

Literature Review

Word count: 3250 (excluding footnotes).

My literature review consists of fields of inquiry that could be applied to, or provide a gap for, the 2014 Disobedient Objects exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which displayed a collection of objects created in grassroots protest groups.

Capitalist Realism, Neoliberalism and the Stylization of Life

The beginnings of my project were sparked by a line from Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, in which he describes protest as a "carnavalesque background noise to Capitalist Realism". Written in 2008, Fisher's text 'Capitalist Realism: Is there No Alternative?' follows a Marxist vein using theories from Althusser, Jameson and Zizek as a way of dissecting the public sector, i.e., colleges, the NHS, and the Police Force. The text aims to critically examine the bureaucratic reign of "Market Stalinism" within 21st century neoliberalism which positions itself ideologically as an economic framework to which there is no viable alternative and in which nothing new can occur. Written in a collage-like effect, with references to mainstream movies such as 'Wall-e' and 'Children of Men', the text describes Capitalist Realism as an all-encompassing, ever-pervasive atmosphere swallowing everything in its path, visually likening this condition to John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Fisher argues that we are now living in a 'feedback culture'; where an organisation expends so much of its energy on hitting targets that it has none left for making any meaningful development, thus leaving all open to constant scrutiny and instability¹. This prompts questions about the potentially uncomfortable consequences that may arise from documenting activist histories within a design museum exhibition; if protest is within the museum with the inability to form anything new, does protest somehow become futile?

¹ Fisher, M. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero, 2009. Print.

Fisher's text was used by Nicola Clewer, Toby Lovat and Doug Elsey in their essay *Capitalist Realism, Neoliberalism, and the Basis of Political Alternatives* to open up the concept of neoliberalism's ability to make imagining a political alternative impossible, quoting Zizek's line "its easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Capitalism", as Fisher does so himself. Clewer, Lovat and Elsey use Fisher's text to open discussion about Capitalist Realism as part of their concerns regarding the polarization seen in environmental debates with "supposedly idealised goals (both scientific and moral) on one hand, and the restraints of political and economic "realism" on the other". However, they criticize Fisher for not being rigorous enough in his examination of neoliberalism². Likewise, in his review of the text, Ed Rooksby accuses Fisher of making rushed generalisations towards Socialism, the Left and indeed his own definition of Capitalist Realism. Despite this, Rooksby does commend Fisher's purposiveness in his writing and his "impressive commitment to strategic writing" in regards to looking for a solution to the strife of what he sees as the ailing radical Left³. I would also argue that Fisher does much to disregard protest action as something that has fallen into the capitalist logic and has therefore become redundant, but does little to examine what protest *is* and the different ways it can manifest in the neoliberal public sphere.

The neoliberal museum⁴ has been a heavily contested subject since the 1990s (post-Thatcher government which saw a "rolling back of the state" approach and an emboldened demand for the arts to prove their use to society⁵) when Eileen Hooper-Greenhill and Tony Bennett both undertook

² Clewer, Nicola, Toby Lovat, and Doug Elsey. *Capitalist Realism, Neo-liberalism, and the Basis of Political Alternatives*. Proc. of Nature™ Inc? Questioning the Market Panacea in Environmental Policy and Conservation Conference, The Netherlands, The Hague. International Institute of Social Studies, July 2011. Web. Dec. 2016. <https://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Conference_presentations/NatureInc_Lovat_Clewer_and_Elsey.pdf>.

³ Rooksby, Ed. "Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?", Mark Fisher, Winchester: Zero Books, 2009." *Historical Materialism* 20.1 (2012): 222-31. Web. Nov. & dec. 2016. <<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/156920612x632827>>.

⁴ Kundu, Rina, and Nadine M. Kalin. "Participating in the Neoliberal Art Museum." *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2015., pp. 42 *Art, Design & Architecture Collection*,

⁵ Harris, Jonathan. "Cultured into Crisis: The Arts Council of Great Britain." *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*. Ed. Marcia Pointon. Manchester: Manchester U, 1994. 182. Print.

studies of the museum as a state-controlled political entity which produced fixed knowledge⁶ and docile bodies through architectural interventions⁷.

Louise Purbrick argues that this was not a new phenomenon to the museum and in fact, the South Kensington Museum – later to become the V&A - itself was borne from a political desire to enlighten the working classes and improve British taste which would thus result in a boost for the British economy as people sought to buy objects of design they had seen in the museum, likewise improving British manufacturing. This was put in place by governmental means, with Royal Commissioners being in sole charge of selecting items of suitable function and beauty and their purchasing thereof, following their own strict principles of design, along with the purchase of land and a building in which to house them in the affluent South Kensington area⁸.

In his 2005 essay *City Cultures and Post-Modern Lifestyles* Mike Featherstone examines the development of culture being instrumentalized for social good and middle class lifestyles rich with choice, entering debates surrounding gentrification and class. As part of this analysis, Featherstone's central argument is that anthropological forms of culture (i.e., the culture of everyday life) have become blurred with high art forms of culture "to take in a wide spectrum of popular and everyday cultures in which practically any object or experience can be deemed to be of cultural interest"⁹.

Kundu and Kalin take these critiques further in their 2015 essay *Participating in the Neoliberal Art Museum*, in which they express concerns regarding public museum art education – or "edutainment" – due to its passive nature as a construction of neoliberalism, masking itself as being of social, civic value:

⁶ Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.

⁷ Bennett, T. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

⁸ Purbrick, Louise. "The South Kensington Museum: The Building of the House of Sir Henry Cole." *Art apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*. Ed. Marcia Pointon. Manchester: Manchester U Press, 1994. 69-86. Print.

⁹ Featherstone, Mike. "City Cultures and Postmodern Lifestyles". *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. Second Edition. London: Sage, 2007. Print

“As a design technique and marketing strategy, participation keeps the institution relevant by soliciting visitors’ ideas and creative labor in order to build personal investment, thereby allowing museums to look like their offerings of experiences fit in with visitors’ desires, while enhancing comfort and constructing a social hub for interpersonal dialogue related to cultural content. All this makes museums more essential to community life as vital participatory venues offering tools for visitors to network with others in relation to social objects and co-created art-related experiences”¹⁰.

Using James Clifford’s ‘Contact Zone’ as a tool for determining successful and unsuccessful audience participation programmes in museums, Kundu and Kalin argue that we must be more cautious in declaring art museums to be truly democratic spaces and instead focus more time on “revealing contradictions and inherent antagonisms to a system under neoliberal logics”. Their essay does much to make a case for change but falls short in suggesting what that change could be, though Clare Bishop makes a robust contribution in this regard in her essay *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* which critiques the writing of Bourriaud regarding the Relational Aesthetics movement in the 1990s. Using art works by Rirkrit Tiravanija as a starting example, Bishop argues that Relational Aesthetics fail in their core political aims of creating relationships and thus creating a new wholly democratic artwork. Bishop makes this argument by referencing the essay *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe which explicitly details the concept of *antagonism*, a mode in which conflict is not eradicated but perpetuated and sustained, and which is fundamental for a state of democracy. The argument here is that if a conflict cannot be found then the population falls to “the imposed consensus of the authoritarian order” and thereby quashes utopian hope¹¹.

Bishop applies this theory to art by declaring that Relational Aesthetics do not question themselves, i.e., become self-reflexive, and therefore cannot be deemed intrinsically democratic. Instead, she

¹⁰ Kundu, Rina, and Nadine M. Kalin. "Participating in the Neoliberal Art Museum." *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2015., pp. 42 *Art, Design & Architecture Collection*, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/docview/1788599694?accountid=9727>.

¹¹ Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110 (2004): 66. Print.

applauds artists Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra who deliberately create antagonistic situations to create a political realism within their artworks which evokes a self-conscious discomfort from artist, viewer and institution. For example, Sierra's various artworks in which he paid participants from the streets to undertake monotonous, humiliating and sometimes scarring tasks such as masturbating, having hair dyed or being tattooed, in the gallery space. This confrontational approach forces the viewer to question intentions of the artist, ethics of participation, and the usual parameters of diversity – race and class – seen within the institution which declares itself to be a democratic public space¹².

Museum as Activist

The ways that museums appear to have taken stock of Bishop's call for antagonism within the institution is unclear. In an interview for radio documentary *The Design Dimension: Designing Protest*, Catherine Flood described the curator's aims for *Disobedient Objects*, stating:

"There is a very old idea that the museum is a place – a mausoleum – where objects come to die, and we really wanted to challenge that and say museums can be relevant to important things that are going on in the world. They can be places where people can come and discuss current issues"

To which interviewer Tom Dyckhoff responds "...it gives a new purpose to the very idea of a museum. The museum can be an activist too"¹³. This notion of the museum "becoming an activist" has developed mileage in the past few years with museums across Britain looking for ways that they can contribute as organisations to discussions and action surrounding issues such as climate change. This debate was featured in a break out session named *The Museum Activist* at the 2016 Annual Museums Association Conference - for people working professionally in the Museums sector - under the themes of:

- People and Places: Stories, Communities and Collections

¹² Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." October 110 (2004): 51-79. Print.

¹³ Designing Protest. BBC Radio 4. London, UK, 14 Apr. 2015. Radio.

- Being Brave: Courage, Innovation and Risk-taking
- Health and Wellbeing: Impact, Evidence and Delivery¹⁴.

In an article for the *Museums Association Journal* published in conjunction with the conference, Rob Sharp examines the different ways that British museums interpret this, from changes in policies affecting disabled and diverse audiences (Richard Sandell of Leicester Museum Research Centre and author of *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum*), to interactive “soft power” displays (Manchester Museum), to collections of activist objects whose display aims to encourage activism from museum visitors (The People’s History Museum, Manchester)¹⁵.

Collecting objects of activism has also been explored through a collaboration between a group of students from the Goldsmiths MA course in Art and Politics and the Museum of London in 2011, using a participatory methodology to examine the ways that a museum could engage with protest, and in the process attempt to persuade the museum to relax and reflect upon its collection safeguarding policies so that it might “collect in the moment”. The project, *Save Our Placards*, took place at a demonstration organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) during which the Goldsmiths team set up a stall, handing out placards emblazoned with images of former protests, procured from the Museum of London’s own collection, thus creating a “mobile exhibition of museum material within the protest”. At the end of the rally, the team asked protesters carrying their own homemade objects if they would donate the items to the museum’s permanent collection, designating a tree as a collection point for ephemera such as placards, banners and t-shirts. A year later, ten of the items were designated to the permanent collection, with the rest holding residency at the Goldsmiths building, as well as being part of touring exhibitions across the UK. The project sought to further challenge the Museum of London’s already leadingly influential participatory approach to collecting items of social interest which has included revolutionising the role of oral

¹⁴ "Museums Association Conference & Exhibition." Museums Association. N.p., Nov. 2016. Web. Nov.-Dec. 2016. <<https://www.museumsassociation.org/conference/themes-and-sessions>>.

¹⁵ Sharp, Rob. "Action Points". *Museums Journal* 116.11 (2016): 29-33. Print.

histories and collecting tweets using hashtags surrounding events such as the 2012 London Olympics¹⁶. This is all very well and good, but while museums have been taking action to show their keenness to partake in political activities and grapple with political content for the sake of the public being able to come together, little has been done to interrogate how museums go about this while pertaining to state-provided and, indeed, market-driven parameters. There is also a gap into an examination of the ways that activists themselves wish to participate and be viewed in this terrain.

In a review of the *Disobedient Objects* catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, Jilly Traganou discusses the conflicting discomfort that comes with taxonomizing political objects in museums from the perspective of a material studies researcher, referencing her own previous work on anti-Olympic Protests which were displayed in Vancouver City Museum. Traganou criticizes some curatorial aspects of *Disobedient Objects*, arguing that though the curators recognise that 1968 was the start of a highly political period, the exhibition does not demonstrate a real turn in political aesthetics. However, Traganou goes on to commend Flood and Grindon for their approach to the project:

My firm belief is that when we are very close to circumstances that we find important but whose impact we are not yet able to fully comprehend (the Occupy movement, Black Lives Matter or the anti-austerity movements in the global South), we should not stay inactive. Some of our available resources as design historians allow us to chronicle their events, to map the state of materiality that these events entail, to note the daunting questions and to come together with other specialists who can shed different light on the phenomena at stake. The editors of this catalogue take all these steps¹⁷.

Likewise, researcher Richard Taws commends the curators and reflects on the difficulty of putting political objects on display:

¹⁶ Atkins, Guy, Georgina Young, and Mark Teh. "Save Our Placards!". *Collecting The Contemporary: A Handbook For Social History Museums*. Owain Rhys and Zelda Baveystock. 1st ed. Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2014. Print.

¹⁷ Traganou, Jilly. "Disobedient Objects". *Journal of Design History* 29.3 (2016): 314-317. Web.

Any exhibition covering this kind of territory risks succumbing to a few pitfalls. Stress the active role of the objects in on-going struggle and the show might come across as po-faced or preachy, turning urgent political critique into weak posture. Push too far in the other direction and the objects on display become subsumed fully into the logic of the museum, smoothing out their political and material differences and losing whatever it was that made them powerful in the first place¹⁸.

However, both Traganou and Taws fall short of thoroughly investigating the relationship the objects have with the official powers of the institution. Criticism by anthropologist-historian James Clifford could also be applied to this debate. Clifford's essay *On Collecting Art and Culture* criticizes Western museums' tradition of lifting indigenous cultures and showcasing them in a display that is patronising and appropriated. Clifford argues that the Western mode of collecting becomes not about representation of cultures by cultures, but about the power of the museum to collect and own and thus becomes something else entirely:

"An excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to *have* is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire. Thus the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies – to make "good" collections"¹⁹

The Arena of Activism

What follows is important to reflect upon here as it provides an introduction into the ways that political space and subjectivities are arranged in the public sphere, and give an indication of possible realities which research into the "political" museum must recognise.

¹⁸ Taws, Richard. "Review of 'Disobedient Objects', Victoria and Albert Museum." West 86th 21.2 (n.d.): 300. Dec. 2014. Web. Nov.-Dec. 2016.
<https://www.academia.edu/13171805/Review_of_Disobedient_Objects_West_86th_21_2_Fall-Winter_2014_297-300>.

¹⁹ Clifford, James. "On Collecting Art and Culture." *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988. 218. Print.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin provides an introduction to the subject of what could loosely be described as 'political aesthetics' – although activist or collective action could be more appropriate terms – through his conception of the Carnavalesque. In his book *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin poses the Medieval carnival as a model of the public sphere in which everything is turned inside out and a mocking laughter directed at the higher order, i.e. the church and the king, takes precedence: "...During carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life...an idea and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life, is established"²⁰.

Bakhtin's work responded directly to the fierce political climate in which he lived and wrote in 1950s Russia and created an arena where laughter, vulgarity and parody come to the fore to demarcate a utopian public sphere that serves to conceptualise the boundaries of hierarchy between the lower and higher orders. This politicised analogy of a structured space of civic grotesqueness serves as a way of observing the spaces and actions of public dissent and has been used as such by theorists both in aesthetics and the social sciences, with studies of protest and social movements (as the field is now referred to) emerging in the 1970s²¹, possibly in response to the socio-political climate of 1968 onwards.

Much of the research surrounding political aesthetics takes a focus on spaces, performance, object and collectivity. Activist and Researcher Pollyana Ruiz's book *Articulating Dissent: Protest and the Public Sphere* seeks to define how heterogeneous coalition groups, such as Occupy Wall Street, can approach marginalized issues and bring them to the mainstream. In concluding her research, Ruiz makes an interesting observation on the trajectory of activist histories within a similar time-period that my research manifests from;

²⁰ Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge, MA: M. I. T., 1968. 203. Print.

²¹ Johnston, Hank. "Protest Cultures: Performance, Artifacts, and Ideations." *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009. 4. Print.

When I began this book, the anti-globalisation movement was at its peak. However, the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 transformed the political environment within which protest groups must function and redirected the energies of the campaigners. The end of the Bush administration combined with the global economic downturn at the end of 2008 has once again altered the relationship between public(s) and both political and economic powers. While the parameters of protest have always been challenged and redefined by the political, social and economic circumstances which surround them, there is a sense in which the last ten years *may* have fundamentally altered the ways in which dissent can be articulated²².

This not only highlights links with Fisher's work in terms of his observations of a world of neoliberalism, but it also indicates that the highly political climate that today's museums are reflecting has been building for some time, which leaves room for further research in the manifestation of protest sensibilities and political aesthetics. Ruiz's words indicate a new consciousness and structure within the terrain of activism which must be examined when regarding the documentation of these histories when placed in the neoliberal museum.

Ranciere made similar observations when dealing with a political and aesthetic space and its characteristics under neoliberalism; in the essay *September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?*, Ranciere concludes that the September 11th attacks against the World Trade Centre were *not* a rupture in the symbolic order and that in fact if it had happened, it did so long ago. Ranciere makes the case that, instead of being an attack on the West, the attacks were intended to mark a rupture in American power, which was rebutted by George Bush's rhetoric of "infinite justice", demarcating a division between the 'Good American People' and the 'Forces of Evil'. It is within this that Ranciere describes the inherent policing of Western states through a mode of consensus:

²² Ruiz, Pollyanna. *Articulating Dissent: Protest and the Public Sphere*. London: Pluto, 2014. 176. Print.

...The supposed naivety of the official American discourse conveys the present state of politics perfectly, or rather of what has come to replace it. At the level of symbolizing our political being-together, politics proper has been replaced by consensus...not simply an agreement between parties in the name of national interest. It implies immediate identity between the political constitution of the community and the physical and moral constitution of a population...the community as an entity that is naturally unified by ethical values²³

The demarcations of public order to which Ranciere refers imply an “us versus them” position between the powers of good (the American state) and the power of evil (terrorism).

Concluding Points and Research Question

The literature I have reviewed has demonstrated a large body of work surrounding the structure of the museum within neoliberalism and the disjointed relationship it has, as a product of the state, with political dissent. My concern is with the archivization of political histories into the museum and the implications this has within wider practices of culture and the effects therein on the boundaries between dissent and consensus. Debates are taking place within the soul-searching of the museum as it attempts to become a hub of discussion and activism, but this opens a gap as to what the implications are for aesthetics that seek to disrupt the social order of consensus. My research question is therefore:

What is at stake for Political Objects and Aesthetics in the *Disobedient Objects* Exhibition?

²³ Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Continuum, London, 2009. 99-100. Print

Methodology

Word count: 3092 (excluding footnotes).

In this research project I intend to interrogate the structures of the neoliberal museum (after Kundu and Kalin) to investigate the ways that dissent can exist within the museum through displayed objects and participation. By doing this I intend to examine and identify the possible risks that come with placing political aesthetics into the museum which, as much of the work in my literature review would suggest, would work to anaesthetize the dissensual impact for which political objects were intended. I will do this using the 2014 exhibition *Disobedient Objects* at the Victoria and Albert Museum as a case study, though my project was initially sparked by a selection of exhibitions at leading public galleries and museums including the Tate, Barbican and Hayward Galleries. I have selected *Disobedient Objects* as my case study because of its explicit use of objects directly from protest made by grassroots organisations, which makes it a robust starting point to really open up the notion of the “museum as an activist”²⁴.

My project is placed within the tradition of Art Historical Research from a “New Art History” perspective, as described by Marcia Pointon. Pointon differentiates New Art History from classical modes of analysis by highlighting its focus as being not only on the project within the realm of the artwork or exhibition in itself, but casting a further eye to the social framing and constitution of the artwork or exhibition at large. She describes the development of New Art History as so:

The notion that there is one group of people finding out the facts about objects (often people based in museums) and another group of people dependent on this work and producing interpretations has been well and truly challenged in the last three decades. It has

²⁴ Sharp, Rob. "Action Points". *Museums Journal* 116.11 (2016): 29-33. Print.

been argued that the conceptualization of “facts” and the decision about what questions to ask of an object are also matters of interpretation. The idea of academic objectivity has been discarded by many art historians who now acknowledge that reading paintings (the term is significant because it recognises that the viewer plays a part in interpretation and that any form of representation may be seen as a text to be “read”) involves multiple meanings which will be to an extent determined by the constitution and environment of the individual doing the reading²⁵

This mode of art historical research concerns itself with diversity of reference, complexity of meaning and self-referentiality of the reading at hand; the first of these is critical in building a valid base of data. It is thus Interpretivist in nature and produces theoretical knowledge; that which is not a taken-for-granted fact, but a response from myself based on credible data²⁶, which becomes a new subjective theory contributed to the discussions I highlight in my literature review. This form of knowledge is subjective, and will most likely produce new questions in its conclusions, acting as a kind of ‘phase’ in an ongoing debate that can never be truly concluded once and for all. Within this interpretation, I must recognise my position as a political student researcher with pre-conceived ideas about the museum in the neoliberal condition. I will be putting strategies in place to mitigate the risk of any potential bias, which I will expand upon later in this essay.

This forms a relationship with Social Constructionism, a branch of philosophy concerned with the construction of social entities that come to form shared ideas of reality, and often comes with an emphasis on observation as the method of choice. Referring to the work of Berger and Luckman, Tom Andrews in his essay *What is Social Constructionism?*, describes how the emphasis of Social Constructionism is on interactions between people (as a collective) with the social world and the inevitable occurrence of routinization and habitualization that follows, forming a collective idea of

²⁵ Pointon, Marcia R. *History Of Art*. 4th ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 33. Print.

²⁶ Davies, Martin and Nathan Hughes. *Doing A Successful Research Project*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 .164. Print.

reality.²⁷ This rationale of thinking will be a useful reference for me in terms of its intention to examine and challenge assumptions of what is socially perceived as reality, and maintaining that there is more than one way of viewing the world, but also that knowledge is constructed. This epistemological position particularly emphasises the existence of institutional knowledge, which comes to be experienced as objective knowledge, and thus internalised into a subjective social reality²⁸. I view the museum as existing within this terrain and it is this assumption of objective reality that I intend to open up with the V&A museum.

Discourse Analysis

I will be employing Discourse Analysis as my methodological approach. Discourse Analysis is concerned with examining and interrogating texts to reveal their hidden meanings, assumptions and plays of power. The method derives from Foucault's writing on panopticism²⁹ - a structural model devised by Jeremy Bentham - which became the new model for the enforcement of law and discipline, away from the extreme limitless violence of the middle ages. Foucault argues that the panoptic model enforces social order through a construction dependent on hierarchy, surveillance, observation and writing (bureaucratic organisations and divisions). Foucault describes this model as so:

They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and

²⁷ Andrews, T. "What Is Social Constructionism?" *Grounded Theory Review | An International Interdisciplinary Journal*. June 2012. Web. 02 Feb. 2016. <<http://groundedtheoryreview.com/>>.

²⁸ Andrews, T. "What Is Social Constructionism?" *Grounded Theory Review | An International Interdisciplinary Journal*. June 2012. Web. 02 Feb. 2016. <<http://groundedtheoryreview.com/>>.

²⁹ Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2001. 174. Print.

to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap³⁰

The aim of discourse analysis is to interrogate the processes and structures that put such plays of power into action to reveal hidden realities, with the ultimate concern being the 'reading' of texts. Gillian Rose divides discourse analysis into two modes of approach; the first being primarily concerned with language (as much Post-Structuralist writing was) and the hidden plays of power embedded within it - the notion that all language is rhetorically constructed and never neutral³¹. The second taking a broader analysis of the structures which come together to form the institution and thus hidden assumptions within objective knowledge that the institution forms. The second of these will be my primary course of action, although elements of the language/discourse approach can be useful to refer to, as Post-Structuralism's focus on language can be applied to all systems of signifying. The intention of these interrogations is to determine patterns (or 'codes') within the structures that are analysed, paying particular attention to recurrences, absences and contradictions.

Tony Bennett and *The Birth of the Museum*

My main methodological guide in this project will be Tony Bennett whose book *The Birth of the Museum* takes direct influence from Foucault's Post-Structuralist writing, in particular, Foucault's analyses of institutions such as the prison, the clinic, and social constructions of sexuality. Foucault's work sought to interrogate language and structures in aid of the 'Politics of Truth', by identifying structures of power embedded within language, the construction of institutions and their

³⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1977. 200. Print.

³¹ Gil, Rosalind, and George Gaskell. "Discourse Analysis." Ed. Martin Bauer. *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound* (2000): 176. Research Gate. Web. Nov.-Dec. 2016. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rosalind_Gill/publication/30529296_Discourse_Analysis/links/541482070cf2788c4b35a7b5.pdf>.

technologies (the apparatuses that cause the institution to function in the way it does³²), and the effect this has on forms of social control and divisions. Bennett's study of the museum seeks to demonstrate how the structure of the museum space and its content are constructed and what implications this holds for its public in terms of class, diversity, politics and the impassivity of accessible knowledge, making it an appropriate guide in my examination of activism in the democratic museum. Using Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault argues that the eighteenth century introduction of a regulated penal system - via a panoptical structure i.e., the implication of constant surveillance - enforces internalised discipline within prisoners, Bennett argues that the later model of the museum seen to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century does likewise to render visitors into docile bodies:

If the birth of the prison, in detaching punishment from the public scene, was one response to the problem, the birth of the museum provided its complement. Detaching the display of power - the power to command and arrange objects for display - from the risk of disorder, it also provided a mechanism for the transformation of the crowd into an ordered and self-regulated public³³

Bennett further makes the point that whilst the institutional structures of the museum and the prison draw intrinsic similarities, they do not draw in complete parallel. Instead Bennett argues that whilst the dynamic of the two structures is the same, they run in opposite directions in that the prison with its rhetoric of reform ultimately sought to divide respectable populations from their criminal neighbors who would be kept hidden out of sight, whereas museums took the most precious of objects that had been permitted to be viewed only by royalty and the wealthy, and put them on display with the intention of offering knowledge to those from all walks of life, again with the intention of reforming the working classes.

³²Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2001. Print.

³³ Bennett, T. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995. 99. Print.

Bennett's work is useful to me because of the observation methods which he employs to uncover hidden realities of the museum embedded within its structure, taking reference from other museum theorists such as Eileen Hooper-Greenhill who identified the architecture of the museum as a means of orchestrated surveillance. Hooper-Greenhill also provides a useful reference to my work because of her explicit observation of acts made by the governing state that would have an impact on the structure and governmentality of museum, for example, identifying the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 which had an impact on the way that museums were made to serve the public and perform a civic and political task³⁴. By examining these institutional apparatuses the researcher seeks to find the occurrence of key themes, claims to truth, complexities which may lead to contradictions, and any absences which produce further questions about claims to truth. Gillian Rose expands on institutional apparatuses in her book *Visual Methodologies: Interpreting Visual Materials* in a discussion of Bennett's work:

" An institutional apparatus is the forms of power/knowledge that constitute the institutions: for example, architecture, regulations, scientific treatises, philosophical statements, laws, morals, and so on, and the discourse articulated throughout these"³⁵

By examining and interrogating these apparatuses, I will be able to uncover a broader vision of the museum's structure, and thus interpret the space of the relationship between the exhibition's objects and their framework. I will approach this through the following:

Observation

A large part of my methodology will centre around observation - a method favoured by Social Constructionism and Post-Structuralism - of the exhibition and its context, i.e., the V&A. I visited the exhibition when it was on display in 2014 and will re-visit and re-observe the exhibition in retrospect - through the use of photographs and notes taken at the time - to critically analyse the curation of

³⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and Their Visitors*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

³⁵ Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2001.174. Print.

the exhibition and examine the structural framework that the museum both provides and imposes.

Marcia Pointon advises drawing as a good way of enabling the art historian researcher to see further when observing artworks³⁶, with Rosalind Gil similarly advising that writing a description of a text will begin the analysis³⁷. The specifics of what I will be looking at will include:

- Content of the exhibition and its displayed accompaniments; the collected objects including films and sound-pieces, their introductory texts and images, the layout of the exhibition and how the objects have been grouped to demonstrate what themes emerge, the construction of the exhibition and how the curators have placed the objects into the pre-existing space of the museum;
- The digital space of the museum and exhibition including the #DisobedientObjects hashtag and the DIY Protest PDFs; a large part of the exhibition that cannot be overlooked is the digital dimension it entails. The use of the digital is a key method on the part of the museum to induce audience participation in line with governmental demands set in place in 2010 that “digital innovation” be a priority in the arts to make it eligible for funding. It is here that the boundaries between a governmentally imposed policy and the output of museum-as-activist will directly meet, and it is imperative to make note of these meetings and possible contradictions within them;
- The accompanying exhibition public programme of talks and lectures and the *Disobedient Objects* catalogue; this will give a further idea of the type of audience participation that was put in place within the museum’s educational remit;
- The architectural space of the V&A; this will give an indication of the ideological fashion of the museum in and for which it was built and the effect this has on the viewer upon entry. It will also be an opportunity to examine the ways that the curators responded to the building

³⁶ Pointon, Marcia R. *History Of Art*. 4th ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 15. Print.

³⁷ Gil, Rosalind, and George Gaskell. "Discourse Analysis." Ed. Martin Bauer. *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound* (2000): 183. Research Gate. Web. Nov.-Dec. 2016. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rosalind_Gill/publication/30529296_Discourse_Analysis/links/541482070cf2788c4b35a7b5.pdf>.

and the ways that the exhibition and the architecture imposed on one another. This could reveal more about the effect the exhibition had on the objects it contained;

- Publicly available governmental documents pertaining to the overarching organisation and development of *Disobedient Objects* with regards to funding and policies of agreement between museum board members and the curators. This will aid me in identifying governmental influences that took place over the production of the exhibition and the ideological impact this may have had. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill emphasises the importance of such powers: “Museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them. Museums, in common with all the other social institutions, serve many masters, and must play many tunes accordingly³⁸”. By identifying the tunes and masters that Hooper-Greenhill describes, I intend to further map out the directions and limitations that were imposed on the development and curatorial processes of *Disobedient Objects*.

Interviews

The curators of the exhibition, Gavin Grindon and Catherine Flood, have agreed to talk and be interviewed by me, along with academic Guy Julier who works both for Brighton University and the V&A and contributed information and leads for the curators of *Disobedient Objects*. Interviewing curators is a common procedure in museum studies and research as it opens further discussion surrounding the intentions and concepts of the exhibition, how it was conceived and how it was practically manifested in terms of negotiating with the museum in question’s protocol, with the aim being to stimulate reflection and exploration³⁹. Martin Davies and Nathan Hughes advise semi-structured interviews as being “at its best...[leading] to significant advances in our theoretical understanding of social reality; more routinely, it is particularly good at enabling the researcher to

³⁸Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992. 1. Print.

³⁹Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2001. 178. Print.

learn, at first hand, about people's perspectives on the subject chosen as the project's focus"⁴⁰.

Gillian Rose also describes this as an effective mode of further examining the technologies of the museum's structure. Grindon and Julier are academics working at Essex and Brighton Universities respectively. Flood is a resident curator at the V&A specialising in posters, prints and graphics. Each of the prospective interviewees has invited to meet me at their respective places of work, which I hope will add further inflection on my analysis of their work, and the perspective their backgrounds brought to the exhibition. The interviews will be semi-structured, meaning that questions posed by me will be limited and open-ended, giving them time to talk reflectively and give broad answers. I will then transcribe the interviews which will be included in my final project. My task will then be to analyse and interpret their answers. I will be looking to gain an insight into their intentions for the exhibition and the choices they made thereof in creating it, as well as their experiences of working with and *within* the museum institution which serves to be one of the most prestigious institutions Britain if not the world. As well as discussing their selections for the exhibition, I am keen to uncover what was *not* selected and the reasons why, as this will make the limitations of representing political content more explicit.

Theoretical Intervention

Once I have garnered the data from the above methods I will then compare and identify patterns and contradictions across my findings in all of its forms, and introduce debates seen in my literature review regarding the neoliberal condition and museum and articulations of dissent. I will debate my findings within a written context and will draw my own conclusions from my interpretations.

Participation

One of the limitations that comes with a Discourse Analysis methodology is that this mode of working is intrinsically uninterested in self-reflexive practices, as highlighted by Gillian Rose. This is a

⁴⁰ Davies, Martin and Nathan Hughes. *Doing A Successful Research Project*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 28. Print.

matter of concern for me as I feel a lack of self-reflexivity would create an internal conflict of interests between the initial aims, concerns and critiques of the project and its outcomes. It also risks developing a bias thesis, even if written unintentionally. In order to challenge this, I intend to introduce a participatory element to my methodology in which others, such as visitors to the exhibition, activists and indeed the curators themselves, are able to evaluate my findings in the research project and contribute their voices through focus groups, thus putting myself as the researcher under scrutiny, in the hope of developing a more democratic method of working. This follows from Clare Bishop's critique of Relational Aesthetics (as discussed in my literature review) in which she argues that for political artworks to be truly democratic, there must be a strain of antagonism which invokes self-reflexivity into the practice (my practice being my writing)⁴¹. I am also consciously taking influence from a conference I attended on 'Open Research' in which various academics from a wide array of disciplines discussed the ways that research practices and data can be made more publicly available and the politics that comes with this in regards to accessibility, public ownership and democratic contribution. I was particularly struck by a presentation given by Dr Kat Jungnickel of Goldsmiths University whose design history project on the cycling attire of Victorian women involved making replicas of clothing from original patterns and offering groups of participants in many different contexts to try on the clothes and respond to them experientially. Jungnickel described this process as the clothes becoming "objects of knowledge"⁴² which thus alleviates the research methodology from a one-sided process of observation.

Objectives

By undertaking this project I hope to develop new theoretical knowledge to contribute to the heavily contested debate of the museum as an activist and the ways that political activism is seen and

⁴¹ Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110 (2004): 66. Print.

⁴² Presentation given by Kat Jungnickel on her project "Bikes and Bloomers" at the Open Research for Academics: A Workshop and Hackathon conference at Goldsmiths University, London. 2016.

understood within the neoliberal museum, and what risks can emerge from this for political aesthetics at large.

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