

THE IMAGINED ENCOUNTER:
RELIVING AND RECREATING IDENTITY IN THE EXOTIC WORLD MUSEUM

by

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Abstract

The Exotic World Museum is a small amateur ethnographic museum created by Harold Morgan and founded on his extensive tourist travels with his wife Barbara. It consists of over 500 pictures, photographs, labels and artifacts which cover the walls and ceiling of the back room of Alexander Lamb's Wunderkammer Antiques, where it is currently housed. Through this museum, Morgan has created an identity for himself as a world traveler and a learned man. As such, the collection stands as a narrative of Morgan's life, portraying the identity he has projected for himself.

Morgan constructs this identity by establishing authenticity through the Museum and tourist experience, by using the National Geographic as a projection in which to place himself, and by creating an encounter between Self and Other. As such, the study of Exotic World has larger implications in the context of the history of museums and of collecting in general.

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The Imagined Encounter:

Reliving and Recreating Identity in the Exotic World Museum

"The strangest thing in a strange land is the stranger who visits it".¹

I. Introduction

If one were to consult a travel brochure on Vancouver, many different sites would be offered as potential places to visit. The goal of this thesis is to present an ethnography of one local touchstone which undoubtedly would elude the typical tourist's eye. The Exotic World Museum is located on Main Street, Vancouver, where it has existed silently since the early 1990s. Visited regularly by a small minority which has followed its progress from the original location to a new venue down the street, it is a small treasure most visitors first stumble upon in a chance discovery. Comprised of over 500 photographs, magazine pictures, artifacts and mounted labels, the Museum is a motley testament to its original owner Harold Morgan who travelled to professed 'exotic' locations annually for 35 years with his wife Barbara.

Despite recently undergoing new ownership under the auspices of antique store owner, Alexander Lamb, the core collection of the Exotic World Museum has remained a legacy to Morgan's life, an interesting fact considering the man himself was not particularly out of the ordinary. As a middle class small business man he did not appear to have the finances nor the curatorial expertise to establish a museum. Moreover, his experiences, while extensive, are not dissimilar to those of

¹Opening line to Dennis O'Rourke's film, *Cannibal Tours* (Los Angeles: Direct Cinema, 1987).

thousands of other tourists who embark upon ethnographic adventures offered by tour companies and cruise lines every year. Yet the presentation and display of his collection has allowed him to both create and project an identity that is larger than himself. Through the Exotic World, Morgan paints himself as a traveler and a collector, an artist and a curator. He documents his experiences as cultural encounters, as the Exotic World stands as an exploration of the Self, presented through the western encounter of the Other.

Unlike many conventional museums, the Exotic World is not about 'Truth', but experience. Seeking to encounter the places he read about in National Geographic, most of Morgan's tourist experiences echo the agendas of the packaged tours which negotiated his travel. As such, his is an encounter with the constructed identity of third world countries, packaged especially for western consumption. The brazen, the colourful rituals and traditions appear seemingly frozen in time as the embodiment of the fabled 'Other'. Tales of cannibalism, head hunting, bride wealth and tribal warfare figure prominently in this narrative. Cultures are generalized and merged into a popular touristic projection, with names like the Mudmen, Ghostmen, and Wigmen suggesting creatures with more basis in myth than reality.

Such notions, while common to the tourist mentality, have been partially responsible for the slow development of tourism studies as a discipline worthy of serious scholarly research. Its acceptance has been particularly difficult for anthropologists, as in the global world, the tourist has become the embodiment of western change, a parasite which feeds on the experiences of other cultures, introducing values of wealth and consumerism which often conflict with the local

traditions anthropologists have been trying to study and preserve. Yet, with the growth of a predominant middle class, tourism has developed into the single largest peaceful movement of people across cultural boundaries in the history of the world, making it unavoidably a topic of anthropological significance.² Thus, if anthropologists truly profess to be recorders of human experience, they cannot easily dismiss the active construction of individual and global identity present in the tourist objective. Like the native, the anthropologist, or the museum curator, the tourist actively creates a narrative founded upon his understanding of the world in a particular time and place. As such, he stands as an influential figure both as a representative of late twentieth century consumer culture and as an actor in the native cultural encounter.

Although the tourist experience enabled the development of Morgan's museum, it was his fascination with the exoticness of the world around him that first inspired it. Unbeknownst to Morgan, this was an interest he shared with Alexander Lamb, a local antique store owner who would come to acquire Exotic World in 2000, shortly after Morgan's death. Appropriately, named The Wunderkammer, Lamb's business is a specialty shop dedicated to the display and sale of early European curios. The Exotic World now sits on display in the back room of the antique store, not far down the street from its original location. Separated from the main shop by brightly coloured curtains, it has remained an active museum, with the recent addition of many new wooden masks and figures.

²Epilogue by James Lett in Theron Nuñez, "Touristic Studies in Anthropological Perspective". *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (second edition). Valene L. Smith, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) 275.

While Lamb's vision is similar to Morgan's, he seeks to emphasize the Exotic over the tourist experience. As such, more 'kitschy' elements of the original collection, such as postcards and souvenirs from Morgan's European travels are downplayed in favour of the brightly coloured and striking imagery of the Pacific, Asia, Africa and Latin America, carefully constructed scenes which cause the visitor to question where reality ends and fantasy begins.

While the Exotic World has undergone new developments in recent months, in essence it has remained the tourist narrative of Harold Morgan, the medium through which he actively constructed his identity as a traveler, and shared his opinions, outlook and fascination with the world around him. In this thesis I will examine the Exotic World Museum as an assertion of Morgan's self identity by conducting an ethnographic exploration of the collection and its history, as well as an analysis of several key themes which have allowed Morgan to actively narrate his experiences in a global context. The affirmation of authenticity and value, the use of the National Geographic in the collection and the pursuit of the Exotic and the search for Self are all elements of particular importance in Morgan's presentation. Finally, I will conclude with a brief discussion on the collector and his domain, examining the wider implications of the Exotic World in the context of the history of museums.

II. The Exotic World Museum

The Exotic World Museum is easily missed if one does not know what to look for. From a distance, the bright yellow storefront of Alexander Lamb's Wunderkammer Antiques stands out from those of other establishments, yet there

is little indication of the museum contained within. If a passerby happened to glance upon a small sign on the door, they would notice that it now housed something called the Exotic World Museum. Were they to ring the doorbell and venture inside, they would encounter a small dimly lit room containing strange memorabilia from the European past. A red curtain is pulled over the door to the next room, an official looking sign in gold lettering reads "EXOTIC WORLD" and "museum entrance". The majority of Sandy Lamb's curious visitors will peek their head in shyly, uncertain if they are trespassing into a private area, despite the sign's invitation.

Entering the world of Harold Morgan is more of a journey than a destination. Despite Morgan's demise, it is a journey which continues through Lamb, constantly shifting in identity and promise. As such, it is very much a living collection, as in the six months since his acquisition, Lamb has added over a dozen new additions to Exotic World. Yet, to understand Lamb's vision for the Museum, one must first understand Morgan, for Exotic World is irrevocably a biography of his travel experiences, an examination of the Self portrayed through the exploration of exotic locations.

An analysis of Morgan's identity through the collection can be performed in three parts. First of all, I wish to introduce readers to the Exotic World Museum by outlining its origins, describing the collection, and briefly discussing its current transformations. Secondly, I will describe the Museum itself, focussing on the three main components of photographs and magazine images, labels and artifacts. I will conclude by examining the Exotic World as it exists now, in the context of Alexander Lamb's Wunderkammer Antiques, looking at how its meaning has altered in the face of relocation and new ownership.

2.1 The History of Exotic World

When Harold Morgan first married his wife Barbara in the 1940s, they decided from the beginning that they did not want to have children. Instead, they chose to spend their time and resources on travelling to various exotic locations around the world. Thus, it was around 1956 when the Morgans embarked on their first trip to the Yucatan, desiring to “take a vacation that was different than what everyone else was taking”, and to “go where nobody else had gone”.³ Like so many other readers, Morgan was inspired by the images he saw in the National Geographic, and wanted to see the world that lay inside its pages. This trip was not to be his last.

Twenty-two years and an equal number of trips later, Morgan had collected three albums full of photographs and numerous artifacts from all over the world. Wanting to share his collection, he started putting a few pictures up on the wall to show to visitors.

I put a few here and there...I put a few more; finally after about three years I figured why not make the whole place a museum of travel to exotic parts of the world. Because everybody was flabbergasted to find that in Burma there is temples covered with gold.⁴

By the time the Museum was formally established in the 1980s, the Morgans had lived an incredibly itinerant lifestyle, having traveled as far away as the Trobriand Islands, Burma, Jakarta, Caracas, Papua New Guinea, Bora Bora, Marrakesh and Tikal. They dedicated two rooms in their house to Exotic World,

³Interview with Harold Morgan, by Roberta Kremer, November 1988. Manuscript in author's possession. P. 1 and 7.

⁴Morgan interview, 2-3.

opening the Museum to the public in order to share their collection of 500 photographs, artifacts, and labels which blanketed tables, walls and ceiling. Included in this colourful potpourri were an assortment of exotic insect species, stuffed crocodiles, currency, weaponry, letters of correspondence with National Geographic and people he had met on his travels, postcards, newspaper clippings and African and New Guinean masks. Tape recordings of African music and Morgan's journal narration of his experiences played in the background. A small red sign posted on the door read "This is a museum of strange facts and exotic places".

Throughout the years, the Exotic World has attracted a significant number of return visitors, and the guest book boasts callers from all over the world, people who would interact with both Morgan and the collection, asking questions and offering tales of their own travel adventures. In the years since its opening, the Museum has inspired a small book of poetry, and drawn the attention of local television stations and newspapers. Morgan himself asked little in return, save for a bit of casual social interaction and perhaps a small donation for the museum's upkeep and future acquisitions. Long into his retirement, he was said to be found in the middle of his museum, hooked up to an oxygen tube, eagerly discussing his life experiences with visitors.

With his passing in 1999, the Exotic World was left to his wife Barbara, herself in failing health. Thus, it was in the summer of 2000 that the Museum was first put up for auction by West Coast Estates.⁵ It was hoped that the collection could be sold in its entirety, although it was hard to determine who would buy a

⁵See Chris Nutall-Smith, "Museum of exotic artifacts closes doors on world of weird", *Vancouver Sun*, July 20, 2000, B1 and B3.

lifetime of someone else's memories, and at what price.

Initially, the collection was reported to have inquiries from as far away as Florida, Toronto and Seattle, although when the collection went to auction, the only bids came from local collectors.⁶ One of these was Alexander Lamb.

While he never met Morgan personally and only visited the original Exotic World once, Lamb was immediately drawn to the Museum because its focus on strange and unusual things complimented his own, and because he had great admiration for the essential narrative quality of the collection as a whole. As he notes,

..in terms of the objects in the museum, if you separated them and tried to sell them, you wouldn't get three thousand dollars...But as a gestalt it had value. There is value in the story and the background involved...The whole thing combined together is sort of a piece of art in itself.⁷

As such, upon hearing that the collection was up for sale, he was immediately interested although unconfident in his financial abilities to purchase the museum. Yet in the end, it was his location and simple good fortune that won him the collection.

With the initial highest bid given by University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology⁸, it did not appear that Lamb would get the collection. Yet, due to a misunderstanding between the Museum and West Coast Estates, as the only other

⁶Brenda Jones, "Museum's bid best but owner wants unique exhibit to stay on Main Street", *Vancouver Courier*, August 2, 2000.

⁷Interview with Alexander Lamb, by Sarah Krose, May 30, 2001. Manuscript in author's possession. P. 3.

⁸The MOA wanted to reassemble the collection as a case study for their Critical Curatorial Studies program, then in development. After reassembling the collection, they would have been forced to pack it in boxes because of lack of space.

party interested in purchasing the collection as a whole, Lamb was asked to match the initial bid in order to claim the museum.

By the time communication was reestablished between the Museum of Anthropology and the auction company, a local newspaper had painted the case as a fight between small business and a larger public institution.⁹ This was fuelled partly by a quote from Barbara Morgan saying she would prefer Exotic World to stay on Main Street where it could be best appreciated by its established clientele. Lamb's claim was not contested by the MOA, which was delighted that Exotic World would have the chance to remain open, an opportunity that they would have been unable to offer. Thus, it was largely by chance that Exotic World came to rest in the antique store of Alexander Lamb, appropriately becoming an extension of The Wunderkammer as it exists today.

2.2 The Collection

Due to its subject material, the Exotic World raises many eyebrows in this age of postcolonialism. Yet, the Museum itself has become an artifact of the life of its creator and curator, Harold Morgan. It is at once a museum, a scrapbook, a travel log, a wunderkammer and a work of art.

Within the Museum, each display is a labour of love, truly indicative of the 'do-it yourself' quality of the collection which makes it so unique. Morgan's paint store business afforded him access to materials with which to display his collection,

⁹ "Museum's bid best but owner wants unique exhibit to stay on Main Street" and Brenda Jones, "Exotic World staying on Main St." *The Vancouver Courier*, August 9, 2000, p. 11.

as the pictures are mounted and remounted in gold frames, metal sheeting and wood panelling in a variety of colours. Labels are carefully type-written in bold letters, underlined, mounted and updated frequently. Place titles are given added emphasis in gold sticker letters, the type commonly used to mark address numbers on house fronts and mailboxes.

Indeed, Morgan's obsession lay as much in the presentation as in the exploration of his travels, and the visitor bears witness to the cumulation of years of effort and display. For each photograph, Morgan narrated his experiences in the first person, describing his global encounters, and providing strange and unusual facts about the places and cultures that they came across in their travels. These labels are a fundamental and necessary part of the collection, for they are highly indicative of Morgan's personality, providing the voice through which he gives his impressions of the world around him.

The collection can be broken down into four main sections, notably, photographs and magazine images, labels, documents and artifacts. While each component interacts and complements each other, they serve different functions and even illustrate contrasting identities presented within the Museum.

Photographs and Magazine Images - Two-dimensional imagery dominates the majority of the collection, with over 450 photographs, magazine cutouts and postcards housed within the small back room of Wunderkammer Antiques. As a consequence, the overall impression of the Museum is largely affected by its reliance on wall space to display the collection, a condition which only enhances its

resemblance to the *kunstkammer* and other early styles of museum display.

Yet, whether it be a postcard or photograph, each image is presented in a careful manner, as Morgan took great pains to display each in a 5x7 or 8x10 gold frame, often mounting and remounting the image with cardboard and metal sheeting, frame within frame, carefully outlining each layer to enhance definition. Frequently, these appear in an indistinguishable series of Morgan's own design, with some larger frames housing up to 8 individual 8x10 images.

Geographically, the presentation of the imagery is difficult to classify. Although Lamb's presentation differs somewhat from Morgans due to space constraints, he has attempted to maintain the overall feel of the display. As such, one can see how Morgan started mounting pictures on a wall and began moving outwards as his collection grew. Images of a New Guinean Sing Sing are displayed alongside photographs of Burmese temples and African children. They have little semblance of order other than to show the breadth of Morgan's experience.

The subjects of his photographs are most commonly native people photographed either by themselves, or posing with Barbara or other tourists. The vast majority of these locals are dressed in traditional costumes. In the whole collection, there are only three photographs in which the native subject is wearing modern clothing. In one, a young New Guinean boy dressed in shorts and a t-shirt stands beside an older man in a grass skirt, face paint and beads. In another, one of the older photographs appearing to date from the late 1950s or early 1960s, a black man in a suit and tie stands beside a fancy car. From his stance and positioning, the viewer may well assume that he is meant to be the hired driver, an assumption which is quite probable considering that most of the personal

relationships Morgan is depicted as having with natives are with service people in the tourism industry. The final photograph portraying a New Guinean man in western clothing is Tony, the cook on the Melanesian Explorer on which Morgan was traveling. His photograph is carefully placed alongside a smaller magazine cutout of a traditionally dressed New Guinean, which appears as a projection of his traditional self. Each of these images suggests a contrast between the traditional and the modern, the western and non-western worlds.

While Morgan himself rarely appears in his own photographs, his wife Barbara is a common touchstone of the collection. Whether she is posing in front of scenery, talking to native children or wearing traditional grass skirts and tribal face paint, through her image, Morgan is able to portray his connection with 'the Other' without expressing the vulnerability of himself being photographed. Instead, Morgan casts himself as photographer, controlling the gaze that captures the world. For this reason, more than any other, Exotic World is explicitly his domain.

One of the most notable exceptions to this rule is a photograph posted above the door exiting the museum, showing Morgan walking into the distance, following a grassy trail into some greater unknown. A matching one of Barbara facing forward flanks the other side of the Exit sign. That Morgan avoids the camera's eye is notable, but it is also quite fitting that the last impression the visitor gets of Morgan before leaving Exotic World is of a lone traveller hiking off into the wilderness.

There is both a curious consistency and intriguing juxtaposition between the photographs and the other images. This is particularly apparent between the photographs and the National Geographic cutouts, which tend to be less posed and more candid in their presentation. While one is intensely sentimental, capturing the

nostalgia of experience and familiarity, the other is detached and neutral, presenting colourful scenes of unknown people by an unknown artist. Both are typically constructions of the western gaze, although unlike the more personalized photos, the professional photographer has the benefit of skill and equipment afforded by the status of his trade. In addition to this, he is also afforded more extensive access to rites and traditions restricted to the tourist eye. This professionalism, coupled with an anonymity not shared by Morgan, help create the illusion of objectivity in every shot. Yet, ironically, with the exception of the personalized images of Barbara, in many cases the visitor cannot easily distinguish between photograph and picture, as both are faded by light and age. A large number of each are framed behind glass, making texture deceiving. By touch, one is able to determine the difference in material for pictures and photographs without glass, but there are surprisingly many which are undeterminable by sight alone. Oddly, there are a disproportionate number of magazine cutouts that are placed behind glass compared to photographs, a fact that causes the careful observer to question the assumed importance of each.

In Morgan's collection, postcards are given equal importance to photographs and cutouts, as they are often mounted on the wall with their own labels. Like the other visual material, the postcards reflect Morgan's fascination with people as a prominent part of the creation of the Exotic, and thus it is notable that such constructed imagery allows him the detail of portraiture that he was not able to capture through his own photographs which are primarily more sweeping gazes. There are two long frames featuring six to nine African women, naked from the waist up, corresponding labels listing the name of their tribes. Another similar

display of traditionally dressed men is labelled "Tribes of New Guinea", and features nine portrait images, with no reference as to their corresponding tribes.

Labels - In *Exotic World*, the photographs and labels deserve equal billing, for while the imagery of each shot provides a visual recording of Morgan's travels by physically juxtaposing Self and Other, it is through text that different layers of meaning are truly established, both through the intricacy of its presentation, and through the rich narrative of its content. The labels are a fundamental and necessary part of the collection, for they are highly subjective, representing Morgan's voice as he gives his impressions of the world around him. Thus, the photographs and text work both together and separately, each enhancing the other showing the passion of a seasoned traveller.

The original handbill for *Exotic World* described it as a 'talking museum'. One of the underlying goals of Morgan's labels is to promote the social interaction between himself and visitors, piquing their interest with unusual (and sometimes inaccurate) cultural trivia, and prompting the visitor to ask questions. Such labels are brief and provoking, encouraging curiosity. One reads, "The tribe the Huli or Wigmen of New Guin. were cannibals previously. Brutal and fierce, they killed all their enemies and burned their villages...QUESTIONS?".

Despite the prominent combination of imagery and text, the biographical character of *Exotic World* is strongest when the narrative is left to stand alone, leaving Morgan's voice unmitigated by distractive photographs which can be more easily misinterpreted. Such use of text appears in two distinct forms. The first is

what Morgan terms "Hard to Believe...", 'fast facts' moulded in the fashion of Ripley's Believe It or Not, an influential source for his presentation. These give interesting snippets of cultural trivia, such as "In some remote parts of the jungles of New Guinea, when a wife has lost her husband, she must wear his cut off foot around her neck for a year". Most of these are conveniently vague and without reference to where the information was acquired, leaving the reader to accept or reject the information as it stands.

The other type, brief 'experience clips', appear as if taken directly from a journal, fragmented and disjointed, yet highly indicative of some of the most memorable and/or unusual hazards of the international traveller, dramatized for touristic intent.

Not realizing that the grave was the son of the island's chief, I took a picture. The chief protested to our guide, a conference took place and I was fined\$1.45...

Others of this type are more dramatic, carrying a morbid humour in the casualness of their mention.

Thought wife was washed overboard 'Melanesian Explorer' during storm off east coast of New Guinea.

We were robbed by natives in the highlands of New Guinea ..also in a earthquake. Later our launch from the Melanesian Explorer hit an unseen coral reef and near-nearly threw us out in shark infested waters.

Many of these clips describe 'close calls', as Morgan describes their brushes with everything from hurricanes, typhoons, political unrest, stalling plane engines and 'hostile natives'. As such, 'the Other' is widened to include anything foreign to the tourist, as the traveller is depicted as vulnerable to both chance and the unknown. The encounters are glossed over, as names, dates and specific cultures are

forgotten in favour of highlighting the tourist's role in the drama. Through careful scripting of experiences, Morgan's status is quickly raised from "interested traveler" to "daring adventurer" in the eyes of his admirers.¹⁰

Documents - This category is particularly valuable to understanding Morgan's conception of Self, as it consists of a motley assortment of written material which he deemed worthy of preservation. Yet, aside from the personal nature of such memorabilia, these are also some of the only items in the entire collection with dates, providing a rare indication of the timeline of his travel. As such, these documents are archival materials in their own right, crucial pieces to assembling Morgan's biography through the collection. While the majority are memorabilia of Morgan's travels, others are souvenirs generated by Exotic World itself, a category which undoubtedly will continue to grow with the Museum's progress.

One of the most remarkable things about the collection is that Morgan saved and displayed almost everything to do with his travels. The most prominent of these are letters which he exhibits proudly as evidence of both the legitimacy of his collection, and the personable relationships he established with the people he encountered. Letters from the National Geographic figure prominently in the first group, as he referred to the magazine's expertise in all matters of cultural curiosity. Despite the fact that the return letters are fairly standard, being answered by any number of research correspondents, each letter has been carefully framed and given emphasis by virtue of his interaction with what he saw as a reputable cultural

¹⁰Morgan Interview, 3

authority.

Also framed are the two letters from New Guinean men he met on his travels, labelled simply "letter from New Guinea tribesman Naua" and "letter from tribesman Pokalal". Both show the awkward handling of the English language and the grateful thanks given to the Morgans for gifts bestowed. Morgan has accented both letters with magazine cutouts, projecting pictures of the men as they allegedly would look in their traditional dress, a transparency that becomes apparent when the visitor realizes that both worked for tourist organizations, and were not likely to resemble the men in the pictures.

One particularly interesting document is a framed notice put out by the Sheraton hotel in Manila, describing protocol for dealing with the current typhoon warning. The notice concludes the list of safety precautions by suggesting that in the meantime, visitors should spend their evenings in any one of their nine outlets, bars and disco. To this, Morgan had added a label explaining: "Note: the main bar had been bombed a week earlier by the guerillas".

The second group of documents stem directly from the Exotic World itself. Morgan was fiercely proud of his collection and the interest it generated. One display boasts the announcement, "BELIEVE IT OR NOT- The head of Ripley's worldwide Museums called in to see us for possible insertion in their museum later on". As proof, Morgan included a framed business card of the company's VP of Franchise Operations in Toronto. A similar status item is exhibited not far away, as an elongated yellow frame documents "The Museum on TV", describing six different features about Exotic World covered by local stations, each boasting the autograph of both the reporter and cameraman that covered the story. Such documents are

indicative of Morgan's need for affirmation, revealing the importance of travel and the collection in his life.

Objects - The final component of the collection are the physical artifacts, a melange of material items ranging from wooden carvings, jewelry, weaponry and displays of exotic insects and animals. While the majority of Exotic World consists of two-dimensional visual material, such objects of material culture carry a more institutional sense of monetary value. As such, unlike the images and text, the physical artifacts are not easily accessible.¹¹ The carvings and weaponry are placed along the top of the walls; the jewelry and insects are displayed separately, en masse, pinned down on large frames; the shells are contained in a glass display case and the stuffed crocodiles line the edge of the skylight. As such, they do not appear as prominently as the rest of the collection, as the visitor is not permitted to examine them close up.

Some of the artifacts Morgan took greatest pleasure were exotic insects. His interest is evident in his interview:

...I'm terrifically interested in large bugs. These [pointing to large exotic bugs displayed on wall] are the only things that interest people. If I had a bunch of little bugs like they have in the museums, it takes away the effect. So what there's 50 types of flies and 100 types of mosquitoes. But if you show them there's one type like that or like that, then they begin to realize; it's like Barnum and Bailey the biggest and the best.¹²

He displays his large collection of exotic insects in homemade display cases

¹¹In the original museum, several carvings were stolen because of their easy accessibility.

¹²Morgan Interview, 7.

fashioned with wood and sealed with duct tape. Most insects are carefully labelled, some with their Latin names. Where he could, Morgan included 'fast facts', such as "These infest the coconut trees" or "This tropical beetle has the longest antennae in the insect world". In one instance, a label explains, "This is a walking stick insect..New Guinea. Extra legs on back wall".

In comparison, the cultural souvenirs have much less in the way of explanation. Where he could, Morgan made gold labels for the weaponry, jewelry and wooden carvings, stating the general place of acquisition, such as "New Guinea" or "Sepik River". The label beside one spirit post reads: "Evil Spirits Beware! Plant this outside of your hut". The stuffed crocodiles and alligators also stand on their own. A sole explanatory label reads "The Huntstien of New Guinea believe crocodiles created the world".

While artifacts did not figure prominently in Morgan's collecting, they are currently a fundamental part of Lamb's, although he appears somewhat limited by financial restrictions, buying most of his artifacts from the antique circuit. The first additions made to Exotic World after his acquisition, were sea shells. As he describes,

...I collected shells when I was going around to garage sales and so on. Some times you see some shells and they're usually not much money so I buy them. I've accumulated a lot. It's not really what you call a 'collection' of shells because there are shells that are rare and exotic. Probably the shells I have are just many many.¹³

Lamb's hesitation to call his shells a 'collection' appear to be based on an understanding of representation and classification. He has bought what he finds

¹³Lamb interview, 10.

cheaply without much concern for type or quality. Yet, they appear exotic because they are all quite large, and as such, appear to have origins outside of North America. These are exhibited in the middle of the room, sharing the sole illuminated glass display case with a select few wooden figures which weren't able to be mounted on the wall.

Other objects added by Lamb include carved wooden masks and figures from Africa and the Pacific. At the time of the interview, these appeared to be a focus, as in the six months since taking over the collection, Lamb had added over a dozen such artifacts, seeking out objects which were unusual, older or aesthetically interesting instead of strictly representative.¹⁴ Unlike Morgan, who referenced his objects through the place and experience of acquisition, Lamb relates to them through the images and information found in books documenting ethnographic collections, thus illustrating a more professional rather than experiential type of value.

2.3 The Changing Exotic World

The new Exotic World as envisioned by Alexander Lamb, draws more on elements of the Exotic rather than the kitschy world of the tourist. Lamb's store, The Wunderkammer appears as a fitting place to house the Museum, forming a complimentary dualism which both accentuates and problematizes the collection. It is here where the two worlds of the Exotic collide.

The Wunderkammer displays strange and peculiar antiques, primarily of

¹⁴Lamb Interview, 11.

European origin. Looking around, one finds such oddities as a Victorian metal toothbrush with rotating head, an assortment of Christian relic ware, and polished coconut shell goblets mounted in silver; the type of thing which would be quite characteristic of an early nineteenth century Wunderkammer.

Separated from the store by a line of brightly coloured gauzy curtains, the Exotic World Museum portrays quite a different part of the world, although one representative of the same western curiosity. Here, the vibrant colours of the photographic imagery come alive in the illumination of the skylight, providing stark contrast to the dimly lit store that preceded it. The objects and imagery appear surprisingly new in comparison. Two worlds of the Exotic placed side by side.

The Exotic World is a vibrant and living collection. Using Morgan's collection as the seed of the Museum, Lamb is moulding it into something which compliments his own interests. The store and the Museum become the Wunderkammer renewed, taken from two different angles. While one portrays the exotic of another time, the other displays the exotic of another place.

III. The Collection as Biography

As a collection reflects the life that is put into it, it is certain that the meaning of the Exotic World will continue to shift the longer it is under Lamb's jurisdiction. Yet, the core of the Museum is founded on Morgan's life, as he lives on through its eccentric commentaries, photo documentary and touristic view of the world. Thus, it is the quality of the museum as biography that gives Exotic World its character, a

factor that Lamb acknowledges and respects.¹⁵ As such, it raises certain questions, namely, how did Morgan use Exotic World to construct an identity that was larger than life? And how does this reflect how he saw himself in relation to the world around him?

These issues can be addressed in three parts, each of which leads to larger questions about the role of museums in general and the ways in which they create meaning. By examining how Morgan validates his experiences by substantiating their authenticity, by using the National Geographic as authority and muse, and by creating an 'Other' through which to see himself, we can better understand how the Exotic World serves to construct and project the identity of its collector.

3.1 Creating Authenticity and Value

Asserting authenticity is crucial to the validation of all things resting in the public eye, including both the Museum and the individual. It can differ according to the value sought by both its presenter and its audience. Yet, it is as much a construction of time as it is of place, making it completely circumstantial and inherently subjective, despite all appearances.

Authenticity stands as a utopian invention bred of nostalgia and devolution. It is the quality through which we measure meaning in the present based on our understanding of the past, rendering it almost inheritably imperfect. As Lionel Trilling observes,

It is a word of ominous import. As we use it in reference to human

¹⁵Lamb interview, 3.

existence, its provenance is in the museum, where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given. That the word has become part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences.¹⁶

The monumental value placed on such a word has been a prominent factor in the extreme restlessness of the late twentieth century. Authenticity has become increasingly problematic since the beginning of the industrial age, as the very quality of being modern is largely dependant on a sense of instability and *inauthenticity*. As such, the notion of progress to which we aspire stands in direct opposition to the constant allure of the authentic, the primitive, and 'the real', resulting in a constant game of 'push and pull' between these two forces.

As a consequence, we inevitably museumize the premodern.¹⁷ Museums have been designated as guardians of the authentic, shrines of reverence and fear in which we face what we have become by revisiting what we have left behind. Yet, however fictitious, it is somewhat comforting to imagine a past unchanged and unaltered, safely contained where it can be visited or ignored as need allow.

In the museum, authenticity is the characteristic that gives value to the objects that are housed within its walls. Claiming ethnographic objects as 'authentic' connotes that they are representative of a certain culture, having been made, used, and valued by their people, thus providing both a reason and a means by which to learn more about them. By calling the displayed collection a 'museum',

¹⁶Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 93.

¹⁷Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken, 1976) 8.

Morgan and Lamb are impressing a specific notion of 'value' upon the public audience. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls this 'the museum effect', suggesting that "not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but also the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls".¹⁸

Yet, authenticity, as it applies to tourist souvenirs connotes a much different kind of value, that which is found in the nature of the tourist experience which sends the message that 'I was there'. In ethnic tourism, it is the desire to capture the primitive which turns authenticity into a commodity.¹⁹ When Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's 'museum effect' is applied to the tourist experience, this becomes increasingly evident. As she notes,

Tourism...takes the spectator to the site, and as areas are canonized in a geography of attractions, whole territories become extended ethnographic theme parks. An ethnographic bell jar drops over the terrain. The vitrine, as a way of looking is brought to the site. A neighborhood, village or region becomes for all intents and purposes a living museum in situ. The museum effect, rendering the quotidian spectacular, becomes ubiquitous.²⁰

The notion of making the everyday remarkable is key to the success of any tourist venture, and in deriving a sense of value in one's experiences. Yet when the real and the authentic cease to coincide in the western imagination, it becomes necessary to create anew the notion of 'the Exotic'. The staging of rituals, 'Sing

¹⁸Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 410.

¹⁹Ian Munt, "The 'Other' Postmodern Tourism: Culture, Travel and the New Middle Classes", *Theory, Culture and Society* 11 (1994):105.

²⁰Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 413.

Sings', and ceremonial dances suggest the freezing of time and space necessary in our understanding of authenticity. The production of this concept suggests its fabrication, yet the tourist's experience of it makes it real.

The lived fantasy of the tourist experience lies in the ability to create narrative. A similar connection can be made with early travel logs. According to Justin Stagl, the authenticity of such documents lie in the sincerity of the traveller towards the world he experiences.²¹ Similarly, Morgan's labels are almost entirely experiential, their sincerity marks their value as his understanding of 'the real'. His narrative revolves around his own experiences rather than those of the people he encounters. Thus, by Stagl's definition, Morgan's description of his experiences is entirely authentic, although highly sentimental.

As such, the souvenir is highly dependant on narrative to establish meaning. Rarity, as it applies to the objects displayed, is only valued in so much as it relates to the person's experience in the place of acquisition. Thus, it is 'place' that determines the authenticity of the tourist object, and almost inheritably, the stories of their makers become lost, or else the items are entirely lacking of a personal connection to their original owners, having been made for sale or mass-produced. Thus, by combining the museum and the tourist experience, as Morgan has done, the question of authenticity becomes blurred, and it is up to the viewer to decide on the value of the collection.

One of the most important ways to create a link between tourist and place is the photograph, an important ethnographic document which figures prominently in

²¹Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: Theory of Travel 1550-1800* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995) 200.

Exotic World. Unlike the souvenir, the photograph is not seen merely as a metaphor of experience, but a section of reality itself, freeze framed in a way which is assumed to be easily readable to all viewers regardless of language or cultural barriers.²² It creates the illusion of objectivity, as “nature [rather than the photographer] seems spontaneously to produce the scenes represented”.²³ Yet, it is unquestionably produced, a mere mimesis of our own creation. In Morgan’s collection, this becomes particularly dangerous when the subject is trying to create scientific objectivity while still sensationalising the exotic and ritual images of so-called ‘primitive’ societies.

Morgan assembled and curated his collection based primarily on the touristic understanding of authenticity. He used his photographs and souvenirs as a kind of scrapbook to create a narrative for his visitors, thereby appointing himself as supreme authority of his own experiences. Thus, authenticity in this sense, like truth, is relative, and subject to the judgement of its author. As such, Morgan cannot be completely severed from his collection without it taking on a different meaning.

As has been established, narrative plays a fundamental role in the tourist’s identity, as souvenirs are used as props to construct what Giddens calls a reflexive biography; namely a combination of the internal narrative and the external

²²Catherine Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 28.

²³Roland Barthes, “The photographic message”. In *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977) 45.

representation of experiences to others.²⁴

As Susan Stewart argues,

The souvenir replica is an illusion and not a model; it comes after the fact and remains both partial to and more expansive than the fact. It will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins.²⁵

Morgan's personalized labels with the caption "Ask me about this" serve as a prime example of how he makes a direct connection between himself and his collection, allowing him to play the role of storyteller to create an 'exotic world' as he sees it. In the original museum, accompanying audio tapes which he used as a diary recording his travels, played in the background. The carefully scripted presentation of the collection effectively romanticizes the tourist experience, as he narrates his quest "to go where nobody else had gone"²⁶ (albeit on popular tourist cruise boats like the Melanesian Explorer), effectively editing out the hours of travel, confusion, and bad weather to present only the best and most exciting of his experiences. As such, his collection presents a documentation of the ideal tourist experience, one which bonds him to others who have similar stories, and more importantly, creates a narrative for those who crave such an experience but never had the opportunity.

Narrative also allowed Morgan to attach another sense of authenticity to his collection. By attributing financial worth, he is asserting a more institutional sense of

²⁴A. Giddens in Luke Desforges, "Traveling the World: Identity and Travel Biography", *Annals of Tourism Research* 27 (2000):931-932.

²⁵Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press) 136.

²⁶Morgan interview, 7.

value, such as that common to museums and the art market. While rarity and craftsmanship are not typically qualities associated with tourist items, Morgan's reference to them is significant. As he describes:

The most things I would figure are personally valuable were the artifacts we picked up in the Sepik River and the interior of New Guinea, many museums of the world are absolutely interesting in things like that, the way things are going. They are able to be hard come by. The masks that you see there and the various carvings . As the people in these various countries get to know the true value of them, like for instance, big mask you see there, that cost me 32 dollars on the river. That's worth probably 800 to a thousand dollars and if you've ever priced the masks of the Indians here in B.C. 500 to a thousand dollars...²⁷

A similar sense of value is conveyed in this mention of his stuffed crocodiles.

I'd take the crocodile (as the most special artifact) because they are absolutely banned from collecting them now, but that was the day that they were just killing them by the thousands and I think I bought that one for nine dollars. You couldn't buy it for a thousand dollars now.²⁸

Both instances convey the idea of discovery, giving the impression of being in the right place at the right time. Thus, it is evident that Morgan viewed his collection as having both experiential and financial value, a factor which is important in understanding how he curated the Museum, and how Exotic World combines several forms of authenticity to add credibility to the tourist experience.

Part of the financial worth lies in proving the scientific worth of his encounters. In several cases, Morgan attempted to confirm the nature of his findings, using the National Geographic as an authority on issues of cultural

²⁷Morgan interview, 8.

²⁸Morgan interview, 10.

curiosity. The most notable example of this is a picture labelled "The Centaur People of Africa", which reveals two bare breasted young girls with bright red wraps around their waists, hiding large protruding rumps which give the appearance of a set of legs placed further back on the body. Morgan backs up the picture repeatedly, citing a photocopied entry of his encounter with a diorama exhibiting the people at the Museum of African History in Capetown.

...we came upon a display showing a strangely shaped tribe of people with a horizontal projection of their spine of chose to 15 inches...Men, women and children.

I asked my guide to call the curator...who I informed that I had a museum of exotic travel in Vancouver...but I couldn't believe what I was looking at...

Did they do this to themselves?...No...Could it be a disease of their spine?...No, he told me that it had been on display for 15 years, been examined thoroughly by anthropologists, medical people and others and their only conclusion that it might be 'inbreeding or a genetic change back in time. Some where still alive, they were bearing children the same shape as themselves...and their legs and hips were as shown...Their tribe?...The Xam or Xan, part of the 'Bushmen of the Karoo area of South Africa'.

Morgan also backs up his experience by posting a framed letter from the "Curator of Museum of African History" who authenticates his description of the diorama, although no mention is made of the 'Centaur People'. Two additional responses from National Geographic are also posted, claiming they have no knowledge of the Karoo and have never published articles on the Xam.²⁹

This display accomplishes two things. First, by mentioning Exotic World to the curator at the Museum of African History, Morgan is authenticating his own museum as a collection to be taken seriously. The written correspondence with the

²⁹There appears to be a bit of confusion, as the NG letter suggests that Karoo was thought to be the name of the tribe rather than the area in which they were found.

African museum adds a sense of authenticity, not only to Morgan's collection, but to his experiences as a whole. Secondly, as he considers the National Geographic to be a scholarly magazine³⁰ and a source of major cultural authority, its baffled reaction to his inquiries serves not to discredit his claim, but only to further substantiate its level of exoticness. The combination of verification by an African authority and the confounded reaction of the National Geographic suggests that Morgan had stumbled across a particularly rare and exotic find. Hence, the 'Centaur People' are displayed as Morgan's 'discovery' and the picture and substantiating letters are given a place of honour amongst his collection.

As the letter from the Museum of African History indicates, the subjects of Morgan's curiosity are the San, a Kalahari tribe which has peaked western interest for two centuries. Probably the most famous instance in nineteenth century 'ethnological show business' was the exhibition of Saartjie Baartman, otherwise known as the "Hottentot Venus", who was displayed in London in 1810-11. The condition called steatopygia characterizes San women, producing a greatly enlarged rump. In Morgan's picture, the hind sections of the womens' bodies are covered, and likely exaggerated to market this feature, resulting in the billing of the 'Centaur People'. The origin of his use of this term is unknown.

Morgan's fascination with the 'Centaur People' is not unlike that which fuelled the display of human subjects two centuries ago. Although not in cages, he is displaying the San as his own, and in essence, exhibiting the people as much as his own experiences. In a similar analysis of Los Angeles' Museum of Jurassic

³⁰Lutz and Collins, 220 and 232.

Technology, Lise Patt describes such fascination as being fetishistic, arguing that “the distinction between self and other is confused and complicated, thus creating the need for the theorist to both rationalize and cover over his or her observations”.³¹ As such, Morgan justifies his curiosity in the peculiarities of the San by describing it in biological terms, which are authenticated by the letters. Yet, the juxtaposition between himself and the other, as illustrated by his account of his experiences conveys that the true meaning of his curiosity was not much different than that which fuelled earlier fascinations with the San, or other instances of anatomical difference.

The example of the ‘Centaur people’ illustrates the many layers of meaning used to validate the way we see the world. As such, what is portrayed as a freak of nature is actually a freak of culture³², a way to affirming the self and finding approval in the eyes of others. Having chosen a life of travel over having children, the Exotic World provides a means for Morgan to substantiate his experiences, thereby affirming his own sense of self worth.

3.2 The National Geographic and the Exotic World

As has been established, the National Geographic figures prominently in all aspects of the Exotic World. By the time of his interview in 1988, Morgan had subscribed to the magazine for 25 years, looking to its pages to suggest travel

³¹Lise Patt, “Horns, Bats, Ideas: Encountering the Fetish at the Museum of Jurassic Technology”, *Museum Anthropology* 20 (1997):71.

³²Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 10.

destinations, serve as a cultural authority, and provide the brightly coloured imagery which figures prominently in his collection. In many ways, he imagined himself as the camera's gaze, wishing to experience a world "just like out of the National Geographic".³³ From the first trip, the magazine spurred his imagination for the unknown.

I wanted always to see the exotic different parts of the world. So I decided I would go to the Yucatan, see Chichenezan and the various lost cities of the world that was a big thing in those days. National Geographic had their exploration barge down in the well of the Zenotie well of sacrifice just in front of the pyramid and we went down there and I was stunned, more or less by leaving mirrida.³⁴

First and foremost, the promise of discovery figured prominently in Morgan's aspirations. The idea of encountering 'lost cities', 'uncivilized societies' and 'exotic worlds' echoed the language he encountered in the National Geographic.

Yet, it was not only the substance, but the form of the magazine which captivated his imagination. Thus, the development of Exotic World was influenced by the magazine's ability to balance science and the popular by emphasizing visual aesthetics over scientific detail, a result of the social evolutionism which influenced the magazine until the 1970s, projecting the guarantee of progress by consistently painting other cultures in a favourable light, while still enforcing stereotypes of race, class and gender.³⁵ Such a dynamic was key in maintaining both the allure of the Exotic and the illusion of its scientific mystique.

The sensationalised imagery of exoticism brings back memories of

³³Morgan Interview, 2.

³⁴Morgan Interview, 1.

³⁵George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987) 233.

nineteenth century freak shows, world fairs and wunderkammers. Yet, in many ways it is not content, but *display* which creates our understanding of the Exotic as something distasteful by postcolonial standards. A comparison between National Geographic and Exotic World is key to making this point.

The two are similar yet different. Like Exotic World, Lutz and Collins declare National Geographic to be a type of souvenir, as "it collects the world between its covers, it is collected by subscribers, and it relies heavily on the photograph, a technology that necessarily miniaturizes the real world".³⁶ Equally, both National Geographic and the Exotic World attempt to create a balance between science and entertainment.

By publically exhibiting his collection and calling it a museum, Morgan was claiming some degree of scientific authority. Yet, given the amateur nature of the production, the distinctly personal perspective and the overwhelmingly visual nature of the exhibits, its emphasis on spectacle and entertainment cannot be disputed. As such, as in all products of a postcolonial era, we have rightly learned to be wary of institutions that claim to present 'fact' while glorifying images of head-hunting, cannibalism and other exotic and ritualistic aspects of primitive societies on the basis that they are picturesque. Such factors, camouflaged well in a 'scholarly journal' like the National Geographic dangerously threaten to give reinforcement to old racial and cultural prejudices. In the case of the National Geographic, this became a particular hazard in the 1960s and 70s at the beginning of the postcolonial era as the magazine attempted to faze the image of the westerner out

³⁶Lutz and Collins, 24.

of their pictures, thereby emphasizing the portrayed cultures in their own right. While placing increased emphasis on the cultures depicted, this also increased the impression of 'fact' by physically removing the subjective western experience as embodied by the western presence. Both tourist and National Geographic use photographs as evidence of the real. Yet, while Morgan uses National Geographic photographs extensively, he exhibits them side by side on a wall, offering a much more comparative effect than their usual concentrated page by page display within a series of hundreds of magazines. On top of emphasizing the sensationalism of the pictures in a comparative manner, he reinserts the subjective voice back into them by complementing them with his own experiences, rather than a scientific voice proclaiming 'fact'. The visitor is unable to discern which images are from National Geographic and which are Morgan's own, and the realization is made that they all are the product of a subjective gaze, and both photographer and tourist alike are guilty of sensationalism. This makes it easier for the viewer to recognize the persona of the Self in the portrayal of the Other.

3.3 The Pursuit of the Exotic and the Search for Self

The need to create an Other against which to judge oneself is not new. Dean MacCannell argues that the term 'primitive' is increasingly only a response to a mythic necessity to keep the idea of the primitive alive in the modern world and consciousness.³⁷ As such, we have come to a point where in many instances, 'primitiveness' becomes a marketable identity for enterprising natives who are willing

³⁷Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe, "The Anthropological Unconscious". *American Anthropologist* 96 (1994):653.

to sell, and for tourists who are eager to buy. Thus, MacCannell argues that "What we have in contemporary tourist encounters is not a confrontation of self and the other but a collaborative construction of postmodernity by tourists and ex-primitives who represent not absolute difference but mere differentiations of an evolving new cultural subject".³⁸ Biding this, the polarity between Self and Other is a construction, not necessarily a reality, and in curating the Exotic World, both Morgan and Lamb use the Other as a concept in which to define the Self.

The word 'exotic' has many connotations for developing our understanding of these constructs. The term has come to be understood in its widest sense, describing what is strange and unknown to the western world, and thus has been caught up in our understanding of the primitive.³⁹ As such, it has taken on distinct racial connotations, yet embodies feelings of both desire and repulsion to experience that which is different from ourselves.

One cannot define 'exotic' without defining the absence of it, and as such, there cannot be an Other without simultaneously defining the Self. Dime museums, freak shows, circuses, and world fairs have all echoed the human fascination with exoticism for as long as there has been a means for travel which would allow an encounter between groups with differing traditions, body types, cultures and languages. This need to create dualisms as a way of understanding the world is a key component of our rational, classificatory and scientific approach to life. As

³⁸ Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 653.

³⁹ Webster's dictionary defines it as that which is "introduced from a foreign country". Yet as Urry notes in Desforges (2000:928), with the increasing familiarity Europeans [and North Americans] have with neighbouring countries, tourists have had to go further afield to find an oppositional identity with which to define themselves.

Susan Pearce writes,

The active self works within his field, organizing and allotting, whether of real or of intellectual space; he, the divider, carves up the divided world into socially meaningful slices; he lives within Eternal Time but creates allocated times within the world. He belongs with the right, the correct the dextrous, the adroit, the legal and the legitimate, and we may add, the conservative forces of stability and established values. The left is in opposition, sinister, gauche, cack-handed and clumsy...⁴⁰

The very name 'Exotic World' claims the non-western world as object rather than subject, as the souvenir becomes the embodiment of the complementary Other, the ultimate memento of the tourist experience.⁴¹ As Morgan asserts control over the Other, captured in the form of the souvenir, he reaffirms his own authority as a world traveller. By casting himself both as narrator and as part of the narrative, he becomes situated in a position where the visitor's gaze on the world is his own, and the Museum is more telling of Morgan than those on whom he sets his gaze. In the end, "it is the possessor, not the souvenir which is ultimately the curiosity"⁴², and the Exotic World becomes a souvenir in itself, a souvenir and a document of Morgan's life.

This process can be traced back to the photograph, the most rudimentary unit of the Museum. The camera becomes Morgan's weapon for asserting control. Thus, the photographic gaze of Exotic World is decidedly masculine. While Morgan

⁴⁰Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge) 162.

⁴¹Deborah Kaspin, "On Ethnographic Authority and the Tourist Trade: Anthropology in the House of Mirrors", *Anthropological Quarterly* 70(2):55.

⁴²Stewart, 148.

figures rarely in his own pictures, his wife Barbara is his most common subject. He captures her interacting with the locals, wearing a grass skirt with a New Guinean woman, getting painted with tribal face paint, and watching dances performed. Rarely does Barbara pose on her own, except beside particularly impressive scenery or notable tourist landmarks. She appears as the extension of himself, authenticating his place in the native encounter.

While the overwhelming presence of Barbara in the photographs reinforces the authenticity of the lived experience, paradoxically it can also belie the authenticity of the scene, betraying it as a production rather than unmediated fact.⁴³ The locals are pulled back into the scenery, becoming a backdrop for the experience rather than factual entities in themselves. As such, Mulvey argues that the western presence in such a picture can promote distancing rather than immersion⁴⁴, reiterating the cautious nature of the host/guest relationship. Thus, the tourist becomes the constant around which the outside world revolves, creating a sense of impenetrable control.

The privileging of people over place is indicative that racial features and cultural dress provide a more direct and explicit impression of the Exotic through which to juxtapose oneself. In particularly prominent tourist areas, this is simplified by the practice of cultural groups donning traditional tribal costumes to increase economic appeal. Yet, failing this, the western imagination quickly takes over.

One of the most interesting displays in the Museum's collection is a framed document labelled simply, "Letter from New Guinea tribesman Naua". Here,

⁴³Lutz and Collins, 206.

⁴⁴Mulvey in Lutz and Collins, 205.

through broken English and careful penmanship, the New Guinean thanks Morgan for giving him a tape recorder and requests further correspondence. In the context of Exotic World, the quaintness of the letter and the care in which it was written help to reinforce the fantasy of 'the noble savage'. To further enhance the backwardness of this imagery, Morgan attaches a National Geographic cutout of a stern-faced New Guinean man in ceremonial dress, providing a visual projection for the western imagination.

Considering most visitors are more likely to pay more attention to visuals than text, the ruse will generally go unnoticed. Yet, the diligent reader soon discovers through the return address that 'Naua' is more commonly known as 'Tonny', and is actually an employee of Melanesian Tourist Services, where it is unlikely that he dons a uniform even remotely resembling the traditionally dressed man in the photo. Suspicions are confirmed when one makes a connection with a neighbouring 8x10 photograph, which reveals a smiling young man in modern dress and a white monkey on his head. The label identifies him as "Tony the cook on our boat the Melanesian Explorer (New Guinea)".⁴⁵

Morgan's desire to depict Tony as a 'tribesman' and project this association onto a more traditional ethnographic photograph coheres with the findings of Lutz and Collins in their analysis of National Geographic magazine. The authors found that many western readers were uncomfortable with images which projected what they saw as a clash between primitive and modern coexisting. Clothing was a prime marker in photographs, and that which was identified as western seemed both out

⁴⁵In Lamb's museum, the letter and larger photograph are placed side by side. The exact relationship in which they were placed in Morgan's original display is uncertain.

of place and a sign of cultural degradation, while non-western clothing was taken as evidence of cultural authenticity.⁴⁶ These findings also adhere to other images within the Museum, for there are only a handful of natives photographed in modern dress, and of those, all are designed to project the development as signs of backwardness, servitude or corruption.

Indeed, such an assessment lies at the root of a great contradiction in western thought. Modernity has become a double-edged sword, for while we frown upon third world poverty and desire to see such people become 'civilized' through education (as illustrated by the emphasis placed on 'Naua's' careful letter), we see the adaption of materialist principles by traditional societies to be the tainting of the west, and the removal of 'culture' in its purest sense.

Thus, the tourist experience can only be depicted as a marker of identity if the identity of the Other is portrayed as different from the Self. The third world offers an extreme, where the Other is often distorted, and rendered stagnant in order to enhance the assuredness of this proclamation. This is seen throughout the Exotic World as Morgan uses the world around him to construct an identity for himself that is larger than life.

IV. Discussion: The Collector and his Domain

The study of Exotic World raises some larger questions about museums and collectors in general. Of particular interest to this discussion is the notion of ownership both parties assert over the world around them, symbolized in the

⁴⁶Lutz and Collins, 247-248.

possession of its parts. This section will look at the evolving relationship between the collector and the collection and how it has come full circle in the context of Exotic World. I shall also examine how the act of ownership serves to reinforce the sense of Self, and what transpires when this ownership changes hands.

Didier Maleuvre described the relationship between the collector and collection as similar to that between the monarch and his kingdom.⁴⁷ They become one in the same, each owning the other, procuring the entanglement between object and subject. The disjointed and random display of pictures, photographs and artifacts in Exotic World were unified largely by the fact of Morgan's ownership. Therefore, now that the collection has changed hands, one wonders how its meaning has become altered with his passing. For as Walter Benjamin described, "the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner"⁴⁸, a problem which has long complicated the relationship between museums and their donors.

Yet, the Exotic World is unique to most other ethnographic museums for two reasons. Firstly, one cannot easily distinguish between the souvenir and the collection, for the souvenir *is* the collection, comprised of fragments of memory which make up Morgan's life. Like a single diary entry, each individual photograph, object and label holds little value on its own. But the sum of these parts span 35 years, portraying an epic life of travel, creating meaning that is not only sentimental,

⁴⁷Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 97.

⁴⁸Benjamin in Maleuvre, 97.

but experiential, drawing on universal ideas of longing and nostalgia.

Secondly, Morgan was not merely the owner, but the creator of Exotic World. As the author and subject of each photograph and label, he steps beyond the curatorial role and becomes the artist of his own life. Unlike collectors of tangible objects which can be more easily separated from themselves, Morgan was collecting memories, mementos of himself as he existed in a time and place. Thus, his presence is implicit in the collection, and the artistic integrity of the collection and its collector's prestige become one in the same. As such, the collection becomes something on the boundary between history and art, and there no immediate threat of the separation of subject and object that endangers most museums.

As the collection is not alienated from its original owner, it remains founded on human experience, an element which while remaining ultimately Morgan's own, can stimulate nostalgia and interest in other visitors. As such, unlike the detachment promoted by most museums, the Exotic World encourages a personal connection between the visitor and the collection, inviting them to ask questions and share travel stories.

Not only was Morgan collecting people and places, but he was also collecting moments in time. As Stewart notes, with souvenirs such as photographs and other tourist memorabilia, "the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside the self and thus presenting both a surplus and a lack of significance".⁴⁹ Yet, the emphasis placed on memory inescapably requires the process of forgetting, for as the nature of memories are fragmented, their

⁴⁹Stewart, 133.

piecing together ultimately demands the privileging of some experiences over others. As such, the past becomes romanticized, a series of instants in time. Through the collection, Morgan is able to construct his past into an "infinite reverie" which allows him to start again, reliving it in a way that it should have been.⁵⁰ To other viewers, much like in a tourist brochure, the exotic images create an imagined familiarity with the subject matter, making them desire to possess the same experience.⁵¹

Unlike photographs, more concrete tourist souvenirs tend to provide a more indirect value to the collector and traveler. Stewart argues that "a souvenir acquires value by means of its material relation to its original location".⁵² Yet, central to this point is its *relocation*, as it is ever reliant on nostalgia to provide meaning. A mass-produced wooden mask has little value in a small Pacific marketplace, yet when it is used as a memory device upon the tourist's return to Canada, and is surrounded by a story of acquisition, travel and discovery, it brings the value of experience that was associated with a certain time and place of value to the tourist. The souvenir becomes the point of origin for narrative that is unique to the possessor.⁵³

Despite its focus on such a modern subject as tourism, the method of inquiry and display in *Exotic World* is highly reminiscent of the earliest form of the museum,

⁵⁰Stewart, 152.

⁵¹John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972) 141, and Lutz and Collins, 32.

⁵²Stewart, 134.

⁵³Stewart, 136.

namely the nineteenth century *kunstkammers* owned by private collectors who sought to classify and encapsulate the many species and cultures of the world. Impey and MacGregor described this as a way to claim ownership and status.⁵⁴ In many ways, Exotic World served a similar function for Morgan, who sought to show off his travel prowess, sharing his experiences with visitors by sitting in the middle of his museum, fielding questions cued by labels which prompted, 'Ask me about this'. Like the *kunstkammer*, there is little order in Morgan's display other than to show the breadth of his experiences. Thus, by claiming experience and knowledge, he is asserting a sense of ownership over the 'unknown' and 'undiscovered', reliving a myth which has been in existence since the earliest explorers.

While it has never been acceptable, the notion of ownership in regards to other cultures is particularly problematic in this day and age. With ethnographic museums finally taking a sensitive look at their shadowy colonial past in the final decades of the twentieth-century, the existence of a museum which titles itself 'Exotic World' raises many an eyebrow. Yet, the similarities between the nineteenth century *kunstkammer* and the twentieth century tourism industry provoke some intriguing questions. Tourism, in fact, appears to be colonialism in another guise, an allegory well performed in the Exotic World Museum. Both tourism and the *kunstkammer* privilege wonderment over reverence, unlike most contemporary ethnographic museums which balk at spectacle, regarding it as a part of their past that should remain buried. While the *kunstkammer* tried to capture the world

⁵⁴Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, "Introduction" in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 1-2.

through a complete collection of the things in it, the tourist in his own way tries to capture the world in a more experiential sense, using souvenirs as trophies to authenticate his travels for others. Both privilege the strange and 'exotic' over the plain and the everyday items. Both are minimalist regarding textual explanations.

Like the *kunstkammer*, souvenirs and tourist memorabilia reflect a historical consciousness that does not consider the present to be qualitatively distinct from the past.⁵⁵ They show how the past can cohabitate with the present through memory, nostalgia and narrative. The quality of ownership brings this meaning to the forefront. Both tourist and collector form a subject-object relationship with material culture, thus linking its value with their own. As their story grows, so does the collection. It lives and breathes the life that is put into it.

V. Conclusion

By nature, museums tend to be faceless institutions. Collectors are separated from their collections, curators and designers appear as meaningless names at the end of an exhibit. Exhibits themselves seem eternal, or else seem to magically bloom like the changing of the seasons. Somewhere in this process, the Museum has become larger than life, appearing to sustain itself with cold professionalism and anonymous scholasticism.

Tourism has suffered a similar fate. Since the industry exploded in the 1950s, there has been gradual homogenization of the individual, reducing travel as

⁵⁵Maleuvre, 82.

recreation to an empty shell of statistics and numbers.⁵⁶ Many academics have become so consumed with Tourism writ large that they tend to ignore its humanism. As such, 'the tourist' has almost become a mythical figure invented to further discussion in social theory.⁵⁷

The wonder of Exotic World is that it turns both tourism and the Museum on its head, reintroducing the element of humanism by casting the individual at the center of the narrative, portraying the Museum as expression rather than institution, and breathing new life into our understanding of the Tourist. Inheritably, this is a result of its amateur status and the diary-like format in which it narrates the life and travels of its original owner, Harold Morgan. Through Exotic World, the tourist is given a name, an identity and a voice. Through the medium of the museum, Harold Morgan not only conveys but constructs his experiences as he wants them to be seen in the public eye.

As curator, Morgan authenticates his collection, drawing on notions of value from both the Museum and his personal experiences; as a creator and navigator, he projects himself through the National Geographic, mapping out a world for both layman and scholar; and as a discoverer, Morgan examines unfamiliar territory with new eyes, redefining the Exotic as he defines himself.

The very existence of Exotic World is evidence to the potential and the empowerment of the collector. It is an amateur museum in an age of professionalism, a return to the age of the wunderkammer and the heyday of the

⁵⁶Desforges notes that certain authors such as Munt (1994) and Bruner (1991) don't talk to tourists, yet set out to debunk the aims of travel.

⁵⁷Desforges, 931.

private collection. Yet, its subject is truly modern, as it documents one man's tourist experiences in exotic places, presenting the cultural encounter of the Self and Other in the late twentieth century. Through his collection, Morgan embraced the power not only to relive but to recreate his experiences with the Exotic, redefining himself as he constructs his narrative. The Exotic World becomes emblematic as a souvenir of his life, as one who decided against having children instead found immortality in a collection which carries on after his death.

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