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# Old Stories, New Narratives: Public Archaeology and the Politics of Display at Georgia's Official Southeastern Indian Interpretive Center

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OLD STORIES, NEW NARRATIVES:

PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF DISPLAY AT

GEORGIA'S OFFICIAL SOUTHEASTERN INDIAN INTERPRETIVE CENTER

by

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Under the Direction of Despina Margomenou, PhD

ABSTRACT

Presenting a case study of an American Indian exhibit at the Funk Heritage Center, I critically examine how this museum's ideologies and preferred pedagogies shape public discourse about Southeastern Indians in the past and present. Using the methodology of Visitor Studies, this public archaeology project illustrates the benefits of incorporating applied anthropology into museological practice through collaboration with museum staff, volunteers, visitors, and American Indians. Operating within the theoretical frameworks of Charles R. Garoian (2001) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991), my results imply that inserting archaeological narratives into institutional pedagogy alters a museum's traditional "performance" of the past by challenging its own authority; ultimately, I show how this process can increase viewer awareness about the politics of display.

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ERIN L. ANDREWS

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For Peter

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INTRODUCTION

> American archaeology, despite some significant progress in the past decade, is still failing to effectively tell the public about how modern anthropological archaeology functions and about the huge gains archaeologists have made in understanding the development of ancient cultures through time and space.[Sabloff 1998:869]

*Public Archaeology and Museums*

Public archaeology is crucial to ensuring public interest in the preservation of past societies and imparting archaeological knowledge to future generations. As Jeremy A. Sabloff (1998) points out, communicating what archaeologists actually "do" and *why* what we do is relevant to the public is an essential step to continuing archaeological efforts to expand our knowledge about the past. Because archaeology enriches our understanding of our human ancestors, its findings are pertinent to everyone. However, while most professionals work with local constituents for their own personal projects, few actually specialize in how to effectively communicate their archaeological findings to the broader general public (Fagan 1977; Sabloff 1998).

*Impetus for Research*

To bridge this communication gap, I argue that museums are effective media through which archaeologists may communicate their changing interpretations about the past to the public. I propose that the representation of prehistoric American Indians in museums should be directly tied to the complex processes of archaeological research and dissemination of knowledge. Understanding that archaeologists shoulder the responsibility of consulting with the local populations of the areas in which they work, I argue that simply maintaining good relations with the public is not enough (Goodacre 2002; James 1999; McLoughlin 1999; Moser 2003; Pearce 1999; Sorensen 1999). On the contrary, because local cultural interpretive centers

actively shape public discourse about the past and especially about early American Indians

(Moser 2003; Nason 2003), I argue that archaeologists need to be more involved with the local

museums situated in their region(s) of study. As James D. Nason, the director of the American

Indian Studies Center at the University of Washington, points out

> most Americans [have] the greatest potential access to local history museums—museums with relatively small numbers of professional staff who have, at some time or another, created long-term exhibitions that usually include local Native American materials…it is these history museums that have had the greatest museological impact on American views about Native Americans, not the professionally created anthropological displays in the larger university, state, or natural history museums. It is not the latter that we should look to as the museum sources of American attitudes toward Native American history and culture, but rather the local history museum. [2000:35 – 36]

In other words, because local history museums are ubiquitous, readily accessible to the public

and often lack the funding or personnel to update their exhibits, it is highly important for

archaeologists to support these institutions in their efforts to educate the public about the past.

Providing a model for other local cultural institutions, this ethnography shows how the

inclusion of archaeological narratives in museum tours and its educational programs engenders

public understanding about how a story is presented, who it is told about, and what information

is conveyed. Rooted in ethnographic evidence obtained from research at the Funk Heritage

Center's Bennett Museum, this thesis offers some possible solutions for other locally based

museums wanting to update the content of their exhibits in order to improve the quality of their

public education.

*Background Information*

Although I work as a full-time archaeologist for a private firm, I have served as a

volunteer archaeologist at the Funk Heritage Center since 2005. Throughout my tenure, I have

taught both children and adults about the importance of archaeology through museum tours,

public lectures, and educational programs. From these experiences I have gained insight into

public discourse about archaeology and identified some of the public's misconceptions about American Indians. Perhaps the most troubling misunderstanding encountered over the course of my activity is an ideology that speaks to an unawareness of *living* Southeastern Indian descendants and their contemporary contributions to American cultural practices.

To deconstruct these misunderstandings, I decided to evaluate an exhibit called the *Hall of the Ancients* housed within the Bennett Museum of the Funk Heritage Center. I set out to understand the following questions: What are the pedagogies currently employed in the institution's presentation of the past and how do these ideologies inform its discourse about Southeastern Indians? How do visitors view or understand the Southeastern Indians displayed in the exhibit? Are visitors aware of the archaeological processes that shaped the main ideas of the exhibit's didactic displays? By inserting new narratives into the exhibit tour and its related educational programs, how can the museum effectively change public discourse about archaeology and the Southeastern Indians? While this intervention may appear to reflect a personal agenda, its original formulation stemmed from the institution's request for the development of an archaeological education program which involved many months of respectful collaboration with the museum's staff, administration, and constituent communities.

*Georgia's Official Southeastern Indian Interpretive Center*

Situated in the northwestern Ridge and Valley province of Georgia, the Funk Heritage Center (FHC) is located behind the campus of Reinhardt College. Opened in 1999, the FHC was founded by philanthropist and Atlanta physician, Dr. James Funk (FHC 2009). According to the institution's website, over 100,000 people have visited the FHC in the last decade making the FHC an influential local history museum for the Southeast (Hout 2008). Marketed as "Georgia's Official Frontier and Southeastern Indian Interpretive Center," the FHC is comprised of an

Appalachian Settlement, which includes several original 19th century log structures and the John

H., Sr. and Ethel C. Bennett History Museum (Hout 2008). The Bennett Museum houses three

main exhibits: *Tools of the Trades, The Sellars Collection: A Native American Art Gallery,* and

the *Hall of the Ancients*. The latter exhibit is designed to tell the story about early American

Indians living in the Southeast and serves as the focal point of my research. To provide the

reader with an adequate context about this museum and the culture surrounding its development,

it is necessary to provide a brief summary about the formation of Reinhardt College.

Established in 1883, Reinhardt College was founded by Captain Augustus Michael

Reinhardt, son of Lewis Reinhardt (the founder of the town of Waleska, Georgia) and his

brother-in-law, Lieutenant Colonel John J. A. Sharp. Backed by the financial pledge of support

from the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in Dalton, Georgia

these two Confederate veterans first opened the school in the remnants of an old cabinet shop

(Smith 2008). Over the past 125 years, the Methodist Episcopal Church has played a major role

in designating Reinhardt's presidents as well as influencing the educational mission of the

college (Smith 2008).

With these roots in mind, the hierarchical structure of the entire institution is as follows:

the FHC is an extension of Reinhardt College which is governed by the budgets established by

the Board of Trustees. This board oversees all financial activity within the college, and therefore,

the museum. Managing all financial undertakings and budgetary decisions, the Board of Trustees

holds the power to entertain recommendations of action by the FHC's Advisory Board; however,

the Advisory Board is limited in its power in shaping the FHC, in that its decisions have to be

sanctioned by the college's Board of Trustees. Most importantly, the Board of Trustees makes

the final call as to which funds, if any, are diverted from the college's general pool for use at the museum.

In this vein, institutional support from the academic college within which the FHC is affiliated was crucial to the sustainability of this project. Therefore, I presented a proposal for this research to the Advisory Board in October of 2008. Because some of members of the Advisory Board sit on the Board of Trustees, this meeting helped me create a collaborative relationship between the museum, its professional staff (including its volunteers), and Reinhardt College. The success of this mission will be revisited in the Epilogue.

*Limitations and Challenges*

"Money and time are perhaps the two largest concerns in developing museological programs whether they are in the form of exhibits or public outreach" (Outside curator, personal communication, February 19, 2009). Based on this curator's testimony, it is unsurprising that these two factors served as my greatest challenges during the course of this research.

Often the Achilles' heel of museum program development, funding can make or break the objectives of any educational program – even with the best laid plans and a competent staff. In the case of this research, I had intended to develop archaeological materials to supplement visitors' tours through the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit. It quickly became apparent that the museum could not bear the costs of these items since the FHC receives only $2500 *per year* for educational program development (Museum staff, personal communication, December 21, 2008). Understanding this constraint, I worked very hard to provide cost-effective measures for improving the exhibit's content; furthermore, I donated my personal time and finances to achieve the basic goals of this research. More of these goals and the means through which they were accomplished are detailed in Chapter 4.

Time, or lack thereof, served as a bit of roadblock for this undertaking. Having submitted an expedited research protocol to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August of 2008, I had originally intended to start my research by October 1, 2008. However, IRB approval of my research design was not issued until December of 2008. Thus, my lay observations and background research constituted the formative assessment section of this research, leaving interviews and sanctioned participant-observation to be conducted during the months of January and February 2009. While I had hoped to conduct research for a longer period of time, I firmly believe that I surveyed a representative sample of the visiting population at the FHC (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, the people I interviewed were gracious enough to donate at least half an hour of their time or more; thus, these testimonials contributed to my understanding of institution's culture and the public discourses formed within it.

*Ethics*

Following the Code of Ethics published by the American Anthropological Association, I ensured that this research would pose no further risk to my informants than they would encounter in a typical day of their lives (AAA 1999). Having received Institutional Review Board approval from Georgia State University, I employed the utmost respect for my informants and their mental well-being and did not disclose their testimonies to anyone other than my supervising Principal Investigator, Dr. Despina Margomenou. Additionally, deception was not employed in any form during the course of this research and every effort was made to explicitly announce the objectives of this research to my informants. All interviewees were provided with informed consent forms outlining the stipulations and objectives of this research; furthermore, I received permission from each interviewed informant to use an audio digital recording device. Upon the completion of this thesis, all the digital audio files were destroyed and the

transcriptions of those files are housed under the protection of a password encrypted electronic file accessible only by the Principal and Student Investigators.

In keeping with ethical standards of ethnographic research, the identities of my informants will remain anonymous throughout this text, including the visitors who participated by filling out surveys and the museum's staff. To further protect the identities of the participants involved in this research, the results of my ethnographic findings are generally presented in grouped categories. However, when specific commentaries are used to support a thematic argument, I have cited these informants using generic job titles and pseudonyms to guard any personally identifying information.

*A Note on Terminology*

After consulting with a number of American Indians and professional scholars, I have decided to use the terms "Southeastern Indian," "American Indian," and "Native American" and their plural forms interchangeably throughout this thesis. While all are technically incorrect, these words are the accepted terms used in both professional and public spheres to describe the indigenous populations of people living on the North American continent before, during, and after European contact.

*Thesis Overview*

In the spirit of public archaeology, this thesis demonstrates how the inclusion of archaeological narratives in museological practice engenders the public awareness of the politics behind displaying the distant past. By presenting a case study of the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit at the Funk Heritage Center, I critically examine how the museum's ideologies and preferred pedagogies shape public discourse about Southeastern Indians in the past and present. Operating within the theoretical frameworks of Charles R. Garoian (2001) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

(1991), I use this case study to illustrate how local museums can improve their traditional "performance" of the past by inserting new narrative into their didactic displays and public educational programming. Relying on the methods of applied anthropology through collaboration with museum staff, volunteers, visitors, and American Indians, my research highlights the benefits of incorporating public archaeology into museological practice.

In keeping with archaeological principles of the importance of context, Chapter 2 weaves an historical overview from archaeological, anthropological, and museological sources, through a review of literature concerned with the formation, development, and modern praxis of museums in the West. Fleshing out the modern implications of this historical background, Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical frameworks of Charles R. Garoian (2001) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) which stem from the fields of performance culture, museum studies, art history, and visual anthropology. Utilizing the interdisciplinary overlap of these theoretical paradigms, I deconstruct the take-home messages of the *Hall of the Ancients* and unpack the public discourse surrounding the pedagogies of this exhibit in the latter half of Chapter 3.

Operating within Garoian's (2001) theoretical structure, Chapter 4 details the methodology employed over the course of this research. This chapter is broken down into the typical investigative phases used in the field of Visitor Studies: Front End Assessment, Formative Interpretation, and Summative Evaluation.

Having established the means through which I conducted my research, Chapter 5 provides the bulk of my summative evaluation by analyzing the results of my ethnographic inquiry. Entitled "Lost Narratives," this chapter compares the museum's original intentions of the *Hall of the Ancients* to its actual practice based on the front end and formative assessments of

my research. Drawing from a number of conversations, I seek to concretely define narratives lost over time and infer some of the reasons for their loss.

Seeking to recapture some of these important narratives, Chapter 6 offers some of the strategies I used to reduce institutional authority, increase visitor agency, enhance public knowledge about the modern contributions of American Indians, and enrich the take-away messages of the exhibit. Taking into account suggestions and critiques of visitors, museum staff, volunteers, and American Indians, this chapter attempts to present some effective measures for improving the educational quality of the *Hall of the Ancients* and its associated public programs through archaeological narratives.

Based upon this ethnography, I conclude in Chapter 7 by detailing the benefits of employing public archaeology in museums. Urging professionals to relinquish some of their traditional authority and embrace interdisciplinary collaboration, I challenge museums, archaeologists, and American Indians to work together to develop quality educational programs about the past for the public. Overall, I argue that actively reinventing museological praxis by including up-to-date archaeological information about the past viewers see on display supports cultural institutions in their missions to maintain scholastic environments for future research, preservation commitments, and public educational outreach. It is my hope that this research will assist future generations of professionals in achieving these goals.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MUSEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

*Introduction*

Museums in the public eye are legitimate cultural storekeepers of knowledge for this reason, visitors tend to believe that everything in an exhibit reflects an authoritative voice, or the truth with a capital "T" (Falk and Dierking 2000; Hein, H. 2000). Aiming to demystify public ideology about museums and the field of archaeology, contemporary scholars have argued for the creation of more accessible disciplines that reveal the constraints of archaeological inquiry and the politics behind the representation of archaeological findings (Moser 2003; Pearce 1999). For the past several decades, museums, like archaeology, have gradually moved away from the traditional practice of collecting for the sake of creating typologies and amassing hordes of antiquities (Binford 1962; Clark 1973). Coming to focus on forming narratives about past cultures through collaboration with archaeologists, amateurs, and descendent communities, museums have sought to complement the formation of their exhibits through public involvement (Shackel 2004). These efforts, whether mandated through federal legislation or undertaken voluntarily, largely have increased the role of the public in the creation of interpretive sites and have acted to increase the accessibility of the discipline of museum studies (Moser 1999; Moser 2003; Pearce 1999; Saville 1999; Sørensen 1999).

To adequately understand the ancestry of contemporary museums in the United States, the first section of this chapter will take into account the profound influences European museological models had on the creation of American heritage institutions. From this departure point, the subsequent text elaborates upon the profound effects the world expositions of the 19th century had on museological displays of American Indians. Finally, the implications of the civil

rights movement in museological discourse and practice will be detailed followed by a brief sketch of the contemporary museum praxis resulting from the "culture wars" of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bunch 1992).

*From the Old World to the New*

Following in the footsteps of their European forerunners, early American museums modeled themselves after Old World institutions (Ames 1992; Bunten 2008; Karp 1991a; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Maurer 2000). Displaying collections from myriad locations using natural specimens, artifacts, and even people, early American museums began to build their foundations in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Like their European counterparts, these American organizations sought to bring "exotic" societies to their homeland audiences in order to illustrate and celebrate America's achieved status on the Western stage (Ames 1992; Karp 1991c; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Wood 1999). In this manner, these early cultural institutions sought to reproduce America's place in the world as a rising economic power by displaying "lesser" cultures to its own citizens (Clements 2000; Maurer 2000). To make explicit the implications of American museums adopting European models, the subsequent text will briefly trace the origins of European museums.

*Noble Conquests for the Common Man*

Emerging from an era of colonialism, early European museums took shape around the late 16<sup>th</sup> century during the vast exploration commissions initiated by European polities (Ames 1992). During these excursions, wealthy merchants and royal agents procured various cultural items from the lands in which they traveled and housed them in their private collections (Ames 1992; Bunch 1992; Handler 1985; James 1999). Typically framed as "curiosities" obtained from "uncivilized" worlds outside of Western Europe (Ames 1992:16; Maurer 2000), the purpose of

the collection and display of these alien cultural goods was to give "evidence of political virtue, indicative of a government that provided the right things for its people" (Duncan 1991:88). As Garoian (2001) points out, these collections were a form of public memory that "served as a tool to store and recall knowledge, to imagine about the world, and to bring order to its chaotic nature" (234). Eventually, these materials came to comprise the base-collections for Europe's most notable museological institutions like the British Museum in London (Hamilakis 1999) and the Louvre in Paris (Hinsley 1991).

During the late 18th century in Europe, antiquarians often found themselves at the center of public debate. Because the social discourse lauded Western European society as the pinnacle of all world civilizations, the social purpose collecting of exotica from "savage" societies was solely to contribute to Western knowledge; in other words, if a noble or merchant procured any item from abroad, it had to serve nationalist intentions and could not simply be collected for the sake of prizing the exotic – to do so would be to legitimize "barbarianism" and detract from the West's "civilized" status in the world (Peltz 1999; Tylor 2008[1871]). For example, collectors from this period would bring back items that could be used for scientific inquiries about the natural or biological world. As Peltz (1999) eloquently explains, such

> salvaged fragments were the source of some contention. It was in the light of the contrast between the liberal requirement for abstract and general knowledge and the comparative vulgarity of self-indulgent and singular interests that the antiquarians' social propriety was consistently attacked. [118]

Moving out of the Enlightenment, collections in the 18th century continued to reflect the cultural ideologies of colonialism by highlighting the profound differences between foreign cultures and those found in Europe through the display of different phenomena (Ames 1992; Trigger 1989).

In the 19th century, European museums transformed from the celebrated storehouses of elite collections to more accessible displays intended for the then-emerging middle class (Ames

1992; Hinsley 1991; Honerkamp 1997). Concerned with amassing collections of exotic objects

to "save" disappearing cultures, Peers and Brown (2003) explain that early museums

> consolidated knowledge as the basis of curatorial and institutional authority. Often this relationship was predicated on another set of relationships, between museums as institutions within imperial powers and source communities in colonized regions. [1]

Throughout this period, museological institutions continued exhibiting cultures from foreign

lands under the control of European powers. However, as these institutions gained legitimacy

from the public, museums burgeoned from limited pockets of collections to accessible cultural

entities. Pelz (1999) points out that

> the idea of the public museum had gained importance and, from the 1830s, this resulted in the building of museums all over Europe. The pan-European foundation of national and public museums has frequently been interpreted as an expression of the self-confidence of the educated bourgeoisie. [135]

Dovetailing into the latter portion of the above sentiment, scholars offer similar ideas about the

purpose of these early European institutions. Some argue that these museological displays acted

to legitimize Western imperialism and subsequent colonization of other cultures (Alter and Ward

1994; Atalay 2006; Baxandall 1991; Goswamy 1991; Handler 1985; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

1991; McLoughlin 1999). Others believe that the purpose of early museums was to "educate and

inform" specialized publics (Hooper-Greenhill 1991:9) about the necessity of collecting these

exotica to reaffirm nationalistic pride and the status of the West (Peltz 1999; Trigger 1989; Tylor

2008[1871]). Taking into account social and economic forces of the time, other professionals

attribute the promulgation of museums to the "printing press, the spread of education in

vernacular languages…and the development of political democracy" (Ames 1992:16).

All of these perspectives are valid on some level. Established to house items of social

significance, cultural importance, or evidence of other natural phenomena, museum

organizations born of the Age of Enlightenment were entrusted (albeit by social elites) to protect

and preserve special objects for perpetuity and "salvage" vanishing cultures for national benefit (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). This is not to say, however, that early museum collections were not controlled by political agendas – quite the opposite. Because most of these early institutions were established, funded, and maintained by elite social groups, access to these resources remained primarily in the hands of dominant social classes (Ames 1992; Lang 2006; Lewis 2005; Marstine 2006). However, a number of early collections were open for public consumption by the turn of the 19th century, though access to highly prized cultural materials remained constrained (Ames 1992). To reinforce Western discourse about its greatness, the majority of European museums exhibited colonized cultures through sacred objects, valuable artifacts, and real people (Karp 1991a; Karp 1991b; Karp 1991c; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Wood 1999). Thus, the objects on display at these museums acted to signify cultural meanings of authenticity, power, and authority in the West (Ames 1992; Crew 1991; Handler 1986; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Kopytoff 1988).

*The Emergence of American Museums*

By the dawn of the Industrial Age in America, the great museums of the Old World were firmly established as institutions of knowledge having procured the majority of their collections from those amassed by venerated social elites in the previous centuries (Hooper-Greenhill 1994c; Lavine 1991). In the United States, the then-nascent capitalist model of the late 19th century created a tense social climate between upper class elites and a burgeoning middle class of *nouveau riche* (Wallace 1986). To distance themselves from "new money," dominant class members sought to legitimize their social status by forging linkages with the past through the creation of ancestral societies; these elite clubs and their collections eventually formed the some of earliest American museums (Lewis 2005).

Building upon the classification system developed by Linnaeus during the age of scientific inquiry, American museums in the 19th century sought to develop taxonomies of the social world by collecting ethnographic objects of "primitive" societies (Greenblatt 1991; Hail 1999; Hinsley 1991; Hooper-Greenhill 1994c; Karp 1991b; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Taking a lead from the scholarship of scientific inquiry, museums became institutions of authority over discrete subjects of interest, caring for and organizing their collections more mindfully (Hooper-Greenhill 1991; Lewis 2005). Glimpses of future educational movements were visible through mission statements of select organizations; for example, in 1856, the goal of the Chicago Historical Society was to "encourage historical enquiry and spread historical information" (Lewis 2005:11). During this period, museums continued to achieve social authority through the significance attributed to the authentic objects they housed (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991).

*World Fairs and Exhibiting American Indians*

Intended to celebrate the industrial achievements of the West, the Chicago World's Fair became a key event in American history by opening a public window to the "exotic" worlds within and beyond the continental United States (Hinsley 1991; Maurer 2000). Building upon European models like The Crystal Palace in London of 1851 and the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867, the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago World's Fair) of 1893 provided a mold for the creation of future museums and the display of cultures through people, performance, and materials (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Maurer 2000). Giving a glimpse into the magnitude of this landmark event, Maurer (2000) details that the fair

> marked the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to North America and was an event of gigantic proportions. A city of huge, gleaming white neoclassical palaces was onstructed from iron frames covered with a white stucco-like material that simulated marble…massive beaux-arts and neoclassical structures were set up on the fairgrounds at the edge of Lake Michigan…and covered hundreds of acres. Individual buildings were

devoted to international expositions of industry, agriculture, forestry, mining, and the liberal arts. [22]

Serving as a cultural kaleidoscope for the American public, the Chicago World's Fair significantly impacted the trajectory of emerging American museums in the late 19th century. Displaying living people performing their daily activities for the viewing pleasure of the general public, the fair endorsed the exhibition of indigenous cultures, especially those of Native Americans (Maurer 2000). While Native American people had made appearances on the European stage of cultural exhibitions in previous centuries, their representation at this event was unprecedented in both scale and cultural breadth. A touchstone for museums to come, Maurer (2000:23) explains that

> The largest collection of Native American displays was in the anthropology building [on the grounds of Chicago's fair]. Architectural models, photographs, maps, didactic information, and actual Indian objects were used to present aspects of Native American life in the major geographical regions of the continent. These displays included a review of culture in the Southwest from earliest prehistoric times up to the late nineteenth century…Hundreds of Native American men, women, and children worked as guides dressed in Native clothing in the popular Indian villages and other exhibition areas.

The ethnographic objects generated from the Chicago World's Fair and other similar international expositions eventually were donated to museological institutions; thus, these items became the backbone of countless museum collections worldwide. In this fashion, the museums surfacing at the beginning of the 20th century possessed a "direct link between the European tradition of world's fairs displaying peoples and objects from Native American cultures and the establishment of the first museums presenting American Indian culture to the non-Indian public" (Maurer 2000:23).

For the next century, American Indians, their art, cultural materials, and sacred objects would be displayed throughout the United States (and abroad) in various museums. While many curators of early museums aimed to educate the public about Native American life ways, exhibits

often denied the presence of contemporary Native people (Shackel 2004; West 2000; Wood

1999). Whether acting as participants in living history exhibitions (Nishioka 1998), or being

illustrated as static figures in ethnographic dioramas in natural history museums (Maurer 2000),

Native peoples were portrayed as beasts or "wild savages" (Atalay 2006; Cooper 2008;

Goswamy 1991; Rosoff 2003). For example, Maurer (2000:25-26) notes that the first exhibits of

American Indians at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History

portrayed

> Native Americans as they lived during the last half of the nineteenth century…[showing] various aspects of Indian life, yet [having] few references to religion or the relationship of the sacred to basic activities such as hunting, farming, of the decoration of objects…There [was] little attempt to show any difference in tribal styles or to recognize the role of the individual …The result [was] another presentation of Native American cultures frozen in time, which brings no sense of Native American individuality to the visitor's consciousness, and fails to depict the development of Native peoples and show how they live today.

Ubiquitous across the United States, museological praxis in the form of cultural displays denied

American Indians their voices, agencies, and contemporary existence. Over the next century,

museums continually contributed to the marginalization of Native American communities by

portraying them as environmental reactors and faceless automatons of the past (Hudson 1991;

Johnson 1999).

During this era, public discourse assumed museums as loci of institutionalized

knowledge about American Indian cultures failing to acknowledge or willingly accept Native

peoples as guardians of their own heritage. Founded upon the authenticity and legitimacy of their

collected materials, museums possessed the sole interpretive authority over cultural displays.

Thus, public ideology revered museums as sacred institutions of knowledge (Cameron 1971;

Hein 2000; Lewis 2005). In all, early American museums started a trend of ethnocentrism in the

form of these ethnographic displays; this trend would be very hard to break over time. Because

the structure and displays of early museums were rooted in colonialist ideology (e.g. "West is Best"), museums found it difficult to break this mold, that is, until the emergence of the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s (Bunch 1992).

*From Authority to Inclusivity*

Beginning in the mid-20th century, the Western world witnessed the advent of public museums in various forms (Wallace 1996). Very gradually, museums relinquished a portion of their authority over their collections (Cameron 1971; Goodacre 2002). Faced with backlash generated during the civil rights and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, museums began to undergo a significant transition (Csikszentmihalyi 1993; Goodacre 2002; Wallace 1996). Increasingly, the public became concerned with issues of representation of minority groups critiquing museums for their exclusionary practices (Lewis 2005; Sorensen 1999).

By the late 20th century, "culture wars" emerged from earlier civil rights movements, calling for museums to undergo institutional change by accepting responsibility for maintaining control over ethnographic objects and keeping human remains from their rightful owners (Bunch 1992; Hudson 1991; Karp 1991d; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Rosoff 2003; Vizenor 1986). Aided by governmental legislation like the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the post-modern movement caused museums to show more institutional respect for historically marginalized groups. Thus, museological discourse and practice began to transform from object-based authority to constituent inclusivity. Lewis explains that the American public felt it was "no longer possible to think of a museum as a site of unquestioned authority…instead, the museum [needed to] become a forum, a space for confrontation, experimentation and debate" (2005:5).

Additionally, the promulgation of the internet and digital technologies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries pushed museums towards including and utilizing new pedagogical practices (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006). Creating virtual exhibits layered with multiple narratives and employing pluralistic pedagogies, museums are growing more cognizant of their public displays and their didactic exhibitions of the past (Hawkey 2006).

*The Value of Visitor Experience*

Due to changing socio-cultural climates of the post-modern era, cultural institutions have undergone a pragmatic transition in museological discourse (Pearce 1999). Physical, "real" objects are no longer at the core of museum values; rather, most cultural institutions privilege visitor experience and audience education over the importance of archaic displays of objects (Dailey 2006; Hein 1998; Hein 2000; Hooper-Greenhill 1991; Hooper-Greenhill 1994a; 1994b; 1994c). Faced with the challenges of an emerging "experience economy" (Pine 1998:97), museums now compete with non-research oriented leisure destinations like Disney World and other theme parks for visitors (Alter 1994; Dailey 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Richards 2000; Rosoff 2003; Wallace 1986; Wallace 1996). In addition to meeting the needs and wants of their visitors, contemporary museums must follow curricula set forth by local, state and/or national public policy to qualify for various funding sources concerned with the public relevance of exhibits.

To combat these challenges, some museums employ marketing staffs and frame their institution as visitor attractions in public advertising campaigns (Pine 1998). Emerging from this practice, the discipline of visitor studies assesses the feedback of museum patrons regarding their museum experience, tastes (likes and dislikes), and various other preferences (Wallace 1996). Illustrating the enormous impact the public has come to have on the creation and maintenance of

museological pedagogies, visitor studies embodies the monumental shift experienced by cultural

institutions at the turn of the 21st century. Put differently, the "common sense" or hegemony

(Gramsci 1975) of museums has changed; instead of being a closed sanctuaries of authority,

museums now are coming to serve as a forums for idea exchange (Cameron 1971).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Introduction*

In the wake of changing museological practice, what is the role of institutional agents traditionally responsible for imparting museum authority? Further, if visitor experience has gained greater legitimacy in the creation of didactic narratives communicated in museum displays, what agency does the viewer possess in giving meaning to that which is exhibited? What other cultural agents are at work in designing the take-home messages of museum displays? Ultimately, how does the institution perform these narratives?

Performance theory provides a tool for tackling these issues; namely, Charles R. Garoian's "Performing the Museum" (2001) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Objects of Ethnography" (1991) offer two theoretical frameworks for explaining the politics behind cultural representations in museums. Specifically, these frameworks suit the needs of this research because the *Hall of the Ancients'* primary means of portraying the past stems from detailed murals within three-dimensional dioramas. Because mural art forms are ubiquitous in the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit, both of these theories offer useful strategies for understanding the complex relationship between a cultural institution and its constituents. Furthermore, these two approaches provide different methods for deconstructing ideologies as they are "performed" in the Bennett Museum.

In the text below, I begin by familiarizing the reader with the essential concepts of the theories presented by Garoian (2001) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991), respectively. At the close of this chapter, I use these theories to critically analyze the take-home messages of the *Hall of the Ancients.*

*Garoian – "Performing the Museum"*

Charles R. Garoian outlines a five-pronged "critical performative pedagogy" designed to challenge institutional authority and allow "viewers" greater agency in the creation of meaning (2001:234). While Garoian's theory is located within the context of art history museums, his principles may also be applied to other cultural institutions. Garoian (2001:236) lays out his argument in the following observation:

> By performing the museum, viewers bring their personal identities into play with the institution's dominant ideologies. In doing so, they are able to imagine and create new possibilities for museums and their artifacts within their contemporary cultural lives.

Put differently, the museum and its constituents are players in a recursive dialogue that creates meaning for objects on display (i.e., an exhibit). Effective means of deconstructing dominant ideologies "played" out in museums by emphasizing the importance of a viewer's individual "cultural history," Garoian's (2001) strategies are "performing perception, autobiography, museum culture, interdisciplinarity, and performing the institution" (234).

Prior to delving into an explanation of these strategies, it is worth mentioning that Garoian's term "viewer" is generally intended to refer to a museum visitor (2001:234); however, for the purposes of my research I will apply the term in reference to *any* person viewing museum content on display. Thus, a museum docent, volunteer, staff member, or lay visitor may indeed be a "viewer."

*Performing Perception*

The performance of perception deals with the ways in which a viewer perceives an object (or subject) on display (Garoian 2001:240). The act of perceiving itself constitutes a performance of the viewer, imbuing the viewer with his or her power of "subjectivity" (Garoian 2001:240). Garoian (2001) explains that performing one's own perception makes the viewer "see what one

is looking at, to be absorbed in its aesthetic qualities through empathic projection…and, in doing so, [viewers] discover qualities of experience that metaphorically link with their own memories and cultural histories" (240). In this way, viewers may possess more power over constructing the meaning(s) of an item on display and ultimately challenge the *intended* cultural messages of a museum.

This strategy is particularly pertinent to deconstructing museum authority because it imparts the viewer with the agency to alter a portion of his or her social structure. Museums represent greater social structures like state or federal governments; for instance, they design their missions, tours, and displays based upon state mandated curricula and federally regulated funding sources (Hooper-Greenhill 1991; 1994b; 1994c). Therefore, when an agent performs perception in a museum setting, that agent plays a direct role in shaping larger social structures (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984).

*Autobiography*

As the word implies, autobiography refers to the personal experiences, "memories and cultural histories" viewers carry with them when interpreting objects on display (Garoian 2001:241). Simply put, this strategy endows viewers with interpreting power over exhibits through the application of their own personal knowledge collectively formed over years of life experience. Using this strategy, viewers bring their own narratives to the table to make sense of ideas represented (or objects on display) in museums. Similar to performing perception, autobiography acts to voice "one's subjective knowledge, which is contrary to the third person narratives that are constructed by the museum that *speak for* the viewer" (Garoian 2001:241, his emphasis). Essentially, Garoian argues that through the performance of autobiography, dominant

museum pedagogies are compromised through a viewer's practice of inserting his or her own personal narrative.

For example, if an archaeologist visits a museum exhibit about early Georgian pottery, she would assign meaning of what she views on display based upon her own life experiences, personal knowledge and her own culture. Bringing these memories to the museum, she may interpret the exhibit differently than another person because she may have background training in archaeology and public history. She might look for tempering techniques used in the construction of the pottery or for the presence of human agency. Continuing with this example, a professional master gardener may interpret the exhibit quite differently. Perhaps she would wonder about the plants burned to fire the pottery or the types of vegetables, fruits, or seeds cooked in the ceramic vessels. In this fashion, both viewers assign different meaning(s) and interpretation(s) to the exhibit's content based upon their individual life experiences.

*Museum Culture*

A foil to autobiography, "museum culture" consists of the "academic and aesthetic codes of…historical research and writing" used to construct museum displays (Garoian 2001:244). In contrast to the viewer strategies of empowerment found in performing perception and autobiography, museum culture speaks to the language institutions employ in their design of exhibits. Building on this idea, Garoian (2001) elaborates several approaches museums consider when creating exhibits for public display. Reiterating his argument for increased viewer participation, Garoian (2001) suggests that this "diverse content of museum knowledge [be] conjoined with that of viewers [so] a dialogue is made possible whereby the museum's essentialized history is expanded to include the diverse memories and cultural histories of its

viewers" (245). In all, this pedagogical strategy emphasizes Garoian's opinion that museums should be more reflexive in presenting their content.

*Interdisciplinarity*

Following the theme of challenging traditional museum authority, Garoian (2001) traces museum roots back to the ivory towers of academia and highlights the disjuncture between institutionalized presentations and viewer perception. Essentially, he explains that the polemic surrounding museum representations is limited to academic pursuits, published in scholarly journals, but remains hidden from the public. Advocating increased interdisciplinarity in museums, Garoian (2001) argues that "socially and historically determined codes of discipline-based culture privilege and protect…academic positions, and…resist the cross-pollination of ideas that can elicit new ways of knowing" (245). In line with his ideas about increasing multi-vocality, Garoian suggests that the inclusion of other perspectives in the formation of museum narratives can deconstruct traditional museum biases by forming numerous "possibilities for interpretation" (2001:246). Applying this logic to the *Hall of the Ancients*, the intersection of museum studies, archaeology, anthropology and the public serves as a starting point for creating new narratives informed from multiple perspectives.

*Performing the Institution*

This pedagogical strategy examines the performance of the museum itself. Here Garoian questions how a cultural institution's operations, including its practices of "collecting, preserving, and exhibiting artifacts," plays into shaping a viewer's subjectivity (2001:246). He offers a critical argument that

> to ignore the signifying power of the museum's institutional context is to eliminate the ways in which its various professional practices shape knowledge. As compared to the visible display of artifacts, these behind-the-scenes operations constitute the museum's hidden curriculum. [Garoian 2001:246]

In other words, the layout of a museum, its physical architecture inside and out, the agendas of its staff, the content of its exhibit, and its cultural base, act together to perform the ideological values of the institutional whole. Garoian (2001) carries this idea further by explaining that through the use of placement, lighting, and space, the institute controls the path, sight, and movement of its viewer (247).

Garoian (2001) argues that the museum should "perform" itself by actively making known its inner-workings to viewers. By doing so,

> viewers' knowledge of museum workers' professional responsibilities exposes the museum's system of labor and the ideological underpinnings of its decisions… Knowledge of these…responsibilities provides viewers with insight into the business and politics of museums and the ways in which they construct history through their collections and exhibitions. Performing the institution in this way enables viewers to gain agency within museum culture. [Garoian 2001:247]

Perhaps the most important point of Garoian's article, performing the institution embodies an essential step to deconstructing traditional museum authority through democratic processes. For instance, in the *Hall of the Ancients*, the meanings viewers assign to the artistic renderings intended to represent the cultures of the early Southeastern Indians may change when he or she comes to understand that the exhibit's representations are rooted in out-dated theories of archaeology. By updating the exhibit's singular narrative to include multiple perspectives of scholars (i.e., archaeologists, Native American professionals, etc.), American Indian people,  and lay people, viewers may begin to understand the dynamics involved in creating the museum "story" they see on display. Furthermore, if the static depictions of the exhibit are ruptured by this changed narrative, viewers may gain a more textured understanding of the heterogeneity

present in the past.  Put differently, by demystifying the Bennett Museum as a pinnacle of knowledge, viewers may come to gain greater agency in producing meaning about what they see in the *Hall of the Ancients* by participating in the formation of the museological narratives.

*Kirshenblatt-Gimblett – "Poetics of Detachment"*

How do museums visually display cultures? Who decides what aspects to exhibit? Who decides *what*, or more importantly, *whose* story is told? Addressing these important questions, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991) article "Object of Ethnography" links human fascination of singular artifacts with the public portrayals of societies, past and present, to illustrate how visual culture reflects those who create it. By applying this design to museums and issues of representation, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991) theory highlights how cultural materials actively shape and reproduce the social contexts in which they occur.

Museums rely on segmentation to portray larger cultural wholes. Approaching segmentation from an anthropological standpoint, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991:387) explains that "ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography…created…by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away." In a museum, an object on display appreciates in value after it has been plucked from its original ethnographic context (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). Terming this phenomenon a "poetics of detachment," the author explains that the meanings of an object changes depending upon the social whole that encompasses it (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:388).

Having established this definition, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett outlines some potential issues associated with the exhibition of ethnographic objects. Recounting a brief history of museums, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett uncovers the ancestry of display, beginning with the emergence of curiosity cabinets up to the growth of public interest in the natural sciences during the latter

years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tracing this lineage back to the beginning of cultural displays in museums, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991:395) emphasizes that museums surfaced to "teach 'by means of object lessons,' but objects could not be relied upon to speak for themselves." Thus, the preparers of museum displays have to account for the meaning of the objects themselves.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) defines two approaches museums use to display fragmentary objects in order to educate the public: *in situ* and *in context*. These two exhibition techniques tackle the problems of interpretation and communication of meaning in different ways.

*In Situ*

Displaying an object *in situ* supports the museum rhetoric of presenting objects as authentic where the context "may or may not be recreated" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:388). *In situ* exhibitions highlight the inherent fragmentation of the object by employing mimesis; that is, an object's assumed "natural" surroundings are recreated in the display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:388). According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991), mimesis subverts the original meaning of an ethnographic object by imbuing it with inaccurate meanings. For example, a period diorama exemplifies mimesis in that it portrays a synchronic "snapshot" of an *idealized* version of what life looked like at certain point in time; in reality, the cultural complexities of the *actual* time period are ignored (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:389). The *in situ* approach also employs metonymy, or the use of one object to stand for another to convey social meaning about the object at hand. In a museum, a specific image may be displayed to represent an entire culture. For example, in the *Hall of the Ancients*, each diorama is meant to represent *all* Southeastern Indian cultures over time and geographic space. Spanning at least 500 years or more, each didactic display suggests that *all* people lived in each fashion represented (see Figures 1 -12),

ignoring the cultural diversity of various human groups occupying lands throughout the

American Southeast. Each scene in the exhibit employs metonymy which constructs a pan-

Southeastern Indian identity for each time period. Often biased in its constitution of cultural

meaning, *in situ* exhibition in this sense may compromise the original meaning of an object by

exaggerating its "boundaries to include more of what was left behind" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

1991:389). This is the case with the dioramic depictions in the *Hall of the Ancients* since each

portrayal focuses on a synchronic frame of reference and does not account for life ways of the

past that may not have conformed to the scene on display.

*In Context*

The *in-context* approach places the ethnographic object within a specific arrangement

accompanied by an appropriate, in-depth explanation. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) explains that

> Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, and diagrams, commentary
> delivered via earphones, explanatory audiovisual programs, docents conducting tours,
> booklets, and catalogues, educational programs, and lectures, and performances. Objects
> are also set in context by means of other objects often in relation to a classification or
> schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical
> relationships. [390]

This type of contextual approach gives the viewer a "theoretical frame of reference," but limits

the different ways in which the object may be interpreted, making the object vulnerable to

"triviality" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 390). Thus, the *in context* approach makes greater

strides in interpreting objects on display for the viewer; moreover, it supports the traditional

authority of museums and minimizes view agency by restricting interpretations to its own.

Acting as symbols of larger cultural wholes, ethnographic fragments presented *in situ* or

*in context* are designed to enhance the authenticity or "realness" of objects (1991:389). These

strategies are pertinent because they act to promulgate museological hermeneutics of the past

rather than involving new perspectives and challenging traditional forms of authority. To

illustrate how these devices are employed at the museum level, I will examine how the *Hall of the Ancients* performs the exhibit strategies of *in situ* and *in context* below.

*Applying Performance Theory*

Located at the rear of the Bennett Museum, the *Hall of the Ancients* gives visitors a sense of what early Southeastern environments "looked" like through the use of natural elements like river cane, deer, and stones (Figures 1 – 3). Employing both *in situ* and *in context* display strategies, the front entrance of the exhibit attempts to transport the visitor into the past by recreating the natural, "authentic" environments of the prehistoric Southeast. In the center of the room lies a "petroglyph," or ancient rock carving (Figure 3). Surrounding the petroglyph are synchronic dioramas intended to represent archaeologically defined cultural periods established in early archaeological practice (Figure 3). Following Garoian's (2001) critique of museum structure, the layout of the exhibit guides the viewer around the centerpiece, from left to right through a progression in time (see Figure 4). As the viewer moves from the oldest time frame to the most recent, the institution performs its authority over the bodies of its visitors. In other words, the flow of the room acts to naturalize the "evolution" of the Southeastern Indians through the passage of time. In this fashion, the structure of the physical space situates the dioramas *in context* while the content of each dioramic display places its objects *in situ* for the viewer (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991).

Using mimesis, the exhibit houses touch station computer kiosks and signage designed to evoke images of nature and American Indian lore of "Father Log" (Figure 5). In this vein, the first dioramic display illustrating the Paleo Period uses metonymy showing a Paleo-Indian male holding a spear (Figure 6). Taking a lead from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991) critique, one

object – in this case a Paleo-Indian man – represents an entire cultural tradition and runs the risk of ignoring variation among people from this time period.

Similarly, Western cultural constructs of American Indian racial identity plays a large role in defining what early Southeasterners actually "looked" like. In an interview with one of the exhibit's designers I was informed that the consulting archaeologist arbitrarily decided how to portray the race of each depicted figure. According to the exhibit designer, the consulting archaeologist felt that a "Siberian-Inuit" person would best fit the description of an early American Indian and that "his offspring should be evident in the subsequent dioramas as his children and grandchildren moved through time." Thus, a Western ideological construction of racial identity acted to create the exhibit's portrayal of early American Indians.

Concerning sex and gender, the institution's performance of its "museum culture" appears to be rooted in antiquated ideologies of early archaeology regarding gendered divisions of labor (Garoian 2001:244). Most of the dioramic depictions reflect this out-dated paradigm. For example, women are absent in the Paleo Period diorama; the only figure shown is a man holding a spear. Similarly, the Archaic Period illustrates a man fishing while women are portrayed as gatherers and housekeepers (see Figure 7). This trend continues in the Woodland (Figure 8), Mississippian (Figure 9), and Historic (Figure 10) dioramas; respectively, women are illustrated as producers or homemakers and men as hunters or protectors. Culminating with the Trail of Tears, the exhibit closes with a small display housing a female mannequin holding an infant (Figure 11) and shows a four minute film loop narrated by a male about the 1838 tragedy inside a 19th century Cherokee cabin (Figure 12).

It is clear that early archaeological theories and praxis were employed in the exhibit's original design to portray gendered divisions of labor. Contemporary archaeological scholarship

questions the oversimplified binary categories of male/female, hunter/gatherer, producer/reproducer rooted in Western cultural perspectives (Sørensen 1999). In general, contemporary archaeological theories allow for more variation when considering gender in relation to the distribution of social categories (Conkey and Gero 1997; Sorensen 1999). In the same vein, a contemporary archaeological analysis of the King site, reaffirms the need to abandon traditional ideologies of gendered divisions of labor (Hally 2008). For example, "in the one case of an adult female burial with abundant grave goods, the artifacts involved relate to the deceased's status as a warrior, a male characteristic" (Hally 2008:498). Particularly relevant to the American Indians the *Hall of the Ancients* intends to portray, the King site dates to about the mid-sixteenth century and is located near the Coosa river, less than 50 miles from the location of the Funk Heritage Center (Hally 2008). Finally, the matrilineal social composition of these societies would have provided women with greater social status compared to patrilineal systems of the West. In sum, these archaeological findings contradict the exhibit's depictions of men as hunters and women as caretakers or homemakers. For this reason, local museums should take these ideas into account when creating and maintaining museological exhibits about Southeastern Indians.

The aesthetics in the exhibit employ a great deal of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991) principles of *in situ* and *in context* to communicate a recreated environment "designed to heighten viewers' experiences of symbolic artifacts" (Garoian 2001:246). For example, the murals, artifacts, and figures on display place the viewer into an institutionally determined context of time, place and event. In two instances, however, the context of display is inverted or simply absent (Figures 13 and 14). The aperture pictured in Figure 13 exemplifies Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991:388) "poetics of detachment," or separating an object from its original cultural

environment, by spotlighting miscellaneous ceramic vessels and baskets as well as a small-scale model village. From whence these objects came remains unknown; however, both the pots and baskets are seemingly valuable as they sit encased behind plexiglass and above the viewer's eyes (see Figure 13). Beckoning the viewer to look down, the model village is located at the waist level; in this fashion, the institution once again "performs" its museum culture (Garoian 2001:244).

A display intended to represent an archaeologist's office is shown in Figure 14. Providing an interesting example of metonymy, the "office" reflects a specific type of archaeological practice that is supposed to represent *all* archaeologists. Akin to a time capsule, this display could represent the early practice of antiquarian archaeology in the 19th century. However, because there is no signage or explanation available, the "office," presented *in situ*, misrepresents archaeologists as collectors of valuable cultural objects, keepers of archaeological secrets, and unconcerned with contextual provenience. To combat the misrepresentations of the profession of archaeology, it is necessary to provide the viewer with a brief, but user-friendly, discussion (perhaps with the use of photos and enlarged text) about the goals of archaeology – an idea further discussed in Chapter 7.

*Conclusion*

Utilizing metonymic representations and synchronic frames of life, the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit disembodies the original contexts of the objects it puts on display. Performing its cultural ideologies (Garoian 2001) through the use of poetics of detachment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991), the *Hall of the Ancients* creates a potential for viewers to take-away an understanding that throughout time, early Southeastern Indians shared a pan-identity and the same cultural practices. While those practices change from diorama to diorama, each

representation denies the cultural diversity of different groups over geographic space and

through time. Furthermore, each diorama represents Southeastern Indian cultures as static,

frozen, and monolithic. These reconstructed slices of life in the past gloss over the cultural

heterogeneity of these prehistoric people, leaving little room for the viewer's perception or

autobiography (Garoian 2001). Reminiscent of determinism and unilinear social evolutionary

theory, the *Hall of the Ancients* claims that early Southeastern Indians lived as reactors to, not

agents of, their environment, progressing "naturally" from savagery to chiefdom-states (Tylor

2008 [1871]).

The politics underlining these depictions reflect the institution's refusal to acknowledge

the cultural diversity of early Southeastern Indians. Failing to accept contemporary social

discourse about inclusivity and relinquishing authority over the presentation of early people, this

exhibit reflects antiquated paradigms that diminish the cultural achievements of indigenous

people in the past *and* in the present. Unfortunately, the exhibit has fallen into the trap of

"preserving a stereotyped idea of the past" resulting in the promulgation of misinformed

knowledge about the early Southeastern Indians (Moser 1999:111) Consequently, the fallacy of

this approach negates the richness of the past since certain individuals, cultural materials, and

lifestyles are represented and others are left out.

In sum, the display techniques like those used in the *Hall of the Ancients* must be

critically examined to minimize exclusionary practices and foster inclusive dialogic

interpretations. Building on this concept, I argue in the following chapters that performing

interdisciplinarity using archaeological narratives actively recreates museological praxis through

the use of viewer participation. Deconstructing institutional performance and museum culture

through viewer participation, I will show how this strategy can aid museums in their missions to

maintain scholastic environments for research, preservation commitments and public educational outreach.



**Figure 1.**  Front façade of the *Hall of the Ancients*.



**Figure 2.**  Front entrance of the exhibit.

**Figure 3.** Overview of the exhibit's interior facing the petroglyph.
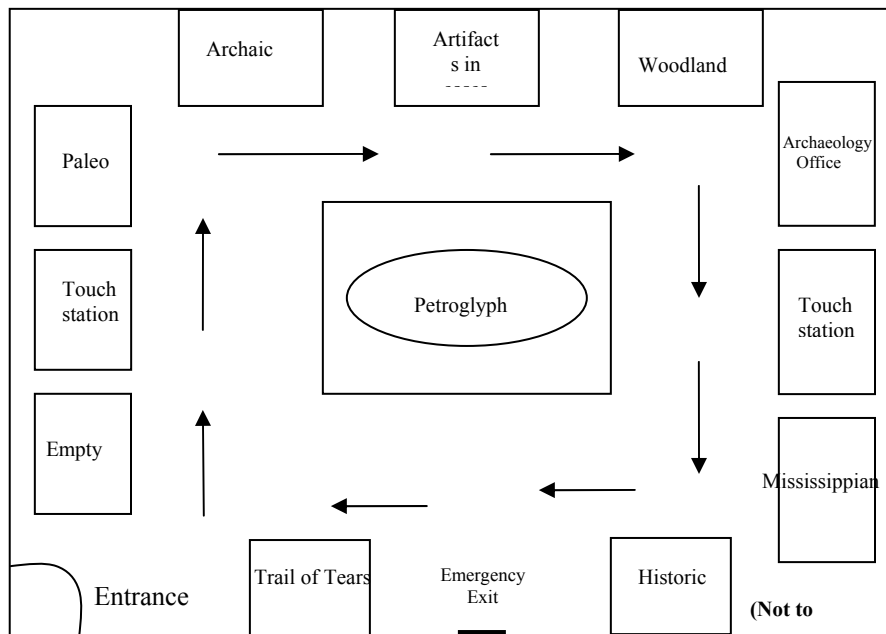


**Figure 4.** Layout of exhibit and intended room flow.

**Figure 5.** Touch station kiosk and signage.

**Figure 6.** Paleo Period diorama.



**Figure 7.** Archaic Period diorama.

**Figure 8.**  Woodland Period diorama.

**Figure 9.** Mississippian Period diorama.

**Figure 10.**  Historic Period diorama.



**Figure 11**. Trail of Tears display.

**Figure 12:** Mannequin of woman holding infant in Trail of Tears display.



**Figure 13.** Artifact cases and "poetics of detachment.

**Figure 14.** Display of an archaeologist's "office."

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

*Introduction*

Drawing from the discipline of visitor studies, three phases were employed in my

methodology: front end analysis, formative assessment, and summative evaluation. I utilized

front end analysis to get a general sense of specific problem areas in need of improvement and

further investigation. Stemming from the preliminary results of this phase, formative assessment

focused more narrowly on addressing the most salient issues through qualitative and quantitative

methods. This stage was the most intensive part of my research consisting of interviews, surveys,

participant-observation, and implementation of preliminary solutions. Finally, I used summative

evaluation to reflect upon the successes and failures of the formative assessment in an effort to

draw conclusions and suggest recommendations for improving the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit.

In each of the following sections, I supplement the phase descriptions with the ethnographic

methods employed over the course of this project.

*Front End Analysis*

As discussed in Chapters 1 through 3, scholars have pointed out that museums are loci of

public education and informational guideposts for the public at large (Dodd 1994; Falk 2000;

Gable 1993; Garoian 2001; Honerkamp 1997; Hooper-Greenhill 1994b; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

1991). By this rationale, curators, administrators, and docents working in museums will promote

institutional ideologies about the past to the public. Applying this logic to the Funk Heritage

Center (FHC), if all museum personnel (employed staff or unpaid volunteers) possess antiquated

understandings about the Southeastern Indians then it is likely that these ideologies would be

perpetuated in the narratives of the *Hall of the Ancients*.

To test this hypothesis, I conducted front end analysis in the form of informal interviews, open-ended surveys (see Appendix A), and participant-observations. During this phase of my research, I attended several volunteer meetings, two teacher workshops, an Advisory Board meeting, and one docent training session; additionally, I interned at the museum for an entire semester. Supplementing these undertakings with public outreach, I presented two lectures at the museum for two special events.

My front end analysis depended entirely on qualitative methods. Building on the relationships formed during my tenure as a volunteer since 2005, I entered my research possessing cultural knowledge about the museum's social structure. In fact, in many cases my presence at various institutional functions had been requested by the museum's staff to provide an archaeological perspective about different public outreach programs the museum wished to carry out. I firmly believe this advantage cleared up the fog of cultural nuances I may have been blind to if I had done my research as an "outsider." Spending this cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977), I gathered ethnographic data from the "bottom-up" over the course of five months. During this time, I embedded myself within the museum's socio-cultural structure to meet individuals I did not know. Generally speaking, I met new informants through the "snowball" effect, or when one of my existing informants would suggest contacting someone else who might "be a good person to talk to" (Museum staff, personal communication, January 12, 2009). In the absence of this method, I employed purposive techniques to interview various people interested in this project. Navigating these social networks, I believe my informants were very forthcoming about their experiences with the *Hall of the Ancients.*

My front end analysis highlighted a number of challenges various constituents wanted to address; however, the following problem areas seemed the most pertinent to my initial goals of

improving the content and inclusivity of the *Hall of the Ancients* as well as increasing public awareness about the archaeological process and its role in developing museum exhibits. These results pointed to snags in institutional ideologies surrounding the "evolution" and "natural" lives of Southeastern Indians and mystified (mis)understandings about the discipline of archaeology. Returning to Garoian's (2001) performance theory, I decided to tease out these aspects of the FHC's institutional performance in the next phase of my research, formative assessment.

*Formative Assessment*

In this phase, I conducted ethnographic research through the use of age-appropriate surveys (see Appendices B and C), in-depth semi-structured interviews (Appendix D), and participant-observations. The bulk of my research sought to understand (1) the take-away messages viewers receive from the *Hall of the Ancients*, (2) the institutional ideologies performed in the exhibit, (3) ways to demystify the field of archaeology as it is presented in the exhibit, and (4) how to increase pluralism through visitor agency in the exhibit. Pulling from a representative sample of museum personnel and typical groups of visitors, I anonymously surveyed 31 adults and 15 children and verbally interviewed 20 individuals.

The survey results generated some common trends which corroborated the results of my qualitative research. I found that the surveys were most useful in pinpointing areas in need of further qualitative investigation. However, because the design of these surveys had to align with the mission of the museum which was to figure out what visitors are or are not learning from the exhibit, I believe that these surveys did not completely test the hypothesis I was seeking to investigate. For instance, I had intended to use the surveys for quantitative data about how viewers thought about archaeology and the Southeastern Indians after visiting the *Hall of the*

*Ancients*. I found that these intentions could not be met for two reasons: First, all of my surveys had to gain the approval of the museum and align with its mission to determine visitors' likes and dislikes of the exhibit. While this information will undoubtedly aid the institution in identifying areas weak in viewer appreciation, it does not conform to my purposes of understanding how Southeastern Indians and archaeology are understood by the public. Secondly, having no background in quantitative research, I found that the types of questions asked in the surveys did not lend themselves to statistical interpretation but aligned instead with my qualitative research efforts. Therefore, I will not provide an in-depth statistical analysis of these surveys; instead I shall briefly outline the main ideas I derived from their content.

Concerning qualitative methods, interviewees included three (all) permanent staff members, four docents, three volunteers, and miscellaneous visitors including two teachers, an undergraduate student at Reinhardt College, the exhibit's designer, three lay adults and three American Indians. Additionally, I interviewed a seasoned archaeologist who is employed as a museum curator; this "outsider" enhanced the texture of my perspective by giving me insight to some of the common challenges museum professionals face in creating, developing, and changing exhibits.

*Summative Evaluation*

As I gathered and interpreted my data, several themes emerged concerning the institution's practice. The most prevalent issues showed that personnel were concerned about the breadth of content they have to cover in exhibit tours and the limited time available to them to communicate this content to the visitor. Further, there was an evident discrepancy between the original intentions of the exhibit compared to the actual performance of museum representatives in relation to the exhibit which is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Having identified several of the key wrinkles in the fabric of the institution's ideology, my summative evaluation analyzed the initial results of my inquiry. It was during this phase that I began to collaborate more frequently with the museum's staff, volunteers, and community stakeholders (including American Indians and Advisory Board Members). Realizing that a change in discourse about Southeastern Indians had to come from *within* the institution, I sat in on several meetings and focus groups to offer some input about how to go about changing the museum's performance. Offering some of the results of my preliminary research, I assisted with improving the docent handbook, docent training modules, and public archaeology education. Further, I organized three public lectures and one teacher workshop to educate people about the processes of archaeology, archaeology of the Southeast, and NAGPRA and its effects on modern archaeological practice and Native peoples.

Applying the above-listed anthropological methods, I worked to evaluate the museum's performance through its representative agents and the *Hall of the Ancients*. Using applied anthropology, I collaborated with the museum and its stakeholders to develop plans of action geared towards improving the institution's educational quality. The results of these methods are discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

LOST NARRATIVES

*Intended Performance vs. Actual Practice*

On the first day of my internship, I performed the role of viewer and shadowed a docent-

led tour for about a dozen seventh graders through the *Hall of the Ancients*. As we walked

through the recreated environment, I listened intently to the docent's account of the Southeastern

Indians how they lived, what they made, and how they "progressed" over time. At the close of

the tour, I marveled at a teacher's commentary:

> I never realized Indians were this far south. So how does Georgia rank in terms of Indian
> archaeology? I mean, do they [archaeologists] find better Indian stuff here than out west?
> Because it looks like the stuff you'd be finding from here *(pointing to the Mississippian
> Period diorama)* would be worth more than the things they were making back then
> *(nodding to the Woodland and Archaic Periods)* 'cause you really see how they [the
> Southeastern Indians] improved over time, farming here and everything *(referring to the
> Historic period)*.

Abandoning my role as spectator, I interjected and reservedly explained that no archaeological

ranking system exists in the U.S., politely adding that archaeologists are concerned with

meticulous processes of scientific investigation to gain knowledge about the past and are not

preoccupied with collecting valuable artifacts. I punctuated this explanation by elaborating that

"Southeastern Indians did not necessarily 'improve,' per se; but, their ways of living changed

dramatically as a result of the clash of cultures created during the European settlement of the

New World." The teacher pondered, "Oh. I've never thought about it like that."

The above anecdote speaks to the contemporary institutional practices that counter the

original intention of the exhibit. Equipped with a portfolio that includes creating theme park sets

for major public attractions, Mark (as I shall call him), one of the original exhibit creators

explained to me that

the goals of the *Hall of Ancients* were to tell the story from Archaic times to the Historic. What we really intended on doing was having more artifacts, um, a lot more…we wanted to display things more than what they are now in cases, so people could see the artifacts… We do have some artifacts in there, so we utilized that with telling the storyline the best we could – But, I just felt like…there needed to be a lot more. We just didn't have the funding like I had hoped. I always hoped that we would have better cases, if we would've had better funding we would have had better cases, optimization within telling the storyline thematically, again intelligent lighting, some other things, audio intelligence. Like when you walk in it's sensory and somebody speaking a Native American language, maybe Cherokee, maybe a language we don't even understand anymore. Something of the past – maybe Iroquois. So, we wanted to go further, but we did the best with what we had.

While this testimony laments how ideal intentions failed to surface in the actual creation of the exhibit, it also illustrates how players involved in its original development were not entirely informed about the cultural groups indigenous to the Southeast. For instance, Mark's mention of the "Iroquois" connotes a misunderstanding about the relationship between American Indians living along in the northeastern coast and those occupying the Southeast.

Pluralism and inclusivity were also two intended goals of the exhibit; however, these elements were compromised due to financial constraints, which the designer later explained to me was abandoned by "an executive decision made by the [museum]." The intended pedagogy of the exhibit was supposed to house multiple narratives through Native voices in the exhibit but came to favor a more narrowed, singular story about the "progression" of the Southeastern Indians over time.

As previously mentioned, Mark is a designer for entertainment venues, although he prefers to design for what he calls "edutainment" projects. For the *Hall of the Ancients,* Mark worked with two other key people: an archaeologist, whom I will refer to as Rob, and an American Indian, whom I will call Chuck. Mark explained that the museum originally hired Rob, Chuck, and himself "to design and create the entire museum and the *Hall of the Ancients*."

While Mark is a licensed experiential designer, no other museological professionals were involved in the creation of the exhibit. According to my conversations with the current staff members, to their knowledge no professional curators were consulted in the process of the exhibit's design, creation, and implementation either. Both Mary and Tom, as I will call them, are part of the museum's staff and were hired years after the exhibit was created. The related to me:

> Mary: "We are supposed to interpret it [the exhibit]. But, everything was in place when we got here."

> Tom: "We had no input because we came after the exhibit was up. They [the museum's original representatives] didn't want a museum professional telling them what to do when they created it. I think the person who most influenced that [the design of the exhibit] was an archaeologist…someone who has never gone on to pursue a career in museum studies. But they were in a position to influence the choices made in that exhibit—so, they succeeded in some ways and they failed in others."

Interestingly, archaeology had a heavy hand in the creation of the exhibit; ironically, this original, out-dated archaeological narrative has come to compromise the *intended* objective of the exhibit. Gauging by the commentary of the original designers, the *Hall of the Ancients* was never meant to portray American Indians in a negative light. To unearth the archaeological perspective responsible for creating this exhibit, I attempted to contact Rob several times via email and telephone messages; however, only one of these messages was returned in the form of an email:

> I appreciate your interest(s)… Though I make no promises, I hope I will be able to provide information – or simply share my opinion about the 'interface' of which you write [I had explained that I was interested in the intersection of archaeology and representation in museums]. I suggest we meet at the Funk Heritage Center for a walking tour and casual interview. I am more comfortable – and suspect the conversation would be more fruitful – if it is helped along with visual aid and creative process/limitations, etc… Thanks again for your interest.

Encouraged by this response I made every effort to follow-up with Rob through repeated emails and voice messages. Unfortunately, I never received a response; so, our "walk-through" never came to fruition. Lacking the original archaeologist's perspective, I had to rely heavily on other people's testimonies, especially those who had worked closely with Rob in the development phase of the exhibit. One of the consulting American Indians who took part in this process told me that Rob's

> goal was to tell the long story about the history of the Southeastern Indians through archaeological time periods. He had it in his mind to make that known, the amount of time I mean, that humans were living here before the Europeans came over because some people may know about this in other areas. I don't think people really know about it [the presence of Native people] here in this part of the country.

Corroborating Rob's involvement in the development of the museum, Mark explained that while preparing comp renderings for the layout of the exhibit, he depended greatly on Rob's archaeological guidance. The designer elaborated that he "had to understand the storyline [Rob] wanted to convey…To do that [he] had to connect—there has to be that point of connection—and that connection was Rob. [Rob] allowed [Mark] to immerse [himself] into history the way it *needs* to be told" (his emphasis). Reflecting an intended narrative from an archaeological perspective, these sentiments contradict the actual performance of the exhibit. According one staff member, the

> design was worked out in the *Hall of Ancients* [*sic*] without regards to the narrative that would be there and a lot of effort was put into a recording that would play over the tour and obviate the needs for signs. But the narrative was to be heard rather than read; and, unfortunately, the narrative lasted about 50 minutes and…that's beyond the limits of most people's attention spans, and it was intended to be a sort of show, actually. But you see, our school classes are only in the room for 15 minutes at most, so we've had to dispense with that.

This disparity in intended versus practiced narratives is further played out in the archaeologist's office display (Figure 14). Its insertion within the exhibit aimed "to really show people what

archaeologists do" according to one of the original participants in the exhibit's creation.

However, when I spoke with another museum staff member, Lily, she explained that she led a

tour of the exhibit once and someone asked her "Whose workspace is that?" The visitor was

under the impression that the display was a museum employee's actual cubicle.

A Reinhardt undergraduate student echoed this idea when I took her through the exhibit.

She said the office "looks like it should be closed off or something so that it's not visible, really.

Unless – is this a display to show an archaeologist's office? Is it just for display?" When I

answered "Yes, it's just a representation" she responded, "If I just saw this and nobody told me

that, I would think 'Well this is where the person comes to work then there aren't any visitors

here.'"

These conversations inculcate a major disjuncture between the institution's original,

intended purpose and its contemporary practice as it is performed in the *Hall of the Ancients*. In

this vein, I will shed light upon another discourse that emerged from conversations about the

take-home messages of this exhibit.

*From Savagery to Civilization?*

When I asked Cherie, a docent who has been with the museum since before it opened its

doors, to tell me what she thought the take-home messages of the exhibit were, she explained

> because we have the dioramas, when I give tours I try to point out the differences in the
> early ages and see the way tools *progress* or the homes *progress*, the fact that it was
> warming up from the Neolithic times to the Woodland times and so the vegetation was
> different, the things they ate were different their style of living was different, *because of
> the environment* and their circumstances and that really gives them a tie-in if they've
> really studied anything about geography or geology and um, seasons and environment
> and hopefully connects them into environmental education and what, global warming,
> they hear it from the future looking back, you know so, this is what's going to happen to
> us if, and to see to where we came from, from ancient times and the Ice Age and see
> where their place is within that. [Emphasis mine]

Cherie emphasizes the importance of making the content of the tour relevant to audiences, especially to children, by using Garoian's (2001) notion of interdisciplinarity; however, underneath this narrative lies a "cause and effect" discourse which reifies the pedagogy that "because of the environment," Southeastern Indians changed their ways of living and inevitably "progressed." Archaeologically, this statement carries some validity due to the fact that housing structures and subsistence practices did change over time. Arguably, Southeastern Indians did not "progress" from the Paleo to the Mississippian, especially if one considers the dramatic shift from hunter-gathering practices to intensive agriculture. In fact, the latter subsistence practices led to a dramatic decline in health in some regions of the Southeast (for further reading see Goodman and Armelagos 1985). The politics underlying the original archaeological narrative in the exhibit reflect an antiquated view of early people as reactors to their environments (Steward 1955; White 1959) as opposed to active cultural agents (Johnson 1999; Steward 1955; White 1959).

Contradictions about the exhibit's take-home messages sometimes occurred *during* the course of an interview. When asked to briefly describe the function of the *Hall of the Ancients*, Mary answered: "Its purpose is to tell the story of the early Southeastern Indians, through dioramas and artifacts." However, when I asked her to describe the exhibit as if she were talking to a stranger, she explained that it

> provides information on over 12,000 years of Southeastern Native Americans, including how the Georgia Native Americans lived and *progressed* over periods of time, through the historical period when the Europeans came to Georgia and the Cherokee Removal. It also gives people information about a petroglyph that was found in around the Canton area. [Emphasis mine]

Again, this social evolutionary discourse emerges but is completely different from the simple

idea of telling a "story of the early Southeastern Indians." Lily, another staff member, formed a

similar discourse about the exhibit when I asked her to describe the function of the exhibit:

> It's more like a, um, a passage through time where you are starting out…at a very early time period and seeing through the different time periods how people have progressed and how they have changed. It's more like time travel, as you take them through each exhibit and you're able to compare to each one of those differences and how they've *improved* and later on as you get to the historic society how, when the Europeans had, come over, how they influenced and even more how they *helped* the Native Americans change. [Emphasis mine]

These commentaries provide insight into the museum's culture as it performed in the *Hall of the*

*Ancients* highlighting that the exhibit's content and docent narratives naturalize a deterministic

portrayal of early Native Americans. Moreover, a discourse permeates the institution's practice

in that it is evident of social evolutionary theory (Tylor 2008[1871]). However, not all of the

institution's representatives are blind to these narratives; for example, Tom believes that the

exhibit

> creates the atmosphere of antiquity… and a feeling of mystery…But the most horrifying part in my mind is that it illustrates a linear progression of the Indians to becoming white. What comes next after that is: "'There are five periods in Indian history and the Federal government says 'Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and so on'" and I don't think most people are interested in those things and so I think setting up those arbitrary categories within the museum maybe doesn't make good sense when you're dealing with school children or adults. I don't think it works for either of them. Aesthetically, it's very pleasing, creating a mood of antiquity and giving inferences to who Native Americans were – I use the past tense because there's no mention of them in the present—and you run into this problem of interpretation. You reduce it down into a few highlights that have to be categorized and numbered, which immediately turns most people off.

Tom's perspective illustrates the disjuncture between the exhibit's original purpose and how the

ideologies are actually practiced in the exhibit; eventually, this practice inscribes misinformed

narratives about the Southeastern Indians on visitor bodies and minds (Foucault 1975). For

example, over the course of a month, I collected 27 surveys filled out anonymously by adults

who had taken a docent-guided tour. The last question of the survey asked: "I learned that

Southeastern Native Americans: (A.) had no written history, (B.) lived in harmony with nature,

(C.) were noble Indians, (D.) didn't wear many garments, or (E.) Other: Fill in" (see Appendix

B). Of these surveys, approximately 44% of the responses answered "B," "C," or "D" (see

Figure 15).

While about 37% of the respondents answered that early Southeastern Indians had no

written history, nearly 10% more used a stereotype to describe what they had learned from the

exhibit. However, nearly 20% (5 out of 27) chose to fill in their answers; these visitors learned
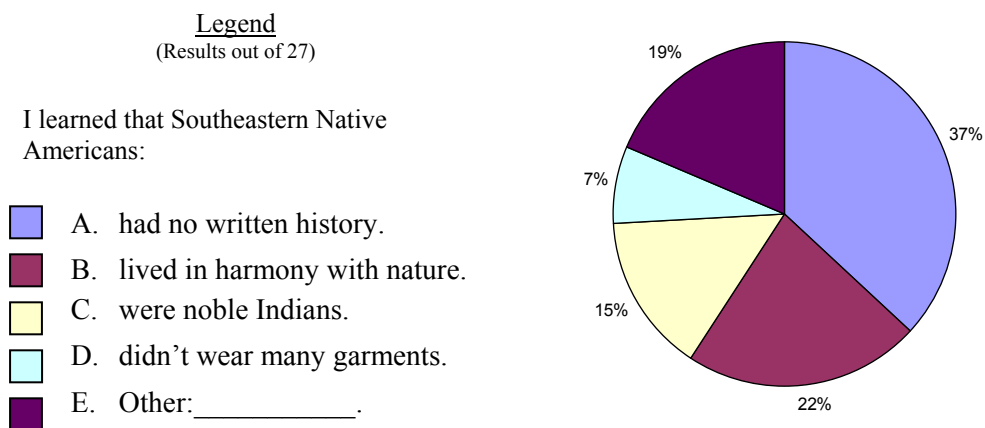
Legend
(Results out of 27)

I learned that Southeastern Native
Americans:

A. had no written history.
B. lived in harmony with nature.
C. were noble Indians.
D. didn't wear many garments.
E. Other:_____.

**Figure 15.** Distribution of answers to question 7 for adult survey of exhibit.

that Southeastern Indians "used many different tools," "made spears out of stone," "used stones

to crack nuts," "had baskets to store food," and "died from European diseases." Interestingly all

of these responses dealt with "advances" in technology. While these sentiments highlight the

effectiveness of selected artifacts on display, this discourse seems derived from cultural

stereotypes narrated and perpetuated in the exhibit.

Admittedly, I had hoped to procure a larger sample of surveys; however, I have

confidence in the trends presented by these data because the discourse found within them can be

traced to institutional pedagogies. One example is the docent manual which contains a section

intended to provide new volunteers with some background information about the *Hall of the*

*Ancients*. It reads:

> [The *Hall of the Ancients*] gallery is a real pleasure for our visitors of all ages. Native
> American artifacts fascinate us and quickly capture our attention. Visitors are introduced
> to native [*sic*] America through the "cultural periods" approach, wherein archaeologists
> have reconstructed the cultural evolution of the native [*sic*] peoples through at least
> 12,000 years of prehistory. [Funk Heritage Center 2009:2]

While originally intended to foster an educated understanding of early Native Americans, these

data infer that in practice the museum's performed pedagogies inscribe essentialized identities

onto cultural agents of the past.

*"Another Dead Indian Museum…"*

The data presented earlier in this chapter serves as springboard for understanding the

fractures in the institution's performance of contemporary American Indian cultural practice. To

investigate possible avenues for ameliorating these issues, I conducted interviews with three

Native Americans. (To maintain my informants' anonymity, I have changed all of their names to

pseudonyms.) Through these conversations I gained an indigenous perspective of the Garoian

(2001) pedagogical strategy of perception performance. I conducted two of the three interviews

in the *Hall of the Ancients* with members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI); the

last interview was conducted by phone with Chuck, one of the American Indians that served on

the *Hall of the Ancients* development team. Chuck's perspective points to some of the politics

underpinning misrepresentations of American Indians in the exhibit today.

> They [the founders of the museum] said they wanted to build an Indian museum, one that
> would show the lives of Native Americans and tell the story down here since very few

people know that story. Maybe they do in other places, but they don't here. So they wanted to build this place and I told them that if I was going to be involved, I didn't want it to become another dead Indian museum. Well they said, "What d'ya mean by that?" and I told them that they needed to have Native people – not me, because I've got a full-time job – leading the tours, managing the front door, showing people around or whatever. So they said, "Sure, sure! We'll put those people to work!" Well, you know what they've got now? You know what it's become? Another dead Indian museum!

Chuck's poignant commentary eloquently iterates the shortcomings of the museum. Ironically, the contemporary institutional performance of Native narratives in the museum contradicts the original intent of the museum's founders. Along similar lines, George, a doctoral candidate and tribal representative, related similar opinions. As a cultural representative and educator, George possesses a breadth of knowledge about the excavation of American Indian prehistoric and historic sites. On the occasion that I interviewed him, George had driven down to Georgia from North Carolina to give a teacher workshop on American Indians and archaeology. Although our interview lasted about 15 minutes, George's perspective was enlightening. As we briskly walked through the exhibit he noted

Everything I see here brings to mind other places I've visited and is just as good as those museums. I don't think that any one display is better or worse than the other, but I do think that you really need some kind of audio elements that would help people hear some of the language. I really like those river cane baskets though – that's some good quality work there and that would be representative of Cherokee women. If they came to look at this that would be the first thing they'd look for is for baskets. Baskets, if it was shown that women ran things, owned things, and their role in gardening, farming the vegetables, and corn. The main thing I would say is that there needs to be more artifacts.

I found George's comment particularly helpful in regards to women since I was unable to secure an interview with any American Indian women. While there are a few baskets on display in the exhibit, there is no written text or verbal docent description of the cultural significance of baskets in Southeastern Indian cultures. Furthermore, George's reference to the river cane baskets served as an example of autobiography and perception performance (Garoian 2001). By

bringing his own perspective, personal history, and education to the exhibit's content, George

highlighted a feature of the exhibit I had scarcely given thought to before.

Chris, another American Indian informant, works as a cultural interpreter and historical

re-enactor. Like George, Chris provided me with critical perspective and useful insight about the

take-home messages of the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit. Observing another detail I had

overlooked, Chris explained that a woman portrayed in the Woodland Period (see Figure 8)

diorama

> [looked] nice, but her hair seems kind of loose and unkempt, but who knows how they
> kept it back then? But, I know in the historic period, the Cherokee, and most of the
> Southeastern women would draw their hair back into a single braid, or almost like a
> ponytail, and her [pointing to the woman in the display] hair just seems to be hanging,
> you know loose, and also, I don't know about back in that period, but the women's hair
> would be very, very long, they would have had it about knee-length and they would
> braid it and put it on top of their heads to get it out of the way, or to tie it back to get it
> out of the way. Here [again pointing to the display] her hair seems to be short. Usually
> they would only cut their hair short like if they were in mourning or if they were a slave.

Digging deeper into these commentaries about American Indian women in the exhibit, I wish to

shed light upon the discourse and narratives performed here. Traces of the matrilineal heritage

linger in contemporary Cherokee cultural practice as evidenced by these two observers. By

performing their own perceptions through their individual observations about women agents,

both informants provided me with a crucial Native perspective about the cultural importance of

women in an American Indian society; thus, this discourse contrasts to the institution's

traditional patrilineal narrative. Immediately I was struck by how my own performed perception

of these displays transformed after absorbing George's and Chris' feedback. This trend

continued as we approached the last two displays of the Historic Period (see Figure 10) and the

Trail of Tears (see Figure 11). Chris remarked,

> When I first saw this I was kind of disappointed because it jumps all the way from the
> Mississippian to past what they call the "Civilization Effort." It's not really

representative of the 1600s or the 1700s, it jumps all the way to the 1800s because it wasn't until then that we had wagons, really much use of log cabins or the plow, that didn't come in until the 1800s. So, it's got stuff from the old culture that carries over like the stickball games and men already have long hair, not like the people of the 1600s or 1700s and they're dressing like the whites, they've got a man that dressed like white man, they've got a woman that's dressed like a white woman. It's showing that they kept stickball, but I'd like to see something in between the civilization or the impact of colonizing Europeans. Yeah, this skips all that time when everything's already changed so much. There's like 300 years that are being overlooked. 300 important years…When I look at "Historic Period," I expect that to go all the way back to first contact and this is skipping 300 years past that when there were very important leaders and events taking place. Maybe they could open up the space between the doors there and add more of those periods.

Drawing from his autobiography and communicating it through his own performed perception, Chris challenges the institutional narrative represented through the *absence* of display; in this case, it is a gap of 300 years. When looking at the Trail of Tears display, George voiced a similar critique:

> Oh, is this the Cherokee Removal? Is it just maps and a film? It seems like you need more artifacts, you could maybe get some books printed in the Syllabary, the still use that in Cherokee church services, Cherokee Syllabary Bible, or hymnal, there's also the Civil War period, when the Cherokees fought you know, for the Confederacy. Is this the last of the exhibits? So that's also overlooking the boarding schools of the 20th century that were really terrible and modern contributions. I'm glad they got something in about the Trail of Tears, and I know you can't fit every period in here, but you don't want to leave people with the idea that history ended then either. It would be nice if you had something of current history um, at the Sequoyah Museum and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, they have that, they try to make a link with contemporary history and current events. And at Sequoyah, they have pictures of the chief, of the different historical chiefs, up to the current one. Also, at the Cherokee Museum they've got a big display of the Civil War period, of Thomas' Legion, and they have a period of Trail of Tears and big mural for that.

Chris echoed this narrative when I recounted George's observations to him. He felt that

> it definitely cuts off the history too early. You could end the exhibit with something more current, more up-to-date with more current, modern issues or you could have so many possibilities, you could talk about modern Cherokee leaders, you could talk about the legal battles going on, you could talk about the different branches of the Cherokee nation, the United Keetoowah, the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina, the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, you know it's divided up now into several tribes after the Trail of Tears, and that would show the fragmentations caused by the legal abuses because Indian

> Law is an important thing. Congressional written Indian Law, which the Indians were never consulted upon that's a big struggle that even goes on until today because Congress can write whatever they want to, imposing whatever decision they choose on Indian people, without any participation by Indian people, which negates all the sovereignty promises of every treaty ever written and yet it continues to go on today…I definitely think that you could work to show some of these issues or bring to light these Indians in the present so the history doesn't stop there. This is just an example of some issues you could look at that people need to be aware of.

Identifying fissures in the recreated histories narrated by the exhibit, both George and Chris bring up important perspectives based on their personal cultural histories, education, and autobiographies. These narratives spotlight how the exhibit's content disembodies contemporary American Indians from their cultural pasts by denying their existence in the present. Suggesting that the storyline should not end with the Cherokee Removal, Chris and George accomplish what Chuck had originally hoped to achieve, a performance of Native perceptions that alters the institution's traditionally performed pedagogies about Native Americans. These informants underlined that in order to make the exhibit relevant to non-Natives today, living stories and contemporary contributions of indigenous populations must be included into the institutional narrative.

*"Precious Little Time…"*

Inserting these new narratives into the tour seemed like the most logical step to enhancing the tour of the *Hall of the Ancients*. However, taking a closer look, I realized that this solution was deceivingly simple when considering the constraint of time. Pulling together threads of various conversations I have had with various museum affiliates, the tours of the museum allow for only 15 minutes in each exhibit or art gallery. Apparently, this time allotment emerged because of the length of the 15-minute film visitors are shown prior to embarking on a full museum tour. As it was explained to me by an important museum official:

All groups have a guide. Most of our groups come from schools but we do sometimes have adult groups that visit from time to time, but if you have a group coming up of 15 or more, you would have a guide or we encourage that, and they are shown a 15 minute movie about the Southeastern Indians. That 15 minute movie segments the rest of the tour… in order for them to see the entire museum, which has at four main galleries and the gift shop in 50 minutes to an hour and a quarter – that's kind of average – you still only have 15 minutes in each room.

Because school students comprise the bulk of the museum's constituency, the tour is gauged around the length of time school groups are able to spend at the heritage center. From my experience over the past year, an hour to an hour and a half is about average for a school group tour when factoring in: The time it takes the school group to attend their "roll call" at their home school, the time taken to get on the bus and travel to Waleska (and this time varies depending where the school group is coming from), unloading the bus (which also takes a surprising amount of time), filing the students into the building, giving the students a bathroom break, and actually taking the tour. Getting the students situated is a bit like herding cats, especially if the group is large (50 children or more). On average, most school groups spend about 15 minutes in the gift shop; the time they spend here and number of students allowed in the store at one time are also monitored because the museum does not have adequate staff or cashier facilities to process purchases quickly. Generally, most school groups end their visit at the time they have a lunch period at school. This scheduling is meant to leave enough time for the group to take a final bathroom break, load the bus, and the drive back to its own school.

Thus, perhaps the most salient issue surfacing in this investigation was the lack of time allowed in each exhibit. Even the docent handbook points out that this gallery is "the most challenging of any exhibit room in the building containing much information about Native Americans in the past" (Funk Heritage Center 2009:2). Asking my informants to identify what they felt their primary constraint was, I found that *all* of them referenced a lack of time. At a

docent training meeting designed to address Georgia's new curriculum standards that the

museum strives to support, Mary, a museum employee, told me that

> One of our major problems we have in any of those areas is the lack of time. We have 15 minutes in each area, so to cover all that material in 15 minutes in the *Hall of Ancients* [*sic*] a real challenge and adding anything is a bigger challenge so we are going to need to try to figure out what we need to concentrate on what we don't need to focus on so that we can meet the needs of the second graders.

In the same vein, Andrew, a docent for the museum since 2003 explained that his biggest

constraint was

> Time. For me it's time, just time constraints. Almost invariably, when I go through there [the *Hall of the Ancients*] and I get to the Historic period, you know, I get the buzzer [the pagers the docents are given to inform them when it is time to change exhibits], and I've got to move on. But to me, the kids are the ones that lose out because we go by the computers [the touch screen stations] and the Historic period, and the Trail of Tears and they are like "Wait! I wanted to see that." I don't know the solution to that, I guess it would be just to allow more time, I don't know how you'd do that. Timing is the problem.

I spoke with two other docents after they had given tours to a large school group earlier that day.

Serving as docents for over eight years, Anne and Vikki communicated similar feelings.

> Anne: There's just too much stuff; I mean, it is so packed full of things to talk about, and if you want to let the kids do any asking of the questions or commenting, or whatever – 15 minutes is not enough. And I've been agitated for years that we just can't get through it all.

> Vikki: Personally, I feel like I'm pressed for time in each area and even though it's a wonderful exhibit I have a hard time making the archaeology fit into the tour.

> Anne: Yeah, you've got to sacrifice one or the other.

> Vikki: And the same thing with the computers because there's just no time for them to look at that.

> Anne: It like here's a Christmas tree, but we're not going to open any of the presents!

> Vikki: Yeah, I think it's back to the same thing though, you've either shortchanged the dioramas or you've shortchanged archaeology or the computers. I don't think 15 minutes…

Anne: It's not enough.

A troubling factor in these ladies' commentary is that the contextual archaeological information gets left out of the exhibit's narrative. Echoing this perspective, Cherie explained to me

> You know you have only got 15 minutes. That is *precious* little time. So, I didn't spend as much time in some areas as I'd like to have, but I lingered on what was interesting to [the children] because I thought it was interesting for them to understand where we came from. I tend to gloss over the archaeology for that reason too. Kids don't even connect with archaeology so I think that while you have so very few moments with them, it is important to talk about the Native Americans. [Her emphasis]

The time constraint excludes several key narratives like the textual information housed in the touch screen stations as well as its footage showing people conducting experimental archaeology. The touch stations (see Figure 5) fill in some gaps about the archaeological processes that led to the narratives formed by the dioramic scenes within the exhibit. However, as evidenced by some of the above commentaries, the time and expense invested in designing these resources are apparently wasted because visitors are not given the time to interact with them. The time constraint also forces docents to end the tour at either the Historic (see Figure 10) Period or the Trail of Tears (see Figures 11 & 12), continuing to ignore contemporary American Indians that are not present anywhere in the exhibit.

To gain insight as to how these limitations play out in visitor perception, I interviewed two second grade teachers chaperoning a visiting school group on January 21, 2009. After asking the teachers about their likes and dislikes of their Funk Heritage Center experience, I inquired as to what they thought could be improved.

> Teacher 1: I really enjoyed all of it and I learned some new things too. I liked that they reinforced the curriculum I teach during the year and I think that those paintings [referring to the murals in the *Hall of the Ancients*] made them [the Native Americans] more real. It was good that the kids could see them [the Native people], but I felt like we missed out on some information in some parts because we had to keep moving.

> Teacher 2: I would've liked for my kids to stay in the Indian exhibit a little longer because we're learning about the Syllabary now and I noticed a picture of Sequoyah as we were leaving. They didn't talk about that though.
>
> Teacher 1: I know my kids really wanted to look at those computer things [the touch stations] but I guess they didn't have enough time to use them so I told them that if we had time at the end they could go back and look at them.

The pressure of time to cover the depth of information clearly manifests itself from this visitor's commentary. Supporting an earlier observation about time constraints, it is apparent that the institution's performance hinders the visitor from gaining knowledge about certain key elements; in other words, this practice promulgates a compromised institutional pedagogy which consists of constrained information. From these various perspectives one clearly sees how many narratives have been lost since the exhibit's inception. The absence of these narratives acts to limit the time visitors have to insert their own autobiographies and perform their own perceptions of the exhibit. Further, it reifies the institution's authority over the narratives inscribed on the bodies of visitors and docents alike. To combat some of these issues, I outline some important strategies for challenging this practice in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

NEW NARRATIVES

*Breathing Life Back into the "Dead Indian" Museum: Change through Collaboration*

Revisiting the performance of the museum (Garoian 2001), I collated the data extracted from my field research in an effort to deconstruct the traditional pedagogy of the Funk Heritage Center. At the same time, my objective was to alter the performance of the *Hall of the Ancients* to promote inclusivity in the form of viewer perception and autobiography in order to diminish the singular narrative transmitted from the exhibit's take-home messages. Two key strategies have proven useful in achieving this goal.

The first strategy aimed to deconstruct cultural biases of the museum's staff and volunteer support. Like most local history centers, the Bennett Museum relies heavily on its volunteer staff to act as docents on its behalf. Crucial to changing the stereotypical narratives imparted from exhibit tours, my primary objective was to update the museum's volunteer handbook and to update the docent training workshops. After teasing out some of the most salient obstacles as detailed in the previous chapter, I began collaboration with the museum's professionals and its stakeholders to generate various solutions. Supplementing these efforts, I collected recent archaeological findings pertinent to the local region, state, and county to give to docents in training an archaeological framework. Further, I researched various publications about Southeastern Indian oral histories in order to compliment the archaeological base of interpretation. Using contemporary applied anthropological approaches to understanding other cultures for inclusion in volunteer training sessions, I worked alongside the museum's staff and head volunteers to improve the docent guide. This guide will always be a work in progress; as such, edits have not been finalized at the time of this writing although the museum's staff

anticipates its completion in the near future; unfortunately, due to copyright laws, the manual will not be duplicated in this text.

Building upon this framework, the second strategy was to launch updated tours of the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit and complement these tours with free public educational events over the course of six months. These events supported the museum's mission to improve the educational quality of their exhibit by hosting guest speakers, movie screenings, and book reviews related to specific themes conveyed in the *Hall of the Ancients.* For example, on February 21, a Cherokee Indian descendent gave a public program about the complex social interactions between the European settlers and American Indians through historical re-enactment. Elaborating on the importance of the Cherokee during the 18th century, this guest speaker gave voice to a portion of the *Hall of the Ancients* that is missing from its display. By presenting the public with information about the complex alliances between the English and the Cherokee of the 18th century, this speaker bridged a critical portion of the 300-year gap portrayed between the Mississippian (c. 1500s) and the Historic Periods (c. 1800) in the exhibit.

Collaboration underpinned the success of each of these strategies. Throughout this process I attempted to work in concert with outside museum professionals, volunteers, visitors, board members, community members, American Indians, teachers, students, and the museum's staff. Each of these contributors brought a different perspective for understanding and imagining ways to improve the *Hall of the Ancients* exhibit. Undoubtedly, this research would not have taken flight without the inclusion of these multiple perspectives.

At times, however, the multiple perspectives gained throughout this process led to disagreements about how certain aspects should (or should not) be changed. For example, a few of the docents disagreed with inserting any mention of the archaeology and the critical role it had

originally played in the creation of the *Hall of the Ancients*. Other volunteers balked at the idea

of having to learn new information about contemporary archaeological sites that might challenge

the narrative they were used to telling to visitors. One lady informed me that she didn't "see the

point in telling the students about these [archaeological] sites because they don't care about that

[learning about archaeology]. All they want to do is walk around and look at the paintings [the

dioramas] or the artifacts." Greeting these strategies with some friction, I found it very important

to rely on the museum's staff to uphold the changes they sought to make. Additionally,

compromise was the best policy to ensure museum changes in the long run. In all, I believe these

two strategies proved useful for loosening the constraints of time and updating the institution's

pedagogical practices.

*Viewer Agency through Archaeological Context*

Providing an archaeological context for the various displays in the *Hall of the Ancients*

may be an effective means of transforming the museum's culture and institutional pedagogy

through viewer performance. To accomplish this, public programming was designed to enhance

viewer understanding of the archaeological narratives in the exhibit. As evidenced from my

observations below, viewers – both docents and visitors – began to perform their perceptions

about the antiquated archaeological narratives used in the museum.  Using these methods, I

challenged viewers to think critically about the storyline presented at the heritage center.

To give an example, Andrew, mentioned in the previous chapter, is a committed docent

and archaeology fanatic. Having traveled to over 32 prehistoric archaeological sites in the U.S.,

Andrew is an avid reader of archaeological reports and visitor of public interpretive sites.

Bringing this knowledge and personal experience to the exhibit, Andrew interjects examples of

archaeological sites that correspond to the various periods on display to his tour groups. One

afternoon I had the privilege of shadowing Andrew's tour. Impressed by Andrew's

archaeological knowledge, I listened as he explained to the students

> The weapon you see here is an atlatl. This is what they used to hunt with. They used it so they could get more speed and I'll show you how it works because I went to Louisiana and visited Poverty Point, an Archaic site, and they had folks down there showing us how to use it. So, you put your fingers here and hold it like that, and you see? It's like an extra elbow that gave them extra distance and speed to get the animal they were hunting.

Hearing this, one of the visitors asked, "Are there sites like that here in Georgia?" and another

inquired while pointing to the Archaic diorama (see Figure 7), "Is that what he's using to fish

with?" The children's questions highlight the viewer's perception; further, by merely interjecting

a brief archaeological aside, Andrew catalyzed the formation of new narratives based on his own

autobiography and the visitors' performance. Causing a rupture of the institution's traditional

pedagogy, several other instances of this deconstruction come to mind, but here I shall recount

just a few.

On January 10, 2009, I gave a public lecture at the museum about archaeology and

American Indian consultation in cultural resource management. My audience consisted of

numerous members affiliated with the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association, about a

dozen of the museum's personnel including staff and docents, and several other local community

representatives. Many of these people were long-time county residents and personally knew

some of the institution's founders and trustees.

Communicating the differences between archaeology and looting, my lecture focused on

the importance of controlled excavation and archaeological context. Explaining the legislation

surrounding archaeological sites located on federal, state, and private property, I outlined some

basic tenets about collecting artifacts by naming examples of various legal and illegal excavation

activities. After the close of this lecture, I opened the floor to questions. One specifically sticks

out in my mind: "If surface collecting is illegal on state property without the state's permission,

aren't some of the artifacts in the display cases here illegal? 'Cause I know at least one of the

donors who gave his artifacts over wasn't *only* collectin' on his own lands" (his emphasis). To

this surprising statement I responded,

> To my knowledge, no records or provenience, that is, contextual, information was provided with the collections when they were donated to the museum. The truth is, without that information, we have no way of knowing exactly where they came from; but, if you have any information about where some of these specific articles came from, I'd be more than happy to talk with you after the presentation.

Unfortunately, the gentleman who made this comment did not know the exact whereabouts from

whence some of the museum's artifacts came. Additionally, he didn't know which artifacts

specifically would have made it into the collection from somewhere other than the donor's

property. In the end, his comment created more questions than answers about the legitimacy of

the unprovenienced artifacts in the museum's possession. But, in this instance, by performing his

own knowledge, or personal autobiography (Garoain 2001), this gentleman shed light upon some

of the original biographies for a portion of the artifacts housed at the museum (Kopytoff

2000[1986]). More than this, his commentary inserted a new perspective and therefore indirectly

highlighted the politics underpinning some of the museum's objects on display.

On a separate occasion, I gave a public lecture entitled "Archaeology and Georgia's First

Peoples" which introduced the public to basic archaeological concepts and elaborated on the

types of sites found in the Southeastern United States. I intentionally structured my discussion

around the archaeologically defined cultural periods portrayed in the *Hall of the Ancients.* In

order to rupture the public's common sense that these time periods were the truth with a capital

"T" (Gramsci 1975), I went into great detail about how these time periods (i.e., Woodland,

Mississippian, etc.) were in a sense defined arbitrarily in that these terms were coined by non-

Native archaeologists. Furthermore, I explained that archaeologists dubbed sub-cultures of these periods by examining common artifact collections found in various regions of the Southeast. In sum, I sought to deconstruct and demystify the field of archaeology by basically stating that everything in the *Hall of the Ancients* was deduced from an educated guess. However, I was careful to highlight the fact that archaeologists rely on rigorous scientific inquiries and reflexivity when reconstructing narratives about the past.

After this public program, I remember being greeted by various patrons who mentioned how much they enjoyed learning about archaeology. These guests were surprised to hear that archaeologists had to make educated guesses about their findings. I felt that these remarks achieved my primary goal of simply getting people to think about archaeology and the processes involved in it. While I did not explicitly talk about the politics of representation, I believe that this lecture deconstructed some of the misrepresentations of archaeology in the *Hall of the Ancients*.

In relation to these lectures, I also had several docents approach me about the new ways that they were coming to understand archaeology. One of these volunteers, a newcomer, explained

> I never realized that so much went into finding sites and working with American Indians. It's amazing that they don't talk about that more in the *Hall of the Ancients* or give examples about sites you mentioned were in this area, but I guess they have to show their best guess. But that's one of the things I liked about [the presentation] that you showed how sometimes we don't have all the answers.

Manifested in these accounts, demystifying the field of archaeology by communicating the fact that archaeologists don't always "have all the answers" can act to rupture institutional knowledge. Specifically applied to the *Hall of the Ancients*, when I challenged people to think about the various processes involved in archaeology and how archaeological findings inform the

stories that we tell in museum exhibits, people started to ponder these processes. I believe I

accomplished a small part of my original objective to make people aware of the politics of

archaeological processes. On a basic level, simply getting people to think about the stories they

are told in the museum challenged the institution's traditional voice of authority.

While some viewers may continue to prefer the out-dated narratives expressed in the *Hall*

*of the Ancients*, I believe these strategies also challenged some of the public's hegemonic ideas

about Southeastern Indians. Put differently, by inserting an updated archaeological context to the

museum's pedagogy, the richness of some of these viewer's experiences was enhanced through

their own perceptual performance. Likewise, the interdisciplinarity of archaeology and

anthropology enabled multivocality and increased viewer agency by adding new voices to the

institutional narrative.

*Cultural "Survivance" and Contemporary Southeastern Indians*

> "Survivance… is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of
> survivance are an active presence…The native stories of survivance are successive and
> natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry"
> (Vizenor 1998:15)

As Gerald Vizenor (1998) eloquently points out, inserting contemporary narratives of

American Indian "survivance" into the stories told today is an essential step towards

deconstructing common misconceptions about Native people. In the case of the *Hall of the*

*Ancients* exhibit, many of my informants, especially those of American Indian descent, felt that

the exhibit should not end with the Trail of Tears. In fact, after combing through my 20

interviews, all of the museum personnel agreed that some mention of contemporary American

Indians should be included in the exhibit. Lily agrees

> I definitely think there needs to be something in there [the exhibit] about Indians
> nowadays. I feel like this is really important because when I take a group to the next
> gallery [the Sellars Native American art exhibit], they all ask me if the pots and jewelry

and all that were found at a dig. But you know I explain to them that they were made by Indians living in other places today. I think it's hard for people to make that connection you know if there is nothing in there about where they [American Indians] live today.

Likewise, another docent, Ted, explained that

I really don't get why the film [shown before the tour] doesn't explain that either and I think that really picks up when we go through the tour because we rarely have time to get to the Trail of Tears much less what Indians are up to today. I think that even if we could put a sign in there or a picture or something, or even a better map – I think that if we had those things to show people where Indians lived and where are they now… yeah, that would be good.

Taking a lead from earlier suggestions made by the American Indians I interviewed (see Chapter 5), these museum representatives give voice to the museum's transforming culture and illustrate a willingness to change the pedagogical structure through personal performance.

Taking into account the ideas offered by volunteer personnel, teachers, students, lay visitors, and American Indians, I hope to impart new narratives about contemporary American Indians to the museum's stakeholders. Using the viewer feedback generated from this research, I plan to illustrate the public's desire for a narrative of American Indian "survivance" in the *Hall of the Ancients* to the staff and Advisory Board.

*Conclusion*

From the strategies outlined above, transforming the pedagogical performance of the *Hall of the Ancients* depended directly upon active collaboration and calculated compromise. Actively participating in the docent training sessions and volunteer meetings, I made great efforts to root out the needs of the institution based on its own discourse. More than this, I donated a great deal of my time to creating interesting public programs and opening forums for public discussion.

By increasing viewer agency, challenging monolithic narratives of the past, and inserting the relevance of contemporary American Indians in U.S. society, the data in this chapter illustrate how archaeological contexts about portrayals of the past can rupture traditional

museum authority. Throughout this process, I continually prompted the Funk Heritage Center's community (volunteers, staff, visitors, students, teachers, etc.) to think critically about the ways interpretations of the past were formed. While it is true that not all of the museum's stakeholders experienced a new viewer perspective, judging from the narratives explained above, the ethnographic data point to some radical changes in the museum's institutional performance over a short span of time. These changes are summarized in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

*Summary of Findings*

Politics underpin any museological interpretation of the past. The Bennett Museum of the

Funk Heritage Center is no exception. Aligning with issues found in contemporary museological

theories and praxis, the Bennett Museum houses its share of old stories and antiquated

perspectives that are hesitant to give way to new narratives or updated interpretations of the past.

As illustrated by this ethnography, these politics became evident throughout my conversations

with the institution's personnel and those of the lay public. From these politics emerged a

discourse which reflected the principles of social evolutionism applied to the Southeastern

Indians. To combat these essentialized ideologies, the goal of this ethnography was to improve

the Bennett Museum's *Hall of the Ancients* by inserting modern archaeological and

anthropological voices into the institution's original narrative.

To achieve this goal, I applied Garoian's (2001) five-pronged pedagogical strategy for

improving the performance of the *Hall of the Ancients*. Putting to work Garoian's (2001)

concepts of viewer perception and interdisciplinarity, I unpacked the Funk Heritage Center's

culture in an effort to deconstruct the museum's traditional pedagogical performance about the

Southeastern Indians. Moreover, I have shown that viewers gain greater agency in interpreting

museum content when they are challenged to think about the political processes behind what

they see on display. Bringing their own performances and personal histories to the museum

stage, I have endeavored to show how viewers can act as importance agents in actively

(de)constructing meaning about people of the past.

Continuing this theoretical approach, the ethnographic data presented herein demonstrate a loss of intended narratives at the Bennett Museum. These lost narratives were originally meant to educate the public about the richness of the South's earliest cultural heritage. Restoring some of the positive aspects of these intentions, most of my conversations with the institution's stakeholders imply a willingness to undergo museological transformation. Examples of this chrysalis include the staff's decisions to (1) update the docent manual, (2) offer updated, improved docent training workshops, (3) and insert references to contemporary American Indians of the Southeast. These three steps may appear minimal on the surface; however, upon taking a closer look, the arduous tasks of collaboration, consultation, and compromise exemplify some successful means of deconstructing traditional museum authority.

As I have previously argued, institutional authority must be deconstructed from the inside out. My personal objective to update the *Hall of the Ancients* was interlaced with the institution's goal of improving the educational quality of its American Indian programming and exhibit tours; specifically, I collaborated with the museum's staff to update the content of the exhibit's tour by referencing contemporary archaeological findings that challenge, refute, or support ideas represented in this exhibit.

While not exactly conforming to the mold I had imagined, these achievements have exceeded my expectations of institutional change. Furthermore, this ethnographic research has played a large role in providing this local history museum with the resources needed to bridge the information gap from American Indians in ancient times to their living descendants today. In the end, however, I do not believe merely changing the *Hall of the Ancients* narrative is enough to fully deconstruct the antiquated portrayals of early Southeastern Indians. It is my hope that upon discussing my research results with the museum's staff and collegiate stakeholders, a

proposal might be developed to overhaul and update the entire exhibit. The outcome of this meeting will be discussed in the Epilogue.

*Public Archaeology for the Museum Community*

This thesis has validated James D. Nason's (2000) claim that local history museums bear the burden of communicating the importance of the past to the public. More than this, the ethnographic data presented herein highlight the need to periodically question the methods and techniques used to communicate this importance. While reflexivity and increased multivocality may assist local history museum professionals in avoiding continued misrepresentations of historically marginalized cultural groups, I have shown that incorporating archaeological narratives into museological practice (in the form of public programming and exhibits) can be an effective strategy for altering antiquated portrayals of early American Indians. More notably, my research proves that even in the form of docent commentary and supplemental educational programming, these new narratives can act to rupture traditional public discourse about institutional authority over people (and objects) on display.

*In Closing*

In conclusion, I have endeavored to show how archaeological narratives may provide local history museum visitors with a sense of context and connection to the visual representations they experience. These narratives can also impart an understanding of the "how" and the "why" of archaeological practice, and more importantly, a deepened public awareness about the politics behind representation. Overall, I have illustrated that keeping museological portrayals of early people up-to-date is a never-ending process; but, if done correctly, this process can be a tool for promulgating contextualized viewer interpretations of the cultural agents gone before us.

Lastly, by tying the complex processes of archaeological research to the didactic displays housed in museums, archaeologists can play a greater role in fostering public stewardship of our shared heritage. To enrich visitor experience and relinquish traditional institutional authority, I challenge archaeologists and museum professionals alike to make explicit the politics behind their representations of early American Indians. As professionals concerned with preserving the past and giving voice to historically marginalized cultural communities, it is our responsibility to continually work to improve museological portrayals of the past so that other generations may come to fully appreciate this history. To breathe life back into our own old stories about the past, we must remember to continually give voice to new narratives emerging in the present.

EPILOGUE

One week after my thesis defense, I presented my research findings to the Funk Heritage Center's staff. Unsurprisingly, the first agenda item addressed was the constraint of time. Taking into account the personnel's unanimous consent about time constraints, the staff agreed that the existing 15-minute time allotment shortchanges the visitor experience. Apparently, the time schedule was a carry-over from the design of the former museum coordinator; the logic in using the 15-minute block stemmed from the length of the video shown to visitors at the start of a tour. Adding five minutes for a spoken introduction before the film screening, the staff has decided to increase the time allotment to 20 minutes. In the end, the staff hopes that this new schedule will free up time for both the docents and the visitors to engage in a dialogic process of posing questions and answers to each other.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, I communicated to the staff that I did not believe simply changing the museum's narrative would entirely combat the antiquated take-home messages about Southeastern Indians in the *Hall of the Ancients*. Politely, I urged them to consider applying for funding to overhaul the entire exhibit; if they received some sort of funding, I suggested that they hire a museum consultant team – a team that would include *at least* one contemporary Southeastern Indian professional – to design a new, updated exhibit.

The staff agreed that eventually the exhibit should be updated; but, according to one of the staff members, "now is not the time." As mentioned previously, most of the museum's constituents are school groups, mainly at the elementary level. For this reason, the staff's current priority is to change the museum's tour content so that it aligns with the newly changed Georgia curriculum standards for Native American history. One of the salient subjects of this new curriculum rests on the idea of trade and bartering. Therefore, the staff is seeking out funding to

create a display about the bartering and trade economies of the South throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; namely, a display about the deerskin trade. If funding is received, the staff plans to insert this new display into the *Hall of the Ancients* in the place of the artifact cabinets pictured in Figure 13 (see Chapter 3).

Concerning contemporary Native voice, the staff decided to brainstorm ways in which to incorporate living achievements and social contributions of Southeastern Indians today. At the time of this writing, however, these discussions are still ongoing and have not taken the form of any tactile solutions.

Conversely, the staff has agreed that the archaeologist's office display should be updated. To achieve this end, all of the fixed cabinetry in the display will be taken out and replaced with easy to read panels of bulleted text and photographs. Conceptually these updates are not yet finalized, but the objectives will be to include (1) maps showing the location of archaeology sites in the state or region, (2) definitions of archaeology, artifacts, and the reasons for excavation, (3) a recreated stratigraphic thin section designed to illustrate *how* archaeologists excavate and *what* they look for in an excavation, (5) a frequently asked questions panel that discusses legislation for artifact collection (i.e., Is it legal to collect artifacts?), (6) poster-sized photographs of local excavations, site maps, and (7) textual panels that briefly explain each of these items.

In sum, the results of this meeting reflect the importance of collaboration throughout the exhibition process. Moreover, the outcome of this research shows that compromise is inevitable when one seeks to change the (re)presentation of history. The staff's decisions did not completely align with my own objectives; however, I firmly believe that important changes have occurred in the museum as a result of my ethnographic research. I hope these changes will assist in making future visitors stewards of our shard cultural pasts.

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APPENDIX A: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY

Please answer these questions after you exit the *Hall of the Ancients*. By filling out this survey, you agree to participate in research for improving this exhibit. Thank you!

1.  What is the purpose of the Hall of the Ancients exhibit?

2.  Who is on display in the exhibit?

3.  Archaeologists are important because…

4.  Native Americans in Georgia belong to the tribe(s) of…

5.  The Hall of the Ancients is important for visitors because…

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SURVEY FOR ADULTS

Hall of the Ancients Survey

**Thank you for filling out this survey. This survey is to improve the Hall of Ancients. By filling out these questions, you consent to be a part of this survey. Thank you for your help!**

1. I would tell a friend that my favorite part of the Hall of Ancients was. . .


2. ___X___ are the scientists that study human groups in the past. They study___Y___, or the material things people left behind to learn about people in the past.

        a. (X) Paleontologists; (Y) bones
        b. (X) Mathematicians; (Y) numbers
        c. (X) Archaeologists; (Y) artifacts
        d. (X) Physicists; (Y) gravity

3. I learned that early Southeastern Native Americans have a history, but it was NOT written. (Circle one, please.)

True            False

4. I think the MOST interesting part of the Hall of Ancients was about:
        a. Native Americans
        b. archaeology
        c. Southeastern plants & animals
        d. the Trail of Tears
        e. Other:_____

5. I think the LEAST interesting part of the Hall of Ancients was about:

6. I would like to learn more about:
        a. Native Americans
        b. archaeology
        c. Southeastern plants & animals
        d. Other:_____
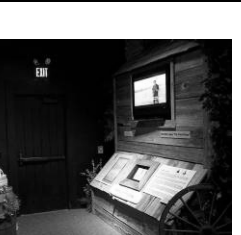

7. I learned that early Southeastern Native Americans

        a. had no written history.
        b. lived in harmony with nature.
        c. were noble.
        d. didn't wear many garments.

## APPENDIX C: SAMPLE SURVEY FOR CHILDREN

Hall of the Ancients Survey

**Thank you for filling out this survey.**

1. My favorite part of the Hall was:
(Circle one)

| | |
|---|---|
| A.  | Archaeology |
| B.  | Southeastern Indians |
| C.  | Rock art |
| D.  | The Trail of Tears |

2. I learned that archaeology studies humans in the past. (Circle one)
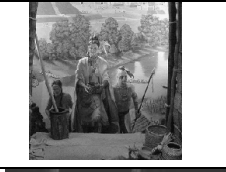
Yes                                    No

3. I would like to know more about:
(Circle one)

| A.  | Archaeology |
|  B. | Southeastern Indians |
| C.  | Rock art |
| D.  | The Trail of Tears |

4. I did NOT like learning about:
 (Circle one)

| | |
|---|---|
| A.  | Archaeology |
| B.  | Southeastern Indians |
| C.  | Rock art |
| D.  | The Trail of Tears |

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is the purpose of the *Hall of the Ancients*?
2. Overall exhibit effectiveness (Briefly describe the exhibit to me?)
3. Exhibit quality
4. Evaluation of the digital media interactive displays
5. Effectiveness of each individual diorama display (What are the take-home messages?)
6. Use of space
7. Evaluation of text
8. Pinpointing the target audience (What audience learns the most from this exhibit?)
9. Thematic scheme (What complex theme is broken down into small parts? What is left out? What is included?)
10. Lighting
11. Signage: size of text, effectiveness of text, location of text, text's usefulness to different audiences
12. Docent tour evaluation (What and whose story is told to the audience?)
13. Video evaluation
14. Memory (What display was the most memorable to which audiences?)
15. Background (Who did the visitor come with? What audience accompanied the visitor? What age group does the visitor fit into?)
16. What are the strengths of the exhibit?
17. What are its weaknesses?
18. What are some of your constraints that you face when giving tours? Designing an exhibit (if applicable)?
19. If you had any resource at your disposal, how would you change the exhibit?
20. Any final thoughts or comments?