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## Abstract

This thesis contends that communication scholars ought to investigate *how* and *to what effect* individual/collective rhetors seek to persuade humans about their interconnectedness with nonhumans and the physical world. Specifically, the author draws on his participant-observations of the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, New York, to rhetorically analyze the ways in which the institution renders intelligible to tourists the sixth mass extinction in natural history, an event known as the Holocene Extinction. By touring the American Museum and documenting his experiences through a series of critical vignettes, the author demonstrates how the institution, namely the Hall of Biodiversity, seeks to create an entangled public, or a collectivity of humans that see their wellbeing and the survival of the more-than-human world as entangled. As an outcome of this thesis, the author theorizes what he calls *pedagogies of entanglement* to refer to a class of instructional discourses that manifest in/through communication about the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, a nascent phenomenon that he argues appears within and beyond the American Museum. To that end, the author calls for a more robust engagement with the pedagogies of entanglement that populate the discourses of other overlapping technical and public spheres. Doing so will provide rhetoricians with the opportunity to assess the effectivity of other situated pedagogies of entanglement in order to offer tools and recommendations to better human communication about the more-than-human world.

TOURING EXTINCTION: THE RHETORICS OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS ON DISPLAY

by

T. Jake Dionne

B.A., University of North Texas, 2014

M.A., Syracuse University, 2016

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in *Communication & Rhetorical Studies*.

Syracuse University  
May 2016

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## Acknowledgements

In the eleventh hour of writing this thesis, I experienced what can only be described as an academic iteration of Stockholm syndrome. *I so desperately needed to visit the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, New York, one last time before I defended my thesis.* Along with my partner Joe, I packed my bags and made the now familiar drive from Syracuse to New York City only to find myself running in the rain as I rounded the corner of West 81st Street and Central Park West.

“I don’t want to rush you, but how long are we going to be in here?” asks the frustrated boyfriend-turned-tourist trailing behind me. I briskly walk toward the entrance of the American Museum and think about how he likely dreads making yet another excursion into the institution for *my* project.

“Not long. Maybe an hour? I just want to move through the museum again and snap some photos of various exhibits,” I respond as I move toward the ticket teller *one last time.*

498 days. That piece of data marks the precise duration between the first and last times I toured the American Museum. I was never alone during any of these costly visits, so “my” time spent was never really “my” time spent—it was “our” time invested. Accordingly, I must spotlight and acknowledge the person who was always by my side in the face of mass extinction. Many thanks, Joe Hatfield.

This thesis is about *how* and *to what effect* rhetors convince *human* audiences that they are entangled with nonhumans and the physical world. Extracted from a host of communicators in overlapping public and technical spheres, I use the keyword *entangled* to mean the absence of distance. Whereas we are physically removed from the Kuiper Belt beyond Neptune, from a very material standpoint, we are still interconnected with it in some way, shape, or form. Whereas

practices of consumption are often dislocated from systems of agriculture ravishing the physical world, from an ethical standpoint, behaviors and institutions are intertwined with one another in a way that makes or breaks the potential for better world(s). In short, to be convinced of entanglements means holding oneself accountable for how we engage in all matters with matter (the building block of the universe).

“The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgement; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind,” wrote Karen Barad in her seminal book about entanglements, “[E]ntanglements are not isolated binary co-productions as the example of an author-book pair might suggest. Friends, colleagues, students, and family members, multiple academic institutions, departments, and disciplines, the forests, streams, and beaches of the eastern and western coasts, the awesome peace and clarity of early morning hours, and much more were a part of what helped constitute both this ‘book’ and its ‘author’” (x). Though Barad and I share different entanglements, I agree with the expressed sentiment.

To Dr. Morris: Thank you for your generative feedback on the many iterations of this thesis. From the proposal to the defense, you have allowed me to have fun with this thesis on my own terms. Even though we share radically different interests and pedagogies, I enjoyed working under your direction and look forward to sharing drinks with you for many years to come.

To Drs. Hall, Rand, and Robert: Thank y’all for serving on my committee. Each of you offered helpful comments and suggestions that found their way into the final draft of this thesis. Without your pushback, I would not have never discovered the narrative “I” that was so integral to the construction of my critical vignettes throughout this document.

To Dr. Kiewe: Thank you for allowing me to explore “animal rhetoric” in your course on contemporary theories of rhetoric. Your kindness and willingness to accept that nonhumans

persuade humans first gave me the courage to journey to the American Museum, so I am forever grateful.

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To Kaicheng & Kyle: Thank y'all for offering me a low maintenance friendship with no expectations. We stressed, laughed, and learned alongside one another. As an introverted person who likes to spend copious amounts of time alone, I most appreciate that neither of you ever forced me to do what I hate most: "Hang out."

To Mom, Dad, and Zach: Thank y'all for forking over the dough so that we could enjoy an amazing family vacation to Northern Europe in the midst of this thesis. Seeing other museums of natural history in England and Denmark was eye opening. I especially appreciated the opportunity to see most of the remaining dodo bird bones.

To Granny Ginger & Pam: Thank you both for traveling to New York and accompanying me on trips to Manhattan. When I reread this document, I think about our shared experiences in the Big Apple. Even though y'all play no part in this thesis, memories of our time together haunt in the margins of this document.

In the spirit of showing consideration toward the more-than-human world, I dedicate this thesis to the dodo bird: Though you were flightless in your lifetime, you are now soaring in our memories.

Finally, I would remiss if I failed to acknowledge the gravity of human exceptionalism. In the days between my first visit to the American Museum and the defense of this thesis,

humans have murdered an estimated **seventy-five billion nonhumans** for purposes of consumption (dietary and otherwise). This figure is both alarming and disgusting. Despite the fact that rhetoricians in this contemporary moment are often attuned to systems of power that denigrate bodies, they continue to overlook the largest population of individuals suffering. As a community, we need to be more conscious of our personal choices as well as systemic anthropocentrism in order to begin the much-needed process of *thinking out* of this catastrophe.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Touring the American Museum of Natural History

One of the many unintended consequences of the Anthropocene has been the pruning of our own family tree. Having cut down our sister species—the Neanderthals and the Denisovans—many generations ago, we’re now working on our first and second cousins. By the time we’re done, it’s quite possible that there will be among the great apes not a single representative left, except, that is, for us.

Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

...bodies of land are intertwined with bodies of people and bodies of thought. Acknowledging these three inextricable linked facets of everyday life as corporeal help highlight how each is rhetorical, dynamic, material, and interdependent on each of the other.

Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*

### 1. Planning a Trip

*Extinction* is more than a buzzword in New York City—it is an organizing apparatus that seeks to remind humans of their place in the “more-than-human world” (Abram 7). In September of 2014, the Oceanic Preservation Society (hereafter OPS), an organization made famous by their Academy Award winning documentary *The Cove*, took to the streets of Manhattan to stage a multi-sensory film against the backdrop of the United Nation Headquarters Building (hereafter UNHB). Billed as *illUmiNations: Protecting our Planet*, the short film sought to mobilize an ecologically conscious constituency primed to demand climate change action from world leaders attending the U.N. Climate Summit. “Scientists predict we will lose half of all of our species on the planet by the end of this century,” said OPS founder Louie Psihoyos of the event, “We wanted to create a specular program that would showcase how fast we’re losing species and why their numbers are declining. We hope *illUmiNations* will bring well-needed attention to the plight of these animals and our role in their decline” (*The United Nations*). Indeed, by projecting larger than life images of the more-than-human world on the exterior walls of the concrete

UNHB, the OPS challenged the so-called discursive and material schism between culture and nature or humans and animals<sup>1</sup>—or, rather, us and them. In other words, the OPS sought to notify humans of their entanglement<sup>2</sup> with the more-than-human world in hopes that our species would stop behaving so vilely.

Having traveled to New York City on a number of occasions throughout the past two years in order to collect data for a few interrelated projects, I know well that this message of human and more-than-human interconnectedness is far more prolific than a single protest.<sup>3</sup> Only a short subway ride away from the UNHB, the American Museum of Natural History (hereafter American Museum), an internationally renowned research institution and tourist destination,<sup>4</sup> has been involved in teaching publics about their entanglement with extinction since the late 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief word on terminology: With the exception of this first use of “animal” to demarcate the human/animal dualism, I refer to other-than-human sentient life as “nonhumans,” a practice supported by various communication scholars (see, for example, Freeman; Freeman, Bekoff, and Bexell; Goodale; Pfister; Seegert, “Queer Beasts”; Seegert, “Play of Sniffication”). Secondly, I refer to nature as the “physical world,” a practice that seeks to curb the “unnatural” qualities, namely (but not limited to), hierarchy, authority, harmony, purity, neutrality, and mystery,” that we associate with the word “nature” (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 3). Finally, when talking about nonhumans and the physical world as a collective unit, I use the term “more-than-human world” (Abram 7). Whereas this shift from “animal” to “nonhuman” only inscribes another binary that centers the “human” against the “nonhuman,” this composition nod toward a more considerate human and nonhuman entanglement serves to disrupt the anthropocentric flow of language on paper.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the word “entanglement” interchangeably with “interconnected.” In the works of ecologically conscious researchers, phrases like *humans are entangled with nonhumans* and *humans are interconnected with the physical world* continually appear. Being an individual who identifies with anti-anthropocentric rhetorics, I constantly think of myself not as “human,” but rather as an entity enmeshed with the more-than-human world. Although my day-to-day reality reifies “nature” and “animals” as entities *over there to be gazed upon*, I personally do not see myself disconnected from the physical world or nonhumans. Quite literally, I am of the more-than-human world. I am entangled with the more-than-human world.

<sup>3</sup> Other instances of extinction and entanglements not discussed in this thesis include the People’s Climate March and an unnamed project similar to *illUmiNations* that occurred in the wake of Cecil the Lion’s murder.

<sup>4</sup> Beyond its duties as an archival and research institution, the American Museum is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, opening its doors to more than five million yearly visitors (Matthews).

Through the Hall of Biodiversity, an exhibition curated by Niles Eldredge,<sup>5</sup> the American Museum “presents a vivid portrait of the beauty and abundance of life on Earth, highlighting both biodiversity and the factors that threaten it” (“Hall of Biodiversity”). These threatening factors are entirely human, namely persons residing in the western hemisphere (Morton, “How I Learned”; Nibert). To that end, the Hall of Biodiversity purports to teach tourists—the humans—about their place in the more-than-human world in hopes of engendering a dialogue that may radically decrease the magnitude of a global catastrophe that is, quite frankly, already occurring (Morton, *Hyperobjects*).

“Touring Extinction” travels to the American Museum in order to assess *how* and *to what effect* the institution renders intelligible the contributing factors and impacts of the sixth mass extinction natural history—a phenomenon known as the Holocene Extinction. In short, “Holocene” is a temporal term that refers to the recent geological epoch and its associated mass extinction event that began approximately twelve thousand years ago and “extends to and includes the present day” (Walker et al. 3-4).<sup>6</sup> Holocene is a timeframe that represents a trivial dividend of planetary history, yet “contains a wealth of detail on diverse phenomena as climate change, geomorphological and geophysical processes, sea-level rise, vegetational development, faunal migrations, and, not least of all, human evolution and activity.” (Walter et al. 4). This latter quality concerns the American Museum, a scientific institution that condemns human inconsideration toward the physical world by ascribing “collective blame” onto tourists through

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<sup>5</sup> Eldredge was the chief curator of the Hall of Biodiversity. As a researcher, Eldredge identifies as a biologist and paleontologist. He was key in restructuring how scientists conceived of the cladogram, a figure to be discussed herein. He recently released a book entitled *Extinction and Evolution: What Fossils Reveal about the History of Life*, a work signifying his ongoing interest in the eradication of nonhuman existence.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout my research, the number “12,000” and “10,000” repeatedly come up. Rather than quibble about which of these two numbers marks the correct beginning of the Holocene Epoch, I will leave this debate unresolved.

the Hall of Biodiversity (Monahan 42).

By touring the American Museum and examining its Hall of Biodiversity, I offer a unique theoretical contribution to the field of rhetorical studies—a term that ought to be especially helpful for researchers working at the intersections of persuasion and ecology. By way of my analysis, I develop the term *pedagogies of entanglement* to refer to a class of instructional discourses that manifest in/through communication about the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, especially in the context of extinction. When quantum physicists assert that the act of observation inherently affects the observed phenomenon, they act as a pedagogue of entanglement; when environmental activists argue that culture is not separate from nature, they perform the role of a pedagogue of entanglement; and when philosophers deconstruct the distinction between humans and nonhumans in favor of a flattened and non-dichotomous subject position, they assume the position of a pedagogue of entanglement. What connects each of these examples is a desire to shrink or eliminate the distance between humans and the more-than-human world—a perspective taken by the American Museum in their fight against the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

From the onset, I must admit that the main objective of this thesis is not to offer a concise overview of *all* pedagogies of entanglement.<sup>7</sup> I maintain that each rhetor, whether an individual communicator or a collective of speakers, have their own particular pedagogy of entanglement when they talk about concerns affecting the more-than-human world. Take, for example, the OPS and the American Museum. Through their documentaries, the former attempts to detach

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst reading, I have written the term “pedagogy of entanglements” in the margins of various books (even before coming up with the idea for this thesis). In order to spotlight the language used by other researchers that I argue represents I pedagogy of entanglement, included throughout as epigraphs are various statements from the literatures of ecology and tourism studies.

themselves from systems of global capitalism responsible for amplifying the sixth mass extinction in natural history. The latter, unfortunately, accepts buckets of money from corporate entities like ExxonMobil and Monsanto.<sup>8</sup> This association, as this thesis will make clear, is an important difference that point toward the ways in which rhetors enact their particular pedagogy of entanglement.

By detailing the means through which the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement talks about extinction, I begin a conversation whereby rhetoricians interested in ecology can better assess the quality of any given pedagogy of entanglement. For rhetorical critics, this opens a new window through which we might analyze organizations such as the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals and Greenpeace.<sup>9</sup> To that end, if we understand the job of rhetorical critics working to better environmental communication, then our critical insight is only as valuable as its dispersal and application by practitioners. As Robert Cox noted, to study how entities community about the environment entails a future-oriented mode of analysis that ought to provide "recommendations and/or 'tools' for many of the communication challenges that our field is called upon to address" (17). Granting that "a judgment is sorely lacking on many environmental issues" in the United States, as Steve Schwarze remarked, answering "the broader call for crisis-oriented inquiries into environmental communication [is] all the more necessary" (96). Accordingly, the study the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement is to chart how the institution responds to an ongoing concern that threatens to eliminate life on Earth

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the museum are placards thanking these corporations, among others, for their generous donations. In the analysis, I will point out how and where I noticed corporate sponsorship.

<sup>9</sup> I mention these two organizations not to spotlight my approval or denial of their rhetorics, but rather because they represent two of the more heavily discussed and critiqued rhetorical artifacts that relate to more-than-human concerns. Though researchers have dutifully espoused the rhetorical dimensions of these organizations' various rhetorics, as an outcome of my conceptualization of pedagogies of entanglement, I open the door for further critical assessment.



as we know it.

The introduction of this thesis will unfold as follows. First I will briefly contextualize the American Museum and its Hall of Biodiversity before charting the basis for studying pedagogies of entanglement. I will then discuss my method for rhetorically analyzing these texts before concluding by offering the itinerary for this thesis. Taken together, these moving parts suggest the exigent need to explore pedagogies of entanglement in situated contexts.

## **2. Tourist Destination: American Museum of Natural History**

Located seventeen blocks north of Columbus Circle is the American Museum. The building, nearly a century and a half in age, features a mixture of architectural designs from various decades. From the castle-like reddish brick walls to the regal grey entrance reminiscent of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., the inconsistencies in building materials calls into question the institution's age. Despite its aging dimensions, tourists still flock to the American Museum—a destination that sits in front of one of the most famous parks in the world.

Although I encountered the American Museum during the 2014-2016 calendar years, the history of the institution, as I suggested, spans more than a decade. “Abandoned and forgotten in the southern portion of New York’s Central Park, not far from Tavern on the Green, lie buried giant, broken molds of dinosaurs and other prehistoric beasts,” told Douglas J. Preston,<sup>10</sup> “These molds are all that remain of an extravagant plan to create a huge Paleozoic Museum and outdoor exhibit in Central Park” (9). The museum of which Preston spoke is “just one of the many failed attempts to found a natural history museum in New York City,” an attraction that Manhattan’s

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<sup>10</sup> Preston, a novelist, was an employee at the American Museum. He managed their department of publications.

big wigs once thought would put their metropolis on the map (Preston 9).<sup>11</sup> In the mid-eighteen hundreds, these failed attempts proved to not be in vain, as individuals such as Albert S. Bickmore<sup>12</sup> saw the fulfillment of their dream of commissioning a museum of natural history.

Consequently, when Henry G. Stebbins<sup>13</sup> addressed audiences gathered around Manhattan Park on June 2, 1874, he framed the American Museum as an institution with two overlapping functions. The American Museum was to pursue “knowledge of kindred subjects” and “furnish popular instruction and recreation” to broader publics (“Natural History Museum”). Not only was the American Museum to collect and study the various artifacts of the cultural and physical world, but also the research institution was to share its findings with local, national, and international tourists. In the years following his speech, the American Museum assumed these constitutive roles with gusto and solidified itself as a premiere research institution and beloved tourist destination. Since its conception, the American Museum has collected and housed more than thirty-two million artifacts, a feat common to only the most esteemed research institutions (“Plan”). Additionally, the American Museum has displayed a significant portion of these artifacts to tourists. Through these measures, the American Museum has accumulated what Pierre Bourdieu called “symbolic capital,” or sociopolitical worth grounded in recognition (17).

As an artifact of study, a host of researchers from beyond communication studies have given consideration to the American Museum (see, for example, Bennett; Elkin, Nunan, and Fenkart-Froeschl; Haraway, *Primate Visions*; Haraway, “Teddy Bear”; Kolbert; Monahan; Paul; Rutherford). Perhaps most famous is Donna Haraway who heavily critiqued the gendered and

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<sup>11</sup> It is customary for “big” cities to host museums of natural history. At the time of the American Museum’s birth, persons in Manhattan were trying to compete against Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.—locations that won over the hearts of tourists (Preston 9).

<sup>12</sup> Albert S. Bickmore was a naturalist and founder of the American Museum.

<sup>13</sup> Henry G. Stebbins was a U.S representative and trustee for the American Museum.

racial inconsideration of the American Museum.<sup>14</sup> “The American Museum, relatively unbuffered from intimate reliance on the personal beneficence of a few wealthy men, is a peephole for spying wealthy in their ideal incarnation,” argued Haraway of the institution’s many exhibitions and displays (*Primate Vision* 56). Indeed, although those with noble intentions may have founded the institution, “leaders of movements for eugenics, conservation, and the rational management of capitalist society” soon took over and foregrounded the American Museum that I encountered (Haraway, *Primate Vision* 56).

In this thesis, I accept Haraway’s characterizations of the American Museum, and will later further discuss her conceptualization of how the institution mobilizes displays. However, I tour the American Museum at a time far past when Haraway first conceived her critique. When Haraway toured the American Museum, nonexistent was the Hall of Biodiversity. This exhibition, as I will demonstrate, quarrels with the ways in which Haraway conceptualized displays.

### *2.1 Excursion: Hall of Biodiversity.*

In 1997, the American Museum hosted an international symposium titled “Humans and Other Catastrophes.” Scholars representing an array of disciplinary backgrounds gathered to investigate how humans greatly accelerate the extinction of nonhumans as a result of overpopulation and consumption.<sup>15</sup> On the first day of the symposium, scholars addressed

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<sup>14</sup> Although I briefly touch on the racial (racist) dimensions of the American Museum in the first chapter of this thesis, given that Haraway—and James W. Loewen—have dutifully launched these types of critiques, I limit myself to issues that affect the more-than-human world. Still, I would not deny that issues of Otherness are entangled with questions such as race and religion (see, for example, Patterson; Spiegel).

<sup>15</sup> I understand the sixth mass extinction to be bound up in an ongoing process of extinction—what scientists tout as the background extinction rate. What the background extinction rate tells us is that extinction happens with or without humans. Our species, however, is greatly contributing to the process of extinction through production and consumption. The Holocene

potential causes of extinction; these thinkers glanced backwards in time to outline how certain nonhumans met their demise (“Presentations Day 1”). On the second day of the symposium, scholars performed a more reactive role and discussed potential responses to modern extinctions; these experts gazed into the future to address what steps might be taken to slow extinction rates (“Presentations Day 2”). Although opinions expressed by programmers, participants, and audiences differed from attendee to attendee, across all groups was a foreboding sentiment: That extinction was occurring “at one hundred times the rate predicted by the fossil record” meant that humans were responsible for implementing measures to significantly reduce these rates for the sake of biodiversity (“Humans”).<sup>16</sup>

That following year, the American Museum unveiled a multi-million dollar exhibition billed as the “Hall of Biodiversity.” Although the institution cemented plans for this exhibition well before its symposium, the museum strategically rerouted apprehensions and anxieties about the future status of nonhumans *into* this new space and *onto* the many tourists who were to visit. Publicized as an interactive exhibit detailing “the variety and interdependence of all living things,” the Hall of Biodiversity sought to extend discussions of nonhuman desecration to tourists in order raise consciousness about the human’s entanglement with nonhumans and the physical world (“Hall of Biodiversity Educator’s Guide”). In an early review of the exhibition, the *New York Times* reported that the Hall of Biodiversity demonstrated more than “an eagerness

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Extinction, therefore, must be thought of as a phenomenon in excess to the background extinction rate.

<sup>16</sup> One year after this symposium, the American Museum released findings from a nationwide survey distributed to biologists that further affirmed the widespread belief in scientific communities that we are not only “in the midst of a mass extinction of living things, and that this loss of species will pose a major threat to human existence in the next century,” but also that “this so-called ‘sixth extinction’ is mainly the result of human activity and not natural phenomenon” (“NATIONAL”). I make no attempt to substantiate claims regarding the Holocene Extinction, because an exorbitant amount of humanistic, social scientific, and scientific research suggests that the sixth mass extinction is a reality.

to instruct” about “the intricately interrelated beauty of life on earth” (“In the Hall”). This exhibit evidenced a willingness to “instruct by seduction,” to force tourists to think, feel, and act against biodiversity loss (“In the Hall”). This was a place tasked with cultivating an affective sense of devastation about biodiversity loss all whilst illustrating how “[t]he tools for rectifying the source of that sadness...remain[ed] in the viewer’s hands” (“In the Hall”).

Speaking to the press about this groundbreaking endeavor was Niles Eldredge, the chief curator at the time of the Hall of Biodiversity’s grand opening. Eldredge commented that the exhibition marked a “fundamental departure from traditional museum exhibits” as the place acted as the museum’s first argumentative room by “tell[ing] the story of humanity’s transformation of the globe, and the consequence of that transformation” (qtd. in Grant). Eldredge’s characterization of this paradigm shift proved to be accurate as this exhibition dutifully documented an inherent entanglement between humans, nonhumans, and the physical world through displays such as the Rain Forest Diorama, a narrative-based exhibit through which tourists visually and audibly witness the rain forest in “progressive states of disturbance,” and the Crisis Zone, a textual timeline embedded into the floor that spotlights “the five previous major extinction events” alongside fossils from each of these tragic happenings (Grant). For Eldredge, this turn toward a non-neutral, interactive exhibit represented the precise moment in which the American Museum casted itself as a public pedagogue of entanglement.

Prior to the opening of the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum almost exclusively informed tourists about natural history through a series of mimetic exhibitions whereby visitors gazed upon recreated flora and fauna encased in dioramas.<sup>17</sup> As exhibitions *in-*

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<sup>17</sup> I say “almost exclusively” because the American Museum has always had other modes of sharing knowledge (i.e., public lecture).

*situ*,<sup>18</sup> these static and metonymic displays stood frozen “in congruous relation to an absent whole” that the institution chose not to reconstruct (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 20). This was the model of exhibitions that the American Museum sought to reimagine when the Hall of Biodiversity adopted its non-neutral stance and invited tourists to physically interact with various exhibits in a manner that competed with commonly held beliefs of the physical world as “timeless and unchanging,” as Eric Aoki, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott described of another museum of natural history (242). In short, in order to effectively perform their role as a pedagogue, curators had to reconsider not only the public’s state in biodiversity loss, but also how tourists were to move through the hall, engage with exhibits, and witness extinction.

Tourists best noticed the fruits of this new design in the key feature of the Hall of Biodiversity, the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” which was a graphic chart displaying more than one thousand of the museum’s collected nonhuman specimen. As an exhibition *in-context*, the “Spectrum of Life Wall” relied upon “particular techniques of arrangements and explanations to convey ideas,” a dynamic process similar to both the nearby Rain Forest Diorama and the Crisis Zone (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 21). Themed as an oversized cladogram, a scientific diagram illustrating relationships between/among various organisms, this exhibit’s expansive size and overwhelming use of (perceivably) authentic animal specimen offered a visually unavoidable lesson about the interconnectedness of humans and animals. Through interaction with this exhibit, tourists were no longer “transfixed” spectators separated by a “glass front of [a] diorama that [forbade] the body’s entry,” as Haraway once critically remarked of the American Museum’s other exhibitions (*Primate Vision* 31), but rather tourists were “made part of the exhibit in order to instill in them an awareness of *their* place within biodiversity,” as Torin

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<sup>18</sup> I deploy the phrase “in situ” in a number of ways throughout this thesis. I have been conscious to make not how what iteration of “in situ” I am relying upon in any given moment.

Monhan suggested in his appraisal of the Hall of Biodiversity (42). Thus the inception of the Hall of Biodiversity in the American Museum truly altered how this institution performed its role as a pedagogue, a critical transformation that Eldredge expressly understood to not only defy the conventions and norms of his institution, but also revolutionize the relationship between tourists and exhibit.

In my experiences at the American Museum to be discussed in this thesis, the American Museum emphasized the entanglement of the human and more-than-human world through their Hall of Biodiversity. In contrast to the exhibitions of the greater American Museum, the Hall of Biodiversity sought to radically alter my subjectivity as a *human* and transform me into some sort of object enmeshed with my more-than-human victims. Thus I term their rhetoric to be a pedagogy of entanglement.

### **3. Main Attraction: Pedagogies of Entanglement**

The key theoretical contribution in this thesis is what I call *pedagogies of entanglement*, a rhetorical resource for technical and public cultures that seek to restructure and/or end the human's mastery over the more-than-human world. This section proceeds in two parts. First, I will briefly and selectively review literature in communication studies that relates to pedagogies of entanglement. I will then describe the three common properties of all pedagogies of entanglement (i.e. they are rhetorical, political, and ecological) by examining one concrete example of the most brilliant and effective deployments of this rhetorical maneuver—*the pedagogy of entanglement enacted by Jacques Derrida*.<sup>19</sup>

As the literature reviewed thus far indicates, in the last half-century communication

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<sup>19</sup> I do not haphazardly select Derrida as a point of entry to discuss pedagogies of entanglement. In the interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies, Derrida was influential in launching such a line of thinking. To that end, posthuman thinkers routinely cite Derrida. In short, Derrida's way of teaching enacts a pedagogy of entanglement.

scholars of rhetoric have been turning their attentions toward nonhumans and the physical world. Through such a focus, we can identify pedagogies of entanglement within communication studies. Over the years, rhetoricians have acted as pedagogues of entanglement by exposing discourses that distance the human the more-than-human world. As its definition implies, entanglement—when discussed in an ecological context—refers to the social, political, material, and scientific interconnectedness among all *things* (humans, nonhumans, objects, environments, matter, atoms, etc.). Rhetoricians as scholars and practitioners have deployed the concept of entanglement as a heuristic in both scholarship and activism in order to discredit discourses and practices “that make the human seem distinct” from the more-than-human world (Goodale and Black 5), a worldview characterized as the rhetorical tremors of René Descartes’ distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Goodale). These same thinkers have been quick to indict this mind/body dualism as logic that violently renders inferior the nonhuman on sociopolitical hierarchies, a worldview Descartes himself supported by way of vivisection (Deluca 58; Seegert, “Queer Beasts” 75-76).<sup>20</sup> From the critique of the mind/body dualism comes discussions of related dualisms, including, but not limited to, human/animal, culture/nature, and subject/object (Sowards 66-70; see also Gaard). Regarding the human/animal dualism, these rhetoricians have argued that both the categorical terms “human” and “animal” are socially constructed positions whereby such a separation becomes the ethical grounds to pit our species against nonhumans. A critique of this violence language has been the justification for a collection of essays on the perceived human mistreatment of nonhumans, particularly calling other thinkers to recognize the more-than-human world as worthy of scholarly attention and in need of human and nonhuman solidarity (Goodale and Black).

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<sup>20</sup> On that note, the American Museum was actually the site where famed nonhuman rights activist Henry Spira successfully protested vivisection.



Whereas rhetoricians have given texture to the conceptual foundation of any given pedagogy of entanglement, less attention has been given to these instructional discourses *in situated practice*. A shortlist of works that not only document the viability of pedagogies of entanglement as rhetorical resources, but also explicate how and to what effect rhetors are persuasively communicate their message of human more-than-human entanglement include Jason Edward Black’s homology of nonhuman rights and pro-life rhetoric; Wendy Atkins-Sayre’s essay on the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals’ (PETA) visual rhetoric; and Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott’s ethnographic inquiry into the Draper Museum of Natural History’s material rhetoric. By comparing the discourses of nonhuman and right to life advocates, two seemingly incomparable movements, Black demonstrated how each public converges at a particular nodal point—the emphasis on a “sensate other” (376). In documenting the comparison between these disparate groups, Black troubled the discourses of nonhuman advocates—many of whom are typically pro-choice—in such a way that would allow collectivities to reconsider the often-unpredictable consequences of rhetoric in action. Elsewhere, arguing that “PETA has taken one of the most radical messages—that of questioning the lines between human and animal—and has helped secure animal rights’ place on the American political spectrum,” Atkins-Sayre praised the organization’s tactical use of hyperemotional or overly violent imagery to deconstruct the human/animal dualism (310). Like Black, Atkins-Sayre critical inquiry has the ability to contribute to nonhuman advocates insofar as her analysis demonstrated how visual rhetoric can “emphasize consubstantiality” (325). Last but not least is Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott’s toured into the Draper to better understand how the museum communicates the human’s “connection with nature” (238). Unlike the other two studies, Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott discussed the physical world and found that the spatial design of the museum—particularly directed movement and

display simulations—places the human in a position of mastery. While Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott were critical of the Draper Museum, their analysis further expanded the definition of rhetoric to include not only spoken and visual texts, but also embodied and material texts.

Synthesizing these works, which I argue individually/collectively represent a pedagogy of entanglement, are three common properties. Pedagogies of entanglement within communication studies and beyond seek to persuade an audience (rhetoric) about the unequal and unethical (politics) relationship between human and the more-than-human world (ecology). We can witness a pedagogy of entanglement in a more concrete and singular form by turning our attention to Derrida.

In an address delivered near the end of his life, Derrida shared an intimate narrative of human immodesty and “the nude in philosophy” (*The Animal* 1). On a day like any other, Derrida stood naked in his bathroom. He was, however, not without company in this place of privacy. With Derrida was a familiar companion—his cat—who observed the front side of the philosopher’s naked corporeal. Derrida remarked, “I often ask to myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment” (*The Animal* 4). Here was Derrida erect in the nude before his cat only to experience the affects of a sexed body policing itself in a place meant for nudity. This was a famed poststructuralist thinker succumbing to a political structure of feelings that separated the human from the nonhuman. Derrida, never one to disappoint, remarked of this indecent situation that he was to his cat the “other animal” just as to his cat he was the “other animal” (*The Animal* 4). Through this observation, which we might understand as an attempt to reduce the critical and physical distance between humans and nonhumans, Derrida recognized his subject position as

not only related, but also interconnected with his cat: ‘I see it as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked’ (*The Animal* 9). In short, Derrida discerned a sentiment expressed each day by pedagogues of entanglement: To understand the human as *interconnected* with the nonhuman is to locate, recognize, and affirm a cosmic politic of matter and mattering—a pedagogy of entanglement.<sup>21</sup>

When Derrida addressed his audience in C erisy, France in 1997, he instructed humans about their essential interconnectedness with the more-than-human world. Even though nonhumans—particularly those exhibiting a type of sentience—only comprise one portion of this universe’s more-than-human population, Derrida’s keynote exemplified a pedagogy of entanglement. By way of its attempt to persuade (rhetoric) about the human’s lack of consideration toward the more-than-human world (politics and ecology), not only did Derrida act as a critical thinker, but also he acted as an activist for a group of philosophers trapped in humanism’s chokehold. Although his presentation was not emblematic of typical (or perhaps stereotypical?) activism, Derrida pedagogically advanced a conversation about human and nonhuman entanglement in order to rupture an anthropocentric paradigm in philosophy. Derrida was on a quest to “induce cooperation” among his colleagues and persuade them reflect on their relationalities with nonhumans all whilst reconsidering the violent human/animal hierarchy within and beyond the academy (Burke 46). Derrida’s presentation was, in other words, a rhetorical performance charged with exposing “the human exceptionalism characteristic of humanism,” a lofty task for even the most savvy of scholars (Worsham 713).

Given these circumstances, communicators trying to persuade others that humans are

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<sup>21</sup> Because of Derrida, few would bat an eyelash at the statement “*human*” is a social construct situated against the “*animal*” Other.

enmeshed with nonhumans and the physical world, what connects each of these arguments, as its name implies, is a pedagogical slant—a *pedagogy of entanglement*. As a class of instructional discourses, pedagogy is the central rhetorical form through which any given audience comes to understand and be affected by a pedagogy of entanglement. Although the word “pedagogy” connotes a teacher/student dynamic that manifests within the walls of an academic or religious institution, the identities of those who instruct and the places from which they communicate are both fluid and unfixd. This is not to say that all communication is pedagogical, a claim advanced by Ronald Walter Greene who offered the metaphor that communication is “a pedagogy of the soul” (“Rhetorical Pedagogy” 434). Although this interpretation is useful in coaxing pedagogy to come out of the classroom, it risks dissolving the rhetorical form of pedagogy. If the rhetorical forms are “sites within institutional matrices of power through which discourse becomes intelligible,” then what differentiates pedagogy from other types of rhetorical communication is an audience’s recognition of pedagogy as an *instructional* (Rand 300). In short, while all pedagogy is rhetorical insofar as it seeks to persuade an audience to adopt a belief or understand a concept, not all rhetorical acts are read by audiences as pedagogical.

In the context of the American Museum, as will be articulated in the next section, discussions about entanglements are read as pedagogical. To tourists, the American Museum performatively inhabits the following mission statement: “To discover, interpret, and disseminate—through scientific research and education—knowledge about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe” (“Mission Statement”). Through such performatives, in/determinate rhetorical effects ensue.

#### **4. Getting There: Tourism as Method**

Scholars of communication from within and beyond rhetorical studies have demonstrated

the capacity for critics to travel and assess the communicative dimensions of tourist destinations (see, for example, Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott; Armada; Bergman and Smith; Bodnar; Bowman, “Looking for Stonewall’s Arm”; Bowman, “Performing Southern History”; Bowman, “Tracing Mary Queen of Scots”; Clark; Gallagher and LaWare; Milstein, “The Performer Metaphor”; Milstein, “Transcorporeal Tourism”; Senda-Cook, “Materializing Tensions,”; Shaffer; Spurlock; Taylor, “Radioactive”). However, tourism as a method and mode of analysis is unique to neither the field of communication studies nor the discipline of rhetorical studies. As journals like *Tourist Studies* and the *Annals of Tourism Research* as well as a growing number of theoretical and site-based books reveal (see, for example, Franklin; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett; MacCannell; Sturken; Urry), tourism studies is an established and prospering interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Accordingly, I move forth by operating at the intersections of tourism studies and rhetorical studies (with, of course, a bit of boundary crossing into performance studies as few tourists enjoy staying behind the velvet rope at tourist destinations).

To chart how and to what effect the American Museum carries out their pedagogy of entanglement in order to render intelligible to tourists the sixth mass extinction in natural history, I draw on an archive of text that I call my *scrapbook*. Some of these materials are produced by the American Museum, including photographs of artifacts and their didactics, recordings of displayed videos, and communication produced via a free public tour. Some of these materials are self-produced, including selfies, personal voice recordings, social media posts, and journal entries. Taken together, these disjointed texts form the scrapbook from which I *re-tour* the American Museum and theorize the pedagogy of entanglements.

Although I toured the American Museum on a number of occasions, I developed my scrapbook during a visit on December 21, 2015. In the wake of a thesis proposal defense meeting

in which I realized that I had not procured any data from which to document my journeys through the institution, I returned to Manhattan with the intention of documenting myself as I moved through the various halls and about the assorted artifacts on display at the American Museum. Here, I heeded Phaedra C. Pezzullo's advice for thinking about tourism as more than optics. "Too often, an ocularcentric approach suggests an image of tourists somehow transformed into walking eyeballs, without bodies attached," argued Pezzullo, "Yet, looking is itself an embodied experience—one that influences the rest of the body's ability to experience the world, and vice versa" (*Toxic Tourism* 28). With my trusty sidekick by my side and a belly fully of vegan fuel, I traversed the exhibition spaces within the institution whilst diligently making note of not only the ways in which I physical and phenomenally moved through halls, but also the many artifacts on display and their didactics. Touring itself is already a tiring experience. Touring with the expectation of critical awareness of oneself is nearly fatal.

Accordingly, I understand tourism as an object and method of study, and henceforth classify my performance as a touring academic as one of participant-observation (an apt method given that Margaret Mead—a former curator for the American Museum—was among the earliest participant-observers). Researchers from within and beyond communication studies have offered complex and various conceptualizations of participant-observation as a method, including a tiered system from non-participatory to complete participation. For me, I approach participant-observation in more simplistic terms. I made myself present at the American Museum, an act that made possible my role as a participant—as a tourist. There, I acted as an academic by building my scrapbook. At no point in time did I fail to perform the role of tourist—I was quite literally forced to tour by the nature of being present at a tourist destination (a performative act, indeed). If anything, I acted as a tourist/participant more than an academic/observer in my musings at the

American Museum and its Hall of Biodiversity—though, those relationships are inseparably entangled in and of themselves.

I must admit that there are pieces of my scrapbook that feel, in retrospect, less complete than others. For example, I found myself carried away by a few cute (presumably) British men standing outside the Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals. At the time, I was trying to record in my journal what it felt like to wait for the tour guide for the free public tour to make herself present. Given that such data may have led to more critical insight, my scrapbook is unavoidably incomplete. Still, I would not want to define an archive as something to be completed. Archives, and scrapbooks, contain traces of events to be made new with each glance within. They are never complete. They are never whole. And yet, as I finger through my scrapbook, I cannot help but re-tour the American Museum.

In order to revisit my experiences at the American Museum via the pages of this thesis, included throughout this document are a series of what I call *critical vignettes*. Vignettes, with their brevity and incompleteness, offer a snapshot of a particular moment in space and time. They detail the contextual happenings at the scene of any given instance of action while concealing an ever present excess of content that remains either nestled within my scrapbook or lost amidst a vast sea of overlapping communicative matrices. To that end, critical vignettes bring to life this rhetorical critic in an attempt to render intelligible the always-fleeting memory of experiencing a tourist destination.

In the vein of reflexive writers like Ragan Fox and Tammy Spry as well as researchers of place like Carole Blair this thesis oscillates between moments “On Tour” and “At Home” (see also Endres and Senda-Cook; Hess; Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook). For sections marked “On Tour,” I offer a thick and reflexive description of myself *in situ*; using my

scrapbook, I recreate the scene in which I found myself touring the American Museum on December 21, 2015. For sections marked “At Home,” I retroactively perform the role of an academic; using my performative writings, I critically appraise the rhetorical engagement between the institution, tour guide, exhibitions, tourists, and myself.<sup>22</sup> By way of these critical vignettes, I offer a series of insights (bolded and italicized throughout) that will help construct an foundation from which I will mark distinct the pedagogy of entanglement as instructed by the American Museum through the Hall of Biodiversity.

Although I rely upon researchers who deploy autoethnographic methods, what I dub critical vignettes may *or* may not be autoethnographic. To produce her study of Cancer Alley, Louisiana, Pezzullo acted as a participant-observer of a local toxic tour (“Touring ‘Cancer Alley’”). During such an experience, Pezzullo performed the mutually constitutive roles of activist and academic as she traversed the grounds of Louisiana. Pezzullo did little to curtail her personal presence when re-touring toxins on the pages of her piece, instead arguing that “it is less helpful to try to create some artificial line between” her role as an activist and academic (“Touring ‘Cancer Alley’” 230). Such work drives this thesis as I too do not want to construct arbitrary boundaries between participation and observation or fetishize objectivity as the criterion for quality scholarship. Instead, I want to provide thick descriptions of myself physically and phenomenally moving through the American Museum (Geertz)—doing so allows me to re-tour the institution and thus document critical insights about the pedagogy of entanglements.

Whereas the thick descriptions I provide—a performance in and of themselves—are built

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, the boundaries between moments “On Tour” and “At Home” are artificially defined. As will become apparent, moments “On Tour” often contain critical appraisal. Likewise, moments “At Home” are often subject to added description.



from my personal scrapbook, I cannot help but mention a familiar face that will become even more familiar within the pages of this thesis. Tourism as a commercial enterprise is largely experienced in groups. Whether it is couples honeymooning in Ecuador or families spending time together at Disneyworld, those with wanderlust tend travel to tourist destinations in groupings. I am no exception to this trend, and thus would be remiss if I failed to mention that I have never toured the American Museum without my partner, Joe Hatfield. Like other pairings, we maneuvered through the institution and commented on the various exhibitions and artifacts on display. My scrapbook is filled with tidbits of thoughts and feelings (as well as snarky comments) uttered by the two of us. Rather than pretend as if he was not integral to the production of this thesis, I have made sure to make him as present as possible in the critical vignettes throughout.<sup>23</sup>

In short, the Anthropocene marks a strange time to be alive, and perhaps an opportune moment to turn toward tourism as a mode of making sense of human (in)considerations. Tourism has become “infused into the everyday and has become one of the ways in which our lives are ordered and one of the ways in which consumers orientate themselves, or take a stance to a globalised world” (Franklin 2). Tourism—whether it be an enterprise or an experience—is entropic insofar as each un/structured tour of place is incredibly unstable. What I experience as a tourist may not be the experience(s) of other tourists. In sum, tourism as a method has the utility of an itinerary. Sure, preparing for the trip in advance provides a roadmap and expectations, but chaos always manages to disrupt plans. Tourism and entropy truly go hand in hand. Hence

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<sup>23</sup> In the process, I have actually developed a number of future methodological questions that I shall discuss in the conclusion of this thesis. In brief, I have found that writing about one’s traveling/life partner is a bit troubling. How does one include the thoughts of someone not partaking in the construction of a project? How do you faithfully represent the fun and struggle of touring together? The answer to why I ask these questions will be made apparent as I re-tour the American Museum throughout this thesis.

tourism as a method makes sense of experiences in the most fitting of ways: by enjoying the bumpy ride with a crooked smile.

## **5. What to Expect on Tour: Chapter Overview**

Conceptualizing entangled as a pedagogy presents us with a (workable) paradox: to instruct about entanglements requires that we—whether this “we” be the principal rhetorician (me) and her/his readership (you) *or* a museum and its tourists—enact what feminist science studies scholar Karen Barad referred to as “agential cuts” (140). Agential cuts are arbitrarily extracted splices of space, time, and matter that allow for an observer like myself to momentarily trigger a materially and discursively constructed distinction between “subject” and “object”—rhetorical critic and artifact. Rhetorical critics legislate an agential cut each and every time they contextualize and assess their artifacts. By their very ontology, rhetorical critics are entangled with their artifacts. Troublesome as this paradox may seem, this practice is inherent to communication and life. This does not mean that we should not communicate, but rather that we must hold ourselves “accountable for the marks on bodies, that is, specific materializations in their different mattering” (Barad 178).

Of course, such an orientation is critical to rhetorical criticism, as James F. Klumpp and Thomas A. Hollihan once famously reasoned that rhetorical critics must be “moral participant[s] cognizant of the power and responsibility that accompanies full critical participation in their society” (94). Whereas I recognize utility in criticism for criticism’s sake, for me, to study the more-than-human world is to be conscious of my subject position in relationship to nonhumans and the physical world. Accordingly, this thesis proceeds by consciously and carefully enacting a series of agential cuts in order to read how and to what effect the Hall of Biodiversity communicates with tourists about the sixth mass extinction in natural history, a pursuit meant to

generate findings to help theorists and practitioners alike.

With an eye toward “ambivalent discourses,” or communication “which at first sight appears to be constructive,” but actually might be problematic insofar as such transactions might be ineffective and/or supportive of processes that comprise the human’s inconsideration toward the more-than-human world (Stibbe, “An Ecolinguistic Approach” 123), this thesis unfolds via three more movements. Taken together, they form the corpus of “Touring Extinction,” a critical journey into the American Museum.

In chapter one titled “From *Beyond* the Hall of Biodiversity,” I tour the American Museum via their free public tour. On this tour, I encounter halls that predate the Hall of Biodiversity; these include, but are not limited to, the Halls of North American Mammals, Ocean Life, and Vertebrate Origins. Regarding these halls, I argue that the American Museum consciously chooses to remain silent about the sixth mass extinction in natural history. In other words, the American Museum hides behind a cloak of scientific objectivity and remains mute about the human’s role in desecrating the more-than-human world. Like a scientific experiment, this chapter functions as a control for chapter two, a compositional space where the pedagogy of entanglement comes out to play.

In chapter two titled “From *Within* the Hall of Biodiversity,” I move myself to *and* through the Hall of Biodiversity. In this segment, I spend a great amount of time documenting the ways in which the Hall of Biodiversity differs from other exhibitions in the American Museum. Because the Hall of Biodiversity boasts a radically different pedagogy, I pause at nearly all of the exhibits within the exhibition. Doing so allows me to showcase how the American Museum enacts a pedagogy of entanglement within its so-called *issues room*—the Hall of Biodiversity.

Finally, I conclude by synthesizing chapters one and two in order to conceptualize the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement. Like I said earlier and will reiterate, pedagogies of entanglement differ from rhetor to rhetor. How and to what effect a rhetor instructs about interconnectedness with the more-than-human world differs with ever-changing contexts. Accordingly, I generate a list of characteristics that detail the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement before offering recommendations for renovations and future research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### From *Beyond* the Hall of Biodiversity

The human organism is an in-between that is plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces. As such it is useful to define it as a machine, which does not mean an appliance or anything with a specifically utilitarian aim, but rather something is simultaneously more abstract and more materially embedded.

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*

[T]ourists' mode of interaction with the environment is more usually to glance around and fleetingly note different things around them, an implicit acknowledgement that they are simultaneously seeing and being seen.

Michael S. Bowman, "Looking for Stonewall's Arm"

#### 1. Itinerary: Overview of the Chapter

In the introduction to her book *Entangled Empathy: An Alternate Ethic for Our Relationship with Animals*, feminist philosopher Lori Gruen offered an alarming and concise synopsis of the state and impact of human and more-than-human relationships:

Although hatred, violence, greed, and indifference cause so much suffering for humans across the globe, in sheer numbers the situation for other animals is far worse. Over 100 billion animals, including sea animals, are killed for food around the world annually. The devastating environmental and climatic impacts of this mass production and destruction of animals, though ignored by too many environmentalists, has led some to call for cutting back on or eliminating animal consumption altogether. An estimated 115 million animals--including mice, rats, birds, fish, guinea pigs, dogs, cats, and nonhuman primates--are used in laboratory experiments each year. Some of the most historically grotesque research that involved separating infant monkeys from their mothers to explore the psychological devastation that results has started up again at the University of

Wisconsin. Elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, rhinoceroses, and other large mammals are being poached into extinction. If drastic measures aren't taken, orangutans may die out in the next decade as their habitat is destroyed to make way for more palm oil plantations. Dozens of species of birds and reptiles are facing extinction. Human activities--including emitting greenhouse gases, forest and mineral extraction, and increased development--are destroying habitats for millions of nonhuman beings. (6)

This description, though far from capturing the breadth and depth of human violence against nonhumans that appear throughout history,<sup>24</sup> is jarring insofar as it points toward the varieties and quantities of torture that manifest via human exceptionalism.

This chapter offers a critical overview of the American Museum as experienced via a free public tour of a number of the institution's more notable permanent exhibitions. These exhibitions include, but are not exclusively limited to, the Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals, the Irma and Paul Milstein Family Hall of Ocean Life, the Hall of North American Forests, the Felix M. Warburg Hall of New York State Environment, Paul and Irma Milstein Hall of Advanced Mammals, Hall of Vertebrate Origins, and the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs. Because I favor a broad interpretation of what it means to tour (see Munt),<sup>25</sup> I also

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<sup>24</sup> Sociologist David A. Nibert offered a transhistorical analysis of human and more-than-human oppression in his book *Animal Oppression & Human Violence: Domestration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict*.

<sup>25</sup> Scholars of tourism have destabilized what it means to tour. As Munt noted, "Tourism is everything and everything is tourism" (104). To that end, John Urry once remarked, "People are much of the time 'tourists' whether they like it or not" (1990). Although definitions have their place in helping communicators offer a decently stable reading of particular artifacts, definitions also stifle. Accordingly, I consider the entire researching and writing process of this thesis to be a tour. When touring the American Museum on the free public tour, I toured. When browsing the American Museum without Ginger, I toured. When writing this thesis from the quiet of my apartment, I toured. In this way, tourism functions like the word "performance" for

visit the *Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt*, the Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, and the food court. I tour these places within the institution in order to establish a foundation from which to compare and contrast a single exhibition in the museum—the Hall of Biodiversity.

I argue that the American Museum—an entity specifically defined within the context of this chapter as all exhibitions, artifacts, employees, volunteers, and tourists except anything associated with the Hall of Biodiversity<sup>26</sup>—consciously chooses to remain silent in regard to the Holocene Extinction. What I mean by the phrase *consciously chooses to remain silent*—a phrase sure to send shivers down the backs of any critical rhetorician attuned to power and domination—is this: ***The institution assumes an objective stance that does not seek to persuade tourists about the human’s role in the sixth mass extinction.***<sup>27</sup> As critical commentary throughout this chapter will make clear, I do not use this phrase to mean that the museum is not engaging in rhetorical and political processes of identification; to the contrary, the institution and its tourists actively identify with systems of global capitalism hell-bent on keeping stable the ethics and business practices of what Lynn Worsham referred to as “human exceptionalism” (52).

In brief, whereas the information presented by Gruen is found—albeit in different

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communication scholars—as a method and mode of sensing something new about a particular artifact.

<sup>26</sup> This definition of the American Museum is meant to ease the flow of this chapter. In the next chapter, when I say “American Museum,” I mean the Hall of Biodiversity. In this chapter, when I say “American Museum,” I mean everything except the Hall of Biodiversity.

<sup>27</sup> In other words, I am approaching the American Museum from the standpoint that it stages its exhibitions and artifacts in a manner attuned with scientific objectivity. Of course this is a rhetorical practice—a strategically planned and executed way of communicating with tourists to produce a desired effect. I merely use the phrase “consciously silent” to denote how the American Museum frames discourses in the Hall of Biodiversity in a radically different manner than in the other exhibitions of the institution.

forms—in the Hall of Biodiversity, the other exhibitions in the American Museum do little to discuss the violent relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. To that end, the Hall of Biodiversity, as chapter two will demonstrate, does do some of the same work as Gruen. Such conversations, I believe, are important in the pursuit to undo a *human* subjectivity in favor of an anti-anthropocentric understanding of how things relate to other things in the shared universe.

What this chapter does not offer is a concise and stable reading of the American Museum. Having toured the institution on a number of other visits to Manhattan, it has been my experience that the many exhibitions and artifacts on display at the museum communicate a variety of messages. Given that the institution houses more than thirty million artifacts that are viewed by daily changing groups of tourists, this communicative matrix is as entropic as the universe itself. On the outset, I must admit that the experience of touring the museum with a guide transformed and enhanced my understanding of the institution. Yet as a rhetorical critic constrained by his very physically limited position within this species, I cannot provide a one size fits all reading of the museum. Because of “the embodied and experiential nature of place,” I enact and recreate a particular cut of space and time at the museum in order to offer a number of nodes from which to critically appraise the Hall of Biodiversity (Endres and Senda-Cook 278).<sup>28</sup>

## **2. From *Beyond* the Hall of Biodiversity**

In what follows, I oscillate between moments of “On Tour” and “At Home” before offering synthesizing concluding commentary for how these exhibitions contribute to the

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<sup>28</sup> In a way, this constraint mirrors one faced by all scholars of performance studies. As Peggy Phelan noted, “Performance’s life is only in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, or documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance” (1). Indeed, tourism as a performance is held to the same standard. Still, I would add that tourism earns its second life in how scholars choose to represent tourism—a new tour in and of itself (i.e., a re-tour).



American Museum's consciously silent stance about the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

### *2.1 On Tour: Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt*

Donning a black faux down vest, I round the corner of West 81st Street and Central Park West and approach the main entrance of the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, New York. The frigid winds of winter, a troublesome force of nature for a Texan, rudely slap my face. Through squinting eyes, I see a statue that irks me.

Guarding the front doors of the American Museum is a monument dubbed the *Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt* (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt*. Photo by the Author.

Sculpted by James Earle Fraser, the bronze statue enshrines former American president and

naturalist Theodore Roosevelt as he sits atop a horse. Next to Roosevelt are effigies of an American and Native American—two figures who appear to guide him through the wilderness. The horse rears as the famed conservationist pulls taught the rein.

“Yeah, you’ve got to write about this statue in your thesis,” proclaims Joe, “I can’t believe no one has removed this statue!” I must admit that it seems rather odd that the American Museum—an institution that relies upon tourism and donations to function—does not take concern with the fact that the monument portrays Roosevelt as if he is actually *using* enslaved people of color. This bust of Roosevelt, oddly enough, feels like a bust!

Not wanting to soil my recently cleaned hands,<sup>29</sup> I forgo touching the four inscriptions found on each side of the statue. Together, these inscriptions read, “J E FRASER SC 1939 // THEODORE ROOSEVELT 1858-1919 // GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK 1899 1901 // PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES 1901 1909 signed.” Due to the disjointed nature of these inscriptions, I cannot help but feel as if these texts are cryptic. “Why not provide more context? Am I unknowingly filming the third installment of *National Treasure*,” I sarcastically question in my journal.

“Perhaps tourists allow this monument of ole’ Theo to pass because it was made in 1939,” I respond to Joe, “Or, maybe the American Museum overlooks this statue’s outward message of racism because Roosevelt is the institution’s sage.” Given that the 26th president of the United States was also a founder of the American Museum, I doubt that any responsible party of the institution is rushing to remove traces of Roosevelt’s presence.

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<sup>29</sup> We often think of tourism as a pleasurable activity. “Tourism is commonly portrayed as an escape from work and *essentially* about pleasure,” wrote tourism scholar Adrian Franklin, “but so many forms and experiences of tourism seem to involve, on the face of it, the opposite” (4). Seeing tourists touch and physically interact with objects causes me much anguish. As will become apparent throughout this thesis, such interactivity—as well as bickering between partners—comes to help define how I see the American Museum.

“You know, I don’t recall seeing other museums of natural history spotlight leaders,” I comment to Joe. That prior summer, I visited a host of other museums of natural history. These institutions included the Zoological Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark (June 28, 2015); the British Museum of Natural History in London, England (July 11, 2015); and the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in Oxford, England (July 12, 2015). With the exception of the Oxford Museum, an institution once frequented by author Lewis Carroll, no place but the American Museum showcased so prominently their respect for a particular figure.<sup>30</sup> If anyone, Charles Darwin comes closest to performing the role of a universal sage. As the father of evolution, traces of his presence make the most sense.

“Do you want a picture with the statue?” asks Joe. He digs in his pocket for his iPhone, but I more quickly fetch mine.<sup>31</sup>

“Of course,” I instantaneously reply. I survey the *Equestrian Statue* for the best spot. Elevated by not only a horse, but also a pedestal, Roosevelt towers above me. Unless I hop atop the horse and risk arrest, I, like the African and Native American, must stand below Roosevelt—a reminder of a tourist’s place within this hierarchy.

“Hurry,” Joe tells me as I grimace at him for rushing me. I position myself below all four effigies in order to allow the *Equestrian Statue* as a whole to take center stage in the image. I

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<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the deployment of a central figure is unique to museums in the United States. Perhaps other leaders existed in the other museums of natural history that I did not notice because I am not attuned to the histories of different countries. What I do know is that Roosevelt had a hand in creating the American Museum, and so it makes sense for him to be prominently displayed. Quite simply put, conservation as a value has roots in Roosevelt (Dorsey; see also Haraway, “Teddy Bear”).

<sup>31</sup> I am quick to say the phrase, “I *took* a photograph,” which in all reality what I should say is, “I *made* a photograph.” A moment like this best marks how participation and observation bleeds into one another. Though I was observing the American Museum, I was actively participating in the production of tourist materials. To that end, I was not actually taking anything. I was making something new to be used in the construction of this thesis—my re-tour.

smile, an act of white anthropocentrism in and of itself, as Joe snaps the photo of me. In true coupled tourist fashion, we bicker until he captures an image of me that suites my fancy.

With iPhone in pocket and my back resting against the *Equestrian Statue*, I take a moment to jot down a few sighted characteristics of the façade of the American Museum (see fig. 2).

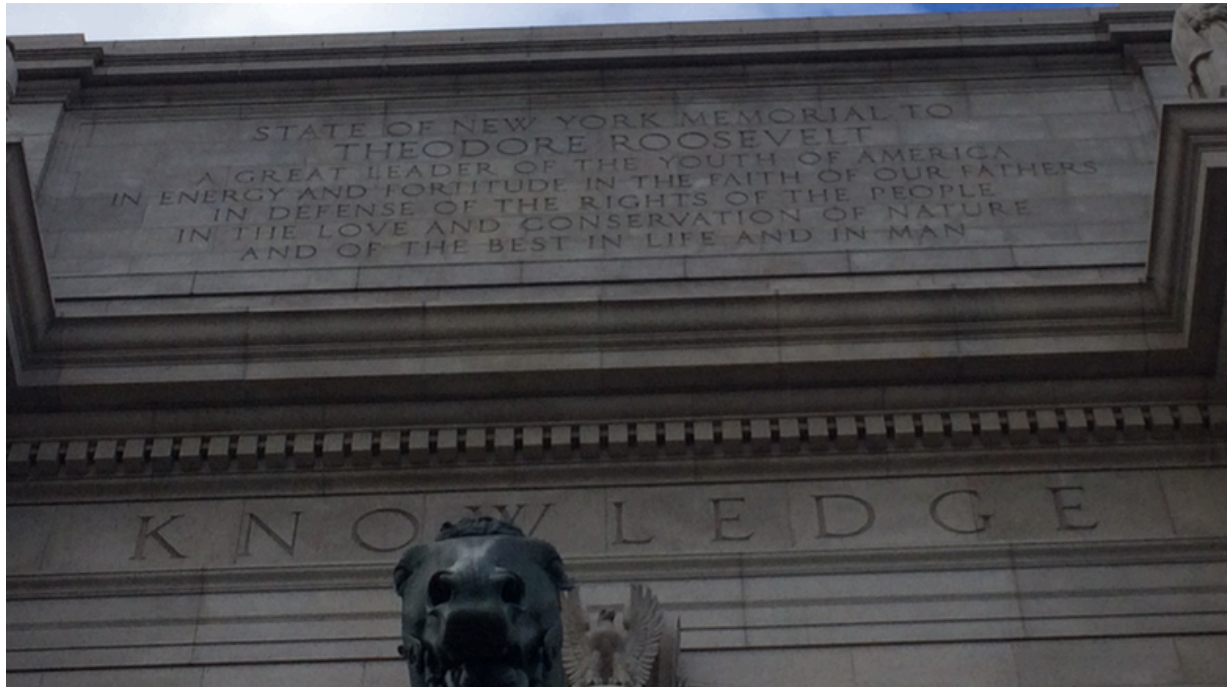


Fig. 2. Inscription atop the American Museum. Photo by the Author.

Directly above the bothersome monument—just below the roof of the building—are words that further confirm speculations that Roosevelt is this museum’s sage:

STATE OF NEW YORK MEMORIAL TO  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT  
A GREAT LEADER TO THE YOUTH OF AMERICA  
IN ENERGY AND FORTITUDE IN THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS  
IN DEFENSE OF THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE  
IN THE LOVE AND CONSERVATION OF NATURE

## AND OF THE BEST IN LIFE AND IN MAN

This inscription hangs above the phrase, “TRUTH // KNOWLEDGE // VISION.”

In my journal, I write, “Because of the sheer magnitude of the *Equestrian Statue*, these inscriptions merely perform a supporting role. They are fading, a characteristic of the text that hinders my ability to easily read these words. If I weren’t touring as an academic, I likely would overlook these inscriptions all together.”

Joe interrupts, “How much longer?”

I roll my eyes and cattily respond, “The tour doesn’t start until 1:15 [in the afternoon]. What time is it?” Joe glances at his iPhone and tells me that we have slightly more than a half hour until we need to be inside.

“Go sit down somewhere. Don’t rush me. I still have time to think,” I reply. Just as he wanders away, so do my thoughts. With nothing else to pen on paper, I locate my bored other half inspecting a nearby food cart.

“I’m ready to go,” I say as I snarl at the vendor selling meat. Commenting about the gross smell of meat, we turn away from the food cart and begin walking up the stairs.

I offhandedly comment, “Somewhere on these steps Henry Spira protested vivisection in the 70s.” Given that my disdain for human exceptionalism is what draws me to the American Museum, it feels all the more strange to know I am breathing the same, albeit more polluted, air as the famed nonhuman rights activist.<sup>32</sup>

Before departing from the presence of the *Equestrian Statue*, I pause briefly to take a picture with a nearby cute topiary (see fig. 3).

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<sup>32</sup> In the mid-1970s, Spira protested the American Museum for its experimentation on cats. Within a year’s time, he was successful in convincing the institution to stop engaging in vivisection, a lofty task given the logics of anthropocentrism.



Fig 3. Topiary nearby the *Equestrian Statue*. Photo by the Author.

The ornamental shrub, presumably an evergreen, assumes the shape of an Iguanodon holding a wreath. I upload and caption the image on Instagram, “Look at this dinosaur created out of various pine tree branches! So festive!!!” Indeed, nothing screams *holiday cheer* like an extinct lizard.

## *2.2 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

The boundaries between the act of touring and the context(s) that surround any given tour are weak and ill defined. In truth, my first critical vignette could have narrated a variety of moments that compelled me to enter the American Museum and partake in the act of touring. For example, I could have written about Amos Kiewe, the first professor to support my interest in

more-than-human persuasion; his kind words spurred my interest in the rhetoric of dodo birds, a topic I have explored elsewhere via museums of natural history (Dionne). I could have described my apprehensions about touring the museum with a headache; it is a fact that I had one too many sangria margaritas the night before. I could have catalogued each and every morsel of vegan food I consumed at Peacefood Café in Uptown Manhattan, a restaurant on 83rd street I visited in the hour just prior to coming upon the American Museum. Yet I begin with a critical vignette of a maddening monument because it best details how *the Equestrian Statue foreshadows the position(s) of domination, namely anthropocentrism,<sup>33</sup> that tourists will come to inhabit in relationship to the various artifacts on display at the American Museum.*

The *Equestrian Statue*, a structure demarcating the entrance of the American Museum for much of the past century, does not exist without criticism. In the writings of sociologist James W. Loewen and historian Charles S. Maier, the *Equestrian Statue* appears as a symbol of human domination over raced bodies. Loewen argued that this bronze statue signifies the museum's longstanding commitment to white supremacy, an insidious orientation to non-white persons that manifests through the institution's exhibitions. "Inside its doors," criticized Loewen, "the American Museum takes the same stance, putting American Indians and Africans closer to animals, whites furthest removed" (31). To that end, Maier described the *Equestrian Statue* as a structure that reminds the onlooker of their rich and profitable history of domination, writing, "All empires exploit grandiose architecture and art to convey the confidence of domination" (46-47). Without reserve, I am inclined to support such accusations given that the *Equestrian Statue*, like other pre-civil rights era monuments, shows little to no consideration of the impacts of

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<sup>33</sup> Anthropocentrism might appear to be an inherent quality of human existence; however, like other "isms," it is based on an understanding of an entity as *the Other*. At the very least, scholars of communication ought to be cautious of the ways in which anthropocentric paradigms build worlds that disenfranchise more-than-human agents.

colonialism on raced bodies.

However, these scholars, just like most tourists, fail to consider the relationship between this statue and what ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood critiqued as the standpoint of mastery. For Plumwood, the standpoint of mastery represents the hierarchal position whereby non-white, non-male humans and nonhumans are collectively disenfranchised by interwoven systems of patriarchy and capitalism. Conscious of the role of language in constructing discursive and material realities, Plumwood is especially concerned with how dualisms (i.e., culture/nature, human/animal, etc.) structure and impact the public sphere. As such, Plumwood calls for other scholars, activists, and laypersons to be wary of their position of mastery as *humans* in a shared universe.

Attuned to the standpoint of mastery, a point of view atypical of most tourists, I encountered the *Equestrian Statue* with an understanding that Theodore Roosevelt's use of the horse represents a particular practice of mastery dubbed domeseccration by sociologist David A. Nibert (12). For Nibert, domeseccration, a portmanteau of domestication and desecration, refers to the "systemic practice of violence in which social animals are enslaved and biologically manipulated, resulting in their objectification, subordination, and oppression" (12). Examples of domeseccration might include dog breeding for purity, forced pregnancy of cows to produce raw materials for dairy products, and the use of horses as a means for transportation (see also Foer). As my first critical vignette alludes, I read the monument as an anthropocentric structure of domeseccration. Immediately upon interacting with the statue, I took concern with the fact that this artifice uncritically portrayed Roosevelt as he sat atop a horse while pulling taught his reins. Others, like the Smithsonian *Art Inventories Catalogue*, offered a similar reading:

Roosevelt is depicted on horseback as both hunter and explorer. He is flanked by



the figures of two guides, one Native American and one African, meant to symbolize the continents of America and Africa. The Native American figure is striding forward wearing a feather headdress, moccasins and a long sarong around his waist. The African figure is striding forward with a cloth draped over his proper right shoulder and a gun in his proper right hand. Roosevelt grasps the reins of his horse in his proper left hand and reaches back with his proper right hand as if to grab the gun that he wears in a holster around his waist. (“Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt”).

In this way, enshrined alongside colonialism are the woes of anthropocentrism—the preservation of domeseccration as a rich and profitable standpoint of mastery.

As will become apparent by way of the exhibitions in the American Museum, especially in regard to the Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda and Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, the deployment of the famed American naturalist repeatedly signifies how nonhumans are useful to humans. Of course, the institution does not celebrate acts of domeseccration like factory farming; however, the process of mounting a nonhuman behind a display keeps species enslaved and manipulated under the ruse of discovery—a colonialist metaphor of abuse.<sup>34</sup> In short, the standpoint of mastery, however insidious, conceals itself behind Roosevelt, a man who supposedly acted “IN THE LOVE AND CONSERVATION OF NATURE.”

### *2.3 On Tour: Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda & Memorial Hall*

Around one o’clock in the afternoon, Joe and I hurry past the *Equestrian Statue*, purchase “pay what you can” tickets valued at .25¢, and meander through crowds of people standing in the

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<sup>34</sup> Given that nearly everything on display at the American Museum has roots in some form of exploration or ethnography, this claim—discovery as a colonialist metaphor—seems all the more fitting (see, for example, Coundouriotis).

Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda (see fig. 4).

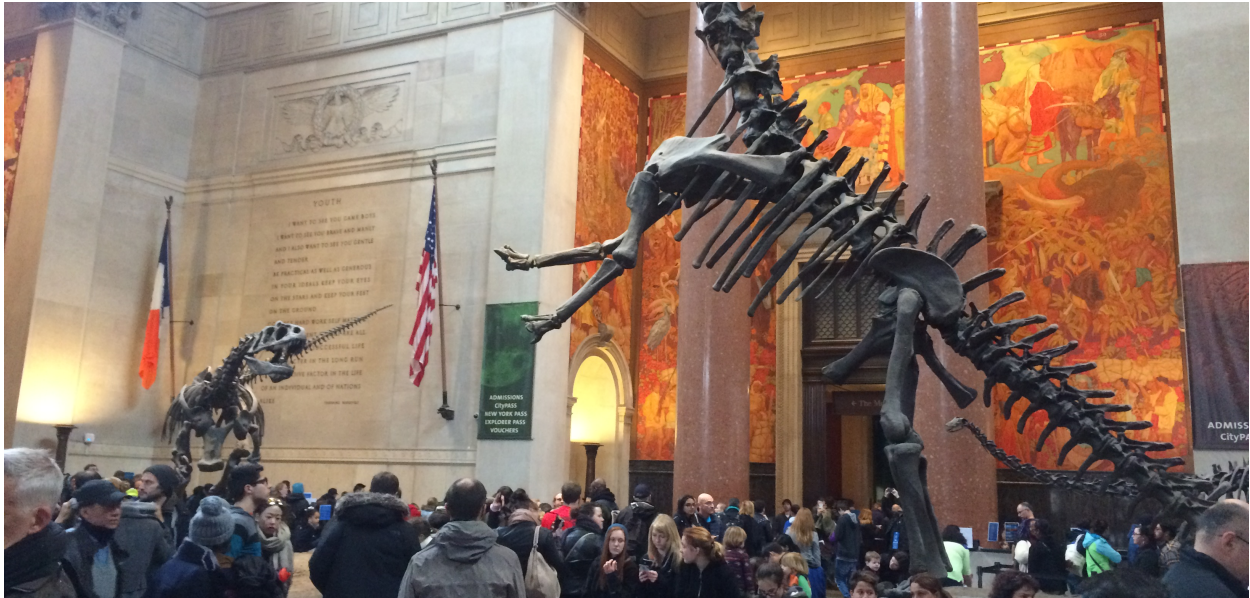


Fig. 4. Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda. Photo by the Author.

Given that several hundred people loudly occupy this exhibition, I find it difficult to discuss and write about this hall. Still, with iPhone in hand, I make do.

“Engraved on the walls are four plaques, uh, categorized under the headers ‘Nature,’ ‘Manhood,’ ‘Youth,’ and ‘The State,’” I record on video, “Under ‘Nature,’ the quotes read, ‘There is a delight in hardy life in the open,’ ‘There are no, uh, words...’” I curse and stop recording. There are too many quotes of which to make note, and so I pause momentarily to reflect on which ones stand out most. I say to my iPhone, “The most ironic quote is, ‘If I must choose between righteousness and peace, I choose righteousness.’” Given that the *Equestrian Statue* depicts Roosevelt torturing humans and nonhumans alike, I would say his definitions of “peace” and “righteousness” is severely misguided.

Because I hate standing shoulder-to-shoulder with anyone, we move quickly through the Rotunda, pass security guards, twist and turn through halls, and scurry down the stairs until we find ourselves in a more peaceful exhibition, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. Located

one floor below the Rotunda, the American Museum dedicates the Memorial Hall to the big stick leader.

“Someone needs to treat these people for ‘Roosevelt Mania,’” I tell Joe in reference *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* by Erika Doss.

Coupled with the fact that my belly is full of cruelty free chickpea fries and chocolate chip cookies, the ambience of this hall works against my capacity to prowl about the exhibition. Still, with time to spare before the free public tour, I survey the hall for a smoking gun—some detail that might incriminate Roosevelt for being, as I quip to Joe, “an anthropocentric bastard.” Irony aside, I stumble upon an actual gun.

Encased in a display titled “Theodore Roosevelt: Firsthand Observer” are the weapons of human exceptionalism: guns, whips, and leather protective garb (see fig. 5). Like weapons on display at the Cody Firearms Museum, the calm and controlled atmosphere of this exhibition and its display “cannot fully erase or eradicate the history of violence and colonial conquering in which guns have played a starring role” (Ott, Aoki, & Dickinson 216).



Fig. 5. “Theodore Roosevelt: Firsthand Observer” in the Memorial Hall. Photo by the Author.

“Look at this musket,” I say to Joe, “Can you believe he used that gun to kill some of the

nonhumans in this museum?” Although concurring with my disgust of such violence, Joe promptly reminds me that I know nothing about guns. “That’s not a musket. This isn’t an exhibition about the American Revolution,” he jokes.

Annoyed, I walk away from the gun and move in the direction of a security guard. Because the free public tour is scheduled to meet soon, I want to make sure that I am on time. “I’m looking for the Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals,” I ask a security guide. With a good customer service attitude for a New Yorker, he points in the direction of a nearby exhibition.

I move toward the entrance of the Hall of North American Mammals, the meeting point for the museum’s free public tour. As I travel through Memorial Hall, I pass through a circular seating area doubling as a memorial (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. Photo by the Author.

Unlike other halls in the museum, this exhibition feels like a holding cell for tourists who either have nowhere else to be, or are waiting for an employee to service them. “In the middle of the hall are curved benches,” I document in my journal, “Casually sitting on the bench is another

bronze statue of Theodore Roosevelt. Surrounding him is a hoard of chatty middle-schoolers that appear to be waiting for a tour. I hope they're not going on the free public tour."

Unlike the *Equestrian Statue*, the memorial around which these children sit does not appear to be outwardly problematic in its use and abuse of human and nonhuman agents. It features a tiny, seated version of Roosevelt. In a way, he reminds me of Robin Williams in *Jumanji*. Other millennial tourists might immediately think of Robin Williams portraying Roosevelt in *Night at the Museum*. To each their own favorite Robin Williams film!<sup>35</sup>

Waiting outside the Hall of North American Mammals are nearly twenty-five people. I wonder if they are here for the free public tour? None budes as time passes, and so I assure myself that this collectivity will be the formation that follows along with me.

As I wait for our tour guide to appear, I browse on my iPhone the American Museum's website and read about the Memorial Hall. I discover that the bronze statue of a seated Roosevelt depicts the former president "as he looked during a famous 1903 camping trip to Yosemite with naturalist John Muir." With the exception of me, rhetoricians of environmentalism seem to love John Muir because of his connection with the Sierra Club (see, for example, Deluca & Demo; Oravec; Pezzullo *Toxic Tourism*). Less than pleased with their advocacy, I cringe but still find myself also feeling grateful about my shared connection with this exhibition.

I browse more. "The hall's four exhibition areas feature never-before-displayed artifacts from the Museum's collections and examine Roosevelt as the Young Naturalist with an early

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<sup>35</sup> Though I joke about Robin Williams, his ghastly presence on tour points toward a communicative phenomenon we know as intertextuality. Throughout my musings at the American Museum, intertextuality as "textual strategy, parodic allusion, creative inclusion, and self-reflexive reference" was made useful and apparent (Ott and Walter 442). Given intertextuality is a byproduct of all communication, it is not hard to see how it is important to tourism. The construction of place and the artifacts each carry with them other contexts that tourists cannot help but conjure (see, for example, Hanna and Del Casino Jr.; Rossetto).

passion for nature; the Firsthand Observer whose experience as a rancher in the North Dakota Badlands impressed him with the threat of extinction to animals,” tells the institution’s website, “the Conservation President who took unprecedented action and placed some 230 million acres under federal protection; and the Lifelong Explorer whose post-presidency expeditions took him to an arduous exploration of Brazil’s River of Doubt in 1914” (“Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall”).

As anyone might exclaim, this is quite a résumé! Yet I cannot help but take concern with how this information positions Roosevelt as a warrior against extinction. Ranchers, individuals connected with the animal-industrial complex, are tied with a system of global capitalism that desecrates more than fifty-five billion nonhumans per year (Nibert).<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Burke said it best: “The shepherd, *qua* shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be ‘identified’ with a project that is raising the sheep for market” (27).

I cannot help myself—I am incredibly exhausted with discourses that act as if anyone in agriculture is a nonhuman defender against extinction. These values do not align. On that point, I also might have an irrational hate for Theodore Roosevelt.

#### *2.4 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Conscious yet not free from the standpoint of mastery,<sup>37</sup> I read the *Equestrian Statue* as an artifice that foreshadows the relationship that human tourists will inhabit in regard to animalized human and nonhuman artifacts. Coupled with the Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda and

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, I doubt that Roosevelt had an extensive knowledge of the transhistorical violent relationship between humans and nonhumans. Indeed, Nibert, as a sociologist interested in critical animal studies, wrote from a completely different perspective than Roosevelt. Still, I merely share this tidbit of info to detail how I, as a tourist, thought about Roosevelt whilst *in situ*.

<sup>37</sup> I must admit that tourism is an anthropocentric activity. It involves mastery of the physical world in order to shape and re-shape objects in such a way that humans can pleasure themselves. Yet I would be remiss to suggest that there is not something to learn from such anthropocentric behavior.

Memorial Hall, the *Equestrian Statue*, as a monument and memorial for perhaps *the* most famous and influential naturalist in American history, invites tourists to honor and behave like our dear leader. We, as tourists of *his* museum and *his* natural world, are immediately hailed into *his* lineage. In other words, I maintain that *the American Museum relies on imageries of Theodore Roosevelt to construct master naturalists*.<sup>38</sup>

In their exposé of the Draper Museum of Natural History in Cody, Wyoming, Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott offered an experiential rhetorical analysis of how directed movement and aesthetic simulations of the physical world structure and maintain a particular subjectivity. They call this subject position the “master naturalist,” or human stewards that respect and conserve more-than-human resources (239). Within the context of their particular museum of natural history, they offer four characteristics of the master naturalist:

- (1) [T]he master naturalist is an observer and explorer who can decipher nature’s signs;
- (2) the master naturalist makes these observations at little risk—the bears do not bite and the fires do not burn;
- (3) these safely rendered observations provide the master naturalist with the necessary resources for making decisions

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<sup>38</sup> A rebuttal to this argument might look as follows: “Yes, but only insofar as sufficient context even resonates/exists for such interpellation to occur. Despite the museum’s best efforts, many not most tourists probably don’t give Roosevelt much thought and are likely impervious to the ideological imposition.” To such a statement, I would respond by noting that the ideological implications are quite present with or without Roosevelt. At the core, tourists can recognize Roosevelt as an American president—a leadership position that carries with it much clout. Moreover, even if tourists have no idea the profile of Roosevelt, the point still stands, as this chapter notes, that the American Museum has crafted their places and displays in a way that positions tourists as students ready to learn. In this case, the lesson is twofold. First, tourists are to learn about nonhuman and cultural entities beyond their typical frame of reference. Secondly, tourists are to learn how to behave in the face of such Otherness. To that end, Bowman noted, “Regardless of how incoherent or heterogeneous a given site or production may be, a set of preferred meanings usually may be inferred from it, and tourists often modify their performances in accordance with the inferences they draw about such meanings” (“Looking for Stonewall’s Arm” 118).

about the natural world; and (4) the master naturalist's decisions will favor human control over the world and focus on human use and extraction of natural resources. (258)

It has been my experience that the American Museum, as categorically the same type of institution as the Draper Museum, casts tourists as master naturalist. Although the American Museum is less systematic in how it directs tourists to move through its various halls, tourists still come to perform the role of master naturalist by way of similar simulations of nature combined with the ethos of Theodore Roosevelt.

Most tourists enter the museum through the *Theodore Roosevelt* Rotunda, the main entrance that houses ticketing and guest information. Not only do tourists have to pass the *Equestrian Statue*, they must come into contact with the scriptures of Roosevelt—what the American Museum describes as “aphorisms inscribed on the walls [that] reflect his thoughts on nature, youth, manhood, and the state” (“Roosevelt, Writer”). Other aphorisms not noted in my critical vignette include, “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased; and not impaired in value,” and, “Conservation means development as much as it does protection.” The institution boasts these aphorisms on huge, stone tablets that overwhelm much of the Rotunda's walls.

During the particular visit chronicled in my critical vignette, I entered through the Rotunda and quickly made my way to the Memorial Hall. Located on the 1st floor of the museum and directly below the main entrance, the Memorial Hall is also accessible from the front of the American Museum. It has been my experience, however, that tourists do not use this entrance as frequently.<sup>39</sup> Still, the point stands that tourists can and do enter through the entrance

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, this entrance has been closed during all but one of my visits.



of the Memorial Hall, an exhibition tasked with “charting Theodore Roosevelt’s journey from a budding naturalist exploring the Museum’s halls to an elected leader with a deep commitment to conservation” (“Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall”)

Certainly, other entrances to the American Museum do exist. Of the four main entrances that come to mind, the passages via both the subway and the Rose Center for Earth and Space do not force individuals to walk past the *Equestrian Statue* or through both Rotunda and Memorial Hall. These alternate entrances, less frequented due to their non-central location, do not as outwardly feature the iconicity of Roosevelt. The subway entrance, however, is a hop, skip, and a jump away from the Memorial Hall, and tourists wanting to enter through the Rose Center for Earth and Space must pass through Theodore Roosevelt Park.<sup>40</sup> It is not inevitable to come into contact with imageries of Roosevelt, but it would likely take an act of chance or an intentionally determined path to avoid the naturalist altogether. Most tourists, I conjecture, set their sights on Roosevelt.

The deployment of imageries of Roosevelt has rhetorical effect. Where the American Museum differs from other museums of natural history (i.e., Draper Museum in Cody; Zoological Museum in Copenhagen; Oxford Museum in Oxford; and British Museum in London) is in the fact that it is not casting tourists in the role of a generic master naturalist. For the American Museum, there is no one size fits all master naturalist. The American Museum asks tourists to perform as Theodore Roosevelt, or, at the very least, within the lineage of this naturalist.

Having walked through a host of museums of natural history, it is not lost on me the fact

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<sup>40</sup> To make matters worse, the American Museum rests atop an area once frequented by homeless populations (Preston). Even in so-called “natural” spaces, human populations police what can and can not be done in order to preserve an idealized notion of capital “N” Nature.

that the American Museum puts on a pedestal one particular leader. Within the context of natural history, it makes sense to showcase notable figures like Charles Darwin and Carl Linnaeus;<sup>41</sup> these individuals are responsible for great discoveries about the more-than-human world (see Davis, “Autozoography”). However, the American Museum does not prominently showcase these leaders; instead, Roosevelt takes center stage. Given the imageries of Theodore Roosevelt (i.e., statues, quotes, guns, etc.) support a standpoint of mastery, it is not hard to see how the institution calls for tourists to inhabit the subject position of a particular master naturalist—Theodore Roosevelt, Firsthand Observer.

### 2.5 *On Tour: Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals*

As Joe and I wait for our tour guide to make herself known, we do what tourists do best: people watch. Leaning against a pillar located just outside the Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals, the meeting point for the museum’s free public tour, I lock eyes with a little girl with Down syndrome. Dressed in pink, she bounces on her father’s left knee as he tightly hugs her. I smile and politely relocate my line of sight elsewhere. I write in my journal, “Near me is a child with Down syndrome. I cannot help but think about her within the economy of my tourist gaze.<sup>42</sup> Like the humans and nonhumans on display, she does not ask for my attention. Still, I see her.”

Our tour guide approaches and interrupts my ponderings. “So my name is Ginger,” she

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<sup>41</sup> Given that Darwin is the father of evolution and Linnaeus is the creator of modern day taxonomy, their contributions to the ways in which humans conceptualize their relationship to the more-than-human world are great. Indeed, even our understanding of extinction relies on the disruption that evolution and taxonomy created to the formerly accepted paradigm—the great chain of being (see Davis).

<sup>42</sup> I use the phrase “tourist gaze” intertextually, as it references John Urry’s *The Tourist Gaze*. I do not mean to suggest that the visual is the primary mode of sensation. On the contrary, I agree with Pezzullo that an ocularcentric approach to tourist studies does not take into consideration the embodied aspects of being present in a particular place (*Toxic Tourism*).

exclaims, “I’m a tour guide at the museum of natural history!” The volume of her voice directs my eyes to a speaker attached to her hip.

The museum “has thirty-three million objects in its collection, and less than one percent are on display,” Ginger reports. “So every item that is on display is here for a reason. It has significance. There’s a story underlying it. So what I’m going to do is share the highlights and those stories of the objects that we’re going to look at.”

I stay close to Ginger as she leads her group into the Bernard Family Hall of North American Mammals, a dimly lit exhibition that displays more than forty different species of nonhuman. The hall, nearly three quarters of a century in age, feels cavernous. Avoiding inattentive tourists, I zigzag around bodies until I reach a display aptly designated, “Alaskan ”” (see fig. 7).



Fig. 7. “Alaskan Brown Bear” in the Hall of North American Mammals. Photo by the Author.

Given the association between bears and caves, the dark, damp atmosphere of this hall feels all the more thematically appropriate.

“So this is the Alaska Brown Bear, or Brown Bears,” reports Ginger. Encased in the

display are two brown bears, both of whom appear to look directly at me. Whereas one bear stands on her two hind legs, the other rests on all four of her legs. Both appear frozen as if curators captured and preserved them while they were in the middle of their daily chores. “The facial expression of the bear standing on her two hind legs appears inquisitive,” I write in my journal, “Meanwhile, the facial expression of the bear on all four of her legs appears mad.”

“Um, I said that every object you see has a story or significance,” reminds Ginger, “So when you look at dioramas, we’re not just looking at what the animal looked like. We’re looking at its habitat.” Indeed, both bears are not roaming on a white canvas—a background that would likely signify a void. The bear standing on her two hind legs peers at me from atop tall brown grass covering most of the lower half of the panorama. Likewise, the bear standing on all four of her legs looks at me as she crawls upon the muddy shores of a small lake. Behind both bears is a snow-covered mountain that stretches from the terrestrial base of the panorama to its cloud-covered ceiling.

Gesturing toward the panoramic scene upon which the bear gaze back at us, Ginger thickens her description of display’s aesthetics. “Every diorama is a specific place and time,” attests Ginger, “This happens to be Alaska. Do you know what time of year? What season?”

Because I am attuned to the ever-changing nature of the physical world, this tidbit of knowledge comes at no surprise. Nonetheless, I fail to quickly survey the display and diagnose what time of year it depicts.

“Summer,” shouts a tourist.

“Spring,” bellows another. Bingo.

“It’s spring!” confirms Ginger, “So, uh, if you’re not sure—this one is tough because of the snow. Uh, why did you say spring? Can I ask? Is there any reason?”

The tourist concisely discloses his reasoning. “The ground,” he says. Below the two bear is brown grass and mud. The latter signifies melting, a feature of spring juxtaposed against the snow-covered mountains.

“Okay, so the ground—right. And, uh, they’ll tell you here, ‘late spring,’” says Ginger as she points at the display’s didactic. I look down at the didactic, but fail to read its text; the darkness of the room forecloses my ability to read in the midst of this large crowd.

Without skipping a beat, Ginger carries on. “What’s happening here are two male bears have just come out of hibernation. So they’ve come down from their den and they haven’t had anything to eat or drink for five to seven months.”

I immediately notice a dead salmon next to a small pond in the display. “Oh, those bear are not like us,” I whisper to my vegan counterpart as Ginger tells her group that an otter on display actually killed the salmon. “The attention to detail in these panoramas,” I later write in my journal, “must go unnoticed and be incomprehensible to the average tourist.”<sup>43</sup>

“I’ll just mention why these animals look so realistic. Everything is real except the eyes,” reveals Ginger. The morbidity of this fact flips my stomach. Ginger continues, “So taxidermy used to be stuffing an animal with straw or newspaper or something like that. And over 100 years ago, Carl Akeley, who designed the Hall of African Mammals, developed a technique for taxidermy. We call it ‘mounting.’” Given that both bears pose before me, it is obvious that neither bear is stuffed, per se. They are definitely too stiff!

Ginger agrees, “I like to say the only stuffed animals are in the shop,” jokes Ginger.

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<sup>43</sup> To suggest that any tourist—myself included—pick up on all cues would be a grave error. With the plethora of mediated messages surrounding tourists on any given tour, no one tourist has a comprehensive and near complete understanding of certain tourist destination. At best, tourists pick upon fragments and organize them to create a particular post-tourist narrative—a scrapbook of their adventures.

Despite the morbidity of this comment, I laugh—a physical response to an affect that points toward my subject position as a dominating human.

After turning out attention toward a diorama of bison, a nonhuman emblematic of the American frontier, we stop just shy of the hall's exit and peer into a much smaller, clearly fake diorama. "This diorama really tells a great story," appraises ginger, "This is California ten thousand years ago." I look beyond the glass and see California during the last ice age.

"These animals are all extinct," laments Ginger. Knowing that the Hall of Biodiversity is nearby—likely the next exhibit we shall visit—this comment feels staged. Is she preparing us for the darkness to come?

### *2.6 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

An internationally acclaimed research institution with nearly a century and a half of artifacts in reserve and on display, the American Museum does not showcase only one type of artifact via one medium. *As tourists turned master naturalists* bounce between exhibitions, on display are a variety of human and nonhuman artifacts that are exhibited via a variety of media. Some examples documented in my critical vignettes include Roosevelt's gun encased in a glass box and brown bears mounted inside panoramic dioramas. Other artifacts to be encountered include artificial reconstructions of nonhumans hanging from ceilings and digitally rendered objects contained within video and sound files. As such, *the American Museum tasks its tour guides with establishing a literacy for reading artifacts on display.*

Like I previously admitted, the experience of touring the museum with a guide was exponentially different than browsing about the museum willy-nilly.<sup>44</sup> Having purchased "pay

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<sup>44</sup> As anyone might note, tour guides are important to tourism. "By leading tourists into new areas and selecting specific sites within them to show to tourists," wrote Eric Cohen, guides act as "pathfinders" and "pathbreakers" of places performatively transformed into destinations (25).

what you can” tickets during three prior trips to Manhattan, I spent nearly a dozen hours perusing artifacts on displays without a precise understanding of how to read each object. For example, I understood the clout of panoramas as aesthetic structures emblematic of museums of natural history, but I did not quite grasp the particular artistic characteristics that comprise each display. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor argued, “Museums exact the knower-known relationship by separating the transient visitor from the fixed objects of display” (*The Archive* 66). Yet the mechanics of this knower-known relationship are always dependent on literacy.<sup>45</sup> I am willing to grant that most individuals, like myself, understand the basic components of a display: There is usually an artifact and a didactic to read. However, I would be remiss if I avoided suggesting that the free public tour—a service that likely does not reach more than one hundred and fifty tourists per day—did not enhance literacy rates for reading artifacts on display.

By taking a moment to teach tourists how to better read artifacts, what emerges is a literacy that makes possible more context(s) to be drawn from objects and their methods of display. Rather than provide a historical overview of the Hall of North American Mammals and, let us say, discuss the exhibition’s recent renovation,<sup>46</sup> Ginger foregoes this information in order to craft a literacy about the actual artifacts on display. As an outcome, dioramas are no longer patchwork collectivities of nonhumans, foliage, and cheesy painted backgrounds—a point of view I entertained prior to this tour. Dioramas are historically *accurate* snapshot into a particular region at a specific time.

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<sup>45</sup> I am thinking about literacy much like Rand thought about the rhetorical form: “sites within institutional matrices of power through which discourse becomes intelligible” (299-300).

<sup>46</sup> A fun tidbit of knowledge that enhances the dimensions of dioramas and exhibitions is the fact that over the past century and a half, the American Museum has routinely had to close exhibitions and renovate them. Over time, nonhumans deteriorate and fade, which requires that curators refurbish their bodies. Nothing at the American Museum is constant.

For tourists, the ability for a tour guide to generate such a literacy is an effective rhetorical maneuver that further solidifies this knower-known relationship. What I noticed whilst in the moment that did not translate well in my audio are the many *oohhs and aahhs* uttered by other tourists.<sup>47</sup> One specific example of this interaction occurred immediately after Ginger revealed that a tiny otter on display actually killed the salmon rather than the brown bears. Whereas I took note of my surprise about this fact in my journal, writing positively about the attention to detail paid by curators, those around me verbally expressed their affective enjoyment by way of sounds.

On that note, the implications of this construction of a literacy are not without political ramifications. Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott took concern with the performance of master naturalists because the tourists they examined did not typically occupy such a position in a critical fashion. With or without Ginger, the American Museum erases the violent history between the slaughter of Indigenous tribes and bison, a story that *could* be told in the Hall of North American Mammals. Aoki, Ott, and Dickinson write these words about the Draper Museum that can be mapped onto the American Museum:

Rather than historicizing the decisions about and struggles over the western landscape, the museum situates these decisions into a place that stops time and asserts that nature, in some deep sense, always has been and thus always should be at the service of human needs. Rather than historicizing nature as wealth extraction, the museum naturalizes nature as exchange value thus removing the vision of extraction from critical engagement (258).

Consequently, how tour guides enhance this knower-known relationship have political

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<sup>47</sup> I interpreted these responses as moments of satisfaction.



ramifications for how humans understand their impact on the more-than-human world.

In short, Ginger's role as a tourist is outwardly rhetorical compared to the more subtle, material tactics used to cast master naturalists at other museums of natural history. As an individual using a tailored script to craft a collective understanding of the importance of the stories underlying significant artifacts on display, Ginger takes a few moments at the beginning of her tour to orient her *Roosevelts* before they embarked on an adventure through the museum's more challenging exhibitions—halls about various forms of extinction. In turn, Ginger keeps alive the American Museum's consciously silent stance toward the sixth mass extinction in natural history by not instructing tourists about their violent inheritance.

### *2.7 Paul and Irma Milstein Family Hall of Ocean Life.*

I feel a bit blue as I depart from the Hall of Biodiversity and enter the Paul and Irma Milstein Family Hall of Ocean Life.<sup>48</sup> Fittingly, the color blue inundates this exhibition. The ceiling—a structure of glass panes concealing glowing shades of cool blue lights—give the impression that I am standing inside of an aquarium. Completely submerged, I look to Ginger for guidance.

“Okay, so we're in the Hall of Ocean Life,” declares Ginger. Commissioned in the early nineteenth hundreds and refurbished in the early two thousands, this two-story hall displays, as its name implies, aquatic nonhumans and their lived environments. From the second level of this exhibition, I see everything from walruses to squids to whales. Some are encased in glass display cases. Some are locked away behind the panes of panoramas. Some are even hanging from the ceiling (see fig. 8).

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<sup>48</sup> In the space between the Hall of North American Mammals and the Hall of Ocean Life, Ginger moved her group through the Hall of Biodiversity. I represent this experience in chapter two, but wanted to note that I “felt blue” because of touring such a hall and hearing Ginger talk about extinction.



Fig 8. Blue Whale in the Hall of Ocean Life. Photo by the Author.

Pointing toward the roof of the hall, Ginger says, “This blue whale is not real. But it is modeled off of a female that was beached in the early nineteen hundreds.” Unavoidably noticeable is a massive blue whale spanning much of the width of the exhibition. Because she swims through air above me, what I see most is her underbelly. It is a lighter shade of blue than her back. Her lower back hits against a supporting beam giving the impression she wants to swim upwards, but the hall keeps her contained.

“Where the hell are we? SeaWorld?” I whisper in Joe’s ear. Indeed, coupled with the fact that the whale’s small, beady eyes appear empty and emotionless, the sheer magnitude of the nonhuman overwhelms the width and depth of the hall. I cannot help but to think about *Blackfish*, a documentary that charts SeaWorld’s abuse-by-captivity of whales of another breed.

“You can tell a mammal, uh, a marine mammal from a fish by its tale, because mammals—like dolphins and porpoises—their tale goes *this* way,” suggests Ginger as flaps her hand up and down before swishing her hand sideways and saying, “Fish tale goes *this* way.” Flat like the horizon, the blue whale is obviously a mammal.

“Way over there we have a whale shark on the wall,” says Ginger as she points toward a

much smaller nonhuman mounted on a wall, “Is it a fish or a mammal?”<sup>49</sup>

“Fish,” correctly shouts a very verbal tourist. I look toward the whale shark. Her skin is grey and covered in spots. Moreover, her fin is positioned vertically. Because she is not in a display case, I think, she is likely a recreation.

“Um, so, a little bit about the oceans. Five oceans. They’re all connected. They cover seventy percent of the planet. They provide half of all the oxygen we breathe. So every second breath, we’re getting that oxygen from the ocean,” tells a quick-tongued Ginger as she gasps for air, “Now, from the surface it might look like everything under the surface is homogenous or the same. But there are many different ecosystems under the water.”

From my position on the second floor of the hall, I survey the exhibition in order to see if I notice the different ecosystems. I see darker waters representing deep oceans and ice symbolizing colder regions. Yet because of the blue themed room, I find it difficult to differentiate between ecosystems.

“So let’s go to the deep ocean and see my favorite! Out of thirty three million, I actually have a favorite,” says Ginger as she ushers us away from the blue whale and toward a small display case resting against the hall’s exterior wall.

Ginger sets the scene, “This is the deep ocean. We’re about 200 meters beneath the earth’s surface where there’s no sunlight.” Maybe it is nothing more than her description manipulating my senses, but as I look into the dimly lit display case, I cannot help but feel as if this part of the hall is darker than others.

Ginger’s description of the deep ocean carries on for far too long, and eventually she

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<sup>49</sup> Audience participation on tours subverts the notion that tourist consume tour guides like they are nothing more than an artifact on display. In this instance, Ginger gazes back at tourists who gaze at her—a process that demonstrates the numerous directions of gazing at work on any given tour (see, for example, Chan; Urry).

remembers why she brought us to this display. “So my favorite is the anglerfish,” she says, “You may have heard of this from *Nemo*.” I gasp! Of course I know the anglerfish from *Finding Nemo*!

Encased in the display amongst other deep ocean dwellers is a fist-sized, grouchy looking fish with a small orb of light protruding from its nostrils. Frozen in time above a school of other bioluminescent fish, the anglerfish shows her terrifying fangs. I laugh, thinking about how Dori and Martin, two of the main characters in *Finding Nemo*, had to defend themselves from one of these predators. I later write in my journal, “It’s unfortunate that my understanding of the anglerfish was determined by Pixar.”<sup>50</sup>

“We got a couple of things going on here. She’s got this little fishing pole coming out of her head. That’s why she’s called an anglerfish. Angler man is a fisherman,” reports Ginger, “And she’s not really making that light. That’s bacteria.” Neat, I think. Symbiosis is at work.

Suddenly, Ginger drops a bombshell on her group that sucks away the excitement of looking at and learning about a deep ocean dweller. “This is a female anglerfish. It’s, of course, not real. We have many in jars behind the scenes,” she reveals.

As an ecologically conscious individual, I enjoy knowing that this anglerfish is not real—one less corporeal indexing of pain and suffering. Still, as a tourist, witnessing an authentic anglerfish would have been more enjoyable.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> On that note, it is intriguing that human audiences perpetuated the idea that the anglerfish—the ultimate marine *Other* due to her deep sea location—is somehow evil. During the composition of this thesis, I also noted that the anglerfish appears on stage as a monster in Lady Gaga’s The Fame Monster Ball. The presence of the anglerfish at this concert as well as in other pop culture venues further demonstrates how humans *Other* nonhumans.

<sup>51</sup> The term “authenticity” has troubled scholars of tourism studies. As one scholar noted, “Tourism is seen as a metaphysical search for completeness, for the authenticity of ‘primal’ social and cultural relations, a pilgrim’s progress of the alienated” (Meethan 91). Still, what is authenticity and why is it really important to tourists? For now, I argue that Carole Blair, Greg

Like clockwork, as soon as Ginger reveals that this anglerfish is not real, the collective energy of her tour group immediately dissipates. I find this reaction odd given the fact that each and every one of these tourists did not budge when Ginger documented the inauthenticity of the blue whale. Nonetheless, not a single tourist—many of who were just laughing about *Finding Memo*—decides to ask a question. Together with Ginger, we swim away from the deep ocean and exit the exhibition.

### 2.8 *At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Separating our adventures in the Hall of North American Mammals and the Hall of Ocean Life was a stop in the Hall of Biodiversity, the only so-called issues exhibition in the entire museum. Given this title and the fact that tourists experience this hall much differently than the museum's other exhibitions, I exclusively analyze the Hall of Biodiversity in chapter two of this thesis. For now, what is important to note is that the Hall of Biodiversity, along with both the Hall of Ocean Life and the two next exhibitions we shall tour, comprise what the museum dubs to be "Biodiversity and Environmental Halls." Unlike other permanent exhibitions classified under the headers, "Birds and Reptiles and Amphibian Halls," "Earth and Planetary Sciences Halls," "Fossil Halls," "Human Origins and Cultural Halls," "Mammal Halls," "Rose Center for Earth and Space," "Theodore Roosevelt Memorials," and the "Discovery Room," the Halls of Biodiversity, Ocean Life, North American Forests, and New York State Environment are all slanted toward conservation, or the philosophy and practice of protecting the more-than-human world for future use and/or existence.<sup>52</sup>

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Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott have the best answer: "...authenticity is a rhetorical effect, an impression lodged with visitors by the rhetorical work the place does" (27).

<sup>52</sup> By contrast, a preservationist approach is more radical as it seeks to eliminate human inconsideration toward the more-than-human world. Of course, this does not mean that preservationism does not come without its own pitfalls in terms of workability and ethics.

Now more conscious of the particularities of the American Museum's artifacts on display, tourists follow Ginger out of the Hall of Biodiversity and into the Hall of Ocean Life. Although the institution renovated the Halls of North American Mammals and Ocean Life within the same decade, the latter exhibition renders itself newer via its use of advanced technologies to construct an aquatic, underwater environment. Ginger speaks of the renovations and describes the various artifacts on display in this exhibition, a communicative transaction that did further cultivate a literacy for reading the objects of this hall, yet at no point in time did she reveal that the American Museum intended for the Hall of Ocean Life to boast a message about conservation. Perhaps I missed such cues, but my audio footage does not contain even the slightest nod toward conservation. Thus the purpose of my third critical vignette is as follows:

***Although tour guides have the capacity to instill a literacy for reading artifacts on display, not all objects reveal their information to seemingly literate tourists.***

Without a doubt, communication scholars and practitioners throughout the ages have been grappling with what appears to be an inherent quality of any transaction, rhetorical or otherwise, between human and more-than-human speakers in this shared universe. In her discussion of rhetorical effects, Erin J. Rand defined rhetorical agency as “the capacity for words and/or actions to come to make sense and therefore to create effects through their particular formal and stylistic conventions” (299-300). Rand refused to foreclose the possibility of communicative matrixes signaling implications beyond the intended meaning of any given speaker, thus finding that rhetorical effects “are never *determined*, and the possibility for radical transformation exists alongside the possibility for retrenchment” (314). What this means for the Hall of Ocean Life, as well as any other exhibition in the American Museum, is that curators might design a hall with an intended message, but that does not mean that tourists take away

such knowledge. This further complicates the knower-known relationship as described by Taylor (*The Archive*).

As my critical vignette illustrates, I experienced the Hall of Ocean Life as an objective space of scientific neutrality. To me, the purpose of this exhibition, much like the Hall of North American Mammals, was to showcase nonhumans and their lived environments. I learned about the blue whale, whale shark, and deep ocean all whilst eyeing various aquatic ecosystems on display in panoramas located on the 1st floor of this exhibition. Ginger even focused on the importance of oceans to human life, saying, “So a little about the oceans. Five oceans. They’re all connected. They cover 70% of all the planet. They provide half of all the oxygen we breathe.” What I did not learn about, however, was biodiversity loss and issues associated with conservation. Neither Ginger nor any of the displays I sighted, simply put, focused on human efforts to protect the-more-than-human world.

If anything, perhaps the Hall of Ocean Life even negates the seemingly positive work of conservationism. I could not help but read despair on the blue whale; calling forth imageries of *Blackfish*, I was ready to further criminalize the American Museum for promoting a message of use and abuse—the Hall of Ocean Life functioned like an *abusement* park. Moreover, rather than taking seriously the anglerfish and her deep oceanic environment, I mapped on top of her a persona constructed by Pixar in the *Finding Nemo*. To say/think that the anglerfish is “mean” just because of her portrayal in animated film adversely affects the message of conservationism, relegating unfamiliar nonhumans to the status of the evil *Other*.

This is not to say that Ginger is a poor tour guide. As future critical vignettes will attest, Ginger performs her duties with skill. Likewise, this is not to say that Ginger intentionally concealed information to thwart the messages of conservationism. As will become apparent in

the Hall of Biodiversity, Ginger is not shy when it comes to talking about extinction. However, the artifacts on display in the Hall of Ocean Life did not call for conversations about conservationism; these objects themselves do not ask tourists to notice messages about catastrophic violence or biodiversity loss. Moreover, at least on my personal front, my performance as a literate tourist was affected by a host of competing, intertextual discourses that made themselves present in this particular communicative moment. In short, just because tourists are literate in the art of reading artifacts on display does not mean those artifacts on display easily provide an intended reading. Gaps in communication are always present.

### *2.9 On Tour: Hall of North American Forests*

As we exit the Hall of Ocean Life and walk through the Hall of Biodiversity, I ask Ginger how long she has been leading free public tours. “Two or three years,” she says, “But I’ve been a volunteer for six years.” It seems generous and noble that Ginger, a former investment banker, has been lending her services to the American Museum. Though, maybe I just have a poor opinion about investment bankers.

“Where are you from,” Ginger asks.

“Syracuse right now,” I respond.

“You in school?” she says.

“Yes, masters.” I confirm.

“For the sciences?” she suggests.

I laugh as I tell Ginger that I am a student in rhetoric program. Although I admire my discipline, I would much rather be a quantum physicist. Un/fortunately, I am forever trapped as a posthuman thinker in the anthropocentric humanities.

Tending to her group, Ginger stops talking to me and welcomes everyone into the Hall of



North American Forests, an exhibition founded in the mid-nineteen fifties that just so happens to feature artifacts from the eighteen hundreds. As we walk into this time capsule, I notice an aesthetic difference in how this hall compares to other exhibitions. Whereas much of the American Museum boasts a modern, sleek look, brown wood paneling encases this exhibition. “This place definitely feels like a 1950s den,” I write in my journal.

“Okay, we’re just going to stop here for a minute,” says Ginger as she plants her feet in front of a display featuring an oversized mosquito. I feel the vibration of my iPhone in my pocket, but give Ginger my full attention.<sup>53</sup> She asks, “Why is a *giant* mosquito here?”

Smaller than the blue whale in the Hall of Ocean Life, this giant mosquito—encased in a display situated in the middle of the exhibition—is arguably just as noticeable as the blue whale (see fig. 9).

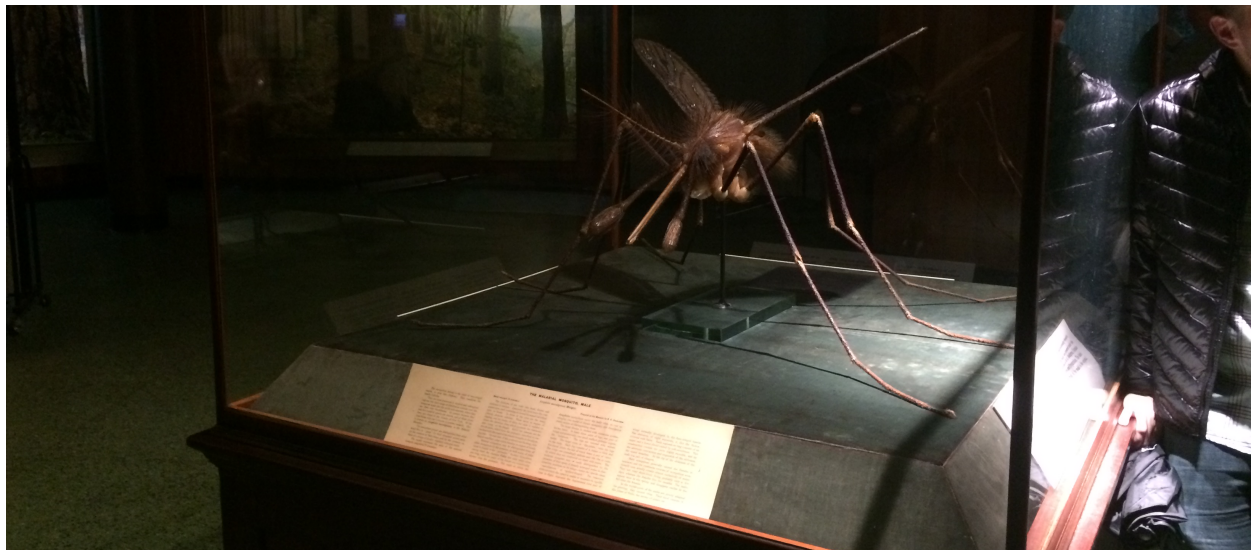


Fig. 9. Anopheles Mosquito in the Hall of North American Forests. Photo by the Author.

I take notice of the mosquito’s amber exterior covered in what appears to be small furs. Are mosquitos furry? I do not ask this question aloud, for the real shocking characteristic of this

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<sup>53</sup> By contrast, most of the tourists on tour with Ginger used their phones more than once. Had I been replicating the experience more accurately, I would have been more present in the world of social media.

nonhuman is her size. As Ginger mentioned, this mosquito is no ordinary mosquito. She is giant!

“This is seventy-five times the real size,” Ginger reveals about the mosquito. I immediately clue into the fact that this mosquito, like the blue whale and anglerfish, is not real. I try not to worry about authenticity in museums, but such thoughts tend to make themselves present nonetheless. “Can you imagine being bitten by that,” I whisper in Joe’s ear.

Just as I begin wondering what type of mosquito at which I am looking, Ginger catches my thought. “The mission of the museum was to educate the public and at the turn of the twentieth century, there was an outbreak of Malaria in New York State,” shares Ginger, “And so they built this model to talk about malaria.” With the exception of the Hall of Biodiversity, Ginger has not documented the ways in which the American Museum seeks to instruct tourists beyond the simple dispersal of knowledge about natural history. Even now, she does not dig too deep into the museum’s history of malaria.

“You have heard that only female mosquitos bite,” asks Ginger, “It’s true. Only females have the mouthpart that can pierce our skin. The reason is that they need our blood for their eggs. Apparently they bite when their eggs are forming.” As Ginger delivers this tidbit of info, I notice a male tourist turn to a female tourist and eye her as if to say, “See, all females suck the life out of men.” Such sexism, albeit maybe nonsexist, triggers my distain for insidious iterations of masculinity. I give him the benefit of the doubt, turning away to think about anthropocentrism—my most hated of the “isms.”<sup>54</sup>

As Ginger trails on about mosquitos and malaria, her voice turns into a soft buzz. Instead of listening attentively, I turn my attention toward the other tourists in her group. Everyone surrounds the display, peering inside as if her or his gaze can unlock some secret knowledge.

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<sup>54</sup> As other scholars have noted, anthropocentrism (and speciesism) are entangled with the likes of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism (Adams; Patterson; Spiegel).

However, no substantial detail seems to hatch from the display or Ginger's chat. The mosquito—a reconstruction of a much smaller, more deadly nonhuman—does not bite.

Ginger calls for the group to walk onward—away from the mosquito and into a new exhibit. Compared to other stops, our venture in the Hall of North American Forests feels short. Was there not more she could say?

Because she has stopped talking, Joe prompts me to better consider the actual tourists on the tour.

“Did you see the couple join our tour,” asks Joe, “What about the family that left the group after the ocean hall?” He points toward a different couple that I had not seen before. Holding hands, they appear to be, dare I say it, in love.

Being engaged with the tour itself, I did not notice a change in the group's number. “No, but you need to take count of everyone on the tour for me,” I instruct Joe. He takes to his phone to write down how many people are on the tour, but immediately becomes sidetracked by Twitter.

“We've been on some duds before,” I tell Joe. Indeed, having frequented a host of tours—some about ghosts, some about history—this one feels more special than others.

Maybe, though, what makes this tour more special than others is the fact that the American Museum offers Ginger's services for free. Because there is no exchange of money, I have little expectation for the quality of this tour. In fact, when I found out that this tour was seventy-five minutes long, I thought that seemed excessive.

As we walk away, Ginger asks us, “Wouldn't it be cool to work in exhibitions? Making all this stuff...” Cool, yes, but also stressful. As each hall has rendered apparent, the American Museum takes seriously historical accuracy. From grass to malaria, curators are responsible for

providing tourists with the realistic portrayal of the more-than-human world. Though I support speculation as a pedagogical mode, I think the *burden of truth* would stifle me.

### *2.10 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

The Hall of North American Forests, an underwhelming exhibition located off to the side of the much more technologically advanced Hall of Biodiversity, might be the last place in which a tourists wants to spend a generous amount of time. Unlike the Hall of North American Mammals, an exhibition that showcases regions at a particular place during a specific time whilst erasing a violent history of colonialism, and the Hall of Ocean Life, an exhibition about conservationism that does not render itself intelligible to tourists, the Hall of North American Forests graciously makes known an important issue: the spread of diseases. Yet the topic of malaria—a disease bound up in histories of colonialism—fails to generate discussions about wealth extraction. Thus just as institutions can determine narrative scripts of exhibitions, tour guides can choose not to reveal information, and artifacts of display can conceal their messages, ***literate tourists might not know how to ask questions about and probe into certain topics.***

Although the Hall of North American Forests features an array of artifacts on display, the giant mosquito, better known as the *Anopheles* mosquito, begs for attention. In addition to her sheer size, her placement in the middle of the hall creates a nearly unavoidable interaction; like the long, narrow hallway connecting foyer of Sims with the TA office, the *Anopheles* and tourists stare each other down. Sure, tourists my pass by the *Anopheles* without giving her the time of day, but in the case of the free public tour, we did not.

The *Anopheles* on display tells about malaria, a life-threatening disease transmitted to humans by mosquitos. Chills. Fatigue. Fever. Headache. Dry cough. Muscle pain. Sweat. Nausea. Vomiting. These are some of the flu-like symptoms that make themselves presents in

human incubators of the malaria virus. Although many think of malaria as a jungle illness, typically associating it with the African continent as a whole, malaria has and continues to threaten global populations. According to the World Health Organization, nearly two hundred million happenings of malaria infection were documented in 2013. In the United States, a region where malaria is essentially nonexistent, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented nearly two hundred and fifty cases in 2012. Of those cases, New York State boasted the most per capita (Simmins). Ginger, a speaker on behalf of the publically pedagogical American Museum in the state of New York, makes known that her main purpose for momentarily stopping in front of the *Anopheles* was to continue the important work of instructing tourists about malaria, a task commissioned more than a half century prior to my visit.

And yet, even though Ginger paused in front of the *Anopheles* and discussed malaria, tourists did not ask relevant questions or probe deeper into the topic of zoonotic diseases. Malaria is a zoonotic disease, what Nibert referred to as “dangerous, mutated viruses” that transmit themselves between humans and nonhumans (249). Per Nibert, zoonotic diseases proliferate alongside the animal-industrial complex and related enterprises of global agriculture. Although zoonotic diseases are present throughout deep history, their prevalence—especially malaria’s dispersal—emerges roughly ten thousand years ago. As such, we can understand malaria as a product of what philosopher Timothy Morton referred to as agrilogistics, or the ten thousand year “time of certain logistics of agriculture that arose in the Fertile Crescent and went viral, eventually requiring steam engines and industry to endure” (259). Unfortunately, tourists do not probe into the dark history of agrilogistics. True to their performance as master naturalists, they remain unconcerned with the use and abuse of the more-than-human world

through processes of extraction.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, most tourists are not attuned to the woes of agrilogistics, and so it would be absurd to blame them for such incompetencies. However, the point still stands that institutions might teach and guides might build a literacy yet tourists fail to ask hard-hitting questions. Rather than ask questions such as “what is malaria” and “how did malaria find its way into New York,” tourists chose to make sexist remarks and uncritically gaze at the Anopheles. In short, literate tourists fail to wipe clean the grime between the cracks in order to render visible the rich history of agrilogistics that gives primacy to processes of wealth extraction that denigrate not only the more-than-human world, but also our shared universe.

#### *2.11 On Tour: Paul and Irma Milstein Hall of Advanced Mammals*

Thus far, Ginger has limited the scope of the free public tour to the 1st floor of the American Museum. After strolling through the Felix M. Warburg Hall of New York State Environment, she informs her group that the next and final of three stops is located on the 4th floor of the museum. Half of her group ascends to the top via an elevator while the others walk up the stairs. Like a good tour guide, Ginger chooses to walk with the little girl with Down syndrome who happens to be scared of elevators.

Everyone reconvenes just outside of the elevator on the highest floor of the museum. Standing in the liminal space between halls, Ginger says, “So this floor goes in a giant circle. It

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<sup>55</sup> Of course, I am merely speculating about the minds of other tourists. I will say, however, that I am suspect of what motivates tourists to journey to the American Museum. Preliminarily, I would hypothesize that tourists travel to NYC and venture to the American Museum because of its symbolic capital as a tourist destination. Given the lack of discourses and studies that find that tourists tour the American Museum and immediately become advocates for an anti-anthropocentric way of knowing and being, I think it is safe to say that most tourists move through the exhibitions with little desire to change their relationship to the more-than-human world. Still, qualitative and quantitative inquiry by further scholars may be of help to better address the orientation tourists take to exhibitions at the American Museum.

begins on your left, but I want to show you something on your right first.”<sup>56</sup> She points toward the Paul and Irma Milstein Hall of Advanced Mammals, an exhibition that on first glance appears to feature dinosaurs.

“So, uh, it’s an evolutionary history of vertebrates—so animals with a backbone. So we begin 500 million years ago with the earliest fish and it goes around in a giant circle,” Ginger says, “So the first hall—not this empty hall—but the first hall is pre-dinosaurs. The next one is a dinosaur with the T-Rex. We’re gonna end there. If you continue, there’s a second hall with stegosaurus, triceratops, and then mammals. So if you continue, you will see all of those wonderful fossils of saber tooth tigers and camels I told you about. But I have an animal—a fossil—that I want to show you here. We’re gonna go 10,000 years ago, but then go back.”

This confusing, time-laden roadmap of the remainder of the tour confuses tourists. As Ginger answers questions asked by her group, I turn my attention toward the nearby, “empty hall” that does not display artifacts. Dubbed the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Orientation Center, this large, seemingly empty room does not display artifacts, but instead hosts a help desk and an open theater. From afar, I see a short film playing. I listen closely and hear Meryl Streep’s voice narrating the video.<sup>57</sup>

Ginger calls for us to enter the Hall of Advanced Mammals. As we walk, she points towards a large, elephant-like nonhuman and says, “So this is a mastodon.” Had I not had prior knowledge of this exhibition, I would have likely classified this nonhuman as a woolly mammoth.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, what Ginger and her group stands before is a mastodon, a species of

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<sup>56</sup> Of all exhibitions in the American Museum, the 4th floor comes closest to directing tourists in a certain path.

<sup>57</sup> Celebrities are important to helping build the symbolic capital of tourist destinations (Roberts).

<sup>58</sup> The breadth and depth of all the species of our shared universe is so massive that it would be nearly impossible for any human to faithfully know the distinctions between nonhumans and

nonhuman that freely roamed North American eons before our nation's birth (see fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Mastodon on display in the Hall of Advanced Mammals. Photo by the Author.

Archeologist Stuart Fiedel argued that the last of the mastodon died somewhere around 10,500 years ago, which roughly aligns with the end of the Pleistocene (the epoch immediately preceding the Holocene). Fiedel and other archeologists agree that the cause of their extinction was likely overhunting by humans, a hypothesis confirmed elsewhere in a study about extinctions near the Great Lakes (Fisher; Martin). To put the age of the mastodon into context, what we know to be ancient Egypt formed just over 5,000 years ago.

Even though the age of the mastodon exceeds our typical comprehensions of time, its fossils have performed a key role in not only the formation of our nation, but also our understandings of natural history. In 1766, Thomas Jefferson came into contact with what he thought to be the fossils of a mammoth. Humans unearthed these fossils in the Great Salt Lick of Ohio, which is near the Great Lakes. In response to these and other fossilized findings, when Jefferson became President, he instructed Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to search for

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other nonhumans. Indeed, humans cannot even acknowledge all the distinctions that make unique different races and cultures of their own species.



fossils as they journeyed across the Northwest Territory (“Upper Jawbone”). Lewis and Clark stumbled upon a number of fossils, including the mastodon’s cranium. Jefferson was pleased with this discovery, and he kept the mastodon in his personal collection for quite some time. The fossils of this particular mastodon currently reside in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (“The Jaw”).

This mastodon, of course, is not the mastodon Jefferson once knew. “This was found in Newburg, New York, just like this,” reports Ginger, “So it was found all put together, standing up, and it had sunk into a bog and was found just like this in the eighteen hundreds.”

One of the tourists interjects, “There was one found on route 80 in New Jersey. When they were building route 80, they had to stop because they found bones!”

“Oh my goodness,” shrieks Ginger before returning to her script.<sup>59</sup>

Pointing toward a set of teeth on display for touching, she says, “You can touch if you wanna touch. There are three teeth over there. One is an elephant, a mastodon, or a mammoth—the mastodon and its relatives.”

I refrain from touching the mastodon’s tooth because I *loathe* interactive displays. Other tourists, including Joe, run their fingers over the fossil.

I ask Joe to describe the tooth. Like a wannabe affect theorist, he jokes, “I was so affected by that dinosaur’s tooth that I felt as if I could be in its mouth at any point.” I roll my eyes and laugh.

In all seriousness, I cringe at the thought of touching the mastodon, and so I wander off while other tourists rub against an artifact crawling with germs. Nearby, I notice a man with a

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<sup>59</sup> Exchanges like this one model how collective rhetoric—“novel public vocabularies as the product of the collective articulation of multiple, overlapping individual experiences” (Dubriwry 396)—matter to tourism.

red button on his shirt. He is an employee of the museum, particularly a *fossil explainer*. Like Ginger, he tells a group of tourists about the mastodon. Although informative and courteous, I find there is something missing in his performance; he does not seem as charismatic as Ginger.

I return just as Ginger's group departs the hall. I make note in my journal, "Thankfully we have Ginger. She's a fabulous tour guide! What I like most about her is that although she is elderly, her attitude is youthful. She really connects with her group."<sup>60</sup> With the mastodon staring at our rear ends, we go back in time.

### 2.12 At Home: Syracuse, New York

The places between the various great halls of the American Museum feel like thresholds between locales of knowledge production. A combination of high ceilings, stonewalls, and the lack of displays are the perfect mix for a sonic concoction that leaves me feeling empty. As such, it truly was not until Ginger approached the elevator that I felt the fatigue of touring such a large institution. The elevator—a product of our species ingenuity—provided me with a moment to consider how I was negotiating this knower-known relationship.

We spent far more time in the halls located on the 1st floor than on the 4th floor, perhaps for good reasons. Most of the exhibitions on the 1st floor of the American Museum represent a familiar *here and now*. Although an unquantifiable number of bison roaming the American plains are no longer part of our material here and now, the halls on the 4th floor transport tourists way, way back to an unfamiliar *then and there*—a primordial soup kitchen of lost souls we think we never knew. In truth, humans are mostly removed from the slaughters and extinctions on display atop the American Museum. *Well, almost.*

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<sup>60</sup> I should add that I tried not to censor my personal thoughts throughout the day. When touring, tourists bump into persons of all sorts of ages, races, sexes, sexualities, creeds, and so and so forth. To that end, Ginger certainly wasn't elderly—poor word choice on my part.

The next three of my critical vignettes chronicle slaughters and extinctions outside the temporal frame of most master naturalists. The furthest removed nonhumans to be encountered are on display in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins. The most entangled nonhumans—at least in terms of time and space—are on display in the Hall of Advanced Mammals, as evidenced by the mastodon. Touring the mastodon, case in point, offers yet another bit of insight about tour guides. This happening reveals how *the American Museum and its tour guides have the capacity to geographically and temporally localize extinction*.

As Ginger noted, the halls on the 4th floor of the American Museum are arranged chronologically. One after the other, these halls are connected to one another in a continual loop that begins nearly five hundred million years ago and ends within the ten thousand year present known as the Anthropocene. Fittingly, the elevators let out just before the entrance of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Orientation Center and the exit of the Hall of Advanced Mammals. Ginger, as fate would have it, chose to defy temporal progression.

The mastodon, as an artifact on display that illegitimately passes as a dinosaur, brings home extinction by quite very literally dying on the lands that many tourists call “home.” As evidenced by the conversation between Ginger and other tourists, mastodons are identified within American culture as American fossils. Whereas this mastodon on display called New York her final resting place, a tourist knew of another mastodon in a neighboring state. For me, the mastodon has long subverted my understanding of mass extinction as something over there; the fact that Thomas Jefferson, a president from long ago and from *this* nation, talked about and touched mastodon fossils is shocking. The fossils of the mastodon, though brown, appear red, white, and blue within the context of the Hall of Advanced Mammals.

More importantly, perhaps, is how the mastodon temporally relocates happenings of mass

extinction. Although tourists may accept that we are in the midst of a mass extinction, the word “extinction” typically indexes dinosaurs. Even the Hall of Biodiversity, an exhibition focusing on the sixth mass extinction in natural history, cannot help but immortalize prior extinctions, namely the end of the dinosaurs. Ginger outwardly admits the reality that this mastodon is, in fact, not a dinosaur; the mastodon as a species went extinct about ten thousand years ago.

Unfortunately, once again both Ginger and tourists stop short of having a critical conversation about how this mastodon and her fellow species met their demise.<sup>61</sup> Yet the answer is in plain sight: the birth of agrilogistics. As agricultural systems changed and humans transitioned from dominated to dominators, the mastodon ceased to remain due to hunting. Once more, the subject position of master naturalist reigns supreme even as Ginger geographically and temporally relocates extinction from *there and then* to *here and now*.

### *2.13 On Tour: Hall of Vertebrate Origins*

I scribble in my journal, “The air in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins smells stale. I’ve never liked this exhibition. Its color scheme is pale and reminds me of Australian Hall [Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples].” I cannot put my thumb on why I dislike the Hall of Vertebrate Origins, but as we enter it through a passageway, I immediately want out.

“So this is the Hall of Vertebrate Origins,” notes the all-knowing Ginger, “All life with a backbone—including us—all life with a backbone began about five hundred million years ago in water. And this first hall is going to show what life needed to leave water.” Surrounding us—hanging from the ceiling and encased in display—are a plethora of nonhumans with aquatic

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<sup>61</sup> Of course, critical conversations are never guaranteed on tours. In a number of ways, tourism reifies dominant structures of power (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett). Still, the point stands that the American Museum could engender discussions about the sixth mass extinction that effectively critique the woes of agrilogistics—discussions that would compromise their relationship and cut ties with violent offenders of the more-than-human world.

characteristics. Above I see what appear to be ancient sharks and tortoises. Along with the light blue coloring of this room, these nonhumans create an Atlantis aesthetic.

“Early life with a backbone would be fish without even a jaw,” suggest Ginger, “Having a jaw millions of years later was a great adaption because it allowed for um—not for chewing—but for eating different things. We don’t get to chewing yet. We need something that we’re not going to get for two more halls. Cheeks!” Everyone laughs as Ginger squeezes her own face in order to mimic the process whereby cheeks expand when filled with air or food.<sup>62</sup>

Up until this exhibition, Ginger has crowded her group around particular nonhumans. In the Hall of North American Mammals, we witnessed the likes of brown bear and buffalo; in the Hall of Ocean Life, we gazed into the eyes of a blue whale and anglerfish; in the Hall of North American Forests, we cringed at an oversized mosquito; and in the Hall of Advanced Mammals, we honed in on a mastodon. Here, in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins, missing is a focus on a particular nonhuman. Instead, we stand in the middle of the walkway as tourists quickly pass through the exhibition as they barely stop to take in this hall’s content.

Ginger asks, “What did we need to leave the water? What adaptation did we need to leave the water?” Her use of the royal we stump me. Because we—humans—are vertebrates, I understand that our species evolved from early aquatic life. However, this use of “we” seems displaced. What angle is she playing? Why is she acting as if we, contemporary humans, grew legs and crawled out of the ocean?

“Does anyone know how scientists separated mammals from reptiles?” questions Ginger. As she quizzes us, she points toward a pattern on the floor. Unlike other exhibitions, this hall

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<sup>62</sup> Whilst on tour, I see laughter as a form of community building communication. Shared moments of laughter—though perhaps outside symbolic registers—are moments that further help build a collective rhetoric.

offers directions via lines on the floor. If I were to follow one set of lines, I would trace the history of mammals. If I were to follow the other set of lines, I would trace the history of reptiles.

No one answers, and so Ginger chimes in, “The way they separate them has to do with holes in the skull.” She describes the difference between synapsids and diapsids. Technically speaking, a synapsid skull contains one set of holes behind eye sockets; humans, as mammals, are synapsids. Diapsids, however, contain two sets of holes behind their eye sockets; reptiles, like dinosaurs, are diapsids.

Ginger tells her fellow synapsids to follow the line representing diapsids. We pass by ancient crocodiles until we come into contact with a flying reptile (see fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Pterosaur on display in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins. Photo by the Author.

“So this is a pterosaur. There’s about one hundred and fifty species of pterosaurs. You’ve might of heard of the pterodactyl,” says Ginger to her very familiar crowd of *Jurassic Park* enthusiast, “Um, I want to show you the longest finger in the world.”

No one quickly makes sense of the pterosaur’s anatomy, and so Ginger swoops in and locates the reptile’s finger. Spanning most of its wing is a single, incredibly long finger. The wing measures, according to Ginger, about thirty feet in length.

“Why would they need a finger that long,” asks a tourist.

“Yeah, so that’s interesting. Why would they need a finger that long,” rephrases Ginger, “Um, and why would dinosaurs need to grow so big? I really don’t know the answer, but my

guess is that they really flew long distances. Um, but I don't know.”

Witnessing Ginger stumble over her words feels odd. With the exception of an abundance of words like “so,” Ginger’s pattern of speech has been crisp, clean, and composed. In terms of style and delivery, her rhetorical performance as a tour guide impresses me. She does not take too long to answer questions, and her knowledge of the American Museum is astounding for a volunteer. Accordingly, I cannot help but feel uneasy as Ginger repeats the question—likely back to herself in order to make sense of it.

“The finger meets the wings,” asks another tourist.

Ginger quickly responds to this tourist, “So the wings attached to the tip of the fourth finger and to the foot. So the wing goes all that way. And when they walked, they folded it up...at first they thought it could only glide, but later, with CT analysis and other things, um, they say that the top of the humerus was very big meaning a muscle was attached to it.”

The answer to this final question satisfies the tourist. Yet the enthusiasm of Ginger’s group seems to be waning. Given that we have been prowling about the American Museum for nearly an hour, I feel tired. Likely, others feel the same way too. Ginger gestures for us to follow her out of the Hall of Vertebrate Origins.

As we exit the exhibition, I turn around and take one final look at the hall. “I don’t know what it is about this exhibition. I find this hall to be utterly boring,” I whisper to Joe. Perhaps I complain too much, because he does not seem to care.

#### *2.14 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

I am not kidding when I say that the Hall of Vertebrate Origins provokes a visceral response from me. I absolutely despise this bland exhibition, a hall I find lacking in the categories of both aesthetics and information. Nonetheless, such an affective response further

indicts the American Museum as producers of master naturalists. Just as museums and tour guides have the capacity to geographically and temporally localize extinction, *the American Museum and its tour guides have the ability to render so ambiguous geographical and temporal aspects of extinction to the effect that no one bats an eyelash at biodiversity loss.*

As we entered the Hall of Vertebrate Origins, our tour, an experience structured in large around particular nonhumans, divested from such interests and entered into a realm of abstract nothingness. In prior exhibitions, artifacts on display performed as pedagogical tools for Ginger; we talked about regional characteristics of particular places, nonhumans, and diseases through artifacts on display. Here, in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins, Ginger relied upon no single nonhuman to instruct about extinctions, neither past nor present. Unfortunately, as waning audience interest and interaction attested, this rhetorical strategy failed to engender a collective appreciation of this particular exhibition.

In a way, this lack of focus on a particular artifact on display is solely Ginger's doings. Exhibited in the Hall of Vertebrate Origins were a host of nonhumans, many of which looked like contemporary species (i.e., alligator and shark, to be precise). With the exception of the pterosaur, a nonhuman located at the exit of the exhibition, Ginger spoke abstractly. In fact, Ginger's lesson about synapsids and diapsids was mired in scientific jargon that was, for me, not palatable to the ear. Not having an artifact on display through which to discuss the particularities of these nonhumans blocked me from imagining the more-than-human world as lived five hundred million years ago.

On another note, perhaps it was the sheer fact that the Hall of Vertebrate Origins was an exhibition about nonhumans that lived five hundred million years ago. Even as I write this thesis and try to envision the Earth as it was in deep historical times, I cannot help but think that our



lives, though clearly entangled, are worlds apart.<sup>63</sup> As a timeframe, five hundred million years is so *over there*. Unlike the ten thousand year present of agrilogistics in which we currently reside, my human species was never in existence alongside any of these nonhumans (well, at least during each nonhuman's more organic moments). As such, the temporal distance between the *here and now* and the *then and there* is so stretched that geographies and times become ambiguous. Five hundred million years ago feels exactly like how it sounds—forever ago.

The geographic and temporal ambiguity helps maintain the master naturalist, a subject position that ignores her or his own relationship with agrilogistics. This disconnected then and there lets off the hook the master naturalist by affirming a world where extinction(s) happen with or without humans. Like climate change deniers that speak about cycles of cooling and heating, extinction becomes *the inevitable* outcome for all species. Although some degree of extinction is always present whether by natural causes or intergalactic catastrophe, maintaining a worldview that extinction is inevitable risks refusing to place blame where it belongs for *this current extinction*—the Holocene Extinction. For the American Museum, an institution that acknowledges the human's role in the sixth mass extinction in natural history, such a message does not gel well with the institution's role as a public pedagogue.

### *2.15 On Tour: Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs*

Separating the Halls of Vertebrate Origins and Saurischian Dinosaurs is a small gift shop through which tourists must traverse in order to pass between exhibitions. Unlike the other museums of natural history I have visited, the American Museum features more than one gift shop. In addition to a main gift shop located on the 1st floor of the institution, the American Museum sells merchandise through a number of pop-up shop style venues. Like the extinct dodo

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<sup>63</sup> Like the deep sea in the Hall of Ocean Life, deep history is hard for tourists with finite imaginations to conceptualize.

showcased at the Oxford Museum, the American Museum profits off of souvenirs boasting the image of extinct dinosaurs.<sup>64</sup> Per my usual demeanor, I scoff as I walk by these tourist objects.

I expect Ginger to pass through this gift show without stopping, but she pauses in front of a display (see fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Oviraptor on display in the gift shop. Photo by the Author.

“So from reptiles evolved dinosaurs, and dinosaurs have a feature that no other reptile has. Only dinosaurs and birds have this feature,” informs Ginger, “And it’s a hole in their hip socket.” To me, a rhetorician mingling in a paleontological space, this information seems excessive; however, this distinction clearly matters to certain populations.

“I want to point out this nest because this, uh, this is a nest—a dinosaur nest,” shrieks

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<sup>64</sup> Although I personally avoid purchasing souvenirs while touring because I do not like clutter in my house, tourist objects play an important role in deconstructing what it means to tour. As Celia Lury noted, souvenirs move from the site they were purchased to other sites well beyond the limits of a tourist destination. In doing so, souvenirs enter a second life and disperse knowledge well beyond the perimeter of any given tourist destination.

Ginger, “This happens to be an oviraptor, which means ‘egg thief.’” I squeal on the inside; being a fan of dinosaurs, especially *Jurassic Park*, I know exactly the profile of the nonhuman before me. Fossilized in rich, pink colored sand is the oviraptor. Though curators did not mount the oviraptor like the brown bears, its flattened corporeal bears a resemblance to the iconic egg thief.

“This nest was found in the twenties in Mongolia,” testifies Ginger, “It was named oviraptor because they thought it was stealing other dinosaur’s eggs.” Others around me appear giddy. What a nice change in mood from the oh-so-boring Hall of Vertebrate Origins.

Describing the flattened corporeal, Ginger tells us that this oviraptor remains preserved in the position she died. She traces the outline of the nonhuman’s skeleton, revealing that this dinosaur was likely sitting on her own egg. This means that this dinosaur was brooding when she died.

“So it got a bad rep and was called egg thief,” concludes Ginger. I take to my journal and write, “How strange is it to think that we continually mischaracterize the lives of nonhumans. Was this dinosaur an egg thief? We will never truly know. As with anything, we can only speculate. Still, it’s weird to think that our speculations about deeply historical more-than-human world is defined by failed speculations.”

Given the oviraptor appears to be brooding, a tourist asks Ginger if this dinosaur was warm blooded or cold blooded.

“We don’t know whether it was cold blooded or warm blooded,” answers Ginger. Indeed, if the oviraptor is a reptile/dinosaur, then it was cold blooded. Yet why would this oviraptor brood. Perhaps this is one of nature’s many paradoxes.

As we walk toward the T-Rex on display, Ginger stops her group in front of a massive nonhuman. “So to your left—this gigantic, plant eating sauropod is an apatosaurus,” tells Ginger,

“If you’ve ever heard of a brontosaurus, the same fossil hunter who found apatosaurus found brontosaurus.” What a small world, I think.

“These are real. 80% of all fossils on this floor are real,” confirms Ginger. I am suspect of this statement. It has been my experience that authentic fossils are kept in climate-controlled displays away from the threat of a tourist touching them. Yet I cannot do anything but trust my guide.

Ginger points toward the solid ground, “These are real footprints. They were found in Texas.” I, a southern transplant, audibly shriek. The north has not been kind to me, so any mention of home sends me into a tailspin.

Ginger walks her group toward the T-Rex (see fig. 13).



Fig. 13. T-Rex on display in the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs. Photo by the Author.

After providing introductory commentary about the dinosaur, Ginger says, “The mounts are interesting. There’s something in the footprints that you don’t see.” Ginger pauses and provides us with a moment to survey the footprints. I see nothing out of the ordinary and quickly give up.

“Many footprints or trackways have been found,” tells Ginger, “What was never found was a mark from the tail.” Indeed, no part of the rocky base of this display features an elongated crevasse matching the outline of a tail. Ginger suggests that absence points toward the fact that the T-Rex did not stand upright.

“So in all the trackways there was never a drag mark from the tail,” says Ginger, “So, uh, the paleontologist realized these guys weren’t dragging their tails. If they weren’t dragging their tails, not only do you have to mount it with the tail up, you have to change the way of the head to balance it.” In order to make her point more salient, Ginger points toward an art piece featuring a T-Rex standing with her tail dragging against the floor.

“So remember, except for that, uh, mastodon we saw, fossils aren’t found put together. They’re like gigantic jigsaw puzzles,” compares Ginger, “And there could be multiple fossils and species in one big pile of bones. Which is why sometimes we’ll have the wrong head on a dinosaur.” Such a mistake seems detrimental, but as an advocate for speculation, I cannot help but overlook the inability for paleontologist to definitively know the truth about any given dinosaur.

Acting more like a bureaucrat than a tour guide, Ginger snaps at a tourist not paying attention to her surroundings, “Could you move forward a minute and let a visitor pass?” To me, the tourist appears shocked and maybe a little embarrassed. Nonetheless, Ginger carries on with her concluding remarks.

“So that’s the end of the tour, but I hope you’ll continue along this black path to the

right,” says Ginger, “And uh you’ll go to the next dinosaur hall and then the mammal hall which is really fabulous. You’ll end up back at the elevators we took near 77th street.” About half of the remaining ten tourists immediately depart. Along with the family accompanying the little girl with Down syndrome, I stand near Ginger. It is my opinion that all tours should end with a gracious moment of thanks. Being a tour guide, I imagine, is no easy feat.

### *2.16 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

The final act of the free public tour unfolded as expected. From the opening moments of the tour, Ginger let her group know that we would encounter dinosaurs at the very end of the expedition through the American Museum. Like clockwork, we wended through more contemporary exhibitions until we found ourselves transported back in time nearly five hundred million years. Here, in the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs, we found ourselves browsing the fossilized remains of the more-than-human world destroyed during the Cretaceous-Paleogene Extinction. Ultimately, what I found was this: ***The American Museum and its tour guides are not so much in the business of making master naturalists as they are maintaining master naturalists.*** In other words, cultural hardwired understandings of human and more-than-human entanglements are predetermined by culturally situated understandings of extinctions. How museums and their tour guides negotiate and/or subvert that relationship plays out *in situ*.

The phrase *in situ* is an anthropological term meaning *on site* (Bizzell and Jarratt; Enos). In the past half century, rhetoricians have begun to take seriously *in situ* as a relevant term for our discipline, departing from “armchair examinations of texts and situations recorded from a distance” in favor of a type of ethnographic fieldwork—a being present in the communicative matrices we seek to understand (Benson 387). This *being present* involves not only the embodied experience of site research, but also interactions between principle rhetoricians and their object

of study in order to provide helpful recommendations and/or tools for collectivities. As Michael Calvin McGee suggested, “*rhetoric is what rhetoricians do*,” and so our focus ought be on the “performance of discourse rather than the archeology of discourse” (279).<sup>65</sup> This logic as allows rhetoricians to note the complex relationship between person and place, or what Jenny Edbauer referred to as rhetorical ecologies. For our purposes at hand, what the *in situ* nature of rhetoric points toward is that tourists come preloaded with ideas and how and to what effect those beliefs mix with a complex matrix of thoughts affirmed by the American Museum is quite entropic. Thus the American Museum’s best bet is to keep stable dominant beliefs under the ruse of rocking the boat.

As Ginger traversed the boundary between the Halls of Vertebrate Origins and Saurischian Dinosaurs, she immediately directed her group’s attention toward characteristics that differentiated dinosaurs from the other nonhumans on display (especially those on the 4th floor). Pointing out the “hole in their hip socket,” Ginger addressed the key distinction that allows paleontologists and other scientists to render unique dinosaurs as a specific albeit diverse classification of nonhumans. Such a rhetorical maneuver was pedagogical insofar as most tourists read all lizard-esque fossils as those of the dinosaurs. Still, the quick shift toward dinosaurs, however pedagogical, points to a more salient truth: *Tourists of museums of natural history expect to view dinosaurs.*

From my first critical vignette to this scene in question, imageries of dinosaurs have either been physically or spiritually present. When Joe snapped a photo of me alongside the *Equestrian Statue*, nearby was the wreath-holding iguanodon. Such festive décor was not without purpose; like Disney using Mickey Mouse as a symbol, the American Museum deploys

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<sup>65</sup> Though, the “or” in McGee’s claim suggests mutual exclusivity—which isn’t the case.

dinosaurs in order to generate interest and cultivate a brand. Moreover, when I entered the Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda, directly in front of my face was a recreated Barosaurus. In a room dedicated to a president made famous in the twentieth century, this nonhuman roars at Roosevelt from a distance of sixty six million years to the effect of satisfying expectations.

On that note, larger, non-touring public recognize the American Museum as a tourist destination that features dinosaurs. As evidenced by the movie poster and storyline of *Night at the Museum*, a successful film featuring Ben Stiller that takes place at the American Museum, the T-Rex plays a significant role in the institution's brand. Immediately upon entering the Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda, the American Museum satiates the desires of tourists by showcasing what they already knew from the movies: There are dinosaurs in here!

Due in part to the fact that dinosaurs are located on the 4th floor and it makes senses to begin the tour closer to the entrance, Ginger withheld the most familiar and perhaps anticipated fossils until the end of the free public tour. When Ginger referenced dinosaurs throughout her tour, she used these nonhumans to signify what was to come. Like a well-crafted speech that saves the most poignant point for last, the exhibition of dinosaurs is the grand finale of the free public tour.

How, then, does the displaying of dinosaurs maintain rather than construct master naturalists? Quite simply said, in this moment marked by catastrophic violence at the more-than-human world, humans are still obsessed with *that extinction over there*. Although humans may be clued into the reality that extinction is an ongoing event, systems of global capitalism responsible for accelerating the Holocene Extinction continue to be ignored by our species (on the whole, that is). Exhibitions like the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs, though instructive, allow



us to tour what we already know.<sup>66</sup> Yes, dinosaurs are cool. No, they are not the only species to ever go extinct. We are trapped in this mentality whereby humans associate that extinction over there with the dinosaurs rather than deal with our own, very modern extinction. If this does not maintain the profile of a master naturalist, then what does?

### *2.17 On Tour: Museum Food Court*

“I hope you liked the tour and I hope you’ll spend more time here,” says Ginger to her group as tourists thank her for her time.

After answering final questions, Ginger turns toward me. “Do you want to look for the heath hen,” asks Ginger. Earlier in the tour, I asked Ginger a question about the dodo. This question prompted her to talk about a slough of birds, one of which being a heath hen displaced to an uninhabited corner of the 4th floor.

“Come on. I’ll show you the heath hen,” prompts Ginger. We move in the direction of the museum’s stairwell, a structure also positioned in the liminal space between halls.

As we walk toward the heath hen, I reveal to Ginger my intentions for experiencing her free public tour. “So I’m actually writing my thesis about the ways tours work and, uh, you’re in it.” Of course, this short statement is not fully true, but I do not want bore her with the particularities of the pedagogy of entanglements.

I ask Ginger to explain how she procured a position as a tour guide, a volunteer position I know must be hard to secure.

“What happened is that I retired seven years ago,” tells Ginger, “I don’t know if this will sound strange to you, but it’s very hard in New York to get a volunteer job.” Given that New

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<sup>66</sup> The American Museum negotiates a unique relationship. On one hand, the institution must instruct tourists about things they do not know; this is key to pedagogy. On another hand, the institution must also meet tourist expectations in order to bring about some feeling of satisfaction—a rhetorical effect.

York is bustling with persons in poverty, individuals who are homeless, and a host of tourist destinations that rely on donations, this statement does, in fact, sound strange.

“I tried to do soup kitchens. I applied to this museum and the MET [The Metropolitan Museum of Art]. And I never heard anything,”<sup>67</sup> reveals Ginger, “And the I met a woman who works in the children’s group, and she said, uh, she said she would hand in my resume.” After working in the children’s room for some time, she eventually gained the support of her higher-ups and ultimately obtained the position as a tour guide.

I congratulate Ginger, “You’re really good at this... You’re doing the right thing. You’re talented!” She thanks me for my kind words and departs from our line of sight. We briefly survey the heath hen before making our way to the museum’s food court to grab a drink and debrief.

Located on the lower floor of the museum is a food court featuring the typical fare for the American Standard Diet: hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken fingers (see fig. 14). These foods are emblematic of the other items that comprise the menu. Being a judgmental vegan, I cannot help but take concern with the fact that tourists consume some of the nonhumans they tour.

Crowds of people filter in and out of the food court. Lines alongside multiple cash registers are ten tourists thick. I sneer as I enter this omnivore’s paradise and purchase a small soda valued at two dollars and fifty cents.

“We paid more for this drink that we did for our museum tickets,” I comment to Joe. With our overpriced small soda in hand, we locate a table devoid of company and chat about our experiences.

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<sup>67</sup> As I said in the introduction, New York City is home to a number of projects that feature a pedagogy of entanglement. The MET is one of those sites as it features the famous painting of a cow looking at a painting of a cow—a very meta pedagogy of entanglement.



Fig. 14. Serving station at the food court. Photo by the Author.

“It was a pretty good tour. It was pretty enjoyable,” assesses Joe. I agree. Compared to the dozens of tours I have experienced in the past, this one takes the cake. Perhaps my personal investment in the content amplified such sentiments, but I still truly feel as if Ginger’s performance as a tour guide sweetened the experience.

Joe agrees, “She was a really good tour guide. Really enthusiastic and involved with the tour. Seemed very professional. I couldn’t believe she wasn’t paid any money to do it.”

“What was your favorite part of the tour,” I ask Joe.

Without a moment to think, he responds, “Oh, my favorite part of the museum tour was when we learned about the chipmunks. You know, how they dug underground and slept there for all those months?”

When we toured the Hall of New York State Environment, Ginger stopped for a split second in front of a panorama featuring chipmunks.

“Chipmunks sleep through the winter. They can’t store fat like the bear,” told Ginger, “They need to wake up, have a little acorn sandwich, and go back to sleep...so I think its kinda cool to look at the nest, see some acorns, and look at their nesting material.” Nearly every one on the tour was intrigued by the fact that chipmunks burrow so far below the earth. To me, it seemed dangerous and unstable.

After we reminiscence about the chipmunks, I ask Joe, “Was there anywhere in the museum that you wanted to see that Ginger didn’t highlight.”

He takes a moment to think before saying, “She only took us to *animal* places. We didn’t go to a single one of the cultural places. Was that an *animal* tour?” Knowing that I hate the word animal, he stresses his use of it. Nonetheless, his point is correct. At no point in time did we experience any hall that showcased human interests or our artifacts.

Elsewhere in the museum are a number of halls classified under the header *human origins and cultural halls*. These include, but are not limited to, the Halls of African People, Plains Indians, and South American Peoples. Having accompanied me as I browsed through the museum during past visits, Joe posits a good question: Was that an *animal* tour?

In short, I do not think Ginger excluded humans in order to showcase the plight of nonhumans. Frankly, the American Museum has far too many objects on display than can be addressed in a single, seventy-five minute tour meant to highlight for the public a few of the exhibitions. Each of the halls we visited were within walking distance from one another, along a specific path. I express this thought to Joe, suggesting, “Perhaps Ginger had a plan to showcase humans rather than nonhumans, but it seems her path dictated the content.”

Still, the truth of the matter is that the free public tour documented nonhumans. On purpose or by chance, Ginger guided us through the museum whilst exclusively turning our attentions toward the more-than-human world. Setting aside the anthropocentrism inherent in gazing at nonhumans, I cannot help but feel a sense of fulfillment. Finally, a tour that reminds everyone that the shared universe is not all about us—the humans.

I rise from my seat to refill my soda.

### *2.18 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Like I said at the beginning of this chapter, the boundaries between the act of touring the context(s) that surround any given tour are weak and ill defined. Technically speaking, the free public tour ended with Ginger's performative utterance, "I hope you liked the tour and I hope you'll spend more time here." Yet Ginger's duties—or, more aptly said, the experience of the American Museum as a whole—did not end with those words. Some tourists quickly departed from Ginger's immediate proximity. Others mingled, asking Ginger for directions to other exhibitions. Joe and I, of course, waited for Ginger to show us one more display. Even after Ginger told us goodbye and disappeared from our lines of sight, the tour was not over. Thirsty, we intentionally journeyed to the museum's food court to refuel and debrief. There, I found the last piece of critical insight about touring the American Museum: ***The American Museum and its tour guides are not in the business of triggering globe altering transformations of human behavior.***

Whether it is ticket prices, donations, merchandise, or food, the American Museum is in the business of making money. Yes, an institution of such caliber requires funds to keep its doors open; the cost of collecting, housing, and display more than thirty million artifacts is not a task that comes for free. No, an institution of such caliber does not have to support what Barbara

Nose famously referred to as “the animal-industrial complex” (22). Slaughtering more than fifty-five billion nonhumans per year (“Livestock’s”), systems of global capitalism continue to perpetuate an understanding of nonhumans as “things” to be consumed and used (Nibert). Museums of natural history, most obviously, keep on display nonhumans as artifacts—the things of the tourist gaze. Still, what is more surprising is their blatant regard for this contemporary moment’s strand of capitalism on the more-than-human world.<sup>68</sup>

As we departed from Ginger and entered the food court, in front of us were hoards of people consuming nonhumans. Hamburger, \$7.25. Chicken Fingers, \$7.95. Hot Dog, \$3.50. These menu items, labeled via what Carol J. Adams referred to as “absent referents” (66), are directly tied to the animal-industrial complex. Although the nonhumans associated with each of these menu items are not close to extinction, the animal-industrial complex is very much bound up in systems of global capitalism that threaten the more-than-human world on a whole. Whether it be the actual eradication of nonhumans or the destruction of habitats, humans are actively and in/directly triggering the extinction of much of the more-than-human world. The American Museum, an institution that accepts donations in order to stay afloat, sells these items among others and this directly supports the Holocene Extinction.

Of course, who am I to make such claims as I sip on my soda, a creation of the same systems of global capitalism that I critique. By way of transition into my conclusion, I want to make clear that I do not so subtly call for a transition to a vegan diet because I think that individuals have the capacity to make such large-scale changes; I do not want to place blame on the individual in that way. Rather, I end this way because the American Museum—whether through artifacts, merchandise, or food—is an institution larger than the individual. As Nibert

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<sup>68</sup> The idea that capitalism is destroying the more-than-human world is heavily discussed in the works of ecofeminist writers (see, for example, Adams and Gruen; Merchant).

said, “The history of the capitalist system is one in which the lives of humans and other animals are expendable—indeed, are fodder for the acquisition of wealth” (247). Consequently, the disconnection between the museum’s role as a public pedagogue and its more clandestine role as a corporation should not be lost—especially not during a tour about extinction.

### **3. Comment Card**

This chapter offered a critical overview of the American Museum by way of a free public tour. Although the institution is consciously rhetorical insofar as its production/maintenance of master naturalists and allegiance to agrilogistics, I argued that the museum by large is consciously silent in regard to the human-induced sixth mass extinction in natural history. With the exception of the Hall of Biodiversity, an exhibition to be toured in chapter two, the institution remains silent on the ways in which human influenced systems of global capitalism come to rape the more-than-human world. Given that we are a class of people who understands that communicators select and deflect realities, we ought to heed Dana L. Cloud’s ominous advice: “Critical scholars cannot take silence as an indication of the absence of something” (201). I, as a tourist attuned to the more-than-human world, cannot ignore the conversation missing in nearly all halls at the American Museum.

In addition to offering a thick description of my participant-observations that showcased a notable absence in content regarding the human’s role in the sixth mass extinction in natural history, I also featured nine insights into how and to what effect the American Museum communicates with tourists. Taken together, these insights tell a story. Like the opening moments of a horror film, the *Equestrian Statue*, Rotunda, and Memorial Hall forebodingly foretell how tourists are to be proud and behave like Him—the greatest master naturalist of all. Tour guides then solidify the transformation into *Rooseveltian tourists-turned-master-naturalists*

by teaching patrons of the institution how to read artifacts on display. Unfortunately, this pedagogical process is imperfect; tourists may or may not know how to read all that the artifact on display has to offer, thus complicating the communicative scene. Given that any give museum of natural history claims to value the more-than-human world, these missed opportunities to talk about entangled effects like zoonotic diseases and extinction are imperative to the ongoing health and wellbeing of all life within the Earth's biosphere. To complicate matters, tour guides talk about extinction, just not the one that is currently happening and perpetuated by systems of global capitalism. These tour guides talk about the most popular mass extinction event—the one that ended the lives of the dinosaurs. Tourists, of course, are not to blame, and so tour guides fail to instill in patrons of the museum a long lasting understanding of the woes of agrilogistics.

In the next chapter, I will return to many of the same topics as already discussed herein. The Hall of Biodiversity—a seemingly resistant place within the American Museum—does foster dialogues about the sixth mass extinction in natural history. From wealth extraction to zoonotic diseases, the woes of agrilogistics are extensively covered. The exhibition, as I will detail, instructs tourists about the impacts of systems of global capitalism via what I term the pedagogy of entanglement—an instruction orientation that ethically yet not effectively places blame on the fleshy culprits that prowl about the American Museum.



## CHAPTER TWO

### From *Within* the Hall of Biodiversity

Indeed, the exhibit [Hall of Biodiversity] is inflected with good intentions and in many ways offers one of the more complex treatments of the entanglements of nature and culture in the making of environmental problems...But I think what the American Museum does through this exhibit is offer an example of governmentality, where particular kinds of science operate as truth-telling mechanisms to construct how nature is understood.

Stephanie Rutherford, *Governing the Wild*

Critical tourism may sound like an oxymoron. We don't "tour" to exercise our brains. A vacation is literally an emptying out, a voiding of daily experience and responsibility. Vacations are supposed to be fun, but then some of us get off on critical thinking. It raises questions about other people's lifestyles and about our own. At best, it shakes up belief and value systems and opens us up to reciprocity with nature and with unfamiliar cultures, even as we reinvent them for our own identities.

Lucy R. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*

### 1. Itinerary: Overview of the Chapter

In his presentation at the “Humans and Other Animals” symposium, Niles Eldredge concluded by stating:

We are basically acting, in terms of destroying the environment, just like those Cretaceous meteorites and those other kinds of models for those mass extinctions in the past have done. We've got here because we've been successful at reinventing ourselves ecologically. I only wonder if we can reinvent ourselves still more and come to a concept of enough, and stabilize our own selves, before we kill off everything on the planet. (“Cretaceous Meteor Showers”)

True to the form of an excellently crafted persuasive speech, Eldredge ended with a thought provoking remark about humanity's capacity to transform their behavior to benefit the more-than-human world. Will humans recognize their role in the sixth mass extinction? If so, will

humans respond to the violence for which they—as an overgrown species—are unfortunately at fault? These provoking questions continue to follow Eldredge, appearing his is public communication as well as *his* Hall of Biodiversity.

This chapter offers a critical exploration of how the American Museum<sup>69</sup> communicates with tourists about the sixth mass extinction in natural history. In contrast to the first chapter that showcased the rhetorical critic’s body moving through a number of the museum’s key exhibitions, this chapter hones in on one particular exhibition in the American Museum—the Hall of Biodiversity. Here, I first briefly tour the Hall of Biodiversity via the free public tour, traverse some previously unmentioned places,<sup>70</sup> and finally return on my own to explore more in depth several of the exhibition’s key exhibits and artifacts on display. These include, but are not limited to, the display titled “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species, introductory video, Resource Center (i.e., “Transformation of the Biosphere Wall” and “Solutions Wall”), Crisis Zone, and “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Taken together, these experiences form the corpus of materials from which I shall discuss the pedagogy of entanglements in the conclusion of this thesis.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Within the context of this chapter, the Hall of Biodiversity is now included within the purview of the identifier “American Museum.”

<sup>70</sup> I structure this chapter by first visiting the Hall of Biodiversity with Ginger before spending some time wandering from the 4th floor of the American Museum—the ending point for the free public tour—to the Hall of Biodiversity. Such content likely will seem excessive and beyond the purview of this chapter; however, I intentionally include this content. As will become apparent, as the day grew longer, tension emerged between Joe and I. We were both tired, and yet I forced us to remain within the walls of the American Museum. Touring is not an easy task. It often involves detours that result in stress. To that end, touring itself is a fatiguing act. Accordingly, I include such detours—the liminal space between the greater American Museum and the Hall of Biodiversity—to not only mirror the process whereby tourists wander, but also detail how critical insights can be discovered by strolling through unplanned corridors.

<sup>71</sup> I save my conceptualization of the American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement for the conclusion on purpose. Isaac West recommended that rhetorical analysis ought to function inductively rather than deductively, writing that, “Texts and lived practices rarely, if ever, fit

Having established in chapter one a foundation from which to compare and contrast how the Hall of Biodiversity discusses the sixth mass extinction in natural history, I tour these places within the American Museum in order to showcase the ways in which the Hall of Biodiversity enacts what I call the *pedagogy of entanglement*. As previously mentioned, pedagogies of entanglement are pedagogical, rhetorical, and ecological; pedagogies of entanglement instruct human audiences about their interconnectedness with the more-than-human world in hopes of persuading those same human audiences to take action against the many iterations of ecological degradation present in this contemporary moment. Whereas the exhibitions in the American Museum other than the Hall of Biodiversity, as chapter one demonstrated, do not express a pedagogy of entanglement, the Hall of Biodiversity does. As will become apparent via my critical vignettes, the American Museum through its Hall of Biodiversity seeks to instruct tourists about their role in the sixth mass extinction in natural history. The institution does so by linking together tourists with the seemingly separated more-than-human world. This is a rhetorical act, because a chance exists for audiences to be motivated to take some sort of action against humanity's inconsideration toward the more-than-human world.

Henceforth, I argue that the American Museum—an entity defined within the context of this chapter as all exhibitions, artifacts, employees, volunteers, and tourists almost exclusively within the Hall of Biodiversity—is *consciously rhetorical* in regard to the Holocene Extinction through its Hall of Biodiversity. In other words, what I mean is this: ***Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum seeks to persuade tourists that humanity is the primary culprit behind the sixth mass extinction in natural history.*** I find that the American Museum supports this message by instruction tourists about their entanglement with the more-than-human

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neatly into our theoretical binaries” (539). I see the pedagogy of entanglement as a finding—the result made clear by the rhetorical critic who spends a great deal of time excavating *in situ*.

world. By hailing tourists into a position whereby they, as humans, are responsible and interconnected with violence, the American Museum engenders an entangled audience where inconsiderate actions have grave consequences for more than just nonhumans.

## 2. From *Within* the Hall of Biodiversity

In what follows, I oscillate between moments of “On Tour” and “At Home” before offering synthesizing concluding commentary for how these exhibitions contribute to the American Museum’s consciously rhetorical position about the sixth mass extinction in natural history. Like the first chapter, the objective of this second chapter is to offer a thick description of my experiences in the American Museum, namely the Hall of Biodiversity (see fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Entrance to the Hall of Biodiversity. Photo by the Author.

Accordingly, I will draw specific details from this chapter when discussing in the conclusion the particular characteristics of the American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement.

## 2.1 On Tour: Hall of Biodiversity

“We’re gonna make one stop at a little diorama on the right,” orders Ginger as she walks toward the exit of the Hall of North American Mammals. To the right of the display of bison is a diorama featuring a distant landscape of the Golden Gate State.

“So this diorama tells a great story,” entices Ginger, “This is California ten thousand years ago.” Unlike the mounted bison and bear in nearby dioramas, it is quite apparent that these miniature nonhumans are figurines.

“I want you to see if there are any animals in here that look strange for California,” tasks Ginger, “This is California during the last Ice Age. Does anybody see any characters you wouldn’t expect to see?” Her group stands a few feet away while peering from afar at a version of California from many years past. Being the first few minutes of the free public tour, Ginger runs into trouble by trying to procure comments from an even broader range of patrons than before. No one answers.

“These animals are all extinct,” laments Ginger. Familiar with the mass extinction event at the end of the Pleistocene, a foreboding feeling overtakes me.<sup>72</sup> Why is she talking about extinction right now?

Ginger points at particular nonhumans in the diorama and says, “We have a relative of the elephant—a mammal or a mastodon. Saber tooth tigers! We have horses!” Tourists begin nodding as if to clarify to Ginger that they do in fact see familiar nonhumans.

Ginger continues, “Now, everybody knows horses were brought here, when, like, maybe

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<sup>72</sup> Foreshadowing plays a role on tour in building suspense, an affective orientation that creates a desire and willingness to learn about what comes next. Oddly, very little foreshadowing occurred during this tour. If anything, the notion of extinction, as I noted in chapter one, is tied to the end of the dinosaurs. Accordingly, this example of Ginger talking about extinction likely triggered a thought about dinosaurs in other populations than me.

the sixteen hundreds? By Europeans?” Again, tourists nod in agreement as Ginger, like a magician revealing the product of their illusion, exclaims, “Ah! Horses were here ten thousand years ago!”

Hearing no *oohs* and *ahhs* from her group, Ginger recovers, “But what are the saber tooth tigers feasting on? A camel!” I squint and see in the distance a herd of camels. Given the modern association between camels and the Middle East, their inhabitation of California is a surprising sight!

“So a couple of weird things,” prefaces Ginger, “Camels evolved in North America. So they were first found in North America. So how do we know that? How do we know that this is what California looked like ten thousand years ago? Well, we have the fossil evidence. So we have the fossil evidence of camels...we have the fossils for every single one of these today on the 4th floor...You’re going to see every single one of these real fossils on the 4th floor.”<sup>73</sup>

As Ginger delivers this rapid-fire monologue, she begins walking out the Hall of North American Mammals and into the Memorial Hall. We make a beeline for my favorite exhibition in the entire American Museum: the Hall of Biodiversity.

Earlier in the day, I browsed the website hosted by the American Museum, specifically taking note of the landing page for the Hall of Biodiversity. “The Hall of Biodiversity presents a vivid portrait of the beauty and abundance of life on Earth, highlighting biodiversity and the factors that threaten it,” markets the institution (“Hall of Biodiversity”). Indeed, as this chapter will attest, it does. However, for me, I believe this objective should be explored throughout the entire museum. Yet I know the corporate powers in charge would not take so kindly to an all out

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<sup>73</sup> Two concerning rhetorical maneuvers appear here. First, Ginger puts forth an understanding that scientific processes reveal truth. Secondly, Ginger plays on the popularly held belief by tourists that *sight authorizes truth*.

war on global capitalism (even if it is systems of global capitalism that are waging war on the more-than-human world).

“We’re in the Hall of Biodiversity,” announces Ginger. In the dark exhibition, I immediately notice the brightest display in the hall, the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” The massive “Spectrum of Life Wall” is a graphic chart that displays more than one thousand of the museum’s collected nonhuman specimens. Themed as a cladogram, which is a scientific diagram illustrating relationships between/among various organisms, the sheer magnitude of this display overwhelms me as it forces me to learn about human and nonhuman entanglements through its visual rhetoric.

Ginger, however, does not park us in front of the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Instead, we pause before a less noticeable display that features a gaggle of seemingly unrelated nonhumans. Billed as “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species,” this floor to ceiling display showcases more than a dozen nearly extinct nonhumans alongside a lengthy didactic that reads:

Today, more species are declining and facing imminent extinction than at any time since the most recent great mass extinction took place 65 million years ago. In an effort to address this crisis, the U.S. Congress in 1973 passed the Endangered Species Act (ESA), giving protection to species it classified as either threatened or endangered. An ENDANGERED SPECIES is considered to be at the brink of extinction within the foreseeable future throughout most or all of its habitat range. A THREATENED SPECIES is one that is likely to become endangered in the near future. The ESA’s lists of species are in addition to the Red List of Threatened Species, which has been compiled by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature since the 1960s. The animals shown here

are a tiny fraction of the plants and animals known to be endangered. If action is not taken to preserve and protect these species and the places where they live, they will eventually become extinct, like the dodo.

Indeed, encased in the display is a complete casting of the dodo (see fig. 16). “Unlike the other dodos, this one is complete,” I write in my journal, “I like how the museum did not texture her body with skin and feathers. But remember, she’s clearly fake.” The “other dodos” being fossils of the bird housed at museums of natural history in Demark and England.



Fig. 16. “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species.” Photo by the Author.



“So I wanted to stop here, uh, because I mentioned that everything on display is here for a reason,” Ginger teases, “Everything in this case is endangered. One exception: The dodo bird is extinct.” Ethically performing her duties as a public pedagogue, Ginger uses this fact to communicate about the significance of biodiversity loss in this contemporary moment. As she lectures, I notice a series of stickers on the floor that direct tourists to the museum’s food court—an establishment that plates, for a price, a host of foods derived from the butchered carcasses of nonhumans.

As we exit the Hall of Biodiversity, I ask Ginger, “So, at other natural history museums, they have the dodo off to the side by itself. Do you know why they chose to encase her in with other endangered [nonhumans] even though she’s the only extinct one?”

Ginger responds, “You know, that’s a good question. I don’t know if they have a good place for her.”<sup>74</sup>

That answer seems reasonable. I further degrade the dodo’s worth by referencing her inauthenticity. “She’s also a casting, so...”

Ginger interrupts me, “Half is real!”

I let out a gasp. “Half is real? Ahh! I’ve been saying she’s a casting,” I reveal.<sup>75</sup>

Instead of chastising me for assuming the museum was trying to dupe me, Ginger affirms my feelings. “I’m shocked,” she says, “because I think there’s only three real ones in the world.” I think to myself: It is always humbling to stand in front of the flightless bird of Mauritius.

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<sup>74</sup> Established tourist destinations typically run into this problem. Available space is usually a concern for any given tourist destination, a constraint only amplified by the fact that Manhattan is packed like a sardine can.

<sup>75</sup> This brief interaction attests to how authenticity matters to tourists. I was quick to act as if this dodo bird was somehow less “cool” than other dodo birds on display merely because I thought she was inauthentic. However, when Ginger defied my expectations, I reacted positively and my appreciation of the American Museum increased.

## 2.2 *At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Although a few rhetoricians have tended to the history and/or significance of nonhumans to practices of human persuasion (see, for example, Davis, “Autozoography”; Davis, “Creaturely Rhetoric”; Hawhee, “Kenneth Burke’s Jungle Book”; Hawhee, “Toward a Bestial Rhetoric”; Kennedy; Muckelbauer; Plec; Seegert, “Play of Sniffication”),<sup>76</sup> I—an advocate for anti-anthropocentric ways of knowing and being—remain unconfident of my capacity ethically to speak of/for the more-than-human world. On one hand, to talk about nonhumans is to risk practices of “anthropocentric ventriloquism”—of putting words in the nonhuman Other’s mouth (Trachsel 34). On the other hand, to ignore the role and significance of nonhumans to human communication is to discriminatorily ignore yet another population. Of what I am confident, however, is that nonhumans—in their visual form—are focal points of significant conversations, and so: ***Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum relies upon the taxidermied bodies of nonhumans as rhetorical devices to teach and engender conversations about the sixth mass extinction in natural history.***

More than a decade ago, Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher developed a unique visual rhetorical theory they called the cipher: “[I]t makes sense to think of the cipher as a blank slate, an empty container, an unwritten text, or an unornamented or unadorned figure—in short, perhaps, a free-floating signifier that is then ultimately filled with various meaning” (24). For Ono and Buescher, a text did not have to be a written or verbal artifact. A text could be a visual image. Accordingly, Ono and Buescher examined how Pocahontas—namely Disney’s racist iteration of her—could be filled with competing interpretations about Native Americans.

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<sup>76</sup> With the exception of Seegert’s study on Bruno the Bear, I have yet to see a rhetorical analysis about one specific nonhuman (“Queer Beasts”). For the benefits of creating rhetorical histories of nonhumans, see Paul Waldau.

“Recognizing the cipher as a component of contemporary capitalism challenges us to rethink not only our relationships to products, images, and representations, but to the current role of images themselves,” found Ono and Buescher, “Rethinking these relationships allows us to see how images relate to products and how over attention to products distracts attentions from the processes that those products draw on to create social meaning” (38). In short, questions of *how* are just as important as questions of *to what effect* when analyzing a visual artifact—an image, object, or otherwise.

Advancing this theory of the cipher more than a decade later, Natasha Seegert argued that the corporeal of nonhumans can be physically and symbolically reproduced in such a way that human communicators can then fill these more-than-human ciphers with competing understandings about various topics (“Queer Beasts”). For Seegert, nonhumans function as visual texts to be discussed by humans and filled with their beliefs about the more-than-human world. Accordingly, Seegert demonstrated how Bruno, a bear murdered for his unruly behavior, became a cipher for humans to discuss their issues with nonhumans that cross national borders and bother farmers.<sup>77</sup> As such, I extend this logic with no addendum, for more-than-human ciphers do indeed “come to represent our human-centered projections and desires,” especially at the nexus of life and death—existence and extinction (Seegert, “Queer Beasts” 80).

Broadly speaking, the American Museum on the whole fills a host of nonhumans with information about extinction. Take, for example, several nonhumans I discussed in chapter one. From dinosaurs like the T-Rex to more recent nonhumans like the mastodon, the American Museum speaks about extinction through nonhumans. As my first critical vignette of chapter two

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<sup>77</sup> To that end, nonhumans—as sentient beings—have the capacity to kick back, per se, at these same human audiences. Just as audiences filled Bruno with their opinions about the more-than-human world, Bruno moved through this so-called human world and disrupted the logics of what is permissible behavior.

reveals, the practice of utilizing nonhumans as ciphers is not contained to just the 4th floor; the extinct camels and saber toothed tigers of California index a few more of the many nonhumans that prowl about the American Museum and teach and engender conversations about extinction.

What differentiates the nonhumans on display beyond the doors of the Hall of Biodiversity from the ones within is that the ones that are within are ciphers filled with a politically charged message about a particular extinction—the sixth mass extinction in natural history in which tourists, as humans, are to blame.<sup>78</sup> One only has to look no further than the didactic aside the wall of “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species” to recognize how the American Museum fills the material remains of extinct nonhumans with a consciously rhetorical message about the Holocene Extinction. As the didactic reads, “The animals shown here are a tiny fraction of the plants and animals known to be endangered. If action is not taken to preserve and protect these species and the places where they live, they will eventually become extinct, like the dodo.” Indeed, these extinct and endangered nonhumans become a “taxidermied vessel” filled with an interpretation about the woes of agrilogistics (Seegert, “Queer Beasts” 76).

On that note, the deployment of the dodo bird’s dumpy corporeal is most certainly not coincidental. The dodo is a species representative of the first time that we, humans, realized our potential to eradicate nonhumans from existence (Strickland and Melville). Just as it would make little to no sense to talk about the Cretaceous-Paleocene Extinction without referencing dinosaurs, it would be a missed opportunity to hold in reserve the dodo bird. To that end, a number of other museums of natural history display castings or authentic remains of the dodo. These include, but are not limited to, the Zoological Museum in Denmark, Copenhagen; the

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<sup>78</sup> In other words, although all nonhumans are ciphers, not all ciphers are filled with human interpretations about extinction. The Hall of Biodiversity, a place about extinction, is an apt realm for nonhumans to act as ciphers for such a topic. Context, therefore, is key to the utility of the cipher.

Oxford Museum of Natural History in Oxford, England; and the British Museum of Natural History in London, England. Elsewhere, I visit those museums and offer an experiential rhetorical analysis of how and to what effect competing institutions deploy the dodo bird (Dionne).

In short, the visual use of nonhumans in a discussion about the sixth mass extinction in natural history is thematically relevant to topics about biodiversity loss, and so it does not come as a surprise that the American Museum—an institution, as Ginger noted, *known* for developing famous tactics of mounting—displays nonhumans. Rather than just evoking nonhumans in name, the institution puts on display nonhumans as ciphers, thus allowing a dialogue between institution and tourists about the Holocene Extinction. These bodies, perhaps conceived as absent of life,<sup>79</sup> are very much still engaged in ongoing practices of communication with and amongst nonhumans. If we listen, they tell us about the grave consequences of agrilogistics.

### 2.3 On Tour: *Stairwell*<sup>80</sup>

As I stand next to the tyrannosaurus on display in the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs, I cannot help but wonder how Ginger would respond to the question, “Are you trying to persuade tourists of anything?” If I were to ask, maybe she would respond, “I want tourists to learn something about the American Museum and its many artifacts on display.” That likely answer

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<sup>79</sup> Regarding fossils, Lynne Huffer argued that the leftover fragments of nonhumans are not “the trace of life” but rather “the mark of absence and death: as nature’s archive, the fossil record is an archive of extinction” (125). Indeed, I share this association between skull and death not to inscribe an anti-ecological binary understanding of life/death, but rather to note that for me, to be present in front of these nonhumans was to accept the materiality of death: species lost to extinction that experienced much suffering in their final days.

<sup>80</sup> Once again, this section further documents my experiences *beyond* the Hall of Biodiversity. Though this section compromises the theme of this chapter as related to the Hall of Biodiversity, I include it because it more accurately details how I moved through the American Museum. Moreover, it further reflects my finding in the first chapter that the American Museum—here briefly defined as everything sans the Hall of Biodiversity—is consciously silent in regard to the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

would be typical for a tour guide, the employee responsible for offering instruction about the institution. Perhaps she might comment, “As an ecologically-conscious former investment banker, I have strategically invaded the American Museum in hopes of gaining rank and positioning myself to better teach tourists about their role in the sixth mass extinction in natural history.” That unlikely answer would probably send my body physically hurling toward a different dimension—forever in the betwixt and between of radical ecological logics.

“I hope you liked the tour and *I hope you’ll spend more time here*,” says Ginger to her group as tourists thank her for her time. Throughout the tour, namely in the first three exhibitions, Ginger nodded toward her desire for us to spend more time in the American Museum. As we walked past but not through various halls, she would comment on their purpose and encourage us to visit them after the end of the free public tour. On her part, such comments seem hospitable; what tour guide would encourage tourists to leave the museum of natural history immediately after their journey through its exhibitions? Still, the call to be present in the museum echoes as it bounces off the various artifacts on display.

Telling other tourists goodbye, Ginger leads Joe and me off the beaten path to a display in the liminal space between exhibitions. Here, in front of the heath hen, we exchange parting words before Ginger descends down the stairs—her out of our sight and us out of her mind. For just a few moments, we remain in this spot and study the heath hen. Like the dodo bird, the heath hen is extinct. Unlike the dodo bird, this was a great American extinction, for the heath hen called home the east coast. Somewhat disinterested,<sup>81</sup> I quickly part ways with the heath hen.

Descending down the stairs, Joe asks, “What time are our tickets for *Fun Home*?”

Because I, like any good partner, can read between the lines of this question, I irritably

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<sup>81</sup> Unlike the dodo bird, the heath hen does not carry the same symbolic capital.

remark, “We’re not leaving this museum until we walk through the exhibitions once more and talk about our experiences!”<sup>82</sup> What Joe does not know that I know is that he wants to leave the American Museum and visit the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art. Despite having dedicated the last two years to museums, I am not a fan of museums; there are too many tourists rubbing up against each other looking at what I feel is clutter. Still, I make a mental note to leave in enough time to make this visit worthwhile to him.

“Let’s make our way toward the Hall of Biodiversity and then get a drink,” I tell Joe. We meander down the stairwell making sure to stop on each floor and make note of the exhibitions in route to the Hall of Biodiversity.

Adjacent to the stairwell on the 3rd floor of the American Museum is an exhibition that academics—well, at least fans of Donna Haraway—know well: the Hall of Primates. I peer inside only briefly and, by chance, lock eyes the skeletal remains of a human on display next to other primates (see fig. 17).



Fig. 17. Hall of Primates. Photo by the Author.

<sup>82</sup> It was around this time that tensions started to manifest. Rather than our typical sarcastic bickering, comments grew more aggressive, which signified our fatigue.

At first, I laugh thinking about how such a display resists creationist discourses. Yet I find myself most enthused by the potential that this human skeleton might be authentic. For the sake of fairness in the most ironic sense, I sure hope that is the case!

We descend to the 2nd floor of the American Museum and see two adjacent exhibitions. On my left-hand side is the Gardner D. Stout Hall of Asian Peoples, the largest cultural hall in the museum. On my right-hand side is the Hall of the Birds of the World. Keeping in theme with the *nonhumanness* of the tour, I quickly browse the latter exhibition.

Much like the Hall of North American Mammals, this exhibition exclusively features dioramas. Encased around me are what appear to be twelve different dioramas, each of which displays their own different nonhuman and habitat.<sup>83</sup> Tourists crowd around one particular display that showcases king penguins (see fig. 18).



Fig. 18. “King Penguins” on display in the Hall of the Birds of the World. Photo by the Author.

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<sup>83</sup> Because the Hall of Biodiversity does not feature dioramas, it is important to understand why this is important to entanglements. As Anne Friedberg argued, “Both the panorama and its successor, the diorama, offered new forms of virtual mobility to its viewers. But a paradox here must be emphasized: as the ‘mobility’ of the gaze became more ‘virtual’—as techniques were developed to paint (and then to photograph) realistic images, as mobility was implied by changes in lighting (and then cinematography)—the observer became more immobile, passive, ready to receive the constructions of a virtual reality placed in front of his or her unmoving body” (28). Indeed, my experiences in the Halls of Primates and Birds were much more passive than in the Hall of Biodiversity.



Huddled next to a glacial lake more than a dozen yellow, orange, black, and white penguins staring up at the sky. At what they are looking is unknown. Tourists use words and phrases like “cute” and “I want to own one” to express their feelings about looking at this display.<sup>84</sup> I scoff and return to the stairwell.

Now on the 1st floor of the American Museum, I know I am nearby the exhibition that outwardly speaks about biodiversity loss. Because I want to enter the Hall of Biodiversity through the entrance connected to the Memorial Hall, I rush through the Grand Gallery, the Hall of Northwest Coastal Indians, and the main gift shop for the entire museum. I only pause to take a photo with a dinosaur origami Christmas tree. If there is one thing the American Museum does well, it is festive dinosaur decorations!

As we reenter the Memorial Hall, Joe says, “Look over there. There’s another tour about to start.” Indeed, at the entrance of the Hall of North American Mammals is a tour guide talking to a group of fifteen or so tourists. No longer part of the free public tour, I pay no attention to what the tour guide says. Nonetheless, it is still pretty odd to think that the American Museum is cycling in and out tourists all day long. I wonder if that tour guide will be as good as ginger.

At the doors of the Hall of Biodiversity, I stand with Joe. “I hope this is the last time I ever tour this exhibition,” I comment.

#### *2.4 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

If the American Museum were the solar system, then the Hall of Biodiversity would be the powerful solar center around which my experience at the institution revolved. Coupled with Ginger’s encouragement to explore the museum on our own, the Hall of Biodiversity draws me down the stairwell of the American Museum and begs for my attention. As I walked down this

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<sup>84</sup> Here ownership of nonhumans becomes celebrated by tourists—rhetorical content which signifies in textual form the standpoint of mastery.

stairwell, I looked at various exhibitions—this time without a tour guide. Many of my findings in chapter one were present in the few halls into which I stepped foot. Yet there is one I (intentionally) forgot to mention. *Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum offers a radically different type of aesthetic and informational experience that has traditionally be practiced in the museum on a whole.* Because I have thus far only graced the surface of the Hall of Biodiversity, the validity of this claim will strengthen and unfold throughout the rest of this chapter.

Exhibitions like the Halls of Primates and Birds of the World offer the most traditional forms of showing and telling about the more-than-human world. Nonhumans are collected, mounted, and put on display in cases often sealed shut by glass. Accompanying these artifacts on display are a series of didactics offering contextual information about each nonhuman.<sup>85</sup> As all of the exhibitions in chapter one revealed, this is the typical method of display utilized by the American Museum. This mode of showing and telling is vacuous in terms of demonstrating a political slant about extinction,<sup>86</sup> leaving tourists like myself feeling as if the American Museum wants to remain scientifically objective about more-than-human concerns.<sup>87</sup>

Still, other modes of showing and telling do exist. “The edutainment at the AMNH [American Museum of Natural History],” writes philosopher Stephen T. Asma, “has grown more

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<sup>85</sup> Of the four museums of natural history that I have visited, this strategy of display remains consistent as sites beyond the American Museum. Indeed, as the various chapters of the edited collection *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* revealed, curators of museums of natural history often mount the remains of formerly living nonhumans next to didactics that fail to conceptualize this particular nonhuman’s history, instead framing a particular nonhuman as a stand in for her species (see Alberti).

<sup>86</sup> Indeed, tourists learn nothing about how humans are harming the more-than-human world inhabited by various species of primate and bird. As Elizabeth Kolbert made clear, no nonhuman is safe from the woes of agrilogistics.

<sup>87</sup> Of course, few institutions beyond academia outwardly put forth arguments that reveal the social construction of reality.

sophisticated. And the science at these institutions vital and important. But politics and ideology are always looming in the wings, trying to get on stage and influence the rhetoric of display” (162-163). As I will detail in this chapter, while traditional methods of showing and telling can also be found in the Hall of Biodiversity, such an exhibition also relies upon other forms of technology from video footage to interactive games (Think: the American Museum does Walt Disney World). Each of these modes of showing and telling are politically charged and rhetorically rendered to instruct tourists about a contested topic<sup>88</sup>—the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

What is perhaps the most jarring difference between the Hall of Biodiversity and exhibitions like the Halls of Primates and Birds of the World is the absence of dioramas. At no point in time during this chapter will I showcase a diorama—an aesthetic rendered display portraying a nonhuman at a particular place and time.<sup>89</sup> Instead, the Hall of Biodiversity displays nonhumans in a forever present here and now. For all intensive purposes, this here and now is a constantly changing present (i.e., the precise moment in which a particular tourists inhabits the Hall of Biodiversity). For an institution known internationally for its dioramas, this change matters.

As I maneuvered down the stairs—the threshold between the free public tour and my own personal adventures in the Hall of Biodiversity—what I noticed were big halls with display cases

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<sup>88</sup> I only say that extinction is a contested topic given its connection with climate change. Deniers of global warming are quick to argue that humans are not contributing to climate change, but rather than heating and cooling is a cycle.

<sup>89</sup> As I noted in the introduction, Haraway critiqued diorama: Through interaction with this exhibit, tourists were no longer “transfixed” spectators separated by a “glass front of [a] diorama that [forbade] the body’s entry,” as Haraway once critically remarked of the American Museum’s other exhibitions (31), but rather tourists were “made part of the exhibit in order to instill in them an awareness of *their* place within biodiversity,” as Torin Monhan suggested in his appraisal of the Hall of Biodiversity (42).

forming the perimeter of each exhibition. Like platelets in the blood stream, tourists enter each exhibition and avoid getting caught on the outer edges of the hall. Conversely, the Hall of Biodiversity is not a hollow exhibition (see fig. 19).

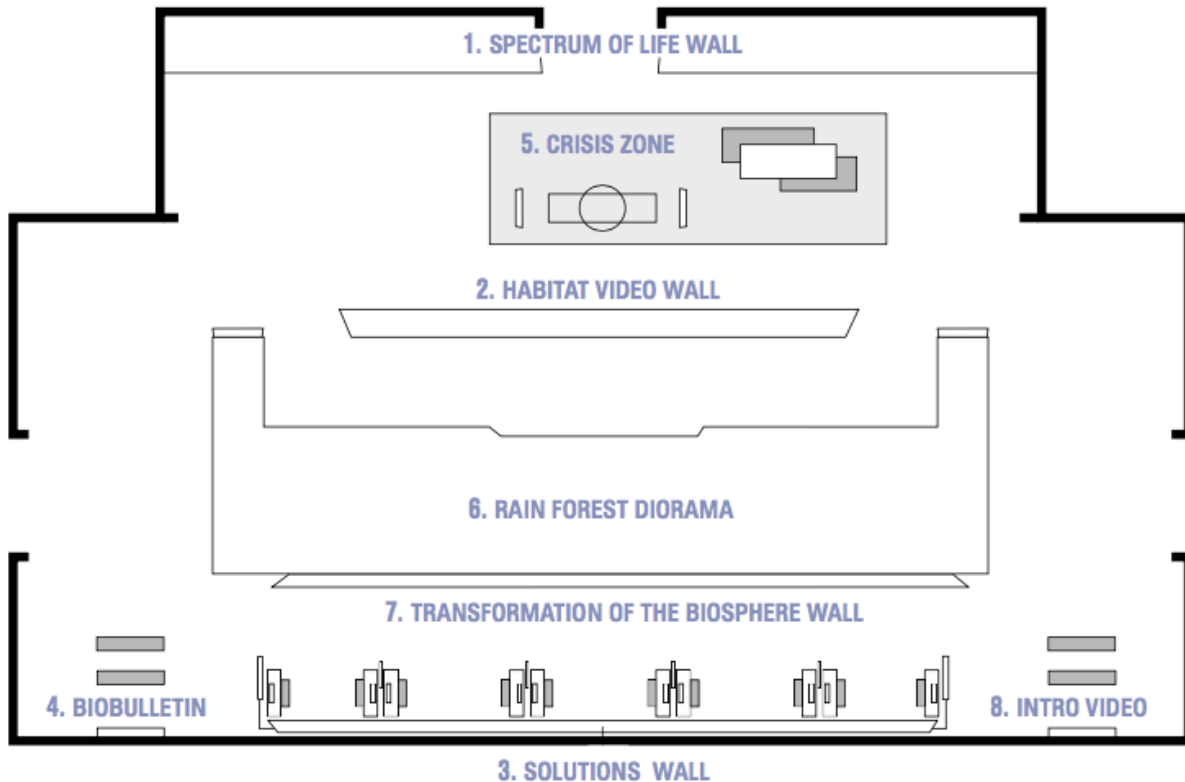


Fig. 19. Map of the Hall of Biodiversity. Screenshot by the Author.

As this map indicates, when tourists enter the Hall of Biodiversity, their bodies are directed toward a number of displays, each with its own message. Having walked through the crowded Hall of Biodiversity on a number of occasions, I know how tricky it is to avoid running into artifacts on display. At the very least, tourists must actively twist and turn their bodies through the exhibition in order to reach much more roomier halls.

Although tourists have a choice in how they will move through the Hall of Biodiversity,<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> In other words, tourists neither have to enter through a single door nor must they visit the displays in a particular order.

the American Museum still restricts their choices and forces them to move through the space and about the objects in a pattern that can only be described as directed. Of the Draper Museum, Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott made clear that institutions have the capacity to force tourists to move through spaces in a particular manner. “It is this extraordinarily careful orchestration of movement through the museum that most thoroughly privileges space over time and that most carefully sutures the subject into a preferred spectral relation to nature,” argued Aoki, Dickinson, and Ott of the Draper Museum (246). In the case of the Draper Museum, tourists are directed from high elevation to low elevation, and, along the way, are falsely taught of the unchanging essence of the more-than-human world. In the case of the American Museum, tourists move through the Hall of Biodiversity from the exterior, consciously silent exhibitions into a rhetorical exhibition about the sixth mass extinction. No longer are tourists gazing at dioramas from a distance; tourists are quite literally interconnected and in the mix of the Holocene Extinction. This strategy of directed movement—from a position of distance to a close up position—marks a critical departure for how exhibitions work in the American Museum.

In short, I include these remarks to acknowledge difference.<sup>91</sup> What I experienced in the exhibitions supporting the free public tour is not what I will experience in the Hall of Biodiversity. In a Derridian fashion, the American Museum, an institution tasked with responding to the plight of the more-than-human world, silently acknowledges the importance of this difference by completely overhauling its typical methods of display in favor of alternate, technologically driven approaches that place tourists at the center of action—forever *in media res*.

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<sup>91</sup> In a very Derridian way, however, the power of the Hall of Biodiversity as an issues room might depend on the other consciously silent exhibitions. If the entire American Museum talked about extinction, then such a topic would be commonplace within the institution and thus radically alter the context of the site.

## 2.5 *On Tour: Introductory Video*

Boredom overtakes Joe as I struggle to figure out how to capture photos of the various displays in the dimly lit Hall of Biodiversity. Being perhaps the darkest exhibition in the entire American Museum (sans the planetarium, of course), this hall, less than two decades in age, troubles what it means to sightsee. To take photos without a flash would be a fruitless pursuit—the darkness overwhelms. Yet to take photos with a flash would be to tick off tourists—the precise demographic who needs to pay attention to the vicious wrath of the Anthropocene.

Unlike other exhibitions in the American Museum, the Hall of Biodiversity features a number of themed areas, each with a particular message about the human's unique contribution to the sixth mass extinction in natural history. Some of these staged arenas include the “Transformation of the Biosphere Wall,” “Solutions Wall,” “Rainforest Wall,” “Crisis Zone,” and the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Knowing this exhibition publicizes an issue, I know I must move methodically and with purpose through this hall.

I begin by turning my attention toward an introductory video meant to provide tourists with a critical overview of the human's role in the Holocene Extinction. In front of a medium-sized screen embedded into the wall are rows of stone benches. I take a seat, remove my iPhone from my pocket, and wait for the ongoing video to cycle back to the beginning. I record what follows:<sup>92</sup>

This is the living world...

...beautiful...

...colorful...

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<sup>92</sup> The introductory video unfolds line by line. In order to recreate authentically the way in which the American Museum revealed each line of text to me, I too chronicle the text of the video line by line.

...abundant...

...biologically diverse.

Biodiversity,

the rich spectrum of life,

ranges from the smallest bacteria

to the giant redwoods.

From crawling millipedes

to eagles soaring overhead.

And it includes us

and our closest living relatives—

chimps,

gorillas,

and orangutans.

Life is everywhere on the planet.

It clings to the highest

mountain tops

and lurks deep in the ocean.

But life is everywhere

under threat.

LIFE IN THE BALANCE

NARRATED BY TOM BROKAW<sup>93</sup> (see fig. 20)

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<sup>93</sup> Capitalization represents the title screen.

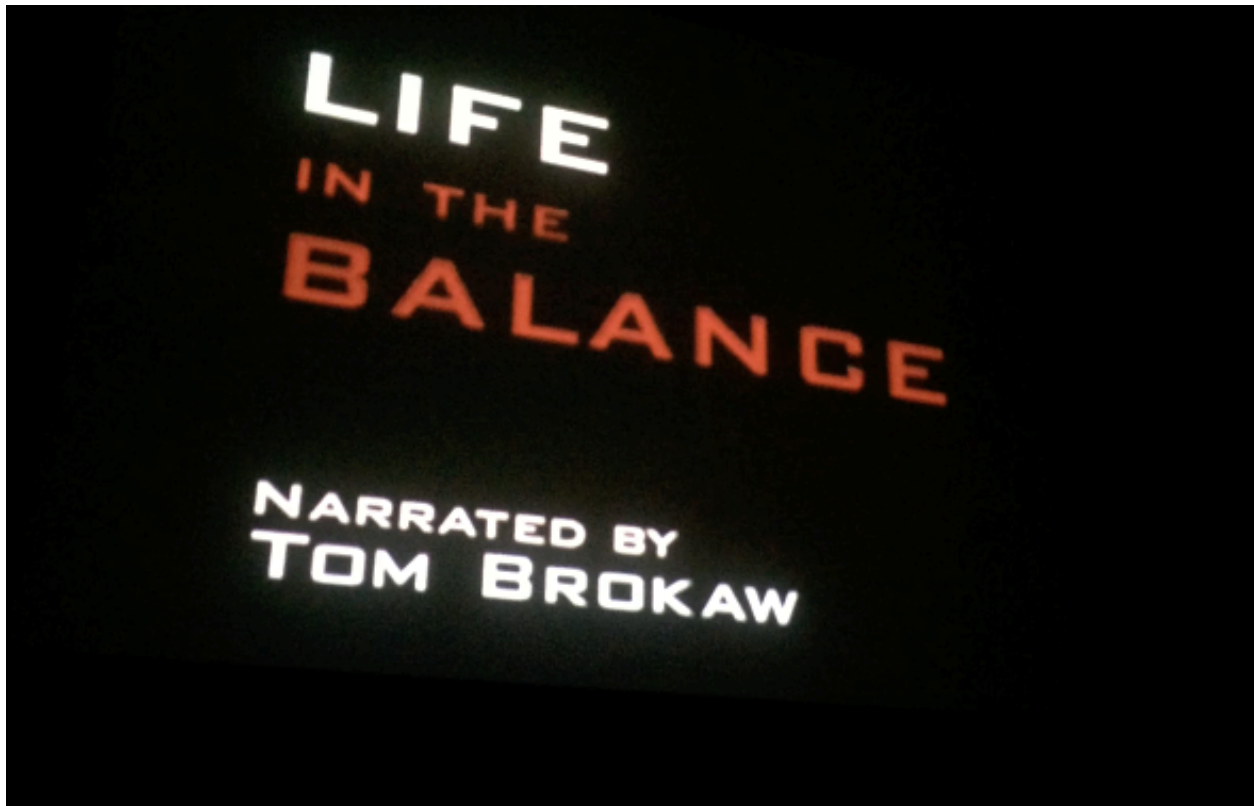


Fig. 20. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot by the Author.

There are at least 10 million  
unique forms of life  
on Earth today...

...possibly many more.

Each species is a player  
in the great cycles of life.  
that keeps all the world's  
ecosystems in balance.

Green plants trap  
the sun's energy,  
converting it to sugars.



These sugars supply the energy  
required by almost every other  
form of life.

When animals consume the plants  
—with their sugars—  
it's like eating solar energy.

And this energy is passed along  
when the plant-eating animals  
are eaten by other animals.

Eventually, all are destined to die (see fig. 21).



Fig. 21. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot the by Author.

Then other forms of life  
—bacteria and fungi—  
break down the dead tissues,

releasing their nutrients  
back to the soil,  
to be used again by succeeding  
generations of life.

The Earth has many different  
types of ecosystems,  
from the frozen polar ice caps  
supporting just a few hundred  
species across vast expanses,  
to the steamy equatorial forests  
where thousands of different  
plants and animals thrive (see fig. 22).



Fig. 22. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot the by Author.

in every acre.

We depend on the great  
abundance and variety of life  
we find in all the Earth's  
ecosystems.

Each day, around the world,  
people are using over 40,000  
different species...

...for food...

...for clothing...

...for shelter.

All of our major food crops—

corn,

wheat,

rice,

potatoes,

tomatoes—

were originally domesticated  
from wild species.

And we continue to rely on  
the wild relatives of many crops  
to strengthen our domestic  
varieties—

to improve yields,  
or to increase disease resistance.

Traditional cultures  
have always relied  
on the chemical compounds  
made by wild animals and plants  
to heal the sick.

Modern medicine as well  
has found most of its remedies  
in the living world.

Aspirin was first extracted  
from the bark of willow trees.

Penicillin was found in a mold.

And new drugs are being  
discovered in the wild all the time (see fig. 23)

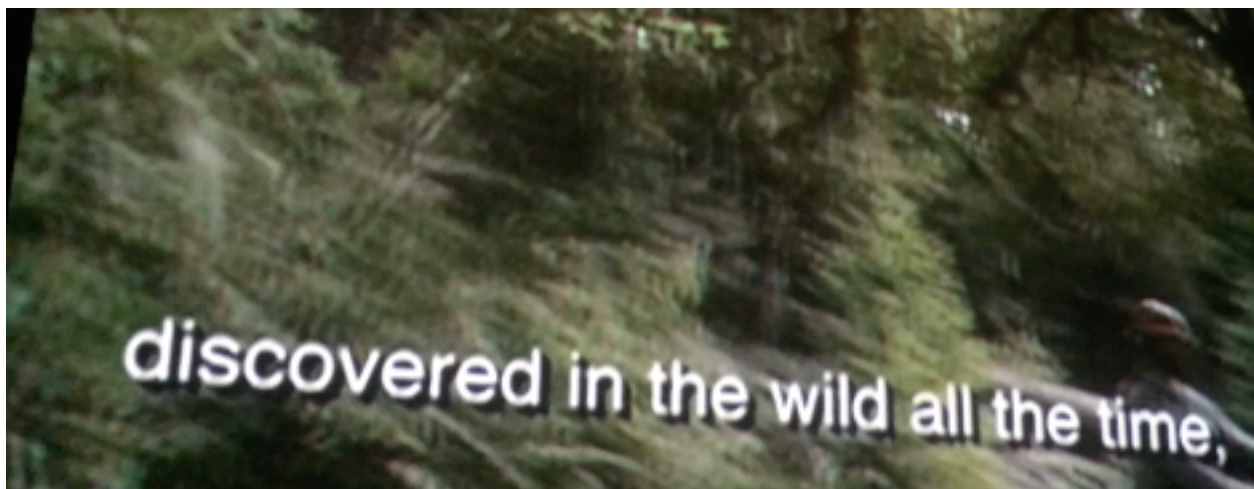


Fig. 23. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot by the Author.

like the cancer-fighting taxol

found in the bark

of the Pacific yew.

We benefit not only from

individual species,

but also from the healthy

functioning of entire ecosystems.

Wetlands purify water

and nourish marine life.

Forests anchor soil

and purify the air,

soaking up carbon dioxide

and giving off oxygen—

and helping to regulate

the global climate.

And though we don't always feel

closely connected to the Earth's

living ecosystems,

we sometimes retreat

to wild places—

to restore ourselves,

to be filled with awe

at the beauty and intricacy

of the living world.

But now, the living world

is in crisis.

Habitat loss,

pollution,

over-consumption—(see fig. 24).



Fig. 24. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot by the Author.

just the sheer expansion of  
human population and activities  
has brought on a massive  
extinction of many unique  
forms of life.  
We have transformed the very  
face of the planet—

to make fields for our crops,  
to build our roads and our cities.

We over-harvest the world's  
forests.

We over-harvest the world's  
seas and freshwaters.

We pollute the air,  
waters, (see fig. 25)



Fig. 25. Snapshot of the Introductory Video. Screenshot by the Author.

and soils.

Right now, around the world,  
a hundred species of plants  
and animals become extinct

each day.

That means about 30,000 unique,  
Irreplaceable kinds of organisms  
vanishing from the earth  
each year,  
forever.

But there is hope that we can  
still save much of what is left.

We have the ability to understand  
the crisis facing life on earth—  
and to decide what to do about it.

The solutions are clear:

Stabilize population growth.

Reduce consumption and waste.

Develop clean technologies.

Set limits on fishing

and clearing of forests.

If together we recognize the full  
value of the Earth's resources,  
then together we can replace,  
replant,

and conserve.

Our welfare...



...and the welfare  
of all other life on the planet  
are one and the same.

THE FUTURE OF LIFE  
IS IN OUR HANDS.<sup>94</sup>

I rise from the hard concrete seat and make note that that introductory video was only six minutes long. Although it does little to tell me—a tourist—how I personally can remedy the woes of agrilogistics, I appreciate the introductory glance into how humans are contributing to the sixth mass extinction in natural history.<sup>95</sup>

#### *2.6 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Though I was born in the 1990s during a time when *Bill Nye the Science Guy* played on PBS, my memories of this television series are situated against the backdrop of post-hurricane refurbished classrooms of Southeast Texas in the 2000s. Still, the dated aesthetic of *Bill Nye* rings true regardless of decade. As I listened to Tom Brokaw tell me about the woes of agrilogistics triggering the sixth mass extinction in natural history, I could not help but feel as if I was watching a much more serious version of a 1990s PBS series. This sense of temporal misconfiguration, most importantly, speaks to a key characteristic of the Hall of Biodiversity.

***Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum takes a consciously rhetorical rather than silent stance about the sixth mass extinction in natural history.***<sup>96</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>94</sup> Capitalization denotes the final frame.

<sup>95</sup> The elements in this introductory video are in and of themselves the ingredients of the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement. Quite literally, the goal of this video is to teach tourists about their interconnectedness with the more-than-human world in hopes of spurring them to act against biodiversity loss.

<sup>96</sup> This claim, of course, is the main thesis of this chapter. I include it as its own standalone piece of critical insight because each exhibit in the Hall of Biodiversity, though containing its own

American Museum neither leaves the topic of the Holocene Extinction unmentioned nor places the burden on the tourist to acquire such knowledge.<sup>97</sup> As a pedagogical venture, the Hall of Biodiversity seeks to transfer knowledge about a topic into the minds of tourists.

Like our tour guide, the Hall of Biodiversity purchased stock in the practice of creating a literacy for how to read artifacts on display. Rather than stationing a tour guide or other volunteer within the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum features an unavoidable introductory video on the side of the room most trafficked in and out by tourists. Though tourists do not have to sit and watch as the world crumbles in front of them, it has been my experience that many, at the very least, pause to watch a minute or two of the introductory video before/after prowling about the Hall of Biodiversity.

The rhetorical form and content of this introductory video is undeniably pedagogical and rhetorical. In fact, the rhetorical form of this content is ecopedagogical. Regarding ecopedagogy, Richard Kahn noted, “[E]cological issues, requiring critical knowledge of the dialectical relationship between mainstream lifestyle and the dominant social structure, require a much more radical and more complex form of ecoliteracy than is presently possessed by the population at large” (6). Through this *introductory* video, the Hall of Biodiversity—as if aware of the very present need to craft a collective ecoliteracy about the woes of agrilogistics—works at crafting this “critical knowledge of the dialectical relationship between mainstream lifestyle and the

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particular characteristics, can be said to point toward this argument. I wanted to offer this insight as its own contention to spotlight it against the backdrop of a particular display rather than abstractly speaking about it across the entire exhibition.

<sup>97</sup> I do not intend this reveal to be terribly surprising. Indeed, the relationship between the Hall of Biodiversity and the greater American Museum is rather cut and dry. In all other exhibitions, the American Museum remains consciously silent about the sixth mass extinction in natural history. Here, in the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum addresses the Holocene Extinction. Such a comparison may seem unimportant, but it is precisely the existence of the Hall of Biodiversity that makes present the pedagogy of entanglements, as I will explain in the discussion section of this thesis.

dominant social structure” by way of scripted text and visual rhetoric.

Whereas the script of the introductory video is obviously directed at demonstrating how humans are ravishing the more-than-human world, *how* the visual rhetoric renders intelligible this message is a bit more slyly put together. A host of scholars from within communication studies have made clear that ecological catastrophe is banal (see, for example, Barnett; Peeples; Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*).<sup>98</sup> Regarding toxic waste that corrodes the health and wellbeing of persons and their environments, Barnett wrote, “Because *they circulate invisibly*, toxins pose a range of challenges for those who wish to protest their production and dissemination” (406). Accordingly, the main challenge for any given activist who is against ecological inconsideration is, of course, the incapacity to render intelligible in a visual manner the woes of agrilogistics. When most successful, activists transform the seemingly health image of environments into what Jennifer Peeples referred to as the “toxic sublime”—the paradoxical image of environments as simultaneously pristine and poisoned (375). Through the introductory video—a visual text that relies upon images of both pristine and poisoned environments—the Hall of Biodiversity dirties the more-than-human world in the minds of tourists. This mud—a goop that tarnishes an understanding of the more-than-human world as unchanging, constant, and safe—indexes how agrilogistics pose a threat to the health and wellbeing of all objects in this shared universe.

In terms of a pedagogical slant, as my placement of this video within the lineage of PBS television series alludes, I personally read the aesthetic of this text as emblematic of dated pedagogical videos that one might find in a middle school science class. The unnamed authors of the video assume that tourists have little to no knowledge about the woes of agrilogistics,

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<sup>98</sup> Although these scholars are specifically talking about toxins, the metaphor can be extended to the woes of agrilogistics as something like climate change is all around us, but not easily witnessed through direct means (Morton, *Hyperobjects*)

prompting Brokaw to say:

Right now, around the world,  
a hundred species of plants  
and animals become extinct  
each day.

That means about 30,000 unique,  
Irreplaceable kinds of organisms  
vanishing from the earth  
each year,  
forever.

This excerpt, too, suggests a pedagogical form—an instructor telling student what he or she does not know. To that end, the name itself—*introductory* video—suggests a desire on the part of the American Museum to orient tourists toward the messages shared via the Hall of Biodiversity.

In terms of the introductory video's rhetorical inclinations, if we take very seriously one of the most basic definitions of rhetoric—the use of symbols to motivate audiences to action—it is hard to ignore that the Hall of Biodiversity claims to offer plans to act. As the introductory video orients tourists toward the woes of agrilogistics, it does not leave tourists without a sense of hope and an idea—albeit an impractical one—about what to do in the face of biodiversity loss. Although this hope may be misguided, the Hall of Biodiversity via the introductory video tells tourists, for example, that they/policy makers need to:

Stabilize population growth.

Reduce consumption and waste.

Develop clean technologies.

Set limits on fishing  
and clearing of forests.

Though these practices are easier said than done, and though the ethics workability of these suggestions are up for debate, the fact remains that the Hall of Biodiversity does not inform just to transfer knowledge—it informs to motivate audiences to action. As such, it is not difficult to see how the introductory video, a text that foreshadows many of the other texts in the Hall of Biodiversity, is consciously rhetorical insofar as it addresses the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

### *2.7 On Tour: The Resource Center*

To the left of the introductory video is a reflective glass pillar marking one of two entrances to the Resource Center, an area comprised of the “Transformation of the Biosphere Wall” and “Solutions Wall.” “The Transformation of the Biosphere (on the left wall) presents the changes that humans have made—and continue to make—to the environment that have initiated the current wave of mass extinction,” comments an engraved poster on the pillar, “Solutions (on the right wall) shows how thoughtful action, by individual, organizational, communities, and government, can help stem the tide of ecosystem disruption and mounting species extinction.” Essentially a long hallway, one of the two walls discusses destruction while the other talks about rebirth.

Lining each wall are plaques, photographs, and various multi-mediated displays featuring the woes of agrilogistics. From urbanization to overfishing, the American Museum covers a vast history of human exploitation of the more-than-human world for purposes of wealth extraction. True to my performance as a master naturalist, I know not all of this information is useful for purposes of this thesis, so I browse for gold nuggets that stand out as representative and

meaningful of this themed area (see fig. 26).<sup>99</sup>

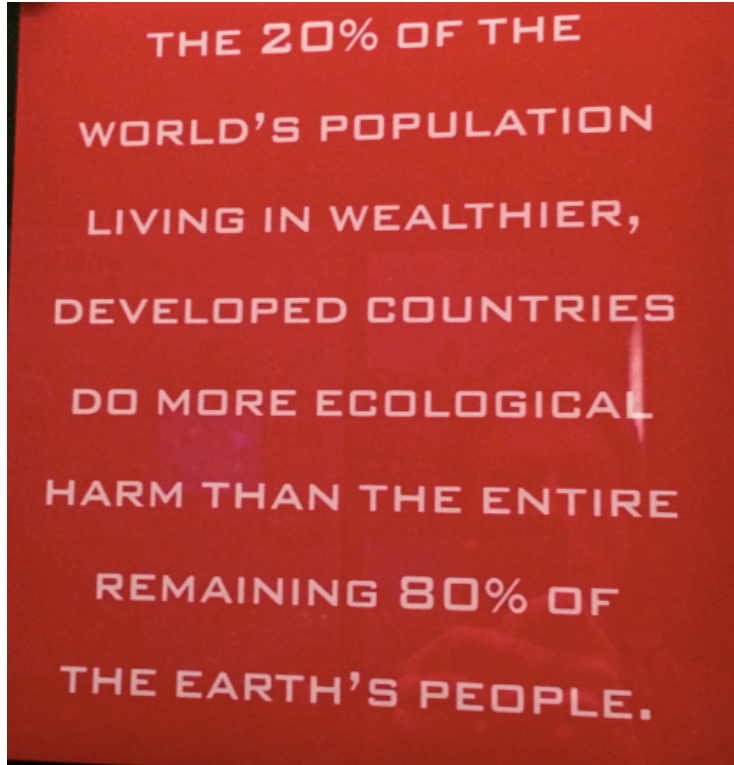


Fig. 26. A plaque in the Resource Center. Photo by the Author.

I find a didactic that summarizes the message produced by this themed area and begin writing in my journal before realizing that taking a photo would be much more efficient for transcription purposes:

The earth has always experienced change. In the past, severe climatic changes and physical events such as meteorite collisions were responsible for periodic large-scale transformations of the environment and five global mass extinctions. Today, the planet's ecosystems are again being rapidly altered, and are undergoing a massive loss of biodiversity that has been called the Sixth Extinction. But this

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<sup>99</sup> All types of participation-observation entail the effort of making oneself physically and mentally present in a particular communicative matrix. Tourism, I argue, is no different. Scholars ought to conceptualize this fatigue, however, because stamina affects the processes of touring and our capacity as academics to dutifully perform our role as researchers.

time, the changes are caused solely by human activity.

*Phew!!!* A concise, well-worded acknowledgement that we, *the* humans, are up to no good. The American Museum continues:

Even in prehistory, humans extinguished many other species as they spread across the world. For example, soon after humans reached the Americas about 12,000 years ago, the saber toothed tiger, mastodon, and mammoth were among the numerous species that disappeared. As our population has exploded and increasingly sophisticated technologies have been developed, our ability to disrupt, deplete, and destroy natural systems has only accelerated. By converting and polluting forests, prairies, and wetlands; overexploiting wildlife and fisheries; and transporting alien species across the globe, humanity is presently causing the extinction of at least 30,000 species per year.

Numbers like twelve thousand or ten thousand always catch my attention because they consistently mark a timeframe in which things turned sour for the more-than-human world.

I look for Joe. Not being able to keep his hands to himself, I find him sitting at a nearby computer.<sup>100</sup> I protest, but he continues touching the screen until a video begins playing. To my surprise, this video discusses zoonotic diseases, namely Lyme disease. “We humans are getting attacked by an increasing number of brand new infectious diseases,” argues an unnamed narrator. Calling upon a number of scientists, a few of whom are employees of SUNY-ESF, the narrator critiques processes of urbanization and deforestation as contributors to an increase in Lyme disease. “As we fragment the landscape, we chop up the continuous forests into little bits. We lose species. They disappear. One of the last creatures is the white-footed mouse,” comments

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<sup>100</sup> Once more, tensions are growing more and more apparent by this point.

the narrator, “So as we reduce diversity, we’re losing the species that protect us and favoring the ones that make us sick.” Indeed, to keep safe and help prosper carriers of infected ticks is to further allow the proliferation of Lyme disease.

Joe and I stand and move away from the video as we giggle about the casting of SUNY-ESF employees. Like the Hall of New York State Environment, this discussion of zoonotic diseases strikes close to home. For purposes of rhetoric, I certainly identify!

I begin looking for practical solutions. I must admit that the Resource Center—an area tasked with problematizing the human relationship with the more-than-human world and offering practical alternates to agrilogistics—is a bit dry on helpful commentary related to the later objective. Like anti-obesity signage that argues that *all you have to do is eat better to lose weight*, the American Museum is incredibly utopic.

The mantra “LEARN / GET INVOLVED / LEAD THE WAY” appears below a number of displays exposing the woes of agrilogistics. I look for substance and find little. “Learn about the biodiversity of the earth, and the essential services it provides,” comments one plaque, “Identify education and conservation organizations, and request materials and guidance on how to establish local programs” (see fig. 27).

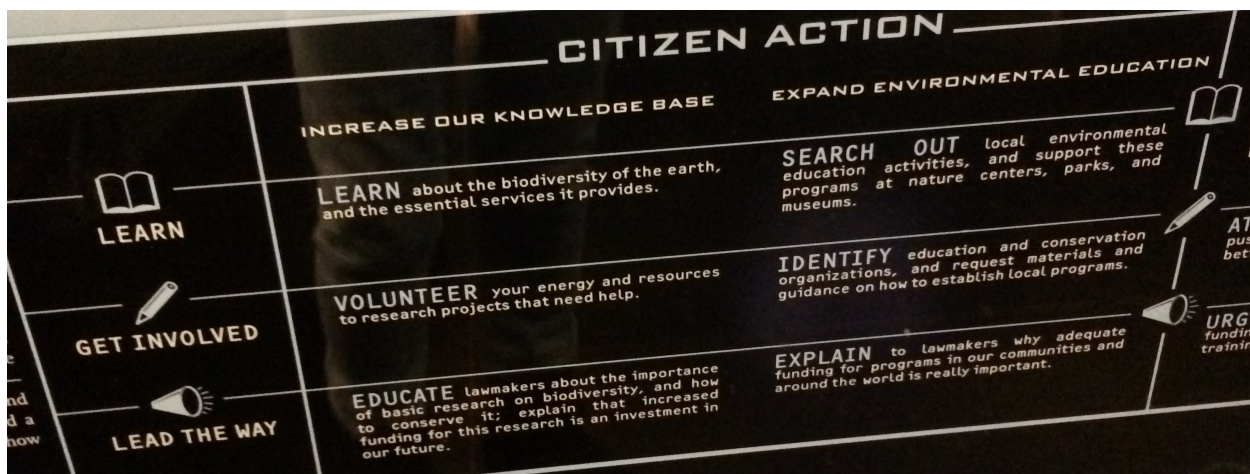


Fig. 27. An example of a solution to biodiversity loss. Photo by the Author.



Although I can vouch for consciousness raising as a legitimate and helpful rhetorical strategy (see, for example, Dubriwry), I cannot, as a radical, queer ecologist, accept anything less than all out resistance as key to rapidly slowing down rates of tragic biodiversity loss during the Anthropocene.

I notice a few tourists make their way into the Resource Center and I watch from afar. They pause to read information about environmental degradation, but, like me, hardly spend enough time to read each and every word. Moreover, they ignore the side about solutions. “No one has the attention span to engulf this information. And these tourists—many of whom are on vacation to NYC—do not want to change their ways. This seems fruitless,” I write in my journal. I continue to watch as these tourists leave this themed area within five minutes of entering.

Of all content in the Resource Center, what strikes my fancy most is a didactic titled “Root Causes” that reads as follows:

The invention of agriculture has caused the human population to soar from 5 million to 6 billion in just 10,000 years. This growth, along with an increase in resource consumption, underlies the great transformation of the world’s ecosystems and today’s extinction crisis.

With little effort, these words direct tourists’ attention to how the woes of agrilogistics are much larger than this contemporary moment. We are experiencing the local manifestations of catastrophe(s) put into effect many thousand years prior. Information like this, abundant in the works of radical ecological figures like Timothy Morton, leave me feeling empty. Yet this emptiness leaves room for political motivation—the ultimate rhetorical situation.

### *2.8 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Perhaps I am more sensitive to the woes of agrilogistics, but I still expected Ginger to

offer some pedagogical insight into the systems of global capitalism that are currently destroying the more-than-human world. During the free public tour, Ginger overlooked a number of opportunities to discuss the impacts of agriculture, colonialism, and globalization, including, for example, the plight of bison in America and the proliferation of malaria in New York State. On the contrary, the woes of agrilogistics are addressed and readdressed in the Hall of Biodiversity.

**Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum does not miss its chance to talk about the nitty-gritty causes/impacts of the sixth mass extinction in natural history.**<sup>101</sup>

As is apparent in all of my critical vignettes in this chapter, the Hall of Biodiversity locates and documents the woes of agrilogistics whilst making sure to place blame on the human.<sup>102</sup> This rhetorical practice is especially apparent in the Resource Center, particularly through the “Transformation of the Biosphere Wall.” As a context building apparatus, the “Transformation of the Biosphere Wall” speaks of the *who, what, when, where, why*, and, most importantly, *how* of agrilogistics. Though many tourists may leave feeling apathetic or overwhelmed by this cataclysmic situation, it is more than unlikely for a tourist to enter the Resource Center and leave without making eye contact with some piece of information that charts the dangerous relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. To that end, the Hall of Biodiversity makes sure to include sound bite style didactics like that of “Root Causes.” At the very least, tourists leave knowing that humans are traumatizing the more-than-human world.

As a multi-million dollar exhibition, the Hall of Biodiversity would hardly be stunning if

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<sup>101</sup> Of course, this is also the stated purpose of the Hall of Biodiversity. Still, this marks an important departure in how the American Museum communicates with tourists about issues. For example, in the Hall of North American Mammals, Ginger completely glossed over the eradication of bison that occurred when humans expanded west.

<sup>102</sup> By blame, I am not suggesting that the American Museum is scapegoating humans.

curators failed to engender a more rigorous dialogue between artifacts on display and tourists. The state goal for the Hall of Biodiversity, of course, highlight the threats to the more-than-human world as they occur due to human inconsideration. Indeed, like a rhetorical critic itself, the American Museum adopts a critical lens to a topic (i.e., extinction) and critiques the ways in which humans—consumers and propagators of agrilogistics—make possible the eradication of more-than-human life. “Vacations are supposed to be fun, but then some of us get off on critical thinking. It raises questions about other people’s lifestyles and about our own,” Lippard noted in the epigraph opening this chapter, “At best, it shakes up belief and value systems and opens us up to reciprocity with nature and with unfamiliar cultures, even as we reinvent them for our own identities” (4). Indeed, the Hall of Biodiversity shakes up what it means to be human. It calls forth the worst kept secret: Humans are more invested in their comfort and wellbeing as consumers than keeping stable the more-than-human world.<sup>103</sup>

One particular topic that struck a chord with me—likely because of its lacking presence in the nearby Hall of New York State Environment—is that of zoonotic diseases. Like malaria, Lyme disease is a zoonotic disease transferred between humans and nonhumans. Moreover, the recent proliferation of Lyme disease, per the employees of SUNY-ESF in the displayed video, is due in large to growing populations that decrease the square footage of natural places. As Nibert asserted, “The general historical pattern revealed so far is one in which the exploitation of large numbers of domesticated animals—a practice largely concentrated in the hands of the elites—both enabled and promoted large-scale violence and epidemic zoonotic diseases” (89).

Accordingly, rather than overlooking zoonotic diseases, the Hall of Biodiversity tackles this

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<sup>103</sup> This communicative process is typical of tourism. Tourist destinations often call out humans on their behavior and fears and beg for them to change; however, tourists often resist (or change, but only in the moment).

topic for tourists, many of whom likely are residents of New York or the Northeast region and thus susceptible to higher rates of Lyme disease.

I highlight zoonotic diseases merely because this is a topic that interests me. Other topics discussed include, but are not limited to, industrialization, population growth, globalization, and overfishing. Regarding the latter, the Resource Center makes clear that we are quickly eradicating marine life. During my time in the Hall of Ocean Life, an exhibition supposedly categorized as a place about conservation, I did not come in contact with significantly sized or powerful displays documenting the human's relationship with the more-than-terrestrial world.

Where the Hall of Biodiversity falls flat is tangible alternatives to the woes of agrilogistics. I am suspect of strategies that include forcing individuals rather than systems to be the agents for change, yet even if I overlook this type of discourse in the Hall of Biodiversity, the "Solutions Wall" does little to tell me, as a tourist, how I can make a change. As the didactic titled "Citizen Acts" demonstrates, the Hall of Biodiversity offers surface level solutions to the woes of agrilogistics triggering the sixth mass extinction in natural history.<sup>104</sup>

Still, the nod toward some type of alternative that would, if successful, slow down rates of extinction to an acceptable level all whilst crafting a more ecologically-conscious world is a noble effort. Through repetition, the Hall of Biodiversity makes clear that humans are not giving due consideration toward the more-than-human world. The Resource Center does not hold in reserve precise information about human domination, but makes clear through examples that the woes of agrilogistics and the sixth mass extinction in natural history are mutually reinforcing phenomenon triggered by the insidiously inconsiderate human species.

## *2.9 On Tour: Crisis Zone*

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<sup>104</sup> Other tourists may or may not share the same opinion as me. I come preloaded with knowledge about agrilogistics, so less comes as a shock to me.

If I were the negative end of a magnet—a fitting comparison given my pessimistic reading on life, death, and everything in between and beyond—the dodo bird would be the complementary and positive end of a magnet pulling me forward. Somehow, I keep finding myself returning to the dodo bird. Whether it be her presence in the American Museum, or her residency in overseas locations, I cannot seem to stop myself from touring her extinction.

As I exit the “Rainforest Diorama,” I find myself face to face with the display “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species.” Because of the nearby “Spectrum of Life Wall,” unbeknownst to most tourists is the fact that the dodo bird and her fellow endangered species are part of a themed area dubbed the Crisis Zone. The Crisis Zone, the only themed area in the Hall of Biodiversity not roped off or demarcated as its own unique area, fades into all other arenas; however, its approximately two hundred square foot perimeter marks itself distinct—a performative gesture resisting the boundaries of other displays in the exhibition.

In short, the Crisis Zone is comprised of two areas, “Lives in the Balance” and an unnamed *textural* display about past mass extinctions embedded into the floor. As I have documented elsewhere (Dionne), I do not believe the American Museum—or any museum, for that matter—effectively and ethically documents *how* and *to what effect* Dutch sailors contributed to the eradication of dodo birds; on this point, I have argued that lack of transparency perpetuates a relationship between humans and nonhumans whereby tourists continue to overlook and miss more-than-human pleas for nonviolence.

“You can see why it was flightless,” I overhear a mother telling her daughter as she points at the dodo bird’s dumpy body.

“Little chicken wings,” responds the daughter. Although said it jest, this comment trivializes the dodo bird’s lived experience as a flightless bird once trapped on an Island

colonized by various invasive species—the Dutch and the rats and pigs that came along with their ships. Because I have spent far too much of my life reeling about human inconsideration toward the dodo bird, I focus my attention elsewhere.

On the floor below my feet are a few plaques, one of which reads as follows:

FIVE MAJOR WORLDWIDE EXTINCTION EVENTS HAVE STRUCK AT BIODIVERSITY SINCE THE ORIGIN OF COMPLEX ANIMAL LIFE SOME 535 MILLION YEARS AGO. GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER CAUSES, PROBABLY INCLUDING COLLISIONS BETWEEN THE EARTH AND EXTRATERRESTRIAL OBJECTS, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MASS EXTINCTIONS OF THE PAST. RIGHT NOW WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF THE SIXTH EXTINCTION, THIS TIME CAUSED SOLELY BY HUMANITY'S TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE (see fig. 26).

Even though other parts of the Hall of Biodiversity outwardly blame humans for the sixth mass extinction in natural history, I still find this message jarring; how the museum gets away with being so blunt, I do not know.<sup>105</sup>

“Put this on your lips,” says another mother to a child as she hands him lip balm. He squirms, but she eventually succeeds. As they walk over the aforementioned plaque, the mom suggests to the little boy that they grab a slice of pizza for dinner. Coincidentally, the markers for the direction of the food court are also nearby the engraved indictment.

“What do you think of this?” I ask Joe. He looks up from his iPhone, a sign that he's growing more and more uninterested with the American Museum.

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<sup>105</sup> Future analyses might take into consideration the role of confrontation at tourist destinations.

“Honestly, it’s just a stupid thing. I would have missed it. I don’t understand the names of each extinction and the fossils look like all other fossils,” he responds. The fossils of which Joe speaks are trapped beneath a strong glass window (see fig. 28).



Fig. 28. Key for deciphering which fossil is from which era. Photo by the Author.

I jump down his throat, “You’re ridiculous. Get off your phone and offer me a better answer.”

To no avail, he jokes, “How can this be possible with the Earth was only developed 2000 years ago?” Though amused, I express further disapproval until he finally offers me a quality answer.

“It makes me feel scared,” Joe reveals, “I am unable to stop being human but willing to

try to do my part. Without everyone on board, we are willingly walking to death.” He has a point; systems of global capitalism are not overtaken by individuals—certainly not by veganism.<sup>106</sup>

“What the fuck are the other three extinctions. I only know of the dinosaur wipeout,” reveals Joe. Rolling my eyes, I imagine this sentiment is shared amongst tourists; most people hold in reserve the idea that an asteroid ended the reign of the giant lizards.<sup>107</sup>

Turning about on top of the fossils, I notice two informationals etched into the hard stone pillars. They talk to one another as they overlook fossils from the previous five mass extinctions.

The first informational, titled “THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY,” reads:

Human population has exploded since the invention of agriculture some 10,000 years ago.<sup>108</sup> People have already transformed vast amounts of land for farming, and the Industrial Revolution has increased the rate of expansion of cities, roads, and manufacturing facilities—all at the expense of natural ecosystems.

Conversion of land for farming and timber production is accelerating, especially in tropical regions, where most of the world’s species live. Our fisheries and numerous wildlife species have become severely depleted through overexploitation, and pollution is poisoning many species outright. Invading species, arriving from distant lands through human contact, are driving large numbers of local species extinct. Some 30,000 species a year are being lost

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<sup>106</sup> As commentary in the conclusion of this thesis will suggest, I am not denigrating veganism or arguing that such a dietary orientation should not be taken by social actors in this shared universe.

<sup>107</sup> This comment speaks to the section in chapter one where I argued that tourist associate extinction with the event that eradicated the dinosaurs.

<sup>108</sup> As a side note, didactics in the Hall of Biodiversity corroborate Morton’s temporal claims about agrilogistics.



forever—and it is all our fault.

The second informational, titled “WHY WE NEED TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY,” reads:

Human beings evolved along with the rest of the world’s species, and we continue to depend on healthy ecosystems and on the millions of animal, plant, fungal, and microbial species with which we share planet Earth. We rely on such ecosystem benefits as the production of oxygen through photosynthesis, the purification of water, and the natural cycling of carbon, nitrogen, and other elements vital to life. We continue to utilize biological diversity for food, medicine, clothing, and shelter. The beauty of life awakens in us as a sense of kinship with the living world, and a moral commitment to seek ways to prevent the tragic destruction of ecosystems and the mounting loss of the world’s species.

Like a quality persuasive speech, these two informationals create a dialogue with one another. The tourists, standing upon the fossils, are trapped directly in the midst of this conversational transaction. “I wonder how many people actually read these things,” I scribble in my journal.

### *2.10 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

To suggest that the Paul and Irma Milstein Hall of Advanced Mammals is anything less than enticing to most tourists would be to overlook the symbolic capital of figures like the mastodon. Yet I would be remiss if I did not repeat my critique of exhibitions like the Hall of Advanced Mammals. Discussions of past extinctions, while important, put forth an understanding of more-than-human eradication as something *then and there* rather than *here and now*. Even the mastodon—an American fossil with connections to states like New Jersey—is still

wrongfully within the purview of the extinction of the dinosaurs. The Hall of Biodiversity, however, offers a competing discourse and strategy of display. *Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum locates extinction here and now and forces tourists to recognize or understand that humans are an actor in this narrative moment.*

In addition to offering nonhumans as ciphers to be filled with anxieties about the sixth mass extinction in natural history, the Hall of Biodiversity amplifies a tourist's connection with the more-than-human world by visually deploying the bodies of familiar nonhumans. From the dodo bird to the giant panda and from the Siberian tiger to black and white ruffled lemurs, the Hall of Biodiversity puts on display nonhumans threatened by *this* extinction. To that end, these are nonhumans that tourists can recognize either by having visited zoos, traveled abroad, or watched television/films.<sup>109</sup> Unlike the dinosaurs which are outside the temporal purview of tourists, these nonhumans on display are *here and now*.

In his books *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, *The Ecological Thought*, and *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecological after the End of the World*, Timothy Morton worked to convince audiences that ecological catastrophe—namely global warming—is not a coming crisis. “What makes humans the most dreadful is their ecological power,” argued Morton, “The uncanniness of human being is that it stirs up the oceans, divides the rocks, and ploughs up the soil” (*Hyperobjects* 200). Taken together along with a slough of other environmentally manipulative actions, humans have constructed a material and social reality that revolves around shape shifting and consuming the more-than-human world. What Morton called agrilogistics is what we are calling the woes of agrilogistics: The impacts of a time whereby human populations massively expanded and patterns of consumption grew so rapidly

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<sup>109</sup> Here, the symbolic capital of nonhumans is once again important.

that the more-than-human world was a risk of domeseccration. In short, ecological catastrophe is not coming. It is so banal and expansive across space and time that it is here right now—in the *here and now*.

This poses a challenge to the American Museum, and has already disrupted the ways in which *this* museum of natural history has communicated with tourists. On the whole, museums as a genre of tourist destination typically display remnants of past historical events. Take, for example, the plethora of Holocaust museums that have popped up around the globe; these museums display what remains of victims of mass genocide alongside contextual information in hopes of keeping alive a memory of what happened. Museums of natural history—in their displaying of artifacts from the cultural and physical world—purport to do the same thing. However, the Hall of Biodiversity—in its displaying of the woes of agrilogistics—constructs an exhibit based around events that are happening *here and now*. Whereas tourists of the Holocaust museum cannot do much to prevent a genocide that is more than a half-decade in the past, tourists of the Hall of Biodiversity witness an ongoing event. To that end, the Hall of Biodiversity does not attempt to make it seem as if that event is on the horizon. As each critical vignette reveals, the Hall of Biodiversity works to make tourists feel as if they are trapped inside an ongoing—highly contemporary—event with catastrophic consequences.

To this point, perhaps what is most insightful about the “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species” is that the Hall of Biodiversity juxtaposes the extinct dodo next to a host of endangered nonhumans. As a rhetorical move, this communicates that extinction is *here and now*, yet does not foreclose the possibility of a better *here and now*. That is, just because we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction of natural history does not mean that rates of extinction cannot be slowed. On the contrary, the Hall of Biodiversity wants tourists to feel empowered

about reversing extinction (corporate sponsorship aside). By putting on display both extinct and endangered nonhumans, the Hall of Biodiversity leaves open the opportunity of a less violent human and more-than-human world.

On that note, it is not just “Lives in the Balance” that works to make extinction *here and now* rather than *then and there*. The display embedded in the floor of the Hall of Biodiversity over which tourists walk quite literally forces humans to interact with extinctions of the past and extinctions of the present. By incorporating fossils from each of the previous mass extinctions—symbols of what becomes of nonhumans in the face of crisis—tourists are given a performative choice: either unconsciously trample on the bones of the more-than-human world or consciously look down and stare at the consequences of the path down which humans are walking.

In short, extinction is a phenomenon that is *here and now*. When the American Museum hosted its “Humans and Other Catastrophes” symposium, it made the first steps to acknowledge on a very public level that humans are living in the midst of the sixth mass extinction in natural history. Here, in the Hall of Biodiversity, the work of public pedagogy continues as humans are reminded of their entanglement with extinction. These entanglements—no matter how bleak—are not reserved for catastrophic violence. If tourists—a group that stands in for all of humanity—take seriously the plight of the more-than-human world, situations can be remedied. Or, at least that is what the Hall of Biodiversity claims.

### *2.11 On Tour: “Spectrum of Life Wall”*

Darkness does not cover every inch of the dimly lit Hall of Biodiversity. Yes, the Resource Center, “Rainforest Diorama,” and Crisis Zone features light; however, it is just enough light—in my case, at least—to comfortably take notes. What is most luminous in the exhibition is the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” a display that, most fittingly to this thesis, deploys

travel language in its description:

The Spectrum of Life is an evolutionary trip through the amazing diversity of life on Earth. The 1,500 specimens represent a wide range of bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals, from the smallest microorganisms to terrestrial and aquatic giants (see fig. 29).



Fig. 29. "Spectrum of Life Wall" in the Hall of Biodiversity. Photo by the Author.

Fatigued by a long day of touring the American Museum, I approach the "Spectrum of Life Wall" with little energy and enthusiasm. Compared to other displays, it is the largest in the room. It spans the entire width of an exterior wall, an area completely covered by nonhuman specimen upon nonhuman specimen.

Because I can see that the "Spectrum of Life Wall" looks like a cladogram, I quickly scan and take note of each category of more-than-human specimen on display. I count twenty eight categories, which includes under the header "LIFE" the following: true bacteria, archaebacteria,

protocists, green algae, mosses and allies, ferns and fern allies, flowering seed plants, non-flowering seed plants, fungi and lichens, sponges, cnidarians, rotifers, roundworms, iophophorates, echinoderms, cartilaginous fish, bony fish, amphibians, chelicerates, crustaceans, insects and myriapods, turtles, lizards and snakes, crocodiles and birds, segmented worms, mollusks, and, last but not least, mammals. From plant to nonhuman to human, so many inhabitants of the shared universe are on display.

Even though the “Spectrum of Life Wall” is the most massive display in the entire Hall of Biodiversity, the sheer magnitude of this exhibit is not enough to sustain my interest. I find myself wanting to check Twitter, an activity that I have thus far refrained from doing in favor of being as mentally present and I am physically present in the American Museum. Still, I catch my eyes wandering as I gaze through an opening in the wall; I see the blue whale in the Hall of Ocean Life and think back to the anglerfish.

As I turn to look for Joe, I see another informational positioned in close proximity to the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Until now, it had not occurred to me to question the definition of the word biodiversity.

“BIODIVERSITY IS THE SUM OF ALL SPECIES LIVING ON EARTH,” informs the American Museum. Below this equation are a series of definitions, including:

EVOLUTIONARY BIODIVERSITY is the range of species organized by their evolutionary relationships—including the most basic divisions of life into animals, plants, fungi, and many forms of microbial life.

And:

ECOLOGICAL BIODIVERSITY is the interaction of the variety of different species from each of these groups to form the web of life in local ecosystems the

world over.

Per these definition, the “Spectrum of Life Wall” must chart evolutionary biodiversity rather than ecological biodiversity. Why? Because the display does not exhibit specimen in relationship to local ecosystems, instead choosing to reproduce a clade. This difference appears trivial, yet to an ecologist, such information would be crucial.

Tacked on as an addendum to these definitions is yet another indictment of the human:

Biodiversity is presently in crisis as humans are degrading ecosystems and driving thousands of species a year extinct. We have the power to stem these losses, but we first must understand the importance of biodiversity and the forces that threaten it.

Like other commentary, here the American Museum blames the human rather than leaving the agent of disaster unlabeled. Where this indictment differs is in the fact that it offers a call to action: “we must first understand the importance of biodiversity and the forces that threaten it.” Under this criterion, the Hall of Biodiversity actively works against the Holocene Extinction—a noble effort. Unfortunately, I question success as I see very few individuals stopping to take in and process the vast amounts of information distributed about the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

I am really surprised at how unsubstantial the “Spectrum of Life Wall” feels as I peruse its artifacts on display.<sup>110</sup> I pause briefly in front of a number of nonhumans on display, but cannot muster up even the most artificial of emotions. I do, however, find myself wondering about the authenticity of each of these nonhuman specimen. With the exception of nonhuman in liquid filled jars, the other nonhumans seem plastic at best. This is purse speculation, and though

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<sup>110</sup> Once more, the dodo bird carries more symbolic capital than a class of nonhumans such as cnidarians.

I cannot find anyone to ask, I imagine I am wrong; the American Museum has a proven record of showcasing the real deal.

If any of the nonhuman stand out, she would be the crustacean (see fig. 30).

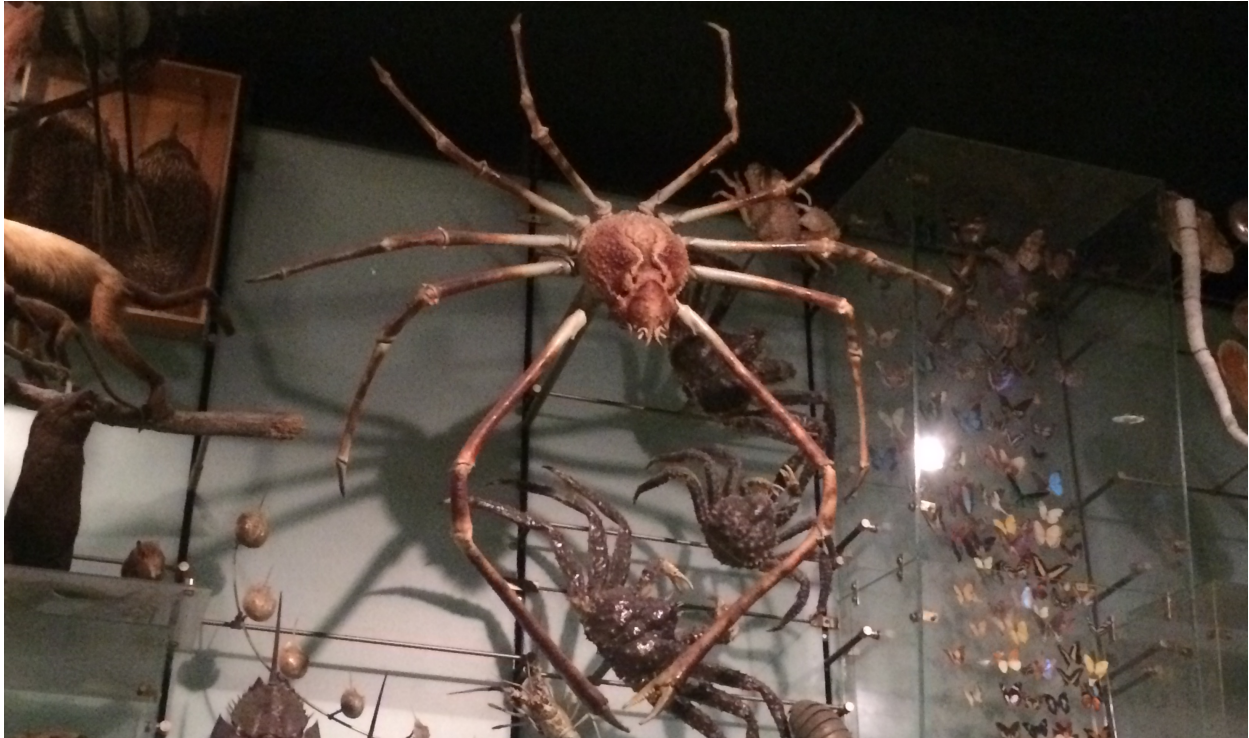


Fig. 30. Crustacean on the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Photo by the Author.

Hanging from above is a large crab-like nonhuman that triggers childhood memories of a favorite horror movie—*Alien*. I cannot help but think about this crustacean as if it was a facehugger waiting to impregnate me with the eggs of a xenomorph. Unlike Captain Ripley, I am certainly not strong enough to survive this battle!

“How much longer?” Joe whines. I agree to leave after one more pass through of the Hall of Biodiversity to make sure I did not miss anything pertinent. I zigzag through tourists and artifacts on display until I make my way to the exit. Just before the archways marking the end of this exhibition and the beginning of another, I see a wooden plaque featuring the companies that financed and/or continue to sponsor the Hall of Biodiversity. One stands out: Monsanto. Being in



the know about Monsanto (see Houston; Rice), I am aware that this multinational company cares little about environments, persons, and nonhumans, and instead favors ongoing wealth extraction. It is only fitting that as I leave the Hall of Biodiversity, I am met with one final disappointment—this exhibition, a place supposedly meant to teach the public about the sixth mass extinction in natural history, is funded by the same souls responsible for the desecration of the more-than-human world.

I need a drink.

### *2.12 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

Admittedly, by the time I interacted with the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” I was tired. As anyone who has ever toured any site and read a plethora of displays would say, moving about places and engulfing information is physically and mentally tasking. In retrospect, I truly do blame fatigue as the culprit for why I felt “so over it” when I reached the “Spectrum of Life Wall.”

Although I did not speak to any other tourist, I did notice that they, like me during my first few visits to the American Museum, appeared to be drawn to the “Spectrum of Life Wall.” Like bugs on a light, many of these tourists migrated toward this display and stared at it. As my first critical vignette in this chapter noted, when I first walked in the Hall of Biodiversity with Ginger, “I immediately notice[d] the brightest display in the hall, the ‘Spectrum of Life Wall.’” Even the most passive tourist would likely find it difficult to avoid engaging with the “Spectrum of Life Wall.”

As one of the many displays in the Hall of Biodiversity, the “Spectrum of Life Wall” offers a number of characteristics that overlap with previous findings. First and foremost, it is a display of ciphers—nonhumans to be filled with interpretations about the sixth mass extinction.

These ciphers engender conversations about the Holocene Extinction and are supported by nearby informationals that locate tourists as a problem. Yet what I find most fascinating as a rhetorical tool is that the “Spectrum of Life Wall” is a type of dated carbon evidence. *Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum displays the organic faces of the sixth mass extinction in natural history.* The institution deploys nonhumans as evidence as to what is lost when humans behave without consideration of the more-than-human world.<sup>111</sup>

In terms of entanglement, the layout of the “Spectrum of Life Wall” cannot be overlooked as anything less than integral to the Hall of Biodiversity’s pedagogy of entanglement. As a visual metaphor, the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” as I noted earlier, is a cladogram. For scientists, a cladogram—a mnemonic and information device developed in the wake of Darwin and Linnaeus—keeps organized organisms of a similar species. In layman’s terms, a cladogram is essentially a family tree connecting the human and more-than-human world via shared commonalities and evolutionary history. The rows and columns of the “Spectrum of Life Wall” speak to the organization of the cladogram in the Hall of Biodiversity—a reminder of the interconnections possible in our shared universe.

This visual metaphor allows tourists to physically see the entanglement, an impactful rhetorical move. Perhaps the rhetorical prowess of the “Spectrum of Life Wall” is located in its sheer magnitude, but the point still stands that this feature, regardless of reason, is the focal display in the Hall of Biodiversity. When I assumed Ginger was flocking to the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” I did not base that claim off of nothing. The American Museum deploys images of the “Spectrum of Life Wall” in their online marketing campaigns of the Hall of Biodiversity.

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<sup>111</sup> This rhetorical maneuver is characteristic of other museums, such as Holocaust museums. To show the victim of violence is to try to cultivate an empathetic unsettlement” and persuade via an “affective dimension of inquiry” (LaCapra 71).

Clearly, even the American Museum recognizes what tourists feel when they walk into the Hall of Biodiversity—the “Spectrum of Life Wall” matters.

The “Spectrum of Life Wall” works by forcing tourists to not only see loss, but also be one with loss. As tourists look at nonhumans on the wall, nonhumans hang from the rafters above. Unlike dioramas that keep tourists at a distance, these nonhumans are physically entangled with humans—victims with their perpetrators.

In short, what matters most about the “Spectrum of Life Wall” is that it entangles tourists with loss. The broad range of nonhumans—from small to big—that are at risk of extinction due to human inconsideration of the more-than-human world is alarming for a tourist like myself. This display forces me to see the victims of my behavior and thus tasks me, as *the* agent for change, with recognizing my entangled subject position. Yet again, this display is rhetorical at its core, for it does its best to motivate tourists to action.

### *2.13 On Tour: Food Court*

No tourist destination is complete without an inappropriate cafeteria on site. From Holocaust memorials to zoos, I do not understand why tourists feel the need to consume, consume, and consume some more in the midst of catastrophe. Nonetheless, I need to debrief and think about all that has happened today, and so like a typical tourist, before exiting the American Museum in route for Broadway,<sup>112</sup> I head to the museum food court and take a brief moment to pen the following reflective letter<sup>113</sup>:

T. Jake Dionne

506 Ivy Ridge Road, Apt. 36

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<sup>112</sup> As with other tourist destinations (see Blair and Michel), nearby sites affect the level of excitement expressed by tourists.

<sup>113</sup> I did edit this letter for grammar.

Syracuse, NY 13210

December 21, 2015

*Scene:* the museum's food court, a dining area that seems unnecessary given the plethora of eateries in Manhattan.

Here I sit in the food court of the American Museum during what I hope is my final engagement with this institution. Since I was a little boy, I have never enjoyed museums. These places are crowded sites filled with junk to touch; I don't like the idea of getting my hands dirty or wasting time playing with toys. Moreover, given my veganism, I am certainly not in love with the idea of looking at dead nonhumans—especially not ones shot and killed by that disgusting cad Theodore Roosevelt!!

I do not know why it didn't occur to me earlier to see if the American Museum hosted tours. In retrospect, I was way more naïve at the beginning of this journey. When I first visited the museum back in November of 2014, I tried to document my every move. From the external features of the museum to every artifact on display I passed, I snapped photos. This feat, as anyone could imagine, was misguided. Now, more attuned to what the museum has to offer, I am grateful for the services provided by volunteers that lead tourists about the museum. I better understand what artifacts matter and how they come to matter through processes of mounting and display. This knowledge truly does enhance the experience of being present in this communicative matrix.

The main objective of this thesis is to uncover how I, the researcher/tourist, come to understand my relationship to the sixth mass extinction. Because of my

fear (and disapproval?) of reflexive and performative writing, I am apprehensive about the future; how will I communicate to Chuck and my committee that the Hall of Biodiversity—one exhibition within a museum of halls—features a radically different type of pedagogy than all other exhibitions? During my thesis proposal committee, Rachel encouraged me to think beyond the Hall of Biodiversity. Though I was nervous about widening the scope of my thesis, having toured with a guide a number of exhibitions, I now see how the Hall of Biodiversity works as a pedagogue of entanglement by virtue of comparison to the greater American Museum. In other words, the other exhibitions in the American Museum act like some sort of scientific control; tourists tour artifacts on display via the mundane yet violent relationship human exceptionalism. Thus when they enter the Hall of Biodiversity, their beliefs about the stability of the more-than-human world is destabilized.

If I had to lob a critique against the Hall of Biodiversity, it would be that the American Museum does not try erase our violent history of wealth extraction and make better the human and more-than-human relationship for the future. This message of conservationism—made possible by T.R. [Theodore Roosevelt]—is one that continues to look toward the more-than-human world for resources. I am convinced that instructing about the sixth mass extinction in natural history is productive, but I am not convinced that anyone should advocate for a continued relationship of domination.

The Hall of Biodiversity is cool. As a vegan and queer (the former position being what motivates my viewing of the exhibition), I enjoy the thought of

tourists being told that they are destroying the more-than-human world. As polemical as it might sound, I absolutely love the thought of tormenting meat eaters and anthropocentric human exceptionalist with anti-agrilogistics information. I can't help it. I just do. Yet as a rhetorician, what fascinates me most—and what has driven my adventures here today—is this phenomenon I want to call the pedagogy of entanglement. For me, what constitutes the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement is that at no place in the entire museum sans the Hall of Biodiversity do tourists see such an ecologically conscious message. It's a complete 180° from that racist Roosevelt statue out in front of the American Museum to the Hall of Biodiversity.

As for the characteristics of this museum's pedagogy of entanglements, I hope to work those out over time. I need to reflect on my experiences before I offer a list of how the American Museum is entangling humans with the more-than-human world. This is a topic for another day.

Best,

Jake

I put away my pen in my leather infused purse—an accessory that always reminds me of the days before I felt entangled with the more-than-human world.

“Are you ready to head out?” I ask Joe. He slowly looks up from his phone with droopy eyes. His tired eyes affirm his desire to leave the American Museum.

I walk to the soda fountain and refill our drink before exiting the museum's food court.

Instead of walking past the *Equestrian Statue*, we try to exit via an entrance shared with the subway. The flow of traffic prevents us from making an easy exit, and so we locate the

nearby Memorial Hall.

I see Roosevelt once more before walking out into the streets of New York. In the most morbid way, I laugh and comment to Joe, “I don’t think I’d protest so much if this museum were filled with stuffed human corpses.” I eye the bronze statue of Roosevelt and think about how cool it would be to see his lifeless corpse mounted behind a diorama. This desire, I think, can be traced to my mother’s fascination with all things creepy, crawly, and dead.

For the sake of human and more-than-human entanglements, I think it’s best that Roosevelt rest in peace. I hope that the day will come when nonhumans are given that same kind gesture. Until then, we die together.

#### *2.14 At Home: Syracuse, New York*

After spending so much time in the American Museum, part of me wishes that I could say that this institution holds a special place in my heart. However, since my first visit to examine the dodo bird to my final visit to experience the free public tour, my participation as an academic-turned-tourist has been filtered through the lens of *the curmudgeon that therefore I am*. I am an angry vegan who knows that his diet is not a lasting solution, but a bandage on a wound. I am an academic skeptical of the individualization of problems. I am a tourist that simultaneously wants to learn, but does not want to be put through so much stress. I am this thing we call “human”—a nasty little term that I do my best to reject both politically and personally. And yet, as I reflect, I cannot help but think the curmudgeon in me is, perhaps, a little bit evil himself. As my final critical vignette reveals: ***Through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum cultivates a sense of hope—an orientation to extinction that begs for and believes in change.*** For me, this “hope” is not bright—but it is there, nonetheless.

Hope—an optimistic orientation—can be cruel. Lauren Berlant is notably famous for her

theorization of cruel optimism. “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing,” argued Berlant, “It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce you in an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (1). As I reflect on the Hall of Biodiversity, I find myself questioning if it is cruel or not?

To answer this question, let us look at the stated goal. The objective of the Hall of Biodiversity—as each of my critical vignettes makes clear—is to craft an ecologically conscious public that is aware of the ongoing sixth mass extinction in natural history. This noble effort reveals itself through the various displays and didactics. From the introductory video, an artifact meant to orient tourists toward the woes of agrilogistics, to the “Spectrum of Life Wall,” a text that details the many lives to be lost, the Hall of Biodiversity works with tourists as they move through the space in order to create a collective rhetoric about the Holocene Extinction.

On one hand, I can easily repeat the often-touted saying, “Knowledge is power!” As our discussion on the banality of toxins and ecological degradation noted, catastrophic violence against the more than human world is easily overlooked as the woes of agrilogistics are more temporally expansive than can be captured via the human eye. Accordingly, any rhetoric that seeks to make known very present, here and now sixth mass extinction in natural history must carry with it some positive power.

And yet I am not so convinced. On the other hand, I could easily ask the American Museum, “With this knowledge, what are tourists supposed to do?” Even as the Hall of Biodiversity crafts a critical ecoliteracy about the sixth mass extinction in natural history, it



remains silent about the profile of the perpetrators. Yes, humans are responsible for the woes of agrilogistics. Yes, these humans are from developed societies. But who exactly are these humans? The answers to this question are the humans that lead the massive corporations like ExxonMobil and Monsanto. “[T]he ability of elites to oppress vast numbers of humans and other animals has been possible only because of their enormous influence over the state—and that power is expanding today,” argued Nibert, “So long as corporate elites and plutocrats control state policy and practice, welfarist efforts to ameliorate the oppression of other animals will be ineffective and most likely will be co-opted by the animal industrial complex” (268). Though tourists may be identified with these so-called elites, more likely than not these are average, everyday consumers. At best, most of these tourists can do little more than change their patterns of consumption. Rather than create a collective of political activists ready to dismantle systems of global capitalism, the Hall of Biodiversity tells tourists to eat better and be conscious of waste.

At the very least, I can commend the American Museum for not relying upon images of the good life on the ranch when engendering hope. In the 2011 documentary *Forks Over Knives*, documentarian Lee Fulkerson explored how grocery stores persuaded consumers to purchase certain types of non-vegan products. One of the ways in which corporate entities convinced consumers to purchase certain types of products was relying upon imagery reminiscent of a time seemingly before the animal-industrial complex—what they called the “pastoral fantasy” (*Forks Over Knives*). By putting an image of a farm raised chicken on a carton of eggs or showing a smiling, grass fed cow, marketers re-personalized the diet by creating a pastoral myth around their products. Pastoral imageries, of course, merely point toward another time in history whereby humans were relying upon the same logics of agrilogistics. Throughout the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum never once calls forth this pastoral fantasy.

In fact, the American Museum seems to embrace the inevitable, always already present posthuman future in the Hall of Biodiversity. On the heels of Francis Fukuyama<sup>114</sup> and Cary Wolfe, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti espoused the need to move toward our posthuman future comprised of technological innovations that reconfigure what it means to be human. “[W]e need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing,” argued Braidotti, “That mean that we need to learn to think differently about ourselves” (12). Indeed, by entangling humans with the more-than-human world, the Hall of Biodiversity collapses—or, at the very least shrinks—the divide between human and nonhumans that make possible the human/animal dualism.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, at no point in time in the Hall of Biodiversity does the American Museum ask tourists to relinquish their right to access technology.

In short, I remain ambivalent at best. For my personal investment in performing an anti-anthropocentric ethos and developing this critical orientation in the public sphere, I find comfort in the fact that American Museum’s has committed itself to fight against the sixth mass extinction in natural history via the Hall of Biodiversity.<sup>116</sup> Still, even after countless hours of browsing the various exhibitions of the American Museum, I am less than convinced of its rhetorical effectivity.

### **3. Comment Card**

This chapter offered a critical exploration of the Hall of Biodiversity by way of both a free public tour and my personal musings in the exhibition. In contrast with the other exhibitions

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<sup>114</sup> This citation is not an endorsement of Fukuyama.

<sup>115</sup> Of course, the Hall of Biodiversity continues to use the word “animal,” which I will discuss in the conclusion of this thesis.

<sup>116</sup> After all, the Hall of Biodiversity is a permanent exhibition. For now, it is not going anywhere.

in the American Museum, I argued that the Hall of Biodiversity is consciously rhetorical regarding the human-induced sixth mass extinction in natural history. Through its various exhibits, the Hall of Biodiversity makes known to tourists that humans are the perpetrators of catastrophic violence against the more-than-human world through a host of behavioral and consumptive patterns. Through the reality of extinction is an uncontested phenomenon, the multi-mediated rhetorical tactics of display relied upon in the Hall of Biodiversity point toward practice that I have referred to as the pedagogy of entanglement. In the discussion section of this thesis, I will offer an in-depth conceptualization of the pedagogy of entanglement as enacted by the Hall of Biodiversity.

As I move toward the conclusion of this thesis, I find myself questioning if the rhetoric put forth via the Hall of Biodiversity has greenwashing capabilities?<sup>117</sup> Per Pezzullo, greenwashing “refers not only to ‘greening’ the appearances of products and commodity consumption, but also the deliberate disavowal of environmental effects” (“Resisting” 346). In brief, greenwashing is a rhetorical process whereby corporations, for example, give the appearance that their products are not harmful for the more-than-human world.<sup>118</sup> In a museum of natural history sponsored by a host of ecological offenders, such ambivalent discourses are alive and well. Again I return to the Hall of North American Mammals. Whereas this exhibition displays bison in a way meant to teach about and help tourists appreciate bison, completely erased is the violent history of westward expansion. To that end, every nonhuman on display

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<sup>117</sup> My initial response to this question would be “yes”; however, Niles Eldredge continues to be an advocate for increasing education about and thus fighting against mass extinction. In terms of his commitment to building an anti-anthropocentric public, I am convinced that he is genuine.

<sup>118</sup> Take, for example, Disney Cruise Line. Whilst on vacation, DCL tells guest that they remain committed to marine safety and thus encourage patrons to not flush any product other than toilet paper down the toilet. In all reality, DCL is trying to save money by not having their filtration systems gum up. Oddly, it is the massive cruise ship cutting up sea life and depositing trash in the ocean that is the main problem. This is an example of greenwashing.

found itself in the American Museum via some form of violent abduction and/or murder.

Perhaps Henry David Thoreau best described museums:

I hate museums...They are the catacombs of nature. One green bud of spring, one willow catkins, one faint trill from a migrating sparrow would set the world on its legs again. The life that is in a single green weed is of more worth than all this death. They are dead nature collected by dead men. I know not whether I muse most at the bodies stuffed with cotton and sawdust or those stuffed with bowels and fleshy fibre outside the cases. (qtd. in Brawner and White)

At any rate, I would not say that the Hall of Biodiversity participates in practices of greenwashing. Unlike corporate entities that are interested in turning a profit, the Hall of Biodiversity is educationally motivated. If anything, the American Museum cannot turn its back on its sponsors or else it'll suffer financially—a practice that would risk access to important rooms like that of the Hall of Biodiversity

In the conclusion of this thesis, I will return to the findings from the first and second chapters. Whereas most exhibitions in the American Museum remains silent about the sixth mass extinction in natural history, as this chapter demonstrated, the Hall of Biodiversity does not exhibit the same type of rhetorical performance. Accordingly, the Hall of Biodiversity enacts what I call a pedagogy of entanglement: an instructional discourse that seeks to teach humans about their interconnectedness with the more-than-human world.

## CONCLUSION

### Toward a Critical Investigation of Pedagogies of Entanglement

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained coexistence. Existence is not an individual affair.

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence.

Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*

### 1. Reflecting on the Trip

The main objective of this thesis was to demonstrate how the American Museum presents in its Hall of Biodiversity a radically different pedagogy about the sixth mass extinction in natural history than in its other exhibitions. In order to meet this goal, I documented my participant-observations of touring the American Museum as a tourist/academic. By performing such a role, I built an archive—my scrapbook—from which I re-toured the American Museum through a series of critical vignettes comprised of thick descriptions and personal commentary. Taking seriously the performance turn in tourism studies as well as an understanding of performance as irreproducible (Phelan), I relied upon these critical vignettes to communicate to the audience a set of witnessed experiences in the various exhibitions at the American Museum.

In chapter one, I toured a number of exhibitions in the American Museum *other than* the Hall of Biodiversity. These exhibitions included, but were not limited to, the Halls of North American Mammals, Ocean Life, and Vertebrate Origins. By way of these exhibitions, I offered a number of critical insights that pointed toward *how* and *to what effect* these various spaces *did not* communicate about the sixth mass extinction in natural history.

In chapter two, I toured the Hall of Biodiversity in the American Museum (and, of

course, the stairwell and exhibitions connecting the 4th floor of the institution to the Hall of Biodiversity). Constructed and curated in a temporal moment in which the American Museum began responding to the Holocene Extinction, the Hall of Biodiversity purported to teach tourists about the human's role in the sixth mass extinction in natural history. In touring this exhibition, I offered a number of critical insights that detailed *how* and to what effect the Hall of Biodiversity differed from other exhibitions in the American Museum by communicating with tourists about the woes of agrilogistics—the local manifestations of a sixth mass extinction in natural history.

Taken together, my critical vignettes revealed that the Holocene Extinction required a different type of pedagogical response than was previously given by the American Museum, an institution founded to “discover, interpret, and disseminate—through scientific research and education—knowledge about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe.” By way of conclusion, I want to synthesize my experiences at the American Museum and touch on what characteristics mark distinct this institution's pedagogy of entanglement. To that end, I will also offer recommendations for what the American Museum ought to change as well as what future scholars might research.

## **2. Reviewing the Pedagogy of Entanglement**

In the introduction of this thesis, I argued that pedagogies of entanglement share three properties in common. Pedagogies of entanglement, as their name tautologically implies, are *instructional*; rhetors seek to bridge gaps in audience knowledge. Pedagogies of entanglement are *rhetorical*; by bridging an audience's gap in knowledge, rhetors attempt to spur a change in behavior or belief. Pedagogies of entanglement are ecological; of what rhetors attempt to alter always entails how humans relate to the more-than-human world. As I made clear in chapter two of this thesis, through the Hall of Biodiversity, the American Museum sought to entangle humans

with their more-than-human counterparts in hopes of demonstrating how our inconsideration of nonhumans and the physical world carry with them disastrous consequences. From an introductory video that argued, “Each species is a player // in the great cycles of life // that keeps all the world’s // ecosystems in balance,” to an informational embedded in the floor that emphatically belted, “FIVE MAJOR WORLDWIDE EXTINCTION EVENTS HAVE STRUCK BIODIVERSITY SIN THE ORIGIN OF COMPLEX ANIMA LIFE...RIGHT NOW WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF THE SIXTH EXTINCTION, *THIS TIME CAUSED SOLELY BY HUMANITY’S TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE*” (italics added), what was made clear from my musings in the Hall of Biodiversity was that the American Museum—a self-proclaimed public pedagogue—was attempting to render intelligible to tourist’s their entangled subject position with the more-than-human world.

Beyond the fact that they are instructional, rhetorical, and ecological, pedagogies of entanglement—in the plural because each rhetorician carries with them their own iteration of this paradigm—also share in common a proclivity toward situatedness. The American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement documents extinction, and so its situation is quite specific to its context. In the temporal context whereby the American Museum talks to audiences about entanglement, audiences accept extinction as a byproduct of life—a naturally occurring phenomenon. This orientation toward extinction has not always been present. “Many people in Western cultures were taught to believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. It was natural to believe every species in existence was made in a single creation event,” argued biologist Mike Viney, “This idea also extended to rocks, which were believed to have been formed as we seem them during the first days of creation. Thus in the absence of two key concepts, extinction and sedimentary rock formation, a more accurate understanding of fossils was not possible.” Indeed,

prior to the mid seventeenth hundreds, audiences did not consider extinction to be a legitimate phenomenon. Rather, publics believed in a great chain of being through which all nonhumans were accounted.<sup>119</sup> In this contemporary moment, the reality of extinction is supported on a scientific and social level; communities of scientists explore past and present extinctions whilst publics tour dinosaurs and whine over the potential loss of nonhumans to be sighted on safaris. This is not to say that the Holocene Extinction is widely known or accepted by all audiences, but rather that publics, on the whole, consider extinction in most basic form to be a real phenomenon. The mere existence of the Hall of Biodiversity proves that extinction—at the very core—is not a wholly contested concept.

In addition to its situatedness in a particular temporal moment, the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement entails a few interrelated and constitutive characteristics. In what follows, I will espouse those characteristics.

First and foremost, the American Museum attempts to develop an anti-anthropocentric ethos in tourist. Many tourist destinations—especially museums—carry with them a pedagogical orientation about some particular “ism.” Take, for example, the slough of Holocaust museums across the United States. At their core, these are places of public memory meant to keep alive some recollection of a horrid act against a particular population of persons. In a way, the Hall of Biodiversity—though discussing an event entirely different than the Holocaust—is actively trying to memorialize an ongoing catastrophe so that humans might get a clue about what our species is doing to the more-than-human world. Anthropocentrism, like racism and sexism, puts on a pedestal one demographic over another. To that end, the American Museum attempts to expose such anthropocentrism under the pretense that it causes a threat to biodiversity, an

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<sup>119</sup> As I noted earlier and documented elsewhere (Dionne), the dodo bird represents one of the first species humanity recognized as extinct.



essential component of our shared universe.

Secondly, to build a case for why anthropocentrism is problematic for biodiversity, the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement blames humans for their inconsideration of the more-than-human world. Unlike other exhibitions in the American Museum—places that I have argued remain consciously silent about the sixth mass extinction in natural history—throughout the Hall of Biodiversity are a plethora of artifacts on display and didactics that call for tourists to question their anthropocentric tendencies. From the inclusion of the dodo bird to the massive "Spectrum of Life Wall" showcasing the vast world that extinction affects, the Hall of Biodiversity, as the American Museum has promoted via its website, "presents a vivid portrait of the beauty and abundance of life on Earth, highlighting both biodiversity and the factors that threaten it" ("Hall of Biodiversity"). Perhaps my most favorite of these exhibits in the Hall of Biodiversity is the introductory video. Not only does this video feature a celebrity narrator, but also it concisely captures what is at stake in debates about extinction. The American Museum recognizes anthropocentrism as a critical orientation that affects the more-than-human world—a body of agents that includes nonhumans and associated ecosystems. As Tom Brokaw noted in the video, "Life is everywhere on the planet. // It clings to the highest // mountain tops // and lurks deep in the ocean. // But life everywhere is under threat." Accordingly, I have found that this exhibit—like others in this exhibition—seeks to build an anti-anthropocentric ethos that seeks to collapse the human/animal and culture/nature hierarchies.

Next, this blame is central to the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement because the institution hopes that by doing so they can generate in tourist what trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra referred to as an "empathetic unsettlement" (71). A rhetoric of sensation has long circulated amongst nonhuman rights activist collectivities with groups quick to posit questions of

empathy: How would you *feel* if you were subject to a rights violation? These collectivities—of which the American Museum mirrors through its Hall of Biodiversity—seek to persuade via an “affective dimension of inquiry” through which a subject undergoes “a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the differences of that position and hence not taking the other’s place” (LaCapra 78). In linking the context of the sixth mass extinction to particular nonhumans on display (i.e., the dodo bird featured in the display “Lives in the Balance: Endangered Species” or the nonhumans mounted on the “Spectrum of Life Wall”), the American Museum showcases the victims of extinction in a manner that elevates the nonhuman and de-elevates the human. In other words, they attempt to achieve what Carrie Packwood Freeman called “humanimality” (11), or the rhetorical blending of human and nonhuman into one interconnected and distinctly animalistic category.

The ultimate objective of the American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement is to create a reflexive public that scrutinizes individual and collective behaviors that are inconsiderate of the more than human world. Regarding humanimality, Freeman explained, “American society is rhetorically constructed on humanist principles that celebrate humanity’s specialness and define it in opposition to animality” (11). For the purpose of the Hall of Biodiversity, I would expand “American” to include humanity as a whole, and not just within this particular moment—across the past 10,000 years. Of all the didactics at the American Museum that attempts to trigger in the minds of tourist that humans are inconsiderate, this is my favorite:

Human population has exploded since the invention of agriculture some 10,000 years ago.<sup>120</sup> People have already transformed vast amounts of land for farming, and the Industrial Revolution has increased the rate of expansion of cities, roads,

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<sup>120</sup> As a side note, didactics in the Hall of Biodiversity corroborate Morton’s temporal claims about agrilogistics.

and manufacturing facilities—all at the expense of natural ecosystems.

Conversion of land for farming and timber production is accelerating, especially in tropical regions, where most of the world's species live. Our fisheries and numerous wildlife species have become severely depleted through overexploitation, and pollution is poisoning many species outright. Invading species, arriving from distant lands through human contact, are driving large numbers of local species extinct. Some 30,000 species a year are being lost forever—and it is all our fault.

That final line—written so directly—is poignant. It inspires a sense of sadness that ruptures what it means to be a so-called human. Whereas many humans are quick to deny their capacity to destroy, this didactic and its final line leave little room for denial and sends tourists on their way to think about the consequences of human inconsideration of the more-than-human world.

At the very least, as a safety fail, the American Museum's pedagogy of entanglement attempts to teach humans that their species' safety is at risk as biodiversity dwindles. Imagery used in the introductory video *dirtied* and *toxified* spaces that humans inhabit (see fig. 22). Take, for example, the image of murky waters flowing from an industrial-sized pipeline. Nearly any given tourist could recognize this visual situation as referencing polluted waterways (to that end, in the background of the image are refineries). Such an image is repulsive. Little to no one wants her or his waters contaminated. Accordingly, as the American Museum showcases how humans are destroying the more-than-human world, it simultaneously details how we are ruining what we think of as our own world.

In sum, these are the basic tenants that I noted after re-touring the American Museum of Natural History. The American Museum reaches a broad population of tourist (more than five

million per year), and so its potential for affecting the ways in which humans consider the more-than-human world is massive. Still, only time will tell if this temporal machine we call the “Anthropocene” does not consume us.

### **3. Recommendations for Renovations**

In his keynote address at the 2005 Conference on Environmental Communication, Robert Cox famously defined the study of communication—rhetorical or otherwise—as a “crisis discipline” (9). The crisis of which Cox spoke of is that of biodiversity loss and ecological degradation—nascent phenomena that we have been referring to in this thesis as the woes of agrilogistics, or what Morton defined as “the time of a certain logistics of agriculture that arose in the Fertile Crescent and went viral, eventually requiring steam engines and industry to endure” (“How I Learned” 259). If we understand environmental communication to be a crisis discipline that responds to the woes of agrilogistics, then the critical insight offered by rhetoricians is only as valuable as its dispersal and application by practitioners (6). As Rosa A. Eberly noted, “rhetoricians, through their teaching as well as their criticism and other scholarship—public as well as academia—could play a more active role in helping to share what different publics remember and how artifacts of cultural memory are understood” (72). Given the circumstances that underscore this thesis—that of agrilogistics—in what follows I will offer recommendations: “Rather than closing our ears and making loud noises to combat the sound of anti-ecological words, we shall absorb them and neutralize them from within” (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 59).

#### *3.1 Eliminate Language that Propagates the Human/Animal Dualism*

Affirming the often touted phrase language shapes reality, first and foremost the findings in this thesis suggests that the American Museum ought to educate tourists about the use of the

word “animal” as well as eliminate such a title from their exhibitions, especially the Hall of Biodiversity. Doing so will not undo our transhistorical violent relationship with the more-than-human world. However, decreasing the usage of such a linguistic category risks jamming the cogs of anthropocentrism that maintain terms like “human” and “animal” as separate from one another.

As a host of scholars have noted, the discursive “/” between human animals and other-than-human animals is dangerous (Derrida, *The Animal*; Giffney; Goodale and Black; Stibbe, “Language, Power”). The conclusion thus far is that the category *human* is not a stable and inherent category, but rather a social construct (Giffney). Discourse constructs the category *human* against the backdrop of what Derrida referred to in the singular as *the animal* (Derrida, *The Animal*). In her discussion of Derrida, Margaret Wetherell wrote, “We have the illusion of control over meaning as we speak but this is an illusion since the meaning of utterances and statements [are] again determined by the place they hold in a discursive system and this is constantly to slippage” (90). In other words, language is not definitive, but rather arbitrary; the meanings of words are constantly being redefined. Among many other arguments, Derrida contended that the human animal comes to know itself through language by placing all living creatures that are not of its kind in a broad category known as *the animals* (*The Animal*).

In categorizing *the animal* as the *Other*, language triggers issues regarding power, which usually finds its footing in regard to the definition of personhood (Stibbe, “Language, Power”; Wrenn). While the category *human* sits in place of privilege in the human/animal divide, hierarchal layers are still present on the left side of the dualism. Scholars (Freeman; Giffney) argue that the human is constantly in a state of becoming human; language continually widens and narrows to include certain bodies as *persons* and therefore human.

With the linguistic construction of the “/” between the human and nonhuman animal comes transhistorical impacts. The human annihilation of the nonhuman animal is a well documented phenomenon, but often times is not considered as important due to both human exceptionalism and scholars failure to affirm the categories *human* and *animal* as social constructs. The relationship between humans and nonhumans (both animal and the environment) is far more catastrophic than scholars like to believe. Nibert argued that nearly all forms of modern society are directly built upon the historical mistreatment of nonhumans. Nibert wrote that humans have used nonhumans “as instruments of warfare, forced laborers, or rations and other resources,” and this has “*enabled* widespread violence” (5). To enact such destructive means, Nibert contended, “profitable oppression of other animals has been socially engineered in no small part through the creation and ubiquitous use of reality-defining words and expressions that disparage or objectify other animals” (5-6). In other words, discourses, which are “particular ways of talking about, writing about, representing, and ultimately, constructing reality,” constitute and maintain the violent disparity between humans and nonhumans (Alexander and Stibbe 105). In all, the human animal annihilation of other-than-human animals is a transhistorical practice rooted in discursive categorizations, and we, as interdisciplinary scholars, can no longer ignore—or disavow—language’s role in propagating this incomprehensible violence.

Accordingly, the American Museum ought to act quickly and correct its inconsiderate use of the term “animal” in, at the very least, its Hall of Biodiversity. If the goal of the Hall of Biodiversity is to critique the ways in which human beings are actively perpetuating the sixth mass extinction in natural history, then a better way of entangling tourists with their more-than-human counterparts is by better eliminating the discursive and material divide between humans

and these entities we misguidedly call “animals.” In short, as Morton noted, “Equating humans with ‘animals’ seems right. But ‘animals’ are often shorthand for tools or objects of instrumental reason—the equation doesn’t sound so clever when you put it that way. Humans are like ‘animals,’ but ‘animals’ are not ‘animals,’ as we are beginning to see” (43).

### *3.2 Propose Veganism as an Alternate Dietary Practice*

As an entity with purposes in educating the broader public, the American Museum ought to instruct tourists about alternate dietary practices, namely veganism. Veganism is a critical orientation to the more-than-human world that rejects the consumption and/or use of nonhumans for human desire. At no point in time does the Hall of Biodiversity address veganism by name; however, the American Museum does encourage an increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in hopes of decreasing a reliance on products derived from nonhumans.

Critics of this recommendation will be quick to cite unworkability and cultural imperialism as two pitfalls of this suggestion. “The argument that the promotion of global veganism somehow represents cultural imperialism is disingenuous, at best,” argued Nibert, “considering that the erosion of diverse cultures and customs throughout the world to date has been the result of capitalist expansion and cultural hegemony” (263). Indeed, no dietary practice is without some type of social construction. Dietary practices are cultural situated and change throughout history to represent availability, desirability, and marketability. The massive growth of the animal-industrial complex—an enterprise contributing heavily to global warming—is bound up in the same discourses and practices that contribute to the sixth mass extinction in natural history. If anything, the animal-industrial complex is cultural imperialism given that it seeks to erase the existence of life on this planet.

At any rate, I am not suggesting that the Hall of Biodiversity *force* tourists to adopt a

vegan lifestyle. Rather, as a public pedagogue, the American Museum should simply provide tourists with information that may or may not be new to them. Accordingly, the American Museum ought to curate a series of artifacts and didactics that speak to the positive effects of veganism. To that end, the American Museum should also immediately halt the practice of cooking and selling nonhumans in their restaurants. Doing so will not only raise consciousness about more ethical dietary practices, but also model for tourists different types of cuisines possible on a vegan diet.

### *3.3 Cut Ties with Corporate Sponsors*

At the risk of perpetuating the myth that any rhetor can practice a pure politic, I suggest that the American Museum cut ties with corporate sponsorship. “As long capitalism prevails, with its imperatives for expansion, exploitation, increasing profits, and concentrated wealth and income---and the accompanying environmental destruction and domeseccration--,” argued Nibert, “most humans will be too preoccupied with day-to-day survival to realize the vital importance of rejecting products derived from animals and cultivating a plant-based diet” (270). When it comes to the Hall of Biodiversity—an exhibition tasked with documenting the woes of agrilogistics—it is challenging to promote a message about ecological degradation whilst simultaneously taking money from and further promoting corporations like ExxonMobil and Monsanto.

In brief, to accept money from a company like ExxonMobil is to propagate a positive image of that corporation. As Marlia Elisabeth Banning noted, “Beginning in the late 1980s, Exxon Mobil has funded a network of organizations dedicated to debunking global warming” (292). To that end, Emily Plec and Mary Pettenger argued, “ExxonMobil has spent a lot on its alternate energy advertising campaign in the US market...In the end, it orients us to accept the greenwashed frame and to resign ourselves to unsustainable consumption of natural resources”



(473). In this way, the Hall of Biodiversity works as another environmental frame to promote the supposedly *green* message of a host of violent corporations.

As such, the American Museum should cut ties with corporate sponsorship that continues to ravish the more-than-human world. In place of such funding, the American Museum could increase ticket prices or seek out corporate sponsorships with corporations historically committed to protecting the more-than-human world.

#### ***4. Planning Your Next Vacation: Toward More Tours & Re-Tours***

Although I recognize my role as a tourist-academic as one that produced a few practical recommendations, I would be misrepresenting my research and writing process if I claimed that my suggestions for renovations were complete. As a budding tourist-academic, my skills for applying findings in a real world setting, per se, are limited. I would not say I failed to provide a list of needed renovations to be put forth by the American Museum. Indeed, the institution ought to think about what it is communicating by using binary language, supporting the consumption of nonhumans, and relying upon donations from corporate enterprises. Like Marita Gronnvoll and Jamie Landau, I am invested in offering “pragmatic solutions to preventable public health problems” (47), and I find that the sixth mass extinction is precisely that: a public health problem. Accordingly, my first suggestion for future research would be for scholars of applied communication to think through my findings in order to offer a more complete list of renovations that the American Museum could enact to better teach tourists about the woes of agrilogistics contributing to the Holocene Extinction.

To that end, I only offered firsthand observations and thick descriptions of my personal participant-observations at the American Museum. As Gerard A. Hauser argued, “Moved to the level of performance, rhetoric opens inventional spaces: places where ideas, relationships,

emotions bond, and course of action can be experienced in novel, sometimes transformative ways” (33). I extend this assertion and further argue that participant-observation is one of the many methods of data collection that can be used to embed rhetors into a communicative matrix so that they might contribute knowledge about any given subject.<sup>121</sup> Still, for researchers to get a more comprehensive look at the American Museum, they should consider applying other methods to this same study. For example, because the goal of this thesis was to discover how the American Museum rendered intelligible to me as a tourist the pedagogy of entanglement, I did not conduct interviews of other tourists. Future research about the American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement would benefit from interviews that assess questions such as, “What did you learn from touring the Hall of Biodiversity?”

On that note, I only spent a few days time across the past year and a half familiarizing myself with and collecting data about the many wonders the American Museum has to offer. I do not want to fetishize time as a defining factor for quality participant-observation. Whereas studies of activist collectivities (see, for example, Chávez) might involve several years worth of participation, tourism does not often carry such a lengthy tenure. Individuals who tour the American Museum are typically present at the site for mere hours, and so my short term residency—though spread out across several visits—remains truer to the typical tourist experience at the institution. Still, researchers with the resources to set up camp in Manhattan ought to consider a more lengthy study of the American Museum’s pedagogy of entanglement.

Moreover, a multi-site participant-observation would compliment this thesis nicely. As fate would have it, elsewhere, at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, is another Hall of

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<sup>121</sup> On that note, I do not want to suggest that “being there” somehow authorizes truth claims. At the very most, “being there” helps researchers collect data from which they make situated claims that may or may not play out if another research redoes the same study.

Biodiversity, and at the French Museum of Natural History is a similar exhibition. A researcher could potentially compare and contrast the ways in which these exhibitions function. A question to ask includes, “Do these exhibitions function around the same objective?”

Beyond the realm of providing recommendations and tools for practitioners, further pursuits in grounding *tourism as a method* for rhetorical studies ought to consider the role that friends, families, and partners play in the writing and research process. Whereas researchers conducting fieldwork have always had to make peace with the fact that colleagues often accompany them as they collect data, tourism as a commercial enterprise provides a different set of constraints. As a type of participant-observation, tourism is often a fun and shared experience. It is not unheard of for tourists to tour alone; however, such a practice is not as common as touring together. I never visited the American Museum by myself: *Joe was always with me*. My approach to foregrounding my method as a tourist-academic was to include with honesty the role of relationship based humor and strife. Indeed, such happiness and turmoil affected how I performed my role as a tourist-academic, and so I encourage others to think through questions of *how* and *to what effect* accompanying parties can be written into further re-tours.

Lastly, and most perhaps most importantly, I call for other researchers of rhetoric and ecology to locate and diagnose *how* and to what effect pedagogies of entanglement function in other communicative arenas. I first noticed the pedagogy of entanglement shortly before transitioning from an omnivorous to vegan lifestyle. In a course on the rhetorics of feminist activism, I met a young woman—now my friend—who practiced veganism. The way in which she communicated to me pointed toward a pedagogy of entanglement as she sought to convince me to show consideration toward nonhumans by way of connecting human suffering with nonhuman pain. Her pedagogy of entanglement worked on me, and I was motivated to take

action against the animal-industrial complex by taking a very controversial and highly polarizing position *to not consume or use products derived from nonhumans and risk my personal and professional wellbeing by continually performing the role of “the vegan.”*<sup>122</sup>

In the introduction of this thesis, I provided a shortlist of potential pedagogies of entanglement: When quantum physicists assert that the act of observation inherently affects the observed phenomenon, they act as a pedagogue of entanglement; when environmental activists argue that culture is not separate from nature, they perform the role of a pedagogue of entanglement; and when philosophers deconstruct the distinction between humans and nonhumans in favor of a flattened and non-dichotomous subject position, they assume the position of a pedagogue of entanglement. Of these, I want to briefly discuss the potential for further considering the former example—what quantum physics might mean for rhetorical studies.

The epigraphs that opened this chapter—decontextualized words of wisdom that, by way of their dis/placement, exhibit a type of diaspora—are estranged and made new through the entangled essence of interdisciplinary inquiry. Uprooted from the pages of two widely circulated books, reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, and hence forever inscribed in this thesis, these epigraphs, themselves texts “produced only in the transformation of another text” (Derrida, *Positions* 26) are interconnected not only with each other, but also with me (the rhetorical critic), you (the audience), and the artifact discussed throughout this scholarly analysis (the American Museum). As a quantum physicist, Barad has called what you are looking at right now an “agential cut” (140). Once more, agential cuts are arbitrarily extracted splices of space, time, and

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<sup>122</sup> To that end, scholars of communication ought to better assess what happens when a pedagogy of entanglement works. I have yet to find a conclusive study in the field of communication studies that documents the plight of vegans in the public sphere, yet from personal experience I can assure anyone that our bodies are violently marked as deviant.

matter that allow for an observer like myself to momentarily trigger a materially and discursively constructed distinction between “subject” and “object.”

In the first epigraph, Karen Barad, a quantum physicist and scholar of feminist studies, contends that critical and physical distance is an illusion; at the core of any discursive or material matrix—for her, the double-slit experiment—are observers who, by their very ontology, are connected with their object of study. That is to say that the very act of observation—no matter how carefully planned and executed—affects the object of observation because this material *thing* we call “the between” is a rhetorical construction that obscures entangled as *the* ontological unit of existence. Only by enacting an illusive “cut” *between* subject and object (read: scientist and quanta) do we come to see observers as separate from their object of study (Barad 178). Thus for Barad, rhetorical appeals in favor of critical and physical distance conceal rather than reveal *entanglement*—a term that paradoxically and simultaneously signifies a subject position and the lack of a subject position.

In the second epigraph, Kenneth Burke, a literary critic and scholar of rhetoric, offers what appears to be a competitive interpretation. For Burke, entanglement is a rhetorical appeal that seeks to decrease the critical and physical distance between subject (rhetor) and object (audience). Extending, challenging, and trumping a Freudian understanding of identification, Burke observes that humans are divided and scattered about the earth and use rhetoric, which he understands as “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols,” in order to achieve the *affects* of consubstantiality—a type of wholeness experienced by divided brethren (43). As his epigraph suggests, for rhetors to proclaim their unity with an audience is to deploy entanglement as a rhetorical appeal that brings together disparate audiences.

At the risk of offering a dichotomous reading of right/wrong, I contend that both Barad and Burke are correct in their assessment of entanglement; *their positions are not competitive, but rather complementary to one another*. Barad offers us an image of the universe whereby we, as humans, are not materially divided from other humans, nonhumans, and the physical world. Unfortunately, we see ourselves as divided, and so Burke offers us an image of the universe whereby we, as rhetoricians, try to render ourselves undivided from other humans, nonhumans, and the physical world. Considering these positions, I propose a syncretism by asking the following questions: If entanglement is the ontological unit of living and non-living matter and meaning—that is, a physical and *very real* condition of existence—what are the rhetorical effects of communication that seek to reduce the perceived divide between human and nonhuman, culture and nature, and subject and object? Can we think about entanglement as both ways at once—as a *subjectless* position and a *subjectivity*? The answer to this latter question is yes. *Entangled is an ontological unit and a subject position*. Still, to answer this question, other researchers—perhaps me—need to further grapple with what rhetoricians can learn from theoretical quantum physics.

In conclusion, I call for a critical investigation of pedagogies of entanglement. Whenever we visit a tourist destination such as a museum, microscopic mites crawl about our eyelashes; whenever we glance at relics from the Middle Ages, we make contact with weapons used to end the lives of chickens, cows, and pigs; and whenever we pay our respects to fallen soldiers from world wars, we thank horses ridden by the cavalry. Tourist destinations might not call us to consider the more-than-human world as the lead performer in any given narrative, but we misguidedly commit a fatal, anthropocentric flaw when we refuse to consider it as integral to constructing, maintaining, and dispersing thought about any given site. If we consider

entanglements as an integral component to rhetorical studies, then these become our central questions when touring: *How might our understandings of tourist destination transform when we consider humans as entangled with the more-than-human world? What becomes of the “human” when there no longer is space between us and the nonhuman Other?* The answers to these questions are all around us, but can especially be found at the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, New York (see fig. 31).



Fig. 31. The Entangled Subject. Photo by the Author.

## EPILOGUE

### A New Entanglement?

When animal bodies leap from the stars, or off the pages of a fairytale and onto actual soil, they violently disrupt established boundaries.

Natasha Seegert, *“Queer Beasts: Ursine Punctures in Domesticity”*

All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings.

Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*

On the day I completed “Touring Extinction,” the American Museum first unveiled its most recent exhibition, “Dinosaurs Among Us” (see. fig 32). As I prepare to share this thesis



Fig. 32. “Dinosaurs Among Us” sign. Photo by the Author.

with my advisor and committee, I have yet to experience this exhibition. Still, I cannot help but



notice some familiar strands of thought reappearing in the American Museum's latest expedition into the lives of those populating the more-than-human world.

According to the American Museum's website, "Dinosaurs Among Us" entails the following experience:

The evolution of life on Earth is full of amazing episodes. But one story that really captures the imagination is the transition from the familiar, charismatic dinosaurs that dominated the planet for around 170 million years into a new, small, airborne form: birds.

The fossil record of this story grows richer by the day. So rich, in fact, that the boundary between the animals we call birds and the animals we traditionally called dinosaurs is now practically obsolete. In this special exhibition, visitors will discover how the dinosaurs' extraordinary story continues today. ("Dinosaurs Among Us")

What catches my attention in this description is that it appears as if the American Museum is trying to entangle a *past* more-than-human world with the *present* more-than-human world. I cannot help but ask why?

In an early review of "Dinosaurs Among Us," William Grimes of the *New York Times* wrote that he considered the main objective of the exhibition to "prove, if nothing else, that evolution has made wonderful cosmetic improvements over the past 150 million years." To meet this goal, the American Museum showcases a series of birds, dinosaurs, and dinosaur-bird hybrids, none of which appear to be housed in dioramas. From what I can tell, this exhibition takes on the visual form of the Hall of Biodiversity rather than spaces like the Hall of North American Mammals.

Of particular interest to this thesis are the oviraptors—the egg thieves. Pictured in the review are two oviraptors affectionately named Sid and Nancy. Grimes noted, Sid and Nancy “were buried in the Gobi Desert about 75 million years ago, probably when a sand dune collapsed, and now lie together, in eternal repose, at the museum.” Like the oviraptors in the gift shop on the 4th floor of the museums, these two appear as if they are nesting. I think back to the tourist who asked Ginger if the oviraptor was warm blooded or cold blooded. Clearly, the answer to that question matters.

At any rate, I can only speculate about the American Museum’s intentions with this new exhibition. Perhaps “Dinosaurs Among Us” is just a ploy to attract tourists. Perhaps the American Museum merely wants to educate the public that dinosaurs are common ancestors to birds. Perhaps this exhibition makes a political statement about evolution in a time where individuals still deny a species’ capacity to adapt and morph over thousands and millions of years. Perhaps the American Museum is interested in all three of these aims. What is clear, however, is that the American Museum has some sort of purpose for curating an exhibition that links together dinosaurs and birds, and this exhibition as a rhetorical force will have some effect on tourists.

It seems fitting that *entanglements know no end* at the American Museum (see fig. 32).

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