A REVIEW OF MUSEUM LITERATURE AND A PERSONAL CRITIQUE MUSEOLOGY: THE EVOLUTION OF A SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS INSTITUTION

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Research Proposal

Intent of Project

I intend to use this project as an opportunity to further my knowledge and understanding of museums. As my curatorial aspirations will most likely require further structured academic study, this research and experience will prepare me for the upcoming years. Not only will I gain a varied background in reading literature on the subject, I will also be applying what I have learned in my own personal critique of museums I visit throughout the two quarters. Such a critical study should illumine the inner-workings of the museum itself as well as the experiences of the society that visits them.

How the Project will be Accomplished

I will explore the relatively recent critical literature published on the history, theory, culture, and politics of museums. The report shall focus on comparing and contrasting curatorial methods as well as the before-and-after effect of the so-called "paradigm shift"—the shift from museums that are object-centered to visitor-centered¹. In this project, I plan to emphasize museums of Natural History and Anthropology, either by selecting literature that already references them or by applying the valid information in other articles. This emphasis will allow me to more closely evaluate the exhibition of human evolution, human remains and Native Americans. How and why would a museum emphasize science over politics in these instances or vice versa, according to museum studies authors?

For the second half of the project, I will review scientific and historical museums and comment on their level of success. Using the information gathered throughout the literature review, I will develop a list of methods I expect to be employed by each of the visited institutions. I will assess the effectiveness of, among other things, the physical layout, exhibit

¹ Weil, Stephen. 1990. Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations. Smithsonian Institution Press.

quality, and atmosphere at reaching the visitor and conveying the intended message. I will consider the museum's balance between science and politics and comment on the clarity of the curator's choices to either maintain or tip that balance. Overall, the first and second half of my project shall complement and facilitate one another.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Alexander, E. P. (1979). *Museums in motion: An introduction to the history and functions of museums*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

Alexander begins *Museums in Motion* with definitions of certain types of museums—dividing them into categories of art, natural history, science and technology, history, and botanical gardens and zoos. I focused primarily on the definitions, descriptions and breakdowns of the natural history and history categories as those relate most closely to my ultimate project goals. Alexander explains the beginnings and evolution of museums and their methods. For example, the Smithsonian Institution began with a request from James Smithson's will to found "an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." The institution's theory of success emphasizes "study, classification, and publication" (p.52). In other research, I have found museum functions to be categorized differently. I will consider all of the main categorizations when I create my own criteria for successful museums.

2. Asma, S. T. (2001). Stuffed animals and pickled heads: The culture and evolution of natural history museums. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Asma's *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads* attempts to "give some palpable sense of the people who historically worked (and currently work) behind the scenes at natural history museums...and unravel the cultural and theoretical convictions that museum exhibits create and reflect" (p.xii). Asma cites and elaborates on Dr. Albert Parr's division of the role of natural history museums into three phases. The first phase was an obsession with collections. The second phase was to function as mediums of proof for evolutionary theory. After evolution was accepted as scientific fact, the natural history museum had no clear agenda. Some pushed for education on environmental and political awareness and today that legacy is visible in the theory. Asma's book is a very accessible chronology and will offer interesting examples of museum culture for my project.

3. Crary, J. (2002). *Géricault, the panorama, and sites of reality in the early nineteenth century*. pp. 5-25 The MIT PressStable. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1262599 Accessed: 04/02/2011

I chose to include Crary's work on early museums because he pays particular attention to the role of the museum visitor. He discusses spectators and the evolution of their attention and interests. This article is applicable since I will be a spectator for the second half of my project. I will be better able to understand my experience with Crary's observations than if I were only to include the other point of view—the view of the curator and their intended interpretations. The article illustrates the formation of "the modern audience" (p.9). "The prioritization of visuality was accompanied by imperatives for various kinds of self-control and social restraint, particularly for forms of attentiveness that require both relative silence and immobility" (p.9). Although seemingly dated, the article provides needed background and explanations of the basic forms of exhibits and framing (which is also included in Marstine's work below) and the implications of both for the visitor.

4. Fleming, D. (2005, November 8-10). *Managing change in museums: keynote address*. The museum and change international conference, Prague.

This speech discusses the two main reasons for an evolving museum: democratisation and self-preservation. Fleming points out the changes in the categories of collection, exhibition, promotion, advocacy, and education. He continues with examples of changes made at his own museum in Liverpool. These specific examples of structural and administrative changes will be useful to include in my critique. Fleming ends with a push for change showing that the paradigm shift is in full effect. "There remains some resistance to change, but change is an ongoing process and the organization has developed a strong momentum. The resistance must be overcome." Fleming's address is directed towards the boards, curators, and other staff members of museums. It will be a valuable complement to Crary's work relating to the visitors of museums.

5. Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000). *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. New York: Routledge.

The main ideas of the book are ways in which museums construct meaning and intended interpretations. Hooper-Greenhill includes detailed information on museum pedagogy today—especially how culture is displayed and ultimately taught. "During the last part of the nineteenth century an approach to the style of museum displays evolved which was based on how objects might be known and used in the production of knowledge" (p.5). Hooper-Greenhill creates a platform for change with the book stating that "power can be used to further democratic possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary values" (p.162). This resource will prove useful in my project because of the questions it asks about constructing values, views, and knowledge in a museum visitor's experience. I will incorporate the theoretical aspects into my literature review and the later questions into the standards I set for the critique of museums.

6. Low, T. (2004). What is a museum? (1942). In G. Anderson, *Reinventing the museums:* historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift (pp. 30-43). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Low provides a very sound base for my project. He defines American museums and their role circa 1942. Museums at that time, according to the Association of Art Museum Directors, were to be for all of the American people—providing service to those "who seek refreshment" while "illuminating the past and vivifying the present" (p.31). Low states that education, a new idea and department for the institutions, is not stressed enough. Education is an aspect of the museum instead of the foundation. He blames directors, curators and educators for not working together toward a common goal. His writing is an early example of the more socially aware museum, exemplified with the included quote from Morse A. Cartwright: "Separated from its social content a museum is meaningless to anyone but its curators" (p.43). With this understanding of museums before the more-official push for political awareness, I will be better able to compare and contrast different theories in the literature. Also provided in the article is Low's projection for the future of museums. He offers suggestions to unify museums including the creation of specified goals and the finding of balance between those goals and processes. These suggestions are still applicable to modern museums. I will incorporate these ideas into my assessment of museum success

7. Marstine, J. (2006). *New museum theory and practice: An introduction*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

The introduction of this book illustrates recent conflicts in museum culture that metaphorically represent conflicts within modern society. Marstine assesses the validity and questioned authenticity of museums in this context. She goes on to talk about how curators and museums frame information and how various projections of the same information can produce dramatically different interpretations. I focused on the introduction of this book as it is extremely thorough in its break-down of museum theory today. I will also refer to other chapters in my final project.

8. Simpson, M. G. (2001). *Making representations: museums in the post-colonial era*. New York: Routledge.

This three part book touches on many issues faced by modern museums and constituents. It provides examples of theory as well as historical and political events that directly apply to the paradigm shift and often-accompanying controversy. Special attention is paid to individual cultural and ethnic groups like African Americans and American Indians. During the middle of the last century, museums—often developed and run by Whites, thus projecting White values on non-White cultures—were under scrutiny by political movement activists and community members who felt underrepresented or misrepresented. This book highlights the arguments and subsequent changes while essentially making further recommendations. The information on specific cultural groups provided by Simpson will be incorporated into a main portion of my final project. I will also be able to compare the museums I visit to the examples Simpson includes.

9. Skramstad, H. (2004). An agenda for museums in the twenty-first century. In G. Anderson, *Reinventing the museum: historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift* (pp. 118-132). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Skramstad outlines a path to success for museums. He states that, essentially, there needs to be a balance between freedom and authority in the institutions. This article is a call to action for museums to call others to action. Museum's diversity is a projection of their constituent's diversity. Building on that idea is essential for survival in a world of expanding media. Skramstad goes back in time to illustrate the journey of museums which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the agenda he has set for the future. I found the paper's organization (from evolution of the past to projected evolution in the future) very effective and I will incorporate some of Skramstad's methods into my own work. I will use aspects of his agenda as a model for what I should expect to see in progressive museums and curators today. I will ask questions based on the research presented. How has the transition from emphasizing inward focus to emphasizing outward focus been manifested? Is the inward focus on quantity or quality? How and why is that focus working or not working for them?

10. Weil, S. E. (2004). Rethinking the museum: An emerging new paradigm (1990). In G. Anderson, *Reinventing the museum: historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift* (pp. 74-79). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Weil discusses the modification of Joseph Veach Noble's (*Museum Manifesto*, 1970) institutional responsibilities (to collect, to conserve, to study, to interpret, and to exhibit) to the now recognized three main functions: to preserve, to study, and to communicate. Weil includes responses to the issue of the "inseparability of the museum's interpretive and exhibition functions..." (p.77). He cites Native American scholars, anthropologists, and the Smithsonian Institution. Although he leaves the qualification of this "new paradigm" understated and up for debate, the article will be valuable as one of the earliest and most straight-forward description of the paradigm shift. Weil's articles are often cited in other works on the subject meaning his ideas show up throughout most of the new museum literature from the 1990's.

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A Review of Museum Literature and a Personal Critique Museology: The Evolution of a Socially Conscious Institution

Introduction

More people are visiting museums today than ever before; history and natural history museums in the United States receive over 80,000,000 visits per year according to the American Association of Museums. With the most recent study estimating 17,500 museums in the United States alone, there are more institutions for these visitors to explore than ever before. It has not always been this way, and although today's numbers seem high, there is still room for growth. Museums have and will continue to adapt to the shifting interest and conscience of society. The world and work of museums is in a state of constant change.

Bettina Messias Carbonell, in the introduction of her anthology of museums states that museums are both "(1) a literal gathering place for the reception of histories, memories, natures, nations, cultures, and audiences, and (2) a topos or more abstract mental gathering place for analytical and creative thinking about our encounters with such representations" (Carbonell 2004: 1). This paper explores both of these literal and abstract natures. It outlines the historical changes and reasons for change that have occurred since medieval times. It also provides a personal critique of museums that exist in various stages of institutional evolution today.

Published work on the history, theory, culture, and politics of museums is explored and analyzed in the first portion of the paper. The paper discusses curatorial methods and spectator expectations and roles in Western museums of history and natural history. Curatorial agendas, early on, were focused on collection and classification, but since have progressed to value advocacy and education much more.

The project emphasizes the so-called "paradigm shift" of museums during the late twentieth century. This is the most obvious and drastic shift in museum community focus.

Critiques from educators, cultural groups, and social activists, among others pressured museums to become more visitor-centered instead of object-centered. During this time, some museums began blending science and politics—they had voices and made social statements. Because this phenomenon is so recent, many museums maintain pre-shift methods making this the opportune time to compare and contrast both styles.

The last portion of the paper involves a personal critique of visited museums. Through studying other work on museums, I have developed a set of criteria on which to judge the chosen institutions. The success of the physical layout, exhibit quality, and atmosphere at reaching the visitor and conveying the intended message will be considered. I will also judge the balance between science and politics, commenting on the curator's choices to either display both equally or tip the scales.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MUSEUM HISTORY AND MUSEUM CRITIQUES Museum Origins

Greek and Roman

The word museum comes from the Greek Mouseion, meaning shrine to the muses—the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom rule over their own art or science: epic poetry, lyric poetry, sacred poetry, music, comedy, tragedy, dance, astronomy, and history.

Greek and Roman museums housed public collections of objects that are now revered for their cultural significance. According to Edward Alexander, Greek temples had objects of gold, silver, and bronze in their possession. They also flaunted numerous elaborate statues and paintings (Alexander 1979: 4). The Romans, however, were more well-known for their collections of paintings and sculptures which were valued on the basis of aesthetic beauty rather than social significance. Wealthy Roman homes often housed large assortments of art and

sometimes natural objects. According to Pliny in *Historia Naturalis*, Emperor Augustus had bones of giants available for viewing in his garden (Murray 1902: 5).

One of the earliest official museums was created by Ptolemy Soter in Alexandria around 280 B.C.E. The state-funded museum in Alexandria acted as a kind of academic institution with an extensive library, laboratories, and housing for philosophers, theorizers, and a priest at the head. According to Walter M. Ellis:

"Ptolemy's Museum and its library changed the intellectual face of the ancient world. It consolidated Greek culture, adding to it elements of many other cultures, and it preserved many works from oblivion...the Museum gave birth to a new age of science. Euclid, Archimedes, Eratosthenes, and Aristarchus were all connected to the museum. Their research and their discoveries constitute the most important chapter in the history of science prior to the seventeenth century of our own era" (Ellis 1994: 57).

Greek and Roman collections were for viewing and contemplating.

Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages in western Europe, the museum transitioned from an educational institution to a personal and private house of treasures—treasures usually looted during wars and conquests. Nobles in Medieval times would acquire special objects from travelers and soldiers. These collections were not open to the public due to their spiritual or personal significance to the owner. The act of collecting was very much alive in Medieval times without the subsequent theorizing and research that existed previously (and then much later).

The Renaissance

The Renaissance created a renewed appetite for knowledge in Europe. Italian museums were at the forefront. According to Murray's *Museums, their history and their use*, museums in the Renaissance showcased Roman coins and medals, engraved gems, and elaborate pieces of

art. Noted collectors during this time included Ermolao Barbaro, (a naturalist), Cardinal Bembo, and Thomas Howard (an English Earl). Antiquities were prized. Murray says that:

"Nearly every subject of classical antiquity was treated more or less exhaustively by various scholars during the sixteenths and seventeenth centuries, and their monographs were subsequently brought together and methodically arranged in the portly volumes Graevius and Gronovius, Sallengre and Polenus, which still remain cyclopean monuments of industry and learning, and indispensible aids in any exhaustive antiquarian inquiry" (Murray 1902: 18).

1700's: Appearance in America

The Charleston Library Society began collecting articles of natural history in the late 1700's. The society became the first of many successful museums in the New World. Many collections began with Native American cultural material. Important members of the growing museum community in America during this time include Charles Willson Peale (a very intelligent yet personable character who brought attention to museum causes), Phineas T. Barnum (of circus fame), Joseph Henry, and Spencer Fullerton Baird.

The Modernist Museum

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill discusses the idea of the "modernist museum" in her book entitled *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. As the curiosity cabinets and private collections were going out of style, nation-states began pushing for powerful public educational institutions. These institutions focused on collection and classification and "were drawn together to produce an encyclopedic world-view, understood from a Western perspective" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 151). This museum model appeared in 19th century Europe and still exists, in part, today.

In 1819 museum prehistoric displays in these "modernist museums" became much more organized with the help of Danish National Museum curator, Christian Thomsen. Instead of

having a case or room dedicated to a type of artifact (i.e. pottery or weaponry), he categorized and exhibited artifacts based on their material—stone, bronze, or iron. Thomsen developed what is now known as the "Three Age System".

The Three Phases

With some overlap in the previous section, I have decided to use Stephen T. Asma's idea of evolutionary phases to delve deeper into museum theory. Asma's book *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads* references three phases in museum evolution based on a presentation by the former director of the American Museum of Natural History, Dr. Albert Eide Parr. The first phase took place in the 17th and 18th century. The second phase occurred during the realm of Charles Darwin's influence in the 19th century. The third phase began in the early 20th century and appears to have transitioned into the Post-Modern museums we find today.

Methods of Museums in the "First Phase"

Curator's Agenda and Spectator's Role: A Frame of Curiosity

A curator's agenda in first phase natural history and history museums usually involved collection with an emphasis on oddities and exotics. A natural history museum's job was merely to sample and collect nature. This is where we would have seen so-called curiosity cabinets.

Collecting is psychologically and philosophically explained by Jean Baudrillard as a display of power: "surrounded by the objects he possesses, the collector is preeminently the sultan of a secret seraglio...Not only do objects help us master the world, by virtue of their being inserted into practical sets, they also help us, by virtue of their being inserted into mental sets, to establish dominion over time, interrupting its continuous flow..." (Baudrillard 1968: 4).

Although Baudrillard's explanation referred more specifically to the individual collector, his ideas can be expanded to the larger collector: the museum.

Oddities and exotics were prized. They required little publicity. They required little attention with regards to display. They brought in year-round revenue through visitors of all shapes and sizes. These visitors were looking for recreation and curiosities delivered by the enticing, the shocking, and the arousing. Asma states, however, that "most nature museums…do not really titillate the appetites, as in the case of consumer manipulation. The feeling of wonder, or the sensation of the marvelous, *is* emotional and can intoxicate, but, unlike the appetites, it has no obvious object or specific goal" (Asma 2001: 34).

Curiosities were, at a basic level, a guarantee of institutional survival—allowing museums to also explore other—perhaps less entertaining—pursuits. First phase museums also helped maintain human relationships with the rest of nature as technology and civilizations progressed. Curators wanted to create a complete inventory of nature (Parr, cited in Asma 2001: 43). Shortly before the Industrial Revolution, visitors were able to appreciate examples of nature's beauty while within the walls of human inspiration through architecture.

Methods of Museums in the "Second Phase"

Curator's Agenda: A Frame of Science

The second phase in museum theory occurred in the 19th century. A curator's agenda in second phase natural history and history museums usually involved collection, preservation, study, interpretation, classification, and publication. Charles Darwin's ideas offered ways of organizing and classifying the collections created in the first phase and museums became institutions of proof for evolutionary theory. Curators interpreted and translated Darwin's theories for the general public in their exhibitions. This educational campaign was successful according to Dr. Parr because evolutionary theory was accepted and left museums questioning their function in the third phase.

During the 19th century, museums also began tapping into what has been called the "Century of History" by assembling products of human activity from nearly all periods and nations. Museums had both environmental and culturally inspired displays. The fragility of the environment and the significance of the relationship between humans and ecology began to show up in late 29th century museums due to the influence of Christian Thomsen (the Three-Age System), William T. Hornaday (of the National Museum in America) and other contemporaries. During this time, museums became social advocates for environmental respect and conservation with artistic dioramas.

Curators were beginning to interpret artifacts through a scientific frame. The apparent cohesiveness of science and nature was inspiring. At the American Museum of Natural History in the late 1800's, president Morris K. Jesup organized expeditions to the North Pole, Siberia, Mongolia, the Gobi, and the Congo. These projects joined the ideas of collection and study.

Spectator's Role

Visitors in the 19th century were no longer only interested in shocks and mystery. With much public debate of Darwin's ideas going on, the public turned to the storehouses of potential natural information for answers.

Museums began training their eager audiences. The public institutions were open to all ages and classes so methods of control were a necessity. Crary notes that "The prioritization of visuality was accompanied by imperatives for various kinds of self-control and social restraint, particularly for forms of attentiveness that require both relative silence and immobility" (Crary 2002: 9). A spectator culture was created. These expectations still exist in modern museums and

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² On Exhibit: American Museum of Natural History. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from American Museum of Natural History: www.amnh.org

galleries: visitors often keep quiet and to themselves, and there are strict rules when it comes to physically interacting with the art or artifacts.

Methods of Museums in the "Third Phase"

Curator's Agenda: A Frame of Entertainment

In the early 20th century, museums begin transitioning into the third of Asma's phases. Since evolutionary theory was recognized, the institutions of proof were no longer needed and according to Dr. Parr, museums were unsure of the future. Instead of turning towards education and advocacy, third phase curators turned to exotics. Asma says that this was a poor choice because of growing American affluence in other media like photographs and films. "This chosen function of the museum was being usurped by other media" (Asma 2001: 44).

A curator's agenda in third phase natural history and history museums took a few steps backward. Curators had no clear plan for the future and tried to keep visitor numbers high by supplying virtual trips to curious and exotic worlds. The third phase was one of confusion.

Today, modern natural history museums that survived the third phase are still attempting to create constructive identities and define their role in society.

Collection standards were not encouraged so museums usually were overcrowded with items that they could not properly care for in the first place. In the American Association of Museums' first ethics code—produced in 1925—preservation was not even addressed (Weil 1990: 2).

The Paradigm Shift

Explanation

In the latter part of the 20th century, museums began transforming yet again. This most recent paradigm shift was basically an institutional emphasis-change from object to visitor—

reformulating the balance of science and social statements—poetics and politics. Stephen E. Weil references an international conference put on by the Smithsonian Institution:

"[We] will consider the fundamental relationship between ideas and objects, conception and presentation in the context of exhibitions. We will organize....around two general approaches: the poetics and politics of representation. Poetics, in this case, may be understood as identifying the underlying narrative/aesthetic patterns within exhibitions. The politics of representation refers to the social circumstances in which exhibitions are organized, presented, and understood. Clearly these are intersecting domains which draw on a common pool of historical memory and shared (often unconscious) assumption" (Weil 1990: 4).

The interpretation and appropriation of culture in museums came under attack starting in the 1960's. Questions about biases and agendas were raised by the general public, critics, and the museum community. Minority groups began demanding rights in the political arena and those ideas overflowed into other aspects of society, museums included. It was (and is still being) argued that White people are able to tell their cultural stories in Western history museums with limited outside interference from other ethnic groups. However, in museums where people of color and their material culture are being displayed, the outside interference of Whites is expected and accepted. If Whites are interpreting and appropriating other cultures, whose culture is really on exhibition? If Whites have that kind of power over minority groups in a museum setting, how does that translate into the other realms of society? Hooper-Greenhill states that "power can be used to further democratic possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary values" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 162).

Deidre Sklar, a researcher of Native American artifacts states that: "Time and space in a museum, are defined in terms of the confines of the collection, not of the context from which [the collection is] drawn. Visiting hours form ten to five and glass exhibit case define Euro-American, not Native American time and space" (Weil, pg. 3). This critique has been combated by some museums that now employ the communities that are being represented. Moira G.

Simpson discusses how cultural communities are now becoming involved in their own interpretation through curator consultation, guest curatorship, and community exhibitions. This involvement can also include participation in talks, research, and offering advice to the museum community from an advisory board position. (Simpson 2001: 51).

Michael M. Ames, the late Anthropology professor at the University of British Columbia, discusses another example of this idea in his article *Museums in the age of deconstruction*. A bronze statue of "The first great Canadian"—Samuel de Champlain stands in front of many important state buildings of Quebec. Beneath Champlain sits a small North American Indian, gazing up at the "great" Champlain. Ames states that "who is publicly proclaimed to be "The first great Canadian" says much about who is considered a part of history and who is not" (Ames 1992: 3). This kind of institutionalized communication is exactly what the most recent theoretical paradigm shift would relate to.

Timothy W. Luke discusses the role politics now play in museum theory in his book aptly titled *Museum politics: power plays at the exhibition*. He references especially, the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. This museum uses strong and emotionally charged imagery to highlight historic crimes against humanity—the Holocaust exhibition is the most visited and advertised. Simon Wiesenthal, the famed Nazi hunter and the name behind a Jewish human rights organization, felt that the museum should inspire visitors to act and push them to make personal and institutional changes.

Another way that the paradigm shift to a more political museum has occurred is through portrayals of evolutionary theory. Some museums place exhibits of human evolution with all other evidence for evolutionary theory. Some museums have human evolution separate from other exhibitions. Some display human evolution as a precursor to prehistoric and historic

human existence. There is a particularly delicate balance between science and politics in this regard. The paradigm shift in this particular subject forces museums to either maintain or tip the balance between educational scientific evidence and a sensitive political statement.

Reason for Shift

Just as it is the responsibility of a speaker to communicate his or her point and not the responsibility of the listener to understand the point, it is the responsibility of the curator to make sure that a museum's agenda is not misconstrued. In portrayals of cultural groups, social consciousness is especially important due to the possible negative implications. In the 1960's there were complaints from American Indian, African American, and Mexican American groups. Many felt as if their culture was being appropriated to cater to White visitor's interests.

Paradigm Shift Ideas Incarnate

Methods in Emerging Post-Modern Museums: Curator's Agenda

Most of the concepts included in the following section are inspired by Joseph Veach Noble's *Museum Manifesto* (1970). The Manifesto stated that the five acts of collection, conservation, study, interpretation, and exhibition act, in Veach Noble's terms, as the five separate fingers of a single hand. Veach Noble's ideas were later amended by Peter van Mensch and Stephen E. Weil at the end of the 20th century. In museum theory today, a curator's agenda in modern natural history and history museums usually involves most if not all of the following: collection and preservation, communication through interpretation and exhibition, and education. *Collection and Preservation*

Collecting artifacts is no longer the main focus of museums yet the institutions are still faced with the dilemma of proper care and preservation of their current collections. Relics, (spiritually or personally relevant articles like a holy person's body or possessions) for example,

which were often hard to care for, no longer have a place in the museum as they did in the Middle Ages. They generally tell the researcher or spectator nothing of historical significance.

Collections facilities are often affiliated with larger museum institutions. Once artifacts and artifactual materials are excavated and studied they are housed and cared for in collections facilities. Curators and other approved educational parties are able to access those collections and the associated information. Conservation specialists are found in numerous departments of larger museums. It is a museum's responsibility to care for its collections. Collection standards are often set up to ensure a department is not overbooked therefore leaving pieces neglected.

There is a "fusion of the question of desirability with the question of preservability" (Weil 1990: 2). Museums now help preserve cultural material and the knowledge and information associated with it.

The modernist museum was entirely made up of objects—the tangible cultural material is all that was used in the explanation of a culture. Hooper-Greenhill asks about objects that have been destroyed before they were "discovered" or other intangible aspects of culture like music, traditions, and oral history. Those require and deserve a place in museums. The idea of collection in the emerging post-modern museum has changed in this sense as well. It is no longer bringing in countless artifacts but the collection of all forms of cultural manifestations. *Research and Study*

Many museums also house or function as research institutions. The Smithsonian is home to nine research institutions and even more research centers. The California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco conducts research in anthropology, geology, and biology among other fields. The Academy also houses the Kimball Natural History Museum, one of the largest in the world. Another example: numerous specialists are currently working on various research

projects at the Field Museum in Chicago. Only about ten percent of the Field's objects are on public display at a given time. Exhibition is not a modern museum's only purpose although it does remain its primary purpose.

Communicate: Interpretation and Exhibition

According to Moira G. Simpson, "Exhibitions organized in consultation with the communities represented can provide a means of counteracting many of the problematic aspects of exhibitions which have drawn criticism in the past... Community involvement in the exhibition planning process can take a number of forms: participation in oral history recording, photographic documentation, and other forms of research; advice to museum staff who are curating an exhibition and ratification of plans, texts, images, etc.; guest curatorship by individuals or groups within the community; or curatorship in entirety by community participants" (Simpson 2001: 51).

In her book *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, Hooper-Greenhill discusses the limitations of exhibits in the realm of education. In emerging post-modern museums, exhibits are only one of the many educational methods employed. She brings up other options like "writers, scientists and artists in residence…discussions, workshops, performances, dances, songs, and meals…" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152).

Education

Education became a major purposeful focus in museums in the later 20th century. Even though museums have always existed within the realm of education, pedagogic methods are now judged and amended regularly depending on community and visitor needs.

Post-modern museums now have complete departments devoted to education. These experts on education will be involved in various aspects of museum activities depending on the

institution—some critics even say that "education" should not be a single and separate department but the overseer of all other departments. The Department of Education will help exhibit designers in meeting the needs of many different types of learners. Visual, tactile, and auditory sensory stimuli are incorporated to encourage guests to interact and thus retain more information. Museums are often more engaging and inspiring than text books and worksheets to young students.

Some critics, however, say that a single and separate department for one of the main functions of the museum is ill-conceived. Weil asks "Should museum education appropriately remain the responsibility of a separate department? If so, should that department…also be principally responsible for the organization of exhibitions?" (Weil 1990: 4).

There is also a hidden curriculum in museums, the biases that are present in every form of communication, which came under attack during the early years of the most recent paradigm shift.

Many post-modern museum institutions are now incorporating cultural centers as a complement and additional response to the recent critique. These centers allow the public to become more involved in museum activities and allow museums to better understand their intended audience. Some examples include, the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center in San Francisco, The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, the future American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma (under construction), and the El Museo Latino: Latino Art and History Museum and Cultural Center in Omaha.

The North American Indian Museum Association was created in 1978 as a group of assistance for Indian museums in North America. (Simpson 2001: 136). According to the North American Indian Museum Association by-laws of 1980: "An Indian museum is defined as an

established non-profit institution essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, with professional staff, that provides exhibits, research, or programs in North American Indian subjects. In addition, the institution must meet the following requirements: 1. A majority of either, the Board of Directors or staff members, must be North American Indian, Eskimos, Aleuts, Inuit or Métis. 2. The institution must serve a local Indian population" (NAIMA 1980). The most famous native-run institution is the National Museum of the American Indian under the Smithsonian Institution, discussed above.

One major controversy facing modern museums is the issue of stakeholders in cultural property. Laws limiting or prohibiting the export of artifacts from the nation or country of origin are relatively recent or even still nonexistent. All museums have had agendas but modern museums, those who took paradigm critiques to heart, have focused on social implications of cultural portrayals. Modern museums are more socially conscious.

Methods in Emerging Post-Modern Museums: Spectator's role

The American public is becoming increasingly non-White, adding countless varieties of expectations and needs to the average museum's visiting audience. Emerging post-modern museums are also facing the issue of the non-visiting public. Weil asks "Is the impact of the museum limited to its visitors or does its role—as an authority, as an arbiter—extend into the community generally?" (Weil 1990: 6).

Today, because of outward spectator pressure and the genuine search for truth, museums are acknowledging their own faults. Asma states that "Museum educators have been loath to present exhibit about the internal disputes regarding evolutionary mechanisms and tempos, for fear that these scientific disagreements will fuel the unrelated cultural fires of

antievolutionism...nonetheless, it does no good for science to pretend to be something that it is not: perfect" (Asma 2001: 265-266).

Important Figures in the Paradigm Shift Idea

Stephen E. Weil

Stephen E. Weil is one of the most celebrated and honored museum theorists of this era. He was a major force in museum evolution and theory for three decades and even served as the scholar emeritus at the Smithsonian Institute for Education and Museum Studies for nearly ten years.

Weil was also a verbal critic of 20th century museum methods. In an interview with the Times, Weil said that "The boundaries defining a museum have become very loose these days... Museums are instruments or tools to carry out particular goals. People have agendas, and a museum is one way to advance an agenda. A privately funded museum doesn't have to give equal time." He wrote an article, *Rethinking the museum: an emerging new paradigm* in 1990 which is included in the aforementioned arguments for the institutional shift towards visitor-centered, education-centered, and socially conscious museums.³

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill is currently Emeritus Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

According to her personal biography on the University of Leicester's website, Hooper-Greenhill is most interested in the educational and communicative opportunities museums have to offer. In her work, she discusses the lack of historical references and comparisons given in modern museum theory. She strives to show transitions in museum pedagogy over time. In her

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³ Stephen's Page. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from Luke Weil & Associates: www.lukeweil.com/_pages/stevePage

book *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, she asks many questions about how and why museums in the past and present do what they do with a focus on their educational and interpretive methods. She inspires future discussion with her questions as she does not provide or claim to have all of the answers.

Tony Bennett

Dr. Tony Bennett is a professor in Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. He was educated at Oxford and the University of Sussex. His online biography states that "his work in museum studies has contributed to the development of the 'new museology' particularly in the light it has thrown on the role of museums as instruments of social governance" His work often outlines the important role culture plays in the reaction to and effectiveness of authority. For example, public museums in the second phase promoted the mixing of social classes which required a reevaluation of social rules and expectations. Bennett has also focused on colonialism and its effects and efficiency which apply to ideas of cultural appropriation in Western institutions.

Post Modern Museum Examples

American Museum of Natural History

The current mission statement of the American Museum of Natural History is: "To discover, interpret, and disseminate—through scientific research and education—knowledge about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe."

In 1869, Albert Smith Bickmore's proposal for a Natural History Museum in New York was accepted. The museum was originally located in Central Park but soon outgrew the venue and moved to 77th street. One of the earliest permanent cultural exhibits was the Hall of

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⁴ Tony Bennett. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from University of Western States: www.uws.edu.au School of Museum Studies. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from University of Leicester: www.le.ac.uk

Northwest Coast Indians which opened in 1896. Other cultural exhibits include the Hall of Eastern Woodlands Indians, the Hall of Plains Indians, the Hall of African Peoples, the Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples, the Gardner D. Stout Hall of Asian Peoples, and the Hall of South American Peoples. In 2007, the museum opened the Spitzer Hall of Human Origins, that according to the museum, offers the "most comprehensive evidence of human evolution ever assembled...and "explores the most profound mysteries of humankind: who we are, where we came from, and what is in store for the future of our species". Timothy W. Luke, in his book *Museum politics: power plays at the exhibition*, states that "From its early days as a material beneficiary of New York's Gilded Age philanthropists to its current activities as an erstwhile defender of global biodiversity, this private scientific institution has been a central site for giving modern Americans their understanding of nature, history, museums, and even America itself since it first opened its doors to the public..." (Luke 2002: 100).

Some very important names in anthropology and ethnography have been involved with the American Museum of Natural History like Franz Boas and Margaret Mead. Edward P. Alexander quotes Margaret Meade as having said: "The Museum is an old fashioned institution, though up-to-date in relation to the media. Nobody is here just to make money...the museum gives you great intellectual independence" (Alexander 1979: 55).

Smithsonian Institute National Museum of Natural History

The Smithsonian Institute's Nation Museum of Natural History's current mission statement is to "increase knowledge and inspire learning about nature and culture, through outstanding research, collections, exhibitions, and education, in support of a sustainable future."

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⁵ About Museums: American Association of Museums. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from American Association Museums: www.aam-us.org

The new building for the U.S. National Museum opened its doors in 1910. Collections included specimens from expeditions and surveys made in the mid-1800's. For many of their early seasons, Smithsonian museums were known as "the Nation's Attic" due to their overcrowded and poorly organized spaces. They have since overcome that stigma. In 1969, the museum was renamed the National Museum of Natural history due to its focus on natural history and anthropology. Today, over 126 million items are under the care of the museum. ⁶

The National Museum of Natural History's permanent cultural exhibits include: the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins, African Voices, and Korea Gallery. From June 2011 through January 2012, the museum will host the American Anthropological Association's "Race: Are We So Different" exhibit.

The British Museum

Sir Hans Sloane gifted his collection of over 71,000 items to King George II in 1753 and the British Museum opened in 1759. In the early 1800's, the museum acquired many notable artifacts including the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon sculptures. In the 1880's, several collections were moved to what would become the Natural History Museum. Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks brought in prehistoric, ethnographic and archaeological artifacts from Europe and Asia. In the 1900's, the curators of the museum began offering services to museum visitors like commentary guides, guest lectures, and other educational opportunities. Although the museum has received criticism for its refusal to return cultural material to the peoples and countries of origin, the museum inspires around 6 million annual guests with its extensive collections and exhibits.⁷

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⁶ Exhibitions. (2011). Retreived March 2011, from Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History: http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/

⁷ *The Museum.* (2011). Retrieved March 2011, from The British Museum: http://www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum.aspx

In a recent New York Times article by Alan Riding, the mission of the British museum was discussed:

"Now, under Neil MacGregor, its director since 2002, the museum has embarked on a new mission of communication with the modern world, not only presenting parts of its collection in countries where it once gathered art and artifacts, but also taking into its galleries art from regions undergoing rapid, unpredictable change. In another sense, by exploiting its historic openness to the world, the British Museum is engaged in an innovative and subtle form of cultural diplomacy, one inspired less by a desire to promote Britain's image than by a belief in the political importance of spreading awareness of cultural diversity (Riding 2006).

National Museum of the American Indian

Before the National Museum of the American Indian was established with the National Museums of the American Indian Act on November, 28th 1989, there had been no American or Canadian national institution strictly dedicated to native cultures. Native cultures were included in parts of national institutions but not solely represented.

The museum is divided among three locations—the main site, on the National Mall, opened in September of 2004, the George Gustav Heye Center is located in Lower Manhattan, and the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland Maryland houses reserve collections and a library.

George Gustav Heye's connection with the museum is described on the Smithsonian's website:

"Heye (1874-1957) was the founder of the Museum of the American Indian (1916) in New York City and served as its director until 1956. His personal collection of Native American materials, gathered during a 45-year period, became the basis of the museum's collection and is considered the most comprehensive in the world. It includes 1 million objects from indigenous peoples throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, collection was transferred to the Smithsonian in 1989, when President Bush signed legislation to establish the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution".

⁸ Exhibitions. (2011). Retrieved March 2011, from National Museum of the American Indian: http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=exhibitions&second=dc&third=current

Native Americans collaborated with the museum community in building design, landscaping and exhibit content. Although the museum is federally-funded rather than community-run, the museum has become an icon and model for other cultural centers. The museum does not exist without criticism, however; Wendell H. Oswalt says that even with commendable planning and cultural consultation, "the end product is an eclectic assortment of poorly designed and badly explained exhibits..." (Oswalt, Ch.15).

The Field Museum

According to their website, the Field Museum in Chicago's mission focuses on "serving the public as an educator" and "reaching out", "living together on the living earth", the "world wide knowledge database" of collections, "offering greater understanding about environments and people", "explaining the patterns and processes that shape the living earth" through research, and "working with others". This last area is what applies most directly to the paradigm shift. The Field Museum collaborates with other museums, research centers, universities and cultural groups so that they may better provide a more well-rounded and accurate example of historical and current cultural realities.

PERSONAL CRITIQUE OF MUSEUMS

Introduction

To complement the research I have done on museum evolution and theory for the first portion of this project, I have recently visited and critiqued museums on my own. I visited 1) a large, established, well-funded, urban museum, 2) a small, rural historical museum that has not been renovated since the middle of the 20th century, and 3) a recently opened cultural museum

 $^{^{9}}$ &8 About Us. (2010). Retrieved March 2011, from The Field Museum: http://fieldmuseum.org/about

that starkly contrasts the previous institution with which it shares property and administration. I discuss the museums mainly on their portrayals of non-Western cultures and their balance of science and politics. Each museum had its own positive and negative aspects. Each also provided a more tangible peek into the different phases and methodology mentioned in the earlier part of this paper.

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science

History

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science was founded in 1900 as the Colorado Museum of Natural History after it was realized that the "Carter Museum", a home collection of Colorado fauna, was too great to be ignored. The museum now also houses an auditorium, planetarium, IMAX theatre, and many traveling exhibits every year. The two exhibits discussed in the coming section, North American Indian Cultures and Prehistoric Journey, are both permanent exhibits at the museum.¹⁰

Personal Critique

In late March of 2011 I visited the Denver Museum of Nature and Science in Colorado.

While exploring both their hall of Native American artifacts and "Prehistoric Adventure" exhibit,

I paid close attention to the museum's interpretation of human history.

As soon as the visitor enters the large hall entitled "North American Indian Cultures" they are greeted and welcomed by numerous American Indians via a "Native Voices" video loop. These featured docents are either dressed in contemporary western or traditional cultural attire and address the visitor in their native tongue.

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¹⁰ About Us. (2011). Retrieved March 2011, from The Denver Museum of Nature and Science: http://www.dmns.org/about-us

To the left of the video loop is the large quote "We are all different; we are all the same". The basic similarities between groups of each cultural region—their need for food, shelter, and clothing are what tie the entire hall together. Each group's methods for meeting those needs are made visibly available for the visitor to compare and contrast. The "...we are all the same" quote is accompanied by other quotes from modern American Indians. These quotes include: "The Ocean is



our highway, our lifeline, our bloodline" and "When we sing our songs, when we show our masks and headdresses, we invoke the presence of our ancestors. We are collapsing time." The curator has combined modern voices with prehistoric and historic artifacts to give the exhibit life and relevancy for all viewers.

The Navajo nation's exhibit is particularly interesting in that it displays cultural material from prehistoric to present time in a linear fashion. The viewer is able to see the changes in one group over time, the influence of Whites on their lifestyle, and current practices. The Navajo display especially offers a more personal and internal exploration of the people. Instead of appropriating the cultural material to fit White interests, it presents an example of the everyday life of a Navajo man or woman. The average is given value—given a voice.

The North American Indian Cultures hall is intended for all ages yet made especially accessible to children. The exhibits were low enough for children to view; there are videos for them to watch, and hands-on reconstructions for them to play with. Parents and teachers can also print off games and discussion topics from the museum's website (www.dmns.org) to keep kids

involved and interested. There are also plenty of explanations, examples, and related stories for adults to read. One area of the hall, comprised completely of words and images, perfectly exemplifies modern museum theory and the shift to a more socially conscious institution.

Entitled "Insiders and Outsiders: Contention Portraits of American Indians: Authentic?

Stereotype? True?", the display discusses portrayals of American Indians through different cultural lenses. As the exhibit reads, "The Denver Museum of Nature and Science Anthropology Department has more than 800 paintings and prints in its collection. More than half portray American Indians. Some of these were created by American Indians themselves: "insiders" depicting their own histories, traditions, and identities from their own perspectives. Many others were created by "outsiders"—Europeans and Anglo-Americans—looking at the subject through their own cultural lens." It goes on to show examples of images from "outsiders" and "insiders", bringing up questions of authenticity, artistic liberty, and stereotyping and racism.

Overall, I found the North American Indian Cultures hall to be a very well-rounded and thought-provoking exhibition. Its displays highlighted artifacts and practices that were and are culturally important to each group instead of what might be the most interesting to the viewer. It brought in varying explanations and impressions of the artifacts and explained, through the "Insiders and Outsiders" section, the biases that are inevitably present in the museum and greater

society.

A light version of Human Evolution is also present in the "Prehistoric Journey" exhibit of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Most of the maze-like exhibit is dedicated to paleontology and kidfriendly dinosaur recreations; however a small corner

near the end of the walk through has a limited amount of information. Housing evidence of human evolution with paleontology instead of with cultural or other human-related exhibits shows that the curator chose to favor science.

The Tulare County Museum and Tulare County Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture History

I visited the Tulare County Historical Museum many times while growing up. I visited it on school field trips, for birthday parties, and on hot summer picnic days in the park to take advantage of the air conditioning. My most recent visit in May of 2011, allowed me to visualize the theories of museum history and function I have been studying for the past year with this project. I was able to see misrepresentation and underrepresentation of a particular cultural group and the emphasis of a White history and truth in the older section of the museum. I was also able to contrast that with the very culturally relevant and diversity-embracing exhibition at the new Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture.

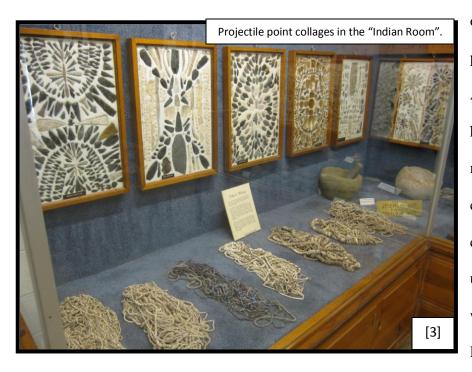
Mooney Grove Park in Visalia, California is home to three different venues: the room of Native American artifacts and the rooms of White history in Tulare County, the Pioneer Village of historic buildings, and the new Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture. I could have critiqued these venues separately but the methods present in each are better compared and contrasted if looked at as a whole.

According to a history book by a local historian, William R. Allen, the museum at Mooney Grove Park in Visalia took many years to create. It was proposed as a memorial to a local hero, Daniel K. Zumwalt, by his wife. Hugh Mooney, left \$5,000 to be used for a museum in his will. In 1928, the Forestry Board issued a Letter of Empowerment to Frank F. Latta to proceed with preliminary work. The museum wasn't completed and dedicated until 1948,

however, and was not open to the public until 1950. The museum includes the Anna Mills Johnston "Indian Basket Collection" and the Donald and Josephine Witt "Arrowhead Collection of Indian Relics". The most recent, and arguably only, major adjustment to the indoor museum since 1950 occurred in 2002 with the addition of blue carpeting as a backdrop to the "Indian Room" cabinetry which was to as Mr. Allen says, "enrich the artifacts' appearance". (Allen 2003: 30).

Personal Critique

The "Indian Room" is the first space available to visitors. In order to get to all other parts



of the venue, guests must pass by the Native
American artifacts. This has both positive and negative connotations: critics could say that the curiosity factor is being utilized while advocates would say that the prime location shows the

importance of the Native American cultural legacy. Upon entry to the "Indian Room" (the title in itself leaves a bit of cultural respect to be desired), the visitor is taken aback by the mass of cultural material crammed into one room. Most of the material is from Yokut Indian tribes. The prehistoric and historic Yokuts are made up of between forty and sixty tribes between Stockton

and the Southern Kern County line in California. The term "Yokut" which means "people" in native Valley dialects was applied to all of the groups by White settlers.

On the left wall, baskets, winnowing trays, seed beaters, cradle boards and other woven artifacts are hung and stacked in large cabinets. Hanging above the basketry are large photographs circa 1910 of native life reenactments—American Indians posing in front of their dwellings, posing with their hunting gear, posing with their baskets, posing with White pioneers—all appearing very content with their transition into a "civilized" culture.

In the back right corner of the room is another display of "arrowheads" (the term "arrowhead" is used to describe most of the pointed artifacts in the room). There are decorative collages of projectile points, knives, needles, beads, pottery, and even textiles from different sites around the county. It appears as if the donors, Donald and Josephine Witt, had collected the artifacts and created these artistic collages to showcase them personally. None of the artifacts in the collages are labeled. The artistic collages project a White idea of beauty—instead of allowing the artifacts and their craftsmanship to stand on their own. Below the hanging collages are displays of other artifacts, including examples from the Yokuts' monetary system: shells, shell beads, and soapstone beads.

On the floor along the right side wall lie around 40 examples of groundstone. They are all under the title "Mortars and Pestles". Although most are indeed bowl mortars and random unmatched pestles, there are a few very good examples of milling slabs and handstones which were not labeled. It appears as if guests have been able to handle and experiment with the artifacts since there is no barrier between the objects and visitors.

In the center of the room is a display of artifacts (mostly basketry) from other Native American groups not found in California. Featured cultural groups include Crows, Navajos, Shoshones, and Chippewas.

Two other featured displays include a full-size recreation of a pictograph found on a dam construction site that had to be destroyed and a recently painted mural by local artist Mona Selph. The mural "is an attempt to selectively portray the most commonly held beliefs relating to the structure of the Yokut's world" (Commentary plaque on the side of the mural). The mural includes interpretations of the Milky Way, the eagle spirit, and a bird like chief called TIHPNIKITS who appears to be the equivalent of a Western angel of death. The mural was created with a grant from the Tulare County Regional Arts Council.



There is an activity area for guests to utilize. Stamps with different designs found on Yokut basketry could be used on paper and taken home as a souvenir. The meanings of the designs (lightning, different animals, man and woman) were stated so guests can look for the same stamp designs on the actual artifacts. This activity area, in my opinion, allowed younger guests to examine the baskets more closely and see Native spiritually and socially important figures manifested in cultural material. This idea

of manifestation was not discussed by the museum, instead only the stamps and their translation were available.

Overall, I found the "Indian Room" both overwhelming and disappointing. I found myself searching for descriptions and explanations. This area of the museum is rather elementary for the only county museum that displays Native American artifacts. I could usually find out what certain artifacts were used for on a basic level. I was not, however, able to find how the baskets, projectile points, or pictographs were made, who made them, or their significance in everyday life. The emphasis is on the object and not the people. Current archaeological and other scientific information is not displayed and when it is there are inaccuracies. It is obvious that the room has not received much attention since the 1950's.

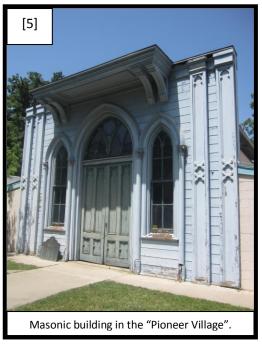
Right next door to the "Indian Room" is an unnamed but obvious "Cowboy Room". The cabinets are overstuffed with limited commentary like the Native American sections. Saddles, hats, and branding irons, and countless guns were some of the articles on display. The large cowboy firearms were not made into decorative and frivolous collages like the projectile points of the Yokuts, but instead displayed on racks to showcase their craftsmanship and strength. The next area was devoted to wartime artifacts. Visitors on their way through to the Pioneer Village would walk first through the "Indian Room", then the cowboy room, then the wartime area—a subconscious proponent of violence—perhaps even "us versus them". The remaining historical indoor section is about five times larger than the "Indian Room". This area is almost just as disorganized as the "Indian Room" but appears to have had more recent attention and exhibit changes. Guests are drawn into the other rooms by music, slideshows and the opportunity to participate in activities like trivia and "treasure hunts". Displays offer artifacts and information from many eras in the county's and country's history. Artifacts from men and women, young and old, religious and secular, everyday and special occasions are utilized.

There is an emphasis on the manifestation of the evolution of technology through artifacts. The people and the lifestyles are featured more than the artifacts themselves. One of the cabinets is revamped by a local historian every six months or so—highlighting different aspects of White pioneer life in the county or country. There is little to no representation of a specific non-Euro-American culture which is surprising in such a diverse California county. To be fair, however, Tulare County has a very small Native American population and the nearest active tribe is about 30 miles East in the Sierra foothills.

Behind the indoor museum is the extensive "Pioneer Village". Buildings like homes, schoolhouses, a post office, a jail, and a blacksmith are interspersed among historic farm equipment and even a train's caboose. The structures and other objects all belonged to the late 1800's to the early 1900's. Main Street U.S.A.—White history—is glorified.

The Tulare County Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture

The Tulare County Historical Society was



awarded a California Council and Historical Endowment grant in 2006. The funds were used to build and furnish the Tulare County Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture. 11

¹¹ *Tulare County Museum Community Master Plan.* (2008). Retrieved March 2011, from Tulare County: http://www.co.tulare.ca.us/about/mooney_park_museum.asp

The museum showcases the different cultural groups that helped shape Tulare County into one of the most agriculturally productive counties in the nation. There are early photographs and explanations for each cultural group on a long wall right when you walk in under the title of "Many languages, one dream: the people who shaped Tulare County Agriculture". The groups include: Filipinos, Portuguese, Japanese, Armenians, Chinese, Mexicans, African Americans, Italians, SE Asians, people from the Dust Bowl Migration, Dutch, Koreans, Croatians and Slovenians, Native Americans, Westward Settlers, and the Basque. Every group (without regard to historical or current significance) is represented equally. A quote from Isami Arifuku Waugh and Alex Yamato is featured above the photos and explanations as well: "The history of ethnic minorities in California is characterized by adversity, hard work, community initiative, heartache, triumphs, indomitable spirits, and hope for the future".

The display is very inclusive and at times has a "melting pot" feel. It is clear that the museum has taken a social and political stance by showcasing every group equally. Every six months, a room to the side of the main wall of photos and explanations is revamped to exhibit a

visit, it was the Armenian's turn and
Armenian community members had
donated stories, photographs, and artifacts
to the cause. On this most recent trip, the
Mexican American experience in Tulare
County was exhibited. The political
connotation, the obvious focus on cultural

different cultural group. On a previous



relativism and the utilization of community members' time, memories, and belongings among

other things shows that this is an emerging post-modern museum. Through hosted events and seminars, the new museum hopes to act as a kind of cultural center as well, which is also a tell-tale sign of new museum theory. It was interesting to be able to see the most recent paradigm shift come to life while walking through the "Indian Room" and the Pioneer Village first before reaching the new museum.

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Appendix

Photographs

- [1] The "Insiders and Outsiders" exhibit sign at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

 Photographed by: McKenna Friend, March 2011.
- [2] A touch-screen exhibit exploring human evolutionary theory at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Photographed by: McKenna Friend, March 2011.
- [3] Projectile point and other artifact collages in the Tulare County Museum's "Indian Room".

 Photographed by: McKenna Friend, May 2011.
- [4] A pictograph replication and "mortar and pestle" exhibit in the "Indian Room".

 Photographed by: McKenna Friend, May 2011.
- [5] A transported Mason building in the Tulare County Pioneer Village. Photographed by: McKenna Friend, May 2011.
- [6] Banners displaying different cultural groups at the Tulare County Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture. Photographed by: McKenna Friend, May 2011.