

ON THE EDGE OF INCLUSION: A LOOK AT THE SHIFTING OF
REPRESENTATION IN MUSEUM DISPLAY AND ARCHIVAL CATALOGING

By

Natalie Ray

A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Arts in English

Committee Membership

Dr. Janelle Adsit, Committee Chair

Carly Marino, Committee Member

Barbara Curiel, Committee Member

Dr. Michael Eldridge, Program Graduate Coordinator

May 2019

ABSTRACT

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This project delves into how the growing trend of social justice has raised new questions about how to better represent marginalized populations and how museum work has followed this pursuit. The digital age continues to impact the dynamism of exhibiting. Accurate representation becomes more imperative now that representative texts are able to reach more people than ever before. This increasing access coupled with the expanding interest in social justice and cultural reconciliation renders it necessary for curators and archivists to create accurate and culturally sustaining work. The exhibits and collections being viewed are in flux, and the texts that have been prepared for the public have been conceived by individuals and institutions with their own motivations and directives. Awareness of this fact allows for visitors to be critical of these possible inflections and misinterpretations. The first chapter provides an overview of the field and structuring of the project, the second chapter analyzes the current conversation among practitioners, the third chapter reviews the methodologies of this project, and the fourth is the project's conclusion. This project aims to recognize practices that are creating new schemas by which archivists and curators will structure history. Following the literature review are suggestions for how the archival process might be changed through teaching integration and increased public outreach.

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CHAPTER ONE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Special Collections Department in the HSU Library facilitates resources that complement the general collections housed within the university's Library. My first project when I started working there as a Library Scholar intern was to process a collection that documented history centered around Redwood National Park. The collection contained an assortment of different documents. It included legislation and reports from both those opposing and supporting the Park's establishment. Before performing this research, I had no intention of empathizing with those who opposed the Park. So I was quite surprised that this form of primary research and seeing the testimonials and projections of how it would impact the loggers' families for generations elicited my sympathy. I had not expected to resonate with them and their plight, but nevertheless I was impacted by these firsthand accounts and records. This task was the catalyst for my project, as it inspired me to consider how perspectives can be more aptly conveyed through collections or to what extent differing perspectives should be included by curators and archivists in representative texts such as interpretive labels, finding aids, and metadata.

The Scope of the Field

Archivists exist to manage raw collected data so that it can be used in research. Without their practice, preserved material would not be useful. They perform a service by

analyzing the entirety of the collection so that it can be digitized and searched with relative ease. This generates something that can be utilized by future users who would otherwise have to cull through the data themselves in order to discern what is relevant to their research and what is not. Without this cultivation, data and perspectives are ultimately susceptible to the mire of selective societal remembrance. And this limited memory may cause the erasure of history to occur.

People have long valued the preservation of their history. Archiving is an ancient practice. Archaeologists have unearthed archives consisting of clay tablets dating back to the third and second millennia BC. Without these discoveries, fundamental knowledge of archaic alphabets, languages, literature, and politics would not exist. The practice of archiving was first developed by the Chinese, the ancient Greeks, and also the ancient Romans. Much of the information that was cultivated by this first generation of archivists has been lost because of their system of preservation utilized materials like papyrus that deteriorates at a faster pace than other materials. Many of the archives of institutions like churches, kingdoms, and cities from the Middle Ages have managed to survive the duration of time. Modern archiving practice takes influence from the French Revolution. In a piece entitled, “Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution” Judith M. Panitch director of Library Communications at *UNC* examines two of the trajectories that resulted from the uprising during the time period,

Rather than exhibiting a direct and discernable evolutionary path, archives more properly reflect the influence of two opposing tendencies which had consequences

for all cultural and historical institutions and artifacts of the day. On the one hand, they suffered in the by-now infamous campaign to eradicate all traces of the defeated monarchy. Statues were torn from their pedestals, books burned, church façades defaced, in a frenzy of Revolutionary vandalism which sought to eliminate any sign of a hated and shameful past. At the same time, a mood of conversation had taken hold, resulting in the establishment of museums, libraries, and archival repositories. Some felt that remnants of the past ought to be retained for pedagogical purposes: other wished to immortalize the founding of the new egalitarian Republic. In either case, these warring propensities toward preservation and destruction defined an era. (32)

The conservation principles have defined much of the principles that archives today are designed by. The instituting of desired narratives is also something that unfortunately still results often from inevitable shifts in power. New systems of government strip away the previous historical records in order to establish their own version of history. Archivists looking back have to review these changes in narrative due to shifts in power. Dealing with situations like these can be a highly speculative process.

Attempts at standardization has been the response to the variability within historical cultivation. A number of standards in the practice of archiving have been put in place by The International Council on Archives. Some of these standards have to do with archival descriptions. The 1970s really instigated the demand for implemented standards. Particularly, archivists in the United States wanted to sanctify their practice with explicit rules from implicit methodologies. These movements were not only focused on

descriptions, but also crossed into the technical methods having to do with preservation, issues surrounding ethics, and management requirements. This shifting has been acknowledged by several writers in the community as a maturing of the profession, stemming from the drive to be taken more seriously, and cultivate more interest intersectionally across multiple corresponding disciplines (Grognet 5).

Inciting Research Questions

The further integration of the discourse into multiple corresponding fields compelled me to investigate its current theories and trajectory. This is because I was curious how these implications would affect this developing. My research is guided by several questions. I came to these questions while I was processing collections. I wanted to know what current standards guide what is included in representative material in museum and archives? And what regard is given to ambiguity or differing perspectives in museum and archival representative material? How is the inherent ambiguity involved in museum and archives translated to the public (what methods are currently being advocated for/performed)? And how can better knowledge building be fostered in historical and cultural settings like museums and archives? Many of these questions were answered through my researching of current theories being discussed by practitioners.

Retroactivism Promotes the Metacognition of Viewers

With these questions in mind I began the process of investigating for answers-- I also asking myself what considerations can be given to non-existent history that has been pushed out in the wake of constructing the dominant narrative? Efforts are being conducted to reweave history so to speak by cultivating previously ignored and repressed narratives. Efforts like these would fall under the terms metacognition and retroactivism. Retroactivism is defined by Jolie Braun in her review of the book *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives* as “displacement—and replacing—of pejorative accounts of lesbianism with new versions of the past [as] an activist strategy to effect change in the present” (10). Constructing new history means constructing new networks of communication in order that experts of those marginalized narratives might be brought together to record their experiences for prosperity. Metacognition is what Retroactivism attempts to produce. In this context it refers to thinking about the process of collection and representation within museums and archives. This is exactly the process that was performed by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in their effort to enact new memories in the book, *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Pasts and Future* by Jean Besette. The book identifies how lesbian collectives employed retroactivist rhetoric to advocate for change in modern identity politics. Jean Besette is an Associate Professor at the University of Vermont who teaches a variety of interdisciplinary subjects including Gender Studies and Archival Historiographic Theory. Besette offers that this system composes versions of the past, and that these delineated narratives question and deconstruct in order to reinvent the historical discourse to renegotiate and challenge

lesbian identity. Jean Bessette writes about their actions in writing *Lesbian/Woman* in her book writing,

Fifteen years after Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), they composed *Lesbian/Woman* (1972). This influential 283-page book is a collection of lesbian experience from hundreds of women the couple had corresponded with through their work with the DOB during the 1950 and 1960s. Though the publications punctuated the dissolution of the organization, the book continued the DOB's agenda to educate women with the same-sex desire about themselves, to promote self-acceptance, and to encourage broader social acceptance through conforming to conventional middle-class values. By strategically collecting and curating the experiences of the many women with whom they communicated throughout the history of the DOB, Martin and Lyon hoped to extend the organizations particular sense of collectivity to women with the same-sex desire across the country. Throughout this curatorial work, *Lesbian/Woman* came to constitute an *archive* of lesbian experience that functioned rhetorically as a communal and identificatory resource for readers. The book provided women without access to lesbian community or what it meant to be a lesbian a curated collection of experiences with which they could identify

(25)

The DOB's book and the experiences that it compiled created a space for lesbian woman that before had not existed. This process demonstrates metacognition in that the DOB was able to recognize the historical absence and attempt to fill it. This newly established

connection and visibility enabled the fruition of new recorded history that otherwise would have been lost. It also established agency for these women because of their new seen and shared identity. A collection of shared experiences grants legitimacy to an individual's sense of self. Personal investment often motivates this kind of curatorial work. In situations where marginalized groups are separated by circumstance or subjugated to the point that their stories are purposely suppressed, participating together to communicate shared narratives may be impossible. Separated communities are realizing the benefit of connecting digitally and feeling validated in establishing these new communities.

As identities evolve what is valued for archiving will likely expand. In this same book Bessette investigates how notions of inclusion and evolving definitions of identity may alter the collecting process. This process of reinvestigating with the purpose of rebuilding demands restructuring of all components of the acquisition process. Bessette writes further in her book again saying, "My definition of retroactivism also recognizes that such generative work often requires more than nostalgia. Retroactivism manifests as lesbian collectives impugn, deconstruct, and scavenge existing historical accounts and libraries, and compose new histories and archives out of the detritus to shape identification and political leverage" (11). Nostalgia for the past is not enough to construct new histories. Although it may catalyze the work that is needed to perform retroactivism, it cannot be the primary motivation or else the cultivation will be coded by that nostalgia.

Because the processing of history is so susceptible to influence, the responsibility of the ultimate imparting message, regardless of every intention the curator, guides, or any other faculty that the museum employs, becomes the viewers'. In exhibit spaces that promote metacognition, the viewer becomes aware and gains an understanding of their own memory-making in interacting with exhibits. Metacognition determines the filter in interpreting where archival and representative texts come up short or may be possibly falsified. Susan Crane's book, *Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum* which is a comprehensive look at representation in museums specifically in the United States and Germany. She writes, "Museums are flexible mirrors whose convex potential for multiple interpretations and participation... will continue to make them appropriate venues for active memory work, either "on site" or in the minds of those whose historical consciousness has been activated, nourished, challenged, and revived" (12). This potential for interpretation is beneficial in that multiple narratives can be derived through museum interaction, but it also leaves room for misinterpretation. Crane refers to the process of "active memory work" which holds the viewer responsible for constructing meaning. They are tasked with holding all the pieces of information and organizing and compartmentalizing the meaning from the displayed items and texts. Learning or non-learning is maintained through their own enthusiasm and vigor. Passivity may result in a lack of discernment. Without a critical viewing eye and discretion, messages and exhibits taken out of context have the potential to promulgate possibly detrimental narratives. However, this may be a lot to ask of a casual museum goer. When can they know that an issue requires more research? And will they even be motivated to

conduct this further investigation or metacognition in order to realize the subjectivity of the generative process in the discourse?

Addressing Constructivism During the Generative Process

Constructivism has a lot to do with metacognition. In defining Constructivist Learning Theory as it has been adopted by archivists and curators, researcher George Hein who has a background in chemistry, science education and museum education, wrote in his article entitled “Constructivist Learning Theory: The Museum and the Needs of the People” that, “The term refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning as he or she learns. Constructing meaning is learning; there is no other kind. The dramatic consequences of this view are twofold” (1). The main goal of curators in enacting exhibits and imparting one message or one set of messages to the viewership becomes decisively problematic when considering constructivism. The way viewers construct their own learning is something that must be taken into consideration during the process of curating and creating representative and interpretive labels. Hein advises that because of the way museum audiences construct their own learning process curators must abide by two modes of thinking: “(1) we have to focus on the learner in thinking about learning (not on the subject/lesson to be taught)” and “(2) There is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners” (2). Considering these implications, viewer feedback and response to exhibits

seems crucial. A survey of attendees might be implemented to gauge whether or not the originally intended messages were instilled within the viewers and how are these feelings negotiated amongst varying groups who might have different stakes involved in the representation taking place. A similar article entitled “The Constructivist Museum” from the book *The Educational Role of the Museum*, also written by Hein, offers two similarly toned considerations, saying “proponents of the Constructivist museum would argue that: 1) the viewer constructs personal knowledge from the exhibit and 2) the process of gaining knowledge is itself a constructive act” (Hein 77). With these additional considerations in mind the viewer receiving the ultimate intended message is quite a challenge. The message being conveyed has to contend with individual learning process as defined by constructivist theory. When practicing exhibiting and constructing archival texts, institutions’ intentions for the final published message are susceptible to a multitude of impacting forces. A litany of different factors may interfere at any stage, from the physical construction and the state of archival materials themselves, to interpretive labels, and then distractions upon the viewer that are completely out of curator’s control. Museology Constructivism acknowledges some of these intermediary and potentially skewing influences.

Reviewing the limitations of this theory, the primary concern and goal is how to better facilitate the individual audience member’s interpretation and reception during their knowledge making process. This shifted goal brings on an entirely new set of challenges. In the same way that a professor cannot currently devise and tailor individualistically driven personal lesson plans for each student within their class, a

curator cannot construct a multitude of exhibits for every different type of visitor to better facilitate their overall reception. And the curator is at an even greater disadvantage because unlike a professor they rarely have knowledge of potential audience members' learning styles or preferences, or what might also inhibit their process of receiving the exhibit's message.

Navigating These Considerations

I shaped my project with these impacting structures in mind. My project consists of four chapters. The introductory chapter that lays out the entirety of the project, and the second is an in depth literature review, looking at new and innovative practices that archivists and curators are currently utilizing in the attempt to cultivate exhibits with more holistic perspectives. I focus particularly on those who are producing pedagogy that is working to include previously marginalized or relegated narratives. This consists of taking a look at specific examples of exhibiting, and also investigating revolutionary methodologies that have the potential to shift practices within the field. I identify efforts that are attempting to be more inclusive or at least more nuanced in their production of representative narratives for exhibits and archival data. I also observe examples of practices that were lacking in that effort to determine what went awry. Also included within the literature review is a look into the current theory and research involved in the teaching and communicating of archives to the public, with specific emphasis given to the informing the role of ambiguity in representation in museum and archival texts and

also the nature of coded language in those same texts. And I investigate why it appears there is not currently much research being done in this theory. Communicating this knowledge is crucial. This literature review investigates how more accurate and inclusive information can be, and is currently being, generated through archives and museum exhibiting, and then how that information can then be best translated into public knowledge including the constraints, stakeholders, and multitude of conflicting forces that are impacting what they view. In the third chapter I focus on teaching the nature of inflected representation both in museums and archives, the texts that represent them, and digital media usage. I taught a Skillshop through the Library that focuses on how to interpret and be perceptive to nuanced and influenced perspective when dealing with archival and museum materials (specifically historical and cultural ones). I show how I utilized the knowledge I have obtained through my internship in the Special Collections Department, and also in conducting the literature review to enact the teaching of consciousness in museums and historically representative settings. In this way, I balance the theoretical with the applied. Through this Skillshop, students are meant to learn to be mindful of the possibility of inflections from outside sources and the institutions that house historical and cultural items. The chapter includes an overview of my lesson plan that I use to guide my teaching of the Skillshop, and is then followed by my experience in enacting it and also my recommendations for performing similar curriculum in the future. This pedagogical chapter is followed by a concluding chapter that considers the evolving trajectory of the field and my responses to perceived gaps. This chapter makes suggestions for further research considering the gaps I notice in my research for the

literature review or friction I observe while performing the Skillshop. My research is highly interdisciplinary and crosses over into multiple converging fields of research, so I hope to define the project in a way that can easily be transferred and navigated by each relevant discourses' audience.

Considering What is

Invariably, when observing the scope of the cultivated materials and documents that have been preserved for future generations to research we must infer that past circumstances have also removed the potential for an untold amount of silenced narratives to be heard. Constructivism also determines that the discourse in its current existence has been contorted according to these defining factors, such as influences like systemic and institutionalized racism, western centrism, the patriarchal cultivation and others. These same issues have led to the culmination of the dominant narratives as they currently exist within museums and archives, and have also impacted recorded history in that marginalized narratives have been left out of the historical canon.

Implemented Methodology

I have enacted my approach to this project in three parts to research further into these arenas. (1) I perform extensive research in the form of a literature review to investigate current innovative ideologies and practices within museology to track the evolution of the discourse. I also review not-so-successful examples of representation in

order to determine why they were unsuccessful. I also record best tactics in the transferring of knowledge to the viewing audience. (2) I performed a Skillshop in the library teaching the nature of ambiguity in museum and archival texts. I use specific examples of cases of layered perspectives or atypical approaches to communicating nuanced perspective to emphasize the challenge that representing varying perspectives presents and how to negotiate transfer within museum-like settings. I use the Skillshop as an opportunity to teach mindfulness of inflection when handling or encountering representative texts in historical and cultural contexts. I have enacted my project this way in order to understand the conversation currently taking place within the discourse by writing my literature review, and then attempting to act within the conversation by implementing the Skillshop. I have done this in order to take what I have learned about ambiguous and nuanced perspectives within these contexts and be able to better communicate issues more directly with the viewing public.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

“The consequence of the single story is that it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult and it emphasizes that we are different rather than how we are similar.”

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Scope

This analysis first provides an overview of a portion of the history relevant to archival and museum research and representation. Then the chapter also presents instances of anthropological, archival, and museum practices that incorporated innovative designs and practice or failed in their representations. Dissecting these actions reveals the benefits of preserving data more holistically than previous research methods could achieve. An analysis of these examples shows that these innovative designs were able to preserve data holistically. Further analysis recognizes instances of exhibiting or collecting that resulted in non-holistic or skewed representative preservation. Particular focus is given to new cultural integration, as this development is vulnerable as it is established and granted space in the museum space and archives.

Introduction- The Reinforcing Relationship Between the Archive and Dominant Cultural

Narratives

During my time working for the Special Collections department as a Library Scholar Intern, I observed that there were multiple instances of varying perceptions affecting the way that historical events and topics were portrayed within the collections that myself and my team members were asked to process. Often times these perceptions were supported by different statistical analyses, hypotheses, and ideologies. The task given to us in representing these collections mandated that we consider equally all narratives associated with the items and documents we were being asked to cull through. There was a challenge in constructing texts and representations for these collections and remaining neutral while at the same time accurately conveying all angles pertaining to the narratives. It was clear to me that the writing of history is a delicate process. Craig Robertson who is a media historian with expertise in the history of information technologies states in his article, “The Archive, Disciplinarity, and Governing: Cultural Studies and the Writing of History”, “History, as a modern concern, is an enterprise devoted to classifying, fixing, stabilizing, and authorizing memories. The production of truthful evidence and facts differentiates history from other forms of memory. In this sense, History is a positivist project within modernity founded on archival rationalization” (11). The description of the endeavor of creating history as “positivist” is particularly interesting when we consider that something that is supposedly as concrete historically as an event may have a multitude of interpretations of motivations and outcomes and ramifications depending on the person asked about it. So while I do agree that our work is “authorizing memories” I am a little skeptical that something so broad can be rationalized as such. Archives do the tangible work of creating, fixing, stabilizing,

and giving authority to narratives. However, the process of selection and the system by which things are chosen to be preserved at the same time is a decision that is influenced by the dominant narratives the curator has internalized. Archivists decide what matters to history, and what matter is worth preserving based on these ingrained dominant narratives.

The responsibility of representing history for posterity has motivated archivists all over the globe for centuries. However, because humans inherently are bound to personal biases and cultural conditioning, ideal representation is absolutely subjective. It is highly dependent on geographical location and the ensuing cultural conditioning. This coding of the processor can then result in inflections upon written representations of documents and physical items. Inflections here refers to perspectives or language impacting an item that may be considered subjective and therefore up for interpretation. Inflections are made upon representative texts and narratives through exhibits, finding aids, digital media, and metadata, etc. We should consider what the visual historian Michel Foucault postulated, “that the phenomenon of being seen is neither an automatic nor natural process, but linked to what power/knowledge guides one to see”. The effects of this potential for skewing or affected perceptions must be taken into consideration when operating within the discourse of museology.

This point becomes especially salient as the field becomes increasingly more interdisciplinary, diverse, and centered around inclusion and also as digital access to archives and museums increases. Susan Howe is an American poet, scholar, essayist and critic. Her work is classified as Postmodern because it subverts traditional notions of

genre. She writes in her book *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* that it is indisputable that “the nature of archival research is in flux” (6). Multiple impacting forces are transforming the way history is preserved. The methods for determining what is intrinsically valuable to a collection, and what should be represented on the meta level in text is largely up to the institution, and more specifically to the individual curators and archivists processing the collected materials. This leaves the transfer of knowledge to the public susceptible to alteration in its message at various stages in that generative timeline.

The Inherent Danger in Interpretive Labels

“Here is your name / said the woman / and vanished in the corridor.” –Mahmoud
Darwish

In considering inflected interpretations when it comes to museums and archive generation, we should absolutely keep in mind the impact of discursive formations. In his textbook, *Representation*, Stuart Hall delves extensively into the ethical concerns involved in representing other cultures. Hall defines discursive formations as “refer[ing] to the systematic operation of *several* discourses or statements constituting a ‘body of knowledge’, which work together to construct a specific object/topic of analysis in a particular way, and to limit the other ways in which the object/topic may be constituted” (164). This means that multiple impacting discourses such as power/systemic and

institutionalized racism, the patriarchy, western ideology etc. inform the finished intended messages of archival and museum texts. Cheryl Beredo who is the director of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives at Cornell University had this to say about the necessary critique of the discipline, “application of the concept of allegory to anthropological practice introduces the possibility that ethnography makes moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements, and given that scholarship in cultural studies focuses on the reproduction of ideology, the concerns addressed in these works clearly resonate with the needed modes of critique of archives” (14). The implications of all these constructs mandate continual review of the patterns of practice and tweaking of those habits in consideration of the need for adaptation and acclamation.

Objects can have duplicitous or contesting meanings depending on the perspective of the individual viewing it-- even if an item is simply being categorized for what it appears to be, that appearance is coded by the cataloger. In *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Beverly Serrell who is regarded as one of the most well-known museum consultants in the United States indicates that “Interpretive labels tell stories; they are narratives, not lists of facts. Any label serves to explain, guide, question, inform, or provoke--in a way that invites participation by the reader- is interpretive” (Serrell 19). Serrell explains the way that interpretative labels are read differently than listed information. They are narratives describing the life of the artifacts. There are many stages during the progression of a particular item in terms of context. To display an item before a most likely completely different set of people than the original context can cause the

message to be skewed. This evolving in the meaning of the item may be important in itself, so the question becomes which meanings are the most important to convey, who defines this, and how can more of these narratives be transferred during the short windows of attention that viewers are willing to give? Steven Dubin comments on this dubious issue at length in his book, *Displays of Power* which details the “culture wars” taking place within American museums. He writes, “Wall labels are the sound bites of the museum world. They aim for maximum impact with an economy of terms. The subtleties of a fully developed essay are necessarily dropped. Wall labels are for everyman and everywoman. They should be condensed, concentrated, concise” (166). This restrictive genre confines the narratives that can be transferred between the curator and the audience. The objective as it stands and as Serrell explains is to incite future research and interest. One particular example that was described by Susan Crane was of wall labeling that ultimately seemed to falter in its attempt at radicalism was an exhibit displaying “the masterpieces” of Pacific Northwest Native American jewelry and art. It utilized almost no explicit representative texts in its final published narrative. The exhibit was designed in the hopes that viewers would feel motivated to conduct their own narrative-forming and possibly incite further research, but as Crane observed, “the visitor left confused and possibly angry, disappointed in the expectation of education or entertainment” (2). This failure to provide enough context resulted in the viewer feeling confused. Without enough guidance, the knowledge generation process was halted and the audience left the museum frustrated by what they had just experienced. Considering the friction of this

exhibit, it can be determined that there is a sweet spot between interpretative labels that are too dense and non-existence.

This limited textual space constricts the amount of narratives that viewers can receive. However, institutions are motivated to not anger different groups by presenting what may be controversial or one-sided perspectives. If misrepresentation occurs, they may see a drop in attendance or funding. With reputations to maintain, it is in their best interest to maintain inclusivity. As Dubin writes further in his book, “If museums stray from ‘making nice’, they risk a confrontation with those who have a certain image to shield or an alternative image that they would prefer to project” (3). This type of adverse response can mean lasting animosity towards an institution. However, an exhibition or museum that sets out to avoid confrontation runs the risk of playing a role in the erasure of issues that may be difficult to discuss openly.

Within the last thirty years, the shifting interests within the field have pushed museums to be more inclusive in their representation. In his book, *Displays of Power*, Dubin emphasizes that, “Exhibits today commonly reflect the interests of groups that are ideologically different from those previously in control- groups that are only recently flexing their muscle, having just elbowed their way into the cultural spotlight” (Dubin 227). These new voices are enabling previously discounted narratives to be given platform to a society that once was unaware or refused to acknowledge them. As they gain more ground in the historical and cultural museums, more opportunities will become available that will only work to continue this wave of integration and representation.

Metadata and Its Implications

Metadata is text generated by curators and archivists that serves to speak for certain items. The definition provided by *The Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* explains that, “Metadata is commonly defined as data about data”. Because individuals come from all kinds of different backgrounds, this writing can be affected by varying perceptions. The expansion of access to archived items and collections housed within museums and historical institutions through the digital landscape has created the need for this data that makes those items searchable to the users. This data is susceptible to the same issues facing representative texts in physical visitor settings. Data that is inflected, or simply absent has the potential to impact research and therefore formed ideology. In his article, “Metadata Principles and Practicalities”, Erik Duval who was a prominent Belgian computer scientist compartmentalizes the surge the internet generated in required metadata and representative texts:

The rapid changes in the means of information access occasioned by the emergence of the World Wide Web have spawned an upheaval in the means of describing and managing information resources. Metadata is a primary tool in this work, and an important link in the value chain of knowledge economies. Yet there is much confusion about how metadata should be integrated into information systems. How is it to be created or extended? Who will manage it? How can it be used and exchanged? Whence comes its authority? Can different metadata

standards be used together in a given environment? These and related questions motivate this paper. (1)

These questions address the issues of consistency when it comes to the creation of metadata. It is susceptible to the same altering and tampering as interpretive labels and historical narratives. This means that systems of checking and involvement in the process are mandatory in order to prevent the coding of uneven or false authority.

Some emphatic structures are already being implemented. Duval continues on in his piece to describe some of the standards that have already been established in order to implement these systems of checking.

The authors hope to make explicit the strong foundations of agreement shared by two prominent metadata Initiatives: the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI) and the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Learning Object Metadata (LOM) Working Group. This agreement emerged from a joint metadata taskforce meeting in Ottawa in August, 2001. (1)

Marking these as foundations would maintain consistency within the discourse. Just as exhibiting has standards that are expected across the discourse, so should the writing of metadata for exhibits, digital finding aids, and archival materials. These standards help to instill the same kind of overarching standards that are set in place for physical representative texts. Metadata must be considered just as powerful if not more so because of its ability to reach a far greater number of people. While institutions impose limitations on the viewers by limiting access to those living or traveling within its vicinity, and are

also limited by hours of operation, online data is available to everyone with internet access at all times.

Some individuals take more initiative to be inclusive in their collecting process than others. In an article titled, “Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar”, archivist Francis Blouin who was director of the Bentley historical Library at the University of Michigan from 1981 to 2013 explains the significance of one aspect of the archival process, “It makes a difference whether documents are written on or off the record, so to speak; stamped with various limitations on disclosure; or assembled for institutional vaults where public access is not thought to be in question” (2). The way a document is processed can dramatically impact its readability, searchability, and inflected meaning. If an item is processed to exist on line, the metadata that is created for the item becomes a part of that item’s meaning, even if the language that serves to represent that item is not actually present within the document. Those words make the document searchable to researchers. The same with items that are processed only to exist on the physical shelves within the institution. The finding aid that serves to represent the materials may offer some overarching meta terms within the abstract but will do little good for a researcher who is not reading that document. The terms can also be misconstrued if they are not appropriate to all of the documents within the collection. Or maybe history that is more relevant to the collection has not been made available to the archivist processing will be left out. All of these impacting possibilities can construe meaning.

Lack of standards can be harmful when dealing with sensitive history. If metadata is racialized it can work to promulgate a continued narrative of prejudice. But if an item has racially sensitive material it can be equally damaging to gloss over that history when creating metadata. For example, in the Special Collections department we have a small book with mostly illustrations called *Places in Humboldt* which was compiled in the 1940s. The book provides scenic views of the county, and advertisements for readers with reasons why they should consider moving to the area. One of the pages lists all the minorities that do not reside within the county. A failure to represent this history to researchers in the metadata would result in its exclusion from that local history. And that non-inclusion may result in that narrative not being built. That designates that recognition of that very challenging history is denied to those oppressed groups that had to struggle against that very real oppression.

Crossover in the Field and Attempts at Teaching

Research that is done to cultivate negative history can then be displayed in exhibits so that it can reach a larger audience than the people who are actively seeking it out. Museum and archival work exemplify a symbiotic relationship. Each discipline has a high level of crossover and in turn has an exponential impact upon the other--museum and archival work being in many cases the tangible final presentation of cultural and anthropological research, and sometimes the catalyst for new practices within humanist studies and also the cultural theory and practice that creates much of the schema by

which museum work follows. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is University Professor Emerita and Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at New York University. She is currently Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. In her article entitled “Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage”, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphasizes that the “focus is less on objects themselves than on agencies of display: how people and cultures at various points of encounter with the material world organize that world for interaction, interpretation, and presentation (11). This paints the inclusion of items as secondary to their agency as a unit of display. Indicating that their meaning is elevated in the context of other items and curated display.

Representative narratives like cultivated displays in museums are used as teaching tools to offer the knowledge being collected by researchers in a comprehensible way to the viewer. Because the viewers are not active in the fields that typically gather and study this history in their everyday life, the information provided about the researcher’s work and the items themselves must be made easy to understand and memorable. The viewer has little say in what is presented to them and is mostly expected to be passive in the environment of the museum and only take in what has been prepared for them. They are not included in the initial process of what is valued as researchable and therefore worthy of representation at the museum level.

Current Standardization in the Field

Current Museology is seeing trends in the developing of more holistic and accurate representations of marginalized populations. A number of standards in practice have already been put in place by *The International Council on Archives*. Some of these standards have to do with archival descriptions. The 1970s saw the instigation of a strong demand for more concrete implemented standards in general for archivists. These movements were not only focused on descriptions, but also on the technical methods having to do with preservation, issues surrounding ethics, and management requirements. This shifting of focus follows the sweeping increase of interest in human rights and representation in anthropology and other fields of study. This movement has been characterized by several within the community as an attempted maturing of the discipline, possibly stemming from the drive to be taken more seriously among the hard sciences. Speaking of the metamorphosis of the museum, Fabrice Grognet who is a Ph.D. holder in Anthropological Ethnography, writes in his article entitled “Ethology: A Science on Display”, that the transformation has been “one in which we would see the emergence of occupations connected with cultural mediation (museum public monitors, museologists) alongside strictly central occupations” (4). And this is the exact end we have seen in result. The transition has created a multitude of different positions as these areas of interest are further instituted. Grognet also outlines some of the specific positions that have resulted from the transformation:

Such a metamorphosis [has] led to the development of two distinct yet complementary professions and practices: on the one hand, ethnologists and fieldwork undertaken through and for research: and on the other, museologists

and the practice of a discourse conducted in the field of activity of the former, through and for exhibitions. More than a division between research and the museum, the aim would be to professionalize the work of popularization in the same way as research work. (4)

This shifting of the view to exhibits as published work in the same way that research results in public reports, creates the same opportunity for feedback and shifts the view of them as something that is standalone and the epitome of truth to one theory or argument from that particular researcher within the discourse. This establishes it as one conversation within the community that is fluid and subjective. This turn has also invited more scrutiny on the part of the viewing public. The digital age is making it easier for viewers to leave feedback and commentary. However, these avenues still have much that can be done in the way of improvement.

Enacted Remembrance

In redefining the narratives that are being communicated to the public, archivists and curators are essentially granting visibility to those who were previously typically silenced. Archives represent material history and in that history a person can find their families, or those that resemble themselves. Gina Watts works as a Library Specialist focusing on data visualization and analytics at Texas State University. She wrote in her piece titled “Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory” that,

people resonate with history when they encounter that others' lives mirrored theirs, in an acid-free box, and in doing so, find themselves, be recognized by the historical record, and claim their right to take up space in the world. This has more than simply an emotional impact—archival records show important legal precedent, challenge our assumptions about the past, and can otherwise lend strength to those looking for support. By contrast, not existing in the archive can seem like not existing at all. (4)

This ability of the discourse to shine the light and grant agency bestows a great deal of power to the particular actions of archivists and curators. Their maneuverings do work to validate identities when researched and constructed appropriately. In the book *The Ethical Archivist*, Elena Danielson who worked for 27 years in the Hoover Archives at Stanford University, serving as head of the archives for the last ten of those years, writes this about the practices involved in the discipline of archiving,

One of the most rewarding aspects of archival work is the way it supports core values such as human rights. When it comes to human rights abuses, gaps in the records and falsifications are troubling. Here, the archival process- this search for truth- is a valued ethical standard. Archivists have made immeasurable contributions to an accurate record of the human rights struggle. (3)

This focus of the field is echoed in another article written by Annie Coombes who teaches art history and cultural studies at Birkbeck College of the University of London. In her piece titled, "Formation of National and Cultural Identities", she imparted that museology has transformed itself, abiding by the motif, "'Education for All' under the

rubric of multi-culturalism” (10). While these might convey what can be interpreted as the lofty ideals of the discipline and those working within it, it is valid to recognize the ultimate power that is granted through the representation in these settings. As Ivan Karp who was a prominent art dealer, gallerist and author denotes in an article entitled “Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations”, “Accurate representation or fabricated history has the capability to influence remembrance which in turn may shift cultural attitudes, resulting lobbying and socio-political implications” (1). Progressive archivists in the field are mandating a reformation in the terms of how certain data is collected and gathered in order to accommodate new acquisitioning and combating the patriarchive, which here refers to the systemic cultivation of history through the white male lens (Derrida and Prenowitz). And subsequently, the term also refers to all other narratives that have been pushed out and erased in wake of that history. In the article entitled, “Scrapbooks, Snapshots and Memorabilia: Hidden Archives of Performance” Australian archivist Glen McGillivray reiterates this point saying, “Archival disappearances are never without human agency as decisions to archive or to ignore, to reveal or to conceal, are always made by someone or some group and these decisions, often made with the worthiest aims in mind, explicitly or implicitly ideological”. While these instances of erasure might not be intentional, they impact the cultural narrative indefinitely.

The context of documents can dramatically affect their scope and message. But the nature of how to go about including intended inflection is not something that is easy to designate. For items that come with little cited context, and no persons who can speak

on behalf of the collection, there is little that can be done to gather further information on those artifacts and documents. This leaves an opening for both archivists and viewers or researchers to misinflect a context that may not have even been intended by the author or the recorder.

Considering Specific Actions & Cases

As previously mentioned, inaccurate metadata or description on the part of the processor can have untold ramifications for the represented group for a potentially inordinate amount of time. Generations may be impacted by faulty representation. However, new metadata protocols are influencing the design of new platforms used by researchers and in some cases improving representation. One particularly revolutionary example of an archivist flexing the process to better accommodate the emphasis of context was anthropologist Mick Gooda's implementation of the Aboriginal tribespeople's own perceptions of being studied and archived into his study of them. In Australia in 2012 he presented his report in Melbourne, stressing the need to include the studied persons' own experiences and narratives in completed collections. His article details his system of including the first-hand accounts of the tribal members being studied. And he also argued that their thoughts on the documenting of their history being described and recorded was an integral part of the collection as much as the transcriptions of their physical culture were. This addition was seen as immensely valuable to the entirety of the study.

Kimberly Christen who teaches a range of classes at Washington University that focus on the ethics of access and openness in relation to knowledge sharing and in particular on the practices and processes around digital humanities and museum and archival access. In her article entitled, "Opening Archives: Respectful Reparation", she describes the same inclusive movement of the 1980 and 1990's impact upon First Nation members. She writes, "In the last twenty years, many collecting institutions heeded the calls by indigenous activists to integrate indigenous models and knowledge into mainstream practices" (185). This emergence is just one example of the larger trend in attempts to obtain cultural understanding through archival and museum practices. Adversely, Adrienne Harling who is an archivist whose work is centered around representing Sipnuuk culture wrote this about past generative history of indigenous populations,

The first written documentation of Karuk people was created by colonists who were part of the social and governmental mission to take possession of our land and resources, destroy our culture and religion, and ultimately remove our presence from this 'newly discovered American' territory. Popular methods employed to this end included genocide, promotion of Indian slavery and forced assimilation, and the written documentation thereof reflected an unabashed sense of entitlement. Once the colonial mission was well underway, churning Indigenous lives underfoot to pave the way for the American dream, a new wave of documentation came with the central narrative being that Indigenous people were a vanishing race. (2)

Reparative historicizing cannot undo the writing of the past. It can only deter the further decay of heritage through proper and considerate cultural preservation. Already knowledge has been lost, but that cannot negate the need to represent what is still able to be preserved. Erosion of culture memory imparts silence which can deny agency to those attempting to locate themselves within a historical context. We should use past abstraction to motivate more hastened efforts for collection and cultivation. As time continues to bury negated history, more fervent attempts to process it for preservation must be attempted.

Sometimes recording history can be a daunting task however. Representing difficult history is a challenge that archivists and curators grapple with. Issues surrounding how to approach disturbing subject matters such as genocide and violence have plagued archivists and curators. Inflections specifically on this kind of history can be especially potentially dangerous. In *Exhibiting Atrocity* by Amy Sodaro who is an associate professor of Sociology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, and the coeditor of “Memory and the Future: Transnational Politics, Ethics and Culture” writes in the chapter “The Museum of Memory and Human Rights ‘A Living Museum for Chile’s Memory’” about the practices enacted while an exhibit for the genocide in Chile was being designed. Exhibits like these are the result of the continued cultivation of interest in human rights and education for the prevention of future atrocities. Refusing to acknowledge and display deplorable events of the past grants the possibility of amnesia and relapse in the same toxic ideology in our progeny. Sodaro writes in her book, “Chile’s struggle to confront its violent past is intertwined with the broader rise of

international human rights in the second half of the twentieth century, which itself is tied to the emergence of memory and coming to terms with the past as a preoccupation for nations and collectives around the world today” (6). This sweeping interest in effective and ethical representation of the macabre subject matter surrounding its history has forced the discipline to reflect on its own process because it is one that is so immediately intertwined with cultural representation. Representations that are incomplete can skew societal perceptions. In a dialogue between French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and Romanian historian Sorin Antohi, Ricoeur explains, “The appeased memory does not seek to forget the evil suffered or committed. It seeks rather to speak of it without anger” (3). In this way, a physical space is granted for healing. Without spaces like museums and archives, ideologies will likely be formed based upon fragments. And limited exposure through fragmented narratives is dangerous in that it can generate stereotypes, and perpetuate unfounded myths about race and culture. These misconceptions can spiral and result in ideology that in turn can catalyze harmful and misguided legislation and lasting animosity. The process must be especially sensitive when a curator or archivist is attempting to design exhibits showcasing past atrocities. Lack of respect or consideration for complex and possibly conflicting perspectives may catalyze further discrimination for the populations that are being spoken for through the representation. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes in his book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, “confession of responsibility will remove us and in which what is spelled out, minute by minute, is the lesson of the terrifying, unsayable and unimaginable banality of evil” (16). This placing of fault may help resolve emotions about difficult history.

Acknowledgement of fault may be difficult to place however in the museum without backlash but denial of circumstances leading to tragedy which would not be conducive to healing.

An institution that has drastically reconstituted the way that disturbing history is approached is The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. The intentions for the impact on viewers is what redefines this museum. In an article written for the *New York Times*, entitled “A Memorial to the Lingering Horror of Lynching”, writer Holland Cotter explains this distinction, “The powerful National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama is meant to perturb, not console — and to encourage truth-telling far and wide”. While many exhibits that serve to represent atrocities may attempt to make sense of the travesty, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice believes that before healing can begin, the injustices and untold suffering incurred by the transatlantic slave trade must first be acknowledged. Experiencing of the subject matter within the museum is likely be nothing short of exhausting for the viewer, but without this kind of raw honesty the legacy of lynching in America cannot be fully understood. Cotter continues by iterating how this transformative approach has generated much needed conversation about the brutal history. He writes,

That [the] silence has been decisively broken with the opening of the memorial and the museum. Both were created by the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit legal advocacy group directed by Bryan Stevenson and based in Montgomery. Both address the subject of history in a way unusual until recently for American

institutions: with a truth-telling, uplift-free prosecutorial directness. And both approach it by different means. (1)

The stripping away of palatable context for viewers grants respect to these heinous events of the past, and imparts a message that the legacy still has current ramifications. The museum utilizes a variety of new technologies to demand immersion from its visitors. A *New Yorker* article written by Allyson Hobbs and Nell Freudenberger describes the use of holograms. They write, “Just past the entrance, a ramp slopes down to five ‘slave pens’ behind which ghostly holograms in nineteenth-century costume tell their stories. Visitors huddle around the pens and listen closely, as the figures speak in hushed tones. The effect is authentic”. These techniques oblige the viewers to experience in a different way, and force them to come to terms with a past that writers Hobbs and Freudenberger note as “painful and embarrassing”.

A proposed recent exhibit that received an inordinate amount of controversy was the plan to display the Enola Gay, B-29 Superfortress at the National Air and Space Museum. The Enola Gay was used to drop the bomb on Hiroshima. The proposal was suggested as an exhibit to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Journalist David Thelen wrote that the response to the proposal was, “A fiery controversy ensued that demonstrated the competing historical narratives regarding the decision to drop the bomb”. This kind of reaction demonstrates the lack of insight into what the Superfortress still represents more than fifty years later. In this instance the planned exhibit never came to fruition, which denotes the kind of effect that public outcry can have in shaping of history that is represented. On January 30, 1995, Smithsonian

Secretary Michael Heyman announced the decision to replace the exhibition with a smaller display and made the following statement:

We made a basic error in attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the 50th anniversary commemoration of the end of the war.

In this important anniversary year, veterans and their families were expecting, and rightly so, that the nation would honor and commemorate their valor and sacrifice.

They were not looking for analysis, and, frankly, we did not give enough thought to the intense feelings such an analysis would evoke. (1)

Heyman's acknowledgement of the error on the part of the institution to enact the display in commemoration of the anniversary is a positive. While it is still concerning that these issues are not immediately noticed within institutions with reputations like this one, the fact that the feedback caused them re-evaluate is hopeful.

Decisions like this can sometimes pass under the public's radar. In building an exhibit, archivists and curators have a duty to acknowledge their impact on the presented exhibits and collections. Recognizing their shaping of cultivated projects lets the public know that this data is not in its raw and original unaltered state. Julie Herrada Labadie Collection, part of the Special Collections Research Center in the University of Michigan's Library imparts the push and pull of impartiality in her response, "Review of Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice by Randall C. Jimerson", stating that archivists are,

sacrificing their image of neutrality and exercising a social conscience in the pursuit of their professional responsibilities. If the archivist has been neutral in her work, doesn't that lend legitimacy to the resulting archives? Shouldn't we fear that our archives would still be biased, but in a different direction? (2)

Randall Jimmerson the professor of history and director of the graduate program in Archives and Records Management at Western Washington University responds by emphasizing a distinction between objectivity and neutrality, in which an objective archivist strives to be fair, honest, detached, and transparent. He writes further, "To take one example, in the interests of transparency it would be appropriate for an archivist to provide, along with the repository's official selection and preservation policy, notes on the reasoning the archivist used in making various decisions regarding acquisition, retention, processing, and the like. (3) Acknowledging this shaping is not something that is really ever included beside exhibits. Although as the Dean and University Librarian at Georgia Southern University W. Bede Mitchell writes in an article titled "Archives, Records, and Power", "These are pitfalls inherent in performing archiving".

Canadian archivist Terry Cook and specialist for the National Archives of Canada Joan Schwartz further explain the importance of these implementations, "Transparency of process about the archivist's performance will facilitate this integration, stimulate the building of archival knowledge, and enable present and future generations to hold the profession accountable for its choices in exercising power over the making of modern memory" (2). This open accountability ensures that archivists are held responsible for the work they generate and process. Currently, monitoring and enacting standards in

archiving research and processing is up to the specific protocols implemented by that institution. This possible lack of consistency across archiving organizations and museums can lead to variances in the histories and perspectives that are preserved. Author and archivist Randall Jimerson had this to say concerning these limitations, “Within the profession there have been initiatives to improve standards of archival practice. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these efforts have often been closely related to underlying goals of increasing professionalism and gaining public recognition” (58). Better execution of standards in terms of collection and guidelines for metadata and interpretative labels will help establish better viewer relations which has the potential to generate more funding for archival and museum practices. Better funding will result in access to resources to provide more relevant and appropriately researched content. One specific example of not enough inflection in the construction of an exhibit was in the *Heart of Africa* Exhibit in the Royal Ontario Museum in 1989. The exhibition received wide criticism with viewers responding that its narrative was structured in a way that the message being presented was racist. In her review of the exhibition and catalog, entitled “Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists: Into the Heart of Africa and The Other Museum”, Enid Schildkrout who is Curator Emerita at the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, writes, “In each instance the commentary with the objects reiterated stereotypes supposedly held by the missionary collectors” (5). The viewers felt because there was no critical tone to the items displayed that somehow the process of colonization and all of its ill-gotten gains were being justified if not shown in a positive light. Viewers felt uncomfortable and the exhibit received a lot of criticism as a

result. Neil Curtis who is the Head of Museums and Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen comments on situations like these that often come up in the world of curating in his article, “Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things”. He writes that, “It is more striking that other forms of acquisition, such as war loot or theft, are not mentioned, despite the number of items which have been acquired in this way” (3). The refusal to acknowledge the sordid history of item acquisition denies them that context and robs the audience members of weaving that context into the narrative that they are constructing when viewing items. Instances like these illustrate the need for nuance. Jamie Lee who is Assistant Professor of Digital Culture, Information, and Society at the University of Arizona writes, “The far-reaching possibilities of the ongoing histories of such archived (un)becomings—the simultaneous becoming and unbecoming—are at play in this archival record and throughout the archival body. Multiple histories—those known, imagined, and surprising—emerge and expand as new records and collections are accessioned” (4). The unbecoming and simultaneous becoming of historical narrative is something that can only be constructed with more diligent cultivation of multi-faceted records.

A different practitioner emphasized the importance of including information given by and about the donors of collections when they are received by an archiving institution. In an article written by archivist Steven Ficsher, he emphasizes the unique insight that donors can grant to collections. I found that I particularly agreed with the perspective of this author. Working in the Specials Collections Department in the Humboldt Room I know that we process a variety of collections that come with varying

levels of information about the donor of the collection. Most of the ones that I have worked on processing so far have had little if any information about the people who have donated them. A handful have had a sizable description. I know firsthand that it helps us get a better sense of the scope and purpose of the collection when there is information on the person who cultivated it or donated it. It saves a lot of time for those of use processing it when we don't have to try to figure out those things on our own. And also it helps prevent us from inflecting our own interpretations on the collection and also from misinterpreting their research. Overall it just helps makes the entire process of organizing the collections immensely easier, helping give us a frame of reference for organizing the data and also eventually generating a finding aid. Another researcher, Antoinette Burton in her article "Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History", remarks "that the context of the historical material and the little clues found among the original archival record can often be lost or overlooked in digitization projects, making it necessary to work with archival sources in person" (2). I agree that ideally this first hand research provides the most context, but this kind of access is not always feasible. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg write in their research titled, "Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives" that they are "surprised that contemporary historians are not consulted during appraisal and other archival activities". They go on to suggest "that historians should be involved in the design of electronic recordkeeping systems" (11). Again, this would be undoubtedly beneficial to capturing nuanced context when transferring physical documents and items into digital forms. The expansion of interdisciplinary work will absolutely ease this communication.

Issues Affecting Progress

Some issues that arise from the call from certain archivists to include more varied and dynamic perspectives in their processed collections is the issue of space and the limited processing abilities of archivists and curators. Information overload can bog down or even stymie the recording process. The physical time that it takes to cultivate and process information can be extensive. Members of the archiving community have also brought up the issue of too much information muddying collections or making them too big to be useful. In an article entitled, “Disorder: Vocabularies of Hoarding in Personal Digital Archiving Practices” written for *The American Archivist*, Anna Chen comments on the nature of over collecting, and how this practice can turn one into a “digital hoarder”. The digitizing of information can turn archivists into hoarders that save every possible source of relevant (and possibly not so relevant) information. This tendency can overburden the archiving process and archivists so that they feel their work can never be done, or even that it should never be completed. And it can also affect the accessibility of the final collection for public usage. If a collection becomes so large that the task of sifting through it is a challenge for an archivist to process, the public will likely not want to take the time to sort through it on their own. So unless they are being guided through the data by an archivist who has spent time familiarizing themselves with every part of the collection, it will most likely be too much for anyone off the street to go through.

Another challenge is that if archives are not communicated in a way that is more palatable to the public then there is also the possibility of social amnesia and public shift in ideology because of lack of willingness to be exposed to that information. In an article entitled, “Students as Donors to University Archives: A Study of Student Perceptions with Recommendations” Jessica Wagner who teaches at CUNY Bernard M Baruch College and Debbi Smith who teaches at Adelphi University, discuss initiatives that may cultivate a better relationship between the archives and students. They write, “research has also been conducted regarding ways to encourage faculty to prepare archival projects for their student” (4). If archival projects are composed with students in mind they may be better received and the information given in turn can be better utilized. Information that is not being viewed is not particularly useful. Currently my department is working on this exact initiative. We are pulling items from the collections we are processing to generate an exhibit to display what kinds of archived resources are available for research through the Humboldt Room. Without this kind of self-advertising, it is difficult for the public to research collections that are available in their local archives.

Another issue is that if protocols for an institution are not clearly defined, documents and data can be damaged or lost. A lack of proper precautions for preserving data can lead to data corrosion. In an article specifically addressing ten of the common mistakes that can be made by archivists, many possible pitfalls for collections are addressed. For example, the article cites not testing backups as something that can lead to data corrosion if it is not done on a regimented enough schedule (Jimmerson). The article also mentions only creating one backup as something that a particular institution might

see as sufficient, but in reality this may not be enough. This limiting of copies may be done to preserve space or preserve precious funds. In a piece also written by Terry Cook entitled “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory”, he had this to say concerning the issue of limited storage space,

Government archives are responsible to both preserve and make accessible the permanent records of government. By any reasonable comparison the legally required records of government, as well as valuable historical documents found in government archives, receive too little funding. Even when compared with other “cultural agencies” that receive federal funding, such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, federal archives receive less support. State and local government archives also function with minimal funding as many local governments across the nation have no archives funding. (1)

Smaller institutions take on archiving work with little to no government aid and therefore exhibit funding is often low. This can negatively affect archivist and curator’s ability to communicate exhibits in a way that is captivating enough for the community. Digitization has been a major tool in the effort to bridge the gap between the public and archives. Archivists not only construct physical exhibits, but also convert artifacts into digital records so that they can be accessed all over the world. This outreach helps maximize the impact of otherwise static collections, still funding is needed to pay people to do this digitizing work.

One issue we have not reviewed is the issue of stagnation in cultural exhibits. In her article, “Staging the Indian: The Politics of Representation.” Indigenous writer Nancy

Marie Mithlo recounts one of her experiences within the field in reviewing an exhibit directed by photographer Edward Curtis who had compiled Northern Native artist's work. She explains,

The exhibit was to be broadly representative (including 20 to 30 artists), travel to smaller communities, and be illustrative of contemporary artists engaged in traditional mediums or themes. I was compelled to tell the organizer that the proposed exhibit had already been done—staged 25 years earlier, with exactly the same title, theme, and focus. Scenarios like this are depressing for those invested in Native arts. Why? Because duplication of cultural arts efforts is indicative of a broader social amnesia, a type of malaise that is part indifference, part ignorance, and in a greater sense representative of an unrecognized cultural disenfranchisement; (5)

This non-recognition of the evolving history of this group realizes a vision of a culture that is not in progress. To propose a show that iterates the same message as twenty years previous demonstrates an ignorance to the development of this community and this in turn is a little concerning in the fact that they are responsible for how they present these cultural items and in turn ideas and conceptions.

Another obstacle impacting the archiving process exists in the realm of personal bias. For example, if political implications are not kept in mind while handling collections, there is a danger of missing integral information necessary to providing a complete view of the scope of the collection. Archivists must have a mindfulness of current political and social events that may be affecting the nature of what is valued as

something worth archiving and preserving for the future. Politically opinions may cause certain types of information to suffer the deterioration of motivated erasure. Knowing this, archivists must keep the future in mind and be objective to an extent. But this objectivity may not be enough to prevent human preference from entering the equation for what ends up being preserved and what does not. As with any other area of an individual's life, actions are motivated by unconscious factors.

Anticipating the ebbs and shifts in culture and interest can be a major catalyst in what is preserved by the individual curating. The effects of predicting societal interest can be either damaging or righteous depending on your perspective. However, these biased motivations whether believed to be well-intentioned or not are in fact biased and generating a one-sided portrait of that historical event. In that same piece written by Terry Cook, and Joan M. Schwartz who is head of the Art Department at Queen's University, unpack the responsibility of power an archivist yield;

In performing their work, archivists follow a script that has been naturalized by the routine repetition of past practice. They act in ways that they anticipate their various audiences would desire. If archival practice is to be influenced by the postmodern ideas of the authors of the essays in these two volumes, then archivists must see that the script, stage, and audiences have changed. (1)

Archivists often follow in the footsteps of archivists before them. This continuation of practices can take time to evolve. Often adjustments will not be made until long after they have been needed. It is the duty of the archivist to be mindful of data in terms of its

relevance to the present and the future. They must keep in mind that if they do not attempt metacognition while processing they may be recording in ways that only supports the dominant narrative.

Disrupting the Dominant Narrative Structures by Decolonializing the Museum

To offer a definition of a decolonialized museum I have provided this description from a shared document through the HSU Library that works as a functioning list of “Areas to Research Existing Data”. The definition provided is for decolonized library, but much of the same theories apply. It reads, “A decolonized library is one that continually examines and systems with the goal of breaking down power structures, practices, and ideologies that perpetuate colonial ideals and privileges Western thought and knowledge” (2). Museums are attempting to operate in this same way when it comes to deconstructing dominant narratives.

Methods like retroactivism and metacognition are being facilitated largely in cultural historicism in the effort to construct a more authentic and whole narratives of previously non-existent histories. In their article entitled “Indigenous Approaches at Play in Creating Positive Student Outcomes in a Tertiary Institution” Judy Taligalu who is a representative for University of Auckland Libraries and Stephanie Cook who specializes in minority studies, writes about cultural reevaluation studies saying, “indigenous knowledge studies can provide a counter-narrative to challenge existing dominant Western-centric deficit discourses” (14). The dominant western narrative leads to an

anemic one-sided view of history. The cultivation of the patriarchive has pushed out the collection of indigenous histories. An example of a decolonial DH project is The African Origins project, which reinserts the human into the history of colonial transatlantic slave voyages. This project is an effort to identify the names and origins of Africans that were forcibly transported across the Atlantic on slave ships (Gauthereau). Layering new records on top of old information enables some of the inflected absences of the past to be reconciled. However, this approach might not work in every situation. Archivist Elizabeth Yakel advises that “With this in mind, archivists should begin to think less in terms of a single definitive, static arrangement and description process, but rather in terms of continuous, relative, fluid arrangements and descriptions as on-going representational processes” (4). This seems like the only logical response to the multitude of potential circumstances. One structure would not be flexible enough to apply to every collecting or exhibiting situation.

The Power of the Observer and the Importance of Observer Response

Response becomes a necessity if curators and archivists are making cultural understanding the ultimate goal. The agency that museum goers and researchers have instills them with the ability to enable practitioners to create more effectively and efficiently. Harnessing feedback and responses and then building with these comments as scaffolding ensures that exhibiting and representative texts that are on the cutting edge of inclusion. In his textbook entitled *Cultural Studies*, Stuart Hall explains that “...the degree

of control which the public can exert over museums through attendance, protest or, the most powerful of all, publicity has grown...For western museums, success is now measured in terms of good management, public approval, financial rigor within an overarching structure” (Hall 178). Visitor response ultimately determines the success or failure of an exhibit or collection. If representative texts and inflection stymie the knowledge building process, that text is in fact inhibiting the learner’s process. To gather responses, emphasis should be given to visitor and researcher engagement. Encouraging participation in the generation by asking for exhibit response would undoubtedly benefit future curation and exhibition.

It seems that if museums want to be more effective in designing their exhibit with relevancy in mind, it is in their best interest to go beyond the guiding standards for practice. Whether that means going the extra step of making exhibits not only interactive, but integrated into the larger schema of knowledge by connecting it to further resources by providing avenues for future multimodal research. As the Digital Age continues to encroach into even our most private spheres of existence, it is more than likely that new standards will begin dictating physical exhibits’ placement within the larger breadth of knowledge, likely through link-ups to other resources. As prominent museum administrator George Brown Goode stated “a finished museum is a dead museum, and a dead museum is a useless museum” (1). The natural progression and integration of society into the virtual realm will impact curators and archivists in the form of altered standards. It is likely that the ability to link up in the future will grant much greater accessibility to those who cannot easily travel to archival and museum institutions. We

can already see this with the pushing for digitization in such institutions as the value of storing and sharing digital copies of artifacts and document only increases. As Helen Mears and Claire Wintle who are both research students within the Arts and Humanities explain in their article, “Brave New Worlds: Transforming Museum Ethnography Through Technology,” “While the internet may have been around at least as a concept since the 1970s, it seems that in the museum sector we have reached the whereby information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been an enticing but ultimately optional extra to becoming part of museum” (3). Largely, technological integration and the continued push for inclusiveness and balanced representation in the museum sphere has been advocated by the entering younger and more diverse (in terms of backgrounds and degrees) group of curators and archivists into the field. They see the value that technology can grant in terms of unlimited accessibility. And they also recognize how new approaches can mean better knowledge-making from the items.

Even as new perspectives come into play the issue remains that decoding and presenting cultural and historical narratives still invites the opportunity for misinflection and misrepresentation. If ethics are not taken into consideration when representing others possible, negative actions may incur and harmful connotations can be translated to the public. In turn this can possibly affect societal and cultural attitudes that may have untold ramifications such detrimental legislation and persecution. Lack of public knowledge can result in misguided ideology that has the potential to impact marginalized groups. And without the visibility granted by museums and archiving institutions it is unlikely that public knowledge can be garnered and changed. The problem then becomes how to

generate awareness of the systematic flaws that are inherent in museum display and archival practices. It seems unlikely to hope that every instance of display and representation can be made perfect, as we have investigated that that is subjective and therefore impossible. There is currently not a lot of theory in the way of education when it comes to how to communicate this need for mindfulness in historical and cultural settings to the viewership. The limited discussion I have been exposed about these issues has only been at the university level. However, this consciousness cannot remain limited to higher level academics, as they are not solely the ones interacting in these settings. Without transparency of the institution and process the imparting message is essentially unfinished.

Maintaining Relevancy for Sustainability

When it comes to informing the viewer about the nature of subjectivity within the museums and archives, the process is highly speculative. Archives and museums are limited to the text that they can provide. If no descriptions are given the person processing must research in order to interpret all possible meanings. If longer descriptions are provided this leads to the same potential problems within museum descriptive texts. Communicating these variables means translating the process to the viewers who normally would only be exposed to the absolute finished product (either the finding aid or exhibit). My effort to do exactly this through hands-on workshops is covered more expansively in the next chapter.

In making the process visible we place some responsibility onto the viewer in constructing a multilayered nuanced narrative. However, the curator and archivist must persist in developing a better finished text. This currently is being attempted by generating work that promotes dual or multilayered narrative construction. This model is designed to enable the viewer to take multiple perspectives away from the presented material. In the interdisciplinary book, *Museums, Immigrants, Social Justice*, Senior Lecturer in Heritage and Archaeology Sophia Labadi argues that museums can offer a powerful, and often overlooked, arena for both exploring and acting upon the interrelated issues of immigration and social justice. She writes about this revamping of the generative process in terms of inclusion, stating,

One strategy concerning the involvement of immigrants in the representational processes has been achieved through employing multiple interpretations of collections within museums. This is a way of moving from epistemological injustices to multiple knowledge creation. This concept of multiple knowledge further helps to move away from the concept of cultural capital. Indeed, if there is a diversity of interpretation of artifacts, based on a diversity of epistemologies, then each visitor can interpret artifacts in her own way based on her own knowledge and background. (41)

Rarely if ever should exhibits be one sided. Historical issues are rarely without complexity--and to be respectful of all sides, a multifaceted representation is necessary if honest display practices are taking place.

The dynamism of these narratives is something that is aided by contemporary growing trends. The current growth of technological integration means that any fields that are not actively adapting run the risk of becoming societally obsolete. Relevancy must be maintained by continually trying to establish better access and facilitation to the viewers and researchers. In her book entitled *Museums and Their Visitors*, historian Eileen Greenhill comments on the precarious position institutions put themselves in when they do not actively chose to evolve with their users. She writes, “The future for museums and galleries lie in the hands and the hearts of their users; those social institutions that cannot demonstrate a real and perceived need for their continued viability will not last for long in the climate of radical change that we are currently experiencing” (180). Static exhibits and galleries that do not give momentum to some kind of action or cause seem not to get the same kind of traction with the public viewership that exhibits or galleries that focus on those efforts seem to attract. This trend in social consciousness and awareness appears to only be becoming more of an expected tenant within exhibit design. This maintains that any institutions that do not initiate this kind of representation are subject to lose participants that are seeking that particular framing.

When material is uploaded online ambiguity or the life-cycle of content is still rarely communicated to the viewers of the exhibits. Unless a viewer is highly perceptive to the lack of transparency in exhibits they are viewing they are likely not to question the content that they viewing. Narratives can be outdated, but the viewer will not know that unless they feel compelled to conduct further research after their visit to the exhibit. A lesson planning website entitled *Teaching Tolerance* specifically designs curriculum with

nuanced and varied narratives in mind. They promote that “Children need to hear narratives that counter common negative stereotypes or omissions about people based on some identity characteristic (e.g. race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, economic status)”. If this kind of mentality can be implemented in the teaching of archives and museum work to the public, it undoubtedly would benefit those who were previously unrepresented or not present at all within the discourse.

Literature Review Conclusion

Without proper checks, the knowledge that is gained will inevitably be exposed to mire of human error and choice. If the person working with a collection makes too many personal calls that affect the scope of what is included, that can impact how the information is received and studied in the future. Keeping this possibility in mind begs the question whether or not stricter practices should be implemented in the archival process, or stricter monitoring. Representations that are incomplete can skew societal perceptions. Limited exposure through fragmented narratives is dangerous in that it can generate stereotypes, and perpetuate unfounded myths about race and culture. These misconceptions can spiral and result in toxic ideology that in turn can catalyze harmful and misguided and lasting animosity. The coding involved in exhibiting is by its very design meant to be impactful. Ignorance of this may be detrimental in either the retention of the information by the observer, or faulty or incomplete information being translated. This is why great care must be taken in construction and display, and why a variety of

credentialed researchers should take part in the exhibit generation. Also the process must be made transparent to viewers so that they better understand the relationship between the current canon of history and the lasting impact of the dominant narratives. This knowledge and discussion of it is currently relegated to academic discourse and those already operating within it. More emphasis outside of these spheres will help viewers be more discerning, which will establish a system of checking outside the institutions.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGIES & PRACTICES

Construction of Theory and Lesson Plan

This chapter reviews how I translated into a classroom space the archive theories discussed in the previous chapter by asking how theories of decolonizing the archive can be translated into public instruction. It serves as review of the implemented structures in the effort to translate for public audiences the dimensions of archival work that were surveyed in the previous chapter that guide such as metadata, and contextualizing with labels. Also I also enact the teaching considering the critical theory developed within the literature review section. The methodologies are developed according to theory centered around inclusion and decentering colonialism and other discursive formations within the museum. In order to perform these actions, I constructed a lesson plan for a Skillshop that was conducted on March 4, 2019 and was entitled “Metadata in Museums”. It also details the process that dictated the schema and goals for this lesson plan, as well as evaluates its execution, and finally reviews steps that may be taken in the future if a similar curricula is pursued.

Theory Impacting Methodology

As discussed previously within the literature review chapter, transformative approaches within the field are a response to the lack of evolving representation, and the gap between producers and visitors. In her article, “Deconstructing Systems of Bias in the

Museum Field Using Critical Race Theory”, Melanie Adams who is a senior director for The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage describes the movement writing that “From issues of social justice to immigration to reproductive rights, communities across the country are seeking spaces that allow and encourage them to have challenging conversations. Museums need to embrace this new role” (5). The space of museums has become a conversation that mandates negotiation. A more direct avenue for response will inevitably expedite the trajectory of more advanced and in-touch exhibiting. But for the scope of the Skillshop the goal is to incite further research and involvement in the discourse.

Reviewing the issues communicated through the recorded reviews and accounts of exhibits, I constructed Skillshop in order to create more mindful observers. Skillshops are 50 minute workshops offered through the HSU library that are co-curricular and designed to offer students hands-on learning practices and to set their own learning goals. Skillshops tend to offer curriculum or insight into topics that may not be a part of their normal everyday coursework. Skillshops can be offered by staff, faculty, and students that are compelled to offer lessons in these subjects. I chose this platform for two reasons because of its structure, and because of the way that students use Skillshops to seek out subjects that they are interested in. The structure was something I was already somewhat familiar with. I had taught similar lesson plans lasting roughly 50 minutes in two classes. So that time allotment was something I knew had already worked in practice. It allowed enough time for lecture and then more hands-on work, and previously had seemed just brief enough so that students would not become bored. The second reason that is unique

to Skillshops is that students have the ability to seek out what they want to learn. I was aiming to teach to students in relating disciplines to Museology like Art, History, Anthropology etc. If I had asked one department if I could teach a lesson, I felt like I would be limiting the audience. And this exact point was demonstrated in the attendees at the Skillshop. There was a range of students pursuing different degrees. There were students studying English, Anthropology, Art, and there was one History major. I knew that the discourse is so interdisciplinary that trying to teach it to only one group denies this integration of subjects. However, after student feedback, the HSU Art Department has asked me to come back in the spring to teach lessons specifically to their classes.

Presenting honest history that is inclusive of uncomfortable narratives is an issue that crosses into multiple disciplines. I attempted to design the lecture and activity to incite the drive to pursue the point further because the Skillshop structure is so brief. But the main goal was to impart the potential for contexts that are absent in museum spaces. Claire Wintle writes about some of the lack of context that is present in museums that students can miss if they are not directly looking for that missing context. She writes, “Despite the increasing scholarly emphasis on the role of the United States in the decolonization of European empires, important questions remain about how the U.S. framed the “imperial” collections of its own national museum” (1). Acknowledgement of flaws within the system and the possibility of inflection becomes necessary in the wake of centuries of colonialism. Visitors sometimes tend to view exhibits and cultivated collections within archives and museum with blind trust unless they have a background that has enlightened them to these issues. They trust that the proper professionals have

been consulted and are a part of the final message that they are receiving. I saw a Skillshop as the opportunity to impart that this is not always the case and that ultimately they as viewers are the last filter to negate these incomplete or skewed narratives.

In developing my theory of teaching in order to create a more reflexive relationship between consumers of museum and archival material, I observed a common thread within the discourse of issues in representation. We have already discussed some of the reoccurring complaints in the literature review section, such as tone-deaf narratives presented in exhibits, and inconsiderate representation. My instruction asked viewers to pay attention to these kinds of limiting thinking. I asked my students within the PowerPoint to ask themselves questions when they are viewing exhibits such as, why am I being shown this? What else can I learn about this culture? And who is responsible for its construction? These questions are designed to get the students as viewers to think more critically about the organized space and hopefully perform their own research following the viewing.

Communicating Ambiguity Through Practice

The lesson plan and its structure were derived in order to bridge the gap between creators and consumers within museology and its neighboring discourse archivology. While conducting the research presented within the literature review, a noticeable lack of conversation seems to be taking place when traversing how exactly to improve critical understanding within museums and archives and also how to better facilitate response

with regards to informing advanced practices and evolving pedagogy. Considering this sparsity in the discourse inspired me to design a lesson plan and devise a Skillshop that was aimed at educating the viewer about a few elements of coding that may be taking place within a museum setting. The course was developed in order to enable viewers to be critical participants within museum and archiving settings. The following objectives were in place and provided to students:

Objective 1: Learn what metadata is and its life-cycle in museums and archives.

Objective 2: Learn through action how created metadata is an interpretive process and apply insight to future research.

Objective one was tackled through the PowerPoint and accompanying lecture. Students were provided explanation on metadata as it pertains to archived items and interpretative labels as they exist in museums. The second objective was addressed through the students' hands-on work analyzing and describing items as if they were going to use the terms to create metadata or interpretative labels. These objectives were meant to give students understanding of how inflection can directly impact representation. This was done so that they would have elevated knowledge of the behind-the-scenes process of archival work after the Skillshop. And then they were meant to take this knowledge with them when conducting research online with archived documents, or in museum spaces when reviewing the enacted texts. The Skillshop was meant to be a jumping off point for the students. I hoped that the process of lecture and the activity would in turn transfer into mindfulness in their future research within museums and archives, and also outside of formal research.

Detailing methods by which information can be coded or influenced was the primary objective. This informing was done through the use of an instructive power point that provided multiple examples of exhibits that had a variety of contexts and therefore multiple possible interpretations. I chose to implement this short lecture in order to concretely go over these examples so that the students would be able to cite specific cases of why what we discussing actually mattered if someone were to ask them about the Skillshop or what they learned in the future. A small amount of lecturing was done concerning how these exhibits were susceptible to multiple interpretations, and how they were actually executed and finally received by the public. Further lecturing was done in regard to the process by which metadata is generated within museum and archives. A mini activity was done in order to demonstrate metadata's inherent subjectivity.

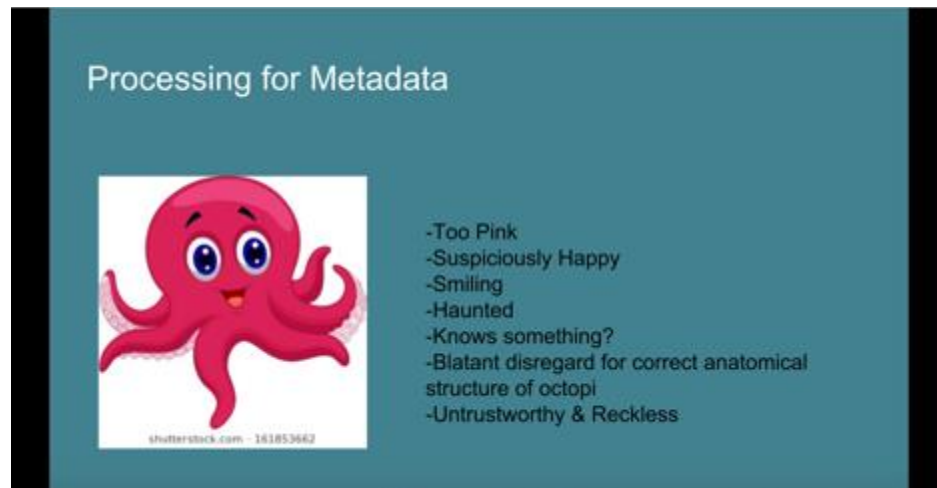


Figure 1

(Slide 16 Metadata in Archives and Museums)

To start the activity, slide 16 was first shown with none of the words displayed on the side. The question was asked “What kind of search terms could we search to try to find this exact picture?” Three students responded with key terms like “clip-art”, “pink, and “octopus”. Then the example descriptors were shown in order to display the interpretive nature of the process. Specifically, this mini-activity was designed in order to teach some of the issues that arise in “The Inherent Danger in Interpretative Labels” section of the Literature Review. Considering the impact of discursive formations, as described by Stuart Hall, imparting the outside influences upon the items that are viewed in museums becomes a necessary take-away. While the example provided is simplistic and possibly a little reductive, it is meant to open the door to understanding how multiple discourses can impact decided representation.

Hands-on Activity Set-up

Items were pulled from the Special Collections Department that were selected because of either sensitive cultural content or the possibility of multiple interpretations. Students were directed to choose their item which were an assortment of maps, photographs, and one book. One of the items was the short book described earlier within my project, *Places in Humboldt*, that includes a highly racist ad, another was a map of a local city Arcata with the description “The White City”. Students were asked to fill out a worksheet (provided in appendix). The questions were devised in order to perform a mock write up of possible terms that could serve as metadata to represent these items.

Students were asked to spend fifteen minutes with their items to evaluate them for metadata. Then they were asked if they would like to share the items and anything they noticed in their process. The design was implemented the way it was in order to have the students enact a process that archivists and curators perform in designing metadata and interpretative labels.

I developed this activity based on my previous work with students in similar instructional contexts. Now that I have executed this structure three times, twice in classrooms and now in the Skillshop I notice that the structuring gives the students who are interacting with the items a lot of confidence. They typically are very engaged in the lecture and hands-on activity. The confidence seems to happen when they are asked to process the items that I am trusting them to represent holistically. They understand that they have been given the opportunity to combat inaccurate representation, and I am always quite impressed with how in-depth they get with their analyses and ensuing presentations.

Response & Recommendations for Future Curriculum

Student response to the Skillshop and its content was overwhelming positive. Engagement was high, and students were curious and receptive to both the lecture and what was asked of them in the performative activity. What I had noticed before in my teaching within the classrooms as far as engagement and participation seemed to only increase in the Skillshop setting. I believe that this was because of the eagerness that

comes with students who are choosing to attend the Skillshop. Also I think students respond to the empowerment they feel when asked to analyze historical items that have to be brought in in a special box that is wheeled in on a cart. This is most always something that has never been asked of them before. The sensitive nature of the history they are being asked to translate offers a level of risk too, which seems to get students more excited. Feedback was tracked through my own notes during the presentation and activity, and also through anonymous surveys provided at the end of the Skillshop. My notes recorded the questions that were asked demonstrated eagerness and curiosity. I noted though that the time in this setting seemed a bit limiting. Students wanted to discuss more corresponding issues after the activity, but because there was another Skillshop that needed to be set up for right after us. Some of the discussion had to be cut short.

Further examples of inflection were requested in the feedback given for the Skillshop. Specifically, more instances of discrepancies within archives were requested in order to emphasize how misinflection can occur. This was one note provided in one of the anonymous surveys. Because of the time constraints, misinflection through interpretative labels was the focus in the PowerPoint. Links to other instances were provided, but it may be better to extend the lesson time enough to account for more varied examples. This is what I plan to do when I come back to teach for the Art Department in the spring. Also more elaboration as to how to go about being active participants within the discourse was requested. This was a question asked by a student at the very end of the Skillshop. My response was that they could attempt to engage with

the institutions that are forming these exhibits if they notice inaccurate or incomplete representations. The student who asked seemed disappointed with this limiting answer, and to be honest I was frustrated that this was the only recourse I could currently advise. This particular point is what prompted the platform I describe in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR PROJECT CONCLUSION

My graduate research has focused on representative measures enacted in archives and museums. While conducting this research, I determined a gap existing between archivists or curators and the viewership that consumes the content they present. I identify this gap as being a lack of response to viewer feedback and also a lack of a direct avenue for viewers to provide critique. In an attempt to reconcile this, I have generated a platform, entitled *Exhibiting Today and Tomorrow*, that enables this response and review relationship to be realized. I created the site through Wordpress. The site allows users to upload photos and videos of exhibits they experience firsthand. Also in doing this more potential viewers can be exposed to these published enactments.

The first intention of this platform is to enable content to be spread more effectively and to a larger audience that may not otherwise have access to these published representations. This objective of this project is to enable feedback to be generated and seen in order to encourage a system of checking and avocation for continued evolution of inclusive representation. The second intention is to allow the allow people who may not be able to participate in academia a space to comment on how culture is represented within museum spaces.

The structure is designed to be user oriented, with users uploading comments reflecting on their experience while visiting exhibits. Uploads have recommendations for what information to include. It is suggested that users include information about where it

was specifically they viewed the exhibits, and also when exactly they saw the exhibit and if they can how long the exhibit will be viewable. Users are required to provide photo or video evidence in order to substantiate their praises or critiques. This public website has administrators in order to ensure valid contributions to the conversation. Comments on posts are permitted but also monitored.

The production of this platform is meant to enable the consumers to essentially have more of an active response to what is being presented to them. And effectively, this adding of members to the conversation is meant to voice to creators possible gaps within perceptions being represented and displayed.

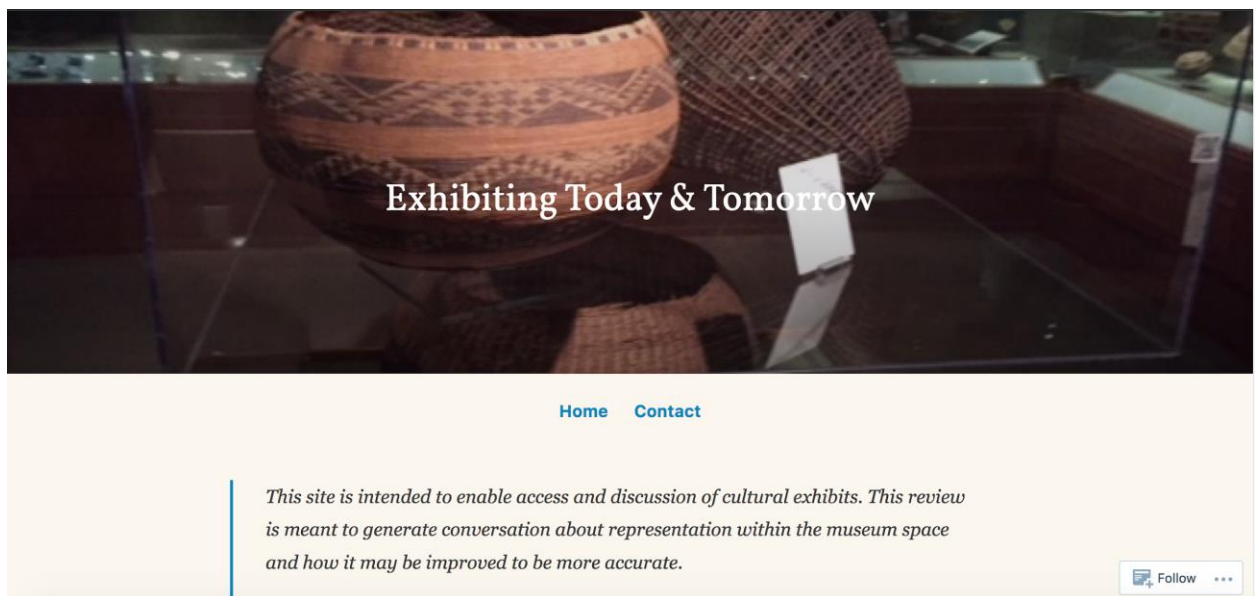


Figure 2

(Screenshot of Exhibiting Today & Tomorrow homepage)

The forum is meant to be a direct facilitation between curators and visitors. Those in the communities that are being represented but may not have access to the exhibits that are being displayed can still review and influence the conversation taking place. This potential for impact is crucial when those that are being represented cannot review the published messages about their culture on display. The site is still in progress but is currently viable for users to begin posting and commenting.

Conclusion

The discourse illustrates that archive and museum representation is experiencing a dramatic amount of development. This evolution comes as a result of increasing access because of the digital age, which has also increased what can be preserved for posterity. This surge of access, coupled with the rise of interest in cultivating histories that were previously pushed out of the dominant historical narrative, is drastically altering the nature of what is deemed valuable for remembering. As these trends will only build upon each other, practitioners of the many interdisciplinary fields that define the discourse will inevitably be required to establish more open lines of communication not only with each other, but also with the viewers to determine success.

While new practices are enabling better facilitation and representation, there is a gap between creators (archivists and curators) and those being represented because of lack of access. The construction of the Skillshop curriculum and the website are my response to this break in the feedback loop. The schema for the Skillshop is meant to be reused and implemented by future library scholar interns, and who have an interest in teaching these issues in other departments. The website provides more direct access to the institutions that dictate the representation discussed, as was requested directly following the Skillshop instruction. These efforts have been made in order to address some of the gaps discussed within the project as a whole. My hope is that similar teaching will be attempted by individuals in all corresponding disciplines. The focus on communication between viewers and curators and archivists will also help to facilitate better generation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Skillshop Lesson Plan

2:00 Greetings & Objectives.

Objective 1: Learn what metadata is and its life-cycle in museums and archives.

Objective 2: Learn through doing how created metadata is an interpretive process and apply insight to future research.

Objective 3: Feel awesome.

Hi Everyone. I'm Natalie.

So I'm going to just do some slides really quick to give you guys kind of a general idea, then we'll break into groups and do an activity with some items I've brought.

Snacks!

So we're here today to learn what metadata is, and how the process of creating it can affect research.

2:02 Power-point.

Opening Questions: Has anyone here used any of the resources through the archives here on campus? If anyone has, can I ask what you were researching?

How many here have used some of the databases available through the library?

Most don't realize, but these documents are actually archival materials that have been digitized in order to provide access to researchers.

2:30? Activity with items.

Goal 1: Understand process by doing.

So I work in the Special Collections here at the library. We house the archives here on campus. I have some items of historical significance and what I'm going to have you guys do in answer some questions about the items that might help if we were trying to create metadata to use in the databases for people to search for them by.

After.

Would anyone like to share their item or anything you guys noticed that you thought was interesting?

At the end. Bonus question.

Appendix B

Skillshop Worksheet

At your research station select a single object to investigate further. Use this worksheet to help you prepare to describe your item and how it might be researched.

What is the archived item you have chosen? What information was provided?

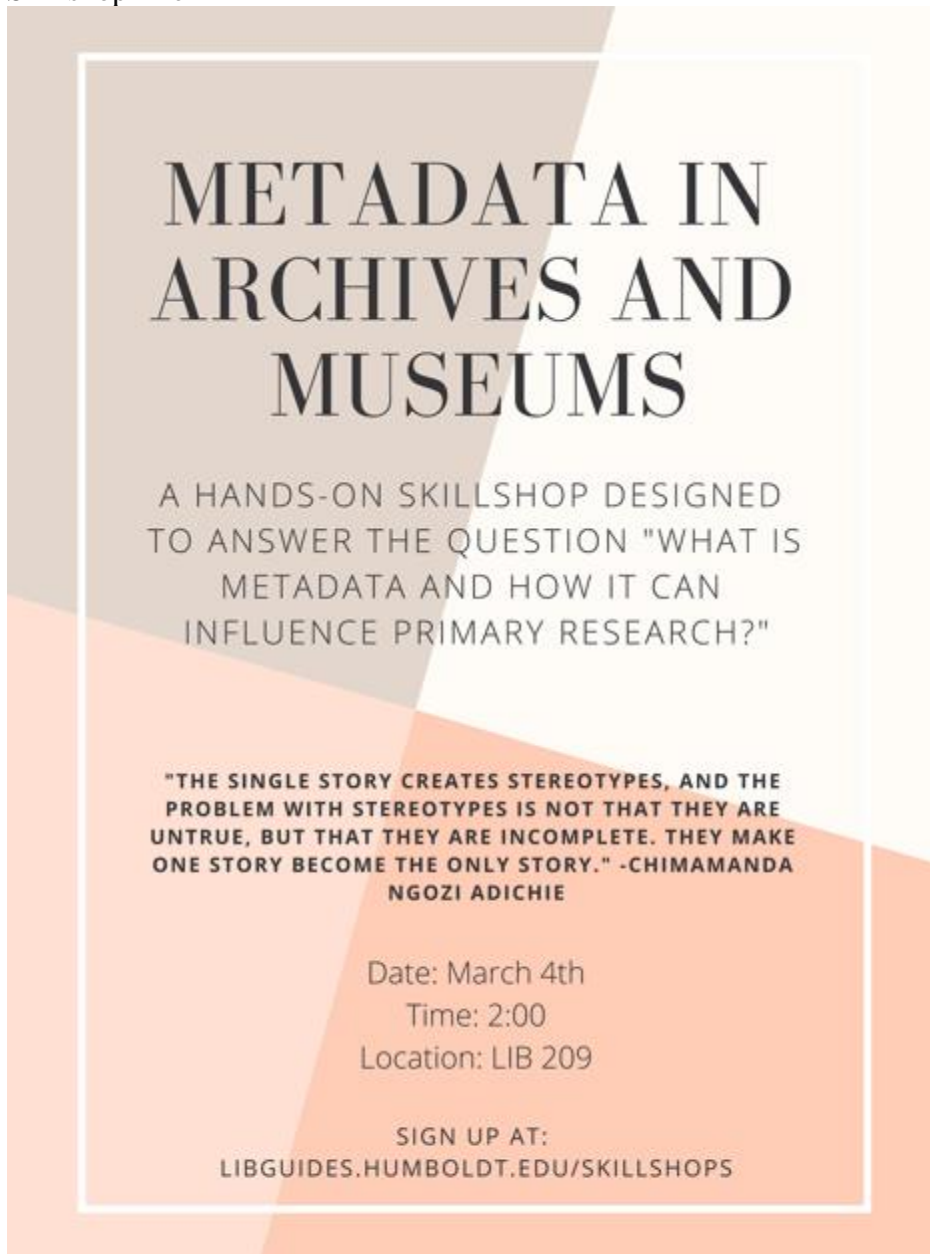
What terms could you use to describe this item?

Why do you think this item was important to archive?

What questions do you have after looking at this object? What do you wish you were able to know?

Appendix C

Skillshop Flier



**METADATA IN
ARCHIVES AND
MUSEUMS**

A HANDS-ON SKILLSHOP DESIGNED
TO ANSWER THE QUESTION "WHAT IS
METADATA AND HOW IT CAN
INFLUENCE PRIMARY RESEARCH?"

**"THE SINGLE STORY CREATES STEREOTYPES, AND THE
PROBLEM WITH STEREOTYPES IS NOT THAT THEY ARE
UNTRUE, BUT THAT THEY ARE INCOMPLETE. THEY MAKE
ONE STORY BECOME THE ONLY STORY." -CHIMAMANDA
NGOZI ADICHIE**

Date: March 4th
Time: 2:00
Location: LIB 209

SIGN UP AT:
LIBGUIDES.HUMBOLDT.EDU/SKILLSHOPS

(Picture of flier advertising Skillshop)