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Shaping Knowledge with Distortions: Museums as Oppressive Spaces and Hermeneutical Injustice

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and Hermeneutical Injustice

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Abstract

Museums are places where people come to make sense of their and others' social experiences related to social identities. However, what if museums present a distorted picture containing prejudicial stereotypes that harm socially marginalized groups? In this thesis, I argue that museums are oppressive spaces that reinforce hermeneutical injustice as distorted hermeneutical resources shaped by the socially powerful to sustain the asymmetrical social dynamics at large. The primary objective of the thesis is to contribute to the existing literature of museums being oppressive spaces by offering a novel explanation utilizing Miranda Fricker's framework of hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice arises when one's social experiences are obscured from the collective understanding as the hermeneutical resources contain structural identity prejudices owing to the asymmetrical social power dynamics at large. As a hermeneutical resource, a museum reinforces and sustains hermeneutical injustice, which ultimately contributes to social injustice more broadly.

Introduction

There are currently over 100,000 museums across the globe, and each serves as a crucial guide and resource for us to gain knowledge about almost everything: cultures, histories, arts, sciences, etc. They make information accessible to the public, making them one of our go-to places for learning. Every object, its organization, label, and spatial layout in a museum communicates something to the visitors. In particular, the "something" museums communicate to the visitors is the social imagination, i.e., a collective source of images, associations, and concepts that a community relies on for forming perceptions, interpretations, and thoughts about the world (Fricker 2007). Moreover, museums are places where people come to make sense of their and others' social experiences related to social identities. For instance, I, as a Chinese woman, am able to understand the history and cultures that constitute the identity of being Chinese and those that constitute the identity of being a woman when I visit a museum, seeing and learning about the objects that represent these identities.

Most museums are public educational institutions. They not only acquire, preserve, and display objects, but they are also a primary source for scholarly research on the objects they store. These functions endow them with the façade of absolute authority in shaping our knowledge. Visitors lacking extensive knowledge of the objects that a museum presents rarely question what they are seeing, nor are they expected to question what they see. The visitors are non-experts. However, this positioning poses a threat to the visitors: what if museums present a distorted picture containing prejudicial stereotypes that harm socially

marginalized groups? This question brings attention to rising criticisms that scrutinize museums' unwavering position in shaping our knowledge. For instance, Eaton and Gaskell (2009) bring to light how museums promote cultural appropriations of socially disadvantaged groups; Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) argue that museums are white sanctuaries that sustain white supremacy; Erich Matthes (2021) contests the roles of museums in displaying the works problematic artists. These criticisms collectively bring our attention to how museums shape knowledge in a tainted way that can serve to amplify prejudices and discrimination against socially marginalized groups.

In this thesis, I argue that museums are oppressive spaces that reinforce hermeneutical injustice as distorted hermeneutical resources shaped by the socially powerful to sustain the asymmetrical social dynamics at large. The primary objective of the thesis is to contribute to the existing literature of museums being oppressive spaces by offering a novel explanation utilizing Miranda Fricker (2007)'s framework of hermeneutical injustice; hermeneutical injustice arises when one's social experiences are obscured from the collective understanding as the hermeneutical resources contain structural identity prejudices owing to asymmetrical social power dynamics at large. As a hermeneutical resource, a museum reinforces and sustains hermeneutical injustice, which ultimately contributes to social injustice more broadly.

To establish this argument, the thesis is structured as follows. In Part I, I shall give an account of the history of museum developments, highlighting that museums have historically been used by the socially powerful to reinforce the structural imbalance of social power in their favor. In addition, I will also present two existing arguments from Domínguez, Weffer,

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and Embrick (2020) and Eaton and Gaskell (2009) about how museums are oppressive spaces. In particular, these two well-established accounts lack a systematic explanation of why museums become oppressive spaces in the first place and in what ways museums, as a source of representation and knowledge, harm marginalized groups. In Part II, I set out to provide an answer to this missing piece by applying Miranda Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice to museum practices. To do so, I first explain Fricker's view and how museums shape knowledge through interpretive activities. These two sections will lead to the formulation of my main argument: museums contribute to hermeneutical injustice as distorted and prejudiced hermeneutical resources shaped the socially dominant and hinder the intelligibility of marginalized groups' social experiences. In Part III, I respond to two lingering questions that may arise from my argument. First, non-hegemonic museums, such as indigenous museums, can be subject to reinforcing hermeneutical injustice. Second, I will consider two limitations to Fricker's lacuna-centered analysis of hermeneutical injustice and provide two alternative but supplementary accounts by Arianna Falbo (2022) and Gaile Pohlhaus (2012).

Part I: Museums are Oppressive Spaces

In this part, I aim to present a picture of how museums are oppressive spaces by accounting for the history of museum developments in Chapter 1. Throughout history, museums have been shaped by the socially powerful and served as a tool to reinforce the imbalance of power dynamics at large. Despite efforts to decolonize or mitigate the oppressive nature within museums, museums remain a space that contributes to the broader social oppression. This is largely because museums improperly present the social experiences of marginalized groups. To make this case, I will highlight two arguments made by Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) and Eaton and Gaskell (2009) in Chapter 2. Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) argue that museums function as white sanctuaries that internalize and express white supremacy and Eurocentric ideologies. Eaton and Gaskell (2009) contend that hegemonic museums that endorse Western values promote cultural appropriation of non-western and marginalized cultures.

Chapter 1: The History and Functions of Museums

Before the nineteenth century, many common practices that we today associate with museums, such as acquisition, curation, and display organization, were primarily held in the hands of the rich and powerful. Princes, aristocrats, and merchants started to curate and establish collections that would demonstrate their knowledge of the past and their social prestige (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). These collections gradually combined private and public spheres that served as the foundation of museums. The private sphere refers to the private environment of social activities largely restricted to individuals who shared similar social

status. For instance, collecting artifacts and presenting them to fellow aristocrats and the rich took place in the houses of the princes and socially powerful. On the other hand, the public sphere refers to the expansion in which these private social activities were no longer isolated and restricted to the socially powerful; the scope of these social activities extended to a wider audience that encompassed every community participant. This transformation in which private collections became accessible to the public later contributed to the systematic studies of classification and organization, or museology, that prevailed in the contemporary world. In this section, I document the history of museums in the Western world from the 1400s to the present. I also illustrate that museums function as oppressive spaces that further mirror and contribute to the unequal social power dynamics in large part due to this history. To do so, I start with one of the earliest pre-museums, the Medici palace in 1444, and cabinets of curiosities in the 16th century. I then document the transition from exclusively courtly collection to public exhibition during the 18th century, followed by the prefoliation of modern museums in the golden era of the 19th century. Lastly, I conclude with the contemporary developments of museums. Collectively, the evolution of museums is marked by different forms of power inequality that have amplified social oppression more broadly.

Early Museums (1400-1700)

One earliest pre-museum in Europe was the Medici Palace built in 1444 by Cosimo de Medici during the Renaissance age; it was held by the family until the end of the fifteenth century. The growth and development of commercial activities, such as banking and trading, accumulated large amounts of wealth and social power for the merchant class. The

flourishment in the economic sphere transferred to the cultural sphere; the activities in the latter assisted the display of economic power. A museum collection symbolized culture, connoisseurship, and ostentation through showcasing expensive and rare objects as well as elaborate constructions and decorations (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). These factors were largely unattainable and unreachable unless one possessed wealth, networks of communication, and an existing superiority within society.

The Medici Palace was a space for the Medici family to express their desire to reinforce and emphasize their dominant status and social prestige as a successful merchant family. Architecturally, the Palace departed from the previous Renaissance style that had been under-decorated and featured utilitarian objects. The Palace housed richly decorated exterior and interior motifs as well as extensive material goods, setting a new architectural standard for palace-building in the rest of the Renaissance. The exterior carried multiple decorative designs such as the Medici arms, marble medallions, and roundels that were drawn from the existing cameos that Cosimo Medici owned. The interior space was constructed with expensive materials, paintings, and furniture. Each object displayed inside was valuable due to its reputable artists or the use of extravagant materials (or both). Similarly, throughout the use of space, many objects symbolized the prestige of the Medici family. Two small chests were embellished with the Medici arms on the ground floors, and a room upstairs contained marble busts of Piero Medici and his wife, Lucrezia Tornabuoni.

The acquired items in The Palace were characterized by three categories: precious materials, Greek and Roman past, and supernatural power (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). In part, wealth was measured by the weight of the precious metal, known as treasure gathering.

During the beginning period of 1450-1500, the collection of items in the Palace mirrored

treasure gathering that focused on objects that were made of precious metals, such as coins,

medals, and carved gems. In terms of monetary value, the most valuable items were antique

jewels, and the carved Greek and Roman gems, ranging from 500 to 2,000 florins apiece.

One of the most notable objects was a unicorn horn that was valued at 6,000 florins and had

the magical power to sweat in the presence of poison (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 53). Moreover,

the presence of items from the Greek and Roman past was a reflection of an interest in the

Greek and Roman past that was reactivated towards the end of the fourteenth century.

Classical objects were considered to reflect a superior epoch. Hence, aristocrats and

merchants started to accumulate collections that would demonstrate their knowledge of the

past and their newfound wealth well into the fifteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

Additionally, the Medici family also exemplified a shift in patronage from a communal and

collective activity to an internal and private one; in other words, patronage which used to be a

public duty became a private activity of glorification that served to display wealth and power

through polishing private spaces (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 54).

Parallel with the development of the Medici Palace, but proliferated later in the 16th

century, were the cabinets of curiosities.[1] Hooper-Greenhill (1992) described cabinets of

curiosities as "a distorted jumble of unconnected objects" aiming to represent the world (79).

An additional factor that contributed to the rise of cabinets of curiosities was international

migrations and trade. These collections were accumulated by aristocrats, merchants,

1. There are several (German) names for this kind of collections, each with a distinct meaning based on the
specific characterizations of the cabinets. For the sake of the paper, these specifications are not discussed. For
detailed discussion, see Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Simmons (2016).

politicians, and those with social prestige, as owning a cabinet of curiosities expressed their social standings (Simmons 2016). Collecting required one to have an abundant amount of wealth to participate in trading and acquiring objects that were considered rare and marvelous. A person also needed the financial ability to display the acquired objects and maintain the spaces of the cabinets; the forms of cabinets often ranged from actual cabinets and rooms to an entire wing of a palace. In addition, collectors needed to possess taste and the capability to distinguish the authenticity and value of collectible objects. Such keen abilities were only possible with an extensive education, which was a luxury limited to the socially powerful. Furthermore, each object in the cabinets was a token of power to affirm the authority of the owner. The early criteria of curation and selection were largely subjective, as any object that was considered unusual or rare by the owner was to be included in the cabinets. The artifacts ranged from dried specimens such as Egyptian mummies and narwhal teeth to artworks to ethnographic objects from other continents (Simmons 2016). Since the collections were often composed of a variety of objects, collectors began to organize the exhibition in a way that promoted the transmission of knowledge, but the classification system remains "idiosyncratic"; the organizational systems reflected the collectors' worldview and personal assumptions (Simmons 2016, 65).

Museums in 18th Century (1700-1800)

Entering the eighteenth century, courtly private collections started to become accessible to the public throughout Europe. One crucial factor that motivated such a transition was a shift in the philosophical view on art, marked by the birth of aesthetics, the study of art and

beauty. One of the most notable figures was Immanuel Kant. He argued in *Critique of Judgement*, published in 1790, that artistic beauty takes form not only in its outward and apparent form but also its psychological experience offered to the audience. He defined taste as "the faculty of estimating an object or mode of representation by means of delight or aversion apart from any interest" (Kant 2007, p. 42, para. 211). Beauty is the object of delight, and the pleasure in beauty is delightful for its own sake. From this definition came two significant elements in the cultivation of taste and aesthetics. First, beauty expresses moral goodness. When we acquire taste, the ability to understand beauty, we can "approach morality along the even, level path of our senses" (Sheehan 2000, 9). In other words, beauty expresses moral goodness by bringing it to our sensory cognition, and taste is the faculty that accomplishes this. Consequently, the appreciation of art is both an aesthetic and a moral act. Second, Kant claims that aesthetic experience is both subjective and universal (Kant 2007, para. 239-241). By subjective, he means that the act of appreciating art is an individual act and the consequent experiences are subjective. However, by universal, he means that taste is a collective product formed by a public discourse in which opinions are exchanged and expressed (Kant 2007, para. 306). He denies that each individual has a subjective taste. As this experience of beauty is collective, the appreciation of beauty must be societal (Sheehan 2000). Hence, the establishment of aesthetics as a discipline marked that the primary value of art was no longer limited to material values derived from rarity and cost, rather it extended to moral and intellectual values.

Throughout the eighteenth century, as a response to the philosophical movement in aesthetics, courtly private collections gradually became accessible to the public as they

became a crucial means to edify people with art's moral and aesthetic values. These courtly

collections became a tool for the socially powerful to export what was to be considered

worthy and good. During this period, the ideas of how objects should be organized and

exhibited slowly began to take shape. As private collections started to become more public,

some aristocrats and princes started to hire experts to help them acquire, organize, display,

and publicize their art; these duties became a basis for modern curators and advisors

(Sheehan 2000). A few earliest public museums were established. For instance, in 1750, the

Luxembourg Palace in Paris under Louis XV was open to the public for three hours twice a

week (Sheehan 2000). Other museums included the Museo Pio-Clementino in 1773,

Belvedere Gallery which gradually became public starting in 1783, and the British Museum

in 1759.

However, these openings of previously private collections came with caveats. First,

visual art had been inseparable from courtly life. Courts and aristocrats had been the main

source of patronage and employed a variety of artists to prepare settings for "courtly rituals,

celebrate the prince's achievements, and create monuments to dynastic glory" (Sheehan 2000,

18). Collecting things became an important part of what constitutes the roles of princes. The

possession of rare and valuable objects was "a source of pride and prestige" and a means to

"[exhibit] the discriminating taste and easy learning" within the courtly and aristocratic

communities (Sheehan 2000, 19). Thus, what one learned from a courtly collection was

primarily defined by the courtly values that reflected the prestige of the socially powerful;

this in turn sustained the social dominance of those who possessed social powers. Second, the

public access was not granted to everyone and embraced a sense of selectiveness. There were

formal and informal restrictions in place that discriminated who could enter these private

collections. For instance, visitors needed to have the financial and intellectual capacities to

purchase tickets, read, and have the appropriate appearance to enter and participate in the

"public" sphere of a museum (Sheehan 2000). By the 1750s, 65 percent of males and 40

percent of females were literate. In France from 1786 to 1790, the literacy rates were 48

percent and 27 percent for males and females respectively, and these numbers were similar in

Germany (Simmons 2016, 94). Note that these countries were the most literal areas of

Europe: by 1800, literacy rates were about 12% for the entire continent (Roser 2016).

Therefore, the literacy hurdle of visiting museums prohibited access for a majority of the

public. Moreover, the issuance of tickets in advance also enabled institutions to check

visitors' identity and reputation, and some collections were open to the general public for

only selected days of a week (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

This transitioning period indeed reflected Kant's notion that aesthetic experience is

necessarily collective, a step towards the liberation of aesthetic education. However, it was

also clear who was and was not included in this collective. The activities that fostered taste

were strictly limited to those who had financial, political, and social power. This restricted

access essentially spoke to who was allowed to cultivate taste, a collective practice. These

constraints of participation were also aligned with the broader social dynamics and power

hierarchies. Whoever was oppressed in the broader social setting remained powerless and

excluded from participating in these museums. Hence, the public courtly collections were an

extension of the broader social oppression. Moreover, since these courtly collections served

as spaces for shaping aesthetic experiences and developing taste, the process of cultivating a

sense of beauty and indirectly a sense of moral goodness was largely controlled by princes

and aristocrats who decided what was worthy of being included to shape this process. Thus,

public courtly collections seemed to further strengthen the intangible powers that the

powerful possessed, a problem that I'll show remains prevalent to this day.

The Golden Era (1800-1900)

The nineteenth century is known as the museum age, a golden age of museum

proliferation. One main factor that contributed to this flourishment was the changed

perception of to whom art and cultural heritage should belong. Before this period, artifacts

were primarily courtly properties. Nevertheless, in this century, the public strived for art not

only to be accessible but legally belong to them as well. Another factor contributing to the

growth of museums was the rise in literacy, and museums were perceived as an integral part

of boosting the level of public education; as a result, the scope of the public that had access to

museums increased as the literacy rate in Europe climbed from 12% to 21% by 1900

(Simmons 2016). The rise of colonialism and imperialism also impacted museums' functions.

Museums as cultural institutions amplified their function as an expression of the cultural

hegemony of the perpetrators of colonialism. In other words, museums and the objects within

demonstrated the colonizers' cultures as socially and politically dominant over others,

exhibiting a sense of nationalist pride and glory.

For example, during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), the powerful used museums

and art in France to express both the democratized public life and the expansion of state

power. The leaders of the French Revolution (1789-1799) realized the significance of art as a

means to political reform and social reconstruction (Sheehan 2000). This realization

eventually became the Grand Gallery of the Louvre in 1789, which was opened to the public

in 1793. In 1794, the government started to send experts to newly conquered territories to

select, or loot, valuable artworks to display in the Louvre. As the French territory expanded

under Napoleon, the scope of the artistic loot that was displayed in the Louvre also grew. Art

became a trophy of victory, and the Louvre became a vessel to showcase these trophies to

visitors. The first museum director of the Louvre, Dominique Vivant-Denon also served as

the artistic advisor for Napoleon. His leadership contributed to France's largest and best-

organized art collection in the world (Sheehan 2000). After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815,

the Louvre agreed to return 2,065 paintings and 130 sculptures to their home countries

including Egypt and Italy. Within this collection, for instance, Napoleon's invasion of

Germany brought back 299 pictures from Kassel, 60 from Berlin and Potsdam, and 250 from

Belvedere Palace in Vienna (Alexander 1996, 26-27). The establishment of the Louvre under

Napoleon's shadow endowed an amplified, if not new, function that museums served: art was

transformed from what was once associated with luxurious consumption and social prestige

into a kind of national property that symbolized "a source of pride and an instrument of

popular enlightenment" (Sheehan 2000, 51). For every visitor, Louvre's collection

demonstrated the French imperium and the nation's political and military dominance.

Furthermore, museums as an educational space of taste and values, became the

battleground between the *anciens regimes* and the public from the end of the 18th century to

the late 19th century. The *anciens regimes* referred to the ruling class or order prior to its

overthrow by the modern systems after the 1900s (Mayer 1981). The origin of museums and

their collections was heavily intertwined with courtly power and governmental control. The *anciens regimes* endorsed classicism and that of so-called official art; under this artistic ideal, artworks featured a more polished finish and often contained religious and historical subject matters. The *anciens regimes* had immense power over museums which originated from the courtly collection. This control led museums to become an instrument for the *anciens regimes* to impose classical values on the public. Nevertheless, this did not parallel the development of the art scene in which avant-gardes, such as impressionism and other modern art movements that defied classical norms, became popularized in the public and the art scene. Consequently, many museums that were closely associated with the *anciens regimes* and those specific values were pressed by the public to include modern and avant-garde artworks (Alexander 1996).

The rise of museums in the United States began around the Gilded Age (1877-1896). Industrialization transformed the country into a world power, but the country lacked the cultural dominance that many European countries enjoyed from their prestigious museums (Saltzman 2008). To cultivate similar cultural scenes, the wealthy started to acquire collections of Old Masters, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art was established in 1870 in an attempt to raise New York as a cultural capital that could trump major European cultural institutions (Saltzman 2008). The success of the MET, the advancement of America's world dominance, and the enormous growth of wealth later motivated the establishment and growth of other major museums in the US, such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1870 and the Art Institute of Chicago in 1879 (Alexander 1996).

Throughout this century, collections continually flowed into European museums

through exploration, exploitation, and colonization (Simmons 2016). The ease of access, however, remained low. The working class was implicitly excluded from participation. The labeling in museums was minimal, and visitors who wished to learn more information about the displayed objects would have to purchase a guidebook (Simmons 2016). It became prevalent that many museums attempted to display foreign objects in an accurate and so-called 'scientific' manner. However, it was almost inevitable that this attempt was tainted with cultural bias and prejudices due to the prevalent belief that foreign cultures "were examples of stages in a progressive development from primitive to advanced" (Simmons 2016, 162). One prominent figure of this transition was Augustus Pitt Rivers, a British self-taught anthropologist who established the Ethnographical Museum or Pitt Rivers Museum in 1874 from his personal anthropological collection which later was donated to the University of Oxford in 1884. His ideology of arranging the display emphasized "the successions of ideas by which the minds of men in a primitive condition of culture have progressed from the simple to the complex, and from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous" (Simmons 2016, 163). The collections contained mostly daily objects and weaponries from non-European cultures acquired through Imperialist activities. Pitt Rivers perceived these objects as material evidence of cultural evolution to support his own prejudicial beliefs that non-European cultures were fossilized at different points of the developmental process until the interference of European and Caucasian cultures; in other words, he considered the artifacts as evidence for the belief that only European cultures were capable of forming civilization (van Keuren 1984).

Furthermore, this era also marked the globalization of the concept of museums. Due to

trade and colonialism, the notion of establishing museums traveled outside of Europe and the United States, primarily located in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia (Simmons 2016). For instance, one earliest museum in South America was the National Museum of Brazil in 1815, exhibiting a collection from King Dom João VI of Portugal (Lewis 1992). Other examples included the National Museum of Colombia in 1823, the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1814 (later became the Indian Museum in 1875), and the South African Museum in 1825 (Simmons 2016). Colonial museums in non-western countries that were once colonies of European countries operated under the European framework and were initially dependent on the colonial power for their establishment and senior management. Native workers constituted small and minor management. These museums initially focused on regional collections that the colonial power acquired in the local areas. In later history, these colonial museums became prominent national museums and began diverging from European influence, transforming into tools for framing postcolonial identities (Simmons 2016).

Towards Contemporary Museums (1900 Onwards)

Moving towards the 20th Century, the museum realm was largely influenced by the two world wars. Destruction, confiscation, and looting dramatically transformed the institutions differently across the globe. For example, during WWII, the Nazi regime looted an estimated 20 percent of the art in Europe under their Aryanization plan, i.e., the Nazi's aggressive measure to confiscate Jewish properties (Birnkrant 2019). An enormous amount of art was destroyed both intentionally and accidentally. The Nazis either confiscated or destroyed "degenerate art," which included modern artworks they deemed as unfit for their ideologies

(Kühnel 2003). However, the perpetrators were not exclusively from the Nazi regime; almost all parties involved in the wars participated in some form of plundering and destruction (Birnkrant 2019).

To restore the damages that the war imposed upon victims, two major reformative events occurred and formulated specific rules that would facilitate the process of restitution: the Washington Principles and the Terezin Declaration. In 1998, representatives of 44 nations and 13 non-governmental organizations established and agreed to the 11 non-binding principles at the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets (Cohan 2013). The Washington Principles requested measures to be taken when the rightful owners or heirs can be identified. The principles required governments to develop systems to "'implement these principles, particularly as they relate to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for resolving ownership issue'" (Davidson 2015, 97). Moreover, the Terezin Declaration, established in 2009, reiterated the main aspects of the Washington Principles and specified guidelines of "the best practices" regarding deliberation over Nazi-looted art (Davidson 2015, 99). Both the Washington Principles and Terezin Declaration are legally non-binding, for the intent behind such regulations is to "avoid resorting to legal arguments grounded in procedural issues" if possible (Davidson 2015, 99). Hence, when countries and museums sign the above agreements, they carry only a moral commitment to abide by them and fulfill their expected objectives.

Despite the later efforts of restitution, many artworks went from plunders to dealers and eventually to museums that knowingly or ignorantly purchased looted art due to the lack of provenance research. For instance, as a part of its commitment to the Washington Principles,

MoMA has identified artworks that have provenance gaps in its collections (Cohan 2011). A list created in 2000 stated that 15 paintings, in addition to 29 works identified in 1965, had problematic provenance, and both lists included two paintings by George Groz, a Jewish artist who was considered a "degenerate" and whose art was looted from their pre-war owners (Cohan 2011). Christel Hollevoet-Force, MoMA's provenance researcher from 2001-2005, estimated that 500 out of 600 works had problematic provenance and confirmed that MoMA has purchased works through Curt Valentin, an art dealer that sold degenerate art to funnel the funds to the Third Reich (Cohan 2011). However, MoMA refused to take restorative and corrective actions by bluntly neglecting or rejecting victims' claims for repatriation.

At the same time, the development of universal museums started to take place and was met with criticism. Universal or encyclopedic museums refer to "older, larger institutions with extensive collections, usually founded during the Enlightenment" (Simmons 2016, 220). Examples of museums that fall under this category include the British Museum, the Louvre, and the MET. The primary objective of universal museums is to "gather, classify, catalog, and present facts about the world" (Cuno 2011, 7). The proponents of universal museums have advocated for encyclopedic museums stating that they have liberated public education. Universal museums offer tangible opportunities for people to learn about other cultures that otherwise would be infeasible without world travel (Simmons 2016). In contrast, many opponents of universal museums have argued that universal museums display objects in the light of imperialism and questionable acquisitions. The core issue is that the prestige of universal museums carries colonialist pasts, but many fail to realize that by concealing such

legacies. Isaac Kaplan (2016) underscored that the term 'universal' museums "implies a hermetically sealed institution where knowledge floats above nationality," but in reality, museums are "political spaces tied to very specific histories and contexts." One notable dispute was between the British Museum and the Parthenon Marbles, in which the rightful ownership of cultural heritage remains up to debate (Simmons 2016). Another involved the Getty and Aphrodite sculpture, which was illegally trafficked by looters. Getty knowingly acquired the sculpture and neglected required research despite questionable provenance, and fortunately, the artifact has been repatriated after legal investigations and orders (Felch and Frammolino 2011).

Parallel to the universal museums was the development of indigenous museums. In 2006, there were about 200 Native American tribal and community museums in North America; these museums were formed under a community initiative "that responds to local needs and demands, directed by a community organization, created and developed with direct involvement of the local population, and owned by the community" (Simmons 2016, 234). Tribal and community museums either exist under the umbrella of a larger institution or as an independent entity. With these establishments, the indigenous communities are able to take initiative and exert agency over decision-making processes without reliance on non-Native institutions. For example, in the Makah Cultural and Research Center (MCRC), founded in 1979 has been managed by the Makah Tribe. The organizational system no longer abided by the traditional archeological standards that failed to reflect tribal values and cultures. Tribal involvements allowed the objects to be arranged based on artifact categories and households of recovery, so each object could be attributed to particular individuals whose names were

also labeled properly. In addition, all artifacts are labeled in both Makah and English, promoting analysis of cultural meanings and a holistic understanding of Makah culture (Simmons 2016).

Closing Remarks: Why does the history matter?

This long list of museum developments signifies the ways in which museums, at least in the Western world, have been historically shaped by the socially powerful and carried the legacies of Eurocentric values. Museums, although commonly considered as public educational institutions, carry with them a reflection of who has been at the peak of social power dynamics and their roles in shaping what should be considered worthy and the collective perception of the marginalized groups and the oppressed "others." The account of museum developments provided here is clearly not exhaustive; it aims to highlight how museums have been shaped by the social oppression at large and used to sustain such asymmetrical social dynamics. However, there have been restorative and reformative efforts and attempts to alleviate the oppressive nature embedded within museums, such as international agreements and the establishment of community museums. Some of these projects are fruitful while others are ineffective. This discrepancy is largely attributed to who shapes the museums as I will later discuss in the remainder of this paper.

Chapter 2: Museums as Oppressive Spaces

As we saw in the previous chapter, the history and evolution of museums has reflected how these institutions historically sustained and reflected the social power dynamics at large. Museums were employed as a tool for the socially powerful to express and maintain their

social power by shaping the structure and organizations of the objects. This in turn shapes what the public or visitors can learn from museums that are tainted by such perspectives. Furthermore, there also have been attempts in the contemporary developments to counter such impacts, moving away from the historical oppressive nature of museums. However, inevitably, without proper and effective measures, museums will remain a main space for maintaining forms of social oppression. In this chapter, I'll demonstrate how this is the case. To do so, I will emphasize two arguments for why museums are oppressive spaces: 1) museums act as white sanctuaries, and 2) museums promote cultural appropriation. Both features are reflected through the physical and spatial arrangements within a museum.

Museums as White Sanctuaries

In this section, I will show that the physical context of museums helps maintain white supremacy, an ideology considering the Caucasian race as superior and more worthy of dominating non-European cultures and their resources. Specifically, Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) argue that museums are white sanctuaries that sustain white supremacy; the museums achieve this through their locations within the city, the layouts of the location, and the physical spaces within the museums. The authors define *white sanctuaries* as "refuges for whites who feel threatened by the perception that whites are becoming the minority and will soon lose their heritage, culture, or societal status" (2030). Before examining what it means for museums to be white sanctuaries, it is necessary to first understand that museums are racial projects. Racial projects connect the meaning of race to the racial organization of both social structures and daily experiences, with the former being the basis for the latter. For

example, many "Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion" (DEI) initiatives within colleges and

companies are examples of racial projects. DEI initiatives set the standards of appropriate

behaviors and procedures in daily and structural interactions based on what race means.

However, racial projects are not necessarily racist. Such a project only becomes racist if it

"creates or reproduces structures of dominance based on racial significance and categorized

identities" (2031). Museums are "created, curated, and maintained" depending on the racial

histories of the place. A museum's primary function is to provide demonstrations of what is

being valued as art and who are celebrated as artists. Hence, museums are placed "in the

center of history, and [provide] people with a sense of place, purpose, and a place to celebrate

achievements" (2030). For example, a porcelain plate from China represents a piece of

Chinese history and what was valued as art during that time by the Chinese people; these

values compose a part of what it meant to be Chinese at the time. Moreover, this

representation extends to a broader setting. A Chinese porcelain plate being placed in a

museum in China versus a museum in France persuades differing connotations to the visitors.

These connotations depend on the racial histories of the locations that define what is to be

valued based on the social and racial power dynamics more broadly. In one case it is an

example of showcasing national and ethnic identity, while it may become a demonstration of

colonialization or orientalism in the other depending on the sub-context of the display. This

sub-context refers to in what exhibition this plate may be placed. Consider an exhibition that

displays Chinese art versus an exhibition containing Western fantasies about Chinese

cultures. In the latter case, the placement of the Chinese porcelain plate is more likely to be

"a demonstration of colonialization or orientalism." This is what I mean when contending

that museums are racial projects.

This leads to another question: are museums racist racial projects? A simplified answer is that many are if not all. For example, museums established under European influences are more likely to be racist than others given the history of those museums outlined in Chapter 1. Many museums are white institutional spaces in which racial structures, racialized daily experiences, and racial ideologies maintain social status and white supremacy. One aspect that reflects this is the demographic composition of museum staff. Given the function of museums, most board members and curators are white, and the artifacts displayed in museums tend to favor Western and Eurocentric ideologies regarding what prestigious art is. This reflects cultural racism which states that significant cultural progress initially appeared in Europe. This view over time has cultivated a sense of cultural superiority that white supremacy endorses: Europeans are considered to be more "mature, evolved, and rational and worthy of dominating non-Europeans and taking over their resources" (Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick 2020, 2031). As a result, non-European artifacts tend to be less valuable than European ones. Since museums are racial projects, and in virtue of being racial projects, many museums that value Eurocentric ideologies over others reinforce the idea of the Caucasian race being more dominant and racially significant. Being a white institutional space, museums reaffirm Whites' social dominance over other racial groups by internalizing and subtly expressing the products of white colonialism and white supremacy.

To demonstrate museums as white sanctuaries and white institutional spaces, Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) investigated two museums: the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (BFA or MFA) and the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). At BFA, the exhibition space

for African Art is narrow and lacks proper lighting. All artifacts are encased in glass without labeling the names of the artists. Instead, the labels clearly display the patrons who were colonial players and exploiters of racism. The exhibition space is distributed into two rooms which mainly serve as passageways, while the majority of the museums are dedicated to European art. At AIC, visitors need to effortfully locate the Arts of Africa exhibition space as it is placed in the very back. This spatial organization also applies to many non-European art exhibition spaces, which are often hidden in the basements and lack the proper amenities and setups that European art exhibitions often enjoy.

Most objects displayed of African art and other non-European art lack variety, limited to tribal masks, headdresses, ceremonial weapons, and a few potteries. Hence, the collection presents non-European culture as "tribal and indigenous" without the presence of any contemporary artists, intentionally excluding the portrayal of non-European cultures as mature as European ones. Moreover, the objects showcased in the museums are retraumatizing. Visitors who identify with racial minorities (in the U.S.) witness these exhibit spaces as a "replication of the colonial genocide" as they have not been given the power to participate in the arrangement of these spaces (Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick 2020, 2040). These spaces are mostly organized by white individuals, and they present non-European cultures through a white lens that degrades and minimizes their cultural significance. Therefore, the layout of the spaces and the collections minimally encourage public participation in the appreciation of African art. For individuals who share non-European identities, the experience in such museums re-traumatizes them.

Next, Eaton and Gaskell (2009) argue that hegemonic museums are oppressive spaces as they promote the cultural appropriation of non-European cultures and those that suffer from systematic oppression in society. The authors define *subaltern* as "groups at a disadvantage to those exercising power within a society," as opposed to *hegemonic* which refers to "the values of Western societies that sustain their dominance, especially insofar as they place other societies at disadvantage" (235). The disadvantage of subaltern groups suffer from cultural appropriation roots in the systematic and persistent subordination to the hegemonic groups. Hence, the scope of Eaton and Gaskell (2009)'s investigation is limited to hegemonic museums.

Cultural appropriation is the use of the cultural products of cultural insiders by cultural outsiders, and it does not only pertain to racialization (Matthes 2018). The wrongful appropriation stems from the social inequality between cultural insiders and outsiders. One main supportive claim for the badness of cultural appropriation is that wrongful cultural appropriation causes harm. The first kind of harm is the derivation of an unfair or opportunistic gain from a vulnerable group who cannot reasonably consent (Matthes 2018). An example of this is the looted or plundered cultural objects in European museums obtained through European colonialization or imperialism. The vulnerable groups that were exploited did not consent to the acquisition or the display of these objects. Another kind of harm originates from misrepresentation and silencing. Misrepresentation can take the form of presenting a culture in a false or misleading light, leading to prejudices and stereotypes (Matthes 2018). For example, museums may present a fragmented and partial aspect of a

culture as representative of the whole. The examples from Domínguez, Weffer, and Embrick (2020) above support this claim as the representation of non-European cultures overemphasizing tribal or ancient objects and excluding contemporary ones. Moreover, cultural appropriation silences socially marginalized cultural groups by denying them the ability to speak for and represent themselves. Thus, cultural appropriation skews public understanding of cultural expertise away from cultural insiders to cultural outsiders (Matthes 2018).

Echoing what has been observed from the history in Chapter 1, hegemonic museums, such as Pitt Rivers Museums, the British Museum, the Getty, and the MET, "legitimate tastes, behavior and markets, and inculcate self-enforced social discipline" that largely sustain the power of the hegemonic groups (Eaton and Gaskell 2009, 240). But most importantly, museums at large enjoy a façade of absolute authority and objectivity, and this lends the hegemonic groups immense power to sustain their social power and disadvantage non-hegemonic groups. Museums tend to exercise absolute and unchallenged control over the artifacts on display, and by extension, over the societies the artifacts represent. The public is alienated and largely removed from the constitution of the display other than mere interaction (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Museums "[homogenize or erase] traces of curatorial authorship," and this makes the result, the display, "inevitable, scarcely questionable" (Eaton and Gaskell 2009, 241). The absolute authority museums possess creates such a curtaining effect, which makes it difficult to attribute responsibility to any particular individual. Thus, the definitions of meanings are restricted and limited to the sphere of museum workers; these staffs share a position of power that allows them to impose their personal interpretations (Hooper-Greenhill

1992). However, the objectivity and neutrality of exhibitions are a false illusion. Throughout the entire process leading to visitors leaving the museums, every step is tainted by value decisions and choices. These personal choices guide visitors' seeing, understanding, and appreciating. Eaton and Gaskell (2009) argue that in museums "objects are categorized, chosen, ordered, described and displayed so as to direct our visual attention and understanding in specific ways" (242). Consequently, the capacities to arrange objects and their appearances make museums the instruments of power for the hegemonic groups when they misrepresent subaltern artifacts and take no accountability.

The exhibition of subaltern artifacts in hegemonic museums is subject to "selective, misleading or culturally limited presentations" that misrepresent and silence subaltern groups to benefit hegemonic societies (Eaton and Gaskell 2009, 244). For example, museums may mask the oppression that hegemonic groups have imposed on subaltern groups by presenting them as primitive or excluding contemporary artifacts to conceal any interaction with European culture. Or in the case of Pitt Rivers Museum in Chapter 1, subaltern objects were represented in a way that emphasized the lack of independence and agency for development in the absence of European interference. In art museums, the institutional authority imposes European aesthetic values and standards of what art is on subaltern art which was produced by communities that did not share such judgments. As a result, subaltern art that differs from European art becomes susceptible to being viewed and judged as deficient or substandard. In addition, hegemonic museums sometimes categorize a subaltern object that serves spiritual or other practical purposes as art, overemphasizing the aesthetic values while dismissing others (Eaton and Gaskell 2009). Such classification imposes the European or hegemonic ideology

that manipulatively selects what values of the objects are considered worthy. Moreover, this also reflects decontextualization in which the subaltern objects are displayed from their original circumstances (Eaton and Gaskell 2009). Those subaltern objects that the subaltern groups value for their non-aesthetic values are now merely valued for their aesthetic values. Hence, the hegemonic museums, through their Eurocentric or hegemonic standards, trivialize the artifacts' values that the subaltern groups originally embrace.

In sum, the power that museums carry lies in four aspects: 1) the capacity to categorize and choose objects, 2) the contribution to the definition of meaning and terms, 3) the organization of seeing and understanding objects in which some pertain to cultural and racial identity, and 4) the apparent neutrality and objectivity (Eaton and Gaskell 2009, 242). This power then shapes and guides our understanding of the subaltern groups and their relationship with them. Since museums are often the sole contact that people have with subaltern societies represented by the exhibited objects, they define the collective cultural perception through a lens of hegemonic values. What are the consequences? Visitors leave with a misrepresented and distorted understanding of the subaltern groups shaped by the hegemonic groups to sustain their powers. The subaltern groups are largely silenced through such a process and become further disadvantaged and marginalized within the social structure broadly.

Part II: Hermeneutical Injustice in Museums

Before turning to my own argument of museums being oppressive spaces, it is important to recognize that something is missing from the existing analysis given in Part I. The two accounts discussed previously, the argument from white sanctuaries and the argument from cultural appropriation, demonstrate two symptoms of the oppressive nature of museums. However, they are insufficient in providing a systematic explanation for how these harmful symptoms are produced. The accounts do not clarify why the harms exist in the first place and in what ways museums harm marginalized groups as a source of representation and knowledge about these groups. Note that this is not to dismiss these two views, but rather I wish to add to these accounts by laying out the underlying explanation and cause of why museums are white spaces and how museums promote cultural appropriation. I aim to then fill this blank in the remaining of this part with Miranda Fricker (2007)'s account of hermeneutical injustice. That is, a museum is a distorted hermeneutical resource shaped by the socially dominant group to reinforce hermeneutical injustice that hinders marginalized groups' intelligibility of their social experiences.

Chapter 3: Hermeneutical Injustice and Its Moral Badness

In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker proposes a framework of hermeneutical injustice in which one's social experience is obscured from the collective understanding. The socially powerful tend to have the proper understanding of their social experiences, while the socially powerless do not. The discrepancy lies in the sources a person draws to form these understandings. For the socially powerless, they tend to

have distorted or inadequate resources of understanding to make sense of their social experience.

To present her view, we need to understand two crucial concepts: social imagination and hermeneutical resources. First, Fricker assumes that there is one shared social imagination within a community. Social imagination is the collection of images, associations, and concepts that every community participant relies on for forming their perception, interpretations, and thoughts about the world (Fricker 2007, 14). For example, all of us have a conception under the social imagination about what it means to be a woman, an LGBT individual, and more. Moreover, there exist hermeneutical resources that contain collective interpretive resources required for a social group to understand their social experiences (Fricker 2007, 148). For example, Fricker utilizes the example of Carmita Wood who suffered from sexual harassment in the workplace prior to the US women's liberation movement. Due to constant unwanted explicit and implicit sexual advances by male colleagues, Wood experienced both emotional and physical distress which led her to leave her job. Applying for unemployment insurance, Wood was asked to describe the reason for leaving her job, but she could not find the right words to describe her experience and was forced to answer with 'personal reasons.' The application was denied not only because Wood could not find a proper way to describe her experiences but also because none of the options on the application correctly describes her experience. 'Personal reasons' is not sufficient in this case as it does not accurately describe what Wood experienced. Consequently, along with other women that participated in a seminar about unsolicited sexual advances, Wood discovered that all the women there shared similar experiences and together they demanded an end to the

predatory behaviors. However, there was no proper term for describing the unsolicited sexual advances that they experienced. To conduct a successful speak-out, an event where the women shared their workplace experiences to the public, the group came up with the name, sexual harassment. In this story, we can see that the collective hermeneutical resources lacked a concept for Wood and other women at the time to interpret and understand their experiences as sexual harassment. The perspective of women was not reflected in the collective interpretive resources.

Additionally, from Wood's experience, Fricker argues that one's ability to make sense of her social experience is subject to structural identity prejudice. A person's ability to understand her social experience depends on her social identities in relation to who has identity power at large. Identity power is entirely imaginative and requires social imagination to operate. The content of the social imagination includes stereotypes which are "widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes", and stereotypes entail some cognitive commitment to the generalization about a social group and are generally neutral (Fricker 2007, 30). Moreover, prejudices are judgments that "display some resistance to counter-evidence owing to some affective investment on the part of the subject" (Fricker 2007, 35). In other words, one is more likely to suspend a judgment in the light of counter-evidence; however, with prejudice, one does not suspend such judgment because she is emotionally or affectively invested in the judgment. Consider Anna who has an avid fear of sharks. Anna holds the judgment that sharks are dangerous and eat humans when given the chance. She may form such a judgment from seeing the movie, Jaws. However, many documentaries have debunked such a myth by showing that sharks can be gentle and

harmless to humans most of the time. Usually, a person who holds a similar judgment as Anna, but without the emotional investment of fear, would be more likely to suspend that judgment as the documentaries serve as counter-evidence that makes the judgment unreliable. However, Anna would not suspend her judgment despite counter-evidence as her avid fear makes her emotionally invested in this judgment. No matter what the documentaries say about sharks being unlikely to attack humans, Anna still thinks that sharks are dangerous and attack humans. Hence, Anna has a prejudiced judgment about sharks, and such prejudiced judgment commonly pertains to social groups as well.

Suppose one makes a judgment about some social group based on the false negative stereotypes in the social imagination. If she chooses to maintain such judgment, then she has a prejudice against such social group. For instance, in the case of judgment concerning all Muslim individuals after 9/11, many people considered all Muslim individuals dangerous. However, upon daily interactions, the people found that Muslim individuals are not more likely to commit terrorist acts than anyone else. These interactions serve as counter-evidence against the widely held judgment mentioned above. Some people yet suspended the judgment that Muslim people are terrorists because they are emotionally invested in that judgment. These emotional investments could be fears and hatred fostered by incorrect media portrayals. Collectively, structural identity prejudice is the one that "affects people in virtue of their membership of a socially powerless group, and thus in virtue of an aspect of their social identity" (Fricker 2007, 155). Hence, Wood's experience indicates that the lack of perspectives from women in the hermeneutical resources is due to the structural prejudice that renders the social group of women disadvantaged and powerless.

Furthermore, the presence of structural identity prejudice in the hermeneutical resources is a condition for hermeneutical injustice. The unequal social power dynamics at large affect the shaping of the social imagination in which the socially powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring this collective understanding. As a result, there is unequal hermeneutical participation in the shaping of the hermeneutical resources. This leads to hermeneutical marginalization which is the unequal participation in significant areas of social experience (Fricker 2007, 153). By 'significant areas', Fricker means the areas of social experiences that are valuable for marginalized groups. Since marginalized groups are excluded from or subordinated to the socially dominant groups in shaping the hermeneutical resources, the damage to the marginalized is significant. In Wood's case, a woman's position at the time was more socially powerless than a man's in the shaping of the collective social meanings. So women had not been able to contribute to the collective understanding of sexual misconduct in the workplace. It may seem that their speak-out may be a counterevidence to women being marginalized or excluded from contributing to the hermeneutical resources. Their speak-out does not counter the fact that women were extensively excluded from forming the necessary hermeneutical resources for making sense of their social experiences in the first place. Also, Fricker emphasizes that hermeneutical marginalization is always socially coerced and a form of powerlessness (153). By socially coerced, Fricker means that social power dynamics reinforce a social group's exclusion from forming the hermeneutical resources.

The most immediate result of the unequal social power dynamics and hermeneutical participation lies in lacunas. Lacunas are gaps in the collective interpretive resources (Fricker

2007, 151). They are shared collectively, not just by the victims. Wood's inability to correctly

name the unsolicited sexual advances as sexual harassment was an example of a lacuna at the

time. This gap affected Wood, the women who had similar experiences, and all other social

participants (e..g, men). However, the lacuna in this case is unjust, both wrongful and

harmful. Although both the perpetrators and victims suffer from the lacuna and lack the

proper understanding of sexual harassment, the lacuna produced highly asymmetrical

(dis)advantages. For the harassers, not knowing that their behaviors are sexual harassment

does not significantly harm them. One may argue that this lack of understanding even

benefits the male harassers as they would maintain the asymmetrical dynamics and continue

their actions without accountability. On the other hand, the female victims in this case carry

much more substantial disadvantages. The lacuna renders them hermeneutically marginalized

and prevents them from understanding a part of their social experience that is highly in their

interest to know. Such lacuna stems from the wider and persistent structural identity prejudice

against the social group of women who are constantly oppressed. Hence, as these women

were excluded and marginalized from the hermeneutical participation, the hermeneutical

resources "tend to issue interpretations of [the marginalized] group's social experiences that

are biased" (Fricker 2007,155); and this bias originates from the asymmetrical power

dynamics in which the socially powerful are more likely to shape the hermeneutical

resources. In Wood's case, the interpretations of sexual misconduct had been largely formed

by men, a socially powerful group. Men dismissed the improper actions as harmless flirting

or playful actions; if female victims did not share the same understanding, they would be

deemed as 'too tense' or 'lacking humor.' Such an interpretation shaped by men did not

capture the substantial and long-lasting harms of sexual misconduct on women; it also gave

an opening for the male perpetrators to continue their actions. Consequently, Fricker

formulates her definition of hermeneutical injustice as follows: hermeneutical injustice is "the

injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective

understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical

resources" (155).

So far, we have identified what hermeneutical injustice is and its cause, but one

question remains: why is hermeneutical injustice morally bad? First, Fricker acknowledges

that there are systemic and incidental hermeneutical injustices. This paper will only discuss

systemic hermeneutical injustice as it is more relevant. Hermeneutical injustice is systemic

when the hermeneutical marginalization translates into other social marginalization and

entails "non-participation in roles for significant hermeneutical participation" (Fricker 2007,

156). In other words, those who are hermeneutically marginalized are prone to face

marginalization in areas of other kinds of injustice. One of such marginalization may be

socio-economic, which in turn prevents hermeneutically marginalized groups from

participating in crucial activities for hermeneutical participation. Hence, systemic

hermeneutical injustice originates from the asymmetrical structural social power relations at

large, and it is a form of structural discrimination. In Fricker's account, the primary harm of

hermeneutical injustice lies in a situated hermeneutical inequality. She defines a situated

hermeneutical inequality as "the concrete situation in such that the subject is rendered unable

to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in her interests to be

able to render intelligible" (162). With the presence of structural identity prejudice in the

hermeneutical resources, hermeneutical injustice excludes marginalized groups from shaping knowledge as they are excluded qua identity. This results in the marginalized groups failing to understand and express their social experiences; epistemic resources are not sufficient for them to render these experiences communicatively intelligible. The interpretation of their social experiences is completely lacking, incomplete, biased, or distorted by the powerful (e.g., sexual harassment as flirting). The marginalized groups are unable to properly have the knowledge of their social experiences or communicate such knowledge to others.

Chapter 4: Museums Shape Knowledge as Hermeneutical Resources

The first step of applying Fricker's framework to museums is to understand how museums shape knowledge through interpretation: how do museums function as a kind of hermeneutical resource? To answer this question, let us first step back to thinking about what interpretive activities are. Luis Oliveira (2022) offers an account of what an interpretive activity is. He writes, an interpretive activity is "our conceptual engagement with our experiences, or the activity of…categorizing experience X as an experience of Y" (4). For example, the interpretive activity in Wood's case lies in categorizing the experiences of sexual advances by male colleagues as an experience of sexual harassment. A simpler example lies in us categorizing our visual experiences as ominous signs. For example, seeing a dead crow on the ground and the number thirteen at the time of the incident (e.g., 13:13), one may categorize these visual experiences as a "bad sign" or an experience of "feeling something unfortunate would occur." More generally, these basic hermeneutic activities are means for us to make sense of and understand information and our social experiences.

Interpretive activities come in two folds in museums. First, the museum staff present

the objects and the space through their own interpretive activities. Then, the visitors gain

knowledge through interpreting these interpretations. However, the former shapes the latter.

Also, an interpretive experience goes beyond information and is situated upon our

entanglement with the personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts (Falk and Dierking

2004). Namely, how we interpret information presented to us largely depends on our

relationships with the surroundings at large. A personal context includes motivations and

expectations, prior knowledge and beliefs, and choice and control (Falk and Dierking 2004).

The sociocultural context may include the interactions among social, political, and cultural

identities with the broader social environment where the museum is positioned. The physical

context contains the design and organization of the physical environment that the

interpretation occurs (Falk and Dierking 2004). For instance, I for the first time saw a

painting by James McNeill Whistler, *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks*, in

the Philadelphia Museum of Art in their exhibition of Impressionist paintings.[2] The painting

is positioned in a room filled with artworks made by Western artists who were highly

"influenced" by East Asian cultures, particularly Japanese and Chinese. When I walked into

the room (presumably in the "right" direction), the introductory writing explained how Asian

art and cultures influenced the works and aesthetic style of Impressionist artists in the

Western world. As I walked past a couple of Monet's Water Lilies, I saw another writing on

the wall explaining the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation.

Then I encountered Whistler's *The Lange Leizen*. Right next to the painting, the label wrote:

    "Whistler enthusiastically collected Asian ceramics and silks, using them as

2. For an image, see Philadelphia Museum of Art.

painting props and design inspiration. Here he depicts Irish model Joanna Hiffernan posed as if painting a porcelain jar, which strangely, already has the glossy surface of a finished product. This detail transforms the scene into a painting about painting, and about the artifice involved in European imaginings of Asia. The Dutch phrase *lange leizen* ("long Elizas") in the title refers to the tall, slender women on the jar's surface – a popular motif during China's Kangxi period. The Chinese characters on the frame, copied from the 'reign mark' inscriptions found on Chinese porcelain vessels, translate: 'Made in the Kangxin reign of the great Qing dynasty.'" (Philadelphia Museum of Art, n.d.)[3]

The label signifies how the museums present information based on the staff's interpretations. They categorize Joanna Hiffernan's portrayal in the painting as "painting a porcelain jar" and the painting as Whistler's "European imaginings of Asian" as well as the jar motifs as "*lange leizen*" in the title. In addition, they categorize the painting as belonging to Impressionist art that was influenced by Asian cultures and within the discussion of cultural appropriation or appreciation.

I formed knowledge about the painting through these interpretations and the three contexts provided by Falk and Dierking (2004). My personal context involved my previous knowledge of Asian art, Impressionism, and Whistler as a male Caucasian artist. I also knew some historical background about the artistic movements of Orientalism and Japonisme; these movements integrated Asian cultural and artistic styles into Western art and sometimes portrayed Asian cultures in an "exotic" way. My motivation was akin to a common visitor who wanted to see what things the museum had. The sociocultural context included my identity as a Chinese woman and the social group's subordinate place in a male and Caucasian-dominant society. The physical context then included the spatial arrangement of the room and the museum at large. For example, this painting is placed in a specialized space

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3. The content of the label quoted here is based on a photo I took during my visit. The text is not duplicated elsewhere. For an alternative official description, see the cited source.

for Impressionist art influenced by Asian cultures, adjacent to the cultural appropriation or appreciation writing. The room is located on the second floor while the East Asian art exhibition is placed on the third floor amid more European art. With the information gained from the museum space and the painting itself, I interpreted the painting as an example of Whistler's Eurocentric fantasy about Asian culture that embodied cultural appropriation shown in Chapter 2.

As we have seen from Chapter 2, museums present information in a deliberate and calculated way. For each object, the location of its display, the design of its display, the labels, and the interior design of the space implicitly and explicitly signal what and how visitors learn about the object. These signals are the results of the museum staff's interpretations backed by the three kinds of contexts. They also operate under the backdrop of history, the current political and scholarly environments, and the visitors' personal context. Curators interpret and form an understanding of the object, and this leads to their decision of how the museum presents the object. In the example, they may first study a collection of Impressionist paintings that contained Asian artistic and cultural elements: the historical background of why such a movement emerged, what and why Asian elements were in the artworks, the artists' motivations and executions… Then, they interpret the information through the lens of their own sociopolitical and sociocultural identities as well as beliefs. For instance, a White male curator may not categorize Whistler's *The Lange Leizen* as an example of cultural appropriation, while an Asian female curator may interpret Whistler's use of a white woman in kimono as an objectification of Asian cultures. Using the information, the curators determine the values of the painting and whether to include it in the exhibition. They also

conclude how to arrange the space and displays based on what they consider fit: where the collection should locate in the museum, e.g., within the Impressionist exhibition, what and where introductory writing should be on the walls, the orders of the artworks within the room, what lighting should they employ for the room, etc.

For the visitors, with the information they perceive, combined with their personal interpretation, they arrive at new understanding and knowledge. This perceived information, as argued, is already framed following the museum staff's interpretations. Hence, the interpretation and knowledge gained from such information may be inevitably and unnoticeably distorted. For example, when a visitor sees a painting, she learns about the painting, the subject matter, and the artist through the painting itself, the labels and information (e.g., brochures) provided by the staff, the position of the painting in the room, the association between the position and other objects in the room, the lighting, etc. If the painting's label contains a star, it may mean that this painting is a masterpiece and extremely valuable; if the painting is positioned in the middle of the room with spotlights, it may suggest that it is more worth seeing or "important" than all other objects in the room. If the painting is within a Chinese art exhibition, then one may interpret the painting as a demonstration of Chinese art. More broadly, if the exhibition room is larger and in the center of the museum, this layout implicitly communicates to the visitor that this exhibition is of greater significance than others. All this information collectively facilitates the visitor's interpretive activities that produce knowledge about the painting and the larger context it represents.

In addition to museums serving as hermeneutical resources for interpretive activities,

Arianna Falbo (2022) argues that hermeneutical resources carry two functions: interpretive and productive. The interpretive function parallels Fricker's account in which hermeneutical resources contain a pool of concepts and ideas that facilitate people to make sense of their social experiences. The productive function "organize[s] members of society and cast them into certain roles and relations with expected behaviors" (348). Given the additional function, hermeneutical resources "sustain, normalize, and justify oppressive social practices and unjust social arrangements" (348). This productive function of hermeneutical resources supports that museums offer a pool of concepts for interpretive activities based on the results of the staff's interpretive activities. Museums serve as an example of how hermeneutical resources are created and contribute to the social imagination "against the backdrop of longstanding and often deeply rooted conceptual schemes" (348).

Recall in Chapter 1, the museums in the 18th Century largely stemmed from courtly collections being open to the public. At the time, what it meant to be princes and aristocrats was collectively understood as the possession of wealth and prestige; and it was a part of such understanding that princes and aristocrats needed to display such possession to the public for moral and aesthetic enlightenment. Hence, each object in the museums reflected this collective understanding. The rare and valuable objects were largely unobtainable by the general public, and they signified the social prestige and wealth the princes accumulated. By displaying them, the princes also reinforced the social imagination that they were the ones with sophisticated taste, worthy of intellectual cultivation. Moreover, while these museums purported to be open to the public, the fraction of the public deemed deserving of viewing the valuable objects was limited. The visitors needed to possess a certain degree of wealth,

literacy, and sophisticated etiquette paralleled the aristocrats. This sense of selectiveness echoed the social convention that only people with sufficient social standing were capable of obtaining an education. Hence, museums sustained and normalized the collective understanding regarding the social power dynamics at large.

Chapter 5: Hermeneutical Injustice in Museums

With the backdrop of Fricker's account, let us proceed to argue that museums reinforce hermeneutical injustice as distorted hermeneutical resources; this distortion originates from them being a space shaped by the socially dominant and powerful groups. As argued in Chapter 4, museums act as hermeneutical resources that shape one's knowledge and understanding of the social experiences related to her social identities. Every object and spatial arrangement reflects the social imagination about cultures, races, and identities. Fricker (2007) recognizes that the social imagination contains prejudicial stereotypes that asymmetrically harm socially powerless groups. Hence, museums as hermeneutical resources sustain and normalize such oppression at large, especially when they operate under a façade of objectivity as argued by Eaton and Gaskell (2009). Moreover, museums are shaped by people within the socially dominant groups, such as the staff, the board and trustees, and the donators; they control the content in such resources and how it is communicated to the visitors. This reflects the lack of hermeneutical participation from marginalized groups in shaping the collective hermeneutical resources.

First, objects in museums reflect and sustain distorted prejudicial stereotypes in the social imagination. Consider the Whistler painting again. In the painting, the elements of

Asian cultures, such as kimonos, Chinese porcelain jars, and Chinese calligraphy sets, reinforce the collective understanding of what it meant to be Asian at the time. Moreover, Whistler opted for a Caucasian woman rather than an Asian person to associate with Asian cultural motifs, and the composition of the painting was also of a Western style. These factors reflected the prevailing social imagination that European cultures held a dominant position in the world, while Asian cultures were deemed subordinate. Therefore, the display of Whistler's painting in the museum sustains and normalizes the colonial thinking from that time; it also justifies the long-lasting negative impacts of the misrepresentation of Asian cultures.

This echoes an account of oppressive things put forward by Liao and Huebner (2021). Although Liao and Huebner do not directly touch on hermeneutical injustice, their argument helps explain why objects in museums can be oppressive. This oppressive nature reflects and contributes to the prejudicial and harmful stereotype of marginalized groups. Liao and Huebner (2021) emphasize that material artifacts and spatial environments can be racially oppressive if they "partially constitute the stability and structure of this racial frame, while also shaping the habits of attention and categorization and the attitudes that are typically adopted by people who live and act within this racial frame" (7). Specifically, material things have a productive function "in sustaining the human-environment mappings that shape thought and action, as well as the overlapping forms of psychological, social, and physical structures that collectively constitute a cognitive niche" (11). Oppressive things shape and sustain racial discrimination and prejudices by invoking and normalizing racist associations, imaginings, and even behaviors. To understand how oppressive things carry out such effects,

we first need to know what oppressive things are.

Oppressive things are embedded with normative biases that exceed statistical biases. Oppressive things are biased not just because they happen to favor one social group over another statistically speaking: this bias stems from the larger and more persistent social phenomena and conventions of racist thinking. Liao and Huebner (2021) demonstrate this through comparing three examples: flipping coins, slot machines, and objects with right-handedness bias. If we flip a coin and it consistently lands on one side, that is a statistical bias that is not normatively significant. On the other hand, consider a slot machine in a casino that never produces rewards. Although it is statistically biased, a slot machine is situated under a broader system in which there exists asymmetrical power dynamics that benefit the casino and harm the players; this makes the bias more normatively significant. However, objects with right-handedness bias are "further entangled with a wide-ranging set of psychological and social phenomena" in which right-handedness is considered normal and left-handed people are deviations from this norm (9). Therefore, for things to be oppressive, they contain normatively significant bias that is shaped by the psychological and social components of systemic oppression.

Liao and Huebner (2021) lay out three necessary conditions for oppressive things: 1) they must be biased in the same direction as the oppressive system, 2) they are "causally embedded" in the oppressive system, and 3) they not only are the products of oppressive psychological processes and social structures but also guide and contribute to such systems (10). On this ground, there are oppressive things in museums that are embedded with negative prejudicial stereotypes and sustain them in the social imagination.

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For example, until two years ago, the objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum had been

displayed with old labels created by the previous museum staff in the 19th and the 20th

Century. Some of these labels contained phrases that reflected negative prejudicial

stereotypes against non-European cultures, such as "primitive adaptions of European

materials as tools" or "modern savage" (Pitt Rivers Museum, n.d.). These physical objects

then reflected the previous Eurocentric supremacy in the social imagination and how it has

penetrated and passed down to contemporary museums. The labels treated European cultures

as normal while non-European cultures as deviations, and so "primitive." The museum was

first organized under the widely adopted premise that non-European civilizations lacked the

agency for development without European interference, and these labels mirrored such social

imagination and the prejudicial stereotypes against these groups. The oppressive nature of

these labels is causally embedded in the conventions of Eurocentric thinking and social

structures. Additionally, when visitors see these labels, they are more likely to associate the

objects with the negative stereotype of non-European cultures as "primitive"; they also are

more prone to adopt such stereotype that carries legacy into the present social imagination.

Since museums operate under the façade of objectivity, visitors are more likely to treat such

association as a normalized mode of thinking. Similarly, the museum's previous display of

human remains from non-European and indigenous cultures echoes the same line of thinking.

The military forcible obtained these human remains from the indigenous communities during

the British Imperialist regimes. By displaying them, the museum treated these human remains

as if displaying animal specimens. It dehumanized and dismissed the dignity of these non-

European cultures. Some of these human remains were tsantsas, these were shrunken heads

made by the Shuar and Achuar people from Ecuador and Peru. They were displayed with labels saying, 'Treatment of Dead Enemies,' when they were a spiritual ritual served to honor the past clan leaders. The misrepresentation of the tsantsas reinforced the pre-existing prejudicial stereotype of these indigenous communities as "barbaric" and "headhunters" (Batty 2020). Hence, as hermeneutical resources, museums reflect a distorted and heighten the negative prejudicial stereotypes within the social imagination.

Furthermore, such distortions within museums as hermeneutical resources are shaped by the socially powerful. These dominant groups portray a distorted and prejudicial interpretation of marginalized groups and their social experiences. First, in many museums, the staff is mainly composed of socially powerful groups. Sweeney, Dressel, and Harkins (2022) investigated the staff demographic within 328 museums in the U.S. From 2015 to 2022, the people of color (POC) within museum staff have grown from 27% to 36%. Amongst those who hold leadership positions, there are 27% POC in 2022, compared to 18% in 2015. 23% of those who oversee collections are POC in 2022. Despite the growth, the demographics remain Caucasian-dominated. These data reflect the phenomenon that the hermeneutical shapers in museums are those who enjoy some kind of social identity power. These statistics carry some degree of normative significance. As hermeneutical resources, these numbers show how hermeneutical participation is primarily composed of the socially dominant groups and excludes sufficient engagement from the marginalized groups. As museums are hermeneutical resources for understanding the social experiences of various groups, the dominance of socially powerful groups in composing such resources poses a threat to an accurate presentation of marginalized groups. This accurate presentation is

necessary for all people to make sense of the social experiences of marginalized groups who are systemically harmed by other forms of injustice.

Moreover, museums operate under the backdrop of absolute socio-epistemic authority as discussed in Part I. Since museums enjoy public credibility and authority as public institutions, they are perceived as objective by the visitors, despite the contents they communicate being based upon the staff's interpretations. Therefore, when museums conceal traces of illegal acquisitions, colonialism, and racism, it is difficult for visitors to detect these problematic executions as many would not question what the labels display. If an object is acquired through Western colonialism but the museum does not present such information, the social group whom the object represents is susceptible to a lacuna in the collective understanding of their social experiences. One such example is the provenance gaps of Nazi-looted art. In Chapter 1, I have indicated that many museums across the world have knowingly purchased Nazi-looted art; to conceal the traces of questionable acquisitions, the staff would choose to forge or leave a gap in the provenance. However, such a gap in the provenance reflects a gap within the collective hermeneutical resources. The lacuna lies in the lacking notion of looting. For many Jewish victims that were subject to Nazi art plunder, many would consider their art lost, destroyed, or stolen. Partially, this is because those museums that purchase Nazi-looted art shape the collective understanding of looted art in a way that benefits them. By concealing a part of questionable provenance, the museums are able to keep those artworks to boost their prestige. However, by doing so, this lacuna in the hermeneutical resources significantly disadvantages the Jewish group who becomes unable to fully understand their experiences during WWII.

Similarly, museum staff create lacunas in museums as hermeneutical resources when presenting non-European cultures. This is largely shown by the museum's curation of non-European art and artifacts. For example, in the MET's Asian Art exhibition, out of over 2000 objects on display, only 67 of them were from the 20th century and later ("Search the Collection," n.d.).[4] Museum staff intentionally creates an association that reduces Asian art and cultures as if they are frozen in the "ancient" period. Hence, there is a lacuna being formed for people trying to understand what contemporary Asian experiences and cultures look like. For the Modern and Contemporary Art exhibition, there are fewer than 20 objects from Asia, but over 300 objects from Western cultures. This comparison indicates that the museum staff organizes the exhibition with a Eurocentric backdrop that significantly limits visitors' understanding of Asian social groups' experiences. In addition, Part I has indicated that the physical layouts of museums tend to feature displays of Europe and Western art before Asian art. Collectively, it becomes clear that the museum staff intentionally or subconsciously consider European standards as the norm that sets the standard of beauty; Asian and other non-European art are considered deviations from the European standards and only served as an auxiliary to the latter. Hence, when visitors wish to make sense of non-European groups' social experiences, there exists a lacuna in which non-European cultures cannot be understood without the backdrop of European norms and influences. Consequently, this lacuna disproportionately harms non-European groups and marginalizes them from shaping the hermeneutical resources as museums. In contrast, the gap favors European and Caucasian-centered narratives in understanding non-European social experiences.

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4. This analysis is based on surveying the online database on the MET's website in April 2023. The database investigation focused on the objects on display. Hence, the data shown here may be subject to database updates.

Part III: Responses to Lingering Questions

So far, we have identified how a museum is an oppressive space as it is a distorted hermeneutical resource shaped by the socially dominant to reinforce hermeneutical injustice. In this final part, I will make crucial additional commentaries on this argument by responding to two lingering questions. First, are non-hegemonic [i.e., subaltern in Eaton and Gaskell (2009)] museums, such as indigenous museums, subject to hermeneutical injustice? Second, Is there any limitation to the lacuna-centered analysis of hermeneutical injustice in museums? If there is, what are some complementary and compatible views that mitigate such limitations?

Chapter 6: Indigenous Museums as Reinforcers and Correctors

The answer to the first question regarding the scope in which we can apply the hermeneutical injustice framework is conditionally affirmative: yes, non-hegemonic museums, such as indigenous museums, can be subjected to hermeneutical injustice. However, this is largely attributed to the premise in my argument regarding who shape the non-hegemonic museums and if the interpretations they bring are accurate and free of distortion. I will formulate this argument by examining indigenous museums, but the points here can be extended to any ethnographic museums that represent non-hegemonic groups. The precise definition of an indigenous museum is heavily debated (see Stanley 2008). For the sake of the discussion to capture a more complete array of the common perception of what an indigenous museum is, I would like to categorize indigenous museums into two kinds: mainstream ethnographic museums (e.g., Smithsonian Institution's National Museum

of the American Indian or NMAI) and tribal museums (e.g., Makah Cultural and Research Center in Chapter 1). Specifically, mainstream ethnographic museums heavily operate under a Western framework when representing indigenous communities even though they actively engage with these communities. Tribal museums, on the other hand, "contest and critique colonial notions of…history that have been so disempowering to tribal nations" and "must serve the varied needs of Indigenous communities (Child 2009, 251). On this ground, I argue that ethnographic museums are more likely to reinforce hermeneutical injustice than tribal museums.

Ethnographic museums are shaped by the socially dominant groups and the involvement of Native communities is limited and restricted to the Western approaches. Consider NMAI, which builds its collection largely from the Gustave Heye Museum of the American Indian (MAI). MAI was an ethnographic museum established in 1916, and many objects in its collection were acquired through excavations and trades of Native ancestral sites without permission. MAI largely neglected inputs from indigenous employees and prioritized those of museum professionals with education in traditional curatorial methods (Brady 2009). In 1989, the collection was transferred to Smithsonian Institution to establish NMAI as an initiative to incorporate Native narrative in telling American history and nationalism. NMAI has been aiming to actively involve Native communities in recontextualizing the collection, especially given that it possesses the largest number of objects from Native communities. However, its efforts were much shaped and contained under Heye's legacy and a Western framework. Heye privileged objects that were considered exemplars of rarity and age, overemphasizing artifacts that upheld Western aesthetic

standards rather than their cultural or historical values. This ideology also carried into

NAMI's curation practices. From 1970 to 2007, 8,500 objects out of over 250,000 in the

collection have been published or exhibited (Brady 2009). Moreover, NAMI's engagement

with tribal communities was largely limited to elders. The elders' traditional knowledge can

provide a literal reading of objects and demonstrate how traditional culture is lived today.

However, this "has [resulted] in an uncomfortable nostalgia that implies that Native people

live only through reference to tradition and must constantly explain how their present-day

lives remain traditional" (McMullen 2009, 82). Combined with the façade of objectivity that

the museum enjoys in presenting what is worthy of seeing, these practices have produced

"freezing images of Native culture that retain their potency for consumption and replication,"

a residual from the common practice for collecting Western antiquities (McMullen 2009, 84).

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that NMAI has a different constituency and

audience. The former refers to the indigenous peoples who can use the space to tell their

voices, while the latter refers to the millions of largely non-indigenous visitors. NMAI differs

from a tribal museum that locates near the indigenous communities that serve as both

contextualization and also audience; it is located distant from the homes of the Native people

(Brady 2009). This lack of engagement is also translated into their organizational and display

approach. The objects are "grouped according to themes like 'beadwork' and 'projectile

points,'" and this is problematic because the objects have been removed from their original

cultural contexts (Brady 2009, 144). Additionally, NMAI continues to use dioramas and life-

size mannequins in displays. This practice illustrates an example of community curators

presenting themselves under the traditional Western museum framework (Brady 2009).

European museums commonly utilized expressionless dioramas and mannequins when representing minority or powerless groups. By duplicating such practice, NMAI imposes a distorted and misleading representation of the Native peoples as a vanishing group; this further perpetuates the harmful stereotypes already deeply entrenched in the social imagination. NMAI, in the virtue of being an indigenous museum, aims to challenge such misrepresentation; but its use of dioramas and mannequins directly undermines this objective. Collectively, NMAI serves as a hermeneutical resource for people to understand the social experiences of the Native communities. However, it is a resource that contains distortions and reflects the prejudices against the people that it intends to represent. This is attributed to the phenomenon that NMAI is shaped by the residual legacies from the long-standing European or Western frameworks in museum practices. Consequently, this creates a lacuna that neglects and omits the conceptualization of Native cultures and history absent of Eurocentric ideals.

On the other hand, tribal museums may hint at examples of how museums could act as a corrective force to mitigate the effects of hermeneutical injustice. Amy Lonetree (2009) stresses that NMAI fails to create an accurate and authentic account of the Native communities as it fails to tell the hard truth of colonialization. Hence, NMAI cannot frame itself as a decolonizing museum when it does not recognize the history and long-lasting effects of colonialization. In her study of three permeant galleries at NMAI opened from 2004 to 2023, *Our Peoples*, *Our Universes*, and *Our Lives*, Lonetree (2008) found that the stories presented in these exhibitions underscored indigenous communities' survival without providing the necessary context for such survivance. The justification for the lacking context stemmed from the founding director, Richard West Jr., who stated that the disastrous times of

war and oppression were only a very small portion of Native history; however, there also lacked extensive treatment for pre-Columbian history (Lonetree 2008). Moreover, in telling the history of colonialization, the exhibition employed an abstract storytelling approach. Lonetree recounts that under the number "1491," there was a case containing "figurines that are there to supposedly represent the diversity of tribal nations before contact" followed by cases with "weapons such as swords and guns, which one could assume were used to plunder" (314). The display lacked explicit narrations accounting for the occurred events and poses a challenge to the museum's purpose. The inadequate truth-telling undermines the educational aim of the exhibitions, as the audience carries "a willed ignorance" of the mistreatment and oppressive history of the indigenous people (315). Echoing the points made above, this argument supports the claim that NMAI is framed by the oppressive legacies of the socially dominant groups. Thus, it provides a gapped resource for understanding Native peoples' experiences by omitting, intentionally or not, the traces of White colonialization.

Moreover, Lonetree (2009) provides a case study of Saginaw Chippewa's Ziibiwing Center for Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways as an effective example of a tribal museum that combats hermeneutical injustice. The Ziibiwing Center organizes its exhibitions in a theme-centered approach that features multimedia presentations with storytelling and first-person voice. Its permanent exhibition presents the history from precontact living to the contemporary issues and efforts facing the legacy of colonialization. In particular, the museum more closely presents an Indigenous understanding of history by incorporating oral tradition. Utilizing prophecies, a part of the Anishinabe people's oral tradition, the museum organizes the display about the history of the Native communities by providing both texts and

audio. This manner of arrangement better presents the historical materials in a tribally based

perspective, and it allows the visitors to engage with the materials empathetically and

contextually. Moreover, the exhibition highlights the tribe's survival and resilience in battling

colonialization. Text panels, labels, and multimedia displays openly discuss how

colonialization manifested in the community: the evidence of European contacts, the

government's forceful treaties, and the intergenerational trauma connecting present problems

with the past. By emphasizing contemporary survivance, the museum sets out to

acknowledge that there currently exist social issues connected to colonialization and that the

Native community continues to combat them and survive (Lonetree 2008). Here we see that

the Ziibiwing Center is another hermeneutical resource for understanding Native people's

social experience. In contrast to NMAI, the Ziibiwing Center directly challenges the

distortion that the socially dominant (i.e., powerful European) have created. The museum

hopes to mitigate the lacuna resulting from the hermeneutical marginalization of the Native

communities by offering concepts and ideas to understand the history from an indigenous

perspective. The museum also directly contests the prejudicial stereotypes in the social

imagination that portrays the Native peoples as a disappearing group. The socially dominant

groups who inherited the legacy of colonialization shaped these stereotypes for concealing

the traces of their harmful actions. This phenomenon created lacunas within the collective

hermeneutical resources that impede one's understanding of Native peoples' experiences.

However, the Ziibiwing Center and many other tribal centers are examples of corrective

forces that hope to fill these gaps and remedy the distortions and bias within the

hermeneutical resources.

Chapter 7: Alternative and Supplementary Accounts of Hermeneutical Injustice

Let us turn to the second question responding to the limitations of Fricker's framework of hermeneutical injustice. The lacuna-centered analysis faces limitations as it fails to consider the cases in which hermeneutical injustice persists even with adequate resources. In particular, I will provide two accounts of alternative and supplementary views: Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (2012)'s willful hermeneutical ignorance and Arianna Falbo (2022)'s productive hermeneutical injustice.

I will first explain Falbo (2022)'s account of hermeneutical injustice from the productive function of hermeneutical resources and how it applies to museum practices. It is crucial to note that Falbo does not dismiss the lacuna-centered analysis stemming from the interpretive function of hermeneutical resources; her account is supplementary to Fricker's account in order to capture a more complete framework of hermeneutical injustice. As we have established in Chapter 4, hermeneutical resources have two functions: interpretive and productive. Recall that the productive function "organize[s] members of society and cast them into certain roles and relations with expected behaviors," so hermeneutical resources "sustain, normalize, and justify oppressive social practices and unjust social arrangements" (348). Given this definition, Falbo states that there are also two kinds of hermeneutical injustice: negative and positive. The negative hermeneutical injustice echoes Fricker's account in which there exists a lacuna within hermeneutical resources and so restrains the interpretive function. The positive hermeneutical injustice stems from the failure or dysfunction of the productive function. In this case, the necessary concepts to understand

one's social experiences are readily available in the hermeneutical resources, but the application of the concepts is limited. Specifically, there is a distinction between the acquisition and the application of a concept, and acquisition does not always translate into a proper application. The acquisition means the initial processing or grasp of a concept, while the application refers to the categorization of some experience as the concept. For instance, one may grasp the concept of 'mammals' but fail to accurately apply it to a whale. When one acquires the concept, 'mammals,' she may have a common association of 'mammals' with animals with limbs inhabiting lands, but a whale is often associated with living in the ocean and having no legs or arms. As a result, this may lead a person to fail to identify a whale as a mammal even though she can accurately identify humans, cats, and rats as mammals.

Applying this to the context of social epistemology, Falbo claims that although the needed concepts are available in the collective hermeneutical resources, one may fail to apply them in socially significant contexts. Such a failure occurs because there are other distorting concepts that "defeat or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept" (352). Falbo demonstrates this with a pair of concepts, 'golden boy' and 'rapist.' In the case in which a golden boy rapes someone, people would fail to apply the concept 'rapist' to the golden boy. 'Golden boy' serves as a distorting concept that defeats and prevents the application of 'rapist.' Note that this clash is conditioned upon social contexts and conventions. 'Golden boy' is conventionally associated with white males who are athletic, privileged, wealthy, and well-educated, while 'rapist' is associated with being strange, a monster, or even mentally unwell. Hence, the concept of 'golden boy' supports "the legitimization of oppressive social practices, namely, practices that sustain and reinforce elite,

white, male dominance by portraying such men as incapable of wrongdoing, and hence, as incapable of rape" (352). Although the concepts of 'golden boy' and 'rapist' are available in the hermeneutical resources (i.e., the victim is able to make sense of the painful social experience, so there is no lacuna), the community structurally fails to apply 'rapist' accurately to a golden boy. Accordingly, positive hermeneutical injustice occurs when "the presence of oppressive and distorting concepts that crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept" (354). Hermeneutical marginalization still plays an important role in positive hermeneutical injustice; this role extends from the initial shaping of the hermeneutical resources to the subsequent revision and reinforcement of the resources in social contexts. For example, a female victim's status as a knower and giver of knowledge is significantly limited as the perpetrator being a golden boy, an oppressive concept, suppresses the accurate application of 'rapist.' In other words, other people in this context, such as bystanders, judges, or media, do not believe that a golden boy can be a rapist, failing to accurately apply the latter concept to someone identified with the former concept. This failed communication renders the female victim significantly disadvantaged as the giver of knowledge regarding her social experience.

Under this account, museums can be reinforcers of positive hermeneutical injustice. Consider the hermeneutical clash between 'woman artist' and 'master.' The concept of 'master' is commonly associated with extremely well-accomplished artists who have produced culturally valuable artworks, such as Da Vinci and the Mona Lisa. In particular, masters are worthy of being displayed by museums that set and operate under the standards of what is considered "good" art. The concept of 'master' is readily available in the collective

hermeneutical resources for decades. Since the Renaissance, many artists have been classified as masters worthy of being in prestigious museums. However, how many female artists who are masters does a common museum visitor know? The simple answer is that we know significantly fewer female art masters than male art masters. Female artists are just as capable to be called masters, as demonstrated by world-renowned female artists such as Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, and Cindy Sherman. Why is it that we fail to apply the concept 'master' to female artists? The reason lies in the distortion in 'master' that arises from the systemic and historical oppression against women as a marginalized social group. Until the 20th Century, art academies and museums significantly restricted women's access and eligibility for education and exhibitions. Even in the present, such limitations continue. Based on a survey that investigates 31 U.S. museums from 2008 to 2000, only 11 percent of acquisitions and 14.9 percent of exhibitions were of work by women artists (Halperin and Burns 2022). Museums as hermeneutical resources readily contain works of female artists and masters, but people fail to apply 'master' to woman artists. The underrepresentation of female artists in museums reflects the structural failure of society to properly attribute 'masters' to 'woman artists.' Museums as shaped by the socially dominant, particularly white men, reinforce the systemic oppression of women at large. In part, the product function can mitigate the harm of systemic oppression; however, museums' productive function is diminished as the content they display also sustain the asymmetrical social dynamics. Therefore, museums are subject to reinforcing both negative and positive hermeneutical injustice.

Another account that can bring attention to the limitation of Fricker's account is Gaile Pohlhaus (2012) who argues that Fricker has neglected the hermeneutical injustice rising

from the dialect relationship between situatedness and interdependence. Situatedness refers to the social position that a knower has based on the structural social power dynamics. Interdependence refers to the collective hermeneutical resources that are maintained through social relations. In particular, the collective hermeneutical resources that most users use to understand social experiences are primarily shaped by the socially dominant. Echoing Fricker's view, Pohlhaus notes that the extent to which the hermeneutical resources account for one's social experiences varies based on the person's social position. A marginalized knower is more likely to find lacunas in the collective resources for understanding her experiences than a socially powerful knower; one's situatedness allows some to develop and spread the hermeneutical resources more easily than others. However, the key difference between Pohlhaus' account and Fricker's view is that marginalized groups could form the needed concepts and hermeneutical resources within their situatedness, but they often fail to communicate them properly as the socially powerful knowers dismiss these concepts. The marginalized group has the necessary concept to make sense of their social experiences, but the hermeneutical injustice occurs when the dominantly situated knowers willfully ignore or refuse to acquire these concepts. Consequently, this willful ignorance sustains the lacunas in the collective hermeneutical resources, significantly harming marginalized groups. The marginalized knowers must be aware of the dominant groups' social experiences, but the dominant groups do not need to understand the social experiences of the marginalized. This imbalance is largely attributed to the unequal power in shaping the collective hermeneutical resources. The socially dominant have more power in shaping the hermeneutical resources than the marginalized. Thus, Pohlhaus' willful hermeneutical ignorance emphasizes the

dominant's willful dismissal of the concepts created by the marginalized. The harm that stems from this kind of hermeneutical injustice is that "non-dominantly situated people often find their meanings and communicative contributions not taken seriously, improperly heard, deemed deficient, reinterpreted, distorted, and too quickly dismissed, and in these ways they are hermeneutically disrespected and wronged" (Medina 2017, 44).

Following Pohlhaus' account, museums as a kind of hermeneutical resources shaped by the socially dominant fail to acquire or willfully ignore concepts that the marginalized groups have created for understanding their social experiences. Recall the case of Nazi-looted art in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. The addition of Pohlhaus' account can help provide a more complete explanation of how museums reinforce hermeneutical injustice in this case. The provenance gaps of looted art not only reflect what is missing in the collective hermeneutical resources, but how the concept is absent. One may argue that the concept of "looting" is absent in the collective hermeneutical resources, but it is present in the resources used by the Jewish victims. In other words, the Jewish victims, as a marginalized group, readily have the notion of looting available to understand their social experiences during WWII. However, the socially dominant staff in museums refuse to admit or acquire this concept. In the MoMA's case detailed in Chapter 1, it was clear that the Jewish victims whose Groz paintings were plundered by the Nazis knew that their properties were looted, not merely stolen. They attempted to communicate such a concept to MoMA in the hopes of retrieving the artworks. However, despite the evidence in the defendants' appeals, the staff at MoMA refused to admit and dismissed that these paintings were looted and questionably acquired. These staff were more dominantly situated and had more power in shaping the hermeneutical resource that

was the museum; they willfully ignored the marginalized group's efforts in communicating the concept of "looting," as they hoped to sustain the asymmetrical power advantage. Therefore, Pohlhaus' willful hermeneutical ignorance provides a supplementary and compatible explanation of how museums sustain hermeneutical injustice at large.

In this final part, I have replied to two crucial questions regarding the argument made in Part II. I have established that non-hegemonic museums can be susceptible to reinforcing hermeneutical injustice shown in the case of NMAI. In contrast, tribal museums like the Ziibiwing Center can serve as a restorative and corrective hermeneutical resource for mitigating hermeneutical injustice. The crucial factor lies in who shapes non-hegemonic museums and whether the interpretations presented through spatial elements contain prejudicial stereotypes. Moreover, I have also considered the limitations of lacuna-centered analysis of hermeneutical injustice; Fricker's account neglects the persistence of injustice when there no gap is present in the hermeneutical resources. On this basis, Falbo (2022) and Pohlhaus (2012) offer two alternative and supplementary views from positive hermeneutical injustice and willful ignorance. Their frameworks remain applicable in explaining how museums sustain hermeneutical injustice. From this, we should note that these additional views support that hermeneutical injustice as a framework can be effectively employed to explain why museums are oppressive spaces.

Conclusion

The thesis began with an account showing how museums have historically been oppressive spaces serving to sustain the social power imbalance. The arguments from museums being white sanctuaries and promoting cultural appropriation offer two clear accounts of how such oppressive nature manifests and remains within contemporary museum practices. However, these two accounts are in need of a systematic explanation of the underlying cause of why museums are oppressive spaces in the first place. To provide an answer to this question, in Part II, I formulated an argument contending that museums reinforce hermeneutical injustice as they are distorted hermeneutical resources shaped by the socially powerful. Museums shape knowledge through interpretive activities of the staff, primarily composed of the socially powerful, and the larger social conventions shaped by the socially powerful. The organization of objects and spatial elements within a museum reflects the prejudicial stereotypes against marginalized groups within the social imagination; they present and spread a distorted image of the social experiences of marginalized groups. Consequently, these factors generate lacunas within the hermeneutical resources that are the museums and significantly sustain the powerlessness of the marginalized. In Part III, I then showed that non-hegemonic museums can either reinforce such hermeneutical injustice or become a corrective force depending on who shape the museums and whether the interpretations presented are distorted. In addition, I also offered two alternative accounts to the lacuna-centered analysis of hermeneutical injustice and demonstrated their applications in museum practices.

In conclusion, with this thesis, I hope to have offered an account that hermeneutical injustice provides a convincing explanation of why museums are oppressive spaces. This may bring forth novel future suggestions for corrective and reformative actions and frameworks that alleviate the oppressive nature of museums. I recognize that there are alternative explanations of epistemic injustice for museums being oppressive spaces, such as the argument in Andreas Pantazatos (2017) from the participant perspective of epistemic injustice. Museums as an epistemic resource are subject to various forms of epistemic injustice, and my account here offers one explanation. Overall, the discussions that apply epistemic injustice to museum practices are crucial for understanding how museums, as one of the most widely used resources for knowledge, shape our knowledge about the social experiences of each other. Such power museums carry cannot go without careful examination as they can become a powerful resource for reformative projects improving the social injustice at large.

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