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Anni A. Pullagura	21 April 2010

Performing the Museum:
Memory, Meaning-Making and Identity Production at the
National Museum of the American Indian

by

Anni A. Pullagura

Adviser

Dr. Rebecca R. Stone

Department of Art History

_____
Dr. Rebecca R. Stone
Adviser

_____
Dr. Kathryn Amdur
Committee Member

_____
Dr. Elizabeth Wilson
Committee Member

_____
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

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Ethnographic museum studies as a discipline examines processes and methods involved in the organization, collection, and installation of museum exhibitions. As the museum institution moves into an increasingly globalized world, however, frameworks of identity and memory problematize the categories of "self" and "other" already challenged in contemporary exhibition scholarship. Central to these conversations is the application of new theories in collective memory—particularly germane to the development and goals of the museum and memorialization—and identity processes vocalized in feminist and race discussions since the 1970s. This thesis argues that the political ramifications of such conversations are important factors for theorizing new futures for ethnographic museums and cultural heritage sites. Beginning with a history of museum practice and theory, memory politics, and performativity and identity issues in feminist scholarship, this thesis will look at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), established in 1989, as one example of the intersection of memory, identity, and new forms of museology—a "female museum" that stands as an alternative to historical museological practices. Of particular interest will be the museum's history, design, and fluid, dialogic function in contemporary identity production. Using this case study, this thesis aims to explore the complex processes involved in constructing cultural memorial sites for the purpose of opening up dialogues of multiple and informed futures.

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Introduction

Museums, Memory and Meaning-Making

Cultural history museum studies attempts to theorize the visual memorialization of group identity and representation in the exhibition space. The consequence of these displays is revealing the political effect such exhibitions hold both on the represented societies as well as the public space of the audience. When associated with the national museum context, these institutions represent sites of reclaiming, reframing, and re-presenting cultural heritage in the national consciousness.

Contemporary cultural memorial institutions like the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) simultaneously inhabit the space of minority and national identity. The negotiations within the galleries as a result of these intersections necessitate a new way of critical thinking. My objective is to analyze the kinds of conversations at work in these spaces for the histories they challenge and the complications they reveal. This thesis is not a history of Native American peoples or a substantial comparison of other kinds of museum exhibitions centered on indigenous societies; instead, I review only the case of the NMAI and the significance of its attempted solutions for dealing with representational politics. As such, I do not argue that the NMAI is the only institution to mirror the kinds of critically engaging conversations at work in contemporary exhibition discourse, but rather that it represents an interesting framework for an analysis of alternative approaches. The purpose of this thesis is not to offer a complete reevaluation of the future of ethnographic and cultural exhibitions, but to determine how contemporary museums themselves are moving towards such reevaluations within current exhibition spaces themselves.

Subsequently, I will be focusing on three aspects in the formation of the NMAI as a site of resistance and reframing of exhibition discourse. Firstly, I explore the history of the museum institution, paying particular attention to those of an ethnographic and cultural focus. This is not to isolate the art museum as a space where conversations of meaning-making are absent, but rather to apply my analysis on one kind of exhibition space that more explicitly relates to critical intersections of culture and identity. In this first chapter, I examine the development of the museum in light of its theoretical implications for materializing the cultures it exhibits through the production of inclusionary and exclusionary collecting practices. This will serve as the foundation for understanding how the museum has secured its validity as a legitimate owner, producer, and maker of cultural knowledge.

The second chapter moves the discussion from within museum collections into the national consciousness. This framework is especially important in determining the political weight of the national museum. The institution that proclaims such a label identifies both with the political authority of the nation-state as well as the social authority of the museum space. I argue that this intersection provides a critical crossroads for analyzing how other cultures are materialized and thus made intelligible within the national imagination, specifically through the exhibition of cultural artifacts in museum halls. In particular, I draw on memory politics and globalization theories to find a place for the way in which indigenous cultures in particular struggle to become a part of the national imagining while at the same time remain an excluded, minor inhabitant of that same consciousness.

In the third chapter, I turn to feminist theory for a model applicable to properly understanding the layers of negotiations at work in the cultural museum. While feminist theory is interested primarily in the effects of gender and sex in the making of political identity, its more general unraveling of the idea of fixed identity categories provides a fascinating tool for similar analyses in other disciplines. Museum studies recently began to incorporate additional frameworks such as feminist theory to understand the multiple layers at work in the museum space, yet I propose that the application requires a more specific analysis. As a result, I argue that Judith Butler's theory of performativity is of particular importance to dismantling the historical fixity of the museum space. Butler's work is especially significant to museum studies for the way in which it returns the "other's" position outside systems of representation to inside those same structures. In doing so, Butler reveals the inherent instability of the structure and offers instead sites of resistance within and produced by the structure itself. Applying this to the cultural institution likewise reveals the museum as an unstable, changing and "false" authority of culture, meaning-making and identity construction. As a result, the museum institution is open, fluid and subject to its own unraveling. In this way, the museum becomes a site for its fluid reworking.

The final chapter is focuses more closely on the NMAI and its visual appearance. I have chosen this museum in part because of its recent entrance onto the national museum stage and its deeply political, symbolic and conflicting subject. My interest in this museum was originally peaked by an excerpt from an interview in which a member of Native American community proudly compared the NMAI to a "female museum," different than its predecessors in the museum world. This interesting choice of words

suggests a fascinating allusion to alternative to exhibition display that departs from a conventional or "patriarchal" style and moves towards a new approach to display politics. This reference provided a strong point of departure for a new kind of museum analysis, one that incorporates additional frameworks for a more interdisciplinary language of discourse. More specifically, I argue that the NMAI visually demonstrates the theoretical frameworks of identity production, meaning-making and the national/local paradigm of indigenous heritage sites. I focus on three aspects of the museum to build this argument: how founder George Gustav Heye's collecting habits embody the materializing of indigenous stereotypes and their resulting effect on native cultural imaginings; how the museum's transition and move to the Mall represent the political negotiation of nation, community, and the place of memory and reclaiming heritage; and how the exhibition design and architecture contribute to the reworking of cultural identity as a fluid, constantly changing production. In this way, the NMAI provides an interesting example for determining how an analytical awareness cultural negotiation, meaning-making, and identity construction affect the museum space and open up critically-challenging forms of exhibition practice.

I. Museum History and Theory: The Future of a Cultural Museum

A survey of museum history literature reveals a strong if not singular emphasis on the institution's prominence in Western culture. That is, while several of the first "museums" drew their collections from the souvenirs of colonial or scientific expeditions, the structure and philosophy of the institution itself has been both theorized and realized predominantly in Western scholarship. As a result, there exists a particularly Western-focused model of museums to which many other institutions subscribe. Such a foundation may be due in part to the physical conceptualizing of the museum as it coincided with Western scientific progress and political thought. This history influenced not only the contemporary ethnographic museum's direction, but also the proliferation and adaptation of the museum in the global imagination. In other words, because early ethnographic museums were so focused on scientific studies, the discipline privileged artifacts rather than culture, an exhibition strategy that the NMAI will attempt to reverse by shifting the focus towards people to dismantle ethnographic objectification and limitation. How the NMAI accomplishes this will be the basis of later chapters, while this preliminary chapter specifically traces ethnographic museum history. I will be particularly interested in how the museum may be understood through the lens of its own construction, serving as the foundational support for additional interdisciplinary frameworks of memory and meaning-making in later chapters.

There are two prominent approaches to the historicizing of the cultural museum: its philosophical and theoretical past and future, and the material timeline of its evolution. The works of Tony Bennett and Ivan Karp focus on these different analyses, providing a starting point for further critical evaluation. In *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory,*

Politics, for example, Bennett positions the development of the museum within a "more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing [the masses], was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power."[1] In his perspective, European governments saw the museum as a venue for regulating culture.[2] This confirmed their interest in establishing national museums in order that the nation-state could control dissemination of knowledge and education in the ethnographic exhibition space. Drawing on these social and political processes, Bennett's volume delves deeply into the theories behind the museum's historical construction in order to rework the political possibilities of such sites. As such, his text is strongly sociopolitical in its attention to the effect of museum imaginings on the national consciousness. Nonetheless, Bennett's argument is particularly useful for unraveling the layers of influence and the dynamics of conversations at play in the contemporary cultural heritage site.

Bennett's interest in the social attitudes concurrent to the development of the public museum reveals the institution's potential as a political tool. He describes three stages in the creation and nature of the public cultural institution: (1) the museum as "a social space [with] the need to detach that space from its earlier private, restricted and socially exclusive forms of sociality"; (2) the museum as a representational space; and (3) the museum as a space for "observation and regulation."[3] In the first stage, according to Bennett, the private beginning drew from a proliferation of solely upper-class collections from which public viewing was generally excluded. In Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, collected objects were used for religious and

[1] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] ---, 24.

fantastical exercises rather than to understand the meaning of the objects themselves.[4] These "princely collections…symbolized not so much the power to amass artefacts which might be impressively displayed to others as the power to reserve valued objects for private and exclusive inspection."[5] Collections were often housed in equally ornate cupboards, originating the term "cabinets of curiosity" among ethnographic collections in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[6] As a result, the beginnings of collections and their private display among the higher class predisposed the museum to its sense of elitist authority about cultural artifacts and the distribution of such knowledge, even before the institution became a part of the public space.

It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that collections became open to the public. This democratizing is interesting for its timing in particular, for it coincides with a political shift in European governments as well as within scientific education. During the Enlightenment and the age of scientific reasoning, current political thinking challenged the formation of imperial rule and advocated a more participatory government. Members of royalty who owned and collected rare artwork and objects were accused of "hoarding [of] treasures of knowledge."[7] Instead, scholars rallied for a public place of intellectual engagement that mirrored the political agenda of colonialism and exploration as heralding the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. The emphasis on this relationship between science and society is fundamentally important for public institutions. Museums became places for public participation in the pedagogic project of representing the order of nature in order to reaffirm racial ideology. It was here in the

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[4] Carolynne Harris Knox, "Genres of Museums: Conventions, Distinctions, and Blurred Boundaries" (Masters' Thesis, Emory University, 1997), 8.
[5] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 27.
[6] Knox, "Genres of Museums," 7.
[7] ---, 8.

exhibition space that evidence of social hierarchy—with the colonial power owning and displaying artifacts of the colonized entity—was neatly organized to visually categorize the national "self" and the minority "other." Because most of these museums and expeditions were commissioned with the approval of the state and the university, and this highly elitist, it may be further assumed that this emphasis on collections was expected to "civilize" the subjects of the nation.[8] Expeditions were financed by museums to collect objects from remote areas of the world, coinciding with the expansion of colonial rule in the nineteenth century.

At this point in the history of museums, the institution's mission adopted a method that Bennett argues was "simultaneously epistemic and governmental."[9] Explorations conducted in the pursuit of science allowed scientists, ethnographers, and collectors to contribute to a growing number of cultural history museums. Those that aligned themselves with a national agenda, such as the British Museum and the American Museum of Natural History, are some examples that are more explicitly political. I argue that the formal exhibition space embodies the idea of the nation that is indebted to the political and social weight of cultural imaginings. In such representations, collected ethnographic objects, especially those retrieved in conjunction with the politics of colonialism, reflect and reinforce difference between the self and other, or nation-state and colonial entity, respectively. More importantly, the display of these collected artifacts, materialized cultural identities of indigenous populations within the public's imagination.

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[8] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 28.
[9] ---, 33.

In this way, the museums of the nineteenth century paved the way for the establishment of a national consciousness in the representation of cultures. At the same time, collecting material objects became the focus of the museum and helped to develop its connection to ethnography.[10] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains ethnography as a process with stages of qualifications that made up the scientific ground for these early collections:

> Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. Such objects are ethnographic not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo's studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves.[11]

In this critique of ethnographic collecting, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett equates the treatment of the artifacts as products of another culture with the political treatment of peoples of other cultures. In her perspective, the collecting the objects make the cultural representations that ethnographic displays produce. As a result, exhibitions may become grounds for dangerous misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Thus the "scientific" museums of the nineteenth century remained an important albeit ambiguous tool in the reconfiguring of political imaginings of the nation during the colonial period.

Mieke Bal specifically comments on this complex relationship between the construction of other cultures in the Western imagination, questioning the effects of the processes that arose with the age of colonialism. He sees this as an intersection of

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[10] Ann McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye: Nationalizing the Museum of the American Indian and Its Collections," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 69.

[11] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 388.

multiple possibilities for the museum's future, either the end of its historical past or "the end of its disingenuous innocence."[12] In other words, the democratizing of private collections removes the act of collecting from any naïve or apolitical associations. The act of making object collections—especially of other cultures— accessible to the public promotes the "other-izing" of identities. In this way, Bal's unraveling critique of museum authority corresponds with postcolonial theory that rejects a fixed relationship between subject and object. The museum's ability to transform and change in reaction to concurrent political and social influences demonstrates that the museum institution itself is not fixed or stagnant, just as the identities it represents shift in the meetings of thoughts, memories, and cultures during and in the aftermath of colonialism.

One example of these colonial intersections is the world fair whose exhibitions "brought the world to visitors for consumption."[13] These European and American fairs featured special shows of ethnographic objects collected as spectacles of culture for a Western audience. The sociopolitical result is a materialization of identities excluded from the national imagining. The museum-as-exhibition in this context provides the ground for meaning-making by the visitor. However, the difference between these two forms of cultural exhibitionism is the intent. Specifically, the world's fair focused on freak shows and unnatural objects, a sensationalist approach to cultural artifacts that often included the exhibition of indigenous peoples themselves and materialized the exotic such that it "offered synchronic views, [while] museums were seen as representing the past."[14] On the other hand, museums during this time held fast to a more grounded and systematic scientific order of collections which, while falling short of explaining the

[12] Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 70.
[13] McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 69.
[14] *Ibid*.

objects or cultures represented, at least *attempted* to provide a more ambivalent and non-partial environment for study and observation.[15]

Another alternative to the traditional ethnographic or cultural museum is that of the cultural heritage site. At these sites, heritage draws from both place and identity in such a way that it legitimizes and preserves a sense of memory tied to location. The memory politics of place, identity and the museum will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, yet to understand the history and future of the contemporary global cultural museum, it is important to examine the heritage site as a method for counteracting the dominant and sometimes oppressive monotonous force of the museum institution. While some museums, such as the NMAI, employ place as a tool for reframing its visual mission, most of these kinds of institutions focus on the space within the gallery as the primary vehicle for critical engagement with representational politics. Thus, the heritage site's implicit departure from this traditional museum structure serves to further reflect the "changing representation of national memory" within the so-called "heritage landscapes" of cultural sites.[16] Local sites are imbedded already with a sense of memory and identity, and the preservation of these conserved spaces in the public sphere further memorializes that place within the public imagination, similar to a kind of "museum experience [which becomes] a model for experiencing life outside its walls."[17]

With the heritage site, cultural representations encompass both the museum narrative from the Western perspective on a so-called other culture as well as the specific

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[15] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Exhibitionary Complexes," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 36.
[16] David Bunn, "The Museum Outdoors: Heritage, Cattle, and Permeable Borders in the Southwestern Kruger National Park," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 357-358.
[17] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 410.

memories of that local site and those peoples. To place these kinds of politically sensitive conversations within the contemporary cultural museum raises several questions that museum critic Steven D. Levine posits in his article, "Museum Practices":

> How can museums make space for the voices of indigenous experts, members of communities represented in exhibitions, and artists? How can the widely varying voices of museum visitors be heard by exhibition makers and reflected in their designs? Can an exhibition contain more than one voice, or can a voice exhibit more than one message?[18]

These are the kinds of questions that I argue the NMAI attempts to answer. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, the NMAI exists as cultural heritage site museum *as* a national ethnographic museum, deconstructing both institutional forms to bridge the new kind of "female museum" mentioned briefly in the introduction. This will be examined more closely in the case study and with other theoretical frameworks; however, how the NMAI could reach this intersection stems largely from the kinds of questions its historical predecessors would soon have to face. Thus, while these concerns may not have been explicitly articulated in the nineteenth century ethnographic museums, following the political changes of the twentieth in the age of globalization and civic rights, they were nonetheless important to the construction of newly empathetic museum spaces.

In the twentieth century, the exhibition space transferred from being exclusively educational to being explicitly conversational. This reflected the multiplicity of identities and memories that had previously been considered static and authoritative by ethnographic institutions. The introduction to Ivan Karp's *Museum Frictions* comments

[18] Steven D. Lavine, "Museum Practices," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 151.

at length on this fundamental transition within museum strategies. He argues that these new museums became indebted to concurrent revisions of the

> nation and citizenship [which] were defined in relation to plural societies in ways that contrasted with such definitions in national museums founded a century or more earlier, in very different times…. Older, established museums also sought to reconfigure some of their displays, collections policies, and relations with visitors and communities within a continuing cultural and political context that recognized that the social order is composed of diverse elements and groups, some of whose presence had not been acknowledged in the museum sphere. Museums and heritage sites were also perceived as a means of claiming or appropriating a role in broader public spheres and of legitimating identity, history, and presence, a perception that shaped this change and growth…. Communities sought the legitimacy conferred by museums for themselves, no necessarily to display themselves to others.[19]

How this revision of the museum practice came about became a fundamental question to contemporary museums. In the case of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), for example, the institution's merging with the highly bureaucratic and ordered Smithsonian Institution was difficult. The NMAI represents a new class of cultural-focused museums dealing with both the political innuendo of the "national museum" as well as the local community voices of represented subjects. How the NMAI specifically responds to this shift will be the subject of later chapters, but its establishment reflects the process that responds to, as well as influences, the sociopolitical negotiations that occurred at the time in which most museums were founded. Specifically, the rise of the nation-state, the democratizing of the public space, and the age of colonialism each contributed to the idea of the cultural institution as it exists today. The modern museum exercises the kind of transitions once "associated with

[19] Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 11.

the development of liberal forms of government."[20] At the same time, it challenges the political concept of governance, authority, fixity, and the nation-state itself, generating different spaces for the representation of indigenous and minority cultures. Bennett is quick to warn against a strictly post-structuralist critique of these historical and sociopolitical processes, arguing instead that a survey of the multiple factors of representation theories, discursive influences, and political factors that gave rise to the modern exhibition space are in far too complex a relationship to be separated or singled out.[21] In this way, the ethnographic museum exists as the "most obviously politically charged institution,"[22] rich with conversations and negotiations concerning the memory of cultures and peoples who occupy a minority place in the national imagination but demand politically equal access to the heritage landscape of the museum world.

[20] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 33.
[21] ---, 45.
[22] Bal, *Double Exposures*, 63.

II. Memory Processes and the National (Ethnographic) Museum

One aspect with which the history of both the museum and museum scholarship routinely grapples is that of the position of memory within the public space. Significant perhaps to ethnographic, historical, and cultural heritage sites in particular, memory discourses and memory practices beg the question of how such private processes shape and are shaped by larger public imaginings. Of particular interest to this critical reading is the effect of memory on the materialization of the national museum, one invested with and governed by the public imagination. Consequently, memory and meaning-making may be articulated as tools through which matters such as politics and museums may be thought as well as practiced.[23] As such, this paper is indebted to the valuable scholarship on the long history of memory in the philosophical tradition as well as in psychological studies. However, this chapter will seeks to determine how memory processes may untangle the complex relationships in the national imagination as they are articulated within the museum space.

Before the question of how memory practices materialize the museum is broached, a review of memory as a tool of meaning-making in public institutions is first required. Memory as a theoretical framework perhaps gained its strongest scholarly support following the reconciliation and recovery efforts after World War II. In light of the horrors of the Holocaust, nations approached the subject not only as a necessary tool to aid the traumatic soul-searching of the national imagination during the postwar period, but also as a method for establishing and negotiating the public space as an acceptable, plausible and necessary strategy of collective memory practice. The trend towards commemorative sites in the 1980s, such as the Vietnam Memorial, is testament to these

[23] John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton UP, 1994), 5.

political conversations and many of these sites refer to a specific social memory. The NMAI, in contrast, is in the tradition of a more general site of resistance to challenge the kinds of memories that have oppressed certain minority groups. The museum acts as a potential site for reframing a history of political conflict. Ethnographic and cultural museums as memorial sites may thus encompass the broader application of memory politics in the way in which such processes work in both the imagination and the imaging of the exhibition space.

The relationship between memory as a private practice and as a collective strategy mirrors that between the private and the public spheres. Though writing with a focus on the politics of war commemorations, T.G. Ashplant prefaces his work by negotiating memory discourses through the lens of the cultural processes simultaneously at work. According to his analysis,

> the concepts of public and private memory provide a means of showing the ways in which individual experience is always structured and understood through cultural narratives, including those of the nation-state. In this way, it has moved beyond the limitations of state-centered analyses which are unable to explain how official commemoration and memory achieves its subjective hold..[24]

Again, Ashplant's position is from the perspective of national trauma and grief amidst war memorials. However, I argue that a similar focus on recovery of lost identities is also sought in the contemporary heritage site, itself embroiled in the politics of a cultural as well as national imagining.

The globalization of museums provides an interesting intersection of memory and national identity. The obvious political undertones of related scholarship should not be quickly dismissed, but rather, acknowledging these material frameworks may help to

[24] T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War memory and Commemorations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14.

explicate further the role of memory processes in national museums. John R. Gillis' *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, for example, is a collection of essays specifically addressing such encounters at the 1990 Public Memory and Collective Identity Conference at Rutgers University. His opening statement summarizes the relationship between memory discourse and museum politics: "Commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation."[25] Referencing the political processes also at work in the constitution of national identity, Gillis' statement presents political trauma as one of the grounding influences of the desire of memorialization. In this regard, public memory acts like a social structure for the exchange of power, understanding, and material culture, and subsequently fashioned in the public sphere.[26] The national museum in particular grapples with these negotiations, the consequence being a "museumizing" of the collective memory practices.

Not the least of the issues concerning cultural institutions is the legitimacy of a group already inhabiting a marginalized position in the nation yet seeking to materialize and challenge that location through the tool of the museum. Central to these multiple layers is the role memory in the *national* consciousness plays in sorting through the various ethnic identities that constitute that nation. Such conversations may be articulated as a collision between a so-called collective, uniform nationality—formed and supported within the imagination of a group memory—and the proliferation of cultural sites which seldom reflect a national history but that of local and often marginalized or oppressed

[25] Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, 5.
[26] John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City," *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton UP, 1994), 75.

peoples. This obvious disjunction parallels the struggle of such museums to fit into the larger framework of national museums: specifically, the founding of and reception to the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., will be explored in detail in later chapters as a case study of these contested discourses.

How cultural or ethnographic museums may enter into the dominant national imagination leaves first the question of the latter's construction. The idea of the nation-state as a sovereign unit of administration and authority has been much theorized in the field of political science, but the alleged immutability of its borders is still a point of contention. Physically, borders as well as nations are susceptible to political and economic change, in the form of revolutions, wars or treaties. However, the very idea of the state itself is of greater concern, especially with its role in the construction of national museums. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* briefly delves into this subject, focusing on how such an imagination materializes itself in the public memory. His argument rests on the thesis that nationality, "or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts."[27] This "nation-ness" can be collected, displayed and recast in parallel with the museum structure. The idea of the nation, then, is itself a part of this imagination and realized in this effect. Susan Alcock's volume on memory and past civilizations explains this aspect of collective memory as a tool to "symbolically smooth over ruptures, creating the appearance of a seamless social whole."[28] This concept of unity is particularly interesting for the museum context, whose exhibition design creates a sense of fluid

[27] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 4.
[28] Ruth Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock, *Archaeologies of Memory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

visual movement that contributes to its context of authentic representations. This may also reveal additional problems to complicate this alleged seamlessness, including the idea of authentic representation itself, which I will analyze in the case study of the NMAI. In this chapter, however, I argue that memory processes allow members of a collective to share in a community of ownership and belonging by participating both in the constructions of these memories as well as in their material demonstrations.

This collectivity is certainly not unique to the development of a national consciousness specifically, yet at the same time it does not encompass the whole of a nation-state's constituents. On the one hand, nationalist ideology is materialized most obviously through national homogeneity, such that even on "maps of the world, each nation, enclosed by an unbroken dark line, is uniformly colored, and the colors of adjoining nations are always different."[29] This, according to Anderson, is evident and maintained by tools such as the census, the political map, and the national museum, each of which respectively encompasses and validates "the nature of the human beings [a nation] ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry."[30]

At the same time, however, such an ideology neglects or overlooks the existence of "internal diversity."[31] In other words, there exist in the imagined state of the nation peoples who may adhere to this collective memory of their inhabited space but at the same time identify themselves differently. For example, native populations in the United States occupy an unusual place both within the political boundaries of the country as well as within the cultural landscape, often reduced to fantastical memories of Western

[29] Richard Handler, "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?", in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 29.
[30] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 164.
[31] Handler, "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?", 29.

romantic pasts or exaggerated stereotypes of "exotic" rituals, costumes and dances. These imaginings are products of the materializing of native identity within or against the larger backdrop of an alleged American national consciousness. However, the establishment of the NMAI on the highly politicized ground of the nation's capital directly confronts the reality of the position of indigenous peoples in the national imagination. Consequently, the national consciousness is doubly imagined within the walls of the cultural exhibition space, bringing the discourse of memory and imaginings to the forefront of museum politics.

Realizing the complexity of this consciousness, Anderson acknowledges the multiplicity of identities and memories within the nation-state which also contribute to the multiplicity of national imaginings. However, even these processes are not "straightforward, simple, or monolithic."[32] Rather, just as the imagining of individual memory is subject to multiple possibilities as well as amnesia, so is the national imagining. In the case of cultural museums, for example, amnesia serves to reveal those aspects of a cultural history and identity that are absent from their visual display. At the NMAI, the colonial encounter, a subject of particularly focus in local tribal museums, possesses few references at the Smithsonian for one reason or another, raising questions that require additional research into this absence. Nonetheless, that the NMAI, as a national cultural museum, also practices visual amnesia of certain histories contributes to the kind of amnesia present in public memory-making. It further suggests that memory and meaning are an active process in constant change and form. The idea of the nation as a "natural object or thing" is thus performative in the sense that it is a product and effect of its own imagining and those identities which constitute it. In other words, the

[32] Van Dyke and Alcock, *Archaeologies of Memory*, 3.

materialization of nationhood is defined by memory processes negotiated between "spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries," which themselves produce the idea of the nation in the public imagination.[33] As such, the presence of a national museum mystifies even as it ratifies both the nation and the museum, presenting both in a context to legitimize and validate one another.

A national museum focused on an ethnographic history of a minority population further complicates this relationship. In such a case, the memory discourses at work in the representation of a group politically excluded and historically reduced threaten the idea of a so-called "national museum" at all. Subsequently institutions like the NMAI represent this challenge both by the titular claim to an equal place in the national memory landscape and by the pursuit of exhibition strategies that illustrate the differences. Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out the risk of "democratizing" identity and memory for cross-cultural discourses precisely because such conceptions are "peculiar" to Western scholarship.[34] Such a critique is worth consideration, particularly for discourses focused on identities constructed and challenged in the museum context. The globalization of the museum institution problematizes this argument further, leaving open the question of alternative approaches to identity and memory discourses.

Andreas Huyssen, writing critically of media and memory in the global age, clarifies the relationship between "reality and its representation," arguing that the multiplicity of national imaginings requires a corresponding multiplicity of "representing the real and its memories."[35] Significantly, the world of cultural museums further insists

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[33] Handler, "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?", 29.
[34] Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, 27.
[35] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 66.

on this dynamic, relying on the imagining of the museum and that of the "host nation" to create new paths of meaning-making in exhibitions of cultural identity. The challenge, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is mediating these administrative and curatorial decisions to avoid negative stereotyping or the historically racist tradition of ethnographic museums. As this long and controversial history remains recently fixed within the public's imagination of the ethnographic museum, changes in the discourse of national and cultural institutions are highly likely to face opposition, as demonstrated in the mixed reception to the opening of the NMAI in 2004. Critic Sharon Macdonald, however, nonetheless advocates for persistence in this direction for museums:

> New memories do not necessarily just jostle alongside existing ones, like new products on a supermarket shelf, but may expose previous silences, raising questions about their motives or the power dynamics of which they were part. Or they may threaten to eclipse other memories, edging them out of public space or undermining their own achieved settlement as accepted heritage.[36]

However varied the results, Macdonald embraces the inclusion of memory politics in the reshaping of the cultural institution's mission, suggesting that the presence of innovative strategies reflects a similar need for reconstituting the role of memory within the nation-state itself. Furthermore, Ashplant agrees with this "redefinition" of memory politics in the age of globalization, one "capable of embracing the operations of power in civil society as well as in the state; of recognizing the existence of a cultural politics surrounding representation and meaning-making; and of tracing the effects of these

[36] Sharon Macdonald, "Unsettling Memories: Intervention and Controversy over Difficult Public Heritage," in *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*, eds. Marta Anico and Elsa Peralta (London: Routledge, 2009), 93.

processes and conflicts from the social domain into that of the psyche, where they constitute a politics of subjectivity."[37]

Interestingly, Asplant's connection between a multiplicity of memories, identities, and subjectivities and the political ramifications of these relations reflects how such conversations are manifested within the public space. Physically, the location of a cultural institution figures strongly into the political sensibility of its imagining.[38] Heritage materializes the notion of cultural identity and memory, particularly within the national consciousness, such that these inscriptions are made and shared within a communally-owned public landscape.[39] In this way, heritage museums and sites allow for the memorialization of "…social groups suffering injustice, injury or trauma"[40] as well as those seeking to bolster "senses of identity and legitimacy."[41] At the same time, heritage politics mirrors those of memory and identity imaginings such that public narratives inscribed in the shared space of cultural sites are "accompanied in many, though by no means all, countries by unsettling, competing or contested, memories, narratives and heritage."[42]

The nature of cultural memories to engage with "pre-existing national and local cultural memories" lends itself to the kind of "political effectiveness" that heritage institutions in particular are able to challenge and encompass as museums take up these new directions.[43] The charge of being politically effective remains one to be further

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[37] Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemorations*, 12.
[38] Gerard Corsane, Peter Davis and Donatella Murtas, "Place, Local Distinctiveness and Local Identity: Ecomuseum Approaches in Europe and Asia," in *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*, eds. Marta Anico and Elsa Peralta (London: Routledge, 2009), 49.
[39] Macdonald, "Unsettling Memories," 93.
[40] Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemorations*, 3.
[41] Macdonald, "Unsettling Memories," 93.
[42] ---, 93.
[43] Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemorations*, 18.

researched. How to imagine the cultural museum as a site for political activity requires a reframing of the exhibitions space itself. In the next chapter, I approach the problem using theories of identity categories found in feminist politics with the belief that these readings may help unravel the processes behind the meaning-making of cultural identities. If memory and identity are thought of as "material objects—memory as something to be retrieved; identity as something that can be lost as well as found," then they are precisely not fixed.[44] This fluidity rejects the notion that memories, whether national, individual, or located to specific cultural sites, are "object[s] bounded in time and space…with [their] own territoriality,"[45] and instead demonstrates that the lack of fixity in the memory landscape of the national imagination is and must be reflected in new approaches to museum scholarship, frameworks, and practice.

[44] Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, 3.
[45] ---, 3-4.

III. The Performativity Discourse and the Ethnographic Museum

In a chapter from her 1993 book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, feminist scholar Peggy Phelan describes performance as an act of "representation without reproduction" (146). Citing an example of an artist who replaced missing works of art with written descriptions or hand-drawn likenesses, Phelan argues that the museum context can represent an artwork without actually reproducing the object. Cultural displays likewise create selective performances of culture. At the same time, however, they maintain that the represented "'Other' *as* the Same is not assured" (Phelan 3). Instead, the exhibition space serves as legitimizing authority that relies on an invented context of objective truth. Such ethnographic displays are not as fixed as the authoritative function of the museum space may make them appear. This chapter argues that the "representation without reproduction" mantra is not adequate for the study of ethnographic museums. It does not acknowledge how an original "given" context is constructed, nor does it successfully explain the museum space as an additionally produced context, repeated and reiterated over time. I will turn to Judith Butler's theories of performativity to frame these processes. In doing so, I argue that these theories reframe the kinds of political instabilities and futures that constitute the ethnographic museum space.

The ethnographic museum, such as the NMAI, creates selective performances of culture in which the societies represented are themselves politicized through their exhibition. The museum exhibits works of indigenous peoples who have been historically and politically marginalized, yet the museum's federal support, identity and location on the Mall in the nation's capital provide a political context in which the periphery is

brought to the center—the minority culture is given a prominent place within the site of national heritage. At the same time, the NMAI exhibitions are both contrary to and compliant with historical traditions of ethnographic displays in Western museums. For example, the museum does not use costumed mannequins but often employs reenactments either in person or in audiovisual materials. In addition, like more formal ethnographic institutions, the museum also displays artifacts no longer within the original context but within constructed spaces intended to recreate the original context to some degree. However, I argue that ethnographic displays are not fixed. Rather, because the cultural museum is concerned with the representation of identity, and identity is a performative act, then the museum itself is a part of this reiterative cycle of meaning-making.

The first chapter of this thesis sought to apply museum theory and history as a process to define and negotiate the function of cultural institutions as protectors and purveyors of social heritage. In doing so, the idea of the museum space becomes one construed with political meaning that is invested with and legitimized by institutional authority. The ethnographic museum, historically focused on the exhibition of a marginalized society for the consumption of the dominant society, is of particular interest to scholars as a site of "representation without reproduction." That is, the ethnographic museum reinforces the authority of the museum as the owner of cultural heritage, "an unchallenged claim to the representation of an objective and neutral knowledge or singular truth."[46] However, "representation without reproduction" does not completely explain the cultural heritage site. Additionally, the idea of the museum as an immutable

[46] Moira McLoughlin, *Museums and the Representation of Native Canadians: Negotiating the Borders of Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 5.

authority may be undermined using Butler's theoretical works, which argue that neither context nor meaning—and thus neither culture nor identity—is fixed. Just as an infinite context produces multiple meanings and futures, the museum space is equally open to fluidity of culture as a result of multiple productions iterated to re-present and re-produce what is neither completely the same nor completely different. It is within this middle ground that Butler's performativity theory may serve to clarify the evolution of the ethnographic museum as an intersection of culture, institution and meaning-making.

The formal ethnographic museum was first formed in the late eighteenth-century in Europe and developed into public galleries of material culture. Museum theorist Timothy Luke writes that "[b]y the end of the twentieth century, museums came to be widely regarded as modern scientific society's 'secular cathedrals,' 'guardians of shared history,' or 'storehouses for national treasures'."[47] As discussed in earlier chapters, the collectors' roles in forming what and how other cultures were studied are useful in establishing the kinds of identities and memories museums produced of indigenous peoples. Museum historian Christina Kreps notes that the position of these often white, Christian "patrons" of another culture demonstrates power over these constructed societies. She argues that the collectors' prestige legitimizes the artifacts' "authenticity" and reinforces "issues of voice, authority and control."[48] As wealthy members of a privileged social class, collectors afforded the luxury of selecting specific artifacts from specific peoples, the compilation of which formed the idea of the ethnographic museum in its infancy.

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[47] Timothy Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiv.
[48] Christina Kreps, "Chapter 13: The Theoretical Future of Indigenous Museums: Concept and Practice," in *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the South West Pacific*, ed. Nick Stanley (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 225.

In this way, the act of collecting material culture becomes the act of producing material culture. How these cultural memories and identities are materialized within the public consciousness relies significantly on which aspects of the represented society are presented and excluded. For example, since collectors like Heye tended to only acquire those objects of ritual or everyday focus—the common interest among ethnographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—then visitors who came to view these public collections would be presented with an idea of the Native whose timelessness and uncivilized nature is inscribed through the display of only these kinds of objects. Thus, this binary of inclusion and exclusion is similar to the selective exhibition focus of the ethnographic museum itself.

I argue that this exhibition binary also recalls discussions of identity posited in Butler's queer theories. Butler argues that systems of representation exclude those identities, bodies and sexualities that are rendered unthinkable in a heterosexual matrix perceived to be the fixed norm of gender identity. These exclusions trouble the idea of a fixed gender norm through Jacques Derrida's logic of supplementarity, which posits that the inclusion actually internalizes the exclusion to produce open and iterable futures that are fluid, not fixed. According to Derrida, collective identities are constructed through the post-modern discourse of "différance," which is

> what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present but this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present.[49]

[49] Jacques Derrida qtd in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 5.

In other words, differentiation is a product and effect of the categories that constitute it. If we apply this concept to the idea of the nation-state, then what to imagine the nation is within the public's memory is to imagine what is *not* the nation. Furthermore, this analogy reveals a more critical parallel mirrored in the contemporary cultural museum, which I argue is in the tradition of producing visually this process of memory-making and identity. For example, theorist Julia Noordegraaf translates Derrida's argument into theories of visual culture by arguing that this internalization process produces a "'reality' [that becomes] an *effect* of the representations instead of the other way around."[50]

While Butler's theory examines what she terms the "performative" possibilities of gender and identity, it is not limited to discussions of sex and the body. The application of her exclusionary theories may help trouble the apparent fixity of museum authority. The idea of the museum as a fixed space of authority is only successful if constructed through the lens of what deserves to be preserved and what does not. This forms a constructed idea of the museum's authority as an effect of the expectation that "[e]verything [understood by] museums to be or want to be rests on a set of expectations or beliefs about objects."[51] Ethnographic artifacts on display succeed if they appear as "authentic representations" that together generate a context of meaning. In producing meaning, an exhibition constitutes a "kind of speech act," which Mieke Bal describes as the "foundational notion [of] display" (Bal 88).

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[50] Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen NAi Publishers, 2004), 13.
[51] Donald Preziosi, "Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality," *Museum History Journal* 2, no. 1 (January 2009): 49.

However, because such constructions are based on a system of codes experienced variously, then that context is no longer a finite or saturated source of meaning-making. In other words, there is no single monolithic truth that a museum exhibition can generate. Furthermore, the objects themselves exist in the museum context and are thus removed from where they were produced or used. Museum curators are conscious of this removal and of the belief that the gallery space is "false," providing for the object first and foremost an exhibition space rather than a citation of another cultural environment. As a result, the scholarly mantra of "representation without reproduction" fails to completely understand the ethnographic museum. The exhibition instead generates a form of culture that is presented *again*, produced *again*. Importantly, through each of these reiterations a different presentation and production serves to disturb ideas of a fixed original and allows for sites of resistance even within the system of exhibition representation. This concept is expanded upon by museum theorist Donald Preziosi, who argues that these new identities are situated in the political dialogue of the Other that "simultaneously erases" previous states or framings of identities, "and consequently each coexists as a kind of artifact or effect of its other."[52]

If the ethnographic museum manufactures forms of culture through a selective process of collecting and displaying, then the museum institution is exclusionary to a fault, highly temporal, and cannot be accepted completely as a fixed, stable authority. What results is a discrepancy between what is thinkable in the museum context and what is unthinkable. This is similar to the concept of performing the museum first posited by museum theorist Charles Garoian, who notes that the dynamic and dialogic relationship of the museum experience helps to "expose, examine, and critique the public dominant

[52] Preziosi, "Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality," 42.

codes inscribed on…bodies by museum culture."[53] This idea of inscription, itself a reiterative and changing process, suggests a fluidity and movement within the museum as well. The resulting unraveling of the institution reveals a mirror shift in determining the museum's role in society as authoritative ministers of culture.

Butler is particularly interested in how exclusionary practices reveal political futures by subverting ideas of a fixed structural norm. Importantly, she argues that "the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized."[54] In other words, this deconstruction of identity politics—revealing the thinkable and unthinkable—"establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated."[55] She thus suggests that the production of identity is in actuality the result or effect of repeated practices that render identity itself. This is, Butler argues, accomplished through iterable citations (that is, citations repeated differently over time) and thus identity may be produced, lived and rethought differently. This theory negates the possibility of a given original, or set norm, and instead argues that identity is continuously shaped and produced by its own effects, and thus innately and inherently open. Using this definition of performativity, museum theory may explore how the performative functions to open the future of the institution to new possibilities as well. Specifically, because the given authority of the museum proves not to be a given at all, the structure of the museum may be thought of as an effect and product the processes that constitute the museum itself.

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[53] Charles Garoian, "Performing the Museum," *Studies in Art Education* 42, no. 3 (Spring, 2001): 247.
[54] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5.
[55] ---, 189.

In another aspect, Butler's theories reframe questions of whether or not ethnographic museums shape indigenous identities. A museum's "seemingly innocent presentations" of indigenous cultures actually "reinforce dominant social structures" [56] and regulate the separation between the proper (majority) and the supplement (minority). Moira McLoughlin summarizes this intersection as an example of how "identity is constituted *both* outside and within representation; it is a product of many imaginations and discourses."[57] However, this separation is also an example of how it produces *and* maintains the proper rather than singularly retaining the supplement as outside the system. Subsequently, even identities generated by ethnographic museums may be open if they, working within the system, reveal that same structure to be unstable. Preziosi explains the argument of the fluidity of museum identity as

> the *non-erasure* and the *re-framing* of the past by the *retention of what is rejected* or historically or theologically superseded as its memorial or monument [which] is essential to making legible the legitimacy of what one wants the present to be understood as being. The museum's contents thus also serve to legitimize what is outside the museum—its contemporary social contexts.[58]

According to Preziosi, then, what is both in and outside the ethnographic museum makes intelligible each aspect together, dependent on what Butler calls intersectionality, in which these identities are "invariably produced and maintained,"[59] and what art theorist Robert Williams claims is a "simultaneous development, side by side, of different possibilities."[60]

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[56] Conal McCarthy, "Our Works of Ancient Times: History, Colonization, and Agency at the 1906-7 New Zealand International Exhibition," *Museum History Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 2009): 121.
[57] McLoughlin, *Museums and the Representation of Native Canadians*, 270.
[58] Preziosi, "Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality," 42-43.
[59] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3.
[60] Robert Wiliams, "Part 6: Post modernism," in *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 263.

To examine intersectionality in the ethnographic museum more carefully, a focus on an institution such as the NMAI will allow a critical engagement with the performative process of museum identity and production. Originally the Museum of the American Indian, the NMAI's precursor existed as an exhibition space linked to the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City, named for and founded by a prolific collector of indigenous artifacts in the Americas. The institution became the NMAI after a much discussed move to the Mall in Washington, D.C., made possible by an Act of Congress in 1989 and completed in September 2004. The symbolic significance of this transition, much like the importance of recognizing the collectors and patrons of other ethnographic museums mentioned previously, cannot be easily dismissed or completely excluded from a critical discussion of the current institution. In fact, the addition of the word "National" to the museum's title serves to legitimize the space as a respectable member of the Smithsonian Institution, a network of museums funded by the United States government and thus politically-minded. Moreover, the political implication of appropriating "national" to the ethnographic museum further complicates debates about the role of indigenous identity within a dominant, colonial nationality.

The NMAI itself acts as a performative site within the context of traditional ethnographic museums. In anticipation of its move to the Mall, for example, a survey conducted by architects and trustees inquired of the mostly self-identifying indigenous staff what elements should be included in the new design. A striking majority of the responses called for a model museum that protected and preserved "Indian identity" while marking a stark contrast to other "traditional" museums. Consequently, the museum's physical structure and exhibition design depart from traditional ethnographic

forms and instead engender new possibilities. For example, the physical construction of the building is markedly unusual: the architecture mimics natural erosion in the organic, curved shape as well as its golden earthy color, much like a cliff or mountain side. Additionally, the museum grounds incorporate elements of nature, including a waterfall, a fountain, gardens of native crops, and a marsh pond. The idea is to transform the museum experience from solely educational to holistically experiential, a concept important to many indigenous spiritual beliefs and thus integral to the structure of this new exhibition space.

As in other ethnographic museums, citations of the museum space as one of traditional respect and authority are internalized in the context of the NMAI as well, as the museum does call itself a "national" institution in a way that legitimizes and produces its effect of authority. But how it differs from other institutions is the process by which these effects are produced: namely, its exhibition design. The NMAI is divided into three permanent galleries: "Our Universes" focuses on philosophies and spiritual beliefs; "Our Peoples" harkens back to traditional historical displays of the experiences of indigenous communities over time; and "Our Lives" illustrates the contemporary fluidity of identity. Each of these galleries seeks to re-present and re-produce contemporary and historical cultures and identities in an experiential way that emphasizes the fluidity of both identity and culture. The physical rendering of the space avoids straight lines and favors round forms to symbolize a fluidity that has no original given or a permanent fixed end. Instead, the space itself generates presentations and products that are different in their new productions, succeeding through citations of the same. The result is a physical rendering of the fluidity and instability of intersections of identity and culture. As Butler argues in

her theories of performativity, identity is unfixed and constantly becoming; Williams calls this a process that "stresses practices rather than essences,"[61] a statement significant for its recognition of the ways in which productions of culture generated by the museum exhibition space are as open to multiple futures and as prone to undoings of norms as identity politics outside the intuition. Luke explains this dynamic as a continuously shifting process between "the exhibition-as-a-world" and "the-world-as-an-exhibition,"[62] each of which succeeds through reiterations of cultural codes that are understood to be fluid and moving. As such, the NMAI's formation, architecture and exhibition design render in a tangible form the discussion of performativity in the ethnographic museum as a producer of multiple identity and culture.

Butler's theory of performativity is useful to dissect further the theoretical frameworks already employed in museum studies. Its interest in the intersection of culture and production is of fundamental and foundational importance in the history of the ethnographic museum. How this intersection and its performative process function within the ethnographic museum becomes a political issue in which already marginalized societies are re-presented and re-produced, that is, presented and produced *again*, rather than a representation or reproduction of the same, the "original." Additionally, this performative process seeks to destabilize the identity politics and cultural production previously considered to be a fixed and stagnant product of museum institutional authority; in actuality, these productions might be better understood as an effect of the process of meaning-making in the display of material cultures. The NMAI is thus understood as a physical example of this performative museum practice, constituting an

[61] Williams, "Part 6: Postmodernism," 263.
[62] Luke, *Museum Politics*, 220.

ethnographic museum that is neither completely like nor completely different from its predecessors in a process that will be analyzed in the following chapter. Instead, Butler's performativity helps to understand the "middle ground" the NMAI symbolically straddles, generating dialogues of multiple political futures of ethnographic museum display.

IV. Case Study: The National Museum of the American Indian

The three theoretical models discussed in the preceding chapters allow us to see the processes through which museums inhabit, challenge and move beyond historical frameworks. This chapter uses the NMAI as a case study to determine how these additional lenses serve to extract museum practice from a singular perspective and place it within an interdisciplinary cast. This is not to say that the NMAI is the only such institution to challenge the history of the cultural museum institution or that it fully personifies discourses in memories and identities in every aspect of its function and design. The NMAI was only officially opened in 2004, making the museum less than six years old at the time this thesis was completed and thus much too young for substantial critical analysis to be sufficiently conducted. Nonetheless, because a close reading of its transition into the public's national consciousness as well as a thorough study of the tools with which it has made this monumental move may help investigate the kinds of conversations at work during the present time.

National v. Tribal

Before going further in my investigation of the museum process and practice unique to the NMAI, I will review first the critical responses to the creation of a national museum versus the alternative accessibility of local heritage sites. In "Museums as Sites of Decolonization: Truth Telling National and Tribal Museums," Amy Lonetree argues that the local tribal museum is the more appropriate venue for truth-telling in the exhibition context.[63] Specifically, tribal museums, like the Osage Tribal Museum in

[63] Amy Lonetree, "Museums as Sites of Decolonization: Truth Telling National and Tribal Museums," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 253. Lonetree's article provides a fascinating introduction to the political tensions between "national" and "local" museums in the represention of culture. Unforutantely,

Oklahoma or the Choctaw Tribal Museum in Mississippi, maintain indigenous identity as separate nations. In contrast, the NMAI's "national" connotation refers specifically to the United States more than the First Nations peoples. Additionally, Lonetree claims that the impact of the colonial encounter on native populations is absent both from the envisioning of the NMAI as well as from its current display strategies, resulting instead in a museum that remains "very much an institution of the nation-state."[64] Likewise, Brenda J. Child's "Creation of the Tribal Museum" in the same volume insists that the tribal museum is more accessible to the "hundreds of diverse nations [in the Native community], each possessing distinct historical traditions and ways of interpreting and defining history, with dynamic cultural practices that predate the nation-state of the United States and Canada."[65] In the pursuit of a national museum, however, the objects are recast into a as part of a "national treasure"[66] rather than as representative of a multiplicity of Native identities and pasts.

In other words, the museum that associates itself with the label of "national" runs the risk of becoming essentialist in its differentiation between what is and is not Native and national identity. A reiteration of the exclusion and inclusionary boundaries that constitute the museums as an institution, this differentiating problematizes whose power is at stake when the representation of a minority's cultural heritage is at odds with the dominant society's imagining of that same heritage. Even founding director Richard W. West, Jr., in a statement before Congress, explained that at the NMAI, "cultures are

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this thesis only examines the effects of "national" representations, though I suggest that future research would be beneficial for understanding a closer comparison to the display tactics involved in both sites.

[64] Lonetree, "Museums as Sites of Decolonialization," 323.

[65] Brenda J. Child, "Creation of the Tribal Museum," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 251.

[66] McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 79.

maintained and sustained and protected at the community level, not here in Washington D.C. or New York," further distinguishing the importance of local sites.[67] Susan Sleeper-Smith recognizes this problem, questioning "whether creating a separate Indian museum at the Smithsonian embodies essentialism" and how effective such a mission is for a group of peoples who themselves embody separate nations and group identities.[68] This is particularly important to consider in a series of museums such as the Smithsonian which "is constituted by *subject matter* and is not intended as a place for perspective-based history. As the NMAI is a subject-matter museum, the public expects that subject to be Native culture, with the emphasis on the singular, rather than on plural cultures."[69] Additionally, "attaching American Indian identity to the national museum" is itself a problematic supposition, for it claims access to a government that has historically mistreated the populations it now celebrates in the national consciousness.[70] Recognizing the effects of these conversations, I argue that the NMAI's way of combating the potential limits of the "National" (as in Smithsonian-Congressional) label was to use the framework of self-representation and self-presentation.[71] In this way, the national museum may attempt to align itself with the policies and relationships of the community or tribal museum, to restore those cultural artifacts to the cultural continuum by

[67] Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, *Status of the Completion of the National Museum of the American Indian*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 2004, 9-10.
[68] Mc Mullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 81.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] Miranda J. Brady, "A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past: The National Museum of the American Indian," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 148.
[71] Brady, "A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past," 137.

harnessing the memorializing and imaginative power of the label "national" and using it for a new performative process.[72]

A History of the History of the Native Representation

Native American identity is often reduced to a singular and monolithic construction in the Western imagination. This is in no small part due to the mission statement of ethnographic collecting and the early museums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the time of Franz Boaz (1858-1942) and George Gustav Heye (1874-1957), the popular belief was that indigenous peoples were rapidly disappearing from the American landscape (overlooking, perhaps, the political reasons for such a consistent decline in population and territory). The response among many scientists and anthropologists was a scramble to collect evidence of the material cultures of these communities. Artifacts were amassed in huge numbers, the most prominent of which became Heye's collection, begun in 1897 when he "bought the [Navajo] shirt, became interested in aboriginal customs, and acquired other objects as opportunity offered."[73] Decisions about what to do with many of these ethnographic objects were complex. Some collectors donated their prizes to natural history or anthropology museums or universities, while Heye himself fervently continued to increase his holdings by obtaining others' collections or traveling to remote locations to add to his own. Eventually, Heye was able to secure a lease on a separate facility on 155th Street and Broadway in Manhattan, New York City, where he had taken up residence at the turn of the century. It was at this

[72] Gustavo Buntinx and Ivan Karp, "Tactical Museologies," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 214.
[73] George Gustav Heye qtd in McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 70.

location that the Museum of the American Indian (MAI), predecessor of the NMAI and the George Gustav Heye Center, was founded in 1916.

At present, the Heye collection contains over 800,000 objects, making up nearly 85% of the NMAI's current holdings.[74] What would become the foundation of the NMAI's collection included a range of objects from the

> old (10,000-year-old Clovis points) to new (baseball caps with tribal logos); from large (a forty-two-foot-tall totem pole) to small (tiny gold beads from ancient Ecuador); from the north (an ivory carving from Point Barrow, Alaska) to the south (a bone spear point from Tierra del Fuego, collected during Charles Darwin's voyage on the *Beagle*).[75]

Most of the works were brought into the museum's holdings with little to no significant external context apart from Heye's self-assigned catalogue number. In fact, Heye was so intimately involved in the museum process that he insisted on inscribing each new addition with its inventory assignment by hand. As one author explains, one persistent rumor about the mystery of Heye's life as a collector and museum man was a convincing lore which held that "his memory for the collections was unsurpassed, that he could pick up an object acquired years before and recount how and where it was collected and what he paid for it."[76]

Thus, it is reasonable to assume Heye's collecting, like his contemporaries, reflected a scientific and ethnographic fascination for the materials. Such collecting appears to support Bennett's claim that these collectors were seldom interested in the actual significance of the object to the respective culture. The large quantity of objects in

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[74] McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 70-71.
[75] Mary Jane Lenz, "George Gustav Heye: The Museum of the American Indian," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 87.
[76] Lenz, "George Gustav Heye," 91-92.

Heye's collections in conjunction with how they were so rapidly accumulated leaves little room for extensive individual research on the artifacts. Even more important, however, is the contemporary feeling towards the collected cultures. U.S.-Native relations were still tense during the Heye's lifetime: the nineteenth century saw the beginning of legislation requiring the removal of native populations westward, ranging from the Indian Removal Act of 1830[77] and the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890. Laurence French calls this policy a legal "ethnic cleansing" and dates it further back into the 1770s, corresponding with American land expansion and the growth of the new nation.[78] The necessary consequence of this political move was negating native sovereignty in the national context. One of the most prominent examples of this is the Cherokee Nation's 1832 appeal to the Supreme Court to win recognizable political sovereignty, which was ignored by the state of Georgia and resulted in the deaths of over four thousand Cherokees in the Trail of Tears.[79] Following this political trend towards the end of the nineteenth century, Heye's collecting of native artifacts and the lack of extensive initial research corresponds with the political agenda of the state. U.S. policy just ten years before to force native populations onto reservation systems, and the resulting rise in demand for ethnographic objects reflected a fear that the Native would soon be lost entirely. In 1924, eighteen years after Heye opened the MAI, indigenous populations were granted citizenship in a move that "implied the termination of their tribal identity and allegiance."[80] The effect positioned native peoples in an ambiguous, conditional role within the American landscapes. Consequently, exhibitions and collections followed a

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[77] Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 41.
[78] Laurence French, *Native American Justice* (Chicago: Burnham Inc., 2003), 7.
[79] Amott, *Race, Gender and Work*, 42
[80] ---, 46.

scientific and objective ethnographic model. According to French, this was an extension of the American government's goal to "depersonalize American Indians, thus making them objects of abuse and violence."[81] While the MAI's exhibitions did privilege the minority artifacts as worthy of being collected and displayed, the museum was in no way in support of a so-called "Indigenous nationalism."[82]

Because Heye's collection followed in this tradition of objective, ethnographic study, materials were required to be of a particular and very specific type of Native American artifact. Heye himself was very stern on this exclusivity. One written note left with the men accompanying him on his collecting trips reveal strict instructions that became known as the "Mr Heye's 'My Golden Rule'," quoted in *Spirit of a Native Place* as the following:

> Every object collected add field tag.
> Material must be old.
> Hunting outfits
> fishing outfits
> costumes
> masks and ceremonial objects, also dance objects
> household utensils particularly stone and pottery dishes and lamps
> Talismans, hun
> ting charms, all ivory carvings (old)
> NO TOURIST MATERIAL.[83]

Heye's list of categories of artifacts mirrors the stereotypes long associated with Native identity. The stipulation that the objects must be old negates any opportunity to showcase current native art movements. Of course, the museum's interest in the past necessitates original, historical artifacts whose validity is legitimized by the significance of age. Yet the final admonition to exclude tourist materials suggests that Heye drew a line between

[81] French, *Native American Justice*, 10.
[82] McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 78.
[83] George Gustav Heye qtd. In Lenz, "George Gustav Heye," 105.

appropriate and inappropriate artifacts of native culture while at the same time conveniently separating the museum from current politics regarding native rights.

The specificity of these particular materials and the fact that these were the only kinds of objects allowed in the collection and on display presents a particular kind of native identity to the public. In other words, that the objects were required to be old, functionally important, and ritually significant to the specific cultures creates in the exhibition space the stereotype of the "Vanishing Indian."[84] This persona inhabits a mystic tie to nature and the past which is confirmed through the display of artifacts describing the native as interested only in historical objects of ritual, function, and ethnographic use. The lack of any contemporary artifacts—combined with the fact that contemporary populations were disappearing west onto isolated reservations—further suggests that the stereotype of the Noble Savage is in danger of being lost to the past, reclaimed only in the space of the museum. The institutional authority of the museum, established as a fundamental component to the museum's development in the first chapter, legitimates the constructions of cultural identity as true and further cements the stereotype into the public's imagination. It is there that Butler's framework of materialization may be of use to explain how this process works: the imagining of Native identity in the national landscape is a product of the materials with which the Western consciousness forms these memories of the other. In other words, the fact that collectors like Heye narrowed their focus to a particular kind of artifact—that is, objects of ethnographic focus, including ritual or everyday objects, textiles, and other metalwork—reveals the expectation that these objects alone constituted Native identity and culture

[84] Felicidad Noemi de la Creagan, "Indian Voices: The Politics of Cultural representation in Three U.S. Museums" (master's dissertation, Michigan State University, 2001) 26.

during a time when the culture was thought to be disappearing. Thus, indigenous peoples were materialized—or made realizable, thinkable—through collected objects. These exhibitions memorialized a brand of Native American personhood within the Western imagination.

Museum, Place, Identity

Having revealed the materialization of Native identity in the exhibition space, the museum context becomes politically weighted. Or, to phrase it another way, frameworks of memory and identity thus demonstrate that the museum space itself is more layered with connotations and meanings than otherwise acknowledged in current scholarship. The most obvious example of these layerings is the physical site of the exhibition itself. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the site of a heritage institution or its "located-ness…remains important in heritage controversies, partly because of the fact that heritage imbues place with such identity significance."[85] Thus the function of the place must not be easily dismissed. The MAI, for example, at its location in the bustling and global city New York, even at the time of its opening, implies a strong connection to a place iconic to the American sense of identity. This political tie to place in the national imagination also changes through the eventual move to the National Mall in the 1990s.

The transition from the MAI to the NMAI is not a mere addition of a word, though that will be further interrogated later in this chapter. The physical place of the Mall is a personification of this claiming of a national Native identity. This transition began in MAI history when two important benefactors and members of the Board of Trustees passed away, leaving Heye struggling financially. After his death in 1957, the

[85] Sharon Macdonald, "Unsettling Memories: Intervention and Controversy over Difficult Public Heritage," in *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*, eds. Marta Anico and Elsa Peralta (London: Routledge, 2009), 95.

museum's staff had to deal with the problem of running the institution as well as housing what had become the largest collection of Native material culture in the Western hemisphere.[86] Coincidentally, it was at this time exactly that the first idea of creating a National Museum of the American Indian was broached. Specifically, it was

> in the early 1970s—two years before Public Law 94-74, signed on August 8, 1975, stipulated that 'the portion of the Mall bounded by Third Street, Maryland Avenue, Fourth Street, and Jefferson Drive in the District of Columbia is reserved as site for the future public uses of the Smithsonian Institution'—[that] Marvin Sadik, director of the National Portrait Gallery had pointed out to the Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley that the 'one remaining spot on the Mall might well be devoted to a National Museum of the American Indian.'[87]

However, this conversation occurred without the participation of the staff at the MAI, who continued to struggle with maintaining its presence in the museum world while at the same time finding New York City to be a limiting factor in any possible growth of the institution.

Questions soon arose about the location of the museum itself. The region of New England signified a historical connection to the first encounter of Western and Native cultures, but the processes that occurred afterwards reflected a push of the indigenous population further from the focus of the new colonial government. Native peoples now live predominantly west of the Eastern Seaboard, including those populations of Canada, Central and South America.[88] The museum is distanced from most Native populations and from the places where these groups lives. When conversations began about a possible

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[86] Brady, "A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past," 135.
[87] Douglas E. Evelyn, "'A Most Beautiful Sight Presented itself to My View': The Long Return to a Native Place on the Mall," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 182.
[88] George Horse Capture, "The Way of the People," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 43.

move, states such as Oklahoma, Texas, and Nevada were quick to claim a stake in hosting the future home of the new institution because of the significant current population of Native peoples in each of the communities. This would have also challenged the accusation that the MAI had made the place accessible for a primarily white audience rather than for the descendants of many of the original creators and owners. The problem became then, according to West, an issue of how "to bring the museum to [native peoples] where they are, rather than expecting them to come to the museum,"[89] with the current solution being a "Fourth museum," or "a museum without walls," in the form of the online community outreach program.[90]

My research in the Smithsonian archives reveals hundreds of memos, letters, and meeting minutes that reveal the intricacies involved in the decision to move to Washington, D.C.[91] One interesting discovery was how well the museum staff was aware of local voices and considered seriously each claim in its decision to move the institution to a more accessible and symbolic location for represented groups. An obvious challenge was the political effect of choosing a place where local communities, themselves identifying among different native groups, currently resided, rather than a place construed with more unifying symbolism so as not to favor one people over another. Several museum employees were also reluctant to leave behind the museum's original history in New York. The city gave the museum viable and credible sense of legitimacy among other cultural significant sites such as the Metropolitan of Art, the Whitney Museum and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), a long institutional supporter of

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[89] Senate Committee, *Status of the Completion of the National Museum of the American Indian*, 9.
[90] National Museum of the American Indian, "Outreach," http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=collaboration&second=landing.
[91] National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Archives, Papers. Smithsonian Institution Cultural Resources Center, Suitland, MD.

Heye and his mission. The museum attempted to find a solution that would allow the collection to remain in New York as well as keep the overall function and organizational run of the museum within the control of the present staff and board. When the offer of merging the collection with Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) was given, staff memos in the NMAI archives reveal a conflicting opinions about the desire for the collection to remain in the state. A letter from Dr. Robert Force, former director of the MAI, to Edward Castiykan dated from July 1985 reiterates Heye's original rejection of Boaz's offer for the AMNH to take over the MAI. In response, Force advocates keeping with Heye's desire to maintain a separate museum for the specific display of indigenous artifacts, rather than merging with another institution, however well-respected.[92] However, the stipulations that came with the offer severely limited the running of the institution as a separate entity. Negotiations could not be reached and the plan was eventually dropped. It was at this point that the previously overlooked option of merging the collection with the Smithsonian Institution became a more viable and increasingly more attractive offer to the MAI.

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian

According to several documents in the early archives, the offer from the Smithsonian was at first not entirely welcome. The MAI was attentive to the distance from current concentrations of native peoples as well to the location of Washington D.C. and the ramifications of its national presence in conjunction with the National Mall and its famous museums. The idea of creating a National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall had been raised within the Smithsonian Institution at various points, though none of these suggestions were pursued until it became clear that neither the offer from

[92] Robert Force, Letter to Edward Castikyan, July 11, 1985.

Dallas nor from the AMNH would satisfy the stipulations MAI required for the making of a new museum. With the Smithsonian, however, came the promise of a separate entity in which the current governing policies of the MAI would be observed, including the requirement for a majority Native member Board of Trustees and staff members. Additionally, the space to house the enormous collection would be financially viable. Even more importantly to the Board of Trustees, however, was the belief that the "auspices of the Smithsonian" would ensure that the "mandate of Heye's trust" would be properly carried out.[93] Finally, there was the state belief that the NMAI could act as a "flagship" of restoration of Native populations in "the brotherhood of man on a global" scale.[94]

The association with the Smithsonian itself is perhaps the key turning point for this transition in the MAI's history. This significance stems from its identity a minister of heritage, museum identity and national consciousness, particularly due to its location in the nation's capital. New York Attorney General Robert Abrams believed that keeping the New York location and taking the Washington D.C. location would "Create two new world-class museums in preeminent locations where tens of millions rather than tens of thousands of visitors could better learn and appreciate the richness of American Indian culture."[95] Douglas E. Evelyn's history of the Smithsonian provides a good foundation for understanding the importance of the MAI's eventual acceptance. Evelyn writes that the Mall is heavy with the political and cultural identity of the nation-state, preserved in the form of "iconic museum and memorials, and for the celebrations and protests that

[93] "Memorandum of Understanding," National Museum of the American Indian to Smithsonian Instiution, March 16, 1989.
[94] Lloyd Kiva New, "Rationale and Critical Response to Exhibition Proposal for 'Living Voices,'" G.G. Heye Center, U.S. Customs House, 1992.
[95] Robert Abrams, Memo to Sentaor Daniel Moynihan, Jan 29, 1989.

remind…and help define…freedom."[96] This area in the nation's capital was once a swampy marshland originally home to Algonquian villages before the English arrival.[97] Realizing the significance of how to put to use the land exactly because of its proximity to political activity, Thomas Law petitioned the Jefferson administration "to develop the neglected spaces of the Mall, 'now laying waste and neglected to the site,' into spaces of 'ornament and utility'."[98] Exactly what to do with this strip of land was decided after the 1826 bequeath of gold worth $508,318.46 by an Englishman named James Smithson, for the purpose of scientific research and education.[99] Subsequently, in 1846, "Congress established the Smithsonian Institution, consisting of research enterprises, a library, and an art gallery. The section of the Mall between Seventh and Twelfth Streets was set aside for the new institution and was called the Smithsonian Park."[100] Interestingly, even after this declaration the space had yet to be funded into anything housing the kind of monumental buildings and dedications originally envisioned by early lawmakers and architects. Instead, the location of the future NMAI endured a colorful history of occupation, ranging from the Washington Gas Light Company and a high-class brothel, to the Miner Institute for the Education of Colored Youth in the 1890s.[101]

Around the time that Heye began expanding his collection and housing it in the original MAI building in New York, the Smithsonian Institution likewise began to expand its own jurisdiction by beginning its collection of national museums on the Mall (Fig. 1).

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[96] Evelyn, "'A Most Beautiful Sight Presented Itself to My View,'" 151.
[97] ---, 152.
[98] ---, 161.
[99] Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 284.
[100] Evelyn, "'A Most Beautiful Sight Presented Itself to My View,'" 164.
[101] ---, 173-175.

Figure 1. Map of the National Mall with NMAI circled in white, Smithsonian Institutions, Washington D.C.

Evelyn neatly summarizes the succession of institutions in the following chronological order:

> The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (1910) was the first building on the Mall to conform to the committee's projected scale and architectural vision. The National Gallery of Art (1941) and the Museum of History and Technology (1964), now the Museum of American History, arrived later on the north side, followed eventually by the National Gallery's East Building (1978) and sculpture garden (1999). On the south side of the Mall, the Freer Gallery of Art (1923) joined the Smithsonian Castle (1855, though reconstructed and enlarged over the decades) and Arts and Industries Building (1881).[102]

The chronology is important for understanding the company into which the MAI would be invited in the late 1980s and 1990s. Not only was the location of the nation's capital tied in the distant past to the physical site of two indigenous villages, but also the land

[102] Evelyn, "'A Most Beautiful Sight Presented Itself to My View,'" 180.

represented the first encounter of Western and Native cultures. Evelyn finds this symbolic for contemporary native populations: perhaps the present site of Washington D.C. was "not a very Native place" anymore, but it had the potential, according to some proponents of the move to the Smithsonian, to become "a Native place again."[103]

More significantly, the seat of the government that had ignored and mistreated its indigenous populations, and specifically sought to remove them from the national space as well, was a significant political place for people desiring to "sustain their cultures and to be recognized as full partners in American society."[104] In addition, the location of the specific site being offered to the MAI was that of the eastern most end of the Mall, facing the Capitol building (Fig. 2) in such a way that, according to architect Johnpaul Jones, "people will be surprised at how close the Capitol appears to be," not simply physically, but also metaphorically in the process of returning the Native voice to the proactive position within the national consciousness.[105] At the same time however, the photograph (Fig. 2) reveals how different the two buildings are in comparison, suggesting that while their proximity is a significant political step towards a reclaiming of Native place in the national landscape, it is nonetheless a contested step meant to highlight the differences as well.

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[103] Evelyn, "'A Most Beautiful Sight Presented Itself to My View,'" 183.
[104] ---, 151.
[105] Johnpaul Jones, "We Want Some of Us in That Building," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 71.

Figure 2. NMAI Exterior, Capitol Building, Washington D.C.

While the MAI considered a position on the National Mall, debate surrounded the question of what to do with the presence the museum would retain in New York City. The final decision was to transform this site itself, moving it to another prized location: the Andrew Hamilton U.S. Customs House in Battery Park. Not only was the physical building itself a part of the political landscape of New York State and thus an enviable spot for building cultural sites—so much so that it was originally considered for a Holocaust museum, another institution for the purpose of representing marginalized groups[106]—but the neighborhood of Battery Park was increasingly becoming a popular tourist and cultural destination. Even more significant is the history of lower Manhattan, through which once passed an indigenous trade route before New York port itself became a trade destination for the American colonies.[107] Here, what would become the George Gustav Heye Center of the NMAI would present "the stories of the people who were first here, while institutions nearby—the Statue of Liberty and the Ellis Island Immigration

[106] Brady, "A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past," 147.
[107] Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, "Making and Remaking National Identities," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 155.

Museum in the harbor, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and the Irish Hunger Memorial, among others—[told] the stories of the people who came later."[108] According to the museum's website, the Customs House is modeled after the Beaux Arts architectural style was the transaction center for the revenue of trade and tax coming into the United States, marked the landmark as a historical intersection among different groups of peoples.[109] Because it is economically significant, however, the building has preserved its architectural history and its elaborate Beaux-Arts style contrasts greatly with the earthly, natural aesthetic of the NMAI in D.C. Again, the significance of place and heritage was fundamental to the choosing of these particular locations, such that the acceptance of the Smithsonian's offer guaranteed that both locations—New York and Washington—would transition the MAI into a national museum.

The Performative Process of Authenticity and Architecture at the NMAI

Realizing all the processes at work in the construction of a new national museum focused on a marginalized community, the architects of sought to embrace these politics and respond to the history of the museum institution. These architects were first led by a team of four individuals of Native descent, including

> Douglas Cardinal, Ltd.—including ethnobotanist Donna House, artist Ramona Sakiestewa, and architects Douglas Cardinal and Johnpaul Jones—took up the challenge of designing the museum on the National Mall…. Five years later, pleased with the conceptual design but concerned with the progress and coordination of the work, the Smithsonian Institution asked…Douglas Cardinal to leave the project. The Smithsonian assumed responsibility for finishing the museum with Johnpaul, Donna, and Ramona, along with the architects Jones &

[108] John Haworth, "New York City in Indian Possession: The George Gustav Heye Center," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 141.
[109] National Museum of American Indian. "Architecture and Building History," http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=ny&third=architecture

> Jones, SmithGroup in collaboration with Lou Weller (Caddo), the Native American Design Collaborative, and Polshek Partnership.[110]

Despite the momentary interruption to the construction, the plans found an overall mission statement when, following the 1989 passage of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (Public Law 105-185), "the MAI collections became part of American national heritage and patrimony."[111] This was further signified by the hugely political move to the National Mall in the neighborhood of other significant and iconic institutions of national authority in the American museum context. At the same time, the staff insisted on a new museum that was uniquely of the "authentic" Native voice."[112]

The choice of "authentic" is an interesting, if problematic, decision here. I argue that one of the foremost theoretical problems facing the contemporary ethnographic museum is how to solve the historical limitations imposed on issues of authentic representations. As mentioned previously, Heye himself predicated his collection on the requirement for "old" materials, implying that importance was given to those artifacts considered "real" for their historicity. However, I also demonstrated that these requirements shaped the collection and in turn the perceptions of Native identity, such that the ethnic constructions celebrated in the MAI's earliest exhibitions are not as "authentic" or sincere as once believed. Additionally, the term "authentic" is particularly problematic for Butler, whose theoretical intervention into so-called "identity politics" provides a point of departure in understanding how and if "authenticity" is an appropriate

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[110] Duane Blue Spruce, "Carved by Wind and Water," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 67.
[111] McMullen, "Reinventing George Heye," 79.
[112] Jennifer Shannon, "The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 219.

model for museum representation. Specifically, Butler suggests that the doing of an identity (in her example, gender, but here, ethnic), are symptomatic of iterations of what constitutes those identities. Because identity can be performed and has been over time, then places of resistance may be found in the gaps created as the iterations are repeated over time and differently every time. Thus, the reiterations are revealed to belong to no concrete, stable "original" and thus claims of "authenticity" are called into serious doubt. In the museum context, then, the system of representation produces its own effects such that multiple reiterations of exhibitions and collecting introduce different constructions. In doing so, the museum deconstructs its own history of an original context or an original representation, complicating issues of "authenticity."

Having established the issue of claiming authentic museum exhibitions or voices, the question remains of how cultures whose voices have been silenced in the past may intervene in their own representations in a politically effective way. While Butler herself does not offer an solution to the paradigm, her theories do reveal that the performativity of identities reject the construction of a so-called original and likewise expose the structure in which they were constructed as unstable. The resulting space leaves open the possibility for sites of resistance within the structure rather than positioning resistance in political power dynamics always outside the structure. Being within negates the structure's authenticity as a given, stagnant authority and allows new kinds of resistances to be fraught.

In terms of the cultural museum context, inhabiting the structure and pushing the boundary from within may allow for a new kind of representational politics in exhibition and display. Turning to the NMAI specifically, the museum administration chose to

incorporate as much of the Native voice as possible in the construction of the institution as well as in the design of its permanent galleries. Their choice in doing so in order to create "authenticity" speaks not so much to the idea of an original national Native identity—as this concept itself is highly contested within the multiplicity of indigenous identities already—but to the importance of having Native voices involved in the process of their representation. In the case of the architecture, for example, the staff paused between 1991 and 1993 to conduct a series of nation-wide surveys and consultations with indigenous members of local communities throughout the United States and Canada.[113] According to contributor George Horse Capture, this was the only appropriate way to create a representative Native museum which also "let the people there know that their experiences and ideas would not only be recognized in the new museum, they would guide its conception."[114] These consultations were also taken into consideration for the design of the museum itself. It was eventually decided that the building should become a site reflective of Native beliefs and thus more natural in form, in contrast to the surrounding Smithsonian museums as well as the Capitol building itself. The political significance of this radical new construction of the NMAI signified its ability to challenge the architecture of the traditional museum.

Specifically, the NMAI's architectural approach draws on the memory practices at work in each of the signifying components. For example, the "creamier-colored Kasota stone that is quarried in Minnesota"[115] which make up the exterior of the museum

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[113] W. Richard West, Jr., "As Long As We Keep Dancing: A Brief Personal History," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 55.
[114] Capture, "The Way of the People," 36.
[115] Jones, "We Want Some of Us in That Building," 72.

visually illustrates a particular landscape foreign to Washington D.C. (Figs. 3, 4). In fact, it is actually more reminiscent of the Western landscape of natural wonders like the Grand Canyon, significant perhaps because this is the region of the continental United States where large contemporary indigenous populations reside. The rippling effect of the exterior walls appear more like waves, seamlessly wrapping the building in warm, earthy tones that are in contrast to the heavy whiteness of the Capitol building across the street.

Figure 3. NMAI Exterior showing pool and waterfall, Washington D.C.

The exterior also embodies natural elements that draw on the memory of what was once originally in the site of the city, the wet marshlands. Donna House explains this decision as "not to restore the lowland marsh of the eastern end of the Mall, but to re-create a natural area around the museum that would represent the natural places found in this part of the world. The land has a memory. By respecting that memory, we honor the land."[116]

[116] Donna House, "The Land Has Memory," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 76.

As such, the emphasis on water retains a unique place in the exterior setting of the museum grounds. A long pool wraps around the side of the museum facing the interior of the enclosed Mall gardens (Figs. 3, 4), ending in a waterfall cascading down the corner wall of the museum itself. The accompanying label text for the museum grounds explains the belief that the exterior space is a part of the museum experience as a whole. The emphasis, however, is on a sense of "restoration" (Fig. 5). House designed the grounds to recall what the area once looked when it was still inhabited by indigenous groups. The fact that the NMAI has returned to this site, coupled with the significance of the Mall itself, imbues the concept of "restoration" with a deeper political agenda that will be seen again in the museum's permanent galleries.

Figure 4: Exterior showing pool, NMAI, Washington, D.C.

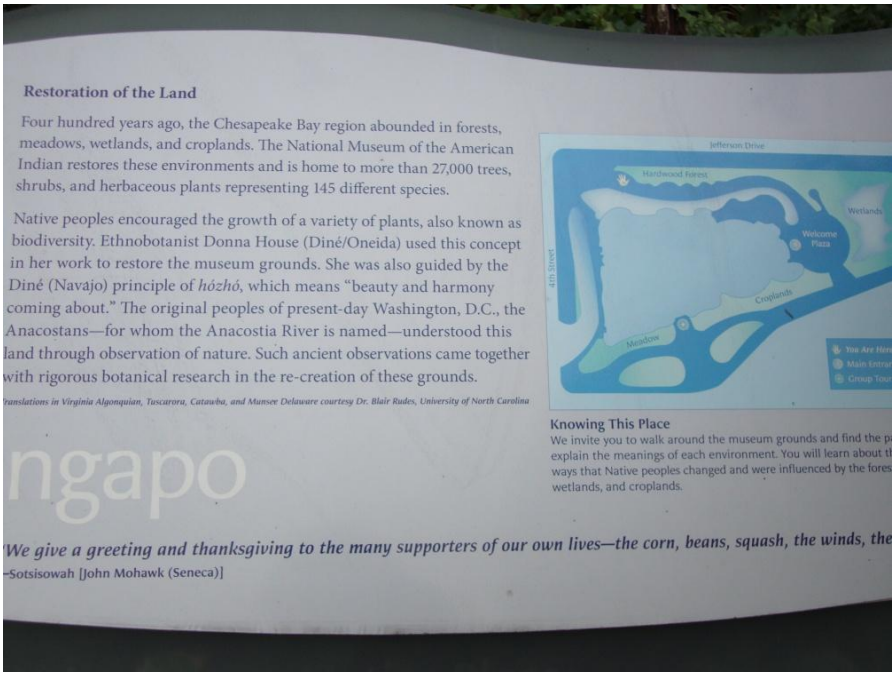

Figure 5: Label for the museum grounds, NMAI, Washington, D.C.

Figure 6. NMAI Exterior Lobby, Washington D.C.

Figure 7. NMAI Interior, Lobby.

Figure 8. NMAI Interior, Lobby Ceiling Dome.

The architectural emphasis on Native beliefs is further exemplified in the museum's interior. Here, the design mirrors the fluidity of the nonlinear exterior walls through the use of circles (Figs. 6, 7). As Jones explains, the "concept of the circle comes up often in Indian thought—in storytelling, for example, and in government. In manifests itself in physical forms as well—tipis are often arranged in a circle, for example,"[117] and circles are also found in calendars, medicine wheels, warrior shields and in dream catchers. As such, the entrance lobby itself leads the visitor into a curved space and a high ceiling rounded in a sunlit dome (Fig. 8). The walkway rotates around the structure of the circular Potomac and brings the visitor into a performance ring where both the daily tours meet and begin as well as special rituals are reenacted for auspicious occasions. Additionally, the

> stone pavement of the Welcoming Plaza, outside the entrance to the building, includes a representation of the night sky over Washington on November 28, 1989. It reflects [the] belief that everything in the world has life. If visitors notice it and ask what it means, the museum staff will tell them that it marks the day the legislation establishing the National Museum of the American Indian was signed. It's a birth date, the day the museum came alive."[118]

As a result, each of the components involved in the construction of the museum demonstrates an awareness of representational issues within the NMAI and offers a resolution that alters the space to accommodate new strategies of display.

Visual Analysis: "Our Lives" and the Reconstruction of Native Identity

Dr. Richard West, director of the NMAI at the time of its inaugural opening in September 2004, envisions so-called philosophy of design was first exhibited in the plans for the architecture and construction, for which the staff met with thousands of

[117] Jones, "We Want Some of Us in That Building," 72.
[118] ---, 73.

representatives of indigenous communities to hear what these populations wanted in a museum about themselves. Some of the suggestions included personal greetings in Native custom or representing all of the Native communities "by including a monument built of stones from each community, perhaps by showing flags from every reservation, similar in style to the United Nations."[119]

While some of these were discarded for practical reasons (the flags, for examples, might have cluttered the interior lobby's goal of simple invitation), others were incorporated into the design, particularly in the formation of the three permanent galleries: Our Universes, Our Peoples, and Our Lives. Central to these exhibitions was the realization that "Native America is not a stagnant, neatly compartmentalized group of cultures,"[120] and as such could not be explained in a simple, historical approach to display. Instead, West outlined three components to deal with new strategies of presentation:

> First, while acknowledging our deep past, Native peoples want to be seen as communities and cultures that are very much alive today. Second, we want the opportunity to speak directly to museum visitors through our exhibitions and public programs, and to describe in our own voices and through our own eyes the meanings of the objects in the museum's collections and their importance in Native art, culture, and history. And third, we want the museum to act in direct support of contemporary Native communities.[121]

Interestingly, West's acknowledgment to a "deep past" begins to reiterate Heye's vision of a collection that was strictly historical, but then departs from this mission in order to solve issues of contemporary representational politics. I argue that this apparent departure

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[119] Capture, "The Way of the People," 42.
[120] Ramona Sakiestewa, "Making Our World Understandable," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 85.
[121] West, "As Long as We Keep Dancing," 56.

reflects a shift in ideological perspectives for the contemporary cultural museum. No longer following the tradition of the historical ethnographic museum, which was more of a scientific categorization of objects rather than a study of cultures, sites like the NMAI are instead concerned with ideas of identity, voice, and representation. As such, the Exhibitions committee of the NMAI was charged with the task of creating exhibits that were "flexible and dynamic approaches" to signify new changes in the museum itself.[122] Using the museum institution as a stage for recasting history, the NMAI's change in emphasis from the past to the current and future reveals an awareness of identity as a fluid entity, one that is in opposition to the stereotypes supported by historical exhibitions. Miranda Brady further develops this idea with the argument that by "[u]sing collections, technology devices, architectures, and telepresence to help visitors connect with the lived spaces of a largely remote constituency, the NMAI understands its role as a platform for 'giving voice' and as a site for 'multicultural dialogue'."[123]

For example, the contemporary permanent gallery, "Our Lives," attempts to present for the visitor a rotating cycle of eight Native communities, curated by members of those populations themselves. The aim of the gallery is to challenge stereotypes of fixed identities and instead highlight the reality of fluid identities. The curators achieve this claim in three ways: the design of the space, the use of guest curators and emphasis on individual communities, and the emphasis on words as a supplement for a recovered voice in U.S.-Native politics. In terms of the exhibition design, the gallery features curved walls with floor-to-ceiling wall texts and images. The gallery itself is generally dark and lit with spotlights fixed to highlight the written text (Fig. 9). While the eight

[122] Exhibits committee meeting minutes, july 14, 1983.
[123] Brady, "A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past," 133.

sections are separated by curved walls and connected in interweaving pathways, the spaces inside are fairly small and contained. On the one hand, this stresses an intimacy with the objects and words on display yet creates a confining space that is different when compared to the open, high ceilings and simple design of the lobby. Thus, it may be assumed that the intimate space was an intentional aspect of the design, one meant to bring the visitor physically face-to-face with the subject of the gallery. On the other hand, the angular design still inscribes the circular shape of the entrance lobby and the Potomac, and the rounded walls refer to the architecture of the building itself. This is a significant parallel: the fluid movement in both the gallery and the interior and exterior of the museum literally embodies the kind of movement intended to break stereotypes of a fixed, immutable Native identity. Instead, visitors physically experience the roundabout journey involved in the shaping and forming of identities as an almost seamless, unconscious performance.

Figure 9. NMAI, "Our Lives".

The subtlety of these fluid paths further demonstrates how challenges against imposed identity categories reveal the categories themselves to become sites of resistance. To borrow from Butler's theories, the use of the exhibition space to mark an alternative representation of contemporary Native identity demonstrates visually how these spaces produce their own unraveling. For example, in the "Our Lives" gallery, eight groups are allowed to curate their own exhibition space to represent themselves. These guest curators are members of the represented populations and as a result, the spaces vary greatly in the depictions of that group's sense of identity. The unifying theme, however, is the similar treatment of the walls: rather than a plan, painted background color, photographic images of people or scenery encompass the entire canvas of the curved walls (Fig. 10). These images make up most of the visual material in the show, and those objects that are included in the specific sections are incased into the wall itself and often lost in the wallpaper (Fig. 11).

The emphasis again appears to be depictions of the people themselves, rather than on the objects, whose accompanying object labels provide few details and instead favor quotes from individuals concerning issues of their own personal experiences. Such a tactic is an interesting move for a museum focused on cultural representation while falling within the history of ethnographic exhibition, and this emphasis on a people-orientated display style nonetheless draws some parallels to critically-panned dioramas that objectified depicted cultures. This criticism is significant because it acknowledges that the NMAI raises its own set of contentious issues in its attempt to solve important museological problems, yet its inclusion of voice, audio and imagery over the use of actual people of mannequins demonstrates a departure from explicit objectification and

blurs the boundaries further. The resulting ambiguity creates spaces for new dialogues that may not necessarily present perfect solutions, but nonetheless introduce alternative methods of critical analysis and pushes exhibition design to a more engaging style of education.

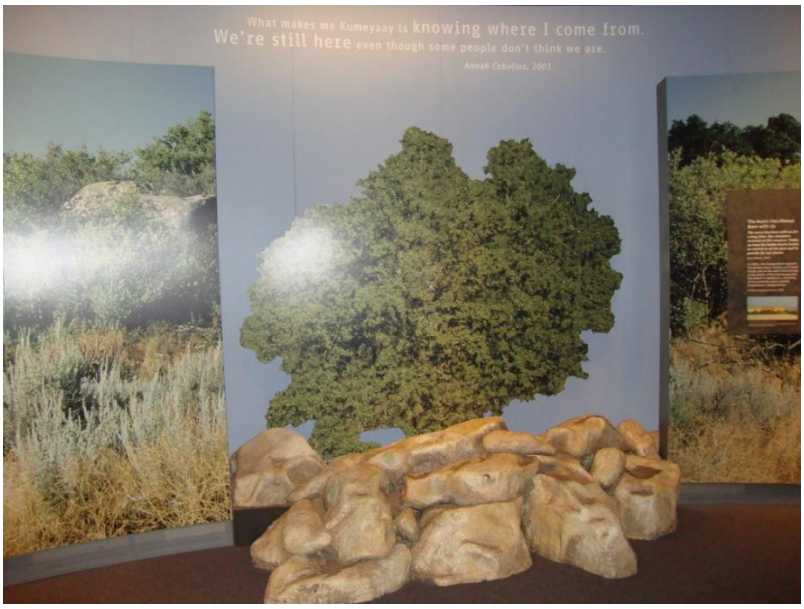

Figure 10: Wallpaper, "Our Lives," NMAI

Figure 11: Object Cases, "Our Lives," NMAI

In the Chicago section, the emphasis is on maintaining "Native-ness" while living in an urban center; for example, the introductory wall image is the life-size photo of an indigenous man wearing a U.S. Navy shirt (Fig. 12). The political intersection exemplified in this photograph is obvious, yet its inclusion in a gallery focused on the lived realities of Native peoples in contemporary America suggests another undertone of positioning the minority subject as an equal participant in the dominant structure. This is juxtaposed in the Chicago section with a television screen replaying video footage of a reenacted ritual dance, suggesting a retaining of cultural ties within the urbanized location of a large metropolis (Fig. 13). There is also a recreation of a living room, perhaps belonging to a Native individual living in Chicago, whose typical interior arrangement of furniture, books, and wall hangings suggest an assimilated place in the local culture that at the same time holds onto to fundamental Native identity. Whatever the ramifications of this image may be, it is nonetheless a fascinating glimpse into how the Chicago curators sought to represent themselves to the NMAI's audience while at the same time arguing for a transition within identity constructions.

Figure 12: Chicago, "Our Lives," NMAI.

Figure 13: Chicago, "Our Lives," NMAI.

In contrast, the Igloolik exhibition includes a real-life ice truck used by present-day indigenous men to survive economically in their current location (Fig.14). In this way, the Igloolik curators suggest adapting to the current situation in a way that desires to participate as needed within the structure but maintain that the reason is because it is "in their blood" (Fig. 15). Regardless of how these connotations are perceived critically, the fact that these sections were curated by local representatives allows the community to speak for itself. Additionally, the objects that are on display are intermixed with audio materials in television screens in some of the sections (Fig. 16). The one negative effect of the use of audio equipment is the introduction of noise to the reflective gallery space, yet here the positive significance lies in reproducing the Native voice literally into the museum institution. This is one way of bringing the local community into the museum space in a way that confronts imaginings of native stereotypes by audibly reinforcing what the reality of lived identities signifies. Thus, having guest curators design the space and narrate their respective experiences returns the exhibition's focus to issues of reclaiming, recasting, and reframing an oppressive past for a more open future. Both of

these examples demonstrate the many layers at work in producing Native identity in its lived reality, and thus the exhibition features different ways to access this representation through space, text, images, objects, and audiovisual materials.

Figure 14: Igloolik, "Our Lives," NMAI.

Figure 15: Igloolik, "Our Lives," NMAI.

Figure16: Audiovisual Media, "Our Lives," NMAI.

The significance of words corresponds with the emphasis on speech in the audio materials. The wall texts and labels are especially important as sites of resistance to issues of oppression and stereotypes that the gallery seeks to dismantle. Unless otherwise noted, the labels are written in plural first ("we") to signify a unified speaker. The idea of a unified entity again runs the risk of being essentialist towards a multiplicity inherent in indigenous populations: native societies in America alone are certainly not unified politically or socially and maintain significant political disharmony that make a "we" voice potentially convoluted and generic. This voice does however present the audience with a confident tone of self-representation to some degree, thus making it useful for the sake of museum education. In the historical context, extensive wall texts and object labels are limited in the ethnographic tradition of objective, scientific studies of artifacts. At the NMAI, however, these texts become spaces for reconstituting self-presentation in Native

representation. The introductory texts to the gallery describe the mission of the exhibition as an exploration in how "to remain Native" (Fig.17) while also explaining identity as "not a thing, but a lived experience" (Fig. 18). Immediately following these two statements is the introductory wall of the gallery that precedes the separate individual sections of each represented community (Fig. 19). This wall's accompanying text bolds the word "survivance"—that is, survival and resistance, two highly political terms in native resistance movements—as a lived reality constantly experienced and fought for among indigenous communities (Fig. 20). The explicitly reference to stereotypical historical representations reveals the exhibition curators' underscoring desire: to defy previous depictions of Native identity imposed on these populations without self-determination, and instead present a contemporary collage of photographs, objects, and words that will prove the liveable, thinkable realities of Native identity as fluid and moving, not fixed.

Figure17: Introductory Wall Text, "Our Lives," NMAI.

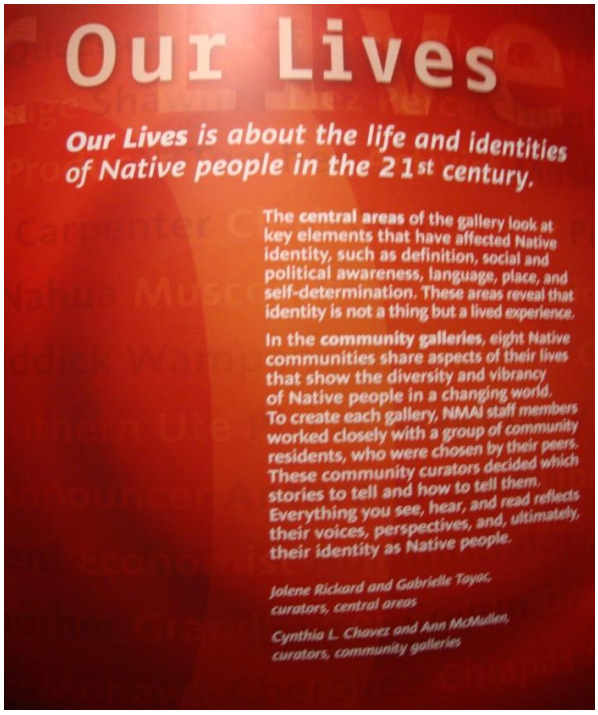

Figure 18: Introductory Wall Text, "Our Lives," NMAI.

Figure19: Photo Gallery, "Our Lives," NMAI.

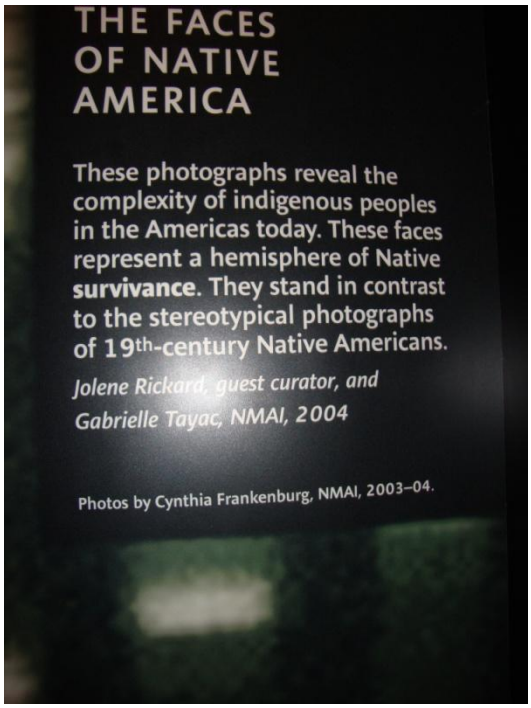

Figure20: Photo Gallery Label, "Our Lives," NMAI.

Additionally, The NMAI website delves into the philosophy behind the planning and intent of this exhibition, explaining its focus "on various layers of identity…shaped by language, place, community membership, social and political consciousness, and customs and beliefs…as native people across the Americas seek to claim the future on their own terms."[124] According to one concluding wall text at the end of the exhibition, the preceding presentation of indigenous cultures and identities is the peoples' way of reclaiming the right to their own identity "on their own terms" (Fig. 21). I argue that this emphasis on self-determination is pronounced explicitly in this exhibition, but also implicitly in the construction of the museum as a tool for staking a political claim to the national consciousness while reframing the Native imagining within that consciousness as well.

[124] National Museum of the American Indian, "Current Exhibitions in Washington, D.C.," http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=exhibitions&second=dc&third=current.

Figure21: Concluding Wall Text, "Our Lives," NMAI.

A Dialogic Museum?

The way in which the NMAI approaches its politics of display demonstrates a new kind of museum called the "dialogic" museum. This term refers to the necessity of museums to acknowledge and give voice to multiple perspectives and layers in the formation of Native identity and presentation in the national museum context as well as within the public imagination. In other words, according to Brady,

> [n]ot only does the NMAI emphasize the importance of conceptualizing its role on the mall in dialogic terms, it has further encouraged dialogue in conversations, extending into various micro-moral domains from general and tribal press to academic discussions, political discourses, and conversations among tourists. It

> represents a major transformation in traditional museological understanding (Sleeper-Smith 139-140).[125]

Certainly the NMAI is not the sole proponent of this approach to museum presentation of culture, as other contemporary cultural museums like also employ different strategies in representational politics for their exhibition design. However, I maintain that the NMAI's current exhibition practice might serve to question practices in other institutions as well as pave the way for new strategies altogether.

Of course, how successful the NMAI is in this endeavor is still difficult to determine. The reception of the museum's opening in 2004 was mixed, with responses ranging from an embracing of the collaborative efforts and minimalistic design, to criticisms of excluded histories (i.e. colonial trauma) and an underlined commitment to a nationalistic, predominantly Western audience that subsequently glossed over the hardship native populations experienced at the hands of Western governments. It must, however, be acknowledged that the NMAI *is* a national museum and the pride with which it wears that label allows for some kind of reconciliation between the Native communities and the national government and public memory of these encounters. The museum is thus performative in the identities it materializes as products and effects of these multiple conversations, suggesting that as there is no original museum context or given Native identity, then the idea that these themselves may be further reimagined and reconstituted is important to the future of the ethnographic museum as a dialogic cultural experience. In conclusion, as Duane Blue Spruce recounts in the foreword to his work, *Spirit of a Native Place*,

[125] Shannon, "The Construction of Native Voice," 231.

> At one of these [collaborative community] sessions, in a hotel conference room in Minneapolis, a group of tough-looking men wearing biker gear sat together at one table. They listened to our presentation and to everyone else's comments in intimidating silence. Then, as the meeting neared its end, one of them stood up and said, 'Our tribe is matrilineal, and our mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters are held in high esteem. We just want to commend you and thank you for building the first female building on the Mall.'[126]

The idea of a female museum brings to mind the presence of not simply a new kind of museum, but one that returns to and grapples with issues in identity construction, memory and meaning-making. It is this particular framework that may thus push the boundary of the cultural institution from a space invested in its historical determination, to a space where multiplicities of identities and meanings generate strategies that likewise commemorate and materialize the museum within more open cultural contexts.

[126] Spruce, "An Honor and a Privilege," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, in association with National Geographic, 2004), 27.

Conclusion

The contemporary cultural museum draws on a history of complex negotiations of culture, identity and meaning-making. Its specific history in the development of the ethnographic museum in particular complicates its current position within the exhibition space. Such a history relies on the subjugation of indigenous and minority cultures for the voyeuristic consumption of the dominant society. Moreover, the scientific and objective foundation of ethnography in conjunction with the institutional authority of the museum itself served to further legitimize the cultural imaginings within these spaces as true, fixed representations of other peoples.

This thesis seeks to unravel this history. Rather than accepting the truths that appear to be inherent within cultural exhibitions, I argue instead that the cultural museum is a product and effect of the same constructions of collecting, displaying, and constructing ideas of other cultures. As a result, issues of memory, meaning-making and identity productions challenge the history and problematize the future of the cultural museum. Introducing Butler's theories to this conversation further reveals how the exhibition space may be useful as a political sites of resistance and reframing of past constructions, precisely because the museum retains its prominence on the cultural landscape of the public's imagination. As a result, contemporary institutions may produce their own unraveling by analyzing the conversations exhibitions of culture produce, inspire and generate for a critical audience.

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), I argue, is one such institution. Its history draws heavily on the influence of ethnographic representation of indigenous cultures, while its adoption by the Smithsonian Institution provides an

explicitly political frame of reference for these constructions. In response, I propose that the NMAI's physical location and visual site produces spaces for the intersection of critical analyses that reveal cultural identity and display as a performative, or fluid and unfixed, process. The museum's active engagement with the architecture and its space on the Mall, its design of the exhibition gallery and its incorporation of contemporary identity productions and community involvement provides the museum with a space for its own restructuring of the oppressive history of the institution itself. The example of the NMAI provides a visual application of these theories in the design of the contemporary galleries, providing a model for the proactive, analytic alternatives at work in the exhibition of indigenous societies.

In his article, "Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture," Tony Bennett similarly calls for a reevaluation of the museum space, arguing that the solution is

> not to say that museums have not been shaped by their relations with public spheres; to the contrary, this is a significant aspect of their recent refashioning in response, for example, to feminist and Indigenous critiques. However, the nature and significance of such relations are more likely to come clearly into view if museums are distinguished from, rather than equated with, such public spheres.[127]

In other words, the cultural museum must be viewed as its own site, its own structure, and more importantly, one that has the inherent ability to produce its own critical reflection, analysis, and reframing of power dynamics and resistance struggles. I argue that feminist critiques, themselves employing issues of identity constructions and revealing those same productions as a constant, reiterative process, are demonstrative of the layers of negotiations at work in these museums. At the same time, however, the

[127] Tony Bennett, "Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 49.

NMAI does not offer a singular solution for all cultural institutions, nor should it be viewed as the model for every kind of heritage site seeking to reclaim self-representation in the national landscape. Rather, the museum offers both visually and theoretically an alternative to the problems contemporary institutions face in negotiating the ramifications of their exhibitions. In this respect, Duane Blue Spruce's analogy to a female museum—an alternative, subversive space labeled "female" for its opposition to the previously, static, oppressive, "patriarchal" monopoly of the ethnographic museum in history—represents a fascinating, critical perspective on the history of the cultural museum and the possibility of its future.

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