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Museums in a Shifting Paradigm: Defining a New "Traditional"

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Museums in a Shifting Paradigm: Defining a New "Traditional"

Increased interaction with museums, correlated with tourism, prompts changes in practice and new approaches to community engagement, leading to a redefinition of the term "traditional" within a museum context. In exploration of museum structures, both physical and conceptual, I argue for continued redefinition rather than deconstruction of museum practices through the lens of reflexivity and audience engagement. To exemplify these themes, I also highlight the museum exhibition floor, where patrons encounter the work of curators and exhibition designers. Analysis of exhibit arrangement and content can facilitate awareness about how museums attempt to engage with their audiences. To demonstrate this, I explore three case studies. First, I juxtapose San Diego Museum of Man exhibits, *BEERology* and *Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth,* to illuminate how their differences create new spaces for visitors to explore. I highlight the exhibit, *Our Senses: An Immersive Experience,* from the American Museum of Natural History, for its use of technology to incorporate viewers as part of the exhibit. Lastly, I investigate the Multiversity Galleries at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology as an innovative model of visible storage that American museums could adopt. I provide readings on how these spaces function to draw people in, while at the same time stressing how they challenge traditional practices and move towards a new definition of what museums are, what they should do, and what they represent. While museums have come a long way concerning accessibility, the case studies I explore illuminate the need for greater reflexivity among museum professionals and museum audiences.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, increased audience interaction with museums has acted as a catalyst for institutional change. Tourism, one of the main drivers of rising museum visitation, has become a motivator for three primary categories of response on the part of museum professionals to accommodate new audiences and rectify past transgressions, such as exclusion of diverse demographics, that are embedded within the complex histories of museums. These categories of response include new modes of representation and display, an increased emphasis on community engagement, and the introduction of collaboration as a common museum practice.

Museum professionals, therefore, are creating change within museums from the ground up, challenging fundamental aspects of what has defined museums for centuries, since their birth from European royal collections. In other words, the underlying foundations of museums are being reevaluated as museum professionals continue to adapt to a changing world. The history of museums as institutions; their social, economic, and political station within society; their influence on the dissemination of knowledge; the primary audiences they cater to, how they engage with them, and why; and what they represent are all being made explicit and then revised. This is an evolving process, and a difficult one, but the work being done currently will continue to influence museum practice far into the future. Progress is accomplished through the questioning of long-standing structures, both physical and conceptual, such as architecture, display, exhibition design, and programs and outreach. Through an examination of such museum structures, I explore themes of community engagement and methods of display within the framework of institutional reflexivity to argue for continued redefinition rather than deconstruction of current museum practices.

Scholarship

Many scholars note a paradigm shift occurring, where museums' inward attention to artifacts and prestige is instead turned outward to the public and service. Yani Herreman highlights the institutional move towards audiences within his article, "Museums and Tourism: Culture and Consumption." He emphasizes the changing needs of visitors and encourages flexibility among museum professionals to develop new programs to meet said needs.[1] Neil and Philip Kotler comment similarly within their study, "Can Museums be All Things to All People?" They assert that in the past, museums drew in small, homogenous, "self-selected" audiences, and museum professionals focused primarily on collections and scholarly activities. Only recently has the museum's role become fundamentally audience centered. They state that "Today, museums are not only reaching out to larger audiences and building demand among new groups, they are designing proactively the arrangements, services and offerings which will generate satisfaction and positive outcomes for their visitors."[2] In other words, these studies show that museum professionals are listening to their audiences on a growing scale, and not only hearing them, but changing their methods to adapt to new expectations.

The discourse surrounding museum practice in relation to museum audiences is full of positive correlations, and each voice adds their own nuance to the discussion. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts that the overarching museum identity as institutions of knowledge comes under fire due to their shifting roles. Similarly to Herreman and Kotler and Kotler, she again confirms that while museums used to define themselves based upon their collections, their

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[1] Yani Herreman, "Museums and Tourism: Culture and Consumption," *Museum International,* 50, no. 3 (1998): 12.
[2] Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler, "Can Museums be All Things to All People?" *Museum Management and Curatorship* 18, no. 3 (2000): 271.

identity in recent years centers instead on their evolving relationships with visitors.[3] Andrea

Witcomb furthers this idea of shifting identity and new societal roles, and mentions how

museums are trying to change the perception that they are "a site of power relations." She claims

that museum professionals attempt to encourage new relationships with diverse communities as a

way to combat this common belief of institution as authoritative body.[4] Graham Black takes the

discussion a step further, bringing the idea of audience participation full circle, stating that

contemporary museums must take the steps to "[respond] to audiences as partners in a joint

enterprise."[5] He posits that museum professionals and visitors should work together to create

programs and build community in order to achieve shared goals.

Seen together in succession, these scholars' words point towards the fact that museum

professionals are considering new practices and incorporating visitors within programmatic

initiatives, and that this change in focus is an evolving process. However, they do not explain

how contemporary museums are accomplishing the goal of engaging audiences, simply that they

are. Three case studies explored in this paper establish tourism within the evolving paradigm

shift from traditional to innovative museum operation through analysis of exhibition display and

methods of audience engagement while stressing the importance of institutional reflexivity.

Before delving into said case studies, some background and definitions are necessary to

build the backdrop for the wider issues explored in this paper and to understand the current state

of museum practice in terms of audience engagement. These include determining which subset

of museums to analyze, understanding the concept of institutional reflexivity in relation to

[3] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 138.
[4] Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003), 79.
[5] Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

museums, defining the term "traditional" within the museum context, and uncovering global trends that impact museum tourism.

Tourism, American Museums, and Reflexivity

Within the lens of tourism and museums, a "tourist" is defined as a person who leaves their normal environment temporarily for pleasure and leisure, cultural experience, work, family visit, health, etc.[6] This category includes domestic and international tourists, those affiliated with museums, and the wider public, all of whom must patronize the museum in some way. The term "audience" on the other hand refers to those who come to the museum as well as those who view promotional materials (e.g. flyers, catalogues, or online materials such as the official website) outside the museum atmosphere. Thus, this category encompasses both target and physical audiences, including those affiliated with museums and the wider public. Lastly, a "visitor" is defined as anyone who walks through the museum doors. Visitors are the physical audience of museums, and may be affiliated with the museum, be a frequent visitor, or a first-time visitor. This category encompasses museum professionals as well as tourists.

Regarding tourism, visitation, and engagement, this paper focuses mainly on American museums due to the importance of revenue to their operation. Most museums in the United States run on a nonprofit model, and therefore professionals face the challenge of gaining enough revenue to support their programs and goals. Sotheby's Institute of Art outlines the three main sources of museum revenue, including fundraising and contributions, program services and admission, and earned income (such as gift shop sales and merchandising).[7] All three of these

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[6] "What is Tourist?" IGI Global, 2019. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/a-business-model-for-accessible-tourism/30292

[7] Sotheby's Institute of Art. "The Business Model of the Nonprofit Museum." January 10, 2018. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://www.sothebysinstitute.com/news-and-events/news/the-business-model-of-the-nonprofit-museum/

categories requires museum professionals to foster communities of support, which is why engagement with audiences, including tourists and visitors, is crucial at many levels.

That said, the Alliance of American Museums reports that museums contribute $50 billion annually to the U.S. economy, that 76% of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural or heritage activities such as museum visits, and that museum visitation amounts to about 850 million annual visits for American museums.[8] These statistics show that museums are popular, and people do flock to them, so why is audience engagement so important if they already bring in these numbers? Well, the composition of those numbers matters. It matters because only those that make an income that supports their travel expenses have the means to buy such experiences. Are these visitors representative of the diverse demographic that professionals are trying to engage? Questions such as this are the reason museum professionals must be reflexive in their practice.

But what does reflexivity mean in a museum context? Understanding this term begins with the realization that institutions are made up of people. Often people speak about institutions, whether museums or otherwise, as if they are autonomous entities, unattached to any human governing body. Of course, this is not the case. That language is evasive and minimizes the individual's role. Museum professionals have a responsibility, as the infrastructure of museum institutions and as individuals, to look critically and honestly at their own accepted and taught practices. They must examine how those practices are imbedded in social processes, ideologies, and academia. In other words, they must be reflexive. They must ask questions, such as how do their practices influence the ways they engage with the wider public? What adjustments can they make to rectify issues that become clear from such examinations? Using these questions as a

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[8] Alliance of American Museums. "Museum Facts & Data." N.D. https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/

starting point, the goal of reflexivity is not to erase past mistakes, but to move forward acknowledging them with goals that will impact change. Reflexivity requires thought and action; it requires a combination of the two, separating it from mere reflection.

However, the work does not end at the professional level. Those who recreationally engage with museum programs and services must also choose to be informed, reflect on history, and actively participate in work to rectify problematic aspects for the future.

For example, James Rondeau, president and director at the Art Institute of Chicago, postponed an archaeological exhibit in early April 2019 due to insensitivity concerns. The exhibit contained Native American pottery specimens found in gravesites and lacked representation of indigenous voices. Members of the community deemed this inappropriate and spoke out against the exhibit. Museum professionals responded accordingly, albeit at the last minute, postponing the opening to discuss next steps. [9] While postponing the exhibit likely cost the museum time and resources, steps such as this show how museum communities, professional and recreational, can be reflexive in their own spheres and work together to further shared goals.

As noted above, discussion of reflexivity is deeply embedded within academia, ideology, and other pervasive and persuasive systems. These systems influence museum audiences, tourists, and visitors in ways that are not always outwardly tangible. In other words, some museum structures have an implicit impact on visitor perception that influences how they interact with the institution. While implicit impacts may be harder to track than explicit, definitive impacts, they still require thoughtful attention. It could be argued that hidden influences are the most significant to realize because of their unconscious effects, which lead to

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[9] Steven Johnson, "Art Institute Postpones Major Native American Pottery Exhibit," Chicago Tribune, April 1, 2019, accessed May 3, 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-art-institute-postpones-native-american-pottery-exhibition-0402-story.html

consequences such as ingrained bias, acceptance of stereotypical representations of people and place, and negative associations between institution and audience. The reflexive process is designed to uncover these implicit impacts, which become most apparent within the "traditional" museum.

The "Traditional" Museum

To begin to understand the term "traditional" within the museum context, an outside-in approach is beneficial, beginning with the physical structure of architecture. In the broad sense of the term, architecture can be defined as a method of communication between architect, stakeholders, and the public. Following this definition in the case of museums, these buildings display cultural and political ideologies that provide commentary on the collections within their walls. Historically, such projected ideologies were skewed to favor a western perspective (i.e. western European) and upheld a colonialist past, portraying the museum as an impressive core of global knowledge and power. Museum buildings were often modeled after Greco-Roman structures such as the Parthenon, and this likeness can be argued to have become the traditional image of museums people expect to see and experience.

The Great Court in the British Museum. Digital image. Wordpress. April 4, 2014. https://personallyglo.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/british-museum-pt-1/

Even before standing at the front doors, people carry mental images and expectations for a museum visit.[10] Accordingly, building design impacts how

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[10] Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum* (London: Routledge, 2005), 79.

people approach museums. The monumental outward appearance of institutions such as the British Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York implicitly dictates to the public how they are expected (and who is accepted) to interact with the building and its interior displays.

Traditional architecture's impact on visitor experience is noted within discourse. Graham Black claims that in a traditional context, "Access was almost grudgingly provided to the public in return for a sense of reverence and gratitude, reflected in an authoritarian protection of the site – 'temple' architecture, cordoned routes, glass cases, security guards, 'do not touch', etc."[11] In other words, traditional museums place importance on being regarded as profound, sacred, and imposing. They are considered the peak of intellectualism, and the knowledge they hold must be safeguarded and secured. Their artifacts and wider collections must be protected against visitors' wandering hands and wondering minds. Paul Jones and Suzanne Macleod, in their article titled "Museum Architecture Matters," sum up the concept of architecture in a museum context well. They write, "To understand museum architecture is, therefore, to understand the ways in which it is both produced in the context of institutions and as it is relative to wider social forces." [12] Museum professionals, as part of their reflexive process, must grapple with the residual sentiments commemorated within the structures themselves.

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[11] Graham Black, 1.
[12] Paul Jones and Suzanne Macleod, "Museum Architecture Matters." *Museum & Society* 14, no. 1 (2016): 208.

Architecture and displays broadcast history. In his 2017 TedTalk "Can Art Amend History?", African American artist Titus Kaphar tells his experience walking up the steps to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City with his sons and coming face to face with Teddy Roosevelt. The statue situated on the front steps of the institution shows the president astride a horse, with two figures walking beside him, a Native American man and an African American man. His son asked, "Dad, how come he gets to ride, and they have to walk?"

Theodore Roosevelt Statue in front of the American Museum of Natural History. Digital image. Flickr. October 2, 2011. https://www.flickr.com/photos/slgc/6205700590/

Kaphar goes on to explain that what his son was really saying was, "Dad, that doesn't look fair. And why is this thing that's so unfair sitting outside of such an amazing institution?" While this example touches on the much greater issue of race relations within the United States, it is through cases such as this that visitor experience is implicitly shaped, which indicates the impact of displays, both exterior and interior, in a museum context.

The statue, built in 1939 before the civil rights movement, carries with it residual historical sentiments. Kaphar's son, at nine years old, did not need to do anything other than walk by this statue, and pause for a moment to look, to ask such profound questions. Viewing is a powerful act, and what is displayed is always viewed. This fact must be remembered and considered within the reflexive process.

Global Trends in Museum Tourism

Architecture and display are hugely important to the museum experience, and this is reflected in the demand for museums worldwide. Today, almost every major city has a museum

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Digital image. Wikimedia Commons. October 10, 2015.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guggenheim_Museum_Bilbao

(or a few), and smaller cities are following suit to meet the desires of the public. For many museums around the world, the goal is to be known. The rise of the so called "Bilbao Effect," following Frank Gehry's 1997 construction of his Guggenheim that revitalized Bilbao, Spain, caused cities to seek out famous

architects (or "starchitects") to create their own locational selling point.[13] Museum buildings became a way for a city to differentiate themselves, and this message of singularity was meant to be advertised, with the goal of bringing people to their doors. For American museums, as nonprofits, this is especially important in terms of revenue.

The necessity of appealing to wider audiences also led to the implementation of new marketing techniques, branding, and innovative display to further stimulate engagement with exhibitions and events. This in turn developed an environment perfect for breeding competition between institutions.

The same pattern is seen throughout the world at many different levels, coinciding with other trends in tourism and globalization. For example, in popular tourist destinations such as Tahiti, whose image and brand are hugely important in sparking and maintaining tourist interest,

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[13] Rowan Moore, "The Bilbao Effect," *The Guardian*, October 1, 2017.
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/oct/01/bilbao-effect-frank-gehry-guggenheim-global-craze

competition becomes their livelihood. Common representations of Tahiti include beautiful white sand beaches, turquoise water, and sensual inhabitants. Whether these symbols are accurate or not, they make the destination stand apart in tourists' minds from other locations, eliciting desires to see these elements for themselves, and pay for the experience.[14] Barbara Kirshemblatt-Gimblett describes this phenomenon in concise terms: "To compete for tourists, a location must become a destination. To compete with each other, destinations must be distinguishable, which is why the tourism industry requires the production of difference."[15] This is just as applicable to museums as it is for the cities they call home. As seen with the Bilbao Effect, museums needed to be different to attract increasing numbers of visitors.

The pattern of competition is also seen with increased globalization, and the bigger picture of urban change that Sharon Zukin discusses. She describes how globalization led city leaders worldwide to adopt new strategies to entice visitors to their locale, competing with each other to become the biggest and the best, but in the process sacrificed the very things that set them apart from the rest. This in turn led to increasingly homogenized global cities. Zukin asserts that this "rebranding" of cities to fit a modern mold tends to push out locals and local traditions, contributing to increasing levels of uniformity.[16]

Rebranding has also taken place within museums, though with some contrasting results. As mentioned, influences such as the Bilbao Effect caused many cities to build new museums, with the goal of attracting tourists and new audiences. While this means that almost every popular city has a museum, they are, unlike structures such as a typical skyscraper that lead large

[14] Miriam Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2011).
[15] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 152.
[16] Sharon Zukin, "Competitive Globalization and Urban Change," in *Rethinking Global Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17-34.

cities to appear the same, mostly unique. Of course, while the traditional museum outlined above falls under what could be termed "cookie-cutter," many new museums have a character of their own, built with features specific to their locale.

Therefore, rebranding museums did succeed in creating difference, and the competition that arose between institutions was not wholly negative, but constructive. In fact, these pressures also caused museums to rethink things like their mission, goals, and policies in order to attract more diverse audiences, leading to more conscientiousness on the part of museum professionals to break away from tradition.

Thus, this trend towards visitor appeal continues throughout the entire institution, not just concerning outward appearance, which is where exhibits become integral as a tool for engagement. In a traditional sense, culturally significant materials were displayed with little context to their origins, and displays were riddled with inaccuracies. Displays were also exclusive, usually intended for white, elite, western audiences, akin to the projected ideologies of exterior architectural features. Unfortunately, these trends, while diminishing, are still found within museums today, which is another reason reflexivity should be stressed.

For example, in 2018, the American Museum of Natural History updated an existing 1939 display due to inaccuracies and stereotypical representations of Native people. The Old New York Diorama, part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, portrays a meeting between the Lenape people and Dutch colonials. The display now has labels telling visitors what exactly is misinterpreted and gives context for the negotiation that is supposed to be depicted. [17]

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[17] American Museum of Natural History. "Behind the Updates to Old New York Diorama," YouTube video, 3:25, November 10, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndj59hGuSSY

Mohin, Andrea. This diorama at the American Museum of Natural History was amended in a way that allows museumgoers to see the historical inaccuracies it perpetuates. Digital Image. *The New York Times.* March 20, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/arts/design/natural-history-museum-diorama.html

Amendments to the diorama include the names of the figures depicted, such as Dutch colonial governor Pieter Stuyvesant and a Dutch soldier as well as Oratamin from the Hackensack group, a Munsee branch of the Lenape. Contributors to the redesign also discuss who and what is missing from the display in the new labels, such as Lenape women that would have likely been in leadership positions and involved in negotiations, and errors in their traditional dress. They mention as well that Lenape canoes are missing from the harbor, and only Dutch ships are included. [18]

These amendments allow for visitors to understand the true history of colonialism as it is exhibited in museums, understand the diversity of Indigenous groups such as the Lenape and their lifeways, and see reflexivity at work. The display was not simply covered up or destroyed, but the staff decided that the history is important to discuss, and that transparency is necessary, especially when the display will influence visitor perceptions.

Museum displays, because they are created by people, are subject to human error. They do not depict absolute truths; however, they can also be used to help rectify previous errors in a

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[18] Ana Fota, "What's Wrong with this Diorama? You Can Read All About It." *New York Times*, March 20, 2019. Accessed April 5, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/arts/design/natural-history-museum-diorama.html

way that is educational, transparent, and acknowledges history that may be hard to swallow, but nevertheless should be understood, as seen in this example.

However, unlike the example of the Old New York Diorama, architecture does not explain itself. As noted, architecture and display have implicit impacts, whereas attending exhibitions and participating in programs are deliberate choices. In other words, for analytical purposes, understanding how people engage with the museum on a deeper, intentional level is necessary. The museum exhibition floor is the most applicable to study in this regard, as it is where patrons are going to encounter the work of curators and exhibition designers. Through analysis of exhibit arrangement and content, one can come to understand more in depth how museums attempt to engage with their audiences and how they change their operational models in response to visitors.

Case Study 1: San Diego Museum of Man

As discussed, audience engagement is one of the most important considerations for American museums, and this is confirmed with the San Diego Museum of Man. CEO Micah Parzen illuminated the fact that audiences brought to the museum through the tourist industry are majorly important to their operation. In an interview with the author, he stated a compelling statistic: "We are highly dependent on admissions revenues, which constitute approximately 65% of our annual operating budget. When the tourist industry grows, we benefit. When it shrinks, we suffer." Thus, displays at the Museum of Man must garner interest from the public and offer something that a variety of people can and want to participate in, no matter their background, in order to support the museum for the future.

Parzen described how he and his staff attempt to elicit visitor interest with their displays. He went on to say that "Our approach is to provide immersive environments that not only engage

people cognitively, but also emotionally and experientially." Two exhibits, *BEERology* and

Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, form the basis of this case study, chosen for their

contrasting methods of display and engagement. Both exhibits were located within the same

space just after the main lobby, and their proximity to one another, whether the curator's

decision or otherwise, provides insight into how museum exhibits have moved away from

traditional methods of display towards the innovative.

Keck, Stacy. *BEERology*. 2018. Exhibit photograph. San Diego Museum of Man, San Diego, CA.

Keck, Stacy. *Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth*. 2018. Exhibit photograph. San Diego Museum of Man, San Diego, CA.

     As visitors walk into the front doors of the museum and through the lobby, just to their

right a sign that reads "BEERology" is positioned alongside a series of barrels and bottles and

brews sitting dutifully in line. Large wooden panels imprinted with variations of the word "beer"

or "alcohol" in different languages from around the world back the exhibit, framing the various

containers and tools associated with the beverage placed atop large wooden barrels between

brick columns. An informational banner hangs beside the wooden collage, and details the

historical, global connections of the alcoholic beverage. Throughout the exhibit, visitors learn

about how the oldest beer was made over 10,000 years ago and how today's brewers are still in

search of the perfect brew. On a busy day, as other museum goers pause to take in the display, a

few will likely also investigate the schedule for the next tasting event, adding their contact

information for the mailing list.[19]

Just adjacent to this display to the left, and in direct view of the entrance, sits the exhibit

Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth. Towering Mayan stelae reach toward the ceiling, casts of

the original monuments in Quirigua, a site in Guatemala, on display almost continually from

1915 when the casts were made until now. Behind them, archaeological materials including

bowls, figurines, and masks sit in glass cases complete with descriptive placards and are

meticulously organized based upon their uses. A 42-foot-wide mural depicting an ancient

Mesoamerican rainforest environment set in the time after the Maya Classic Period (250-900CE)

provides the backdrop. The ceiba tree is located at the center of the mural and references the

Maya cosmos.[20]

These two exhibits, placed in such close proximity as they are, created an intriguing in-

between space. The exhibits were notable because of their juxtaposition to each other as well as

the novelty their contrast provoked. The only connection they shared was space, yet the decisive

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[19] "BEERology," San Diego Museum of Man, 2018. Accessed Nov. 1, 2018.
https://www.museumofman.org/exhibits/beerology/
[20] "Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth." San Diego Museum of Man, 2018. Accessed Nov. 1, 2018.
https://www.museumofman.org/exhibits/maya-heart-sky-heart-earth/

factor was that their difference generated originality, a sort of bridge between traditional viewing of objects and interaction with them, which in turn created a new space for visitors to explore.

BEERology appealed to a contemporary leisure activity, in this case drinking as a communal pastime, and incorporated an educational twist, detailing the global history of the beverage. The exhibit invited visitors to offer their own knowledge and perspective while hopefully learning something at the same time, and then invited them to return to further engage the subject with a community of people. There was an added element of interactivity in *BEERology* that was absent in *Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth*, which more closely adhered to traditional methods of exhibition.

Even so, the museum includes a disclaimer on their webpage about common misconceptions still held regarding the Mayan people, such as the idea that they do not exist presently. Museum professionals made sure to include that "more than seven million descendants continue to carry on many of the traditions and cultural traits of their ancestors through weaving, woodcarving, and ceramics." The most prominent feature of the exhibit, the stelae casts, are deliberately displayed as well. The museum states that displaying the casts "offers us a way to present the Maya as a cultural continuum," displaying the historical as well as present context of Mayan culture.[21] In this manner, museum professionals create an exhibit that breaks through the barrier of traditional display methods and make their thought process known publicly.

This transparency allows viewers to understand why they see what they see when they visit. In this way, visitors are brought into the design process, furthering their understanding of museum operations and thus strengthening relationships between museum professionals and museum-goers through the displays themselves.

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[21] "Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth." San Diego Museum of Man, 2018. Accessed Nov. 1, 2018. https://www.museumofman.org/exhibits/maya-heart-sky-heart-earth/

Parzen greatly emphasizes this idea of visitor-museum relationships, and encourages reflexivity on the part of professionals to encourage community:

> Our relationship to our visitors is everything to us. It is why we exist. We have moved from being an authoritative provider of answers to an asker of questions and convener of conversations. To act as a convener, we need to meet our visitors where they are. To meet visitors where they are, we need to understand them. To understand them, we need to listen to them. Indeed, we need to really listen to them—not so that we can tell them why we are correct, but rather as if we may actually be wrong.[22]

Both *BEERology* and *Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth,* while entirely different in content and setup, engaged visitors through experience. Their proximity allowed a push and pull to happen between traditional and non-traditional, visitor and professional, and brought to light how these apparent opposites may harmonize.

Case Study 2: American Museum of Natural History

While the American Museum of Natural History, as discussed in Kaphar's TedTalk, is an example of how displays such as the Teddy Roosevelt statue can adversely impact visitor experience, museum staff have made strides to include exhibits that oppose this trend, such as the Old New York Diorama. In November 2017, the American Museum of Natural History opened a new exhibit titled *Our Senses: An Immersive Experience*, another example of positive engagement. This exhibit is emblematic of how museum professionals are implementing technology and interactive elements more often within their displays, and how some museums almost completely abandon traditional display methods, allowing visitors to curate their own experiences.
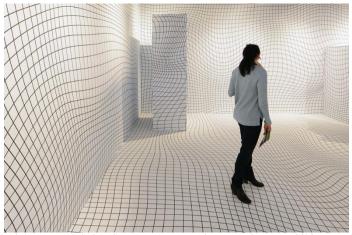
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[22] Micah Parzen, email message to author, December 4, 2018.

The exhibit consists of eleven rooms, all dedicated to different sensory abilities of the brain including seeing, detecting, hearing, selecting, balancing, correcting, touch, and smell. Some rooms also incorporate experiences beyond human senses, such as technological advancements that extend human abilities. The exhibit webpage begins with an attention-grabbing sentence: "Every day, we perceive the world through our senses…. But as it turns out, for humans 'reality' isn't ever exactly what it seems."[23] Right from the start, the exhibit is introduced in a way that is intended to fuel people's curiosity. It likely makes them ask questions and wonder what about their reality is altered by their senses.

Inside, visitors can explore how the human brain processes information, and learn about how other organisms' brains and senses differ from humans. For example, in one room, museum goers can touch the eyes, noses, mouths, and other sensory organs of various animal sculptures to see neural pathways projected on a screen. In another, visitors can look through a device to see the thermal patterns that a snake would see when hunting for prey. Visitors can also understand how technology affects everyday life, and what it enables humans to do that would be impossible otherwise.

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[23] The American Museum of Natural History. N.d. "Our Senses: An Immersive Experience." Accessed Nov. 28, 2018. https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/our-senses

All the while, visitors are immersed within the exhibit. It may even be appropriate to say they become a part of the display. For example, "In one gallery, visitors discover what happens when our senses disagree: though their feet will feel a flat floor beneath them, their eyes will see walls and a floor that appear to ripple."[24] In this way, visitors are testing their own senses to corroborate the information the exhibit presents to them and are simultaneously able to watch others as they experiment with their own reality.

Mickens, R. N.d. Our Senses: An Immersive Experience. Exhibit photograph. The American Museum of Natural History, New York.

One of the rooms also includes a live presentation, where museum goers are encouraged to participate in discussion and ask questions, adding another element of learning and interactivity to the experience, this time with another person, an expert on the topic, rather than simply engaging with the objects and materials.

The level of interactivity presented within the *Our Senses* exhibit also likely garners interest from a broader demographic than static displays. For example, the tactile nature of most objects allows children to explore their creativity almost without bounds. Touching the displays is part of the rules, something not seen readily within traditional museums. The exhibit allows for audiences to engage with subject matter directly related to their humanity, and do so within a community of people, regardless of who they are.

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[24] The American Museum of Natural History. N.d, "Our Senses," https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/our-senses

Case Study 3: University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology

Shifting focus away from American museums, the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in

Vancouver, B.C. embodies a shift in interests from traditional academic superiority to human

connection, encouraging collaboration and discussion between groups about what makes them

human. For this reason, the museum is used as an example for American museums to follow,

especially regarding display and reflexivity.

As stated, tourist interaction with museums caused a wave of new methods of display and

engagement, many museums began to rethink long-held practices and policies, leading to

changes in museum operation and administration. Questions of heritage, preservation,

repatriation, transparency, consultation, collaboration and related concepts were analyzed in a

new light. Understanding and defining these ideas became more important than ever. What did

these concepts mean, presently and for the future of museums, museum professionals, museum

goers, and the peoples whose cultures were held in the balance?

In relation to cultural heritage, museums faced backlash for their assumed authority over

cultural material. As Miriam Clavir writes, "Most people would agree that it is important to

preserve heritage, but what exactly is being preserved, and how does one determine the best way

to do it?"[25] While it is important to ask what is being preserved, and how, this question needs to

be added upon. It needs to do something more. Museum professionals and others involved in

various museum processes must ask what is being preserved, how, and *for whom?* At MOA,

practices have developed over the years to include this essential addition. With the idea of

audience in mind, MOA set a new standard for museum practice in two main ways: the

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[25] Clavir, Miriam. *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2002), xvii.

development of an innovative method of collections storage and redefinition of the term

"collaboration."

Though it may not be obvious to all visitors, the organization of materials in the museum

is noteworthy: "Instead of exhibiting works according to their provenance, usage or type, a

practice common to most museums, the Museum of Anthropology arranges works according to

indigenous criteria." This means that objects are organized based upon ceremonial appearances,

history of ownership, or highlighted for their craftmanship and status as art. In this way, the

museum aims to provide access to many alternative views of "reality."[26]

New organizational and display methods continue within the rooms dubbed the

Multiversity Galleries, which feature over 10,000 cultural materials from around the world for

anyone, at any time, to see, study, and experience. The galleries also contain a system called the MOACAT, which is a digital catalogue containing more information about the collections accessible anywhere within the

Johnson, Cejay. The Multiversity Galleries at the Museum of Anthropology. February 2019. Photograph. Vancouver, BC

galleries. This, along with the galleries' design, allow for the collections to be viewable,

physically or electronically, by all who walk in the doors rather than stored in rooms with

restricted access.[27] This breaks down the traditional method of collections storage that many

museums still ascribe to, which entails the ordering and filing away of materials behind lock and

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[26] Carol E. Mayer and Anthony Shelton, ed. *The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009).
[27] Arthur Erickson, N.D. "Museum of Anthropology." Accessed March 1, 2019. https://www.arthurerickson.com/cultural-buildings/museum-of-anthropology/12/caption

key. Under this traditional system, a sense of ownership is given to the museum. Museum professional decide what objects to display, when, and how to display them. The museum is given authority over the materials of a culture and therefore over the representation of that culture. This then leads to an imbalance of power between the professionals studying said culture and the Indigenous peoples whose culture is represented.

In an effort to further break down this flawed system, collaboration with First Nation and Indigenous peoples became a primary focus at MOA. However, first museum staff needed to define what collaboration meant, and what it looked like. In a more traditional model, "a museum typically asks outsiders to partner with the museum according to its own pre-arranged agenda. The customary museum model for managing the exhibition process does not easily lend itself to full collaboration with non-museum partners whose agendas or timetables might not be the same."[28] Thus, collaboration needed to be redefined to accomplish something altogether new before change could really begin.

The process was a long one. In 1948, Harry Hawthorn, MOA's first director, worked with the British Columbian Indian Arts and Welfare Society and organized a conference where First Nations people were invited to speak about their cultures and communities. [29] A small first step, this event set the precedent for the collaborative engagement that would come to mark the museum's identity.

In 1974, a new director, Michael Ames, entered the picture. He became well known worldwide for his critical analysis and rejection of traditional museum practices, favoring an

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[28] Michael M. Ames, "How to Decorate a House." *Museum Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (1999): 41.
[29] Carol E. Mayer and Anthony Shelton, ed. *The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia*, 10.

approach that emphasized "the right of all people to tell their own stories and curate their own exhibitions."[30] During his tenure as director, MOA would experience huge changes.

In his article, "How to Decorate a House," Ames centers on two foundational MOA exhibitions held in 1996, titled *From Under the Delta: Wet Site Archaeology from the Fraser Valley* and *Written in the Earth,* in which a fully collaborative partnership was made with First Nations groups for the first time. Roles shifted dramatically, and museum professionals— including curators, archaeological experts, and Ames himself— no longer held the final say in how the exhibitions were designed, what promotional materials featured, and how the process moved along. The authority was no longer theirs, but in the hands of the First Nations, who wanted to see their culture presented the way they understood it.

Exhibition decisions depended on the approval and support of the First Nation Band Council, and museum staff was asked to record every step of the process. If they failed to meet the agreed upon arrangements, the Band Council could revoke their approval, effectively shutting down the exhibits. Throughout the process, "questions were raised about institutional authority, museological procedures, the setting of agendas for collaboration, the rights to information and its use, and who constitutes a museum audience."[31] Some museum staff expressed concern over the changing process. They wondered whether the new method infringed on "research opportunities, academic freedom, and curatorial prerogatives."[32] However, their concerns did not come to fruition.

While the exhibitions opened a year or two later than originally planned, they had extended their reach past initial objectives, and strengthened relationships. Positive feedback

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[30] Carol E. Mayer and Anthony Shelton, ed., 12.
[31] Michael M. Ames, "How to Decorate a House," 42.
[32] Michael M. Ames, 42.

came in from news outlets, visitors, and most significantly, First Nations. [33] The exhibitions successfully bridged gaps between the "exhibitors" and "exhibited." In fact, these terms were broken down to mean something altogether new. No longer was the process about exhibiting cultural material and knowledge but rather celebrating difference, humanity, and ways of knowing the world. On an unprecedented scale, traditional museum practices were put on trial, so to speak, and rewritten into an improved template of operation, one that included diverse perspectives and mutual success.

Today, staff at MOA have continued their reflexive process. As a result, the museum has implemented free admission for University of British Columbia students, staff, faculty, MOA members, and Indigenous peoples.[34] These local communities, as well as the domestic and foreign visitors who walk through the doors, play a huge role in disseminating not only gained knowledge of diverse cultures, but of the subtle ways the museum's design, layout, and organization of materials alters people's consumption of and engagement with displays. Their voices and their experiences will hopefully further turn the tide, encouraging more museums to follow MOA's lead.

Conclusion

The above case studies exemplify the paradigm shift occurring within museums in regard to audience engagement, exhibition design, and reflexivity within museum practice spurred by the tourism industry. The studies also build upon one another. The San Diego Museum of Man shows how exhibits can move from traditional to innovative through juxtaposition and transparency, encouraging audiences to engage. The American Museum of Natural History, as an

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[33] Michael M. Ames, 48.
[34] University of British Columbia, N.D., "MOA: FAQ," accessed May 5, 2019. https://moa.ubc.ca/faq/

example of an innovative exhibit, showcases how exhibits can bring interactivity to a new level, opening the door to a wider demographic. The Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver is a great example for American museums to emulate because from display to engagement to practice, museum staff integrate reflexivity, encourage community, and incorporate audience voices within their programs, including underrepresented communities such as First Nations.

Looking to the future, however, American museums in general have not made the same strides in terms of reflexivity that can be seen at MOA. The impact of tourism, the 850 million visitors that American museums bring in yearly, do not support that U.S. museums are engaging diverse communities. The American Alliance of Museums reported in 2018 that nonwhite people make up 23% of U.S. population, but only 9% of museum visitors, and that 46%—almost half— of museum boards are all white. This does not match with national trends in demographic data and does not reflect the diversity of the communities that museums serve.[35] While this does not mean there is no effort put forth or successes, more needs to be done, professionals must be more reflexive, if change is to be made. Museum audiences must also make a commitment to be informed about what they are viewing as part of their collaborative, reflexive engagement with museums. In other words, more museums must make changes as seen within the San Diego Museum of Man and the American Museum of Natural History, and follow the lead of the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver in order to bring about a new traditional in terms of museum practice and display.

Where does this leave us? How can museum professionals in the U.S. move away from incremental change, as seen with the Art Institute of Chicago archaeology exhibit postponed at

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[35] "Facing Change: Insights from the American Alliance of Museums' Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group." American Alliance of Museums, 2018: 10. https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AAM-DEAI-Working-Group-Full-Report-2018.pdf

the last minute, and continue to create sustainable change, as seen with the Old New York Diorama? Further, how can sustainable change and reflexivity begin to unearth even greater issues beginning from the ground up as professionals and staff at MOA have?

In 2018, the American Alliance of Museums held a conference where museum professionals discussed the idea of DEAI, which stands for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion, and how such initiatives can be implemented in museums. One of the main takeaways within their report is the idea to broaden pathways to employment. This means implementing programs such as paid internships to attract new and previously excluded demographics. If unpaid internships are a prerequisite to secure a museum job, recruiters are only going to receive applications from those who can afford to work for free, which narrows the candidate pool severely. Efforts to diversify staff to incorporate underrepresented voices is another way to broaden employment pathways, as is conducting targeted recruiting efforts to underrepresented student organizations, which can raise awareness for those who may not have considered a museum career at all.[36]

While these initiatives provide great insight into how American museums in particular can do better to meet the diversity of their audiences and engage with new communities, the fact of the matter is that this has not yet occurred in full. There are still many steps to take to redefine practices to meet audience and community needs. Practices must not be deconstructed, and the process of redefinition should not happen behind the scenes. Transparency and collaboration throughout the process with audiences and listening to underrepresented voices is paramount. Further, creating platforms for these things to occur needs to continue. As seen with the Old New York Diorama, amending past mistakes and issues is much more valuable than covering them up.

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[36] "Facing Change," 9.

Acknowledging the roots of museum practice, moving forward with goals such as DEAI with those roots in mind, and creating sustainable change is the way forward.

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