the artwork in the community outside the 'protected' space of the museum is noteworthy. The status of the artwork in the community not only destabilizes notions of ownership (i.e., it is commissioned and 'owned' by the collective), but also foregrounds an element of risk, i.e., regarding how the artwork will be used, preserved, re-purposed, or abandoned. The processes of decay, forces of nature, and urban development (including gentrification) all relate to community-based museum ecologies that acknowledge links to human and non-human agents and tensions between preservation and decay (DeSilvey 2017). To the extent that artworks become dually inscribed and signified as 'art' and 'community', they may also register these tensions and become sites of contestation and appropriation (e.g. as sites for political activism, protest, or cultural tourism).

Although museums are not identified in the NC Protocol as performing specific roles in the mediation, commission, or display of community artworks, Hers has addressed their potential for participating in NC projects. Hers calls on museums to 'concretize the initiative of citizens', not only by conceptually 'step[ing] outside their buildings', but also by recognizing that the functions of preservation and mediation cannot be fully realized without the participation and engagement of the community, and by acknowledging that their collections ultimately 'belong[s] to the collectivity that financed and received them' (2016: 45-6). While museums have not been major participants in NC projects, the NC Protocol intersects with recent discourses on the participatory museum, community engagement, and social practice (as noted above). The following discussion outlines how the NC project may inspire museums to rethink their community-based projects.

In 2014, administrators and curators at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) initiated internal discussions on how they might adapt the NC methodologies and the Protocol to the specific context of MACBA. Bartomeu Mari (Director) and Beatriz Preciado (Research Director) noted several factors that inspired them to consider the relevance of the NC in the context of the museum. These challenges included reductions in state funding of 30 per cent, a desire to rethink MACBA's relations with the community surrounding the museum, and the recent addition of several properties adjacent to the museum (including a former convent and a chapel). These new additions shifted the visual center of the museum and incited the staff to consider how these buildings might relate to the museum, but also how they could create new spaces for potential interactions with the public and the community outside the museum.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than addressing community engagement 'as something secondary' after the conceptual plan for an exhibition or project was fully formed, MACBA realized that the administrative distinctions between exhibition operations and public outreach activities could be eliminated in order to situate the community as a participant in developing new exhibitions and projects from the outset. As Preciado observed, 'Today, if we start thinking of the museum as a place of production of the collective knowledge, as a meeting place, as a machine for rethinking the future, to transform the society, then we can absolutely not think of the relationship between exhibitions and public programs as a hierarchical relationship'.<sup>29</sup> As a result, they decided that the director of exhibitions and the director of public programs would 'form a research team in which we would work transversally in the production of critical spaces that go across exhibitions as well as across public programs and even independent programs [or] that sometimes will go beyond the museum'.<sup>30</sup> The NC Protocol represented a transformational shift that would renegotiate relations within and outside MACBA: 'The challenge is to change the behavior of the museum in its interactions with the public, with its users and with its surrounding communities and this through artworks which will be part of the common heritage'.<sup>31</sup> Although

Mari was unable to implement the NC methodology during his tenure at MACBA, this vision should be considered within the context of MACBA's experiments in realigning the museum's relations to the public (Mahony 2016: 234-5). Moreover, it suggests that some museums are recognizing that they can rethink the ways in which they approach their relations to communities by embracing processes (such as the NC Protocol) that de-center the museum.

### Museum Ecologies: Working Toward A Commons?

This article has discussed several museum ecologies that have emerged from community-based collaborations and collectives. PDW creates conceptual platforms that deterritorialize the museum, while also developing place-based collaborations with communities that are often linked to the land, e.g., the *Collective Museum*. Like PDW, many of the NC projects also involve community-based, para-curatorial interactions and mediations that foster or facilitate museum ecologies. The emergence of alternative museum ecologies in the NC is perhaps most pronounced in the implementation of the NC Protocol that *(re)negotiates* the creative process and relations among communities, mediators (e.g., curators), artists, and (potentially) museums. Hers has invited museums to embrace the NC Protocol as an alternative to museum-centric practices. MACBA, mima (Museum 3.0), and other museums noted above, have taken steps in this direction by acknowledging and attempting to address the asymmetrical relations between museums and communities, which have become a significant focus of curatorial and museum studies (Boast 2011; Lynch 2013; Message 2015; Richter and Kolb 2017). However, approaches that either emanate from museums (and seek to engage communities) or begin with community-based projects (and include museums as collaborators) appear to perpetuate a binary relationship between museums and communities. While both perspectives, or processes, have a strategic value in facilitating community-based empowerment, how might museums be positioned within alternative museum ecologies, i.e., outside museums' own conceptual or institutional frameworks? To what extent is it possible for museums to step outside their own methodologies and practices in order to reimagine their relations to communities, institutions, or agents? The museum ecologies discussed in this article do not provide definitive answers to these questions; however, they underscore ongoing shifts in how museums and their relations to communities are being reconceptualized by a wide range of participants, 'stakeholders', and collaboratives, and within the discourses of museum studies. More important, these experiments in museum ecologies provide an aperture for rethinking or situating the respective relations of these participants as *co-constitutive* agents within a commons that includes, but is not limited to, museums and communities.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri define the notion of a common(s) as a transformational force for social democracy that is based on the freedom of assembly as 'a *constitutive* right, that is, a mechanism for composing a social alternative for taking power differently, through cooperation in social production' (2017: 295). Rather than conceptualizing museums, artists, curators, and communities as separate agents, or as participatory nodes, the commons *anticipates* the development of a collective for social practice, shared ownership, and contestation that suggests alternative notions of how museums might be *(re-)constituted*. The emerging, alternative museum ecologies discussed in this article intersect with this notion of the commons. Museums must be willing to accept the risk of embracing experiments and conflict that emanate from, and are based in, communities. Not only the sharing of power, but also the shifting of power and ownership, or 'taking power differently', point to a commons that realigns the asymmetrical relations between museums and communities and goes beyond 'empowerment lite' (Lynch n.d.).<sup>32</sup>

Paula dos Santos has asked, 'What happens when what makes a group of people into a community is not mainly their shared experience in the territory, but their shared condition in society as in the case of minorities?' (2013a: 7). Fostering a diversity of voices and coalitions, achieving consensus that also values contestation, or redefining the ways in which individuals and groups can (re-)constitute communities, may require rethinking notions of community (e.g., when neighborhoods are reshaped through gentrification and displacement or are constituted in virtual spaces), in terms of a commons that fuses spatial politics and social practice. The spatial dimensions of many museum ecologies are inextricably linked

to the socially engaged practices of artists and community-based co-curators, but also the social relationships that emerge from, and are created by, shared ownership. That is, not only ownership and decolonization of collections, but also rethinking museum spaces as a commons for assembly, contestation, and social production. As Nagel observes, this requires all the agents involved (e.g., in the case of the NC Protocol) to 'operate outside their normal zones of practice' (2017). How communities, coalitions, institutions, including political and corporate interests, (re-)constitute their positions, identities, and interests within a commons is undoubtedly a complex process that is explored by Hardt and Negri (2017) but exceeds the scope of this article. Yet, the notion of a commons has gained momentum not only within the discourses and practices of para-institutional formations and artist-initiated organizations, but also among some museums that are working toward similar objectives as the examples in this article suggest. Referring to museums and cultural institutions, Yates McKee has observed that 'Much remains to be done with them - and to them - in such a way as to support the flourishing of autonomous, movement-based artist infrastructures' (McKee 2016: 242). Museums can learn from, and contribute to, emerging museum ecologies and practices that imagine and work toward alternatives for a social commons.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Regarding the uses of 'soft power' to garner funding and demonstrate community engagement see Lord and Blankenberg (2015).
- <sup>2</sup> <http://publicdoorsandwindows.tumblr.com/about/>, accessed 25 March 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the discursive trajectory and phases of museum studies related to the theory and practice of new museology and issues of social justice, see Message and Witcomb (2015: xxxviii).
- <sup>4</sup> Professional associations have also sought to systematize social practice. See: Museums Association (2018) 'Measuring Socially Engaged Practice: A Toolkit for Museums'. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives/measuring-socially-engaged-practice/19032018-museums-socially-engaged-practice>, accessed 22 March 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Regarding the historical legacies of community arts organizations and collaborations with museums, see: Arlene Goldbard (2008) 'Postscript to the Past: Notes Toward a History of Community Arts', *Community Arts Network - Reading Room*. [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/1999/12/postscript\\_to\\_t.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/1999/12/postscript_to_t.php), accessed 10 July 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> Bruguera developed the Immigrant Movement International in partnership with Creative Time and the Queens Museum.
- <sup>7</sup> Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art 'Where do we go from here? A vision statement for 2015–2018'. <http://www.visitmima.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/mima-vision2015-18.pdf>, accessed 15 March 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art 'Where do we go from here?'
- <sup>9</sup> Exploratorium (2013) 'The Best Things in Museums Are the Windows: A participatory project co-organized by Harrell Fletcher and the Exploratorium'. <https://www.exploratorium.edu/arts/works/the-windows>, accessed 19 July 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> See three essays on the 'Relational' by Andrea Fraser, Pablo Helguera, and Ralph Rugoff in Shannon Jackson and Paula Marincola (eds.) *In Terms of Performance*. <http://www.intermsofperformance.site/keywords/relational/andrea-fraser>, accessed 13 March 2018.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Collective Museum with Public Doors and Windows'. <http://ias.ucsc.edu/projects/collective-museum>, accessed 13 March 2018.

- <sup>12</sup> 'Collective Museum - Sites'. <http://iascollectivemuseum.com/>, accessed 25 March 2018.
- <sup>13</sup> Josephine Reed and Harrell Fletcher, 'Harrell-Fletcher-Podcast.mp3' *NEA Interview*, National Endowment for the Arts, Artworks Podcast (transcript) 2016. <https://www.arts.gov/file/harrell-fletcher-podcastmp3>, accessed 13 March 2018.
- <sup>14</sup> Clifford has described the UCSC campus as an 'ecotone', i.e. 'a transition area between ecologies, where life-worlds meet and integrate. The word combines eco and tone (from the Greek tonos or tension). A place where ecologies are in tension'. <https://people.ucsc.edu/~jcliff/IMAGES/Ecotone1.pdf>, accessed 13 March 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> Harrell Fletcher, 'Projects - KSMoCA'. <http://www.harrellfletcher.com/projects/1648>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>16</sup> Reed and Fletcher.
- <sup>17</sup> 'KSMoCA - Artist Mentorship Program'. <http://www.ksmoca.com/mentorship/>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>18</sup> 'KSMoCA - Let's Go Inside the Paper to Go Inside the Museum'. <http://www.ksmoca.com/lets-go-inside-the-paper-to-go-inside-the-museum>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> *Carson Ellis: Intro to Galactic Alienology* (2016). <http://www.harrellfletcher.com/projects/1648>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> *KSMoCA International Art Fair 2017*. <http://www.ksmoca.com/ksmoca-international-art-fair/>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>21</sup> Regarding the use of the term 'safe space' in museums, see Robin Clarke, 'Are museums 'safe spaces for debate'? Not always...', School of Museum Studies Blog, 6 September 2017. <http://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/museumstudies/2017/09/06/are-museums-safe-spaces-for-debate-not-always/>, accessed 9 July 2018.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Protocol'. <http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/44/protocol>, accessed 17 March 2018.
- <sup>23</sup> 'L'Crevisse - United Houma Nation Cultural Center - Rudy Ricciotti'. <http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/25/314/l'crevisse-united-houma-nation-cultural-center->, accessed 14 March 2018. 'Reception and Celebration Kicks Off UHN Cultural Center and French Immersion School Plans'. <https://nouvelleorleans.consulfrance.org/La-Nation-Houma-presente-son>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>24</sup> Holly Duchmann, 'Fundraising begins for Houma Indian cultural center', *Houma Today*, 5 March 2018. <http://www.houmatoday.com/news/20180305/fundraising-begins-for-houma-indian-cultural-center>, accessed 7 July 2018.
- <sup>25</sup> Xavier Veilhan, *The Monster* (2004), Perrotin Gallery. [https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Xavier\\_Veilhan2/8/the-monster/9945](https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Xavier_Veilhan2/8/the-monster/9945), accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Tours: monster square!' <http://www.touraineloirevalley.co.uk/discover-touraine/what-s-happening/tours-monster-square>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Le Monstre/The Monster'. <http://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=4566&menu>, accessed 14 March 2018.
- <sup>28</sup> Bartomeu Mari and Beatriz Preciado, 'The New protocol at the museum'. <http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/17/8/the-new-protocol-at-the-museum>, accessed 15 March 2018.



<sup>29</sup> Bartomeu Mari and Beatriz Preciado.

<sup>30</sup> Bartomeu Mari and Beatriz Preciado.

<sup>31</sup> Bartomeu Mari and Beatriz Preciado.

<sup>32</sup> Bernadette Lynch, *Summary Report: Whose cake is it anyway? A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation [no date], 11-13. <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Whose-cake-is-it-anyway-report.pdf>, accessed 9 July 2018.

Boast also alludes to ownership, noting that 'museums [must] to learn to let go of their resources, even at times of the objects, for the benefit and use of communities and agendas far beyond its knowledge and control' (2011: 67).

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