

POWER AND DIALOGUE AT THE ART MUSEUM:

Sharing Authority at Issue-Based Exhibitions



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ABSTRACT: Within the art museum, diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and interpretations converge and at times clash. Exhibitions of taboo subjects can set the stage for conflicts between the institution and community expectations and values. As relevant social institutions, I feel museums should proactively address contemporary issues in exhibitions in ways that allow visitors to share authority, engage in dialogic experiences, and contribute personal narratives that ideally result in a transformative experience. This research uses a theoretical framework based on the work of Foucault and Bakhtin. A review of the literature is followed by a short case study on the Portland Art Museum's exhibition *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo* (2009). It concludes with recommendations for ways in which art museums can facilitate dialogic and subsequently, transformative, visitor experiences through the use of technology and storytelling in conjunction with controversial exhibitions.

KEYWORDS: *art museums, controversy, exhibitions, dialogue, storytelling, interpretation, sharing authority*

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The photographer Gordon Parks once said, "I was just born with a need to explore every tool shop of my mind, and with long searching and hard work I became devoted to my restlessness." This research has been informed by my personal desire to explore, to question, to *find out*. The world of the twenty-first century is ripe for my colleagues and I to innovate, to implement our creativity, and to test the waters with new ways of conceiving of our world's most precious institutions: museums. Some may call us naïve, perhaps we are. We are exploring every tool shop of our minds and restlessness can lead to progress.

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Portland Art Museum, June 2009-June 2010

Development Intern

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| CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH |

Problem Statement

Within the dialogic, authoritative, and democratic space of the art museum, diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and interpretations converge and at times clash. Exhibitions that highlight controversial subjects can create rifts between the institution and what the community expects and values. Social practices or cultural phenomenon that have commonly been regarded as taboo, including body art, are now emerging as a facet of popular culture and have the potential to offend or be trivialized. I argue below that exhibiting important contemporary issues can help museums reflect and converse with their publics, and present a subject that may draw in people who may have previously felt alienated from the museum.

To be relevant social and cultural institutions, museums should proactively engage with contemporary issues in exhibitions and through them, allow visitors to share authority, engage in dialogic experiences, and contribute personal narratives. This is not an easy feat with a public that is aware that one “may misinterpret or find a particular interpretation not to their taste, and the ensuing controversy between visitor beliefs, agendas, and curatorial premise can threaten public support of museums” (Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004, p. 160). McClellan (2008) warns that making art museums places that encourage active engagement and learning for a broad spectrum of people with different expectations and experiences remains an enormous challenge” (p. 188). However, ensuring organizational sustainability in the twenty-first century museum requires an institution that is willing to engage with important contemporary issues. By doing this, museums seek to distance themselves from a history of applying the modernist museum and its passive visitors. Instead, they embrace the constructivist-inspired model of Hooper-Greenhill’s (2000) “post-museum” and its active, contributing public.

This research uses a theoretical framework based on Foucault’s engagement with power/knowledge applied to the modernist museum, and Bakhtin’s theories of dialogue

(Gardiner, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). A review of the literature in chapters two and three is followed by a short case study on the Portland Art Museum's exhibition *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo* (2009). It concludes with recommendations for ways in which art museums can facilitate dialogic and, ideally, transformative, visitor experiences in conjunction with issue-based exhibitions, through the use of technology and storytelling.

Topical Literature Review

The central question this research explores is: How do/might art museums facilitate dialogue within controversial exhibitions? A contextual review of the literature in chapters two and three examines the meaning of controversy in relation to exhibitions in the art museum; incorporates theories, published scholarship, and reports from practitioners who have written critically about this issue; and provides a theoretical frameworks about the role of dialogue, including storytelling (in shaping museum visitor experiences in exhibitions of taboo subjects). A visual representation of that conceptual framework is provided in Appendix A.

The primary concern of this research is the exhibition space, an area in the art museum traditionally dedicated solely to the display and interpretation of works. In contemporary times, the understanding of the use of these traditional spaces has been reevaluated and expanded to take advantage of exhibiting art in other parts of the institution, as well as beyond the four walls of the museum either online or in locations in the community. However, systemic factors inform the display of issue-based art that can be controversial or taboo, including disparate opinions about the role of the museum in contemporary society. This includes the argument about whether or not the museum should display and discuss provocative issues. In the literature review, a look at these arguments will help contextualize the more narrowly focused question of how museums do and might facilitate dialogue within controversial exhibitions of taboo subjects. From the literature, it is apparent that the museum has the important task of

representing its public, but translating this rhetoric into practice is harder done than said. The museum is shaped by internal and external factors, and is traversed by diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and interpretations that converge and often clash. This is the ‘political-discursive space of the museum’ as discussed by Dibley (2009), Karp and Lavine (1991), and James Clifford (1997). The museum, according to Bacon, Korza, & Williams (2002), can “expand opportunity for democratic participation by encouraging broader, more diverse publics to give voice to the critical issues of our time” (para. 6). In this respect, it can set the stage for the development of transformative dialogic practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is informed by Foucault’s (1991) writings on power/knowledge. According to Hooper-Greenhill (1992), Foucault “calls into question the rationality which grounds the establishment of a regime of acceptability” (p. 9). The regime of acceptability in the context of the museum refers to the traditional notion of power as centered in the institution, broadcast through the monologic, curatorial narrative. Conversely, in the post-museum, power is decentered and the concept of shared authority emerges as normal procedure. My research also uses Bakhtin’s writings on dialogue (Gardiner, 1992). He writes, “ Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth” (as quoted by Gardiner, 1992, p. 31). Bakhtin developed the theory of dialogism, defined as the open-ended possibilities generated by discursive practices, with dialogue understood to be systemic and relational with the goal being responsive understanding (Romney, 2005). Bakhtin used the term *heteroglossia*, or many-voicedness, to describe the power relations that naturally occur between dialogue participants where diverse voices exist and often clash, giving rise to new ideas across varying experiences (McKay & Monteverde, 2003). When museums present issue-based art exhibitions, different

values and opinions collide, and can result in controversy. However, this “...open process of dialogue is in itself a key to the maintenance of democracy” (Evans, 2001, p. 772). Encouraging the sharing of personal narratives by incorporating platforms for dialogue before, during, and after a visit to the exhibit aids visitors in connecting to the museum in a more intimate and meaningful way. Controversy and the sharing of conflicting viewpoints should not be considered negative if the goal is to further understanding of an important contemporary issue. The art museum can be an ideal space for overcoming its institutional power and sharing authority with the public in a dialogue that is multivoiced and encourages many different possibilities for interpretation and understanding (Romney, 2005).

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research, which includes a contextual literature review and an in-depth case study, is to explore the role of the art museum in facilitating dialogue within controversial exhibitions (particularly those that address taboo subjects) using technology and storytelling. This research is best positioned in the interpretivist constructivist and critical inquiry methodological paradigms as it applies a theoretical framework in order to determine pragmatic application. Interpretivist constructivist is rooted in the idea that reality is constructed through human interaction; it informs the critical inquiry paradigm, but critical inquiry takes a more theoretical stance, injecting research problems with knowledge in order to illuminate inequalities and issues for activating social change. As Neuman (2006) states, “the purpose of critical social research is not simply to study the social world but to change it” (p. 95). Examining the socio-cultural and political role of the museum in light of current scholarship provides a comprehensive view of the issue of dialogue within controversial exhibitions, and helps to focus and expand the research questions. These methodologies are informed by a hermeneutical inquiry as they situate the research within a larger context.

Researchers possess biases, intentions, goals, and assumptions that can influence the research process and how the collected data is interpreted and reported. My research questions indicate predetermined assumptions about the existence of a power and authority structure within the museum, an institutional narrative, and community standards. As a researcher, I must be willing to study and include in my project disconfirming scholarship. I also need to ensure that the questions I ask in the interview process are not biased, and do not wish to unduly persuade the interviewee to supply answers that are merely supportive of my preconceived ideas and assumptions.

This research seeks to explore the following questions:

Central Question:

How do/might art museums facilitate dialogue within controversial exhibitions?

Sub-Question #1:

What does 'controversial' refer to when an exhibition is described in this way?

Sub-Question #2:

What is the role of the museum in facilitating dialogic experiences for visitors?

Sub-Question #3:

How do community standards—values adhered to by institutional stakeholders— influence the actions of museums in exhibiting controversial art?

Research Design

Definitions

Art Museums: Since their inception in the nineteenth century, public museums in the United States have espoused a rhetoric of democracy for the betterment of society and the preservation of heritage. They were primarily established to act as agencies of collection, accumulating and caring for objects not only from the United States, but also from cultures around the world. Justification for the existence of museums occupied the minds of practitioners beginning around the turn of the century as education and accountability to the

public rose to the forefront of their concerns. Frederic A. Lucas, director of the Brooklyn Museum, speaking in 1908, asked, “Why do we have museums at all; what are they for; why in this very practical age are millions expended in establishing them, what does the public receive in return for the money it has invested?” (as cited in Genoways & Andrei, 2008, p. 57). Paul Rea, director of the Charleston Museum in South Carolina, in his proceedings of the American Association of Museums in 1912, advanced a democratic agenda of museums as “truly popular institutions in the sense that they exist for the people” that possess “an obligation to the people” (as cited in Genoways & Andrei, 2008, p. 62). Intertwined with these arguably democratic and inclusive sentiments, however, is the fact that many museums still claim ties to modernity and the nineteenth-century European institutional form. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) writes:

The idealized space of the modernist museum was positivist, objective, rational, evaluative, distanced, and set aside from the real world. The museum visitor was accorded the status of the neutral observer, walking in an ordered fashioned through the galleries that were in themselves ordered, well-lit, and laid out for the acquisition of knowledge...(p. 130).

The institutional narrative of the modernist museum—what it communicates about itself, explicitly and implicitly, through the mediums of educational programming, mission statements, and exhibition—can be tied to Michel Foucault’s writings on the ways that “*discourse* creates relationships of *power/knowledge* which then become the framework within which human thought and action are possible” (Klages, 2006, p. 142). While the American art museum espouses democratic principles and intentions, it has been argued that it still clings to its ideological, discursive, and elitist history. While this history has solidified the museum as an authoritative and trusted institution, this privileged pedestal is gradually eroding.

Hooper-Greenhill’s (2000) model of the post-museum proposes questions of justification, public accountability, and transparency. It calls for museums to share authority with

the public, to facilitate dialogic experiences through exhibitions that will result in active meaning-making for the visitor. Lord (2006) explains that the post-museum shows how museums increasingly allow multiple voices to be heard and encourages plural interpretations (p. 7). It draws from George Hein's constructivism, a learning theory that privileges active engagement in the learning process and the visitor's own sense-making mechanism (Mayer, 2005, p. 14). It creates collaboration between the museum and the public, generating "constructivist learning opportunities that empower the visitor to become an active and politicized participant in an open-ended educational experience" (Marstine, 2006, p. 30). This research advocates for the model of the post-museum, but recognizes its modernist foundation and elitist connotations. Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) model is juxtaposed with Foucault's (1991) writings on the power/knowledge structure inherent in authoritative institutions representative of modernity and the rupture of society embodied in secularization, industrialization, and alienation.

Community Standards: In its most simplistic form, community standards represent a generalized set of unique cultural, social, and political factors that identify a specific geographical area that may also exemplify the museum's stakeholders, which include visitors, trustees, and staff.

Controversy/Taboo: Controversy in art museum exhibitions is often dependent on contextual and institutional factors rather than a concrete definition. A work of art or an exhibition that incites backlash from a specific community or from a stakeholder at a particular museum may not be contentious in a different context. However, if we narrow the scope to the subject area of taboos, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) provides the following definitions: 1: forbidden to profane use or contact because of what are held to be dangerous supernatural

powers; 2: banned on grounds of morality or taste; banned as constituting a risk. Social *faux pas* and cultural practices can fall under the umbrella of the taboo, as well as religious symbols, sexual practices and nudity, body art, and the display of some cultural objects.

Dialogue: The definition of dialogue is drawn from sociologist Daniel Yankelovich:

Dialogue encourages participants to *suspend judgment* and allow assumptions and preconceptions to be brought out in to the open, in order to foster understanding and break down obstacles. It attempts to create *equality* among participants, seeking ways to even our inequalities in levels of information about the issue, experience in public forums, and real or perceived positions of power or authority. It encourages *empathy* by inviting *multiple perspectives* to the table and supporting their expression, thus facilitating a greater understanding of others' viewpoints. Through these and other means, it seeks to build a climate of trust and safety, without which genuine dialogue cannot occur" (as cited in Bacon, Korza & Williams, 2002, p. 2).

Exhibitions: Exhibitions draw crowds and impress with their elaborate designs, celebrity artists and curators, and strategic marketing and public relations plans. As one of the museum's communication mediums, they can be considered an institutional utterance and a strategic system of representations (Ferguson, 1996; Greenberg, Ferguson, & Nairne, 1996). Exhibitions encompass displays of the permanent collection, in addition to temporary shows, and usually include didactic text panels and digital devices that aid in the learning process. It is a space that provides knowledge of art, artists, cultures, social phenomenon, and history. It also creates subjects by reinforcing ideologies and meta-narratives. Bal writes that the "the work of exhibition" involves the narrative strategies and frames through which exhibitions position viewers and offer up particular, positioned, readings (as quoted in Macdonald and Basu, 2007, p. 5). Objects do not speak for themselves but are spoken about, according to Hooper-Greenhill (2000); they "make visual statements which combine to produce visual narratives" (p. 3). But lest we believe that the museum has full control over the subject—the visitor—it is important to recognize the free will and interests of the participant. While the museum generally maps

out certain information and paths to follow through a gallery, a person is an active learner with their own objectives and can defy these institutional constraints. Worts (1996) describes the exhibit design process as only partially the responsibility of the museum. It is also based on the visitor's personalization of symbolic objects—the art. It is a process that “is not prescriptive, so institutions cannot control how the personalizing occurs” (Worts, 1996, p. 123). Exhibitions have the opportunity to be exciting and fascinating, to be reflective and personal.

Interpretation: Interpretation plays a key role in exhibitions. Lord (2006) writes that without interpretation, which involves, “representing a relation between things and conceptual structures, an institution is not a museum, but a storehouse” (p. 5). The ideal situation is for museums to provide platforms that visitors can build their experience from, creating their own narratives. This can result in interpretation that “...is shaped as much by the life experience visitors bring to viewing objects” as it is by the institution and the art (Mayer, 2005, p. 15). Technology and storytelling are two interpretive platforms the museum can present to assist visitors in the meaning-making process. Reussner, Schwan, and Zahn (2007) examine the learning potential of technology in the form of digital media in museum exhibitions, and suggest that its use allows for active participation and experience customization by the visitor. This enables the museum to shift from a monologic approach to a dialogic interaction with the visitor, who has the opportunity to create an individual, self-directed learning opportunity.

Storytelling: Storytelling, according to O'Neill (2006), “enables the museum to ask and answer questions about objects in an open-ended rather than a closed way, and to make statements of significance without preempting the visitor's own judgment or overwhelming her experience” (p. 107). Ferrer (2007) validates this when she writes, “Stories in museums...can help to open multiple interpretations and to reflect on contemporary issues” (p. 6). While some storytelling programs at museums have centered on children's educational programming,

this interpretive platform can also be incorporated in the exhibition space for visitors of all ages to use to create meaningful dialogue.

Power/Knowledge: The definition of power/knowledge aligns with the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Rorty (1999) explains: “Foucault helped us see, or at least reminded us, that our own description of ourselves, and thus our own self-knowledge, is dependent on the linguistic resources available in our environment” (p. 236). Foucault’s philosophy can be applied to the museum as a way to “criticize the workings of institutions which appear both neutral and independent...so that one can fight them” (Foucault, as cited in McClellan, 2008, p. 10). These ideas have not always sat well with some scholars who question their application to the museum, which encourages public access to art (McClellan, 2008, p. 24). Foucault’s ideas of society, to some, ignore what Gordon (1991) states is, “the possibility of meaningful individual freedom” (p. 4). Thus, it is useful to juxtapose the power/knowledge concept with Hooper-Greenhill’s (2000) post-museum which attempts to progress from the modernist foundation of the American art museum.

Representation: Art museums are inherently representational institutions as collectors, caretakers, and exhibitors of the aesthetic heritage and culture of humanity. They exude authority and power as they frame, edit, isolate, defuse and control (Bennett, 1995; Foucault, 1991; Williams, 2001). By presenting knowledge and promoting meaning-making, Witcomb (2003) argues, “The relationship between museums and visitors can be understood as part of a wider question about the way in which public institutions address the audience they both produce and represent” (p. 57). Cameron (2006) argues that pedagogic and performative models provide ideal frameworks for crafting the museum as a space for engaging with contentious and taboo subjects, as well as audience relationships, knowledge, authority, controversy, and the political-correctness of institutions (p. 2). The pedagogic refers to the

emphasis of industrial-age-era museums on the education of the people, and the performative is an engagement with embodied and lived experiences. Cameron (2006) uses Frederic Jameson's analogy of surface/deep representations to examine the two models in relation to museum exhibitions. Pedagogic aligns with surface representations, or the maintenance of the status quo, and performative pairs with the concept of deep representations, the ability to challenge in a constructive manner. Museums that demonstrate the performative and deep representation take controversial topics and go beyond the surface, "examining, interrogating and exposing societal values and actions with all their blemishes and imperfections" (Cameron, 2006, p. 5).

Transformative: The idea that issue-based exhibitions in art museums can facilitate transformative experiences can be understood according to the concept of perspective transformation. Sachatello-Sawyer et al. (2002) writes about perspective transformation as "...the process through which adults change their meaning schemes and meaning perspectives" (p. 13). A transformed perspective is evidenced in an individual's ability to make new meaning, exhibit greater acceptance of other ways of life, become more engaged with the museum, and accept greater responsibility for social issues (Sachatello-Sawyer et al., 2002).

Delimitations

The scope of the case study in my research was narrowed to the Portland Art Museum, a regional, mid-size art museum on the West Coast of the United States in Portland, Oregon. The study was further delimited to one specific exhibit, *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo*. This exhibit has been well documented and the information was retrieved through web-based research and in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with museum staff members. The central research question implies that my research focuses on dialogue *within* exhibitions, examining dialogic interaction in the space of the exhibition between the visitor and the object, the visitor and his or her companion(s), and between the visitor and the institution. I chose not

to focus on communication outside of the exhibition that is promotional, or messaging that is used by the organization as a marketing tool. However, I incorporated editorials and blog posts from Portland-area writers who wrote about *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo* in order to triangulate the museum's account with the community's standpoint.

Limitations

As a researcher, I believe that art museums are institutions of power and influence the way people think and the knowledge they acquire. I also believe that art museums are gradually forsaking these modernist roots in favor of a more democratic, educational, and dialogic model. In the research, I seek disconfirming evidence in order to balance my biases with the data. The research focused very narrowly on rhetoric versus practice in art museums in the United States in relation to issue-based and sometimes controversial exhibitions. The research is not meant to be generalized across a variety of museums. Every organization boasts a unique constituency and environment that will need to be assessed before implementing any of the final recommendations.

Research Approach

The intended audience of this research paper is museum practitioners, including but not limited to administrators, curators, and educators. This study used a literature review and a short case study to examine relationships in order to offer “practical solutions to a concrete problem” (Neuman, 2006, p. 25). In this case, theoretical knowledge and practical recommendations offered in this research will benefit the museum field as it seeks to connect in more meaningful ways with its constituents through issue-based exhibitions.

The research deductively hypothesized assumed processes and connections with a middle-range, substantive, interpretive theory at the meso-level of analysis. It theorized in a

deductive direction because it begins with “abstract concepts or a theoretical proposition that outlines the logical connection among concepts and then move toward concrete, empirical evidence” (Neuman, 2006, p. 59). Middle-range theory refers to the fact that the research connects to observable phenomena, and substantive implies, “A type of theory that is specifically tailored to a particular topic area” (Neuman, 2006, p. 62). When a research design claims a purpose of interpretive explanation, this essentially tells the reader that the scholar is attempting to locate phenomena—the event or practice being studied—within a specific social context. A meso-level of analysis focuses on organizations, social movements, or communities (Neuman, 2006).

Strategies of Inquiry

I used two strategies of inquiry in this research. The first is a literature review, which situates the research within a larger body of scholarship, extending the dialogue of past studies and filling in gaps (Creswell, 2009). In this project, the literature review in chapters two and three explores scholarship about controversy and dialogue, respectively. The other strategy of inquiry is the use of a short case study, accompanied by the data collection method of semi-structured interviews. In a preliminary review of the existing literature, it became clear that it would be helpful for me to examine in-depth a case in which dialogue within an exhibition of a taboo subject had been successfully facilitated at a museum. The exploration of a specific case, *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo* to be specific, augmented the literature review in an illustrative capacity. In the case study, I interviewed two museum professionals who were directly involved in the development and implementation of *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo* at the Portland Art Museum. The information obtained from these conversations illuminated connections between policy and practice, and provided information not readily available in the existing literature. It also revealed the importance of circumventing institutional constraints in

order to engage in important, contemporary issues within a more traditional museum environment.

The interviews I conducted with the two staff members from the Portland Art Museum were guided by scholarly research. Interviewing is a basic but labor-intensive qualitative research method, predicated on meaning-making, traditions of storytelling, and the ability of language to illuminate personal experiences and worldviews (Schostak, 2006; Seidman, 1991). The literature speaks of interviewing as a conversation with a purpose (Kvale, 2006), and as an encounter instead of a tool (Schostak, 2006). It is especially applicable when researching information for a case study about an art museum or to examine social, political, or cultural issues, particularly from the perspective of an individual or from the stance of a specific arts organization. For example, in 2005, researchers interviewed 20 museum professionals in the United Kingdom using a semi-structured, in-depth inquiry method to find out what their museums and science centers were doing to accommodate the government's social inclusion agenda (Tlili, 2008).

Interviewing is a constructive method of qualitative research, and has the ability to generate honest opinions and genuine conversation between interviewer and participant. However, in order for this to happen, it is essential that researchers take the time to reflect on and become aware of their personal agendas, and remain open to objections from participants as information could emerge within those situations that prove to be vital to the purpose of the study.

Case Study

Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo, Portland Art Museum, June 20 to September 13, 2009

This exhibit took place in the gallery in a long, wide corridor that connects the museum's two buildings. A projection screen was hung on one wall and images of tattoos were projected in a sequential fashion for the public to view. The photos were all publicly-sourced; the museum set up a Flickr account strictly for the purpose of collecting images of body art from Portland residents. Every day, a crowd gathered in front of the screen and on the benches in the gallery for long periods of time, as if watching a movie. The statistic that states that visitors only stand in front of an art work for an average of 3 seconds, or an equally dismal figure, did not apply here. The shared authority evidenced in this exhibit allowed the public a conduit for contribution, and ensured that meaningful dialogue around *Marking Portland* was not simply the responsibility of the museum, but was shared by the public. The museum connected the popular culture aspects of the tattooing with examples of tattoos in its ancient Asian art collection. For some, this helped elevate the topic from mere spectacle as it linked it to the wider art historical narrative.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the following key informants at the Portland Art Museum: Rob Bearden, Director of Operations and Tina Olsen, Director of Education and Public Programs. These individuals were the key individuals at the museum who instigated, developed, and implemented *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo*. The same list of questions was asked of all informants and is attached as Appendix B. During the interviews, copious notes were taken using a computer. While the case study examined the exhibition from the perspective of the museum, in the future it would be useful to triangulate the information and analysis of this exhibition with additional perspectives from members of the tattoo community, community members, and visitors.

I sent a recruitment email to solicit participation from informants in researching the case study exhibition (See Appendix C). The email requests the individual's participation, states the

purpose and provides an abstract of the research, details the informant's requested participation responsibilities, and lists contact information for the principal investigator (myself), my research advisor, and the University of Oregon Office for the Protection of Human Subjects. Once an individual agreed to be interviewed, they signed a consent form (Appendix D). The form provides information similar to what is in the recruitment email, as well as information about the minimal risks inherent in the research. The informant agreed to all of the conditions listed in the form in order to consent to participate. This form is very important for the researcher as it provided proof that the person gave permission to use their words from the interview in the research. It also protects the interviewee, who is made aware of the research and the end result of the knowledge they are providing. A copy of the signed consent form was given to each interviewee for their files.

The preliminary coding of the literature—both for the contextual review and the case study—was guided by a coding list of keywords and an associated color value. Articles are organized in binders according to their most frequently occurring keyword, and each article has a cover sheet attached with quick reference information, including keywords, page numbers associated with key quotes, and space for notes. To ensure validity of the findings, the research used triangulated methods and data, and a thick description of research methods and design. I worked closely with my research advisor to ensure that the questions I asked in my interviews were not leading but allowed for a variety of authentic responses from the informant.

Conclusion

In the following chapter, I use current scholarship to frame an understanding of controversy in relation to issue-based exhibitions. I suggest that controversy can be understood according to five categories: paradigm, power, people, progress, and programming. Controversy does not always refer to sensation, and can occur when a stakeholder or community feels its

values have been violated by a subject that the museum has chosen to examine in an exhibition. By looking at controversy as the five 'P's', I provide museum practitioners with a lens through which to view controversy as not strictly a negative response but as an important mechanism for preserving their value as socially and culturally important institutions.

| CHAPTER 2: CONTROVERSY & ISSUE-BASED EXHIBITIONS |

This chapter explores the role of the art museum in contemporary society and the power relations that shape its institutional narrative and exhibitions. Within this context, I discuss controversy and the importance of museums providing issue-based shows, particularly those that examine potentially taboo subjects. Based on my review of the literature, I posit that controversy in art museum exhibitions can be organized in relation to five 'P's': paradigm, power, people, progress, and programming. I then discuss how museums plan for controversy and the museum programming concerns that arise in conjunction with these types of exhibitions.

The literature supports what was stated in chapter one: controversy in exhibitions varies across types of museums, is often dependent on contextual and institutional factors, and does not always conform to a concrete definition. However, the dictionary provides a starting point for understanding controversy: a discussion marked especially by the expression of opposing views (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It is synonymous with dispute, quarrel, and strife. Strife and dispute can develop when a museum designs an exhibition around a taboo subject. Here again, Merriam-Webster offers insight and defines taboo as something that is banned on grounds of morality or taste, and banned as constituting a risk.

Williams (2001) presents six theoretical models of museums that explain the growing trend of exhibiting and engaging with taboo subjects and its affect on the expanding role of the curator from expert to communicator. The author writes that museums' "new willingness to tackle inherently ambiguous, problematic representations now exists..." and defines representation as the institution's ability to frame, edit, isolate, defuse and control (Williams, 2001, p. 1). The emergence of the taboo in museums is two-fold, according to Williams: first, it is a result of a post-modern 'crisis in meaning' that requires an exposure of information, even subjects that have previously been viewed as controversial; and second, the practice in

contemporary times of viewing the museum as a neutral space for contemplation and education and thus has the capacity to mediate the curatorial investigation of sensitive topics.

Williams' (2001) six theoretical models explain the various ways that museums appropriate the use of controversy and taboo. The marketing museum employs the taboo as a way to appeal to a wider demographic and brand the institution as responsive and "hip" (p. 4). The post-modern museum is pessimistic, positioning the taboo in the exhibition space as a crisis of meaning in the modern institution as authority replaced with plurality. The emancipatory museum resembles the perspective of the post-modern model but views the taboo as a mechanism to critically examine contentious topics, especially related to the representation of culture in anthropology and in natural and cultural museums. The fourth theoretical model features the exposing museum, an institution that connects to the "democratic right of exposure" and the ability to subvert power structures by exposing taboos and making them lose meaning and become obsolete (Williams, 2001, p. 6). The rational museum aligns with enlightenment and Kantian principles of rational thought, classifying and examining controversial subjects with scientific-like precision and objectivity. The final model, the auto-anthropological museum, orients taboo to the expertise of its respective culture and local contexts of observation and education.

The models help connect the emergence of the taboo subject in museum exhibitions to a wider shift towards a post-modern preoccupation with exposing of controversial subjects within the so-called neutral space of the institution. Williams (2001) argues, "Museums cannot retreat from wider societal transformations and must, if they want to remain relevant, both reflect and dissect the concerns, interests and obsessions of contemporary audiences" (p. 13). To explore this issue of museums and their relevancy to society in more depth, I will next introduce the first "P" of controversy, which is paradigm.

Controversy as Paradigm

Throughout history, scholars, practitioners, and the public have demanded a more democratic museum. This discourse continues today, informing the paradigmatic shift of core museum functions away from a preoccupation with collections and assuming a role as more socially relevant institutions through educational programming. Yank (2010) writes:

The increasing embrace of what we might call the 'social practice' genre by institutions is an unmistakable trend. The difference is, these are not one-off performances, but ongoing programs that change the way visitors (and artists for that matter) think of and interact with museums. (para. 6)

The American art museum's paradigmatic shift from temple to forum, from conceiving of itself as a powerful gatekeeper to assuming the role of cultural broker, is not without opposition. However, scholarship overall supports the idea of the art museum as visitor-centric and as a space for learning and experimentation. The intention is not to detract from the institution's collections but rather, to lend increased legitimacy to formerly peripheral functions. Museums should establish achievable goals towards social betterment, writes Maxwell Anderson (2007), the Melvin & Bren Simon Director and CEO of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Establishing visionary goals requires an organization to undergo a process of rethinking their role, their mission, the values they create, their stakeholders, and how they measure success.

As early as the 1960s and more prominently in the 1970s, unfolding concurrently with the civil rights and feminist movements as the personal became increasingly political, museums experienced a massive transformation. They began changing from traditional repositories to assuming a more active, socially aware role as forums. Henry (2007) describes museums as influenced by the political and cultural changes of 1960s, at which time they "...sought to increase their relevance to contemporary life...broadening their range of exhibitions..." (p. 160). Kammen (2007) relates how the Cleveland Museum of Art began to embrace art

education as an institutional priority, a decision that forecast events to come in museums across the United States. It predicated a shift in interpretive practices from collections to visitor-centric programming, informed by learning theories used by George Hein (Constructivism), and John Falk and Lynn Dierking (The Contextual Model of Learning) in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively (Alexander & Alexander, 2008; Mayer, 2005).

An article by Tucker (1978) elucidates this paradigmatic shift in New York City with the example of the founding of The New Museum, officially opened in 1977. Tucker (1978) writes that it was:

An ideal opportunity to find out to what extent a museum, with living artists as its priority, could be established by people who were not independently wealthy or politically powerful, but who cared about the work that was being made...and about the kind of scholarship and documentation which was needed to support that work. (p. 241)

Tucker and her team believed that a museum could function without an exhibition space, that an informal environment could be more complimentary to viewing art. At the time, her thinking was revolutionary and was expected (even acceptable) from a non-traditional institution like The New Museum. Today, museums are adopting similar models that are more critical and less traditional formats, a trend that is appearing even in organizations that have historically adhered to an essentialist view of the museum as having “no purpose other than to carry out the functions of preservation, research and display (O’Neill, 2006, p. 96). While Tucker preferred to show art in environments other than exhibition spaces, indicating a major break from the museum practice of the time, museums in the twenty-first century tend to strike a balance, foregoing eliminating exhibition space and constructing a space conducive to exploring contemporary issues.

As the museum embraced its identity as a forum for learning and dialogue, it also engaged with its role as a market-driven hub of entertainment and consumerism. The

blockbuster exhibition rose to prominence in the 1970s, fostering the public's fascination with the works of the old masters, Impressionism, and ancient Egyptian and Greek artifacts. Blockbuster exhibitions were family-friendly journeys into a different place and time, providing pleasing aesthetic encounters and encouraging awe as individuals experienced authentic objects and art in a personal way. Any semblance of controversy associated with the exhibition topic was neutralized or removed from the text panels, reserved for the show's catalogue if communicated at all (Marstine, 2006, p. 12). Museum administrators often disagree about the value of adopting for-profit streams of income and whether or not they align with the institution's overall mission. Williams (2001) argues that in some museums, the use of the taboo is not linked to educational goals at all but is a highly sophisticated marketing tool intended to rebrand the institution as contemporary and progressive, a thinly veiled attempt to expand audiences and attract a younger and more 'hip' demographic. For critics like Williams, these ventures are more about selling an experience, linking the museum to its for-profit endeavors. Not so, argues Cameron (2006). She writes: "A rich body of scholarship on museum learning...suggests that institutions need to consider themselves as mediators...for knowledge rather than suppliers of information, and to provide tools for visitors to explore their own ideas and to reach their own conclusions" (p. 20). Subject matter presented in exhibitions that provoke discussion and reflect multiple viewpoints can enhance inquiry, encourage the free exchange of ideas, and "...encourage the formulation and articulation of carefully thought-out, defensible opinions" (Pedretti, 2007, p. 130). Exhibiting art that promotes dialogue about important contemporary issues aligns with the mandate that accompanies being a democratic museum. This can and should be the furthest thing from employing this subject matter for the sole purpose of garnering publicity and expanding audiences.

Tucker (1978) wrote about The New Museum as a forum for dialogue and controversy. This model has been assumed by museums around the world with previously radical thinking becoming institutionalized. Williams (2001) writes, “Over the past ten years museums have transformed their attitudes toward interpretation and a bracing commitment to risk and experimentation has become an increasingly evident feature of the contemporary museum world” (p. 1). Tucker, in writing about the progress of the museum from collections-oriented to visitor-focused, states “...the most fundamental change that has affected museums during the [past] half-century...is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public. The old-style museum felt itself under no such obligation” (as quoted by Weil, 1999, p. 2).

Museum professionals frequently use the terms ‘democratic’ and ‘relevant’ to describe their programming and exhibitions, but the debate rages on as to the social purpose of museums, revealing that in some ways these institutions have not progressed as far as they think. The social purpose debate has been especially strident in Great Britain where the government’s social inclusion policies are both lauded and contested. The New Labour Party’s social policies focused on museums’ important role in addressing issues associated with social exclusion (Newman & McLean, 2004). Culture as a remedy for societal woes harks back to Victorian-era England when elite society members used schools, libraries, and museums as conduits to improve and ‘refine’ the public (Kawashima, 2006; Mason, 2004). Action led to legislation in the form of the Museums Act of 1845, which allowed local authorities to establish museums for the sake of the community. The patronization of the masses by the Victorian elite eventually developed into local museums with clear social agendas. Proponents of social inclusion argue that it is the obligation of museums as institutions that safeguard heritage to advocate for the democratization of culture (Newman & McLean, 2004).

Others view the policies as political ideology that is being imposed on museums by agendas beyond their influence, and deter museums from addressing their missions of collections and education (Mason, 2004).

In the United States, the social value of the museum is not as strictly regulated by government policies, *per se*, but American museums possess an identity of democracy and accountability to the public as old as their founding in the nineteenth century. One of the earliest advocates for a more reactive museum was John Cotton Dana, who in the nineteenth century adamantly expressed his belief that the “museum should be grounded in the community and should respond to its specific needs” (McClellan, 2008, pp. 30-31). Museums are constantly called upon to reevaluate their role in a society that is diverse and deeply politicized, and to justify their existence (Cameron, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Stephen Weil’s model of the museum as social enterprise draws “legitimacy from what it does rather than what it is,” being for somebody not simply about something (Fleming, 2006, para. 3). The museum as social enterprise seeks to involve individuals as opposed to informing or instructing them, building on a foundation of four core values of revival, involvement, debate, and opportunity, and reflecting diversity, sustainability, collaboration, positioning, and stakeholder interest (Fleming, 2006). In many ways, this model aligns with Hooper-Greenhill’s concept of the post-museum.

Hooper-Greenhill (2000) theorized the post-museum after twenty-five years of observing the progression of the institution from a place rooted in the homogenizing, categorizing, and neutralizing master narratives essential to the modernist museum, to an organization that viewed its core responsibilities in a broader way. The post-museum retains some characteristics of its modernist ancestor, as it continues to hold and care for objects. Now, however, its interest lies in objects’ intangible heritage, with an emphasis more on their

use for educational and social change purposes rather than on their accumulation. The post-museum assumes an adaptive, external view, sharing power with its communities, promoting social understanding, and facilitating dialogue in an attempt to de-center institutional authority and disrupt the monologic institutional narrative (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Knutson, 2008; Macdonald, 2007; Marstine, 2006; O'Neill, 2005). In addition, in the post-museum model, exhibitions are a form of communication the institution uses to organize partnerships and incorporate many voices and perspectives into the museum. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) imagines the post-museum as a process or an experience rather than as an immovable architectural structure. Furthermore, Marstine (2006) states that proponents of the post-museum believe it can promote social understanding. Bruce (2006, pp. 134-135) provides a helpful chart to distinguish the differences between attributes of the post-museum or “new museum” and the modernist or “old” museum.

What the new thinks of itself:	What the new thinks of the old:
“Project”	“Museum”
Values:	
<i>Populist</i>	<i>Elitist</i>
Experiential	Static
Fun	Serious
Entertaining	Educational
Play	Work
Visitor Experience:	
<i>Interactive</i>	<i>Contemplative</i>
Sensory	Mental
Immersive	Passive
Participation	Observation
Celebration	Edification
Social	Solitary
Institutional Presentation:	
<i>Innovative</i>	<i>Traditional</i>
High-tech, media	Artifacts
Discovery/multiple viewpoints	Authoritative/institutional viewpoint
Boisterous	Quiet

Figure 1. Bruce’s categories distinguishing the “old” from the “new” museum.

Bruce's use of binaries to distinguish the "new" from the "old" assists in understanding the post-museum from a practical application standpoint, but it lends an unfair advantage to institutions that emphasize entertainment and fun over education and quiet, contemplative mental exercise. One category or the other is not preferable nor do most art museums in contemporary times display one or the other more prominently. What is more common are museums that maintain core functions of collections care and education as they incorporate elements of the new museum model in the form of issue-based exhibitions or programming. This can include those that are designed to attract non-traditional audiences or to explore important contemporary concerns of environmentalism, multiculturalism and race, as well as engage with popular culture topics. Issue-based exhibitions, especially those that address taboo subjects, are more commonplace in museums that embrace their role as forum-like, social institutions. Nevertheless, these types of exhibitions have the ability to alienate or anger stakeholders who may feel that the values expressed in the show clash with their values or does not align with the institution's usual offerings.

Controversy as Power

The art museum in the twenty-first century is progressing from the modernist ideologies of homogenization and categorization, but Cameron (2006) writes, "Engaging 'edge' topics requires a reframing of museum authority to one of expert mediator, informant and facilitator (p. 23). While institutional power and authority is often more apparent in cultural and anthropology museums as issues arise concerning artifacts, cultural patrimony, and source communities, art museums are also governed by institutional narratives and influenced by power relations (Harrison, 2007). Roberts (1997) states that museums have traditionally been institutions of great authority that cling to interpretations and knowledge based on a whites, European, and male perspective, and a Western art historical trajectory.

Michel Foucault's writings on power criticize "the workings of institutions which appear both neutral and independent...so that one can fight them" (as quoted in McClellan, 2008, p. 10). Likewise, Bennett's (1988) concept of the exhibitionary complex resounds throughout museological scholarship as offering a historical trajectory for the development of the museum as a seat of power/knowledge. The museum has occupied a place of "show and tell" for more than a hundred years, used by the state to further social agendas and ideologies through the entertainment of the masses. Bennett (1988) weaves through Foucault's writings on disciplinary institutions, the carceral archipelago, surveillance, and the penal system of the period from the late eighteenth century and into the early part of the nineteenth century where we learn about the social efforts arranged for the "increasingly large and undifferentiated publics" (p. 78). An agent of collection and exhibition, the museum is an exhibitionary complex due to the fact that it transferred objects from the private to the open public arenas where they were represented in ways that advanced messages of power to society. Knowledge was unquestioned, the visitor was passive as he or she absorbed the information presented.

Bennett (1988) discusses the museum being open to visitors on a regular basis in the early days of these institutions as they progress from the private to the public realm. The museum was used by the state to further a social agenda and educate and entertain the working class. Representations within the exhibition were shaped by academic disciplines of art history and anthropology forming mechanisms and tools of classification and display that persist in museums in contemporary times. The power of the institution and its use as a tool to advance political aims is not as apparent in the United States as it is in a country like England where a majority of the museums are fully supported by the government. An aspect of the exhibitionary complex is the issue of representation of objects and cultures, which persist in an institution that has been founded upon the gathering of art and artifacts from different locations, through

peaceful means or not, and placing them together under the direction and perspective of usually Western curatorial staff. This is an ongoing critical issue in museology and museum practice today.

Marstine (2006) indicates that theorists like Mieke Bal and Carol Duncan believe that museums still conform to the Foucauldian disciplinary model (p. 25). As quoted by Carrier (2006), Duncan appears aggressive in whittling museums down to nothing more than institutions that are moored to their ideological power and prestige, and work within politically and socially structured limits that ultimately stilt their ability to enlighten and illuminate; a truly populist art museum is a contradiction in terms, she says (pp. 62-63). To Duncan, even the architecture of museums in their early history, with facades resembling Greco-Roman design, embody an idea of the state, and subsequently evoke ideas of authority (McTavish, 2006, p. 239). Giebelhausen (2006) counters this notion, arguing, "...the museum has mostly been understood as a building type that is poised to assess, define, and display the value of culture for the changing demands of contemporary society" (p. 42).

It can be limiting for practitioners to deny the authority and power that art museums possess, but their institutions must not be constrained so harshly or literally to the disciplinary model. Museums must be reflexive about their history and the obligations they have to their stakeholders. They should be willing to acknowledge power relations as productive, and by acknowledging this, exercise the ability to share power with their stakeholders, especially when it concerns exhibitions. Ferguson (1996) offers an enlightening perspective on this subject:

By understanding the exhibition as an institutional utterance, we will begin to know who speaks to whom, why, where and when and under what conditions. Only when museums are utterly articulate will anyone be able to understand what is authentically being said. Otherwise the exhibitions as a speech performance will remain a loud monologue followed by a long silence, the silence that unfortunately reigns in most art institutions today, the sound of curatorial failure and audience disappointment. (p. 188)

Ferguson's insight encourages practitioners that communicating effectively is better than communicating everything. The way to counteract the power inherent in the institutional narrative is to view it as productive instead of detrimental. The institution needs to become reflexive about the stories they tell, about who should be involved in creating these narrative experiences other than the museum experts, and what interpretive platforms can be used within exhibitions to share authority with the public.

Controversy as People

Museums exist for people, if one oversimplifies the rhetoric. Every person subscribes to a unique worldview and values and the potential exists for those to be violated if an individual encounters something contrary to or critical of their deeply personal convictions and experiences in an exhibition. A museum's public—also called stakeholders—includes visitors, trustees, funders, staff, the media, researchers, and sponsors (Rentschler, 2002). Cameron (2006) writes, "Contentious topics such as 'difficult' histories, taboo topics and hot' contemporary issues are difficult to represent in exhibitions and provoke controversy because they are divisive and engage an individual's or group's values, beliefs, ideologies or moral position" (p. 2). Contemporary issues may not directly offend anyone—the museum may want to display art that examines environmental issues, for example—but the fact that the institution is engaging with a subject that many people have opinions on, opens the opportunity to incite a diverse array of feedback even negative backlash.

Controversy relates directly to the museum being perceived as a democratic institution. Engrained in the very foundation of the United States, the American public relies on a democratic system where everyone's vote counts and public forums host passionate debates about a diverse array of topics. The post-museum possesses characteristics of democracy, promoting interactivity, education, and participation as an "active player in the making of

meaning” (Marstine, 2006, p. 5). Kammen (2006) writes that while communism produced anxiety and was the political hot topic of the 1950s, it was supplanted by democracy in the 1960s (p. 162). Democratizing art, sentiments explored through the Pop Art movement, expanded to radicalization of art in the political sense in response to the national and international crises of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, as I explored earlier in the section on controversy as paradigm. It became a struggle between the values of the so-called elitists, those who had controlled the decisions of America’s museums for the past hundred years, and the public. Kammen (2006) also details the “falling out” of democracy as popular rhetoric in association with museums in the 1980s. The discussion has recently immersed in such literature as an essay by Lonnie Bunch, a renowned African American scholar and museum practitioner. Bunch (2010) writes that American museums struggle to define themselves and to demonstrate their relevancy. He recommends that they “...prove their value by addressing the most significant issues of the 21st century: Who are we as a nation and what does it mean to be an American?” (2010, p. 37).

Scholars and practitioners discuss how best to engage with their communities, but “Unfortunately, museums...have not yet made use of...policy tools to develop carefully thought-through guidelines about how negotiations with communities should be framed or about how community perspectives should be incorporated into a museum’s institutional structure” (Rothfield, 2001, p. 8). Exhibitions can be sites where museums have the opportunity to engage with nontraditional audiences and expand their role as a cultural broker, forum, and voice for many different communities, their values, issues, heritage, and art. Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts Institute for Community Development and the Arts, encourages civic engagement and dialogic activities centered on art and promotes the space of the museum for such activities. While this will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter,

it is important to mention here that it is vital that the museum has the ability to bridge the gap between itself and its public. Doing so can perpetuate its role as vital and relevant in contemporary society. Museums carry the burden of reaching diverse communities and eliciting input, but are ultimately the decision-makers on what content will be included in an exhibition. A fine balance must be struck between the museum's institutional freedom to do so and the ability of the public to challenge the museum (Boyd, 1999, p. 202). Wise (2003) sees museums as "uniquely positioned to play a role in facilitating the telling of local and community based stories...These are the kinds of spaces that might facilitate a healthy, collaborative dialogue with multiculturalism and assist in bridging cultural difference" (as quoted in Peach, 2005, p. 2).

Controversy as Progress

There is value in viewing controversy as a space for progress. The artificial environment of the museum, Weibel and Latour (2007) argue, constructs an ideal setting for experimentation. Museum administrators are beginning to realize the value of doing so in order to remain relevant in the future. Cembalest (2009) cautions that if they do not "respond to technological, social, and demographic trends, by midcentury, museums only visitors will be students and senior citizens" (para. 3). A number of factors can compromise a museum's ability to provide a space where provocative issues can be discussed through the universal medium of art. Louagie, et. al., (2005) advocate to fellow museum professionals that, "...the risk of controversy should not dissuade us in our work...museums are one of the few public venues that can tackle complex issues and difficult subjects that otherwise might not be addressed" (p. 8).

Extending visitors' current beliefs through a visit to a museum exhibition helps them feel competent and satisfied, encouraging them to return in the future (Falk, 2009, p. 215). Museum stakeholders believe museums have the power to shift an individuals viewpoint, and

many view the role of museums as public forums where issues can be explored, and challenging and even controversial issues are crucial to societies that are democratic and free-thinking (Cameron, 2006). At times, art pushes the limits of society's values but "...even provocative or controversial art can offer compelling opportunities for thoughtfully planned dialogues...and can open up civic issues in vital and valuable ways" (Assaf, Korza & Shaffer-Bacon, 2002, p. 4). Throughout history, artists have visualized in an aesthetic way their impressions and feelings and opinions about important social and cultural issues of the day. They pushed the limitations of the existing boundaries and were often ostracized, ridiculed, even banned because of what their art expressed.

Museums possessed a goal to educate the uncultured masses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in that regard, have been concerned with social issues for at least a century. These actions were perhaps more acts of charity rather than aligning with post-museum ideals of sharing power and encouraging the formation of personal narratives in exhibitions. In these instances, however, museums were institutions that played a role in progress, promoting education, industrialization, and culture in the United States. They take a different approach to doing so today, but such democratic ideals remain consistent throughout the history of museums. Bunch (2010) argues that museums maintain "...tight links to their communities by exploring issues of meaning and relevance," even those that may be controversial (p. 42).

Controversy and Programming

Scholarship about controversy in the art museum exhibition tends to focus on the "exhibit" part of the subject rather than engaging with the importance of the programming that accompanies exhibitions. These auxiliary activities assist in facilitating transformative experiences for visitors. While the next chapter expounds on the use of dialogue and

storytelling in a programmatic and non-programmatic way, I wish to elaborate on the use and importance of programming for controversial exhibitions.

Programming requires participation from individuals and is an effective way to engage visitors in conversation, provide an educational and information outlet about the topic on display and aids the institution in balancing its narrative with the voice of the public. Scholarship discusses how the post-museum (or postmodern museum) is a visitor-centric, populist movement against the traditional modernist and elitist model of the past. By exhibiting issues that are of contemporary concern and are socially relevant, museums enter into discussions with their stakeholders. The democratization of the museum can be furthered by joining exhibitions with programming, a collaborative effort that helps the institution fulfill its role as an instigator for transformative experiences and dialogic interactivity.

Museum programming for the public comes in two forms: programs that are developed based on what is on the exhibition schedule and programs that are developed independent of these shows. They range from those that take place in the museum, online, and “off campus,” referring to programming that takes place external to the museum in the community and in schools. On its website, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art features its current exhibitions on individual pages with their respective listings of public programs. They include docent tours; conversations with artists, curators, and educators; discussions; films; a digital slideshow of the artwork; lectures; and art classes.

Museum programming, writes Rutherford (2008), “is much more than curriculum; it provides an opportunity to socialize, a path to personal growth, and a form of entertainment” (p. 186). Few museums have opted to share authority with their publics to the extent that they allow co-curation of shows, so programs play an important role in inviting and implementing stakeholder input and participation. Korza (2007) focuses broadly on community arts

organizations and their programming but her advice can be absorbed by museums. She states that these auxiliary activities are less static and more an evolving mix of activities that are responsive to the diverse interests, needs, and concerns of organizational stakeholders “in a way that broadens and deepens the cultural life of the community” (Korza, 2007, p. 67).

Programming is a purposeful and intentional tool the museum employs to engage with the art and issues in an exhibition. Beyond the labels next to the artwork and beyond the exhibition catalogue, programs assist the museum in being perceived as a forum. Creating opportunities for sharing power and building these into exhibitions from the early planning stages encourages collaborative work internally between the curatorial and education departments and highlights the importance of building programs into the exhibition so that they are responsive to the issues explored through the art and not simply responsive to curatorial cues.

Science cafés and Philosophy Cafés are two program ideas that an art museum could use to augment an exhibition. I propose their use in art museums in addition to the standard offerings of lectures, artist talks, docent tours, and art classes. The first, science cafés, have been employed by science centers and museums as an informal way to learn about topics relevant to their field. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) uses the term ‘science pub’ to incorporate the fact that individuals can drink wine and/or beer while in attendance. Science cafés generally involve a casual meeting place, plain language, and inclusive conversation to fashion a welcoming atmosphere for individuals who may or may not have a background in science (NOVA scienceNOW, n.d.). The format begins with a short talk from a speaker, usually an expert or writer on the topic to be discussed, followed by a break for refreshments (conversation can begin here), and then an hour is dedicated to a question-and-answer session and general discussion (Café Scientifique, n.d.). When used by a museum, these

programs are often held at public locations external to the actual museum campus, bringing the conversation into the community and involving the public who may or may not know much about science.

Philosophy cafés offer “...comfortable surroundings for street level discussions on burning issues of the day” as scholars address philosophical issues at places external to their universities in an attempt to transcend the authority and formal learning of the institution (NOVA scienceNOW, n.d.). According to the Philosophers’ Café at Simon Fraser University (n.d.), these gatherings meet five dimensions of human existence: social gathering (emotional), physical (food and drink), intellectual (scholars and intellectuals), spiritual (juxtaposition of disparate ideas and thoughts) and action.

The format of these two types of informal learning cafés differ from current programming due to the fact that they bring the expert to the level of the learner, meeting the individuals where they are coming from instead of talking at them, which often occurs in exhibitions, lectures, and docent tours. They can also be deliberately organized to encourage dialogue about often difficult or controversial topics in an environment open to healthy discussion and exchange of opinions and knowledge. In an art museum setting, an ‘Exhibit Café’ could be incorporated into the exhibition planning process to enrich the public’s experience. A space purposely built into the gallery for the café could act like a living room or dining room for the coming together of experts and museum administration with the public. This demonstrates the institution’s willingness to sit down with visitors at a pre-determined time to engage over refreshments and common interests and talk about relevant contemporary issues associated with the respective art hanging on the walls of the gallery. The format of the ‘Exhibit Café’ could also be applied in an external environment as a way to escape the often-daunting environment of the museum and extend the exhibition’s influence to community spaces.

Conclusion

Museums shape cultural awareness through the objects they collect, the interpretation of these objects, and through the exhibition of art that reveals the condition of society and the world. They can be complicated institutions with “contradictory goals” and an inherent “complexity of relations, pressures, and incentives” (Karp & Kratz, 2007, p. 1). There are many instances when a museum plans for controversy in association with one of its exhibits and the response from the public is not one of derision but of acceptance, or the plan must be implemented due to negative feedback or challenge from stakeholders. There are also times when museums disregard or ignore the controversial elements of a show, do not anticipate a negative reaction or simply fail to make the most of the opportunities for dialogue associated with an issue-based show. Whatever the outcome, this chapter stressed the significance and importance of museums presenting issues that may or may not incite controversy, issue-based exhibitions that encourage dialogue and facilitate potentially transformative experiences.

The next chapter examines the role of dialogue in facilitating transformative experiences for visitors in association with issue-based exhibitions. Integrating dialogic activities into the planning stages of an exhibition, collaborating across departments and sharing power with stakeholders, is a vital and purposeful way a museum can address potentially controversial elements of an exhibit before the show opens to the public and ideally creates meaningful conversations about contemporary issues.

| CHAPTER 3: DIALOGUE |

In the previous chapter, I wrote about the paradigmatic shift of the contemporary art museum from temple to forum, a significant progression from “object-oriented repositories to sites of subjectivity, voice/dialogue, and participation as conveyed through a discourse of empowerment” (Brady, 2008, p. 764). Art museums are assuming more active roles as social participants, engaging with important contemporary issues through exhibitions and auxiliary activities that obviate the notion of the institution as a neutral zone and encourage dialogue through public participation and interaction.

In this chapter, I delve more deeply into the definition and role of dialogue and its use in art museums, especially in association with issue-based exhibitions. Museums are striving to learn more about their audience members and what they can do to begin conversations with the public before, during, and after they visit. They are “refashioning themselves from bastions of remote culture into social centers and community hubs” (Goodale, 2009, para. 2). However, museums continue to contend with a long-held image as elitist and boring, especially for younger audience members who may prefer the hands-on experiences offered at science centers and natural history museums. Sandell (2003) writes that museums “have been characterized as lumbering, prone to inertia, unwilling and unable to proactively respond to change,” change that must permeate practice as well as programming (p. 47). Gallery spaces that offer little more than row upon row of paintings and sculptures can turn off many individuals who may need more than didactic text panels or a hand-held audio tour to connect their lives with eighteenth century Rococo masterpieces, Minimalist canvases, or video art. As Falk (2009) argues, “The museum’s impact in a community...is defined by an abstract social construct determined by...the larger prevailing socio-cultural perceptions of what museums are and the potential roles they play in society” (p. 240). Recently, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston conducted research that revealed that visitors preferred choices other than audio

guides and formal tours, prompting the Museum to offer “spotlight talks,” informal, fifteen-minute discussions with guest lecturers (Vogel, 2008). These talks bring the experts to the public to engage in a dialogue about two or three artworks. While demonstrating responsiveness to the stakeholder interests, the institution chooses the works beforehand and the ‘spotlight talks’ still prioritize the voice of the expert.

Museums need to alter visitor expectations by resembling more a town square than a reliquary or a shrine dedicated to the voice of the expert. By this, I refer to the ability of an art museum to truly become a place for congregation and dialogue, even beyond the galleries. Some practitioners may view this as antithetical to the mission of the institution but to the public, the ‘place’ of the museum and not just the current exhibition or permanent collection becomes integral to their social and cultural identities. By becoming a town square, thus uniting community with institution, the museum displays a willingness to acknowledge its inherent authority and history of elitism, and expand its four walls to enable individuals to view the institution as a place that can truly engage with community concerns without appearing phony. The theoretical model of the post-museum acknowledges and encourages the expansion of the institution as a ‘place’ in the life of the community and not simply as a tourist attraction or caretaker of objects. Roberts (1997) communicates that within this progressive type of organizations:

...visitors are being ‘empowered’ to know and to speak in ways that are meaningful to them. They now share with museum personnel responsibility for and control over defining their experiences with the collections. Consequently, several long-standing tenets have been eroded, such as the authority of the curator, the sanctity of objects, and even the prestige of the institution itself as a source and distributor of ‘knowledge’ (p. 132).

Sharing authority with the public by creating spaces that encourage dialogue, which do not merely broadcast the opinion of the institution should be regarded as an integral part of its

mandate as a public forum. The museum can obstruct its own progress towards embracing a visitor-centric format if it is unwilling to acknowledge this point. Practitioners need to discover the value in expanding their organization's obligation to society, shifting from a collections management focus to a more proactive response to the concerns and interests of its stakeholders. The social value of the museum is as important as collections preservation, interpretation, and educational provisions (Dodd, as cited in Sandell, 2003).

Art museums cannot expect the public to immediately forget that for the past century, they have been "tremendously authoritative institutions" that operated by their institutional agendas rather than acknowledging the value of the visitor's narrative, often "regarded as something private, accidental, and therefore beyond the scope of museum attention and practice" (Roberts, 1997, pp. 72 and 140, respectively). Gradually, this way of thinking is eroding in favor of a viewpoint that aligns with the opinion of Maxwell Anderson (2007) of the Indianapolis Art Museum: "Surely there is no more important role for art museums than in opening [sic] our eyes to varying points of view...Art Museums need not violate their founding intent in order to foster greater awareness and tolerance of our multifaceted world (para. 6). Archibald (2004) describes the United States as a multicultural society where "Voices previously silenced are raised in a rich and complex chorus..." (p. 207). This extends to museums, institutions once considered "closed circles of authority," that now seek to interact in meaningful ways with the community "...by methods that more clearly reflect the increasingly dispersed authority and power within our communities and nation" (Archibald, 2004, p. 207). Museums enable a "rich and complex chorus" of voices in issue-based exhibitions by encouraging individuals to tell their stories as part of the exhibition in order to form personal narratives and meaning.

Museums use narrative in the form of storytelling to educate, interpret, and make meaning. Visitors make sense of exhibitions through language via the conversations—audible and inaudible—that they engage in with others, with their inner selves, and with the artwork (McKay & Monteverde, 2003; McManus, 1991). Mäenpää (n.d.) writes, “Stories create meaning by providing a known context. Narrative is a means of representing and expressing” (p. 3). Narrative requires an active construction of meaning making, allowing the visitor to imbue their museum visit with personal anecdotes and understand the exhibition from a familiar place. In this chapter, I will look at how the museum is experienced dialogically, the use of storytelling as a purposeful mechanism for dialogue, and how storytelling can and has been applied to issue-based exhibitions. The information presented in this chapter draws from literary theory, scholarship from dialogue experts, audience development and social inclusion research, and storytelling practitioners and organizations.

The Role of Dialogue

Museums are increasingly sharing authority with the public in a variety of ways, using exhibitions to communicate a contemporary narrative of social-responsiveness and relevancy, and opening their spaces as forums for dialogue. Knutson (2008) speaks of museums as providing opportunities “...for people to share an experience around content that has been designed to support certain kinds of disciplinary conversations” (p. 2). Dialogue that supports the visual and textual elements of the exhibition is offered in a variety of ways. As noted in the introduction, this research employs the following definition of dialogue from sociologist Daniel Yankelovich’s:

Dialogue encourages participants to *suspend judgment* and allow assumptions and preconceptions to be brought out in to the open, in order to foster understanding and break down obstacles. It attempts to create *equality* among participants, seeking ways to even out inequalities in levels of information about the issue, experience in public forums, and real or perceived positions of power or authority. It encourages *empathy* by

inviting *multiple perspectives* to the table and supporting their expression, thus facilitating a greater understanding of others' viewpoints. Through these and other means, it seeks to build a climate of trust and safety, without which genuine dialogue cannot occur. (as quoted in Bacon, Korza & Williams, 2002, p. 2)

Dialogue is not the same as debate. The former is interested in the relationships between participants while the latter assumes a me-you dichotomy with a stress on finding the “right” answer (Romney, 2005, p. 59). In its simplest definition, dialogue is a conversation between two or more persons. When using it to resolve social issues, it is engaged in intentionally to increase understanding, address problems, and question thoughts and actions; it has a focus and a purpose that is not implied by ordinary, everyday conversations (Gergen et al., 2001; Pedretti, 2007; Romney, 2005). Murphy believes dialogue is a facilitated discussion with the purpose of providing opportunities for people to tell their story, listen to others and build understanding (cited by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, n.d.).

The philosopher Bakhtin has been prolific in shaping understanding about dialogue in literature, but his ideas have also been applied to the museum. Dialogue, according to Bakhtin, is set in contrast to the monologue, and consists of three elements: a speaker, a listen/respondent, and the relationship between the two (Klages, 2006, para. 4). According to Bakhtin, “Life by its very nature is dialogic” and to live means to participate in dialogue (as quoted in Gardiner, 1992, p. 31). An individual understands herself only while revealing herself to another, through another, and with the help of another (Bakhtin, as quoted in Umiker-Sebeok, 1994, para. 13). The Art Education Department at the University of Houston applies Bakhtin’s theory of *heteroglossia* to the interactions between their teachers and students. The application is evidenced through the commitment to dialogue and collaborative efforts to progress beyond a mutually beneficial learning experience where shared goals are addressed, in order to work together in ways that re-define learner goals in the absence of an authoritative

voice. *Heteroglossia* refers to the fact that novels present multiple voices and forms, they are not monologic and thus do not cling to a central voice of authority.

The messages the museum conveys through exhibitions are reflections of its institutional narrative, which weaves through the organization's practices and policies in both obvious and subtle ways. Ferguson (1996) writes, "Exhibitions are the central speaking subjects in the standard stories about art which institutions and curators often tell to themselves and to us" (p. 176). This includes the behavioral cues that the museum communicates to the visitor and that the person reflects back in a form of a corporeal response that may not be audible, yet is a form of negotiation between entities in the form of social dialogue. The goal of social dialogue "is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders in the world of work" (International Labour Organization, 2007, para. 2). It can be applied usefully in the exhibition space in respect to the negotiations that play out according to McKay and Monteverde's (2003) concept of dialogic looking. It also manifests in the concept of arts-based civic dialogue.

Arts-based civic dialogue aligns the arts with ideas of civic dialogue, which is intentional and purposeful dialogue about civic issues, policies, and decisions that affect people's lives, communities and society at the local level as well as on a wider scale (Korza et al., 2005). When Animating Democracy, a project created by Americans for the Arts, has worked with museums, guiding them with arts-based civic dialogue, they emphasized the primacy of art. Meaning, the dialogic events corresponded to a planned exhibition and art selection rather than the other way around. However, it has been argued that the use of civic is not applicable to dialogic events that occur as part of issue-based exhibitions. According to Korza, Bacon, and Assaf (2005), issues that have a personal or cultural dimension are not necessarily civic in nature but "...should be considered public dialogue about a personal issue" (p. 99). Others contradict this

thinking and believe that the personal cannot be separated from the civic: “Most people move fluidly between the two modes of thought...The arts play a valuable role in drawing out the personal dimensions of civic issues” (Korza et al., 2005, p. 99).

Exhibitions play a key role in facilitating discussion, understanding, and dialogue, and are spaces of complex representations that are institutional, social and personal (Ferguson, 1996, p. 180). Welsh (2005) argues that museums never “are” but are always “becoming” (p. 106). While this can mean regression, I favor the argument towards progression. Art museums have the ability to escape stagnation in favor of active responses to important contemporary issues. These overarching issues may be local or they may be global, but in order for museums to effectively stage an exhibit about potentially controversial topics, they must link the civic to the personal to engage meaningfully with their stakeholders and to facilitate dialogic experiences. Korza, Bacon, and Assaf (2005) assert that constructive dialogue in conjunction with provocative art requires proactive programming and contextualization (p. 171). According to these experts, this includes carefully framing the project and its intent, explaining the decision behind choosing a particular artist, artwork, or issue, and thoughtfully designing opportunities for dialogue (Korza et al., 2005, p. 171).

Facilitation appears frequently in the literature about dialogue and one can assume it is an important feature of dialogic experiences. The purpose of facilitation is to guide an individual from art experience to dialogic engagement. Museum visitors like having choices, and many go to the museum anticipating “...an effortless, multi-sensory, and enjoyable learning experience,” not always to learn anything in particular but for the sake of discovery (Falk, 2009, p. 57). For The Jewish Museum’s 2002 exhibition *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, museum administrators opted to use civil dialogue as an important component of the show as the subject matter was highly controversial. The exhibition was facilitated dialogically through

design and interpretive elements (Korza et al., 2005, p. 27). In addition, the museum organized 67 one-hour dialogues including a symposium, panel discussions with guest speakers, an artist roundtable, public forums, and film screenings; a professional facilitator was hired to assist in many of these programs.

McManus (1991) indicates that museums encourage social interaction, including face-to-face communication by designing exhibits that prod visitors to discuss their thoughts on the subject matter and their interpretations of the artwork (p. 39). Adam Gopnik (2007) writes about the concept of the 'mindful museum' that encourages conversation, "...a place where at least they'll let you talk and won't force you to listen to a prepackaged monologue" (para. 18). Not every museum that wants to design dialogic experiences in association with potentially controversial subject matter has to seek the assistance of a professional facilitator or be associated with Animating Democracy like *Mirroring Evil*. The Oakland Museum of California creates situations for the public to converse with each other and the curators by using participatory elements like interactive journals (Goodale, 2009, para. 15).

Dialogue between the museum and the public can begin before, during, and after a museum visit, and can occur both in the museum and off site. The exhibition, and the art and issues it engages with, should not exist only during the visit on-site. It has a value and potential for transformation beyond the present; it can serve a dialogical purpose prior to a visit as well as after. Falk (2009) writes that the "in-museum" part of the visit that takes place inside the actual architecture of the institution is less important than historically expected or believed: "...what appears to be vital to an understanding of the museum visitor experience is represented by events that happen long before the individual ever sets foot inside an actual museum" (p. 89). Falk's research has been instrumental in illuminating the fact that the personal

interests, values, and knowledge of the individual has a significant influence on the exhibits, objects, or labels he or she chooses to view and give attention.

Audience development research emphasizes the importance of institutions involving people in order to “understand their needs and interests, and to create an environment and experience that appeals to them” (Heritage Lottery Fund, as cited by Waltl, 2006, p. 3). The New Dialogue Initiative at the Wing Luke Museum “strives to connect diverse people in the dialogues and create innovative ideas” by collaborating with members of the Asian Pacific American community, from which exhibitions topics and content are developed and informed by personal narratives of these individuals (Wing Luke Museum, n.d., para. 3). In addition to collaborating with stakeholders on exhibitions, more art museums are using social media tools like Facebook and Twitter, as well as organizational websites and blogs to create a conversation with the public, perhaps even those who only know about the museum through an online format. Macarthur (2007) believes that museums must allow visitors “...to be active participants from the beginning of the interpretive process, not just passive recipients at the end of it,” in order to remove barriers that may impede some individuals from engaging dialogically with the museum, especially in connection with controversial, issue-based exhibitions (p. 59). Using creative ways to engage with stakeholders before they visit the museum can instigate dialogue about important contemporary issues before the individual steps foot through the door. Posting information about the potentially controversial elements of an exhibit on the website gives the public open access to important information not only about the art and the subject matter but also about how to engage in dialogue as “...characterized by...speaking and active listening...especially important in a democratic society when there are differences and disagreements about what constitutes the good” (Evans, 2001, p. 771). I am limiting my discussion of pre-visit dialogue between the institution and the public to the realm

of the visitor and the art and exhibition. There are many other stakeholders at play like the media and also important. I recommend the reader review the case of *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* at The Jewish Museum to further investigate this dynamic.

During a museum visit, talking makes the experience meaningful, and through talking we can hopefully understand more (Gopnik, 2007). The exhibition is a unique communication medium that is appropriated by the museum to further an institutionalized story for public consumption (Ferguson, 1996). However, relying solely on the perspective that the museum is an authoritative institution and prone to power plays does not acknowledge the increasingly proactive role they are assuming to be more relevant to their stakeholders, to share authority and not simply spout institutional monologue using art. It also furthers the notion of the museum visitor as a passive rather than as an active participant in the making of meaning. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) argues, “Meaning is produced by museum visitors from their own point of view, using whatever skills and knowledge they may have, according to the contingent demands of the moment, and in response to the experience offered by the museum” (p. 5). In the twenty-first century museum, “...visitors are being ‘empowered’ to know and to speak in ways that are meaningful to them,” sharing the responsibility with the staff to control and define their experiences with the collections (Roberts, 1997).

McKay and Monteverde (2003) present three ways in which a person explores the museum through what they call “dialogic looking.” Influenced by Bakhtin’s theories, they align their concept with “*heteroglossia*, where multiple social voices come together and clash, giving rise to new ideas across varying experiences” (McKay and Monteverde, 2003, p. 42). According to McKay and Monteverde (2003), the museum visit is primarily a social experience and this is the first way individuals engage with the museum dialogically. Writing more than a decade before these authors, McManus (1991) advanced the idea that the “social aspect of visiting is

very influential on the communication situation in museums. Being able to have a relaxed time in social contact with family group members is very important to many visitors—often as important as the exhibits they will see” (p. 35). One talks to the person or people they arrive with, and often with fellow visitors and staff. The second incarnation of dialogic looking appears as the visitor works through an inner dialogue to make sense of their environment and the objects and people they encounter. Third, when an individual looks at an artwork, a conversation is initiated between the art and the person (Assaf et al., 2002; McKay & Monteverde, 2003). Korza, Bacon, and Assaf (2005) assert that art is in fact an alternative form of dialogue, carrying meaning and communicating beyond the limits of conventional language (p. 6).

When developing an issue-based exhibition, art museum staff should be aware of each of these dialogic interactions presented by McKay and Monteverde and implement elements that attempt to engage individuals at each of these levels. Making sense of and exhibiting complex issues can be difficult but “offering dialogic experiences enables visitors to express their own opinion, to share experiences and to come to terms with ‘difficult’ issues, events or exhibition content...” (Cameron, 2006, p. 14). Museums can infuse exhibitions with personal narratives written by or spoken by the artist, videos of the installation of the gallery, or curators and education staff discussing the selection and interpretation of the artwork on display. The museum can also build adjacent to the gallery an area that offers insightful reading materials or video kiosks with interactive games to stimulate dialogue about the issues in the exhibition. The Indianapolis Art Museum’s (IMA) Davis LAB is a model for this. The LAB is a permanent gallery space dedicated to IMA’s digital efforts, is meant to be innovative and experimental, and is about risk-taking, brainstorming and interactivity. The space has computers where visitors can browse the collection, read posts on the IMA’s official blog and leave comments, look at the

museum's Facebook page and become a "fan," or learn about exhibitions. Dialogue can also be built into an exhibition through programming by offering opportunities for the public to meet with dialogue specialists, hosting forums or artist roundtables, or training docents to be able to engage in meaningful dialogue with visitors about the issues presented in the exhibition.

A museum visitor engages in enlightening and transformative experiences by connecting their personal narratives to the story the museum communicates in and through exhibitions. We have discussed how museums can communicate with the public before and during a visit. Now let's address the post-visit dialogue that occurs. Falk (2009) encourages museums to stay in contact with their visitors in an effort to invest as much time and energy into reaching stakeholders after leaving the building as they do trying to support them while at the physical location (p. 234). Much attention is paid to what occurs while the individual walks through the gallery and engages with the art and the issues represented, but post-visit scholarship and recommendations are lacking. The post-visit is a time when many people reflect on the experience they have had and share their experience with peers. The hope that many museums have in engaging with important contemporary issues in exhibitions is that through exploring the subject matter and art in a dialogic manner, the museum has facilitated a transformative experience for that individual. The idea that a visit to a museum exhibition, even one that addresses subject matter that is highly relevant to the visitor, presupposes that museums have the potential to influence people, and possibly change the way they think and feel (Newman & McLean, 2004, p. 168). However, we do know from scholarship on dialogue that it has the "...potential to improve collective inquiry processes, to produce coordinated action among collectives, and to bring about genuine social change" (Isaacs, as quoted by Romney, 2005).

Storytelling

It is one thing to insist that art museums fulfill their relevancy to society by encouraging dialogic experiences in conjunction with issue-based exhibitions. It is quite another to make generalizations about how institutions can best accomplish this task. In addition to the recommendations I have offered in previous pages, I argue that storytelling is an ideal option that most art museums can use to effectively share power with their stakeholders. It may not require the formal facilitation of planned arts-based civic dialogue and personalizes the museum visit. The Society for Storytelling (n.d.) explains that “Museums are places with objects, but the objects in themselves mean little, only telling about them, interacting with them and assigning meaning to them...can we understand their significance” (para. 2). Ferrer (2007) concurs with this statement, writing, “Stories in museums...can help to open multiple interpretations and to reflect on contemporary issues” (p. 6). Museums are ideal social and cultural spaces for dialogic experiences and storytelling is an especially important form of dialogue that can be used to incorporate perspectives, opinions, and personal experiences of visitors.

Incorporating storytelling cues into exhibitions encourages dialogue about contemporary issues, and may aid in the presentation of topics that are especially difficult or taboo. “At their most basic, museums communicate. In communicating, they ignite memories, activate emotions, and spark interchange. What visitors do with these possible responses is part of the narrative they craft (Roberts, 1997, p. 137). Stories in museums can be a way for the institution to share authority, as well as connect the personal to the civic, public space of the exhibition, opening up multiple interpretations and reflections (Ferrer, 2007, p. 6).

Objects aid in the storytelling process. The Portland Art Museum is launching a one-year initiative called *Object Stories* with the goal of empowering disadvantaged communities to

share stories about objects that matter to them either from the museum collection or from their communities. It bridges the gap between individuals who may not know about the museum or visited before and the diversity of Portland's neighborhoods. The four components of the initiative are an on-site video booth to capture visitors' stories about the objects, storytelling workshops, documentary filmmaking workshops for the Spanish-speaking population, and an event at the museum where participants are invited to "...display the objects of their storytelling focus, and to celebrate the power of the storytelling process to unify and give shape to the collected objects..." (A. Williams, personal communication, March 23, 2010). The Portland Art Museum views this project as a way for the institution to engage diverse audiences, and believes that storytelling will assist visitors in engaging in meaningful ways.

Museum visiting is a social event, and incorporating dialogic elements into an exhibition opens the space up as a forum for discussion. Macdonald (2007) indicates that in a museum, people expect an experience that is shared and collaborative (p. 156). The Contemporary Jewish Museum, although not technically an art museum, provides an applicable example of a way in which object-based collaboration can instigate dialogue about important issues. The exhibition, *Our Struggle: Responding to Mein Kampf*, opened on February 11, 2010, and centers around a very controversial and painful object in Jewish history, Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. Over a period of three years, Linda Ellia, a Jewish painter and photographer, had drawn and written and painted over thirty pages of this book, and then distributed pages of the book to professional artists, young people, and others to alter in their own artistic ways. Six hundred pages from seventeen different countries were returned to her by 2007, essentially six hundred different rewrites of *Mein Kampf*, that she then bound into a book called *Notre Combat (Our Struggle)*. The Director of the Museum stated that she believed this exhibition "...creates a unique opportunity for dialogue about tolerance in the modern world" (para. 6). The project

was not free of controversy and although the museum has not communicated this, it is likely the exhibition has received its share of reactions from anger to awe. However, it was important to the artist and the museum that the public exhibition of the work was a “...dynamic place of memory, haven and testimony” (Contemporary Jewish Museum, n.d., para. 23).

As visitors actively participate in the making of meaning at museums, questions arise about who is speaking, to whom, why, where, when and under what conditions. The institution (via the curatorial interpretive voice), the artists, and the visitors possess their own unique stories that they tell in a variety of ways. Ferguson (1996) writes that exhibitions are a communication medium for art, “...the central speaking subjects in the standard stories about art which institutions and curators often tell to themselves and to us” (p. 176). They are not just displays of art but are systems of signs that express messages about objects, the world, and the institution (Roberts, 1997). Nina Simon (2010) presents two models of museums, one as content providers and other as platform providers.

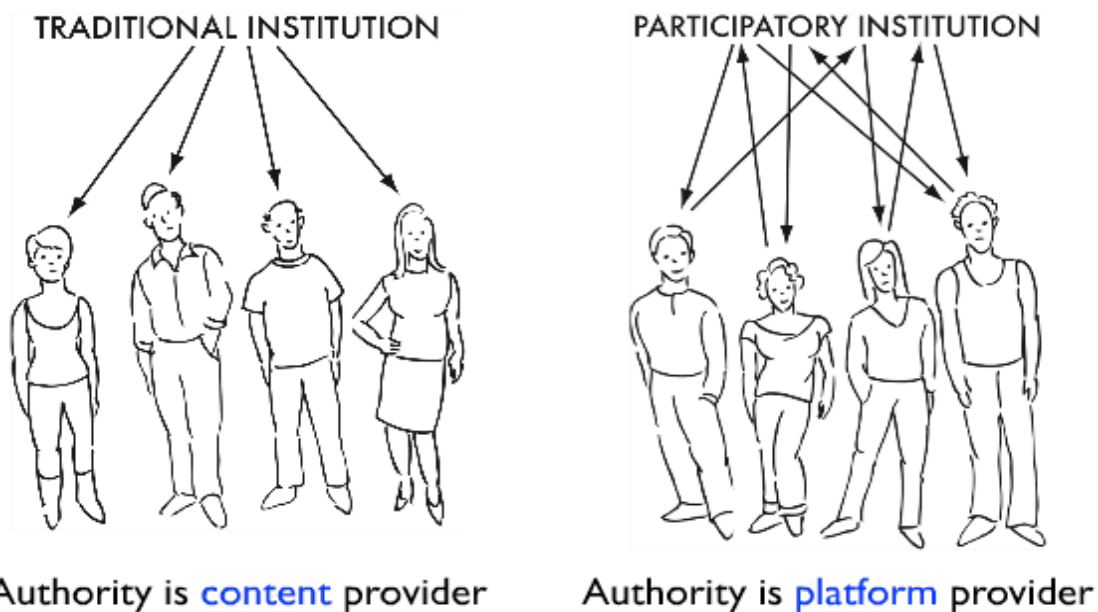


Figure 2. Nina Simon's model of museums as content and platform providers, respectively.

The former model shows the traditional model of the institution steeped in power; the latter falls in line with the notion of the post-museum, or what Simon (2010) calls the participatory museum. Storytelling opportunities offers a platform for sharing authority with the public, connecting the stories the museum tells through exhibitions with the stories the public brings to the museum as well as the narratives of the art in the galleries. When art museums become platform providers instead of merely content providers, they legitimize the presence of multiple voices and multiple perspectives in interpreting the art and the subject matter on display.

Conclusion

In the next section, a short case study is presented on *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo*, which took place at the Portland Art Museum that took place in the summer of 2009. It not only demonstrates how a museum can encourage dialogue and storytelling in conjunction with a relevant contemporary social issue but also reveals ways in which an art museum can provide platforms for encouraging the incorporation of community voices and input into an exhibit with positive results.

**| CHAPTER 4: *MARKING PORTLAND: THE
ART OF TATTOO*, PORTLAND ART MUSEUM,
JUNE 20-SEPTEMBER 13, 2009 |**

Case Study of an ‘Experience’

Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo was imagined by staff at the Portland Art Museum (PAM) to connect with the local community and underrepresented visitors, including a younger demographic, those who followed more alternative lifestyles, and individuals in the tattoo community. The West Coast has more tattoos per capita than any other region in the United States, 20 percent higher in fact, according to a 2003 Harris Poll (Kaiyala, n.d., para. 12). The prevalence and popularity of tattooing among the Portland population is evident in a 2009 article by Peter Korn for the *Portland Tribune*, a local media source:

It’s largely a generational thing, and Portland is full of young people, but knowledgeable folks both within and outside the body-art industry seem pretty sure that Portland has more tattooed and pierced residents per capita than any city in the country. And no, you can’t classify this in the Keep Portland Weird category – for those under, say, 40, tattoos have become very mainstream, crossing all sorts of political lines (para. 5).

Rob Bearden, PAM’s Director of Operations and one of the catalysts for developing *Marking Portland*, spoke to this trend as one of the reasons why this *experience* was even allowed after years of board member and curators dismissing the idea. Bearden said, “Tattooing is out of control in Portland. We thought, ‘What new audience might a show like this attract and have we connected with that audience?’” (as cited by Machado, 2009, para. 4). Interestingly, the recession played a role as well. From a financial standpoint, the exhibitions and programming PAM had scheduled for the 2009 fiscal year would not have drawn sufficient numbers of visitors to produce the revenue needed to satisfy budget concerns (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010). Audience development interests coupled with the fear of economic hardship was enough to convince the museum’s curators to agree to introduce tattoos as an art form into the more traditional museum exhibition offerings.

The museum qualified *Marking Portland* as an “experience” rather than an exhibit, which in the opinion of Tina Olsen, PAM Director of Education and Public Programs, was fortuitous

rather than a demonstration of institutional authority (personal communication, March 23, 2010). The Foucauldian disciplinary model as applied to the museum and propagated by theorists like Mieke Bal, Carol Duncan, and Tony Bennett is too simplistic a way to view the museum within a complex cultural and political environment (T. Olsen, personal communication, March 23, 2010). Olsen argued that by deeming *Marking Portland* an experience, the staff in charge of managing it were able to avoid the political operating systems of the institution and had the opportunity to experiment more (personal communication, March 23, 2010). By slipping around the boundaries that define terms like art, exhibitions, and the public in the concrete, traditional and conservative ways they are often used by an art museum, the term experience garnered the necessary support from the curatorial staff and the executive direction when the show was framed in this way. The term was not appropriated in a pejorative way but liberated the planning and implementation of *Marking Portland*.

The PAM staff had ninety days to develop and implement *Marking Portland*, which was not curated, per se, but was project managed by Bearden who partnered with Olsen, Beth Heinrich, Director of Public Relations and Marketing, and Bruce Guenther, Chief Curator. Together, they envisioned an experiment that would connect the museum to the community in a more visceral way and meet people's interests, animate the permanent collections, and facilitate visitor experiences that were not facile (T. Olsen, personal communication, March 23, 2010). Olsen indicates that it was important to develop programming in conjunction with the gallery-based experience. In the interview, she stated that programs are more flexible and innovative than exhibitions, which are the oldest and more conventional ways that museums communicate (personal communication, March 23, 2010). According to Olsen, *Marking Portland* was not controversial but two issues did arise in the planning stages of the experience (personal communication, March 23, 2010). The first was a desire among the project management staff to

acknowledge the complexity of history and by acknowledging it, to educate the public about the visual and religious tradition of tattoos in a deep and not facile way. This thinking aligns with the research of sociologist Kosut (2000) who wrote:

The tattoo is complex: it is a cross-cultural, historical and contemporary phenomenon. It is replete with meanings, both personal and cultural. Tattoos have been commodified and yet are still considered deviant. They are simultaneously visual and textual—an aesthetic...that can be *read in many ways* (p. 98).

The second issue arose in conjunction with the Flickr account that the museum opened to accept images of tattoos that could be projected on a wall in a gallery space. How the museum would monitor content for potentially offensive subject matter was a key concern when using crowdsourced material. In response to the question of controversy, Bearden believed the subject matter to be controversial and stated:

You run a healthy risk that ‘legitimate’ lenders, funders, foundations, all of the traditional art museum, visual art support community...will think less of you as a professional institution the minute you delve into any sort of controversial subject matter that you can’t neatly box and present as art (personal communication, March 23, 2010)

It was important for staff to communicate the purpose and intention of this experience by speaking with major donors about how they were developing *Marking Portland*, what changes they anticipated in audience demographic, and how this experience anticipated positive things for the future of the institution (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Ultimately, Bearden said, “We changed people’s minds about this institution who formally saw it as stuffy and elitist” (personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Marking Portland was comprised of three components. First, the exhibit took place in the gallery in a long, wide corridor that connects the museum’s two buildings. A projection screen was hung on one wall and images of tattoos were projected in a sequential fashion for the public to view. The photos were all publicly-sourced; the museum set up a Flickr account strictly for the purpose of collecting images of body art from Portland residents. Every day, a

crowd gathered in front of the screen and on the benches in the gallery for long periods of time, as if watching a movie. The statistic that states that visitors only stand in front of an art work for an average of 3 seconds, or an equally dismal figure, did not apply here. Up the stairs from this space and closer to the galleries where current major exhibitions are staged was a kiosk with information about the exhibition and a digital photo booth developed by Portland-based organization Second Story. More than 8,000 visitors used the booth to project tattoos on their bodies using the technology installed by Second Story (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010).

The second element of the exhibit connected the popular culture aspects of the exhibit and tattooing with examples of tattoos in the museum's permanent collection Asian and Pacific Northwest galleries. For some, this helped elevate the topic from mere spectacle as it linked it to the wider art historical narrative. Information-rich kiosks were installed in the galleries and text panels were placed next to art objects that displayed tattooing. This afforded the experience of *Marking Portland* legitimacy as it tied to pieces in the permanent collection.

Olsen and Bearden detailed the third part of *Marking Portland*: the supplementary programming that extended the experience beyond the galleries, to explore the topic outside the normal exhibitionary conventions (personal communication, March 23, 2010). *Skinvisible: Tattoo Expo and Floorshow* took place on July 25 and showcased tattoos in fashion, music, performance and multimedia with tributes to Portland's tattoo artists, celebrity tattoos, and local artists (Williams, 2009, sidebar). This was planned in order to display tattoo art and tattooed people in front of a conservative museum audience in order to facilitate understanding of the meaning and intention behind them. As Bearden indicated, there is "...more going on here than just a tattoo on the back of the leg" (personal communication, March 23, 2010). PAM enlisted local performance artist and celebrity Storm Large to help cast *Skinvisible* and hired

Amy Palomino to choreograph a runway/dance performance by tattooed individuals. Both the matinee and evening show sold out. The Tattoo Expo featured half a dozen local artists actually tattooing, which provided a visitor experience similar to watching visual artists paint live. Mary Jane Haake of Dermographics Tattoo in Portland brought two hundred swatches of artificial skin and a tattoo machine to allow the Expo attendees to experience her profession for themselves. In all, a thousand people attended *Skinvisible* and ‘buzz’ in the community was generated through participants, presenters, performers, community members, and the media. Portland’s so-called “Godfather of Tattoo,” Don Deaton of *Sea Tramp Tattoo*, also made an appearance. Overall, feedback was positive and the museum feels that it generated dialogue and bridged the gap between itself and this nontraditional museum audience.

In addition to *Skinvisible*, the museum organized a panel discussion that featured three generations of Portland Tattoo artist to discuss the history and popularity of tattoo art in the city. The guests included Haake as the moderator, and Deaton, Jeff Johnson, and Cherie Hiser were the panelists. While Olsen believes that dialogue was not intentionally developed as part of *Marking Portland* and in our interview, stated, “I would have a hard time making an argument that [this experience] was a catalyst for significant dialogue even if we’re talking about verbal” (personal communication, March 23, 2010). She instead suggested looking at the meta level to understand changes that happened in the community as a result of *Marking Portland* and its associated programming, to question how it changed conversations in the community about the museum and its role and its relationship to community and contemporary issues that spurred new dialogue. The important focus was not did this change opinion and instigate dialogue about tattoos in particular, but contemplate changes in the public’s perception about their ability to be part of an exhibit, with their own products (in this case, their body art), and their contributions

can be made part of the museum. Olsen related to me that this is new for the museum (personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Tattoos: Controversial or Not?

I learned from my interviews that rather than being controversial, tattoos are conversational. While Olsen and Bearden disagreed on the subject of tattoos being controversial, they both stated that the subject prompted dialogue about tattoos on a meta level; it assisted in changing public perception about the role they can play in exhibitions and the role of the art museum in the community as a more vital, relevant, and interesting place (personal communication, March 23, 2010). As the researcher, I conveyed my definition of the term controversial before I asked them what they thought were the controversial circumstances surrounding this experience.

Bearden deemed *Marking Portland* and the topic of tattoos controversial for the very fact that it was unusual for PAM to engage with this subject or attempt to reach out to a more alternative, nontraditional audience to collaborate on what was projected in the galleries and involved in the programming (personal communication, March 23, 2010). Conversely, Olsen indicated to me that she did not believe it was controversial; the issues that arose in the planning stages were not particularly different from concerns that arise in any exhibition that is staged at a museum (personal communication, March 23, 2010). Tattoos are more mainstream than ever before, and rather than inciting virulent backlash from community members; they merely stimulated curiosity, interest, and conversation.

It is interesting to note that what could potentially fall into the controversial category sprung not from the conservative funders of the museum, visitors, or from museum staff but from individuals in the tattoo community and a journalist. Even in these cases, it was less controversial and more critical of the museum's intent with staging *Marking Portland*. Bearden

related that early in the planning stages of the experience, he reached out to leaders in the Portland tattoo community in an effort to learn more about their community, their art, and to engage their participation in the artwork to be projected in the galleries and the programming (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010). One of the first individuals he attempted to force a relationship with was Bob Baxter of *Skin & Ink Magazine*. Baxter was angered by the museum's seemingly trite treatment of the tattoo art genre and disgusted at the mere 90 days PAM was dedicating to putting on *Marking Portland*. The dialogue between the two eventually disintegrated and ties were severed. In addition to the negativity expressed by Baxter emerged in a piece by writer Richard Speer for the *Willamette Week*, a local Portland circular.

Speer (n.d.) framed *Marking Portland* less in terms of cultural anthropology than as a collision "...of the blue-rinse set that bankrolls the museum and the blue-mohawk set who were paraded through the show's main event like exotic animals" (para. 1). Far from forging community ties and dialogues that were equally beneficial for the tattoo community and the traditional museum-going public, Speer (n.d.) argues that what an event like *Skinvisible* did was nothing more than provide "...a moment of mutually opportunistic cultural imperialism as the mostly over-40 patrons mugged like tourists with the mostly twenty-something performers. The freaks seemed every bit as eager to be objectified as the established types were to objectify them" (para. 3). I have no way of determining if the museum addressed these concerns before or after *Marking Portland* closed. What I do know through observation is that for the most part, leaders and individuals from the tattoo community and the general public became willing and eager participants in an experiment that proved to change opinions about the museum and its willingness to incorporate other voices, even nontraditional voices—the personal narratives of the "other" and the "freak"—into the sacrosanct space of the museum gallery. The show was

even extended for two weeks. Olsen said that the various elements that made up *Marking Portland* contributed to feelings of intense pride and pleasure among the tattoo community and drove people to the museum (T. Olsen, personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Summary Analysis

Previous to conducting my interviews, I believed that exhibiting tattoos in a traditionally conservative institution like the Portland Art Museum would naturally raise the ire of stakeholders as well as garner support from formerly peripheral audiences. To me, I believed that this was inevitable due to the popular culture and alternative-lifestyle aspects of the subject matter juxtaposed with the usual fare offered by PAM. What I discovered through my interviews was that the exhibit was controversial among the curatorial staff and board members who had to be gradually persuaded that the *experience* would contribute rather than detract from the reputation of the institution. Controversy in the form of negative backlash was not a response from the general public, and did not emerge in my interviews. However, as Bearden described to me, some key individuals from within the tattoo community were disappointed at the lack of space dedicated within the museum to the subject matter and believed the museum was trivializing this genre of art (personal communication, March 23, 2010). One person was so irate that he eventually ceased to communicate with the museum or agree to cooperate on helping to develop or implement *Marking Portland* (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010).

The museum invited artists and live models to share the stories about their body art with those viewing the projections or looking at the kiosks in other galleries. There was usually someone present in the gallery to answer questions as well, stimulating constructive dialogue about a subject matter that is often misunderstood by those not part of the tattoo community or who do not have body art. Kosut (2000) writes, "...aside from their obvious visual and

narrative quality, tattoos also have a distinct narrative quality” (p. 82). These individuals assisted museum-goers in formulating positive narratives about the body art, and the kiosks in the galleries of the Asian and Pacific Northwest permanent collection nested the stories in a historical and cultural context.

Marking Portland emerged as an illustration of circumventing institutional constraints rather than as an example of an issue-based or controversial art museum exhibition. It demonstrated an institution’s willingness to share authority with the public as it established a conduit for contribution, and ensured that meaningful dialogue around *Marking Portland* was not simply the responsibility of the museum, but was shared by the public. In this way, it contributes to the research as an example of incorporating dialogic mechanisms to facilitate collaboration and understanding.

Recommendations

Concerning the role of the museum in facilitating dialogue about potentially controversial art, Olsen approached it from a philosophical perspective. She stated:

I think that art museums have responsibility to engage in dialogue about issues of their time and to help people grapple with those issues but I think that I would frame it that way rather than engage with controversial issues. Some may be controversial or may not be but have responsibility to be central places for conversation and dialogue for community and act as a vehicle and catalyst for those to push discourse forward for the public (personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Museums that are contemplating engaging with experiences or exhibitions about potentially controversial subject matter should question who their audience is, is the audience going to design the exhibition with museum staff, what are the goals of the project, what are the hopes for exhibiting something that could be contentious and how will the institution channel these into something productive rather than destructive (T. Olsen, personal communication, March 23, 2010).

Bearden recommends that museums start earlier in the planning process than his team, to get to know the community or communities that directly relate to this subject matter, and get them involved early (personal communication, March 23, 2010). The museum must also know how they are going to explain the necessity and goal of such an exhibition to their most conservative patrons, how they are going to incorporate the participation of curators, many of whom are not willing to comprise their resume to curate a show that features something like tattoo art. Bearden believes it is vital to organize the information and the art in a way that is intellectually accessible, and this should be the primary and key objective in the mission of the organization (personal communication, March 23, 2010). He said, “To the extent that you fail to make people...understand what they are seeing...you fail to make the connection, to make the piece intellectually accessible” (R. Bearden, personal communication, March 23, 2010) Bearden and Olsen both embrace the notion that that visitor must be allowed to enter at their own level, be engaged at that level because if that is missing, the institution fails to facilitate the individual’s connection to the collection (personal communication, March 23, 2010). Interactive engagement is vital not only to the educational mandate of the institution but also for building a future foundation of financial support, breeding ownership among visitors through collaboration and providing opportunities for personal interpretation and meaning making to occur.

Conclusion

The information shared in the interviews, in articles in local media, and in the literature investigated for the purposes of this short case study, aligns with the information about controversy, shared authority, and dialogue that has been discussed in the previous chapters. While *Marking Portland* was revealed to not align completely with this research’s understanding of controversy, it demonstrates the ability of an art museum to engage with nontraditional audiences by displaying a subject matter that is relevant in contemporary American society,

especially among West Coast residents. It also challenges the notion that exhibitions should be the primary communication medium for museums to engage with potentially controversial subject matter. In the future it would be useful to triangulate this information with the personal perspectives of members of the tattoo community and the general museum visitor population to generate a more in-depth and critical case study on *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo*.

In the next and final chapter of this research, I conclude with recommendations based on the literature review and case study examined in the previous chapters. I also address the relevancy of my examination of issue-based exhibitions and dialogue, as well as consider if the research questions introduced in chapter one have been leant sufficient inquiry.

| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS |

This research traced the development of the art museum from its modernist roots to its contemporary incarnation as a visitor-centric institution that is increasingly becoming a more proactive social participant, incorporating and reflecting the voices of its stakeholders. This trend corresponds to an increase in art museums engaging with the taboo in exhibitions, showcasing art and artists that speak to important contemporary issues. At times, these have the potential to incite controversy. The research reviewed the literature that details art museums and controversy, the use of dialogue in this context, and concluded with a short case study of *Marking Portland: The Art of the Tattoo*, an experience offered by the Portland Art Museum in 2009. In concluding this research project, I will revisit the problem and purpose introduced in chapter one as well as the research questions, summarize the findings of this research and their relevance, and offer suggestions for future research.

Revisiting the Problem & Purpose

Art museums are dialogic, authoritative, and democratic spaces that are traversed and informed by diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and interpretations that converge and at times clash. Exhibitions that tackle controversial subject matter have the potential to empower stakeholders but can also alienate some who may feel the art museum they once trusted has violated community standards and personal values. I posited that as socially and culturally relevant institutions, museums have a role to play in proactively engaging with contemporary issues in exhibitions, and through them, to allow visitors to share authority, engage in dialogic experiences, and contribute personal narratives.

The research in this project was derived from a contextual literature review and a short case study. These informed an understanding of the role of the art museum in facilitating dialogue within issue-based exhibitions particularly those that addressed taboo subjects. The research uncovered surprisingly few complaints against art museums that stage issue-based

exhibitions and related programming. Some scholars believed that art museums are only just now realizing their potential to act as catalysts for social change. Others argue that this progress is stilted by the fact that museums continue to grappling with a modernist identity as authoritative institutions, blinded by their internal narrative as they disregard the importance of the voice of the public. Overall, however, the research conclusively agreed that art museums are crafting more efforts to be self-reflexive about their practices and to share authority with the public.

Revisiting the Research Questions & Summary of Findings

The central question of the research was: How do/might art museums facilitate dialogue within controversial exhibitions? Three sub-questions were also examined. The first asked, “What does controversial refer to when an exhibition is described in this way?” The second inquired about the role of the museum in facilitating dialogic experiences for visitors. The third sub-question was interested in the ways in which community standards—values adhered to by institutional stakeholders—influence the actions of museums in exhibiting controversial art. In this paper, the final sub-question was not afforded the attention I believe it deserves, but did emerge briefly in the literature review and in conjunction with stakeholder concerns in the case study.

The definition of controversy in relation to art museum exhibitions changes depending on contextual and institutional factors, and does not always conform to a concrete definition. Generally, it is marked by the expression of opposing views. The research organized what was communicated about this topic into the five ‘P’s’ of controversy: paradigm, power, people, progress, and programming. These relate directly to a post-modern, post-museum that objects to the notion of the gallery as a neutral space by acknowledging its inherent power relations. The post-museum views issue-based exhibitions and the expression of opposing views as

progress as it shares power and encourages the formation of personal narratives in exhibitions.

The research determined that dialogue is an important facet of the museum experience for visitors. Dialogue is understood to be an act that encourages the suspension of judgment, equality, and multiple perspectives. It is not always a conversation between two or more people and is not synonymous with debate. McKay and Monteverde's (2003) concept of dialogic looking provided an insightful framework to help understand how individuals experience the museum dialogically: first, among their social group; second, conversing with an inner self; and third, with the art itself. I argued that a fourth dialogue exists between the visitor and the institution—the museum—long deemed elitist and authoritative. A museum can facilitate dialogue by assuming the role of facilitator to establish dialogic cues for helping the visitor engage in enlightening and transformative experiences by connecting their personal narratives to the story the museum communicates in and through exhibitions. Arts-based civic dialogue offered another way for practitioners to connect the civic environment of the museum with the personal narratives of their stakeholders by encouraging dialogue in reference to issue-based exhibitions. I used Nina Simon's (2010) research to assert that the museum should assume a participatory role by offering platforms for sharing authority rather than acting as content providers. The latter assumes the visitor to be passive and not the active participant that he or she should be. Incorporating storytelling into issue-based exhibitions is a platform for sharing authority.

Through the literature review and short case study of PAM, I found that art museums can successfully facilitate dialogue within exhibitions, particularly those that are issue-based and have the potential to be controversial. Particular to my study, however, was an emphasis on programming as the conduit through which to do so, an idea that immersed in my interview with Tina Olsen at PAM. Programming, according to Olsen, can allow for more experimental

and creative efforts that may not be possible through the traditional communication medium of the exhibition (personal communication, March 23, 2010). In my research, I successfully linked scholarship about dialogue and museum exhibitions to the use of storytelling, and explained how storytelling can assist the museum in reflecting and incorporating the voices of stakeholders into the exhibition. It encourages the sharing of power in a highly personal and possibly transformative way. In relation to the controversial subject matter, many museums attempt to reach out to the communities directly involved in the issue before the show opens. This is accomplished in order to understand and possibly integrate their personal narratives and perspectives with the curatorial voice interpreting the exhibition from the curatorial perspective. I afforded attention to how art museums are reaching out to their stakeholders before, during, and after a visit to an issue-based exhibition in order to stimulate constructive dialogue.

Recommendations

The central question of this research asks for practical solutions to an existing condition. It assumes that museums can facilitate dialogue and that they stage issue-based exhibitions, both of which have been proven through this research. Art museums can facilitate dialogue within controversial exhibitions and transformative experiences can open people's minds to a range of viewpoints, new knowledge, and offer ways that individuals can become more socially active (Cameron, 2006). This research stated that a museum visitor can engage in transformative experienced by connecting their personal narratives to the story the museum communicates in and through issue-based exhibitions. Cameron (2006) uses the word alteration to describe a process through which an individual begins to engender empathy for other points of view.

Alteration may be the word we need to use to describe what practitioners hope happens when art museum stimulate dialogue in association with issue-based shows. Perhaps alteration

should be the goal rather than transformation, which may require more of an art organization than it can possibly give. Dialogue promotes communication, the sharing of viewpoints, and it ultimately celebrates a free flow of meaning. In this way, the museum should view issue-based exhibitions as catalysts for change, providing platforms for participation and meaning-making. Collaboration with universities, social organizations, and other arts and culture groups can help situate the museum in a larger conversation about important contemporary issues, and extend its social role beyond the gallery space.

Relevance

Art museums continue to seek ways to ingratiate themselves as vibrant institutions within their communities. This research offers those in the field a new way to look at controversy. It contextualizes it in relation to paradigm, power, people, progress, and programming. One of the strengths of the research, I believe, is that it does not focus on case studies that sensationalize or highlight the negative circumstances that have affected controversial exhibitions in the past. It aims to get beyond the sensation and into the minds and lives of the public. The research suggests that dialogue is not simply the act of two or more people conversing but there are many ways a person experiences the museum dialogically. Dialogue can help visitors discuss and think critically, openly, and honestly about important contemporary issues, even those that are controversial or taboo, without feeling that their opinions do not matter to the museum. Sharing authority is a hallmark of the post-museum, a theoretical model already being appropriated by museums in order to engage at creative and dynamic levels with their stakeholders. Based on the literature and my interviews, it appears there is broad agreement that museums must do this to be relevant, democratic institutions in the future.

Further Research

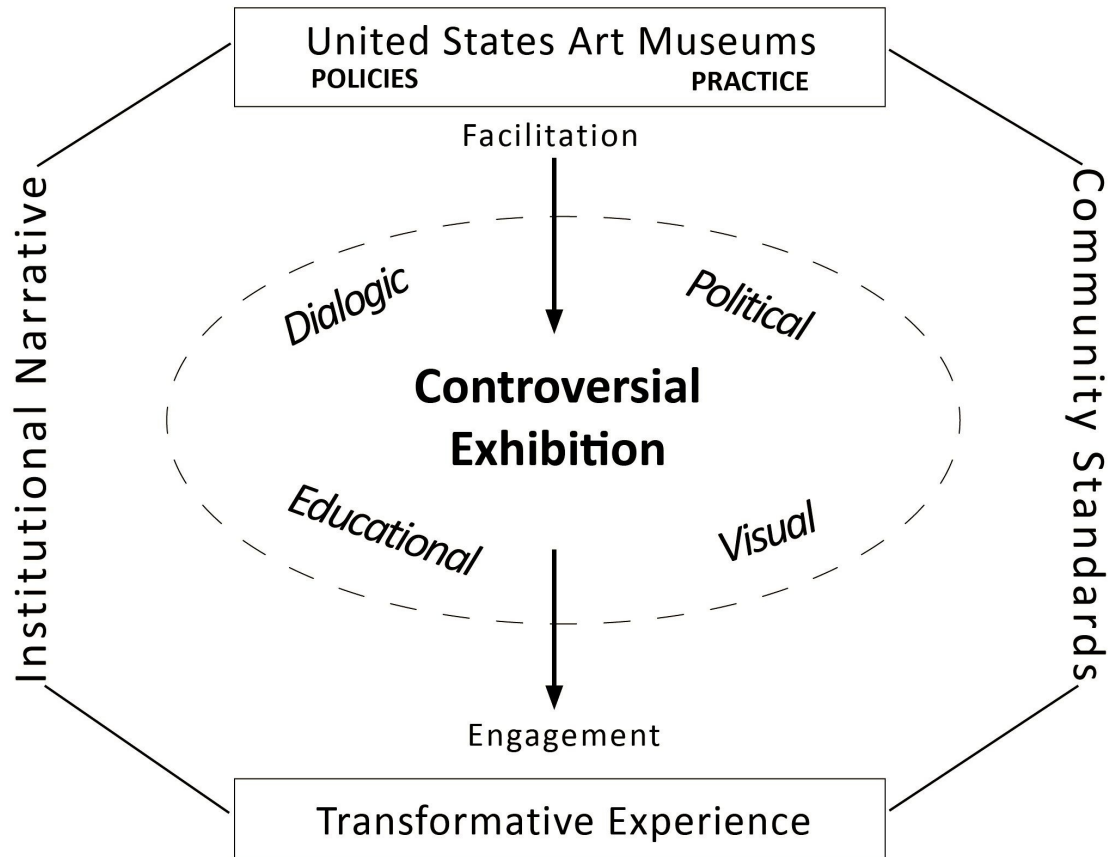
In the future, I recommend further research be conducted to investigate the role of dialogue and storytelling in exhibitions using arts-based civic dialogue but tailored for smaller organizations and in more informal ways that do not require a professional facilitator. More research should be contributed to the growing body of scholarship on the role of the twenty-first art museum as a catalyst for social change. Funding agencies, the government, and the public demand relevancy and accessibility of trusted public organizations. Audience development research, and research on the impact and relevancy of museums, has been conducted in the United Kingdom over the past decade in response to the government's social inclusion policies. For example, Newman and McLean (2004) write about documents that Great Britain's Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Scottish Museums Council wrote in the early 2000's that reflect the role of museums and galleries in fulfilling the government's social inclusion policies. In addition, Sandell (2003) relates how museum professionals are undergoing training to assist in facilitating socially inclusive work. Staff at the Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery worked with consultants from the Drawbridge Group to better understand how to work with the disabled population (Sandell, 2003). Further critical studies need to be conducted in the United States that takes into account the unique circumstances of the American art museum in relation to their social impact as integral cultural institutions.

Conclusion

Art museums must seek ways to become even more vital, living institutions in their communities. Exhibitions can no longer offer just art on walls or sculptures on pedestals. This type of art exhibition is static and uninteresting, and aligns with the traditional and authoritative

modernist museum that viewed its visitors as nothing more than passive receptacles. The twenty-first century museum is undergoing an exciting paradigmatic shift. O'Neill (2006) speaks to what I have attempted to detail in this concluding chapter: "In a world where negotiating the difficulties posed by profound individual and cultural differences are critical to civil society, museums can function as places where people can explore their own identities in relation to others, to reflect on how people are different and how they are the same" (p. 109). This research has demonstrated that there are times when issue-based exhibitions should not be shunned because they may offend someone. Exhibitions may be the more traditional communication medium of museums, but they are nevertheless one of the key reasons individuals visit. Inviting stakeholders to contribute their personal narratives to an exhibition, even their own bodies as we saw in *Marking Portland*, is not going to look the same in every museum. Every institution knows their resources, their visitors, and their capacity to support dialogic experiences.

| APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK |



| APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PORTLAND ART MUSEUM STAFF |

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Case Study: _____

☐ Email ☐ In Person

Question 1: What role did you play in the development and implementation of *Marking Portland: The Art of Tattoo*?

Question 2: What do you consider to be the controversial circumstances surrounding this exhibition?

Question 3: What questions and concerns, if any, arose in the planning stages?

Question 4: What do you believe is the role of dialogue in the exhibition?

Question 5: What could controversial mean in the context of this exhibition? (Unless identified clearly in Question 2)

Question 6: How do the values and standards of the museum's public influence whether or not an exhibition is controversial?

Question 7: What do you believe were some of the unseen factors that contributed to the outcome of the exhibit?

Question 8: I posit that the museum is a political space that is often quick to use institutional authority to quash a controversial or potentially controversial exhibition. Has this been the case in your experience? Why or why not?

Question 9: What do you believe is the role of the museum in facilitating dialogue about potentially controversial exhibitions?

Question 10: Should the art museum avoid exhibiting art that is concerned with contentious topics, whether cultural, political, or the like?

Question 11: What recommendations would you make to museums that wish to facilitate dialogue around a **potentially** controversial exhibition, or are concerned that an exhibition may incite controversy?

| APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL |

Dear <POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Power and Dialogue at the Art Museum: Facilitating Transformative Experiences at Controversial Exhibitions*, conducted by Megan Blankenship, a graduate student from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of the art museum in facilitating dialogue concerning controversial exhibitions.

Art museums often engage in self-reflexive practices, proactively addressing public interests and concerns through exhibitions and framing them in such a way that they allow visitors the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue concerning potentially contentious topics. It should concern administrators when stakeholder interests, backlash from the community, or misuse of institutional authority compromise a museum's ability to provide a space where provocative issues can be discussed through the universal medium of art. This research, through a review of the literature, case studies, and interviews, aims to provide conclusions and recommendations for creating an exhibition space that facilitates dialogic and subsequently, transformative, experiences for the visitor.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with <NAME OF RELEVANT CASE STUDY ORGANIZATION>, and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to the development of exhibitions and facilitation of dialogue in museum in <CASE STUDY CITY>. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an interview through a phone call, using Skype, or email, lasting approximately one hour, during the Spring of 2010. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 602.332.9185 or blankens@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Phaedra Livingstone. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Megan Blankenship
1475 W. 12th Ave.
Eugene, OR 97402

| APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM |

Research Protocol Number: _____
**Power and Dialogue at the Art Museum:
Facilitating Transformative Experiences at Controversial Exhibitions**
Megan Blankenship, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Power and Dialogue at the Art Museum: Facilitating Transformative Experiences at Controversial Exhibitions*, conducted by Megan Blankenship, a graduate student from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of the art museum in facilitating dialogue concerning controversial exhibitions.

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Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. With your permission, your name will be used in any resulting documents and publications. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the museum sector. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 602.332.9185 or blankens@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Phaedra Livingstone. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate how you would prefer to be identified:

_____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

Please read and initial the following statements to note your agreement:

_____ I consent to the use of audiotapes and note taking during my interview.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Megan Blankenship
1475 W. 12th Ave.
Eugene, OR 97402

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