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# Of Us and Other "Things": The Content and Functions of Talk by Adult Visitor Pairs in an Art and a History Museum

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# Of Us and Other "Things": The Content and Functions of Talk by Adult Visitor Pairs in an Art and a History Museum

## **Abstract**

Surprisingly little is known about the processes by which objects in museums come to hold meaning for visitors. Reconceptualizing the museum within a mass media framework in which visitors actively negotiate meaning through talk with their companions, this study explores four questions: 1) What are the kinds of interpretive acts that visitor pairs make in museums? 2) Are there patterns to these responses? How might they vary depending upon museum type and gender configuration of pair? 3) What are the social functions of such talk? 4) What does this suggest about the role of the museum in society?

To investigate these issues, the talk of 60 visitor pairs - 15 male-female pairs and 15 female-female pairs at one art and one history museum respectively - was tape-recorded as these pairs viewed a target exhibit at their own pace. Each visitor completed an individual interview and questionnaire afterward. The content of visitor talk was analyzed and a 7-step qualitative procedure utilized to compare and interweave the three types of data.

All visitor talk in both museums was found to consist of five major interpretive acts - establishment, absolute object description, relating competence, relating personal experience, and evaluation. Visitor pairs combined and emphasized these acts in seven different ways to form interpretive frames - distinct ways of talking and thinking about objects. These frames further collapsed into three major modes of meaning-making - Objective, Subjective, and Combination. In addition to making meaning of objects, visitors' talk was found to communicate several aspects of their individual and relational identities. The invocation of interpretive frame varied most by relationship type, as represented by gender configuration and amount of time pair members knew each other.

In sum, visitor pairs filter their competencies and tendencies through the context of their relationship to produce a shared interpretive approach. The resulting talk constructs and reflects the meaning of objects and of selves operative within the relationship. The museum is concluded to be a modified mass medium, a locus for the negotiation of cultural meaning, particularly identity.

## **Degree Type**

Dissertation

## **Degree Name**

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

## **Department**

Communication

## **First Advisor**

Larry Gross

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**Keywords**

interpretive act patterns, visitor pair conversation, art/history museum context, recorded data/interviews/questionnaire, male-female/female-female dyads

**Subject Categories**

Communication | Fine Arts | History | Interpersonal and Small Group Communication | Mass  
Communication | Place and Environment | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology of Culture

OF US AND OTHER "THINGS": THE CONTENT AND FUNCTIONS OF  
TALK BY ADULT VISITOR PAIRS IN AN ART AND A HISTORY MUSEUM

LOIS HELAYNE SILVERMAN

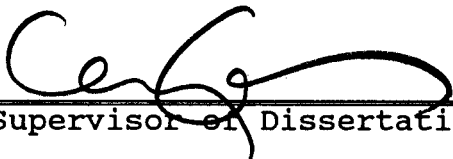
A DISSERTATION

in

COMMUNICATIONS

Presented to the Faculties of the University of  
Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy.

1990

  
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Supervisor of Dissertation

  
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Graduate Group Chairperson

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LOIS HELAYNE SILVERMAN

1990

DEDICATION

To Philip Silverman,  
in loving memory

"Never did I realize till now what the ocean was:  
how grand and majestic, how solitary, and boundless,  
and beautiful and blue" - Herman Melville

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the inevitable low moments of this process, I often bolstered myself by revising a crucial piece of this work - these acknowledgements. While rewriting is often tedious, it has been a savored joy to thank several important people in a variety of ways over the past two years for their contributions to this project. While this page at last fixes certain words for posterity, the feelings they represent are nearly inexpressible.

It is particularly difficult to convey the extent of my gratitude to and appreciation of Larry Gross, advisor of this dissertation. Larry's support, encouragement, generosity, insight, and humor formed the guiding light down this dark path, as well as throughout all of my graduate studies. I feel fortunate to have been his student. I am also grateful to Paul Messaris, committee member, whose perspectives have been invaluable to me since my earliest courses at Annenberg. I thank Christine Bachen for her contributions during the early stages, and Joe Turow, who stepped in later in the process with important input to round out a challenging yet helpful dissertation committee.

This research was supported in part through the Smithsonian Institution Fellowship Program. Many thanks to the administration of The National Museum of American History and The National Gallery of Art, respectively, for allowing me to study and interview the visitors to these important institutions. I am indebted to the study participants, whose willingness made it possible for me to do the kind of project I wanted to do. While the Smithsonian program enabled me to meet many wonderful people, I treasure three in particular. Dr. Christopher With, Director of Art Information at the National Gallery, was directly responsible for facilitating my presence there, providing useful facts, stimulating chats, and much-appreciated interest and support. Mary Dyer, Internship and Fellowship Coordinator at NMAH, always had or found the answers in her unique way. And, in a category all her own is Dr. D.D. Hilke. Officially, my Smithsonian Fellowship project advisor, D.D. has also been colleague, teacher, dissertation midwife, and most importantly, friend. I am overwhelmingly grateful for her

expertise, generosity, and incredible supply of right words at right moments.

Several other individuals made unique contributions, and I thank them each. Amy Jordan and Diane Umble provided essential feedback and support during the development of this work at its proposal stage. During the analysis and writing, Victor Caldarola with rigor and care became insightful critic and chief dissertation comrade. Lane Browing has been an important and stylish colleague throughout my graduate school days. Mary Alexander, Randi Korn, and Linda Snow Dockser have been lifelines to the museum profession, as well as cherished friends. Gail Transeau's special gifts helped me to find in this task strengths and beginnings of all kinds. With Julie Weiss I shared many wonderful hours of talk and tarot. David Thelen provided the golden carrot before my nose, and a belief in me that worked like high octane. I am particularly grateful to Steve Neugeboren, my definitive d.c. friend, who kept me singing and dancing through it all. His company and his kindness, especially during the final laps, have been nothing short of precious.

Pursuing doctoral study brought many gifts to my life, among them three relationships which truly transcend all categories (as did the phone bills). I thank Barbie Zelizer for her friendship and spirit through a range of emotions unimaginable on this journey. I am always grateful to John Encandela for the dance and the elastic tie, especially the renewal ushered in together in 1990. Most of all, I thank Michael Willmorth for the past eight years of understanding and joy. In those earliest lunchtime talks of synaesthesia I found not only my constant grad school companion but a one of a kind person with whom I've learned the spectrum of friendship.

It is impossible to express the depth of my gratitude to and respect for my parents, Harvey Silverman and Marlene Silverman, and my sister, Lisa Silverman. I thank them now and always for their love, generosity, and faith throughout my pursuit of this goal, and all others. I am particularly grateful to my parents for their cheerleading and understanding, which truly helped keep me going, and to my sister, for her generosity, and for being my role-model now as in the past. I also thank David Siegler for helping me keep things in perspective with pep talks and humor.

True to the topic of this research, it is through interaction with these individuals that this particular "thing" has come to hold meaning for me.



## ABSTRACT

OF US AND OTHER "THINGS": THE CONTENT AND FUNCTIONS OF TALK BY ADULT VISITOR PAIRS IN AN ART AND A HISTORY MUSEUM

LOIS HELAYNE SILVERMAN

LARRY GROSS

Surprisingly little is known about the processes by which objects in museums come to hold meaning for visitors. Reconceptualizing the museum within a mass media framework in which visitors actively negotiate meaning through talk with their companions, this study explores four questions: 1) What are the kinds of interpretive acts that visitor pairs make in museums? 2) Are there patterns to these responses? How might they vary depending upon museum type and gender configuration of pair? 3) What are the social functions of such talk? 4) What does this suggest about the role of the museum in society?

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visitor talk was analyzed and a 7-step qualitative procedure utilized to compare and interweave the three types of data.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Every day, in a number of different ways, human beings encounter and consume a multitude of symbolic products. For information, recreation, and maintenance of the threads of shared meaning which sustain our world, such products, from television programs to bibles, from billboards to paintings, are integral to our lives. Facilitating our consumption of them are the channels we call "the mass media," typically thought of as television, radio, and print. Yet another important "institution" exists in our society which facilitates such encounters, and is in fact the very home of those symbolic objects considered exemplary of our culture: the museum. From the Charleston Library Society in South Carolina, the first museum opened in the United States in 1773, to the many historic houses, science centers, and galleries in existence today, the museum serves, by present estimates, nearly 700 million visitors a year with over 6,000 institutions (Danilov in Budd, 1979). What do we know about the nature of the encounters within?

Like other mass media, the museum presents symbolic objects to a large, heterogeneous body of consumers, who do not necessarily know each other, or the "creators" of the presented messages. On the other hand, the museum differs from most mass media in several ways: here, the

audience comes to the message rather than vice versa, although this is also true of live performances of music, dance, and theater, movies in commercial theaters, and billboards. Perhaps the primary difference between museums and other mass media would lie along the lines of uniqueness, especially in the case of the art museum. In our age of mechanical reproduction, we typically encounter duplicates rather than 'originals.' To some extent in history museums, and exclusively in art museums, we encounter original symbolic products, a unique aspect of the museum which seems to distinguish it strikingly from other media. Yet the reproduction artifacts and prints made available to visitors in most museum "shops" might in fact be thought of as contributing this missing aspect. Thus, the museum might well be studied from the perspective of mass media.

The museum as a mass medium might be further understood through a focus on the products it contains. A number of academic disciplines, including american studies, sociology, and aesthetics, have explored and documented the human fascination with and relationship to "things" - i.e., symbolic objects, artifacts, and works of art of present and past times and places. Common to such study is the underlying belief that the meanings of such products, like music (e.g., Feld, 1984), television programs (e.g., Katz and Liebes, 1986) and literature

(e.g., Fish, 1980), are socially constructed and maintained through processes of interpretation and interaction. As summed by Blumer (1969):

Objects must be seen as social creations...as being formed in and arising out of the process of definition and interpretation as this process takes place in the interaction of people. (p. 11)

Thus the question of "the meaning of things" (cf. Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981) is fundamentally one of communications, productively addressed through the exploration of these interpretation and interaction processes. Research has shown that 75 to 95 percent of museum visitors encounter museum artifacts in the company of others, over one third in pairs (Draper, 1984). What is known about the nature of the "meaning" of museum "things" to people? By what processes does that meaning come about?

Despite its ubiquity in our culture and its clear social nature, the socio-cultural practice of museum-going and the processes by which objects in the museum come to have meaning for visitors is a subject that has been comparatively neglected by social scientists. Although a sizeable literature on the museum audience has evolved within the museum profession, very little of it has theoretically conceptualized the interpretation process beyond an institutionally biased concern with learning and the accurate transmission and reception of an intended

message. While the work of aesthetic theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1934) and material culturists (e.g., Schlereth, 1982) suggests that the way people approach objects is likely to differ depending upon the discipline of the museum, no explicit comparisons of interpretation for art versus history objects in museums have been conducted. And while a few studies have described the social nature of the experience for families (e.g. Hilke and Balling, 1985) and for friends (e.g. Draper, 1984), none have considered the factor of gender configuration of the relationship or its possible role in meaning-making. Despite the recent proliferation of studies illustrating the communicative nature and function of "goods," such as home furnishings and personal possessions, including artwork and photography, little of this literature has been considered in relation to museum visitor behavior. In fact, such studies suggest the possibility of further significance to "personal" ways of relating to artifacts, ways traditionally considered "naive" and "uneducated" by professionals within the museum context. In sum, while Graburn (1977) argued that "sociological and anthropological studies of the role and impact of museums in modern life are needed" (p. 182), few have been undertaken.

Part of the cause for this dearth of advanced study has been the absence of appropriate theoretical frameworks



within which to situate studies of museum audiences and to conceptualize the interpretation process. To this end, this dissertation recasts the museum within a mass media framework, in which the interpretation of symbolic objects is viewed as a creative, audience focused process which takes place in the social and relational context of interaction with one's companions. This perspective provides a solid base for the formulation of important research questions. Reciprocally, the museum is an important case context in which to study the social construction of meaning.

Precedents for the investigation of the museum context within a communications framework exist. In the 1960's, for example, writers in both the museum field (e.g., Cameron, 1968) and the communications field (e.g., McLuhan, 1968) discussed ways in which the museum could be viewed as a communications environment. Interestingly, the developing conceptualization of the audience in museum literature reflects changes similar to those in the history of mass media studies - i.e., a movement from a passive, "effects" approach to a more active "uses and gratifications" paradigm.

Recent developments in mass media audience studies, of a symbolic interactionist nature (e.g., Fish, 1980) suggest potent theoretical and methodological directions for further exploration of the interpretation process in

museums. One trend, reader response theory (e.g., Iser, 1978) suggests that instead of simply passively receiving meaning from a media object, an audience member is actively involved in creating that meaning, by virtue of what she brings to it. As a result, there will be patterned ranges of responses and approaches to the object or work (cf. Iser, 1978, Fish, 1980). The act of interpreting a television program, film, or other work has been described as a social experience in which audience members often negotiate meaning through conversation with each other (e.g., Custen, 1980, Katz and Liebes, 1986). Thus, to explore how meaning is made, these researchers have illustrated the usefulness of studying people's talk - their conversations about film and tv programs, the terms used and topics covered, and other responses which occur. In addition to yielding patterns and approaches to interpretation, studies which look at people's talk (among other sources of data) have also uncovered other social functions of the viewing experience. One such study found that discussion about television programs allowed family members to show competence and to transmit values (Lull, 1980).

This dissertation applies these media research approaches to explore the construction of meaning by museum visitors. Museum studies have tended to focus on whether or not a pre-determined message has been received

by the audience, a relatively passive and linear view of the interpretation process. However, a growing awareness of variations among visitors' backgrounds and their attitudes on the part of museum researchers indicates that museum audiences are perhaps far more active in the creation of meaning of an object than previously theorized. As such, the interpretation process can be usefully conceived of as an interactive creation of producer, object, and audience (cf. Fish, 1980). And, while previous museum and aesthetic research shows visitors to have a wide range of responses and approaches to objects, a preponderance of museum visitor "typologies" seems to suggest that a patterned range might exist, as is the case for media audiences (Fish, 1980, Katz and Leibes, 1986). Like the experience of viewing film and television, museum visitors also seem to negotiate meaning through conversation with companions (Draper, 1984, Hilke and Balling, 1985). And, although this interaction has been documented, few have closely examined audience talk in order to describe responses, interpretive strategies, social functions of the experience, or possible patterns, or have examined the influence of museum type or gender configuration of visitor pairs on these patterns. Perhaps of equal importance, few studies have asked visitors themselves about these topics. This study thus addresses the following questions:

1. What are the kinds of interpretive acts and verbal responses that visitors make in museums? What do they suggest about the nature of "meaning" of museum objects to visitors?
2. Are there patterns to these responses? How, in particular, might they vary by museum context (art as compared to history) and by gender configuration of visitor pair (female with female as compared to female with male)?
3. What are the social functions of such responses? How might they vary?
4. What do these patterns and functions suggest about the the role of the museum in society?

To investigate these issues, an interpretive comparative field study was designed, in the tradition of "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Through the content analysis of tape-recorded conversations of female-female versus male-female pairs in an art and a history museum, together with the qualitative analysis and corroboration of interview and questionnaire data, the purpose of this study is to present a picture of interpretive strategies in visitor talk in museums, the social functions of this talk, and their variations, especially those relating to museum context and gender configuration of the visitor pair.

As such, this study is intended to make several contributions. To the communications field, particularly, to mass media audience studies, this work provides an in-depth case study of an important social context in which the meaning of objects is socially constructed by the

audience. To the growing interdisciplinary study of goods as communication, this study contributes an integration of theory and approach that is hopefully enlightening. Last but not least, to the museum profession, this study presents a new theoretical and methodological approach to and understanding of basic issues regarding the visitor experience.

### The Organization of this Presentation

This presentation consists of seven chapters. The following chapter traces relevant literature and presents the theoretical framework utilized in this study. Chapter Three details all relevant aspects of the design and operation of the study. Chapter Four introduces and explicates the five interpretive acts found in the talk of all museum pairs. These acts were found to constitute the building blocks of specific interpretive patterns. Thus, Chapter Five presents and discusses the seven resulting interpretive "frames" displayed by visitor pairs, as well as their variations and connections to each other. Chapter Six looks further within the context of visitors' relationships to address the social functions and consequences of museum talk. Finally, Chapter Seven provides a summary and discussion of the findings, with particular focus upon the implications of this research.

## CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of disciplines inform the theoretical and methodological approach constructed in this study. Notable among them are three broad areas of literature - professional studies of the museum visitor, recent developments in media studies and literary criticism, and the interdisciplinary study of "goods" as communication. This chapter reviews and integrates these and other relevant topics to provide the theoretical framework for the exploration of the posed research questions.

### On Meaning and Interpretation

We cannot speak of meaning without speaking of interpretation. (Feld, 1984, p.2)

Whether speaking of a television program, book, or museum artifact, the notion of meaning is central to the study of communication. Its definitions, however, are many. Studied in its own right, the word "meaning" has yielded 16 of them (Ogden and Richards, 1923), while more recently, Crosman (1980) has pinpointed three:

The word can, in short, stand for a speaker's intention, the common understanding, or an individual's subjective valuing of something. (p. 150)

Yet even among those options, the explication of the term remains contextually dependent.

A more fruitful approach to studying the "meaning" of cultural artifacts and messages has been to study interpretation, i.e., the ways in which meaning is made of mass media and other cultural products (cf. Lindlof, 1987, Smith, 1982, Worth and Gross, 1974). As Worth and Gross suggest

meaning is inherent in the social context, whose conventions and rules dictate the articulatory and interpretive strategies to be invoked by producers and interpreters of symbolic forms (p. 30).

Thus, a major research focus which has evolved from this perspective is the description of the specific processes by which meaning is made, including the codes and conventions used, as well as the nature of the relationship between producers and interpreters in different contexts.

### Interpretation in the Museum Context

One major context in which people interact with objects and artifacts of cultural significance is the museum, yet the subject has not been widely considered by social scientists. Newman (1982) suggests that this may be due to the fact that the museum has traditionally been viewed "as a storehouse for the artifacts of culture, rather than an active creator of culture" (p. 69). Generally, museums are defined as institutions for the "collection, preservation, exhibition, study, and

interpretation of material objects" (James, 1985, p. 4), especially those deemed representative and exemplary of the culture. Despite the development of a reasonable body of professional literature over the last 70 years, very little is known about the processes of visitor interpretation in the museum, the conventions of audience response, or the relationship between museum "producers" and audience. This literature does, however, provide the only coherent body of work on the museum audience. Before reviewing it here, a brief summary of the museum's function in the U.S. will serve to introduce and inform subsequent studies.

#### The History and Function of the Museum in the United States

Despite its relative popularity and growth in France, the museum in America developed slowly (Alexander, 1979). As in Europe, the earliest American museums, in the 1800's, were known as "cabinets of curiosities." These "cabinets" were actually the private collections of wealthy individuals, often displayed in homes and open to the public, and later exhibited in public halls or libraries. The first of these, the Charleston Museum founded in 1773, and Peale's Museum in Philadelphia in 1794, both collected natural history materials, while Peale's Museum also contained portraits of the founding fathers. As in the early museums of Europe, objects at



this time were displayed with little background or explanatory labelling, stressing the function of the museum as an institution which collects and exhibits. This implies that visitors were "on their own" to understand, learn, or make meaning of what they saw.

The 1870's and 80's can be seen as the second stage in the development of the American museum, both in quantity and in philosophy. Due in part to post-Civil War affluence and the expansion of philanthropy, as well as a new interest in historicism and preservation of culture (Rawlins, 1978), this period saw the founding of 4 major institutions - The Metropolitan in New York (1879), the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1879), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1876) and the Art Institute of Chicago (1879) (Rawlins, 1978). Distinguishing these museums from their predecessors was the fact that they were all chartered as educational institutions, not only as collecting institutions (Rawlins, 1978), a philosophy that was acknowledged formally by all subsequent museums in the country (Hamilton, 1975). Thus, in theory, the museum developed a second function, education. Despite these charters, however, the period remained primarily one of collecting and amassing - little was done to realize actual methods or practices of education (Rawlins, 1978).

The third major movement of American museum history occurred in the beginning of the 20th century, when new

museums flourished in many cities. At this time, institutions were established housing separate collections, i.e., art museums for art objects, history museums for history objects, and the like. The institutionalization of American material culture assumed a new form with the launching of 2 major historical museums - Henry Ford's Edison Institute, containing the artifacts of the "common man", and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s initiation of financial support of the organization that would evolve into Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (Schlereth, 1982). With collections established, attention turned toward education and the development of "interpretation" - the "spoken, written and audio-visual communications (the visitor) receives from the interpretive staff" (Alderson and Low, 1976, p. 3), including tours, explanatory labels, programs, and other didactic materials produced by the museum staff in their efforts to make sense of objects "for" visitors. The use of such methods was not found in all museums. In the early 1900's, art museums especially debated the evolving educational practices of museums, making explicit a long-standing European debate - should the museum be for a cultured elite, or should it be for the masses? (cf. Rawlins, 1978).

Economics helped the decision in many cases. Suffering from dwindling donations by the Depression of

the 30's, museums turned to federal agencies for funding, and in so doing, expanded public and educational offerings to help justify their relevance and existence (Rawlins, 1978). By the 50's and 60's, museum offerings included performances, blockbuster exhibits, and socially conscious programs in efforts to reach wider audiences and support sources. Thus, the education function of museums prevailed.

While most museum staffs today consider their institutions to be primarily educational (Rawlins, 1978), the debate over the exhibit versus education function of the museum is not extinct. This carries with it implications for and about the museum audience. One manifestation of this debate is the split in attitude toward the necessity and amount of interpretation of objects through explanatory labels and the like. While there are exceptions, many in the profession seem to feel that art objects "speak for themselves" and don't need interpretation (e.g., Coen, 1975), while history, science and ethnography collections do - continuing a long-standing elitist tradition often associated with art and art appreciation (cf. Alexander, 1979), and the split between the appreciation of aesthetic as opposed to functional objects (cf. Panofsky, 1955). Thus it seems as though the art museum audience is expected to be more educated or versed in its respective discipline on its own

than is the history museum audience, which is provided with more information at the museum. Whether through exhibit only, or interpretation as well, by the 70's and 80's, both history and art museums have evolved to serve a common function as preservers and transmitters of our culture (Danilov in Budd, 1979). Yet these two types of museums, art and history, respectively, maintain traces of difference in underlying tradition and attitude. The overall museum bias toward the education function greatly informs the subsequent museum literature reviewed below.

#### Studying the Museum Audience

Needing to better understand their clientele and document their efforts to funding sources, museum personnel in the 1930's began what is now a common practice in the museum field - visitor study and evaluation. While strongly affected by the institutional constraints and concerns of the specific museums which sponsored them, these studies represent the only literature to imply any conception of the role of the audience in the interpretation of museum objects. Further, a review of this literature illustrates the development of the profession's conceptualization of the museum audience. Interestingly, it parallels two major trends in the conceptualization of the mass media audience in communications studies, i.e., "effects" and "uses and

gratifications" (cf. Lowery and DeFleur, 1983) suggesting the relevance of applying further developments in mass media theory to the museum audience. It also illuminates theoretical and methodological gaps worthy of attention.

The earliest museum audience research, in the 1920's and 30's, was conducted by E.S. Robinson and later, A.W. Melton, both psychologists. Setting the trend of the period, their work explored the basic issue of describing people's behavior in museums and explaining how various museum variables such as lighting and isolation of objects affected interest on the part of the visitor (e.g. Robinson, 1928, 1930). While they did document major aspects of museum behavior, such as walking, looking at exhibits, and talking (Melton, 1933, 1935), the studies reflect a number of behavioristic biases. "Visitor interest" was measured by the problematic operationalization of visitors' stopping and starting behavior, and average time spent looking at artwork, measures not necessarily indicative of preference. Reliance on such behavioral variables provide no clear explication of "meaning" or "interest" to visitors. Understandably, for an early effort, the audience is conceptualized as an undifferentiated mass, yet the conceptualization also suggests that the visitor can be manipulated by museum variables. This recalls the passive, receptive audience of the early "magic bullet"

theory of mass media effects studies (cf. Lowery and DeFleur, 1983). Some theoretical work by Robinson (1931) encouraged other museum researchers to consider "real men and women," beginning a second major research trend, demographic analyses of museum audiences. Thus they implied, although did not yet explicitly address the audience as a variable body.

While studies in the 1940's continued along the lines set by Melton and Robinson, C.E. Cummings, director of the Buffalo Museum of Science in 1940, criticized the behavioristic approach and suggested the need for research into visitors' backgrounds, interests and motivations (1940). He suggested testing, among others, the postulate that before an exhibit, a visitor is

unconsciously pondering what there is in it for him personally, or in other words, Is there anything in this that I myself will find of use or value? (p. 141)

His concept posits a more active, differentiated visitor, suggestive of the beginning of a "uses and gratifications" type approach to museum audiences, and a consideration of meaning as construction, rather than information (Dervin, 1981). Unfortunately, Cummings' work remained theoretical and not empirical.

The decade of the 50's saw the "uses and gratifications" like, more active audience conception developed further, yet within the context and influence of market research methods. Many of the studies conducted

were evaluations of particular exhibits in specific museums, rather than studies of visitors in general, reducing the generalizability of their findings (e.g., Bower, 1956). Theoretical perspectives revealed a more sophisticated and detailed conception of the visitor. For example, Wright (1958) discussed the need to consider a visitor's "X" factor in evaluation - "the aggregate of experience a visitor brings to the display material, including memories, imagination, and personality characteristics" (p. 63). Unfortunately, he did not describe how the X factor impacts upon the museum experience. In a major methodological development, Niehoff (1959) for the first time, asked visitors themselves why they came to museums. The results provided the first of many uses and gratifications type typologies - with the largest percentage of his sample (55 percent) reporting a visit to the museum for educational reasons, and the second largest (35 percent) for amusement or recreation.

Museum professionals writing in the 1960's seemed more and more to agree that "in reality, the public is not a homogeneous unit - it is made up of individuals of different interests, temperaments, backgrounds, and capacities" (Pott, 1963). To this end, a number of additional uses and gratifications-like typologies were proposed, yet few were based on empirical work and none

overlapped. For example, while Morris (1962) suggested a typology based on frequency and nature of visit, Pott (1963) suggested one based on motivation for the visit.

Of particular relevance to this study was the brief dialogue in the 60's inspired by Marshall McLuhan (cf. McLuhan, 1968) on the nature of the museum as a communications environment. This period saw perhaps the first discussion of the mechanism of the interpretation process in non-art museums, and the relationship between the producer, object, and audience. Cameron (1968) posited the object itself to be the carrier of the museum staff's "message," yet considered the labels and other interpretive materials to be "subsidiary media" which help visitors to understand:

Once the exhibitor has determined the intended message, he selects the artifacts or kinefacts which he believes will carry his message effectively...The exhibitor knows, however, that his receivers, the museum visitors, do not share his specialized knowledge and that without some aids to translation...the decoded message will bear little resemblance to the intended message. The exhibitor therefore qualifies his non-verbal medium with subsidiary media which he can reasonably expect the visitor to understand. (p. 36)

Thus, while maintaining a linear, transmission view of the communication process, Cameron does imply that more than one meaning or "decoding" is possible. Among others, Knez and Wright (1970) basically agreed with this conceptualization, but specified that the "subsidiary media", rather than the object, are in fact "the principle



conveyors of the exhibitor's message" (p. 20). These theoretical discussions were not taken much further.

While museum research in the 1970's included a continuation of psychologically oriented studies (e.g., Loomis, 1973, Screven, 1974), two anthropologically oriented developments were also forged, one theoretical, the other methodological. Drawing on the writings of Levi-Strauss, Graburn (1977) was the first to discuss the museum as a cultural production, pointing out that the tempo of the museum experience is controlled by the visitor. However, his ideas were not empirically substantiated. Parallel to Graburn, a spate of studies by Wolf, Tymitz and colleagues, conducted at the Smithsonian Institution (e.g., Wolf and Tymitz, 1978, 1980) forwarded the use of "naturalistic evaluation," the combination of observation with exploratory interviews in the museum. While these studies produced further typologies, the methodology reflected an underlying focus on the perceptions and ideas of the audience.

The 1980's have seen a major professionalization of museum audience evaluation and research efforts, from the formulation of the American Association of Museums Standing Professional Committee on Visitor Research and Evaluation, to the establishment of the International Laboratory of Visitor Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the publication of the first

major text on museum evaluation procedures (Loomis, 1987). In the realm of theory, major contributions have been made from the perspectives of sociology.

Of particular relevance to this study, several researchers have documented the museum visit as a predominantly social experience (Draper, 1984, McManus, 1987), and have begun to explore the behavior of visitors as it occurs within different social contexts. Notably, some of these studies have included visitors' verbal behavior and comments to each other as data (e.g. Birney, 1982, Hilke and Balling, 1985). Focusing primarily on such verbal behavior, Birney (1982) eavesdropped on the spontaneous speech of approximately 50 visitors during guided tours at Colonial Williamsburg, concluding that the major verbal behaviors observed were visitors directing each other to look, and naming or identifying objects. Hilke and Balling (1985) conducted detailed observations of families in a natural history museum and found that while family members tended to look at, read, and manipulate an exhibit individually, apparently pursuing separate agendas to learn, much information was transferred within the family group through the spontaneous and unsolicited sharing of salient aspects of individuals' experience. Through intensive interviews with returning visitors at the San Francisco Exploratorium, a hands-on science museum, Draper (1984)

demonstrated that the presence of companions, in this case, friends, contributes greatly to learning in the museum environment. McManus (1987) illustrated that behaviors such as reading and manipulating an interactive exhibit in a science museum varied with social group composition; groups with children, singletons, pairs, and adult groups each behaved differently.

Together, these studies suggest that the nature of one's companion(s) in the museum, and the talk which ensues, are crucial components of the museum experience. However, only one such study has addressed visitor relationships within the context of a history museum (Birney, 1982), and none have considered that of the art museum. Furthermore, only Draper (1984) emphasized the fact that social consequences other than learning occur in the museum, a finding discussed later in this review. True to their institutional concern, most visitor studies in the 80's have remained focused upon the influence of social factors on the ways in which visitors "learn" museum messages.

Although the history of museum audience research reflects great strides in the relative importance of and attention to the role of the audience in the museum, that audience remains posited within a linear communications view, which keeps museum professionals and theorists continually and narrowly focused on the efficacy of

message transmission - an approach which may in fact be missing the point. Further, existing studies of museum visitors lack contextualization within or consideration of culture at large. Locked within institutional constraints, new conceptualizations of the interpretation process and the role of the audience are needed from other academic realms to advance the study of the museum audience.

#### CONSTRUCTING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

##### Other Approaches to the Audience: Mass Media Studies

The study of audiences of mass-mediated products, such as films, books, and television programs, provides perhaps the broadest, most sophisticated theoretical debates and concepts for exploring the interpretation process. This literature suggests new ways to explore the museum audience. Among them, four specific developments are particularly relevant and useful, and together inform the theoretical framework of this study - the view of interpretation as an interactive creative process, the identification of patterns of interpretation through the study of audience talk, the exploration of social functions through talk, and the consideration of explanatory and/or influential factors relating to the patterns. Each concept as posited in media studies,

followed by its application to this museum audience study, will be reviewed in turn.

### Toward Interpretation as the Interactive Creation of Meaning

Central to the study of the mass media audience has been the debate over the nature of the relationships among the reader or viewer, the text or product, and the creator or producer, in describing the mechanism of the media communication process. The first two perspectives argued in post-war studies were those of the "effects" view, in which the relatively passive audience was seen as being injected with information from the media, and the "uses and gratifications" paradigm, in which the more active audience consciously and selectively made use of the media (cf. Lowery and DeFleur, 1983). In short, the former was a look at what media do to people, the latter, what people do with the media (Halloran, 1970). While these paradigms debated the "activeness" of the audience, and the extent to which the "message" was viewed as "information" as opposed to "creation" (cf. Dervin, 1981), a third view evolved in both media studies and literary criticism to offer a somewhat combined perspective. According to Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, for example,

readers are, of course, engaged in productive work, but under determinate conditions...which are specified both by the text, the producing

institution and by the social history of the audience. (p. 5)

Similarly, in the field of literary criticism, reader response theory (e.g., Iser, 1978) suggests that instead of simply passively receiving meaning from an object, book, or other "text", an audience member is actively involved in creating that meaning, by virtue of what he/she brings to it. Thus, the modified view of media communication posits interpretation as an interactive creative process.

As previously illustrated, the museum literature has alternately implied the "effects" and "uses and gratifications" models of the communication process. As a result, the notion of museum interpretation has remained constrained by a linear view of communication as transmission. While the growing concern for visitor demographics, beliefs, and attitudes seems to indicate that an active conception of the audience is warranted, the history of institutional biases in object presentation, as well as the documentation of museum variable effects on visitors (e.g. Robinson, 1930, Screven, 1974) suggest that the museum itself does influence audience response to some extent. Together, these findings suggest the fruitfulness of a similar theoretical advance as made in mass media studies - the recasting of museum interpretation as a creative process of interaction of the audience, object and exhibit, and

institution. Such a view suggests the importance of research focused upon the audience and its active construction of meaning, as intended in this dissertation.

### Patterns of Meaning and Response: The Study of Audience Talk

Following from the above interactive model is the belief that the mass media communication process yields not just one, but a number of possible meanings or readings of a particular message (e.g., Katz and Liebes, 1986). While extremists of this position suggest an infinity of idiosyncratic responses, a modified view posits that there is in fact a patterned range of interpretations or responses which are dictated by the interaction of the producer, text, or object, and reader (e.g. Iser, 1978). How can these patterns be identified and studied?

A profitable method of accessing interpretive strategies and processes has proven to be the study of people's talk as it occurs in specific contexts of interaction between people and cultural products. As Feld (1984) posits, in his discussion of music:

When people talk to each other...they often draw upon... the stock of interpretive moves...these sorts of common structures of verbalization tell us something about the nature of interpretation (p. 14)...speech about music...constitutes an interesting source of...information about...discourse, interpretive moves, and conceptualization of ideas. (p. 15)

Custen (1980) analyzed audience members' conversations after viewing a film. Combining this with interview data, he described the kinds of interpretations and other verbal responses made, the reasons given for them, the imputation of authorship for the film, and the nature of the focus of the talk about film among frequent as compared to infrequent movie goers. Using episodes of "Dallas", Katz and Liebes (1986) observed and coded the post-viewing discussions of 50 groups of 3 couples. From this data, the researchers described the social dynamics of meaning-making and the critical apparatus used by the couples in interpreting and responding to the programs.

Given the social nature of the museum visit experience, the documentation of conversation as a common occurrence and integrated component of the museum experience (e.g. Wolf and Tymitz, 1978, Draper, 1984), and the recent museum studies which included visitors' verbal behavior as data (Birney, 1982, Hilke and Balling, 1985, McManus, 1987), talk also seems to be a fruitful vehicle for accessing interpretive strategies and responses of visitors in the museum. And, the preponderance of museum visitor "typologies" from the 1950's and 60's suggest that these responses may also form distinct patterns. The in-depth analysis of museum talk is therefore utilized as a central methodological approach in this project.



## Talk and Social Function

In addition to uncovering patterns of response and interpretation, the study of talk in particular contexts has also proven to be a useful method for accessing data about the social functions, or consequences for a social group (Merton, 1957), achieved in those contexts. That language achieves social functions is a basic assumption of research studies known as ethnographies of communication (cf. Hymes, 1962, Stubbs, 1983). As Stubbs (1983) explains:

Language may have as its primary function the task of getting a message across and of persuading the addressee of some point of view. But cocktail party chat...talk about the weather, reminiscing about old friends...may have the primary function of establishing or maintaining social relationships and solidarity. (p. 45).

Thus two well documented functions of language are the transmission of new information, and the maintenance of relationships, often through the communication and reinforcement of known or shared information. Through self-disclosure of new information, such as memories and experiences, new bonds can be formed (Thelen, 1989), especially when similarities are discovered (Davis, 1979). When verbal devices, such as styles of speech or code competencies are shared, metamessages of rapport can be conveyed within new and longstanding relationships alike (Tannen, 1984).

Studies of talk in contexts of mass media consumption have documented the occurrence of social functions during the viewing situation (cf. Reid and Frazer, 1980). In an especially comprehensive study, Lull (1980) developed an extensive typology of such functions, labeled structural and relational uses of television, based on ethnographies of over 200 families. In addition to finding ways in which talk about television provided new information and maintained relationships, Lull also specified other social functions including communication facilitation, social learning, and the expression of competence and dominance, which occurred during the viewing situation. Might such social consequences occur as a result of talk about objects in the museum?

#### Talk About Goods and Social Functions: The Communication of Identity

A number of studies of artifacts in social contexts other than the museum, such as the home and the marketplace, have explored and documented many social functions of communication about goods. In short, researchers from a variety of disciplines maintain that goods function as media in the management of social relations (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, Musello, 1986, Rapoport, 1982). In particular, these interdisciplinary studies persuasively illustrate the crucial role and consequence of goods as communicators of identity. A

brief look at such studies suggests possible consequences of museum talk as well.

Anthropologists and sociologists alike have illustrated that within society at large, the choice of, consumption of, and talk about goods mark and communicate classifications and discriminations (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, Gans, 1974, McCracken, 1988, Bourdieu, 1984). As Douglas and Isherwood contend,

The choice of goods continuously creates certain patterns of discrimination, overlaying or reinforcing others. Goods, then, are the visible parts of culture. (p. 66)

Notable categories as communicated through goods include social class (Gans, 1974, Veblen, 1953), social class and educational level (Bourdieu, 1984), and age (Olson, 1985, Sherman and Newman, 1977, Unruth, 1983). As Musello found in his study of family homes, taste preferences can also convey one's position relative to a community's shared system of values. Thus through goods we engage in a continuous process of social differentiation (McGovern, 1989).

Identity itself is based upon such processes of social interaction and differentiation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, Dewey, 1934, Meade, 1974). As Weigert et al. (1986) explain,

Identity is a socially constructed definition of an individual. As socially constructed, the definition of an individual makes use of culturally available meanings and...patterns of stratification...(p. 34) It is a definition

that emerges from and is sustained by the cultural meanings of social relationships activated in interaction. (p. 31)

Thus in the expression of social differentiation, goods communicate identity and the construction of self. As Goffman (1961) described, goods are components of an "identity kit" in which ideas, conceptions, and beliefs about oneself are located and stored.

As a social construction, identity is not static. As McCall and Simmons (1978) state, it must be "won and rewon continually" (p. 166), legitimized and reconstructed in interaction.

[one] must...legitimate [one's identities] by gaining a modicum of corresponding role-support from self and others... not only must such support be achieved, it must be more or less continually maintained. (p. 165)

Typically this occurs on the level of interpersonal relations, where talk about goods and artifacts continue to mediate such consequences. For example, while Unruh (1983) found personal possessions to be mediators in identity preservation between dying persons and their surviving loved ones, Csikzentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton (1981) illustrate that in fact our possessions convey messages about identity to ourselves and to others all the time, and can even aid in the development of notions of "self." Danet and Katriel (1987) found this to be true particularly in the case of collecting behavior. Household objects, gifts and possessions have also been

demonstrated to yield important consequences for interpersonal relationships. Such categories of goods have been found to facilitate the defining of roles, and the maintenance and expression of patterns of kinship and association. Among the ways that these functions are achieved is through the use of objects as stimuli for reminiscence and the exchange of stories (e.g. Musello, 1986), and as symbols of loved ones (e.g. Sherman and Newman, 1977). As a result, talk about goods can also mediate the maintenance and expression of relational identities, such as "family" and "couple" (Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Many of these studies found art, photography, and everyday artifacts among people's possessions, the same "goods" found in art and history museums, respectively. While encountering such goods in the museum context is likely to elicit certain behaviors not relevant in the home setting, to what extent are these "home" ways of relating and social consequences operative in the museum?

A handful of recent museum studies introduced earlier suggest that such social functions of talk indeed occur in the museum context. In their study of families, Cone and Kendall (1978) conclude that museums seem to be places where parents, especially mothers, teach their children subject matter, as well as social rules about display and distancing behavior, suggesting a social learning function

and the communication and maintenance of familial roles. In her study of friends in museums, Draper (1984) reports that the museum visit facilitates "opportunities to demonstrate expertise, skill, and the ability to teach". Both studies also conclude that from interaction with one's companion(s), museum visitors learn about subject matter (i.e., new information), as well as about each other (i.e., relational information) (Cone and Kendall, 1978, Draper, 1984). Of particular relevance to this study, Draper also documented the fact that social interaction between friends in the museum provides reinforcement and validation for individuals and for friendships through the avenues of exploring and expressing interests and affiliations. However, she does not explore the mechanics of this consequence, nor the relationship of such consequences to particular interpretive strategies or to the "meaning" of things. Unfortunately, no other museum studies have explored conversations in depth to reveal other social functions of the experience. The study of interpretation and talk, as conducted in mass media contexts, appears to be a fruitful tool with which to search further.

#### Accounting for Patterns: Interpretive Communities and Other Variables

In addition to identifying patterns of response and interpretation, and social functions, media theorists have

sought to describe the possible explanatory or predictive variables or influences that might account for them. In literary theory, Fish (1980) contends that the mechanism for differential readings and interpretive strategies is what he calls "interpretive communities" - membership in particular groups which share common ways of approaching texts (for example, those of an academic, literary community will tend to approach a text as if it were literature, and go about analyzing it with the techniques they have learned). While Fish does not explain or account for the role of several important factors upon interpretive communities, such as history and culture, the notion is still a useful one for audience study. As Jensen (1987) contends,

It may be necessary in reception analysis to think of audiences in terms of codes or discourses, rather than in terms of socioeconomic categories. For reception-analytical purposes, recipients are their codes of understanding. (p. 28)

These "ways of approach" are similarly discussed by Gross (1974) and Worth and Gross (1974) as codes and competencies. The question follows naturally in the museum context as well: if there are differences in response, interpretation, or social function, what factors might be involved? Are there interpretive communities (Fish, 1980) to be found within museum audiences? If so, what responses or patterns might we expect?

### Museum Talk Patterns: The Role of Museum Type

One of the two major factors that seem likely to influence the nature of museum talk, given existing literature, is the museum type, i.e., art versus history. This is suggested by the differences in institutional presentation in art as opposed to history museums, as well as the paradigms for interpretation presented by theorists in aesthetics and material culture, respectively.

As reflected in the history of the museum function, detailed earlier in this review, art museums and historical museums traditionally display their collections in different ways. In general, art museums tend to display objects and works with little description or information given, usually treated as unrelated objects, while history museums tend to provide much more contextualizing information, and more commonly detail the relationship of objects to one another. Thus, in following their representative disciplines, art museums and history museums tend to provide certain kinds of information that are likely to guide and/or influence audience response.

Equally importantly, the museum type itself is likely to dictate the general type of interpretive approach that the visitor brings to bear, given the developed paradigms of aesthetic appreciation and material culture. As Fowler (1989) explains,



Genre makes possible the communication of content: its coded signals prompt readers to take up a work in an appropriate way. (p. 215)

The long tradition of study in aesthetics suggests that an educated or competent viewer will approach a work defined as art by attending to its formal properties, conventions and elements in order to understand that which has been intentionally conveyed by an artist (e.g., Hospers, 1946, Feldman, 1967, Gross, 1973). Specific types of aesthetic response include comparison, description, authentication, interpretation and evaluation (e.g., Feldman, 1967, Smith, 1967). According to some theory, an aesthetic response is one which is absolute (Meyer, 1956), i.e., exclusive to the context of the work itself, making no reference to anything outside itself (cf. Panofsky, 1955). And, given the concern with the artist's intention(s), the work will most likely be viewed as symbolic, rather than natural - therefore, interpreted through the processes of inference rather than attribution (Worth and Gross, 1974).

Unlike aesthetics and art history, the study of the interpretation of functional, historical artifacts has not yet evolved such a unified paradigm. This may be due to the fact that the subject is informed by a number of disciplines, including art history, social history, and material culture studies (cf. Schlereth, 1982). Material culturists, however, do suggest specific ways in which an

"educated" viewer will approach an historical artifact. One should attend to certain aspects of the work, such as its history, material, construction, design and function, using particular strategies such as identification, evaluation, cultural analysis and historical interpretation (Fleming, 1982, Montgomery, 1982, Schlereth, 1982). In general, the interpretive model for material culture and everyday objects seems to view these objects more often as natural, than as symbolic, (Worth and Gross, 1974), i.e., their meaning more a reflection than an intended message. According to Schlereth (1982):

The common assumption underlying material culture research is that objects made or modified by humans, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, reflect the belief pattern of individuals who made, constructed, purchased, or used them, and by extension, the belief patterns of the larger society of which they are a part. (p. 3)

Thus, audiences may be more likely to attribute than infer the meaning (Worth and Gross, 1974) of functional, historical artifacts.

Problematic of models of both aesthetic and functional object appreciation is that they describe the ideal, or highly competent approach, often developed outside the specific context of the museum. As Stapp (1984) notes:

in contrast to...detailed accounts recorded by...practiced connoisseurs...information about the average visitor's encounter with objects remains sketchy (p. 4).

In their efforts to define aspects of response that are not "truly" aesthetic, several theorists have documented other types of responses to art objects which occur, most often for the incompetent or "naive" viewer, such as references to topics outside the work, and personal and associative thoughts (cf. Bell, 1914. As Bell suggests,

before a work of art people who feel little or no emotion for pure form...read into the forms of the work...the ordinary emotions of life... instinctively they refer back to the world from which they came... for them the significance of a work of art depends on what they bring to it. (p. 29)

In a recent study of novices' experiences of art appreciation in the museum context (McDermott, 1988), novice visitors were brought before paintings in a museum and asked to talk about what they noticed, thought or felt. "Novice" was defined in this study as museum visitors with self-reported moderate to high interest in art, but little to no formal background. Their overemphasis on such viewing characteristics as a need for personal connection and an emotional response were considered as evidence of the "ways their experiences with art objects are stunted" (p. 135) by comparison to experts' aesthetic experiences.

Sharpe (1982) and Silverman (1987) have also documented the occurrence of reminiscence and personal, referential responses to historical/functional objects.

However, the meaning of such responses to historical object appreciation are not clear. What role do these types of response play in the conversation of the museum visitor? Do they appear only in the talk of naive audience members? What part do they play in the creation of meaning?

While these questions require exploration, the literature on aesthetics and material culture seems to suggest differences and possible patterns in visitors' approaches to meaning-making of objects. While the exact differences, as manifested in the museum context, remain to be studied, it appears as though the type of museum may indeed affect the nature of response brought forth. What other factors might affect these or other aspects of conversation and interpretation in the museum?

#### Talk Patterns and Social Functions: The Role of Gender Configuration

In her study of social ties and learning in the museum, Draper (1984) states, "...over 1/3 of visitors come in pairs...one of the biggest influences shaping a museum visit is the group with whom one visits." (p. 94) While several museum studies have begun to explore the influence of this factor (e.g. Hilke and Balling, 1985, McManus, 1987), one likely variable impacting museum interpretation and social consequence heretofore unexplored in that of the gender configuration of the

pair. What differences in response might result from gender configuration?

Gilligan (1982) contends that as a result of differences in socialization, men and women come to hold fundamentally different world views. These views are characterized by the "male" orientation toward separation and individuation, and the "female" orientation toward connection and fellowship. These ideas are consistent with the writings of several symbolic interactionists (e.g., McCall and Simmons, 1978, Stryker, 1980), who suggest that men and women differ particularly in the ways that they view themselves in relation to others.

This suggests potential differences in the ways that pairs of different gender configurations might operate interpersonally, as well as perceive and respond to information. For example, women have been found to be more self-disclosing about personal feelings and opinions than men on both intimate and non-intimate topics (Morton, 1978). And, as Katz and Leibes report (1986), there appear to be gender-related differences in meanings made of the tv program "Dallas" which, however stereotypically, echo the position of Gilligan (1982) above: women were most interested in the relationships and love complications among the show's characters, while men respond much more to the business problems, cowboy elements, and power and wealth represented.

Particularly intriguing to the present study is the fact that Czikszenmihayli and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found similarly consistent gender-linked preferences in their study of people's treasured possessions. Males chose as "treasured" significantly more objects of "action" such as stereos and sports equipment, while women significantly preferred objects of "contemplation" such as photographs and sculpture. To what extent might such gender-related orientations, or others, impact upon the meaning-making of objects in the museum context? Might women with other women be more likely to self-disclose than women with men? These and other possible influences of gender configuration will be explored in this study.

#### Other Factors

The above literature seems to support the expectation of patterns and differences in museum talk and functions across the primary factors of museum type and gender configuration of pair. However, a number of other variables seem worthy of consideration for their possible effects as well, such as level of schooling, the length of time pair members have known each other, experience in art/history, and income. To this end, these factors are also considered in this exploration.

## In Sum

Borrowing from four major theoretical developments in recent studies of mass media audiences, this dissertation presents a reconceptualization of museum interpretation as an interactive, creative process which seems likely to result in a patterned range of verbal response, interpretive strategies, and social functions. These patterns are believed to be accessible primarily through the study of audience talk in museums.

As the literature illustrates, two major factors seem likely to influence these patterns, suggesting possible interpretive communities along museum type and gender configuration of pair. Interdisciplinary studies on the communicative nature of goods suggest the possibility of unexplored social consequences of visitor talk in museums. Through a thorough examination of such talk, as well as the exploration of audience attitudes, habits, and beliefs, this study aims to profile the unique as well as shared aspects of visitors' meaning-making strategies and experiences in an art and a history museum.

### CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN AND OPERATION OF THE STUDY

As suggested by recent trends in mass media studies (Katz and Liebes, 1986, Custen, 1980), a methodological approach was needed which would allow for both the examination of museum visitors' talk in social context, as well as the consideration of visitors' discourse and attitudes about their experience. To these ends, an interpretive, comparative study was designed in which actual museum visitor pairs responded to displayed objects within the museum context, and also acted as informants about behavior and attitudes. At each of two museums, The National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, and The National Gallery of Art, respectively, a combination quota and random sample of 15 male-female pairs and 15 female-female pairs viewed a target exhibit at their own pace while carrying a small tape-recorder which recorded the comments they made to each other during the experience. Each pair member also participated in an individual interview afterwards and completed a questionnaire. Through the content analysis of these 60 taped conversations, together with the systematic qualitative analysis of the interviews and questionnaires, the goal of this study was to identify, describe and interpret patterns and approaches of meaning-making and their subsequent social consequences. This chapter will



describe all relevant aspects of the conduct of the study, and will conclude with a profile of the informant sample.

#### RESEARCH LOCATIONS

In order to explore the role of museum type in the content and consequences of visitor pair talk, an art museum and a history museum of similar scope, location, and attendance were required. The National Museum of American History of The Smithsonian Institution (NMAH) and The National Gallery of Art (NGA), respectively, were chosen as the sites for this study. Located in Washington, D.C., just blocks apart within the popular Smithsonian Mall, these two museums house much of the nation's collections of historical artifacts and art, respectively. By recent estimates, both museums record between 6 and 7 million visitors per year (Curry, 1988; S.I. Visitor Count Statistics, 1989).

The National Museum of American History, opened in 1964 and presently under the direction of Roger Kennedy, contains three floors of exhibits which depict the social and cultural history of the United States. All told, the museum houses 16 million artifacts, 14 million of which are stamps, 1 million of which are coins (Foster, 1990). In their own words, NMAH "is devoted to the exhibition, care and study of artifacts that reflect the experience of the American people" ("Material Matters", 1988). To this

end, exhibit topics range from American maritime history to black migration, from transportation vehicles to the development of anaesthetia and pain relief methods. Many recall it best as the museum which houses some of our country's popular culture treasures, such as the original Charlie McCarthy doll, "Fonzie's" leather jacket, and the magical "ruby slippers" worn by Judy Garland in "The Wizard of Oz." The museum presently displays over 30 halls of exhibits, the explanatory labelling of which varies from brief identifications of objects in some instances to extensive thematic material in others.

Just a few blocks down the street is The National Gallery of Art. Founded in 1941 through support of Andrew Mellon, the Gallery is funded and administered independently from The Smithsonian, although they are neighbors. NGA's mission has been and continues to be "to exhibit art of the finest quality for the enjoyment and intellectual enrichment of the public" (With, 1990). Under the direction of J. Carter Brown, NGA consists of two buildings; the older West Building, housing American and European decorative art and sculpture, and the newer East Building, notable for its unusually beautiful architecture by I.M. Pei, housing modern art. The West Building, where this research was conducted, contains two floors and over 125 galleries open to the public. Among the West Building's permanent collections are notable

works of Monet, Vermeer, Rembrandt, and others. While the museum often features temporary exhibits which can contain more extensive thematic explanatory labelling, the majority of NGA's permanent collection is labelled minimally, with discrete identifications of the artist, title, and date of each work.

Given their cultural prominence, national status, and popularity, The National Museum of American History and The National Gallery of Art, respectively, cannot be considered completely representative of history and art museums in this country. Unlike most museums, both are funded in part by the American government. Situated within the Smithsonian Mall, the status of these institutions affords a presence, cultural authority, tourist appeal, and subsequent annual visitation that few other American museums rival. This uniqueness limits the generalizability of the study findings to all museums. However, the specific exhibits and objects from NGA and NMAH respectively included in this study do represent those found in most American art and history museums. The influence of these particular institutions will thus be considered when discussing study findings.

#### STUDY PROCEDURE: PRE-TEST AND DEVELOPMENT

A number of pre-tests of different data collection procedures were conducted during the design of this study

in order to find the most fruitful way to explore the described issues. Of primary concern was the need for a method to collect visitors' comments while viewing exhibits. Observation, unobtrusive eavesdropping, tape-recording, and exploratory interviewing were conducted in four Philadelphia museums in 1988 - The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, The Atwater Kent Museum, and the Balch Institute. These pre-tests illuminated the problems with any one individual method, owing to the nature of the study and the difficulties in collecting speech (cf. Stubbs, 1983). Unobtrusive eavesdropping and observation proved unreliable as well as ethically troublesome. Tape-recording visitor conversations with their consent provided surprisingly rich data, but introduced questions of self-selection and the influence of the procedure on the talk itself. While no single method appeared problem free, the goal became the construction of an approach which would combine methods, in order to collect the richest "talk" data possible as well as alternative types of data with which to contextualize, check and test any research conclusions. The subsequent "triangulation" procedure combined tape-recording visitors' own conversations while viewing a target exhibit, with interviews and questionnaires. While the tape-recording method yielded in-situ conversational data, the interviews

collected visitors' own thoughts and discourse about their experiences, and the questionnaires enabled the collection of self-reported demographic and background information. The analytic procedure thus compared and interwove these three types of data.

#### TARGET EXHIBITS

In each of the two museums, a target exhibit was chosen by the researcher to provide the specific "stimuli" for the audience talk collected. Many factors entered into the selection of these exhibits. No choice of exhibits was perfect, yet several guiding concerns emerged. The two respective exhibits needed to contain works representative of those found in art and history museums. Ideally, they would both include a variety of artists/creators, and span more than just one time period, so that visitors would encounter a variety of objects. The works needed to be comparable in terms of general recognizability to visitors. For example, a history exhibit of everyday artifacts would not compare well to an art exhibit of modern, abstract works. Only permanent exhibits, rather than temporary ones, were considered, in order to insure the availability of the exhibit for the duration of the study. Exhibits undergoing repair or modification were likewise inappropriate. The target exhibits needed to be comparable in size and space as

well. And, given that each visitor pair would be interviewed immediately after their viewing experience, the target exhibits needed to be located relatively close to a suitable interview location to minimize "travel" time. Perhaps the single most important criterion was the need for comparable amounts of explanatory labelling within the two exhibits, material which can play a role in orienting visitor's comments. Chosen on the basis of these criteria, the target exhibits used in this study were A Material World in The National Museum of American History, and Galleries 71, 70, 69, and 68 of The American Collection in The West Building of The National Gallery of Art. Each exhibit will be briefly described in turn.

A Material World is a permanent exhibit at NMAH which traces the history of materials used in the manufacture of everyday artifacts in America from the 1700's to the present. It is located on the first floor of the museum, directly in front of the museum's entrance from Constitution Avenue. The exhibit features objects typically found in a history museum, including bicycles, helmets, toys, and tools, most of which are displayed in four major sections that form a large center area of approximately 3680 square feet. While several other cases outside of this area are actually considered to be part of the exhibit, they are located several feet away from this main, self-contained section and hence were not included

in the study. The study area contains 432 artifacts grouped in 45 sections. Thus at any given platform or case, a number of items are displayed quite closely to each other. While introductory labels explain the theme of the exhibit, they are relatively brief and somewhat easy to miss. The labels near the objects are, for the most part, simply dates of manufacture, materials used, and identifications of the objects. Each item is numbered or lettered in order to reference its explanatory label. Thus explanatory material within the exhibit is fairly minimal. For a list of the exhibit contents, see Appendix A, and for the content of the introductory explanatory labels, Appendix B.

The above exhibit compares well to Galleries 71, 70, 69, and 68 of The American Collection at The National Gallery's West Building, located in the extreme east wing of the main floor. These four consecutive galleries, totalling 4004 square feet (NGA, 1980), form a circle that can be followed by first walking through to one's left, and, at a specific painting (The Old Violin by John Frederick Peto), returning through the same four galleries by following on the right, back to the starting point. Consisting chiefly of art of the American School, many different artists are included, such as Cassatt, Eakins, Whistler, and Bellows. The time period of the 44 works displayed in these 4 galleries spans 1834 to 1940.

Explanatory labelling within the exhibit consists only of identifications of paintings, artists, and dates. As in A Material World, all works are American. See Appendix C for a list of exhibit works.

While A Material World contains objects from the 20th century, and the American Collection does not, a comparable "familiarity" is represented by the two exhibits. A number of the objects in A Material World are quickly recognizable if not quite familiar. Most of the works in The American Collection are representational in style, and are also recognizable and familiar in content.

A final factor in the selection of these two exhibits was their proximity to appropriate and logistically possible locations for conduct of the visitor pair interviews. A Material World in NMAH is adjacent to The Palm Court, a relaxed, lounge area with seating, while the American Galleries in NGA are located near a rotunda area, similarly relaxing, with benches and chairs.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE AND COMPONENTS

### Sampling Goals and Approach to Visitors

In order to consider the role of gender configuration in relation to museum talk, a combination quota and random sample consisting of 15 pairs of adult men and women, and 15 pairs of adult women with women, was chosen in each of the two museums. As pre-tests showed, these two gender



configurations were far more common in the museum than was the configuration of two men, and thus these were chosen for comparison. Adult pair status was operationalized as any pair in which both pair members appeared to be over the age of 18. Only visitors moving through the museum in pairs were considered; no pairs of people were "extracted" from larger groups.

The researcher approached potential participants from a pre-designated spot adjacent to the beginning of the target exhibit, but far enough away that the exact content of the exhibit was not always clear to visitors. This was intended to minimize the self-selection of visitors who came to see the target exhibit specifically. The researcher approached every second appropriate pair that walked by her spot, alternating gender pair type. Upon stopping a potential informant pair, the researcher explained the nature of study participation, and showed and offered a small souvenir booklet from each respective museum as a thank-you gift. In talking with a pair, the researcher said the following:

Hi folks. We're conducting a study in this area today and I was wondering if I could explain it to you and see if you might be willing to help out?

(If they said no, they were thanked.  
If they said yes, the researcher continued:)

I'm interested in what people say at this exhibit, and the way I'm studying it is, I give you this little tape-recorder to carry (show it to them) and ask you to go through the exhibit

going as fast or as slowly as you wish, doing whatever you would normally do. Then, we'll do a brief interview that will last about 10-15 minutes, and if you'd do that, I'd like to give you these booklets as a thank you gift. Could you help out today?

Approximately 1 out of every 3 pairs approached agreed to participate. To facilitate data collection, and guard against potential bias by time of day, data were collected during three periods of the day: 10:30 to noon, 1:30 to 3:00 and 3:30 to 5:00, Monday through Friday. No data were collected on the weekends, due to extremely crowded conditions in the museums on those days. Data were collected at each museum, alternating weeks, during the period from November 1988-March 1989. Thus the results represent the weekday visitor during the winter season, and are therefore limited in their generalizability to other time periods and seasons. The sample yielded a total of 60 pairs, in the following 2 x 2 design:

	ART museum	HISTORY museum
FEMALE-FEMALE pairs	15	15
MALE-FEMALE pairs	15	15

#### Museum Talk Tape-Recordings

Once a visitor pair agreed to participate, they were lead over to the beginning of the target exhibit. Here

they were provided with a small Sony walkman-style tape-recorder with lapel microphones nested in a small leather pouch with a strap. The recorder, Sony Fm/Am stereo cassette-corder Model # WM-F66/F76, was of typical "walkman" proportions - approximately 4 5/8" long by 3 5/8" wide, weighing less than a pound. The two lapel microphones, Realistic brand clip-on mono mikes, each with wire over 3 1/2 feet long, (catalogue #33-1052) were attached to the recorder through a small stereo jack. The researcher assisted the pair in positioning the recorder and the microphones in the following manner. The recorder in the pouch was carried by one visitor, slung over the shoulder which faced his/her companion. Thus the recorder was carried between the pair. Each of the two tiny lapel microphones, with its 3 1/2 foot cord connected to the tape-recorder, was then clipped on to the lapel or shirt button of each pair member. Given the length of the microphone wires, the pair members could wander away from each other approximately three feet. Beyond that length, they would disconnect their mike from the recorder.

Once the recorder and mikes were in place, the researcher explained the path of the exhibit, and once again instructed the pair to do whatever they normally would while viewing the exhibit, i.e., stop at, look at, or discuss only that which they wanted to, feeling free to pass by objects if they wished, and to simply let the

recorder run the entire time. The researcher informed the pair that she would be in the vicinity, and would meet them and shut the tape off for them when they got to the end of the exhibit. At this point, the researcher turned on the tape and the pair proceeded. Maxell C-120 cassette tapes were used, offering 1 hour of recording time per side, so that no changing or flipping of tapes by visitor pairs was required.

The researcher followed and observed the pair, at an unobtrusive distance, noting on a small checklist at which objects/exhibit areas the pair stopped for later reference, and insuring the safety of the equipment. The pairs did not seem to attend to the researcher's presence. When the pair appeared to have completed viewing the exhibit, the researcher again approached them, turned off the tape, and retrieved the equipment.

These tapes yielded from 5 minutes to 60 minutes worth of comments and conversations. On the average, visitors spent approximately 19 minutes looking at the art exhibit, and approximately 17 minutes looking at the history exhibit. Each tape was transcribed by the researcher using the Sony recorder and its accompanying stereo headphones which yielded reasonably good clarity. Each transcription was reviewed twice.

## Interview and Questionnaire

In order to collect information about visitors' thoughts, attitudes and backgrounds, an interview was then conducted with each visitor pair after they concluded their exhibit recording session. In order to minimize the bias or effect of pair members answering questions in front of each other, as well as shorten the amount of time required for the process, the research questions were split into two instruments - an interview and a self-administered, written questionnaire. The interview followed a schedule of 8 topics (see Appendix D), designed specifically to ascertain visitors' own thoughts and descriptions of possible social consequences of the exhibit experience and attitudes about the notion of "meaning" of artifacts. The 3 page, 18-item questionnaire (see appendix E) solicited demographic and background information, and also contained a few questions designed to explore visitors' thoughts about the influence of one's companion on the museum experience. Each component took approximately 10 minutes to complete, for a total of 20 minutes.

Upon finishing their viewing and tape-recording experience, the visitor pair was brought from the exhibit to the nearby interview location. In each museum, this area was located within a few feet of the exhibit in order to facilitate successful completion of the entire

procedure. Upon entering the interview area, the researcher explained the two-part nature of the procedure. One of the pair members was then handed the self-administered questionnaire on a clipboard with a pen, and invited to sit down, while the researcher took the other pair member to a seat out of earshot of his/her companion and conducted the interview. With the informant's permission, the interview was tape-recorded. Thus, while one pair member completed the questionnaire, the other was interviewed. Both tasks were designed to take approximately 10 minutes each. Upon completion of the first task, pair members switched places and tasks, and the procedure was repeated: as the second pair member was interviewed by the researcher, the first completed a questionnaire. When both pair members had finished both tasks, they were brought together, thanked, and given their thank you gift. At that time, the questionnaires were collected. 100% of all informants completed the entire procedure, yielding one tape-recorded conversation of comments made while viewing the target exhibit, two individual interviews, and 2 individual self-administered questionnaires from each visitor pair.

## ANALYTIC PROCEDURE

### Data Description

As intended, the methodological approach generated three distinct types of data. The taped conversations

yielded transcripts which averaged 13 pages for art, and 18 pages for history, respectively. During these conversations, visitors looked at an average of 38 objects in the art museum and 55 objects in the history museum. Upon encountering an object, they typically exchanged a few comments, moved on to the next object and discussed it, and so on, proceeding through the exhibit. Visitors selected the objects they wished to view, and variations in amount of talk and silence occurred both within and across transcripts. In the 10-minute interviews, visitors typically provided thoughtful and sometimes extensive self-reflections. These interview tapes were each reviewed twice, summarized in note form, and analyzed for recurring themes. Finally, the questionnaires provided self-reported demographic and background information. Categorical information was coded onto a computer database program, DBASE 3-PLUS, and important qualitative information was noted and coded by theme. Following the tradition of the "grounded theory" methodological approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss, 1987, Hardesty, 1986), the ensuing analysis and interpretation was based on the comparison and integration of all three types of data.

#### Procedure Summary and Rationale

The theoretical approach of both the analysis of talk tapes and interviews was guided strongly by the

methodological tradition of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss, 1987, Hardesty, 1986). Through this approach to analysis, concepts at low levels of abstraction are identified and then proceed toward more general yet more definitive concepts, derived through the constant comparison of dissimilar groups (Hardesty, 1986). In particular, this study employs some variations on grounded theory, as described by Hardesty (1986) in her analysis of interactions between therapists and clients. Unlike Glaser and Strauss' version of grounded theory in which preconceived theory is discouraged and sampling is multistaged, Hardesty's "formal analysis of processual data"

differs in its embrace of the Meadian use of theory to guide the research act by an apparent theoretical problem, the search for universal statements, and theoretical sampling (p. 103).

Both approaches to grounded theory, however, "recognize and pursue emergent theory" (Hardesty, 1986), as does this study.

Thus, a 7-part iterative procedure was evolved for the systematic and integrated qualitative analysis of data. In sum, an interpretive content analysis of talk, topic and thematic analysis of the interviews, and a demographic background description of visitor pairs were compared and combined in the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning-making. This was achieved through the following tasks:



1. The interpretive content analysis of visitor talk transcripts
2. The analysis of topics and attitudes in visitor interviews
3. The review of talk transcripts for corroboration of interview topics and attitudes
4. The coding of questionnaire data
5. The coding and analysis of visitor talk transcripts for patterns of interpretive acts
6. The search for "interpretive frames" and social functions
7. The interpretation of patterns and variations

Each of these 7 components will be reviewed briefly:

1. The Content Analysis of Talk Transcripts

The first goal of this analysis was to describe visitor talk. What kinds of comments did visitors make? How did they go about making meaning of what they saw? Using techniques suggested by Strauss (1987) and Hardesty (1986), and intensive study of the transcripts, it soon became apparent that, as Feld (1984) describes of music, visitors appeared to accomplish "interpretive moves" through their talk. Through the comparison of talk within and across pairs, lists of descriptive categories were devised and collapsed following the "negative case analysis" approach (Kidder, 1981) of revising hypotheses until they account for all cases in a qualitative study. Finally, a set of 5 interpretive acts were identified that encompassed all of visitor talk. This seemingly simple process actually involved several long stages, from the description of every single verb or action observed, through steadily smaller lists and the progressive folding in of larger and larger theoretically encompassing

categories. The criteria for and coding of these acts are explicated in detail in Chapter Four.

2. The Analysis of Topics and Attitudes in Visitor Interviews

At the same time as, and in fact informing the theoretical formulation of coding categories for the talk, a thematic analysis of the visitor interviews was conducted. Specific topics and attitudes which emerged in visitors' discourse, and which reflected upon the concepts of "meaning" of objects and social consequences of talk were noted.

3. The Review of Talk Transcripts for Corroboration of Interview Topics and Attitudes

With topics suggested by the interview data, the transcripts were again reviewed, this time for corroboration to aid in the interpretation of the interview attitudes and discourse. In particular, conversational exchanges were sought which seemed to support or disclaim visitors' attitudes regarding social consequences of talk and meaning of objects as expressed in their interview discourse.

4. The Coding of Questionnaire Data

Background and demographic information as supplied by visitors on their questionnaires was coded and put into a computerized database (Dbase 3+). This information was treated as a set of "independent variables" for later consideration of variations in meaning-making approaches.

From this material, the informant samples were described, as provided later in this chapter.

5. The Coding and Analysis of Visitor Talk Transcripts for Patterns of Interpretive Acts

While the 5 identified interpretive acts were found to characterize the overall content of visitor talk, they did not yet explain or account for the existing qualitative variation in conversations. Treating these acts as building blocks, it soon became apparent that visitors evidenced definite emphases in the use of the acts. Further, the acts were evoked anew each time a different object was encountered. A data-base aided coding and analysis of a selective sample of the transcripts indicated that the order of the acts did not seem to vary systematically, however, the emphases of acts used did. Further, an examination of talk both within and across pairs by specific object indicated that, although object choices sometimes differed across pairs, the nature of talk emphases appeared to vary by pair, rather than by object. The following method was thus evolved to provide a systematic method for the identification and suggestion of specific clusters or emphases in use of acts - eventually defined as interpretive "frames".

With the aid of observation notes indicating where in the exhibit the pair was, as well as the pair's own comments, conversations were fairly easily broken down into object-related interactions for coding. Each block

of object talk was reviewed, and the absence or presence of each of the five basic acts for that block was noted on a tally sheet. The number of "hits", i.e., presence of an act per block, was then tallied up for the pair, resulting in a numerical score on each of the five act types. That number represented the number of times per pair that an object was talked about in a certain way, i.e., evidencing a certain act. The number of available objects in the two target exhibits varied, and visitor pairs themselves varied in the total number of objects they chose to look at. Therefore, this method adjusted for such potential variation by calculating scores that were based on the total number of objects viewed. Scores for each act were then compared across all pairs, and distributions were examined.

Based on these distributions, the scores were then transformed into ratings of "high" and "low" emphasis. For each move, those scores above the median became a "high" rating, while those below became "lows". Since the distributions revealed the art and history scores to vary by museum, the definition of "high" and "low" were figured separately for the art and history pairs respectively. As a result of this process, each visitor pair could then be characterized as a 5 point configuration of "highs" and "lows" (representing their rating on each of the 5 interpretive acts). Through the use of the computer

database, various patterns of "high" and "low" configurations were searched and identified, such as all pairs who rated "high" on two particular acts, and "low" on all others.

While sounding quite quantitative, this method was evolved to insure a systematic review of talk tape content and to suggest possible patterns of focus. As such, it was one aid in the search for patterns, rather than the tool that determined patterns per se. The actual definition and interpretation of patterns, however, came from steps number 6 and 7.

6. The Search for Interpretive Frames and Social Functions

Rather than rely on any one method to determine patterns, the goal was then the comparison and integration of patterns and discourse suggested by the talk data and the interview data. This step was then to identify various move patterns in the database, and compare them to qualitative analysis of the transcripts. Also considered was the connection of visitor discourse and attitudes, and independent background variables. Thus, a "pattern" was defined as a repeating configuration of "high" and "lows", shared by visitor pairs with some background or museum variable in common, who exhibited particular common attitudes or discourse. While some also varied systematically with social function, social function in fact emerged as somewhat independent of these interpretive

frames, and were noted. Combining these materials, similarities and connections emerged that led to the identification of 7 interpretive frames.

#### 7. Interpretation of Patterns and Variation

The final step of the analysis was the examination and interpretation of these patterns of interpretation, social consequences, and the variations of each. This analysis proceeded through the continued examination and comparison of the interpretive frames and consequences, and through reconsidering them in light of existing literature.

#### CONSIDERING POTENTIAL BIASES AND CONCEPTUAL LIMITATIONS OF METHOD

##### On Tape-recording Visitor Talk

In order to study how meaning is made through talk by visitor pairs, some portion of the methodology required the collection of such conversations. As introduced earlier, while the method of self-selected, explicit tape-recording was preferred over eavesdropping and other less ethical or reliable methods, it in fact raises several other important questions and potential biases which must be acknowledged and considered. As a quasi-experimental method, the tape-recorder was a somewhat intrusive research tool. On their questionnaires (item #18), visitors were asked, "do you think your talk today was

typical of the way you and your companion talk together in museums normally, or not? Please explain here." Overall, 81% of the total sample reported that they thought their talk was indeed typical of their talk in museums generally, although several of them mentioned feeling weird or uncomfortable at first. Most of the positive responses looked somewhat like the following:

I found it pretty natural to have the tape recorder. It certainly didn't seem to inhibit our normal flow of conversation, and I think it fairly accurately recorded our normal mode of interaction.

A little weird for the first few seconds, but I felt we were comfortable and natural. I forgot about it!

While their ability to analyze themselves and their experience accurately may in fact be questionable (cf. Messaris, 1977), those visitors who felt that their talk was not typical or was in some way different than their talk in museums generally reflect three main areas of potential bias of the tape-recorder method that concur with common sense. In ascending order of reported frequency, they are content of talk, physical nature of the viewing experience, and amount of talk. Each of these potential biases will be described and considered in light of other studies and the goals of this research.

Given that informants know they are being tape-recorded, what affect might this have on what they say? The implications of this issue are crucial - to what

extent is the content of these taped conversations representative of the content of museum talk at large? Of those visitors reporting any negative effects, 17% felt that their talk content deviated from normal. Of all 3 biases suggested, this one was reported with least frequency. While this potential bias cannot be dismissed, the nature of the deviations as reported by visitors are interesting to consider in light of the actual findings. Of those reporting that their talk content was in some way altered, all explained that the nature of this alteration was the editing of or refrainment from comments not related to exhibit - such as personal information, jokes, and profanity. However, the actual analysis revealed such material to be present to some extent in all visitors' talk, and to represent a substantial portion of the talk of at least half of all visitor pairs. While visitors may in reality engage in more of such verbal behavior when they are not tape-recorded, the sample informants did so perhaps more than they thought they did, and at least enough to represent such talk as a quite active component of museum talk.

Since the primary goal of this study was to analyze the content of talk, the possible bias of the method must be considered beyond visitors' own self-reports. To this end, it is encouraging to note that the types of comments found in this data are comparable to those found in museum



visitor conversations collected through less obtrusive measures at Colonial Williamsburg (Birney, 1982), as discussed in the literature review of this study. In Birney's study, researchers eavesdropped upon visitors in a historical institution and identified types of comments not unlike those found in this study. Further, the content of this study's taperecordings was also found to be comparable to that found in the researcher's own pre-test experimentation with the eavesdropping method in an art museum and a history museum in Philadelphia, as well as concurring with personal experience.

This evidence suggests that the content of the tape-recorded conversations may in fact be considered fairly representative of the nature and scope of visitor talk comments. However, visitors' own reflections suggest that it is difficult to assess the representativeness of the frequency of non-exhibit related talk. It may well be that non-recorded visitors engage in more of such non-exhibit related talk. While previous studies (Draper, 1984, Birney, 1982) suggest this is not the case, the dearth of research on this issue prevents any firmer conclusion.

In order to solicit interactions from both pair members, the tape-recorder and lapel microphone system in fact created a particular physical context. The microphone arrangement kept pair members walking within three feet of each other, throughout the entire exhibit.

To what extent is this physical behavior representative of museum going at large?

Reported more frequently than the issue of content, 28% of those visitors who felt the experience was not typical for them commented on this physical aspect. For many,

We don't usually stay so "joined". Sometimes I go off in one direction and he in another. But we usually meet up again.

This in fact concurs with pre-test observation, both at the Philadelphia sites, as well as at the actual site museums, of the physical aspects of museum pair's viewing behavior. While many do walk through an exhibit as close together as this study required them to, many pairs also move separately, wandering away from each other and joining up again, and wandering and joining throughout the entire exhibit. While such visitors are usually not conversing as they look separately, they may in fact converse when they are together, and/or join back together specifically when one makes a comment to the other or calls to the other to "come see something." While no extensive studies exist on the physical aspects of pair museum viewing behavior, it is difficult to say whether or not there is a dominant mode or behavior, or whether or not it varies systematically for certain types of pairs. Clearly, however, it must be said that the physical

closeness of the recording experience created by the study methodology is indeed unnatural for some.

Perhaps the most crucial bias that such closeness would create is the third, and most frequently reported effect, an influence on the amount of talk. 55% of those visitors who felt their talk was not typical reported an effect on the amount of their talk. Approximately half of these visitors felt that they talked more than usual, while roughly half of these visitors felt they had talked less than usual. For some, the tape-recorder made them feel "obliged to talk", while others felt "inhibited by it." What impact might these effects have on the representativeness of pair conversations at large? Considered in light of the physical influence of the method, how representative are the tape-recorded comments of visitors as actual conversations? And perhaps most importantly, of what import to and effect are these concerns on the claims of this study?

As visitors suggest, there is little doubt that carrying a tape-recorder may have affected the amount of talk. Coupled with the physical nature of the methodology, many people may in fact have talked more than they usually do. Also considering these two aspects of the study together, one may rightfully speculate as to whether or not visitor pairs actually engage in on-going conversations throughout an exhibit. Perhaps more likely

for some, the typical experience of museum-going pairs includes stretches of independent viewing and silence, as well as stretches of joint viewing and talking.

While in fact the recordings in this study do contain stretches of silence, the consideration of this bias urges a clear reminder of the intentions of this method as an elicitation tool, and the meaning of the data thus collected. These tape-recordings are not intended to represent typicality in the viewing experience. While it may for some visitors, it remains to be explored through future study to what extent on-going, physically close conversation is the dominant mode for pair exhibit viewing in museums. The method and its resulting data are intended, however, to facilitate as well as represent interchanges of content which are representative of the ways that people do talk together about, and hence make meaning of displayed objects in the museum context.

Given these goals, variations in the amount of visitor talk, while very likely biased by the tape-recorder methodology, do not pose a large threat to the representativeness of the content of such interchanges, brief or long. Further, the method used for rating visitor talk on the five interpretive acts, as discussed previously in this chapter, was calculated to adjust for the total number of objects viewed. While one might argue that visitor talk in natural situations is either briefer

or more extensive than that collected here, it is proposed here that the nature of such comments, the main concern in this study, is in fact fairly representative.

A fourth concern, although not mentioned by visitors themselves, is the extent to which certain kinds of individuals self-selected for this study, given the unusual nature of its requirements. To that end, the findings may represent the behaviors of only a certain type of people. While a paucity of existing studies on NGA and NMAH visitor populations prevent conclusive evidence, the similarity of these samples to those of other museum visitor studies, addressed later in this chapter, suggest that the visitors who engaged in this study are in fact similar in background to other, comparable museum visitor populations. However, this potential bias cannot be disclaimed until further data is gathered on the visitor populations of NGA and NMAH respectively.

#### Conceptual Limitations to Studying Visitor Talk

The use of tape-recorded visitor talk as data for the study of meaning-making processes carries two important conceptual limitations. First, the meaning of museum objects can no doubt be created through non-verbal and/or individual means. Therefore, the emphasis on talk data in this study affords the exploration of only one aspect of

meaning-making, that which visitors verbalize. Secondly, as Souriau (1955) contends, such speech is not necessarily the same as unspoken appreciation of a work, but is rather a "product" that can "be acquired or developed through special training" (p. 15). It is indeed debatable how talk with a companion in a museum is related to individual, aesthetic appreciation, considered by many aesthetic theorists to be a silent process when in its "purest" form (cf. Souriau, 1955). However, given the documented frequency of talk among visitor groups while viewing exhibits in museums, such talk is studied here in its own right - as a common mode of social interaction and experience in the museum setting.

The unusual methodological tool of self-recorded visitor conversation indeed introduces potential biases and conceptual limitations that cannot be overlooked in the interpretation of this data. While it is tempting and easy to treat the data as actual and/or representative "conversations," the reader is reminded that the visitor talk collected is intended rather as evidence of social, verbal meaning-making strategies which occur through object-focused talk, regardless of length and continuity.

#### On Visitor Self-reports

The other major sources of data in this study were questionnaires and interviews with visitors, both self-

reported material. As Messaris (1977) describes in detail about studies involving self-reports of media "uses and gratifications", this approach introduces its own set of potential problems. Of particular relevance to this study, Messaris points out that informant's own explanations may in fact be "invalid rationalizations", and that researchers must be careful not to accept them uncritically or treat informants as capable of objective analysis (1977).

To avoid these "pitfalls", the logic and use of the interview data was interpretive, as illustrated in the work of Ang (1985) and Radway (1984). Borrowing from the approaches of these studies, visitors' own reports and self-reported data were viewed critically as discourse about the topic or theme, representative of their ways of thinking and talking about a topic. Or, as Messaris describes, "respondents' statements are treated only as symptoms of the existence of a particular function, which is then inferred through further analysis on the part of the researcher" (p. 320).

### In Sum

This study sought to interpret meaning-making approaches in talk through the comparison and interweaving of three types of data, the methodological strategy known as triangulation (Denzin, 1970). This strategy provides

an attempt to compensate for the shortcomings of each method by relying on the replication and/or corroboration of similar data. The corroboration between tape content analysis and interview data together provided the basis for interpretations and conclusions. It is proposed that the existence of such corroboration through triangulation lends further credibility to the methodology and subsequent analysis.

Ultimately, this is an interpretive study, in the tradition of grounded theory. As Glaser and Strauss describe, it is therefore

still dependent on the skills and sensitivities of the analyst. The constant comparative method is not designed...to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory (1967, p. 103).

It is hoped that by evidencing discipline in method and by offering analysis based on multiple sources that resonates with reason as well as with the personal experiences of the reader, that the limitations and potential biases of this study do not obscure the validity of the findings. At their most conservative, the findings identify and suggest compelling patterns worthy of further exploration.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE INFORMANT SAMPLES

In accordance with the combined quota and random sampling design, 15 male-female pairs and 15 male-male



pairs were recruited at The National Gallery of Art and at The National Museum of American History, respectively. This resulted in a total of 30 pairs from each museum for a overall sample of 60 pairs. Beyond the variable of gender configuration, however, the background variables of the pair members were not controlled. Thus, as might be expected from previous discussions about differences between art and history museums and their functions, the backgrounds of the art museum visitor pairs were indeed somewhat different than those of the history museum pairs. This section will briefly examine the similarities and differences between these two groups.

#### Age and Ethnicity

Art and history pairs were similar in constitution on the variables of ethnicity and age. The overwhelming majority from both museums were white. While no visitors under the age of 18 were included in the sample, the average age of the history museum visitor was 38, while for the art museum it was 42. Broken into groups, art and history visitors were comprised of equal numbers who were between the ages of 18 and 39 (65%), and 40 or older (35%).

## Residence

As Table 3:1 illustrates, individual art and history museum visitors hailed from 4 parts of the country - east, west, south, and midwest - as well as three from from Australia and Britain. While the total number of visitors from each group received comparable rankings at both museums, there are slightly more art than history visitors from the east and south and slightly more history than art visitors from the west.

TABLE 3:1: RESIDENCE OF INFORMANTS

	ART	HISTORY
East	30	25
West	23	18
South	13	9
Midwest	4	5
non-US	0	3

While the above numbers aren't terribly different, a look at visitor pairs broken out as tourists, locals, or combined, as in Table 3:2, is perhaps more suggestive. In this comparison, the art museum reflects a larger number of local pairs, while the history museum reflects a larger number of tourists.

TABLE 3:2: TOURIST VS. LOCAL PAIRS

	ART	HISTORY
Tourists	20	27
Locals	7	0
Combos	3	3

### Socio-economic Status

The variables of education, income and occupation suggest differences between art and history visitors' socio-economic status. Each of these three factors will be reviewed in turn.

### Education

On the variable of education, the art museum pairs clearly reflect a higher education level than that of the history museum pairs. As Table 3:3 indicates, the largest group of art visitors are those who have completed 4 years of college (38%), while the highest group of history visitors are those who have completed some college. Eighty percent of the art museum group have college education or more, compared to about half of the history museum group (52%). Further, more than twice as many of the history group as compared to the art group (16% vs. 7%) haven't any college education.

TABLE 3:3: EDUCATION LEVEL OF INFORMANTS

	ART	HISTORY
some hs	0%	3%
hs grad	7%	13%
some college	13%	30%
college grad	38%	25%
some grad	10%	17%
grad complete	32%	10%
other	0%	2%

Income

Visitors drawn from the art museum also reflect a higher income on average than visitors drawn from the history museum. As Table 3:4 below indicates, while art and history visitors are fairly comparable in percentages of each found in a middle income range of \$30-59,000, art visitors are highly represented in the \$60-99,000 or "high" income category, while history museum visitors are most highly represented in the \$0-29,000 or "low" income category.

TABLE 3:4: INCOME OF INFORMANTS

	ART	HISTORY
\$0-29,999	15%	37%
\$30 - 59,999	37%	33%
\$60-over 99,999	43%	22%
missing data	5%	8%

A look at categories of occupation seems to confirm these data on income levels. As Table 3:5 shows, art museum visitors include in the sample a higher number of "professionals" and teachers, whereas history museum visitors reflect a greater number of those involved in labor and business. While it might have been possible that the low income scores in the history museum could be explained by a greater number of retirees or students, in fact these categories are similar across museum,

suggesting that the income and occupation of art versus history pairs do differ:

TABLE 3:5: OCCUPATION OF INFORMANTS

	ART	HISTORY
business/sales	10	14
homemakers	4	4
labor	1	8
professionals	22	11
retirees	2	1
students	8	9
teachers	8	4
clerical	2	4
technical	1	3

Taken together, the differences found between art and history museum visitors, respectively, on the variables of education, income, and occupation suggest that the sample of art museum visitors reflects a higher level of socio-economic status than does the sample of history museum visitors. These differences must be considered when attributing influence to the museum context as a possible variable in patterns of talk. Despite possible differences due to art and history content, these visitor subsamples vary in education and socio-economic status.

#### Special Involvement with Subject Matter

On their questionnaires, visitors were asked whether they were or have been involved in the subject matter of the museum in any special way (art or history, respectively), such as having studied it, having a job

related to it, or having a special interest or hobby related to it. As Table 3:6 shows, in both museums, a bit more than half of each sample reported that they have or had special involvement with the subject matter, with a slightly higher percentage in art (63% yes) as compared to history (57% yes). As a pair measure, 3 types were possible - those where both members reported special involvement, those where one did and one didn't, and those where neither member did. The art and the history samples each contained roughly similar amounts of each type of pair:

TABLE 3:6: SPECIAL SUBJECT MATTER INVOLVEMENT OF PAIRS

	ART	HISTORY
Both yes	13	12
One yes, one no	12	10
Both no	5	8

The variable of gender, however, appears to play an interesting role when examined within each museum. Of all women in the art museum sample, 62% report special involvement with art, while of all men in the art museum sample, only 33% report special involvement. Interestingly, this imbalance is reversed, and somewhat lessened, in the history museum: there, 73% of all men in the sample reported having special involvement with history, while only 51% of women reported such

involvement. It thus appears that special involvement with the subject matter of the museum may in fact be linked to gender, with more women than men having involvement such as classes, job, hobby or special interest in art, and more men than women having such involvement in history. This link is further suggested at the pair level. Of all female-female pairs that rated "Both yes" on special involvement in either museum, 67% of those appeared in the art context, while 33% appeared in the history context. Conversely, of all male-female pairs that rated "Both yes" on special involvement in either museum, 70% were those from the history museum context, while 30% were those from art.

### Relationship Context

Visitors were asked how long they had known each other. Their answers ranged from 1 day to 30 years. Examining these distributions, it became clear that nearly equal numbers of pairs had known each other for 5 years or less, deemed relatively shorter, and for more than 5 years, deemed relatively longer, in each museum context. Specifically, in the history museum, 53% of the pairs had known each other longer, while in the art museum 50% had known each other longer. A look across the variable of gender, as in Table 3:7, revealed that female-female pairs seemed more likely than male-female pairs to have known

each other a longer time, while male-female pairs seemed more likely than female-female pairs to have known each other a shorter time:

TABLE 3:7: TIME KNOWN BY GENDER OF PAIR

	FF	MF
shorter time known	40%	57%
longer time known	60%	43%

A look at this gender difference within museum type reveals a more pronounced difference within the history context than within art. As illustrated in Table 3:8, in the art context, the ratios are switched, but fairly similar - female-female pairs may be slightly more likely to have known each other a shorter time than a longer time, and male-female pairs, the reverse. In the history context, however, the differences are clearer. Female female pairs seem more likely to have known each other for a relatively longer time (73%) than shorter, and male-female pairs to have known each other for a relatively shorter time (33%) as compared to longer (63%):

TABLE 3:8: TIME KNOWN BY GENDER OF PAIR BY MUSEUM CONTEXT

	ART		HISTORY	
	MF	FF	MF	FF
Known longer	53%	47%	33%	73%
Known shorter	47%	53%	67%	27%



What might account for these differences? An examination of relationship type lends clarification.

Relationship Type and Gender

The types of relationships of the sample pairs fell into three categories: spouses or lovers, friends (including co-workers), and other family members (including sisters, sisters-in-law, and parent-child). When examined by gender, relationship types grouped as follows: 83% of all male-female pairs were lovers or spouses, the remaining 17% were friends. 63% of all female-female pairs were friends, while the remaining 37% were other family members. When examined by amount of time known, an interesting difference emerges. As illustrated in Table 3:9, while spouses or lovers seem nearly equally likely to have known each other for a shorter time (48%) or longer time (52%), friends seem slightly more likely to have known each other for a shorter time (58%) than a longer time (42%). Not surprisingly, all family members (100%) knew each other a longer time.

TABLE 3:9: TIME KNOWN BY RELATIONSHIP TYPE

	KNOWN SHORTER	KNOWN LONGER	
friends	58%	42%	24
spouses	48%	52%	25
family	0%	100%	11

When relationship type is examined within museum context, an interesting difference emerges, which helps clarify an earlier variation. While the art and history contexts contained similar numbers of spouse pairs (history=43% and art=40%), the distributions of female-female relationship types seemed different: In history, more female-female relationships were those of family members (30%), while in art, there was a greater percentage of female-female friends (53%) than relatives (7%). Looking further at the length of time pair members knew each other in these female-female pairs suggests the reason for the higher representation of longer-time knowns in history than in art - family members are a longer known type of relationship and are greater represented in history, than are the female-female friendships which seem more likely to be shorter knowns, with a greater percentage in art than in history. Thus it seems that together, the difference can be summed as follows: While both art and history samples contained roughly equal amounts of male-female spouse or lover couples, history museum female-female pairs were more likely to be relatives who've known each other a longer time, while female-female pairs in the art museum were more likely to be friends who've known each other a shorter time. The nature of the relationship appears to account for the

differences in time known. Why might it be that more female-female friends visit the art museum and family members visit the history museum? In light of the fact that the art sample seems to contain slightly more local pairs, it may be that visitors are more likely to travel locally with a friend, and tour farther distances with a family member.

#### SAMPLES TO NMAH AND NGA POPULATION - REPRESENTATIVENESS

Given the unusual nature of informant participation in this study, namely, willingness to be tape-recorded, one might especially wonder whether or not visitor pairs self-selected for participation, a question raised previously in this chapter. To what extent are these samples like the museum visitation of each respective institution at large? While The National Museum of American History plans to undertake collection of more rigorous demographic data in the near future (Hilke, 1990), several reports presently exist which summarize data collected in small studies at the museum over the last 10 years. Comparing those descriptions to the data from the present study, this sample appears to be similar to those drawn for other studies and reports on the variables of age (Hilke, July 1986 memo to N. Glass), and ethnicity (Hilke, August 1986, memo to V. Hyatt). Existing estimates place the ratio of tourists to locals

somewhat differently than did this study - 75% tourists as compared to 25% locals (Hilke, "An overview of our visitors"), while this study yielded 90% to 10%. This difference, however, might be accounted for by differences in season.

Unfortunately, at the time of this study, The National Gallery of Art did not have demographic information available on its visitors. Thus, a direct comparison of such findings to this study could not be made. Given the paucity of comparable data at these two institutions, it is difficult to say to what extent the samples drawn in the present study are representative of the respective museum's general visitation.

#### THESE SAMPLES AND ART AND HISTORY MUSEUM POPULATIONS NATIONALLY

While demographics of NGA visitors are not available, the description of this sample does seem to match descriptions of other American art museum audiences - as highly educated, predominantly white, affluent, and professional (e.g., Korn, 1989, Harris and Associates, 1988). Similarly, the conclusions drawn in comparing this study's samples from National Museum of American History and National Gallery of Art, respectively, echo the conclusions drawn by DiMaggio, Useem and Brown of performing arts and museums (1978) that the art museum

visitor population was better educated, wealthier, and composed of more professionals than visitors to history, science, or other museums.

While it is difficult to draw conclusions without further comparative data, the present samples of visitors to The National Museum of American History and The National Gallery of Art respectively appear similar to the general descriptions of art versus history museum visitors in America. If in fact this were true, one could speculate that perhaps the informants in the present study were not particularly different than the population of museum visitors at large. Given the paucity of comparable data, no definitive conclusions can be drawn.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the representativeness of The National Museum of American History and The National Gallery of Art as "typical" museum experiences is a question that must also be kept in mind. While the constitution of the visitor population to NMAH and NGA may appear to be similar to that of other art and history museums in America, in fact the experience itself may be quite different, due to the status and cultural authority of the site institutions. This and other caveats and limitations pointed out in this chapter must be considered as the research findings and interpretations are presented.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MEANING: INTERPRETIVE ACTS IN VISITOR TALK

Pausing in front of each artifact they choose in the respective target exhibits, museum visitors share thoughts seemingly inspired by the object before them. What are the kinds of comments that visitors make? What do these responses suggest about the ways in which visitor pairs go about making meaning of museum artifacts? As described in Chapter Three, the first goal of this research was to analyze the content of visitor talk in order to identify and describe its component parts. After a brief discussion of the nature of interpretation through talk, this chapter presents and illustrates the five basic categories of response found in visitor talk - establishment, evaluation, absolute object description, relating special knowledge, and relating personal experience. These categories of response, termed interpretive acts, are posited as the verbal reflections of tacit intertextual processes (cf. Feld, 1984). Through interaction with one's companion, intertextual resources are maximized and shared. Thus the five interpretive acts constitute the verbal building blocks with which visitor pairs socially construct meaning. Some preliminary differences in the emphasis of each move across museum context and across several pair attributes are then

presented as an overview of variation in museum talk.

#### ON THE NATURE OF INTERPRETATION THROUGH TALK

Talk can be thought of as the reflection of tacit processes. Feld (1984) explains, for example, that talk about music consists of "attempts to recreate, specify, momentarily fix, or give order to things that take place so rapidly and intuitively when we experience musical sounds" (p. 25). Specifically, Feld contends that when people talk to each other about music they "draw upon the...stock of interpretive moves" (p.14) - processes whereby

the action of pattern discovery as experience is organized by the juxtaposition, interactions, or choices in time when we encounter and engage obviously symbolic objects and performances (p. 8). These moves...act roughly like a series of social processing conventions...Such conventions do not fix a meaning, instead they focus some boundaries of emergent and fluid shifts in our attention patterns as we foreground and background experience and knowledge in relation to the received...object/event (p. 10).

Thus, musical meaning is created intertextually (cf Hutcheon, 1989) - through the comparison of presently encountered sounds and meanings to previously experienced sounds and meanings. Talk about music reflects these processes.

Talk by its nature, is social. When visitor pairs discuss museum objects, (just as when companions discuss music, tv programs and films), individual knowledge,

experiences, perspectives and other intertextual resources are maximized and shared (Hilke and Balling, 1985, Draper, 1984). Thus meaning is socially constructed. While not all meaning making occurs verbally, talk itself constitutes part of the process.

Given the social nature of interpretation through talk, it is no longer the individual contributions of the pair members which matter, so much as the joint processes which result. To understand the mechanisms of meaning making through talk, this study sought to identify its component speech acts (Searle, 1965). As Searle explains, "there are many kinds of acts associated with a speaker's utterance...including...making statements, asking questions, issuing commands, giving reports, greeting, and warning," (p. 221) - not specific words or sentences per se but rather actions achieved in or resulting from talk. Adapting Searle's concept as a heuristic tool, this study identified 5 specific interpretive speech acts accomplished within visitor pair talk through which meaning is made.

#### VISITOR TALK

Holly and Jed (not their real names) are fiancées who've known each other for two years. During their visit to the National Museum of American History, they pause in front of a scale from 1931, and say:



H: Look at this nice scale. Isn't that pretty?  
'1931'.  
J: It's a penny scale, huh? To get your weight.  
H: Um hum. That's beautiful.  
J: Yeah.  
M: It says it's vitrious enamel to cast iron.  
J: Yeah. Those are all cast.  
H: So they put enamel all over?  
J: Um hum. Just like the bases of the tables in the  
soda fountain room in there. Remember we saw the  
bases of those tables?  
H: Um hum.  
J: They were all cast. The bases of each one of  
those pieces - one, two three four pieces - are  
all cast.

Renee and Lynn, friends of less than a year,  
exchanged these remarks while viewing the painting Adrian  
Iselin by John Singer Sargent at The National Gallery of  
Art:

R: This is John Singer Sargent, I thought so.  
L: Hm? Who is that?  
R: This is Sargent.  
L: Let's sit down.  
R: Wonderful faces. He did nice landscapes, too.  
They had a show of his at the Whitney.  
L: Sargent? How did you know so much about American  
painters if they weren't that...what'd you do, go  
to school?  
R: I was an art teacher.  
L: Oh right. That's right.  
R: I don't know enough about art.

Typical of all study participants, Jed and Holly, and  
Renee and Lynn exchanged comments about the work they  
viewed. Within these excerpts, they also exhibited the 5  
interpretive acts which characterized all of museum  
visitor talk in this study - establishment, evaluation,  
absolute object description, relating competence, and

relating experience. While the above two examples evidence all five acts, most individual object encounters did not - rather, they invoked different combinations of the acts. Further, such combinations did not necessarily occur in a specific or repeated order. Thus the acts can best be thought of as building blocks which are combined in various ways each time a new object is encountered by a pair. Over their entire transcripts, visitor pairs evidenced definite act emphases which thus formed larger frameworks of meaning making (explored in Chapter Five).

Utilizing the above examples, and others, each of the five interpretive acts will now be reviewed and described in turn. These acts do not occur in any specific order during visitor talk, and are merely presented so here for explanatory purposes. All examples used are quoted verbatim from visitor talk transcripts, and the speakers are generally marked "M" and "F" for male and female, or "F1" and "F2" for female 1 and female 2. All names are fictional, as no names were collected from study informants. Pairs noted with an "H" were collected in the history museum, while those noted with an "A" were collected in the art museum.

#### 1. ESTABLISHMENT

Like many object encounters in the history museum, Holly and Jed's very first comment names and identifies

the object before them: "Look at this nice scale." And, while visitors in the art museum know tacitly that they are viewing paintings, like Renee and Lynn, they also routinely name or identify one of three key pieces of information about the object they are looking at - the subject matter of the work, its title, or, as in Lynn and Renee's case, the artist:

R: This is John Singer Sargent, I thought so.

L: Hmm. Who is that?

R: This is Sargent.

While manifested slightly differently in the history as compared to the art context, the first interpretive act is establishment - to name, recognize, and/or identify from exhibit label, an object, its title, its creator, its subject matter, its date of creation, or, to refer to the exhibit theme. As Dewey (1934) explains about perception, "Some detail or arrangement of details serve as a cue for bare identification" (p. 52). Establishment acts may thus be thought of as the noticing or accounting of those details. In the history museum, where objects are not "titled" per se or credited with specific creators, the most important "detail" or feature to visitors appears to be the name of the object itself. However, some visitors also seek to establish the year the object was created, a fact provided by the explanatory label. In the art museum, where the object's "identity" as a painting is known, the key identifying features instead become the

subject matter of the work, the title of the painting, the artist's name, and/or the date of its creation. The source of the latter three facts can be either one's own knowledge, or the explanatory label in the exhibit.

As the existence of these two sources suggests, there are two distinct "modes" of establishment - identification and recognition. In the case of identification, the facts are obtained from the explanatory labels, as in this interaction in the history museum about a tower clock movement by Pair 20H:

M: 'Tower clock movement'. That's interesting, the tower clock movement.

F: Is that what that is? How did you know that?

M: It says it over here.

F: Oh.

In the case of recognition, the cues or facts come from one's memory, as in this example about Edward Hopper's painting Cape Cod Evening by Pair 17A:

F1: Oh I know this one, Helen. This was in my art class, I remember. Edward Hopper.

F2: Edward Hopper.

F1: We studied him in American art history.

As the data suggest, both modes of establishment serve to direct a pair's attention to the object, and/or isolate or mark it as the focus of attention. This is particularly important in the history museum, where many objects are displayed near each other. Naming and establishing key details might be thought of as fixing a

mental handle on the object. That handle provides a specific purpose: it is the jumping off point in the search for stored information. Where did this search lead? For some, the outcome was the acknowledgement of recognition and the sharing of further details and information. For others, the end was the acknowledgement of unfamiliarity and the incorporation of the new material. For others, like Pair 23A in this example regarding Winslow Homer's painting Autumn 1877, it is a combination of both:

F: Who's this? 'Homer. Winslow Homer.'

M: Yeah.

F: Is that someone I know? Do I recognize that name?

M: I don't know that name.

F: I'm thinking Homer, the writer Homer.

M: Homer is a, yeah, Greek writer.

Using the label, the pair established the identity of the artist. From that handle, they both searched their memory for some previous knowledge or association. They then concluded their lack of familiarity, and may in fact have absorbed the new information. One association was located and shared, that of the Greek writer Homer, even though it is not directly relevant to the painting.

Regardless of the fact that they recognized a detail or name, some pairs sought out the explanatory exhibit label for confirmation, as in example from Pair 27A regarding the painting Both Members of This Club by George Bellows:

F1: I want to know if the boxers are George Bellows.  
F2: Well let's see.  
F1: Look at the difference.  
Yes, they are. Oh, you're right.

For others, it was the reverse; an object was named or a detail established from memory, with no reference to or concern for the "definitive" label, as in these examples from 07H about a mutoscope, and 27H about a vacuum cleaner:

M: There's a peep show.

F1: An old electrolux!  
F2: Ma had one of those, didn't she?  
F1: Yeah.

Some history museum pairs, although not many, made it a point to consult the explanatory labels which introduce the exhibit theme. This act is typified by Pair 11H, upon encountering their first chosen item in the exhibit, a plow:

F1: So what is this exactly about? It's just about the materials that they make things out of. Right?  
F2: I guess. What's it say?  
F1: I sort of read this one over there. Right. I read this. Okay. This is kind of neat cause you don't ever really think about what things are made of. What's that?  
F2: A plow.

In sum, visitor pairs appear to fix the basic identifying details or features of an encountered object through the interpretive act of establishment. These details are determined through one's memory, the exhibit

label, one's companion, or in some combination. More often than not, previously formed meanings are recalled which inform the present.

These findings echo the theoretical writing of Carson (1983) and Dewey (1934). As Carson described about interpreting history artifacts,

....names,...dates and provences are the coordinates people use to locate the mental pictures of the past that we all carry around in our heads. Images called up from this repository of everybody's personal material culture are the templates against which we test the familiarity of every new appearance of history we come across (p. 187).

While stated somewhat more simply, Dewey in fact implies the same notion regarding art - "In recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme" (p. 52). Thus establishment acts can trigger a process of searching for information.

## 2. EVALUATION

Immediately after establishing the painting as a work by Sargent, Renee offers an opinion of the painting's content: "wonderful faces." Back at the scale, Holly's establishing remark in fact also accomplished an evaluation - "this nice scale," followed by two more explicit judgements - "Isn't that pretty?" and the later comment, "that's beautiful." This second type of interpretive act is evaluation - to express a preference, judgement, desire to own, or interpretation regarding an

object at hand. Through evaluation, visitor pairs express their own conclusions about the work before them. It is notable that evaluation acts are found in history museum talk as well, since evaluation is a traditional component of aesthetic appreciation. By offering evaluations, visitor pairs in essence draw their own conclusions about the work before them. Four distinct types of evaluation acts were found - preference, judgement, interpretation, and desire to own.

The most frequent evaluation act found in visitor talk was preference - any explicit statement of like or dislike. Such comments were often made without any further elaboration or justification, and were perhaps the most personalized form of evaluation, as illustrated in these typical examples:

Pair 08A, on Wapping on Thames by James McNeill Whistler:

F: I like the ships. Whistler's ships.

Pair 23H, on Whalen and Janssen bicycle:

F1: Look at the wooden bicycle.

F2: Gosh I like those kind.

Distinct from preference were judgements, defined here as evaluative descriptions that did not involve any explicit statement of preference per se. Often this was merely a descriptive statement such as that of Pair 23H,



looking at a television set, or Pair 20A, viewing Winslow

Homer's Autumn 1877:

F2: Look at this tv.  
F1: God that's weird.

F: Hmm.  
M: Hmm. That is interesting. Very pretty. The  
Winslow Homer? 'Autumn'?

Interpretations, the third type of evaluation act,  
were descriptions of a message, meaning or conclusion that  
visitors attributed to or drew from an object, such as the  
following:

Pair 19A, on Club Night, by George Bellows:

F1: This is not fun either.  
F2: Same deal. These are great. Look at that.  
F1: This isn't explaining the beauty of the  
human form.  
F2: No.  
F1: This is portraying the human form as a  
machine. Pitted against another  
machine, with all the rest of these  
machines watching.  
F2: You're right.

While such interpretations occurred far more often in the  
art museum, some visitors in the history museum also  
concluded opinions about or messages from objects, such as  
pair 03H viewing an ashtray:

F: We're in the age of plastics, huh?  
M: Yeah, everything's plastic. I guess we run  
out of oil, we go back to everything else.

The last type of evaluation act was the expression of  
a desire to own, display or buy an object. While  
apparently an indication of extreme preference, this act

occurred often enough and in both museum contexts to warrant its own category:

Pair 18H, on purse:

F2: Look at the pocketbook. Look at the pocketbook.

F1: That's celluloid, too, isn't it?

F2: Oh that. I would love that.

F1: Oh no, that's something different.

F2: Oh I would love to have that.

Pair 07H, on automatic phonograph:

F: I'd love to have an old jukebox in my house.

M: Yeah.

F: Boy, that's a fancy one.

Pair 01A, on Midsummer Twilight by Leroy Metcalf:

F: I like that. That would look good in our dining room.

M: It's true. It would. It's the right colors.

This is a particularly intriguing response, given that objects in the museum for the most part cannot be purchased. This response seems borrowed from other cultural contexts in which objects are ownable and purchasable, namely, the home and the marketplace.

All four types of evaluation acts are ways in which visitors draw conclusions about and take positions vis a vis encountered objects. Thus pair members exert choice and individuality through the act of evaluation. Like establishment, evaluation acts also seem to represent underlying processes of intertextuality.

This intertextual nature of judgement in art has been documented by aesthetic theorists. As Dewey describes,

the material out of which judgement grows is the work, the object, but it is this object as it enters into the experience of the critic by interaction with his own sensitivity and his knowledge and funded store from past experiences (1934, p. 309).

For the aesthetically competent in art, as Gross (1973) defines, the intertextuality will particularly involve special knowledge of other works:

the appreciation of the skill embodied in works of art will therefore require a great deal of familiarity with works of art within the same mode, and an ability to understand the skillful aspects of choice and control (p. 127).

For others, the intertextuality involved in preference and judgement may simply be one's own personal, everyday experiences, or even one's "uneducated" perception of other paintings. Through evaluation acts in talk, visitor pairs express conclusions and attitudes.

### 3. ABSOLUTE OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Next in their comments about the scale, Jed and Holly refer to two of the object's attributes - its function; "to get your weight," and the materials of which it is made; "It says it's vitrious enamel to cast iron. Yeah. Those are all cast." Renee and Lynn, after identifying the artist, briefly direct their attention to a visual attribute of the work at hand - a specific part of the content: "look at those faces." These remarks represent

the third interpretive act category, absolute object description - to discuss or describe aspects of the object at hand without explicit reference to outside information, particularly those relating to four distinct points - perceptual aspects, physical aspects, function and subject matter.

The description and elaboration of visible and/or deducible aspects of an object is a key component of many paradigms of object appreciation for history as well as art (e.g., Montgomery, 1982). While previous knowledge or information from labels is often brought to bear, this act does not necessarily occur in explicit verbal references (cf. Meyer, 1956).

Two of the four topics of absolute object description were found in both museums - description of physical aspects, and description of perceptual aspects of a work. The description of physical aspects includes such details as size, condition, or materials. Given the differences between art and history objects, as well as the history exhibit's thematic focus on materials, this topic was found more often in the history than the art context. In their reference to the materials of the scale, Jed and Holly exemplify this category. In the art museum, a similar act is exhibited by Pair 03A in their interaction regarding Albert Ryder's Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens:

F1: Ryder.

F2: That's interesting.

F1: Turbulent, huh?  
F2: Um hum, yes.  
F1: Dark.  
F2: That looks like its quite old, doesn't it?  
F1: Yeah.  
F2: Looks like a damaged...  
F1: Um, not that old  
F2: No, just damaged. Do you think? Is that  
what it is?  
F1: Um. Dried. It might not have been stored in a  
good place.  
F2: Um.

In describing perceptual aspects of encountered objects, visitors discussed formal, visual aspects of the object, such as color, shape, line, hue, and appearance. Although this category is associated with formal aesthetic appreciation, such talk was found in both museums, as these examples typify:

Pair 22H, on a carnival glass:

F: That "J" is, ah, carnival glass.  
M: Carnival glass.  
F: Like what Mom likes.  
M: Yeah.  
F: It's orange.

Pair 22A, on James McNeill Whistler's Chelsea Wharf  
Grey and Silver:

F: James McNeill Whistler. 1875. That's like a  
transparent painting almost. You have to  
imagine what's going on because of the fog.  
M: Yeah.  
F: Everything is so dilute.

The two remaining topics of absolute object description were unique to the art and history contexts, respectively. Owing to the nature of the objects

themselves, visitors in the art museum often described the subject matter of the work. This was quite distinct from perceptual description. Rather than describing technique, this act focused solely on painting content.

Pair 30A, on Winslow Homer's Hound and Hunter:

F: And here's another one.

M: That's pretty.

F: Yeah.

M: Hound and Hunter. I think that deer's about to get the better of him.

F: Looks like he's going for a ride, he's taking him for a ride.

M: Um hm.

The final topic of absolute object description, object function, was unique to the history museum context. This interpretive act is illustrated here by Pair 11H's remarks about a bootjack:

F1: What's that?

F2: 'G' is a bootjack.

F1: How does that work?

F2: You probably stick your foot in there, and use that to take it off.

F1: Oh. Okay.

The acts of absolute object description involving these five topics are the means by which visitor pairs verbally elaborate upon the details and aspects of the object that are noticeable and important to them. Through this interpretive act, visitors characterize the encountered object. It is through this act that visitors process the details of the present object, regardless of familiarity.

However, it is likely that this seemingly "absolute" act is also informed by an underlying intertextual process. The determination of what is "unique", or even what is noticed, may well be informed by previous knowledge and experience. Pair 19A seems to discuss this very topic, while viewing Charles Tarbell's painting,

Mother and Mary:

F1: You know, this is a great lesson. Like you know, you'll get these students that paint the top of a, you know, they're doing a still life and they'll paint the top of a desk or the floor, brown, solid brown. You go, look for the colors! Look at the colors.

F2: Yeah.

F1: Wouldn't it be a great example?

F2: Absolutely. And see that's what I absolutely cannot see. I would not know how to translate to...

F1: I have trouble too.

F2: I mean, I can see them now that you point them out. All I can say is, ooh, gee that looks just like a realistic floor.

F1: You got to look for it, don't you. See the light falling?

F2: Um hm.

With the knowledge of color technique, as pointed out by Female 1, Female 2 is able to "see" the floor in the painting differently.

The interpretive act of absolute object description seems to suggest a tacit process involving memory and comparison. As an interpretive act in talk, however, absolute object description appears to include no verbal references beyond the work at hand, as visitors isolate and characterize object details which are salient to them.

The first three types of interpretive talk acts indeed seem to reflect underlying tacit processes that involve comparison and intertextuality. Establishment, evaluation, and absolute object description seem to rely on the location and integration of existing knowledge and associations. This may occur too fleetingly to be a fully conscious experience or even a verbalized one. However, in the remaining two acts, relating competence and relating personal experience, intertextuality is evidenced directly through talk. In these two acts, explicit associations and connections are articulated, contributing quite obviously to the social construction of meaning.

#### 4. RELATING SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE

In the history museum, Jed and Holly draw in some previously gained, specialized knowledge of the process of casting iron as they make sense of the scale before them:

J: Yeah. Those are all cast.

J: So they put enamel all over?

J: Um hm. Just like the bases of the tables in the soda fountain room in there....they were all cast.

Similarly, in the art museum, besides making an evaluation, Renee explicitly connects her specialized knowledge about the artist's work when she says: "he did nice landscapes, too."

These examples illustrate the interpretive act of



relating special knowledge - to bring specialized knowledge to bear upon the object at hand, including facts, and background information. In the art museum, this included relating knowledge of other relevant works. In the history context, details about how an item worked and background on the materials were sometimes discussed.

Two particular forms of this act were found: aesthetic knowledge and intellectual knowledge. In both museums, visitors displayed intellectual knowledge - the ability to relate factual and background information. This is typified by the following two interactions, in the history and art museum, respectively:

Pair 07H on laser dyes:

M: Laser dyes down there.

F: Laser dyes?

M: Yeah, you can use...

F: Oh that's what makes 'em the different colors.

M: Yeah, they can...They use dyes with tunable lasers that you can actually, over a certain range, change the color a little bit. It's good for, I guess, medical, cause you can like tune in to the wavelength that might get certain types of cells and not others.

F: Hmm.

And Pair 23A, on Mary Cassatt's Children Playing on the Beach:

M: Now that's Mary Cassatt. She's that American woman that was in the French School.

F: Oh, she's the woman. Oh, okay, okay.

M: You see, they had her over there in the French impressionist section.

F: '1894.'

M: Now they got her over here in the American section.

F: Huh. So she came back. Wait a minute. How many women artists were there probably? Not very many. Not that period of time.

M: No, I can't remember too many.

F: Um hm.

In the art context only, however, visitors displayed aesthetic knowledge, defined here as the ability to relate other relevant artworks by the same or other artists to the work at hand. This was a particular competence combining knowledge, memory, and visual skill, as suggested in the following comments by Pair 29A on James McNeill Whistler's portrait, Vanderbilt:

F: Can't see this one.

M: Yeah. It's awfully dark. That reminds me of that, Velasquez. The guy on the horse, where, just extremely vertical. The horse and the rider are just way too exaggerated from top to bottom to be anything close to real.

F: Oh, yeah.

The ability to make visual comparisons and to bring other specialized information to bear has long been considered requisites of aesthetic competence. Gross explains that

in order to comprehend when an artist is trying to make choices and exercise control over the execution in ways which are both novel and difficult one must be able not only to perceive these choices and the manner in which they are carried out but also to compare them to those embodied in previous works and performances in the same mode (1973, p. 127).

Similarly, the "connoisseur of artifacts" (Montgomery, 1982) must know facts and information in the history

museum, in order to contextualize and explain that which he/she is viewing. It is thus through the act of relating competence that visitor pairs quite explicitly connect, compare and contextualize the object before them within the network of knowledge they possess.

#### 5. RELATING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

As they talk about Sargent's painting, recall that Lynn asks Renee a personal question and elicits an explanation of her friend's experience:

L: How did you know so much about American painters if they weren't that...what'd you do, go to school?

R: I was an art teacher.

L: Oh, right. That's right.

R: I don't know enough about art!

And somewhat less explicitly, Jed urges Holly to recall another context in which together they experienced something:

J: ...Just like the bases of the tables in the soda fountain room in there. Remember we saw the bases of those tables?

The final interpretive act, relating personal experience, is one in which visitors bring personal experience to bear upon the object at hand, including memories of and references to people, places, objects and events in one's life. While this might be expected in the history museum context, where visitors encounter objects they might in fact have owned or used during their lives,

it occurs in the art context as well. In all, five types of this act were noted - personal association and reminiscence, idiosyncratic association, reference to other individuals, reference to own possessions, and reference to others' possessions.

The first and most common version of relating personal experience found in both museum contexts was that of personal association and/or reminiscence, in which visitors related and described a specific memory or personal association. The following examples are typical:

Pair 09A, on Edward Hopper's Cape Cod Evening:

F: Looks like those houses that we saw up in, you know. On our trip to Maine, we went on the..

M: Right.

F: At Bar Harbor

M: We took the boat across

F: Um hm.

M: To that lighthouse.

Pair 08H, on the mutoscope:

F1: The ah...

F2: The machine?

F1: Yeah.

F2: For looking at the moves?

F1: We used to go to a, we used to go and see that down at Coney Island. Remember?

F2: Yes.

F1: Oh that was before your time? (laugh)

F2: Yes.

The next version of this act was idiosyncratic associations, brief references that were not explicitly personal nor well described, but appear to be unique to the person who thought them. Often these were images from

mass media, popular culture, or current events, such as the following typical examples:

Pair 28A, on The Old Violin by John Peto:

M: Hmm. That's an interesting flash.  
F: That's almost Disneyish.  
M: Yeah.  
F: Doesn't it remind you of Pinocchio?  
M: Yeah. Yeah. A little bit. Well, I guess there's some reason behind the bits and pieces on there. Interesting. Okay.

Pair 08H, on scrollsaw:

F1: Scrollsaw. Hmm. 'Trump brothers.' I wonder if that's Donald's.  
F2: Donald's (laugh)  
F1: Any relation (laugh)  
F2: It's Donald's original!  
F1: Yeah.  
F2: His family.

Visitor pairs made specific references to individuals they knew often enough to warrant this as a third and separate category of relating personal experience. Most often such individuals were significant friends or family members. This interpretation is further supported, given that Cziksentsmihayli and Rochberg-Halton found "association to others" to be the most frequently reported reason for valuing personal possessions in their 1982 study. Such references, in the museum context, are typified by the following:

Pair 09A on The Early Scholar by Eastman Johnson:

F: Oh look. This is cute. A wood stove. Early Scholar. Isn't that cute? Little boy.  
M: What is he, reading?  
F: No he's warming his hands.

M: Yeah but it says Early Scholar.  
M: Well he's probably studying and he got cold. Oh there's his books.

F: Yeah. The books. Looks like Luke.  
M: Yeah. Early distractions.

Pair 26H, on Bowden spacelander bicycle:

F2: Look at the red one.  
F1: Don't get mud on you.  
F2: I could picture my brother on something like that, you know?  
F1: What?  
F2: I could have pictured David on something like that.  
F1: It even had headlights.

In the fourth version of relating personal experience, visitors drew in references to their own possessions, past and present:

Pair 29H on a skimmer:

F1: I have a spoon just like that.  
F2: Are you serious?  
F1: But its not gold you know. But its stainless steel. A skimmer.  
F2: A skimmer. Early 19th century.  
F1: I have one like that.

Pair 02A on Snow in New York by Robert Henri:

F1: This is one of my favorites, I have a copy of that.  
F2: Oh really?  
F1: Yeah. It's in the den.  
F2: Oh.  
F1: I've always like that. I think, no, wait a minute, I'm wrong. I have one that's similar to that, it's not that one.

While this happened more frequently in the history context, where similar objects were more likely to have

been owned by visitors, those in the art museum made more than occasional references to prints or reproductions of the displayed artwork which they owned.

In the final version of relating personal experience, references to the possessions of others, visitors combine the previous two categories. Rather than simply referring to or mentioning another person, these remarks included specific mention of particular object(s) owned or used by particular individual(s), past or present, as follows:

Pair 06A, on Snow in New York by Robert Henri:

F1: There. See that's the one I gave up. But now that I took it out of the frame, you know? Cause I bought that...

F2: Only interesting thing I like about that are the touches of red.

F1: You know I saw that, Martha, no, who had that in their office? Churchill has that in his office.

F2: Churchill would. Rather dull.

Pair 14H, on a pipe of briarwood, rubber, clay

F: My dad had one like 'I.' Briarwood, rubber and clay. Meerschaum. He had one. He always smoked straight ones. Usually.

M: Oh yeah?

That people draw upon their own personal experiences to make meaning of what they see is a common aspect of the museum experience. Like relating competence, it is an explicitly verbal intertextual process in which meaning is fashioned through the connection and comparison of the present work with other objects, experiences, people, and events of one's life.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERPRETIVE ACTS IN TALK

These five interpretive acts - establishment, evaluation, absolute object description, relating special knowledge, and relating personal experience - are the significant speech acts found in the talk of all visitor pairs in this study. But what do they seem suggest about the ways people go about making meaning of objects in museums?

Like talk about music (Feld, 1984), talk about museum objects seems also to suggest the existence of underlying tacit processes by which people perceive artifacts. These processes involve the invocation of intertextuality between aspects of the object at hand, the text of the museum labels, and the "texts" that constitute and reside in one's memory. As Feld says, "one works through the dialectics by developing choices and juxtaposing background knowledge" (1984, p.8).

Reflecting these on-going processes, however, visitors speak words and sentences which, in interaction with one's companion, lead to the accomplishment of five speech acts. Through these acts, pairs exchange and socially construct meaning. As these examples of object encounter have suggested, what one may know, notice, or associate with an object at hand interacts with and modifies what one's companion knows, notices, and



associates. Companions can also influence what each shares with the other. The result is a socially constructed product.

As the five interpretive acts suggest, ways of talking about museum objects also reflect the codified discourses of art appreciation and object connoisseurship which exist in our culture and are traditionally associated with museums. In particular these include the acts of absolute object description and relating special experience. As we see, however, visitors demonstrate other ways of talking about objects in the museum - discourses such as those of personal possession and consumerism, seemingly "borrowed" from contexts of object encounter in everyday life. Notable here are the similarities between several of the ways of relating personal experience which echo the meanings that personal possessions hold for people, for example, as associative and mnemonic devices (Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

This difference in ways of talking about objects reflects a particular tension that Bourdieu has noted in French culture (1980, 1984) between the "aesthetic" - the formal, critically distanced form of appreciating art and objects, and the "popular" - an "integration of aesthetic consumption into the world of everyday consumption," a mode of appreciating art and objects which is based

instead on participation and relevance. As de Certeau (1984) contends, the later, or popularization of culture, can be thought of as "making do" - creating one's own meanings with what is "given" by society. Bourdieu illustrates in French society that these differences are rooted in and therefore reflective of differences in education level and class structure. The connection between the display of these discourses and the social backgrounds of the American informants in this study will be explored in later chapters, including the extent to which these discourses are mutually exclusive in visitors' talk. However, it is important to note the apparent existence of such a "distinction" within visitor pair talk in this research.

### Conclusion

As Riffaterre (1983) says of the reader in literature,

...explication of texts is really a machine for taming a work, for defusing it by reducing it to habits...to something reassuring (p. 2).

Whether that "something reassuring" is the special knowledge of other works, or personal associations and everyday experience, or both, such a "taming" or connecting process appears to be the key mechanism by which visitor pairs make meaning of museum objects. Sometimes the connection is verbal, other times not.

Sometimes previous knowledge or experience is quite limited. Such "reduction" to the reassuring or familiar does not necessarily preclude learning or creativity. Rather, it is within the context of the "reassuring" or known that "new" or "different" is defined. From this context, details are noticed, information is absorbed, conclusions are drawn, and present meanings are made. Thus the specific previous meanings and discourses brought forth and shared as contextualization are crucial determinants in the formulation of "the meaning of things" (cf. Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

#### THE FREQUENCY OF INTERPRETIVE ACTS

Although these 5 acts are found in all pairs' talk, visitors did not exhibit the exact same interpretive acts nor the same order of acts for all objects they encountered. Further, visitor pairs appeared varied in the emphases they placed on different interpretive acts within their talk. In order to uncover configurations or patterns, a system was devised to rate each visitor pair transcript on the five interpretive acts. As described in Chapter Three, each object-focused block of talk in a pair's transcript was coded for the presence or absence of each of the five interpretive acts. For example, the sample blocks from Jed and Holly, and Renee and Lynn, would both have been coded as 'present' on all five acts.

A total score on each of the five interpretive acts was then calculated for each pair, which represented the average number of times the act was invoked, relative to the number of objects viewed. For example, a score of 75 on establish means that for 75% of all objects encountered, that is, 75% of the time, a pair "established" a given object.

Prior to translating these scores into ratings and patterns of "high" and "low," the pair scores and distributions were examined, and the "grand mean" (average of the average scores) of each act was calculated for each type of museum pair (i.e., art pairs, history pairs). While the primary goal of the overall analytic procedure was to determine patterns and configurations of acts, these grand mean scores nevertheless provide a broad-brushed picture of variation that is useful as a backdrop to understanding subsequent patterns. Note that these comparisons are merely suggestive, and do not by themselves answer the fundamental issues addressed in this study.

### Comparing Means

Table 4:1 contains the grand means of each interpretive act by museum context, plotted within the following qualitative categories. If a grand mean rated a zero, then the act can be considered to have never

happened. If the grand mean fell between 1 and 10%, it almost never happened. A grand mean of 11% to 25% represents an act which occurred rarely, while a grand mean of 26 to 50% represents an act which occurred sometimes. A grand mean of 51 to 75% represents an act that happened often, while 76 to 99% is an act which occurred almost always. A grand mean of 100% represents an act which always happened. Viewing the grand means within these categories helps offer some sense of their differences.

When all talk in both museum contexts is considered together, the most frequent interpretive act is establishment, which occurred often. This is followed by absolute object description, with a lower average score, which also occurred often. Third most common is evaluation, an interpretive act which occurred sometimes. At roughly the same average, are relating personal experience and relating special knowledge, both of which occurred sometimes. Thus museum talk in general for the average pair appears to be primarily object focused, with the interpretive acts of establishment and absolute object description occurring often, while giving evaluations, relating experience and relating special knowledge all occurred sometimes in museum talk.

The Variable of Museum Context

The average scores for art museum pairs as compared to history museum pairs suggest interesting differences about the nature of talk in these two contexts. In short, while history pairs scored higher on establishment, art pairs scored higher on absolute object description, relating special knowledge, and evaluation. Only the category of relating personal experience is similar in both contexts.

TABLE 4:1: FREQUENCY OF INTERPRETIVE ACTS:  
GRAND MEANS FOR ART AND HISTORY

Never	Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Always
0%	10%	25%	50%	75%	100%	100%
				*57*		[90]
					<u>establishment</u>	
			[29]		*78*	
			<u>absolute object description</u>			
[2]			*29*			
<u>relating special knowledge</u>						
			[33]	*35*		
			<u>relating personal experience</u>			
			[29]		*68*	
			<u>evaluation</u>			

KEY:

- \* \* = art grand mean  
[ ] = history grand mean

These averages offer sketches of the nature of talk in each museum context, as illustrated in Table 4:1. As the history means suggest, noted in Table 4:1 within brackets ([ ]), the interpretive act of establishment occurred almost always, with the highest average of any act at 90%. The second most frequent act in the history context was absolute object description, skipping an entire category in frequency and therefore occurring sometimes. Relating personal experience also occurred sometimes, as did evaluation. Last but not least, relating special knowledge almost never occurred in the history museum context. Thus, in sum, talk in the history context emphasized the identification of objects, while personal experience was sometimes related, evaluations offered, and objects described, but almost never was special information brought to bear.

The nature of pair talk in the art context differs sharply. As Table 4:1 illustrates, with art grand means noted within asterisks (\* \*), the most frequent interpretive act in this context was absolute object description, which occurred almost always. This was followed in frequency by evaluation, an act that happened often. Next in frequency was establishment, which also happened for the average art pair often. Occurring sometimes were the two explicitly intertextual acts, relating personal experience and relating special

knowledge, respectively. Thus art pair talk focused most upon description of the object at hand, while evaluation and establishment talk happened often, and personal experience and specialized knowledge were sometimes brought to bear.

Thus the nature of the visitor pair talk differs depending upon the museum context. However, of note are two interesting similarities. First, is the similar score of the act of relating personal experience in both museums. Given the emphasis on absolute appreciation in models of aesthetics, together with the preponderance of objects of familiarity and everyday life in the history museum, we might have expected the experience score to be higher in the history as compared to the art context. The similarity between these scores suggests that relating personal experience is indeed a component of museum talk in general. Secondly, it is notable that while the most frequently occurring act differed by museum context, the least frequently occurring act was the same in both contexts, namely relating special knowledge. While in the art museum this move occurred sometimes, and in the history museum, almost never, this confirms the notion that special knowledge may indeed be the purview of a small group of visitors in either museum context.



### The Variable of Gender Configuration

A second variable in this study was the gender configuration of the pair - namely, female-female pairs as compared to male-female pairs. To what extent do the grand means of these groups vary? Comparing the average scores on the 5 acts for these 2 groups shows similar scores on all but one act - personal experience. In this category, women show an average of 38%, 7 points higher than the male-female average of 31%. When examined within museum context, the differences are found to exist only among art museum pairs. Here, female-female pairs maintained a higher average than male-females not only in relating personal experience (43% vs 29%), but also in relating special knowledge (33% vs 25%). No differences were found in the history museum. Thus a connection by gender seems to function in the art museum only, where the female pairs' score is higher on average than that of the male-female pairs for both intertextual acts, relating personal experience and relating special knowledge.

### Time Known

While museum context and gender pair configuration were the two variables explicitly controlled in this study, another variable emerged as potentially related to the content and consequences of museum talk - the amount of time companions had known each other.

The study sample yielded roughly equal numbers of visitor pairs consisting of individuals who had known each other for 5 years or less (deemed relatively "shorter"), and 6 years or more (deemed relatively "longer"). While it seems likely that there might exist differences within the "shorter time known" group, i.e., 5 years being not as short as 6 months, for example, this median split in fact appeared valid in later analysis. The average length of time known by pair members within each group perhaps suggests the reason for the validity. Those pair members within the "shorter" group had known each other, on the average, for 2 years, while pair members within the "longer" group had known each other for an average of 15 years.

This variable was also considered for its connection to the speech acts. While the two groups show similar averages on the categories of establishment, absolute object description, special knowledge, and personal experience, the average score on evaluation was slightly higher for those who have known each other a shorter time than those who have known each other a longer time (52% to 45%). When examined within the context of the museum type, the difference as well as its direction is maintained in both contexts. In the art museum, shorter time known pairs rated a 71%, as compared to longer timers a 65%, while in the history museum, shorter timers rated a

32% while longer timers rated a 26%. Thus we might conclude that the talk of pairs who've know each other a shorter time seems to contain, on the average, a slightly higher percentage of acts of evaluation than pairs who've known each other a longer time.

### On The Differences

What sense can be made of these differences? First it is reiterated that the purpose of these comparisons was to provide a broad overview of visitor talk content on each of the five interpretive acts in general, and given different variables. In keeping with the logic of the analytical procedure of this study, the interpretation of "differences" in meaning making approaches among visitor pair types will be reserved until patterns and configurations of acts are presented, in the following chapters. Equally important, these percentage comparisons are tentative. However, the "differences" suggested by these comparisons yield three general conclusions.

First, the largest variation is due to the factor of museum context. Secondly, the variable of gender appears to be connected to the existence of more variation in the art context than the history context. This echoes the existence of a more codified and differentially accessible discourse of aesthetic competence in the art museum as compared to the history museum, that may in fact be gender

related; recall that in the description of the informant sample, significantly more women than men reported special experience in art. Interestingly, female-female pairs also rated higher than male-female pairs on relating personal experience in the art context as well. Lastly, only one variable seemed to suggest a difference across museum context - the length of time people knew each other, connected to the evaluation act. Perhaps people who've known each other a shorter time feel more comfortable sharing evaluations as a "safe" way to exchange information about themselves. This suggests an intriguing notion - the possibility of variation in the social consequences of museum talk. These variations, and the configuration and patterning of interpretive acts, will be examined further in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: MAKING MEANING OF THINGS: INTERPRETIVE FRAMES IN VISITOR TALK

As detailed in the previous chapter, the initial stage of analysis identified five major interpretive acts found in the talk of all visitor pairs. Through these acts, pairs make sense of objects they encounter. While these five interpretive acts were present to some extent in every pair's interaction, the frequency and emphasis of the acts varied considerably across pairs of different types, yielding qualitatively different talk overall. By rating each pairs' talk transcript as "high" or "low" on each of the five interpretive acts and studying the transcripts qualitatively, 7 distinct patterns of "high" and "low" configurations emerged, each of which appeared to be connected to one or more variables. The nature of these configurations or "patterns" was further illuminated by visitors' own self-reflections and attitudes as expressed in their interview responses. Pairs exhibiting similar interpretive patterns also expressed similar attitudes about the meaning of museum objects and their experience.

This chapter addresses the second major research question of this study: Are there distinct patterns to the responses and interpretive acts that visitors make in museums? Do these patterns differ in the art museum as compared to the history museum, for pairs of different

kinds? After a brief discussion of the process of locating patterns, and of the notion of "interpretive frames," this chapter will define, illustrate and discuss the 7 patterns or interpretive frames invoked by visitor pairs, the variables which appear to be connected to them, and the common attitudes held by each group of visitor pairs. These interpretive frames have been labelled as Recognizers, Evaluators, Personalizers, Evaluator-Personalizers, Competents, Competent-Personalizers, and Multi-Framers. Following a detailed examination of each frame, a synthesis and interpretation of the frames and their variations will be presented.

#### FREQUENCY OF INTERPRETIVE ACTS: FINDING PATTERNS IN VISITOR TALK

While establishment, absolute object description, evaluation, relating special knowledge, and relating personal experience are the basic building blocks of visitor talk, like words these blocks occur in various combinations. Each time a new object is encountered by a visitor pair, the pair invokes one or more interpretive acts. But, visitors did not necessarily repeat the same act, order, or combination of interpretive acts for every object encountered. Rather, what did emerge as patterned was the frequency with which each act was evoked over the course of the entire transcript; in short, given a large

number of encounters with objects in the course of viewing one exhibit, visitor pairs tended to emphasize (however unconsciously) certain interpretive acts over others in their talk. In general, visitors showed preferred ways of relating to the objects which also connected to specific pair and/or museum variables, as well as to common attitudes. To isolate these patterns, repeating connections were sought between the "high" and "low" configurations, pair variables, and pair attitudes. These attitudes, while not always unique to a particular pattern, were notably prominent in the discourse of all pairs displaying a particular pattern of interpretive acts. The following example illustrates, in a condensed fashion, the process of isolating such patterns.

A hypothetical visitor a pair encountered a total of 3 objects. In their talk about the first object, they established what it was and then evaluated it. Upon encountering the second object, they first related some aspect of their own experience, and then established what the object was. For the third object, they simply established what it was. While the exact configuration or order of acts does not appear to repeat, the pair clearly evoked establishment far more often than any other act. Continuing with this example, when compared to other pairs, this pair indeed displayed relatively frequent use of the establishment act throughout, but infrequent use of

the other four acts. This combination of emphases - "high" on establishment and "low" on all other acts, constituted a distinct pattern for making meaning of the objects. Further, this frame was found to be displayed by a number of visitor pairs with some pair attributes, museum variables, and attitudes in common. In order to be deemed a pattern, the configuration had to be exhibited by at least 4 similar pairs and had to resonate with qualitative impressions of the transcripts as well as make theoretical sense. In the final analysis, 7 pairs did not meet these criteria and were not included in any pattern. The other 53 pairs were grouped into 7 distinct patterns.

This study set out to explore the influence of two specific variables upon museum talk: the museum context, and the gender configuration of the pair. However, a number of other variables, such as education level, special experience, and amount of time pair members knew each other, were also included in the computer-assisted search for repeating patterns. Of the variables explored, museum context, gender configuration, and amount of time pair members had known each other were the three which emerged as related to visitor talk in this study. Education level and specialized experience in museum subject matter will also be considered.

As a result of the small sample size of this study, the resulting "patterns" are small as well. Therefore,



the role of any "variable" can only be considered a suggestive connection, rather than any definitive influence. However, the 7 patterns found were quite distinct from each other qualitatively, representing different ways of approaching objects. Their existence and connection to explanatory variables warrants further exploration in larger sample studies. As discussed in Chapter Three, the reader is also reminded that this study describes only those aspects of meaning-making which occur through talk. The primary goal of this analysis was to explore the extent to which variations in such meaning-making exist and to describe in detail the nature of these approaches.

#### Patterns As "Interpretive Frames"

Of what significance are these patterns of meaning-making? In emphasizing some interpretive acts and combinations of acts over others, visitors tend to approach museum objects in certain ways. Katz and Leibes (1986) describe how television viewers select, through their conversation, frames for interpretation - particular perspectives or contexts within which programs are interpreted. Similarly, patterns of acts and attitudes in museum talk can also be thought of as interpretive frames - contexts of perspective created and maintained through talk, through which the meaning of objects is made.

Consequently, these frames affect the apparent nature of meaning.

Each frame, named for its predominant acts, will now be reviewed in turn, including a discussion of its nature, users, and their attitudes, presented with examples quoted verbatim from visitor pair transcripts and interviews. For each interpretive frame, an actual and representative pair will be introduced, and samples of their remarks presented. Names are provided to aid memory, but are all fictitious, since no names were collected. All other descriptive details are factual.

#### 1. RECOGNIZERS

Susan and Jane (13H) are friends who have known each other for less than two years. They've come to the National Museum of American History for a day's outing. As they go through the target exhibit, they seem to focus upon establishing the names of objects, with particular emphasis on recognizing objects, and expressing their familiarity with them. Typical to their entire discussion are interchanges such as the following, upon encountering a tobacco box, a "Big Wheel" toy bicycle, and a "solrad 9" satellite:

J: Lucky Strikes! Is that a pack of cigarettes?  
'Tobacco box.'  
S: Yeah.

S: A Big Wheel. Oh my God, remember Big Wheels?

J: Oh, that made it?

S: My God. A Big Wheel.

S: What's that? It looks like a sputnik or something.

J: It does. I wonder what it is. This is getting more in our time zone here.

S: Yeah, really.

Susan and Jane typify Recognizers - an interpretive frame in which all visitor pairs rated "high" on establishment, "low" on relating personal experience, and "low" on relating special knowledge. Of six Recognizer pairs, five were found in the history museum, four of which consisted of members who had known each other for a relatively shorter time (less than 5 years). As the above talk sample illustrates, this frame emphasizes the act of establishment, Susan and Jane's first and major interpretive concern in most cases. Rarely is the object itself described or evaluated, and rarely is any specialized knowledge or explicit personal experience brought to bear. Only in the course of recognizing what the object is, and occasionally the date of its creation, do Recognizer pairs make any implicit reference to themselves and their own knowledge.

In talking about their museum experiences in interviews, Recognizers seem to reflect the same concerns for the identification of objects and their own familiarity with them that they emphasize in their actual talk with each other. For example, Person 04 (02H)

complained about the target exhibit, "there were several things that were not identified - and I did not recognize." This same person, when describing a recent museum visit alone, lamented -"I did not recognize some of the things. And perhaps a companion would have known what it was and told me". Other remarks suggest that recognition is perhaps the preferred mode of establishment. As Person 29 (15H) said,

it's more interesting when you see something that you can relate to, and identify with, rather than something that you don't even know what it does, or what function it served, or whatever.

What meaning results from this frame? It appears that Recognizers experience a sense of validation through the encounter of a familiar or self-related item that has been chosen and included by a cultural authority, the museum. In the course of her own conversation above, Jane remarks, "oh, that made it?" -suggesting that the display of the object in the museum was in fact the result of some selection process. Expressing her own excitement in her interview, Jane explained,

They had a couple of things from up state New York and Syracuse. And we're from Syracuse and Utica, and that was like, Oh my God! I can't believe that! That's here. And we were walking through the museum and there was something else from Syracuse and that was neat. You see something from home and I guess that makes it more worthwhile.

Person 43 (22H) described her feeling even more self-reflectively:

We saw the railroad whistle was donated from the Pennsylvania railroad. We're from Pennsylvania, so, it kind of tied something in, too. It's that, we were able to contribute something to the display. Not us physically, but you know, the State of Pennsylvania. You know, that's part of your history, too, that's on display. I think it was neat to see something from Pennsylvania.

The above visitors come to feel as if they are in fact "part of" the museum's authorized account of history. For them, a private or personal connection has been publicly validated and proclaimed as representative. Through their interpretive frame and their attitudes, Recognizers appear to see and find meaning in that which is familiar to them and validated by its inclusion in the museum.

Why might Recognizers appear in the history context primarily, and among pairs who've known each other a shorter time? That they were found in the history museum context seems likely, given the nature of the objects displayed. Unlike the objects in the art museum, many of the items in the Material World exhibit could in fact have been part of visitors' every day experiences. Since visitors appear to view the history museum as an authority on objects worth preserving, they feel validated as a result. The chronological nature of the exhibit might also encourage such emphasis on recall.

Four out of five of those history pairs have known each other for five years or less. Lacking an extensive

common history to draw upon, and perhaps lacking an established or extensive rapport, the interpretive act of establishment might provide a "safe" or less personal focus for conversation than do some of the other acts. Additional analysis of this factor will be provided later in this chapter, when all of the frames are considered together.

## 2. EVALUATORS

Richard and Kathy (01A), both in their twenties, have been married for six years. On a trip back east to visit relatives, they spend a day at the National Gallery of Art. While viewing the target area of American Collection paintings, Richard and Kathy overwhelmingly express and exchange their opinions and judgements regarding the works. Rarely, by comparison, do they evoke acts other than evaluation. Their remarks at three paintings characterize Evaluators, Children Playing on the Beach by Mary Cassatt, Mrs. W.C.H. Endicott by John Singer Sargent, and Lady with a Lute by Thomas Dewing:

R: I don't like that.

K: See, I like this.

R: I don't like children.

K: Mary Cassatt.

R: I'm not into children at all, in paintings.

K: I like that.

R: Um.

K: I was thinking about getting that.

R: Okay.

K: Okay, now I'm not into these.

R: No. Not into people.

K: I'm not into these people.  
R: This does nothing, nothing.  
K: Well, no, I like this one. There's something about that.  
R: I just don't like it.  
K: I think it's the detail.  
R: That's true.  
K: "Lady with a Lute".  
R: It is kind of a refreshing change from the abstract.

Like Richard and Kathy, pairs displaying the Evaluator frame rated "high" on evaluation, "low" on relating personal experience, and "low" on relating special knowledge. Thus the primary focus for Evaluator pairs was on the expression of preference, opinion and judgement. Six out of seven Evaluator pairs were found in the art museum context.

For the majority of interview questions, Evaluators betrayed no particular similarity of attitudes. However, when asked if they had learned or confirmed anything about their companions, Evaluators overwhelmingly emphasized the notion of "taste." Typical of Evaluators, Kathy explained,

Well, I know that he's a very detailed person. And so all the paintings he enjoyed were very detailed. And he also likes very light colored things, and all the paintings that were light, he enjoyed.

Like many Evaluators, Person 100 (20A) responded,

I think I got a real sense of his taste. You know, what he likes and doesn't like.

Thus Evaluators invoked the notion of taste in their responses far more frequently than did other pair types, reflecting the same bias in their own interview discourse as they showed in their talk with each other.

As a result, the meaning made of objects through this frame appears to be highly personal, the result of one's own judgement, or shared opinions. Whether or not one likes a work, and/or agrees with one's companion about such judgement, thus becomes the nature of meaning for Evaluators.

Six out of seven Evaluators are found in the art museum context. Thus, Evaluators can be thought of as an art frame. This seems understandable, given that the discourse of evaluation and taste is a codified aspect of art appreciation, while it is not as firmly in place within the discourse of historical object appreciation.

### 3. PERSONALIZERS

Tom and Jill (04H) are spouses who have been married for 8 years. In their experience of A Material World in NMAH, they display a particular focus - to relate nearly all that they see to aspects of their own personal experience, past and present. Reflecting the Personalizer frame are their comments in response to a dial telephone, a "black beauty" slot machine, a "wall-o-matic" jukebox selector, and a hair comb:



T: We had...in the old house in Salt Lake? Was that exact telephone, just like that.

J: Really?

T: And it was there, the woman next door worked for the phone company, so she arranged to...it was just a rented phone, you know, part of the phone..she arranged to make sure she got it back and put it in her house next door.

J: Really?

T: Cause you couldn't get those anymore.

J: Huh.

T: A slot machine.

J: Yeah. Supposedly that guy Danforth Cullet has a whole basement full of those.

T: Really?

J: Most of em got dumped off the John's old bridge.

T: Why?

J: When they outlawed it in Idaho.

T: Oh. Is that where he got em?

J: No.

J: Don't see those around much anymore either.

T: At the uh, North Highway Cafe.

J: "Wall-o-matic" jukebox.

T: In every booth.

J: Do they still?

T: Yup.

J: Oh.

J: Look at the hair combs.

T: Yeah.

J: Ones like that might even stay in my hair, with those big long teeth.

T: Yeah.

Beverly and Dan (09A), married 20 years, view the American paintings in the National Gallery. In their talk, they also exhibit the Personalizer frame - an overarching focus upon relating personal experiences to the works at hand, including memories, people they know, and places they've been. Typical of their talk are their

following remarks about the works Cape Cod Evening, by Edward Hopper, and Repose, by John Singer Sargent:

B: Looks like those houses that we saw up in, you know, on our trip to Maine, we went on the...

D: Right.

B: At Bar Harbor.

D: When we took the boat across.

B: Um hm.

D: To that lighthouse.

B: "Repose." Looks like Sharon asleep.

D: That's the girl who no one called. Who was supposed to call?

B: Oh it's December 3 in Oregon and Jim didn't ask her to the dance.

D: Right.

B: Um. Did I tell you that, I probably did, that um John Regan's wife said their son went through that too. He wasn't going to any of the dances. With a friend, the night of the dance..

D: He changed his mind?

B: He was the pits, no.

D: Oh, he's all depressed.

B: Yeah, and so John took him out to eat.

D: Uh huh.

Beverly and Dan, and Jill and Tom typify the frame of Personalizers - visitor pairs who rated "high" on relating personal experience, "low" on evaluation, and all but one (09A) "low" on relating special knowledge. Personalizers are characterized by their relating of encountered objects to aspects of their own lives, past and present. Far less often by comparison are instances when specialized knowledge is brought to bear, evaluations given, establishment made or objects described.

The discourse used by Personalizers when reflecting

upon their museum experiences indicates a similar valuing and appreciation of this personal connection or familiarity. Said Person 58 (29H):

A lot of these are things that were familiar to us. And so...we could both identify with what we were looking at, and identify with someone we knew who had one, or could have had one.

Most Personalizers in the history museum made particular reference to the importance of their own memories, or personal past, such as the following:

Person 58 (29H): If it associates to my personal memory, it would be more meaningful.

Person 16 (08H) (when asked what made a museum object meaningful): I guess what you'd have to relate to it. Maybe some part of your past or your present.

Person 59 (30H): It's things that are out of your mind until you come to the museum, then they kind of come back to you, brings it back. That's kind of the reason why I come to the museum, I guess. I'd rather look at the older stuff and invoke memories..That's the way I am.

Person 15 (08H): I just look at the things as reminders of times past, good or bad.

Person 60 (30H): Probably personal memories is going to be what brings it out to me personally.

Similar comments were made by the art viewers. As Person 77 reflected (09A),

Some of the paintings had scenes in it that reminded me of familiar scenes that I've seen in the past...I don't tend to like the modern art so much because I can't relate to it. I haven't experienced what they're trying to portray.

Quite subtly, Person 80 (10A) illustrates an example of making such a personal connection:

Mary Cassatt...those pictures. Little round face kids. I was a round face child, and I still have a round face. But the one where they're digging in the sand. I remember seeing a picture of myself digging in the sand in Lake Michigan. And think I even made the comment, Lake Michigan. Those, I guess made more sense to me than the other ones.

Person 90 (15A) finds paintings meaningful

if I can relate to it. If it's an outdoor scene, if it's something that I've done, someplace I would like to be, if it reminds me of something.

While Person 89 (15A) sums it up,

Just you look at something and you try to place it somewhere in terms of your own experience.

In the art museum, the familiarity and personal connection seems to serve explicitly as an aid to understanding and assessing the painting. In both museums, however, such personal connecting seems to be the preferred frame of response by Personalizer pairs. But what sort of meaning results? Some Personalizers in the history museum expressed the same sense of validation as Recognizers did. For example, Person 60 (30H) said:

We all like things familiar to us. And to see it on a special display, makes it even more familiar and exciting to people, I think.. A lot of the stuff we see out in our shops or our sheds, being stored. Because it's got a special meaning to us and we don't throw them away. And so when you come here, it's exciting, because boy...that's nice enough for them to want to put in our U.S. history museum, and we're using that at home still! You know, so it's a nice feeling.

Unlike Recognizers, however, Personalizers appear to derive great satisfaction from actual reminiscing -

discussing and enjoying the memories or connections invoked by the objects. Rather than focusing primarily or exclusively on the identification of the object, as Recognizers did, Personalizers in both museums share with each other actual details, descriptions and references to persons, places, things, and experiences of their lives. Thus the resulting meaning appears to be dependent upon the relevance of the works to visitors' own experiences, particularly, experiences of the past.

Personalizers were found in both museum contexts, three pairs of the male-female configuration, and four pairs the female-female configuration. All Personalizer pairs, however, consist of individuals who have known each other for a relatively longer time - 6 years or more. Those who have known each other a longer time are likely to have more shared history, common experience and knowledge of each other upon which to draw, and are comfortable enough with each other to do so freely.

#### 4. EVALUATOR-PERSONALIZERS

Kristen and Melissa (13A) are college roommates studying in Washington, D.C. for a year. While visiting the National Gallery, they discuss the paintings A Friendly Call by William Merritt Chase, Children Playing on the Beach by Mary Cassatt and Mrs. W.C.H. Endicott by John Singer Sargent:

K: (laugh) The faceless people.  
M: Imagine wearing a veil?  
K: "A Friendly Call." Melissa, that's you and me.  
  
M: That's excellent. I like that. Jennifer's got that print in her room.  
K: It's so cute. Is that why I've seen it before?  
M: Everywhere.  
K: That would look cute in our apartment. I wonder if, I have to find out where the bookstore is. That's really cute.  
M: That is cute.  
  
K: She looks like...did you see that movie, um...  
M: "Somewhere in Time?"  
K: Yeah, "Somewhere in Time," but also "Flowers in the Attic?" Like the lady from the...  
M: Yes. The scary one?  
K: Yeah. Kinda eerie.

Kristen and Melissa exemplify Evaluator-Personalizers in the art museum - a frame in which both evaluation and relating personal experience were marked "high", while relating special experience was marked "low". Thus there is emphasis on both sharing preferences and judgements, as well as on bringing personal experience to bear, but relatively fewer instances of relating special knowledge, describing objects, or establishing them.

In the history museum, this frame, while maintaining the same "high" and "low" configurations, took on a qualitatively different emphasis: the explicit comparison of one's possessions to the displayed museum objects. Hence, the history museum version of this frame is dubbed Consumers. Elizabeth, age 35, and her mother Margaret, age 63 (18H), exemplify Consumers with their comments

about a porringer, the very first item they encounter, gelatin molds, and a baby bottle:

M: Ooh. Don't we have something like this?

E: Similar. What is it?

M: "D".

E: "Porringer." I don't like this kind of colonial stuff.

M: Yeah, but it also makes you think of what you may have that's...

E: True.

M: Oh I remember these.

E: Yeah, I still have those.

M: This? With "jello" on it?

E: I have those, yup.

M: Oh, you better keep them.

E: Those are the bottles you used to have for us, those baby bottles? Wasn't it?

M: They would be good to have. 1940's, yeah. Pyrex.

While resulting in slightly different qualitative foci, Kristen and Melissa in the art museum, and Margaret and Elizabeth in the history museum both maintain an emphasis on evaluation and relating personal experience in their approach to encountered objects. Like Personalizers, Evaluator-Personalizers in the art museum reflect in their interviews their concern for and desire to connect their own experiences to the works. Melissa, for example, mentioned that what she found meaningful was "something that I can relate to somehow", while Person 71 (06A) explained,

Art is a medium that you find yourself in and you do your own interpretation...And so from there I look at it and let my mind go free as to what I want to say...I'm very aware of the fact that my commentary on the painting is out of my experience, and my life and how I feel.

Like Personalizers and Recognizers, Consumers in the history museum, as well as art Evaluator-Personalizers, typically consider meaningful that which "I can place in my life" (Person 46, 23H); "I'm moved by things that I have a connection with" (Person 45, 23H). Person 30 (15H) explained, "It's stuff that I like in my life so I like to see it elsewhere, too." However, consumers also reflect a unique concern, as in their actual museum talk, for possessions, theirs and those of relatives. As Elizabeth said of her mother,

Everytime she sees celluloid she mentions it. I know we have all this. I know my mother had this and she just recalls things she has or had when she was growing up. It's frightening, cause I find myself doing the same thing.

While Person 52 (26H) noted,

There are a few artifacts that I've seen that we have at home, or other relatives have. Like the Maytag washer. It's neat to compare. The different things that we have to what they have in a museum.

While visitors' own discourse regarding their interest in comparing possessions does not betray any attempts to explain this behavior, their remarks to each other in actual interaction suggest an underlying motivation. Recall the talk of Elizabeth and Margaret. They begin by pointing out that what they see might suggest "what they have that's...". The missing word might well be "valuable", once again a specific status conferred by the museum. Much of their talk includes



references to saving. In speaking of a hula hoop, Elizabeth laments, "Hula hoop. That's about when I had my hula hoop. Why didn't I save it?" And upon encountering a Bic safety razor, Elizabeth laughs, "Am I supposed to save the Bic safety razor?" Similarly, Person 52 (26H), also visiting the museum with her mother, is interested to know if the comb that her grandmother owned is still in the family's possession:

- 51: I can remember seeing some of those, like "k".  
The ivory.  
52: Wait, Grandma had some?  
51: Um hm.  
52: You still have 'em?  
51: I doubt it.

Perhaps most explicitly suggestive, Pair 23H, two sisters, remark on the bicycles:

- 45: Look at these bikes.  
46: Here's the garage sale. Doesn't it look like a garage sale?  
45: Yeah. It's like the things we sold when we sold our house. And Mom didn't know the value.

Thus Consumers notice the artifacts which relate to themselves in a highly specific way. Meaning for them is the conferral of value upon their own or possibly obtainable possessions.

Combining the cases in both museum contexts, Evaluator-Personalizers tend to be female-female pairs with 7 out of 9 cases of that gender configuration. The Consumer version is indeed a history pattern, with all 6 cases occurring in that museum. Five out of six Consumer cases are also female-female pairs. To make sense of

these variations, consider each museum context separately. Evaluator-Personalizers are found in the art museum since the frame brings together two main ways of relating to art already found in that context. And the other version of this frame, Consumers, occurs in the history context, given the nature of those objects as actual or potential possessions. The display of this frame mainly by women pairs invokes the cultural association of women with shopping and consumerism. More specifically, however, 3 out of 5 cases of Consumers were female relatives, who are often considered to be the "keepers" of family tradition, especially regarding objects and possessions (cf. Musello, 1986). To all Evaluator-Personalizers, the meaning of things appears to be a highly personal connection - that which one likes and is familiar with. For history museum visitors particularly, the meaning invoked with this frame is the apparent appraisal and validation of one's particular possessions as valuable and worth saving.

##### 5. COMPETENTS

Ed and Barbara (24H), married 24 years, visit the National Museum of American History during their vacation in Washington, D.C. Their talk about the target exhibit represents a frame and emphasis quite different than those discussed thus far. Seldom do they refer to any personal experiences, make evaluations, or "recognize" objects.

Instead, they focus on describing the objects before them, often referring to the "materials" theme of the exhibit, and upon relating their own special knowledge to the objects at hand. Their talk represents that of Competents, exemplified by the following remarks about an anvil, the very first object they encounter, a "white lightening" baseball bat, and a pipe made of calabash.

E: Hmm. Look at the anvil.

B: "Natural materials".

E: Yeah.

B: Oh, it's in chronological order.

E: Huh?

B: Chronological order.

E: What? It is?

B: Yeah.

E: Oh. That anvil's neat.

B: Each one's chronological order on a certain topic, it looks like.

E: Oh, okay. What's this one here?

B: This is all metals.

E: "Materials Panorama."

E: Plastic baseball bat. "Material Messages." That's a conglomeration there.

B: Well you go from metals to plastics, from wood. So wood was the natural product?

E: Wood was first. Oh I see. They went wood to plastics.

B: And metal. Wood and metal.

E: Yeah, okay.

B: And these were all combinations.

E: Combinations of different materials.

B: Yeah.

E: What's "h" then? Meerschaum. Yeah.

B: Calabash. But isn't that something that's put together? Isn't calabash mixed?

E: It's a kind of pottery clay, I think.

B: Yeah. So it's not natural.

Dave and Julie (23A) are business associates, in Washington for a convention. Walking through the American collection in the National Gallery, they also

display the talk of Competents, about the paintings Vanderbilt, by James McNeill Whistler, Street in Venice by John Singer Sargent, and Wapping on Thames, also by James McNeill Whistler:

D: Oh, Whistler.  
J: Is that Whistler, 'Whistler's mother' Whistler?  
D: Yeah. Yeah.  
J: Oh! I got to stand back and look at this. Is that him? Is that Whistler himself?  
D: No. George Vanderbilt.  
J: Whistler painted him. Okay.  
D: A lot of the Americans were still doing portraits.  
J: So these were being painted in America about the same time the impressionists were...  
D: Yeah, uh huh.  
  
J: This is an interesting... 'Street in Venice.' This doesn't look like his.  
D: But it's got the dark colors I've seen in all of his things.  
J: Yeah.  
  
D: Now Whistler seems more versatile to me.  
J: Um hm.  
D: You know? There was that really foggy or snowy impressionist thing.  
J: Right.  
D: And the real traditional portrait of Vanderbilt, you know? Now this is really complex.  
J: Yeah, it really is.  
D: Scenes through the lines and so on.  
J: Um hm. Um hm.

Barbara and Ed, and Dave and Julie typify Competents, a talk frame in which pairs rated "high" on relating special knowledge, and "low" on relating personal experience. Some pairs in this group also rated "high" on evaluation or absolute object description. 7 of the 10 cases were found in the history museum, and all 3 art cases were male-female pairs. As the above examples

illustrate, this talk is characterized by an emphasis upon relating that which one knows about the objects, and thus showing one's competence. In the history museum particularly, this frame is also characterized by a greater than average concern for the theme of the exhibit, materials. As the attitudes reflected in the interviews of Competent pairs differ slightly for art and history, each will be considered in turn.

In their interviews, some of the history Competents make reference to valuing things to which they connect personally. However, their interview discourse reflects two main points which have not been emphasized by any other frame thus far - the expression of a more objective and communicative notion about the "meaning" of objects, and second, a "familiarity" based on specialized knowledge and the apparent valuing of opportunities to connect and show such knowledge.

Unlike pairs of the previous frames, for whom the "meaning" of objects appeared to be quite personally defined, history Competents provide notions of a far more objective nature when asked what makes a museum object "meaningful" to them. Person 14 (07H) said that he

wonder[ed] about the person or persons who are responsible for it.

Person 28 (14H) explained,

I like to see items from everyday life. To me, that tells me a whole lot more than a frock coat worn by George Washington.

Or, as Person 13 (07H) said,

I think it just imparts that sense of time and place of when the object was made.

Such comments from Competents, unlike those of previous frames, subtly suggest that information or messages about people and times are inferred from the objects.

In their interviews, Competents also show interest in the opportunity to express and apply their own previous knowledge. This can be thought of as a type of familiarity, although one based on knowledge rather than personal experience, as in other frames. Typical of history Competents, Person 34 (17H) explains,

I just feel the more you know about something, the more meaning its going to have for you.

Person 33 (17H):

It's meaningful to me if I'm familiar with it. If I know that particular time period well, then I can associate the object better than something I'm not as familiar with.

Person 22 (11H):

It's the things I know a little bit about that I want to look at and learn more about them.

For these people, then, meaning appears to result from familiarity with what one knows about, offering an opportunity to express competence.

While Competents in art do not particularly convey a desire to relate what they know, they do, however, seem to focus on the artist, and the existence of a message from the artist as the main source of a painting's meaning.

They acknowledge this, yet also tend to express self-consciousness about their own ability to access this "message." Person 106 (23A) said:

Sometimes a piece of art will speak to you in particular, and another piece won't. And maybe that piece will talk to somebody else but not you...I'm still in the stage where I get impressed because the artist happened to be Rembrandt...or, that's Van Gogh. Or, to see a Picasso.

At first, Person 105 (23A) described,

I'm sure the artist had something in mind often, but the wonderful thing about art is that it triggers different meaning for different people and that's ok with me.

However, later that same person explained,

I admit that with a little education it might have some meaning for me...like some expressionist things. I have friends for whom it says nothing and yet with a little background information I find them highly meaningful... because I understand a little more about what he was trying to do, and then it starts saying something to me.

Person 102 (21) said simply, "I think that somewhere they may be trying to give some sort of message." And, perhaps most elaborately, Person 115 (28A) explained that what makes a painting meaningful to him is,

Whether I can get inside the mind of the artist and try and understand what he is trying to tell me as a viewer. And what he was trying to put down on canvas that he was seeing. Obviously some of that comes from the naming of the painting, from the artist's side of it. But if you can get in synch with what the artist is trying to do.

Thus Competents in art acknowledge and focus upon a message from the artist, although they seem to imply that

one must have the knowledge or training to access or understand the message. Interestingly, both art and history Competents suggest the object as mediator in some sort of communication process, either conveying information about the people who used it or made it, or conveying the artist's vision.

7 out of 10 Competents were found in the history museum. This may be explained by the fact that in the history museum, the theme of materials, although fairly subtle, is conveyed through the explanatory labels. This might have served to direct people's attention and meaning-making to an object-focused mode. However, of the 3 Competent pairs in the art museum, all are male-female pairs, and across museum, 7 out of 10 of all Competent pairs are male-female configurations. Perhaps it is the combination of men with women as compared to women with women which for some reason encourages a focus on competence. This possibility will be considered further when the frames are viewed together.

#### 6. COMPETENT-PERSONALIZERS

Carol and Shelley (27A) are friends and fellow art teachers, visiting the National Gallery. In their remarks about the target works, they emphasize not only specialized knowledge, but their own personal experiences, as well. By comparison, the other three acts occur rarely.



Their talk, like that of other Competent-Personalizers, consists typically of comments such as the following, about the paintings A Friendly Call by William Merritt Chase, The Biglin Brothers Racing by Thomas Eakins, and New York by George Bellows:

C: No comment.

S: What do you mean? These guys are all American impressionists, I think.

C: Um hm.

S: Well, I know they are. Now this guy, I have always liked his paintings. Remember the ones we saw at Carnegie? William Merritt Chase. Those great portraits?

C: Does he have one with walls?

S: Yes.

C: Of other paintings all over the wall?

S: Yes. I think so.

C: Looks like Boathouse Row, Philadelphia.

S: Did you ever see the Eakins show when it was in Philadelphia?

C: Um hm.

S: I never went to that. I wish I would have. I don't know what I was doing when it was there.

C: Um. I don't remember anything shockingly different about it.

S: Um hm.

C: New York City?

S: Uh huh.

C: Yup, New York City.

S: That's George Bellows. I'm impressed. Cause I only knew that he did those boxing things. I never knew that he did...

C: Another Mellon collection.

S: Oh yeah.

C: It's amazing how much New York looks like that now, you know what I mean?

S: What, dirty and the polluted air and stuff?

C: No. But I mean the buildings, and that was a long time ago. Buildings were pretty big.

S: Yeah.

C: '1911'

S: Have you ever seen the thing I have at home, The Changing City? It's like a book, but it isn't a book. It's a series of posters?

C: Next time you come over I'll try to remember to show it to you. It's done by a German guy and it starts with a city in 1953 and it's a drawing, like this big. And then every three years they draw the city up until '73, I think it's 20 years. And you see the changes that occur. It's incredible. I mean...

S: I would think so.

C: You look at it and you're like, oh no!

Carol and Shelley typify Competent-Personalizers - pairs who rate "high" on relating specialized knowledge, "high" on relating personal experience, "low" on evaluation, and all but one "low" on absolute object description. As the above example illustrates, Competent-Personalizers are characterized by a high degree of relating both special knowledge as well as personal experience while viewing the works. In particular, Competent-Personalizers appear to relate a noticeable amount of references to other museum and/or aesthetic experiences among their "personal experience." All 5 Competent-Personalizers were found in the art museum, and 4 out of 5 of them were female-female pairs.

In their interviews, Competent-Personalizers echo this focus on their own competence and museum experience. Far more often than any other group, Competent-Personalizers made reference to their own aesthetic interests, including mention of art classes they've had, or the desire to relate encountered works to those they know about. This attitude is similar to that expressed by

Competents in the history museum. For Carol, for example, what makes art meaningful is,

The whole creative process...the style, the technique...I try to relate what I know about artists of that period before, after...try to appreciate it in its total context.

Person 93 (17A) said, "there were a lot that I recognized from classes and other books and things", while her companion, Person 94 said, "it reminded me of my art history class in college." Thus Competent-Personalizers appear to make meaning through the relation of previous specialized knowledge about the works, and previous museum-going experiences in general, to the works at hand.

Like Competents in art, most Competent-Personalizers also acknowledge a message or intention of the artist. Shelley said,

You know that the person painted it for a reason, but that reason could be anything from wanting to represent real life, to wanting to communicate a political idea.

Person 64 (02A) explained:

I think the painter had a lot more in mind than just making the picture of what you were seeing there. There's got to be an idea behind it, unless you read a book with the painting in it you have to come up with your own meanings I guess. It's useful to read a book or a guide before you see a painting for that very reason.

Like Competents, Competent-Personalizers imply an awareness that background information or knowledge is necessary to understand the artist's "message". Unique to Competent-Personalizers is that they stress in their talk

their own personal experiences, often shared museum experiences, as well as relating specialized knowledge.

All 5 Competent-Personalizers were found in the art museum context, and 4 out of 5 of them were female-female pairs. While it is found in the art museum only, this frame is notably similar to that of Competents. Both emphasize the relating of specialized knowledge in talk as well as in interview response, and both show an awareness of and concern for the artist's intentions. However, Competent-Personalizers also rate highly on personal experience, although it principally regards other museum or aesthetic experiences. The 4 female-female pairs of this frame are friends who visit museums together. This suggests two possible interpretations. It may be that such pairs of female friends stress both their own competence as well as their shared backgrounds of experience during their activity, forming a particular interpretive community. It might also be the case that female-female pairs are more likely than male-female pairs to include an emphasis upon personal experience in their talk. This seems plausible, as Competents in art, who are all male-female pairs, do not rate high on personal experience.

#### 7. MULTIFRAMERS

Renee and Lynn (03A) are friends who've known each

other for less than 1 year. They visit the National Gallery while their husbands, who work together, are at a conference. Their talk typifies that of Multiframers, as they encounter the paintings Dr. John Brinton by Thomas Eakins, and Three Brazilian Hummingbirds by Martin Johnson Heade:

R: I love the way that rug is painted!  
L: Huh?  
R: I love the way that rug is painted. I paint rugs.  
L: Yeah, that's where your eye goes.  
R: Yeah, and it probably isn't a good painting because of that. Oh and it's an Eakins and I love Eakins, isn't that funny? Usually the first thing you look at in an Eakins is the face, cause the face is so rich. In Philadelphia they have a lot of nice...  
L: But here it's not significant in the painting.  
  
R: This is strange, I don't know this one at all. Isn't that weird?  
L: Yes that's good. I like it though.  
R: Do you?  
L: Yes I do. Cause it's so realistic. Well, it also has birds. I do like birds. It's colorful, too.  
R: It kind of relates to the Erte that you like. You know, in its laciness, and its whimsical, fantasy quality, too.  
L: Yeah, yeah.  
R: Funny, I've never seen it before. When was it painted?  
L: Heade, do you know Heade?  
R: '1871'. No, huh uh.  
L: "Three Brazilian Hummingbirds."  
R: My sister has humming birds outside her window.  
L: And there is a palm tree.  
R: My sister has hummingbirds outside her window.  
L: Oh God.  
R: It's so nice to see them there.

Jed and Holly (03H) are fiances who've known each other for 2 years. As they explore A Material World in the history museum, they also typify the talk of

Multiframers, as seen in the following remarks about a powder horn and a mid 19th century hair comb:

- J: There's a big horn. Powder horn.  
H: Uh huh.  
J: That's scrimshaw on there. I want to do that to that horn that I've got but I don't know what I'm going to hold in it.  
H: You know, we saw a display the other day, um, it was all scrimshaw? Oh, it was with the Eskimos?  
J: Yeah.  
H: And it never used the word scrimshaw in the whole display. So I don't know where the word comes from. But that's what it was.  
J: That comes from whalers.  
H: It was not an eskimo word.  
J: Um hm.  
H: But it was all scrimshaw work, and the word was never used in the display, but it was on the Native American.  
J: Um.
- J: How do you like this here? That's a lot of work to cut that out.  
H: Gorgeous. Yeah. I have a, I don't know if it's Indian or not, but it's silver with turquoise, you've seen it, at home, it has turquoise in it, it's silver...  
J: Um  
H: It's Navaho.  
J: You have a tiara like this?  
H: Not a tiara, a comb.  
J: Oh, a comb?  
H: These are hair combs. But I gave one to Johnnie for some time when they didn't have any money, and I had two of them, and I wrapped one up and gave it to her for her birthday or something.  
J: Um. Oh.  
H: That's real pretty. Very oriental type things, you know? Real beautiful.

Renee and Lynn, and Jed and Holly represent Multiframers, pairs who rated "high" on relating special knowledge, relating personal experience, evaluation and absolute object description in their talk. This is the only frame to contain "high" ratings on more than 2 of the

acts. Like Competent-Personalizers, these pairs bring both special knowledge and personal experience to bear. However, they also rate high on evaluation comments and descriptive comments as well. While found in both museum contexts, there appeared to be a possible gender configuration link. All art Multiframers are female-female pairs (4), while all history Multiframers (5) are male-female pairs. While similar in talk focus, the attitudes of these two groups appeared to be slightly different.

Notably, the comments of art Multiframers about the meaning of objects appear to reflect their awareness of and belief in a variety of ways to relate to a work. In particular, they cite formal elements and artists' meanings, as well as personal reactions and experiences as sources of a work's meaning. While pairs of other frames have mentioned either of these topics, Multiframers uniquely include mention of both (or more) components of meaning. Typifying such explanations, Person 65 (03A) remarked,

You can do it, appreciate art, a variety of ways. You can like art because it has an impact on you sensually, or you can like it because you understand more about the artist. Its a personal kind of thing, very personal.

Person 66 (03A): I can relate to every kind of painting in a different way. Some for the scene, some for the place I've been, but then just some for a painting idea.

Person 96 (18A): It can be all kinds of things. It can be subject matter, or it can be technique, or it can be colors, or it isn't any one thing. Could be an association.

Person 98 (19A): Meaning? Sometimes I just look at a painting and you get a response from it without thinking about what the artist was trying to say. But I think that's always a second step. You look at it, you get a feeling, you're immediately impacted emotionally, and then the second phase of looking at a picture is that you actually try to think of what the artist was trying to say. What makes it meaningful is your own experience from the past, and whether you just generally like the color and composition and all that stuff.

Person 110 (25A): Probably right at first it's maybe colors that you're responding to. And a certain kind of form. And things maybe that have been experiences of yours that remind you of something else. And it's putting down thought that you might have had that maybe you weren't able to catch what you were thinking about and it shows that. And sometimes you like something, and sometimes you don't.

The history Multiframers, while exhibiting the same emphases in their talk transcripts as did the art Multiframers, stressed two attitudes in their interviews unique among the various history frames. First was the acknowledgement of the many ways to respond to and make meaning of a work, similar to the attitude expressed among art Multiframers.

Person 01 (01H): There's the way that the person who decided to put the exhibit together, what they were trying to get across, but then, we're human beings - we're not machines. We can interpret it in anyway that we want. There's got to be a theme...you can put a label on it, but it's whatever each individual here wants to look at. This was on the materials that go to make up something, but I thought, hey, this is a lot of my past.



Person 06 (03H): I think everybody's message is a little bit different. Someone might like a pretty natural dye that was used in a Navajo rug, or someone might like to see a piece of metal and how it was turned, but I think that's all different for everybody.

Person 50 (25H): Sometimes I thought that you were trying to show in this particular exhibit that materials determined sometimes the items that were used. But sometimes I didn't care about the material. It was just the item that was kind of fun to see...

Typically, Multiframers, as these examples illustrate, felt there was a variety of ways to make meaning of a work.

Person 17 (09H) explained that an object is meaningful

when you can associate with some personal experience or artifact. That I think gives it a lot more meaning. But the other reason, other than associating it with something you know or something you're interested in it, something that adds a dimensional piece of knowledge. It's not as if 'oh I know that and I'm remembering it'...but it adds something wholly new.

This emphasis and value upon learning and experiencing the new was the second attitude unique among the history frames. As the above comment suggests, this is distinct from the attitude of history Competents, who wish to connect something that they already know:

Person 02 (01H): I love the things that I'm not familiar with, that I've not seen before.

Person 41 (21H): For me when I see things in the museum, I like to get as much information about that object as possible.

As Person 50 explains in detail,

The ones that mean the most to me are the ones that I have not used, did not know what they were, and then had them described or told to me what it was....But the ones that maybe are not from your locality or...your time are more interesting because it tells you something about that time and place.

History Multiframers, like Competents, appear to emphasize a more objective notion of the meaning of objects, acknowledging the existence of some message or information to be gained. However, they uniquely stress the desire to learn new information, as compared to the opportunity to show that which they already know. Multiframers in both contexts appear to reflect an awareness of and interest in multiple ways of relating to an encountered object. In particular, they highlight and combine the two previous and mutually exclusive modes of relating - relating the personal and subjective, and relating specialized knowledge and the more objective and communicative sense of meaning.

Multiframers are found in both museum contexts, but the frame appears to be gender-linked. All Multiframers in the art museum are female-female pairs, while all in the history museum are male-female pairs. The attitudes they express also appear to vary by museum context. Lacking explanatory labelling near the works, it is difficult for visitors in the art context to actually learn new information from the exhibit as the history visitors can in their exhibit. As for the gender link,

recall from the description of the sample in Chapter Three that the extent of special experience in the different museum contexts was similarly gender linked - more men than women reported special experience in the subject matter of history, while more women than men reported special experience in the subject matter of art than history. Perhaps it is those pairs with the most special experience or competence in the subject matter that have at their disposal the widest variety of ways of relating to the objects.

#### A Summary of the Frames

Before considering the relationship of the frames to each other, let us briefly recap the distinguishing features of each of the seven interpretive frames found in visitor talk.

Recognizers, found primarily among shorter time known pairs in the history museum, rated high on establishment only, and expressed in their interviews a desire to know what things are and to see things that they recognize.

Evaluators, found primarily in the art museum, rated high on the act of evaluation only, and typically referred to the notion of taste in their interview responses.

Personalizers, found in both museums, but among pairs who have known each other a longer time, rated high on relating personal experience and low on relating special

knowledge. In history, Personalizers expressed a particular thrill at reminiscing and connecting memories, while in art, the personal connection appeared to be the way in which visitors related to and understood the work itself.

Evaluator-Personalizers are pairs who rated high on evaluation and relating personal experience, and low on relating special knowledge. While they were found in both museums, and primarily among female-female pairs, their qualitative foci varied slightly by museum. In the art context, Evaluator-Personalizers seemed to personalize through sharing experiences as well as tastes, and reflected attitudes similar to those of Personalizers. In history, Evaluator-Personalizers took the specific form of Consumers, pairs who appraised the worth of their own possessions in comparison to the objects on display, and conveyed the attitude that the museum is in fact a validating authority on value in their interviews as well.

Quite different from the previous frames, Competents rated high on relating special knowledge and low on relating personal experience, representing a more "distanced" or "aesthetic" approach (cf. Bourdieu, 1980, 1984). Found in both museum contexts, Competents expressed far more objective and communicative notions of meaning regarding objects, acknowledging and emphasizing that the object conveys a message of some sort. History

Competents conveyed a desire to show their competence by connecting that which they know. Art Competents are predominantly male-female pairs.

Existing only in the art context and among female-female pairs are Competent-Personalizers, who rated high on relating special experience as well as relating special knowledge. Like art Competents, they reflected an awareness of and focus upon the artist's intention, and like history Competents, seemed to stress their own competence. Uniquely, however, they also included references to their own experiences, often those involving other aesthetic experiences or museum visits.

Last but not least are Multiframers, the only frame in which visitors rated "high" on more than two categories - namely, relating personal experience, relating special knowledge, evaluation, and absolute object description. Found in both museum contexts, Multiframers appeared to be gender-linked - all cases in the history museum were male-female pairs, while all in the art museum were female-female pairs. In attitude, all Multiframers reflected an awareness of and interest in a variety of ways to respond to an object, acknowledging a message or information that co-exists with one's more subjective sensemaking. Uniquely, history Multiframers reflected a desire to learn new information.

## INTERPRETING THE FRAMES AND THEIR VARIATIONS

While the seven interpretive frames exhibited in museum visitor talk appear distinct and compelling, they are each displayed by relatively small numbers of pairs. However, they do appear to reflect several dominant ways of relating to objects as found in the existing interdisciplinary literature on people and material culture. What, if any, larger theoretical grouping might be made to integrate and account for the variation in frames within the sample at large?

A three-step examination reveals the larger order significance of the patterns and their variations. First, the differences in act emphasis within the talk frames alone suggest that there are four general categories of frames. Secondly, when variations in visitor attitudes are also considered, these four categories collapse further to reveal three major modes by which visitor pairs make meaning of museum objects. Finally, within this tri-modal typology, the significance of internal variation, possibly related to such variables as gender configuration, museum type, and time known, becomes much clearer. Each of these three steps will now be briefly addressed.

### Step One: Examining the Talk Frames

How might the interpretive frames be further grouped to explain broader trends in meaning-making approach?

When considered independently of the visitor pairs who invoke them, the seven interpretive frames in visitors' transcripts vary clearly on the basis of one major act configuration. In short, the combined ratings on the interpretive acts of relating personal experience and relating special knowledge appear to drive all variations of interpretive frames. These two acts form an internal unit by which the seven frames clearly collapse into four general categories for preliminary review. Despite the variation of other acts, and their contributions to the frames, the factors of relating experience and relating special knowledge appear to distinguish all seven frames. Table 5:1 indicates the four resulting categories:

TABLE 5:1: FIRST-STEP REGROUPING OF FRAMES:  
ON EXPERIENCE/KNOWLEDGE CONFIGURATION

- Category 1: "low" on experience, "low" on knowledge:  
Recognizers and Evaluators
- Category 2: "high" on experience, "low" on knowledge:  
Personalizers and Evaluator-Personalizers
- Category 3: "low" on experience, "high" on knowledge:  
Competents
- Category 4: "high" on experience, "high" on knowledge:  
Competent-Personalizers and Multiframers

In Category 1 we find Recognizers and Evaluators. In both of these frames, visitors rated "low" on relating personal experience as well as "low" on relating special

knowledge. The meaning of objects through this frame comes from an emphasis on another act, establishment or evaluation, respectively. Neither personal experience nor special knowledge play a defining role.

In Category 2 we find Personalizers and Evaluator-Personalizers. These are the frames in which relating personal experience rates "high", and is the main source of meaning, while relating special knowledge rates "low."

Category 3 contains the reverse; for Competents in both museums, relating special knowledge rates "high" and is the operative action, while relating special experience rates "low".

In the fourth and final configuration are the Competent-Personalizers and the Multiframers, rating "high" on both experience and special knowledge. In this category, meaning is made through both interpretive acts (as well as others).

Thus the seven frames reveal four larger categories or approaches in talk which emphasize either 1) an act other than personal experience or special knowledge 2) personal experience 3) special knowledge 4) personal experience and special knowledge and other acts interpretive acts.

### Step Two: A Three-Part Typology

When these four categories of frames are considered in light of visitors' interview responses, there clearly



emerge three major ways or modes by which visitor pairs relate to museum objects - the Subjective mode, the Objective mode, and the Combination mode. Consider the following.

The Subjective mode consists of frames in Categories 1 and 2. While the frames in Category 1 do not emphasize relating personal experience as do those in Category 2, all visitor pairs in both of these categories reflect similar attitudes in their interviews. For both, the source of meaning of displayed objects appears to be quite personal and subjective, be it one's taste, familiarity, or more elaborate memories or personal associations as brought to bear upon the work. So, while the frames in Category 1 do not emphasize personal experience per se, they do emphasize in both talk and attitude other relatively subjective and personal ways of making meaning, and can thus be collapsed into one group.

In contrast to these Subjective mode frames, the talk and attitude of visitor pairs in Category 3 are quite different. Stressing only special knowledge, these visitor pairs regard the source of meaning as far more objective - a message or communication from or about the artist or the users of the object, meaning which can be accessed through the application of one's own special knowledge. And, while the Competent-Personalizers frame technically invokes both personal experience and special

knowledge, the focus and attitude of these visitor pairs is strikingly similar to that of the Competents, stressing the objective meaning and previous museum experience which reflect Competents. Thus, the frames of Category 3 together with Competent-Personalizers represent the Objective mode.

The remaining frames of Category 4, namely, the Multiframers, display a very different approach. In attitude as well as in speech, these visitor pairs recognize and emphasize both subjective and objective ways of relating to objects. Thus they represent the Combination mode.

When speech emphases and visitor attitudes are combined, we thus see clearly the existence of three major modes through which visitor pairs make meaning of artifacts - that of subjective frames, objective frames, and through those frames which combine the two. The significance of this finding will be discussed shortly.

### Step Three: Internal Relationships of Interpretive Frames

While the nature of the interpretive frames and visitor attitudes suggest three modes of meaning-making, those modes contain seven interpretive frames and some intriguing relationships between the variables of museum context, gender, and time known. While the numbers involved in these cases are indeed too small to yield definitive connections, a look at these internal

variations suggests some compelling possibilities for understanding why certain frames might be invoked by some visitor pairs rather than others. This section will outline and compare the internal variation of frames within the 3 modes.

Table 5:2 lists the 5 different frames which constitute the Subjective Mode. For all, the focus of meaning making is upon relating one's self, taste, experiences or own life to create relevance and meaning. What might explain the use of one subjective frame over another? There are three connections - to the museum context, to the amount of time visitor pairs have known each other, and to the gender configuration of the pair. In each museum context there exists a "safe" or low self-disclosing frame which is related in the art museum to shorter-known pairs, a more in-depth or self-disclosive frame related in both museums to longer known pairs, and lastly, a frame particular to female-female pairs. The exact nature of the "safe" frame and the "female-female" frame varies somewhat, due to the nature of the discourses invoked and codified by the particular museum contexts, in interaction with the pair type. Let us consider each in turn.

At the first "level" of subjective frames, Recognizers and Evaluators, there exists a difference by museum type. In the history museum, we find Recognizers -

who react through familiarity and personal relevance to the objects they see, while in the art museum, we find Evaluators, who give their preference to works they see. While neither invoke personal experience directly, both involve connections between the self and the object. These frames reflect the discourses which are traditionally associated with each respective museum context - history includes an emphasis on establishing what the item is, while art includes a greater emphasis on expressing taste.

TABLE 5:2: INTERPRETIVE FRAMES WITHIN THE SUBJECTIVE MODE

HISTORY:	Recognizers (shorter time known)	Personalizers (longer time known)	Consumers (e-p) (female-female)
ART:	Evaluators	Personalizers (longer time known)	Evaluator- Personalizers (female-female)

That Recognizers are predominantly shorter time known pairs begins to make sense when we compare them to Personalizers, a far more explicitly self-disclosing frame, invoked predominantly by those who've known each other for a longer time. It thus seems likely that shorter-known pairs may lack the shared knowledge base and/or the comfort to self-disclose in the way that Personalizers do, who've known each other a longer time.

Lastly, among the subjective frames, there appears to exist a version specifically connected to female-female pairs, with a slightly different qualitative focus in each museum. The Consumer focus in the history museum may be explained when we consider these objects as potentially ownable. We can also speculate that the concern for family possessions and the discourse of consumerism, as in society at large, emerge here as a more likely domain for female pairs as compared to male-female pairs. While the art cases only number 3, their significance as all female pairs will be seen shortly.

TABLE 5:3: INTERPRETIVE FRAMES WITHIN THE OBJECTIVE MODE

History:	Competents	
Art:	Competents (male-female)	Competent-Personalizers (female-female)

As Table 5:3 indicates, there are 2 frames within the Objective Mode - Competents, and Competent-Personalizers. Within this mode, we find one possible connection - to the variable of gender configuration in the art museum context. While Competents are found in both museum contexts, there in fact exist two objective frames in the art museum that seem connected to gender configuration. Although small, these connections suggest that perhaps there is a gender distinction in the expression of competence in art, that is not found in this sample in the

history museum. While the male-female pairs (only 3) emphasize special knowledge only within the frame of Competents, the female-female pairs in fact invoke personal experience along with their special knowledge (in the frame of Competent-Personalizers). This suggests two possible readings. Given that the Competent-Personalizers were all female-female friends, it may be that female-female friends who visit art museums often form a particular interpretive community, for whom reference to their own competence as well as to previous or shared museum experiences are both critical parts of their approach to objects. This is not the case for the particular male-female Competent pairs. Or, it could be the case that female-female pairs, as compared to male-female pairs, are simply more likely to include the relation of personal experience in their appreciation of artifacts. This later notion is further supported when we reconsider that the only subjective frame to combine personalizing with another way of relating, namely, Evaluator-Personalizers, was also exhibited by female-female pairs. This suggests that in general, female-female pairs may be more likely than male-female pairs to invoke personal experience as a major component of their sense-making.

Lastly, in the Combination Mode, the Multiframers also display an interesting relationship to gender

configuration in interaction with museum context. Table 5:4 below shows that while all cases in the history museum were male-female, all those in art were female-female. This suggests that the Multiframer attitude is related to subject matter competence. Recall that the description of the study sample indicated that women were more likely than men to have special experience in art, while men were more likely than women to have such experience in history. Or, if in fact women are more likely to invoke personal association than men, this tendency may interact with gender-related competence to result in these configuration differences.

TABLE 5:4: INTERPRETIVE FRAMES WITHIN THE COMBINATION MODE

History:	Multiframers (male-female)
Art:	Multiframers (female-female)

This study began by asking how meaning-making strategies might vary for female-female pairs as compared to male-female pairs, in art as compared to history museums. The resulting answers are not quite so neat, nor the samples big enough, to offer definitive answers about these variations. However, given these constraints, and the previous analysis, a brief suggestive profile will now be provided for each of the four museum experiences

examined in this study. The extent to which these relationships bear out as definitive variables must be explored in further studies.

### The Art Museum Experience

In the art museum, visitor pairs exhibit three primary ways of making meaning - through a Subjective mode, an Objective mode, or a Combination mode. Unique to the art context are two particular frames - Evaluators, a subjective frame that seems to stem from the codified discourse of art appreciation, and Competent-Personalizers, an objective frame that is unique to female-female friends, suggesting that this group may be a particular interpretive community within the art museum audience.

In general, pairs who display subjective frames in the art museum appear to derive meaning from relating their own tastes, experiences and memories to the work at hand. This way of relating appears to provide an avenue for relating to the content of the painting. Pairs who display objective frames, on the other hand, stress their own knowledge of and competencies in art in order to access or comprehend messages or intentions of the artist. The meaning of the work thus appears to be that which is intended by the artist and accessible by the viewer. Lastly, pairs who display combination frames, female-



females specifically, combine both subjective and objective ways of relating to artwork, acknowledging and seeking to access the artists' intentions, yet sharing and valuing their own personal reactions and subjective responses as well.

### The History Museum Experience

As in the art context, there are three major ways of making meaning of objects in the history museum - through the Subjective, Objective, and Combination modes. Unique to the history context are two particular subjective frames, owing to the specific nature of history objects - Recognizers, the short-time known pair's connection to familiar things, and Consumers, the female-female pair's emphasis on possessions. In subjective frames, the overarching meaning of things appears to be the thrill of connecting one's own personal experience, memory or ownership to that which is publicly authorized and validated by the museum. For those displaying objective frames, the focus is rather upon connecting one's knowledge to recognize and elaborate upon factual aspects of the object, such as its users or makers or a particular theme or time period, as conveyed by the objects and exhibit labels. For combination frames, male-female pairs particularly, meaning is derived through both subjective

and objective connections, with a unique focus on learning new information from the exhibit labels.

### The Influence of Museum Context

The specific museum context, whether art or history, evokes particular frame variations as related to the codified aspects of discourse regarding the type of artifacts in each museum. Given the existence of historical artifacts in our everyday lives, such discourses as consumerism and recognition are evoked when such objects are encountered in the museum as well. And, given the strongly codified discourse of art appreciation, evaluation is a key response evoked within the art context.

### The Female-Female Museum Experience

Unique to female-female pairs of both museums is the Evaluator-Personalizers frame and the Competent Personalizers frame. Multiframers in the art context are also uniquely female pairs. The data suggest that female pairs, in interaction with museum context, may in fact be more likely than male-female pairs to relate personal experience when making meaning of objects, to invoke the discourse of consumerism, and to reflect competence in talk about art.

### The Male-Female Museum Experience

Unique to male-female pairs are the Competence frames in art, and the Multiframer frame in history. The data suggest that male-female pairs may be less likely to invoke personal experience, and may in fact be more likely than female-female pairs to reflect competence in talk about history objects.

### The Influence of Gender Configuration

The likely influence of gender configuration appears to work in interaction with museum context. Of particular note, there appears to be a connection between females and art competence, and males and history competence, as expressed through talk and self-reported attitudes.

### The Influence of Time Known

While this study did not set out to explore the influence of the amount of time pair members had known each other, this factor emerged as potentially significant for its connection to the particular subjective frame evoked. While the "median split" into 5 years or less and 6 years or more is a crude measure of time known, the reader is reminded that the average years' duration of relationships in these two groups are 2 as compared to 15. In the history museum, pairs who've known each other a shorter time use a "safer," less self-disclosing frame for

meaning-making, than do pairs who've known each other a longer time; the latter use a more disclosing frame. Similarly in the art museum, the Personalizer frame is also evoked by pairs who've known each other a longer time.

### Summary

In sum, this 4 step analysis reveals that the 7 frames represent three distinct modes for making meaning of museum objects - Subjective, Objective, and Combination. The factors of museum context, pair gender, and amount of time known were found to be related to variations in the use of specific frames within each mode. These connections, while numerically small in this study, are worthy of further examination in larger sample studies.

### ON THE EXISTENCE OF "MUSEUM" MODES

While the influence of several factors upon visitor talk appears to be quite suggestive, it is perhaps equally significant that this study uncovered three primary ways of making meaning of museum artifacts which, despite variations, were found in both museum contexts. This suggests the existence of modes of meaning-making in museums generally, independent of museum type. However,

the extent of their generalizability must be tested in other types of museums.

Two of these three modes strongly echo the writings of Pierre Bourdieu regarding taste and culture in French society (1980, 1984). Although Bourdieu's work was based on a survey of individuals' specific tastes and choices among paintings, music, and other objects, his writings suggest important notions about the processes of meaning-making which underly choice and taste. Like the objective and subjective modes of meaning-making found in this study, Bourdieu reports the existence of two kinds or mechanisms of taste - the pure, aesthetic disposition, and the popular. The former, like the Objective mode found in this study, asserts the emphasis of form over function, and involve the deciphering of stylistic characteristics and a distanced, aesthetic eye. The latter, like the Subjective mode found in this study, involves an emphasis upon the relevant according to Bourdieu, "a systematic 'reduction' of the things of art to the things of life" (1980, p 246). Integral to Bourdieu's analysis is the relationship of these two mechanisms of taste and meaning to educational level and social class. In his work, Bourdieu illustrates the aesthetic taste as a product of education training, and the popular taste to be the product of the less well educated working class. Thus taste is predisposed to function as "cultural capital,"

markers of 'class' legitimizing social differences and functions through a mechanism that neutralizes and therefore conceals this function. To what extent are the Subjective, Objective, and Combination modes in this study related to education level?

TABLE 5:5: MEANING-MAKING MODE BY EDUCATION LEVEL IN THE ART MUSEUM

	Subjective	Objective	Combo
High school-college grad (LOWER EDUC)	66%	50%	49%
post-grad study (HIGHER EDUC)	34%	50%	51%

While the sample size once again precludes definitive conclusions, a similar relationship is suggested. As indicated in Table 5:5, representing the art museum context, slightly more individuals of the lower education group than of the higher education group are found represented in the Subjective mode frames. However, in the Objective mode as well as the Combination mode, there are equal percentages of the lower and the higher educated individuals. This may reflect the fact that since the study measured the talk of pairs, all that is required is one pair member to be competent in order for competence talk to be reflected by a pair. However, of the lower education group, a greater number is represented in the Subjective mode, while of the higher education group,

greater numbers are represented in the Combination Mode and Objective Mode than in the Subjective mode.

The connection is even clearer in the history museum, as indicated by Table 5:6. Here, nearly twice as many individuals of the lower education group than the higher education group are found within the Subjective mode, invoking subjective frames. And, more than twice as many of the higher education group as compared to the lower education group are found in the Objective and Combo modes, invoking their frames. Further, of all the lower education group, the highest percentage are found in the Subjective mode, while the highest number of the higher education group are found within the Combo and Objective modes.

TABLE 5:6: MEANING-MAKING MODE BY EDUCATION LEVEL IN THE HISTORY MUSEUM

	Subjective	Objective	Combo
High School- College Grad (LOWER EDUC)	59%	28%	20%
Post-grad Study (HIGHER EDUC)	40%	72%	80%

Thus in both museum contexts, but more so in the history context, there does appear to be a connection between education level and meaning-making mode. This is similar to that which Bourdieu found (1980), namely, that those

less educated are more likely to represent the "popular," or Subjective approach, while the higher educated are more likely to represent the "aesthetic" or, in this study, the Objective or Combination modes of interpretation. One important caveat is noted. As the education level categories in this comparison reflect by distinguishing between "college graduates" and those with graduate study, the overall education level of the sample is quite high. This is unlike Bourdieu's groups which, as in French culture, spanned wider differences across class and education level. However, this study suggests that in American society, meaning-making mode might well be related to education, in the realm of reflecting finer distinctions within the already fairly well educated population of museum-goers.

#### IN CONCLUSION

While this study echoes the findings of Bourdieu, there are crucial differences and questions raised as well. If education level alone accounted for all differences in meaning-making of museum objects, why then would there exist so many internal varieties of frames related to the factors of gender, museum context, and time known? Further, what is the significance of the third interpretive mode, invoked by visitor pairs of high



education level, in which both the "popular" and the "aesthetic" ways of relating appear to be intertwined?

While education level may affect the extent to which one has gained the competencies required for the "aesthetic" or objective ways of relating to objects, this factor alone does not tell the whole story of how meaning is made of museum objects. As this chapter has illustrated, other connections appear to exist - such as the relationship between gender and specific subject-matter competence; a connection between women pairs and the invocation of personal association and consumerism; a relationship between the amount of time pair members have known each other and the extent of self-disclosure among subjective frames; and a number of museum context-based variations on interpretive frames. Unlike taste, viewed more as product, this study explored meaning-making as a social process - created through talk in the context of relationships. Education and resulting competencies may indeed affect the range of frames accessible to a pair, as well as the extent to which a pair is likely to invoke a solely subjective frame. However, the actual invocation of a frame or mode in museum interaction seems modified by other factors as well - particularly, those which characterize the very relationship of the visitor pair.

In traditional aesthetic theory and material culture study, objective and subjective ways of relating to

objects are typically posited as mutually exclusive. Indeed Bourdieu's work suggests that those who have the "cultural capital" and competence want only to flaunt it. This study suggests otherwise. While many pairs do appear to display such cultural capital, those invoking Combination frames, themselves highly educated, emphasize relevance and subjective experience as well as special knowledge and objectivity as integral parts of their meaning-making in social context. Together with the subtle variations in frames within each of the three interpretive modes, the findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the experience of talking about museum objects with a companion might in fact be affected by, and simultaneously result in, more than just the display of class and competence. It is these issues that Chapter Six will address in detail.

## CHAPTER SIX: MAKING MEANING OF US: SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF VISITOR TALK

The suggestion that talk with a companion about museum objects might be affected by aspects of the relationship of the visitor pair leads us to consider the third major research question of this study: Are there social functions which result from museum talk? As Fiske says of talk in general,

discourse not only makes sense of its topic area, it also constructs a sense, or social identity, of us as we speak it. (1987, p.15)

A number of studies have documented the fact that talk about objects in particular can convey information about speakers (e.g., Musello, 1986, Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, Danet and Katriel, 1987), yet few have considered this phenomena within the museum context. What are the social functions of museum talk within each frame? Do these functions vary for different pair types, or by museum context? Providing examples once again from representative visitor pairs, this chapter presents and explores the social functions of each of the seven interpretive frames identified in this study. Such functions are defined here as any result of talk which appears to impact upon the relationship of the pair speaking. The identification of such a function by the researcher was determined on the basis of the corroboration of evidence within visitor transcripts and

interview responses. This material will be provided as illustration. Let us now reconsider the pairs we have met in Chapter Five from the perspective of this research question.

#### 1. RECOGNIZERS

Recall Susan and Jane (13H), friends who have known each other for less than two years, visiting the National Museum of American History for a day's outing. As Recognizers, their talk emphasizes the naming and recognizing of objects, and the expression of familiarity with them. Like all Recognizers, Susan and Jane have known each other for a relatively shorter time (less than 6 years), and seem to find familiar museum objects most meaningful. Through this familiarity, they experience a sense of validation and connection to the museum and perhaps to history at large. By questioning each others' familiarity with and memory of objects throughout their talk, they also quite subtly locate themselves by age:

[about a Big Wheel toy bicycle, a "solrad 9" satellite, and a clock by Peter Max]:

S: A Big Wheel. Oh my God, remember Big Wheels?

J: Oh, that made it?

S: My God. A Big Wheel.

S: What's that? It looks like a sputnik or something.

J: It does. I wonder what it is. This is getting more in our time zone here.

S: Yeah, really.

J: Look at that psychedelic clock.

S: Peter Max. Remember that?

J: Yeah.

This process is even more explicit in the talk of Pair 20H, male-female lovers who have known each other for only two months. Throughout their talk, they make reference to their respective familiarity with objects. On the basis of this familiarity, they quite explicitly compare their ages, assessing the extent of their similiarity and/or difference. This is typified by their comments about a vacuum cleaner, a "wall-o-matic" jukebox, and a "predicta" television receiver:

F: An old electrolux.

M: Now we're starting to come into things that I've seen.

F: I've seen them too.

M: Those things pile up in a lot of those junky used vacuum cleaner places. See a lot of those.

F: You do?

M: At least I remember seeing them. That's I guess the difference between 26 and 34 [years old].

F: Oh, there's a little one too. '18'?  
"Wall-o-matic."

M: Yeah. Those I remember seeing in the restaurants growing up as a kid.

F: Me too. Me too.

M: I remember TV's like this though.

F: I don't. Must have been before my time.

M: Well not everybody had 'em. It was before your time, as a matter of fact. Stuff like this is stuff that people used to, you'd see it thrown out. Now it's probably worth a lot of money. For that thing, I mean, people...

Pair 02H, also a male-female lover pair who've

only known each other for 6 months make numerous references throughout their talk to familiarity with objects as a product and indicator of age. Both in their 40's, these two were actually only two years apart. In talking about a telephone, the issue of age even becomes the topic of a joke:

M: We ought to know everything about this one!

F: Where?

M: '1950's and 60's.' Well I know you weren't born 'til 1978, but...(laugh)

F: (laugh)

Of what significance are these references to age among Recognizer pairs? When asked in their interviews whether or not they felt they had learned or confirmed anything about their companion, the majority of Recognizers in fact referred to the concept of similarities and differences of age and background. Their comments reflect the belief that recognizing objects and expressing familiarity with them conveys one's age and also clues about one's background. From this information, visitors appear to surmise conclusions. As Jane (Person 26) said in her interview, she learned

There's a little age difference between us. She's in her early 30's and I'm in my mid 20's... so...things she remembered more ...I had no idea...like the washing machines.

Pair 20H also appeared to draw conclusions about similarities and differences between their respective ages and backgrounds. Interestingly, these two pair

members seemed to differ in their perceptions of just how big a difference exists between them. As the female of the pair (Person 40) reported, the experience confirmed

our age difference. Even though it's not that great. Just on some of the things that we could identify with, they were slightly different. Not much, but a little bit.

According to the male in this couple (Person 39), however, the viewing experience

made me a little more aware of our age difference and difference in where and how we grew up. She was raised on a small midwestern farm and I grew up in a suburban eastern town. Pretty big [difference].

Thus pair members may indeed draw different conclusions from their interactions.

Recognizer pairs of both gender configurations in the history museum thus appeared to communicate and conclude similarities and differences in age and background through their particular form of interpretive talk. Indeed, "the cautious and mutual discovery by two people of shared memories" (Thelen, 1989) appears to constitute "the very elixir of friendmaking" (Davis, 1977). That the Recognizer interpretive frame is found predominantly among people who have known each other for a relatively shorter time may be reconsidered, in light of this apparent social consequence. While directional influence cannot be concluded, Recognizer talk appears to provide a relatively "safe", low self-disclosing vehicle for pairs of shorter duration to express, assess, and construct similarities

and differences in age and background. While Recognizers appear to enjoy the thrill of familiarity and validation, that familiarity becomes a means of expression of similiarity and difference, crucial to the process of relationship development (cf. Rokeach, 1960, Knapp, 1978).

## 2. EVALUATORS

Recall Richard and Kathy (01A), an art visitor pair in their twenties who have been married for six years. Viewing the target area of American Collection paintings, Richard and Kathy typify the Evaluator frame, in which art museum pairs overwhelmingly emphasize the exchange of opinions and judgements about the works.

Many pairs in the sample, but especially Evaluators, make reference in their talk to the extent to which a painting reflects one's self. As Richard says to Kathy about the painting Cattleya Orchid and Three Brazilian Hummingbirds by Martin Johnson Heade:

R: Not flowers, that's not me.

K: That is...

R: It's very pretty.

K: Interesting.

R: On second thought, maybe I do like it.

K: Well, you like the weird...

R: I like the detail on the flowers.

About the painting Autumn 1877 by Winslow Homer, Person 68, the wife in Pair 04A, another married couple, draws a positive conclusion:

F: I like that.



M: 'Winslow Homer.'  
F: I guess I would.  
M: Uh huh (laugh)  
F: That's me.

In their interview responses, Evaluators such as those above elaborate upon the belief that one's taste is synonymous with aspects of one's personality. Explained Kathy about Richard,

Well I know that he's a very detailed person. And so all the paintings he enjoyed were very detailed. And he also likes very light colored things, and all the paintings that were light, he enjoyed.

Reflected Person 100, the female of Pair 20A, a male-female couple who have only known each other for a month,

There were some things that I felt about him that were confirmed by what I perceived to be his taste. Like, the way he looks at things.

Of what social consequence is the expression of taste, given its equation with aspects of personality? As the interview response of Pair 20A above suggests, two people who don't know each other well appear to get to know each other through the comparison of their likes and dislikes. A look at their transcript talk also suggests that they are getting to know each other through the confirmation or disconfirmation of their expectations about each others' taste, and through the conclusions they draw as a result. Typical of their (Pair 20A) exchanges are the following regarding the works Mount Katahdin by

Marsden Hartley, The Early Scholar by Eastman Johnson and  
Natural Arch at Capri by William Haseltine:

M: See, I like that.  
F: I like that too.  
M: I like the Hartley painting. I guess it's because I like kind of blobby, round...  
F: Dark...  
M: No, no, no. Just round and soft.  
F: Uh huh. I don't know Hartley at all, do you?  
M: No, nothing about him.

M: Ooh.  
F: That's adorable.  
M: Now this I like.  
F: That's a wonderful picture.  
M: And you know I'm a fan of wood stoves anyway.  
F: Uh huh.

M: I knew you'd like this one. Parts of it.  
F: I like this but I don't care for the interpretation of the rocks. If I squint a little so that I can't see the hard lines, I like it better.  
M: Yeah. I'm a fan of the cypruses and trees, I like trees and rocks, and he treats that real nice in this section here.  
F: Uh huh. I like that. But I don't care for the way the angular...  
M: And I like the expanse over the water.  
F: Yes. That's beautiful.  
M: That's pretty neat. I don't care for the lefthand side of the picture.  
F: Yeah.

Through their talk, this couple shares tastes about things like trees and wood stoves, as well as the paintings.

From these remarks, however, Person 99, the male, draws a comparison which seems to imply a difference in their personalities:

We discussed...roundness versus hardness, and sharpness. I'm a very round, I like round and soft things, and very open and airy kinds of things, and she prefers her things more tight

and restricted. And a lot of the paintings fell into those [categories].

While those who have known each other a shorter time, like Couple 20A, seem to assess similarities and differences through evaluation, those pairs who have known each other a long time do so as well. For longstanding pairs, evaluation seems to function as an assertion of either individuality or pairness, depending upon the particular relationship.

Pair 14H, a mother in her 40's and her daughter, aged 24, rarely agreed in their preferences of paintings viewed. Noticeably throughout their transcript, the daughter appeared to disagree with or contradict the expressions of preference made by her mother, as illustrated in their remarks about the works Chelsea Wharf Grey and Silver by James Whistler and Cattleya Orchid and Three Brazilian Hummingbirds by Martin Johnson Heade:

M: I like that. I like the colors in that.

D: I hate that too.

M: I like that.

D: The Whistler? James McNeill Whistler?

M: No its 'Chelsea Wharf Grey and Silver.'

D: I hate that. It's so depressing.

M: I should have gotten one of those. That would have been good in my house.

M: This is so real.

D: Do you like this? This looks like..

M: Orchid..

D: Too much of a mixture or something.

M: It's beautiful. Look at that. That looks real though. It looks like you could just touch it, it looks so real.

D: I don't know. It looks like it's really lost in the background.

M: Um um.  
D: Um hm.  
M: But it's just so close up though.

While this pair may simply differ in taste, the daughter herself (Person 28) stressed and described in her interview response the "difference in point of view" between herself and her mother:

She picks out the strangest things! I'd go, 'Gross! I don't like that at all!', and she loved it or something. She notices things that I would never notice...it's a different point of view.

For this mother and daughter, evaluation appears to function as a discourse of self through which individuality and separateness within the relationship is expressed.

For Pair 04A, a husband and wife of 20 years, evaluation talk appears to serve the opposite function - namely, to express and confirm similarity and pairness. This couple, in contrast to the mother-daughter pair above, agreed on almost all judgements and preferences, even referring to things that "we" like, and choosing a work to purchase for their home. Consider their remarks about the works Salem Cove by Maurice Prendergast, Adrian Iselin by John Singer Sargent, and Repose, also by John Singer Sargent:

M: Prendergast.  
F: Doesn't do anything for me.  
M: That's impression stuff. I don't like that stuff.  
F: Most of it, no.

F: God, look how realistic her face is.  
M: I know. It looks like...  
F: Isn't that amazing?  
M: Looks like it's right there.  
F: I know it. You feel like you're in the room.  
M: The hands are kind of funny looking though..  
F: Yeah. He started getting less detailed as you go down. But look at the face.  
M: Yeah, his faces are like that.  
F: It's almost like a picture.

F: That's one's pretty. Yeah, of course. Who do we like? John Singer Sargent. I like that. That would look pretty in the livingroom. We ought to get a print of that one.  
M: Sure.  
F: I like it.  
M: Be glad to.  
F: You owe me a copy.  
M: I know.

In their interview responses, both the husband and wife of this couple, unlike the mother and daughter pair reviewed above, emphasized their similarity in taste and perspective. Reflected the wife, Person 68,

I know he likes John Singer Sargent. We both do. We didn't even have to look at the name on the painting. We'd see and and we'd say, 'I like that!', and we'd both go, 'oh, look who it is!' That was fun. It seems like we both like the same type of art, which has been shown to me before, so I kind of confirmed that. Both of us are very detail oriented. There was one painting where the woman's face was very well done, detailed, and as you went further down the painting, her hands were a little more blurry. Less detailed. And he and I both noticed that. It was interesting to me that we both noticed that.

Said the husband, Person 67,

We pretty much have the same taste.

When taste is considered as synonymous with "self" or "personality," as it appears to be for most Evaluators, this statement is a strong confirmation of a relationship. For this longstanding relationship, evaluation operates as a discourse through which "pairness" is expressed and confirmed.

Found primarily in the art museum context, where the expression of preference and judgement is indeed a codified aspect of object discourse, evaluation, like recognition, also appears to operate as a discourse of self. Its consequences vary with the nature of the relationship, especially the amount of time pair members have known each other, but more specifically, with the apparent "separateness" or "pairness" of the pair members. For those who've known each other a shorter time, evaluation can lead to the assessment of similarities and differences in personality. For those of longstanding relationships, evaluation can express difference and separateness, or similarity and "pairness."

### 3. PERSONALIZERS

Recall Tom and Jill (04H), spouses of 8 years visiting the National Museum of American History, and Beverly and Dan (09A), married 20 years, at the National Gallery of Art. Both represent the Personalizer frame, and in so doing, relate nearly all that they see to

aspects of their own personal experience - past and present. Equally split across gender configuration, Personalizer pairs were couples whose members had known each other for a relatively long time. Of what social consequence is their talk emphasis?

Consider the comments of Beverly and Dan as they invoke and relate memories and associations of shared places, experiences, and people in their life together in relation to the works Cape Cod Evening by Edward Hopper, Harriet H. Carville by Thomas Eakins and Cattleya Orchid and Three Brazilian Hummingbirds by Martin Johnson Heade:

B: Looks like those houses that we saw up in, you know. On our trip to Maine, we went on the...

D: Right.

B: At Bar Harbor?

D: We took the boat across

B: Um hm

D: To that lighthouse.

B: See, that lady looks fairly real.

D: That looks like, ah, Kay.

B: It looks like Janette.

D: Or Janette.

B: Yeah it looks like Janette. That was really funny last night. Lou thought one of the pictures of Mom was me, when she was about my age.

D: Is that right?

B: And I don't ever think we look very much the same.

B: Here's an unusual one. Remember we saw that kind of hummer at San Diego?

D: Uh hm. With the long tail?

B: With the really long beautiful tails. That's a weird picture. When were they painted? When was that painted? '1819-21.' Wouldn't have thought they would do that kind of a...it's kind of like an outdoor still life.

D: Well it's weird because the orchid is so huge.  
B: Um hm.  
D: And everything else is so small.  
B: Um hm.

Through their talk, Beverly and Dan seem to reinforce their shared life together.

Similarly emphasizing their shared experiences is Pair 30H, a married couple visiting the history museum. They too invoke shared associations and experiences, as typified in these examples of talk about a grain cradle, and a toy car:

M: This is like the thing your...  
F: What?  
M: This is what your Dad...  
F: Oh. Yeah.  
M: Put together on that plow. Did you see that big block of wood?  
F: Um hm. Did he take thank one out to that benefit?  
M: I don't think he ever got it done.  
F: Didn't he?  
  
F: That Ford Museum. They've got a bunch of those. Remember?  
M: Oh.  
F: Metal cars.  
M: Um hm.

While Beverly and Dan did not express any attitudes particular to this interpretation, the above Pair 30H stressed how relevant the artifacts were to them as a pair, and also stressed their similarities:

Person 59 (husband): We kind of have the same interests, the same backgrounds, and we were kind of raised the same way.

Person 60 (wife): A lot of things in there we



relate to...A lot of things...we still use.  
We're farmers.

Through the recall and sharing of past memories and present associations, longstanding married couples of the Personalizer frame appear to experience a sort of joint validation of their shared world of affiliations and experiences, confirming their identity as a pair.

While married couples who have known each other a long time might maintain a vested interest in presenting a joint or pair identity, long-standing female-female friends, the other major constituency of Personalizer pairs, seem more expressive of themselves as independent individuals. For these pairs, individual reminiscing and story-telling appears to be highly enjoyable, and through such talk, pair members compare themselves to each other. Pair 08H, for example, consists of female-female friends of 15 years, their style of talk typified in these remarks about a gasoline pump and a Schwinn panther bicycle in the history museum:

F1: Look at the gasoline pump.

F2: They were at least pretty.

F1: Yeah. Do you remember, do you remember you could see the gas going up?

F2: No.

F1: You don't remember that? You could see the gas going up in the little...

F2: No. We never had a car.

F1: Oh, oh.

F2: My father never drove, so I wouldn't even remember.

F1: Oh, no my father did, but I remember. I don't remember the light on top of it, but I

remember the gas going up into that little thing there.

- F2: I remember that, that's a Schwinn. One of em's got to be a Schwinn.  
F1: Is it? Yeah. "7".  
F2: "6"  
F1: "7"  
F2: "7"?  
F1: Oh "6". Okay. Schwinn. Oh you're very good with your bikes. Did you have a bike? Did you own a bike?  
F2: Yeah.  
F1: Oh, see I didn't have, I had to always rent one.  
F2: Oh, I owned a bike.  
F1: We were poor.  
F2: But you had a car.  
F1: When we got, after we got married.  
F2: Your father. Didn't your father have a car?  
F1: Oh my father had a car, right.  
F2: Yeah, my father didn't have a car.  
F1: Oh. I guess we were rich (laugh).  
F2: Yeah you were richer (laugh).

Through their talk, this pair appears to establish differences in age and background. Even for such pairs who have known each other a long time, new information can still be exchanged. As Person 15, F1 in the example above, explained in her interview,

When you're looking [at objects] with someone else, it's kind of like a sharing experience. For example, with my friend and I, we're at different age groups. And background. So I remember some things that I can tell her about...and she being born later than I could say well gee, I don't remember that, but I remember this, so...

Or, as described by Person 58, a member of a pair of sisters-in-law (29H),

She recognized the anvil that they had out there to do the horseshoes, and she said, "oh my Dad

had one like this", and told me about it. I didn't know they had horses they had to shoe.

Like Recognizers, these Personalizer pairs of female friends appear to learn aspects of each others' age and background, sometimes leading to assessments of similarities and difference. However, unlike Recognizers who have known each other only a short time, longer-known Personalizers convey information about themselves and their past through stories and detailed explanations. This difference echoes existing theory on the concept of self-disclosure (Altman and Taylor, 1973) which posits that interpersonal exchange progresses from superficial, nonintimate areas to more intimate, detailed topics as partners get closer.

That the objects themselves function as tools in the sharing and retelling of personal information is further suggested by this interview remark from Person 57 (29H):

I only wish I had my children here to let them see what was used when I was raised. Because we were just plain farmers, struggling like everybody else. We didn't have the finer things of life...we had the crude tools.

For Person 57, the museum objects function as illustrations of her own life story.

In sum, for pairs of the Personalizer frame, museum objects in the art or history context function as reminders, provoking the recalling, telling, and retelling of experiences and associations, much like the role played

by personal possessions (Musello, 1986, Csikzscentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). For longstanding married couples, such stories are largely those of their life together, further reinforcing their identity as a pair. For longstanding female friends, reminiscing appears to offer an enjoyable means of individual self-expression through which similarities and differences in identity are conveyed and new information is sometimes learned about one's friend. As Davis contends (1977), biographical nostalgia operates to maintain identity.

#### 4. EVALUATOR-PERSONALIZERS

Kristen and Melissa (13A), college roomates visiting the National Gallery of Art, and Margaret and Elizabeth (18H), a mother and daughter pair in the National Museum of American History, were the pairs introduced in Chapter Four that typify Evaluator-Personalizers. While pairs of this frame in both museums emphasize evaluation and the relating of personal experience over all other interpretive acts, recall that the history pairs of this frame, dubbed Consumers, display a unique emphasis on comparing their possessions to the museum objects. The majority of Evaluator-Personalizer pairs in both museums are female-female.

Two out of the three art museum pairs are female

students who attend college and live together, although they've only known each other for a short time. Their behavior is quite similar, and, true to their frame "Evaluator-Personalizers," seem to combine the social consequences of evaluation and personalizing, respectively, as discussed so far.

Consider more examples of the talk of Melissa and Kristen. Here, they discuss the paintings A Friendly Call by William Merritt Chase, Wingersheek Creek Beach, Gloucester by William Picknell, Street in Venice by John Singer Sargent, and The Lone Tenement by George Bellows:

K: The faceless people.

M: Imagine wearing a veil.

K: 'A Friendly Call.' Meliss, that's you and me.

M: That's pretty. See, I like that a lot better.

K: Oh I like that too. You know it looks like someplace like, I don't know, down by Sunset Cliffs kind of?

M: Um hm. Complete with...

K: I like that.

K: That's sad.

M: I know. I think we have the same taste. See I don't like...

K: I like this better than like, those dark portrait people.

M: Um hm.

K: But this is like kind of depressing.

K: I like that kind of day.

M: Same here. Looks like where we got lost. Remember?

K: (laugh)

Evoking references to their shared world, such as

their apartment, friends, and experiences, Kristen and Melissa express and emphasize their relationship as a pair. They also confirm their "pairness" and similarity through their comparison of and agreement regarding taste.

In their interviews, Melissa and Kristen also emphasize their similarity. As Melissa explained,

We both have the same opinion on the paintings, I think. We both tend to like the paintings that are a little bit lighter and have softer colors...We both liked the lighter ones. We're both kind of similar. We're both happy, up people, and so I'm assuming that's probably why we both like happy, up paintings.

In her interview, Kristen remarked

We both have the same kind, a lot of the same taste. We both realized that. Cause we've never lived together before...it seemed like all of the pictures that I liked, the paintings that were lighter and brighter, she said 'oh, I like that one'. It kind of just reconfirmed that we do have the same taste, which is something that I already knew.

When thought of as a discourse on self, the similarity of taste, along with the shared references expressed by Kristen and Melissa presents a clear portrait of a valued pair identity based on similarity.

The second pair of female college roommates (06A) are slightly older. While they too reinforce their identity as a pair, it is one in which differences are key. Consider first the remarks of this pair about the paintings Children Playing on the Beach by Mary Cassatt, and Both Members of this Club by George Bellows:

F1: She's got a big project going. And she's going to make it.

F2: That reminds me of us. One is always looking away, and the other is there... and I think we take turns doing that, you know?

F1: Yeah, yeah. I was going to say, I'm the one diligently working.

F2: (laugh) Yeah.

F1: Busy at her project.

F2: Do you have a hat on or not? Are you the one with the hat, or not?

F1: Well, right now I'm the one diligently working, cause I got to prove I can do it without any help from anybody.

F2: Look at the grotesque faces. Ugh.

F1: I love this one. It is so grotesque.

F2: It's too gorey.

F1: It's not gorey, it's grotesque. Like Flannery O'Connor's writings.

F2: Ooh, I don't like it.

F1: I like it.

F2: (laugh)

F1: Hey, this is a social statement. That oppressed man has just beat the hell out of the oppressor. And he is going to win and get out.

F2: But the bodies don't even look real.

F1: Yeah but the struggle looks real. I love that one. And this guy's face down here is the jester?

F2: Eew.

F1: Don't you see the jester? It's a satire, It's a social statement. Look at this guy over here. I mean, they're like the mask. The drama mask. And they're, look, they're all, you know, it's like the crowds. And the oppressed is getting free. What's the date on that? '1909.'

F2: Um hm.

F1: 'Both Members of This Club.' It's got to be a social statement.

Reminiscent of the mother-daughter Evaluator pair, the women in this Evaluator-Personalizer pair seem to stress their individuality through differences in taste. At the same time, their references to common

experiences and their relationship reinforce their identity as a pair. In their interviews, they each stressed the differences between them, as typified by the following comments:

(Person 71, F1): In my way of thinking, she missed some of the deeper meanings. And that's our experiences. She's very, very intelligent, but the deep struggles and pains that are in life and around are not something she would talk about. She would know a lot more information and facts, but as far as deep, analytical...I saw that in the different way we viewed the paintings.

(Person 72, F2): This reinforced where we are. She's having a hard time right now. But I'm doing okay.

Like Kristen and Melissa, this pair of female college roommates also appears to convey and confirm a pair identity through the expression of shared personal references and evaluation. While the first pair stresses their similarities, the second pair stresses their differences instead.

Among the history museum Consumers are two types of relationships - three pairs of female relatives, and two pairs of people who are getting to know each other. Each relationship type displays a distinct social function, and will be reviewed in turn.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Consumers uniquely compare their own and others' possessions to the exhibited objects. This focus is strongly exhibited by three pairs of female family members - two mother-daughter pairs, and



one pair of sisters. Typical of this group are the comments of Margaret and Elizabeth (18H), the mother-daughter pair, about a porringer, a telegraph key, a tumbler, and a toy car:

E: Ooh. Don't we have something like this?

M: Similar. What is it?

E: 'D'. Porringer. I don't like this kind of colonial stuff.

M: Yeah. But it also makes you think of what you may have that's...

E: True.

E: The telegraph. Didn't we have one like that?

M: I think, yes, I think so. Your father might still have that.

E: Um hm.

M: Remember "W"? Remember when they came out?

E: What, those "W's"?

M: Yeah.

E: Yeah. Awful looking.

M: No, because they were acrylic and they made...remember when we had them in the backyard?

E: Yeah.

M: Oh wait, this I have to look at. I have to show you where the tin soldiers are when we go home. I have to show you where they are, just in case, you know?

While relating shared personal experiences and evaluations, Margaret and Elizabeth do so predominantly through response to specific objects that they owned or own. While confirming that they in fact owned or in some cases still own something "valuable" as validated by the museum, they also invoke their relationship as family through their references to past experiences and to other family members. Particularly intriguing is their

interchange about the tin soldiers "at home". Apparently a valuable item that the mother possesses, this comment reflects the intricate family matters of heirloom and inheritance, often the domain of mothers and daughters (cf. Musello, 1986). Thus their familial relationship is further expressed.

The notion of "family" is in fact invoked in the interview responses of these female family pair members. As Elizabeth remarked,

She [mother] just recalls things she had when she was growing up. It's frightening cause I find myself doing the same thing..Sometimes I saw things that my grandmother had, or my great grandmother.

Pair 26H, also a mother and daughter, made many detailed references to other family members both in their transcripts as well as in their interview responses, such as the following:

Person 52 (daughter): There were a few things that I saw that I know my grandfather had. Different little things like...a straight back razor that one of my uncles had...having her [mother] there, she told me who it was from.

Person 51 (mother): The railroad lanterns...kind of brings me back to stories that my mother used to tell me about my uncle. Her brother. Who used to work on a railroad.

Thus for the small "interpretive community" of female pairs of relatives, talk about present or past possessions of their families serves as a springboard for reminiscing and referencing details and stories which reinforce family identity.

The same emphasis on comparing one's possessions to exhibited history objects appears to result in slightly different social ends among two Consumer pairs who have only known each other a short time and are not related. These pairs demonstrate a belief about the communicative nature of one's possessions, and hence use their tastes and personal references to get to know each other.

For example, Pair 28H consists of two women attending a conference in town, who have only known each other one day. Their remarks throughout are typified by the following exchanges about a churn, the first object they encounter, a "Black Beauty" slot machine, a record, and a maytag "master" washing machine:

F1: Now I've got a thing just like that, except it's smaller. Its got that same blue pattern on it?

F2: Um hm.

F1: And everything. It's just a little bit smaller.

F2: Smaller.

F1: Um hm. I have it in the livingroom.

F2: It would make a really nice umbrella stand  
(laugh)

F1: Yeah.

F2: I'm sure for historical value, that's like...  
(laugh)

F1: I hesitate to tell you, but I also have a slot machine too. In my bar.

F2: Really?

F1: Um hm.

F2: "Black beauty slot machine".

F1: It's not exactly like, it's much more modern than that one is, but... It's kind of neat.

F2: You see where it's from? From the U.S. Marshall's in Cleveland (laugh).

F1: (laugh) Yeah. Have to call those guys up. They must have busted somebody (laugh).

F1: Look at the size of that record. My God.  
F2: Long playing.  
F1: I guess.  
F2: We still have a bunch of old 78's at home.  
F1: Do you?  
F2: Oh yeah.  
F1: I think when we were little we used them all  
for frisbees and stuff.  
F2: Yeah.

F2: My mother still has, see that Maytag right  
there?  
F1: Yeah. That's Maytag.  
F2: She still has it. Still uses it.  
F1: I have a Maytag, but it's not quite that old  
(laugh).  
F2: She still uses it. I bet it's the same year  
(laugh).  
F1: Well like the repair man says, you know?  
F2: Oh no. She uses it primarily like when for  
rugs, jeans, all the heavy duty kinds of  
things that...  
F1: Um hm.  
F2: You can run it for as long as you can run  
it.

By describing things that they own or owned, or that their family member owns or owned, these women appear to be expressing information about themselves and their backgrounds. With what consequences? As suggested by their own interview responses, these shorter-time known visitors appear to draw conclusions about each other as a result:

Person 56 (Female 2): You sort of find things out about her. Things that she has collections of, or things that are in her home. It's informational...

Person 55 (Female 1): I think she's got a family background. She said, 'oh my mom's got a washer like this,' and 'you're not going to believe it, but I've got one of those in my kitchen'. You know, just things like that. Close family relationships, I think, I confirmed about

her...We both thought the same things were pretty so I guess maybe our tastes run kind of similarly.

Once again, through an object-focused discourse, namely consumerism, visitors appear to convey and glean information about themselves, which then results in the assessment of similarities and differences about background between them.

A similar social consequence is exhibited by Pair 15H, a male and female Consumer pair in their early 20's who have only known each other for three months. However, given that they do not own much yet, they convey the same kind of personal information through "wishful consumption" - i.e., references to their taste, and to things that they would like to buy. This intriguing variation is illustrated in two of their typical interchanges, regarding an automatic jukebox selector and a protractor:

- F: Look, and there's one of those things. A jukebox.  
M: Uh huh. Uh huh. Those you can find, like at the Sam Swap Shop and stuff?  
F: I've been keeping my eye out for them in Madman Antiques cause they make a point of carrying this sort of thing?  
M: Uh huh.  
F: Like they have all these dishes and stuff like that. But I haven't seen one.  
M: I have a hard time buying anything like that, because, hey, I threw all that stuff out years ago. Why would I want to buy it again?  
F: See, I like it.  
M: When they were doing the first auction on the Hasbrook House? You know, when they were

selling all the stuff off after old man or old lady Hasbrook died?

F: Um hm

M: They had a drafting set that was just, I mean to me... it was all brass.

F: And?

M: Well, I didn't have any money. I was a young child at the time. But it was just gorgeous.

Even as "window shoppers", this pair conveys information about themselves.

While differing slightly in qualitative nature, Evaluator-Personalizers in art and Consumers in history invoke both the relation of personal information and evaluation. Such talk appears to result in specific social ends, depending upon the particular relationship type. For those already invested in maintaining a pair identity, be it longstanding or evolving, such as female family members or college roommates, this frame appears to result in the expression and confirmation of that relationship. For others, who do not know each other well, museum objects appear to provide a conduit through which shorter time known visitors get to know each other. In either case, the museum objects themselves are the springboards for such talk and its consequences.

## 5. COMPETENTS

Dave and Jule (23A), business associates of two years, and Ed and Barbara (24H), spouses of 24 years, represent the frame of Competents in the art museum and

history museum, respectfully. Seldom do these pairs make any personal references, evaluations, or recognitions. Instead, they focus on the objects, and upon relating to them their own special knowledge. While all three art pairs are male-female, the seven history pairs represent both gender configurations.

Consider first the talk of Dave and Julie in the art context. In their discussion of the works Chelsea Wharf Grey and Silver by James Whistler, Oyster Sloop Cos Cob by Childe Hassam, and A Friendly Call by William Merritt Chase, as in their entire transcript, Dave appears to take on the role of expert, pointing out aspects of the paintings to Julie:

J: There's Whistler.

D: Yeah. See, he was trying to deal with light and stuff.

J: Um hm. Um hm.

D: Now there's an impressionistic...

J: Um hm.

D: See how they dealt with the water?

J: This is still impressionistic in a way, isn't it?

D: Yeah.

J: It's fuzzy edges.

D: Yeah. Like the face through the veil.

J: Uh huh.

While both Dave and Julie appear to possess competence, Dave seems to lead the conversation, and Julie seeks confirmation of her artistic perceptions through questions to Dave.

In the case of Pair 28A, a married couple, it is

the wife who exhibits the role of "expert", as typified in their exchange regarding A Friendly Call by William

Merritt Chase:

M: Oh that's pretty.  
F: That's Chase, see?  
M: That's Chase. Stand back. okay. Now, tell me about him.  
F: Well, I don't know. He was a little more photographic.  
M: Um hm.  
F: Than somebody like that Hassam thing.  
M: Uh hm.  
F: But it's still...  
M: Um hm.  
F: It's not that really stark heavy outline.  
M: It's not bright. Yeah.  
F: The tones are muted but you get a real intense feeling of color. He has some beautiful landscapes somewhere.  
M: Oh?  
F: With people in fields.  
M: I'll have to go through and see.

Here, the male asked the female to "tell me about" the artist, encouraging and participating in the construction of the "expert" - "learner" dichotomy.

In the history museum, most Competent pairs display the same set of roles. Interestingly, in neither museum do these roles appear to be gender-linked for Competents. In the case of Barbara and Ed, it is Barbara who plays the teacher or competence leader, as exemplified by these exchanges regarding an anvil, a "white lightning" baseball bat, and an army helmet:

E: Hmm. Look at the anvil.  
B: Natural materials.  
E: Yeah.  
B: Oh it's in chronological order.  
E: What? It is?



B: Yeah.  
E: Oh. That anvil's neat.  
B: Each one's chronological order on a certain topic, it looks like.  
E: Oh okay. What's this one here?  
B: This is all metals.  
E: "Materials panarama".  
  
E: Plastic baseball bat. "Material messages."  
That's a conglomeration there.  
B: Well you go from metals to plastics, from wood. So wood was the natural product.  
E: Wood was first? Oh I see. They went wood to plastics.  
B: And metal. Wood and metal.  
E: Yeah, okay.  
B: And these were all combinations.  
E: Combinations of different materials.  
B: Yeah.  
  
E: There's an old steel pot.  
B: Um hm. They should have a chinese wood one in there. You know, a wooden hat?  
B: Oh, like they use in China?  
E: Yeah, a construction hat.  
B: What's that other one?

Subtly, Barbara leads the pair in analyzing the exhibit.

In Pair 07H, male-female friends of a shorter time, it is the male who plays the expert. In this typical example regarding a shiva laser amplifier, the female in the pair explicitly validates the expertise of the male:

F: What this thing? '31'. Any good guesses?  
M: Looks like a laser.  
F: Excuse me, you're just a little too smart.  
M: (laugh)  
F: Shiva laser amplifier.  
M: 'Shiva'. That was the one they were going to use for fusion. Or trying to.  
F: Huh. That's amazing.

Among female-female pairs, the same relational

consequence of talk within the Competent frame is found. Here, in a mother-daughter pair (10H) discussing a betty lamp and an early 20th century hair comb, the mother is constructed as the expert, most often the one determining or attempting to provide answers to her daughter's questions:

M: What's that, 'f'?

D: 'Betty lamp'?

M: Wonder how it worked? Suppose you put the oil in the bottom there, but there's no wick or anything, I don't know how it actually worked.

D: Is that a lamp to light something, or...?

M: I presume it must be a..something to light it anyway.

M: And 'F'? Early 20th century.

D: 'Celluloid'.

M: Celluloid.

D: What's celluloid?

M: Oh, it's man-made material, that's a bit like plastic.

Through their focus on relating special knowledge, Competent pairs in both museums appear to construct and validate a particular role configuration - that of an "expert" and a "learner" or "less competent" individual. When asked in their interviews if they had learned or confirmed anything about their companions, Competents themselves zeroed in on the issue of knowledge and expertise. For many pairs, one member stressed the others' greater competence, while the other member mentioned her/her companions' lesser competence. For example, in the art museum, Julie said of Dave,

He is fairly...well, more knowledgeable in art than I am. He is president of the art museum in [town] where we're from...He has a good insight into the painting and the art and the artists from that.

While Dave said of Julie,

Although she's really rather unschooled in art, she reacts emotionally to art. I wouldn't have guessed that she would react that way. And that's interesting to watch.

In another male-female art pair, (21A), the husband was an artist. While the wife (Person 112) explained

He's an artist. And, I don't know much about art and he knows a lot about art. He has...an MFA. And so... his knowledge of the different periods and the styles of paintings and things that I don't know much about...comes out...

Her husband (Person 111) said,

Sometimes I reserve judgement on something until I hear what my wife has to say because I've had a lot more training in the arts and she is much less experienced.

Barbara of Pair 24H, who appeared to be the expert between herself and her husband, reflected no particular emphasis in attitude about these issues. However, Ed, her husband, emphasized his wife's knowledge:

The meerschaum pipe. I always thought it was a material carved and she knew it was a clay material. And she pointed out the wooden bicycle. She just saw different things.

For Pair 07H, the male-female friends in which the male appeared to be in the expert role, the female (Person 73) said,

[I confirmed] things about his background. Being a physics major in college and that kind of stuff. I could tell by what he was looking at and what he knew about. Things he knew...things he knows that I really didn't realize he would know about...It was good to go through that exhibit with him, cause he knows so much about science and all that kind of stuff.

As Stubbs (1983) contends, "it is principally through conversational interaction...that social 'roles' are recognized and sustained" (p. 7). Such roles or aspects of identity must be recognized and reacted to (Klapp, 1969, Beckman, 1981). Thus while both members of Competent pairs may relate special knowledge to the objects they view in either museum, the two individuals typically cast themselves into the roles of "expert" and "less competent". For some, especially those who have known each other a longer time, this talk seems to confirm such aspects of individual and relational identity for the pair. For individuals who are getting to know each other, the Competent frame may in fact serve to construct such roles within the pair.

## 6. COMPETENT PERSONALIZERS

Recall Carol and Shelley (27A), friends and fellow art teachers who've known each other a long time, visiting the National Gallery. They typify Competent-Personalizers - pairs in the art context characterized by a high amount of relating both special knowledge and personal experience

to the works viewed, including many references to other shared museum and aesthetic experiences. Four out of five of these cases were female friend pairs.

True to the name of their frame, Competent-Personalizers typically appear to achieve a combination of two social functions. While constructing both pair members as competent, but one in particular as an "expert" like the Competent pairs, Competent-Personalizers also confirm their identity as friends through the invoking of shared memories and experiences. Consider these exchanges by Carol and Shelley about the paintings Mount Katahdin by Marsden Hartley, A Friendly Call by William Merritt Chase, and Mrs. W.C.H. Endicott by John Singer Sargent:

S: There was an exhibit of Marsden Harley's about 5 or 6 years ago in New York that unfortunately I missed. We have a book about it at home, and it's really interesting. He's like a guy that you never would know about.

C: No. True. I mean, I must admit, that I've never had much interest in learning about. Any of these I'd pass by.

C: No comment.

S: What do you mean? These guys are all American impressionists, I think.

C: Um hm.

S: Well, I know they are. Now this guy, I have always liked his paintings. Remember the ones we saw at Carnegie? William Merritt Chase. Those great portraits?

C: Does he have one with walls?

S: Yes.

C: Of other paintings all over the wall?

S: Yes I think so.

C: I definitely like Sargents.

S: I always liked his paintings, too. I guess

- its just sort of why I like an Eakins portrait, is that it's just..
- C: It's kind of like an American Rembrandt. If that makes any kind of sense.
- S: (laugh) But having seen Rembrandt today, they're not like Rembrandt.
- C: No, but there's...

Like Competents here, one pair member, Shelley, plays the role of expert, while Carol, although competent herself, appears to defer to Shelley's greater knowledge. At the same time, however, they refer in the examples above and in other parts of their talk to previous museum experiences together - e.g., "remember the ones we saw at Carnegie" - affirming their relationship as friends and fellow museum-goers.

Pair 07A, female friends of shorter duration, appear to achieve the same social consequences of constructing one pair member as the expert but also validating themselves as friends with a shared history, however brief. Here, they discuss the paintings Mount Katahdin by Marsden Hartley, Midsummer Twilight by Leroy Metcalf, Autumn 1877 by Winslow Homer, and Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens by Albert Ryder:

- F2: I never heard of these guys.
- F1: Looks like something I could do (laugh). Looks like school, kind of. One of those depressing days, when the sky was all overcast? Ugh.
- F2: Bad memories.
- F2: This kind of looks like the ah, French impressionists a little bit. I've never heard of any of these guys.

F1: It says 'American school.' Hmm. Did you all have like a theme in that class? Did you...

F2: We went through different, the different, like, phases in art, like the Byzantine, we started out with...

F1: Oh, okay, and the Impressionists, and the...

F2: and worked our way up to the Impressionists.

F2: Homer. Homer is famous too.

F1: I've heard of him. Me, the uneducated.

F2: This one's Jenny.

F1: (laugh)

F2: (in a funny voice): "Oh my goodness! What are you doing there!" She stands up.

F1: Yeah, she's standing up going, "come in, come in, take your clothes off!"

F2: "Join us! Why yes!"

In this pair who have known each other for a relatively short time, Female #2, who has had art classes, is constructed as the expert, while Female #1 plays the less competent role, referring to herself, for example, as "me, the uneducated." Together, though, they also make reference to their shared experiences of school, and a common friend. It is not just Female #1, the less competent, who invokes these personal references. In the final example above, where they associate their friend Jenny to the painting of a nude bather, as in other examples throughout, Female #2, the "expert", initiates the personal association. Throughout their talk, both women bring up shared personal references.

Typifying Competent-Personalizers, the interview responses of these two pairs further support the interpretation of both social consequences - the

construction of one pair member as an expert, and the confirmation of their identity as friends. In the first pair, Carol remarked about Shelley,

Her art history background is stronger than mine. So she can fill in a lot of things that I have questions about. The notes that she takes...she actually does research the answers immediately when she gets home. We've done travelling together and been in a lot of places. I'm suprised she does that as much as she does.

Shelley said of Carol,

[I confirmed her] previous art historical knowledge. Some things she was able to remind me of, though not all...I like to experience museums with somebody that then when I leave I also have a relationship with because it becomes a permanent part of your memory, and you constantly have that reinforcement going on all the time.

In just one interview response each, both pair members alluded to the expertise as well as the friendship components of their experience together.

The "less competent" friend of Pair 07A, Person 73, dwelt more on the expertise issue in her interview:

She mentioned before we got in here that she had taken a class at school, an art class. While we were walking around I hadn't heard of anybody. Whereas every other picture she had heard of the people that had painted them.

The "expert" of this pair, Person 74, noted their difference in approach to the art, but also remarked upon her own knowledge of her friend's personality:

She asked what I thought was going on or what the story behind the picture was, whereas I was looking at it more as a piece of art, more how it was done and what techniques were used. But



in talking about some of the paintings, what she thought of them, what she asked about them, I kind of confirmed what she's like in her choice of things to do, or the way she dresses.

Like these two pairs, Competent-Personalizers, be they friends of longer or shorter duration, appear to construct and validate the roles of "expert" and "learner", like Competents. However, equally importantly, they invoke references to shared experiences, which also serve to reinforce their identity as a pair of friends.

#### 7. MULTIFRAMERS

Multiframers uniquely relate special knowledge and personal experience to the works at hand, and also rate high on evaluation and absolute object description in their talk. Typifying Multiframers are Renee and Lynn (03A), friends of less than a year visiting the National Gallery of Art, and Jed and Holly (03H), fiancées of two years, visiting the National Museum of American History. Of what social consequence is the talk of these pairs?

The consequences appear to vary, depending upon the duration of the relationship. Consider first the talk of Lynn and Renee, just getting to know each other, as suggested by their remarks about Tennis Tournament by George Bellows and Wapping on Thames by James Whistler:

L: Oh, okay, Bellows.

R: Bellows. Remember I told you about Bellows? But this is not a finished Bellows. This is a...

L: Unfinished?

R: Yeah. Interesting, too, I mean when you look...  
L: Why, because the forms aren't uh...  
R: Yeah, well, he hasn't finished.  
L: Oh here, oh I see, right, right.  
R: Yeah. Well, that's the way Bellows painted. Bellows was very dramatic, and as I said, this has just become...come back into ah...  
L: He's American then?  
R: Favor again. I mean, for years...  
L: Never heard of Bellows.

L: Oh I like that.  
R: Um hm.  
L: Probably not because it's a wonderful painting, I'd just like to be there (laugh).  
R: (laugh)  
L: I guess I'm drawn a lot to people sitting around areas, like that, just sitting casually.  
R: I see that as part of your personality, too...  
L: I guess. Just hanging out, having a capuccino.  
R: I think I'm drawn to that too (laugh).  
L: (laugh)  
R: In a place where there's water...  
L: Right. Right.  
R: Uh huh.  
L: Outside, a garden or water...  
R: Uh huh.

[on viewing the above painting from the other side of the room:]

R: I like that, now that we're standing on the other side of the room. I really like that painting.  
L: Yeah I like it too.  
R: I'd love to have that in my house and sit and look at it all the time (laugh).  
L: Um hm. Um hm. But see it has that quality that I liked in the Rousseau, people sitting around and they look like they were just relaxing.  
R: Uh huh.  
L: And they were with friends and having a good time, in a nice environment.  
R: Uh huh.  
L: Comfortable quality about it.

R: Yeah.  
L: Yeah, I would have that.  
R: You like that too.  
L: Definately.  
R: We'll chip in, we'll tell Bruce, and...then  
one month at your house, one month at my...  
L: That's right, and then they'll divorce us  
both.  
R: They'll sell their cars.  
L: Right.  
R: (laugh) Sell everything to buy that painting.  
Mortgage the houses, we'll build a shack,  
we'll live in it and look at that painting.  
L: Right.

Through relating special knowledge, the pair constructs Lynn as the expert. Through evaluation, both women express themselves, which leads to perception of similarities. Through personal references, especially their "joke" about selling all they have to buy the painting they like, they seem to confirm their similarity in backgrounds and values, and suggest a "pairness" that would result from joint-ownership of the painting.

In their interview responses, Lynn and Renee noted both their growing perceptions of similarities and the friendship between them as well as Renee's role as expert. As Lynn explained,

She's just a very comfortable person to be with. She's also very knowledgeable about art, but she doesn't make you feel badly. She's not instructive in an arrogant way. It's really just nice to learn. And share.

Said Renee, emphasizing their similarities,

We haven't been friends that long and I assumed she was a bright lady, and interested in a lot of the same things I am...and I confirmed that...it was interesting that we both liked one

painting, we both liked the scene. We both wanted to be in that place. And that was nice.

Like Competent-Personalizers, this Multiframer pair concludes and validates the nature of a growing friendship between them, as well as the expert status of one pair member. In Multiframer talk, however, these consequences are achieved through the relating of special knowledge, personal experience, evaluation, and the unique talk which results from the emphasis upon all four interpretive acts.

Remarkably similar to the interview responses of Renee and Lynn were those of Pair 19A, another pair of female friends who had known each other for less than a year. Said Person 97, the "less competent" pair member, of her companion,

She brought to light technical aspects that I figured she would know, compositional, treatment of color. I thought she would know and she did indeed...She feels comfortable...to speak freely with me. So we were able to talk about our husbands..as well as the art. She's a pretty good listener.

While her companion, the "expert" (Person 98) reflected,

You can get a feel for some things you intuitively know. Not that I know her that well, but just by what she said about the artwork. Just a general feeling for the kind of person she is. I like being with her because she's like me. She has similar interests. That was confirmed.

Thus both shorter-known female pairs in the art museum seem to construct the expert-learner roles, but also get to know each other and confirm an evolving sense of friendship based on similarity through the interpretive

acts of evaluation, personal experience, and special knowledge.

Female friends of long duration in the art museum (2) reflect a different social consequence. Neither of these pairs appear to stress the construction of the expert-learner roles, although both convey their competence through the relating of special knowledge. Primarily, through evaluation and personal experience, these pairs appear to express individuality and differences, as exemplified by Pair 25A. Here, they discuss the works Midsummer Twilight by Leroy Metcalf, Oyster Sloop Cos Cob by Childe Hassam, and Harriet H. Carville by Thomas Eakins:

F2: Now this one, I love that. I love that kind of thing.

F1: Now that gives me the feeling of Impressionism again.

F2: And that's what you don't like. Or you do like?

F1: I don't prefer it.

F2: Yeah.

F1: Okay.

F2: See but for me it's because I like the soft colors.

F1: Right. Oh yeah. There is a softness to it.

F2: I like, you know, the shadows.

F1: Yeah. And I guess with me, I like a definiteness.

F2: Uh huh. Well in some ways that kind of stays too, because don't you think in life too, you like things, it's a decision made. It's right or it's wrong?

F1: Yeah. I don't like fuzziness. Right. You're right.

F1: See here we are again.

F2: Um hm. See now, that's very appealing to me. It's interesting too that art, also what

you like, does say something about your philosophy.

F1: Right. Your personality.

F2: Yeah.

F1: Right.

F2: The fuzzier the better.

F1: Oh my. That's striking, isn't it. That woman's face.

F2: Yeah. You look at something like that and you just think of the matriarchial society where you go to Mom.

F1: (laugh)

F2: And she says 'no way.'

F1: (laugh) Now that's Sargent again.

F2: I think of too is that at that time, how long it would take you to get dressed.

F1: Right.

F2: And how confining the clothes are.

F1: Um?

F2: My grandmother used to, one thing I can remember is with us, we used to have to, she had the corset like with stays and stuff? We used to just hate this, but my mother would have us go up and help grandma with her corset.

F1: (laugh)

F2: And you'd be pulling on this thing, trying to get all the breath out of her.

In the above examples, this pair clearly expresses the belief that evaluation and taste are reflective and communicative of one's personality. As a result, they express their differences. Further, the personal associations they invoke are individual, rather than shared. Together, this creates a sense of their individuality and separateness, rather than similiarity.

Their interview remarks, while brief, indeed focused on their differences as conveyed through taste:

Person 109 (F1): We disagree on what we like.

Person 110 (F2): Everything's black and white for her...it's just a different perspective on life. But it comes through when we're looking at a painting.

Displaying similar emphases in transcript talk as well as interview response, the other female pair of longer time known art goers (25A) made brief but remarkably similar comments:

Person 95 on her companion: She's very opinionated.

Person 96 on her companion: I was surprised how much better she likes representational art than I do.

Thus with a greater emphasis on evaluation, female art Multiframers of longer duration emphasize their individuality and differences. Recall that Competent-Personalizers are also female friends of longer duration, and that they emphasize the expression of their pairness. Perhaps these particular pairs of Multiframer friends aren't as close as the Competent-Personalizers, and might be less invested in regular museum-going. It is intriguing that the same type of pairs convey different social consequences depending upon the frame of talk they invoke.

In sum, among art Multiframers, the amount of time the women have been friends is an important factor in the specific consequences which seem to occur. While friends of shorter duration tend to emphasize their similarities, those of longer duration, at least among

Multiframers, express their individuality and differentiation.

In the history museum, all Multiframer pairs are male-female couples. In this context as well, the amount of time that the pair members have known each other is an important factor in the social consequences of the talk. These consequences, however, are somewhat different than those of art Multiframers.

Recall Jed and Holly, fiancées of two years, as they discuss a scroll-sawn coaster and an ashtray:

J: And see B? That's carving in some kind of wood.

H: 'Walnut and birch'

J: That's where you use...a saber saw for that. It's a table with a little saw and it comes up like that.

H: Oh yeah, you put it on top and cut?

J: Yeah. You draw the design on the whole thing, and then you just drill a little hole in the middle of each design.

H: Um hm.

J: And then whenever you want to cut out that little piece you just put it over the saw, and then you can saw it out, and then take the next piece, and drop it over the saw, and saw it out. Remember in L.A. we went to the temple down there, and the doors, you'd see the metalwork on the doors?

H: Um hm.

J: It was done just like that, with that kind of a saw.

J: See the little ashtray like that?

H: Um hm. Remember those?

J: My mom, she used to have an ashtray, for in the bedroom.

H: Um hm.

J: That, ah if, you know, you lay your cigarette on it...

H: um hm

J: And if it burns down too far, the heat would raise the cigarette up, on the thing it



was laying on, and it would throw it in the ashtray. So that way you couldn't fall asleep with it like that.

H: We're in the age of plastics, huh?

J: Yeah, everything's plastic. I guess we run out of oil, we go back to everything else.

For history Multiframers of short duration, such as Jed and Holly, the roles of expert and learner were indeed constructed. Above, and throughout their talk, Jed "teaches" Holly about machines, manufacturing, and a number of topics. They also invoked throughout their talk a number of individual, rather than shared, personal associations and reminiscences. As a result, this male-female couple appears to stress their individuality, yet through that expression, learn new things about each other. Their interview responses reflected these two consequences. Jed stressed the competence issue:

She's learning things that maybe I already know something about...

Holly referred to this issue, but also reflected on the importance of sharing and learning about each other's backgrounds through the relating of individual personal associations:

Anything that I show an interest in that he knows about...all the tool things, all the building and mechanical things...I knew that he will explain to me until I have some idea of how it works. I could see a machine and he could tell me about it. I like that. I don't resent that at all..And also the comfort of being with someone close to you...you really do feel like you can stop and look at something to your heart's content and not worry about them...I did notice something [else]. I said, da da da about

something and Jed responded and finished it from something I told him probably a year ago about my childhood. Because we really do talk. And the more he knows about me fussing at the dinner table at age 5, telling my mother I wasn't going to eat oatmeal...he remembers...One thing that it shows me is...we also remember..we don't take it in one ear and out the other, we listen to our partner...He told me of some things that were in his mother's house. Something in here reminded him of it and he told me about this little ashtray thing...it's important.

Thus the sharing of individual memories and associations, while conveying new information about each person's identity, also seems to confirm for this couple their closeness and good communication skills as a pair.

By comparison, the two male-female Multiframer history pairs who have known each other a long time seem to emphasize rather exclusively their "pairness." Interestingly, both of these pairs invoke the Consumer type dialogue, along with their special knowledge and absolute object description, as evidenced in these examples from Pair 25H about a churn, a canning jar and a hair comb:

M: Bill said that this churn, stoneware?

F: Um hm.

M: The one he has out at the cabin right now, \$800?

F: How big is it?

M: It's not quite as large as this one.

F: Do you know the one that we have upstairs holding the door open?

M: Yeah?

F: I saw one almost like it except that it had a crack in it, ours was perfect. And it was worth \$150.

M: Now there's your mother's glass jars, or something similar that she gave away.  
F: Yeah. Looked just like those. How many?  
M: She gave two dozen of 'em away, canning jars, yeah. All with the glass tops in the middle.  
  
F: Look at the combs.  
M: I had an aluminum comb once.  
F: I did too. I lost it.  
M: I didn't like it.  
F: I didn't either. It broke the hair, didn't it?  
M: Um hm. It cut it.

In their interview responses, this couple stressed the fact that they had been together for so long as the reason that nothing about their companion's behavior was much of a surprise. In so doing, they actually emphasized their pairness, as they seem to do in their transcript, through shared personal references. Said the husband, Person 49:

She just has an extensive knowledge of life in general. But that wasn't surprising to me. We've been together many years.

Said the wife, Person 50:

He has an interest in old tools that I thought was confirmed. Many of the things [here] are things from our childhood. I didn't learn too much because we've been married 35 years.

Thus, while history Multiframer couples of shorter duration seem to emphasize individuality and learning about each other, those of longer duration emphasize their identity as a pair.

In sum, Multiframers appear to vary in social

consequence both by relationship type and by amount of time the pair has known each other. Female friends of shorter duration in the art museum, and married couples of longer duration in the history museum, both emphasize the expression of similarity and pair identity. Female friends of longer duration in the art museum, and married couples of shorter duration in the history museum, on the other hand, both emphasize the expression of individuality. These differences in social consequence might indeed reflect differences in the operative social agenda for each pair type.

While some construct the expert-learner roles, most Multiframers appear to draw conclusions about and express aspects of their relationship through the invocation of evaluation, personal associations shared and individual, and special knowledge. Given that Multiframers are characterized by their high rating on several interpretive acts, they appear to be the least uniform in social functions achieved. Emphasizing the widest variety of ways of talk available to them, social functions are achieved for Multiframers through a number of them.

#### A Summary of Social Functions

As McCall and Simmons (1978) state, "identity

must be won and rewon continually" (p. 166). As in other contexts such as the home and the marketplace, talk about objects in the museum setting also expresses and constructs aspects of self-identity, such as individuals' age, background, personality traits, and competence. Through the sharing and relating of such information in interaction, visitor pair members express their differences and "uniqueness," as well as their similarity and "pairness." As a result, relationships are assessed, developed and maintained. In cases in which individuals have known each other for a relatively short time, pair members express and assess similarities and differences, and construct roles. These functions are instrumental in the further development of the relationship. For pairs in longstanding relationships, talk about objects provides a vehicle for the expression, validation, and maintenance of existing relational identity. For some, this appears to focus upon the expression and validation of differences, for others, upon similarities and "pairness", for yet others, upon both.

While the frames of Recognizers and Personalizers were invoked by only shorter-time known and longer-time known pairs respectively, all other frames were invoked by pairs of both types. Thus, through five of the seven interpretive frames, both major types of relational functions were achieved. While the interpretive frames

themselves provide unique ways of achieving these consequences, it is the nature of the pair relationship itself that seems to account for the bulk of variation in social function.

#### Explaining the Variation: Time Known Plus Gender Equals Relationship Type

At first glance, the key factor in the achievement of a particular social function appears to be the amount of time the pair members have known each other. When the factor of gender is considered along with amount of time known, it soon becomes clear that the operative variable in relational function is in fact the nature of the relationship itself. In sum, there are five types of relationships represented in this sample - shorter time known female friends, longer time known female friends, longer time known female relatives, shorter time known male-female couples, and longer time known male-female couples. Important differences exist among them. While shorter time known female friends and longer time known female relatives seem most often to emphasize similarity and "pairness" through their talk about objects, longer time known female friends, for the most part, seem more likely to emphasize their differences. Interestingly, the reverse is true for male-female couples. Here, the shorter time known pairs, getting to know each other through their object discussions, were most likely to

emphasize their differences, while the longer time known pairs, most of them married, emphasized similarities and pairness.

What might explain such variation? In short, these five relationship types might be thought of as reflecting differences in investment in the establishment of a "pair" identity. To some extent, this may in fact be gender related.

Consider first the differences among shorter known pairs by gender. While getting to know each other, female friends were more likely to emphasize their similarities, while male-female pairs, mostly couples on "dates," were more likely to focus upon their differences. While this may simply be a product of the particular pairs in the sample, it might also be a product of gender and relationship type. Since women seem more readily than men to value affiliation and similarity (Gilligan, 1982), this value may in fact be represented in their orientations to developing relationships and thus reflected in their talk. Also, since most of the male-female pairs were on "dates", their focus might indeed reflect a more cautious focus on assessing compatibility, reserving "pairness" for subsequent stages of relationship development (cf. Backman, 1981).

The reverse gender tendencies are found among

longstanding pairs. Here, women friends focus more often on differences within their relationships, while female family members and male-female married couples, the relationships most invested in pair identity, focus upon expressing similarities. While again such differences might simply be artifacts of the particular pairs in this sample, the trends suggest that the type of the relationship, particularly, its gender configuration in interaction with the amount of time pair members have known each other, might in fact reflect a social agenda, however unconscious, which relates to the relational functions which result from visitor pair talk in museums.

#### The Role of Interpretative Frames

While each interpretive frame, except for Recognizers and Personalizers, was invoked by pairs of longer as well as of shorter duration, it does not appear to be the case that the frames themselves determine the social functions which result. However, the frames do provide variation in the aspects of identity conveyed, as well as in the manner in which that information is conveyed. In sum, interpretive frames of the Subjective mode, namely, Recognizers, Evaluators, Personalizers, and Evaluator-Personalizers, primarily result in the exchange of personal information and background characteristics, such as age, experience, family background, and



personality traits. This occurs through the use of the objects as mediators of taste and familiarity from which background is inferred, as in the cases of Recognizers and Evaluators, or through the use of the objects as triggers in the explication of memories and experiences, as in the case of Personalizers and Evaluator-Personalizers. Interpretive frames of the Objective mode, namely, Competents and Competent-Personalizers, result primarily in the construction and/or maintenance of an "expert"- "learner" role dichotomy. However, Competent-Personalizers are, in social consequence, more like the frame of the Combination mode, namely, Multiframers, in that both types of information are conveyed in the manner of both previous frames combined.

#### The Role of Museum Type

Since social function appears to vary by relationship type, the context of the museum, art or history, plays a relatively small role in function variation. The majority of all social functions found among pairs in this study occurred in both museums. However, three differences are explained by museum context. Owing to the nature of the museum artifacts, and the discourses they invoke, the frames of Recognizers and Consumers are unique to the history museum context. Therefore, the social functions of assessing similarities and differences among shorter

time known pairs through the Recognizer Frame, and validating family identity among female relatives through the Consumer frame occurred only in the history context. Also, the frame of Evaluators, through which pairs of shorter and longer duration assess similarities and differences solely through taste, occurred only in the art context. In these cases, social function appears to be related to the discourses invoked by the museum contexts. All other social functions occurred in both museums, however, suggesting once again, as in the case of the interpretive frames and modes themselves, that many of the findings of this study might in fact describe visitor talk and social functions across the two different museum contexts explored in this research.

## CONCLUSION

At the everyday empirical level, identity is available through language, the systems of codes by which humans define self and other. (Weigert et al., 1986, p. 31)

Like communication about goods in the home and the marketplace, communication about goods in museums also conveys identity. As this study illustrates, the same interpretive frames that visitors invoke to make meaning of displayed objects simultaneously make meaning of "selves." As Bourdieu (1984) illustrated within French

society, taste and interpretation of objects indeed operate as "cultural capital," conveying distinction regarding education level and class, as reflected in one's ability to invoke the "aesthetic" response as compared to the "popular." While this study suggests that education level may be one such distinction conveyed through visitor talk, it is by no means the only one. Through talk about objects in museums, the individual members of a visitor pair express their similarities to and differences from each other regarding age, background, personality traits, and experiences, as well as competence, class and education, a number of "distinctions" which constitute identity. In so doing, the resulting whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts: a relationship is assessed, developed, or maintained.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

We never look at just one thing. We are always looking at the relationship of things to ourselves. (Berger, 1972, p.7)

As this study illustrates, the 'meaning of things' is rightfully a question of interpretation and interaction. In order to understand the meaning of museum 'things' to visitor pairs, this study has provided a reconceptualization of museum object interpretation as a media process in which visitors actively construct meaning through talk with their companions. From this perspective, four specific research questions were posed in Chapter One. Rephrased in terms of the findings, those questions are:

1. How do visitor pairs make meaning of museum objects through talk? What sort of "meanings" result?
2. What are the social functions of this behavior?
3. How might the factors of museum context (art as compared to history) and gender configuration of visitor pair (female with female as compared to female with male) account for variations in meaning-making and social function? What other factors appear to be operative, and how?
4. What do these findings suggest about the role of the museum in society?

To answer rephrased questions #1-3, this chapter will first present a summary, integration and discussion of the key findings of this dissertation. With reference to the study findings, question #4 will then be addressed. This

is followed by a discussion of the implications of this study for three important areas - mass media audience studies, the interdisciplinary study of goods as communication, and finally, the museum profession. Last, but crucially, the reader is reminded of the methodological limitations of the study, suggesting avenues for further research.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

##### Making Meaning of Things: Interpretive Acts, Interpretive Frames, Interpretive Modes

In the talk of all visitor pairs in this study, there exist five basic categories of response, or interpretive acts - the verbal reflections of tacit intertextual processes. These acts are establishment, absolute object description, evaluation, relating special knowledge, and relating personal experience. While present to some extent in every pair's interaction, the frequency and emphasis of these acts varied considerably across pairs. Thus these acts were found to constitute verbal building blocks which form interpretive frames, different contexts of perspective created and maintained through talk. While surely not all meaning construction occurs through talk, these interpretive frames represent visitors' preferred (though not necessarily conscious) ways of speaking with each other about objects, as well as their distinct attitudes about objects and the museum

experience as evidenced in their interview responses. In all, seven different interpretive frames were identified and named: Recognizers, Evaluators, Personalizers, Evaluator-Personalizers, Competents, Competent-Personalizers, and Multi-Framers. These names reflect the predominant interpretive acts or behaviors invoked within each frame.

When collapsed further, the seven interpretive frames represent three major interpretive modes in talk and attitude by which visitor pairs make meaning - the Subjective mode, the Objective mode, and the Combination mode. Frames within the Subjective mode stress a quite personal nature to talk and meaning, emphasizing taste, familiarity, and/or memories and associations. Frames within the Objective mode stress the relating of special knowledge, and regard the meaning of an object as communicative of information from or about its creator or users. Frames of the Combination mode uniquely stress the combination of both subjective and objective ways of talk and attitude - personal responses together with more intellectual ones.

Generally, these interpretive frames reflect discourses of relating to objects which exist in our society. Some, like the aesthetic disposition, reflected in the Objective mode, are codified in large part by the museum and other institutions which promote art

appreciation and object connoisseurship. Others, such as the Personalizer frame and the Consumer version of the Evaluator-Personalizer frame, both in the Subjective mode, reflect discourses such as consumerism and personal possession, found in other contexts of object encounter such as the home and marketplace. Notably, this study illustrates their role within the museum context as well.

### Making Meaning of Us: The Social Functions of Visitor Talk

Through interpretive frames of talk, visitors make meaning of displayed artifacts in art and history museums. At the same time, they are making meaning of themselves and their relationships. As in other contexts, talk about museum "goods" communicates identity. In short, interpretive frames operate as discourses of self, expressing and constructing aspects of identity such as age, background, personality traits, and roles. Through the sharing and relating of this information, two distinct but related outcomes are possible: the expression of difference and "uniqueness", and the expression of similarity and "pairness." As a result, developing relationships are assessed, and longstanding relationships are expressed, validated, and maintained. In particular, frames within the Subjective mode convey information about experience, background, age, and personality traits of companions, involving the museum objects as mediators of

taste and familiarity, or as triggers in the explication of memories and experiences. Frames within the Objective mode construct or maintain an "expert"- "learner" dichotomy within pairs, utilizing the objects as triggers for the invocation of special knowledge. Frames within the Combination mode can lead to the exchange of both kinds of information.

#### Accounting for Variation: Acts, Frames and Modes

While the mechanics of meaning-making and social function apply to all visitor pairs in this study, variation among frames and functions, as expected, was indeed found along the factors of museum type (art vs. history) and gender configuration of pair (female with female vs. female with male). Additionally, the factors of education, amount of time known and, eventually, relationship type, emerged to play a role in accounting for variation. While the small sample size of this study and the subsequent small number of cases of various types preclude definitive correlations, a number of compelling connections are indicated, warranting further study.

When the mean ratings of each interpretive act were compared for different pair types in Chapter Four, museum context was found to play the biggest role. While pairs in the art museum rated higher than those in the history museum on absolute object description, relating



special experience, and evaluation, pairs in the history museum rated higher than those in art on establishment. An interesting variation was found by gender in the art museum only. Here, female-female pairs rated higher on both acts of relating special knowledge and relating personal experience than did male-female pairs. Across both museum contexts, pairs who had known each other a shorter time rated higher on the interpretive act of evaluation than did pairs who had known each other a longer time.

These variations in interpretive acts were indeed reflected in the variation found among interpretive frames and modes. Here, several factors appear to be connected to the variation observed. Education level appeared to be related to interpretive mode - those of college education or less seemed more likely to invoke a frame within the Subjective mode, while those of graduate level education seemed more likely to invoke a frame within the Objective mode or the Combination mode. This suggests that those of higher education might be more likely to have access to the codes or competencies required for the "objective" ways of relating to objects. However, education alone does not tell the full story.

The museum context by itself, as the mean ratings of interpretive acts suggest, accounts for some frame variations. Specifically, Recognizers, who emphasize

establishment, are found in the history museum only, where in fact this act occurs much more frequently. Similarly, Evaluators, who emphasize evaluation, are found in the art museum only, where this act was found to occur more frequently. These differences are attributed to the conventional discourses of history and art appreciation, respectively.

The museum context in interaction with the gender configuration of the pair accounts for further frame variation. Specifically, Consumers and Evaluator-Personalizers are female-female pairs found in history and art, respectively, reflecting the possibility of gender-linked discourses. As the mean ratings for female-female pairs in the art museum foreshadowed, pairs of this type, as represented in the frames of Competent-Personalizers and Multiframers in art, invoke both special knowledge and personal experience. This reflects the more frequent association of women as compared to men with competence in art, as well as with higher self-disclosure. Conversely, female-male pairs, as Multiframers in history, reflect the more frequent association of men as compared to women with competence in history.

Finally, within the Subjective mode only, the amount of time visitors have known each other appears to account for the variation between the use of the Recognizer frame, as compared to the Personalizer frame.

While the former, less disclosing frame is invoked by shorter time known pairs, the latter, involving far more detailed self-disclosure, is invoked by pair members who have known each other a longer time.

In sum, variation in interpretive frames appears to be accounted for by the factors of museum context in interaction with aspects of the pair relationship itself - namely, gender configuration as connected to subject matter competence and self-disclosure differences, and amount of time pair members have known each other, also related to self-disclosure differences.

#### Accounting for Variation: Social Functions

While each interpretive mode and frame appears to facilitate social functions in a slightly different way, it seems to be aspects of the pair relationship which determine the particular social function achieved. While shorter time known pairs assess and construct developing relationships, longer time known pairs validate and maintain existing relational identities. When gender configuration and amount of time known were looked at together, the particular identity focus emerged suggestively as a function of relationship type: while shorter time known female friends, longer time known female relatives, and longer time known male-female couples, mostly married, emphasized the expression of

similarities and "pairness", longer time known female friends and shorter time known male-female couples emphasized the expression of differences and uniqueness. This difference may be explained by differing levels of investment in the development and maintenance of a "pair" identity.

#### On Frames and Functions Together: The Role of the Visitor Pair Relationship

While the specific social functions of talk in museums were not found to vary consistently by particular interpretive frame, they are closely connected through the variables of museum context, gender configuration, and amount of time pair members have known each other. This leads us to consider the reverse question - to what extent might the invocation of specific interpretive frames be a function of the social agenda and identity of the pair, however unconscious?

While the qualitative nature of this study and the relatively small number of cases of each relationship type precludes any definitively causal statement, the relationship type itself - combining the variables of gender configuration and time known - appears to be a potentially crucial factor in the interpretation of museum objects by visitor pairs. Working in interaction with the particular museum context, and the discourses associated

with and invoked by the content (art vs. history) the visitor pair relationship appears to serve as an interpretive community of sorts - a locus of shared meaning which mediates and modifies the invocation of available discourses. Thus, pairs filter their individual and gender-linked competencies and tendencies through the context of their relational identity to produce a shared interpretive approach. The resulting frame constructs and reflects the meanings of "things" and of "selves" valued by and operative within the relationship itself. The talk then impacts upon the construction and maintenance of those meanings. The identity of the pair is both a product and a mediator of verbal meaning-making. Thus for example, while female relatives in the history museum discuss the artifacts they own that are valuable and may serve as family heirlooms, potential lovers on dates explore the extent of their compatibility through the metaphor of "taste" in the art museum. While different types of pairs may in fact invoke similar interpretive frames, their social ends, and ultimate qualitative nature, reflect back the very relationship within which meaning is created. As Berger states, "we are always looking at the relationship of things to ourselves" (p. 7, 1972). Indeed, our sense of selves - i.e., our identities, as individuals and pairs - are the filters through which we make meaning of museum objects.

## ON THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM IN SOCIETY

This study has illustrated that despite some variation in specific frames, gender-related competencies and approaches, and overall education and class level of informants, the modes of meaning-making as well as the social functions achieved through talk are similar for pairs in the art as well as the history museum. As only two exhibits in two museums were studied, the generalizability of these findings is indeed limited. Speculatively, then, what might be suggested about the role of the museum in society?

### The Museum as Mass Medium

As discussed in Chapter One, the museum is an institution which facilitates our encounters with symbolic "products" such as exhibited artifacts and paintings, presenting them to a large body of consumers who do not necessarily know each other or the "creators" of the messages. As this study illustrates, the meaning-making processes which take place within further suggest that the museum may well be thought of as a mass medium in our society. Like other mass media, the museum facilitates surveillance, correlation, socialization, and entertainment, as described by Wright (1986). The products of the medium are created through an organized

system of contributors, i.e., the museum staff who construct displays of objects. However, the meaning of those objects, as in the case of television programs and films, is often negotiated through the reception and interaction of visitors within the social context of their significant relationships.

It is the museum staff, including curators, designers, and educators, in their specialized roles, who together determine the content of exhibits and the ways in which artifacts and artworks will be presented to the public. Thus the contextualization of the artifact itself becomes part of the museum's "product." Acting in a gate-keeper role, as do media editors, it is the museum staff's selection of objects which determine the available "stimuli" for visitor response. That which is not collected and exhibited by the museum, cannot be responded to. Conversely, that which is collected and exhibited by the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of American History, to name two cases, is considered to be exemplary and valuable.

As this study suggests, the authority of the art museum is felt implicitly by visitors. Providing Art with a capitol "A", the museum is a strong mechanism for maintaining the very standards of taste and competence. In order to appear the expert, one must know how to relate to the specific works on display. While visitors without

the competence to do so may instead exercise their own taste and associations, this is often done with a nagging awareness that there is "more one should know", as many informants expressed in their interviews. The paucity of explanatory labelling or educational material that often accompanies art exhibits may well maintain this feeling of inferiority among visitors. On a more "mundane" level, the content of paintings may dictate to some extent the type and range of personal associations and reminiscences that people can make.

Similarly in the history museum, the particular objects included and therefore validated as "representative" carry some strong implications. As in the art museum, the choice of history objects themselves dictate the kind of knowledge necessary for one to appear "competent". As the Consumer pairs illustrate, those items included in the museum are gleaned by some to be worth saving and historically, if not financially, valuable. Thus the objects displayed by the museum can dictate the extent to which visitors can construct themselves as "owners of valuable goods." In this context, where objects often spark stories of relatives and past experiences, the museum's "chosen" objects might even affect the type of memories conjured in the museum setting. Providing an official "view" of history, visitors may well compare and contrast their own



experiences and memories to those represented in exhibits.

In both types of museums, the particular items exhibited may in fact influence visitors' own collecting, saving, and/or purchasing behavior. While this study chose exhibits with minimal amounts of explanatory labelling, the influence of the labelling on visitors' response is indeed an entire area for investigation. Thus museums affect visitors' potential responses through the very artifacts they select and display.

Visitors respond, however, in patterned ways, combining both "expected" or traditional discourses with more personal, idiosyncratic meanings. Ultimately, it is through the filter of their own identity and the identity of the significant relationship within which they view objects that visitor pairs negotiate the museum's offerings. Like other mass media in our society, the museum is a locus for the creation of culture, a site where individual and collectivity meet. The museum serves as a mirror - an institutional authority representing validated and exemplary culture in response to which people confirm and construct aspects of their experience.

#### The Museum as Site of Identity Construction

One such aspect of experience confirmed and constructed by visitors through talk about museum objects with their companions is identity. As this study

suggests, the museum, like other consumption opportunities (cf. Fiske, 1987), affords an arena for the construction and expression of self and relational identity through talk. While many occasions of verbal interaction may do so, the museum facilitates such behavior through the stimuli of objects - paintings, tools, machines, and other artifacts which, in many other contexts, appear to function as symbolic markers of ourselves (cf. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). As this study suggests, the museum is no exception. Here, visitors encounter familiar objects within the context of expected, additional discourses of "appreciation" and "education". As a result of this unique blend, the museum is an arena for the expression of "distinctions" of several kinds. Some are used in the display of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1980, 1984), for the construction and expression of cultural "experts" and "learners". Yet, as in the home or marketplace, the museum is also a stage for the enjoyment of reminiscence and association, and the exercise of taste, themselves all vehicles of "distinctions" and identity.

As Berger (1972) points out, there is an analogy between possessing and the "way of seeing" incorporated in Renaissance oil painting. As Levi-Strauss, the first to notice this connection, explains,

For Renaissance artists, painting was perhaps an instrument of knowledge but it was also an

instrument of possession....rich Italian merchants looked upon painters as agents, who allowed them to confirm their possession of all that was beautiful and desirable in the world. (1969, p. 133)

Thus a wealthy merchant's painting, depicting all the riches he possessed, offered him confirmation and validation.

While few people today can afford to commission their own paintings, the same function of "culture" may well be served by the act of "seeing" objects on display in museums. Through talk about artworks as well as historical artifacts, museum visitors construct and confirm themselves as possessors of many "things" - knowledge, skill, experience, status, opinions, and relationships, as well as tangible objects. And if it is true that one's "self is the sum total of all that he can call his" (James, 1890), it is no wonder that the museum, the storehouse of goods, is an arena for the expression and construction of identity.

### In Sum

Like other mass media, the museum in our society provides information, interpretations about that information, socialization, and entertainment (cf. Wright, 1986), as well as a locus for the negotiation of cultural meaning between individuals and the collectivity. As the meaning in question is that of goods or "things," the

physical objects we so deeply and perhaps subconsciously treat as symbols of ourselves, talk about objects in museums is a particularly potent vehicle for the expression and construction of identity of selves and relationships.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

This study has combined theory from three important areas - mass media audience studies, the interdisciplinary study of "goods" as communication, and theory and research within the museum profession. The implications of this research for these three areas will now be briefly addressed.

##### Implications for Mass Media Audience Study

Positing the museum as a modified mass medium, the findings of this study echo and reinforce several aspects of the growing literature on media audiences and meaning-making. In particular, the findings herein concur with conclusions by media audience researchers (e.g. Morley, 1986, Lull, 1980) that the specific social context of reception, particularly, the relationship of "others" with whom one views, is a crucial factor in reception. Like studies of television viewing and film viewing, (Katz and Leibes, 1986, Custen, 1980), this study illustrates how the meaning of media messages is socially constructed

through talk with companions. Last but not least, this study concurs with the view that media consumption presents an opportunity for the construction of identity (Fiske, 1987). As a media audience study, the findings of this research thus reinforce the concept of mass media reception as social process, negotiated through interaction, and key to the expression of identity. Further research on mass media audiences of all kinds must continue to explore the processes of meaning-making within the context of social relationships at points of actual consumption.

To view the museum as a mass medium suggests a more general theoretical implication for mass media audience study - namely, the value of considering other institutions as potential "mass media" in our society. While television, radio, film, and print no doubt contribute tremendously to the maintenance of meaning within our social world, other important institutions provide similar and/or related encounters with symbolic products. To consider such institutions as modified mass media can provide, where appropriate, a useful framework for communications study, as well as additional perspective on the role and operation of "mass media" in general.

While those in the museum field have posited museum

interpretation as a process of communication, albeit in a limited fashion, few in the communications field have examined it as such. It is hoped that this study will encourage the further consideration of the museum as an important medium in society, worthy of detailed scrutiny by communication scholars.

### Implications for the Study of Goods as Communication

While many researchers have documented the role of personal possessions and goods, including art and photography, in the communication of identity (e.g. Csikzentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981, Musello, 1986) none have considered the role of these responses within the museum experience. This study documents them to be central, suggesting that the museum is an important site for the negotiation of value and meaning of goods in a context in which such goods cannot always be purchased. While further research must explore the similarities and differences of goods as communication across the various contexts of home, marketplace, and museum, the existence of some similar responses in these contexts warrants the continued development of cross-context theory regarding people and goods. As this study suggests, people use goods as markers and symbols of identity in the museum, where "consumption" is largely experiential, as well as in the home and marketplace, as other research has shown.

In the area of aesthetic and cultural theory, it is of particular note that two of the modes of meaning-making found in this study, the Objective and Subjective modes respectively, are similar to the two opposing approaches to cultural appreciation identified by Bourdieu (1980, 1984) in his seminal study of French culture, namely, the aesthetic, or distanced, educated eye, and the popular, or personal, relevance-based response. While Bourdieu and many aesthetic theorists posit these types of response to be mutually exclusive, this study found a third mode, exhibited by highly educated visitors, which in fact invoked a combination of both types of response together. Thus some visitors with the competence to respond "objectively" appear to value both modes of response. When considered in light of the extensive research documenting the importance of goods as symbols of identity, the "subjective" mode of response appears to be much more than just the naive behavior of the unenlightened; it is in fact a valued and purposive mode of response to objects and artifacts in its own right.

While Bourdieu posits these differences in response mode as expressive of class and educational "distinction," this study suggests a finer-grained distinction among a generally highly educated sample, as well as a number of other "distinctions" achieved in interpersonal interaction through talk about museum

objects, such as age and personality traits. Thus while talk about goods in museums continues to be associated with education and class level, it also expresses many other aspects of identity.

### Implications for the Museum Profession

As an exploration of museum visitors, this study holds several implications for the museum profession. What would it mean for museum practitioners to view the museum as a mass medium, or a site of identity construction? At root is a challenge to the very conception of the museum's mission.

While the notion of the museum as a communications environment has existed within the profession since the 1960's, the conception of its nature as a process has changed remarkably little from a linear, sender-receiver model. As recently as 1989, museum visitors were described in a major museum publication

as part of a special communications system, receiving messages from the museum staff through the medium of the exhibit. To know if the message has been understood, the museum can complete the communication process by listening to visitor response (Borun, p. 36, 1989)

Given their definition as predominantly educational institutions, it is in fact not surprising that museums and their practitioners should remain nearly exclusively focused on the transmission of their intended "lessons" or messages.



However, this study indeed "listened to visitor response," from a reconfigured and updated notion of the communication process, as posited in recent media studies. The result? Visitors in museums make meaning, rather than "receive" it. While the "message" of the museum and/or the object is important to some, it is not always the only source of meaning, and in some cases, it is not very important at all. Besides learning, visitors value reminiscing, associating personal experiences, recognizing things they know, describing what they see, exercising their taste, appraising the worth of objects they own, expressing their competence, expressing their identity. What are the implications of these findings?

While museums and museum personnel may be uniquely equipped to teach aesthetic appreciation and present historical interpretation, and indeed, many visitors seek such information and instruction, a museum already is much more to its visitors than a place to learn. While many museums have acknowledged this, few have truly embraced it or reflected it within their missions, exhibits or programs. To operate from a conception of visitors as meaning-makers no doubt presents the spectre of a frightening loss of power for museum personnel. On the other hand, to acknowledge, validate, and incorporate other ways of relating to objects and

other social functions of museum-going might ultimately democratize the museum experience in such a way that visitors and museum practitioners might all learn more about the variety of ways that things have meaning in our society. Further, it might result in the attraction of broader audiences, a claimed desire of museums for at least 30 years.

To think of the museum as a mass medium may in fact help museum practitioners to recast the institution and its mission within such a broader framework. As this study suggests, museums, like other media, indeed provide information, interpretation, and entertainment, but also facilitate socialization, and the expression of identity. In all of these processes museums participate with visitors in responding to objects and in the negotiation and creation of culture.

Some interesting efforts in potentially more democratic directions are already in existence. At the Denver Art Museum, experimental painting labels in one gallery ask visitors questions, including whether or not they associated personally to the painting (Chambers, 1989). While this technique is used as a tool in order to get "naive" visitors to see the differences between their ways of relating and that of "experts," it at least does not condemn the "subjective" response. In this case,

acknowledging alternative ways of responding to artworks might even aid the teaching of specific approaches.

At the Atwater Kent Museum, the museum of the city of Philadelphia, a series of experimental programs brought elderly citizens together with school children to exchange stories and reminiscences about Philadelphia (Osaki, 1988). While promoting learning as well as reminiscing, such a program minimizes the "authoritative museum message," and in fact joins museum resources and "regular" people for an exchange of information.

At the very least, this study has suggested the importance of "updating" the conception of the museum as a communications environment with reference to existing advances in mass media theory, in subsequent visitor research. As a modified mass medium in our society, the museum plays an important role in the creation of identity and culture. That role must be practiced responsibly. At best, the findings of this study present a challenge to museum practitioners to reflect the "updated" view of a more interactive, democratic, responsive visitor/museum relationship in all their endeavors. This is not simply a matter of listening to visitors in order to find out if they heard what we wanted them to hear. It is also a matter of listening to visitors, in order to find out if and why they are visiting museums and/or even listening at all.

## METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In considering the findings and conclusions of this study, the reader is again reminded of its methodological limitations. Three main areas of limitations must be kept in mind - the nature of the sample, the number of cases in each pattern, and the tape-recorder method. Each will be reviewed briefly.

This study is based upon the talk and interview responses of self-selected visitors to two particular exhibits in two particular museums. The demographic background of the informants seems similar to those of art and history museum visitors in other institutions, as described in Chapter Three. However, the extent of the samples' representativeness of all visitors at the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of American History, respectively, await the availability of additional demographic profiles at these two institutions. It may be that visitors' experiences at these two museums, highly esteemed American institutions, may not be representative of visitor experience and meaning-making in other, less "official" museums. Further, this study sampled adult pair informants visiting the museum on weekdays only. The experience of the weekend visitor, or the demographic background of that visitor, might in fact be different. Thus the study sample represents a highly specific group. The extent of these findings as

descriptive of other visitor samples warrants further study.

Owing to the intensive, qualitative nature of the analysis, the sample of 60 visitor pairs produced a wealth of data. However, given the existence of a number of interpretive frames and apparent variations by several variables, the number of "cases" representing a particular pattern or connection often turned out to be relatively low. By offering supporting literature and extensive description, it is hoped that the interpretations of such patterns and connections, even in instances where the number of cases were low, are nonetheless compelling, at their most modest. At best, it is hoped that these patterns and connections can now be sought in larger sample studies.

Perhaps most questionable are the potential biases introduced by the tape-recorder methodology, as discussed in detail in Chapter Four. While it appears that the method did indeed affect the amount of visitors' talk, causing some to talk more and others less, the reader is reminded that the intent of this methodology was to elicit samples of meaning-making approaches utilized by visitor pairs when encountering objects. As such, the tape-recordings are not intended to reflect actual pair conversations. However, further explorations of tape-recording visitor talk is warranted. As a tool for

accessing visitors' meaning-making approaches in various exhibits, this methodology holds much potential.

#### IN CONCLUSION

In explaining the significance of "things" to people, Czikszenmihayli and Rochberg-Halton (1981) wrote:

Meaning, not material possessions, is the ultimate goal in [our] lives...People still need to know that their actions matter, that their existence forms a pattern with that of others, that they are remembered and loved, and that their individual self is part of some greater design beyond the fleeting span of mortal years. (p. 145)

For many who visit, and talk about objects they see in the company of a significant other, the museum provides one seemingly peripheral place in which to make such clearly central meanings.

APPENDIX A: INVENTORY OF TARGET EXHIBIT, NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF AMERICAN HISTORY

The main section of the exhibit "The Material World," located on the first floor of the National Museum of American History, constituted the target history exhibit used in this study. The artifacts contained in this area are listed below. This inventory also served as a checklist for observing and noting the location of visitor pairs.

Glass, 19th Century:

Railroad lantern, circa 1855  
"Electric Egg" electrostatic device  
Railroad lantern, circa 1860  
Electronic discharge tubes  
Pharmacy show globe, 19th c.  
Objective lens, Vassar College telescope, 1860's  
Railroad lantern, circa 1845

1750's-1830's:

Platform 1 Items

1. Sign, circa 1800
2. Fireback, 1748
3. Basket for wool, 19th c.
4. Spinning wheel for wool, early 19th c.
5. Clock reel for yarn, early 19th c.
6. Scaling device for lumber, 19th c.
7. Bar clamp, 19th c.
8. Parlor stove, 1837-47
9. Tower clock movement, circa 1830
10. Churn, 1840's

Case 1 Items

- a. Plate, 1802-20
- b. Backstaff, 1775
- c. Plate, 1825-75
- d. Porringer, 1730-1800
- e. Skimmer, early 19th c.
- f. Powder horn, 1762

1830's-1840's:

Platform 2 Items

11. Cooking pot, early 19th c.
12. Bucksaw, 19th c.
13. Clamps, 19th c.

14. Locomotive bell, 1838
15. Frame saws, 19th c.

#### Case 2 Items

- a. Canteen, 19th c.
- b. Teapot, 1820-50
- c. "Lacy" pressed dish, 1830's
- d. Fire bucket, about 1830
- e. Teakettle, early 19th c.
- f. Betty lamp, 1838
- g. Whale oil lamp, 1820-40
- h. Clockworks, patented 1843

#### 1840's-1850's:

#### Platform 3 Items

16. Pan for sugar-coating pills, 1856
17. Anvil, 19th century pattern
18. Harness maker's stitching horse, 19th c.
19. Keg for horseshoes
20. Stone for milling cocoa beans

#### Case 3 Items

- a. Ale bottle, 1853
- b. Railroad lantern, about 1850
- c. Burlwood mallet, 19th c.
- d. Hunting knife, 1855-60
- e. Penknife, 1850's
- f. Mortising chisel, 19th c.
- g. Adze, 19th c.
- h. Plow plane, 19th c.
- i. Dressing table mirror, 1850's

#### 1850's-1860's:

#### Platform 4 Items

21. Plow, about 1888
22. Grain cradle, 19th c.
23. Iron converter, 1850's
24. Flopover hay rake, about 1850's

#### Case 4 Items

- a. Eskimo snow knife, 19th c.
- b. Scrimshaw, about 1860
- c. Revolver, .36 caliber, 1862-63
- d. Tobacco pouches, 19th c.
- e. Sword belt plate, 1851



- f. Waist belt plate, 1860's
- g. Navy knife bayonet, model 1861
- h.i.j.k. Union cases, 1850's-60's
- l. Hand mirror, patented 1866

1860's-1870's:

Platform 5 Items

- 25. "Fleetwood" scroll saw, circa 1876
- 26. Railroad grade-crossing sign
- 27. Drawing press, circa 1882

Case 5 Items

- a. Scrollwork advertisement, late 19th c.
- b. Scroll-sawn coaster and screen, late 19th c.
- c. Leather creasing machine, patented 1875
- d. Leather scraping tool, 19th c.
- e. Letter opener, patented 1874
- f. Harness ornaments, 1870's
- g. Bootjack, patented 1873
- h. Polishing lathe, sales model, patented 1877

1870's-1880's:

Platform 6 Items

- 28. Bridgebuilder's nameplate, 1887
- 29. Brewery Brine Pump, 1890's
- 30. Gauge panel, 1891

Case 6 Items

- a. Factory sewing machine, patented 1877
- b. Stockwell's time lock for bank, patented 1877
- c. Caliper gauge, 1880's
- d. Canning jar, 1885-86
- e. Canning jar, late 19th c.
- f. Telephone receiver, presentation piece for Queen Victoria, late 19th c.
- g. Telegraph key, patented 1880

1880's-1900's:

Platform 7 Items

- 31. Shop sign, patented 1876
- 32. Fresnel lighthouse lens, 1884
- 33. Switch stand, circa 1882

### Case 7 Items

- a. "Royal granite" enamelled ware
- b. Railroad watch, circa 1897
- c. Toy train, early 1890's
- d. Dressing table set, about 1890's
- e. Watchspring container, 1890's
- f. Steam engine indicator, 1890's
- g. Photograph album cover, 1890's

### 1900's-1920's:

### Platform 8 Items

1. Mutoscope, about 1900
2. Generator control panel with recording wattmeter, circa 1910
3. Telegraph office sign, 1920's
4. Locomotive whistle and valve, 1923
5. Ship's telegraph, 1920's
6. Traffic signal, circa 1919

### Case 8 Items

- a. Spittoon, about 1910
- b. Food tin, early 20th c.
- c. "Little Giant" electric drill, patented 1913
- d. Table fan, 1900-1910
- e. Cigarette case, about 1915
- f. Telephone call box, early 20th c.
- g. Container for blasting caps, early 20th c.
- h. Gunpowder canister, before 1903
- i. Canteen, 1910 model
- j. Meat can, 1910 model

### 1920's-1930's:

### Platform 9 Items

7. Washing machine impeller, circa 1927
- 8A. Radio receiver, about 1923
- 8B. Radio speaker, 1920's
9. Mills new modern scale, 1931
10. Gasoline station sign, about 1930
- 11A. Gasoline pump, 1932
- 11B. Red crown globe, about 1935

### Case 9 Items

- a. Oil bottle, 1927
- b. Automobile radiator emblems, 1920's
- c. Hood ornament for packard phaeton, 1932

- d. "Hotpoint" electric toaster, about 1925
- e. Purse, about 1929
- f. Manicure set, about 1926
- g. Dance card, 1924
- h. Dial telephone, 1920's
- i. Gelatin molds, 1920-40
- j. "Melrose" beauty cream jar, 1920's

1930's-1940's:

Platform 10 Items

- 12. Vacuum cleaner, about 1937
- 13. "Photophone" motion-picture projector
- 14. Observation car sign, 1938
- 15. Reserve parachute, 1945
- 16. Airplane propeller blade, 1940's

Case 10 Items

- a. Bud holder, about 1936
- b. Tobacco box, early 20th c.
- c. Transparent demonstration model shaver, after 1937
- d. Flashlight, about 1935
- e. World's Fair souvenir coaster, 1939
- f. Pitcher and saucer, 1930's
- g. Canape plates, about 1936
- h. Cigarette box, about 1934
- i. "Baby brownie special," about 1939
- j. World's Fair "univex," 1939
- k. World's Fair salt shaker, 1939
- l. Coffeepot, about 1929
- m. Belt buckle, about 1931
- n. Cigarette holder, about 1930
- o. Ashtray, early 20th c.

1940's-1950's:

Platform 11 Items

- 17. "Black Beauty" slot machine, after 1940
- 18. "Wall-o-matic" jukebox selector, after 1948
- 19. AM1 automatic phonograph, model A, 1946
- 20. Neon sign, 1950's
- 21. High-tension suspension insulator, 1940's
- 22. Surfboard, 1966
- 23. Stacking side chairs, 1970's

Case 11 Items

- a. "Moonbeam" alarm clock, 1952-53

- b. "Bristol Beaufighter" recognition model, about 1944
- c. "Breakfaster" toaster oven, 1940's
- d. Employee security buttons, 1940
- e. "Embedded" photograph, 1945
- f. U.S. army bugle, early 1940's
- g. Experimental bottle, 1947
- h. "Wartime conservation container," about 1945
- i. Baby bottle, 1940's
- j. "Petipoint" iron, about 1940

1950's-1960's:

Platform 12 Items

- 24. Hula hoop, 1958
- 25. "Predicta" television receiver, 1950's
- 26. Portable phonograph, 1957
- 27. Gasoline pump sign, about 1955
- 28. "Solrad 9" satellite, landed 1968
- 29. Randle for "minuteman" missile, 1960's
- 30. "Big wheel," 1973-79

Case 12 Items

- a. Telephone, 1950's
- b. Mirrors and brush, 1950's
- c. Boontonware, 1950's
- d. "Penthouse" ashtray set, 1950's
- e. "Revereware" teakettle, after 1953
- f. Tape measure, after 1952
- g. "Clearsips" straws 1940

1960's-1970's:

Platform 13 Items

- 31. "Shiva" laser amplifier, 1977-81
- 32. Human-powered vehicle, 1986
- 33. "Quicksilver" slalom skateboard, about 1976
- 34. "Pool" skateboard, 1970's

Case 13 Items

- a. Electric toothbrush, about 1964
- b. "Super Pro" frisbee, after 1973
- c. Beverage bottles, sales samples, 1974-75
- d. Bounty frypan, about 1970
- e. Solar-powered radio, 1960-62
- f. "Shape-o-toy," 1970's
- g. Lamp, 1960's
- h. Kitchen scoops, 1970's

- i. Peter Max clock, 1960's
- j. Nail polish kit, 1960's
- k. Model airplane kit, about 1964
- l. Shuttlecocks, 1970's

1970's-1980's:

Platform 14 Items

- 35. Kite, 1980's
- 36. Functionoid

Case 14 Items

- a. Digital clock, about 1971
- b. Microwave casserole dish, 1980's
- c. Missile radome, 1987
- d. Pacman radio and headset, 1980's
- e. Pacman video game, 1980's
- f. Cup and saucer, 1970's
- g. "Tupperware," about 1984
- h. Pocket calculator, about 1971
- i. Multilayer substrate for IBM 3090 computer, 1988
- j. Turbocharger rotors, 1980's
- k. "Plastic," 1980's
- l. "Ronald McDonald" kids' watch, 1970's
- m. Rubrik's cube, 1980's
- n. "White Lightning" baseball bat, 1980's
- o. "Roth glasser" cello bow, 1970's

Glass, 20th Century:

- Semiconductor Chip, Prototype for video display processor, 1982
- Xray Tube, about 1920-25
- Insulators, about 1937
- Crystal, early 1970's
- Insulator, about 1930
- Cathode ray tube, dumont oscilloscope, about 1950
- Cathode ray tube, dumont 5-inch test pattern, about 1938
- Holographic deflector disc for supermarket scanner, about 1982
- Holographic deflector disc for industrial scanner, 1987
- Laser dyes, 1985
- Basket for silicon semiconductor chips, about 1967
- Edison mazda daylight lamps, about 1930

## Hammers and Mallets:

### Outermost Case

Croquet mallet  
Silversmith's finishing mallet  
Jeweler's tapping hammer  
Mechanic's assembly hammer  
Die-setter's rawhide mallet  
Silversmith's embossing mallet  
Silversmith's detailing mallet  
Judge's gavel  
Carnival "test-your-strength" bell ringer  
Autobody mallet  
Crab-cracking mallet  
Craftsman's mallet  
Woodworker's chiseling mallet  
Chef's meat tenderizer  
Machinist's dead-blow hammer  
Machinist's "unihammer"

### Innermost Case

Neurologist's percussion hammer  
Physician's reflex hammer  
Surgeon's bone-breaker  
Cabinetmaker's claw hammer  
Silversmith's forming hammer  
Cooper's barrelhead seater  
Carpenter's claw hammer  
Metalworker's ball-peen hammer  
Stonecutter's chiseling hammer  
Sledgehammer  
Shoemaker's tacking hammer  
Welder's chipping hammer  
Carpetlayer's tacking hammer  
Barrelmaker's adze  
Mountaineer's hammer  
Autobody fender bumper  
Tracklayer's maul

### Platform 15 Items (bicycles):

1. Velocipede, patented 1869
2. Starley safety bicycle, about 1887
3. Columbia model 41 women's safety bicycle, 1896
4. Silver king bicycle, model L2, 1935

Case 15 Items (combs, 19th & 20th century):

- a. Comb, mid 19th c. (tortoise shell, gold, turquoise)
- b. Combs, 1890's (aluminum)
- c. Comb, 1920-40 (celluloid)
- d. Comb, 19th c. (ivory)
- e. Comb, early 19th c. (tortoise shell)
- f. Comb, early 20th c. (celluloid)
- g. Comb, 1920-40 (celluloid)
- h. Comb, about 1885 (celluloid)
- i. Comb, mid 19th c. (gold, coral)
- j. Comb, 1870-90 (silver)
- k. Comb, early 20th c. (horn)
- l. Comb, 1902 (aluminum)
- m. Comb, late 19th c. (tortoise shell)
- n.o.p. Combs, early 20th c. (celluloid)
- q. Comb, circa 1926 (casein)
- r. Comb, early 20th c. (pyralin cellulose nitrate)
- s. Comb, 1950's (acrylic)
- t.u. Combs, 1950's (nylon)
- v. Comb, 1980's (delrin acetate)

Platform 16 Items (bicycles):

- 5. Whalen and Janssen bicycle, 1942
- 6. Bowden spacelander bicycle, 1960
- 7. Schwinn panther bicycle, model D-77, 1953

Case 16 Items (mugs, tumblers, cups, 18th-20th century):

- a. Mug, about 1825
- b. Tumbler, 19th century
- c. Mug, about 1850
- d. Medicinal quassia cup, 19th c.
- e. Cup and saucer, 1950's
- f. Tumbler, mid-19th c. (rubber)
- g. Tumbler, 1950's
- h. Beaker, 19th c. (pewter)
- i. Mug, about 1800 (clay)
- j. Tumbler, about 1910-20
- k. Beaker, about 1725
- l. Mug, about 1765
- m. Cup, 1880's
- n. Mug, about 1876
- o. Cup, 1988 (styrofoam)
- p. Tumbler, 19th c. (horn)
- q. Tumbler, 1960's
- r. Meissen teacup and saucer, about 1735
- s. Mug, 19th c.
- t. Mug, 1960's
- u. Goblet, 1881-1916

- v. Mug, 19th c. (leather)
- w. Tumbler, 1950's

(No Platform 17)

Case 17 Items (drafting instruments, 18th-20th century):

- a. French curve, 20th c.
- b. Triangle, early 20th c.
- c. Polygraph, patented 1885
- d. Protractor, late 19th c.
- e. Protractor, about 1720
- f. Protractor, about 1906
- g. Protractor, 20th c.
- h. Triangle, early 20th c.
- i. Protractor, 20th c.
- j. Protractor, mid-19th c.
- k. French curve, 20th c.
- l. Triangle, 20th c.
- m. Sector, mid-18th c.
- n. Compass, 1987
- o. Compass, 19th c.
- p. Compass, about 1900
- q. Compass, patented 1894
- r. Sector, early 19th c.

Helmets:

- Infantryman's helmet, 1940's
- "Cushion airlite" football helmet, about 1926
- Soap box derby helmet, about 1975
- Construction worker's helmet, 1950's
- Apollo training helmet, 1960's
- Fireman's helmet, about 1860's
- Miner's helmet, about 1935
- "Vetta" bicyclist's helmet
- Construction worker's helmet, 1950's
- Football helmet, 1974-75
- Infantry helmet, 1987

Phonograph records:

- Experimental record, 1890's
- "Speak-o-phone" record, 1930's
- Edison "gold moulded" cylinder record, 1908
- Berliner record, 1895
- Vocalion record, 1924
- Vogue picture record, 1950's
- Edison demonstration record, 1878
- Experimental record, 1885
- Record (transcription), 1928
- Record, 1940's



Compact disc, 1988  
Edison "blue amberol" cylinder record, 1912  
"Hit of the week" record, 1930  
Records, 1940's  
Record, about 1955  
Record, about 1909  
Victor record, 1904-05  
Experimental record, 1980's (cement)

Platform 18 (washing machines):

1. "Union" washing machine, about 1860's
2. "The Easy" washing machine, about 1900
3. "National vacuum" electric washing machine, 1912

Case 18 Items: (pipes, snuffboxes, and tobacco tins, 19th & 20th century):

- a. Pipe (clay)
- b. Pipe (bakelite phenolic, brass)
- c. Pipe (clay, pewter, deerhorn)
- d. Pipe (corncob, reed)
- e. Pipe (phenolic, rubber)
- f. Pipe (briarwood, rubber)
- g. Pipe (clay, meerschaum, amber)
- h. Pipe (calabash, clay)
- i. Pipe (briarwood, rubber, clay)
- j. Snuffbox (lacquered wood, mother of pearl)
- k. Snuffbox (tortoise shell, gold)
- l. Snuffbox (buffalo horn, tortoise shell)
- m. Tobacco tin (pioneer brand)
- n. Snuffbox (burlwood, tortoise shell, glass, mother of pearl)
- o. "Roly-poly" tobacco tin
- p. Snuffbox (silver inlaid wood)
- q. Tobacco tin (brass and copper)

Platform 19 Items (washing machines):

4. Savage washer and spin dryer, 1926
5. Maytag "master" washing machine, 1947
6. Maytag automatic washer, model A700, early 1960's

Case 19 Items (toy cars & trucks):

- a. Dump truck, early 1950's
- b. "Matchbox" 1929 Bentley, mid 1960's
- c. "Matchbox" Ferrari, mid 1960's
- d. "Slik-toys" Convertable, 1950's
- e. "Corgi" Corvetter Stingray, early 1970's

- f. "Tootsietoy" stake truck, about 1925
- g. Cadillac Sedan, about 1948
- h. Chevrolet two-ton, about 1956
- i. "Century of progress" Greyhound bus, 1933
- j. Ford Coupe, about 1935
- k. Sedan delivery truck, early 1950's
- l. Coupe, 1930's
- m. "Five winders" Porsche 928, about 1984
- n. Esso gasoline tanker, 1950's
- o. Bus, 1920's
- p. Oldsmobile Sedan, about 1939
- q. Chrysler Airflow, mid 1930's
- r. Coupe, 1930's
- s. Road signs, 1930's
- t. Taxicab, 1920's
- u. Transporter and three sedans, 1930's
- v. "Wicker" sedan, 1920's
- w. Race car, early 1930's

(No Platform 20)

Case 20 Items (razors, 19th and 20th century):

- a. Safety razor (celluloid handle)
- b. Safety razor (wood handle)
- c. "Woods multiblade" safety razor
- d. "Schick injector"
- e. "The Fox" safety razor
- f. Safety razor (silver)
- g. "Valet" safety razor (brass)
- h. "Pastipack" safety razor
- i. "Bic" safety razor
- j. Straight razor (wood handle)
- k. Straight razor (bone handle)
- l. Straight razor (brass handle)
- m. Straight razor (staghorn handle)
- n. Straight razor (celluloid handle)
- o. Straight razor (also celluloid handle)
- p. Straight razor (rubber)
- q. Straight razor (ivory)
- r. Straight razor (whalebone)
- s. Straight razor (celluloid)
- t. "Milady" safety razor
- u. Straight razors in case (mother of pearl, silver)
- v. Razor in plastic box

Mortars & Pestles

- Mortar and Pestle 1930's (resin coated pressed fiber)
- Mortar and Pestle, mid 19th c. (black marble)
- Mortar and Pestle, 1880-1920 (cast iron)

Mortar and Pestle, 1930's (china)  
Mortar and Pestle, 19th c. (lava stone)  
Mortar and Pestle, 18th c. (bell metal)  
Mortar and Pestle, 1950 (agate)  
Mortar and Pestle, 1920 (glass)  
Mortar and Pestle, mid 19th c. (marble)  
Mortar and Pestle, mid 19th c. (brass)  
Mortar and Pestle, late 19th c. (alabaster)  
Mortar and Pestle, late 19th c. (lignum vitae)

APPENDIX B: MAJOR EXPLANATORY LABELS IN "A MATERIAL WORLD"  
EXHIBIT, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Below is the text of the two major explanatory labels located within the target history exhibit, "A Material World."

A MATERIALS PANORAMA

Arrayed here in roughly chronological order is a "Materials Panorama." The oldest artifacts date from the 1700's, the newest from the 1980's. The panorama indicates how the look and overall "feel" of our world have changed in the course of two centuries, and suggests that an important aspect of this change has been due to "material" factors.

MATERIAL MESSAGES

Everything is made of something, and, as the artifacts around us show, some things are made from a great variety of materials. Many artifacts that are now usually made of plastics were formerly made of metal and, before that, wood. Yet artifacts may be available in many different materials, all at the same time. In trying to understand why an object is made of a particular material, it is vital to keep in mind not only resource availability, technology, and cost, but social context and subjective matters of cultural value. We draw all sorts of conclusions about artifacts - about intrinsic worth, about status - on the basis of materials they are made from. Materials convey messages. Some of those messages are suggested here.

APPENDIX C: INVENTORY OF TARGET EXHIBIT, NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF ART

Galleries #71, 70, 69 and 68 of American Collection art, located in the West Building of The National Gallery of Art, constituted the target art exhibit used in this study. The works contained in this area are listed below. This inventory also served as a checklist for observing and noting the location of visitor pairs.

Gallery # 71 (left wall):

1. Salem Cove - Maurice Prendergast
2. Mount Katahdin - Marsden Hartley
3. Tennis Tournament - George Bellows
4. Cape Cod Evening - Edward Hopper

Gallery # 70 (left wall):

5. Midsummer Twilight - Leroy Metcalf
6. Oyster Sloop, Cos Cob - Childe Hassam
7. A Friendly Call - William Merritt Chase
8. Winter Harmony - John Twachtman
9. Children Playing on the Beach - Mary Cassatt

Gallery # 69 (left wall):

10. Mrs. W. C. H. Endicott - John Singer Sargent
11. Vanderbilt - James McNeill Whistler
12. Lady with a Lute - Thomas Dewing
13. Adrian Iselin - John Singer Sargent
14. Chelsea Wharf: Grey and Silver - James McNeill Whistler
15. L'Andalouse, Mother of Pearl & Silver - James McNeill Whistler
16. Mrs. Louis Husson - Thomas Eakins
17. Dr. John H. Brinton - Thomas Eakins
18. Harriet H. Carville - Thomas Eakins

Gallery # 68 (left wall):

19. Street in Venice - John Singer Sargent
20. Wapping on Thames - James McNeill Whistler

21. The Artist's Garden - Ralph Albert  
Blakelock/Cattleya Orchid and Three Brazilian  
Hummingbirds - Martin Johnson Heade\*
22. Baby at Play - Thomas Eakins
23. My Gems - William Harnett
24. The Biglin Brothers Racing - Thomas Eakins
25. The Old Violin - John Frederick Peto

Gallery # 68 (right wall):

26. Autumn 1877 - Winslow Homer
27. Hound and Hunter - Winslow Homer
28. Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens - Albert Ryder
29. Archbishop D. Falconio - Thomas Eakins
30. The Early Scholar - Eastman Johnson
31. Breezing Up a Fair Wind - Winslow Homer
32. Repose - John Singer Sargent

Gallery # 69 (right wall):

33. Wingersheek Creek Beach, Gloucester - William  
Picknell/Natural Arch at Capri - William Haseltine\*

Gallery # 70 (right wall):

34. Snow in NY - Robert Henri
35. Edith Reynolds - Robert Henri
36. Mother and Mary - Charles Edmund Tarbell
37. Young Woman in White - Robert Henri
38. Sweet Tremulous Leaves - Arthur Davies

Gallery # 71 (right wall):

39. The Lone Tenement - George Bellows
40. Blue Morning - George Bellows
41. Both Members of This Club - George Bellows
42. New York - George Bellows
43. Club Night - George Bellows
44. Grey Sea - John Marin

\* Note: In the two marked cases, the first painting listed was replaced by the second by the Gallery staff approximately half way through the period of data collection.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Is there any specific reason or reasons why you came to the museum today with this particular companion?
2. During the time you just spent looking at the exhibit I had you view, did you see or hear anything about your companion that you already knew? (Probe: In other words, was anything that you already knew about your companion confirmed for you?)

YES NO If YES, Explain.

3. During the time you just spent in that same exhibit, did you learn anything new about your companion?

YES NO If YES, Explain.

4. Did anything in that exhibit remind you of something in your own life?

YES NO If YES, please explain.

Does that happen to you often in museums like this one?

YES NO

When it happens, do you usually share that thought with your companion? YES NO

5. Were there any objects in this exhibit that you enjoyed or were impressed by that you didn't comment on or talk about with your companion?

YES NO

If so, which object? Why didn't you comment on it?

6. Do you ever go to a museum by yourself?

YES NO

Does going to a museum by yourself differ from going with one other person?

YES NO Please explain.

7. Do you feel that objects or works in this museum have a "correct" or "specific" meaning that you are supposed to "get"?

YES NO Please explain.

If so, is it important for you to get that meaning?

YES NO

8. If you can put this into words, can you describe what makes an (art/history) object meaningful to you?



APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION VISITOR STUDY

DEAR VISITOR: FOR EACH QUESTION BELOW, PLEASE CIRCLE ONE ANSWER ONLY, OR FILL IN THE BLANK, AS INDICATED. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

1. Which category best describes the relationship between you and the person you are here with today?

(circle one)

- a. friends
- b. spouses
- c. parent/child
- d. other relative: (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- e. unmarried romantic relationship
- f. other: (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

2. About how many years have you known each other? \_\_\_\_\_ yr(s) (IF LESS THAN 1 YEAR, about how many MONTHS have you known each other? \_\_\_\_\_ month(s))

3. Do you presently live together? (circle one) YES NO

4. Are you (circle one) MALE FEMALE

5. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years

6. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is the LAST level or grade of school that you have COMPLETED? (circle one)

- a. 4th grade
- b. 5th grade
- c. 6th grade
- d. 7th grade
- e. 8th grade
- f. 9th grade
- g. 10th grade
- h. 11th grade
- i. 12th grade
- j. 1st yr. college
- k. 2nd yr. college
- l. 3rd yr. college
- m. 4th year college
- n. 1st year grad.
- o. Master's degree
- p. Doctorate
- q. other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
(TOWN OR CITY) (STATE) (COUNTRY)

9. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all important", and 5 being "very important", how important is it to you to talk with your companion as you view exhibits in the museum?

(circle one) 1 2 3 4 5

10. In an average year, how many times do YOU (alone or with anyone) visit HISTORY/(ART) museums?     time(s). How many of these would you say are with the person you are here with today?     time(s)
11. When viewing exhibits today, how much did you and the person you are with talk with each other, as compared to when you watch television together? (circle one)
- a. we talked about the same amount
  - b. we talked more here than when we watch tv
  - c. we talked less here than when we watch tv
12. INCLUDING TODAY, how many times have YOU been to this museum?            time(s)
13. Which category best describes your total household income, before taxes? (circle one)
- |                    |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| a. \$0-9,999       | e. \$40,000-49,999 | i. \$80,000-89,999 |
| b. \$10,000-19,999 | f. \$50,000-59,999 | j. \$90,000-99,999 |
| c. \$20,000-29,999 | g. \$60,000-69,999 | k. over \$99,999   |
| d. \$30,000-39,999 | h. \$70,000-79,999 | l. I DO NOT KNOW   |

VISITOR: PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME IN ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. THE MORE DETAIL, DESCRIPTION, AND EXAMPLE YOU PROVIDE, THE MORE YOU HELP US! USE THE BACK OF THE SHEET IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE FOR ANY ANSWERS.

14. Are you now, or have you ever been involved in HISTORY/(ART) in any way, such as having studied it, having a job related to it, or having a special interest or hobby related to it? (circle one) YES NO Please explain here:

15. Would visiting a museum with a person you DON'T know very well be any different than visiting with someone you DO know well? (circle one) YES NO  
If YES, in what ways would the two visits be alike?  
If NO, in what way(s) would the two visits be different? Please explain YOUR answer here:
16. Would visiting a museum with a LOVER OR SPOUSE be any different than visiting with a PARENT? (circle one) YES NO  
If YES, in what way(s) would the two visits be different? If NO, in what way(s) would the two visits be alike?  
Please explain YOUR answer here:
17. Please think back on your experience in the exhibit I just had you visit. Were there any place(s) in this exhibit where your companion's comment(s) helped you understand something, or think about something in a different way?  
(circle one) YES NO  
IF YES, please describe what you saw, what they said, and how it affected what you were thinking:
18. How did it feel to carry the tape-recorder with you? Do you think your talk today was typical of the way you and your companion talk together in museums normally, or not? (circle one) YES NO  
Please explain here:

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION! ENJOY YOUR VISIT!

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