INTRODUCTION

All Museums Are Sex Museums

I view sex as a diverse, dynamic, interactive, and interdependent social relation cultivated by the ways in which bodies, spaces, and objects interrelate; it is not, therefore, solely a relationship between human bodies but also a relation between bodies and objects and the ways in which bodies are invited, coerced, and positioned around and toward particular kinds of objects. Museums are theatrical spaces of everyday drama, veritable contact zones between bodies and objects.[1] Sex has never been outside the scope of the museum's representational field, and the museum has always participated in the disciplining of sexuality that occurs in other sites (e.g., the prison, the school, the asylum), albeit differently. Especially when it comes to display—the interactive and public museum practice that frames much of contemporary Western understandings of knowledge and culture—museums have played a pivotal but often overlooked role in how we talk, think, and represent sex.

This book is about what happens when museums display sex, explicitly or tacitly. In it, I demonstrate how museum debates about what sex is and how to manage it have been integral to defining the parameters of sexual normalcy. In particular, I focus on the politics and the performance of display—that is, the ways in which sexual display transforms museums into culture war theaters where dramatic civic struggles over how sex relates to public institutional space, national and global citizenship, public discourse, definitions of art and history, and performances of sexual identity are staged. In addition to analyzing the diverse

sexual artifacts that populate museums, this book also investigates what can be learned about the formation of Western sexuality by studying how various museum publics have managed sexual knowledge through the use of display as a technique and the museum as an institutional space for disciplining sexuality both within and outside museums.

The museum management of sex has profoundly strengthened the tenacity of sexuality as a modern invention and its persistence as a category of politicized meaning. Diverse representations of sexuality, in some form, are always present in archival collections that reflect and shape definitions of *culture*. Most often, however, museums organize exhibits that assume that patriarchal heterosexuality and traditional structures of sexual intimacy and gender performance represent national sexual culture for their visitors. *Sex Museums* illuminates the heteronormativity of most museums and proposes alternative approaches for the future of public sexual display projects. Thus, it develops theoretical concepts with practical applications for collection, curatorship, policy management, and visitor services in museums.

In light of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's argument that "display not only shows and speaks, but does,"[2] this study examines the effects of museum display on the history of sexuality by exploring four interrelated themes. First, it treats the museum context (of the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries) as a pivotal and highly influential site in the construction of modern sexual subjectivity and the categories of normalcy and perversity. Second, it explores a group of present-day museums, called sex museums, as explicit sexual spaces in the public sphere that combine pedagogy and public entertainment to redefine what *sex* means. Third, it examines the successes and failures of sex museums and describes the pleasures and dangers associated with exhibiting marginalized sexual subjects (e.g., women, people of color, LGBT individuals). Fourth, it proposes the seemingly paradoxical assertion that all museums are already sex museums, even as a diverse array of sexualities has been historically marginalized from the museum's scopic field. While sex is present in most all museums, sex museums are a particular group of museums that have their own history that builds on but diverges from the ways that other museums have traditionally managed sexual display. Building on my experience as an archivist and curator at one sex museum, the Leather Archives and Museum (LA&M) in Chicago, my analysis also proposes alternative models of curatorial labor that I gather under the term *queer curatorship*. Queer curatorship is an experimental display tactic that stages alternative spatial configurations for two distinct purposes: to expose how traditional museums socialize

heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors and to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures, for example, leather whips as objects with historical ties to both gay leather/kink culture and antebellum slavery. In homage to the exhibition *Mining the Museum*, in which the institutional critique artist Fred Wilson reorganized the white historical archive of the Baltimore Historical Society to centralize its margins by placing Maryland's fraught racial past center stage, queer curatorship aims to do for sex (and race) what Wilson did for race in the context of display.[3]

My analysis of museum history dovetails with the periodization that in *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault labeled as the perverse implantation, an "age of multiplication" wherein sexualities were dispersed and strengthened and multiple forms of "perversions" were invented.[4] The transition from immense Renaissance collections known as the *Wunderkammern* (wonder rooms) to the post-Enlightenment project of the modern museum was also characterized by dispersal and the reclassification of what Douglas Crimp has called the heterogeneous profusion of the *Wunderkammern*.[5] *Sex Museums* views these overlapping histories wherein objects and bodies were reclassified under newly invented categories as intimately related and takes as its central claim that museums should be counted among the institutional instruments that make up the perverse implantation. My examination of the museum context and its relationship to the proliferation of sexual perversions in Western thought thus begins with some of the earliest display spaces that emerged during that transition from wonder rooms to modern museums and continues into the twenty-first century in order to trace how the museum as an institution depended on norms and normalization in practices of display. Tracking the history of the museum through the history of sexuality shows how display materialized and shaped shifting political and social ideas about gender, race, and class as they related to changing notions of sexual subjectivity.

Yet the history of the normalizing force of the museum always paralleled another history—a queer history—one in which the display of unruly objects of nonnormative sex rebels against museum norms, as do risk-taking curators. Throughout the book, I foreground display as a materialization of queer theory and as a form of queer praxis. Specifically, I propose queer curatorship as a mode of display that puts antinormative principles into practice. Queer curatorship is a curatorial activity that can highlight and rearrange normative narratives about what it means to be a historically and geographically specific sexual subject. It can also materialize a spatial and discursive approach to display that utopically

imagines new forms of sexual sociality and collectivity between bodies, things, and nations in public institutional display spaces, such as museums. The point of queer curatorship as a form of queer praxis is not only to say that there is homophobia, transphobia, sex negativity, and racism at work when queer and dissident sexual materials are thought to belong in the trash can and not the museum, though this too is an important aspect of queer curatorship. It is also to say that a queer antinormative point of view is crucial now in the struggle against oblivion, both in the form of the long history of suppression and of ignoring such materials and in the mainstreaming of gay culture, which may deem these materials irrelevant in the name of pride, dignity, and sameness with heterosexual cultures.

Thus, while heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homophobia are central to the version of museum history that *Sex Museums* imparts, so too is *homonormativity*, a more recently activated term within queer scholarship that aims to theorize an emerging set of social, embodied, and rhetorical codes for promoting and performing ideal forms of "gayness" while disciplining other forms of sexual difference. In the 1990s Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner initiated the use of the term *heteronormativity* when they famously suggested that homosexuality could never acquire the same normative force as the densely institutionalized workings of heterosexuality.[6] Queer theorists have since revised this argument when they introduced the term *homonormativity*.[7] Overwhelmingly, these theorists have emphasized the cultural influences of "neoliberalism," an economic ideology that stresses privatization, a market economy, and transnational trade politics, on gay and lesbian formations and the emergence of assimilationist approaches to gay politics. Throughout the book, whenever I refer to homonormativity, I mean to pinpoint the phenomenon that queer theorists have seized on to illuminate the interrelationship between macroeconomic policies and quotidian sexual culture. The book therefore examines the disciplining of certain kinds of sex through display that span heterosexual and homosexual cultures from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries.

The concept of queer curatorship thus seizes on a definition of *queer* very much in line with twenty-first-century queer critique and particularly with the scholarship of José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz defines *queer* as a "not yet here" and "as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future."[8] Central to the notion of display as a form of queer praxis is the repositioning of the body in relationship to the objects on exhibit, regardless of the sexual culture from which these

objects derive or whether the objects had previously been arranged in heteronormative and/or homonormative configurations. This approach to display as a materialization of queer theory and as a mode of queer world making draws inspiration from theater and performance studies scholars who prioritize questions of embodiment and corporeal histories to forge new paths for rethinking display in museums.[9] These scholars agree that, like theaters, museums carefully position viewers in particular scenes of meaning making where knowledge and the organization of that knowledge have always been staged. For Muñoz, as for this book: "Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future."[10] *Sex Museums* traverses the history of the museum through the history of sexuality, and vice versa, so as to imagine and reach toward the future queer potential of display.

Any conversation about display and the staging of knowledge in museums begins in archives, repositories of artifacts from which the objects for display are chosen. Performance scholars have also been instrumental in revealing the limitations of archives. In particular, Diana Taylor uses the work of Jacques Derrida, Paul Connerton, and Pierre Nora to imagine a symbiosis between official archives and the embodied performance of memory and history of the everyday. She theorizes performance as a "vital act of transfer" communicated through "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproductive knowledge."[11] *Sex Museums* extends Taylor's project by exploring the distinctive relationships of sex to archives and to museums. Furthermore, it argues that sex should be viewed as a unique component of Taylor's repertoire, one that possesses a close association with histories of policing and stigmatization. By combining sexuality and performance studies, I join scholars and artists dedicated to the project of queering the archive, a project that has historically wavered between outing gay and lesbian predecessors and locating sexual moments in the archive that disrupt the normative sexual narrative of a particular time and place.[12] By focusing on the display of sex as a performance rather than sexuality as an identity, I intend to keep my analysis open to all kinds of identifications and desires so as to question what constitutes history, identity, and publicness; I can then also examine what assumptions about privateness and publicness museums share with other spaces and sites for sexual discourse. Indeed, I propose that museums both reflect and shape the ways in which institutions manage sex in the public sphere.

In the following pages, I look at Western modernity's quintessential space of display—the museum—to examine the ways in which museums

have been pivotal sites in the construction of epistemological frames for understanding sex. I go on to examine the late twentieth- and twenty-first-century museum phenomenon—the sex museum—to think about how and in what ways that genealogy can be reconfigured. Never neutral or natural, exhibiting sex exposes the theatricality of display and disturbs how we understand the museum and its relationship to sex and publicness.

Sex Museum Theory

When I refer to a museum, I refer to a location and a space of display and spectatorship within which restricted performances of meaning making happen. *Museum* also signifies a positionality, a stance from which museum publics contest and reflect what Erving Goffman called frames of understanding, or the organization of the continuous stream of life activity into digestible components and categories of meaning.[13] Museums organize and display objects, and, in so doing, they simultaneously show the structures by which people understand and categorically arrange objects and also invent new models for understanding those objects. Whether the organizational structure of object arrangements reiterates, supports, or confirms an already existing frame of understanding or breaks, subverts, or moves between frames depends on the practices of meaning making enacted by bodies moving in, around, and through museums. This process of meaning making, practice, and action is what I will refer to throughout the book as performance.

My focus on how bodies move through space to interact and form relationships with other bodies and objects on display—what I call display choreography and describe at length in chapter 1—is intended to illuminate museums as sites of performance and as locations, to borrow a term from Michel de Certeau, for exhibiting "intersections of mobile elements" that specifically highlight sex as one of those elements. Like de Certeau, I view space as a "practiced place" guided by a general itinerary (e.g., floor plan) but with ample room for moments or pockets of visitor agency, active interpretation, and inconsistent experience.[14] For space to be a "practiced place," bodies must circulate and make meaning within and around it. In this book, the intersecting mobile elements that compose space (and hence "sex objects" of analysis) include the experience of moving as a sexual subject within a particular urban landscape, stepping into a particular museum located within that landscape, moving through museum galleries where sex objects are displayed, organized,

and juxtaposed to other objects, textual analysis, and the predetermined assumption on the part of museum planners of who constitutes its audience. Like Rebecca Schneider, I seek to add "stimulating confusion" to scholarship on space, specifically how museum spaces, especially sex museum spaces, prepare scenes for performing the relationship between the passerby (the visitor), the passed by (objects on display), and archival sexual knowledge.[15]

I combine de Certeau's definition of *space* with the work of queer geographers like David Bell and Gill Valentine who discuss "the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute one another."[16] Geographers of sexualities start with embodiment—with what bodies do—in order to analyze how spaces are produced through social practices that, in turn, enact environments structured by regulating norms. These practices encompass sexual relations between the bodies and, I would add, objects that make up and take up space. Above all, these scholars agree that "sexualities can usefully be understood through the institutionalisation of spaces at a variety of scales, from the national to the transnational."[17] In museums, hierarchical structures of race, gender, sex, and class are so intricately enmeshed in the architecture and layout of the space that the always ongoing process of constructing sexual normalcy becomes invisible, background, or seemingly "natural." Studying the reiterations and disruptions of the hegemonic sexual and gendered order performed in museums contributes to the cultural study of how these structures and practices became institutionalized through display.

The museum's history, its persistent resonance in the cultural imaginary as a place of objective education, and its spatial demands on the compliant body create atmospheres in which it is difficult to enact, detect, or imagine forms of embodied resistance. While museums primarily function on the logic of the visible, visitor resistance to how knowledge and expertise are organized and presented typically remains under the visual radar as public outbursts and emotional performances are deterred, if not forbidden. In all display spaces, not only what is seen but also what is felt are things that are carefully staged. With this in mind, *Sex Museums* identifies and reads the *emotional habitus*, to borrow Deborah Gould's term, of museum displays and proposes that museum scholars view the production and circulation of particular feelings as another exhibitionary technology that—like the floor layout, the display design, and the content of the exhibition—mediates a museum visitor's experience with objects.[18] The emotional habitus of a display, and whether or how this habitus is shared across different exhibitions in separate museums, not only furnishes the tone of a display but also

invests the display with certain feelings about the objects and bodies exhibited. My proposal that feelings be used as diagnostic tools, however, goes beyond the analysis of space; it also addresses the ways that the critical purchase of mindfulness, and in particular the emotional habitus of the museums I examine, can be extended to cover an investigation of museum visitors, their motivations, their horizon expectations, and their own analytic practices in museums as well. By analyzing archives, visitor comment books, and my own collection of museum ethnographies from contemporary sex museums as affective texts, I hope to illuminate how museum visitors emotionally resist sexual exhibits that they find problematic.

When I refer to sexuality, I mean the discursive and visual construction of sexual normalcy in the context of sexual display. For Foucault, sexuality simultaneously refers to power and pleasure, or to use his language, systems of surveillance, policing, and discipline, and to taxonomic configurations and intelligible categories (e.g., sexual identities). Like Foucault, I call for a "different economy of bodies and pleasures,"[19] one that embraces communities, desires, and practices and asks sex to speak in the service, not of vilifying or exposing the speaker, but rather of invigorating the political with pleasure. Throughout this book, I view museum practices that occur in, around, and with sexual displays in museums not *like* performances but *as* performances as I believe in the revelatory function of performance, and in particular performance studies, to show how "sexuality is a very real historical formation" through a "tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance."[20] The examination of this tactical reversal requires a synthesized approach to analysis that incorporates more than one modality to encompass movement, speech, texts, narratives, objects, and the various practices (e.g., collection, exhibition, spectatorship, security, ticket taking, installation, publicity, etc.) that are specific to museums as sites where a multitude of ethnographic, artistic, scientific, and social historical frames are used to select, present, and consume objects.

As the museum studies scholar Tony Bennett has shown, power in museums operates through very specific mechanisms. Museums proceed through related and overlapping but ultimately different scopic dynamics than the panoptic devices of the disciplinary regime as defined by Foucault.[21] Bennett argues that the disciplining function of museums hinges on the logic of the seen, what he calls the exhibitionary complex.[22] According to Bennett, the exhibitionary complex constitutes "a public

dramaturgy of power," whereas Foucault's "carceral archipelago" focuses on incarceration rather than public display as the primary technique of power.[23] Museums emerged as constitutive of the exhibitionary complex, a system devoted to making visible those bodies and objects that had previously been displayed in private settings (e.g., royal palaces) to a small coterie of elite individuals. Display is the hinge that distinguishes the exhibitionary complex from the disciplinary regime described by Foucault, but ultimately both models encompass the construction and dissemination of power in distinct but historically synchronic institutions.

In keeping with how capitalism set the stage for the establishment and dissemination of new forms of power, practices of knowledge acquisition about sex in museums have generally been contrived as cheap amusements and spectacles. Like the dance halls, picnic grounds, and street corners of turn-of-the-century New York City, museums were modern sites for recreation and pleasure marketed toward the masses, but they were also social spaces in which the shifting contours of gender, race, and class "played out."[24] What was commonly perceived as the leisure activity of museumgoing—an idea popularized and commercialized through the advent of dime museums and figures such as P. T. Barnum—often affirmed the social organization and hierarchies of the hegemonic culture at large. In these instances, display became a mode for staging modern state techniques for subjugating certain bodies and practices and celebrating others. These exhibitionary violences were rendered more insidious by the use of mundane display techniques to disseminate them among the public.

Drawing from Foucault's theory of biopower, I position museums as one of many institutions in which there occurred an "explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations."[25] Like Paul B. Preciado, I continue Foucault's project by locating architectural sites of sexual popular culture as intertwining systems of representation for the display of biopolitical techniques that aim to govern sex, gender, and race. Preciado's study of *Playboy* revealed how its influence on sex and sexuality extended well beyond the pages of the magazine to promote new sexed and gendered lifestyles that were marketed as "modern" and accessible through utopian but physical sites such as the Playboy Clubs of the 1960s.[26] I impart a related analysis of museums, but I begin in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, before the age of networks, to trace a genealogy of sexual display as a biopolitical technology for the organization of time and space and the capitalistic production of sexual social norms.

As in the scientific model of worker efficiency known as Taylorism, sexual display carefully presented the ideal of sexual life according to the values of a given time and locale and organized them into fractional components. In instances of explicit sexual display, museums served a pivotal function not only in presenting modern biopolitical realities but also in shaping those realities in entertaining and engaging ways. When exhibits tacitly displayed sex, they aimed to show the best method for achieving satisfaction, not in the workplace, but in the intimate home and within a person's sexual social life. In the context of the biopolitical museum, sexual hegemony took shape as production and social reproduction merged through the performativity of sexual display. Museums provided recreational stages for the galvanization of "normal" sexual desire through the leisure activity of museumgoing as a complicated popular practice that engaged the conventions generally brought to activities associated with amusement. The inclusion of sexual display in museums thus pinpoints a business strategy that helped frame the practice of museumgoing as an amusement and promised certain pleasures and disciplined others through visual and textual lessons of sexual biopower.

While museumgoing has always been a leisure activity and a site of popular entertainment, museum displays typically offer frames for consuming biopower in a manner that reverses the logic of the theater. As opposed to watching a drama unfold on the theater stage, display enfolds the audience (as a collective body) and the spectator (as an individual witness) into the spectacle by "forming a technology of vision which serve[s] not to atomize and disperse the crowd but to regulate it, and to do so by rendering it visible to itself."[27] The architectural decisions that regulated bodies in space and time in prisons were adapted to the museum context, which, in contrast to the panoptic logic, demanded that everyone be able to see all things. The move from sovereign to state power included a transition from the private exhibitions of princes and aristocrats to "an organization of space and vision that would enable museums to function as organs of public instruction."[28] Museums provided the perfect platform to combine top-down coercion with the internalization of policing norms as the notion of what constituted the public shifted from "a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect," to "a collection of separated individualities."[29]

Occasionally, biopolitical production in museums also produced resistance in the form of embodied actions that opposed capitalist biopower and the emerging medicine of perversions it upheld. In rare instances,

museums became stages where minority voices and values regarding sex could be articulated, though only temporarily and at great risk. When museum visitors rebelled in overt ways, they defied the implicit and official rules of museumgoing as an activity experienced in leisure time. The individual visitor faced off with museum events that used sex as a powerful exhibitionary and strategic tool for creating a set of hierarchical relations for understanding modern sexual subjectivity. While certain curators or spectators resisted this burgeoning use of museums as sites for performing the politics of sexual biopower, the organization of space and vision in museums depended on acquiescence, docile behavior, and normative feelings about sex and sexuality. Museums also hinged on the acceptance of the frames they presented for understanding life as constituted not by the invention of specific historical and geographic formations and epistemologies but by the revelation of undeniable "truths." Through the use of display techniques such as selection, juxtaposition, and labeling, museums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries authenticated emerging biopolitical narratives and used the display of objects or human bodies framed as objects to show audiences the new biopower of hierarchical sexual differences between genders, races, and classes.

One often overlooked outgrowth of the exhibitionary complex pertains to how museums have consistently functioned as one of many institutions that have defined sexual perversity and additionally to how they have given rise to an erotophobic examination and exhibition of sex in Western culture. Through a process of meticulous citation and reiteration by which certain discursive and visual formations gain the force of common sense (a process known as performativity), museums establish taxonomies of normalcy. Through the performative display of what Foucault labeled power-knowledge-pleasure in museums, these categories of sexual normalcy (that which is visually framed and displayed so ubiquitously as to appear normal) and sexual perversity (that which is rendered obscene or offstage, as Linda Williams suggests translating the term)[30] take on the force of the natural. In museums, Foucault's call for "bodies and pleasures" would require the organization on the basis of sexual practice rather than categorical identity in order to open up possibilities for creating new frames for understanding curatorial labor and sexual spectatorship.

Thus, when I use the word *performative*, I refer to two divergent strains in queer studies that utilize performance theory as an antiessentialist way of explaining how ideas and behaviors become sedimented into everyday life and take on seemingly natural or commonsense qualities.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, working primarily out of a tradition inspired by J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, argues that performative language does things (e.g., constructs reality) rather than merely describing things (speech acts that Austin refers to as constative utterances).[31] For example, the group of museums explicitly known as sex museums that I focus on in the latter half of this book attempts to do things with words that shift the ways visitors understand, approach, and use sex objects. They do so through the creative use of narrative voice, for example, using humor and vernacular speech (rather than a detached and patronizing tone) to communicate potentially new sexual knowledge in an unthreatening and comfortable way.

In general, all museums that bill themselves as explicit sex museums take objects typically occluded by their literal use value—for instance, a purple, glittered and waterproof vibrator—and create contexts for situating and displaying them as complicated and historically contingent sexual artifacts. In the case of the bedazzled vibrator, sex museums might discuss the emergence of women-owned, queer-centric sex shops (such as Babeland or Good Vibrations); the celebration of female sexuality promoted by "sex-positive" or "prosex" feminists; the "clitoral turn" in female sexuality since the 1970s when sex gurus like Betty Dodson encouraged women to focus more on the clitoris than the vagina as the site for optimal stimulation and orgasm; or the effects of mainstream pornographic films on female sexuality as in the popularity of Gerard Damiano's *Deep Throat*, an absurd hard-core farce of the so-called clitoral craze whose central character (played by the late Linda Lovelace) discovers that her clitoris is located at the base of her throat, thus necessitating deep and prolonged stimulation through fellatio.[32] Sex museums thus recast commodity norms of sexual material culture by using language to suggest that what defines a sexual thing is not always, only, or necessarily the thing itself but rather the performances of identity, desire, pleasure, representation, power, and regulation that happen around that thing.

I also refer to Judith Butler's theory of performativity as it provides the shorthand for the process of socialization whereby gender and sexual identities are produced through regulating and citational practices. For Butler, performativity's power to shape a sense of cohesive identity grows out of the seeming naturalness and transparency of what she describes as the "reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names."[33] The framing that sustains performative socialization is harder to identify because normalization has rendered it ubiquitous and, therefore, unmarked. Important to Butler's

performativity (and what distinguishes it from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus) is "that a certain performative force results from the rehearsal of the conventional formulae in non-conventional ways."[34] *Sex Museums* treats display spaces as sites for furthering the development of the theoretical genealogy of performativity theory. It aims to explore "how to do things with things" and to track and recode how object arrangements in display spaces such as museums that already produce endlessly staged and reiterated performances between objects and bodies influence the reception and recognition of certain things as bad or good sex objects.

Sara Ahmed engages the epistemological goals and tactics of feminist phenomenology and queer geographers to make two primary claims that are helpful for theorizing the performativity of sexual display in museums. First, all spaces are sexed, and all locations, erotic or otherwise, orient their environments (primarily through strategic object placements) toward an assumed heterosexuality. Second, social differences result from the ways in which bodies relate to one another in space. Specifically, object arrangements create backdrops that (re)produce sexual tendencies. While Ahmed's analysis primarily looks to lesbian and gay desires (laudably placing women and lesbian subjects at the center of some chapters), her project also makes the question of race a queer matter. The embodied realities of living as a raced subject are visible in ways that sexuality is not (always).[35] The recognition of white sexuality as an empowered racialized sexuality, and not an original (as in presocial) sexuality or a benchmark against which nonwhite sexualities are derivative, is a mandatory first step in mobilizing this analysis. Dismantling and reorganizing sexual hierarchies that glorify white heteronormativity at the expense of other sexualities (including the many ways in which white people practice heterosexualities) to accommodate the complex intersections of nonnormative sexuality and race as well as class and gender pose some of the biggest challenges to sexual displays, then and now. *Sex Museums* therefore pays close attention to the ways in which the normativity of race and the normativity of sexuality become mutually constitutive in the history of the museum.

Display Anatomies of Race and Gender

Throughout the book, displays of the female body will repeatedly emerge as some of the most informative sites for examining the geographic and temporal vicissitudes of how modern museums were used as stages to perversely implant contemporary notions of sexual normalcy and

abnormalcy. In particular, I focus on a kind of visuality that I will refer to as patriarchal perspectivalism as one consistent and persistent frame for sexing the display and spectatorship of the female body, dead or alive, in all kinds of museum environments. Patriarchal perspectivalism describes a mode of seeing that was born in early modern Europe and fortified in nineteenth-century museums, galleries, and elaborate theaters of exhibition; orchestrated by private collectors in commissioning artwork and establishing art markets for certain kinds of sexual representation; and used the female body as a display technology to institutionalize certain classed and raced norms of nationalized sexual culture and acceptable forms of public sexual consumption defined against the burgeoning category of the illicit obscene.[36] Most saliently, the history of the nude as an impossible and composite representation of white femininity looms large in the story of how patriarchal perspectivalism was developed in museums and performatively repeated in the burgeoning contemporary media of photography and cinema. In line with Laura Mulvey's work on the patriarchal gaze mobilized in mainstream cinema,[37] there is a long history of cultivating particular ways of seeing the female body, even in environments seemingly devoid of sex or, in the case of anatomical museums, a pulse.

So-called anatomical museums of the nineteenth century demonstrated the influence of emerging notions of sexual difference on the organization of pedagogical, institutional, and recreational spaces. The origin of these displays dates back to early modern Europe and the great tradition of anatomical illustrations that began in the sixteenth century. These illustrations belong to a genealogy of representations that visualized, categorized, and disciplined sexual differences between emerging notions of what constituted "men" and "women." "One would think," Lyle Massey has argued, "that under the leveling influence of the anatomist's knife, social divisions between men and women would melt away. Instead, the resulting visual images confusingly mixed new anatomical observations with moralizing conceptions of sexual difference and erotically charged points of view."[38] Unlike the display intentions of nineteenth-century exhibitions of gendered and sexed anatomy, however, early modern illustrators who contributed to the emergence of the modern science of anatomy made little to no distinction between sex, as physiological variation, and gender, as a notion of maleness and femaleness based in hierarchical power relations as they pertained to social, economic, and political contexts and norms. If these drawings were displayed, they would have also circulated within a display architecture more akin to that of the *Wunderkammern* with its emphasis on

the "strange and the miraculous" or the bounty and variety of human shapes, forms, and functions.[39] Categorical divisions of maleness and femaleness, therefore, neither looked the same nor possessed the same politicized and social meanings for sixteenth-century illustrators as they did in the nineteenth-century when the notion of men and women as "opposite sexes" took hold of the cultural imaginary and began to influence the spatial organization of public institutions.[40] The use of sexual difference to organize space in anatomical displays during this later period showed how modern forms of gendered political identity and narratives about seemingly private institutions such as marriage, motherhood, and heterosexual desire came to be displayed prominently in the developing public sphere.[41]

The nineteenth-century anatomical museum is possibly the first display architecture dependent on the hard core—a frenzied politics of visuality focused on the consumption of female genitalia and, in particular, the inside of the vaginal orifice and later popularized in mainstream pornography of the late twentieth century.[42] The theater historian Tracy C. Davis writes about how one such anatomical museum, the Ladies' Museum of Anatomy, which traveled to New York in 1869, invited female visitors to move through displays in ways that not only showed them anatomical models, particularly molds of vulvas and vaginas, but also encouraged "a performance about the underlying meaning of the place [that] occurs, and is made by the visitor without the intercession of docents."[43] Unlike other anatomical museums of the time that included depictions of the (dead) female body in a state of undress and often ecstasy and purported to be educational but have also been discussed as pornographic and used by men as an outlet of sexual thrill seeking, the Ladies' Museum of Anatomy was just that: it showed the female body but admitted only "ladies," thus interpellating a certain bourgeois class of women into a performative relationship with their vulvas.[44] Only superficially, however, did the museum attempt to educate the women about pleasure and the body; rather, it overwhelmingly displayed gynecological, infant, and congenital disorders and diseases that diminished any notion of female pleasure, orienting instruction instead toward motherhood and intercourse in the service of visitors' presumed husbands. The exhibit offered a special all-female viewing where women (and their children) could traverse the space examining the models, comparing their bodies to the abnormal and diseased bodies on display, and then visit the doctor who held office hours on-site to discuss and possibly treat what they recognized as the freakish aberration of their reproductive organs and functions.[45] Thus, while the

Ladies' Anatomy Museum provided a space where female visitors could encounter hard-core imagery, that being the mysterious interior of the female body, and while, like Davis, I want to maintain the queer potential for eroticism even amid these ocular medical technologies of patriarchal perspectivalism, the displays certainly denied the pornographic possibilities that anatomical museums that admitted men encouraged.

Encounters with the dead female body in anatomical displays of today offer a clue to the possible embodied repertoires of traversing the Ladies' Anatomical Museum. Entering the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, a display space that preserves the look and feel of the nineteenth-century anatomical museum, shows how scientists staged the dead, female body according to the logic of patriarchal perspectivalism. Originally intended for medical students only, the Mütter Museum of today sells itself to the public as "disturbingly informative," playing more on its ability to show the weird and the wonderful rather than the purely instructional for the practical sciences. One particular anatomical photograph of a female patient or a woman performing "patient" shows the erotic perspective with which science portrayed medical procedures specific to women's bodies. I originally found the photograph in the widely circulating Mütter Museum catalog compiled by the long-time Mütter curator and director Gretchen Worden. The book contains more images than text and communicates a selection from the museum's extensive collection of photographs, body parts and skeletons, and artifacts.

In the catalog, a photograph taken by James F. Wood in the 1890s for a Philadelphia obstetrician by the name of Dr. John Montgomery Baldy shows an anonymous woman demonstrating the Sims position.[46] The Sims position is a well-known medical position for inserting an enema in the anus (and in the past a speculum in the vagina) and continues to be a well-used nomenclature in American medical and hospital environments. The position was invented by James Marion Sims, the self-proclaimed father of gynecology, who infamously used slave women as experimental subjects for his surgical trailblazing.[47] Sims's black female subjects served as the necessary, abnormal foil to support the argument of the normal sexuality of white, bourgeois American women, who were nevertheless eroticized and depicted as suitable sex objects in the medical photography of the period.[48] In this particular albumen print, a white woman presses her chest to the surface of what seems to be a table cushioned with a velvet or velveteen duvet and pillow. She is naked, her buttocks slightly raised and the cheeks parted. Her arm dangles alongside the table as if she is asleep, intoxicated, or, perhaps euphemistically, in a state of deep relaxation. She is in a perfect position to receive an enema

I.1 "The Sims Position." Albumen print, Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Image used by the kind permission of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Photo by James F. Wood.

or a speculum to examine the interior of her vagina, but the posture also suggests that she is available to receive the penis for vaginal or anal sex.

While I had originally viewed the Sims position photograph in the Mütter Museum catalog, I had another serendipitous encounter with it when the nationally touring exhibition *Extraordinary Bodies: Photographs from the Mütter Museum* returned home to Philadelphia in 2009. I was in town for the "Rethinking Sex" conference at the University of Pennsylvania, but as soon as it ended I made a beeline to the Mütter Museum.[49] Not knowing about the exhibition before my visit, one could imagine my surprise as I left the permanent collection galleries and wandered into this temporary display. Surrounded by photographs of corpses and bodily anomalies, the woman in the Sims position from the catalog took on new meaning. The wall panel explained that *Extraordinary Bodies* was meant to explore the "nonliving body stripped of its superficialities" and the "mysteries of human life and the challenges to medical understanding." The exhibition, which took up several walls in one partitioned gallery mixed contemporary fine-art photographs (e.g., by Joel-Peter Witkin) with a selection of reproductions of historic medical photographs from the museum's permanent collection. By blurring the medical with the aesthetic, and by including a wall text that portrayed all the photographers as "artists [who] create works that transcend the original education purpose of the Museum's collections," the

I.2 Pregnant woman posed at the exhibit *BODY WORLDS: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies*. Photo by Garrett Bryant.

Mütter showed how each photograph could be viewed from perspectives that are typically disaggregated from one another. Using the twenty-first century display of the nineteenth-century Sims position print as proof, it is my intention here to include patriarchal perspectivalism as one of many "transcend[ed]" purposes for the display and consumption of anatomical displays broadly. In the context of the exhibition, the woman, even if alive when photographed, was rendered a "nonliving body" through the juxtaposition of her body to the wall text description and the pickled or dissected corpses that surrounded her. Though not explicitly labeled as such, the vulvic aperture created by her upturned buttocks became the visual focal point for locating one of the "mysteries of human life and the challenges to medical understanding" that the exhibition purported to elucidate.

The staging of the female body for hard-core scientific scrutiny is not a new phenomenon, nor has it ended. Audiences experienced a modern-day anatomical exhibit when the amazingly popular and well-attended blockbuster exhibition *Body Worlds* arrived in cities throughout the United States and all over the world. Hundreds of plastinated corpses and corpse

parts were displayed for public viewing. The most aesthetically rich and affectively contemplative of these corpses consisted of a naked woman, her once-pregnant stomach cut open to reveal the dead fetus in her womb. At the Chicago iteration of *Body Worlds*, which I attended at the Museum of Science and Industry, this display was the only one to include a female corpse that was simultaneously eroticized and static. Surrounded by the other, more centrally positioned displays of male bodies arranged as if performing dynamic human activities (e.g., playing chess, riding horses, jumping hurdles), the female corpse, though arranged with much attention to aesthetics, occupied a slightly obscured corner of a remote and separate gallery. The dead, naked woman had been molded into a provocative pose with what was once her fetus sadly peeking through her cut-open abdomen. Around her, other aborted or miscarried fetuses (of varying and ordered sizes from smallest to most developed) floated in their individual formaldehyde tubs. With her hand resting on her thrown-back head, her breasts in-tact, and her body spread long, her decaying pose, while grotesque, recalled the stance of the modern-day pinup girl voluptuously posing for the museum visitor. Eroticized, and stigmatized by its marginal placement, the pregnant corpse simultaneously injected the exhibition with sex and represented the shameful inertia of failed motherhood and the politicized stigma of abortion.[50]

In the instances of both the Mütter Museum and the *Body Worlds* exhibition, it was not simply the positioning of the female body that invited an eroticized point of view. Rather, the props included in the photography elicited a particular sexual, rather than clinical, relationship to the dead female form. In the case of the Mütter Museum photograph, the velvet, the dangling arm in juxtaposition to the naked white flesh, and the upturned buttocks fashioned a sexualized representation of an anonymous, vulnerable woman who wittingly or unwittingly involved her body in a scene that was organized as sexual but framed as medical and scientific. In so doing, the photograph dramatized a patriarchal encounter with the dead female body that blurred the distinctions between high-art nudes, hard-core pornographic photography (an emerging technology in the 1890s), and medical photography that circulated among the expert clinical classes of white elite men in the name of scientific research.

What are also blurred, however, are the racist origins of the speculum and the figure of the black woman as the unanesthetized test case for ocular and medical technologies. Positing the inside of the female vagina as a mysterious cavern within the context of the nineteenth-century anatomical museum coincided with the emerging view of sexuality as

some elusive, internal truth lodged in the body, or what Freud, who unquestioningly used the racist ideology of the early twentieth century, referred to as the dark continent.[51] As Terri Kapsalis argues for the history of the pelvic exam, so too did these anatomical displays furnish a theater that illuminated the gendered and raced "politics of visibility . . . and what is left invisible—pain and suffering, power differences, slave identities, questionable origins, semi-visible contraceptive technologies."[52] New medical technologies and popular media such as photography and mass industrial production occurred alongside the birth of the modern museum in the nineteenth century and coincided with a time of teeming sexual consumption and production. Nineteenth-century anatomical museums exemplified the industrialization of the time period by seizing on these technologies as display apparatuses that could be used to show anatomical differences between genders and races in ways that galvanized normal sexual desire and the new sexual biopower. They did so not only in the service of the leisure activity of museumgoing aimed at the masses but also for the lucrative business of inventing pathologies.

In the nineteenth century, the display of the female body also contributed to the manufacture of the colonial gaze, not coincidentally at the same historical period as projects of nationhood and empire. Benedict Anderson, among others, viewed Western museums as decisive landmarks in the politicized production of the nation functioning through an "ecumenical profane genealogizing" that invented enemies "as in an ominous prophetic dream, well before they came into historical existence."[53] No other exhibitionary technology more conspicuously used sexual display to create and record this abusive genealogizing than freak shows. In street fairs, circuses, and dime museums, freak shows not only exhibited but also created cultural otherness and narratives of cultural superiority and inferiority among nations through elaborate performance scripts that were mapped onto people of color, the disabled, and other nonnormative subjects. As in anatomical museums, sex was integral to freak show performance scripts, perhaps most infamously exemplified in the display of Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman, or, as she was advertised, the "Hottentot Venus," whom I will discuss in chapter 2.

Both anatomical displays and freak shows arranged bodies according to the classifications and categorizations of the gendered, sexed, and raced knowledge of the time period; they also corroborated and extended this knowledge by interpellating new audiences to identify or disidentify with what they saw and how they felt and moved in that space. In the freak show, the exposure of flesh and the sexualization of

the displayed body became less obscene when the flesh in question was aberrant, other, or monstrous. In the anatomical museum, the exposure of flesh became more acceptable and tasteful when the flesh in question was white, female, and, as I mentioned in the earlier example of the Sims position photograph, dead. The anatomical museum and the freak show represented two sexual architectures that created acceptable forms of public sexual consumption through the performativity of display in nineteenth-century museums. Dependent on patriarchal perspectivalism and scientific racism, these display architectures promised to teach the new science of racial and gender hierarchies through the curatorial performance of sexual-social difference. Throughout the book, I pay attention to the ways in which museums of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries continue to unquestioningly use performance scripts of patriarchal perspectivalism and racist visual economies toward new ends; for the museums of the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first, these architectures of display shape-shift alongside normative assumptions of audience composition to conform to the political and sexual-social demands of their historical period. When one views museums through the lens of sexual display, the so-called postcolonial and postfeminist museum exposes itself as far from decolonization and liberation.

When viewing the history of the museum through the intersectional lens of race and gender, the historical performances that constitute display and spectatorship in museums have profoundly influenced the institutionalization of power-knowledge-pleasure. Foucault defined *power-knowledge-pleasure* as the regime that sustains Western discourse on sexuality. My examination of museums aims "to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said."[54] Practices of display have a multivalent relationship to the ways in which sex is put into discourse as it operates through diverse forms of performative citationality that, in the case of sexual display, include the implicit classification of sexual normalcy, the explicit labeling of perversity or obscenity, or one of many exhibitionary silences. Drawing on the work of the sociologist Avery Gordon, I intend for this book not only to analyze what is presented but also to "confront the ghostly aspects" of sexual display in museums to encourage "a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production."[55] While searching out and coping with ghostly traces in any archive cannot but change the museum practice of curatorship

generally, I have found that this shift in how to deal with the archive is the only way to begin to access the sexual histories of those who have systemically been erased.

Museums are not and never have been sites of the Foucauldian repressive hypothesis. Instead, they use display as their primary technology to institutionalize certain normative and disciplined relationships between bodies, objects, and space that influence the ways in which we move toward, between, and around certain categories of sex and sexuality. Sex museums, or museums that explicitly rather than tacitly display sex, attempt to play with those embodied, affective, and intellectual rules of engagement and the ghosts, if you will, of how museums have historically coped with sexual diversity with varying degrees of success and failure.

The Invention of Sexual Epistemology

Arguably, there have always existed private collections of sex objects that may or may not have been shown or shared with a coterie of spectators. For example, the *Wunderkammern* exhibited the abundant possessions of the collector and reveled in the rare, surprising, sensual, and even outlandish mixture of objects on display.[56] *Sex Museums*, however, begins in the post-*Wunderkammern* nineteenth century in order to explore how the emergence of the modern museum occurred alongside the elite cultures of collecting and display within the framework that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called the capitalist system. This periodization also allows for an examination of the construction and consolidation of phenomena that intimately affected the invention of sexuality not only as a set of identities but also as a body of knowledge for categorizing bodies and pleasures as normal or perverse.

It is not coincidental that collection and display practices, both inside and outside the modern museum, that were predicated on showing and repeating taxonomies of normalcy emerged concurrently with the invention of sexuality (the term *homosexual* first appeared in print in an 1869 German pamphlet by Karl-Maria Kertbeny and *heterosexual* in 1892 in a translation of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*) and the foundation of sexology as a branch of science that created sexuality as an object of study. Rita Felski has shown how the end of the nineteenth century was a crucial period for the invention of sexual identity, a political, social, and cultural creation that became dependent on visuality and performance: "Sexuality was no longer simply a question of

particular acts, but was expressed in appearance, personality, and even bodily structure."[57] While sexology as a science rooted in physiological and congenital preoccupations seems obsolete and archaic today, Felski argues that one of Foucault's greatest contributions to the history of sexuality demonstrated the continuity between Victorian and post-Freudian cultures; what we share with Victorians and their sexologists is the idea that understanding our sexuality is essential to understanding who we are.

Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century sexology gets resuscitated in the twentieth century "due to the emergence of the gay rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s and a growing interest in constructing a history and tradition of same-sex desire."[58] The profuse foundation of lesbian and gay archives after the Stonewall Inn and other riots in the 1960s can be viewed, I propose, as a crucial chapter in the history of sexological influence on sexual subjectivity in the twentieth century. Specifically, sexology transformed the definition and spurred the consolidation of the homosexual as an identity and a distinct type of person. Of course, the gay and lesbian archives that were formed during this period can also be viewed as dissident responses to the persistent exhibitionary silences on homosexual lives in mainstream archives and museums. Without the solidification of a body of experiences, histories, and materials that could be ascribed to the homosexual, there would be no rubric around which archives could be gathered and formed. Leaders in the lesbian and gay archives community, such as ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and the GLBT Historical Society, all fostered the idea that it was not only necessary to store and collect lesbian, gay, and to a lesser extent bisexual and transgender history but also imperative to embark on a crusade of visibility to ensure sexual freedom and a more expansive idea of sexual citizenship.[59] Along the way, the consolidation of tangible materials that made up these homosexual archives became one facet of what was becoming the moral and political obligation of gays and lesbians to come out. Moreover, the loss and mourning that characterized the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis among gay male communities politicized these archives, simultaneously making these collections into something that could hold the memories and histories of the lives that were lost and could in the deadly chaos be controlled. The cultural work that occurred in these archives, while epistemologically divided from the labor of museum practice, not only amassed the raw materials to publicly display homosexual identities but also reinvented what sexual identity meant in the late twentieth century.

Perhaps it goes without saying that the institutionalization of sexual normalcy in museums designated only certain forms of speech and display as acceptable for public consumption. Studying the ongoing debates about the display of nonnormative sexualities in museums can, therefore, inform past and present discussions about the efficaciousness of sexual visibility politics. With historical ties to a philosophy of knowledge as something contingent on the display of visual "facts," museums provide experimental sites for testing the theories of mainstream gay and lesbian politics: namely, what happens when sexual orientation is regarded as something that always should be seen and made manifest in public. Whether or at what point the display of sexuality transforms from a progressive political agenda into something more akin to what Foucault warns against as confession is at stake.

The modern museum also emerged alongside the invention of sexuality as a separate category considered to be almost identical to a nascent bourgeois notion of private life that exists outside or under the layers of social reality. Late nineteenth- and early twenty-century museums implicitly displayed the assumption that sexuality should be regarded as something presocial, purely biological, and, through a psychoanalytic lens, constitutive of mysterious, inborn drives. Beliefs about what sexuality is and when it is formed have continued to have a profound impact on definitions of publicness and politics and what counts as the exhibitionable. According to Robert Padgug:

> Such a view necessitates the location of sexuality within the individual as a fixed essence, leading to a classic division of individual and society and to a variety of psychological determinisms, and, often enough, to a full-blown biological determinism as well. These in turn involve the enshrinement of contemporary sexual categories of universal, static, and permanent, suitable for analysis of all human beings and all societies. Finally, the consequences of this view are to restrict class struggle to nonsexual realms, since that which is private, sexual, and static is not a proper arena for public social action and change.

Democracy, industrialization, Marxist thought, and praxis, the latter defined by Padgug as "the production and reproduction of material life," are implicit in this passage.[60] With the emergence of the nineteenth-century economic model of capitalism (sometimes referred to as liberal capitalism), which espoused the values of individualism and private property under national and colonial democracies, sexuality became something that was considered ideologically separate from the rest of societal experience.

The periodization that *Sex Museums* spans encompasses different economic models of museums as businesses. In the latter half of the book, I turn my attention to what Rosalind Krauss has characterized as "the cultural logic of the late capitalist museum," a historical bracket designated for the corporate objectives of museums and for noted shifts in the conditions of museums as cultural institutions that were in the process of being transformed by art markets.[61] For the museums of late capitalism that I discuss, boards of directors and trustees and the operations of markets, such as the antique and art markets and the urban tourist market, highly influence definitions of *public* and *private* and exert tremendous control in circumscribing the domain of the sayable in museums. The application of late capitalist notions of publicness and privateness in museums has had chronic repercussions for the display of dissident and queer sexualities, repercussions that I will examine in chapter 3; in chapters 4 and 5, I emphasize how museums have come to be viewed as sites of consumerism, globalization, and tourism and problematic players in urban renewal projects that draw from neoliberal and often sex-negative ideologies to influence the politics and performance of display for the urban landscapes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Following Padgug's definition of sexuality as a set of social relations intricately tied to the economy and other public human relations and Krauss's study of the influence of economic models on museum policy and practice, I propose that, from the nineteenth century to the present, museums offer spaces for tracking sexuality as relational between bodies, objects, and spaces through the analysis of the ways in which sexual knowledge and its relationship to political economy are implicitly and explicitly displayed through the framing and arrangement of objects. As I examine how museums exhibit sex, sex shows itself for what it truly is: a complex, socially contingent, and highly contextual performance of pleasure and power, and not the outward expression of some mysterious and immutable secret lodged within the inner recesses of the mind or the body or, as Freudian psychoanalysis would have us believe, some inevitable, predictable drive toward normal sexual behavior.

The Secret Museum and the Invention of Pornography

Thus far, I have proposed that the birth of the museum in the nineteenth century be viewed as intimately connected to the new visuality of sexual perversions and its attendant rhetorics of sexual identities, sexology, scientific racism, and biopower. The organizational impulse to

place explicit sex objects within taxonomies of obscene thingness can be dated earlier, however, to the semipublic foundation of what is now known as the Secret Museum. It was here that late eighteenth-century archaeologists and cultural custodians in Italy first attempted to create a space for viewing what we now call pornography. And it is here that I locate a tentative origin of the modern sex museum.

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD 79, sixty feet of ash and pumice covered the bodies, buildings, and terrain of Pompeii as the people there moved through the practices of their everyday lives, and the fast-moving layer of molten lava froze them in their tracks. Not until the late eighteenth century did archaeologists begin to unearth what became for many of them—and subsequently for the modern, Western cultural imaginary—a distinct and temporally contingent category of artifacts that failed to gel with their fantasies of Roman civilization.[62] Symbols and signs of eroticism covered the surfaces of the unearthed Pompeian artifacts. Unsurprisingly, archaeologists found sex objects in the excavated sites of bathhouses and brothels. But they also found sexual scenes, startling Priapuses and horny Pans, painted on utensils and trinkets, in doorways and inside homes, and depicted in frescoes and mosaics that lined and decorated public streets.[63] The diggers and artifact custodians who found these objects decided that the Romans possessed an alarmingly degenerate philosophy of taste and lacked an adequate system for organizing objects and images when it came to furnishing space. They placed these obscene antiquities in a secret room in the Herculaneum Museum in Portici in 1795. Not until 2000 did these artifacts become more widely available to tourists (with a prior reservation) visiting the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (National Archeological Museum in Naples). They remain, however, a distinctly labeled and separated category of artifacts and occupy what is known as the Raccolta Pornografica (pornographic or reserved cabinet). This place was, and still is, known as the Secret Museum.

Since the excavation of Roman erotic artifacts by Victorian archeologists at Pompeii and the foundation of the Secret Museum at Naples in the early nineteenth century, the question of how to approach the collection and display of sexual material culture has posed complex moral, political, and logistical dilemmas to the Western institutional apparatus known as the museum. Integral to the organizational system of the Secret Museum was the creation of a "vulnerable" class of viewing publics—women, children, and the lower classes—who were seen as too endangered by the potential contamination of a temporary rendezvous with sex objects. Before and during that period, sex objects circulated mainly

among the male elite and were shown only to other members of upper-class society and only in homes, sparsely circulating catalogs, or medical and scientific journals. In the Secret Museum, however, an entirely new taxonomy of objects was created so as to designate these Roman sex objects as obscene antiquities. After the founding of the Secret Museum, many different genres of museums cultivated a particular strategy for sexual consumption largely modeled on the detached viewership choreographies of patriarchal perspectivalism that had occurred in anatomical exhibits and private homes, the latter to be discussed in chapter 1.

Secret Museum named both a concept and an actual space. The Secret Museum thus marked a turning point in display strategies as they related to sex objects. The sexed and sexy Roman artifacts unearthed at Pompeii were housed in a secret room, thus setting in motion a mode of dealing with certain explicit sex objects through marginalization. But the Secret Museum also functioned like a private club in which books, artifacts, and other sexual or immoral materials were covertly cataloged and sparingly circulated or displayed only to those individuals above corruption, namely, white, elite men. When nineteenth-century cultural custodians created the category of the obscene by storing these artifacts in the Secret Museum, they also set in motion the conceptual consolidation of what we have come to know as pornography.

According to Walter Kendrick, the beginnings of the modern moral dilemma of pornography can be traced to the excavation of Roman erotic artifacts in 1795. The invention of the word *pornography* and the transition from the unremarkable display of erotic and eroticized objects in the *Wunderkammern* to the specialized and partially hidden installation of pornographic objects in the Secret Museum uncover the connection between this neologism, the birth of the museum, and Foucault's perverse implantation. As rhetorical descriptions of benign sex objects shifted to proclamations of dangerous exposure to corrosive because pornographic objects, so too did the discourse of sexual perversions. Like the etymological meaning of the word *pornography* as "the writing about whores," emerging categories of sexual normalcy and perversity drew from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century urban reform studies of venereal disease and the misplaced emphasis on female sex workers as the originators and principal transmitters of sexual infections in emerging cities.[64] Thus, the Secret Museum spatially marked the historical shift from the terrain of explicit erotic representation where soon-to-be marginalized sexual subjects, such as women, could participate in public performances of (feminine) sexuality to the advent of pornography as a separate genre and a tool with which agents could police pleasure and

condemn certain sexual practices and their representations as bad or praise them as good.

With this historical shift in mind, I define *pornography* as a highly subjective and contested category of obscene thingness predicated on taste as well as gendered, raced, and classed hierarchies of power, sexual or otherwise. I agree with Kendrick when he asserts: "Pornography names an argument, not a thing."[65] Throughout the book, I navigate cultural anxieties about what might constitute pornography by drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's scholarship on taste and the ways in which the separation of objects of high culture from those of low culture reproduces class hierarchies and from Linda William's scholarship on filmic pornography as partially, if not wholly, inspired by concern about the body's role in spectatorship.[66] Neither the argument for or against pornography nor pornography's connection to cultural claims of taste is benign, and the Secret Museum signaled the beginning of a spatial method for mobilizing a categorical understanding for policing legitimate and illegitimate desires. By separating certain kinds of sex from public view, and by proposing the idea that some sex was tasteful and thus displayable while other categories of sex were obscene and thus undisplayable or capable of being consumed only by those assumed to be above or beyond historically and morally contingent notions of corruption, the Secret Museum exemplified an exhibitionary logic drawn from emerging hierarchical and politicized categorizations based in gender, race, and class. The history of the Secret Museum is, in many ways, the history of the display of sex and sexuality. On the one hand, it is a playful history of hide-and-seek, of things revealed and partially concealed by the changing social mores of particular geographic locations and time periods. On the other hand, it is a history of disciplining and policing and of designating certain kinds of sex as depraved and obscene while claiming others as normal through the repetition of unremarkable and unremarked on display techniques.

The exhibition model that began with the Secret Museum and, as this book will demonstrate, the performativity of that model in the ensuing history of the museum engendered a highly conflicted relationship between archives of sexual materials and their public display and accustomed that display to a marginal cultural position. For example, this logic influenced the historical relationship between sex and archives as it laid the foundations for the ways in which museums continually create closets for sexual artifacts. The now defunct Secretum at the British Museum is indicative of the ways in which museums, even sex museums, have on- or off-site storage for what they deem the obscene, the

pornographic, and thus the undisplayable. In other cases, museums simply refuse to archive sex objects and thus dispose of them. While the Secret Museum certainly thwarted many queer and utopic relationships between sex and display, it also provided a space to preserve what are, according to Kendrick, "precious, poisonous things." For Kendrick, sexual artifacts such as the ones found at Pompeii were "valuable because they formed a source of knowledge, and knowledge requires dissemination; [but] somebody besides diggers and custodians had to view these things if their value was to be realized."[67] Following Kendrick, this book analyzes what kinds of knowledge sexual artifacts impart and how display poses possibilities and challenges to disseminating these knowledges.

Sex Museums

The museums that I explicitly call sex museums and analyze in the last half of the book cross traditional museum genres and push the boundaries of display. Sex museums encompass a particular kind of museum experience: they respatialize and recaption sex while reorienting bodies in curatorial space. To archive and display something as embodied and ephemeral as sex, I argue, requires an epistemological approach that combines art, anthropology, and history. To describe how museums adopt and adapt certain themes, contexts, and display technologies to exhibit sexuality for diverse museum audiences, I draw on my field research at four sex museums: the LA&M in Chicago (a grassroots, not-for-profit dedicated to the collection and display of artifacts from leather, fetish, and BDSM cultures), the Museum of Sex in New York (a privately owned social history museum with rotating exhibits), the World Erotic Art Museum in Miami Beach (which displays the four-thousand-piece collection of Naomi Wilzig), and El Museo del Sexo in Mexico City (the privately owned museum once located in the city's historic center and part of a larger complex, Sex Capital). These museums each emerged within the same five-year period (1999–2004) yet exemplify radically different approaches to the display of sex.

The four primary sex museums in this study are the love children of the Secret Museum at Naples and the first museums to explicitly display sex in the twentieth century, the *hihoukan* (houses of hidden treasures) that emerged in rural Japanese towns in the 1960s.[68] Located mainly in Japanese amusement and entertainment locations, such as spa resorts, the *hihoukan* reveled in dioramas, surreal configurations of body parts (human and animal), sex-ed displays, and mannequin-populated sex

scenes that range from the biblical to the popular. Although some of these museums continue to operate today, sex museums in Japan are becoming less common, partially owing to Japan's economic crash in the 1990s, which caused disposable income and thus attendance rates to dwindle. In one of the few available resources on the *hihoukan*, Ed Jacob explained why Japanese "sex museums have become passé." He attributes this phenomenon to what he described as Japan's famously "faddish" culture as well as the sanitizing effects of Westernization. Public indifference to sex museum culture in Japan, the effects of the economic bubble burst in the 1990s, and the global economic recession recognized in 2008 resulted in fewer tourists, increasingly dilapidated exhibits, and sex museum closures.[69]

As sex museums in Japan began their gradual descent in the 1990s, they began to emerge in major European cities throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Prague, and Copenhagen all host or at one time hosted at least one sex museum. More recently, in 2007, London opened its version of the sex museum called the Amora Academy of Sex and Relationships. The first Russian sex museum opened in St. Petersburg in 2004. The South Korean outdoor erotic sculpture park, Jeju Loveland, opened on Jeju Island in 2004. A professor of sociology at the University of Shanghai, Liu Dalin, opened the first sex museum in Shanghai in 1999. Pressured by government authorities to close, Dalin has moved the museum to different locations several times, but since 2004 his museum has remained open in Tongli, fifty miles west of Shanghai, under the name of the China Sex Museum. India's first sex museum, Antarang, opened in Mumbai in 2002 but has since moved from its original location in the red-light district of Kamathipura to the Wadala Acworth Leprosy Hospital complex, where the Mumbai District AIDS Control Society is also based. Meanwhile, plans to erect the interactive Cidade do Sexo (City of Sex) in Rio de Janeiro were permanently stalled when residents angrily protested. El Museo del Sexo in Mexico City, which I discuss in chapter 5, the only Latin American sex museum, has closed owing to local resistance to the sexing of the Centro Histórico neighborhood in which it was located. Despite the rise and fall of many of the sex museums I list here, the global interest in sex museums characterizes a universal sexual consciousness aimed at selling not only sex but also sexual pedagogy through the formation of temporary sexual knowledge publics who are interested in, to varying degrees, sexual history, sexual style, and the expansion of sexual repertoires (a supply of sexual skills, devices, and capabilities).

From a global perspective, the ways in which sex museums, or as many of them are called erotic (art) museums, perform and exhibit sex are as widely varying as the four primary sex museums that I investigate. The sexual pedagogy pioneers Marianna Beck and Jack Hafferkamp describe their experience visiting six sex museums in four European cities: "Each varied dramatically in presentation and content and ranged from a fun-house atmosphere (Amsterdam) to more dignified settings apropos of serious collections (Berlin, Hamburg and Paris). Some were attached to tacky sex toy shops, others to elegant bookstores. Yet all are worth visiting; the objects provide insight into the times and places they were created and appreciated, from Japanese wood block prints and Sumatran fertility figures to eighteenth-century French lithographs and nineteenth-century Viennese condoms, through twentieth-century art, artifice and excess." Beck and Hafferkamp wrote their article before the advent of sex museums on the American landscape. They pit the "big hit" success of European sex museums against the absence of sex museums in the United States, which in their words culturally marginalizes sex owing to a hysterical social attitude about the function of erotic art. For Beck and Hafferkamp, the function of erotic art "always has been to arouse, offend, even shock the viewer and the larger community." "The notion of an entire museum devoted to sex," they continue, "would no doubt strike terror in the hearts of most curators and trigger nightmare thoughts of being trapped forever in Cincinnati." The reference here is to the art versus obscenity drama in Cincinnati in 1990 when Dennis Barrie and the Contemporary Arts Center were indicted for pandering obscenity only hours after the opening of the photography exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. In this way Beck and Hafferkamp seize on this spectacular moment in the culture wars as a decisive one for the future (or lack thereof) of sexual display in the United States.[70]

While many sex museums have remained open to tourists and locals for decades, the story of the global sex museum implies the challenge of maintaining locations dedicated to the exhibition of sex. Founded by the sexologist Alfred Kinsey in 1946, the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Bloomington, Indiana, has provided a small space for rotating exhibitions of its archival collections for more than sixty years. More recently, in 2010, the first LGBT museum opened in San Francisco to display the vast archives of the GLBT Historical Society, and, in 2011, the Leslie-Lohman Gallery in New York City became the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. According to

my research, the first American museum dedicated to exhibiting sexualities to public audiences in the United States was the International Museum of Erotic Art in San Francisco, which operated between 1973 and 1975. In an email exchange with me, the museum's former assistant director, Janice Epp, described the difficulties of exhibiting erotic materials even in a sex museum: "The main challenge was confronting the bias of art 'critics' whose sexual attitudes prevented them from acknowledging that anything erotic could also be 'art'—including Picasso. Another challenge was working with breathlessly beautiful works from antiquity to modernity, knowing that many people found them offensive because of their subject matter. Some days, it was difficult to be positive in the face of so much negativity, judgment, and discomfort." Epp also stated that the museum closed owing to the "political climate": "Plus, in hindsight, I believe the support of appropriate politicians wasn't solicited."[71] Thus, for Epp's museum, as for all sex museums, displaying sex in the museum context requires negotiations with erotophobic detractors as well as the employment of strategic marketing initiatives and garnering the support of local and state political elites. Many of the factors that led to the closure of the International Museum of Erotic Art in 1975 continue to challenge sex museums today.

Similarly, sex museums in Canberra, Australia, South Korea, and Los Angeles all closed within two to five years of opening their doors to the public. After a six-year run, the Erotic Heritage Museum in Las Vegas closed its doors in February 2014. Sometimes government pressure affected the viability of sex museums in certain locations, as in the case of the China Sex Museum. At others it was the prohibition against advertising in mainstream newspapers and magazines that contributed to a sex museum's failure, as was the case in the failure of El Museo del Sexo in Mexico City. And still other scenarios of sex museum closure revealed that planners did not adequately provide an experience that promised a safe, pleasurable, and innovatively pedagogical encounter with sexuality for diverse audiences (as was the case for the Erotic Museum in Los Angeles, which I touch on in the coda). Whether the proliferation of sex museums and their struggles signal the frisky foreplay or the ultimate climax of sex museums in the Americas is unclear. What is certain is that sex museums and their struggles serve as rehearsal spaces for gauging the viability of future sexual display projects.

In this book, the analysis of sex museums shifts according to the museum's genre, business status, urban location, differences in audience, practices of collecting, breadth of artifacts, and technologies of display and spectatorship. Overall, I propose that explicitly exhibiting sex in

museums restages sexual artifacts and offers new ways for approaching, engaging, and understanding issues of desire, sexual identity, and sexual practice as they intersect with the history of the modern museum and sexual history in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. By crossing national boundaries, *Sex Museums* examines the transnational circulation of sexual commodities and the globalization of sexual discourse, showing how representations of sexuality in museums communicate gendered, classed, and raced notions of sexual community.

In keeping with the history of sexual display, sex museums are also spaces of commercial leisure and tourism. They are public entertainment businesses that compete with other recreational sites for local, national, and transnational tourist capital in cityscapes during late capitalism. This book frankly diagnoses the obstacles these important institutions must surmount in order to survive and the reasons they fail, in part to help public historians, museum studies scholars, and sexuality scholars anticipate, address, and surmount some of the challenges they may encounter when pursuing public sexual display projects. Sex museums face enormous pressure to reproduce normativity and dominant ideologies through technologies of display, but they also often resist those norms by exposing the histories of sexual stigmatization. Most importantly, sex museums offer collaborative moments when spectator, object, and environment interact, reconfigure, and exceed the horizons of expectations around sexual display.

Sex museums fit within a longer history of managing sex in museums but also have their own history, one that accompanies a contradictory and ambivalent moment in North American sexual politics marked by competing attitudes of fear and curiosity. Ultimately, I argue that we need sex museums for tracking the crucial changes in sexual politics. Sex museums contextualize the ambivalent climate of anxieties and a curiosity that continues to characterize the contested relation between sex and publicness in museums today and in the future.

Entering a New Kind of Sexual Theater

In El Museo del Sexo, visitors follow their tour guides through a museum where everything on display is available to touch. At the World Erotic Art Museum, you might turn a corner and catch some couples kissing on the museum benches or, on one of the more rambunctious evenings, a woman in a state of undress being escorted by the security guards off the premises. At the Museum of Sex, one of the visitors expresses his interest

in becoming a "live" exhibit and offers his body for intimate examination when he interprets my study of sex museums as an erotic overture. At the LA&M, the newly acquainted take their potential lover(s) to see the exhibits, hoping that they might encounter something (a toy, an act, a scene) that can mutually pique their interest and provide the catalyst to their first kinky exploration. Sex museums are erotically theatrical, not insofar as they invite embodied sex, but in the ways in which they prevent the kind of museum spectatorship "that is so absorbing that the audience forgets it is spectating."[72] To use a Brechtian concept, displaying sex in museums performs a *verfremdungseffekt*, or, as it is usually translated in English, an *alienation effect*, that provokes the awareness of looking (and being looked at looking) at the staging of explicitly sexual material rendered strange by the museum context.

The theatrical frame of the museum becomes illuminated when sex enters the scene. In turn, the visitor becomes hyperaware that these objects were collected, carefully chosen for display, and mounted in this space to create the dynamic and affectively fraught moment of their spectatorship. In the bathhouse, the porn shop, the secluded locker room, the bedroom, the strip club, people know how to respond to sex. They know the rules, feel invited or unwelcome, and forgo or engage (jubilantly or ambivalently) in the pleasures it potentially holds. In sex museums, what to do and how to feel seems unclear to many visitors. When sex objects become part of an everyday scene that usually hides them, marginalizes them, or displays only the most socially acceptable of examples, the museum becomes a space of interderminancy. This indeterminacy has a profound effect on the ways in which the body traverses space and, in the museum, how it interacts, interfaces, and interprets knowledge.

I came to this project on sex museums inspired by my own experiences in museums but also by my fascination with the possibilities for exhibiting sexual knowledge within already existing exhibits and museums. In sex museums, I found the ideal sites to investigate what happens when diverse sex objects emerge from the archive and become mise-en-scène, arranged and framed as central sites for multinodal meaning making. I found in the advent of sex museums on the hemispheric landscape a unique opportunity to explore sexuality as something performed and dependent on the ways in which sexed objects and sexual bodies move through institutional spaces, across borders, and within or outside the imaginary parameters of taste, value, and publicity/privatization. What began as an ethnographic project focusing on four sex museums in the United States and Mexico flowered into *Sex Museums*,

a book that looks to sex museums as sites for illuminating the ways in which sex has always been displayed, albeit differently, in all museums.

My reading of the exhibition of sex underlines the ways in which knowledge is staged in museums and draws attention to important practices of spectatorship. My methodology blends theoretical concepts from performance studies, art history and visual culture, queer theory, critical race studies, and ethnography. I employ archival research, exhibit analysis, and participant observation. I conducted more than fifty interviews with visitors and museum staff, including guards, gift shop workers, ticket takers, maintenance personnel, curators, collectors, and owners. I also draw from personal experience. During more than five years at the LA&M, I worked as an archivist, a curator, and a programming director as well as a researcher. This interdisciplinary methodology is necessary for understanding the affective motivations and tensions that surround sexual material culture.

While sex museums engage sex seriously, humor, pleasure, and other creatively generative affects greatly inform their display practices. Thus, in relating my experiences in these spaces, I try to capture some of the texture of my interactions with diverse objects and visitors, combining an anthropological method often referred to as thick description and a performance studies practice called performative writing.[73] In other words, the challenge to my analytic interpretation is also the challenge of displaying sex in museum contexts: to balance the academic with the erotic and power with pleasure. In both instances, sex becomes a tool and a method for framing pedagogy as pleasure and display as a powerful historical, political, and aesthetic technique for doing so.

I view this methodological approach, and its demonstration in this book, as another kind of queer praxis. In this way, queer praxis is not only a practice in museum exhibition spaces—it is also a way of understanding the work of queer scholars through grounded research methods such as ethnography, interviews, participant observation, and self-reflexive approaches to archival research. While ideological and epistemological battles about the efficacy of queer studies may rage and persist, another key intention of writing this book is to show how there is still a vital need for material and concrete practices of queer scholarship.

The Architecture of *Sex Museums*

The material presented above is a summary of arguments that I elaborate on and refine in the subsequent six chapters. I am concerned here not

only with how sex is displayed in museums called sex museums but also with how sex has always been and continues to be displayed in most all museums, even those that view themselves as temples of high culture. I attempt to clarify the role of museums in the history of sexuality in the West by focusing on these implicit and explicit displays of sex, which at times diverge and at others overlap in surprising and unexpected ways. Central to the book's logic are the performances of diverse museum publics and thick descriptions of their interactions with sexual displays (derived from archival research, interviews, and ethnographic data).

Chapters 1 and 2 examine temporary exhibitions of sex and sexuality and the performances of desire, pleasure, power, and violence that occurred in and around those exhibits. They establish the high stakes for exhibiting sex in museums and the impact of affectively and theatrically intense sexual exhibitions on the management of sexuality in museums today. In chapter 1, "Hard-Core Collecting and Erotic Exhibitionism," I analyze the transnational provenance of Gustave Courbet's painting *L'origine du monde* (1866) and Andrea Fraser's film *Untitled* (2003) in order to examine the intricately entangled relationship between capitalism, patriarchal heterosexuality, and collecting and displaying art. Chapter 2, "Nudes and Nazis; or, Surveying Sex through Violence in Museums," develops my definition of the museum as a theatrical space by exploring specific acts of violence committed against certain sex objects, as in the suffragette Mary Richardson's attack on Diego Velázquez's *Rotheby Venus* at the London National Gallery in 1914 and the Nazi's *Degenerate Art* show in Munich in 1937.

Chapter 3, "WARNING: Dissident Sex in the Museum," transitions to temporary, though explicit, displays of queer sexuality in museums, specifically examining how the emotional habitus on sexual display is managed beginning in the late twentieth century. This period, sometimes referred to as that of the culture wars, marks a pivotal moment in the institutionalization of certain sexual display policies (e.g., warning signs) that continue to influence the ways in which sexual material culture is consumed in museums. In the final section of this chapter, I juxtapose the politics and performances of display in temporary sex exhibitions in mainstream museums to the controversy surrounding a display of sex toys at the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco. I examine what happens to queer sex when it is displayed in a museum dedicated to representing queer lives and what this means for the application of queer theory in museum practice.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore three sex museums in cities in the United States and Mexico as specific cultural sites for the investigation of analytic

categories such as tourism, urbanity, neoliberal capitalism, transnationalism, gendered and racialized ways of looking, sexual rights, LGBT discourse, and sexual modernity. Chapter 4, "Touring the Sex Museum," proposes that sex museum tourism be analyzed within the framework of what Elizabeth Bernstein has called postindustrial sexual commerce and examines the Museum of Sex in New York and the World Erotic Art Museum in Miami Beach as sex museums that have one foot in the sex tourism business and the other foot in the market-driven forces that have led to the rise of the for-profit museum business model. The museum gift shop at the Museum of Sex and the globe trekking of Naomi Wilzig, the owner and founder of the World Erotic Art Museum, constitute two different stories of how these sex museums encourage revisions of what sex tourism and museumgoing mean. In chapter 5, "Exhibiting the Sexual Modern," I examine the exhibition of LGBT and queer sexualities in El Museo del Sexo in Mexico City to explore how this sex museum provides a site for tracking how queer discourse gets translated as a concept across borders. Chapter 6, "Queer Curatorship," proposes an experimental model of curatorial labor and narrates the story of a particular challenge I faced as a curator at the LA&M.

As Michel Foucault argued, policing sex is one technique in the creation of a docile and productive citizenry. I argue that the policing of sex in museums has been an integral but overlooked part of this history that has only recently garnered scholarly attention.[74] *Sex Museums* shows how display profoundly affected the history of sexuality and proposes that we need to rethink the ways in which sex is archived, displayed, and consumed in all museums. To do so is to rethink sex and the museum and their relationships to publicness, pedagogy, politics, and performance.