"If we had had the budget and had the time:"
The processes of museum text creation at The Spurlock Museum

While often one goes to a museum in order to see visual artifacts, be they paintings, a shovel from the fifth century, or the inside of a space engine, it is important to remember that "meaning is constructed and interpreted in relation to text-based resources: meanings do not arise from thin-air; they are textual products" (Ravelli, 150). In museums, these "resources" include, but are not limited to, the exhibit labels that "explain" the artifacts in terms of the museum's communicative objectives. In this study, I will focus on how these texts are created at The Spurlock Museum, with a particular focus on the current exhibition "Where Animals Dance" that is being held in the Campbell gallery. "Where Animals Dance" is an exploration of the mask customs of contemporary Western Africa.

Tandy Lacy, the director of education at Spurlock, sat down with me to discuss the textual production processes of the Spurlock staff. She told me that even before exhibitions, as such, were created, the Spurlock staff had to decide on a few institution-wide standards. In effect, the Spurlock had to create their own particular genre of museum texts. They did this in consultation with "professional exhibit designers [who] brought in a member of their ... team who talked about how to have an upfront introduction and how to build a hierarchy of texts that is a combination of size, visual impact, design elements and levels of texts." Lacy and the Spurlock staff took this professional guidance and created the system in which exhibits begin with an "eye-catching initial text" followed by "large-wall texts." Next, on the reading rails in front of the exhibits are "selected topical discussion" that lead to, finally, on the right corner of the reading rail, "flip-books for more detailed information and the identification of the artifact."

Schematic Diagram of this structure:
This system of textual organization, however, is not without its problems. In order for people to identify an artifact they have to turn to the flip-book, and only one flip-book exists for each case. The fact that each case only has one flip-book creates a potential problem when more than one person would like to identify and learn more about an artifact. This lack of foresight in how bodied individuals navigate museum spaces is a problem identified by vom Lehn et.al., when they state that "relatively little research is concerned with the organization of social interaction in exhibitions -- how couples or groups navigate, encounter, share, and experience them together" (198). The staff of the Spurlock neglected to consider how multiple individuals make meaning out of an exhibit together. Nonetheless, the staff consciously moved ahead with the flip-books, knowing this problem, because "we really did not have enough time to have the label texts," individual texts positioned close to each artifact. Time considerations made the option of individually labeling each artifact unfeasible because individual label texts demand an additional level of structural design that the museum staff didn't have time to do: "frankly we haven't had the time," states Lacy. In the Spurlock environment, where there is always one rotating exhibit and
perpetual changes occurring in the permanent exhibits, "it's a pretty tight schedule for us," said Lacy.

In addition, Lacy points out that in the initial exhibit design, there was "very little consideration of how text was going to be managed." Laurent Marquart posits that the three-dimensional positioning of textual portions of museums "must be broached at the beginning of a project ... typography must not be regarded as a minor element amid the array of communications tools available" (234). However, in the Spurlock, with all the other design considerations inherent in setting up a museum, text locationing was not one of the central concerns. The staff, in effect, neglected to utilize the communicative potential of text in museums by not spending enough time thinking of the three-dimensional meaning-making apparatus in which text plays a part. As such, the early set-up of the museum overlooked that, as Louise J. Ravelli points out, "the organisational framework is an intrinsic part of meaning-making. It is an 'enabling resource' ... bringing together both representation and interactional meanings into a coherent whole" (17). Although the museum staff has considered how this particular organization system affects accessibility, they have not considered how this very organization plays a fundamental role in the creation of the an artifact's meaning.

Even with the creation of this system, however, the staff could not simply plug-in intuitively text to match the artifacts. An entire literature exists for museum practitioners about what to, and what not to, include in exhibit labels. At the Spurlock, Lacy stated that in the beginning of the creation of the texts the team relied often on *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* by Beverly Serrell: A book Lacy said they used as a "guideline." In addition to helping Lacy and the education team learn about the issues in text creation, the book also helped faculty when Lacy "gave the curators that we were working with certain parts of the book to read and
think about as they began to develop text."

These two forces, the professional design team called in and the reliance on museum text literature, illustrate that even before a single text was written for the Spurlock Museum the textual environment had been created in relation to what was being done in museums across the globe. Spurlock was in dialogue with these institutions, adapting their conventions both as it saw fit to their particular environment and as time and financial considerations allowed.

Still, before texts were created the museum staff had a number of important decisions to make. In the case of the African masquerade exhibit, the staff first had to decide what artifacts to use based on "their condition, their general appearance, the amount of work that it was doing to take to mount them, and some of what we thought would be high visual impact." The very selection of the artifacts is an important textual decision, since, as Johndan Johnson-Eilola points out the mere selection and arrangement of objects constitutes a type of "symbolic-analytic college" (222) that deserves equal status as a creative, textual endeavor in our postmodern society.

After the selection of the artifacts, or more accurately, in tandem with the selection, the staff develops a "story they want to tell" about those exhibits and the culture(s) from which they came. Last year, the Spurlock hosted an exhibit on Balinese art in which one of the curators knew the artifacts well, so well in fact that for the curator "those artifacts began to tell their own story," according to Lacy. In the case of the Africa exhibit, on the other hand, where the texts were being created in-house by the education staff, who were not Africanists, Lacy recalls that "the more that we got to know the artifacts, they actually grouped themselves. And in the process we recognized or understood what seemed to be the important, primary discussion." In the Africa exhibit, then, as opposed to the Balinese exhibit, the staff had to learn about the artifacts before the artifacts spoke to them. I see this as meaning that rather than the artifacts themselves speaking, Lacy
metaphorically means that what spoke to her was actually the knowledge she had learned about the artifact, the scholarly apparatus that mediates between the artifact and reality. One can begin to see this when one considers that "every story can be told in many different ways, and different representations will construct different pictures .... Choices in the representational framework both reflect, and actively construct ... the subject matter being communicated" (Ravelli, 96). In other words, even as museum staff people "hear" artifacts, they are actually hearing their own knowledge reflected back to them. What they construct is not a "natural" portrait of an artifact, but a representation based on academic knowledge that constructs the very meaning of that artifact.

The supposed "naturalness" of textual representations becomes problematic when considered in a postcolonial context. Sometimes, in telling the stories the museum wants to tell important artifacts are missing, or the artifacts are not the ideal ones for the situation. An example occurs in "The Americas" permanent collection. In the North America section as a visitor approaches the exhibit in the northwest corner, he/she confronts what appears to be a stylized mannequin regaled in authentic Native American costume. Behind the mannequin we see two images of what appears to be a dancing Native American and the title "Life was Dancing, Dancing was Life." However, as one goes behind the exhibit and reads the text, one realizes that these images, and these costumes were not created by Native Americans, but rather by Reginald Laubin, a white man who, the exhibit tells us "devoted his life to building respect for and appreciation of the Indigenous Peoples of North America." Lacy calls this exhibit a "striking example" of what happens when a museum doesn't have the artifacts they need to tell a story. The best the Spurlock could do was to offer this re-creation since the museum did not have access to authentic costumes. The blatant re-creation of authentic Amerindian clothing illustrates the ways in which all museums re-create authentic cultural experiences. The artifacts do not carry with them the culture they
represent, rather an academic writer needs to approximate (or re-create) to the best of his or her ability that cultural framework using textual and spatial communication tools.

In the case of the Americas exhibit, Lacy and the Spurlock staff are trying to move closer to that ideal approximation by working with the American Indian Center in Chicago in order to bring authentic artifacts not present in their collection in for that discussion. This will mean borrowing artifacts: "it's not likely we will be able to acquire those." Here we see a museum, institutional goal -- the immediate involvement of Native peoples in their own representation -- contrasted with a constraint -- the financial situation of the museum and a lack in their permanent collection. In addition, even in an ideal situation "the meaningful content of exhibits and accompanying text often are misunderstood, oversimplified, and even distorted to fit pre-existing misconceptions" (Screven, 19). In the representation of minority cultures, the museum needs to struggle not only with time and financial considerations, but also cultural prejudices stereotypes, walking the thin line between alienating the group they are trying to represent and alienating the general, majority culture, audience.

Problems in available resources also affected the development of the artifact collection for the current African mask exhibit. In researching the masks, the museum staff worked with a man from Burkina Faso, "who is Sanufo, and he brought back to us a good amount of documentary images." Unfortunately, the museum didn't have access to those types of documentary images for the other cultures, which results in a situation in which the flip-book for the Sanufo culture features many photos of people in hoeing competitions, etc., while the other flip-books for the other cultures feature no images at all. Lacy states, "If we had had the budget and had the time then we probably would have been able to go out to other institutions and get similar images ... I knew that I didn't have time to do the same type of thing for the other cultures, but why not do it for Sanufo?"
While recognizing the fact that this choice made the exhibit somewhat lop-sided, Lacy opted to reveal as much of the culture as she could, rather than limit the museum's portrayal of Sanufo culture because other resources were lacking for the other cultures. This choice alters the exhibit's representation to the extent that Sanufo culture seems more lived, more immediate through the documentary images, while the other cultures seem more removed and distant because we can't see how these artifacts are used in quotidian life.

However, the museum was able to expand on the text/artifact representation of the cultures by including both a video kiosk with a four-page, print bibliography next to it. Both the kiosk and bibliography serve similar purposes; they encourage visitors to think beyond the exhibition, using the exhibition as merely a starting point to examining these cultures, rather than as an all-inclusive portrait of the cultures. However, in the African exhibit the museum only had access to video displays for certain cultures, which results in the fact that the video kiosk accompanying privileges the representations of certain cultures over others. "We're showing what we have," said Lacy. Often, the museum is in a position in which it needs to balance its goals with its collections, its ideals with its resources.

All the artifacts that are eventually collected are organized around a "big idea," a thematic connection that organizes the entire exhibit. This creation of the "big idea" behind the text, which Serrell defines as "guiding the development of exhibit elements and their labels ... that support, exemplify, and illustrate aspects of the big idea" (2), does not simply occur before text creation and remain static throughout the writing process. As Lacy points out, in real-world museums, "in which you're under pressure" the staff begins seeing connections between the artifacts even "as the text was being developed." In other words, Serrell's static conception of the "Big Idea" becomes something more organic and fluid when put into a real-world setting.
After a "Big Idea" has been selected, at least tentatively, the exhibit coordinator is responsible for "documenting and confirming the concept with all parties involved in development," according to Lacy. Serrell recommends this step because by focusing everyone around a "Big Idea" "there will be less need for the single job of 'educator' because the whole team will share that role" (Serrell, 7). The individual writer, then, subsumes his/her identity beneath the category of the "Big Idea," the objective that will shape the entire exhibit. Anne Beaufort believes that this "shift to the institutional point of view also enables writers to gain the appropriate rhetorical stance in their texts." In the case of the Spurlock Museum, by circulating the "Big Idea" of the exhibition, the director induces everyone involved in the textual production to keep the rhetorical, institutional agenda of the museum at the forefront of all their writings. However, it would be misleading to suggest that all writers have exactly the same conception of the exact meaning of the "Big Idea." The different writers all experience this norm subjectively, meaning that "it is only through agreement between subjective individuals, or intersubjectivity, that norms can be established and maintained" (Beck, 422), with intersubjectivity defined by Beck via Rommetveit (1974) as "what allows one conversational partner to assume that he or she shares certain knowledge and beliefs with the other, and, thus, to leave these shared beliefs or knowledge unspoken or merely hinted at" (Beck, 421). In this discussion, the crucial thing to note is that the knowledge of the "Big Idea" may or may not be truly shared, one merely "assume[s]" that it is shared while designing the exhibition.

In the past, this has caused tension between the museum staff and the curators/visiting scholars when they attempt to negotiate the meaning of the "Big Idea." Lacy states "I'm working with people to whom this information is very important and they want to be sure that an editor doesn't change the meaning .... That gets to be extremely difficult when you're talking about
cultures and you have words that carry a great deal of meaning for scholars." In the intersubjective negotiation, scholars must realize that the knowledge they have about individual words is not, in most cases, shared with the general museum-going public that the Spurlock education staff attempts to represent in the negotiation for textual content.

Lacy recalls working with a particular scholar who was "horrified" by the idea of others working on her text. In order to get over her anxiety, the scholar talked with other faculty that had worked with the museum before, and she talked with Lacy, who "assured her" about the process. This scholar, in effect, had to be assimilated into the genre conventions of the Spurlock Museum. Lacy educated her into this particular genre by showing the scholar changes she had made so that the scholar "was able to look again at texts she was creating and understand why and how [Lacy] had made certain changes" so that she could "make those changes herself." This visiting scholar learned by example the collaborative, institutionalized voice necessary for the creation of museum text.

Although the case of the above scholar represents an extreme example, Lacy, when working with a guest curator, "starts off with a discussion that explains the process to them and we work to find out from them what it is they can be comfortable with." In some cases, the scholars never become completely comfortable with the process. In order to satisfy academic curators, the staff gives them the "option of loading the flip-books with text that we felt fairly certain that a majority of visitors were not going to take the time to read." Here Lacy tellingly reveals that she acknowledges that in the hierarchy of texts the flip-book is at the bottom, and as such will seldom be read cover-to-cover. That the Spurlock staff, in certain cases, allows scholars to put in museum exhibitions text the staff considers uninteresting to the general public illustrates the problem described by Screven in which "visitors not only do not learn from [museum texts], they learn to
ignore them!" (21). In the cases in which museum text is not presented in a "style, format and language" carefully suited to the "targeted audiences" (21), visitors become turned off to the entire idea of reading museum texts -- museum texts become culturally constructed as boring and uninteresting.

In other cases, Lacy has worked with faculty who flat out refuse to let the museum staff touch their text. The faculty, in effect, want the museum to tell them exactly how much space they have and where the text will be positioned and then write all the text themselves. Then, the museum staff's "process is one of accommodation to scholars' intent and their nature." On the opposite extreme, Lacy has done exhibits in which scholars have sat down with the staff to talk about the ideas, and "then they wanted us to go and actually do the research, write the drafts of text, bring those back for them to read and discuss and then polish it off."

The positioning between museum staff and scholar is a very interesting one. On the one hand, museum staff actively instructs scholars in the conventions and standards of museum text creation, which implies that the scholar is a novice who needs to adapt himself to pre-existing standards. On the other hand, the scholar is often the principle source of knowledge in the creation of an exhibit and as such wields a considerable amount of power. After all, the staff needs to "accommodate" themselves to him or her. The extremely varied processes Lacy describes in working with scholars exemplifies the difficulties inherent in trying to educate someone with a deep investment in their particular style of writing and who, furthermore, because of position exercises a large amount of power. Each process is somewhat different because each scholar is different and has different needs.

Which is not to paint scholars in a negative light: one scholar in particular, Laura Bellows, who worked with Lacy on the Balinese exhibit, become so involved with the collaborative process
that she suggested "having the exhibit reflect physically the physical temple structure and that was a very good concept." This reflects the belief of Ravelli that museum organization should "create meanings about what is important, what story is being told, and the visitors' roles within that space." In the case of the Balinese exhibit, the structural suggestion of Bellows created a space in which visitors were invited to experience the exhibits not as artifacts in a museum, but as symbolically representing the actual positioning of them in the real world. This structure, then, serves to close the gap between the museum and the world to which it refers. The exhibit represents the Balinese culture as if that culture were being recreated within the museum through the temple structure.

After everyone seems to be on the same page about the direction of the exhibit, the actual texts (broadly conceived) are created. In the ideal case, Lacy likes "more than a year in advance of having to turn the finished designed label over for production" in which to create the texts. In the real world, the staff had a "number of months" for the design of the texts in the feature galleries on the upper-floor of the Spurlock. In this process, the staff had a series of meetings in which they would

"address initially the overall exhibit, the concept, the storyline, the main points that scholars wanted to make in the galleries, and then together with the people who are responsible for artifact installation and the physical structures in which the artifacts are mounted. We would all meet together as a team to actually come up with a floor plan, a location in the galleries for certain important ideas to be presented."

Here, Lacy acknowledges again the importance of the physical space on the shaping of meaning, how the space itself can be created textually. Additionally, Lacy points to the ways in which the textual portion of the museum actually shapes in very significant ways the formal design of the exhibition, how the textual decisions effect broader design issues.

In crafting these texts, the staff asked whoever was writing the texts to initially write
something quite lengthy that contained "the information they wanted to get across." With this initial text, the museum staff thought about how the text could be made accessible and how it could be either divided and/or condensed and "edited down so that it would physically fit into the spaces" of the museum. In addition, the staff had to consider how much text does a visitor want to see. To answer some of these questions, the Spurlock staff turns to books by researchers who have looked at embodied museum interactions to determine the best types of texts for a given situation. The physical encounter between multiple visitors and an exhibit "emerges in and through the interaction of those within 'perceptual range of the event' (see Goffman 1981), not just those who are in some sense 'together,' but also others who just happen to be within the 'same' space" (vom Lehn et.al, 190). The staff needs to consider what forces will alternatively attract or repel a visitor to or from a text, and how many of these forces can be harnessed effectively during the organizational planning. In the initial stages, however, the staff tries to keep these concerns away from whoever is writing the text so that he or she can concentrate on the storyline and artifact without worrying about the concrete concerns of reception until later in the process.

In the case of the African mask exhibit, however, a somewhat different process emerged. Here, the Spurlock received artifacts from the Illinois State Museum that already had texts attached to them. However, every museum has its own particular genre in which it positions its texts and the Spurlock had to expand on the exhibit "because our audience is used to more text," said Lacy. In order to do these modifications, however, the staff first needed to negotiate with the Illinois State Museum, a painless negotiation for Lacy since she used to work there. In certain cases, through research at the University, the Spurlock staff even discovered slight errors in the existing artifact labels. They brought these discrepancies to the Illinois State Museum, which was "open-minded enough to want the additional information."
As Lacy points out, especially in relation to cultural exhibitions in which ongoing research is occurring, texts often need to be modified after they have been placed in an exhibition. This knowledge, in fact, was one of the factors that lead the Spurlock to exclude individual labels and instead put all artifact labels in flip-books. If a scholar approaches the museum with a needed change, then, all the staff has to do is "go into a text file, make an edit, print out a different page, open up the book and put it in." This process reduces a lot of cost and enables the museum to stay very cutting-edge. In addition, the museum often pulls artifacts or replaces them with artifacts loaned from other institutions, and the flip-books allows for easy modification and flexibility in that regard.

The actual drafting of the modified texts for the African exhibit was done by a graduate student, who did independent research on the artifacts in consultation with Mahir Saul, an anthropologist who, while not writing any texts for the exhibit, sat in on discussions and provided guidance for Lacy and her assistant. Lacy's relationship with her assistant in many ways mirrored her relationship with past faculty she had worked with. Lacy would ask her questions about what she wrote, then go back and clarify -- "I often was responsible for writing the final version of the text, so I was using her draft much the same way as working with curators that have provided us with drafts of text." As the most experienced member of the team, Lacy needs to bring her experiential knowledge to bear on the texts of others, shaping that text to match with how she understands the discourse conventions of the Spurlock Museum.

This multiplicity of voices shaping one text recalls Goffman (1981) via Prior's division of the writer into three roles: "the animator, who actually utters/inscribes the words; the author, who selects the sentiments and words; and the principal, whose positions are being represented in the words." In the case of the Spurlock exhibitions, the principal would be Lacy herself, who as
educational coordinator attempts to convey most accurately the institutional point of view of the Spurlock Museum. Lacy, along with the curators and her assistants, also serves as the author. The technologically produced and designed texts have as an animator, however, (cut this discussion??)

In addition to Lacy and her assistant, there also is a back-up proofreader because in a writing process that can stretch for over a year "sometimes you can't read it or even see it or think about it anymore," said Lacy. In addition, before the texts are produced in preparation of being placed in the exhibits "if we have the time, within the education section we may be passing texts to other people for review," said Lacy. Again, the key word is time. Frequently, deadlines become too pressing and the texts are not heavily circulated before production. In an ideal world, Lacy, as head of the section, would examine all text before it went out, but she has not had time to keep up this routine. Lacy would also like to align herself and Spurlock with the emerging Museum Studies Certificate program at the University in order to circulate "maybe six different versions and have visitors come in and say, this is the version I like and this is why." Currently, however, this type of focus-group seems unfeasible. Lacy states, "if we had a large grant and we had the opportunity to completely redo a gallery, for example, and if we had no serious time constraints than that's something we would like to do," but the constrains of time and money are too powerful to allow the museum staff to truly test out their products before they are produced. As a result, the museum relies on scholarly studies of museum receptions to help determine the texts they create.

When the texts are sent away for production, however, the process still does not end. During the time it takes for the text to be produced the information has become outdated, information has been lost or grammatical errors have popped up. "The more people you have involved in creating texts and reviewing texts the more open you are to making mistakes," Lacy
said. As a result, texts frequently needs to be produced more than once.

**The Exhibition itself**

(insert layout of African exhibit here followed by discussion of actual texts)

I will now turn to an examination of the actual African masquerade exhibition content in order to assess some of the issues museum text creators need to deal with. I will start by attempting to piece out, from the various texts, the "Big Idea" that supposedly shapes the entire exhibition. As one enters the exhibition one first encounters the stand-alone introductory text, which states "the origins of the carved wooden masks included in this exhibit, the meanings attached to their imagery, and the contents of the various masquerades to which they belong, are the subject of *Where Animals Dance*." The central idea is boiled down further in the last line of the introductory text "as you tour this exhibit, take time to learn more about each mask, the impetus for its creation, its imagery, and its place in masquerade." This three-pronged invention -- to learn about mask creation, imagery and contextualization -- gives the visitor a purpose beyond merely browsing through the artifacts and reading occasional texts attached to the artifact, if interested. The framework created in the introductory text creates a textual environment in which each exhibit ideally will fit and dialogue with the other exhibits, giving unity to the holistic experience of touring the exhibition.

The first exhibit one encounters in the collection, however, loses the tight organization begun by the introductory text. On the reading rail the first two texts refer to the first two artifacts independently while the third text refers to the *fourth artifact*, without any explanation why the third artifact was skipped. The first text discusses the role of blacksmiths in mask production, the second discusses gendered masks and the third discusses the "royalty" of certain animals. No real attempt is made to unify the discussion of these artifacts and the visitor is left to conclude that
these artifacts from distinct cultures were arbitrarily organized. As one turns to the flip-book, any identification or discussion of the artifacts is delayed for two pages by a discussion of the role of Islam in West African culture and art. Equally problematic, the last page of the flip-book begins talking about an artifact that is not even in the case, the hornbill that is located by itself in a separate part of the exhibition. These organizational choices prevent any attempt at holistically comprehending the artifacts in the ways suggested by the opening invitation -- the poor organization invites frustration and confusion rather than comprehension of the museum's communicative objectives. I should mention here that nearly all the other exhibits are much more internally cohesive than this case, but I wished to discuss this case to demonstrate the potential problems that can result from shoddy, or no, organization in meaning-making.

Running parallel to the central "Big Idea" introduced in the introductory text is a tangential "Big Idea" introduced on what I consider a second introductory text embedded deeper in the exhibition (big txt). This (long) text entitled "Mask Forms and Materials" deals more with the technical terminology used by scholars to discuss masks and includes a discussion of how masks are classified so as to draw connections among masks and cultures. Whereas the first "Big Idea" focused more on a depiction of the masks as they exist in their cultures, this second "Big Idea" foregrounds the academic endeavour to understand and make sense of the artifact, a meta-discussion embedded deeper in the exhibition so as not to alienate or scare away potential visitors.

As a result of these competing "Big Ideas" we see different types of representations emerging often even in the different exhibit texts. The caption to the leaf masquerade photo states that "Duo may come out in masquerade during a festival or appear before initiates only." In this statement, the existence of Duo is not for one second doubted. We are given the perspective of one within this culture in order to understand the use of this mask in that culture. In contrast, in the
"Protecting the Family" exhibit we are told that "All Nana masks, within their original context [my italics], are the embodiment of Su." This statement, while not explicitly doubting the existence of these spirits, implicitly says that we are not in the context where such spirits exist. It presupposes that we are in an academic context of analysis rather than in the immediate culture in which the mask was produced.

The dialogue between these two objectives, the contextualization of the artifacts and the foregrounding of the academic endeavor to make sense of the artifact, takes on urgency when one considers that "that which is communicated" via museum texts "is not a passive transmission of 'reality,' but an active construction of it" (Ravelli, 108). These two different representational schemas produce two very different visions of reality, and the tension between these two realities is ultimately left unresolved within the exhibition. The visitor is simultaneously meant to assume, however briefly, the identity of a member of the represented culture and to assume the identity of a scholar making sense of that culture. The texts navigate between these two identities and realities without, ultimately, bringing them together in a holistic whole.

**Conclusion: The continuing dialogue of meaning in museum exhibitions**

The museum staff is open to constructive criticism about the representations created by the exhibit texts. Lacy feels that many people are needlessly "anxious about presenting" criticism since the staff is very interested in hearing how the texts are received, and whether or not the visitor has received what the staff intended to communicate. As an example, Lacy states that she likes to read articles about the exhibitions before they are published to see if the articles represent what the staff felt they were communicating. Here, however, we see the slippery nature of all communication. The receiver has the option of interpreting an exhibit however he or she wishes, no matter how hard the staff tries to shape reception. It is impossible to create a text that all the time and for all
viewers communicates exactly what the writer had in mind. As Beverly Serrell points out "Visitors certainly can create their own meanings, in ways unintended by the exhibit developers, but this is not a problem as long as what the majority of them create is not contradictory to the exhibit's purpose, or does not perpetuate misunderstandings that the exhibit was supposed to correct" (5-6). Thus, the museum can only attempt but not always achieve the communicative goals it sets for itself as an institution. The staff's job is to try to achieve these goals in most cases.

In addition to the reception of the visitor, the museum staff also has to worry about the reception of the institutions that fund the museum, although Lacy states that no prior review exists for the museum. Within the next year the American Association of Museums will review the Spurlock, creating the type of analysis that will help museums like the Spurlock Museum across the country make the decisions about text and interaction that the staff of the Spurlock deals with daily.

From these two examples, criticism from the visitor and analysis from the Association, we see that museum texts exist in perpetual dialogue rather than in static form. Lacy often during the interview stated her desire to re-do certain portions of the museum, if she had the time and the money, because of the criticism she has received. The Spurlock Museum, then, is not a situation in which an authoritative voice forces content on the visitor, rather it is an interactive situation in which changes can, and often do, occur in how particular artifacts are represented and how they are given meaning through texts.
Works Cited


