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Bringing Museal Silence into Focus: Eight Ways of Thinking About Silence in Museums

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In recent years memory studies scholars have begun to focus on how silence is an integral part of processes of remembering. The emphasis has been on moving away from the binary of remembering and forgetting and the equation of forgetting with silence (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010; Winter 2010, 2013; Dessingué and Winter 2016). As places of memory we would expect museums to be at the heart of such conceptualisations. Indeed, as part of this broader trend, discussions of forms of silence within museums are emerging which go beyond a reduction of silence to cultural amnesia (Munroe 2016; Thorpe 2016). Such research has focussed on the distinct operation of one or two 'types' of silence within museal space. However, until now there has been no systematic attempt to delineate the many different ways that silence is present and operating within museums. In this article we draw on a series of international examples to ask in what ways the specifics of museums as forms of media, representation and cultural practice produce certain kinds of silences. We focus on eight ways of thinking about silence in museums which can help us work through this question. While we tackle these different manifestations in turn, it will become clear from the discussions that they often coexist; indeed we argue that a shifting coexistence is what characterises silence in museums. It is for this reason that a breadth of focus is important.

Silence, as many authors have argued, is socially constructed. Functions and interpretations of silence therefore depend on communicative context and audience (Jensen 1973; Jaworski 1993). Silence, while not speech, has been described 'a speech act' (Huckin 2002), as a non-verbal form of communication that nevertheless 'speaks' (Ehrenhaus 1988, 2), a prerequisite for speech (Bruneau 1973), and 'a performative non-speech act' (Winter 2010, 28; 2013). Such lines of argument suggest that many silences are productive (Ryan 2002). Indeed, Vared Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger have argued that silence should be understood as 'a complex and rich social space' (2010, 1104). There have, as a result, been different attempts to categorise silence 'in social interaction' over the past decades (Kurzon 2007, 1673). Writers use language of 'meanings', 'forms' (Bruneau 1973), 'functions' (Jenson 1973), 'purposes' and 'types' (Huckin 2002; Kurzon 2007) and 'cultural practice' (Winter 2010, 4). They range across scales (from the personal to the collectively social) and disciplines (including phenomenology, law, media studies, literature, sociology), while attempting to pin down what Jaworski has argued is 'probably the most ambiguous of all linguistic forms' (1993, 16).

Within this context, it is clear that theories of silence that focus only on interpersonal response, on text, on narrative, on representation, on social context, on objects, or on performance are insufficient in themselves for describing what happens in museums. Museums are all of these and more. Museums have their own representational and institutional particularities and therefore we need ways to talk about such specificities. In the following we build upon the relatively recent moves by scholars to problematise the equation of silence with forgetting and argue that understanding museum silences in terms of the following eight 'types' helps do this work of complicating the picture. We suggest that by delineating the different forms of silence that are produced within museal spaces, we can productively advance debates about silence both within museum studies and within memory studies more broadly.

1. Silences in the historical record as collected by museums

It has been substantially demonstrated that those who have tended to be left out of the historical record as collected by museums are society's less powerful. Historically, public museums have been associated with cultural elites and nation-states whose motivations typically reflect their interests, even when couched in terms of the public benefit. Generally those who have been missing are the groups and individuals whose material culture was not considered worthy or appropriate for collection. This is a case of absent memories where the material evidence is simply not present in the historical collection. Examples here would be working-class people's work clothes or home-made children's toys. It is only really in the twentieth-century and in countries where there has been a recognition of 'history from below' or what is called 'social history' in the UK that museums have come to value ordinary people's lives as historically important in their own right and moved beyond their traditional focus on elite material culture. This matters because, as Susan Crane argues, 'being collected means being valued and remembered institutionally; being displayed means being incorporated into the extra-institutional memory of the museum visitors' (2000, 2). Crane's point here can rightly be read as highlighting that being ignored or absent from the historical record has the reverse effect; it connotes lack of recognition, non-value, non-existence. While the point is well-understood, the processes by which such silences occur deserves further unpacking. This where the broader literature around silences can be usefully applied to thinking about museums.

According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, for example, there are four key moments when silences are encoded in historical production: 'the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)' (1995, 26). He looks at where 'power gets into the story', where certain voices and perspectives become prominent (1995, 28). It is

possible to see how all these four key moments can be extrapolated to the work of museums and indeed they have been applied by Michelle Caswell in her persuasive broadening of Trouillot's framework to investigate commemorative silence and the photographic archives at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia (2014). Caswell looks at how historical records become '*pluralised* as collective memory' and how these records are often 'in motion' across uses, users and contexts (2014, 13-16, emphasis in original). In the following, our discussion is informed by the work of Trouillot and Caswell, and by that of Julie Thorpe, who conceptualises silence as being 'in motion between presence and absence' (2016, 65). We suggest that thinking about *multiple silences in motion* is particularly useful for delineating different elements of silence in the museum and how they are related to the historical record.

A museum might not be telling a particular story because they do not have the sources or artefacts to do so. A particular curator, or group of curators might or might not be aware of this and they might or might not wish to redress the situation. As was seen in the calls in the press and online by local and national museums in the UK in the run up to the centenary of the First World War, many museums wanted to tell a story (and indeed to tap into various funding sources) but needed to source the exhibits to do so. On the other hand, a museum might have a collection which is so extensive that its very vastness that leads to certain possibilities being occluded; which leads to silencing of some stories 'at the moment of fact assembly', to use Trouillot's term, that is, during the selection of the exhibits for display (1995, 26). The inescapable problem inherent in all archives and museum collections is that as one set of memories are to be selected to come to the fore, many others will be pushed out of sight. Such is the inevitable consequence of the process of selecting things for display. It is in this respect that we find it useful to speak of silences as 'in motion'. The concept of motion is apt for describing collections which are often in flux, which are created, borrowed, retrieved, transferred, and even stolen. As such, we can also understand the collections and archives as containing 'latent silences' (Dissengué and Winter 2016, 7), storages of memory which could be reactivated, or not. These latent silences can be both haphazard and more obviously structural as we discuss further below.

A related point is also what Winter calls 'essentialist silence', where some voices are silenced because they are not seen to have the authority to speak (2010, 6). In 'the making of narratives' (Trouillot 1995, 26) museums are always negotiating claims to representativeness, making decisions to include privileged voices, or indeed claiming to speak on behalf of them. This is an area where much recent museum-studies work has been focused. For example, studies have pointed to structural tendencies towards silencing the voices of indigenous or first peoples in museums and the subsequent reclaiming of those spaces by such groups for activist purposes (Message 2014). The longevity of many museums as institutions means that they are at the forefront of debates about how to preserve privileged, eye-witness accounts into the future, to save

them from silence. At the exhibition stage, decisions about which stories are to be privileged may well be made based on assumptions about the meaningfulness and affective power of such voices for the visitor of the present and the future (see Munroe 2016, 176). However, even when there is a determination to privilege first-person witness accounts, silences in the historical narrative may also result from the event itself. This issue is particularly acute when representing difficult and challenging histories. From the atrocities of colonialism to the horrors of the Holocaust, many writers have discussed the limits of representation and the unrepresentable, of what can simply not be said, that which will always remain silent (Rabinowitz 2013; Munroe 2016).¹

What is clear is that the museum as a cultural form is the ideal space for drawing attention to gaps in the historical record, to the policies of collection and display, and to the limits of the historical narratives. Michael Fehr's exhibition entitled 'Silence' – during which he emptied the contents of the Karl-Ernst Osthaus-Museum – did exactly this (Fehr 2000). In a different way, the decision to initially open Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin without exhibits not only served to draw the visitors' attention to the silences made manifest through the architectural design of the building itself but also to the limits of what could be told about the Holocaust.

Attention to the museum as cultural form also leads to us an important caveat when we judge whether there are silences in the record, and, in Trouillot's terms, silences in 'the making of history' (1995, 26). While we share Caswell's rejection of Trouillot's claim that history is ever made 'in the final instance' (2014, 13), histories produced in museums are nevertheless products of their time. It is therefore always necessary to ask what account of silence are we judging the museum, display or exhibition against. If a particular exhibition was only ever set up as an entirely partisan private collection, and is acknowledged as such, it may be anachronistic to point to silences in a historical record it was never aiming to redress. If, on the other hand, a museum makes a claim to be representing a nation or a community, then it is more legitimate to do so. It is always the case that when an institution is charged with a national, or indeed international, brief that powerful vested interests are inevitably in play.

2. Museums being silenced by external pressures

Silences in the museum context can be produced by both internal and external factors. The examples above focus on how the internal practices of selection, collection and curation result in silencing certain pasts, albeit in some cases unknowingly. However, external, deliberate pressures for silence are also important to acknowledge. Museums can be subject to political pressures if they are directly and overtly managed by governments which see them as instruments of the state's education and patriotic apparatus; this can be understood as *coercive silencing* or, in Robyn Fivush's terms

'being silenced' (2010). At stake here is how a given country's approach to cultural policy enshrines the philosophical contract between state and museum in terms of principles of autonomy and independence. In the U.K., for example, the 'arm's length' principle, the use of intermediate bodies ('quangos' or 'NDPBs') and the frequent use of peer review to determine quality and allocation of funding is meant to ensure that governmentally-funded cultural organisations are protected from direct interference or control.² Jennifer Craik's (2007) work on the implications of such cultural policy frameworks in different countries is instructive in thinking about how the power of governments to silence museums is organised. However, we should not imagine that this only happens in dictatorial or more interventionist regimes, nor only in the past. In societies where there is a concept of a public museum supported by public money for public benefit, it is always the case that this public funding comes with specific responsibilities and expectations from those in position of power and government. Even in the UK with its arm's length principle, the government of the day does still make clear its priorities for its funded bodies and it can be argued that this trend of intervention has been increasing in recent years. For example, in relation to a forthcoming exhibition about Charles Darwin, the Ulster Museum in Belfast, Northern Ireland, found itself threatened with legal action by the then Christian Minister of Culture who: 'called upon the Ulster Museum to put on exhibits reflecting the view that the world was made by God only several thousand years ago.' (McDonald 2010)

In the museum studies literature there are many such examples where the consequences of being in receipt of public money result in conflict between different stakeholders (Luke 2002). Museums' public mandate therefore has particular ethical implications for thinking about silences within museum space. This means we always need to pay particular attention to how the priorities of the funders may silence things deemed inappropriate, as Steven Dubin argued in his (1999) book: *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. A few months after this appeared in print Dubin wrote an afterword prompted by 'Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection' art exhibition which had just opened at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. 'Sensation' prompted calls for the museum's public funding to be withdrawn because of objections by religious groups and the city's Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. As this now well-known example illustrates, demands for silencing institutions are produced in relation to museums in the intersecting space between competing value systems around public taste, public decency, freedom of expression and the museum's various obligations to a range of different stakeholders: artists, publics, politicians, funders and trustees. The same arguments were again brought to the fore more recently during the controversy surrounding the Kelley Walker exhibition, 'Direct Drive'. This opened at the Contemporary Art Museum in Saint Louis in September 2016 and showed images of black Americans which some members of the local community, and some museum

staff, found offensive. The resulting publicity led to the museum modifying the exhibition and to the resignation of the chief curator, Jeffrey Uslip (Muñoz-Alonso 2016).

External pressure may also be exerted in more subtle ways, through those in positions of power assuming a right to review text panels and influence exhibition choices. Pressure over what can be said may also come from sponsors or collectors with vested interests. Museum staff may find themselves self-censoring in anticipation of political repercussions, even where external pressure is not being applied on them (Maguire 2001). In situations where communities are divided it might be deemed more acceptable by museum staff to avoid given topics for fear of inflaming existing tensions or appearing to be partisan and thereby losing trust from one side. Indeed, a museum's situatedness within the communities of which it is part means that it can become embroiled in debates and controversy. It also means that it is inevitably responding to society's wider silences.

3. Museums' collusion in society's silences

While the previous point focused primarily on the politics of silence produced at the level of the individual institution, there are many examples where the silences shared or advocated at the level of the institution are the same as those present more widely in a society. At both levels silence can occur if a particular group 'actively does not wish to remember or commemorate a specific event or person', what Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger would call 'overt silence in the domain of forgetting' (2010: 1110) and what Zerubavel has discussed as a 'conspiracy of silence' (2006; 2010). Museums' silences can therefore represent and also participate overtly in wider societal disavowals and denials. This can be seen clearly in museums which were enlisted in the service of colonialism or involved in practices which are no longer deemed acceptable, such as the collection of human remains taken by force or illicit objects (Colwell 2015).

However, these 'overt' silences can also be understood not simply as a way to repress or marginalise histories but also, as we suggested above, as being the necessary prerequisites for dialogue and community cohesion. Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger suggest more broadly that this might be a way of remembering while minimising the conflict with others or broadening the commemorative community (2010, 1104, 1112). It is what Winter calls 'political or strategic silence' where 'the hope [...] is that the passage of time can lower the temperature of disputes about these events, or even heal the wounds they cause' (2010, 5). The Law of Historical Memory in Spain which prohibited any 'formal and public inquiry into atrocities committed during and after the civil war of 1936-9' is a well-known example (Winter 2010, 5). A more recent example is evident in Rwanda, in the 'national identity' laws which are supposedly there to help society move beyond the binary categorisations of Tutsi and Hutu that proved so lethal. However, Hohenhaus has examined various memorial museums and other memorial

sites which have continued to use such terms in their representation and commemoration of the genocide. Drawing on work by Paul Williams, Hohenhaus suggests that this is only possible due to the involvement of, and funding by, a foreign NGO (2013, 151; Williams 2007, 111).

While for Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 'overt' silence involves a literal absence of speech, 'covert silence in the domain of forgetting' covers or veils past events through other mnemonic representation (2010). This has particular resonance in a museum: as mentioned above, representation in museal space *always* involves a focus on specific aspects of a history at the expense of others due to limitations of space, time, and finance, among many other things (Crane 2000). However, a resulting 'absence of content' amid much memorial activity (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010: 1104) can also be the result of state-supported discourses which prescribe certain versions of the past. Sara Jones proves a compelling example of this in her examination of the 'Palace of Tears' exhibition (Border Experiences: Everyday Life in Divided Germany) in Berlin. She argues that in this museum 'extraordinary' life in the former German Democratic Republic is the focus despite the supposed emphasis on the ordinary and everyday. She shows how this serves to accentuate narratives of GDR totalitarianism promoted by the state (Jones 2015).

As the above examples of Spain, Rwanda and Germany show, such silences are related to legal and political frameworks. Consequently, if these frameworks change, so do the possibilities for silence. Such silences move through cycles and phases. We would therefore agree with Winter that silence 'has a life history' which can be partially measured in terms of generational or regime change (2010, 5).³ In the interim, a museum may find other ways of expressing that which has been silenced and indeed, as the following example shows, may use silence strategically to do so.

4. Museums using silence obliquely: ambiguity and ambivalence

A museum may speak about a topic obliquely rather than head-on and use tactics of non-naming and alternative terminologies to explicitly make a point. For example, in 2011 Taiwan's National Museum of History in Taipei held an exhibition called 'We: The People. 100 years of the Republic of China (ROC)'. The ROC is more commonly called Taiwan, while the People's Republic of China is more commonly called China. This exhibition was a potentially complex undertaking because national identity and sovereignty is a matter of such great political sensitivity between Taiwan and China. What was striking was that although the entire exhibition was discussing the Taiwanese as a distinct nation nowhere did it actually address the specific question of disputed national identity claims or relations between Taiwan and mainland China. Instead the exhibition was framed in what appeared to be poetic but politically neutral and generic terms. As a whole it spoke about the people of both the Republic of China and Taiwan

(using both names) as a family and a community united by the country's own special history and culture. This is the text from the entrance panel to the exhibition 'We the People: 100 years of the Republic of China' which appears in both Chinese and English:

One Hundred Years' Journey

Who am I?

Who are we?

Where do we come from?

Where are heading to?

History is not carried over.

Looking back is for looking ahead.

This exhibition tells the story

Of people living on this land together.

Of living in Taiwan and sharing history.

It is dedicated to "us".

Who live here together.

One way to read this elliptical language is in terms of what is not being said. It is noticeable that much of the text is framed through open questions to the visitor rather than assertions from the curators, and uses the non-specific personal pronouns of 'I', 'we' and 'us' with the latter in quotation marks. Yet, it can also be seen as a powerful statement about the distinctiveness of the history, culture and people of Taiwan precisely because it does not mention China and instead uses the phrases 'living on this land together' and 'living in Taiwan' to denote the geographical space, although this could be also read as leaving room for 'Taiwan' to be understood as a political entity, if the visitor was so inclined. It also makes a strong assertion about the need for the people of ROC and Taiwan to see themselves as living together and to look forward to the future not just the past. From this perspective, the ambiguity afforded by the strategic use of linguistic silences, avoidances, and ambivalences has opened up a shared space of possibility. Silence, or 'being silent' in Fivush's terms, here is utilised as a source of power (2010, 91). Ultimately, the visitor's own knowledge and perspective is critical here in terms of how they will fill in the gaps and what political motivations they will attribute to such a display. Dimensions of power and politics such as these are at the heart of all these ways of thinking about silence in museums but become manifest in different ways. It is apparent in this example from Taiwan that power resides in a particular way of understanding silence, that is, a particular way of seeing and knowing. This same applies in our next example.

5. Museums thinking they have nothing to say: structures of knowledge which produce silence

This is related to the 'silences in the record' point identified above but is not exactly the same. Museums may consider that they simply do not possess the material culture about a given topic because they are used to looking at their collections through a specific disciplinary lens. This can foreclose their ability to actually see other potential histories, even though they may be present. Yet, when encouraged to consider other ways of seeing, it has been possible for those institutions to identify relevant material. In recent years, these 'hidden histories' have been revealed to be in fact 'hiding in plain sight' on topics such as slavery, sexuality, and disability (Rice, 2009). Some museums have re-examined whether the way they have organised their collections has actually hidden some histories from view and made them into 'latent silences' (Dissengué and Winter 2016, 7). The work on 'hidden histories' involves making the silences which are already present but latent now resonant, audible, visible and ultimately possible to know.

For example, collections traditionally classified as decorative arts can be re-read for what they can illuminate about international co-dependencies between a domestic trade in luxury goods, colonial exports such as sugar, and the human cost of slavery. Collections at the Victoria and Albert museum in London have been re-read in this way. Between February and June 2007 an exhibition ran entitled 'Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave Trading on Contemporary Art' which invited interventions into the V&A's galleries by eleven international artists as part of the bi-centenary of the abolition of Britain's slave trade. The V&A's website described it as follows:

Displayed throughout the V&A's permanent collection galleries and other public spaces, the interventions created a visual dialogue between historic design objects, many rooted in imperialism, and compelling, emotive examples of recent art and design. These creative expressions form a bridge between the safe and anodyne and the unspeakable and indescribable (Whitley 2016).

As this example illustrates artists have been particularly instrumental in this kind of revealing of so called 'hidden histories' and in the activating of 'latent silences' to make such connections, narratives and identities manifest. The best known of which is undoubtedly Fred Wilson whose landmark work 'Mining the Museum' (Wilson and Halle 1993) has inspired many similar acts of intervention in museums and heritage properties throughout Europe. Wilson's work can be found in temporary exhibitions such as this one at the V&A, and the Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg where his work now has a permanent presence in the display.

Other examples of revealing of 'hidden histories' can be found in work around the reinterpretation of medical collections in order to highlight the social history of people with disabilities as opposed to the more technological and medical history of the objects related to disability (crutches, wheelchairs, iron lungs etc). The landmark work in this area has been done by Sandell et al (2005; Sandell, Dodd and Thomson 2010). Scholars such as Levin (2010) and Sandell and Frost (2010) have also been instrumental in shaping academic museum thinking around hidden histories of gender and sexuality. One of the problems with some of the 'hidden histories' work in practice, however, is that it has frequently been delivered through temporary exhibitions, temporary small-scale interventions into permanent displays which remain unchanged, or through trails which require visitors to pick up on these new activities and go out of their way to follow this new counter-history. It can also be argued that the use of artists is a convenient method of delegating responsibility to an external party to act as the institution's conscience, thereby absolving the institution of the need to make long-lasting and systematic change for itself (Whitehead 2009, 24).

When such activities are triggered by external anniversaries it can also look like the impetus for paying attention to such latent silences is opportunistic and driven by external factors rather than internal desire for change. Notwithstanding this, a positive shift does appear to have recently occurred in 2017 with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England. Most museums have until recently presented a history of the past that was predominantly heteronormative, despite having significant evidence within their collections relating to the histories of homosexuality (Levin 2010; Sandell and Frost 2010). However, in 2017 a realignment of institutional attitudes to homosexuality appears to have taken place across a number of key players in the U.K.'s cultural heritage sector. The National Trust ran a programme for the entire year, called 'Exploring LGBTQ history at National Trust Places'. Tate Britain hosted an exhibition called: 'Queer British Art 1861-1967' billed on its website as 'the first exhibition dedicated to queer British Art' in which 'the diversity of queer British art is celebrated as never before' (Barlow, 2017). During the weekend of Gay Pride (7-9 July 2017) the British Museum replaced its traditional union jack flag on the top of its flagpole for that of the Rainbow Flag and George Benson, the Assistant Collections Manager wrote on the museum's own blog that the British Museum:

[...] has a duty to represent all the cultures and societies throughout history through its collection. ... Equally it represents the faces from all societies whose history was denied them – the unrecorded lives, the unwritten conversations, the unspoken romances, the denigrated, the disenfranchised, the downtrodden. The Museum is a museum of the world, for the world, and since you are part of the world you'll find yourself here too, even if you're queer (Benson, 2017).

While it is too soon to tell how permanent this shift will be, the institutional support for this realignment of attitudes points positively towards a more systematic thinking about this particular set of silences.

These recent examples are all ways of addressing what is really a problem of expectation, tradition, and of historical habits of taxonomy which come to frame the way we understand the world through museums and produce silences. A common misconception is that museums are mirrors for society and reflect society back to us (see also: Whitehead 2012; Macdonald and Fyfe 1996). While, of course, they do this to some degree, they also school us in ways of thinking and seeing so that what we get is really what we see and what we see is what we are already looking for. This situation comes about not through a deliberate suppression but because ways of seeing and classifying the world are culturally constructed and because cultural practices tend to reproduce the dominant narratives and silences of wider society. Fivush points to the silent power inherent in such master narratives, writing that 'if the canonical is expected, there is no need to voice it' (2010, 94). In his work from within media studies, Huckin refers to something similar as 'presuppositional silence' (2002), by which he means assumed knowledge, what it is not deemed necessary to discuss but what comes with multiple layerings of social and cultural capital. Through repeated representation, museal conventions, and the attribution of institutional significance, these 'presuppositional silences' mean that certain kinds of narratives, images and objects become canonised and accepted as the most truthful or appropriate ways of organising the world (see Whitehead 2016 for a discussion). Such assumptions reproduce particular dynamics of power and of inclusion and occlusion for certain groups, histories and identities. Moreover, even when a museum as an institution becomes conscious of a particular way of seeing, and takes step to challenge it, characteristics inherent to the museum as cultural practice might continue to thwart its intentions as this next example illustrates.

6. *Silence by design*

Museums are multimedia by nature. By this we do not just mean that the contemporary museum is often a space of transmedia interaction and participation (Kidd 2015) but also that its very form demands the interplay of spaces and the materiality of the displays (Mason 2005). While recent work on memorial museums has stressed how visual, aural, spatial and architectural elements can work together to create 'aesthetic and embodied experience' linked to silence (Munroe 2016, 176), we suggest here that different manifestations of silence can coexist in the same space for reasons directly related to this multimediality. For example, in the Centre D'Histoire de Montreal,

Canada, what might be termed *silence by design* reproduces broader societal silences related to the history of the First Peoples, the St. Lawrence Iroquoians.

The museum was established in 1983 and on the ground floor a permanent exhibition, called 'Traces, Places, Memories' describes its purpose as follows:

Montreal is a living, dynamic entity, born from the encounter between a territory and a diversity of peoples. Like every city, it is in constant flux—never complete, always in the process of becoming. It bears the traces of those who came before: physical traces, reflected in the architecture and landscapes of its neighborhoods, and intangible traces, cast in lifestyles, languages and mentalities. The city's history is that of its inhabitants, past and present. A history of places and memories that shape a present and suggest a future.

Accordingly, the display is set out following a comb pattern with the following six areas:

1641 - First Peoples
1642-1759 Founding
1760-1849 Consolidation
1850-1899 Industrialization
1900-1949 Metropolis
1950 - Modernization

Manfred Lehbruck (1974: 224) describes a comb pattern thus:

A comb-type layout functions according to the principle of a central axis, with ancillary loops offering a graduated succession of alternatives which may at the same time correspond to the system of classification of the museum's holdings. Access may be either from one end of the 'comb' or through one of its sides.

In this case, the different indigenous and settler groups are introduced in the various rooms in chronological order from earliest to most recent. This arrangement culminates in an account of recent migration to the area and contemporary multicultural populations in Montreal. The issue here is that the comb design sets up a system whereby individual groups are dealt with per individual room so that the first peoples introduced at the outset are not returned to in the subsequent rooms. The outcome is they appear to be locked away and frozen in time in that first phase of Montreal's past, whereas in reality the Iroquois still live in Canada today. Showing the ongoing presence and interconnectedness of the descendants of all of Montreal's different groups would have required a different spatial layout and thematic approach which emphasised the

continuous and continuing presence of each of the groups and their relations with each other.

This apparent message that the Iroquois belong to the past and not the present - as is really the case - matters enormously given that there is a structural pattern of forgetting these first peoples which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC 2015) identified as being endemic to Canadian society. This has been identified as so problematic in the light of past injustices and atrocities perpetrated against some first and aboriginal peoples by the Canadian state that a report from 2015 argued for the need for a national, government-led programme of remembering particularly around the history of residential schools where indigenous children were forcibly taken from their parents for 're-education' by the state and the Church; a practice which has been described as state-led cultural cleansing (TRCC 2015, 192). The report recommended a programme of national reconciliation to address this silence encompassing museums, heritage organisations and practices of national commemoration by: "Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history." (TRCC 2015, 334)

This report builds on many years of efforts in Canada to address the historical silences of museums around the history and culture of Aboriginal people since the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (TRCC 2015, 133). In this case, the design choice in the Centre d'Histoire de Montréal continues to inadvertently perpetuate residual societal silences even within a broader national framework which aims to confront them. Given the organisation's mission statement is: 'to promote Montréal's cultural diversity and a better intercultural understanding among its citizens', this example also illustrates how different components of the same museum can simultaneously be signifying in opposing directions (Centre d'Histoire de Montréal 2017). Here the institutional mission and the overall stated interpretive framework of the exhibition point the visitor one way, while the layout of the actual exhibit within a part of the exhibition functions in a counter-direction and undercuts the good intentions. While some design approaches like this inadvertently reproduce wider societal silences, others are explicitly commissioned to use design to purposively create space for silence in the museum and to engender certain embodied responses from visitors.

7. Museums staying respectfully silent

Silent spaces of a planned, active, and deliberate kind are part of a bigger pattern, as Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger remind us, of how silence can be the 'ultimate example of acknowledgement and remembrance' (2010, 1108). Describing what they call the 'overt silence in the domain of memory', they look at silence which is 'intentional, purposive and planned in advance and [whose] raison d'être is commemoration' (2010, 1108).

These silences are intended to work on the visitor's body, eliciting a disciplined performance of reflection (Brown 2012, 246). These silences can, more widely, become habituated and ritualised at a local or national level, for example on Remembrance Day, as commemorated on 11 November in the U.K. (Gregory 1994), on Memorial Day for the Holocaust in Israel, or the Memorial Day for the Fallen in the Netherlands. Such silences are institutionalised and, to use Kurzon's term, 'situational' (2007, 1681). The point of such silences is to produce spaces of reflection and to engender certain types of subjectivity. Such moments of commemorative silence are sites where, Steven Brown maintains, people are meant to be 'absorbed in the visible act of demonstrating their empathy' (2012, 246).⁴

Some museums have responded to this wider commemorative impetus by actively deciding to create space for silence as commemoration, as contemplation or simply as a place where a surfeit of emotion can be processed. Indeed, silence is inevitably going to be found within certain museums, notably military, war or national history museums, because these topics all have a commemorative component. Furthermore Winter claims that silence is '*always* part of the framing of public understandings of war and violence', and by implication in the museal spaces associated with them, because war touches on sacred, moral problems and is part of mourning practices (2010, 4, our emphasis). Winter names such silence 'liturgical', in line with his characterisation of the museum space as the place 'where we pose the questions the liturgy and the clergy no longer reach' (2012, 152). Silence is often a response to social disaster and may be manifested as repression, or it can become a necessary part of performed ritual in response to help with trauma (Frijjda in Beristain, Paez and González 2000, 119-120). This is particularly so where the museum holds objects directly associated with traumatic events so that it takes the kind of sacred role previously held by churches in relation to relics.

In addition to museums which focus on such topics, the relatively recent rise of the specifically 'memorial museum' (Williams 2007) brings the role of commemorative silence in these curated spaces even more prominently to the fore. Williams defines 'memorial museums' as 'a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind' (2007, 8). He draws attention to the specific dynamics produced by the coming together of the memorial and the museum genres in one institution, particularly when the interpretive style is immersive, emotive, and heavily dependent on personal testimony and witnessing. Recent competitions to design memorial museums to commemorate the Holocaust have led to the reproduction of a particular counter-memorial aesthetic in which spaces of silence have become an expected part of the process (see Young 1992; Ball 2008; Ionescu 2017). The Holocaust Tower in Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin is an often-cited example. The closing of the heavy Tower door and the restriction of the number of people entering this space marks it out as a threshold into silence. It is undoubtedly a place of

affect and emotion for many visitors, one that can provide the space for empathetic practice based on a focus on self and other. As Brown, with reference to John Cage, points out, silence 'ultimately reveals to us the sounds made by the functioning of our bodies, from which we never escape. Silence brings us back to ourselves' (2012, 247).

Silence is also used to purposively to powerful effect in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The last space in the museum is that of the Hall of Remembrance situated next to the Wexner Centre and Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center. The Hall of Remembrance acts as the US memorial to victims of the Holocaust and is inscribed with names of major killing sites, according to the guidebook which asks visitors to: 'Please honor the dead by lighting a candle or observing a moment of silence in their memory.' The Wexner Centre carries the statement: 'From Memory to Action: Meeting the Challenge of Genocide' and 'provides ways to explore the past, through the Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Centre and to think about today, through presentations on contemporary genocide' (USHMM Museum Guide). This is in keeping with the overall museum approach which is to invite and encourage visitors to move through the states of being educated, emotionally moved, and respectfully silent to empathetic political engagement and a sense of individual responsibility. Throughout the museum the leaflets and signage in bear the same comment and question: 'What you do matters. Now that you have seen, now that you know ... what will you do?' This theme of the responsibility that comes with knowledge, is reinforced most strongly by the single line of white text on a black wall which sits high in the main atrium through which all visitors pass. It reads: 'You are my witnesses. Isaiah 43:10.' Commemorative, educational silences such as these are therefore seen as active, productive and, for many visitors, professionals and critics, positive.⁵

8. *Communities wishing to remain silent*

Similarly positive but productive in a different way are occasions when museums may choose not to speak or make representations out of respect for culturally sensitive or 'sacred' knowledge which is not intended by the source communities for unrestricted public sharing (Colwell 2015). In such cases a decision for silence on the part of a museum can 'serve a linkage function' (Jensen 1973, 249), it can bind rather than sever relationships with communities. This can be seen particularly with museums dealing with indigenous communities in postcolonial contexts where the museum wishes to rebuild trust and avoid repeating the condescension of colonial regimes. In some cases the impetus for silence may come from the museum, in others in my come from the communities themselves. In this situation the museum's various publics will experience the same silence in markedly different ways. For those outside the particular group for whom this has special meaning, the silence will operate to exclude them while for those

within the group, the very act of excluding those others is a powerful affirmation of their own identity and recognition by the public institution. The issue of respecting sacred knowledge is particularly sensitive where past state practices of breaking up communities and families have led to a rupture in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. In countries like Canada and Australia where programmes of forced separation of indigenous children from their parents and communities occurred the importance of museums as bearers of community memory is particularly acute and still very much of the present. The website of the Australian Museum in Sydney, for example, tells how this practice happened in 'every Australian state from the late 1800s until the practice was officially ended in 1969. During this time as many as 100,000 children were separated from their families' (Australian Museum 2015).

Museums keeping deliberately quiet, is thus often understood in terms of indigenous groups and sacred or restricted knowledge but this desire for privacy, respect or secrecy (depending on how you perceive it) is not restricted to such groups. For example, some social historians have identified an understandable reluctance by communities to discuss issues like incest, alcoholism, or domestic violence because they may be painful both for individuals to tackle but also because they bring public shame to bear on their communities (Carnegie 2006). From a purely historical perspective this means that serious issues may again be withheld and missing from the historical record as constituted by museums, where control is passed to community groups to self-represent.

Some curators have made efforts to overcome such self-imposed silencing by sensitively handled history projects as seen in Scotland's Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery 'Glasgow Stories' display which dealt with issues of domestic violence against women, the history of mental health care and the history of sectarianism in Glasgow (Glasgow Museums 2017). At the same time, there is an ethical question here about whether it is appropriate to expect individuals to share such stories in a public setting. We have to ask what is the balance between the public benefit of hearing such histories and the individual cost of telling them? When is it appropriate for the museum to accept a preference for silence and when is it not? Do museums have an obligation to the broader public to tell the stories that individuals and communities wish to keep silent? How does this fit with the agendas of co-production and self-representation of community groups? Such questions also draw attention to two key issues that are integral to all eight ways of thinking about silence in the museum, which are stressed in the literature on silence more broadly, and which go to the heart of the complexity of the museum as cultural practice: intention and effect.

The Specificity of Silence in the Museum: Intention and Effect.

Academic work on the production of silence often raises the question of intentionality. For example, Kurzon maintains the importance for looking at the intentional or non-intentional nature of silence where interpersonal communication is concerned (2007, 1675-6). Winter asks why people *choose* silence as a form of cultural practice and talks of 'four impulses underlying the social construction of silence' (the liturgical, the political, the essentialist and the familial) although he also speaks more broadly about the ways in which 'processes of silence are conditioned' (2013). Contributing to such discussion poses particular challenges in the case of the museum.

As can be seen from our discussion on silence throughout this article, the sources of authorship and the degrees of individual interventions are multi-faceted, discontinuous and distinct in the museum as representational form. This is not least because while the term 'the museum' is a useful shorthand it is also a simplification, as authors such as Sharon Macdonald have stressed (2002). Behind this term there is a complex web of individuals (curators, educators, conservators, designers, managers, and accountants), groups, institutions, collections, architectures, displays, interpretive practices, cultural assumptions, visitors, audiences, communities, publics, nations, and states. All of these bring their own issues of agency and intention to bear on what we call 'the museum' and what it comes to mean is held in tension between them. Silence is often 'a collective endeavour' but nowhere is this more evident than in a museum (Zerubavel 2010, 36).

It is this view of the museum not as a single entity but as the interplay of a continually shifting constellation of people, practices, collections and perspectives that we need to keep in mind whenever we seek to understand museums in societies and the silences operating within, and beyond, them. Sometimes 'the museum' is being acted upon by others. Sometimes 'it' is more in control. Sometimes 'the museum' recognises its power and ability to act. Other times 'it' does not because it is effectively blind to its own cultural position. In order to capture this complexity, we suggest therefore that it is necessary to think in terms of multiple and diffuse points of intentionality in the processes of production and consumption in a museum, all of which create different possibilities for silence.⁶

These diffuse points of intentionality arise because museums are what we call perpetually 'open-ended' or 'unfinished' representations. They are open and unfinished in the sense that a museum's permanent exhibition spaces are always subject to change over time and in space, and this is a constant feature. Curators and designers can redevelop, reorganise and reinterpret spaces on an-ongoing basis. However, because it is expensive and time-consuming to redesign permanent museum exhibition galleries and displays, this often this means adding to, adapting or removing some aspects while leaving others intact. Wholesale redevelopment of individual spaces tends to be periodic and - depending on funding - may happen only once a decade or longer. Wholesale redevelopment of the entire institution happens even less frequently

due to the resourcing implications so that individual internal spaces tend to be redeveloped on a rotating basis, depending on the greatest need and opportunistic funding sources which might be tied to external events (for example, the anniversary of a particular event, which is tied to a governmental pot of money or cultural policy initiative). The consequence is that the resulting display visitors will see is always the composite result of many different curatorial intentions and interventions over the years which have become so intertwined, entangled and overwritten that it is almost impossible to distinguish where one person's, or team's, or time's imprint begins and another ends. It is only within short-term, temporary, exhibitions or single displays which have been put together in a deliberately unified way within a clearly delimited time-scale that the number of authors and their various intentions are circumscribed, and even then they are not necessarily visible to the visitors.

Alongside these diffuse points of intentionality in production of silence are the dynamics inherent in the recognition and consumption of silence. As theorists of silence have long argued, the effect of any silence depends on the way that silence is received. In the museum context, that means it is of course dependent on the nature of the visitor-museum relationship. As visitor research would suggest (Leinhardt and Knutson 2004, 1-20; Black 2012; Smith 2015), a visitor's attentiveness to silences of various kinds depends on numerous factors, including, but not limited to: their 'entrance narratives', their familiarity with the spaces, objects and histories represented in, and embodied by, the museum; their expectations (and the expectation that it is a museum's job to show and tell rather than be silent); and the framing of visit (including whether they have paid to enter, whether it is a special exhibition, and even the ways in which the displays have been demarcated or colour-coded). While several authors have persuasively examined how exhibitions create silences of various kinds (e.g. Munroe 2016; Thorpe 2016), it cannot be assumed that certain silences will inevitably prompt anger or disgust about marginalised stories while others create spaces for empathy. It is worth reiterating that our individual and collective perspectives on silence will always be culturally and historically specific.

Conclusion: museal silences in motion

In this article we have outlined eight ways of thinking about silence in museums. Our work is situated within a broader memory studies context where the performative and productive nature of silence within the processes of remembering is being emphasised. It should be clear from our discussion that in order to conceptualise silence in museums it is necessary to range across disciplines and geographical contexts, across 'types' and 'forms' of silence. As theorists from a wide variety of fields have stressed, not all silences are the same and the complexity of museum space makes this particularly

evident. The specificity of museums as media, representation and cultural practice creates intricate conditions for the production and consumption of silence. As such, the usefulness of attending to multiple silences in motion that we highlighted in our discussion of silences in the historical record may be seen to apply more widely to co-terminous and shifting silences within museums in general. By bringing these silences together and exploring how they come into focus in individual museums at different points in time we hope to provoke future work within museum studies which looks at the intersections between different silences across and between museums and geographical contexts and, in doing so, contributes to the wider debates in memory studies about the 'transcultural complexities' of silence as integral to the processes of remembering (Erlil 2016, 212).

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Notes

¹ For example, Holub (2000) usefully differentiates between silence of the Holocaust and silence about the Holocaust, where the former is inherent to the event itself and the latter is manifested in the denial, avoidance, suppression which followed it.

² QUANGO: Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation. NDPB: non-departmental public body.

³ Both overt and covert silence 'in the domain of forgetting' fall under the category of what Kurzon calls 'thematic silence' (2007, 1677). He argues that such silence is actually a metaphorical form of silence - other forms of speech, narrative, representation are present so there is, in effect, no actual silence but instead a silencing (2007, 1684). Kurzon claims that this type of silence can be distinguished from other forms because it cannot be measured in terms of real time.

⁴ It is worth reiterating that the idea of disciplining visitors' bodies within museum space has a long history within museum studies (Bennett, 1988).

⁵ Munroe considers such spaces in two exhibitions on Slavery (2016, 188-189).

⁶ Facing a similar methodological challenge in relation to the complexities of the print media, Huckin (2002) speaks of 'dispersed intentionality' to encapsulate socio-political context which serves to create silence in different ways. This is in contrast to the 'manipulative silences' that he refers to in his analysis of media reporting of homelessness, whereby certain media articles are written in such a way as to intentionally deceive, to the advantage of the speaker (Huckin 2002, 8).