

Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning through Cultural Display

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Museum exhibitions are commonly seen as critical sites for the constitution of identity and difference. They provide occasions and resources for representing and reflecting on notions of quality, worth, and other social values and meanings. But how are values and identities shaped and produced through exhibitions? How are exhibitions put together in ways that might communicate particular values and shape various identities? This article begins to consider how “rhetorics of value” are produced through contemporary museum exhibitions by exploring the multilayered, multimedia communication involved as exhibitions convey evaluations and interpretations through visual and verbal means and through “designed space.” [exhibitions, museum studies, communication, cultural values, design, multimedia, lighting, exhibit texts]

Let's not just talk about art. Because, finally, the museum's purpose is not just to develop an appreciation of art, but to develop an appreciation of values. Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*

[W]hat people want when they go to museums: to be told what they should value, so that they can then decide for themselves whether or not to agree. Michael Kimmelman, “Museums in a Quandary”

Museum policy and mission statements have featured assertions about the capacity of museums and exhibitions to form values and shape identities since at least the mid-19th century. Among myriad examples, one could cite an 1853 British Parliamentary report that claimed museums “would contribute to the moral and intellectual refinement of ‘all classes of the community’ and the formation of ‘common principles of taste’” or the Metropolitan Museum of Art's mission to “stimulate appreciation for and advance knowledge of works of art that collectively represent the broadest spectrum of human achievement at the highest level of quality” (McClellan 2003a:8; Metropolitan Museum of Art 2000). This putative role of museums in forming values and identities has also been central in the literature on museums and exhibitions that burgeoned since the mid-1980s, often called the new museology or critical museology.¹

Taking a broader view than earlier work focused on particular kinds of museums or exhibition methodologies, critical museology looked at the nature and

functions of museums as social institutions and the varied representations created through exhibitions (Karp 1991). Questions about values and identities figure in this literature in four main ways, related to (a) the role of museums in forming citizens, class relations, transformative education, and governmentality; (b) thematic content of exhibits and how “Others” are constructed; (c) who is represented and involved in particular types of museum; and (d) relations between museums and communities.² Scholars examined museum exhibitions and other cultural displays as critical sites for the constitution of identity and difference, civic engagement, and subject formation, as well as places for education, amusement, and social interaction. They show how exhibitions provide occasions and resources for representing and reflecting upon objects, ideas, institutions, social relations, histories, and memories.

Producing and visiting exhibitions, then, can be ways people formulate—and sometimes debate—notions of quality, worth, and other social values and meanings. These processes entail judgments that help create hierarchies of merit and importance and define such broad fields as aesthetics, history, and morality, as well as particular political economies. These are weighty matters, yet their contexts can be simultaneously serious, playful, festive, and amusing, and some ways through which they are accomplished might draw little notice.

Surprisingly, there have been few systematic attempts to examine precisely *how* values and identities

are shaped and produced through exhibitions and the forms of visitor interaction this would imply.³ How do museums put things together in ways that might communicate particular values and shape various identities, creating “rhetorics of value”? Answering these questions requires analyzing the diverse communicative media of exhibitions and a pivotal nexus where they come together and through which these processes occur—exhibition design. Sometimes considered a largely technical field, the notion of “design” covers important features with communicative, rhetorical, and political implications. Emphasizing its technical or intuitive aspects can mystify these implications and effects and draw attention away from exhibition design conventions that have become naturalized. “Color, form and meaning are charged aesthetic-political idioms” (Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, p.c.). Exhibition design has yet to be unpacked in all its communicative possibilities and conundrums.

In the mid-1980s the expression “poetics and politics” became a catchphrase in scholarly work on cultural representation and power in museum display, literature, ethnography, and other domains of practice. Today the phrase is almost taken for granted. Yet it seems the *politics* of exhibition representations have received greater attention, leaving a good bit of work still to be done on poetics to fulfill the promise of that double vision. In developing the notion of rhetorics of value in relation to exhibition design and communication, this article sketches topics, analytical methods and approaches directed toward that rebalancing, ways to bring out interconnections between poetics and politics. The “rhetorics of value” concept and communicative framework outlined here may prove productive elsewhere too.

Described further below, “rhetorics of value” draws attention to the ways evaluation and valorization combine with and are effected through persuasive form and practice. Notions of value have been discussed from many theoretical perspectives. “From Smith to Ricardo to Marx to Mauss, and by way of Simmel and Saussure, the category has been used in varied ways to illuminate ethical, economic, aesthetic, logical, linguistic, and political dimensions of human life” (Eiss and Pedersen 2002:283). Treatments focused on the economic sense often mention that notions of value in the other sense of standards, principles, esteem, and cultural worth become

entwined with economic systems. Tensions between the two have been a perduring concern, identified through various contrasts: meaning and the market, cultural and economic values, sign values and material values, qualitative and quantitative values (Eiss and Pedersen 2002:283; Irvine 1989:262; Myers 2001:6). Efforts to rethink notions of value seek to bridge the dichotomy with a broad, varied sense of evaluative process that attends to the dynamics and “contingencies of value,” highlighting their interconnections, transformations among different values, and transvaluations across different contexts (Herrnstein Smith 1988:28–31; Myers 1994:35).

Although sometimes portrayed as intrinsic or transcendent, especially in art and literature, values and processes of value creation are socially generated and inherently comparative and relational (and hence may shift as relations are redefined).⁴ Values establish patterns of equivalence and hierarchy in various contexts, and also define ideologies of identity. Concepts such as “regimes of value” or “value frameworks” recognize this interrelated, systemic sense, with processes producing different regimes or frameworks embedded in and backed by various forms of practice and institutional authority (Appadurai 1986; Appiah 2000:428; Bourdieu 1987; Herrnstein Smith 1988; Kopytoff 1986; Myers 1994). For instance, authenticity is an esteemed and debated value in such realms as art and history, set in relation to counterfeit, fake, reconstructed, restored, simulated, or reproduced (cf. Crew and Sims 1991; Jamieson 1999). Yet authenticity is not an inherent property but a value produced through processes of collection and chains of evaluative verbal authentication that might be indexed in museum exhibitions (Irvine 1989:257–258; Phillips and Steiner 1999:19).

Museums are sometimes seen as places where economic values alter as objects are diverted, enclaved (Appadurai 1986:22, 28), and taken out of circulation for collections. Yet they are far from an economics-free zone. When major museums acquire a particular object or kind of object, it affects market values for similar objects, just as showing a privately owned item in an exhibit figures in its pedigree, prestige, and economic value. But if museum objects are removed from market circulation, when they are used in exhibitions—recontextualized and combined with other objects, texts, narratives, lighting, and other

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FIGURES 1–2. Installation photographs of *Dancing Shadows, Epic Tales: Wayang Kulit of Indonesia* (2009) at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe. Figure 1 shows overall exhibition design, as seen from the entry, and how the exhibition evokes wayang performance through re-creation of performance space with gamelan orchestra, stage, and video projections. Figure 2 shows the performance video projection more clearly and how performance space also displays puppets. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art. Photographs by Blair Clark.

design features—they become part of the circulation of other social values. Within the art-culture system of value production (Clifford 1988b), exhibitions, like objects, “convey and condense value, and in doing so, are used to construct social identities and communicate cultural differences between individuals and groups” (Myers 2001:3).

The concept of rhetorics of value addresses these processes of circulation, recontextualization, exhibition production, and interpretation, seeking to illuminate how social meanings and judgments are constituted and understood through persuasive form in exhibitions, combining poetics and politics. Overall, museum-going has been connected to class-based values and hierarchies, particularly middle-class identities and elite notions of taste (Bourdieu et al. 1990), helping to shape associated habitus and social aesthetics (MacDougall 1999). Broad values at stake in particular exhibitions might have to do with defining art, authenticity, historicity, epistemologies, and various criteria of quality. For example, Karp (2001) discusses notions about art and artists in different cultures conveyed through exhibit installations for *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern* (1984) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

More specific examples might include distinctions and judgments related to particular forms, as when *Dancing Shadows, Epic Tales: Wayang Kulit of Indonesia* (Museum of International Folk Art 2009) explains aesthetic criteria related to these shadow puppet performances, their history, regional variations, and roles in Indonesian culture and politics, placing them in the

pantheon of world art. In addition to well-crafted explanatory texts, its multisensory, multimedia, installation invokes wayang performance, providing visitors varied ways to relate to the tradition (see Figures 1 and 2). Similarly, the object-rich signature exhibition of the Atlanta History Center, *Turning Point: The American Civil War*, underlines particular historical and museum epistemologies as “over 1,400 original artifacts tell the fascinating story of the monumental struggle that United the States of America” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E60qFdmBsZQ>). The exhibition offers resources for the ongoing constitution of Southern identities and values related to family, nation, and politics, supported by an installation combining personal narratives, extensive information, objects, and dioramas rendered evocative through dramatic lighting (see Figures 3 and 4).

In trying to specify the cultural values involved in these exhibitions, one of my first recourses was to describe exhibition content and related domains. Yet rhetorics of value also incorporate more ineffable aspects of exhibition design and experience whose features and effects are more difficult to articulate and bring to awareness. While it may be hard to specify their particular contributions in terms of descriptive content, they help shape an exhibition’s tone, mood, and general affect and might influence visitors’ orientations and receptivity to values and identities associated with and conveyed by an exhibition. These seemingly inchoate kinds of effects are akin to the “culturally patterned sensory experience” that David MacDougall calls “social aesthetics” (1999:5), the cultural perceptions and shifts



FIGURES 3–4. Installation photographs of *Turning Point: The American Civil War* at the Atlanta History Center (first opened 1996). Figure 3 shows the exhibition's entry and orientation gallery. Figure 4 shows one of the exhibition's dramatically lit dioramas. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

related to “the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities” that Raymond Williams addressed as “structures of feeling” (2001:64, 1977) and the limits of awareness that Michael Silverstein identified in showing why some linguistic forms are not available to speakers for conscious commentary (1981).

The question of how museums and exhibitions shape values and identities is vexingly elusive in part because it is so multifaceted. It entails considering how museums have developed as institutions, their embeddings within cultural and political economic dynamics and histories, and their changing relations to other cultural institutions, as well as tracing how notions of identity, the subject, values, and modes of attention and display have also shifted, in interaction with these same trajectories (Bennett 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2003, 2004; Crary 1990, 1999; Foucault 1977, 1985; Herrnstein Smith 1988). In addition to the histories of museums and exhibitions, then, it is important to explore the assumptions, conventions, and habits of communication and attention that have structured them as fields of cultural production. Such conventions of visual culture and communication are among the “social conditions of possibility” (Bourdieu 1987:203) that make plausible claims about museums and exhibitions asserting values and defining identities.

These historical trajectories are important for understanding how exhibitions help constitute values and identities, but I cannot examine both histories and current exhibition dynamics in this essay. Here I simply begin to consider how “rhetorics of value” are produced through contemporary museum exhibitions, exploring the multilayered communication involved as exhibitions

convey evaluations and interpretations through visual and verbal means and through “designed space.”⁵ These communicative resources and meanings are central to the ways values are constituted and the politics of identity are played out through exhibitions.⁶

Rhetorical Designs and Environments

Tony Bennett identifies the late 1800s and early 1900s as a time of considerable debate about exhibitionary forms and goals. He examines how particular kinds of “visual legibility” in design layout and the use of labels became codified as ideals for museum exhibitions (Bennett 1998a, 1998b, 2004). Similarly, Carol Duncan describes the display of art in the form of historical progressions according to periods and schools as a late 18th-century development, replacing a mode of display more decoratively and formally motivated. She characterizes this as a shift from the connoisseur’s or gentlemanly hang to the art-historical hang (Bennett 1995:35–36; Duncan 1995:24–25).⁷ Lisa Roberts describes how, in the 20th century, increasingly precise definitions of format and design for labels accompanied the rise of visitor studies and the growth and professionalization of museum educators, particularly in the United States (1997; cf. Hooper-Greenhill 2006; Serrell 1996). In addition, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett outlines contemporary shifts toward more theatrical exhibition design as one aspect of what might be another period of debate and transformation in conventions and expectations for museum exhibitions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2000; cf. McLean 1999:100).

Each of these shifts is related to the ways visitors are thought to apprehend exhibitions at the time. They are also related to a growing emphasis on exhibitions as a site for pedagogy and seemingly greater precision in defining kinds of learning that take place in exhibitions.⁸ Many, perhaps most, of these changes in exhibitionary conventions developed from concerns about subject matter: how to present and communicate thematic content most effectively, what kinds of information are most important, and how knowledge is most usefully or accurately organized. Yet along with thematic, referential content, exhibitions also communicate attitudes and values, whether through features of label text and layout or such details as wall colors, style of display cases, or type of lighting. Contemporary changes noted by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett are related to pedagogical models too, though also profoundly caught up in the dynamic tension between education and entertainment, prominent during the last 25 years in museums.

Bennett, Duncan, and Roberts highlight particular aspects of exhibition form and design (labels and the ordered arrangement of objects), each associated with specific conventions and expectations and addressing particular sensory realms.⁹ Yet the range of media and communicative resources combined in exhibitions produce a total experience, an overall gestalt and synesthesia that is more than the sum of its parts. Certain kinds of “total exhibition experience” receive explicit attention in recent theatrical designs, exhibition environments, or theme parks, but museum exhibitions have always created environments and encouraged particular modes of experience—sometimes engrossing, sometimes tedious.¹⁰ The totalizing, environment-creating nature of exhibitions is important for considering how they help inspire and advocate values as well as convey information.

This environment-creating nature underlines the fact that values are embedded in and conveyed through myriad details and aspects of daily practice in exhibitions, producing what I call “rhetorics of value.” Rhetorics of value are not just figures of speech or dramatic, eye-catching arrangements of objects, but powerful persuasions that draw on and synthesize an array of sensory and communicative resources and media. They invoke a range of experience for visitors and establish cross-contextual links and resonances. Their persuasive force and effect arise from interactions between aesthetic, intellectual, affective, and cognitive modes of experience, knowing, and learning. How these combine depends on the exhibition topic and genre, as well as the type of institution, as do the particular values at issue. For instance, children’s museums often seek to engage young visitors through playful and kinetically

appealing displays that might lay groundwork for conceptual understanding through physical engagements. Similarly, while design vocabularies in exhibitions on art, history, natural history, and science certainly overlap, their patterns of use, combinations, and frequency in different kinds of exhibitions are not the same. Since people typically go to museum exhibitions with others, all these processes are further mediated through the social interactions and interpretations involved in exhibition visits.¹¹

Values at stake can be as wide ranging as exhibitions themselves. Rhetorics of value deal first of all with thematic content. An exhibition marks a topic as worth attention. Further, themes and issues addressed can reinforce or redefine the contours and public understandings of art, history, or other fields. Consider, for example, the transformations involved in treating Australian Aboriginal painting as “art” (Morphy 2000; Myers 2002), the constant “discovery” of African art (Steiner 1996), or the role of the 1991 *Africa Explores* exhibition (Vogel 1991b) in putting contemporary African art on scholarly agendas and in the public eye. But it is important to recognize that rhetorics of value thread throughout an exhibition (and even throughout a museum)—conveyed in the ways objects are treated and presented, the photographs included and how are they used, through subtle textual details such as adjectival choices, tense, topics addressed, and so forth.

Exhibitions present visitors with settings where they can encounter, try out, or debate particular values and ideas, so rhetorics of value also have to do with visitors’ own identities, judgments, and perceptions of worth. Identity formation involves personalizing and internalizing a range of values and attitudes that become orientations to life situations. Taken together, the texts, spatial arrangements, lighting and other design elements through which rhetorics of value are produced comprise particular perspectives and modes of address. Visitors are thus positioned in particular ways as they encounter the fields of value embedded in and presented by exhibitions, though they may not accept the stances suggested. Indeed, tensions or contradictions between stances visitors bring to exhibitions and those exhibitions bring to visitors can be a source for visitors’ ironic commentary, criticism, or disaffection (Kratz 2002).

Rhetorics of value are powerful both because they are felt in many ways (and may seem “natural”) and because they encapsulate the authority of their institutional embedding. They are not simply about words, images, or themed experience, then, but are both part of and about political economies of representation too. While I use “rhetorics of value” here to refer to the ways

that evaluative meanings are produced through the multiple media and communicative resources combined in an exhibition, the processes at work within specific exhibition settings reach much further. They interlock with exhibition representations elsewhere, reviews, institutional self-representations, and related venues and display forms.

In a paper I wrote with Ivan Karp, we addressed these broader linkages by distinguishing between ethnographic and cultural authority in exhibitions, developing Clifford's (1988b) discussion of travel writing and ethnography (Karp and Kratz 2000:202–210). Ethnographic authority “involve[d] the means through which cultural others are represented” in exhibitions (Karp and Kratz 2000:207). In this article, I delve further into such techniques and processes, but extend beyond our earlier focus on representation of cultural diversity in exhibitions. Appropriately, then, I recast and broaden this concept to “exhibitionary authority.” Critical attention must also be paid to social and institutional contexts and claims to knowledge that both shape and inhabit representational processes in exhibitions, features we summarized as cultural or institutional authority (Karp and Kratz 2000:208). Writing about producing literary canons—a related evaluative process—Hernstein Smith recognizes their diffuse power: “the privileging power of evaluation authority may be very great, even when it is manifested inarticulately” (1988:47). Exhibitions and rhetorics of value produced through them are simultaneously underwritten by institutional authority even as they may provide resources through which to contest and debate that authority.

The *Art/Artifact* exhibition that toured from 1988 to 1990 is often cited to illustrate contrasts and effects of different installation styles (Vogel 1988). It showed similar objects in the mode of an art gallery installation, austere white-cube art museum vitrine display, a 1905 curiosity room, a “classic” (i.e., early-mid-20th century) natural history case and a reconstructed “field setting” diorama (see Figures 5–9). As curator Susan Vogel said, “Recognizing that the physical setting of an object is part of what makes it identifiable as art, the installation showed art objects and non-art objects in such a way as to raise the question in the viewer's mind. . . . The exhibition stressed that these different styles reflected differences in attitude and interpretation, and that the viewer was manipulated by all of them” (1991a:195–198). About the same time, artist Fred Wilson created *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art*, an installation that made similar points by displaying art in three settings and identifying works not with artists' names, but with “generic history-oriented museum-style labels” (Hoban 2003).¹²

These exhibitions and a handful of others have taken both the museum itself and modes of display as explicit topics of inquiry and commentary.¹³ They often do so through creatively jarring juxtapositions. They might place side-by-side display styles usually found in separate contexts or re-create typical display environments with certain features altered in ways that violate expectations, raise questions, and introduce critical distance. For instance, Wilson's installations include unusual subjects or perspectives in labels or draw attention to objects and topics typically omitted from exhibitions, for example by combining slave shackles and repoussé silver vessels in a display case labeled “Metalwork 1793–1880” or putting a mannequin in a business suit within a display of African dress. Patterns of attention might also be redirected with lighting or interrupted with object placements that violate expected lines of sight (perhaps hanging artworks at different heights, or clustering them in ways that seem “cluttered”).

These examples underline both that in exhibitions “people relate to objects as symbolic of values and mnemonic of stories that express those values,” as museum educator Lois Silverman observes (2000:235), and that “embedded in their presentation is material evidence of the presenter's intentions and values,” as Kathleen McLean, then director of public programs at the Exploratorium, notes (1999:83). There is a dialogue of values coming from several directions, from both visitors and producers. These examples draw attention to some ways that these narratives and embeddings take shape. Yet their impact and success rely on re-creating a full setting or exhibition environment. Display genres are recognizable through their particular combinations of communicative resources and forms.¹⁴ The examples begin to outline particular rhetorics of value by upsetting the configurations' “natural” sense, but they do not explore the range of options in the exhibitionary repertoire, how particular contrasts and variations might inflect evaluative meanings and narratives or help produce effects.

Although I concentrate on museum exhibitions in this article, rhetorics of value are by no means confined to those contexts. Other cultural displays—from festivals and ritual to advertising—provide related sites and occasions through which rhetorics of value take shape. Many images, themes, and representational forms cross domains and sites, creating interdiscursive resonances through which social values become known, shared, and taken for granted. One way values are endowed with a “natural” sense is through the dispersal, repetition, and seeming ubiquity of images and presentational techniques across contexts and topics (Kratz 2002:104–111;



FIGURES 5–9. Installation photographs of the exhibition *Art/Artifact* (1988) at the Center for African Art, New York, showing Kenyan *vigango* statues displayed in art gallery context (Figure 5), in art museum context (in the case in the rear left corner) (Figure 6), in a reconstructed 1905 curiosity room (leaning against the wall to the left of the window) (Figure 7), in the style of a natural history museum exhibit case (Figure 8), and in a field context re-created in diorama form (Figure 9). Courtesy of the Museum for African Art. Photographs by Jerry L. Thompson.

Kratz and Gordon 2002:251). It would belie that unquestioned, “natural” sense if “its historically fabricated and densely sedimented makeup is made evident” (Crary 1990:7). Yet at the same time, values and rhetorics embedded in different domains and sites might contradict each other, leaving room and laying grounds for contestation as well.

Museum exhibitions are just one site through which evaluative understandings and meanings are constituted, but they are settings where questions of design and communication receive explicit attention. Inquiry into exhibitionary communication, then, illuminates the range of resources, media, multisensory codes, conventions, and vocabularies through which social values are

produced in other contexts as well. Indeed, design handbooks typically treat exhibition as a display mode found in commercial displays, trade fairs, world fairs, heritage centers, science centers, and theme parks, as well as museums and galleries (Klein 1986; Velarde 1988), and theater designers have also worked on museum exhibitions in recent decades. Some museums are embracing the notion of “designing experience” to emphasize a more comprehensive, visitor-oriented approach that goes beyond “exhibition design.” As design practice creates intersections and interactions across contexts and types of cultural display, design techniques, vocabularies, and categories may also travel, blend, and transform in the process. They might also stretch beyond public settings into the texture of daily domestic life. “[E]xhibition design functions as a language of form manifesting ... aesthetic, social and political concerns” (Staniszewski 2001:295).

In the rest of this article, I begin to consider how rhetorics of value are produced in exhibitions by developing a fuller sense of the repertoires available in various media, sketching the formal vocabularies and range of possibilities within individual media. Design elements stand in implicit contrast to other choices in a repertoire, choices that could alter sense, tone, and effect. Rhetorics of value do not arise from a single design feature, but from combinations and configurations across media, set in interaction with visitors. Yet exploring the formal vocabularies of different media is essential to understanding how those combinations and rhetorics of value are produced. The next section outlines my analytical approach to exhibitionary communication as a framework for examining rhetorics of value. I then consider the range of choices within two media of display and the implicit values and histories they might invoke. Throughout, examples illustrate how media combine to help produce particular rhetorics of value.¹⁵

Process, Mediation, and Value in Exhibition Communication¹⁶

Exhibitions are simultaneously events, objects, and interactive processes, and are always caught up in—and products of—diverse social and political relations and negotiations. The many choices made as an exhibition develops entail appraisals and judgments, formulated in various settings and interactions, that shape the values and frameworks an exhibition presents. Hence exhibitions always present particular perspectives, or sometimes explicitly include several perspectives on materials shown. As communicative practice and social action, exhibitions mediate among diverse agents, from

those who commission and create exhibitions to exhibition visitors and even readers of exhibition reviews. They can also serve as mediating forms and occasions that spark interaction among exhibition visitors. Through such mediation, exhibitions are involved in creating, expressing, disseminating, debating, and contesting cultural values, identities, and cultural knowledge.¹⁷ Yet while cultural values are always part of what exhibitions communicate, they are not always or even primarily conveyed through words. In fact, we expect “that story telling [will] be a visual experience in museums” (Karp 2001:69), though many senses and media are involved.

The work exhibitions do in constituting value, meaning, and worth (more precisely, the work people do through exhibitions) is metacultural as well as metacommunicative (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002; Kratz 2010:16–18; Urban 2001). Exhibitions are social processes through which people make cultural meaning; their work is metacultural in that exhibitions also explain and comment on culture, history, and society: “[E]xhibitions ... are not only media of representation, but also forms of cultural (or ideological) production. What was collected, selected, and exhibited constructs a framework for the representation of people, their culture, their history” (Myers 2001:38). Rhetorics of value, then, are simultaneously means for making culture and commenting about culture through exhibition design and representation.

Museum exhibitions also do metacommunicative work since they always go beyond their thematic foci to communicate about what exhibitions themselves are, what museums are, and how they should be understood and experienced. These aspects communicate about exhibition communication itself and its interpretative conventions, and are often part of the very framing that defines exhibition structure and sets exhibitions apart from other experiences. Thresholds, for example, signal beginning and end with titles, changes of wall color, signature objects or logos, and entrance narratives where visitors cluster for orientation to an exhibition’s topic, learn the kind of exhibition being presented, and so forth. Variations in label and font sizes also indicate different topics or hierarchies of importance. Particular display forms or genres of representation within exhibitions might also evoke their own histories and interpretive conventions. To understand how people both convey and shape values and identities through exhibitions, then, one must first have a sense of the structure, experience, and workings of the communication involved. Rhetorics of value are one product of those complex structures and processes.

Exhibitions are multilayered, multimedia communication (cf. Kratz 2010:15). They combine visual and

verbal media into spatial arrangements, potentially including material objects, texts, pictures, music, and multimedia forms such as video. Each medium holds possibilities and constraints, and visitors experience exhibitions as a temporal flow as they move through them.¹⁸ Juxtaposition, spatial design, and movement through exhibitions often contribute to intended or implied narratives that exhibitions convey (cf. Bal 1996:87; Berger 1982). Space and time are thus also significant means of communication in exhibitions. With multiple components and media, exhibitions incorporate many kinds and layers of meaning. Particular objects, photographs, labels, and texts might be considered individually, in pairs, in groupings within thematic sections, or as formal arrangements in a case. As noted earlier, exhibition genres are also characterized by specific combinations of conventions and expected uses of language and other media—though genres blur (Karp and Kratz 2000).

Exhibitions incorporate a kind of modularity. Parts might be interesting and effective individually, but they can also be the basis for larger synergetic and synesthetic wholes that are more than the sum of their parts. Juxtapositions, contrasts, unspoken assumptions, and spatiotemporal flows—aspects of exhibitions that defy modular analysis—are also part of exhibition communication and the ways visitors engage them. Visitors experience exhibitions socially, often within a group. They might learn about particular topics, but exhibitions are not only about learning information. Exhibitions communicate more than referential content and are occasions for other modes of experience as well.

The different forms and media combined in exhibitions provide avenues for understanding and experiencing exhibitions in different ways. As people visit an exhibition, they might take off from any number of details, devise their own questions and answers, focus on particular portions, skip labels, and see an exhibition through interests and experiences not anticipated by exhibition developers. Exhibition responses and interpretations are never entirely predictable because exhibitions contain many communicative possibilities and because visitors bring their own backgrounds and interests to them. Rhetorics of value offer interpretative guidance with persuasive frameworks that advocate certain ways of seeing and thinking about the world. While they might create contexts that encourage and lead toward particular understandings, however, ultimately exhibitions cannot control visitors' engagements and experience. As Kimmelman noted, "told what they should value ... they can then decide for themselves whether or not to agree (2001:1). Designer Jos Thorne observes, "design influences how people insert themselves in the space and play out the viewer/viewed duet"

(2008:149). Exhibitions are settings where contradictions, disjunctions, and synergetic interactions among media are all possible, shaping how exhibitions take form and are understood. This means exhibitions are always interpretively in-process, though those most engaged in these processes change over an exhibition's life—from those who plan and create it, to those who install, visit, and talk about it. At every stage, there are potential debates.

Exhibition experience is inherently double-sided, based on the mediating role of exhibitions: it relies both on what visitors bring to exhibitions as well as what exhibitions bring to visitors, which is already the outcome of complex processes and decisions that shaped the exhibition. Rhetorics of value are part of what exhibitions bring to visitors, but visitors relate to exhibitions in different ways, through diverse interests and orientations. What they encounter in an exhibition provides resources through which they may experience and formulate their own values and identities, whether as individuals or members of social groups. People produce notions of value and identity in relation to objects and subjects on display, in relation to experience they bring to the exhibition, and in relation to politics of representation at play in other contexts. Recognizing similarities and contrasts with other people and situations is an essential, ongoing aspect of the formation of values and identities. Situating oneself in relation to others entails imagining other lives and places even as it brings into focus aspects of one's own lives and identities.

Several sources of diversity and complexity converge and interact in exhibitions, then: multiple forms, functions, and layers of exhibition communication; various processes and people involved in producing, presenting, and visiting exhibitions; and the diverse orientations, expectations, and backgrounds of those involved. Rhetorics of value are produced and become effective on the basis of this joint groundwork.¹⁹ The communicative structure of exhibitions incorporates a range of possible emphases, meanings, and experiences; it necessarily includes some openness and unpredictability. Yet rhetorics of value, as part of various politics of representation, entail emphasizing particular meanings and values. Exhibitions thus become both occasions and means through which people produce social relations and positioned understandings of values and identities.

A Selection of Rhetorical Repertoires

To examine how rhetorics of value are produced in relation to the framework and processes of exhibition

communication just outlined, I now consider two media regularly included in exhibitions: lighting and texts. Neither comprehensive reviews nor complete histories, I sketch some choices and repertoires of social value and meaning associated with these components of exhibition communication and how they begin to contribute to specific rhetorics of value. Why these two media?

Few would deny that objects and texts are central to the messages and values an exhibition presents: “[T]he artefact, once placed in a museum, itself becomes, inherently and irretrievably, a rhetorical object” (Bennett 1995:146). Indeed, text-object combinations and sequences are the primary basis for most deconstructive critiques and commentaries on exhibitions.²⁰ Lighting, on the other hand, might seem little more than a practical requirement. But lighting and texts both focus attention, and lighting designers recognize other potential effects and connections: “We use light as we use words, to elucidate ideas and emotions. Light becomes a tool, an instrument of expression” (Pillbrow 1997:114).

Designing with Light

Exhibition lighting and texts both have practical aspects and rhetorical aspects, but they seem opposites in the extent to which what they convey is discursively based and articulable. While difficult to put into words, however, lighting does impart meaning, just as certainly as texts convey mood. Lighting is considered here precisely to explore some less easily articulated associations that can, sometimes implicitly, be entailed in rhetorics of value and exhibition practice. Given the usual analytical and critical reliance on objects and texts, it is useful to examine an alternative claim that “in exhibition design, light can be the most significant ingredient of all” (Klein 1986:98).²¹

Boutique lighting seems to bear this out. Often cited to show how modes of display can shape viewers’ perceptions, boutique lighting can highlight an object’s importance and suggest that it is highly valued for its beauty, age, uniqueness, and/or costliness. Greenblatt, for instance, identifies ways to provoke aesthetic wonder with heightened theatrical effects of “the so-called boutique lighting that has become popular in recent years—a pool of light that has the surreal effect of seeming to emerge from within the object rather than to focus upon it from without” (1991:49).²² The *contrast* between light and dark makes it stand out—a reminder that exhibition lighting is differentiated, with various types of lighting forming sequences across space. This might include floodlighting, spotlighting, backlighting, fiber optic lighting, and even neonlighting, to create

ambient lighting, feature/key lighting, and lighting within display cases.

As the name suggests, museums borrowed boutique lighting from commercial display. “Department stores were among the first modern institutions to disseminate the new technologies of color, glass, and light” in display, using spotlighting by the early 1920s (Leach 1984:323–324; see also 1994).²³ Spotlighting was particularly effective in highlighting small objects, like jewelry and gems, and could transform interior spaces. In museum exhibitions, similarly, boutique lighting picks out individual objects within larger exhibition spaces. Although boutique lighting is an easily recognized and common example, however, it might well constitute a marked case. Other lighting techniques are often less conspicuous, incorporated more seamlessly into exhibition design, and harder to correlate one-to-one with specific meanings, instead having greater variety in formal/functional relations.²⁴ Yet if boutique lighting is associated with particular effects, what might other modes of lighting implicitly convey? “No matter how flat, no matter how diffuse, lighting is never neutral. It has always been determined by someone—it is always intentional” (Roberts 1994:75).²⁵

Lighting is closely allied with space and color in a synergetic architecture of display, defining paths and pacing, delineating spaces, directing attention, and evoking ambience and atmosphere. Together these design elements constitute an exhibition’s basic staging, making them difficult to disentangle in understanding how rhetorics of value are produced. In one 1952 exhibition, for instance, “spotlights and contrasting patterns of dim and bright lighting functioned almost as tangible architectural elements” (Staniszewski 2001:184). Yet as Walter Benjamin noted about architecture, the reception of exhibition lighting and its effects takes place in a “state of distraction.” It is part of the background, rarely a focus of direct attention, noticed “in incidental fashion” (1968 [1936]:239–240; Crary 1999:49; Rutsky 2002:283–286). Lighting designers remark on this:

Sensuous perception of light is seldom a conscious process. Perhaps it is precisely because its emotional effect is unconscious that it affects our sensibilities so incisively. [Keller 1999:11]

Effective stage lighting is subtle and rarely noticed . . . designed to create the mood of a scene as unobtrusively as possible. [Gillette 1978:7]

This habitual, diffuse, implicit sense makes it a powerful resource for rhetorics of value yet compounds the difficulty of analytically isolating and talking about how lighting figures in their persuasions.

For help we can turn to theater and film. Lighting design is more elaborate and complex in these fields, requiring a greater array of effects and changes to create different settings, circumstances, times of day, and mood shifts. An elaborate lighting plot and choreography of cues are created to follow the script, using dimmers to shift illumination and intensity levels, diffusers, color filters, projected images and gobos (template masks) on spots to control light form or create pattern. The lighting changes, colors, and movement essential in film and theater design are less common in exhibitions: "But it has to be recognized that the evenness of museum lighting reflects not so much a failure of imagination as the creation of a deliberate effect" (Roberts 1994:75). Since the 1950s, film and theater have had specialists "who assume design responsibilities, within the creative team, for the lighting" (Reid 1995:1).²⁶ The elusiveness of language for characterizing lighting is more vexing and urgent in a context of specialization, teamwork, and greater elaboration in lighting design. Theater lighting designer Peter Maradudin recalls attempts to develop shared vocabularies during his training at Yale in the early 1980s:

What were the *words* that you used? That, actually, was the biggest thing, learning to talk about something that you couldn't describe easily and that you couldn't necessarily draw, and so, often, discussions would be about what words did you use? ... When you say soft lighting ... what does that mean to you? ... does that mean there are no edges, or does that mean that the light comes from everywhere, or does that mean there are no shadows, or the cueing is seamless? [in Pillbrow 1997:266, original emphasis]

Lighting designers talk about their work as "light painting" and creating "stage pictures," in effect fashioning a changing series of tableaux that help constitute and portray theatrical or filmic narratives. The tableaux of exhibition lighting are juxtaposed spatially, experienced by visitors both spatially and as temporal sequence. They also must meet constraints related both to conservation requirements and the more enduring nature of exhibitions. Yet exhibitions, film, and theater all work with the same light qualities and possibilities, drawing on a range of means and associations to create effects. With theater designers working on museum exhibitions in recent decades, some convergence in patterns and uses might be discernible.

So what means are available, how are they used, and what do they do? Lighting design books all discuss the controllable qualities of light, the purposes of lighting and associations that different light qualities and styles evoke. They differ somewhat in how they divide and

enumerate categories (for instance, listing three, four, or eight controllable qualities), but cover the same basic ground. In order to create an imagined scene or effect, lighting designers analyze it into the controllable aspects of light: quantity or intensity, color, distribution, form, and movement (Gillette 1978:86–87, 110; Palmer 1985:2–4; Pillbrow 1997:4–6; Reid 1995:4).

Intensity has to do with luminosity and brightness, but also with attention and general perceptive state. "The eye is invariably attracted to the brightest object in the field of vision," and brighter light tends to make people more alert (Pillbrow 1997:6). Color is critical in creating moods and emotional tenors.²⁷ Light distribution is related to the direction and angles for lighting an object or a scene, as well as the light's general coverage and diffusion. For some designers, "it is the angle at which the light hits the actor or scenic element that is the primary brush stroke in the lighting designer's paintbox" (Reid 1995:55). Together, light direction and intensity can mold an object's image and shape.²⁸ Movement can mean the light beam itself is in motion, as well as shifts in intensity or changes in other light properties—for contrast and change are critical in lighting design. "Lighting is ultimately about a balanced contrast within each picture and a balanced contrast from picture-to-picture. It is about pace—accelerations and decelerations" (Reid 1995:29). Marshall, for instance, talks about introducing "slow space" through aesthetic effects that allow museum visitors to refocus (2005:174ff). In exhibitions, lighting contrasts set off different spaces within an exhibit and "very even levels are always to be avoided." *Balanced* variation is essential, manipulating light levels "in consideration of the subject matter, design theme, and pacing" (Klein 1986:93). Designers control light qualities by using and combining different kinds and sources of light, templates, filters and through light placement (distance, focus, angle).

Color receives considerable attention from lighting designers: "Color is a powerful tool, particularly when deployed to assist in exerting a subconscious influence on the audience" (Reid 1995:68). Elaborate discussions of associations and meanings ascribed to different hues draw on evidence from physiological response, attributes that test subjects ascribe to colors, and affective attributes assigned by artists and writers with some consistency and continuity over time. Yet discussions and charts that relate specific colors to emotions, moods, psychological or metaphorical associations, and even synergetic links to taste always make disclaimers that such reactions can be highly variable and personal and depend on context and culture (Keller 1999:225–226; Palmer 1985:47).

The clearest, simplest and most universally recognised connection (at least, in the western world)

between coloured light and emotion seems to lie in the range from warm-happy through neutral to cool-sad. This is a continuous scale which has no definitive points because response to colour is relative. [Reid 1995:69]

While effects of particular hues are difficult to pin down precisely, however, it is generally agreed that brighter and more saturated colors draw more attention, that size of the color field matters, and that color changes are needed to maintain a significant response (Palmer 1985:46–51).

In exhibitions, however, colored light and filters are relatively rare.²⁹ White light is the norm, a practice that itself may relate to rhetorics of value concerning art, history, and appropriate modes of perception in exhibition settings, just as Bertolt Brecht insisted on even white lighting for his plays (see note 26). White or natural light may be associated with truth or authentic aesthetic perception, creating an underlying assumption in exhibition lighting in museums, particularly art museums: object-centered exhibitions offer the “real thing,” best presented in realist light that allows visitors to approach the artists’ perspective, scientists’ perception, or the historical facticity of an object and enhances (or creates) the objects’ aura.

Many designers treat lighting as an afterthought . . . [and] tend toward one of two extremes: the ‘white’ gallery with flat, monotonously bright illumination, or the ‘black’ gallery where each object or display floats in its own hard-edged pool of incandescent light, separated by gloom from every other part of the exhibit . . . [neither] taking advantage of the rich range of possibilities available through the skillful use of light. [Klein 1986:92]³⁰

While exhibitions themselves are highly mediated, their lighting works to offer the appearance of unmediated objects. Lighting not only contributes to rhetorics of value related to particular objects and exhibits, but also conveys metacultural messages about exhibiting and museums themselves, contributing to their cultural and institutional authority as well as exhibitionary authority.

Color is no stranger to museum exhibitions, of course, but it is concentrated in other design elements, such as walls, rugs, display backgrounds, exhibit furniture—all juxtaposed with colors in the objects displayed. For example, Goswamy describes an exhibition of Indian art arranged according to the Indian theory of *rasa* (aesthetic delight), with walls in each gallery painted colors thought to correspond to the mood and *rasa* of the art displayed, producing a “palpable heightening of effect, and of feeling” (1991:75–76).

Or note the contrasting overall color tonalities of the blue–gold exhibition shown in Figure 1 and the red–gold exhibition shown in Figure 3. Light joins with color in important ways in museum exhibitions, even if they usually use white light. Different kinds of light have different effects on an object’s surface—a characteristic called color rendering. For example, white light from different sources can make a plum-colored wall appear deep orange-red, dull reddish brown, deep bluish purple, or light reddish brown (Klein 1986:95). Even seemingly realist white lighting, then, requires attention to how objects and spaces will appear, and color choices and effects are simply deflected to other design elements.

Natural light has sometimes been taken as the ideal, but it too has a varied history in museum exhibitions (Kino 2004; Newhouse 1998:47). In the early 19th century, daylight was the only light source available in museums, supplemented after the mid-1800s by gas-lights and later by electric lighting. Around the 1950s, “the balance suddenly tipped toward artificial light” (Kino 2004) and more versatile lighting systems gradually became widespread.³¹ The Museum of Modern Art’s original 1939 galleries, for instance, had daylight filtered through translucent Thermolux in the main galleries, with skylights in the third-floor galleries; its 1959 East Wing expansion had a large daylit gallery. Yet in later years, the Thermolux was covered to create more exhibition space, the skylights were plastered over, and the East Wing windows were usually covered (Newhouse 1998:153–154). In MoMA’s celebrated 2004 redesign, “light spills through an enormous skylight” once again and windows provide “artfully arranged glimpses out into the city,” while galleries are outfitted with “countless beady little halogen spotlights on their discreetly recessed tracks” (Ouroussoff 2004; Updike 2004:106). The subtle, changing effects of natural light in museums and art exhibitions have been praised and admired and contribute to the sense of heightened realism, authenticity, and authority discussed above, but its ultraviolet rays are destructive and natural light must be shaped, directed, controlled, and combined with other light sources (incandescent, fluorescent, or the increasingly popular fiber optic lighting).³²

The question of when and how natural light is used in exhibitions and museums returns us to the goals and purposes of lighting design, how they relate to rhetorics of value, and to interactions between exhibitions and their larger museum settings and between exhibitionary authority and institutional authority. Visibility is clearly the central purpose of exhibit lighting, but visibility can be selectively modulated. Other goals and effects include focusing attention, highlighting formal features and material properties of objects, setting

atmosphere and style, and creating contrasts that can shape both overall composition and pacing (Gillette 1978:3–7; Palmer 1985:3–4; Pillbrow 1997:6–10; Reid 1995:21).

In theater, lighting actors—especially their faces—is central, making them “stand out vividly against their background” and at times “appear ‘jewel-like’” (Pillbrow 1997:119). Similarly, “in dance theater priority is given to lighting legs and feet” (Keller 1999:217). “The dancers becomes a series of moving sculptures, and revealing these visually to the audience in a dramatic or appropriate way is the lighting designer’s task” (Pillbrow 1997:122). In exhibits, objects are the stars, with texts lit as supporting cast. At the same time, “the show and the story is all-important” in exhibitions, film, and theater alike, and lighting is also designed to enhance broader scenes and narratives (Brian Gale, quoted in Pillbrow 1997:243; cf. Malkiewicz 1986:98).

Yet architecture is sometimes the hero as well in museums. Built-in sources and patterns of natural lighting foreground the museum itself, setting the stage for its exhibitions and rhetorics of value. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, explains how “the Museum becomes a resonator of memory . . . intended to engage the visitor and stir the emotions” through its architecture and lighting patterns” (n.d.:1). Some museum buildings, however, seem to upstage the very exhibitions they contain—an interference where “architectural experience has become . . . confused or conflated with the museological” (Stanley 2000:43). Newhouse describes examples where museum architecture and built-in natural lighting work at cross purposes with exhibitions, to the point where screens, different glass, or window coverings “had to correct excessive light” (1998:70–71; cf. MacLeod 2005:2, 10).

The Menil Collection in Houston often exemplifies architecture and lighting seamlessly integrated in the service of exhibiting art. Variable, sometimes strong, Texas sunlight becomes zenithal natural light, without glare or shadows, via intricate systems of light diffusers and louvers until it “seems to caress the objects of art with perfect daylight” or provides “an otherworldly luminescence” (Johnson and Feldstein 1999:18A; Newhouse 1998:23, 82).³³ An elaborate rhetoric of values undergirds the museum’s lighting and design, connecting art display in intimate settings with “living light” that varies with weather, season, time of day, even passing clouds, with the possibility to experience transcendence, and a philosophy and aesthetic of “the sovereignty of each object.” This philosophy and rhetoric of values was part of collector/founder Dominique de Menil’s vision, expressed in her “atmospheric” approach to display and Renzo Piano’s architecture (Smart 1997:120–121, 2001:8

and 17, p.c.). But this complex, well-developed rhetoric of values embedded in the exhibitions from the founder/producer’s point of view is not described in exhibit texts. Nor is it necessarily understood by visitors, who might simply enjoy the beauty of the setting and art and relate it to other rhetorics of value.

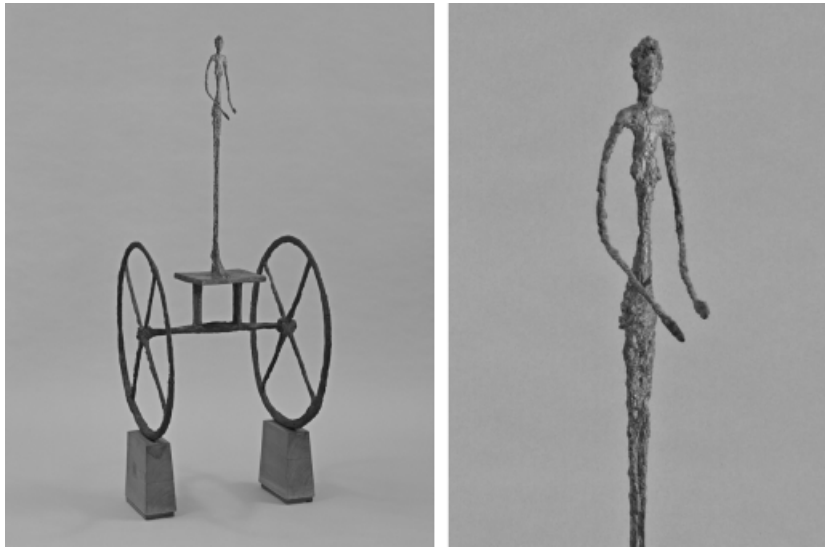
Lighting’s different roles and uses underline both the modularity of exhibitions and the parallel differentiation of lighting types and sequences in exhibition design. They also suggest that different exhibition components and sections might represent and support different rhetorics of value that resonate and coalesce, yet might also be inconsistent and contradictory. The architectural lighting examples suggest a material sense of the intersections and interactions of institutional and exhibitionary authority, as well as the synthetic layering of communicative means and media through which rhetorics of value are produced: “Light can create multiple frames like pictures in a gallery or arrange frames within frames” (Palmer 1985:75).

In reviewing fundamental aspects and concerns of lighting design, lighting’s potential as a resource for rhetorics of value is clear.

The overall ‘tone’ of the exhibit can be determined by the amount, variations and color of light, the pathways can be delineated, the organization, emphasis, and focus can be enhanced. Dramatic and/or serene moods can be created, and objects can be lighted to bring out particular aesthetic or material qualities. [Klein 1986:92]

Lighting’s specific effects, however, are rather elusive and ineffable, difficult to articulate and interpret separately because it works in close conjunction and interaction with color, space, and other aspects of exhibition design and is perceived in a “state of distraction.”³⁴ As a means for highlighting and subtly orchestrating attention and pacing, lighting design works as an articulator, binding together other design elements and helping to forge the synergies and syntheses of rhetorics of value. While lighting techniques and particular meanings rarely correspond in a clear one-to-one lexicon or set of formal-functional relations, lighting’s potential impact is incontestable. “Light has an undeniably powerful effect upon our state of mind. Almost nothing has such a direct impact upon our emotions” (Pillbrow 1997:9). In modulating pacing and mood, lighting may affect visitors’ orientation, attention, and receptivity to values and identities portrayed and conveyed through exhibitions.

In articulating various aspects of exhibition design and communication, lighting might emphasize particular objects and properties as well as relations among



FIGURES 10–11. Description of *The Chariot* (1950) by Alberto Giacometti in a 2004 Museum of Modern Art gallery guide directs attention first to the full sculpture (Figure 10) and then to what is visible on closer view (Figure 11, detail). Bronze, 57×26×26 1/8". Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Sculpture © 2010 Succession Giacometti/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

objects displayed or among exhibition sections.³⁵ The properties and relations most central, however, depend on the particular aesthetics and rhetorics in play—whether related to art, science, history, ethics, social identities, or other domains of value. The flip side of lighting's relatively inchoate, unarticulated sense is that interaction with other media and design elements is critical in shaping and specifying how it is perceived, as are ideas and expectations that visitors bring to an exhibition. "Unfortunately, it is difficult at best to gauge audience response, particularly in an area where there is not much refinement of sensitivity and where responses are likely to be largely subconscious" (Palmer 1985:51). If designers think a mode of lighting or other design features communicate one emotional sense, while visitors see it otherwise, then encoding/decoding issues become prominent, bringing potential disjunctions between what producers intend and what visitors perceive (Hall 1993, 1994). To return to boutique lighting, special lighting makes objects seem rare and precious and directs attention to them, but why? Is it the quality workmanship of an artistic masterpiece, an ancient and important historical artifact, a rare scientific discovery or unique natural object?³⁶ Having caught visitors' attention with lighting, the particular aesthetic contexts and social values at stake are foregrounded and specified through other communicative media and design elements, especially through exhibit texts and labels.

Designing with Words

Like lighting, texts and labels help set an exhibition's tone and focus visitors' attention. But they also encourage "directed vision" (Bennett 1998b:347) in more specific ways. It is easy to imagine how this text, from a 2004 gallery guide at the Museum of Modern Art, leads one's eye and attention in looking at the Giacometti sculpture, even suggesting a change of viewing distance (see Figures 10 and 11):

The Chariot may be the most mysterious and arresting of the frail, elongated, impossibly slender figures made by Alberto Giacometti between 1947 and 1951. Rising above two high wheels recalling those of Egyptian chariots, a filament-thin woman stands poised in precarious equilibrium, perpetually suspended between movement and stasis, advance and retreat. Close up, the rough, knotted surfaces of Giacometti's forms impose a conceptual distance between viewer and object, just as they paradoxically exact an intimacy that solicits the viewer to touch, even if only imaginatively.

Similarly, this label in a historically oriented display at the Alexander & Baldwin Sugar Museum, in Puunene, Maui, in 1996 shows diversity in immigrant plantation labor in the 1930s by directing attention to a series of household artifacts:

For immigrants adjusting to life in a new land, customary foods prepared in traditional ways provided

comforting continuity that helped ease the transition. They brought over, made or purchased what they needed to prepare the food. Ethnic artifacts on display include Chinese soy sauce jug, sushi (vinegared rice with various toppings), box handcrafted by a Japanese plantation carpenter, Japanese mortar and pestle, Filipino coconut grater.³⁷

As they draw attention to particular details and aspects of a display, exhibit texts also do far more: they convey referential content, present and explain concepts, categories, themes, and other information that define an interpretive framework and help create rhetorics of value. At times seeming a “dense and proliferating web of words,” exhibition texts and labels “narrate the gaps between objects” (Bennett 2004:167, 174). In narrating these gaps and directing attention, texts help define relations among things and ideas, whether showing stylistic developments or contrasts, an evolutionary sequence, or historical connections. Particular topics selected, word choices, and emphases suggest criteria of judgment, hierarchies of merit and importance, and other evaluative nuances—taken together, they help produce an exhibition’s rhetorics of value. Their presentations fashion curatorial perspectives and simultaneously position visitors, creating grounds for interaction within the exhibition.

In the 1880s, labels were coming to be seen as essential in natural history exhibits, a critical adjunct that could make taxonomic groupings and evolutionary processes clear. George Brown Goode of the Smithsonian Institution even declared in 1888 that “‘an efficient educational museum’ was best regarded as ‘a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen’” (Bennett 1998b:363; cf. McClellan 2003a: 15). Debates about exhibit texts in art museums followed several decades later. John Cotton Dana, the Newark Museum’s director in the 1920s, for instance, advocated “rigorous use of descriptive labels in order to transform art museums from mere ‘gazing museums’ into ‘institutes for visual instruction’” (Bennett 1998b:368).³⁸ Similarly, Alfred Barr introduced extended texts and labels in his early exhibits at the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s, “making visible the unity and coherence of the show” (Staniszewski 2001:62–64). General expectations today associate more extensive textual explanations with natural history and history exhibitions, and presume that labels in art exhibits will be more minimal, but there are many exceptions and historical shifts in how exhibit texts have been used. Other variations in approaches to exhibition labels and texts can be found in science museums and children’s museums, differences between smaller museums and large urban

museums (Serrell 1996:xiii–xiv), and between the United States and Europe (Vogel 1994:83).

Contemporary museum professionals often discount the extent to which visitors actually read texts and labels. Yet recent analyses of visitor conversations in exhibits suggest that roughly 70% do read texts in some way and that visitors incorporate them into dialogic engagements with exhibitions. In fact, visitors may literally give them voice by using text segments or close paraphrases in their own conversations. Such “text-echo” was one indication that people read exhibit texts (McManus 1989:175–177). Stainton found that 50% of visitor discussion was “museum prompted” on average, sometimes as much as 65%.³⁹ Apart from a small percentage of talk about visit management or other topics, the balance consisted of “visitor prompted” comments in which people related their own backgrounds and experience to exhibit material. “Visitors worked hard to make connections by exchanging curatorially-supplied information they thought interesting or worthwhile and through their cross-cultural and cross personal connections” (Stainton 2002:17–18, 29). Exhibit texts and labels, then, may be particularly important both in shaping and conveying rhetorics of value—to the point of letting visitors inhabit curatorial perspectives by putting words in their mouths—and in providing ways through which visitors engage and relate their own identities, interests, and experience to them, whether they do so earnestly, critically, ironically, or playfully.

How is this “filter of words” (Bennett 1998b:351) produced and how does it contribute to rhetorics of value? Exhibit texts and labels combine features of form, design, and visual presentation with content-related features blending thematic foci, writing style, and grammatical choices. In offering exhibition visitors guidance, they also proffer particular perspectives and appraisals. Texts help define an exhibition and its organization, marking structure with different kinds of texts and font size—ranging from the name of the show, to large wall texts that portray broad themes and demarcate sections, to smaller labels tied to specific cases and objects on display: “If large texts had sound they would be very loud. Small size texts are more like whispers, pulling the viewer in, suggesting an intimacy” (Thorne 2008:145).

In creating exhibition structure, texts also introduce key themes and concepts and explain their relations. This textual array provides varied opportunities to communicate with visitors, opportunities that can be coordinated and integrated or suggest different stories and values. Typeface choices also contribute to emotional tone and stance, evoking subtle associations,

as consumer researchers, commercial designers, and scrapbookers have noted (Association for Consumer Research 2009; Gormish 2009; Gump 2001; Will-Harris 2000).⁴⁰ In the South African exhibition *Democracy X: Marking the Present, Re-presenting the Past* (2004), for instance, organizers recognized that a sans serif "X" in the title could evoke the vote on a ballot, while serified typeface (X) clearly referred to the country's 10 years of democracy. To reconcile and maintain both senses, they designed an X that was half serif and half sans serif (Thorne 2008:154–155).

The words, themes, and narratives of exhibit texts, though, hold special potential to shape rhetorics of value presented and visitors' impressions and understandings. As they convey specific meanings and associations, texts direct the synesthesia of exhibition display toward particular emphases and interpretations. They highlight topics and features as worth attention and select stories to tell, their importance buttressed by the implicit imprimatur of institutional authority. Exhibition titles, for instance, sometimes result from delicate negotiations between curators, public relations, and marketing managers, seeking an interesting catchphrase to communicate the topic and importance to a broad audience (cf. Kratz 1994; Plankensteiner 2007).

Section texts and labels offer frameworks and narratives that incorporate and portray a range of values. Labels aim for clarity and focus, but shifts of topic and perspective within and between labels may tellingly incorporate judgments and values. Nelson observes how this works in a slide lecture, relevant here too and even more pertinent for audio tours:⁴¹

[A] text allows multiple stagings of selfhood. . . . When the audience is addressed . . . 'Notice how the tones move,' viewers are led to see [in particular ways] . . . [T]he lecturer . . . may take another footing and gradually shift from looking at the object to speaking for it or its artist. From this rhetorical position the art historian can account for motivation and intention because he has become either the work of art or the artist or both. This ventriloquist act enables the picture to speak, to act, to desire. [2000:419; cf. Mitchell 2005]

Similarly, in other exhibitions,

texts about diet shift into discussions about dentition; texts about the impact of new technologies slide into descriptions of the equipment's mechanical functioning, and texts about an artifact's aesthetic

and design qualities move on to its creator's life history. [McManus 1989:183]

These examples raise questions of authorship and voice in exhibition texts. Is there one main perspective or several? Whose perspectives are conveyed and how do they relate? Are there perspectives from the periods/societies/artists portrayed? Recent decades have seen more multi-perspectival exhibitions, sometimes staging a kind of multiculturalism through textual juxtaposition or incorporating primary sources to offer firsthand commentary and a sense of authenticity.⁴² Although used in art exhibits, this textual strategy seems more common in ethnographic and historical exhibits. (However, such distinctions are increasingly blurred.) Incorporating multiple perspectives in itself indicates the value of considering different cultural, historical, and personal ideas and attitudes. It might also address or make apparent potential intersections, interactions, clashes, and contradictions among differing social priorities, moral judgments, and aesthetic preferences, showing their social embedding and conundrums created by incommensurable values.

The Neue Gallerie, for instance, included letters, diaries, and literature in its 2008 exhibition *Alfred Kubin: Drawings, 1897–1909*. The UCLA Fowler Museum's *Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head* (1995) had four labels per object, highlighting different curatorial possibilities, much as *Perspectives: Angles on African Art* at the Center for African Art (1987) invited ten co-curators to select objects. The District Six Museum's *Digging Deeper* incorporated extensive interview excerpts, treating them simultaneously as image, artifact, voice, and as part of the museum's relation with the community (Julius 2008; Thorne 2008:146). My own photographic exhibit, *Okiek Portraits*, incorporated commentary from those shown and used three languages in captions (Kratz 2002). Such approaches seem less common in science exhibitions, although they may incorporate personal narratives, information on scientists, historical highlights, and "fun" didactic elements (Gutwill-Wise and Allen 2002; MacDonald 2002) or blend science and technology with art and culture in thematic exhibitions, as in Utah's new Leonardo-Science center.

The style or tone of exhibition texts and labels may suggest particular attitudes and relations between visitors and subjects on display (Kratz 2002: 124–129). Contextualizing labels might use an objective, generalizing tone or one that particularizes by stressing specific events, people, and situations. Aestheticizing labels emphasize formal properties, iconography, and artistic quality. Some exhibitions use

one of these styles relatively consistently; others artfully combine them. In the Bishop Museum in 1996, for instance, a case with two feather standards in the *Legacy of Excellence, Highlights of Hawaiian Culture* exhibit was labeled:⁴³

Kahili Lele—Hand Kahili (pair)

19th century

Great Frigatebird, 'i'iwi and white feathers, whale and walrus ivory, turtle shell, wood, silver coins, satin ribbon, cordage, thread
Kekaaniauokalani collection, loan (Elizabeth Kekaaniau Pratt) 1902
and gift 1920 (c.4417–18)

Containing feathers from Guano Island birds and 37 American 10 cent coins worked into otherwise traditional handles, this handsome pair was described in 1902 as “the only ones of their kind.” They belonged to Princess Elizabeth Kekaaniauokalani Kalaninuiohilaukapu Laanui Pratt (1834–1928), a high ranking member of the Kamehameha family. In her youth she was named one of the select few eligible for the Hawaiian throne.

The label's first part, providing date, material, and museum provenance, could stand alone in most art exhibits, and indeed the exhibition title stakes a claim to artistic distinction. Labels incorporate this style, underlining objects' uniqueness, but rather than maintain focus on aesthetic quality or technical workmanship, this label moves to royal provenance. Historical information enhances the objects' importance and uniqueness through association with a princess eligible to become queen, whose life spanned the Kamehameha Dynasty, the Hawaiian Kingdom's overthrow (1893), and beyond.⁴⁴ At the same time, that reference threads into complex genealogical and historical stories of the kingdom told throughout this and other Hawaiian museums, underlining the injustice of the overthrow and connecting to contemporary sovereignty debates and heritage movements. If written in a more distant, generalizing style, the personal narrative, political evocations, and aesthetic heightening of the actual label would fade. It might read something like this:

Kahili Lele—Hand Kahili (pair)

Kahili feather standards were used from ancient times by Hawaiian royalty. Made from the feathers of a variety of birds, kahili indicated status, lineage, and family ties. The tallest state kahili, carried by attendants, could be up to 10 meters tall. Smaller kahili were like a scepter, but also used as a fan or flywhisk. The colors and patterns of kahili show great variation.

In some museums, labels are performed. They may be delivered in first person in living history museums

like Colonial Williamsburg (Handler and Gable 1997) or cultural displays such as the Polynesian Cultural Center, where they are sometimes presented in a jocular, ironic way that draws visitors into the performance. I'olani Palace in Honolulu also eschews written labels. A historic house museum restored to the pre-overthrow period when Queen Lili'uokalani lived there, it can only be viewed on tours that use third person to describe and personalize the period, people, and place. Stories about furnishings and possessions during the tour subtly construct a narrative of royal life and legitimacy. Like tone and style in written labels, labels performed in tours shape visitors' experience and relation to knowledge and values conveyed through their language and presentation.⁴⁵

Style, tone, and attitude in labels are communicated through vocabulary, word choice, and patterns in the use of person, tense, adjectives, and modes of address. Consider, for instance, the different senses and time frames evoked by the adjectives “antique” versus “used” versus “ancient” or, in the world of American Indian arts, the highly specific, regulated meanings of “handmade,” “handcrafted,” “American Indian made,” and “American Indian style” (Berkovitch 2000). Joseph Traugott specifically addressed such phrases in *Term Limits: Crafting a Discussion about New Mexico Art* (Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, 2000). The exhibit considered conceptual clusters such as fine art/fine craft/native art/folk art/naive art, design/craft/artifact/popular culture/kitsch and how categories shift across contexts. The exhibit labels and brochure noted, “Although art terms may seem culturally neutral, invariably they imply hierarchies that validate one set of artistic assumptions and denigrate others.” In this way, extended arguments and assumptions—sometimes emotionally charged ones—can be condensed in a single term or sets of terms.

While most labels in that exhibition were written in third person, one sentence with first person pronouns stood out: “We all know what we consider to be art but often have difficulty defining exactly what that means.” The label invokes a general normative “we,” incorporating readers into the perspective of the author/exhibition/museum, and draws attention to modes of address through which labels situate visitors. Pronoun usage is one signal of this; labels also address imagined visitors through language registers used (is it written like a formal lecture, a friendly conversation, or some other sort of interaction?). First and second person pronouns can emphasize a dialogic, interactive sense (Kratz 2002:127–128; Nelson 2000:417), though first person singular is relatively rare in exhibition texts unless authorship is explicitly indicated or they include quotations. If “we” or “our” is used, how are boundaries of

inclusion drawn, in contrast to whom, in relation to what issues or values? How does pronominal use vary through an exhibition or text, altering relations and modes of attention (Brown and Gilman 1960; Kratz 1991; Pennycook 1994; Urban 1989, 2001; Yeh 2004)? How are questions used (Jones 1995:265)?

Contrasts and shifts of person and tense suggest different stances toward subjects and objects displayed, incorporating informational reporting (likely in past or narrative present) and analytical commentary or generalization (commonly in present tense) (cf. Nelson 2000:418). Similarly, third person labels in the Wattis Hall of Human Cultures in San Francisco in 1990 suggested an omniscient, objective scientific perspective, without comments or voices from societies depicted. Tense patterns, however, differentiated the 11 cultures displayed, with present tense for African and Pacific cultures, past tense for “traditional” Japanese culture, and past and present tense conveying historical development for Native American cultures until the early 20th century. Together, “the patterns of tense, historical narratives and information provided . . . tend to organize world cultures in a hierarchy that is strongly implied but not overtly stated,” conveying a rhetoric of values that seemed to rank world cultures and differentially distance them from visitors (Karp and Kratz 2000:215).

Each of these details—word choices, perspectives, patterns of tense and person, label styles, typefaces, etc.—is an element in the array of exhibition texts and labels. Difficult to interpret in isolation, each is part of a repertoire that helps define contrastive meanings and associations. Together they create exhibition narratives that foreground certain topics and concepts, offer information, and simultaneously convey distinctions, evaluations, and criteria of merit and judgment—rhetorics of value—to which visitors might relate in various ways. As visitors go through an exhibition, they bring texts into interaction with each other, with other media, and with their own experience—through explicit cross-referencing as well as implicit interconnections and experiential syntheses. Exhibitions thus become scenes where rhetorics of value are “continuously produced, reproduced and revised in dialogues” (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:2). Text-echoing in visitors’ discussions is one sign of these interpretive processes, and one way that objects, photographs, texts, and overall design come together. Infused with the authority of their institutional setting, exhibitions constitute and endorse criteria of authenticity, skill, beauty, worth, and a range of knowledge found at various intersections of history, culture, science, and identity. Visitors, in turn, might learn and accept such notions, or they might question, challenge, adapt, or ironically mock them. In the process,

they define and reshape their own notions of value and identity.

Rhetorics of Value: Designing Values and Identities

Museum exhibitions can edify and delight, infuriate and amuse, challenge, puzzle, and inspire visitors, expanding their horizons, deepening their knowledge, and offering occasions for beguiling diversion, spirited exchange, poignant memorialization, and significant social interaction. Regardless of specific topic, visitors encounter curated representations, narratives, and a totalizing environment that allow them to try out, consider, and debate rhetorics of value in relation to their own backgrounds. Through this dialogic experience visitors affirm or reshape values and identities they bring to the exhibition. “The museum is teaching—expressly, as part of an education program and an articulated agenda, but also subtly, almost unconsciously—a system of highly political values expressed not only in the style of presentation but in myriad facets of its operation” (Vogel 1991a:200). Such values define hierarchies, equivalences, and criteria of quality and worth and shape ideologies and politics related to identities.

Conveyed through visual and verbal means, rhetorics of value combine diverse media of communication and draw on exhibitions’ character as “designed space” experienced as visitors move through it over time. “The viewer’s decisions are aided and abetted through choices made by curators and effected by designers and lighting technicians, who work to develop a sense of perspective within the museum landscape,” translating “from concepts to spatial resolutions that represent the ideas and meanings expressed by curators” (Roberts 1994:75; Thorne 2008:141). In exploring how rhetorics of value are produced in exhibitions, I considered two media used in exhibition design, helping to craft visitors’ impressions and experiences. Lighting and exhibition texts offered significant contrasts in how readily what they convey can be articulated, representing two ends of a spectrum. Yet outlining the repertoires, vocabularies, and possibilities associated with each disclosed both efforts to specify and describe lighting effects as well as ineffable features of texts and labels that signal tone, affect and help define relations with visitors. Aspects of each are apprehended in a “state of distraction,” modulating and mediating visitor experience and understandings as they combine with other exhibition components such as objects, spatial layouts, color, and case style. Perspectives, tones, and affect fashioned through exhibition design and curation are part of the

persuasion of rhetorics of value, a nexus combining poetics and politics.

By the time an exhibition opens, these choices have sedimented into the overall display, synthesized into rhetorics of value: "A great deal of effort often goes into maintaining the illusion that the form the finished exhibition takes is exactly what was intended all along, unmarred by compromise or indecision," questions or choices (Müller 1994:14). Visitors are rarely privy to decisions and debates that went into the design and may only become aware of how such choices shape impressions and understandings when alternatives are shown, as in Fred Wilson's provocative installations. Otherwise, installation design works as "the unconscious of an exhibition" (Staniszewski 2001:xix). Such subliminal workings are also part of the cross-contextual links woven through rhetorics of value, evoking interdiscursive associations or contrasts both through design features and thematic content. These tapestries of interconnection, resonance, repetition, and counterpoint are among broader processes through which notions of worth and value are constituted, re-created, and naturalized (Kratz 2002:109–110, 2009; Kratz and Gordon 2002).⁴⁶

Commenting on languages of definition and judgment used about art, Bourdieu notes, "the use that is made of these terms and the meaning that is given to them depend upon the specific, historically and socially situated, points of view of their users—points of view which are quite often perfectly irreconcilable" (1987:205). Similarly, what visitors make of rhetorics of value offered in cultural displays and their potential cross-contextual connections depends on the initial knowledge, experience, and frames of reference they bring to the exhibition. Exhibitions hold potential, then, for disagreement, debate, and controversy as well as approbation and enchantment. Yet the exhibition's rhetorics of value define contours of meaning and discussion, at least initially, and provide contexts and resources through which visitors may reflect on, reproduce, or reshape their own values and notions of identity.

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Notes

- 1 Several "new museologies" developed in different countries about the same time (Halpin 1997:53). They share an understanding of museums as social arenas, a concern for the politics of representation, ideologies and hegemonies associated with museums, and for museum-community relations. Histories of the museum as an institution and of specific museums were also part of this developing field. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002) notes developments in French museology.
- 2 A sampling of this work would include (a) McClellan (1994); Bennett (1995, 2004); Duncan (1995); Holo (1999); (b) Karp and Lavine (1991); Ames (1992); O'Hanlon (1993); Coombes (1994); Pointon (1994); Gaspar De Alba (1998); Stanley (1998); Karp and Kratz (2000); Kratz (2002); Shelton (2001); (c) Handler and Gable (1997); Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998); MacDonald (1998, 2002); McIntyre and Wehner (2001); Kreps (2003); Carrier (2006); (d) Clifford (1988a); Karp et al. (1992); Rassool and Prosalendis (2001); Coombes (2003); McClellan (2003b); Archibald (2004); Witz (2007); and Croke (2008). These works often cover several of the topics as do edited books and readers such as Pearce (1994); Greenberg et al. (1996); MacDonald and Fyfe (1996); Preziosi and Farago (2004); and Karp et al. (2006).
- 3 MacDonald and Silverstone (1990:185–186) contrast approaches that see those who come to museums as "visitors" and "consumers." Bennett (1996) considers terms referring collectively to people who come to museums: publics, audiences, communities, and citizens. Each has different histories, connotations, and implications for how museums' public roles are conceptualized. I use "visitor" here to emphasize interpretive processes—how people experience and understand exhibitions. "Visitor" also avoids the overemphasis that "viewer" places on a single sensory mode.
- 4 Fabian notes the related problem of reifying values as motivations for action when they are not seen as part of cultural process, a way of working out situations and meanings (1978:329).
- 5 Installation artist Fred Wilson uses "designed space" to emphasize the communicative role of exhibition design. Wilson uses all design aspects—wall color, lighting, orientation, exhibition furniture and cases, paths through display space, as well as arrangements and juxtapositions of objects and texts—to draw attention to display conventions, their influence on expectations, judgements, and interpretations, and to offer trenchantly witty social and political commentary (1994, 1996; Thompson 2008:178).
- 6 I focus on examples from the past 25 years, with longer historical scope as relevant. I also concentrate more on forms and modes of communication in exhibitions than on

the museum as institution or a particular museum. Exhibitionary themes, forms, and functions are shaped by institutional locations, and museums and other display institutions are shaped over time by the ways exhibitions define varied relations with visitors and how exhibitions fit an institution's configuration of activities and roles.

- 7 However, Staniszewski (2001) argues that art exhibitions in museums through the early 1900s were hung according to principles that sought to balance picture sizes and that "skied" them in arrays several layers high. She attributes to Alfred Barr, the Museum of Modern Art's first curator/director, today's art exhibition conventions of neutral wall colors and single rows of paintings arranged in chronological or thematic orders. Yet until the 1960s or 1970s, that was just one display style at MOMA; later, a narrow range of aesthetic installation became the norm.
- 8 Jeffrey lists potential kinds of learning in exhibitions: "factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, process knowledge, curiosity, heuristics ... and affective learning" and notes "perhaps it is the interaction of the cognitive and the affective realms that makes museums such uniquely powerful learning institutions" (2000:218).
- 9 Bennett describes expectations developed in the late 19th century that exhibitions should be "legible to the eyes," emphasizing a visual mode of address and didactic goals (1998a, 1998b). Other senses were also part of exhibitions, but this signals the attention and importance attributed to various modes of sensory experience and how they are thought to relate to exhibition communication and pedagogy. On the cultural and historical development of notions of visual prominence, see Tyler (1984); Jay (1988); Jay and Brennan (1996); Cray (1990).
- 10 These differences are not simply a matter of effective design and formulation, but depend too on visitors' backgrounds and varied familiarity with exhibitionary conventions. The same exhibition might be engrossing to some visitors and tedious for others.
- 11 In a 2004 survey, for instance, the Smithsonian Institution found that 40% of visitor groups consisted of two or more adults, 40% were mixed-age groups including adults and children/teens, and 7% came in other groups, including school groups. Only 14% of visitors came alone. Art museums were far more likely to have solitary visitors (2004:4–5). McClellan traces changing ideas about art museum publics and tensions between the democratizing or elitist roles of art museums (2003a). An earlier Smithsonian study from 1994 to 1996 found the same figure of 14% solo visitors out of 16 thousand interviewed (Weil 2002:67).
- 12 René d'Harnoncourt's 1941 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *Indian Art of the United States*, is a little remembered precursor. It also used varied display methods: "The visitor ... would view Native American culture exhibited as art in the modernist-aesthetic exhibits, as ethnographic artifact in the historical re-creations, as contemporary tradition in the atmosphere rooms, as a fashionable commodity in the commercial ... galleries,

and as part of a Native American ritual in the reenactment areas ... [I]t disrupted a unified, totalized presentation of these objects and their cultures as 'exhibition'" (Staniszewski 2001:97). Wilson's later works conveyed social commentary and criticism through self-conscious use of display conventions (Wilson 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2007); Vogel also continued using exhibition design to make incisive points about definitions and understandings of objects sometimes considered art. Vogel has been wonderfully thoughtful, creative, and articulate about the effects of many aspects of exhibition design (Vogel 1994, 1997).

- 13 See, for instance, the exhibition *The Museum as Muse* (McShine 1999) and exhibitions at the Musée d'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel (Gonseth et al. 2002, 2007). The Museum for African Art (formerly Center for African Art) also did other exhibitions that considered how exhibition conventions structure knowledge, including *Closeup* (1990) and *Exhibition-ism* (1994). Some museums, including the Pitt Rivers Museum and Harvard's Peabody Museum, preserved portions of earlier installations as a way of historicizing exhibition styles and conventions.
- 14 Similarly, while Kaplan (1995) recognizes the diverse communicative media involved in exhibitions, she simply describes particular combinations and examples and does not offer analysis of the effects of particular components and choices. Because display genres are constituted through configurations of communicative resources, genres can be blurred by shifts within configurations and altering combinations slightly. Museums, department stores, theme parks, and hotels all share and exchange some display features (Harris 1990; Karp 2001:74; Karp and Kratz 2000; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Klein 1986; Kratz and Karp 1993; Leach 1984).
- 15 My focus on choices and elements in exhibition design and production means I cannot also address how visitors engage potential rhetorics of value and how they become effective for visitors. See Kratz (2002) on exhibition visitors.
- 16 This framework is developed in Kratz (2002); this section draws on chapter 1. Karp and Kratz (2000) also use this communicative approach for analyzing exhibitions.
- 17 If exhibitions are occasions and means through which such issues are explored, they might also become opportunities to re-create or reformulate identities, values, and social or political priorities and allegiances. The corollary is that exhibitions are also potential triggers to disagreement or controversy, as people with other perspectives, interests, and values object to or oppose those conveyed.
- 18 A visitor's path is not necessarily the one exhibition makers envision, introducing multiple spatiotemporal flows that might affect visitors' construal of implied narratives in exhibitions. Sandell (2005) considers how spatial strategies in exhibitions can shape visitors' understandings. My discussion of exhibition communication rests on a semiotic approach that Kratz (2010:10–11, 20–24) explains further in relation to ritual performance. It draws on Jakobson's work on the multifunctionality of language and

understandings of language as social action. These have been developed by many scholars, including Jakobson (1960); Silverstein (1976, 1993); Bauman (1986); Mannheim and Tedlock (1995); Briggs (1996); and Agha (2007). Bal (1996) offers another semiotic approach that reads exhibitions as combining rhetoric and narrative, but pays little attention to social and historical process or to the communicative repertoires of exhibition making. Hooper-Greenhill's collection seeks "to place museum communication in the context of mass communication and media studies" (1995:iii).

¹⁹ This is also the groundwork for the politics of representation that permeate exhibitions (Kratz 2002). In politics of representation, issues of power and control are formulated and contested through cultural forms.

²⁰ For instance, Bal (1996:10, 31–36, 98–117) considers tensions between objects and captions in exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum, based on her own visits and interpretations.

²¹ Objects have also been central to work on material culture since the mid-1980s (Appadurai 1986; Brown 2001; Buchli 2002; Miller 1987, 1998, 2008; Myers 2001; Thomas 1991). Klein is not alone in thinking that light is part of the message and effect. The "Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence" include this criterion of excellence: "Design elements (i.e., color, lights, graphic treatments, exhibit furniture) contribute to and support the exhibition's ideas and tone" (<http://www.n-a-m-e.org/standards.html>, accessed October 24, 2002).

²² In exhibits by Vogel and Wilson mentioned earlier, sharply focused boutique lighting spotlights are used to question the kinds of objects so lit and the values implied.

²³ Harris (1990) and Staniszewski (2001:173–190) discuss parallels and interactions between display styles in museums and commercial stores.

²⁴ Variations on boutique lighting can suggest other meanings. The Musée du Quai Branly shows Kongo *nkisi* figures in a dark alcove, each in a wall enclosure with dramatic spotlighting. Rather than suggesting great beauty and value, the collective effect evokes mystery, presumably to suggest power, but this "boogabooga lighting" (as Ivan Karp dubbed it) plays into stereotypes of African superstition.

²⁵ Some intentions in museums relate to conservation issues, but discussions limited to technical aspects of lighting (e.g., how many lux of illumination are appropriate for textile display) may sidestep or obscure lighting's interpretive effects in design and rhetorics of value.

²⁶ Some lighting changes and techniques common today were foreign to earlier practice. Spotlights and dimmer controls were introduced after World War I, for instance (Pillbrow 1997:xxv). Historical and cultural variations in theatrical light design have been related to architectural patterns, theatrical organization, technological changes, and aesthetic-ideological-theoretical positions. Several sources comment on Bertolt Brecht's insistence on simple, continuous white light illumination, correlating this ap-

proach with direct, clear theater and illuminating the "truth" in the text. Brecht also felt white light would help alienate viewers so they would not be caught in theatrical delusion (Pillbrow 1997:85; Reid 1995:22–23, 67).

²⁷ Mood effects combine color, intensity, distribution, and movement (Pillbrow 1997:9), but all discussions of light color emphasize mood and emotion associations.

²⁸ Gillette (1978:89–96) has photographs illustrating variations, while images in Klein (1986:98–99) show the effects on objects in exhibitions.

²⁹ Yet they may be important in creating some dioramas or theatrical settings, such as the California Academy of Sciences diorama re-creating 24 hours at Ngorongoro crater (Karp and Kratz 2000:216).

³⁰ According to Zack Zanolli, former lighting designer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the late 1960s "the model for museum lighting gradually metamorphosed into a dark, mysterious cavern pierced by dramatic pin spotlights" (in Kino 2004). See also Cassidy (1987) and Cuttle (2007:216).

³¹ This was about when lighting design became more specialized in film too. Track lighting, now absolutely standard, was one major innovation in exhibition lighting. Edison Price is often credited with inventing it. The Lightolier company claims to have created the first track lighting fixtures in the 1960s. See Kino (2004), "In Memoriam: Edison A. Price" (Anonymous 1997), "Edison Price" (Anonymous n.d.), and Merda (n.d.).

³² Skylights are often coated with UV-filtering films now to protect artworks. Incandescent light sources, including halogen lights, are generally warmer, sharper, and better able to be focused. Fluorescent sources are generally cooler, harder to control, and can have fuzzy shadows without diffusers, but are often economical. Fiber optic systems deliver light that is highly controllable and highly focused, with little or no ultraviolet rays.

³³ More museums (particularly art museums) have incorporated elaborate louver and filtering systems into their design in recent decades to take advantage of, yet tame, natural light for display: "Today designers are using computers to create 'active' systems. . . . As the sun rises and falls, the louvers readjust themselves" (Kino 2004). Cuttle (2007:50–127) surveys natural lighting systems in art museums.

³⁴ For instance, an article on the Frick Collection eloquently describes effects of changing wall color from brown to coral velvet. Yet it does not discuss kinds of light and effects involved in "upgraded lighting," the other main refurbishment noted (Smith 2010).

³⁵ Klein (1986:104) shows an example of lighting that emphasizes relations among objects within a case.

³⁶ Klein (1986:102) shows boutique lighting in a scientific exhibition. Other examples can be seen in the Hall of Geology, Gems, and Minerals at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

³⁷ Hawaiian examples come from joint research with Ivan Karp on representations of cultural diversity in varied

display settings. We thank the Smithsonian Institution for supporting initial research.

- ³⁸ This contrasted with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' position in the early 1900s: "Rather than provide useful information or technical instruction, the art museum was increasingly directed toward the service of 'joy not knowledge,'" emphasizing "aesthetic experience" above all (Phillips 1982:32).
- ³⁹ The range related to visitors' backgrounds and experience with the exhibition's topic and/or with museums. Those with less familiarity relied more on exhibit texts to understand and discuss what they were seeing. Talk was coded as "museum prompted" if it directly reflected label or wall text messages (including text-echo) or the visual features of material displayed (2002:17).
- ⁴⁰ Similarly, the Museum of Modern Art's recent exhibition on *The New Typography* showed how this 1920s–1930s movement "brought graphics and information design to the forefront of the artistic avant-garde in Central Europe" (<http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1015>, accessed February 12, 2010).
- ⁴¹ Fraser (2006) offers insightful commentary on a Guggenheim Bilbao audio tour and provocative enactment of its description of museum experience.
- ⁴² Jones (1995:262) describes an exhibition that juxtaposes multicultural objects in ways that challenge conventional classifications and bring to awareness visitors' own concepts and values.
- ⁴³ Relative font size indicates lines in smaller type in the original labels.
- ⁴⁴ Thorne discusses similar label style in the *Democracy X* exhibition (2008:154). For biographies of Princess Elizabeth Kekaaniauokalani Kalaninuiohilaukapu Laanui Pratt, see <http://www.keouanui.org/Elizabeth.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Kekaaniau, accessed March 28, 2009.
- ⁴⁵ Fine and Haskell (1985) discuss tour guide performance. Since South Africa's Robben Island Museum opened in 1997, former political prisoners have given tours, combining third person descriptions of the history of apartheid and anti-apartheid activism and first person experience and witness of the period. Questions arise about which political perspectives the guides/ex-prisoners emphasize (Garuba 2007; Solani 2000) and whether to deal with the aging of former prisoners by training new guides lacking that firsthand cachet or by incorporating more text.
- ⁴⁶ Bennett notes similarly that an artifact in an exhibition "is just as thickly lacquered with layers of interpretation as any book or film. More to the point, it is often lacquered with the *same* layers of interpretation. For it is often precisely the presuppositions derived from other media that determine both which artifacts are selected for display in museums and how their arrangement is conceived and organized" (1995:146, original emphasis). Ruffins (2006: 401–410) discusses how television, film, and museum exhibits interacted in representations of slavery in the United States in the 1980s–1990s.

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