

Sussex Studies in Culture and Communication

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Books in this series express Sussex's unique commitment to interdisciplinary work at the cutting edge of cultural and communication studies. Transcending the interface between the social and the human sciences, the series explores some of the key themes that define the particular character of life, and the representation of life, at the end of one millennium and the beginning of the next.

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8 Reflections on the fate of Tippoo's Tiger

Defining cultures through public display'

Ivan Karp and Corinne A. Kratz

Oscar Wilde once observed, 'the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people' (1971: 684). Museums and exhibits are instruments of such invention. Through them, imaginary Japanese are invented along with imaginary cultural selves to accompany them. All reside cheek-to-jowl within universal survey art museums or the various museums of man [sic] created by that other invented entity, 'the Western World': imaginary Japanese, artificially constructed 'American Art', capriciously named 'Renaissance painting' and 'Halls of Western Civilization', that enshrine the customary, narrow use of 'civilization', for Western cultures (e.g., in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC).

The placement of these halls of culture within museums is neither arbitrary nor inconsequential: the invented Other is often placed downstairs from the upstairs domicile of European and American art 'traditions' which museums and exhibits invent and claim. In museum exhibits as much as in other cultural terms, the construction of cultural identity is achieved through two simultaneously occurring processes: (1) the use of exaggerated differences or oppositions that can be alternately a mode of exploration and understanding or an act of discrimination and (2) the use of varied assertions of sameness or similarity between audience and object of contemplation (Barthes 1984). The way these exaggerations and similarities are used are relevant materials for understanding ideologies of cultural identity and their links with other sets of representations (Boon 1982).²

Consider the fate of Tippoo's Tiger (Archer 1959) (Figure 8.1). Originally constructed by Indian Sultan Tippoo as a sign of resistance to the extension of British imperial rule, it was captured in the sack of his city. Taken to the Colonial Office, it finally came to rest in the most British of British museums, the Victoria and Albert, part of a two-sided colonial image of self and other, there seen as an imperial trophy. For children, the highpoint of the school visit to the Victoria and Albert was making the tiger (which was a barrel organ) roar by pulling its tail. Destroyed during the Second World War bombing of London, it has since been restored and put back in its 'rightful' place, now more British self than colonial Other. Recently it has been reinstalled in the Victoria and Albert as part of a permanent exhibition titled 'The imperial courts of Southern India'. At one and the same time Tippoo's Tiger stands through the exotic, the imperial and the same. It



Figure 8.1 Tippoo's Tiger, a barrel organ now on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, illustrates the complex and changing interpretations and displays to which objects may be subject.

Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.

is, after all, an Indian representation of an Englishman, an assertion of independence by a 'native ruler', and a trophy of the conquest of a strange and faraway place. In its new display setting it may imply that Commonwealth nations share the imperial experience with one another. The multiple contextualisations and recontextualisations of this image of an Englishman subdued by an Indian tiger show some of the semiotic devices through which displays can present cultures as assimilated to one another or as different.

Inventing *Self* and *Other* through exhibition

'How did you come to invent yourself?' asks a character in the English film version of *Les liaisons dangereuses*. No doubt, we may reply, while inventing the Other. Such contrasting inventions are an inevitable and integral part of the formation of cultural and personal identities, simultaneously combining relationships of identity and difference (Barthes 1984; Said 1984; Turner 1978). The cultural materials out of which identities are fashioned are the rhetorical, poetic and visual devices through which people understand their world!

In museums as elsewhere, the cultural imaginations that give meaning to artefacts are clearly as political as they are poetic. Through displays, they have a tendency to harden and assume the aura of the uniquely real and natural,

sometimes to become representations of domination. One prominent example of museum representation of the dominated Other is the delicately fig-leaf covered Canova that dominates the stairs of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum (Figure 8.2), an early imperial collection set within a self-consciously imperial city. The Canova statue portrays Theseus clubbing a centaur into submission. Centaurs – exotic, mythic savages residing on the outside edge of the imaginary geography of Classical Greece – are represented with half-bestial bodies that reflect their 'half bestial nature'.⁴

The Kunsthistorisches Museum is an example of the most commonly recognised relationship of same and other, where the audience and exhibit makers define themselves as a homogeneous entity counterposed to an exotic Other. But even the centaur of Classical and Viennese imagination shares half its nature with the audience that views it. What about representations in which the object or image is wholly human? If the Kunsthistorisches Museum portrays its Classical continuity through depiction of the subjugation of savages, what is the American equivalent? One example is a sign featuring a door handle, depicting the seated figure of the last independent king of Dahomey, defeated by the French and exiled to Martinique (Figure 8.3). The unidentified picture may originally have been a



Figure 8.2 This Canova sculpture shows Theseus subduing a centaur, a creature from Greek mythology that was half human, half horse.

Sown: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



Figure 8.3 The man shown on this comic door sign was the last independent king of Dahomey.

Source: Vintage Images.

colonial postcard. The origin of the picture and sign is as much an artefact of an imperial political system as the Canova. Customers who purchase the sign learn nothing about the king of Dahomey than they learn about the Dahomean art exhibited in the Musée de l'Homme. These images and objects operate as indices, pointers that define Western cultural patrimony, or as material for ironic commentary about ourselves. The door sign says 'Back in an hour', but the figure is not presented as the king of Dahomey. Rather he is a generalised exotic savage, America's own centaur. The differences between audience and image are not situated here in differences in human form, but in costume, context and, perhaps, skin colour.

Political and ideological messages in exhibits that portray exotic Others are based on the construction of opposed categories: the familiar and the exotic.

These become particularly effective when familiar and exotic are set in a temporal framework in which 'they' precede us (Fabian 1983). Again, consider the example of the National Museum of Natural History and its solitary Hall of Western Civilization. The overall organisation of Smithsonian museums' reproduces a classificatory scheme in which people of colour are encapsulated in a museum dedicated to mirroring the order of nature (National Museum of Natural History), while the generally middle class products of Americans are honoured in a museum that tells the double story of American history and technological advancement (National Museum of American History, formerly called the National Museum of Science and Technology). Colonial history, the very context within which many Natural History collections were acquired, is given little place in this structure. Even the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African Art, opened in 1987, exhibits its Benin bronzes without reference to the so-called 'punitive expedition' which initially brought them into European and American collections.

The actual distribution of exotic objects amongst the various Smithsonian Institution museums reflects the history of their collection, reception, and classification. Africana collections, for example, are found in both the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of African Art. Though different museums might show the same objects, they typically have different representational aims. The first usually aspires to tell stories about exotic cultures, while the second usually assimilates exotic objects to a specific set of Western aesthetics (cf. Bal 1996). Exhibition design reinforces their different messages, but even the differentiating and assimilating goals of the two museums draw on their opposites to produce their effects! Natural History museums may exoticise cultures, but they assimilate them all to a story of nature. Art museums may obliterate cultural specificity in the service of setting up the sacred category of art, but they inevitably differentiate between artists and others when they do so (Karp 1991b).

The distribution of museums and collections in the Smithsonian complex illustrates the opposition between messages of difference and similarity and implicitly displays their many political resonances in exhibitions and display techniques. Stressing similarities produces an assimilating impression, creating both familiarity and intimacy with representations and their subjects. Assertions of unbridgeable difference, on the other hand, exoticise by creating relations of great spatial or temporal distance, perhaps the thrill of the unknown. This opposition takes a variety of forms in different exhibition settings, ranging from the elaborate systems of cultural classification found in natural history museums to the untenable distinction between 'naïve' and self-conscious art on which the modernist aesthetic of the contemporary art museum thrives (Karp 1991a, 1991b).⁷

Ambivalence and uncertainty about 'ethnographic' or 'non-Western' objects (and those who make them) are apparent in the strikingly different ways that similar objects are treated in different museums, or even in one object's different treatment over time. The collection and exhibition history of one classic object of ancient Mesoamerican culture provides a striking and instructive illustration: the great Coatlicue, Aztec representation of a goddess, known as the 'Lady of the

Serpent Skirt' (Figure 8.4). Discovered on 13 August 1790, during a municipal excavation in Mexico City, she was first taken to the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico as 'monument to Mexico's past'. Rejected by the university administration as unsuitable for exhibiting next to Greco-Roman materials, she was shortly thereafter ordered to be reburied after fears were expressed that the object might incite the subjected native population to rebellion. In 1804, at the request of the assiduous Alexander von Humboldt, the Lady of the Serpent Skirt was disinterred, examined by him and immediately reburied – surely one of the oddest 'private showings' in the history of art. At the start of the nineteenth century the figure was once again uncovered and placed in the university courtyard, and was subsequently put in a corridor behind a screen 'like an object that provoked both curiosity and embarrassment', as Octavio Paz would later write (1990: 18). Today the figure occupies a place of honour atop a pedestal in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

Fear, embarrassment, curiosity, secret veneration, object of national pride, specimen of science, example of great art – this is the history of just one object. Perhaps when we know more about how others regarded the figure we might be able to add 'icon of oppositional culture,' and 'occasion for ironic commentary' to our list of the complex and often contradictory attitudes so frequently expressed towards this exotic object.

As these examples demonstrate, the poetics of similarity and difference, of assimilating and exoticising, in exhibitions is not entirely the product of differences among genres of museums. Ethnographic displays are not confined to natural history museums, ethnographic museums or culture history museums. They are part of almost all cultural displays, including displays of the ethnographic, the folk, and the Other in art museums and outside museum contexts altogether. Our chapter shows how this opposition organises the exhibition and display of 'ethnographic' material in a variety of settings.

Ethnographic display as the certification of knowledge

The 'ethnographic', the 'tribal', the 'ancient' are more than specific topics for some museum exhibitions. They are also background categories against which most museum displays are made meaningful. These categories of ethnographic exhibiting emerge out of complex histories and ideological contexts that include at least four elements. The first is the dark side of the Enlightenment inheritance that combines its encyclopaedic project to explain everything with the assertion that both nature and other cultures can be known by the same principles. Classificatory schemes that 'naturalize the primitive' (Marouby 1985), and relegate exotic cultures to natural history museums, are aspects of this Enlightenment inheritance. The Enlightenment asserted the universality of reason while it found reasons to deny universal capacities to some peoples (cf. Bennett 1996).

The second element is the history of imperial and colonial expansion through which other peoples and their cultural products have become known and collected in museums. Collections have histories and they are often histories of



Figure 8.4 Coatlicue.

Saterra: National

Anthropology and History, Mexico City.

appropriation (Hartog 1988; Bann 1994). The third element is the history of representing the Other itself. This complex phenomenon includes various ways of denying the existence of culture among conquered and exotic peoples, projection of class imagery onto other cultures, and the incorporation of images and stories from other cultures into our own systems of representations (Mason 1990).

The fourth element is the specific history of exhibiting exotic cultures in various contexts. Most important is the emergence of what Tony Bennett calls the 'exhibitionary complex' (1988), formed through the variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century display settings, ranging from temporary events (such as world fairs and international expositions) to permanent institutions (such as museums and zoos). Bennett concludes that the 'exhibitionary complex' set the exotic Other up as a category of visual spectacle that in turn encouraged an audience to imagine itself in contrast as homogeneous, predominantly white and European in culture. This spectacle depends on the construction of two categories of cultural display: exhibitions of the exotic and exhibitions of the Euroamerican self (in which distinctions of class conveniently become irrelevant). As Lawrence Levine has shown – in the United States, at least – the lower classes were systematically disciplined in the appreciation of 'high' culture (Levine 1988).

This brief sketch shows that the terrain of ethnographic exhibiting extends across space and time. It encompasses different types of museums, styles of display and museum-like settings outside the museum. The history of museums tells us that museums not only develop out of earlier forms of collecting and display, such as cabinets of curiosity, but that they are also affected by the cultural institutions with which they often compete. In the 1930s, in a period of declining museum attendance, the Rockefeller Foundation supported a survey of display techniques found in the great emporia by a Buffalo, New York museum director so that museums could use the techniques to draw visitors (I larris 1990). 'I'llis is a continuing history in which commercial displays, defined as entertainment, legitimise themselves with museum-like displays at the same time that museums continue to seek 'audience share' by borrowing the techniques and technologies developed in commerce and entertainment. Epcot Center's World Showcase contains seven museums, and Natural History museums build Imax theatres and charge admission for 'Dynamation' dinosaur exhibits (Kratz and Karp 1993).

The history of display, including commercial display, is written into museums. Museums, including art museums, do not take their techniques of display simply from other museums and organs of high culture (Yamaguchi 1991; Greenblatt 1991). The process of recycling 'low' into 'high', and vice versa, is not restricted to the making of art; it is also an element in the display of art and artefacts (Karp 1991c). What happens when the techniques of merchandising are adapted to the poetics of the art museum setting, when objects are displayed as if they were jewels in a shop – a form of display customarily used by art museums?

There is a fascinating history that remains to be written here, one that shows how techniques and strategies of display pass back and forth among museums, museum-like and non-museum settings, how those techniques and strategies construct implicit classifications which are taken as real, and how they may be part

of continuing transformations of the exhibitionary complex. This history works in *every* possible direction, but we present only two examples. Although he had done research in Kenya for ten years, the first time Ivan Karp saw *vigango*, funeral posts made by the Giriama people of Kenya, was in the Paul Stewart clothing store in midtown Manhattan. Guardian lions, our second example, are ubiquitous figures used in diverse cultural settings and periods. They are, perhaps, one of the most prevalent instances of quoting used in public displays. When we look at the guardian lions in Figures 8.5 and 8.6, it is difficult to know which stands inside the Honolulu Academy of Arts, which in the Westin Kauai Lagoons resort hotel, and which outside the neighbourhood Chinese restaurant (Figure 8.7). As the cartoon in Figure 8.7 recognises, the display of exotic objects – even reproductions – can lend an aura of authenticity that pervades an entire experience. As we will show later, commercial settings from shops to theme parks to hotels appropriate and reformulate the authority of the museum to enhance their appeal, but in doing so they also challenge museum claims to be sites for experiencing authenticity.

'Authenticity' assumes that authorities somewhere can distinguish 'real' from 'fake', fully verify the 'historical' and expose the 'fiction'. The word 'authentic' is often used as if it describes a quality inherent in an object, but such attributions are the outcome of complex processes and contestations. 'Authentication' is a process by which an exchangeable item, or in this case reproduced experience, is invested with social value, where only an "expert" can tell if it "really" is what it purports to be or reproduces what it is "really" like' (Irvine 1989: 258). But as Irvine points out, authenticity rests 'not just on a single testimonial statement, but on a chain of authentication, a historical sequence by which the expert's attestation . . . is relayed to other people' (*ibid.*). We would add that chains of authentication are also institutionally embedded at various points along the chain."

Such testimonials also depend on the development of particular expert languages and concepts.¹¹ Philip Fisher describes the art historian as one of those who 'must authenticate – to set economic value, to date, to reach precise historical sequences . . . and) develop sophisticated keys to style and period, perhaps the most cerebral of concepts' (1975: 595). Museum curators are also enmeshed in these processes. They serve as final links in the interpretive chain that underwrites the authentication and authority of museum displays. They are experts that declare identifications, categorisations and representations to be accurate and 'authentic'. The museum itself is part of the institutional and cultural background that legitimises their testimonies.

Ethnographic authority

Every exhibition context and display technique embodies particular claims to authority, though all draw on culturally shared evaluations and assumptions about truth, reality, representation, and differences among cultures. In considering the processes involved in such exhibitionary claims, we make an analytical



Figure 8.5 Guardian lion at the Kauai Lagoons resort hotel.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.



Figure 8.6 Guardian lion at the Honolulu Academy of Arts.



Figure 8.7 Guardian lion as 'authentic atmosphere' for a Chinese restaurant.

Source: Tribune Media Services. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

distinction between two kinds of authority, inextricably combined in every exhibition: ethnographic authority and cultural authority.

The notion of 'ethnographic authority' was developed particularly in relation to written texts, especially genres of ethnography and travel writing. In translating intensive research experience into descriptive and interpretive representations of social life, ethnographic authority is claimed and created through the use of particular stylistic devices, metaphors and analogies, patterns of tense, person, voice and address, as well as recurrent scenes dispersed throughout the text. Together these create and signal the author's expertise (Clifford 1988; Fabian 1983; Pratt 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). These devices simultaneously contribute to the creation of imaginary Others, vis-à-vis expert author and reader, and to relations of power and authority between them. Shifts in the patterning of stylistic devices are related to and implicated in changing relations of power, domination and control (Fabian 1986).

James Clifford describes four ways of defining ethnographic authority in anthropological texts: experience, interpretation, dialogue and polyphony. The first two – experience and interpretation – are prominent, longstanding strategies for claiming and creating ethnographic authority, often combined. Both draw on paradigms of scientific objectivity, observation or objectification. 'Experiential authority is based on a "feel" for the foreign context, a kind of accumulated savvy and a sense of the style of a people or place' (Clifford 1988: 35).

Experiential claims centre on communicating 'I was there', 'I speak the language', 'I have a panoramic or broad conceptual view' (Mitchell 1989; Pratt 1986). They appeal primarily to an observer's authority and need not include the experience and interpretations of those who are described in the text. Hence, they reproduce the epistemological stance of naturalism: a knowing subject examining an unknowing object. Interpretive claims to authority treat culture and experience as texts that researchers are uniquely situated to read and interpret, again, because of their experience.

The other two strategies of ethnographic authority – dialogue and polyphony – are more recent, according to Clifford. They encode attempts to recognise the

inevitably political contexts of research, an enterprise that includes agents with unequal power. They emphasise the interpersonal, communicative and reflexive basis of research and knowledge of other cultures. Including long quotations and dialogues in the text is only one device these strategies use, though Clifford notes that this device may only simulate dialogue within a text created by the 'expert' author (*ibid.* 50).

Appeals to ethnographic authority figure as much in museum displays as in texts. In the museum context they become multimedia presentations, drawing on objects, music, space, and performance as well as texts. Labels and verbal explanations are critical for defining the attitudes and interpretations of an exhibit, but many other design elements figure in the representation of other cultures and in claims to ethnographic authority in museum exhibitions: the selection and exclusion of objects, their combinations and arrangement in cases or on stands, lighting techniques and emphases, other media included, choice and use of photographs, the floor plan and sequential ordering in paths through the exhibit and so on.²

The shifts towards dialogic and polyphonic strategies of ethnographic authority that Clifford noted in anthropological texts also have parallels in museum displays over the past twenty to twenty-five years." The late 1960s and 1970s saw a movement towards more interactive and experiential, media-oriented, hands-on exhibitions. This began chiefly in science museums and children's museums, but then spread to natural history and ethnographic museums. At times the authority of familiar ethnographic displays based on curatorial categorisations and interpretations and on scholarly textualisation and contextualisation of objects can be interpreted politically as paternalistic, racist or as culturally hegemonic. But in light of these shifts, they are also seen by some as deadly boring, 'book on the wall' exhibits that assume one mode of learning for all visitors and a relatively undifferentiated public. Exhibits now seek to engage a variety of ways of knowing, to give visitors the experience of other cultures rather than to lecture from the authority of experience and present interpretive results didactically. They seem to give visitors the authority to know from personal experience while they democratise the basis of ethnographic knowledge.

This shift in exhibition strategy, however, can be more apparent than real. Claims and struggles over ethnographic authority have often gone behind the scenes, hidden by a facade of populist assertions that justify the exhibition in terms of shared experience and decision making: this exhibition will initiate you into the secrets of this culture, and then we will all know about it. But we still have to ask who orchestrates the experience? Who decides what is included, what is real, since it is not experience but representation of experience? This kind of exhibition, itself sometimes stereotyped as 'touchy-feely' or a 'kiddy exhibit', seems more in line with dialogic and polyphonic claims to authority (Gurian 1991). But again, the dialogue is often simulated.

This simulated quality becomes overt primarily in situations of social conflict, where implicit principles are made explicit in contests that take on ideological and categorical overtones. Then the contested nature of exhibit making can go public,

never more so than in an age when museums are arenas for contests over the nature of institutions and community relations in civil society (Karp 1992). Exhibits are contested terrains and curatorial authority and control can be questioned in exhibition development, as it was in disagreements over The Field Museum's exhibition 'Travelling the Pacific' (Honan 1990). If visitors are given authority through their experience, it follows that specialists in exhibition techniques could develop an ethnographic exhibition as well as specialists in culture and ethnography (e.g. museum curators). Further, they might create one more entertaining and appealing to the public.

This was the premise behind The Field's development of the Pacific exhibition. Specialists in exhibition development and 'audience advocacy' designed the hall, creating a 'Pacific experience'. It begins with videos and interactive displays on volcanic activity and Pacific island formation, then leads into a representation of human cultures in the Pacific centred on canoes. Curatorial staff were consulted on the accuracy of label copy and object identifications, but were not involved in overall conceptualisation and interpretation. Bitter disputes resulted. The internal politics of exhibition development were articulated in idioms that resonated with the external politics of representation. Concerns about ethnographic authority, realism and representation were voiced.

We do not want to leave the impression that we stand with the exhibition developers against the curators. The exhibition was didactically excellent, but its content reproduced the naturalising and totalising message of the natural history museum. It portrayed the peoples of the Pacific as though determined entirely by their need to adapt to the natural forces of the great ocean 'highway'. The result was an exhibition claiming to present cultures in their totality, but obliterating differences of language, history, and belief, and virtually ignoring active members of these societies not primarily involved in ocean travel, such as women. The Chicago audience may have been empowered by the interactive displays, but the agency of Pacific Islanders was as missing from this exhibition as it was in the ethnographic dioramas of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, or in the severe modernist installations favoured by the National Museum of African Art, also at the Smithsonian.

Experiential, interactive exhibition display strategies have penetrated art museums far less, but even there, challenges to the curatorial basis of the authentication process have arisen. Who is involved in creating exhibits? How should the voices involved and the criteria of evaluation be diversified? An important effort in this direction was the curatorial process used by UCLA's Wight Gallery for 'Chicano arts: resistance and affirmation'. Extensive committees and consultations were part of an attempt both to open up exhibition curation and object selection and to resist the appropriation of objects of aesthetic *and* political appeal to the apolitical aestheticising context of the art museum (Gonzalez and Tonelli 1992). Yet the open-ended quality of the selection process did not extend to the installation. Were reception issues addressed in curatorial practice? Did either the Anglo audience or the Chicano audience understand the political basis to the aesthetics and objects displayed in the exhibition, or did they *leave* the museum believing

they had seen an exhibition of beautiful, but not political, Hispanic-American arts?

Attempts to question ethnographic authority are as subject to subversion in art museum settings as they are in other kinds of museums, and for the same reason. All such exhibitions draw on the overpowering cultural authority of the museum. They may question what museums include, perhaps only to fit themselves into the canon, but they often reproduce the underlying structure of assumptions about other cultures and how we understand them in our own society. Whether we domesticate or exoticise others, we still interpret cultural differences in terms of our own familiarity, comfort or distance from what we are viewing. Often we do both at the same time. The cultural and epistemological claims of museums certainly do.

Cultural authority

In these examples, our focus has been on the exhibit itself. Hence we stressed how ethnographic authority was produced and debated. But cultural authority figured prominently in the production and experience of the final product. We treat these two types of authority separately because they focus on different aspects of exhibitions and underline perspectives that face in different directions. 'Ethnographic authority' in texts and in museum displays involves the means through which cultural others are represented. The 'cultural authority' of museums, or of texts, builds on and encapsulates 'ethnographic authority', but involves larger claims and aims as well.

Cultural authority is an aspect of how authority is asserted and claimed in texts and institutions that Clifford omitted from his account of ethnographic authority. It may be that his initial focus on texts blinded him to the institutional and discursive claims that were part of the contexts in which they are read. His emphasis on writing, "as useful as it is, ignores the professions, universities, classrooms, libraries, bedrooms and studies where writing is disseminated and received. In other words he defines authority as more a matter of the production of texts than anything else, and he fails to provide a sociological and situational dimension to the acts of writing and reading. Nor does he pay sufficient attention to how patterns of circulation affect authoritative claims.

Cultural authority involves broader institutional self-representation and museums' self-appointed missions as scientific, artistic and educational institutions. Cultural authority can also be interpreted sociologically, in terms of the historical circumstances and internal diversity of societies where museums and other forms of display emerge. Cultural authority itself includes 'native' interpretations of these circumstances. Claims to cultural authority justify the museum or museum-like forum by constructing a privileged place in history and society for museums. Sometimes, they deny that these institutions are a product of historical and social circumstances. Cultural authority is a fundamental resource that museums use to produce and reproduce themselves, precisely because it motivates audiences to attend museums and legislatures and donors to support them. The

science that museums do and exhibit, the art they collect and show, the diversity they document are all justifications for their existence and reasons for going to them.

Cultural authority is more difficult to describe than ethnographic authority because it is dispersed and diffuse.' It is embedded in educational curricula, part of inchoate attitudes formed through school trips and family holidays, manifested in museum architecture, and claimed in assertions of personhood. Claims to cultural authority are not simply claims about knowledge and the 'accuracy' of representations. In institutions they take the form of more direct claims about who controls the distribution of knowledge (usually curators and museums), and about the ranking and relations of types of knowledge and types of society. These claims help define who will set standards for what is worth knowing about world cultures. They make museums into the repository of truth and error, able to sort things out and tell us which is the best, what to look at, and how to relate to people in other parts of the world. The cultural authority claimed by museums also includes more ambitious and encyclopaedic claims to knowledge, claims which are intrinsically evaluative and hierarchical, and very much a defining feature of institutions (Duncan 1991; Duncan and Wallace 1978).

Cultural authority is objectified in ethnographic (and other) displays but not contained in them. It relies on its sociological embedding and links with other cultural institutions. Nonetheless, claims to cultural authority do draw on devices like those of ethnographic authority. Museums present themselves to the public not only through their exhibitions, but in founding ceremonies, in brochures, in fund drives, and in catalogues and guides. The language and stylistic devices of these self-portrayals provide important clues to the cultural authority claimed by museums and the ways it is constructed. At one and the same time, then, cultural authority is a defining feature of genres of discourse, the type of institution, and a way of channelling the circulation of images, ideas and things"

The constructed realism and representation so prominent in our discussion of ethnographic authority here also become the rhetoric of self-presentation. The brochure from the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, for instance, tells us how the California Academy

has pursued the mission envisioned by its founders [th more than 137 years I – to explore and document the diversity of life, and provide science education of the highest quality . . . We hope that work such as ours will lead to wiser management of our world's resources and the preservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

They claim the right and ability to tell you about the world and what you should value and preserve in it.

The most recent *Guide to the Metropolitan Museum of Art* tells us that:

The Metropolitan Museum is a living encyclopedia of world art. Every culture from every part of the world – from Florence to Thebes to Papua

New Guinea – from the earliest times to the present and in every medium is represented, frequently at the highest levels of quality and invention.

(1983:6)

And, of course, the guide identifies the 'highest levels':

This work . . . is one of the finest American primitive paintings.

In its effect of realism this picture surpasses even the masterful portraits of Christus' teacher.

This outstanding prayer rug .

The passionate pursuit of collectors and the skills of scholars have assembled at the Metropolitan Museum an encyclopedic treasure.

(*ibid.*: 18, 174, 310, 7)

Museums' claims to cultural authority derive from their basic activities: collecting, documenting, conserving, displaying, researching. Two of the most important are the collective research experience and expertise of their curatorial staff, and the 'authenticity', quality and scope of their collections (again defined, verified, and certified by the staff's interpretation of academic conventions and their connections within chains of authentication). The scholarly products and ethnographic authority created by each staff member, then, add to the institution's cultural authority as well. In a sense, the collection is a product that encompasses and represents collective staff expertise over the life of the institution, the status and prestige of donors who have added to the collection (boosting the museum's definition as repository of culture and knowledge), and the institutional power to appropriate and control objects, selectively exhibit them, and define their audience and their exhibition experiences.

Museums justify their right to evaluate and rank with claims to encyclopaedic knowledge, even if they acknowledge that the encyclopaedia always needs to be expanded.' Their educational mission justifies the incorporation of display techniques developed in all kinds of other contexts, but it is a mode of incorporation which is simultaneously conservative and voracious. Techniques from department stores, fairs, theme parks, or cinema might be used in museum exhibitions, but the recontextualisation must somehow free them of their most obviously commercial associations. Put to edifying museum purposes, they must be incorporated into the criteria of authenticity and accuracy that the museum imposes and upholds for its exhibitions.

Museums are not unique in using multiple display techniques, but they put those techniques to the hierarchical service of cultural authority in their exhibitionary strategies. Because of their institutional claims to cultural authority, the museum context may be subject to constraints and limits that are irrelevant in more blatantly commercial settings. Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality*, for example, took him to settings which were attractive, effective and commercially successful precisely because they skilfully blurred real and reproduction (1983). Certainly, those commercial settings also exercise cultural authority. They help to shape and

define our images of other cultures, and of relations and hierarchies among them – perhaps even more than museums do today. But because they do not claim the museum's cultural authority in the same way, they are freed from its constraints of didactic representation of 'authenticity' and 'truth'. Instead, they rely more on the 'authenticity' of recreated experience, supposedly sharing the authority of experience with their visitors. Furthermore, these settings can play quite self-consciously on the cultural authority of museums. Resort hotels in Hawaii, such as the Kauai Lagoons and the Westin Maui, quote and replay the history and techniques of art museums in their display of reproductions in sumptuous surroundings. They also offer glossy coffee table catalogues of the hotel and its displays. The Kauai catalogue declares 'The hotel is an art piece', 'The hotel is an art gallery', explains 'The art of collecting art', and ends with a tantalising section 'About the collection' that obfuscates the status of the pieces on display. The Maui catalogue makes the hotel's goal and claim quite clear, 'The vision: you must be overwhelmed' (Hopkins 1989). The Kauai hotel catalogue explains:

Our destination resorts are created to heighten one's fantasies, to bring back the romance of life. We attempt to restore the grandeur that King Louis XIV must have experienced at Versailles. We attempt to understand people's dreams and expectations and develop experiences that turn them on. We attempt to exceed those expectations.

(Hopkins and Fuller 1990: 79)

Kauai Lagoons combines several fantasies tier its primarily American and Japanese patrons: they are simultaneously living on a colonial sugar plantation, in an emperor's palace, and in a museum. But as Eco recognised in his discussion of Disneyland, the creation of a total fantasy environment that coaxes you into a prolonged, safe stay within the resort complex is also intended to make you 'buy obsessively, believing that you are still playing' (Eco 1983: 43).

The California academy of sciences

To explore further the ways exhibitions develop and draw on ethnographic and cultural authority in different display settings, we will juxtapose the Hall of Inman Cultures in the California Academy of Sciences and the Kauai Lagoons resort hotel." Both share the exhibiting goal of illustrating diversity, but they differ in the way that one draws on the conventions of natural science and is situated in a museum and the other draws on the conventions of the art museum but is a museum-like attraction rather than a museum. We will look particularly at what the exhibits communicate about other cultures, how they do so, how ethnographic authority is grounded in display techniques, and how they convey 'the hierarchies and relations fundamental to claims to cultural authority'. These exhibitions can be interpreted on various interconnected levels. As we will see, hierarchies that help constitute and legitimate claims to cultural authority often emerge from specific ethnographic displays in several ways. They emerge

simultaneously as components of overall interpretive frameworks and as meta-messages that are conveyed as exhibition strategies are translated into details of label text, lighting and arrangement of objects.

The Wattis Hall of Human Cultures at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco is an extremely attractive, well designed, comprehensive, and long term exhibition that attempts to describe cultural diversity on a worldwide scale. Installed about 1980, it uses multiple exhibiting techniques to illustrate its grand theme: how cultures adapt to the environment. We will examine just a fragment of this complex and costly installation, summarising a few major design elements in the displays: general floor plan, diorama design, object selection and presentation, label text, and use of photographs.

The large rectangular hall contains eleven open dioramas with a major entrance at one end (Figure 8.8). Each stage-lit diorama has glass cases along its base, uses backlit photographs, and most have extensive wall texts providing general information about the culture depicted.' The hall is arranged along two grids to illustrate its environmental theme, adaptation to climate. A hot to cold axis runs the length of the hall, with a dry to wet axis crossing its width. The eleven cultures are arranged in this Cartesian matrix according to their adaptation to these two climatic features."

This exhibition is an extreme example of the naturalisation-of-the-primitive theme so characteristic of natural history museums, and virtually universal in exhibitions about certain cultures.' The naturalisation theme, which assimilates culture to nature, here reduces culture to a means of ecological adaptation. Other



Figure 8.8 Open dioramas in the Wattis Hall of Human Cultures.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.

assumptions, familiar from the environmental movement, accompany this reductive celebration of cultural ecology and create implicit contrasts with other, absent cultures who are not so finely attuned to the natural environment. For instance, the assumption that these cultures are closer to nature is subtly conveyed in virtually all these dioramas by showing people in close association with animal species, often holding or touching an animal. The Australian man has a dingo lying on him (Figure 8.9). The Gabra woman holds a goat and has a camel nearby. The Navajo man is shown with a sheep, the Hopi woman with a large bird, the Highland Peruvian man with a llama, the Netsilik Eskimo with a seal, the Dani woman in New Guinea with a pig (Figure 8.10), and the Caroline Islander is roasting fish.'

The exceptions are instructive: the 'extinct' Northwestern California Indians and 'Traditional Japanese Rice Farmers' are not shown in clear association with animals, though their texts tell us they could have been. The Japanese raised fish in their rice paddies and the Indians hunted animals and had a 'Predominantly marine-based diet'. We will soon see that these exceptions are also distinguished in other ways, and that, taken together, these differences communicate an implicit evaluative hierarchy.

These cultural exhibits suggest that all these peoples are roughly equivalent in their dependence on the environment, and that their differences can be explained by environmental factors (e.g. temperature, precipitation, altitude). They imply a contrast with cultures not contained within the hall, cultures known to have elaborate archaeological records, that can be shown to change over time, and that



Figure 8.9 Diorama showing an Australian man and dingo resting together.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.



Figure 8.10 Diorama showing a pig associated with a Dani woman of New Guinea who is working in her garden.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.

are usually grouped under the category of great civilisations. Once again a hierarchy is set up between canonical cultures that comprise the 'inheritance' of Western civilisation and a fragmented world of equivalent other cultures.

The glass cases around each diorama hold objects considered typical, intended to enable visitors to compare different cultures. These include tools related to major economic activities that show how culture adapts to environment, food processing objects, often a type of exotic money (showing how exchange systems work), an ornament that illustrates social differentiation, and an object of ceremonial or religious life. There are no sequences of objects that might illustrate change or adaptation to different circumstances. As a result, the cultures are frozen in time, but each at a different moment in world history. Thus cultures portrayed in a pre-Western contact period are compared with colonial societies, while extinct societies are compared with contemporary societies. The Gabra people of Kenya are depicted in diorama in 1970, Navajo and Hopi Indians of the American Southwest at the turn of the century, the Japanese during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868 AD). The peculiarity of these historical juxtapositions is not mentioned in texts or selection of objects. Each culture is treated as a whole unto itself, perhaps set in regional context. Only the scientific grid of comparison brings them together.

We know something of the circumstances and times during which material for at least one diorama was collected, that of Gabra in Kenya." It is striking to us

that Western-style clothing and the use of objects derived from industrial materials are almost entirely omitted from discussion, even though the Gabra diorama includes mass-produced cloth. At that time, Gabra also used plastic water carriers, aluminium pans and similar products ubiquitous in Kenya, though such artefacts are not 'cultural' or 'traditional' enough to be displayed. But industrial material *is* the subject of comment in one case, revealingly so.

The glass cases for Gabra include two women's necklaces with the following labels (Figure 8.11):

NECKLACE: A woman wears this string of blue beads when she bears a male child.

WOMAN'S NECKLACE: The aluminum is obtained from melted-down cooking pots.

The presence and recycled use of an aluminium cooking pot is the only aspect of the second necklace selected for comment, regarded as the most remarkable information to convey, as if pans are a unique outside intrusion into Gabra life." Note also that the 'intrusion' is not portrayed as direct or intentionally selected, i.e. someone went to the shop, bought a pot, boiled tea in it for several years, and reused it when it was worn out. Rather, the description suggests a scavenging mentality that reinforces both the image of isolation (by distancing the initial economic transaction) and the adaptive attitude to nature stressed in the hall (by making the pot into a found object like other natural resources). This adaptive

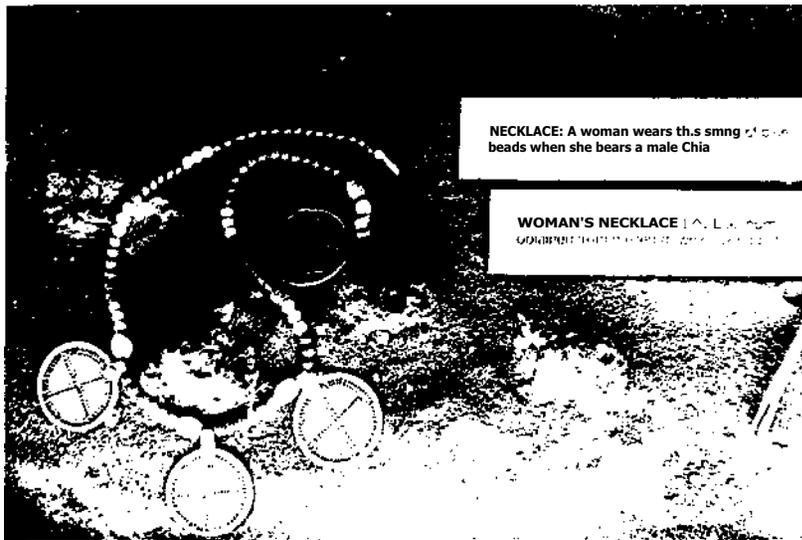


Figure 8.11 Exhibit case with necklaces worn by Gabra women in Kenya.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.

reworking is what makes it remarkable, otherwise labels focused on the source of materials could read:

NECKLACE: The blue beads are purchased in shops.

WOMAN'S NECKLACE: The aluminum is obtained from worn cooking pots, which are melted down and reworked. The red and yellow beads are purchased with money from milk sales.

This mode of presenting people is characteristic of the natural history animal diorama, which presents an ideal picture of perfect specimens, uncontaminated by historical and situational considerations. Applying this type of display to human cultures often has the consequence of eliminating history from consideration, especially the history of contact and political and economic subordination. The suppression of history, of time and of worldwide interconnections is conspicuous in this exhibition.

The floor plan, dioramas and object selections in the hall emphasise and create similarities between the eleven cultures displayed by treating them in more or less the same way. Common treatment assimilates them to each other and differentiates them as a group from cultures (modern and Euroamerican) which supposedly are not determined so immediately by natural environment. There have been hints of differentiation within the common treatment, however, and of a hierarchy that is communicated more directly by the last two design elements we consider, exhibit texts and photographs.

Exhibit texts reinforce the messages of other design elements. All texts are written in the omniscient third person of scientific observation, with no comments or voices from the cultures described. African and Pacific cultures are described consistently in the present tense. Past tense is used for Native Americans, switching to present for Navajo and Hopi after historical narratives of their migration and cultural adaptations bring them up to the turn of the century. Japanese are consistently described in past tense, and are the only culture whose display is qualified as 'Traditional' (having since transcended their environmental limits). Their historical narrative takes them back to the third century IR (!) and their glass cases are full of long texts about rice taxes, class differences and social complexities.

Some of these patterns of tense might be 'factually' motivated, e.g. Japanese lives are now very different. But surely Australians, Gabra and others also have historical narratives that could be included. Have the Australians no sell appellation, no language to name (other than 'Aborigine')? Why are Hopi and Navajo frozen into present tense at the turn of the century? At whatever time they are shown, none of these people are depicted as engaged in national politics, land claims, and so on. Texts thus reinforce the suppression of history, politics, contact, and coevalness (Fabian 1983). But the patterns of tense, historical narratives and information provided also tend to organise world cultures in a hierarchy that is strongly implied but not overtly stated. Peoples of Africa and the Pacific, without history and without change, are portrayed as furthest from the American audience and the most primitive, despite their chronological proximity.

Traditional Japanese Rice Farmers are at the top, most like the audience, despite their greater historical distance. Native Americans are somewhere in the middle – not quite like the audience, but hard to distance in light of contemporary American politics and the generally positive attitude many middle class Americans now have towards Native American culture.'

Photographs and wall murals further amplify these textual messages. Japan is again singled out, this time by the use of Japanese self-representations. The Japanese scene is set by drawings by 'Hokusai, an artist who rendered aspects of *rural* society during the time'." All other dioramas have background murals of environmental scenes, with photographs included inside their glass cases. Dates and locations for some photographs and dioramas provide a sense of ethnographic verisimilitude, as does portrayal of mannequins in interaction with others painted in the murals. Some photographers and individuals are named, but only for the Navajo and Hopi displays (e.g. 'Migaleto, medicine man' by G. P. Baldwin 1931; 'Brushing meal from a metate' by Floyd Evans 1945). Yet we know from our own research and talking with one of the consultants to the hall that vivid personalities are represented in other photos and murals here as well. However, authoritative ethnographic devices are used to illustrate typicality in this exhibit, not individuality. Even the photographs of named individuals fit them into a framework of typicality, slotting names into social categories or activities. The unique detracts from the typical and the ideal in a generalising exhibition such as this one.

The ethnographic authority of this exhibition draws on a variety of devices of realism, only some of which we have discussed here: artefacts that represent fragments of reality and serve as indices of authority (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991), diorama reproductions, textual patterns. The eleven representations are united by parallel uses of the same devices, creating mutually reinforcing claims. Their individual and collective ethnographic authority is reinforced by the organisation of the overall floor plan in terms of a 'scientific' model of environmental determinism, playing on the received wisdom that brute facts of nature are more epistemologically secure than interpretive conclusions. But this hall is just one component of the museum's broader message of cultural authority, which also depends in part on the exaltation of scientific understanding and the control it allows. Parallel to this hall is an exquisitely crafted hall of animal dioramas named 'African Safari'. In true postmodernist fashion we were asked by a couple dressed in safari clothing to take their pictures while they posed in front of a diorama in that hall. The diorama was as anonymous as the people in the Human Cultures hall, but we recognised it as a brilliant recreation of Ngorongoro crater in Tanzania. There were no pastoralists in the Ngorongoro diorama, but somehow it seemed fitting.

As the cultural authority of this museum incorporates the scientific paradigm, it also creates an implicitly evaluative message that elevates nature over culture for sonic peoples and subordinates interactive involvement and interpretive understanding to observation as a means of knowing.' The omission of sonic cultures and the inclusion of others reproduces the cultural scheme of such Victorian museums as the Pitt Rivers in Oxford, where some cultures were shown to evolve

from early to late, while others were unable to make the transitions achieved by those in the implied audience (Keuren 1984). The Pitt Rivers' message differs from that of the California Academy of Sciences primarily to the degree that it makes its case directly rather than by inference.

The museum's claims to cultural authority entail the communication and wider legitimisation of this message (and itself) as well. As part of the exhibitionary complex, the museum is involved in 'inscribing and broadcasting messages of power ... throughout society' (Bennett 1988: 74). Attendance by many school groups (often at once, and finding other messages in displays as well) helps to create and continue this aspect of the institution's authority, providing a steady and impressionable audience for the cultural hierarchies portrayed.

The Kauai Lagoons

We turn now to a resort hotel to show how the authoritative claims of museums are present in non-museum settings, how non-museum settings frame themselves as museums" and how visitors learn about museum experience from them. Our focus is the spectacle of cultures represented in the Hawaiian resort hotel already mentioned, the Westin Kauai Lagoons, whose catalogue presents the resort in a self-conscious play on issues related to cultural authority and museums." Its parallel claim to authority allows us to view it through the very elements we examined at the California Academy's Hall of Human Cultures: floor plan and paths through the exhibit, dioramas, selection and display of objects, and use of texts.³

The resort's layout and paths are slightly labyrinthine. Unlike most hotels, the entrance does not lead into the lobby, but down an escalator to an enormous courtyard and reflecting pool, with hallways and garden paths leading off in various directions (Figure 8.12). The first impression, then, is like coming into an imperial home or a large public building and park (not unlike a museum). One turn leads down a half flight of sweeping stairs to the lobby. Beyond that, paths continue and expand again around a spectacular swimming pool. Paths are punctuated by displays of exotic art objects and by spacious, comfortable sitting areas. Unlike the scientific grid of the California Academy, which provided a map to locate any culture of the world by temperature and precipitation, these paths emphasise comfort, freedom, adventure, and whim.

Native Hawaiians are represented only by a large sculpture of a poi pounder and by the hotel's sole diorama-like display, a late addition to the decor showing a canoe of historical and local significance in the centre of the lobby.' This is the only use made of natural history museum realism. The rest of the hotel complex invokes art museum settings, with exotic objects on display that show the art of Thailand, Burma, China, Indonesia, and an occasional Sepik River mask. These are not arranged in artefact groupings or vitrines, but tastefully arrayed along the magnificent, broad walkways and around the expansive sitting rooms. Objects are displayed in art museum mode: isolated on stands and specially lit. Sonic displays also make extensive use of mirrors, an elaboration that fits quite well with the



Figure 8.12 Reflecting pool and sculpture at the courtyard entrance of the Kauai Iagoons resort hotel.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.

other conventions and perhaps even exaggerates their effect (Figure 8.13). Object labels also follow art museum conventions. They describe an object's national origin, its materials and occasionally provide bits of iconographic information.

Though the manner of display and interpretive labelling says 'art museum', this is also an art-in-the-home mode of experience – provided your home is a palace or plantation. The hotel's public rooms are on a grand scale surrounding palatial courtyards. The settings manage to invoke both royal and imperialist and colonial nostalgia at the same time (Rosaldo 1989).³¹ The mix of home and museum adds to the atmosphere and the fantasy. You can touch these objects, if you can overcome your museum training. No alarms go off. You can enjoy the sense of fine art at home, the profligate extravagance of having 'art objects' exposed to the elements for your enjoyment in such surroundings, and also have the thrill of defying museum guard authority.

But Oscar Wilde is right: there is no such place as Japan. Not a single Japanese object is displayed in the hotel collection – not even 'traditional' Japanese rice farming. Nothing detracts from the Japanese clientele's sense of visiting the exotic. Surroundings encourage Japanese and American guests alike to imagine themselves as anything else; their own artistic traditions remain implicit as contrasts or comparisons.

But whether you are the fantasy owner or an actual guest, the hotel conveys



Figure 8.13 Burmese harp displayed with a mirror background at the Kauai Iagoons resort hotel.

Source: Corinne A. Kratz.

implicit hierarchies through the way it selects, displays, places, and labels its collection. In some sense, the nations whose art it gathers are assimilated to each other, and also assimilated to European collecting and artisanal traditions (as when occasional nineteenth century reproductions appear in sitting areas). The hotel is less explicitly concerned to rank the world's cultures than to assert a hierarchy of art over non-art, collector-connoisseur cultures over maker-cultures. Of course it is also concerned with more overt hierarchies of class, wealth and power that are familiar from art museum displays of exotic arts.

The hotel conveys the 'authenticity' of its reproductions in ways that draw on the visual language of the art museum and gallery, but argues along different lines. Value is conveyed less in terms of the expert's research time and knowledge of what is real, or by the history and heritage of the 'context' left behind. Rather, value is instilled by talking about the incredible work and care that went into shaping each part of the resort: its collectors spared no expense when they

travelled all over the world to find authentic places and people to make reproductions." The best of everything, at any effort, is claimed – even for the Clydesdale horses that pull visitors in carriages.

Perhaps what is most ingenious about the Kauai Lagoons' claims to cultural authority is the way that it combines the authoritative stance of two types of art museum. First it is an exotic encyclopaedia of the Pacific Rim, but second, it is also a palatial home of the collector-connoisseur, not unlike Boston's Gardner Museum." There are echoes within echoes here, in which museums echo the homes from which they derive, while resorts echo the museums echoing palatial homes.

The appeal of the resort also lies in the artful way that it combines domestic and exotic in order to create what it calls a 'total experience'. This is its overt justification. The catalogue explicitly asserts that you are simultaneously at home and visiting a museum, a plantation and a nature preserve. A unique variety of experience is assembled, creating another criterion of value and authority. At the Westin Kauai visitors can even see zebras or African monkeys on island zoos in the lagoons. This, the catalogue adds, is a unique environmental experiment. By the end, this returns us to the encyclopaedic claims of the great art museum or the thirteen-bureau Smithsonian complex.

The destination resort is a further extension of both the tourist industry and the exhibitionary complex. It is a special development of the move to democratise collections that opened private, princely collections to the public in museums, and then conferred upon museums an educational mission. Collections at Kauai Lagoons are once again experienced as if in a palace, but with museum-like techniques of authentication, such as labels, and with the additional museum apparatus of a catalogue. They are experienced by a public composed both of guests who can afford to stay in the hotel and guests who can only view it. Thus temporal experience of the resort ranges from temporary resident to temporary visitor." Visitors capture their experience in photographs. At the same time museum visitors back home – on school trips or holidays that a wider public can afford – photograph themselves in front of museum dioramas, looking as if they were in an exotic luxury resort or on a safari adventure, too. But we should also remember that many museums are set in what were formerly palaces or great homes and that museum architecture is designed to invoke the palace and the temple itself. Even the genres quoted within other genres are blurred.

The resort hotel is as comprehensive in its set of implicit categories as the California Academy of Sciences. Instead of distinguishing cultures that have escaped the domination of nature from those that have not, the resort hotel and, by extension, the art museum distinguishes between those who can appreciate art and those who cannot. The resort hotel systematically confuses the ability to afford the experience with the art museum's claims to possess the attributes of taste.

Conclusion

Ethnographic displays – displays about cultural similarity and difference – are found in every genre of museum, even those that exclude the ethnographic object. Nor are ethnographic displays confined only to museums. The settings where ethnographic displays are found, the ways that the ethnographic is used to invoke identity, the manner in which forms of display resonate with one another (as well as with other cultural forms) – all are means through which people create, objectify and legitimise their sense of themselves, their cultural inheritance, their differences from people of other cultures, and the relations between cultures.

As means for the construction of identity, ethnographic displays have systematic and historically determined features, which we described above and briefly recapitulate here. The rise of museums has been accompanied by claims to comprehensive and encyclopaedic coverage of culture and cultures that set up some cultures as the heirs of civilisation and excluded others from this line of succession. These hierarchical and encompassing claims are made in multiple sensory idioms in exhibitions in museums and other settings. At the same time they establish their effects through rhetorical and visual devices that cast the viewer as the second-order consumer of expert knowledge. Intertwined claims to ethnographic and cultural authority undergird these evaluations and representations. While some products of other cultures become assimilated into the domesticating contexts of the exhibitionary complex, the people of those cultures often remain exoticised, objects rather than participants.

This is not an inescapable condition. The problem is not 'otherness' itself. Cultural diversity is as much a part of life as biological diversity, and as worthy of understanding and interpreting. Cultural diversity is an inevitable fact of life, a necessary condition for change. The problem is that the construction of cultural diversity within Euroamerican cultural traditions has more often focused on what the Other lacks than on the complex dialectic of similarity and difference that operates in all display settings at one the same time.' Museums have too often represented cultures in a hierarchy that reproduces inequalities of power.

The solution is not to deny diversity and 'otherness' but to recognise that all peoples, even museum curators, are members of other cultures – an 'other among others', as Paul Ricoeur says.' In his words, 'it becomes possible to wander through civilization as if through vestiges and ruins. The whole of mankind becomes an imaginary museum: where shall we go this weekend – visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of Copenhagen?' (Ricoeur 1965)?" Ideally, exhibitions created with such recognition would not only tell visitors about cultural diversity and include several perspectives, but also show the process through which curatorial judgements were made, that those judgements are contingent and contestable rather than final, and that there are other stories that were not included but might have been.

Notes

- 1 The first version of this chapter was prepared as a public lecture for the series 'How Museums Came to Display the History of Art' at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in 1991. We thank the following for help in assembling the photographs and other resources: Mary Jo Arnoldi, Connie Cortez, Christraud GCary, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Jeanie Kortum, Robert Leopold, Susan Vogel, and staff at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. Johannes Fabian discussed the paper with us at length; we also benefited from discussions with Joann Berelowitz, Suzanne Blier, Sabine MacCormack, Mario Torclli, and Hayden White. Further thanks to those who commented on versions presented in 1992 at seminars sponsored by the Anthropology Department at Northwestern University and the Art History Department at Emory University.
- 2 Museums and exhibits, of course, are not the only sites and instruments available for the construction of imaginary lives and identities. Consider the following. The Santa Monica National Public Radio station (KCRW), as part of its around the clock coverage of the Gulf War in 1991, devoted an hour long programme to exploring the 'vast cultural differences between the Christian West and the Islamic Middle East.' Confronting a newly born-again Muslim, Saddam Hussein, was the resurgent monolith of the recently secular but now solidly 'Christian' West. When will this side of the war also be referred to as a crusade?
- 3 Holquist argues that stereotyping is 'a universal strategy for seizing the other' (1988: 460) that is inherent in use of language. [Stereotypes] are a function of the nature of the sign itself and precede any particular subject or experience; but this general condition is specified into particular stereotypes in different times and places' (ibid.: 468).
- 4 This phrasing is from the Oxford English Dictionary.
- 5 The thirteen-bureau Smithsonian Institution complex includes a zoo and research institutes as well.
- 6 Yet domesticating and exoticising exhibiting styles are not inexorably married to specific museums, for even the Natural History museum occasionally 'domesticates' exotic objects in its displays by emphasising universal aesthetic appeal. In the 'Splendours of nature,' exhibition, for example, Native American feather work and a Hawaiian feather cape are displayed in the same vitrine-encased, boutique-lit style as objects in the National Museum of African Art, or the Rockefeller Wing of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 7 Cf. Varnedoe and Gopnik's exclusion of tribal art, children's art, imagery of the insane, visionary amateurs, and rural folk from consideration in *High and Low* (1990: 15).
- 8 Kratz (2001: Chapter 4) discusses this ambivalence and tension in relation to ethnographic photography.
- 9 Literature on the notion of 'authenticity' and 'the fake' is extensive, crossing fields from art history and history to folklore, literary studies and anthropology. The following are a few useful citations: Adorno (1973), Dorson (1976), Eco (1983), Kasfir (1992), and Errington (1994).
- 10 Gable and Handler discuss the management of 'authenticity' and authority at the heritage site, Colonial Williamsburg. They consider how the chain of authentication and impressions are managed to allow 'for the dream of authenticity to remain viable even in an environment in which all available empirical evidence could easily be perceived as supporting constructivist paradigms or alternatively as undermining authenticity-based claims to truth or value' (1996: 569).
- 11 Briggs's recent articles on metadiscursive practices in academic writing are wonderful analyses of how academic authority is created in the presentation of texts, the formation of genres, and in questions of history and tradition (1993, 1996).
- 12 Kratz (2001) discusses the way different texts and installations figured in interpreting an exhibition of ethnographic photographs.
- 13 These shifts in ethnographic texts and museum exhibitions are related to changes in world politics. Previously, field research experience was one primary claim to knowledge and authority, as it still is. But claims to such authority are now more problematic and less automatically accepted as legitimate.
- 14 His emphasis on texts begins with a focus on participant observation as a key anthropological method and the question of how the intense, intersubjective relations of anthropological research become descriptions of other cultures.
- 15 In formulating our notion of cultural authority and its dispersed nature, we draw on the concept of discursive formation that Foucault develops in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972: 3144).
- 16 The concept of cultural authority bears family resemblances to Voloshinov's discussion of 'official ideology', draws on Stuart Hall's valuable discussion of the importance of keeping the production, circulation and reception phases of media communication separate and Foucault's studies of how discourse defines personhood and allocates authority. Most important, however, is C. Wright Mills's account of what he called 'the cultural apparatus' the set of institutions and personnel that provides interpretation for people in society. These are, Mills tells us, 'the observation posts, the interpretation centres, the presentation depots' which define the grounds out of which interpretation of everyday life and exceptional events are made. In order for this set of institutions and personnel to work, they must define themselves authoritatively. Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production has parallels with the way we use the concept of cultural authority. As he points out, acts of cultural production are accompanied by discourse about production itself. But Bourdieu lacks the sense of institution and context so clearly manifested in Mills's writings.
- 17 The claims of museums differ; we emphasise here the 'great' museums whose ambitions are encyclopaedic and world encompassing. But even community museums often draw upon the same Enlightenment ideology and encyclopaedic project to justify their missions. The history of colonial natural history museums is instructive. They often spent considerable resources trading their locally collected materials in order to obtain comparative collections that would put them in the same class as metropolitan natural history museums (Sheets-Pyenson 1988). The four elements we discussed above — Enlightenment ideology, imperial and colonial history, the history of representing the Other, and the exhibitionary complex — are all elements in the historical and social formations out of which museums fashion their claims to cultural authority.
- 18 Our documentation of these sites began in 1990 and 1991. We have visited the California Academy hall several times since, but the Kauai Lagoons was devastated during hurricane Iniki in September 1992. After being closed for several years, the property was divided and the hotel sold to Marriott International. Redesigned to a 'traditional Hawaii' theme, it was eventually reopened as the Kauai Marriott Resort and Beach Club. Our description of Kauai Lagoons is based on the pre-Iniki Westin period; we will consider the contrast between the two versions of the hotel elsewhere. This is part of a larger research project on the representation of cultural diversity in a range of display settings. Thanks to the Smithsonian Institution for research support.
- 19 The exceptions to this were dioramas depicting the Dani ('Farmers and Warriors of Highland New Guinea') and the Caroline Islanders of Micronesia ('Sailors and Gardeners of the South Pacific'), which included no overview wall texts.

- 20 Some dioramas bring in supplemental features of the environment to explain features of the cultures they display. The Peruvian peasant diorama, for example, stresses the highland nature of their culture.
- 21 Southern African hunters and gatherers, for example, are almost always portrayed in terms of their paucity of material culture and ingenious adaptation to a harsh environment. Their complex social organisation and expressive culture is often absent from display.
- 22 We do not include the West Coast Alaskan Eskimo diorama because it was under repair and had no mannequin when we saw it.
- 23 Karp has been doing research in Kenya since 1969; Kratz has been working there since 1974.
- 24 See Kratz (1995) for a discussion of the recent vogue of recycling and how it is represented.
- 25 See Constance Perin's account (1992) of the vast difference that race made in the attitudes of visitors to the National Museum of Natural History, and how this emerged in attitudes to Native Americans versus Africans in the ticket groups she conducted.
- 26 Emphasis added. The label suggests a rural/urban distinction which is again absent from representations of the other cultures.
- 27 Across the road in the Golden Gate Park is the California Academy of Science's sister museum. The DeYoung Art Museum, a museum of primarily Asian, European and American arts, is advertised in San Francisco hotels as 'illuminating the Western inheritance from the time of the Pharaohs to the twentieth century'. We could not have selected a more telling contrast in claims to cultural authority, though the two share the same hierarchy of cultures.
- 28 The cross over is two-way; museums emulate hotels for commercial survival.
- 29 Our description of Kauai Lagoons is based on its 1990 state, before Hurricane Iniki. See Note 18.
- 30 Unlike the California Academy of Sciences, photographs and murals have no place in the Kauai Lagoon's formal displays. Naturalistic murals are unnecessary; the destination resort is not two dimensional, but a fantasy world into which visitors step. The entire scene is one visitors themselves photograph, placing themselves into the scene in a way that shows 'I was there'.
- 31 When we were there in 1990, it was labelled 'Exhibit in progress' with a typed page of information about the canoe and its history (once owned by Hawaiian royalty, later used by the Kauai Canoe and Racing Club, damaged in Hurricane Ewa, and restored for display). This is one part of the Kauai Lagoons that was retained and elaborated by the new management, quite appropriate for their new 'traditional Hawaii' theme. The canoe is still ensconced in the middle of the hotel lobby, in a slanted mount, accompanied by a case with a paddle. Several labels explain the boat's importance.
- 32 See Kratz (2001) for a critique of Rosaldo's notion of imperialist nostalgia.
- 33 Of course the distant lands where reproductions were made were often places where labour costs were low as well.
- 34 Many of the Great American art museums are actually the living spaces of the wealthy who collected the art in them. One consequence of the way in which the living spaces of the rich become museumified is that museum audiences are led to think that the context of acquisition is the initial context of production and appreciation. This is a process which has parallels to the elevation of the collector over the maker in the display of 'primitive' arts.
- 35 The new version of the hotel under Marriott does not include all the grounds of the Westin version. They have been made into a park where visitors can pay to ride on the carriages or on boats through the lagoons, making the day visitor a more explicit category for marketing as well.

- 36 But this kind of representation of cultural diversity is hardly unique to the US and Europe.
- 37 Karp (1996a) develops the notion of public scholarship in relation to museums and museum curators, emphasising the cultural and communicative boundaries that must be traversed in making exhibitions.
- 38 Our solution is Ricoeur's nightmare. His essay attempts to construct grounds on which authenticity can be asserted, whereas we tend to look critically on assertions of authenticity, from whatever source.

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9 Towards an erotics of the museum'

Julie Marcus

Within the literature exploring the nature of the museum, one can discern two broad strands of thought regarding its origins. One of them sees in the modern museum a clear departure from the pre-Enlightenment model of a cabinet of curiosities; while the other draws attention to continuities between those older cabinets of curiosities and their wondrous collections, and the great collections and collection houses of the nineteenth century. The genealogies proposed through both strands of that literature mask a set of concerns with what the museum is, and does, today. Is the museum a teaching institution aligned with the universities, or, is it more appropriate to see the museum as a form of theatre, which can best be approached through analyses of performance and spectatorship? Yet the question of the museum is a broader one.

Successful museum displays and exhibitions conjure into existence particular visions of the nature of the world. In doing so, they provide at least some of the spectators, as well as museum curators, with those moments of illumination which could be thought of as resembling the Heideggerian 'flash' of insight that offers a glimpse of a truth. That truth is not, of course, necessarily 'true'. But in those flashes of understanding which bring in to light an unseen order which bears upon the worlds of daily life, there lies a moment which both offers truth *and* a way towards the truth, a moment of new knowledge. It is this moment, always visual in the museum, where offer and promise, the power of looking, and the approach of 'truth' are collapsed within a poiesis which is so seductive, and so pleasurable.

This moment of pleasure and wonder is the sense of the marvellous that traditional genealogists of the museum associate with the pre-modern museum, with the cabinets of seventeenth-century curiosities now so well-documented and critiqued. Yet the ordered display of natural and cultural objects found in the great modern museums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presented marvels no less wondrous for being ranged in modern taxonomies of one kind or another. While ordered differently, that new order produced and represented new relations, new knowledges and new possibilities to a broader audience, but the distinction between the old and new museum orders is not as fixed as some have imagined. It is incorrect to think of the old cabinets of curiosities and wonders as either necessarily heterogeneous or as existing only in the past. Neither is it