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Against All Odds: Representing Native American Identity in the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

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Disciplines
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**Against All Odds: Representing Native American
Identity in the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and
Research Center**

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Against All Odds: Representing Native American Identity in the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

Abstract

The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (MPMRC), a tribal museum located on the Mashantucket Pequot Native American Reserve is, a nationally recognized tribal museum dedicated to the study of Pequot history and culture. Typically museums are treasure houses separated from both the present and the future. Tending to place the West in the foreground of civilization and progress, museums tend to highlight the primitivism of "other" cultures. As a result, the MPMRC is a pioneer tribal museum that was erected in response to the atmosphere of western stereotypes. As one of the most revolutionary museums in North America, the museum claims both the past and the present to shape a decolonized future for Indigenous populations. However, it is also worth noting that the MPMRC is utilizing the museum, a western institution, in order to establish its people's unique identity within a western society. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research center is truly an institution of living culture. It is a place as focused on a cultural present and future as it is on a cultural past.

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Introduction

Museums have long been understood as institutions that house collections—collections of art, scientific specimens, or other artifacts or objects considered to be of permanent value because of their rarity, and aesthetic uniqueness for display. As colonizing forces in the Americas, museums cannot be underestimated. Historically, through the research, study, and systematic collection of Native remains and artifacts, museums have objectified Native Americans, believing them to be a vanishing race of primitive people. This practice, which developed and continued in the United States through the formative years of the new republic, has deeply affected both Native and non-Native Americans in several significant ways. Museological systems contributed to the establishment of strict boundaries between Native and non-Native cultures. This resulted in a hierarchical relationship perhaps best characterized by pairs - researcher/subject, civilized/primitive, dynamic/static, normal/exotic, etc. - ironically making those who were foreign to the Americas seem "native" and those who were native to the Americas seem "foreign."

Furthermore, these "imposed identities" have all too frequently been nineteenth-century identities, which serve to freeze Native peoples in a particular historical moment, denying the dynamism and vitality so much a part of Native culture. Such imposed identities have had tremendous psychological as well as material consequences. This persistent desire to define Native Americans, which is manifested in everything from museums, to movies, to mascots, continues to affect federal policy directly and thus the ability of tribal nations to exercise their inherent sovereignty. Ultimately, making cultural continuity that much harder.

Since the repatriation movement of the 1980s and 1990s, however, it is true that museums have begun to acknowledge their power as institutional colonizers. As a result,

museum theory and practice has made significant strides in revising its relationship with Native peoples, particularly as Native individuals have entered the arena as curators themselves. Significantly, the years following the passage of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act in 1990 have seen the emergence of what has been called the "new museology." Based on actually incorporating criticism of museums into exhibitions, the new museology throws the authority of museums into question, thus shifting some, but by no means all, of their power (Dubin 2001, Kreps 2003, West 2000).

Museums can play an important role in the process of cultural redefinition and re-appropriation. They have the capacity to reconnect people to cultural legacies that have been severed by the experience of colonization. Museum representations can articulate ideologies about how a society perceives itself in determining what is culturally significant, in defining a society, and in constructing the face that it presents to its own people and the world at large. Western fine-art museums as recently as thirty years ago would classify the artistic creations of indigenous peoples as "primitive art" (for example, the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition "Masterpieces of Primitive Art from the Rockefeller Collection" in 1978) or these artifacts were displayed in natural-history museums within an ethnological context; that is, as artifacts exemplifying pre-industrial, undeveloped societies.

It should be noted that there have been significant changes in such curatorial practices as evidenced by the relocation of indigenous people's art from the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History to the newly-created Museum of the American Indian where curatorial decision-making is exercised in consultation with tribal representatives. Moreover, its organization is not predetermined by aesthetic categories in the style of an art museum. Instead, it is closer to a historical museum - it displays objects to document the development of tribal societies.

One of the most significant recent developments in the museum world is the emergence of tribal museums on some reservations across the United States and Canada. These museums reflect the desires of Native Americans to present and preserve their history by establishing cultural institutions for their own communities and sometimes for the general public. The development of tribal museums is important given the complex historical relationship between Indigenous people and museums and the role that museums have played in the appropriation and misrepresentation of Native American people and cultures. Tribal communities, in an act of self-determination, are controlling the representation of their cultures and challenging mainstream museum representations of the past.

Current estimates place the number of tribal museums in the United States between 120 and 150 (Lonetree 2008: 158). The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research center is one of the finest. In southwestern Connecticut the Mashantucket Pequot reservation extends over 1,250 acres of thickly wooded terrain and is home to some 650 people. The Pequot's casino business has been a phenomenal success since the day it opened in 1992. Building on the tribe's highly profitable bingo operation that began in 1986, the Foxwoods casino has made the Pequots wealthy beyond anyone's expectations allowing the tribe to open a new, 308,000 square foot, 193-million-dollar museum facility in 1998.

As a Native American Institution, however, the museum has been the site of much controversy and a favorite case for debates about museum ethics, both because of the tribe's struggle for recognition and museum's close financial ties with the nearby casino. Awaiting the public, were exhibitions representing time periods ranging from the last Ice Age to the present. They depicted, for example, a glacial crevasse, a caribou hunt, a sixteenth-century Pequot village, and eighteenth-century farmstead and twentieth-century trailer home. The Museum

reflects current and innovative exhibition strategies, including thematic rather than object-centered exhibitions; effective use of multimedia, storytelling, and the first-person voice throughout; and, most notably, an emphasis on contemporary survival that challenges head-on the "vanishing race" stereotype prevalent in past museum representations of Native Americans.

The tribally authored narratives presented in the museum were developed in consultation and collaboration with Pequot community members. The text is all in the first person, and the oral tradition is prevalent throughout the galleries. Equally significant, is the Pequots' desire to address the legacies of historical, unresolved grief in their community; they bravely speak the hard truths of colonization to promote understanding and healing for tribal members. By emphasizing the oral tradition and by presenting the painful stories of colonization, the community attempts to engage in an act of decolonization and provides a model for other tribal museums to follow.

However, even with the development of the new museology, a paradigm dramatically carried forward by the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, building an indigenous museum was a complicated project. The growing rapprochement between Native Americans and museums coincides with an ongoing transformation in the very idea of the museum--from a temple where experts pass on sacred knowledge to a forum in which different voices, including those of traditional outsiders, contest history and culture. Traditionally the museum represented the natural world not as it is. But as it was (Clifford 2004: 639). In many cases these specimens illustrate not the seamless continuum of being, but a severing of the natural present from the natural past. "In the galleries of the traditional museums, whether wandering in the galleries of fossils or in front of the dioramas filled with stuffed animals, visitors confront all that remains of extinction" (Conn 2000:73). The Mashantucket Pequot

Museum and Research Center is truly of an institution of living culture. It is a place as focused on a cultural present and future as it is on a cultural past. By examining the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center as a vehicle of public representation, the following paragraphs will explore how Native American identity is constructed within the walls of a museum, and how the MPMRC modifies the museum model to suit the desires of the Pequot Nation.

Where culture meets power: Foucault and Gramsci

The museum is a cultural product of western history, and it is all about power. Historically, museums have been deeply influenced and culturally colonized by Western concepts. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center attempts to channel the power of the museum to the tribe by incorporating museum criticism in its exhibitions. The following paragraphs indicate how power is established by the museum, and how the Pequots attempt to minimize harness the power to present their own identity.

When looking at museums through the lens of poststructuralist theory many scholars have found that museums play a part within society's disciplinary mechanism. The practices of collecting, classifying, and displaying must all be understood as exercises of power. Tony Bennett, assesses the museum according to the theoretical framework of Foucault and Gramsci. He sees museums of the nineteenth century as places "aimed to inveigh the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power, which it represented as its own (Bennett 1995: 95)." In other words, museums do not coerce visitors into behaving properly, but instead they act as part of a larger, late Victorian, bourgeois hegemony.

Museums, typically, derive this power by creating categories of knowledge. As cultural and social institutions, museums play a critical role in terms of crafting knowledge through

exhibitions. They collect objects, select topics, and build discourses through exhibitions. In doing so museums become not only the staging grounds of culture but also the unchallengeable authorities of knowledge (Rogoff 1994:96). In other words, they possess the power of knowledge, which may further dominate the shaping of the public's ideologies and beliefs of what should be considered "truth."

As Foucault argued in his writing, techniques of knowledge and strategies of power are mutually inherent. Power is based on knowledge and it makes use of knowledge; on the other hand, power reproduces knowledge by shaping it in accordance with its anonymous intentions (Foucault 1972). One of Foucault's central assumptions has been that none of the categories and classifications into which human experience and understanding have been put represents natural, essential, or timeless truths. Knowledge might well be divided into any number of different categories, and it is the job of museums to persuade visitors that the classifications they employ are "correct" i.e. that they do represent self-evident truths about the world.

In her, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill maps Foucault's concepts of the Renaissance, the Classical, and the Modern *epistemes* onto shifts in conceptions of knowledge and the changes that these shifts created within museum collecting. Hooper-Greenhill argues that sixteenth century collections or "cabinets of curiosity" were structured around the principles of rarity and novelty, while seventeenth century moved more towards organizing collections along more taxonomic lines (Hooper-Geenhill 2000). Her final epistemic shift relates to the emergence of the disciplinary museum during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the way in which museums became a means of "civilizing" the public. Museums as centers of knowledge exercise their power through creating knowledge. They become the authority of knowledge and subsequently produce hegemony in defining culture.

The concept of cultural hegemony initially came from Marxist concepts. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci elaborated Marxist thought on the concept of hegemony, proposing that dominant groups maintain power and protect common class interests, namely, wealth and ownership, through the use of cultural institutions and alliances with other members of the elite, and not by coercion. According to Gramsci, the term hegemony refers to the dominance of one group over other groups, with or without the threat of force.

More broadly, cultural perspectives become skewed to favor the dominant group, and consequently, hegemony controls the ways that ideas become “naturalized” in a process that informs notions of common sense (Kachgal 2000). Cultural hegemony also results in the empowerment of certain cultural beliefs, values, and practices to the submersion and partial exclusion of others. It influences the perspective of mainstream history, as history is written by the victors for a sympathetic readership. Accordingly, cultural institutions, such as schools and the media, create a compatible version of reality, which favors elite interests. And museums are no exceptions.

However, many scholars find the poststructuralist analyses of museums guilty of oversimplifying. Steven Conn’s view “object based epistemology” was based on the assumption that objects could be made to “speak for themselves” as long as they were displayed properly – and proper display usually meant a progressive developmental sequence, usually inspired by Darwinian ideology (Conn 2000: 4). Conn offers his thesis as an alternative to the Foucaultian vision of the museum as part the mechanics in disciplinary society; he charges, “ many scholars of museums have not investigated thoroughly, or taken seriously, the intellectual foundations of museums, they seem to miss not only that knowledge was *always* understood to be what museums had to offer but also that knowledge was what they were charged to create and what

they were obligated to provide to a visiting public” (Conn 2000: 11). Conn argues that the Foucaultian power model within museums ignores the intellectual function that classification plays. He sites George Kubler’s *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* in which Kubler observed that knowledge can only exist within some *framework* of understanding (Kubler 2008: preamble).

In this age of globalization, which promotes thinking globally and acting locally, culture exchange is inevitable. However, this begs the questions: whose belief, whose identity, and whose value is to be chosen in the process of cultural exchange. To this extent the diverse and dynamic nonwestern cultures are affected by cultural hegemony in the Museum sphere. Museums like the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, however, take matters of cultural hegemony in their own hands in an attempt to project their own cultural identity.

In the MPMRC the Pequot Nation, in an act of self-determination, controls the representation of their culture and challenges mainstream museum representations of the past. Upon entering the museum visitors are introduced to the idea that the Pequot understanding of history will guide their experience in the gallery. In addition the MPMRC asserts itself as a public center of power. As a result, the Pequot Nation’s museum seeks to harness the power of the museum in order to proclaim their own identity. The MPMRC inherently questions the authority of the traditional museum and in doing so, marginally questions the power of the conventional museum.

Power of Objects

Since their beginning museums have always been built upon the assumption that objects could tell stories, or as Steven Conn refers to it “object based epistemology” (Conn 2000: 4). In

the late nineteenth century, Americans held the belief that objects were sources of knowledge and meaning. Even today, the objects in the large-scale museum tend to be endowed with an inherent power. However rather than relying on object based epistemology, the MPMRC bases its exhibition on an overarching narrative structure that guides visitors through the museum's material. It effectively breaks free from placing objects on pedestals in glass cases creating an environment, which makes the history of the tribe more approachable.

Stemming from the same poststructuralist vein as the power inherent in museums there is power in objects. Several theories that attempt to answer the question: What is the source of power that objects have over people? For the sake of this paper several points of view may be distinguished.

First, things become powerful when they are viewed as standing for social relations among people. In Durkheim's totemism argument he explores the sacredness of objects. In totemism, tribes are divided into clans whose solidarity derives not from kinship, but from a religious relationship between its members. As Durkheim understands it, this relationship is based on a sacred association between the clan, its members and a totemic entity or god, usually a local animal or plant species. Essential to this spiritual belief, in Durkheim's view, was the idea that an emblem or object was sacred. Its sacredness lay in the fact that it conferred sacredness on whatever was marked with it (Durham 2001).

Karl Marx also subscribes to this theory of the object in his commodity fetishism. He asserts that when people produce goods for the market, the value of those goods is set not by their usefulness, but by their ability to be exchanged for other things (Marx 2000: 436). Thus when we look at the economy, instead of seeing a set of relationships between people, we see a

set of relationships between things (Marx 2000: 438). This symbolic relationship imbues the objects with power.

Another view, is that the power of objects derives from the meanings that are attributed to them through culture, language, and meaningful personal experience. Objects become powerful when people instill them with significance, whether or not they are disguised representations of social relationships. As Igor Kopytoff's *Cultural Biography of Things* suggests, the material characteristics of an object may be relevant to the meanings that are attributed, but it is the meanings and not the characteristics that produce the power (Kopytoff 1988: 64-91). This point of view is, in short, that culture makes objects meaningful.

A related, influential perspective on the power of objects is Daniel Miller's concept of objectification. His view indicates that by making things people define themselves in the process. Miller suggests that objectification merges the subject/object and individual/society by insisting that both pairs of oppositions are as much constitutive of culture as constituted by it (Miller 1987: 33). The key issue is the process of alienation by which goods become altered from through consumption to desires. Richard Leventhal unpacks Miller stating, "The meaning of the object and its place within culture are all being shaped and constantly changed through the process of use and consumption – both in the past and in the present" (Leventhal 2007:11). The meaning and power of objects relate specifically to the context within which people today place these cultural properties. Objects, and especially objects constructed by human beings are not only given meaning by culture (nor are they only representations of social relations), but they are also themselves vehicles through which culture moves throughout the world. Things may derive power from their role as conduits for culture.

So when objects, which already have an inherent power, enter into a museum their meaning is further altered. They are no longer used for what they were initially created, and for all intents and purposes the objects have lost their utility. But that hardly means that these objects have become meaningless; they have not lost their value. Paradoxically, museum objects are preserved for their original function and meaning, but by preserving them they lose their function and their meaning gets altered. The significance of objects is dynamic; they change through time and place and depending on who looks at them. The same woven rug can be a desirable luxurious object to one person, an emotional keepsake for the next, and a useless piece of junk to another. David Lowenthal addresses the unstable nature of the past and its reliance upon “relics” (objects endowed with historical significance) to dictate history. He states, “Simply to appreciate or protect a relic, let alone embellish or imitate it, affects its form or our impressions. Just as selective recall skews memory and subjectivity shapes historical insight, so manipulating antiquities refashions their appearance and meaning. Interaction with heritage continually alters its nature and context, whether by choice or by chance” (Lowenthal 1985:263). He asserts that preservation is inherently paradoxical and inevitably leads to the alteration of meaning. Thus, the past is not fixed and stable, but conventionally interwoven with the present. Although the meaning of objects is dynamic, institutions like museums present the object with a certain meaning. They choose one or more of the objects’ meanings and display the object accordingly.

The indication of meaning by museums starts when the object enters the museum. What museum it ends up in is already of influence on what meaning will be stressed placed on the object. Museums are divided into different groups. Among others, there are art museums, anthropological museums, historical museums and natural history museums. Each of these

types of museums have their own ideas of collecting and their own methods of presentation. When an object enters a museum, the curators of the museum decide the meanings to the object that suit the museums' own context. So, the same painting might be displayed as a piece by a famous artist in an art museum, or a piece of ethnic art, showing the style of painting of a certain cultural group.

The museum decides in which one of its collections the object belongs, whether it will be displayed or saved in a depot, and what name the object will receive on its label. With this creation of a new context for the object, the museum classifies the object and gives it new meaning. As the museum classifies objects and designates the context in which they show them to the public, they choose the meaning of the object that they show us. But that is not all; different meanings are not valued equally. Both the different types of museums and museum objects are subject to a certain hierarchy. In general art museums like the met are perceived to have a greater value than anthropological museums and authentic masterpieces are thought to be more valuable than cultural artifacts. So when museums have an important say in deciding to which category objects belong they also strongly influence their hypothetical value.

Interestingly, the Mashntucket Pequot Museum on the whole displays very few heritage pieces. Museums usually rely heavily on the importance of the historic objects, but the MPMRC establishes itself through photographs, audio, interactive display and video. As mentioned in the above paragraphs, the objects within museums or from archeological sites are not themselves cultural heritage or identity. Rather, the relationships between the objects and the people who view them create the conception of the past, present and future. "It is this vision that connects people to objects in the creation and changing nature of cultural identity (Leventhal 2007: 11)." By modifying the importance of objects within the museum context, the MPMRC does not

follow the general museum model. Instead, it places higher value on storytelling than on objectification. Thus, the MPMRC makes a statement that the Pequot people are not defined by their basketry and arrowheads; instead, they are a modern people with their own identity.

Identity

Theories of collective memory deal explicitly with the ways in which individuals form cultural identity, the relationship between these theories and the museum is one that should be further established. The study of memory is often explored with scientific objectives—how the brain collects information and stores memories—whereas collective memory deals with the social and communicative production of memory as it relates to cultural identity. Wulf Kansteiner, in his paper, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies” writes that collective memory is: “A collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it often privileges the interests of the contemporary. It is as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated (Kansteiner 2002: 179-197).”

Kansteiner’s definition of collective memory echoes popular criticism of museums and the danger in their inherent, perceived authority. On the basis of the existence of so many objects from the past, people desire to create and collect objects that are representative, in some way, of their experience. Ultimately, however, “collective memories have a strong bias toward the present; they dedicate disproportionate amounts of time, space and resources to communications about events that happened within the lifetimes of its producers and consumers.” It is easy to consider collective memory and history to be the same thing, but the distinction lies in the time-

space relationship between objects, the producers of objects, and the consumers of objects. History itself has a specific location in the past; museums interpret and display objects found within history. Museums run into problems of appropriation and representation when they define their contents as historically accurate.

Collective memory depends on individual participation and formulates group identities, which is essentially what the museum does as well. What the museum does, is form an additional level of cultural assumptions based first on what curators perceive to be objective truth and then on what visitors perceive to be the truth based on the exhibitions. These exhibitions are produced by curators—individuals who are hired by museums to compile and display artifacts in a way that is “faithful” to museum board’s perception of history. Individuals curating exhibitions have a concrete understanding of the external effects that led to the production of the objects based on archeology and historic study. They tend to assemble the exhibitions based on their own individualized understanding of the past and identity.

As a western innovation popularized during an imperial era of global colonialism, the profession of museum collector arose at a time when wealthy amateur collectors and universities were collaborating with anthropologists to conserve and preserve the historical past. This form of institution was a public enterprise that made the private collections of the rich accessible to everyday people. In doing so, museums effectively defined their own identities as gatekeepers of identity and “good taste”. Presenting identity has always been at the center of the museum mission. Therefore, museums took over the functions of anthropology and private collecting, for the public good, and functioned as expressions of national and civic identity presided over by European gatekeepers. As Boon points out, museums attempted to “make explicitly exotic

populations appear implicitly familiar and explicitly familiar populations appear implicitly exotic” (Boon 1994: 9).

This is not a new concept—since the late 1800s, ethnographers, anthropologists and museum directors alike have struggled with the paradox of the museum. Though it is perceived as an educational institution, the museum is not necessarily communicating objective information as much as mediated opinion. Otis Mason, a late-nineteenth century ethnographer, was aware of the complexities of anthropological exhibitions, and attempted to address the complexity with curators who “organized their materials in mobile cases so that they could be presented by geographical region or, alternatively, by type” (Kohlstedt 2005: 589). Mason “suggested that cabinets (i.e., collections) were essentially ‘thoughts in things.’ Whatever the configuration, of course, the presentation formulated a position about human development and imposed an order on the artifacts that was not implicit in them” (Kohlstedt 2005: 589-590).

The pre-museum preference for collecting was born from the desire to exhibit the refined, expensive and exotic tastes of European aristocrats (Bennett 1995:115). Whether showcasing fine art or ethnographic artifacts, industry discourse identifies museum exhibitions as presenting “an out-of-date, essentialist view of non-Western cultures, that is, the belief that there is an “essence” of...culture...that can be represented through dioramas and exhibits” (Haas 2008: 53). While the general public may not be able to define the museum as such, there is a general perception that what is displayed in the museum is “historical” and “true,” though critics of the museum know better. Of course, the museum finds no trouble with the authenticity of the objects themselves—the difficulty lies in the communicative realm where mediated versions of history are often projected on visitors who do not know to question the validity of its presentation.

Collective memory is described in the same way that museums are often criticized: they are constructed through contemporary bias, objects are inevitably (though not necessarily intentionally) recontextualized, the objects bear the voice of a group of individuals, and they strive to achieve a unified visual and literary identity, among other points of distinction. Additionally, collective memory also influences the production of national identity.

Since their inception, museums have been used to house national heritage, thereby fulfilling national ambitions by creating a national identity (Kaplan 1994). Initially created as private collections amassed by elites through conquest and exploration, museums have since developed their role to conserve cultural heritage and to educate the public. The way in which collections are used in museums to illuminate and interpret the past is now generally under serious review among museum professionals. Probably the most comprehensive account of national identity in museums was carried out by Flora Kaplan who edited: *Museums and the making of Ourselves: the role of objects in national identity* (1994). She considers museums in specific historical contexts, and relates them to processes of change. She demonstrates the many ways in which museums have been significant in creating national identity and in promoting national agendas. Kaplan also considers the symbolic significance of particular objects, which stand for the nation, embodying the nation for the people.

Kaplan emphasizes the fact that museums are social institutions, the products of political and social change. Thus, periods of significant growth in museums can be related to surges of nationalism and a sense of national identity. In the US for example, the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, represented the pride of the nation in its industries and its colonization of other nations. The second significant growth of museums has taken place in the late 20th century. In the last few decades, the growth of community museums and tribal

museums has far outpaced the growth of traditional museums throughout the USA, reflecting these smaller cultures reassertion of their identity. National identity is not something that is inherent but it is culturally constructed over time.

The establishment of museums is believed not only to enhance the civilization of the public, but also to construct their national and cultural identities. In his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1993), Benedict Anderson argued that the census, maps, and museums had changed their original forms and functioned as major institutions of power, which built a group's collective national identity as an imagined community (Anderson 1983). Among institutions of power, the museum was particularly employed by the colonial state to shape the legitimacy of its ancestry. The museum was capable of giving political implications and making the invisible power structure evident. In this way, the public could distinguish the We from the Others, the high from the low, the primary and the secondary etc. Today, even though we no longer use the term colonialism, the relationship between the colonial and the colonized still exists in the form of cultural colonialism, which refers to domination by one group's culture over others.

If we understand that culture has a significant impact on shaping identity, museums accordingly become arenas for a cultural power struggle. The winning culture is always the one with the potent power, and is often politically dominant. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum can be used as an example: through contextualizing objects and texts, this museum constructs a discourse that its curators deem "culturally accurate". Utilizing this cultural dialogue the MPMRC is able to educate its visitors about the values and beliefs that it considers important in regard to Native Americans. The museum has become the Pequot nation's tool to perpetuate their constructed identity.

Museum History

The collecting of Native American cultural material is part of a larger historical phenomenon of Western desire for exotic objects. Mary W. Helms traced the roots of this desire to Europe in the Middle Ages, when alien objects were coveted not for their physical and cultural importance, but for their “cosmological qualities and powers” (Helms 1994: 355-377). Objects from foreign lands helped their collectors to organize and understand the “wilderness” that stretched beyond their physical and cultural boundaries. Susan Stewart saw the same phenomenon in modern “longings” for souvenirs of the exotic. Human difference once conceptualized in terms of space and location are now thought of in terms of time, when authentic “others” exist only in the past. In Stewart’s paraphrasing of Jean Baudrillard “the exotic object, like the antique, functions to lend authenticity to the abstract system of modern objects, and...the indigenous object fascinates by means of anteriority” (Stewart 1993: 146). Stewart’s emphasis on the appeal of cultural antiquity is useful in understanding the value accorded to the racial authenticity of Native American objects.

Initial American collecting followed the acquisition and exploration of Western territories. The famous explorers Lewis and Clark were among the first to cross this newly acquired territory, and when they reached the Pacific they collected a Chinook basketry whaler’s hat and a Wasco twined bag that now reside in Harvard University’s Peabody Museum (Lanford 2000: 62-71). Individuals who relocated to Native American communities at the turn of the century would collect rare and important objects and refer to them as “specimens.”

The rise of Anthropology initiated a new era of collecting. Early ethnologists saw Native American cultural material as evidence to a prior phase of human history. Side by side, objects

from “primitive” and “civilized” societies could be used to illustrate the stages of human evolution (Conn 2008: 5). Convinced that Indian cultures were on the verge of vanishing, early ethnologists sought “genuine” cultural artifacts. Adhering to the tenets of salvage ethnography, anthropologists sought objects that represented authentic, pre-contact lifestyles.

The history of collecting bears witness to centuries of Western fantasy. American Indians are best known in imaginary or historical forms. They are conjured as relics of a primitive race more savage, more simple, and closer to nature than their western counterparts. Images of these Indians can be found in advertisements, movies, and books, while their living descendents remain hidden from public view. Throughout American museum history perceptions of the West have remained relatively stable, by putting in the foreground civilization, progress, and culture. Meanwhile, key elements of the imagined Indian have varied, at times highlighting savagery, the primitive, the childlike, or the natural.

The German word *museal* (Museumlike) has unpleasant overtones. It describes Objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in The process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchers for works of art (Adorno 1967:175).

This quotation by Theodor Adorno brought to the front by Andrea Witcomb is embedded with a set of ideas that stray from modernity; that is to say, the museum is represented as a mausoleum-like institution (Witcomb 2003: 102). This tradition equates the museum with a temple or a treasure house – an image that reinforces the idea of separation from the present. It also points to the central importance of objects in constructing narratives of cultural authority. The materiality of objects provided the basis for nineteenth-century ideas of civilization as material progress. At the same time it supported ideas of authenticity and originality which were

curtailed in the construction of the notion of tradition. By studying objects, museum curators could classify and order them into taxonomies in what they considered to be an “objective” manner. These classifications were supported by a historical framework that used the exhibition space of the museum to popularize a narrative of Western society as the pinnacle of civilization. As Tony Bennet argues “ a historical framework for the display of museum exhibits was concurrent with the development of an array of disciplines and other practices which aimed at the life-like reproduction of an authenticated past and its representation as a series of stages leading to the present” (Bennett 1995:88-89). In other words, order was imposed on a complex, heterogeneous world.

As already indicated, the image of the museum as a mausoleum is firmly linked to the idea that museums enclose objects. The museums separate them from the outside world that gave them their original social and political meanings and pose as a mere storehouse for the accumulation of material objects. This ideology is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century ideas of civilization as material progress (Ettema 1987: 62-85). Simply, that civilizations, which had the most complex objects, were the most advanced. In displaying the objects of various cultures, museums taught a hierarchical understanding of cultural development and instilled the value of materialism. They linked objects to a set of values, which supported the ideas of technological progress and aesthetics.

As a result of this focus on colonial power relationships, museums fall victim to much criticism and are accused of commodity fetishism and elitism. These critiques have been extended by the emergence of what Andrea Witcomb refers to as the “New Museology” that she defines as a field of study, which critiques museum practices in relation to their social, political, and economic contexts (Witcomb 2003:108). New museologists question the traditional

museological notion that objects possess inherent moral, aesthetic characteristics or reflect an objective representation of the social world.

Quite often, the new museologists focus on a political dimension, which is encapsulated in a call for a greater focus between museums and communities (Karp, Mullen, Kreamer, and Lavine 1992). The concept of 'community' in this case tends to be associated with resistance to the dominant culture. Communities are often understood as being outside the government and even in opposition to it. Witcomb argues that by placing the 'community' at the heart of the enterprise it will be possible to overcome the role of museums as hegemonic institutions.

Several new museum models have been put in place in order to decolonize the museum: Community museums Please Touch museums, and Children's museums etc (Witcomb 2003:106). These institutions emerged out the social turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was during this period of history that activist movements protested against social inequality military policies, and government: the Civil Rights Movement, the Feminist Movement, the Student Movement, and the Black Panthers to name a few. These movements addressed the status and civil rights of marginalized peoples within the society of the United States. Stemming from this uproar arose activism within the artistic community, particularly nontraditional/ethnic artists who had not been represented fairly within major museums. They organized protests at museums in which they demanded artists be represented on museum boards, the inclusion of female, Black, and Latino artists, and branch museums for minority communities (Lippard 1984).

One particular alternative institution was the community museum. Influenced by the political climate, marginalized communities began establishing community museums as instruments of empowerment. As the name indicates, community museums began as

neighborhood art organizations whose primary purpose was to promote the art and culture of minority communities. These museums were generally housed in converted community spaces and relied on the support of local members and artist's donations. Since their foundation, community museums have evolved both in form and purpose and have been met with a mix of success and failure. These community organizations successfully capture the perspective of the community that is represented; however, over time these museums have tended to fall victim to financial woes, which force them to stray from their initial community identity in order to keep up in the competitive museum environments.

Another modern iteration of the "decolonized" museum is the tribal museum – a community based museum that is meant to house cultural expression, dialogue, learning and understanding. They are meant to serve the communities and the people who initiated them, as well as wider audiences, by stimulating cultural activism and continuity that endures for the sake of future generations. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center is a candid example of these "decolonized museums." The following paragraphs will explore an analysis of the MPMRC and whether it can truly be deemed a decolonized museum.

Mashantucket Pequot museum:

The most elaborate tribal museum is the MPMRC and it is openly celebratory in tone. The MPMRC attempts to personalize the humanity, historical presence, and modern existence of Native Americans. Days before the museum opened its doors Lori Potter, a member of the tribal council, reported: "When I was a little girl and I looked our tribe up in an encyclopedia, it said we were a warlike tribe that was extinct. That was a lie, and I never forgot it. Now, our tribe is strong and united again, and this museum will make it possible for the world to know the truth"

(Weizel 1998: D15). The statement above reveals not only the aspirations of the new Mashantucket Pequot Museum and research center, but also the tenacious “Vanishing American” paradigm against which it must struggle. This review of the MPMRC will comment on how several galleries in the museum prompt visitors to consider tribal museums as privileged sites for establishing Native American humanity, historical presence, and contemporaneity for post-colonial audiences.

Through the exhibitions installed at the extravagant facility, the Pequot tribal nation is attempting to communicate a distinctly Pequot perspective. In fact, during the dedication of the new museum facility one tribal member presented an analogy for the new facility: “The museum is like this huge family album, on the grandest scale imaginable” (Weizel 1998:D15). It is this metaphor that the museum attempts to project on all of its visitors. Though certain aspects of the museum are quite successful in capturing Pequot identity, the museum fundamentally struggles against the colonial model of the museum.

This “family album” metaphor is evident throughout several of the museum galleries. The “Portrait Gallery” is the most literal manifestation of this concept. The walls of the gallery are adorned with black-and-white photographic portraits of Pequot tribal members (taken by David Neel) and contextualize them with audio recordings of interviews with the individuals featured. These portraits present distinct individuals; and their recorded voices speak clearly and eloquently of strong ties to the past, present, and future of their family and community. The voices weave anecdotes and recount how their families survived in the past and how important Pequot identity is to them in their contemporary lives. This exhibition humanizes popular notions of Native peoples generally but the Pequot people in particular.

This personalized “Family album” approach in the MPMRC firmly establishes the historical presence of the Pequot people during the post-Pequot war period, when their reputation as an “extinct” people had begun to take hold. The museum designates the entire second floor of gallery space to what life on the reservations was like for Pequots from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Dioramas and exhibit text highlight the life histories of particular individuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Robin Cassacinamon, Joseph Sunsimon, and Hannah Occuish(. It seems that the “Life on the Reservation Gallery” stresses what was really going on; not only that Native Americans had a hard life, but also the specific hardships that they personally experienced (Patrick 2000: 45). In a sense this gallery is telling the stories that otherwise would have gone unsaid in most ethnographic museums.

In an attempt to humanize the Pequot people the museum has chosen to tell some of these challenging life stories. The Life on the Reservation gallery connects the Pequot experience of land loss to the need for intense cultural adaptation. Although Europeans and Americans have associated the Native American with cultural extinction, the Pequot museum shows a representation of survival through adversity. The second floor displays life history exhibits, which feature how particular men were forced to leave the shrinking reservation in search of wage labor, finding work as fishermen, farm laborers, and soldiers; under these circumstances women sold baskets in towns, or served as indentured servants. Yet even under these harsh circumstances people maintained ties to tribal identity. This gallery communicates how self-identification as Pequot people continued despite modification in material culture and subsistence practices.

Despite the stories that connect the museum to the genealogy of Pequots that stretches from centuries ago to the present, the tribe still struggles with the legacy of their reputation as

being “extinct”. The “Vanishing American” paradigm explains that the Native American is doomed, by racial constitution, by historical necessity, by the realities of Indian-white relations, to disappear from the face of the earth (Dixon 1913: 173). The nature of this paradigm was fueled by Fredrick Jackson Turner’s 1893 proclamation that the frontier of the American West had come to an end. As one scholar points out: Turner“ trained an influential generation of historians between 1890 and 1924 [who] were able to exercise a dominant influence on the teaching and writing of American history” (Nash 1991: 4). Turner’s thesis indirectly allowed politicians, popular writers, and cinematographers to reinforce the myth that the west had been “tamed” or colonized. Since the 1960s, however, the historic frontier experience has increasingly been presented as a negative legacy of conquest. Native American activists have been extreme critics regarding the nostalgic absorption of Indianess into national identity and popular culture (Hill 1991:14-23). The notion of the “Vanishing American” has profoundly shaped not only the Tribe’s desire to create a museum, but also the public’s reception of the museum.

However, there remains a cloud of skepticism about the “cultural authenticity” of the Pequot people and their museum. This skepticism places a burden and challenge on the new museum’s exhibitions and programming that is different than other mainstream museums. This cynicism is a product of the apparent resurgence and reassemblage of a previously divided Pequot community. Not only does the MPMRC have to authenticate the few objects it possesses, it also has to verify the culture of the people, which it exhibits. Adding to this skepticism, the museum was created through funding provided by a portion of Foxwoods casino profits (Patrick 2000: 10). In fact, a small forerunner to the museum was located on the bottom floor of the casino. Following the opening of the new museum, much press coverage has stressed the museum’s impressive price: nearly two hundred million dollars. This figure is nearly

impossible to imagine for a tribal museum, and is comparable to the sum expended on the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C (219 million dollars).

Beyond providing the revenue to build the museum, the casino also figures as an important character in the Pequot's narration of their history. Two galleries – Pequot Nation and Life on the Reservation – touch upon the links between the museum and the casino, and issues of sovereignty. These exhibits reveal for the audience how retaining ownership of the reservation land and establishing the casino have profoundly shaped the contemporary experience of the Pequot people. In the mid twentieth century, there were only two women left on the reservation, and they were determined to stay. One of these women was the grandmother of the previous president of the tribal council, Richard Hayward, and the current museum director Theresa Bell.

In the 1970s, Hayward returned to the reservation to reconstruct the Pequot community (Campisi 2000: 13). This was the era when struggles for federal recognition, adequate housing, and economic development accelerated. In addition, the Pequot Nation gallery on the first level establishes the narrative of linking land ownership issues to the establishment of the casino and contemporary Pequot sovereignty. The gallery also takes its own history and that of the casino as subjects for contemplation. The Pequot Nation room also explains, "What is here today" including not only the museum and casino, but also a post office, firehouse, child development center, pharmaceutical corporation, and water treatment plant. Thus, showing that all of these tribal enterprises have contributed their resources to the plans to make their dream of a museum into a reality.

The wealth of this tribal museum is evident through the museum's lavish architecture and the richness and quality of the exhibition space. The 308,000 –square foot facility is anything but classical in its construction: the facility “melds into the landscape, with two of its five levels below ground” (Patrick 2000: 14). Rather than the typical mausoleum-like structure, the building is composed of three primary sections: a circular glass and steel structure that serves as the symbolic center and focal point of the museum, as well as primary entry and gathering space; the landscaped terrace which offers extraordinary views of the reservation; and the structure that houses the research library, archives, and archeological laboratories. The architecture of the building suits the Pequot's constructed identity: incorporating views of their current land, while at the same time attempting to blend into the surroundings in the most contemporary fashion.

Inside, the exhibit design incorporates modern technology. Video monitors and interactive, audiovisual sound stations are placed liberally throughout the museum, representing everything from basket and boat making to war strategies of ancient man, even incorporating presentations of traditional stories. The depth of financial resources is perhaps most evident in what could be called the “heart” of the museum: the Pequot Village.

The most visually impressive part of the museum is the “Pequot Village”, but it is also full of controversy. The Pequot Village is a 22,000 square foot re-creation of a sixteenth century Pequot village arranged as almost a living museum (except that all the people are in fact mannequins) (Patrick 2000: 18). In this gallery the museum takes the generic life group dioramas to a new level. In essence, the “Pequot Village” is an extremely high-tech version of Holm's turn of the century Life-Sized Groups. These life groups – groupings of one or two costumed figures, which provided a life like rendering of the typical activities of an Indian tribe – are still the main attraction in ethnographic museums like the American Museum of Natural History

(Ewers 1958: 519). However, the Pequot village tries to avoid reproducing another timeless, ethnographic present by including digital audio systems for visitors. The heavily used, portable audio systems disrupt the timelessness of the display, providing a Pequot and Non-Pequot interpretations of Pequot life.

At the entrance to this exhibit, visitors are encouraged to take a headset and proceed into the gallery. At every numerical stop point, visitors are given the option “to go behind the scenes with an expert archeologist” or to hear an interpretation from the Pequot perspective. At the MPMRC, visitors walk through a re-creation forest complete with wigwams and startlingly life-size mannequins, which to the distracted observer can be mistaken for living, breathing things. The museum tries to simulate the visitor with incredible detail in order to create a nearly complete immersion experience: it incorporates the smell of the forest and campfires, and the sounds of wildlife and running water.

Native Perspective on the Museum:

Native peoples have inherited a system of representation that has caused considerable tension. Lacking opportunities to represent themselves, Native people have had, historically, to play the role of the subject/object, the observed, rather than the observer. Rarely have they been in a position of self-representation. Along these same lines, the native peoples have always been the informant, seldom the interrogator or the initiator.

In exploring and understanding the Native perspective, the MPMRC attempts to assert a number of complex frameworks, which they believe should be acknowledged by the public. First, given the continuing existence of the Native American in the Americas, the museum

asserts that there should be a history of two founding nations, not just that the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock to found the United States. Typically, ethnographic museums studied the Native Americans and their cultures in much the same way they studied the West's flora and fauna, as curiously foreign objects to be sketched, cataloged, and recorded as something which was part of nature. "The scholarly and political polemic of the late 1700's and early 1800's equated the Indian people with the environment of North America. In 1794 Charles Wilson Peal [first] institutionalized the Indian as an object of natural history in his museum of natural history in Philadelphia" (McGuire 1997: 68). The MPMRC attempts to prove this point wrong by tying the history of the Native American to the land. By beginning the story of the Native American in the Ice Age, the MPMRC indicates that the Native American was the first settler of the Americas, rather than just a specimen that was found by the Europeans.

Second, the curators of the MPMRC want visitors to recognize the variety of social, cultural and historical perspectives within an indigenous North America. In ethnographic museums, the Native American groups tend to be lumped into one display and considered as the same. However, the MPMRC deals entirely with the Pequot nation and its specific history. Though the museum does mention several other Native groups and their views on creationism, the heart of the museum focuses only on the Mashantucket Pequots and their specific history. The multivocality expressed in the Pequot Village and Photo Gallery exhibitions also creates diversity within the tribe adding a personal dimension that can be understood by the visitor.

Lastly, the museum highlights that the histories of Native and non-native have often crisscrossed and profoundly affected one another. Usually the detailed history of the interaction between European and Native American is concealed from the viewing public. At the MPMRC the public gains a full understanding of the injustices experienced by the Pequot Nation during

both colonial and modern epochs. The museum displays that disease spread as a result of colonialism and the political inequalities suffered by the Pequots in the 1950s and 60s. It attempts to employ these installations in order to highlight these occurrences to the non-Native audience.

Criticisms

The museum on the whole had very few heritage pieces on display. In the Pequot village gallery there were smaller, hard-to-find rooms set to the side, which displayed a total of about 30 historical objects. Museums usually rely heavily on the importance of the historic objects, but the MPMRC establishes itself through photographs, audio, and video. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the objects within museums or from archaeological sites are not themselves cultural heritage or identity. Rather, it is the relationships between the objects and the people who view them that creates a vision of the past, of the present, and for the future. It is this vision that connects people to objects in the creation and changing nature of cultural identity (Leventhal 2007: 11).

By changing the importance of objects within the museum context, the MPMRC, attempts to create a new museum model: one, which places higher value on story telling than on objectification. In order to present their own version of Pequot identity the museum curators at the MPMRC worked under the assumption that museums are “idea based” rather than focus on the objects themselves. This idea was based in the argument that museums need to overcome the belief that because they work with objects, their knowledge claims are necessarily objective. The aim is to recognize the ideological basis of all museum work (Witcomb 2003: 120). The result can be seen in the MPMRC focus on the narrative. The absence of interpretation with

objects has come to be seen as elitist and imperial. Thus, the MPMRC makes a statement that the Pequot people are not just represented by their material works, they are a modern people with their own identity.

What sets the Pequot museum apart from Western-minded museums is that it includes the “native voice” in its exhibit design. In a recent essay reviewing the Indigena project, Gerald McMaster explained the importance of the Indigena in the museum. Indigena was an exhibition that brought together paintings, sculptures, installations and new media pieces, that addressed the meaning of the 500 years since Columbus’s arrival from the perspective of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The exhibition was the first show to be mounted by a large Canadian museum in which all the key participants – curators, artists and writers for the publication – were members of the Aboriginal community (Stone 1982: 63). McMaster expresses that western museums typically present the material culture of native cultures as either art or artifact and do not include the native perspective. The original ceremonial function of artifacts tends to be erased when they are presented in art museums like the Met. Yet the presence of Indian objects at ethnological and historical museums (The Natural History Museum) in North America has inevitably implied that these are not works of art, like European paintings and sculpture, but that they are artifacts of “primitive” peoples (McMaster 1992: 66). In art museums, the aesthetic and symbolic meaning of an object is displayed only as far as the geographic and temporal context. In historic and anthropological museums, “primitive” works are displayed only as material culture and not as legitimate art. In either case, the objects from these cultures are presented as “ethnic” and separate from American culture. In addition to his criticism, McMaster also highlights the growing number of native peoples, curators and administrators, who are developing a new native ethnography. He emphasizes that native people should be principally in

charge of planning and interpreting the exhibition of their own culture. The MPMRC tries to represent the “decolonization of the museum” - the increasing ownership and direction of museums by Native communities. Visitors to the museum are meant to notice the complexity of the museum’s voice - they are encouraged to feel a tangible Pequot presence. This voice is one of the prize effects of indigenous museums in post-colonial societies.

Colonialism is, of course, the determining framework of modern Pequot history. Contemporary life is its product, however much influence recent wealth and recuperated tribal ties may wield. While the history of conquest is very much present in the this museum, the tribe projects the more evident self-representation that highlights Pequot distinctiveness and the regained hold on culture, land, and authority at Mashantucket.¹ In a general sense, then, the museum represents the tribe as a distinct, historic entity with a stable core of being.

Research Center

It is important to recognize that the MPMRC is much more than an exhibition space. Perhaps it is most significant as a place for cultural preservation and revitalization. The research center sponsors exemplary community cultural activities such as performances, reading circles, story telling, and school field trips. Research Libraries that provide visitors with free access to the museum’s extensive collections of Native American literature and reference book. Also, the research department is responsible for collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting historical documents, archaeological data, and oral histories as they relate to the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe and other Native American communities in southern New England. The historical documents include Pequot Overseers papers, Connecticut Indian Papers, Federal Census records,

¹ Manshantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, pamphlet for Foxwoods Resort Casino issued August 2007.

historic maps, vital statistics, land records, and probate records. Collectively, this information allows tribal researchers to better understand and reconstruct historic Pequot communities and their interactions with other tribes and neighboring European American and African American communities in the region. The work produced in the research center makes it abundantly clear that the center is a site of community revitalization, knowledge making, and cultural sovereignty with a focus on continued exploration of Pequot identity.

Casino

In contrast, the near by Foxwoods casino paints the tribe as a stylish pastiche mixed up in the popular culture of mainstream America. Foxwoods is an enormous, Vegas-like complex amid a quiet, otherwise undeveloped woodland environment. Inside, an overwhelming array of portraits, video images, lights, and sounds assault the senses. B list celebrities sing and dance on giant video screens posted outside theaters. In the cocktail lounge, waitresses wearing Indian maiden outfits wait on customers from around the globe. Tribal drumming and mall-style music compete with the clang of slot machines.

As the advertisement suggests gambling at Foxwoods Casino is “Gaming in its Natural State.” This Natural State is illustrated with dozens of fake, life-sized trees positioned strategically between slot machines. At one end of the building, there is a river scene with a giant trout curling around imitation rocks and aquatic plants. The overt fakery of these woodland scenes inside the casino is all the more noticeable, given the panoramic views of the real thing through the casino’s many enormous windows. The window scape paired with the synthetic interior has the effect of drawing the outside in, creating an inflated sense of nature.

References to Indian, sometimes specifically the Pequot, history and culture attach themselves to the theme of "Gaming in its Natural State" and become part of the spectacle. In the midst of a cluster of "trees," there is a huge statue of an Indian Warrior, who kneels with a bow and arrow pointed skyward. Every half hour, the scene comes alive with lights, rain, smoke, and sounds of drums. A sober voice narrates the lifestyle of the Pequots in their ancient homeland.

Given the long history of gaming among Native peoples, arguments suggesting that the games at Foxwoods and other tribal casinos have nothing to do with indigenous traditions do not hold. Rather than looking at gaming as corruption, one should keep in mind that the ends toward which the tribe claims the casino is aimed included the reconstruction of and return to tribal culture. But what is one to make of the prevalence of native motifs at the casino? On one hand, the repeated references to the indigenous environmental and cultural history and to the Native sculptures and paintings help intentionally identify the casino as specific to Pequot. On the other hand, the Indian statue, the drumming music and the videos of native dancing look very much like Indian stereotypes drawn from Euro-American popular culture. Thus giving visitors what they expect to see and hear from a Native enterprise.

It is hard to ignore the historical irony in the idea that such fragments of an iconography that has helped to foster the disempowerment of native society since the seventeenth century are now being put to use in reverse order to redress the massive economic injustice of the past. This is not to say that Foxwoods systematically ensnares its customers, seducing them into losing control of their money or themselves while tribal members stand by and laugh. Nevertheless, these motifs can be said to implicitly critique their Western sources.

For all their enormous differences, Foxwoods and the museum have several things in common. Both serve as ambassadors of contemporary Pequot society to the tribe's publics. The museum offers "a theatrical, time-travel experience where, like ghosts from the future, visitors can see, hear, and smell the village" (Dufresne 1996). By this description, the museum's "Pequot Village" recalls the woodland scenes and New England villages inside Foxwoods. The giant fake trees are like those that surround the Indian statue in the casino; and some of the mannequins of the Pequots in the dioramas of life before English call to mind the statuary evident in the casino. Michael Stoll describes the museum somewhat dismissively as "part Disney, part 'Dances with Wolves,' though his argument is somewhat insulting it is not entirely illogical (Stoll 1998).

The perfect re-construction encourages one to wonder about the recent controversies over the "Disneyfication" of the museum and historic-site exhibitions. The term "Disneyfication" refers to the over popularizing or commercializing of museum exhibitions and historic sites. Making the museum resemble a theme park is an effort to compete with other tourism attractions by making learning more enjoyable through interactive learning environs. Many of these critics also argue that these effects can endanger the integrity of the representation (Hall 2007:73). On the other hand, it is not as though the museum has relegated its artifacts to the attic in favor of glitz. In fact, given the scarcity of surviving Pequot artifacts, the museum's solution is remarkably creative: an eclectic and often engaging mix of film, computers, and vast, theatrical dioramas that vividly describe the tribe's early history, cultural decimation after the Pequot War of 1637, and astonishing casino-fueled revival.

The question then arises as to whether the museum is like the casino in its emphasis on narrating to the public the historical continuity between present day Pequots and their past tribal

community confirms the idea of stagnant cultural nexus, or whether it creates a counter representation of a continuously changing people struggling constantly to recompose themselves as a specific social group. Does the current historical narrative of the museum, with its data collected from the past, turn the present day tribe's focus backward? Or instead does the museum locate the Pequot tribe more firmly among a cultural present and future?

Beneath the group photo at the entrance to the museum, the text reads, "In addition to being a tribal nation, we are also a newly revitalized community – one that has been realized by years of planning, hoping, and hard work." Nation and community building for the Mashantucket Pequots is a collective effort at re-creating a home as well as a public image as an authentic Indian tribe. Judy Bell, a tribal member, explained to reporters in 1993: "It's the rebirth of a nation, and you can't do everything all at once... You're learning a little at a time, but unfortunately by having to unearth our culture, it's going to take a while before we know as much about ourselves as other tribes know about themselves" (Johnson 1993). The museum placard and Bell's statement emphasize the unfinished condition of the Pequot cultural formation, even as formal tribal assertions frame the tribe as a work-in-progress. The Pequots do seem to be faced with a field of cultural possibilities, a confusing array of associations and resistances to the larger western culture. In the future Pequot identity may be seen as a construction or an invention rather than a return to tribal heritage.

Conclusion

Museums have and always will play an important role in the creation of identity. As the homes of model collections, museums are the purveyors of value. As collectors with resources and longevity far greater than any individual, museums are sources of power and authority. They

also play a large role in determining what is traditional and/or authentic. As 'sacred spaces' open to those who know how to read its rituals and texts, museums are typically socially and culturally exclusive (Duncan 1995).

It is well known that Native Americans have a tortured relationship with museums. Museums offer significant knowledge that cannot be discounted; nevertheless, museological practices are underpinned by Western epistemologies, systems of classification, and ideological assumptions. In the past when these systems have been applied to Native Americans they have functioned in exploitative, objectifying, and demeaning ways. By using a historically unquestioned authority to take Native objects and remains and to define who and what Native Americans are, museums have, in many ways, trapped Native Americans behind their glassed-in cases, rendering vital, contemporary Native voices silent, dynamic Native cultures invisible, and abstract concepts of legal and cultural sovereignty difficult to exercise.

However, the MPMRC demands a total overhaul of traditional museum practice. The primary goal of the museum is to establish itself as open space for indigenous people to become speaking subjects who voice their own ideas and contribute to their own representations. With their rigorous and collaborative approach, they have achieved an engaging exhibition of Indigenous history and memory as well as a modern dialogue on Pequot society. The exhibition represents a decolonizing museum practice that bode well for a future in which museums serve Native American communities as well as Native American communities have served them.

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