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CultureWork

CultureWork: *A Periodic Broadside for Arts and Culture Workers*

CultureWork is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon Center for Community Arts and Cultural Policy. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, policy, and community.

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Current Issue Includes:

April 2007. Vol. 11, No. 1.

Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theater. **Ann Craig**

Queering the Museum. **James H. Sanders III**

Special Topic Issue: Do.It.Yourself? - Reflections on an arts exhibition in Portland, Oregon... **Wendy Miller**

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Welcome to the Winter/Spring 2007 issue of CultureWork.

This issue of *CultureWork* presents two articles considering standard interpretation frameworks within museums. James Sanders challenges the heterosexual language and interpretations of visual culture in "Queering the Museum" while Ann Craig considers the gap between academic and public interpretations of history in "Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theater." Both authors ask curators, historians, educators, scholars, and administrators of museums to examine the lenses, and filters, through which they are presenting and organizing interpretations of history and art.

Regards,

Julie Voelker-Morris
Robert Voelker-Morris
Editors

Special Topic: Do.It.Yourself? - Reflections on an arts exhibition in Portland, Oregon that was "independently" produced by the artists it showcased (with a little help from their peers, neighbors, patrons, lovers and the Whitney Museum of American Art)

As part of our special topic series on DIY (Do-it-yourself) arts and culture, we present a commentary by Wendy Miller, an arts consultant in Portland, Oregon. In 2003, a group of Portland based artists resolved to form the large-scale exhibit, Core Sample, in reaction to the neglect they felt was created by an extensive regional presentation of artists. Miller outlines her experiences as the at-will production manager for Core Sample, exploring ways in which administrative practices may effectively organize and fund arts initiatives that support the hands-on nature of DIY culture. To expand this inquiry, Miller further provides recommendations for working within a DIY organizational model.

Julie and Robert

Previous Issue Includes:

December 2006. Vol. 10, No. 4.

Bridging the Generation Gap in Arts and Culture Leadership: Taking the First Steps. Victoria J. Saunders

This issue of CultureWork continues the discussion of generational leadership transition within the arts. Arts consultant Victoria Saunders presents examples of select ways in which local, regional, and national organizations are addressing the concerns outlined in our summer issue (see Boomers, XY's and the Making of a Generational Shift in Arts Management). These models are presented as the possible first steps for individual communities and organizations to build transitional leadership programs. The foundations of creating strong management transitional models are essential to the strengthening of not only the business of the arts, but also the promotion of the arts to generations to come.

Julie and Robert Voelker-Morris
Editors

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Previous Special Topic: Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy

Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy

Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy represents the explorations of the students and faculty associated with the Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy freshman seminar at the University of Oregon. This exhibit features examples of zines created by zinesters from around the United States as well as by students in the seminar. This exhibit is an online interpretation of a Spring 2005 University of Oregon Knight Library exhibit of the same title.

Curators:
Doug Blandy
Robert Voelker-Morris

CultureWork seeks submissions of concise (500-1500 words) critiques and advisories on community arts and the preparation of community arts workers. Graphics that express the spirit of community arts are welcome, to be published with attribution. Manuscripts should be sent via email as an attachment (as either .doc Word format or .txt plain text format), or can be sent via postal mail on zip disk, CD-R, or DVD-R. Use American Psychological Association guidelines for style and citations. If accepted for publication, authors may be asked to make revisions.

Send submissions to culturwk@uoregon.edu or via postal mail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403

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Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theater

Ann Craig

(Note: Links open in a separate browser widow or tab)

Introduction

This article asserts that there is a gap between academic and public interpretations of history. Historical museums have the opportunity and the responsibility to help narrow this gap by presenting more complete and complex historical narratives. This case study describes how museum theater was developed and implemented in 2005 – 2006 to enhance the historical exhibit, *Spirit of the West*, at High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Through the innovative use of volunteers, High Desert Museum was able to create a trained and dedicated corps of performers to portray historical characters. This study explores the process and results of the museum's strategies.

Museums have a responsibility to educate visitors by offering more complete and complex versions of history (Hobbs, 2002; Loewen, 1999; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). Complete and complex historical narratives are those interpretations of history that use current scholarship to uncover changing perceptions and new evidence. These may include previously unheard voices and considerations that inform a broader context of the historical period portrayed. The periodic re-interpretation of history, based on emerging scholarship and fresh understandings uses all the available evidence to improve and democratize understandings of history.

Scholarship suggests that by encouraging collaboration among historians, museum professionals, and the public, history museums can incorporate complex historical narratives into dynamic learning environments that can engage a variety of museum visitors (e.g., Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Gardner, 2004; Hayashi, 2003). In an address to the National Council on Public History, Smithsonian curator James Gardner (2004) declared that public historians must be "advocates" for both history and visitors. Accomplishing these goals simultaneously can be a challenge; museum professionals struggle to balance complex knowledge from academia with the need to interest and entertain visitors.

Scholars and museum professionals agree that museum theater is a promising tool with which to address this challenge. Museum theater captures the interest of audiences of various age groups, backgrounds, and ethnicities and is an excellent tool for presenting multiple perspectives and controversial issues (Bridal, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hughes, 1998). (1) This case study explores how museum theater was implemented and whether it was able to enhance the historical narratives presented in the exhibit, *Spirit of the West*. Could this museum theater experience help create and facilitate historical consciousness among High Desert Museum visitors?

Museum Theater at High Desert Museum

Located three miles south of downtown Bend, High Desert Museum is set in a natural environment. Currently occupying approximately 40 of the 135 total acres it owns, the museum incorporates indoor and outdoor exhibits which feature art, natural and cultural history, and wildlife of the High Desert region.

Administrators planned to implement museum theater throughout the museum, incorporating a variety of topics and contexts from

poisonous snakes to discussions about land use. This case study focused only on the museum theater developed for the *Spirit of the West*, a history exhibit. Mounted in 1990, *Spirit of the West* is a series of eleven life-size displays depicting Western expansion in the High Desert (see Figures 1 and 2). The exhibit scenes wind chronologically through one wing of the museum's main building and recount the different people and time periods that had an impact on the region. Each exhibit is complete with sounds and artifacts that give visitors the feeling that they are stepping into that particular place and time. There is little text throughout the exhibit; each scene has only one panel to identify the topic and year with a few sentences describing the exhibit and interpreting artifacts.

Figure 1: The first scene in *Spirit of the West*, a 1790 Paiute encampment depicts Native American life in parts of the High Desert prior to Euro-American expansion into the region. (Photograph: Ann Craig)

Figure 2: The final diorama in *Spirit of the West*, a buckaroo ranch in 1900, illustrates the importance of ranching and the influence of Hispanic and Latino culture in the High Desert. (Photograph: Ann Craig)

Though visually rich, the exhibit design is problematic because it suggests a linear progression of history and implies that inhabitants depicted in each diorama existed only during the time periods in which they are represented. Museum staff hoped that museum theater would further expand and redefine the message in *Spirit of the West* by offering varying perspectives and providing the opportunity for museum visitors to connect with the past through a personal connection in the present (Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998).

Program Development & Implementation

A new staff member, Bill Armstrong, was hired to design and implement the program because of his past experience with museum theater. Armstrong was charged with training volunteers to become museum theater performers and using exhibit areas as stages for presentations. Volunteers attended training sessions over a three-month period. During this time they selected a character to interpret and learned about museum expectations, interpretation techniques, research methods, presentation styles, and protocol.Volunteers participated in activities such as creating a driver's license for the character, discussing the kind of work his or her spouse did, explaining cultural influences, life-changing experiences, and influential persons in their characters' lives (Armstrong, personal

communication, April 12, 2006). Volunteers researched and refined their characters in order to perform by Memorial Day weekend, the museum's official kickoff of the busy summer season. Museum managers hoped to have *Spirit of the West* staffed by several living history interpreters daily throughout the summer months.

Results: Has museum theater enhanced *Spirit of the West*?

The structure and content of the living history presentations suggests general conclusions regarding the program's ability to enhance *Spirit of the West*. Only 5 of the 11 sections in *Spirit of the West* have living history interpreters. By encouraging volunteers to choose their own characters to interpret, the museum relinquished control over deciding which sections of the exhibit would be "peopled." This decision may have been effective in recruiting and maintaining volunteers in the training process; however, it has resulted in an uneven distribution of characters and sets. The lack of age and ethnic diversity among living history interpreters is another program flaw. Of the 14 living history volunteers presenting characters in the *Spirit of the West*, 5 are men and 8 are women, all are white, and only one is under 40 years old. The age and ethnicity of characters is limited by the age and ethnicity of volunteers, thereby diminishing the program's ability to include varied first person perspectives (see Figure 3).

Character	Date	Environment
Hudson Bay Company Trader's Wife	1826	Fur Trader Fort
Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
Assayer	1885	Silver City
Shotgun Messenger	1885	Silver City
Temperance Advocate	1885	Silver City
School Marm	1885	Silver City
Madam	1885	Silver City
Dress Maker	1885	Silver City
Miner's Wife	1877	Placer Mine
Miner	1877	Placer Mine
Rancher	1900	Buckaroo Ranch

Figure 3: The living history characters developed during the training workshops will interpret 5 of the 11 dioramas in *Spirit of the West*.

For summer 2007, the museum is determined to include more diverse roles (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). If the museum hopes to increase and diversify museum audiences and perspectives, human and financial resources must be committed to recruiting and/or hiring interpreters of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Although the program lacks ethnic and age diversity, the exhibit has been enhanced with other perspectives that contribute to its depth. For example, characters' social and economic positions in their communities are relatively varied, ranging from a shotgun messenger and a rancher to a school marm and a bordello madam (see Figures 4 and 5). The volunteer who plays Mona, a bordello madam from Silver City, uses the character to challenge assumptions about madams and bordellos in the American West. During her interpretation she explains that madams were often respected for protecting women and providing health care to the community. Bordellos provided safe houses for women who needed to escape from abusive husbands or fathers, and in the absence of a doctor, provided medicine and cared for the sick (S. Walker, personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Figure 4: Volunteer living history interpreter Mike Ford plays a shotgun messenger who protected Wells-Fargo cash boxes that were transported on stagecoaches in the 1880s. (Photograph: Ann Craig)

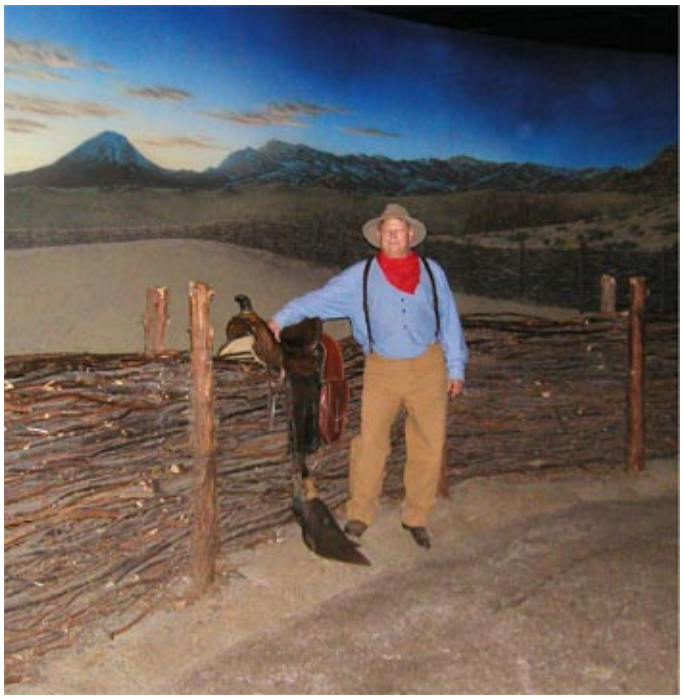

Figure 5: Living history volunteer Gary Dolezal plays a ranch owner who worked with buckaroos at the turn of the 20th century. (Photograph: Ann Craig)

The lack of academic input from a professional historian is another weakness of the program. A Historic Review Committee, comprised of museum staff and volunteers, meets periodically to discuss museum goals for historic interpretation. However, the absence of a professional historian, whose job it is to perform historical research, is a serious flaw in the program's structure. If the museum hopes to become a respected destination that interprets the American West, it must employ or contract a professional historian.

The stories and discussions offered by living history characters in *Spirit of the West* provide visitors with a greater depth of information and historical understanding than the exhibit offered previously. Though the lack of multiculturalism and current research is a significant problem, the attention to research and presentation techniques among volunteers have made the interpreters excellent resources for increased historical understanding. Still, it is essential for current interpreters to address the lives of people

who are not represented by first person characters.

Museums offering museum theater or living history programs must consider who performers will be able to represent. Museums that address the history of the American West must offer not only discussions of the significance of African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics to this history, but also the first person perspective that fosters an emotional connection between the visitor and the past.

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1. For further discussion of and precise definitions of museum theater, see the International Museum Theater Alliance Web site at http://www.imtal.org/keyDefs.php, Retrieved November 5, 2005.

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Queering the Museums

James H. Sanders III

(Note: Links open in a separate browser widow or tab)

What is queer about the museum? Certainly not its silence when it comes to sexuality. Traditionally the museum has claimed its practices of collecting, categorizing and conserving as scholarly, scientific, rational and objective. It has also historically served as an instrument of heteronormativity(1) by systematically erasing or rendering artists' queer (2) identities, desires and representations invisible. Amidst a U.S. political backdrop of homophobic legislation (3) this paper calls for museum curators, educators and administrators to reexamine their role in the construction and maintenance of mandatory heterosexuality. I argue that historic and representational technologies employed by the art museum have silently privileged white male heterosexual ideologies. Challenging museum scholars, art historians, critics, and educators to (re)consider their inattentiveness to (homo)sexual subjects, I seek a reinvention of the museum as a responsible and responsive institution that reveres human rights through its representations.

I begin by introducing key concepts and aims of queer theory and intelligibility, (4) social and aesthetic signification, and those ways in which the museum might serve as a site of progressive social change. After reviewing the neglect of queer subjects by museum historians and theorists, I discuss both the possibilities and potential problems faced in queering museum practice and study.

Why Queer Theory?

Queer theory is a dynamic concept that problematizes identity as a construct; a theoretical development owing much to feminist, race, postcolonial and critical theories, postmodern and post-structural thought concerning ethics, ontology, epistemology, (see Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990 and; Warner, 1993). Concurrently emerging from gay and lesbian liberation struggles and gay activists' questioning of notions of normalcy (D'Emilio, 1983/1998; D'Emilio, Turner & Vaid, 2002; Sanders 2004; Weeks, 2000), the political move from gay and lesbian to queer marks a shift in self identification that Warner (1996) called, "an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (p. 288).

Queer theory denies any singular definition for sexualities, and like visual texts, allows for multiple readings according to a reader's values and experiences. Queer reading practices (Britzman, 1998), like performances of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990) constitute (un) conscious acts that articulate and define our being in the world. Proliferating queer readings of museums and their historic, curatorial and educational practices could benefit both those engaged in museums and cultural studies, and those subjects challenging heterosexual norms.

(re)Examining the Master's Tools

Wallis (2003) asserted that, "museums are central to the ways our culture is constructed... principally concerned with sorting and classifying knowledge" (p.163), and noted that they "... serve as disciplinary structures, socially constructed means of defining and regulating difference" (p. 179). He further argued that these differences in meaning are fixed by museums, therefore "... it is crucial to understand the arsenal of institutional means geared toward the enforcement of.... ideologically inflected principles" (p.179). French philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of bio-power (5) is useful for unpacking the political, social and scientific functions of naming and classification, and questioning the ends served by objects being ordered and understood within specific historical and cultural context (see Rabinow, 1984).

Foucault's archaeological methods of historic research (1970, 1974) has provided the philosophical and methodological foundation for Hilde Hein (2000), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 1995), and Stephen Weil (1995, 2002) who explicated the museum as a changing social and cultural institution. Each author has attended to the museum's role in producing meanings, subject positions, valuations of knowledge, historic worth, and aesthetic merit—considering the museum an instrument and technology of social and cultural reproduction. While at times problematizing its historically classist, elitist,

nationalist, masculinist, racist, and abilist productions—each largely ignores the museums' failures to address queer subjects.

Hein (2000) noted that, "exhibitions traditionally put objects 'on view,' inviting visitors to inspect and contemplate them, guided by the epistemically privileged museum authority" (p. 5). This authority selects what is to be collected, preserved, documented and publicly presented; decisions unavoidably reflecting an authority's beliefs, values, vision and standpoints —many involving unremarked complexes of social/sexual concern. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) linked the Western museum's evolution to shifts in social/ scientific searches for knowledge —attentive to what Foucault noted are historic ruptures. Exploring the significance of individuals' and groups' collecting, organizing, and presenting objects as representations of knowledge (systems of meaning making and claims to knowledge and power), she too fails to consider how the museum constructs and sustains mandatory heterosexuality by suppressing subaltern sexual subjects.

Museum and education theorists staking claim to critical perspectives at times seem more interested in preserving their own professional authority, than in changing the social conditions that gave rise to a critiqued problem. (6) In calling for a queering of museums, I seek not to simply sweep subaltern sexual subjects to the center of curatorial practice, but to disrupt those socio-sexual assumptions that have been thoughtlessly reenacted. Through this repeated practice of queerly (un)naming and opening history and artworks to multiple readings, one may reinvest in the museum as an institution and its objects' ongoing (re)production, relevancy and vitality.

Museums' encyclopedic collections are (re)presentations of past and present understandings of the world—serving as our lexicons of visual language. The language of the museum, however, is always/already assumed to be heterosexual—a presumption so pervasive as to be considered commonsensical. Wittig (1992), following semiotic analyses of discourse, suggested that language itself is an order of materiality and one tightly connected to politics. She asserts that, “To live in society is to live in heterosexuality.... Heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories. It has sneaked into dialectical thought (or thought of differences) as its main category" (pp. 40 & 42). The museum philosopher and historian's role in sustaining this sneaky dialectical thought is a problem to which I now return.

The (im)Possibility of Queering the Museum

While Hein (2000) and Weil (1995, 2002) both asserted that museums have shifted from object-centered to experience-centered self-reflexive institutions, neither considered queer concerns except in light of controversies arising over Mapplethorpe's sadomasochistic homoerotic imagery and resultant culture wars. By contrast, gay, bisexual, lesbian and queer artists, cultural theorists, and historians have been producing writings, exhibitions,

and art works that do address such matters. In example, essays by Ruby Rich, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña queerly speak to border crossings and disrupting staid readings of raced, gendered, and classed relations–turning the reader's gaze back on those donors who fund museums and cultural institutions (Becker, 1994; Patner, 1994). Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha & West (eds.) (1990) offered dozens of essays critical of the museum's role in the maintenance of social injustice, as well as essays by French post-structural (lesbian) theorists Irigaray and Spivak who attest to those ways that museums fail to rethink misogyny and heteronormativity. Exhibits, like Harmony Hammond's (2000) groundbreaking, *Lesbian Art in America*, *A Contemporary History*, curator Jonathan Katz's (2002) *Queer Visualities: Reframing Sexuality in a Post-Warhol World* (http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/QVisuality/QVEsssay.html) at Stony Brook University in New York, have made similar contestations of dominant sexuality, but through assemblages of object and words. More recently, Glenn Ligon's (2005-2007) *Some Changes* (also see *Annotations*, at Dia Arts Foundation website www.diacenter.org) extend the discourse of Hammond and Katz, by attending to the intersecting constructions of race, gender, class and sexuality deployed through technologies like the family photo album, and today's interactive websites.

Art historians and scholars such as James Saslow (1989, 1999), Martin Duberman (1997), Horne & Lewis (1996), Duberman, Vicinus & Chauncey (1989), among others, examined the specific contributions of gay and lesbian artists. Encyclopedic references are now readily available in print, or on the internet, including such sites as Claude Summers' (2002-04) *glbtq*: *An encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer culture*, virtually sited at http://www.glbtq.com/arts/lempicka_t.html. Too rarely, however, do these scholars' research make their way into curatorial essays, wall labels within the museum, or the interpretive educational programs of museum art educators.

Museum professionals must begin to grapple with their representation of artist and subjects' queer biographical data while considering historically and culturally bound notions of sexuality that, at present, have largely been structured into binary hetero/homo sexual thinking. Perhaps through cross-disciplinary explorations by museum arts professionals – examinations that consider cultural, sociological, and art historic research within feminist and queer theoretical frameworks can inform and challenge current heteronormative practices within the museum. Discussing the libidinal energies of artists and subjects within and across genders, disclosing those lives rendered invisible by current curatorial customs, and embracing queer scholarly research within and outside the art historic and curatorial communities the field may someday regularly name those artists' longings and desires denied in disciplinary neglect.

Given the hundreds of years that museums have consistently ignored concerns of sexualities, it is difficult to know where one might best begin to make recommendations for change. Certainly museum associations could begin the process by taking a stance on

human rights and social justice. Curators within existing institutions could begin to employ existing research in their writing, and in re-labeling public presentation of works by non-heterosexually identified artists in their collections. Additionally, arts administration and cultural policy researchers might begin to trace how museums are addressing shifting social attitudes and legal sanctions regarding queer subjects—research not only on late 20th and early 21st century curatorial practices, but also involving institutional employment policies, or trustee readings of representational responsibilities. In addition to the promotion of single artists' exhibits (Ligon), and those identity based group shows (Hammond, or Katz) that some see as ghettoizing and limiting the queer artists' reach, I want to challenge curators to begin openly questioning those categories through which they see, organize and represent sexuality. Further, I would challenge historians, archivists and database managers to begin grappling with ways of developing fluid sexual categories and discussing their utility, so future researchers might be able to consider how an artist's sexuality might have shaped their representations and gaze.

If actors across arts museums and historic collections can openly discuss and consider those challenges put forth in this paper, the field might begin to act as an active agent in the struggle for human rights. An unaltered alignment with those preservation practices of the past could alternately be seen as a renewed commitment to cultural injustice and straight privilege.

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1. Heteronormativity is a term identifying the innumerable social practices, legal strictures, semantic structures, definitions and rituals through which either explicitly or implicitly, heterosexuality is constructed as the only "normal" way of sexually being in the world. Sedgwick (1990) asserts that any cultural analysis that fails to address the embedded heteronormative structures in social performance is fundamentally flawed.

2. In this paper I use the term "queer" in a number of different ways. Firstly as a political reclaiming of a violently and derogatory naming; secondly, as a rubric under which gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning and two-spirited identities might be organized; thirdly as a way of thinking and doing things in unexpected ways; and fourthly as an ongoing palimpsestic process of (re)performing one's identifications.

3. In a *New York Law Review* (2000) essay entitled No Promo Homo: The Sedimentation of Antigay Discourse and the Channeling Effect of Judicial Review, William N. Eskridge Jr. traces antigay rhetoric and its "constitutionalization." In the essay he reveals the multilayered strategies behind calls for enacting and sustaining discriminatory legislation against queer folk. Considering key court cases, like *Boy Scouts of America v Dale* (1998), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the state could not apply public accommodation laws to require a private group to retain an openly gay scoutmaster (p. 1332), he shows how social republican argument superceded medical research (the

American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973) and through individuation, rationalized the state's discrimination. More recently, "Defense of Marriage" laws enacted by a majority of US States, and State Constitutional Amendments limiting marriage and its benefits to only unions of a man and a woman. Such actions claim the majority's right to enact economic and legal injustice—an about face from historic protections of other minority populations.

4. My challenge regarding "queer intelligibility" asks museum professionals to not only acknowledge the existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer subjects in history, but work toward making those subjectscomprehensible or understandable.

5. Foucault's notion of "biopower" was first introduced in his (1976) *History of Sexuality*. The term serves as a rubric under which a broad array of technologies (especially governmental policies and law) can be deployed to subjugate and control its subjects' (sexual) bodies. These technologies, including sexual repressions, in turn produce docile bodies that can then be more readily manipulated.

6. James Scheurich (1995) critiques traditional and post-positivist research, asserting that both focus on maintenance of existing policy authorities and institutions. Scheurich argues that researchers should critically examine their own role in sustaining or managing defined "problems." He proposes a "policy archaeology methodology" which draws heavily on Foucault -- challenging researchers to first question the construction of the problem, then consider the range of policy options available, and finally, self-reflexively/ critically examining the role of policy studies within (or as a part of) the problem. My queer reading of the museum as an institution recursively reenacts this analytic process.

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