

**Museum Pieces:
The Politics of Aesthetics and Knowledge at the Museum**

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O. An Overview

Nothing in life is a given. Everything instead must acquire a more fixed state of "givenness," and museums serve as some of the most giving institutions in this process of drawing out the for-grantedness of our ontological contracts in the New World Order. Giving knowable qualities to everything requires all things to be pieced apart, albeit in some clearly aesthetic manner, so that the play of power through discourses of holistic knowing can piece these parts together again, granting us fixity in our reality's givenness. In a hyperreal time, when models precede meaning and maps come before terrains, museums function as critically important modelling agencies and mapping centers to meld ontological meanings with cultural terrains. So we are not surprised anymore to learn that there are over 7,000 up and running in North America, and one or two more open every week (Belcher, 1991: xiii). And, if there is one museum on this continent, which might singularly represent all of these tendencies, then it is the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

Indeed, the American Museum has done much over the past 125 years to define and popularize the nature of humanity's place in Nature for all Americans. From its early days as a material sign of New York's Gilded Age philanthropists to its current activities as an erstwhile defender of biodiversity, this private scientific institution has been a central site for giving modern

Americans their understanding of Nature, history, museums, and even America itself since it first opened its doors to the public on Central Park West during 1877.

In many ways, the American Museum of Natural History also is the most well-known and highly regarded of any museum in the United States. Other municipal museums in Boston, Charleston and Philadelphia are older, Chicago's Field Museum is nearly as impressive and innovative, the Smithsonian's many museums contain larger collections; but, the American Museum of Natural History sits in New York, and many of its collections have been gathered in wide-ranging, free-booting Indiana Jones-style expeditions that the City's media have celebrated for decades. Consequently, Webster's Unabridged College Dictionary uses the American Museum of Natural History, like the British Museum in London, to exemplify its authoritative definitions of the word: "museum." As the noted biologist, Edward O. Wilson observes, "The American Museum of Natural History: This is a museum that has thought big about the world" (1995: 18). At the same time, its big thoughts about the world have done much to shape the popular understanding of Nature and History in New York, the United States, and the world at large. Because so many pieces of the world--dinosaur bones, elephants, totem poles, whales, huge meteorites--are assembled as foundational pieces of so many people's sense of their world's fundamental reality in the displays and storerooms of the American Museum, this institution gives us one of the

world's best venues to reconsider the politics of aesthetics and knowledge at the museum.

Our reconsideration of politics/aesthetics/epistemics in museums is important, because of the on-going "culture wars" that are still wracking the body politic. James Davison Hunter argues that "America is in the midst of a culture war that has and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere," and this cultural conflict can be understood as "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding" (1991: 34, 42). Although he strangely ignores museums, Hunter argues that "it is in the context of institutional structures that cultural conflict becomes crystallized, because cultural conflict is ultimately about the struggle for domination" (1991: 173, 52). And, domination always is well worth struggling to attain within any institution, because it leads to power. Cultural forms of power, however, are the most potent, because they carry a vital prerogative: "the power to define reality....nothing less is at stake than a sense of justice and fair play, an assurance that life is as it should be, indeed, nothing less is at stake than a way of life" (Hunter, 1991: 52).

Most battles in the cultural wars do center upon defining "a way of life" with moral authority. And, in the United States, many have been sparked by museum exhibitions, as the pitched polemical battles over the Enola Gay exhibition at the National

Air and Space Museum during 1995 or "The West as America" show at the National Museum of American Art in 1991 both illustrate. This paper, however, will not look at an obviously controversial show that has ignited some serious spate of intense fighting. Instead, this discussion will examine an essentially uncontested site--the American Museum of Natural History--to evaluate how it exercises its vast powers to define reality such that it assures all who visit that their life "is as it should be" in the American "way of life."

Rather than treating contemporary America's culture wars as some discrete event whose past causes, current processes or future outcomes can be completely explained in one coherent picture, it makes more sense to weave them into a "history of the present" (1979: 31). As Foucault suggests, this history will not examine some freeze-dried slice of the present in order to extract its underlying laws of genetic causation or refine some underpinning web of epochal outcomes, presuming all along to have shown how some foreshadowed kernel of the present germinated out of a well-defined past that now can definitely sum up our situation. The present must rather be seen as layered tracings of contemporary systems of discourse and discipline, marking where power circulates, wins legitimacy, takes form, and directs the politics, culture, economy or society of the United States in some specific fashion. The American Museum of Natural History shows how museums are much more than the depositories of culture:

they are power's staging areas, common carriers, collective assemblies, and expressive effects. In playing out these roles for power, museums operate as "ontologues," or definitive foundational expressions of what is "real," which they then work to make rational. The following analysis explicates how these ontologues are written, what the ontologues do, or whose interests the ontologues articulate in the rhetoric of relics and spectacle of specimens.

The American Museum's scientific field studies have carved out many of the key tenets still circulating in the disciplinary fields of modern America's sciences. Its expeditions and curators have defined much of our natural history: the origins and identities of "early Americans" from the Bering land bridge to Anasazi pueblos of the Four Corners regions; the scope and duration of the Aztec and Inca empires; the exotic animals and peoples populating the Pacific Rim; the decline and collapse of Pacific Northwest Indian tribes; the location and qualities of the North and South Poles; the diverse flora and fauna of Africa and Asia; or, the ancient lives of dinosaurs from Mongolia to Montana--all of these natural and historical realities have been extracted scientifically from the field, disciplined technically in the laboratory, and then aestheticized formally as "knowledge," vended and taken to be definitive and true, by the powers of the American Museum's many authorities. As the premier scientific institution in the major city of the twentieth

century's most enduring superpower, the halls of the American Museum are one of contemporary world culture's most consulted ontologies: what is real is finally established here, and here is where America's most basic natural and historical realities are often first selected, shaped, and stabilized. The disciplinary capabilities of these productive powers, at the same time, can be studied closely and completely in such institutions for they produce both the subjects and objects of modern technoscience's secular humanist reality. Museum sites are ontopes, museum discourses are always ontonymic, and museum curators are ontocrats. Surely, the political dynamics of their aesthetic and epistemic practices are well worth studying in much more detail.

II. The American Museum of Natural History

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many cities featured "cabinets of curiosities" and "academies of sciences" in which nature and society were poked and prodded by accumulating vast collections of oddities, curiosities, and relics culled from all over the world. Most of Europe's great cities had built such institutions during the Enlightenment, and by the mid-nineteenth century so too did Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington, D.C. New York, however, was often dismissed "as merely a center of crass commercialism, incapable of producing a museum of note," even though it featured Delacourte's Cabinet of Natural History as far back as 1804 (Preston, 1986: 8-9). Yet, this small

institution closed soon after opening due to financial difficulties, and Delacourte sold his motley collection to Russia.

The founder of the American Museum of Natural History, Professor Albert S. Bickmore, created this unusually influential institution mostly by the force of his extraordinary entrepreneurial personality. Born in St. George, Maine during 1839, he attended Dartmouth, and then graduated from Harvard after studying chemistry and geology. After a brief apprenticeship under Louis Agassiz at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Geology, he set off for the East Indies on a collecting expedition in 1863, which was to accumulate specimens that might stock a new natural history museum in New York. Indeed, this museum project was, as one colleague noted, "that incessant preoccupation of his mind, the new museum building, its future, its uses, how it should develop, how it would feed school, college, and university...how it would expand commensurately with the new continent's metropolis until it outrivaled...the collective shows of all the world" (cited in Preston, 1986: 16).

In 1868, many New Yorkers were thinking along the same lines as Bickmore. Andrew Green, who headed the Board of Commissioners of Central Park in New York City, resolved to build a Paleozoic Museum fashioned after the great dinosaur panoramas of London's Sydenham Park. To be devoted to "specimens of animals of the

pre-Adamite period," the Paleozoic Museum was intended by the commissioners to be "a museum devoted to American beasts" so that those modern Americans, who would visit the Paleozoic Museum, could be reminded of Time's many divisions and passages by feasting their eyes on concrete simulations of the flesh that once hung on pre-historic beasts such as those suggested by recently discovered fossil bones: "for thousands of years men have dwelt upon the Earth without even suspecting that it was a mighty tomb of animated races that once flourished upon it...Generations of the most gigantic and extraordinary creatures...huge fishes, enormous birds, monstrous reptile, and ponderous uncouth animals" (cited in Preston, 1986: 8, 11). The project, however, never came to full fruition, because William "Boss" Tweed came to power in Albany. Tweed could not find a means of getting monetary kickbacks from its contractors, so he had its already constructed foundations plowed under and its main planner, Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, harassed by thugs until he abandoned the idea.

Bickmore, on the other hand, admired Louis Agassiz's Harvard-based Museum of Comparative Zoology, but regretted its out of the way location in Cambridge. "In Europe," he argued, "the institutions of this character are placed in the political and monetary capitals of the several empires," so it stood to reason that if New York was America's "city of the greatest wealth" that it probably was "the best location for the future

museum of natural history for the whole land" (Preston, 1986: 14-15). To realize this vision, he resolved to set about making it happen himself.

Bickmore's fundraising activities among wealthy New Yorkers who could help with his plans, including J. Pierpont Morgan, Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., Morris K. Jesup, and Samuel J. Tilden, soon garnered enough pledges to support a world-class institution. "Boss" Tweed ran its charter through the state legislature in 1869, and Albany also gave Manhattan Square, a sixteen acre of land adjacent to Central Park on 79th Street, to the Museum. On June 2, 1874, President Grant laid the cornerstone for its new building in a ceremony attended by three members of his cabinet, the governor of New York, and the Mayor of New York City all of whom wanted to help launch a national institution devoted to accumulating "a collection of objects of scientific interest second to none other in the world" (Preston, 1986: 19).

Haraway's (1989: 26-58) fascinating analysis of the American Museum of Natural History as an expression of shared anxieties about the death of organic nature and racial contamination percolating through the upper crust of Gilded Age America's robber barons deciphers many of its more famous displays as object lessons in race, gender, class. These interpretations are compelling, but they do not begin to exhaust all of the Museum's meanings. The multivocal polyvalence of the Theodore Roosevelt

Memorial, lurking behind its declared institutional engagement with TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, VISION on the walls around the American Museum's Central Park West entrance, does much more than simply deploy the arts of taxidermy or politics of eugenics against decadence. Consequently, our investigation must look beyond Haraway's intriguing reappraisal of the dynamics of social class in nature's historical dynamics, namely, its generation of a new ontological program for modern industrial society. Its chronicles of natural history, in fact, unfold in various chronologies that historicize Nature, giving us "the givens" of an Americanized natural reality.

This museum is one mechanism by which the disorder of beings, ordinarily known as "Life," has been reshaped into an order of things in the collections and displays of its holdings.

Most importantly, these museumological orderings of things both express and enforce the dominant political means for coping with disorderly beings in the life of the state by normalizing "a way of life" in their aesthetic and epistemic representations of Nature. So the highly touted discursive accessibility of the Museum's many exhibits derive from clear political agendas aimed at satisfying the educational expectations of a wealthy railroad magnate and banker, Morris K. Jesup, who was a Museum founder and one of its most important presidents. A self-made millionaire who left school at age twelve, Jesup saw immediately how the Museum could become "a power of great good" in New York, and he

set himself up as the measure of its teachings, claiming "I am a plain, unscientific man; I want the exhibits labelled so I can understand them, and then I shall feel sure that others can understand" (cited in Preston, 1987: 22-23). Great power and wealth in New York's ruling elites, then, demanded simple accessible statements about the reality they sanctioned, and the American Museum has provided them faithfully for many decades.

Clearly, the American Museum of Natural History has embodied Jesup's plain unsophisticated pursuit of scientific truths for over 125 years: "cataloguing species, describing their distribution, and enumerating their familial relations and physical evolution--the primary scientific tasks of the Museum" (Rexer and Klein, 1995: 29). Yet, fixating upon "the facts, just the facts" reveals a very factualized justice, whose fair play in "the American way of life," assures all that "life is as it should be." As a vast observatory of disciplined life-forms, which will be, in turn, subjected to science's always on-going disciplinary investigations, the American Museum's many collections constitute a catalogue of beings--past and present, animal and plant, human and non-human--whose scope and depth represent contemporary humanity's socio(onto)logy from the paleo(onto)logy of dead dinosaurs once native to America to the neo(onto)logy of moribund Native American tribes (Agger, 1989). Its disciplinary role in creating more informed subjects always has been in play, but the dynamics of these powerplays must be

made more manifest. Plainly, "the Museum was, first of all, a repository of facts--tangible, visible evidence of a world beyond New York City that many of the visitors would never see. Somehow, seeing the Great Auk, its founders believed, would make New Yorkers and all Americans better citizens, more diligent workers'" (Rexer and Klein, 1995: 25). So the American Museum always has sustained a specific political order as it created its new epistemic order in its highly aestheticized recreations of Nature.

III. Politics and Epistemics

Museums of natural history, like New York's American Museum, are intimately connected to the epistemic rupture in the seventeenth century that marks the rise of modern knowledge systems (Foucault, 1979: xv-xxiv). Rejecting the cosmic syntheses of similitudes and resemblances once used to establish knowledge in the theogenic Book of God and/or autogenic Book of Nature through hermeneutic semiologies, Cartesian knowledge-systems shifted to a more purified rationalistic system of empirical comparison rooted in an anthropogenic and anthropocentric regime of mathematical measurement and temporal genesis. Semiotic exegesis is displaced by rational observation, turning hermeneutical signs into analytical tools. Rational observation, mathematical measurement, and diachronic narratives reconfigure knowledge: "the simultaneously endless and closed, full and tautological world of resemblance now finds itself

disassociated and, as it were, split down the middle; on the one side, we shall find the signs that have become tools of analysis, marks of identity and difference, principles whereby things can be reduced to order, keys for a taxonomy; and, on the other, the empirical and murmuring resemblance of things, that unreacting similitude that lies beneath thought and furnishes the infinite raw material for divisions and distributions. On the one hand, the general theory of signs, divisions, and classifications; on the other, the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature's repetition. And between the two, the new forms of knowledge that occupy the area opened up by this new split" (Foucault, 1970: 57-58).

In the split, natural historians slowly gave up interpreting Nature through arcane documents, Biblical parables, or ancient myths to accumulate objects from various discretely bordered spaces, like nation-states or their imperial territories, in ordered collections for rational analysis and measurement. As Francis Bacon claimed, the objects and specimens gathered together in such a museum cabinet changed human society's relations with and knowledge of Nature: "And so you have in small compass a model of the universal nature made private" (cited in Impey and MacGregor, 1985: 1). Appropriating this universal nature, and then making it private to remodel its forms within a small compass, in turn, soon assumed national and/or statal forms as the English Royal Society (founded in 1660)

recruited scientists and taxonomists (beginning 1669) to create an "Inventory of Nature" (started in 1666 and in published catalogue by 1681) of the British Isles. Elias Ashmole used a similar national logic for collecting at Oxford's Ashmolean Museum (founded 1683), and this practice gradually spread to the Continent (St. Petersburg, 1764) and North America (Charleston, 1773).

With the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the analytics of finitude unlease "Man" from the constraints of Renaissance Humanism and Classical rationalism, creating "man, as a primary object with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge" (Foucault, 1970: 310). In folkloric culture museums, art museums, or natural history museums, abstract atomic individuals and concrete national collectives could cojoin their collective imaginations in the "imagined community" of nations (Anderson, 1983). Here, museums begin to operate, on the one hand, as ethnological generators, collecting objects and classifying events from their newly historicized nations "to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future" (Anderson, 1983: 19). On the other hand, they also start serving as cosmological memorials, interpreting genetic process and exposing objects in evolutionary progression so that individual death and collective life for Man and Nature in the

Nation transform "fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (Anderson, 1983: 19). As Prösler observes, national museums of art, culture or nature take on the forms of "a complete microcosmic representation of the nation state. The collected objects in the museum document a human community extending in time and space: the nation...the building contains representatively everything in the state territory--and in this way becomes itself a symbol of the power relationship" (1996: 35). Preston suggests, once these ontological chains of descent and schedules of progression are positioned in the American Museum of Natural History, "a scientist can reconstruct evolution or figure out how a species fits into the staggeringly complex pattern of life on Earth by looking at collections. These collections are the corpus delicti of natural science" (1986: xii).

Preston's celebratory assessment of the American Museum of Natural History as a center of natural science supports this sense of its disciplinary practices.

More than anything, natural scientists of the late nineteenth century believed deeply in the value of collections. To them, collections were facts. They held secrets about the world; secrets that could be extracted through careful study. Collections would reveal the relationships among all life on the planet, including human beings. They would be a resource for scientists centuries into the future, long after such things no longer existed in the wild (1986: 24).

Such disciplined museumological practices are the foundation of the American Museum's "positivity." Each fragmentary piece in

every collection becomes a factual bit of reality, making possible various scientific statements about natural beings and their many relationships with the Earth.

The Museum's self-professed mission, namely, "the natural history of our planet and its species is revealed in more than forty exhibition halls" (American Museum of Natural History, 1995: 3) enables the enunciative modalities of its discursive displays to go to work upon both its professional employees and visiting patrons. We find in natural history museums "a field of regularity for various positions of subjectivity," and discourse there is not "the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined," making it preeminently "a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed" (Foucault, 1972: 55).

Even though many of the American Museum's expeditions have been launched with the hopes of procuring the raw totality of life's many specimens, establishing some transcendent foundation for life, or discovering ultimate life's origins, one can stand back, and see the collecting process as more significant than the products of collecting. Therefore, "by substituting the analysis of rarity for the search for totalities, the description of relations of exteriority for the theme of the transcendental

foundation, the analysis of accumulations for the quest of the origin" (Foucault, 1972: 125), we can begin to see the ontogenic positivities that the American Museum discursively fabricated during and after its expeditions of discovery.

The emergence of Man in the late eighteenth century necessitates the coterminous creation of his collective consciousness, including nationalized registers of memory, contemporaneity, and futurity, which museums help to articulate and communicate in many possible branches of positive knowledge.

As the natural, mathematical, physical, and social sciences develop out of the Enlightenment, "a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (Foucault, 1979: 224) explodes in the proliferation of museums. Each and every agglomeration of municipal, provincial or national Man finds its memory in the observatories of art, culture, history, nature, or science museums. The museum simply articulates one more specific modality of disciplinary power "whose general formulas, techniques of submitting forces and bodies, in short, 'political anatomy,' could be operated in the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses, or institutions" (Foucault, 1979: 221).

The American Museum of Natural History, like the British Museum in 1753 or the Musée National de L'Histoire Naturelle in 1793, emerged in 1869 with a clear founding mission: "For the purpose of...encouraging and developing the study of Natural

Science, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and to that end of furnishing popular instruction" (American Museum of Natural History, 1995: 1). Simply stated, its basic goals are totalizing and particularizing: "Museum scientists have sought to identify and describe the Earth and its life forms and to explore human culture" (American Museum of Natural History, 1995: 2). So the American Museum has helped to systematize all of the disparate knowledges that later came to be known by new disciplinary names, like zoology, geology, botany, archaeology or anthropology.

Modern empiricities, which take the origins, nature, and evolution of life, labor, and language as their object, emerge along with Kant's three existential questions in his Logic: What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope? Implicitly, a fourth question emerges from these three: Who is this knowing, acting, hoping "I," or what is Man? The thought of Man necessitated reordering all that Man might think, creating a new order of things tied to the History of Man. As Foucault notes, "since the human being has become historical, through and through, none of the contents analysed by the human sciences can remain stable in itself or escape the movement of History" (1970: 370). In this manner, Natural History emerges as a body of knowledge or an ambit of power connected to this Man's historicization of nature. Beginning before and beyond the modern university, museums of natural history are essentially

attempts to collect all of the world's facts, as artifacts, specimens or examples, and then classify, organize, and interpret their meanings in an effort to answer Kant's questions about humanity's knowledge, action, hope, and, implicitly, identity. In this way, as Castañeda argues, the modern museum can be reaffirmed "as a 'theater of the real' (versus of memory-images) in which the representation of the world is triangulated by the categories and qualities of Nation, Civilization, and Man that are not displayed directly in images, but evoked through realist images of objects" (1996: 103). So it is American Man and Civilization whose knowledges, actions, hopes, and identities are (re)presented on Central Park West in New York City.

The divisions and disciplines of the Museum's collections, reflect Americanizing knowledges about the history of human and non-human nature that need to be defined or discovered in order to understand Man. "Discipline 'makes' individuals," as Foucault argues, "it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals as objects and an instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 1979: 170). The disciplines of natural history, which so many activities of the American Museum of Natural History show, are so remarkable, because they mobilize scientific analyses as "killer applications" of ontological determination. They oddly remake collective statements out of individual specimens that mostly are dead in exercising their institutional explanatory powers. Whether one sees dinosaur fossils, leopard

skins, conch shells, gorilla carcasses, primitive cultures, or pickled fish, wherever one looks, the natural multiplicities that the Museum surveys, assesses, classifies, or judges are dead.

Ironically, then, the self-understanding of humans in the world's greatest modern metropolis has been grounded upon building one of the planet's most extensive necropolises. In celebrating its disciplined collectors, Preston naively inventories this dark side of discipline's enlightenment:

Any attempt at enumeration of the items in the collections quickly becomes absurd. Butterflies? The Museum has 2 million of them (in addition to its 1.6 million beetles, 800,000 flies, 1 million spiders, and 5.5 million wasps. Bones? The Museum stores roughly 50 million of them, including 330,000 fossil vertebrates, 100 complete elephants, and the largest skeletal collection of Manhattan aborigines, among others.

It also has one million birds, 600,000 fishes in jars of alcohol, one thirty ton meteorite, eight million anthropological artifacts, one balding tarantula named Blondie, two skulls of Tyrannosaurus Rex, several dozen dinosaur eggs, 4,000 Asian shadow puppets, 264,000 amphibians and reptiles, a stuffed gray parrot that once belonged to Houdini, the skeleton of Jumbo the elephant, 120,000 rocks and minerals, the Star of India sapphire, a grasshopper found on the observation deck of the Empire State Building, 8.5 million invertebrates, one Copper Man, 250,000 mammals, and one dodo bird....it has the largest hippo on record (Caliph, who died in a zoo in 1908 of acute indigestion); the largest collection of skunks in formaldehyde, the largest collection of non-Western smoking pipes; the largest crab (twelve feet from tip to tip); Raffles, a starling that spoke more languages than any other bird; the longest elephant tusks; a hermaphroditic cloth (about 4,500 years old and replete with mummified lice); the most slowly cooled meteorite known (the Emery, found by sex researcher Alfred Kinsey); the finest collection of birds of paradise; the finest uncut emerald; the largest piece of polished jade; the largest azurite specimen (the Singing Stone, weighing 4.5 tons); the only red topaz; the largest cut

gemstone (the Brazilian Princess); the only two Pachycephalosaur skulls in existence; and the best fossil horse collection (Preston, 1986: x-xi).

This inventory is almost as startling as that Borges passage from a certain Chinese encyclopedia, which launches Foucault's The Order of Things, because it too demonstrates the exotic charm of another system of thought: one that has pieced together a comprehensive vision of Life by piecing apart so many things and beings in the domain of Death. What systems for thought and unthought would chronicle the history of nature by filling, in defiance of "reasonable description and enumeration," vast storerooms with "the most spiders, the most beetles, the most dinosaurs, the most fossil mammals, the most whales, the most plant bugs, and the most birds of any museum in the world" (Preston, 1986: xi)?

The organic reality of pre-industrial traditional societies, which Haraway rightly criticizes the American Museum for struggling to document, is dying, if it is not indeed already dead, when the institution was at its apogee from the 1880s to the 1930s. Imperialism had by 1885 parcelled up every last corner of terra incognita among the major capitalist powers, machinic industry and agriculture were already polluting vast regional ecologies, and most terrestrial biomes featured tremendous anthropogenic changes of remarkable scope, depth, and duration. From the beginning, then, the American Museum has been a memorializing monument; indeed, a headstone marking the passing

of pre-capitalist Nature with its vast accumulation of dead bits and pieces from Nature's not yet fully mortified corpse. Its conservatorial intentions are to accumulate the best or the greatest from the corpus delicti so that its methodical morticians in "the Museum's numerous scientific departments" (American Museum of Natural History, 1995: 3) might put them on display under glass in perfect taxidermic taxonomies.

Even more ironic, these treasure troves of historicized dead nature are now regarded as "not only more fragile than previously thought, but also far more valuable" (Preston, 1986: xii). After the death of Nature, the dead from Nature "have become absolutely priceless from a scientific point of view, since they could never be replaced or duplicated," and many artifacts or specimens "have become highly sought after by private collectors and dealers who pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for even mediocre artifacts" (Preston, 1986: xi). Merchant's fairly intellectualized renderings of "the death of Nature" (1980) can be moved into far more concrete realms of material practice by reexamining how the collections of natural history museums are built. Piece by piece, specimen by specimen, the death of Nature is registered as bits of dead nature as it is pinned, picked, or pressed in the storage cabinets of countless taxonomical tombs. In the catacombs of classification, out of the morticianship of morphological categorization, through the crypts of conceptualization, the dead define the not yet dead that the

Museum's various displays use to depict "Earth and life forms" (American Museum of Natural History, 1995: 3).

Because power establishes its dominion through the unfolding of life, "death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'" (Foucault, 1980: 138). Natural history museums, like the American Museum, constitute one decisive means for power to de-privatize and re-publicize, if only ever so slightly, the realms of death by putting dead remains into public service as social tokens of collective life, rereading dead fossils as chronicles of life's everlasting quest for survival, and canonizing now dead individuals as nomological emblems of still living collectives in Nature and History. An anatomo-politics of human and non-human bodies is sustained by accumulating and classifying such necroliths in the museum's observational/expositional performances. Thus, the American Museum's 30 million cultural artifacts and scientific specimens are strange superconductive conduits, carrying the elan vital of contemporary biopower between "the disciplines of the body and the regulations of population," or those "two poles around which the organization of power over life" directs "the performances of the body," either living or dead, supplant sovereign power's ministrations of death with disciplinary power's "calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1980: 139-140).

IV. From the Disorder of Being to the Order of Things

Foucault's investigations of disciplinary society incessantly underscore its pervasiveness, stressing how "the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others" so thoroughly by "linking them together, extending them and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements" (1979: 216). The hierarchical classification, normalizing judgment, and examination routines of natural history show how infinitesimally distributed these power relations have become in ordering and reifying everything from Paleozoic pre-history to the biodiversity threatened fast capitalist present in "the order of things" represented by natural history. Nature is not merely discovered, instead it must be meticulously manufactured out of endless series of disciplinary decisions. Inclusion in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History constitutes both Nature and History, as Preston celebrates in the work of Henry Dybas, a Museum curator from Chicago's Field Museum, as he canonically stabilized Bambara intricata, a minute feathering beetle from the Bimini Islands, for the American Museum.

For four months in 1951, Museum entomologists trapped 109,718 insects and 27,839 arachnids on the Bimini cays, discovering six species of feathering beetles among the thousands they captured. By examining, sorting, and classifying them, Dybas "was able to illuminate the complex workings of a small

corner of the natural world" (Preston, 1986: 5). After borrowing a number of the American Museum's specimen vials in the mid-1960s, Dybas conducted morphological and behavioral studies of the feathering beetles that turned up a new species, hitherto unknown to science. In turn, he selected a "type" specimen to represent B. intricata in the American Museum's collections in complete conformity with Foucault's sense of disciplinary practice. To select, shape, and stabilize "a small corner of the natural world," Dybas chose "the most normal, the most average individual he could find, and designated it the type. In doing so, he made an utterly insignificant beetle--an almost invisible brown period--a scientifically priceless specimen....locked in its cabinet, resting in perpetuity as the official representative of all its kind" (Preston, 1986: 6).

This strategic alliance of the Field Museum and American Museum of "natural history" shows how the museum is little more than a vast observation machine, classification engine, or preservation apparatus. Nature acquires by means of this disciplinary procedure a history, resting in perpetuity in the cabinets of a culture which compares and contrasts the other innumerable living beings of its world against the thoroughly enumerated dead in such hierarchical normalizing judgments. As Preston asserts, the American Museum of Natural History takes the chaotic, irrational pre-history of Nature to the bar of such examinations and creates a calm, rational history for Americans,

and all other modern humans, of Nature. That is,

The Museum is the guardian of thousands of such seemingly insignificant specimens, but as each bone in the mighty *Tyrannosaurus* is just a piece in the puzzle of the whole, each tiny bug is an indispensable link in the chain of knowledge that exists in the collections of the American Museum. Like the beetle, virtually every Museum specimen is invested with significance and a history. (Indeed, specimens without a history are often thrown out)...*B. intricata*...is an example, in microcosm, of what the Museum is (Preston, 1986: 6-7).

Preston is, ironically, dead right in these observations. Typing specimens from Nature to specify the significance and history of Nature anthropogenically is what the Museum is about. Those specimens without a history then can be thrown out of this historicized nature by the guardian of these well-disciplined dead beings. Nature, however, is never "wild Nature" per se. It is a pastiche of historicized representations, whose specific identities and various commonalities emerge from the normalizing judgments of hierarchically authorized examining powers, who deputize one typical specimen, who "becomes the physical and legal representative of all of its kind" (Preston, 1986: 6) to serve in the cabinet of definitions appended to the parliament of things permanently constituted in the Museum's storerooms. In turn, these highly disciplined dead delegates are empowered for life "to describe what the new species looks like," and it is these individuals "that all others will be compared or contrasted with, and measured against, for the rest of time" (Preston, 1986: 16).

These death-dealing dynamics of definition, however, are

applied to much more than tiny insects, common songbirds or ordinary plants. Charismatic megafauna, like elephants or gorillas, also are invested with significance and a history, in the taxidermic theater of habitat groups. The Museum's world-renown Akeley Hall of African Mammals, which includes the infamous Gorilla Group that inspired Haraway's attacks on the Museum's "teddy bear patriarchy" (1989: 26-58), was modelled on the smaller habitat studies in the Museum's Hall of North American Birds. Begun not long after the turn of the century, the idea of such "habitat groups" was to show animals and plants in the native surroundings against realistically represented backgrounds, and "by 1909 the techniques of duplicating plants, flowers, rocks, trees and backgrounds had been perfected" (Preston, 1986: 81). Carl E. Akeley, a remarkably innovative taxidermist working for the Field Museum in Chicago, was commissioned by the American Museum in 1909 to procure and mount a group of elephants. In planning of his display, Akeley intended to push an aesthetics of duplication beyond technically perfect taxidermy in static and unreal settings into the realm of hyperreal simulation, creating habitat groups "on a huge scale, and he wanted them to be bursting with vitality and spontaneity, to be aesthetically beautiful as well as scientifically accurate" (Preston, 1986: 81). Instead of stuffing animal skins, like old sofas, he re-modelled them over realist armatures, whose life-like sub-sculptures give the skins the hyperreal role of natural

costumes in an materialized play of concrete organic matter. The Gorilla Group, for example, simulates an actual clearing in the Kivu Volcanoes of Zaire, two miles up the rain-forest covered side of Mount Mikeno during the day late in the afternoon.

The American Museum had African exhibits already on display when Akeley signed on to create its new elephant group. However, they were the usual static showings of dead animals, killed and stuffed for exposition, as representative examples of the many more live ones still on the hoof out in the wild. After nearly being killed in Kenya by an old bull elephant he had tracked down for the exhibit, Akeley had a revelation about animals, taxidermy, Africa, and Nature during his lengthy recuperation. Things were changing in Africa too quickly; then, on the eve of World War I, Akeley realized that too much had changed since his first trips to Africa as a young man. Farming and ranching were displacing game very rapidly, and the wildlife of Africa was doomed, soon to be replaced by the agriculture, herding, mining or town building brought by European colonialism. Hence, the premise of the American Museum's existing African exhibits were becoming invalid. As Akeley told a friend, "everything that has been done in the American Museum of Natural History in the way of African exhibits must be thrown out and complete discarded: we must start over again" (cited in Preston, 1986: 81).

Akeley's new African aesthetic, then, memorializes the anthropogenic (Americanizing) transformation of Earth by (Modern)

Man. Africa in its unspoiled state already was becoming a memory; hence, Akeley's bizarre taxidermical art was mobilized to simulate it in a series of hyperreal tableaux mordant to preserve realist representations of African wildlife for future generations. Africa's once vast biomes and robust biota therefore had to be remembered as they perhaps were before being dismembered by global capitalist exchange and European imperialism in Akeley's galleries of charismatic megafauna. Each of his microcosmic necrotopes would realistically reproduce representative groups of endangered wildlife in their disappearing habitats by sacrificing some more of the precious few remaining live examples to serve as signs of the increasing lost millions of dead beings.

After convincing two wealthy patrons to fund the expedition as well as serve as honored shooters of the specimens, Akeley led George Eastman and Daniel Pomeroy on the Eastman-Pomeroy-Akeley African Expedition for the Museum during 1926. To shoot animals, gather plant material, paint landscapes, and map sites. Working in harsh conditions from October through December, the expedition travelled through Kenya, Uganda, and Zaire, collecting and documenting. Akeley died of fever in November, leaving his wife, Mary, with colleagues and assistants to complete the expedition's activities. She, in turn, devoted herself to making the Gorilla Group into a memorial for her husband, documenting the site he had picked and gathering all of the plant materials for copying

the location in New York. Before he died, Akeley corresponded with the Museum's Director, expressing shock over how rapidly things had slid even since 1921 when his safari collected the gorillas he needed for the Gorilla Group: "The old conditions, the story of which we want to tell, are now gone, and in another decade the men who knew them will all be gone" (cited in Preston, 1986: 84).

Here the mordant energies of the Museum reach their perfect pitch. Like the Akeley Hall of African Mammals, the Hall of North American Mammals, the Hall of Reptiles and Amphibians, or the Frank M. Chapman Memorial Hall of North American Birds simulate "the old conditions" of real beasts living unclassified and free--a state now long gone virtually everywhere--for animals in their natural habitats. Preserved to be observed, these scientifically stabilized ontogenic models represent to the urban millions "a way of life" being taken away from forms of life, like these real dead beasts, by the proliferating material demands of scores of world cities, like New York. Ironically, these displays, once designed and built to represent the raw promise of Nature's wild fecundity at the dawn of the twentieth century, now are being releveraged in the century's dusk to alert the urban masses to the much more refined threats from Nature's tamed exhaustion in the Hall of Earth's Diversity.

On one level, the Nature that Akeley and other American Museum exhibition designers wished to depict should be unspoiled

by "civilization," but, on another level, their centers of life were grounded entirely upon these same spoilt civilized systems: mechanism, capitalism, instrumentalism, scientism, elitism. The dioramas are meant to freeze time, slowing or stopping civilization's spoilage with simulations of Nature played out in conservationistic skits. Yet, as Haraway observes, the positioning of male/female, young/old, charismatic/uncharismatic, and powerful/clever animals in these dioramaturgies have done much to construct and confirm American society's contemporary understandings of race, gender, class and authority (1989: 54-55). The philanthropists of the Gilded Age funded such naturalistic works of theater, because their realist narrative's depicted Man as the unseen seer, the transcendent terraformer, or the empowered knower, who is, like the invisible hands in the marketplace or the rational dissembler in history's ruses, not really in/of/for Nature, even though their observational vision depicts/displays/drives these scenes.

Plainly, museums, like the telescope, the lens, or the microscope, emerge in the early modern era as one of science's most important "observatories," because they too are "an apparatus in which the techniques make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" (Foucault, 1979: 170-171). Curators also serve, in keeping with a key original meaning of the term, as "overseers," whose oversight is

concretely arrayed through the galleries of their institutions in accord with "the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen" (Foucault, 1979: 171). Shrewd curating, then, designs displays so that every gaze cast by any visiting patron would see through specific sorts of eyes, which always see without being seen, and form "a part of the overall functioning of power" (Foucault, 1979: 171). Likewise, the entire problematic of museum architecture after the Enlightenment shifts from registers of the dynastic sovereign--royal storehouse, curiosity cabinet, or family hoard--to one of a national people--open exposition, chambers of chronological progress, or discursive display--as the disciplinary intentions of museum observations diffuse into the built rhetorics and concrete logics of more modern modalities of power. Architectural design begins to function within the calculated economies of disciplinary power inside of which one sees,

an architecture that no longer is built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (cf. the geometry of fortresses) but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control--to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. Stones make people docile and knowable. The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure...began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies (Foucault, 1979: 172).

Like schools or hospitals, which were erected as pedagogical

machines or therapeutic operators, the museum is remade into a remembrance observatory.

What once was merely a hoard of precious keepsakes or exotic curiosities becomes a nationalized place of modern humanity's training, recording, and observing in which the objects to be known and the knowing subjects who must gain knowledge are correlated at one site where normalizing judgments and disciplined examinations are hierarchically organized by formally authorized overseers. "The perfect disciplinary apparatus," as Foucault asserts, "would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly" (1979: 173). The nature museum approaches perfection as once chaotically intermingled curiosities are subdivided into topically dedicated galleries, thematically focused centers, or theoretically reorganized expositions. The art museum, nature museum, science museum, history museum, or culture museum emerge, in turn, as "a sort of apparatus of uninterrupted examination" whose disciplinary power is exercised "through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" whereby disciplinary power "manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects" (Foucault, 1979: 186-187). These thematizations of discourse and discipline, at the same time, enable museumological discourses to push beyond classic styles of textual legitimacy by grounding their studies in collections of epistemically real chronologies of "things."

Observation, preservation, and conservation all coalign in the well-disciplined or clearly focused museum, permitting scholarship tied to museums to now "abandon its textual character and take its references not so much from the tradition of author-authorities as from a domain of objects perpetually offered for examination" (Foucault, 1979: 186).

The museum pushes the panoptic problematique of operationally into many new dimensions: pantemporal, pancultural, panspatial, panspecies, pandisciplinary, pantechological. The state-centered man of national modernity needs equally abstract settings, othernesses, pasts, presents, futures, or products that are as carefully fabricated as man himself. Plainly, the museum, like society, is not a venue of spectacle but rather a site of surveillance:

under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and of bodies. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism (Foucault, 1979: 217).

Not surprisingly, then, we speak of the American Museum of Natural History, the British Museum, or National Air and Space Museum, because these panoptic machines help to construct us--as Americans, Britons, or nationalists--even as we take their

partitions of knowledge--natural history, antiquity, air and space craft--as what is "the given" by piecing together their powerful narratives as the mechanisms grant us such realities. Discipline does make individuals: both the living and the dead, museum object or museum subject, the seen and the seer, curator and visitor.

For societies in which community or public life are eclipsed by private individuality or statist administration, relations must be regulated in non-spectacular forms, and museums provide excellent answers to Bentham's panoptic programs of technified control. So states--cities, counties, provinces, nations--build vast panoplies of institutions, like museums, through which "the ever-growing influence of the state, to its ever more profound intervention in all the details and all the relations of social life, that was reserved the task of increasing and perfecting its guarantees, by using and directing towards great aim the building and distribution of buildings intended to observe a great multitude of men at the same time" (cited in Foucault, 1979: 216-217).

Museums also are apparatuses devoted to the disciplinary training of memory. Their thematic subjects--art, culture, history, or science--are not bent into a single uniform mass; on the contrary, the museum "separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units" (Foucault, 1979: 170) in its

curatorial observations. By organizing what are "moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements," museum pieces emerge as memorable fragments to be remembered purposely through careful curatorial intervention in "small, separate cells, organic autonomies, genetic entities and continuities, combinatory segments" (Foucault, 1979: 170). Once collected and displayed, the museum expositions reveal all of the modalities of disciplinary power--hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and routinized examinations--in their everyday operations.

V. Politics and Aesthetics

The aesthetic monumentalities of the Museum, like much of modern anthropology in its many paleontological, archaeological, physical or cultural flavors, distance Industrial America/New York/International Modernity from all of the objects it observes within its displays. In order to "furnish the popular instruction" of "Natural Science" and "of kindred subjects," a shared time and space is ruptured by the overseeing analytical classifications of its curators. The referents of its mineralogical, paleontological, zoological, and anthropological discourses are otherized and instrumentalized by relegating them all to "a Time other than the present of the producer" of such scientific discourses (Fabian, 1983: 31) slowing and fixing their images apart from the globalized economy's fast capitalist times

such that they hold "still like a tableau vivant" (Fabian, 1983: 67). These moves simultaneously place the visitor/viewer in spaces of acceleration, activation, and appropriation, whose difference authorizes the symbolic and material utilization of these otherized observational objects.

This allocentric pose saturates the entire American Museum of Natural History. Looking at its more than forty halls, almost all of them depict images or dictate stories fixed in registers of "long ago" and/or "faraway." The Arthur Ross Hall of Meteorites show lost fragments of the extraterrestrial cosmos that have impacted life on Earth. The Harry Frank Guggenheim Hall of Minerals shows how earth's inorganic formation brings useful materials from earth's genesis into our daily economic transactions as treasured gems in the suitably named John Pierpont Morgan Hall of Gems and mining-minded Guggenheim Mineral Hall. The Hall of Human Biology and Evolution shows humanity evolving through lost millennia into the sentiment consciousnesses of the present. The Eastern Woodland Indians, Plains Indians, Northwest Coast Indians, Eskimo, Mexico and Central America, South American Peoples, African Peoples, Asian Peoples, and Pacific Peoples Halls mix contemporary ethnic and geographic labels to freeze frame all of these humans in otherized times/spaces/ecologies/economies before, beyond, or beneath the universalizing transformative influences of North Atlantic capitalism erase them through trade or war. And, of

course, the dinosaur and Extinct Mammal Halls resurrect the Sein
und Zeit of non-human beings known only through the arcane
hermeneutics of fossil analysis.

In its displays of the Human Family in all of these
ethnological or paleontological halls, the American Museum of
Natural History privileges the nation-state, or, in particular,
the American nation-state, in a naturalized history of social
progress. Its collections are the definitive point of
classification, documentation, and interpretation by which a
modern nation-state reimagines all other forms of human
community--groups, bands, tribes, races, cultures, civilizations--
in grades of growing complexity, sophistication, and power.
Likewise, all of Nature is reaffirmed in memory/knowledge as
"native to America" or "foreign to America" in the process of
revealing how Americans' biophysical environments came to become
what the contemporary nation-state finds as its standing reserves
of technoscientific action.

As Castañeda suggests, the modern museum forms "a natural
history in which Man is simultaneously centered in the universe
yet decentered through naturalization" (1996: 101). The tone of
the American Museum's tableaux vivant, however, resonates with an
externalization of biopower in which an expansive American
multinational commercialism finds "the natural history of our
planet and its species" (American Museum of Natural History,
1995: 3) as an ontogenic space of movement for its economy and

society to assume "responsibility for the life processes and undertook to control and modify them" (Foucault, 1980: 142). The lifetime of the American Museum begins at that moment when:

Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space that could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the face of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, and the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of operation (Foucault, 1980: 142).

Not surprisingly, then, the American Museum's focus is on "fundamental issues that concern us all," that is:

- * the evolution of the human species and of human culture
- * past and present extinctions of plant and animal species
- * patterns of social and biological adaptation
- * processes that shape the earth and provide the environmental frame work for the evolution of life

(Official Guide, 1993: 1-2)

The American Museum's dioramas rationalize the randomness of death and its fatality, redirecting the outcome of extinction and evolution into knowledge's control and power's intervention. Its ontotopic chambers teach through these fundamental issues what it means for modern Americans to have a body, conditions of existence, or probabilities of life by showing all of the forces they have modified--other human and non-human--and all of the spaces--present, past, and future--that they might redistribute

in an optimal manner.

Gems, minerals, plants, animals, and all other races are taken control of through the political existence of American nationhood--a historicized nature becoming a naturalized history--worldwide on expeditions of discovery and accumulation. Capitalist efficiency plus imperial effectiveness recast Marx's famous dictum, taking all that was solid and vanishing into thin air, or Life and its energies, by reconjuring its presence out of the extinct, the dying, or the dead from long ago and faraway in the solidified narratives of this museum's thick descriptions of "bio-history." At this juncture in time, the American Museum illustrates why anthropogenic changes are the most powerful forces at work on earth, as globalized ecological colonialism causes the extinction of non-human life and economic imperialism initiates an eradication of many human life forms, but it also positions America at the center of these shock waves of destruction.

The American Museum, therefore, provides a rich archive on the regulation of populations, surveillance of energies, or understanding of bodies which arise when we apply "the term of bio-history to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another," forcing us "to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformative of human life"

(Foucault, 1980: 143).

The exposition of life on Earth at the American Museum, also is shot through with biopowered systems of sexuality. Patterns of biological adaptation, sources of extinction, or origins of evolutionary shifts are sexualized registers giving the Museum's curators and scientists "a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species" (Foucault, 1980: 146). Its polyvalent natural historical discourses implicitly embed the Malthusian couple in virtually every diorama of human and non-human life just as procreative behavior is socialized by the American state to support population dynamics. Whether it is the dioramas depicting the Australopithecus afransis couple leaving footprints in the mud, upland gorillas in the mist of Mount Mikeno, the African elephants in their taxidermic charge through the Akeley Hall, or the Komondo dragons preying on the wild boar, the fertility of couples in family groups interlock individual bodies and collective populations in biopowered histories of extinction-avoidance/evolution-continuance as the American Museum's exhibits maneuver to "furnish the popular instruction" in nationalized stories of survival.

The Hall of Human Biology and Evolution, for example, continues these nationalized/statalized metaphors in its dioramic discourses about "the human body." The body is explored in diagrams, like an engine or transmission, to reveal all of the componentalized sub-systems that have contribute to its overall

physiological workings. Joints and muscles are explored in a video of baseball players, revealing how joints, muscles, and tendons function like simple machines composed of fulcra, pulleys, levers, or hinges. The interplay of organism and environment show how humanity evolved from other primates mostly by demonstrating incremental increases in brain size, unusual abilities for tool use, and conjugally-based family societies. The natural history of humanity, therefore, is recast in these historicizations of human anatomy as political substance: muscles are energies, joints turn into machines, brains are information engines. Nature reveals itself as a cosmic collection point of intelligent/energetic entelechy as the human body's evolution for an Americanized History of the Natural is one of the controlled insertion of machineries of production into bodies caught in technoeconomic processes.

The American game of baseball stabilizes the hardball of modern biopolitics, which needs to grow, domesticate, and access such biopowers among individual bodies and population bodies, by using computer-generated guides act as machines in baseball game playing movements. So dioramas of skeletal human families watching computer-generated cyborg cartoons in their suburban home distill the Hall of Human Biology and Evolution down into DNA-driven chronicles of an evolving biotechnologized humanity. This dioramaturgy reveals how even dead bones can be charged with biopower--one more exercise of biopolitics in its many forms, or

"the investment of the body, its valorization, and the distributive management of its forces" (Foucault, 1980: 141).

Here, the American Museum of Natural History proves to be a key capacitor for bio-power in the development of capitalism inasmuch as its allocentric representation of reality segregates various types of life and non-life, otherizes living beings as instruments of exploitation or species for extinction, and classifies remote societies or distant lands as likely sites for further progressive development. The ontonymic machinations of museum dioramas and ontocratic judgments of museum curators are biopolitical acts, helping to manage "the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomenon of population to economic processes" (Foucault, 1980: 141).

Some American Museum examples are quite suggestive: The Hall of Ocean Life depicts how even vast population of marine life must be managed carefully to economically/ecologically sustain the insertion of these bodies into machineries of production; the Akeley Memorial Hall of African Mammals guarantees that zebra, gorilla or elephant life might survive as representations even as encroaching human populations displace them from their habitats with maladjusted economic processes; and, the Guggenheim Hall of Minerals presents the Earth's inorganic substance as minerals and crystals, which must be extracted to create many of the products we use. Turning all of

the world under observation into a storehouse of treasures charges economies and ecologies with the disciplinary logics of biopower. The aesthetics and epistemics of such dramaturgies in the American Museum harness "processes that shape the Earth and provide the environmental framework for the evolution of life" (Official Guide, 1993: 2) in highly disciplined representations, which serve, in turn, as "methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern" (Foucault, 1980: 141).

The paleontologies of the American Museum, however, carry many other meanings. At first blush, dinosaurs, like the cast of the saurian plays from Andrew Green's planned Paleozoic Park, might be seen as tokens of human origins, representing pre-Adamite life's highest attainments. Yet, two other implications also seem to follow from the vast scientific expeditions of American Museum dinosaur hunters, scurrying out across Mongolia's or Montana's outbacks. First, these small-scale searches for fossilized bones mimic the quest of large-scale sweeps by American capital through every remote expanse of the world in search of other organic goods from the Paleozoic era, like coal, oil, gas, or pre-Paleozoic inorganic minerals, like gold, silver, copper, bauxite, or iron. Just as the American Museum of Natural History excavated dinosaur fossils to bring ancient life to modern human awareness, so too would Amoco, Asarco, or Alcoa extract other long-buried ancient treasures from

other lands to let them dance in the markets of America's major cities. And, second, the fixation upon dinosaurs, as fossilized megafauna, provided a uniquely scientized tombstone for organic life itself in the dawning age of human megamachines. Like man the hunter or gatherer, dinosaurs as hunter/gatherers were truly awesome beings, which were worth of remembrance, but now they are Paleozoic. Neozoic life forms, like the vast corporate collectives of capitalist men and corporate machines that actually exhume, exhibit, and explicate them, are not singularly organic life forms. In an era of global corporations, national states, or international markets, sovereign individual men and women also may become dinosaurs whose traces can appear most sensibly at best in museums. Otherwise, they are collaborating cellular elements of the new multicellular beings of contemporary technoscientific capitalism. Thus, "paleontology" parallels the implicit guidance laid down for human beings by the "neoplutographies" of modern megamachinic institutions.

VI. Museums of Naturalized History/Historicized Nature

Museums of natural history, particularly inasmuch as they function as definitive archives of historicized nature, must construct the visual rhetorics and discursive imageries of all the "sciences of man." The American Museum of Natural History shows how such museums provide the most complete opportunities to produce "the way in which individuals or groups represent to themselves the partners with whom they produce or exchange, in

the mode in which they clarify or ignore or mask this function and the position they occupy in it, the manner in which they represent to themselves the society in which it takes place, the way in which they feel themselves integrated with it or isolated from it, dependent, subject, or free" (Foucault, 1970: 352-353).

By positioning Man (Men) in Nature (Natures), the explanatory logicians of the American Museum of Natural History marshal together many universal tokens of social exchange--cultural costumes, family households, community buildings, religious rites, or domestic implements--to investigate the partnerships of individuals and groups with animals, plants and settings.

Museumological man is the man of/for the human sciences, or, more concretely, "that living being who, from within the life to which he entirely belongs and by which he is traversed in his whole being, constitutes representations by means of which he lives, and on the basis of which he possesses that strange capacity of being able to represent to himself precisely that life" (Foucault, 1970: 352). Indeed, the ontologies at work in accumulating, archiving or articulating any given museum's collection of objects and subjects struggle to capture as many of the representations by which men and women live in order to center their new museumic representations at the core any collective understandings of this life. So museums of history or nature do not have as their object "that man who, since the dawn of the world, or the first cry of his golden age, is doomed to

work; it is that being who, from with the forms of production by which his whole existence is governed, forms the representation of those needs, of the society by which, from which, or against which he satisfies them" (Foucault, 1970: 353).

As special spaces devoted to what already has been done, museums fix and finalize the empiricities of humanism and naturalism as complex clusters of practicable representations, carrying stabilized accounts of normalizing knowledge. Every contemporary museum's formalized displays are organized to lead "the sciences of life, labour, and language back to that analytic of finitude which shows how many, in his being, can be concerned with the things he knows, and know the things that, in positivity, determine his mode of being" (Foucault, 1970: 354). Consequently, like the human sciences, museums always deal "in that stratum of conduct, behavior, attitudes, gestures already made, sentences already pronounced or written, within which they have already been given once to those who act, behave, exchange, work, and speak," which can, in turn, "something like a speculative knowledge of life, production, and language" (Foucault, 1970: 354) in the meta-epistemological codes of their displays or expositions.

In fact, the American Museum of Natural History is not directed at Nature; it instead is "addressed to man in so far as he lives, speaks and produces" (1970: 351). Musing about Nature in galleries devoted to its origins, diversity, and mysteries,

human beings learn from and are directed by the muses of a historicized nature. From encounters with the museum, human beings pick and choose thoughts from the unthought. Museums of natural history are the consummate ontologue, revealing in their explanations and expositions how man grows as a living being,

...that he has functions and needs, that he sees opening up a space whose coordinates meet in him; in a general fashion, his corporeal existence interlaces him through and through with the rest of the living world; since he produces objects and tools, exchanges the things he needs, organizes a whole network of circulation along which what he is able to consume flows, and in which he himself is defined as an intermediate stage, he appears in his existence immediately interwoven with others, lastly, because he has a language, he can constitute a whole symbolic universe for himself, within which he has a relation to his past, to things, to other men, and on the basis of which he is equally able to build something like a body of knowledge" (Foucault, 1970: 352).

Once constituted as the expanses of whole symbolic universes, museums expand their articulated activities, creating stories of power and images of knowledge as universal symbolic wholes. Organized, institutionalized, stabilized, these relations of man with other men, things, and the past are taken as what is epistemically real, what should be narratively historiographed, and what must be logically explained. On these grounds, then, museums erect rhetorics in stone or cast logics in concrete. Modern museums of natural history are not, in turn, "an analysis of what man is by nature; but rather an analysis that extends from what man is in his positivity (living, speaking, laboring being) to what enables this same being to know (or seek to know)

what life is, in what the essence of labor and its laws consist, and in what way he is able to speak" (Foucault, 1970: 353).

Natural history museums with their fixation upon evolutionary explanatory logics richly resonate modernity's "administrative and economics of control," namely, "a social time of a serial, orientated, cumulative type: the discovery of an evolution in terms of 'progress'" (Foucault, 1979: 160). Evolution, of course, was discovered to unfold in terms of some intrinsic logic of "genesis." Natural history museums in many ways are dedicated to careful discursive disclosures of many genetic progressions from the intertwining of nature and history. As Foucault argues,

These two great 'discoveries' of the eighteenth century--the progress of societies and the geneses of individuals--were perhaps correlative with the new techniques of power, and more specifically, with a new way of administering time and making it useful, by segmentation, seriation, synthesis, and totalization....'Evolutive' historicity, as it is constituted--and so profoundly that it is still self-evident for many today--is bound up with a mode of a functioning of power. No doubt it is as if the 'history-remembering' of the chronicles, genealogies, exploits, reigns and deeds had long been linked to a modality of power. With the new techniques of subjection, the 'dynamics' of continuous evolutions tends to replace the 'dynastics' of solemn events (1979: 160-161).

Piecing apart nature into zoology, botany, geology, meteorology, etc., and then arraying little serial genetic narratives of their many constituent elements in bigger totalizing explanations is the essence of the American Museum's synthetic representations of Nature.

Natural history museums do not accord us straight up histories of Nature in their display cases and exhibition halls.

On the contrary, they become nationalized sites to historicize Nature, repositioning it in all of the most useful and obvious relations shared by the peoples who coexist with it. As T. R. Adam asserts, nature and science museums can use familiar "intellectual and emotional symbols" to impress "great number of people with their basic place in nature" with dramatic displays of systematized knowledge that represents "the understanding mankind has achieved of its relation to the rest of nature" (1939: 93-94).

Heidegger's metaphysical musings about the "constituting" (Gestell) of our world can be given a much more materialized coherence in the discursive theatrics of museum displays. His overdetermined efforts to track the origins of the Gestell back to Aristotle's allegedly teleocratic modes of reasoning, for example, ignore the far more obvious constitutionalizing conventions at work today in modern museums. The world as "standing reserve" (Bestand) gets stood up everyday of the nature, history, science or culture reserves of any serious museum. Adam suggests that museums are not theaters. They do, nonetheless create "many fascinating and telling scenes," to tell their stories, using many "striking illusions of stagecraft" even though "no one has yet written the whole play into which these separate sciences might be cunningly fitted" (1939: 96). Adam,

of course, is mistaken. The whole play of Nature is written, and the museum fits all of its separate scenes into series of naturalized narratives that constitute "the world" in essentially historicized terms, standing all of its quiddities in reserve for any and all forms of technical manipulation. The Gestell becomes physis, as Adam's simplistic summation of the dramaturgies in any natural history museum suggests, that is, "the task of the natural history museum in the field of public enlightenment is to present a coherent synopsis of the environmental background nature has provided for the individual human being" (1939: 96). Nature as synopticized background, in which natural history museums ground their synopses back to the uses and needs of atomized individuals in modernity's fully mobilized markets, is already Gestell. Museums help constitute the constituting constitutional constructs in their arrays of objects and explanatory narratives through which select standing relations and stabilized reserve meanings are intertwined as specific privileged modes of techne (know-how) and poiein (doing).

Heidegger, then, can help us understand more fully how natural history museums can operate as sites where historicized natural scientific discourse becomes "an instrument of popular judgment over the control of the nonhuman environment" (Adams, 1939: 103). The presencing of technology, according to Heidegger, technologizes all presences. "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to

stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering" (1977A: 298). As Bestand, or "standing reserve," enframed presences mingle power and knowledge, starting "man upon the way of that revealing through which the real everywhere, more or less, distinctly becomes standing reserve" (Heidegger, 1977A: 305). The unconcealing of reality as the standing reserve of technology repositions museums in a very special place. Inasmuch as natural history museums represent these representations as knowledge to human beings, who are defined by and dependent upon the powers that these representations capture, their rhetorical technics serve as one vital register for the enframing, setting-upon, and order of the world as standing reserve. Certainly, any questioning concerned with technology builds a way, but these ways, once built, soon become technologies concerned with relegitimizing this way of questioning: the museum constitutes one authoritative way for such power questions and knowledge technologies to locate their dwelling in a building that lets specific powers and general knowledges positively represent "man's everyday experiences" in these doubled dwellings as that "which is from the outset "habitual"--we inhabit it, as our language says so beautifully: it is the Gewohnte" (Heidegger, 1977A: 325-326).

Museums after all are built environments, enclosed spaces, or, if we choose to be Heideggerian about it, activated localities. Always sited in specific places, their spaces are

buildings that mark the how, where, when, why, and what of everything "that mortals are" by virtue of their settled practices of building/dwelling/thinking. The ontologies of museums depict how mortals and their surroundings are, because they show and say that "in dwelling they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations" (Heidegger, 1977B: 335). Men and women, located in relationships of society and space, found and join spaces in their dwellings, which bring forth, shelter, or house their being. So if "the essence of building is letting dwell" (Heidegger, 1977B: 337), then a natural history museum's building clearly has its own ontological tectonics. Museums are a technics of dwelling, built knowledges and power constructs, whose showings and sayings "bring forth or produce" (as the Greek verb tikt_ directs) the power/knowledge of art/culture/history/nature/science as "something made, as something present, among the things already present" (Heidegger, 1977B: 337). If all spaces--artificial and natural, cultural and cosmic, prehistoric and historic--pervade all human beings, then museumic representations of these spaces as built space can begin presencing those shaping them: "spaces open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man" (Heidegger, 1977B: 335).

Pieced together out of the aestheticized displays of specific artifacts, images or events, the museum's many fragments are visited where they/we dwell. In turn, this is where they unfold through our popular reception as ontologies with their own

authoritative registers of epistemic realism, narrative historiography, and logic of explanation (Campbell, 1992: 4).

Automatic acceptance of epistemic realism is not some arbitrary event. It is fabricated out of innumerable practices and beliefs, which transform metaphorical "as if" assumptions into determinate "as such" certitudes. A world where objects, events, and beings are presumed to exist independently of our beliefs or thoughts about them may well be epistemically real, but we will never know this independent of some discursively realized episteme. The built rhetorical environment of museums provide realistic registers of knowledges, which are constructed and communicated so compellingly that their aesthetic performance of many different realist epistemologies acquire the authoritative permanence of a unified truth borne by epistemic realism. The social acceptance of an external reality, then, existentially depends in part upon internalizing such materially realized epistemes during various visits to many different museums. Just as museum displays epistemically reduce each one of their various topics to realistic events and their consequences to identify the material causes behind epistemically real occurrences, these realized epistemes can reduce their authoritative reliability to the consequences that should materialize from topically identifying with any one of many real museum's events.

Narrative historiographies do not spring out of nothingness.

A figuration of things such that they appear to speak for themselves self-evidently requires reified prefigurations of any narrative's form and content. Museums are perfect sites to propagate the mythos of narrative historiography in carefully staged shows of force, whose authority and legitimacy suffuse spectacles of self-evidence in every display case or wall mounted exhibit. The curatorial role quite often is cast only as that of the impresario, who marshals together some compelling collection of objects and/or images. Taken together, these things are presented in-themselves as self-evident exemplifications of the topics under examination, exposing their truths as pictures or pieces arrayed in some natural narrative order. Yet, such expositions, in fact, require some historiographical narrator to order their narrative historiographies. Even if things are believed to speak for themselves, they never speak by themselves. Whatever truths they bear in themselves must be selected, shaped, and stabilized by many culturally contingent interpretations. Curators pose as only impresarios, but they also are necessarily always interpreters whose promotional selections of which displays to expose are the evidence that they choose themselves in performing the pretense of self-evidence.

A logic of explanation is not simply discovered and then verified. It must be carefully created out of innumerable operations aimed at discerning, inventorying and then judging the various causes of events so thoroughly that its ordering of

things justifies why it discovers its discoveries as well as how it verifies its verifications. The museum becomes a built environment embodying the logic of explanation in all of its galleries, depositories, and acquisitions. Eschewing the impossibility of never adequately explaining anything, all of its maneuvers are directed at cultivating a definitive explanatory logos for all of its patrons. Accumulating artifacts, propounding categories to analyze them, and organizing spectacles to communicate their many meanings are all activities aimed at acculturating explanatorily-inclined visitors who map the museum's logics of explanation incessantly over their world to order things outside of the museum as the museum orders them inside. Once again, the sociological rituals of organizing things to be known, knowledges of things, and people who know these things this way generate logics of explanation from the logistics of explaining in these ritualized ways at museums.

The world still does exist independently of language. Its qualities precede and exceed all of our interpretations and explanations. These are realities, and they remain external to us. We can never know these certainties with certitude, because we are discursively-constituted, language-using, and interpretatively-constrained beings. Being both in and of this world, our external reality with all of its infinite qualities is realized internally, finitely, qualitatively for us only through discourses, languages, and interpretations. This recognition

follows Foucault, who asserts "we must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favor" (1984: 127).

Taking this position does not endorse any school of thought that would reduce human thinking to a pure play of language, as some conservative pundits claim, where discourse is all that there is or nothing is real. Despite Foucault's disclaimers, the world has been given a legible face, our knowledge of it comes from certain accomplished practices, and its favors are disposed discursively to us. Therefore, we need to investigate how some discursive providence sketches the visage of our world such that it gains legibility, liveliness, legitimacy. Somewhere and somehow, the disciplinary regimens of discursive exchanges must construct and communicate reality in many symbolic registers. Within these spaces, as Campbell observes,

some statements and depictions come to have greater value than others--the idea of external reality has a particular currency that is internal to discourse....investments have been made in certain interpretations; dividends can be drawn by those interests that have made the investments; representations are taxed when they confront new and ambiguous circumstances; and participation in the discursive economy is through social relations that embody an unequal distribution of power (1992: 6).

Meanings circulate through many venues: schools, theaters, churches, sciences, technologies, and states all mediate the exchange of this discursive economy. Museums, however, plainly

provide a decisively important conjuncture for such discursive forces. The idea of external reality often is realized internally first and foremost for us by museums, which turn the worlds of art, culture, history, nature, science or technology to our favor, giving it a highly legible face, namely, those shown by the art museum, nature museum or science museum. So while the world exists independently of language, the museum externalizes our realities of it inside of the dispositions provided by our languages and interpretations. These dispositions--epistemic realism, narrativized historiographies, and logics of explanation--often come to us from the displays of the museums. They give us narrative glue to assemble totalizing oversight out of fragmentary facts.

VII. Summary

The fact that more people probably learn more about art, culture, history, nature or science from museums than they do from universities recenters our attention on the stakes of culture war. They are ontologues, because museum displays create, control, and circulate representations of other people's history, environment and culture. Consequently, their voice and vision are acts of power/knowledge, which often occlude subjugated knowledges and deflect insurrectional powers. How identity/difference, superordination/subordination, value/valuelessness, and origins/ends are represented at any museum creates terrains of contestability where, not too

surprisingly, culture wars can break out as opposing interpretative blocs each mobilize all of their symbolic and material forces to compel their opponent's to do their will.

As centers of scholarly research, museums play a major role in training both museum-visiting publics and museum-managing professionals to accept particular representational practices as markers for actual realities. Most importantly, as repositories of human artifacts and/or non-human specimens, museums resocialize people to accept displays of material objects and natural specimens as authoritative and legitimate means to understand the world. Museums reify reality. Reality, in turn, becomes a series of objectifications, reifications, or constructions as these objects depict culture, those specimens denote nature, or such apparatuses disclose science. Moreover, museums develop a shared sense of particular spatial and temporal order, which emerge and then endure in specific national places and historical chronologies. As products and producers of national modernization for the state, museums are intimately involved in fabricating a mass consciousness of shared spatial contexts and temporal chronologies.

Clearly, museums can no longer be viewed as isolated enterprises. They are frontline fortifications in an unending war of position whose expositions continually reposition the channels of power and conduits of knowledge to produce societies of subjects as well as collectives of objects which are capable

of circulating easily with the disciplinary demands of modernity.

Natural history museums are perhaps the most central of these emplacements, because they seek to collect, classify, and conceptualize everything from across all of the time to reposition Man, most importantly, as nations of men/women in territorially containerized expanses of Nature. Our natural familiarity with this project comes from museums, and their natural history dioramas depicting prehistoric man evolving into what is taken to be the "us" where we first or most frequently gain our powerful productive subjectification:

The modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws, to know them and to subject them to total clarification--all these themes so familiar to us today and linked to the existence of the 'human sciences' are excluded by classical thought: it was not possible at that time that a being whose nature (that which determines it, contains it, and has traversed it from the beginning of time) is to know nature, and itself, in consequence, as a natural being (Foucault, 1970: 310).

Without museums like the American Museum of Natural History, these ontological constants could not construct and circulate with any sort of effectiveness.

This visitation at the American Museum of Natural History has not sought to uncover hidden essences or recover lost treasures underneath the discursive dust coating all of the Museum's displays. The Museum's exposition are not documents, serving "as the sign of something else, as an element that ought

to be transparent," but rather must be treated a monument, a solid and sustainable "discourse with its own volume" (Foucault, 1972: 138-139). Instead, it simply has sought to systematically describe the objects and practices of its discursive objectification of Nature vis-a-vis parallel currents in History's discursive subjectification of humanity. Nationhood, possessive individualism, progress, technoscientific knowing, and reality are all clusters of constitutive practices enabled by the subjectifying museum displays of this historicized American nature at the American Museum of Natural History. Thus, this discussion, as Foucault asks, is "nothing more than a rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written. It is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object" (1972: 140).

Real enlightenment, as the American Museum of Natural History packages it, must be fascinating, easily digestible, and noncontroversial, summing up everything every where for all time in a large, albeit still one single, building. If our ontologies must be built, then this immense structure very well represents how to go about it. The capture and containment of otherness-- plant and animal, human and non-human, prehistoric and primitive-- is the goal of the American Museum, which deploys its exhibitional authority to historicize nature and naturalize history. Geographically categorized peoples are intermingled in

adjacent galleries on the same floors with geographically defined species of birds, mammals, and fish. Everything is shown in terms of "X and Our World" from mollusks, minerals and mammals to insects, ichthyology and Indians in representations of "Seven Continents of Park Central West." Discovery is discoverable at first, but it quickly settles into disciplinary rigidity. Once brought into these halls, authority freezes excitement with interpretative orthodoxies and disciplinary certainties. Arts and sciences collide in an alluring alliance of fictions in which the world factually becomes "our world" now, in the past, and forever.

Unlike the American Museum of Natural History, this study cannot pretend to know what is real and unreal, and then demonstrate how or why these knowledges are true. Instead it has examined this one museum as a strategic site where some coaligned sets of enabling discourses constitute and then circulate an authoritative ordering of things, which represents what is accepted as "the real" and tags what must be treated as "unreal."

These subtle, but invasive, procedures of disciplinary intervention, in turn, plainly enable the new specific social identities and cultural differences to proliferate. Many of power's constitutive relationships in the United States, then, unfold in practices and philosophies put into play by many American institutions, but the knowledges engendered, endorsed, or encoded as "reality" at the American Museum of Natural History

seem to be one of the most significant sources of such productive power. Furnishing popular instruction about Nature and its life forms, then, gives us more than a sense of our natural world. It gives our natural world as well as our sense.

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