Volunteer Docents

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of docents in museums with special attention to their volunteer status and interpretive function. Particular reference will be made to the docent program at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature (specifically the "Indians of the Plains" and the "Inuit" programs).

In the wide context, volunteerism is seen as the very core of North American idealism (Naylor 1967:19). In consequence, this "gift of service" has become fundamentally important to nearly every area of public service and, as Wriston (1977:17) and Wilson (1976:20) assert, the trend is actually increasing the number and variety of volunteer roles in modern society. As institutions dedicated to the public good, museums also make use of volunteers in several areas, but primarily in that of interpretation/education (Reibel 1971:28).

The term "docent", coming from the Latin word meaning to teach, is defined as one who guides groups, particularly school classes, through museum exhibition areas after having had training in subject matter fields, museum operation and philosophy, and group management skills (Burcaw 1975:41). L. Flint (1959:104) states that the volunteer docent's job "...is primarily to help people discover interesting and exciting facts and relationships, and to find pleasure in the process." According to M. C. Bradshaw (1973:1), the activities of volunteers should not replace the efforts of professional staff here, but rather expand them. Indeed, as E. S. Straus (1977:24), S. P. Low (?:3) and others maintain, they should be treated on the same basis as the professionals themselves in order to encourage professional responses from volunteers in the course of their duties. We are therefore not dealing with the "tea pouring", "money raising", "social" auxilliary (although not belittling their potential "fringe benefit" contributions (Payson 1967:18)), but with integral, functioning members of an educational team.

D. B. Reibel (1974:16) maintains that volunteers must be considered as part of the staff, in reality, as "unpaid employees", since, as Naylor (1967:28) asserts, the antonym of "volunteer"
is not someone who is "professional", but someone who is "paid". Therefore, volunteerism can not be used as justification for inferior or unprofessional behaviour (Bradshaw 1973:3). Since they are expected to behave professionally, it becomes important to look critically at the role and performance of volunteers.

People are motivated to volunteer according to Bradshaw (1973:5) and Silver (1977:17) because of a desire for social contact with peers, intellectual and cultural stimulation, satisfaction in service to the community, status in association with a social elite, or a route to a permanent position.

In the past, volunteers in general, and docents in particular, have been typically W.A.S.P. (Reibel 1974:22), upper-middle class, college educated housewives who were recruited by friends (Bay 1974:25), aged thirty to forty-five (some say "older"), with children in school and husbands in executive positions (Flint 1959:104). Naylor (1967:45) has predicted that in future, volunteers will increasingly tend to come from the ranks of the lower-middle class who will have been automated into shorter hours. The professional group she predicts will be faced with even more demands on their time in the future and therefore will have less to volunteer. It also seems clear that unemployment (in the teaching profession for example) will also swell the ranks of volunteers. As well, there are presently several museums who are looking to draw from teens, senior citizens, minority groups and even children to broaden their volunteer base (Hall 1977: Reibel 1971:28, Seidelman 1965:301).

Ideally, the qualities museums look for in volunteer docents are: good communication and interpersonal skills, dependability, a broadly educated background (Morgan 1968:30), flexibility and adaptability, a willingness to accept guidance and constructive criticism (Fayson 1967:18), a desire to learn and to improve the quality of performance, a reasonable appearance (Bradshaw 1973:3), accuracy of knowledge, an interest in people (Seidelman 1965:299), a desire for challenge, and a variety of interests, as well as a strong committment to the museum (Wood and Cuthbertson ?:4).

The value of using such volunteers is widely recognized. This becomes apparent from A. Z. Silver's (1977:16) report that a survey under the National Endowment for the Arts determined that in the United States volunteers comprised sixty-seven percent of the
of the total work force in art museums.

Beyond the "fringe benefits" of volunteer social activities, the advantages inherent in a volunteer program for museums are: the warmth and enthusiasm which volunteers can add to museum programs which in turn help to counter institutional inertia and unburden overworked staff (Silver 1977:17). N. J. Hall and K. McGraw (1977:28) cite the benefits of being able to extend emphasis on participatory activities beyond the capabilities of a small number of paid staff. P. Harris (1976) cites the following benefits: 1) the humanizing of the museum program, 2) the injection of new ideas, 3) thus giving different perspectives from the "professional", 4) energizing and enlivening of programs, 5) the breakdown of inertia and tradition, 6) the freeing of staff from non-professional duties, 7) injection of new enthusiasm in staff, and 8) the possible addition of skills which staff may not possess.

Thus, many museumists do maintain that the services of volunteers are vital to the operation of museums. Nevertheless, despite the distastefulness of criticizing volunteers (who, after all, are engaged in highly valued social behavior), there are a number of disadvantages involving the use of volunteer workers (Bay 1974:25). There have been certain conflicts causing doubts about the real value of volunteers in museums ever since the beginning of the concept in the early 1900's (Silver 1977:16). Reibel (1971:28) goes so far as to state that some large museums consider the volunteer as a "pest"--the fewer the better.

The very nature of the "typical" volunteer is cause for some concern. Reibel (1971:29) and Silver (1977:19) note that non-"Establishment" groups (ethnic and linguistic) are seriously under-represented in the ranks of volunteers. This problem is apparent in the makeup of the docent group at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. Despite the fact that Native people for example have been approached to participate (Nancy Vincent personal communication), there are few if any minority groups involved. Reibel and Silver would suggest that still more effort must be exerted by museums to involve a wider range of people in their programs.

Some (Bay 1974:25) are critical that quite often the "social" aspect of volunteer organizations overrides other functions and that, as individuals, volunteers tend to be unreliable. L. Flint
(1959:104) reports that problems sometimes develop when volunteers undertake assignments in which they are interested, but for which they do not recognize their lack of qualifications.

In some cases, another difficulty is that volunteers and their organizations undermine the power structure of the institution and begin to "run away with the museum". This problem becomes critical when such a separate power structure acts contrary to the philosophy and goals of the museum. R. L. Selby (1977:21) indicates that the difficulties in coping with this problem arise, first of all, from a "vagueness" in the volunteer role definition and, secondly, out of the reluctance of museums to exert tight control over (and perhaps thus alienate) volunteers. As well, Silver (1977:18) asserts that volunteers through personal connections often have direct access to trustees or administrators and can therefore undermine the position of staff members. Volunteers have been known to go over the heads of staff members in order to have their own ideas implemented.

Reibel (1974:21) suggests that one way of avoiding this type of problem is by not allowing volunteers to organize their own groups at all, since such organizations only tend to exclude people anyway. Selby (1977) asserts that the problems could be eliminated by clearing up the ambiguity in volunteer role definition through specific guidelines or bylaws.

The encroachment of unrestrained volunteers into areas which the staff consider to be their own preserves adds to the tension which characteristically develops between the two groups. M. Wilson (1976:152) asserts that the major problem here is a lack of staff acceptance and support of volunteer workers. A. Z. Silver (1977:16, 20) states that because of a "snobbish attitude" on the part of the paid staff, volunteers become keenly aware of their "museum leper" status. Volunteers tend not to feel as if they are in fact accepted by the professionals because they do not often receive encouragement toward becoming professional at their tasks. A. Heine (1965:288-9) maintains that this indicates "...plain professional, possessive jealousy, mostly caused by intellectual insecurity in the paid staff."

Such strained relations lead to bad management and ineffi-
cient use of volunteer services (Straus 1977:25). Wilson (1976:16, 53, 55, 143) is critical here of inflexibility (seen as the greatest management weakness), and a lack of planning, sensitivity and management skills.

Another major problem regarding the volunteer docent has to do with their qualifications as educators. M. Harrison (1960:83) has stated.

One of the assumptions that museum educationists have to live down, however, is that anyone who can read and can speak to a group of listeners is, ipso facto, able to convey the significance of museum material to that group. It is a far more subtle and difficult matter than that and, as a general rule, only specially trained staff can hope to do it well.

The deficiencies here become critical in the view of A. Bay (1974:26) and G. Guthe (1964:29). They believe that in the end analysis it is the docents upon whom much of the effectiveness of the museum depends. As the primary function of the docent, "interpretation/education" will be examined in more detail below.

According to L. H. Coen (1975:283),

The necessity to interpret them (museum objects) in an exhibit follows from the fundamental anthropological principle that the meaning of objects is a sociocultural product. Humans impart meanings to objects and can radically change their significance, and therefore exhibits must be designed to communicate the chosen interpretation of the objects displayed.

The value of the volunteer docent under these circumstances, according to Silver (1977:17) is that s/he is able to be a...

...translator, a person who speaks the lay language to the public on its own terms. Standing in the middle ground between audience and object, the docent must find ways to make art (or other subjects) personally meaningful to visitors by raising questions prompted by her own enthusiasms and, in turn, eliciting and affirming those of the public.

Interpretation has been defined by J. R. Dum (1977:15) as,

...activities that responsibly explain, and/or display the collection in such a personalized manner as to make its background, significance, meaning and qualities appealing and relevant to the various museum publics... (It is also) ...the personalized attempts to bring out the meaning, feeling and understanding of an object, literary peace or idea. It is within this realm, devoid of any intention to teach or educate, that the interpreter works
to bring his or her museum to the many audiences that he or she is attempting to reach...the interpreter is charged with appealing to the audience in a manner that precipitates a productive emotional encounter out of which the visitor ultimately develops a deeper attachment for, and appreciation of, the museum, its collection and the cultural and natural heritage it represents.

There seems to be some question as to the distinction (and indeed the very need for such distinction) between "interpretation" and "education". As Bay (1974:25) also maintains, docents are to be considered not as "instructors in subjects", but "interpreters of objects!"

Dum believes that museums must separate and define the functions of education as apart from interpretation. The argument is that the differences between the two cause dissention and frustration among the staff as well as a loss of interest by visitors. Dum defines education as being education is central with systematic instruction, within a specific time period, in subject areas related to the collection, the results of which are capable of being measured.

The key difference seems to be that education is factual while interpretation deals with feelings and emotions.

In the light of the modern educational philosophy of "confluent education" (i.e. the affective must not be isolated from the cognitive), the distinction here seems a trifle specious. It seems obvious that if interpretation and education as defined by Dum are different, that the function of the museum is in fact to combine, not separate the two. If museum education is not an attempt to create an emotional as well as cognitive understanding, then it is difficult to comprehend exactly what it is or should be.

The solution here is to assume that the two terms are mutually inclusive and that the purposes of museum "interpretation/education" are fundamentally the same. They both strive to produce some growth in the visitor. If "education" is defined conflually, there is no conflict between the two terms.

There are a number of other problems connected with interpretation in museums which have led J. R. Dum (1977:16) to emphasize J. Fortier's statement that "Our present 'methods' are primitive and slipshod. We have to cultivate a far more sophisticated level of interpretation."
Already at the bottom of the totem pole, museum educators, according to Silver (1977:18), are offended that theirs is the only museum field in which the responsibility rests primarily with "amateurs". It is not only the idea that someone might be paid for the job done by volunteer docents, but (again) that volunteer docents have a tendency not to behave and perform like professionals, or, are casually irresponsible.

Silver (1977:19) also notes that the "typical" docent as described above may have difficulty in relating to minorities because they lack the needed background, sensitivity and skills to overcome the barriers. In general, L. Flint (1959:102) notes that museums do have difficulty in dealing with visitor differences.

According to Nancy Vincent (personal communication), this is a concern in the docent program at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. In observing the delivery of the "Indians of the Plains" and the "Inuit" programs, one can note aspects of docent performance which do indicate a lack of cross-cultural sensitivity, not to mention ultimate accuracy (see also Low 7:2). Although there are certain factors operating here which are beyond the control and responsibility of the docents (such as program and exhibit design 1.), the volunteers at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature do exhibit some serious weaknesses.

In general, the concept of "cultural relativity" 2 does not seem to be understood by all docents. Bay (1974:28) asserts that it is in fact quite difficult to give guides unfamiliar with anthropology a sufficient grounding in the discipline to be able to project acceptable understandings of anthropological concepts. Harrison (1960:83) too maintains that,

The stimulation of the imagination and development of sensory awareness which are among the prime purposes of museum education cannot possibly be fostered by persons who have been given bare facts but have not had the experience of daily contact with tangible objects from which the facts are derived, or with which they are related.

Negative evaluations which are cummulative occur through use of value-added terminology 3, "old wivery" (eg "Inuit noses are short because they use ulus to cut their meat which they hold in their mouths" 4.), confusing ethnographic present, as well as statements that Indians were not "smart enough" to invent the
wheel (despite the fact that this was later qualified).

There is also a tendency to be rather superficial, not dealing with the underlying explanations of Native life styles; the lack of which fails to promote cross-cultural understanding. As one example, it is difficult to deal with the term "eaters of raw meat" in isolation from the ecological factors, or without reference to those in our own culture who enjoy "rare" meat.

The cumulative effect of such references and approaches (minor though they may be in isolation) results in an ultimately negative evaluation of Native life and has caused some problems with the self-image of Native students taking the program (Nancy Vincent personal communication).

The teaching methods typically employed by docents have also been a source of criticism. According to Bay (1974:26), the problem here rests not in the teaching of the content, but in the methods of communication. M. Harrison (1960:84-5) points out that the group teaching methods used and the stressing of verbal facts while neglecting the museum objects, results in a serious misuse of the museum facility. L Flint (1959:104-5) indicates that the problem arises out of the reliance on rote presentations. It is a basic concept of the museum that the education derives primarily from the objects themselves, and therefore, the gallery is where the most effective education takes place. Particularly the "Inuit" program at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature tends to stress a lecture and audio-visual presentation rather than the gallery and the museum objects themselves. Less than one quarter of the program is spent actually in the gallery looking at the exhibits. In some cases even this is shortened rather than the lecture or the audio-visual elements. Harrison (1960:85) states,

> The real purpose of the visit is to look at the exhibits in their setting and if too much time is spent in the museum classroom the group will be given too little time opportunity to see the galleries...the real contact with the objects should come first, and the abstraction -- the words, theories and explanations -- follow.

Wood and Cuthbertson (?:8) deal with the tendency to depend on audio-visual materials. They point out that actual objects which can be seen and touched have a great impact on the T.V. generation. Therefore, audio-visual materials should be used
minimally since the most important impact comes from the objects and since the entire point of coming to the museum is to have contact with actual things. They also recommend that audio-visual materials should not be used without comments, questions and discussion. Otherwise, they believe, they have no value. The audio-visual material in the "Inuit" program tends to be inserted, not only in lieu of more extensive exposure to the gallery itself, but at the end of the visit when effective discussion is not possible.

Another criticism of docent performance deals with the interpretation methodology used, specifically the use of questions. M. Harrison (1960:89) and Wood and Cuthbertson (?:?) assert that, "Probably the single most important interpretive device is the question. It is a tool, which, when skillfully used, can guide the student to form his own chain of reasoning about objects or ideas." M.P. and N.A. Flanders (1976:212-3) maintain that one of the major mistakes of docents (and teachers in general) is that they spend too little time developing a challenging sequence of questions (ie narrow questions about facts and features of artifacts, then comparison, and finally asking for groupings, explanations and conclusions).

From observation of the docent programs at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, questions (when they are used at all) may be formulated improperly on the basis of prior information possessed, or tour dynamics. This seems to indicate a lack of prior thought. Also, questions might be asked, but answers are not awaited long enough, and the docent finds him/herself answering their own questions. Sometimes there is also a tendency to ask questions which underestimate the intelligence or level of the students. As Wood and Cuthbertson (?:?) state, "The art of teaching is in matching child and question at the point where the child is not affronted by simplicity or mystified and frustrated by difficulty."

Therefore, it is apparent that docents must develop better interpretive approaches if they are to be effective in proceeding toward the goals of the museum.

The difficulties with docent roles and performance noted above are widespread despite the major benefits which they still do contribute to the operation of museums. The solutions here seem to lie in the improvement of training and evaluation of these
volunteers.

The training of docents becomes critical because they have accepted what are really professional responsibilities demanding special training in order to develop the needed competency in knowledge and skill (Straus 1977:24).

H. S. Payson (1967:18) maintains that staff members must train volunteers as carefully as if they were new additions to the paid staff. According to Reibel (1971:30), the greatest problem here is getting volunteers to accept the need for a professional attitude and quality of work. There are a number of elements which have been recommended for inclusion in docent training programs.

W. L. Morgan (1968:29) and several others recommend strongly that attendance be mandatory at initial and at all follow-up training sessions.

One of the first elements for any training program is an introduction to the ground rules, philosophy and objectives of the institution (Compton 1965:295, Flint 159:105). More specifically, this also applies to the purposes of the exhibits and programs (Wood and Cuthbertson 1977). Without such a grounding, docents can easily be confused and perhaps actually be working at cross purposes to the museum. Clear, precise goals and objectives help to tie the organization together and to motivate toward excellence (McFarland 1973:2).

It is also important, according to Seidelman (1965:300) and McFarland (1973:3-4) that volunteers be made aware right at the outset exactly what will be expected of them in terms of their responsibilities, authority and accountability. One way of ensuring this is to have volunteers sign a "contract".

M. Wilson (1976:155) feels is is important that, since the learners are adults, the training program planning should take into account that the learning aimed for should be problem-centred and present-oriented rather than subject-and future-oriented. Adults tend to be more interested in practical help aimed at improving their performance than theoretical discussions. According to James Jorgensen (Wilson 1976:155) the ideal adult learning experience should be planned around mutual trust, respect and concern. It should also be as open and as challenging as possible.

Since "accuracy is absolutely essential" in docent presenta-
tions (Wood and Cuthbertson ?:5), it has been recommended that docents be encouraged to continually broaden their knowledge and check their facts. This is best accomplished by the distribution of printed materials on the artifacts, pertinent anecdotes and appropriate questions which would be involved in each program. (Morgan 1968:30). In addition, background information and a bibliography should be provided so that the docents can continue to expand their knowledge on their own (Bradshaw 1973:5-6).

In short, docents need a steady flow of provocative information relative to the subjects with which they deal in their interpretative role and relating to the art of interpretation itself. This stimulation must be constant, informative, entertaining, relevant, and it must be geared to their needs, not over their heads (Bradshaw 1973:6).

Docent training should also aim to help in the selection of details to be included in program tours (Low ?:7). M. C. Bradshaw (1973:5) has suggested that docents initially should be given highly structured "tours" with definite routes and specific information at each learning station. Although there are problems with this approach, Bradshaw asserts that this would put an end to the "myth making" and repetition of gossip" to which the untrained docent often turns in desperation. As the volunteer becomes more confident, knowledgeable and flexible, s/he could be allowed to alter or abandon the set presentation as needs, strengths and interests dictate. The professional staff, however, should be consulted about what is to be included (Low ?:6).

M. P. and N. A. Flanders (1976:216) maintain that tour performance of docents could be improved with coaching in the best "interactive patterns" to use and in the necessary skills to be developed. As noted above, the skills of good questioning should be included here along with public speaking, group dynamics and "museum manners".

L. H. Coen (1975:283) asserts that training in "the interpretative point of view" is also necessary. This involves subject matter competence as a prerequisite, as well as a study of the "synthetic, synergic notion of museum exhibition".

The Flanders (1976:205) have noted that, as is the case with classroom teachers, teaching behaviour will rarely be modified without the time, incentive and resources being made available.
to allow a thorough grounding and trial. Docents must be given the opportunity (and in fact required) to participate in initial and continuing training so that they can meet professional expectations. Another factor determining the success of docent programs is seen to be the involvement of these volunteers in an evaluation program.

There is quite often great resistance to the evaluation of volunteer workers. M. P. and N. A. Flanders (1976:199) indicate that despite the relatively wide availability of training for docents, inservice evaluation is virtually non-existent, even where excellent opportunity for such evaluation exists. Indeed, Silver (1977:19) asserts that evaluation is actually the weakest part of museum education programs.

The explanation for this deficiency is that it is felt by many that volunteers will not accept being evaluated (Flanders 1976:199). There is also the prevailing "existentialist" view that some aspects of human behaviour are impossible to analyze since the very artistic, spontaneous, creative behaviours sought are destroyed by the very process of looking for them. It is felt that docents do best when left alone, free from the interference and threat of evaluation (Flanders 1976:207).

Nevertheless, M. Wilson (1976:88) believes strongly that evaluation is essential to any good volunteer program. This is only partially because sponsors are now beginning to demand practical justification of the known results of volunteer activity. Docents are now expected to assume professional behaviour and responsibilities. Therefore, the only way in which their performance can be monitored, improved, or at the very least prevented from damaging the museum's reputation, is through evaluation. According to G. V. Glass (Flanders 1976:207), the only way people can proceed toward excellence is by measuring the impact of their actions. Evaluation is essential, if only because the amount of effort expended by the volunteer is so great (Flanders 1976:199). Reibel (1971:30) goes so far as to state that if volunteer work is not evaluated, it should be abandoned altogether.

A. Z. Silver (1977:17) acknowledges the need for accountability and evaluation for volunteers, but decries the lack of a "qualitative evaluation through which on-the-job performance of volunteers
can be judged and through which they can be 'fired'. This void seems to have been filled by the Flanders scheme in their 1976 article "Evaluating Docent Performance". They have developed a process for evaluation based on self criticism and "interaction analysis". In this process docents study their own interaction, practice different interaction patterns, receive constructive criticism and go on to further study.

Contrary to Flint's (1959:105) and Bay's (1974:26) recommendations that evaluation should take the form of "spot checks", the Flanders (1976:201) and Wilson (1976:91) maintain that evaluation should be an integral part of the program from the very beginning and that it should continue constantly throughout. Such continuous monitoring helps in the discovery of weaknesses before they become unmanageable (Wilson 1976:91). The familiarity of the volunteer with the constant evaluation greatly reduces the threat nature of the process because it becomes part of their learning and a vital aspect of program improvement. The threat situation inherent in evaluation can be reduced substantially by meaningfully involving the volunteer in the planning, implementation and discussion of findings, and by stressing that its function is focused on improving the program as a whole rather than on individual docents (Reed 1972:21, Flanders 1976:201). The evaluation should also be carried out in a "non-directive", supportive manner under feelings of mutual respect between staff and volunteers (Wilson 1976:143).

The first stage of evaluation should occur in the screening process. As noted above, not every one is suited for the role of docent. Careful selection of docents on the basis of institutional need and individual ability should be paramount considerations in order to prevent misplacement and "elitism" (Selby 1977:23).

The Flanders (1976:200) point out that it is important to evaluate not only what the docent knows (ie subject matter, major concepts etc), but how the knowledge is used to conduct a tour. It is clear that the effect of the training program must also be evaluated (Flanders 1976:201).

The Flanders (1976:199) and Wood and Cuthbersson (?:8) stress that evaluation will be meaningful only insofar as specific
objectives have been established. Wilson (1976:88) defines the basic steps in the process of evaluation to be 1) the establishment of standards, 2) the measurement of performance against the standards and 3) the correction of deviations from the standards. Morgan (1968:29) and Seidelman (1965:300) recommend that written tests and micro-teaching processes be utilized. Wilson (1976:90) suggests the use of outside evaluations (visiting teachers' for example (Morgan 1968:30).

A. Bay (1974:26) and Morgan (1968:29) recommend that docents prepare their own "tour outline" giving the interpretations they plan to use and submit this to the staff, as well as performing a "trial tour" under scrutiny of peers and "professionals".

The process of evaluation may seem to be a complex and time consuming one. However, it has vital importance for maintaining and improving the professional quality of the docent and for providing a growing fund of knowledge about the program itself. As the Flanders (1976:199) assert, "If we don't begin to evaluate our docents around here our program will go downhill; we need to get the cobwebs and old wives tales out of our tours." This cannot be accomplished without a serious commitment to continuing evaluation and corrective action on the basis of the results.

In conclusion, it is more than apparent that volunteers are vitally important to the operation of museum activities. The value of their efforts really goes much beyond the dollar savings. However, despite the fact that it is distasteful to criticise those who are giving so much time and effort to the museum, it is true that the quality and efficacy of volunteerism has been called into question. It must be remembered that these questions may be as much criticisms of the museum structure itself, as of the individuals. The answers appear to lie in the area of clarifying volunteer roles and in the closer cooperation between "paid" and "unpaid" professionals. Volunteers must on one hand be treated and expected to act like professionals. On the other hand, they must also receive a thorough training and be allowed the right to self improvement through participation in their own evaluation. These things must occur if volunteers are to assume the responsibilities of professionalism.

approximately 4,500 words
Endnotes

1. As described in another paper, one can be critical of several aspects of exhibit design e.g. the use of skeletal material only when dealing with animals and Native people, a lack of attention to the concepts of culture change and adaptation, a lack of holistic treatment of Native people, in some cases a perpetuation of the "naked", "depressed", "savage" stereotypy, outright misrepresentation, an ethnocentric, even racist approach, and an end result of reinforcing prevailing attitudes of Western superiority.

2. Used here in the sense that no aspect of human life can be judged meaningfully outside the context of the specific society, culture, or time in question.

3. For example, the use of the negative evaluative term "gucky" (in reference to the process of hide tanning in the "Indians of the Plains" program) is of little descriptive value, but is highly charged with negative, depreciating value. San Francisco artist and teacher R. A. Lanier (Silver 1977:19) expresses concern that the "neat and clean" orientation of "middle-class museum docents" militates against their portrayal of an acceptable concept of art (to which we might add other aspects of culture, i.e. subsistence activities).

4. S. E. Low (1977:7) states, "Interpretation should be accurate and in good taste. It is often a temptation for interpreters to use questionable material just because it makes a good story, or to play for audience response with off-color jokes."

5. This continuing evaluation should 1) correct mistakes arising from ignorance and the so-called "drifting emphasis" (i.e. the gradual embellishing of an explanation to the point of distortion because it is rewarding), 2) check the over-exploitation of certain objects or exhibits, 3) ensure that generalizations are valid, and 4) help determine the most effective communication patterns (Flanders 1976:23).
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