MAKING FOR MUSEUMS, COMMISSIONING LIVING CULTURES: A STUDY OF THE 'HINDU SHRINE' PROJECT AT BRIGHTON MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY AND THE 'REKINDLE' VIDEO SERIES AT MANCHESTER MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

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Commissioning Source Community Artists and Makers

The commissioning of source community artists and makers has a long and established place in museum ethnographic collecting.[1] As Chantal Knowles pointed out in the pages of this journal in 2003:

> Commissioning items for collections goes right back to the first collectors: anthropological fieldworkers, working within the theory of salvage ethnography, obsessed over collecting 'complete' or 'representative' collections and [were] frequent commissioners of items. The artefacts they procured may have been made in order to replicate an artefact that was already obsolete, or to acquire a 'pristine' or unused version of something they had seen, or even to obtain scale models of large items that they could not hope to ship home. (Knowles 2003: 57).

The contemporary commissioning of source community artists, from local makers to well-known conceptualists such as Fred Wilson, may usefully be considered in relation to this legacy. For many of the issues pertaining to the early commissioning practices apply to recent activities involving source community artists and museums. In this context, however, it is also important to consider the influence of the act of commissioning itself.

Knowledge of commissioning practices is informed by either traditional museum collecting, which often included commissioning makers to complete collections, or by new ideas and understandings of the sociopolitical theories of multiculturalism that have the aim of presenting cultural diversity. What is striking is that within ethnographic exhibitions the two influences often coexist, resulting in the juxtaposition of nineteenth-century collecting practices and late twentieth-century notions of multiculturalism. In line with either practice, a

demand can be created for certain items or ritualistic performances that might otherwise have slipped into obscurity, because artists and makers respond to the external influence of the commissioner. Consequently, items and ritualistic performances previously considered obsolete can end up being publicly displayed as commonly practised and used to illustrate, inaccurately, a living culture and a people.[2] Yet, implicit in the commissioning practice is the assumption of a substantial level of authenticity, manifest in both the commissioned product and the involvement with source communities. The work commissioned, however, can be more accurately considered as a product of the 'contact' between commissioner and maker, artist, or performer. This 'contact' stages a renegotiation of power relationships within the context of an existing 'contact history'; that is, a history of trade, expansion, and imperialism.[3] The contact, in this context, is almost a therapeutic process, manifest in the preoccupation with 'living culture' (see Kreps 2003: 149–52) and 'intangible heritage'.[4] These concepts have entered into current museum practice and can be considered as an articulation of the twenty-first-century commitment to and pursuit of authenticity. Interestingly, the search for authenticity is at once a nineteenth-century mission and a late twentieth- and twenty-first-century preoccupation. The longevity and currency of 'authenticity' was illustrated in an article in a recent issue of the *Museums Journal* in which Felicity Heywood (2009: 27) states, 'it is clear that the main benefit to the museum in working with indigenous individuals or groups is to bring authenticity to the collections'. The very presence of indigenous people in the museum is thought to convey authenticity and credibility, lending kudos to the collections and the museum.

Art and Interpretation: Diversifying Histories

Artists have revealed the ways that museums function as political institutions.[5] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the neutrality of both the 'white cube' and the 'ethnographic exhibition' was contested. For example, Hans Haacke's installations *On Social Grease* (1975) and *Metro Mobiltan* (1985) emphasized the political nature of the funding and management of major art museums, whereas in his *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content and the Context of Art* (1987) Fred Wilson illustrated the effect of gallery context by simultaneously exhibiting contemporary art in three distinct gallery spaces: an ethnographic gallery, a salon, and a white cube.

Fred Wilson has become one of the best-known artists working with museums. From the early 1990s, he has frequently been commissioned to create, curate, and install site-specific interventions.[6] Wilson's museum practice combines institutional critique with alternative interpretations of the collections. He spends an extended period of time researching, gaining insights

into the employees' opinions of the institution. He talks to all the museum staff, from members of the maintenance department through to the executive director, which helps him to form important relationships with the people who work at the institution (Karp and Wilson 1996). Significantly, as he explained in a presentation in Brighton, Wilson also goes out into the local community to find out the public's thoughts about the museum.[7] This research gives Wilson a comprehensive understanding of existing perceptions of the museum.

Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, exhibited in 1992–93 at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, is a seminal piece of installation.[8] A key strategy of *Mining the Museum* was to work consciously with museum methods of display but to also introduce objects previously held in storage that had not been exhibited before. In an exhibit titled *Modes of Transport, 1770–1910* (1992–93) Wilson placed a Ku Klux Klan hood in an antique pram. In a display titled *Metalwork, 1723–1880* (1992) slave shackles were located in a cabinet of decorative silverware. These juxtapositions simultaneously illuminated the absence of the history of slavery and racist activity in the Maryland Historical Society's permanent display and brought a completely different set of narratives into the local history exhibition. Wilson has stated that through the juxtaposition of carefully selected objects it is possible to elicit 'a conversation between them that creates an unexpected, but essential, thought' (Berger and Wilson 2001: 33). The juxtaposition present in *Modes of Transport, 1770–1910* effectively conveyed a local history in which racial prejudice permeated the community, passing from one generation to the next, from parents to children. The juxtaposition in *Metalwork, 1793–1880* of the slave shackles with ornate silverware linked slavery to wealth in the area. Wilson's museum interventions coexist with the museum's interpretations, providing a translation, illuminating the exhibitionary language of the museum, contributing to the reconstruction of object meanings, and challenging visitors' perceptions of the collections.

Mining the Museum was co-curated by Lisa Corrin, director of The Contemporary Gallery, Baltimore, also known as 'the museum with no walls'. The Contemporary had extensive experience of instigating site-specific projects and working in collaboration with artists and local communities. *Mining the Museum* reflects a significant change within the international museum sector that had gathered momentum by the 1990s, relating to what Nick Merriman and Nima Poovaya-Smith (1996: 176) refer to as 'making culturally diverse histories'. This change revolved around a critical dialogue in which the ownership of cultural artefacts, the right to interpret their meanings, and the right to assign them a place in history were contested (González 2008: 66), alongside a deconstruction of the 'exhibited other'. Merriman and Poovaya-Smith (1996: 177) point out that at the time they were writing museum practices in North America were more progressive than in Britain regarding 'the recognition that the history and contemporary reality of minority

communities are worthy of representation in museums', highlighting the 'recent and somewhat faltering beginning in Britain, with the exception of Jewish history, which has a longer museum pedigree'. Referring to the famous collections of essays edited by Ivan Karp and his colleagues (Karp and Lavine (eds) 1991, Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine (eds) 1992), Merriman and Poovaya-Smith emphasize the 'relatively sophisticated' dialogue on cultural representation in museum practice in North America. The critical dialogue on museums in the 1990s significantly reflects the influence of a post-colonial critique that locates the museum as a form of knowledge production and a manifestation of residual colonial power relations. There is an intersection between post-colonial museum critique and theories of race. The analysis of representations of culture within museums and museums' relationships to communities are influenced by these theories, which consider the implicit historic and current power relations and politics involved in the control of representation.

New Labour's Multicultural Politics

In the 1990s, race discourse was distilled into the politics of identity, which came to a particular crescendo in Britain as a result of New Labour's multicultural politics. Discrimination was rearticulated into the following notions, all of which focused on making points of contact with 'hard-to-reach communities': 'social exclusion', which resulted in the 'social inclusion agenda' (DCMS 2000); the 'access initiative' (DCMS 1999a, 1999b) that encouraged 'audience inclusivity' (Alberti 2009: 193); and 'community cohesion' (Crooke 2007). It was within this climate that the 'Hindu Shrine' project was created at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery and the 'Rekindle' video series was created at Manchester Museum, University of Manchester.

One of the first texts to articulate the 'social inclusion agenda' for museums was *Including Museums, Perspectives on Museums, Galleries and Social Inclusion* (Dodd and Sandell (eds) 2001). The publication was supported by Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the political rhetoric of the New Labour government saturates the text, reflecting the currency of the 'social inclusion agenda' within much of the museum sector. Even by this time, however, four years into New Labour's Britain, there had already been some critique of the 'social inclusion agenda' and its integration into the museum sector (see, for example, Appleton 2001, Newman 2001). In their introduction to *Including Museums*, Jocelyn Dodd and Richard Sandell recognize the resistance to working with the 'social inclusion agenda', but position this resistance of some museum professionals and commentators as being against museums having a social role and on these grounds dismiss it (Dodd and Sandell 2001: 3). On the contrary, critical discussion of the 'social inclusion

agenda' relates to the broader implications of the museum sector's engagement with government agenda, embedded in what has been called a top-down approach (see Goodwin 2010, Bodo 2010), saturated in state rhetoric (Brighton 2003). The multicultural politics on which New Labour's 'social inclusion agenda' was founded has received significant criticism.[9] Critical dialogue on multicultural politics frequently returns to a discussion about the power and the right to define. Fundamentally, who is seen as marginalized and/or as a minority is informed by the dominant core and not by the people relegated to the margins (see Younge 2010). Critics of multicultural politics, therefore, perceive these notions as based essentially upon an unequal power relationship that perpetuates marginalization and the notion of the 'other' (see Dewdney 2010, Goodwin 2010). The repercussions of this for ethnographic departments in particular are significant, pertaining as they do to the continued mobilization of the 'exhibited other'.

Through the last decade of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first, the prerequisites of such funding schemes and programmes as Renaissance, Designation, and the Heritage Lottery Fund have continued to articulate the museum sector's role in the 'social inclusion' agenda. In retrospect, this role—and the museum activity and projects that the 'social inclusion' agenda triggered—have since been labeled as the 'welfare model'. During a panel discussion in response to Gary Younge's keynote address (Younge 2010) at 'From the Margins to the Core?', a conference held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2010, Mark O'Neil, head of art and museums at Glasgow city council, defined the 'welfare model' as reinforcing the division between majority and minority or core and marginal. He went on to say that projects functioning within the 'welfare model' can be characterized as working with small numbers of people from communities on projects that do not do enough to have an impact on the whole community. This analysis aligns the 'welfare model' with a multicultural tokenism that reinforces the marginalization and minority status of the people they involve. However, collaboration with people from local communities is central to the 'welfare model' actively developing processes to expand the variety of perspectives and voices present in museum displays. The 'Hindu Shrine' project and the 'Rekindle' video series may usefully be considered within the context of the 'welfare model' criticism, for both projects involved artists and only limited numbers of people from the local community classified as ethnic minorities according to cultural-diversity definitions.

Commissioning Living Cultures

Object-based collecting was not a focus of the museum sector in Britain during the first few years of the twenty-first century. This is evident in the themes of

the many events and initiatives that focused broadly on 'inclusion', 'exclusion', 'access', 'audience development', 'cultural diversity', and 'outreach' work. In 2005, however, the Museums Association's report *Collections for the Future* was published, reflecting another shift within the sector. At this point it became clear that any work commissioned by regional museums for display in their permanent ethnographic galleries up to 2005 was going to be of particular significance for anyone interested in the various manifestations of museum professionals' interpretations of the 'social inclusion agenda' and the shift in status of community engagement from temporary activity to permanent display. As both the 'Hindu Shrine' project and the 'Rekindle' series involved making work for permanent exhibition they may be usefully located and analysed within this context.

The 'Hindu Shrine' project features in the 'Believers' section of the James Green Gallery of World Art in Brighton Museum. As part of the project, Balavendra Elias was commissioned to work in consultation with the local Gujarati community to carve a Ganesha statue, a donation box, and three domes to go on top of an existing nineteenth-century shrine. The Gujarati community contributed to a booklet on Hinduism (Cook 2001) and, notably, the local Hindu women's group also made garlands, jewellery and clothes for the deities, all of which were placed on permanent display (Parker 2004: 65).

The 'Rekindle' series is displayed in the 'Living Cultures' gallery in Manchester Museum.[10] The project originally consisted of five touch-screens embedded in the frames of the display cases in the 'Cloth and Clothing' and 'Out of Clay' sections. A total of eighteen videos were created by Kuljit Chuhan, a local digital media artist and filmmaker, depicting members of the Manchester community advisory panel and two poets speaking to objects from the gallery.

Both the 'Hindu Shrine' project and 'Rekindle' were installed in their respective permanent displays following a period of museum closure and redisplay. In these periods of closure, both Brighton Museum and Manchester Museum went through redevelopments, the key aims of which were underpinned by the 'social inclusion agenda'. As Toni Parker, former assistant curator of world art at Brighton Museum, writes: 'one of the key aims of this redevelopment was to promote inclusion and improve access in all its forms: physical, intellectual and cultural' (Parker 2004: 64). Parker clearly locates the 'Hindu Shrine' project firmly within this remit: 'the partnership between the Museum and Brighton and Hove's Gujarati community, which was the basis for the Hindu Shrine Project, was one of several initiatives that aimed to engage local community members with the Museum and its collections' (ibid.). Sam Alberti describes the 1990s, the period running up to the redevelopment at Manchester Museum, as the most turbulent decade in the museum's history, and in museums in Britain more generally. Alberti notes that in this period the 'New Labour government elected in 1997 shifted the emphasis from free market economics to social inclusion' (Alberti 2009: 193) and goes on to state that it

was in this climate that: 'a new Director, Tristram Besterman, was appointed in 1994 to transform the Manchester Museum… Besterman orchestrated the most significant—and at times difficult—transformation in architecture and staff at the Manchester Museum since the 1920s, resulting in a new management structure, redisplayed galleries and a new entrance space' (ibid.).

The Brighton Museum and Manchester Museum redevelopment projects were embedded in the social inclusion agenda through funding prerequisites. Developing access and widening participation, by making points of contact with groups defined by New Labour as 'socially excluded', directly informed major funders' priorities, including the coveted Heritage Lottery Fund (see HLF 2002). Many museum projects and initiatives in this period conspicuously targeted people that fell into the category now labelled 'BME'—Black, Minority Ethnic—answering the sector-wide call to respond to cultural diversity.[11] Both the 'Hindu Shrine' project and 'Rekindle' were part of this cultural-diversity activity, while also reflecting the development of museums' work with source communities.

The partnership between Brighton Museum and the local Gujarati community dates back to the *India 50* exhibition of 1997, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence from Britain (Parker 2004: 64). Parker notes that following this exhibition and during community consultation it was suggested that a shrine be put on permanent display at the museum. As a result, the presence of a shrine was integrated into the plans for the redisplay of the James Green Gallery of World Art. The 'Rekindle' video series was implicitly linked to Manchester Museum's community advisory panel. The panel was created in 2000 to 'debate, identify and articulate the needs and interests of diverse communities to create a culturally inclusive representation in the Museum' (Manchester Museum 2008: 2). As she explained to me in 2005, Bernadette Lynch, the museum's then recently appointed education manager, drew upon her experiences in Canada, where native North American communities are represented on museums' standing bodies, to set up the panel.[12] The creation of the panel can thus be seen as being informed by best practice in museums in countries with indigenous First Nations populations, while simultaneously responding to the cultural-diversity agenda in Britain (see Khan 2000: 4). As Lynch explained, the panel was set up specifically to address the 'concept of representation', ensuring that the local community within a six-mile radius of the museum (which is one of the most diverse in the city and therefore considered to be sufficiently representative) had a voice.

The 'Hindu Shrine' Project

The 'Hindu Shrine' project and the 'Rekindle' series came about for very specific reasons. Parker (2006: 64) highlights that the intention at Brighton was

Figure 1. View of the figures of deities dressed in outfits made by members of the Hindu Women's Group as part of the 'Hindu Shrine' project at the James Green Gallery of World Art at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (installed 2002). The nineteenth-century shrine has been left unpainted, in accordance with the Museum's conservation practice rather than traditional Hindu practice. From a photograph taken by the author on 9 April 2010. Courtesy and copyright, Hindu Women's Group.

to create 'a religious space—a Hindu shrine' within the gallery. The project involved inviting people who had domestic shrines in their homes to come and decorate the nineteenth-century shrine held in the collection. The inter-generational textiles project that took place led to the making of garlands, jewellery, and clothes for the deities on the shrine (see Figures 1–3). Handling sessions took place at the museum and community venues to select objects for display. As a result of the handling sessions, several objects were reinterpreted and previously unidentified deities were named, thereby contributing narratives with clear ethnographic value. These interpretative contributions are not emphasized or even directly acknowledged in the display and, as a consequence, the opportunity to mobilize these respective voices within the exhibit is missed. Instead, this information was absorbed by the museum and expressed through the curatorial voice in the exhibition booklet *Hinduism in Brighton* (Cook 2001). In this instance, therefore, consultation with the source community maintained institutional practices as opposed to changing them (Peers and Brown 2003: 2).[13] This was a missed opportunity to demonstrate to

Figure 2. View of the deities, decorations, coins, and petals on the Hindu Shrine in the James Green Gallery of World Art at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (installed 2002). From a photograph taken by the author on 9 April 2010. Courtesy and copyright, Hindu Women's Group.

visitors the active process of constructing interpretations; instead the privileging of the institutional voice was perpetuated.

Through the process of involving the community 'the Museum hoped to ensure an accurate and contemporary representation of a Hindu shrine, and one which the local community would use and view as sacred' (Parker 2004: 64). However, the accuracy and level of authenticity with which the people involved were allowed to decorate the shrine was fundamentally compromised and controlled by the museum's conservation practice. Ordinarily, a Hindu shrine is kept in pristine condition, being regularly painted and redecorated, but the

Figure 3. Close-up view of the figure of Ganesh, made by Balavendra Elias, in the James Green Gallery of World Art at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (installed 2002). In accordance with the museum's conservation practice, the figure was left unpainted. From a photograph taken by the author on 23 June 2006. Courtesy and copyright, Nicola Ashmore.

museum's conservation policy actively prohibited the nineteenth-century shrine's peeling paint from being repainted, an issue of contention between the museum and the community (see Figure 1). Again no information about this compromise is provided in the display; on the contrary, a notion of the authentic is expressed in the text-panel by stating that the shrine 'has been dressed by members of the Hindu Women's Group and Hindu Elders' Group'. Compromise is, of course, an essential part of any collaborative project, and it would have brought an interesting level of critical dialogue and transparency to the construction of the display for the visitor to be given an insight into the conflict between conservation and authentic practice. The bareness of the wood is a dominant feature of the commissioned figure of Ganesh, the donation box, and the three domes, all of which would ordinarily be elaborately painted, but this is not explained in the display (see Figures 1, 3 and 4). The Hindu women's group also created outfits for the deities (Figure 1). This is not explicitly detailed, however; and only one person, Mrs Mohini Bansal, is acknowledged in the accompanying booklet (Cook 2001), which does however include information on private domestic Hindu practice and on seven Hindu deities.

Figure 4. View of the figure of Ganesh, the donation box, and the domes on top of the Hindu Shrine, carved by Balavendra Elias, in the James Green Gallery of World Art at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (installed 2002). From a photograph taken by the author on 9 April 2010. Courtesy and copyright, Hindu Women's Group.

The Gujarati community also donated some deity figures for the exhibit, complementing the existing collection of deities held by the museum, some of which belonged to Hindu soldiers who convalesced in the Royal Pavilion after the First World War. The interesting provenance of the deities was, however, not illuminated through the labelling of the shrine. A curatorial decision was made not to include individual object labels 'as it was felt that this would detract from the visual and spiritual impact' (Parker 2004: 65). This curatorial rationale is

not explained in the display. In the context of an ethnographic exhibition where the majority of objects are accompanied by individual labels, this decision might well lead visitors to wonder about the provenance of the objects and to question whether the objects are important enough to have labels. Unfortunately, the collaborative nature of the project and the critical dialogues that arose between Brighton Museum and the Gujarati community are not elements that feature heavily in the display or in the accompanying literature; thus the visitor is given no insight into the important dialogues lying behind the public presentation.

Rekindle

In 2003 each member of Manchester Museum's community advisory panel was invited to choose an object in the 'Living Cultures' display, which—after they had received basic training from the museum's conservators—was then made available to them for handling. Kuljit Chuhan, the artist who created the 'Rekindle' videos, came up with the idea of asking the participants to speak to the objects (see Figure 5). Two poets were also invited to participate in the project. The members of the panel were then shown the poets' performances, in which they integrated narrative, emotion, imagination, and humour when interacting with the objects. In preparation for the filming, the panel members were presented with several questions that they could use if they wanted, and their contributions do demonstrate a pattern in response to the 'optional' questions. Notably, many participants state the reasons why they were attracted to the object, the question they would like to ask it, and what sound the object makes them think of. The museum's visitors, however, are not told about the questions that were presented to the participants.

A strong characteristic of all eighteen videos in the series is the way in which the participants speak directly to the objects. The objects are addressed as if they are people; they are assumed to retain memories and meanings, and to know about the context of their own production and use. There is a sense of a dialogue between the past (the collection) and the present (the participants), which can also be read as a statement by the museum about progress, from colonialism to outreach—in which source communities are given a voice. The recorded voices and accompanying videos are signs of a wider community that has been given a place in the gallery as an act of inclusion and representation. Through 'Rekindle', the museum also appears to stage the communities' involvement that they want to encourage; an interaction is performed with people from the source communities and objects from the collections.

As Lynch explained to me, the 'Rekindle' participants were generally encouraged to speak emotionally and from memory when engaging with their chosen object:

Figure 5. View of the second 'Rekindle' touch screen in the 'Cloth and Clothing' case in the Living Cultures gallery at Manchester Museum, University of Manchester (installed 2003). From a photograph taken by the author on 11 March 2005. Courtesy and copyright, Nicola Ashmore.

> The idea was to encourage others to feel that you don't have to have prior knowledge of an object to respond to an object. We didn't have any control of what was selected or what was said and what was very interesting about that project was how often people chose objects outside of their own cultural heritage.

The fact that the participants chose objects 'outside of their own cultural heritage' meant that the lived experience of the material culture was largely absent from the interpretations. This indicates that the value of the spoken interpretations was not considered in relation to a sense of the 'authentic' pertaining to ethnographic value or lived experience. Instead, the value of the interpretative content provided by the members of the panel lay in the legitimacy of their emotive, imaginative, individual engagement with the object. Implicit in this approach is the sector-wide attunement to people, implemented in order to consciously develop audiences and visitor engagement. Michelle Henning has observed the burgeoning museum practice of creating experiences that aim to instigate a transformative personal experience for the

Figure 6. View of the 'Rekindle' screen situated between two sections of the 'Out of Clay display in the Living Cultures gallery at Manchester Museum, University of Manchester (installed 2003). From a photograph taken by the author on 12 March 2005. Courtesy and copyright, Nicola Ashmore.

visitor. In her discussion of museum design as 'setting the stage for transformative experiences' (Henning 2006: 112), she points out that 'the emphasis on experience displaces the emphasis on artefacts' (ibid.). Henning argues that within this process of emphasizing subjective experience, museum objects are frequently rendered 'little more than props or stimuli' (ibid.). This is evident in the 'Rekindle' interpretations and conveyed through the visual aesthetic of the videos. The videos have very high contrast images, with strong shadows and intensely lit areas (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). This aesthetic, combined with the glare and reflections from the screens due to their positioning in the gallery, reduces visible detail and definition, inhibiting the ease with which the objects can be identified. Clearly, the videos would have benefited from being tested on location and adapted accordingly. As it stands, the visual aesthetic of the display actively draws attention away from the object and on to the participant's oral interpretation, reinforcing the notion that the project is not about the objects but about people's emotional engagement and imaginative responses.

Figure 7. View of two young visitors activating the first 'Rekindle' touch screen in the 'Cloth and Clothing' display in the Living Cultures gallery at Manchester Museum, University of Manchester (installed 2003). From a photograph taken by the author on 13 March 2005. Courtesy and copyright, Nicola Ashmore.

The video series also incorporates a device—the touch screen—that explicitly integrates 'the visitors' presence into the space' (Henning 2006: 63). Henning states that: 'hands-on exhibits acknowledge the visitors' presence and even require them to activate them' (ibid.: 61) (see Figure 7). The 'Rekindle' series not only acknowledges the visitors' presence, but—arguably—was aimed at appealing specifically to people of diverse ethnic origins. Seventeen of the eighteen videos features people from ethnic minorities, though one features a young white woman. Thus, through 'Rekindle' the museum was able to make visible its facilitation of access to the collections for people from local ethnic minority communities, thus demonstrating its response to both cultural-diversity and access policies. Visibility of community engagement is an increasingly important consideration for museums.

The visibility of the individuals who created the 'Rekindle' interpretations is important within the context of the ethnographic gallery because it distinguishes these subjective interpretations from the anonymous curatorial voice.[14] The 'Rekindle' interpretations were clearly authored in two ways: the

participants were visible in the video and their names were listed under the tab 'People' on the touch screen. Analysed within the context of the ethnographic gallery, the authored interpretations do not share the same status as the unnamed curatorial voice, which conveys what Carol Duncan describes as secular truth: 'truth that is rational and verifiable—that has the status of "objective knowledge"' (Duncan 1995: 8). However, Bernadette Lynch locates the videos' power in their distinctiveness within the gallery, highlighting the fact that they succeed in 'getting some voice into that gallery, in what is a very traditional gallery in essence'. Lynch describes 'Rekindle' as an intentional process 'like putting down the first marker, that it is legitimate to include narratives, personal narratives in the interpretation of objects that are not based on prior academic knowledge'. This distinction between the authoring of the community voice and the anonymous curatorial voice is indicative of the conflicting ideas present in the gallery redisplay. Interestingly, the 'Rekindle' interpretations and the more traditional curatorial voice in the redisplay do coexist within one gallery; both are absorbed into Manchester Museum's ethnographic exhibition's interpretive offering. The source-community interpretations sit alongside the labels and text-panels that privilege ethnographic value. Consequently, this juxtaposition could be construed as an endorsement of the dominant ethnographic approach mobilized in the gallery, which displays the colonial collection but does not actively contribute to the critique of the institution's presentation of the 'facts'.

Conclusion

The conflicting ideas I have highlighted here—between conservation and living practice, community engagement and evidence of contribution, authored subjective interpretations and anonymous institutional interpretations—are indicative of the merging of museum practices that occurred through the period of the New Labour administration from 1997 to 2010. Work with source communities, largely developed from the ground up in Britain, has adapted and combined with New Labour's 'access' and 'cultural diversity' policies, generated from the top down. Cultural representation within this period has become an issue of 'exclusion', of 'access', a case of responding to cultural diversity remedied by involvement and engagement of people classified by ethnicity and a marginalized status, all of which fundamentally maintains and cements a division between minority and majority.

The process of curating exhibitions that feature local source communities and commissioned work is a complex and important one. Visitors should be given an insight into the dialogues that occur between the museum and project participants and makers, thereby conveying some of the complexities of the

construction of collection interpretations. The uncomfortable tensions that arise between the museum and its local communities are part of the 'frontline' of contemporary ethnographic museum practice. It is where progress can occur.

Notes

1. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (2003: 2) explain that the term 'source communities' refers 'both to…groups in the past when artefacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today' and argue that it also applies 'to every cultural group from whom museums have collected: local people, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, settlers, and indigenous peoples' (Peers and Brown 2003: 2). I draw upon their definition in this article.
2. For further discussion of the issues surrounding the practice of commissioning objects from source communities, see Bauman and Sawin 1991, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, Knowles 2003, Wingfield 2007.
3. James Clifford uses the terms 'contact history' and 'contact relations' to describe an ongoing, complex, and contentious relationship, with a past and a present, between source communities and the 'collecting museum' (Clifford 1997: 193).
4. For discussion of intangible heritage see, for example, Wingfield 2007 and the papers in Graham and Howard (eds) 2008.
5. Artists whose works highlight how museums function as political institutions include Michael Asher, Judith Barry, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, James Luna, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Fred Wilson. These artists are discussed in Corrin 2004 and Gonzalez 2008.
6. For more information on Fred Wilson's exhibition history, see Wilson and Appiah 2006, Berger 2001.
7. Wilson made this point in a presentation he gave at the Sallis Benney Theatre, University of Brighton, on 28 November, 2009.
8. For examples of critical writing on Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, see Berger 2001, Corrin 2004, Gonzalez 2008: 64–119, Karp and Wilson 1996.
9. For critiques of multiculturalism, see Dewdney 2010, Goodwin 2010, Lasch-Quinn 2001, Malik 1996, 2008.
10. For an account in this journal of the Living Cultures gallery from the point of view of one of its curators, see Bankes 2006; for a review, see Pole 2004.
11. On the sector-wide call for cultural diversity, see DCMS 1999a, 1999b, 2000, Hooper-Greenhill 1997, Khan 2000.
12. For more on my interview with Bernadette Lynch, drawn on here, see Chapter 4 of my doctoral thesis (Ashmore 2011).

13. For a critique of community engagement that maintains institutional practices instead of changing them, see Ames 2003.
14. For further discussion on museum display and subjective experience, see Henning 2006: 90–98 and 109–13, Hein 2000: 65–87, Maleuvre 1999.

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