

SPACE, PLACE, AND STORY:  
MUSEUM GEOGRAPHIES AND NARRATIVES OF THE AMERICAN WEST

by

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Space, Place, and Story: Museum Geographies and Narratives of the American West

Thesis directed by Professor Emeritus Kenneth E. Foote

This dissertation examines how the complex geography and contested history of the American West are presented through stories told in the region's history museums. I examine how iconic regional-scale place images are juxtaposed with more critical perspectives on dissonant historical episodes in museum exhibits, and how the spaces of museum exhibits and galleries represent places, structure narratives, and suggest new thematic and geographical connections interpreting the region. Using a series of case studies of museums in Colorado and adjacent states, I develop new methods to analyze museum exhibits as "three-dimensional narratives," in which spatial arrangements of objects, texts, and media structure narratives that interpret and contest the past.

This research builds on cultural geographic research on how contested memory is expressed and presented, both in symbolic landscapes, and through media. I extend this work in three main ways. First, I extend research on monuments and memorials to consider how museum spaces present and contest the past. Second, I follow recent engagements between geography and narrative theory, examining storytelling as a distinct form of discourse, with its own spatial dimensions. Third, I situate this investigation amid increasing scholarly attention to heritage tourism, particularly in terms of how the "Legacy of Conquest" of the American West is made marketable to visitors.

I explore this narrative geography through three case studies: First, a detailed examination of the History Colorado Center in downtown Denver highlights how spatial narratives organize and structure museum presentations, emphasizing some thematic and geographical connections while downplaying others. Second, a comparison of six Colorado museums highlighting race, ethnicity, and labor conflict examines the "genre conventions" through which these "counter-narratives" are

linked to more conventional presentations of the regional past. Finally, a comparison of the state history museums of Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming explores how state geographies are presented as foundations of civic identities.

This research contributes to the cultural geographic understanding of museums as significant venues in which cultural meaning is presented and contested, and develops new methods for understanding museum narratives geographically. Such methods can be productively applied in other heritage tourism settings.

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CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION

*INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

This dissertation explores the stories told in a series of museums in the American West. I examine how a series of iconic place images—many of which are central to the region’s historical identity, and its promotion as a tourist destination—are juxtaposed with more critical perspectives on the region and its history. I focus on museum exhibits, not only because their exhibit spaces allow for more extended and nuanced presentations of conflicting cultural discourses and narratives, but also because the spaces of exhibits are an important resource for arranging and structuring those presentations. This research thus contributes to a geographic understanding of how museum narratives present cultural systems of meaning to public audiences, and how narrative analysis methods can contribute to cultural geography more generally. Moreover, it extends a broader body of research into symbolic landscapes, monuments and memorials, and other “geographies of memory” into the rich history and complex regional geography of the American West.

Museums have begun to attract the attention of cultural geographers, because they are important sites of cultural production, representation, and consumption. Although museums have long been identified with the collection of objects, they also arrange those objects, along with interpretive displays and other media, into presentations that interpret and narrate systems of cultural meaning. This is especially significant in historical museums, where historical events are assembled into broader discourses about places and their pasts. These museums thus extend

several of cultural geography's core concerns, including how systems of cultural meaning are formulated and presented as social discourses, how those discourses are contested and transformed, and how those discourses are linked to the geographies of specific places and larger regions.

These museums, and the discourses they present, are also significant because they are arenas for the exercise of social power. Because museums present certain historical episodes and highlight certain themes, while downplaying others, they reveal underlying processes of how societies choose to remember or forget past events. In particular, museums have been identified as sites where social and political identities have been synthesized and presented to public audiences, representing the perspectives and interests of socially powerful groups, while minimizing the presence of minority groups, or perspectives that disrupt and criticize these dominant discourses. Even so, many museums have actively worked to reclaim and present these more critical readings of history, whether at dedicated museum sites, or by incorporating new historical episodes, material objects, and interpretive perspectives into existing museum presentations.

The role of museums in negotiating and presenting systems of cultural meaning is particularly interesting in light of the recent growth of heritage tourism, which explicitly values areas of historical and cultural significance as tourist attractions. Museums have emerged as important heritage tourism destinations, offering opportunities for presenting places' histories and cultures to new and broader audiences. In many cases, this tourism development has led to new or redesigned museum exhibits, incorporating new strategies for engaging visitors through complex and immersive displays, featuring new interpretive multimedia as well as fresh readings of the past and its relevance. But this growth has also led to more critical discussion of what aspects of places' histories are presented as "visitable" heritage. In many case studies, this heritage is critiqued as being simplified into recognizable "place images" which easily align with visitors' expectations, but which leave out more complex and contested dimensions of the past that unsettle dominant

discourses about the past and its significance. Thus, although many scholars have called for a public history that is inclusive to minority viewpoints and more dissonant readings of the past, it is unclear how extensively these dimensions of cultural meaning are addressed or presented in heritage tourism settings. Because museums often present more extended, complex, and potentially contradictory interpretations of history and heritage, they are important settings for examining how heritage tourism addresses more complex dimensions of “narrative economies” for a public audience.

Moreover, museums are also interesting to cultural geographers because they extend systems of cultural meaning across complex geographies. At one level, museum presentations are situated amid the iconic images of places that are frequently central to both heritage tourism promotions, and the expectations of tourists. But more generally, museum presentations also connect individual places in new ways, forming routes, regions, and other relational geographies that are connected through shared histories, themes, and cultural discourses. These presentations connect numerous different locations, including the physical site and context of a museum building, as well as the locations represented by and in historical objects, images and texts, and other media including maps, films, and interactive multimedia activities. By juxtaposing these locations into new contexts and arrangements, museums thus articulate not only intersecting historical episodes, themes and discourses, but also a series of geographical relationships through which those discourses are presented and realized.

In this dissertation, I seek to extend this research into an emergent field of “museum geographies” through two main innovations. First, I ground my research in a series of museums in the American West—a region that has received relatively little attention from cultural geographers. I am specifically interested in how museums present a series of critical readings of the region’s history alongside more iconic place images and dominant discourses about the region’s past. Such

presentations offer important opportunities to explore how museums juxtapose and connect complex and potentially contradictory discourses in their exhibit spaces.

Second, I draw on recent engagements between cultural geography and narrative theory to highlight use of storytelling in structuring and organizing museum presentations. In contrast with prior work on museums and historic sites, which has employed a wide variety of research methods to understand how museum exhibits are developed by museum staff or interpreted by visitors, I instead focus on the “texts” of exhibits, and extend content and discourse analysis methodologies to highlight how museums tell stories in exhibit spaces. In many museums, I argue, such spatial storytelling works to connect, and possibly to reconcile, multiple historical episodes, themes, and discourses.

Within this regional and methodological framework, I pose several more specific research questions, each central to one of this dissertation’s three substantive chapters:

1. How is museum content organized through narratives, both within and between particular exhibits? How do these narratives suggest relationships or connections between historical episodes and themes, or draw conclusions from stories? This is the focus of Chapter 2.
2. How do museums address more critical perspectives on race, ethnicity, labor conflict, and other issues in their portrayal of the American West? How are these “counter-narratives” incorporated into, or dismissed from, more conventional portrayals of the Western past? This is the focus of Chapter 3.
3. How do narratives presented at state historical museums juxtapose multiple locations and themes in their presentations? How are these locations used to define and present state civic identities? This is the focus of Chapter 4.

## *RESEARCH CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE*

These are important questions that relate to the many roles museums play in society. Answers will contribute to five interrelated areas of contemporary research. At the most general level, my project is situated within the field of cultural geography, and its concern with how cultural meanings are produced and negotiated in material places. Within this broad field, my second area of focus is on tourism geographies, and especially the role of heritage tourism in valuing particular places and their pasts. Third, my work extends these themes into the spaces of museums, drawing on a growing body of research on “museum geographies,” in which geographers have been informed by museum studies to extend cultural geographic perspectives into the spaces of museum exhibits. Fourth, I situate my work in the setting of the American West, where debates in regional history have raised questions about the themes, narratives, and place images that have been used to characterize the region, and how these are presented in museums and at historic sites. Finally, I build upon recent research into narrative theory and argue that it provides a foundation for analyzing museum exhibits.

### *Cultural Geographies of Meaning in Place*

At the most general level, my research contributes to cultural geography by focusing on how systems of meaning are attached to places, spaces, and the material world. These meanings involve complex social, cultural, economic, and political processes, such that their expression in particular places can reveal structures, tensions, and changes in contemporary society (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Alderman and Inwood 2013). This is especially the case when those meanings change over time, or when they reflect the views and interests of different groups, with different levels of power. Since the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1980s, geographers have joined other scholars in tracing how these systems of meaning are constructed, negotiated, and applied across a wide



variety of settings (J. Duncan 1980). These include not only the representations of places in other media—including the “place images” presented in films, school study material, illustrated travel accounts, and popular periodicals (Zonn 1990; Lukinbeal 2005; Schulten 2001; Stafford 1984; Lutz and Collins 1993), but also more direct investigations of how meaning is presented and contested in specific places and landscapes (Wylie 2007). In this perspective, places themselves are “texts” to be investigated, both as direct representations of systems of social meaning, and as keys to understanding how claims to such meaning are embedded in the visual and material (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Cosgrove 1998; J. S. Duncan 1990; G. Rose 1992; Monk 1992).

Museums are also important settings for many of these processes. They use objects, text, art, and multimedia to portray particular places and how these places fit into broader regional contexts (Azaryahu and Foote 2008). Moreover, museums are also located in specific places, and draw on the symbolic meanings associated with those sites. Exploring these museum geographies, therefore, applies and expands cultural geography’s work with how meanings are defined and contested in particular places.

One area in which cultural geographers have pursued this question is in the “materialized discourses” of symbolic landscapes (R. H. Schein 2006). Monuments and memorials have been the focus of a number of studies exploring the role of material places in constructing cultural systems of meaning (Till 2006). Geographers have advanced several approaches to understanding places as reflections of these systems of meaning in the context of broader systems of social power and cultural meaning (Dwyer and Alderman 2008, 169). Analyzing the “texts” of monuments and memorials—and the discourses underlying them—highlights the ways in which materialized meanings reflect the perspectives and attitudes of their authors, but also how contrasting perspectives—particularly those of subaltern groups including women and racial and ethnic minorities—are excluded from representation. Yet Dwyer and Alderman also note that a textual approach also illustrates how these interpretations are rooted in place, and how they change over

time. This is because monuments and memorials are often constructed at particularly significant sites. These sites become themselves symbolically meaningful, such that further alterations develop from a process of “symbolic accretion” (Dwyer 2004).

Geographers have also advanced other perspectives on understanding how meaning is embedded in places. In addition to textual analysis, Dwyer and Alderman (2008) have also proposed that many symbolic sites can be understood as “arenas”—in which opposing viewpoints vie for dominance—or as “performances,” in which the embodied behaviors of individuals and groups reshape and reinscribe the meanings of particular sites. Although these approaches are not as directly pursued in this dissertation, they are related to museums. Many debates over new or revised memorials and museum exhibits hinge not only on the historical content or symbolic meanings being presented, but on how these new systems of meaning are juxtaposed in context with other, established presentations (Leib 2002; Hoelscher 2003, 2006). These perspectives extend the metaphor of “texts” to emphasize the need for critical perspectives on which views are and are not included in these presentations. Even if those absences are at times rectified, they are strongly influenced by the role of place in constructing meaning.

Recently, geographical research has engaged with material absence as an important component of spatialized meaning. In some cases the absence of a perspective from place-based presentations of cultural meaning is a reflection of the fragility of the material landscape (DeLyser 1999; DeSilvey 2007, 2017). Yet in other cases, such absences speak more directly to social processes, in which explicit decisions are made to “rectify” sites with violent and tragic pasts, or to eliminate them from the material landscape entirely (Foote 2003). These decisions are deeply revealing of social power, but absence can also trace more subtle disparities. Kaufmann (2009) has noted that many ‘story sites’ significant to minority groups—and the “counter-narrative” presentations of history they suggest—are often less clearly visible to outsiders as memory-laden sites, and thus are less often officially recognized as historic. Although many authors have called for

memorial landscapes—and geographies of memory more generally—to work to reflect “socially just futures” (Alderman and Inwood 2013), such inclusivity is often challenging. In the absence of direct historical or material memory, efforts to commemorate minority presences and perspectives have often relied on the identification of “commemorative surrogates,” as the focus of memorialization (Dwyer, Butler, and Carter 2013; Alderman 2010). Yet this surrogation has frequently led not only to debates about which individuals, episodes, or objects are appropriate focal points for this “memory work,” but also to questions about how those surrogates are juxtaposed with other, more conventional presentations of meaning and memory in established settings (Hanna 2016).

Finally, it is important to note that meaning unfolds at scales beyond those of individual monuments, memorials, or other symbolic landscapes. Indeed, many portrayals of cultural meaning—especially those at historic sites and museums—do not reflect single specific locations, but extend meaning over larger spatial frames, such as linear routes or larger areas (Azaryahu and Foote 2008). More generally, these frames of meaning also extend beyond what is presented by specific authors and groups at individual sites.

Cultural meaning is also *intertextual*—that is, it is not only represented in particular sites, but from the relations between the content presented in multiple sites, and across multiple media. These overlapping frames of meaning are often described as “place images” or “imaginaries.” However, Hoskins (2010) is more specific in characterizing them as elements of a “narrative economy,” in which places’ pasts and significance are represented through numerous presentations and stories across multiple presentations. In this perspective, individual presentations—often in the form of narratives—acquire value and legitimacy based not only on their factual content, but also on their compatibility with other presentations.

Within these complex and evolving “narrative economies”, the portrayal of counter-narratives, minority perspectives, and critical readings of the cultural past is particularly important.

Alderman and Inwood note that rather than fully disrupting dominant discourses, “memorials and heritage sites narrate a more racially and ethnically inclusive national history, but it is a story scripted to uphold dominant ideas and values about society” (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 191).

Museums—along with monuments, memorials, and other symbolic landscapes, are thus important extensions to cultural geography’s concern with how places and landscapes represent frames of cultural meaning. These meanings are frequently dynamic, contested, and even contradictory, and reflect discourses rooted in social, cultural, economic, and political power. Cultural geographers have highlighted the significance of place, context, and materiality, both for understanding how places express meaning, and how that meaning is contested between different perspectives, and negotiated across multiple sites and geographies. Yet these frames of meaning—and the places in which they are presented and negotiated, have been also reshaped by their framing as sites of tourism. In particular, tourism has often linked place images and imaginaries to new forms of economic valuation, attracting new audiences to monuments, museums, historic sites, and other symbolic landscapes, and potentially redefining the cultural meanings and values associated with them.

#### Heritage Tourism and Place Images.

Tourism is an important extension to contemporary cultural geography. Museums and monuments attract visitors; thus they have economic valuation and are sometimes heavily marketed as tourist destinations. Through this process of definition and promotion, these places are rendered “visitable”—simultaneously marked as unique and distinct from tourists’ daily lives, but also accessible and understandable to casual visitors (Dicks 2003). This process of commoditizing heritage has been criticized theoretically as well as for its impacts on the sites themselves (MacCannell 1976; Urry 2002). In this view, places are developed and marketed as tourist destinations based on their unique qualities or authenticity, but these qualities are lost as

the sites themselves are developed and commoditized. Subsequent scholarship has further interrogated this framework, identifying possibilities for places to acquire authenticity over time, and for tourists to appreciate and value “staged authenticity” but the relationship between tourism and the place images and meanings discussed above remains a problematic one for many cultural geographers (Cohen 1988; Crang 2004; Oakes and Minca 2004; Minca 2007).

In recent years, scholars have identified heritage tourism as a rapidly growing, and potentially less problematic approach to tourism promotion and development. Heritage tourism—defined in one key review as “visits to sites of historical importance, including built environments and urban areas, ancient monuments and dwellings, rural and agricultural landscapes, locations where historic events occurred, and places where interesting and important cultures stand out” (Timothy and Boyd 2006, 2), offers possibilities for tourism that appreciates and includes cultural distinctiveness, rather than appropriating and commoditizing it (Shilling 2007). Many heritage attractions have experienced rapid visitor growth: the American Alliance of Museums has estimated that museums in the United States receive 850 million visits per year (only 55 million of which are from organized school groups), that 75% of leisure travelers participate in heritage-related activities, and that this tourism makes up 23% of all domestic travel (American Alliance of Museums n.d.). Although tourism to museums, historic sites, and other heritage attractions is not entirely new (Jakle 1985; Wright 2009), this growth has prompted extensive scholarly interest, in geography, tourism studies, and other fields (Timothy and Boyd 2006).

Yet heritage tourism has also been criticized as an extension of the same processes of commodification and inauthenticity that characterize other forms of tourism (Ashworth 1994; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000). As Lowenthal (1996) has argued, the heritage promoted to tourists is not the same as scholarly or academic history; it is focused not on accurately representing or critically analyzing the past, but on applying the past to the needs of the present. In particular, many heritage destinations—museums among them—are focused on the intelligible and

the “visitable.” These presentations therefore draw heavily on place images that align with visitors’ expectations, while potentially minimizing conflicting or contested pasts that visitors may not be as familiar with (Dicks 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). This is especially problematic when the heritage of minorities and other subaltern groups are presented for consumption by outsiders. While such presentations can be made responsibly—and even in a manner that fosters awareness and redresses past wrongs—concerns abound that heritage tourism instead commercializes cultural identities, strips communities of their agency, and places control in the hands of outsiders (Boley and Gaither 2016).

Fortunately, numerous case studies of heritage tourism in practice have identified counter-examples to these critiques. In many cases, heritage tourism has provided opportunities for contesting complicated pasts, and for genuine valuation of cultural encounters. Some heritage attractions do indeed present perspectives on the past based in fiction, or deeply incongruous or compromised juxtapositions of dominant and minority perspectives (DeLyser 2005; Zakos 2015). More commonly, however, the presentation of heritage attractions in historic sites and tours instead draws on a range of dominant and critical perspectives which comprise an overall “narrative economy.” In this view, authenticity is not strictly binary, but is instead a complex reflection of what Chronis (2005) has termed the “co-creation” of heritage. This means that visitors interpret the content presented to them in light of their own knowledge and expectations. The presentation of counter-narratives can blend with and extend visitors’ prior knowledge and expectations, or can directly challenge them, leading to potential rejection (Deufel 2011). Moreover, place—and especially visitors’ perception of places as aligning with expected place images—is often crucial to these perceptions of authenticity (DeLyser 1999; Rickly-Boyd 2012, 2015).

Furthermore, a significant body of scholarship on “dissonant” or “dark” tourism has argued that visitors are not only attracted to sanitized and conventional place imagery, but may also be

specifically interested in morbid, violent, or dissonant episodes of the past (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Hartmann 2014). Although the primacy of this dissonance to tourists motivations and experiences has also been called into question (Miles 2014; Stone 2006), many heritage sites presenting traumatic or complicated pasts have nonetheless emerged as significant heritage tourism destinations. At many of these sites, including the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (Lennon and Foley 2000), and the Smithsonian's Museum of the American Indian and Museum of African-American History and Culture, heritage tourism has not only presented dissonant pasts to wider audiences, but engaged minority communities in presenting their perspectives and stories. These critical presentations of heritage are not only found in national-scale attractions, but are also evident—to greater or lesser degrees—in more local museums and historic sites (Alderman, Butler, and Hanna 2016).

This means that heritage tourism can present with nuanced and critical readings of the past to visitors. These presentations are particularly interesting in the contexts of museums and historic sites, as they offer visitors opportunities to engage with historical presentations in detail and at length. Yet somewhat less attention has been paid to the role of museums as an element of heritage tourism, or to how cultural geographic perspectives can inform and extend museum research.

### Museums as Sites of Tourism

In a recent review article, Geoghegan (2010) identified museums as important sites of geographical research, and proposed that cultural and historical geographers work more closely with the interdisciplinary field of museum studies to explore these “museum geographies.” Museums, Geoghegan argues, are not only places where material objects are collected and displayed, but sites where knowledge about the world is formed, organized, and transmitted. These knowledges, moreover, are spatial; they are not only framed in terms of the places, regions, and connections represented in museum exhibits, but are also presented in the specific location of

museum buildings, galleries, and exhibits, Similarly, Rutherford (2011) has argued that museums present iconic representations of the natural and social world, which help to define, regulate, and govern how people, and society as a whole understand, experience, and act within that world. Museums are therefore important sites, not only for the formation and presentation of social systems of meaning, but also where those systems are connected to understandings of place and space.

Museums, as important destination for heritage tourism, offer opportunities for people to encounter past events and places in in depth and detail. Many “new” museums seek to engage visitors with innovative exhibit designs, signature architecture for new buildings, and the use of interactive multimedia (Message 2006). These strategies have both positioned many museums as significant heritage tourism attractions, and allowed visitors to explore places’ heritage in depth and detail.

There is no escaping that these new efforts are just as deeply embedded in frames of social power as were earlier efforts to establish museums in earlier eras. Museums are not neutral actors, but instead present particular social discourses as authoritative knowledge. Early museums of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, frequently presented the world through colonial and imperial worldviews (T. Mitchell 1988; Hetherington 2007; Pratt 2008; Said 1978). By visiting such museums, visitors were inculcated into these ways of seeing their own identities in national contexts, and understanding the place of colonized others. Outside of these sweeping national and international contexts, many museums functioned to portray the spaces, histories, and perspectives of social elites (Vagnone and Ryan 2016; Trubek 2010). Even today, many museums work to naturalize certain readings of the past into public discourse, while alternative readings are excluded (Rutherford 2011). Thus, it is important to understand museums in critical perspective, extending the work of Dwyer and Alderman (2008) to consider the social contexts and power relations in which exhibit content is considered, presented, and revised.



Fortunately, many museums have also worked to portray alternative readings of the past to public audiences. Alongside the promotion of museums as attractions for heritage tourism, many museums have also worked to attract new and diverse audiences, particularly from diverse socioeconomic groups, by participating in a wide variety of community outreach activities (Vagnone and Ryan 2016). This has complemented new exhibits and interpretive strategies through which some museums have incorporated a range of counter-narrative themes and presentations into museum programming (Handler and Gable 1997; Ferentinos 2014; Bench 2014; Lantzer 2014; van Balgooy 2014; Gallas and Perry 2014; J. Rose 2016).

Yet even though contrasting dimensions of social meaning are presented and engaged at many museums, relatively little work has answered Geoghegan's (2010) call to consider those contrasts in more geographical terms. Initial explorations of these "museum geographies" have focused on a wide range of themes, from the analysis of specific museum exhibits, to the more abstract geographical relationships involved in curating museum collections and community outreach programs (Geoghegan and Hess 2015; DeLyser 2015; Munro 2013). One of the most geographically interesting dimensions of the work reviewed by Phillips, Woodham, and Hooper-Greenhill (2015) is what they term "geographies of museum assemblage"—the objects, texts, and interpretive media that comprise museum exhibits, and how they are arranged in exhibit spaces. These "assemblages" are particularly interesting, because museums exhibits not only assemble artifacts and media to present historical events, but also juxtapose the locations and times being presented. Much like other forms of media explored by communication geographers, these assemblages may trace complex spatial geographical and environmental issues through time, as well as "folding" space and time into new geographical relationships (Hetherington 1997; Adams 2009).

## Portraying the American West

The American West offers many good examples for studying museums and the way they present a diverse, contested, and geographically nuanced regional identity and history. Indeed, the West's distinctive identity has long been central to its tourism industry. However, the cultural geographies of the region's heritage tourism have not been explored as extensively as some other areas of the United States, particularly in comparison to recent research focusing on the American South.

There are reasons for the focus on the South. Not only is the legacy of slavery an enduring challenge for interpreting American history on a national scale, but many Southern monuments and tourist destinations have long focused on—if not outright celebrated—memories of the Southern “Lost Cause” (Hoelscher 2003, 2006; Inwood and Martin 2008). This place imagery is thus central to a strong, yet deeply problematic, narrative economy which has been extensively analyzed in numerous case studies and comparative analyses (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Modlin 2008). These presentations have also been challenged in many ways, including museums focused on the enslaved (Cook 2016; Alderman and Campbell 2008; Hanna 2008), incorporation of slavery-focused exhibits and tours into other museums and heritage sites (Alderman, Butler, and Hanna 2016), and contrasting dimensions of heritage tourism focused on the Civil Rights Movement and other dimensions of regional culture (Dwyer 2000; Dwyer and Alderman 2008). This work has been empirically rich, methodologically diverse, and theoretically productive.

The American West is a similarly distinctive region that has been the subject of popular media and tourist promotion for many years (Blake 1995; Malpas 2015; Shaffer 2001). These popular images also mirror scholarly debates over regional identity and the place “the West” has played in developing a sense of national character (Cronon 1992; Brechin 2006). Perhaps the most important of these was Turner's Frontier Thesis that argued that the expansion of the westward frontier was central to the formation of American democratic society (Turner 1921).

In recent scholarship, these ideas and images have been called into question by more critical readings of Western historiography. This “New Western History” has focused on the “legacy of conquest” of Western places and spaces (Limerick 1991, 2006; Wrobel 2004). In place of a nation-defining frontier experience, New Western historians and other scholars have highlighted a region born of violent racial and ethnic conflict, capitalist exploitation of natural resources, enduring environmental degradation and fragility, dependence on outside capital investment and federal government policy, and continuing cycles of boom-and-bust economies (White 1991; W. G. Robbins 1999; Power and Barrett 2001; Nash 1999; Limerick, Travis, and Scoggin 2002). This is an important point given the growth of tourism in the mountain West (Travis 2007).

This new regional historiography has nonetheless been critiqued by geographers, among other scholars, who have argued that broad-brush generalizations of regional identity have failed to engage with the either specific western places and landscapes, or with the complex regional geographies, diverse populations, and different economic patterns found in the region (P. Robbins et al. 2009; D. Mitchell 1998; Meinig 1972; Wrobel and Steiner 1997; Travis and Robb 1997). Even so, this critical reading of the Western regional past has highlighted many more specific counter-narratives, which can be applied to the region. These include not only the themes of ethnic dispossession and disenfranchisement, persistent resource conflicts, and enduring environmental legacies noted above, but also critical evaluations of Western labor conflicts, and of the role of women and religious and sexual minorities in the Western past.

The growth of tourism—and especially heritage tourism—in the American West has thus been marked by an interplay among a range of place images. Not surprisingly, Western tourism has long drawn on dominant place images of the region, promoting themes of wilderness and recreation, as well as of a frontier made accessible and visitable (Pomeroy 1957; Shaffer 2001; Christensen 2002; Philpott 2013). Yet these images often minimize the presence of minority groups, or pose them as visitable cultural spectacles (Delyser 2003; DeLyser 2005; Young 2006).

More recently, some writers have questioned the promotion of tourism as solution to the decline of some of the West's other industries (Coleman 1996, 2004; Rothman 1996; Park and Pellow 2011; Philpott 2013). Some scholars have even argued that tourism is a "Devil's Bargain," in which communities lose their authenticity and agency to outside investment and promotion (Rothman 1998; Clifford 2003).

History museums in the American West are therefore an important and potentially revealing setting for examining how a complex set of place images and narratives are presented, whether to heritage tourists or as a reflection of how westerners see their own heritage. While the West's iconic places and frontier iconography have long been central to the region's tourism promotions and identity, critical historiography has highlighted a number of counter-narratives which potentially disrupt these discourses. As both heritage attractions and educational institutions, museums offer opportunities for examining, contesting, and presenting the meaning of the region's past, across multiple scales. Yet there has been only limited work done in assessing the extent to which these "New Western" readings of history have been presented in museum settings (Winchester 2009; J. M. Price 2009; Smoak 2009). More significantly—and in contrast with the extensive work done on the legacies of slavery in the memorials and heritage sites of the South—very little of this work has been done by geographers. This is important because the West offers a much wider set of dominant and critical heritage narratives. How these narratives are interwoven across multiple scales in museums is a crucial opportunity, not only for understanding heritage tourism in the West, but also for considering how different museums present complex and contested histories.

### Narrative Approaches in Museum Research

Narratives are interesting to cultural geographers as an approach for understanding how people create and communicate their experiences of material places (Cameron 2012; Ryan, Foote,

and Azaryahu 2016). Stories and storytelling have long been recognized in psychology and in literary studies as important ways in which people remember and share experiences. In the social sciences, narrative analysis has emerged as a useful research methodology (Ryan 2007; Clandinin 2007). As one methodology within the broader fields of content and discourse analysis, narrative focuses on one particular kind of discourse—storytelling. Even though discourse analysis and other types of context and textual analysis have been used in geography, especially in political and cultural geography, narrative approaches are relatively new to many cultural geographers.

Narratives—understood here as “anything that tells or presents a story” (Azaryahu and Foote 2008, 180) are important because they link individual experiences with broader social and political contexts and discourses. This connection—particularly when applied to discourses presented in places—relates to a central theme of cultural geography. More significantly, narratives are often used as organizing frameworks for the presentations of cultural meaning in museums and other symbolic spaces.

Narratives are particularly interesting to cultural geographers because they trace cultural meaning across different scales. Although individuals often frame their own experiences and memories in narrative frames, storytelling also extends those experiences to engage collective identities (P. L. Price 2010; Cameron 2012). As Price has noted, narratives can “instruct in the proper ways of behaving, provide a compelling order to events, serve as an articulated historical repository, elicit strong emotions, forge consensus, sway opinions, provide alternative understandings, and incite to action” (P. L. Price 2010, 203). But narrative presentations can also present these larger social systems of meaning through recognizable individual scale stories (Rowe, Wertsch, and Kosyaeva 2002).

Even so, geographers have been somewhat inconsistent in their engagement with narrative analysis. As Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu note,

at the moment, the concept of narrative is applied somewhat loosely in geography. Terms like "narrative" and "storytelling" are used increasingly, but inconsistently. Sometimes the term

"narrative" is substituted for "theory" to emphasize the tentative, situated and contingent nature of explanations in post-structuralist theory. In other areas of geography that employ ethnographic methods, the term "narrative" is a substitute of "oral history" or "autobiography." These uses do not necessarily imply the incorrect applications of concepts drawn from narratology, but narrative theory has more to offer geographers than these ideas alone. It offers a range of analytical tools that can aid geographers in analyzing stories and text across many media in new and inventive ways (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 2).

One way in which geographers have applied narrative perspectives has been through exploration of how places are represented across a wide variety of media. These media include not only conventional formats, such as written texts, audio recordings, and films, but also interactive multimedia and the "texts" of street names, historical markers, and the spaces of historical sites (Dittmer 2010a; Hoskins 2016; G. Rose 2011; Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016; Azaryahu and Foote 2008). Within these texts, several different sorts of spatial representations and relationships are interesting. First, most presentations trace internal geographies, based on the real and imaginary places across which narratives unfold. These places can be mapped and analyzed to illustrate the spatial setting of a narrative, and the influence of that setting on the narrated events (Piatti 2012; Stadler, Mitchell, and Carleton 2015). Second, many of these narrative productions are presented in particular locations, which may have their own significance. Because many conventional media, such as printed books, are portable, the locations where they are printed or read are not especially central to their meaning. But this is not the case with museums and historic sites, which occupy specific locations that can provide important contexts for the stories being told (Azaryahu 1996; Hanna and Hodder 2015). Finally, narratives often unfold in very different ways across the spatial forms of different media. In printed texts, these narratives are largely two-dimensional and linear, while in maps and comics, as well as other three-dimensional and interactive multimedia, narration proceeds in more complex and interactive ways (Pearce 2008; Caquard 2013; Caquard and Cartwright 2014; Dittmer 2010b; Dittmer and Latham 2015). Yet in each of these media, narratives can also become much more complex, through genre conventions and narrative devices, such as

flashbacks, foreshadowing, and juxtapositions of multiple scenes, which allow multiple storylines to be explored in a less linear fashion.

Many museum exhibits—as well as entire museums—are also designed around narratives, so that storytelling becomes an important component of the rhetoric and organization of exhibit content (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 2010; Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011). These museums use exhibit space itself as a narrative medium, such that the architecture and layout of walls, galleries, and pathways through exhibits defines or suggests narrative sequences, or presents visitors with multiple choices (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016). In many cases, these narratives are essentially linear, such that stories proceed through direct relationships of cause and effect along clearly defined pathways (Crang 1994a). However, other relationships are possible, including multiple diverging or intersecting storylines, or the presentation of different perspectives on the same narrated events. These extend museum storytelling beyond simple relationships of cause and effect, to trace connections through spaces, or thematic links between different storylines. Yet it is less clear what genre conventions allow more sophisticated and complex stories to be told in and through museum spaces, or how these narratives “are configured to use spatial, visual, and geographical cues to direct visitors along particular routes” (Azaryahu and Foote 2008, 191).

Numerous case studies have begun to explore how narrative is used in museums, to reconcile scales and engage visitors. A number of high-profile national museums, including the German Historical Museum in Berlin, *Te Papa Tongarewa* in Wellington, New Zealand, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem are completely designed around narrative frames. In these museums, architectural design creates not only strong narrative progressions through museum space, but also emotionally laden and affectively engaging “commemorative atmospheres” (Till 2001, 2005; Schorch 2013; Oren and Shani 2012; Sumartojo 2016; Waterton and Dittmer 2014). Other museums work narratively across multiple scales, blending local, regional, and national scale

framings of heritage narratives (Desforges and Maddern 2004; Hoskins 2012; Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010).

Yet museum narratives are also important reminders of the need for critical perspectives in interpreting heritage presentations in light of broader frames of social power. Modlin (2008) has identified a number of persistent story structures presented in southern plantation museums, which work to center the narratives presented in these sites on the experiences, perspectives, and material property of the affluent planter class, while minimizing the presence of the enslaved. Even as some museums have worked to incorporate portrayals of the enslaved—along with other counter-narrative presentations of heritage—many museum narratives remain focused on more conventional place images and the dominant discourses they reflect (Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; Hanna 2016). Thus, even though narrative presentations of history offer intriguing possibilities for juxtaposing multiple historical perspectives within museum spaces, they can also work to maintain focus on more conventional portrayals of heritage. This is especially the case when counter-narrative perspectives diverge significantly from visitors' expectations, or from the majority of stories present in a narrative economy (Hoskins 2010; Deufel 2011).

There are thus multiple entry points for examining museum narratives. Some studies have looked in detail at the narratives presented in individual museums, and how they connect different scales or create commemorative atmospheres. Others have instead focused on visitors' experiences with museum narratives, and how visitors react to presentations that align with or challenge their interests and expectations. However, much of this work stops short of directly applying geographical perspectives to understand how museum narratives present stories about places in the *spaces* of museum exhibits. Such research would highlight not only the complex way museum spaces are organized in three dimensions for these presentations, but also the genre conventions used to connect, emphasize, or obscure different historical episodes and points of view.



## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to understand how historical discourses are presented in museum spaces, this dissertation develops and applies a research methodology focused on museums as spatial narratives, within a comparative analysis of a series of museums in the American West. This approach is framed around three key elements. First, this research extends qualitative discourse analysis to explore and analyze how these discourses are *narrated* in museum space. More specifically, I focus on the *texts* of museum exhibits, rather than the *processes* of how those exhibits are conceived and designed, or how they are interpreted by visitors. Second, in contrast with many other studies of the presentations at museums, historical sites, and other heritage tourism attractions, I have framed this research around a series of case studies, selected to illustrate multiple settings, thematic emphases, and presenter perspectives. Doing so allows both in-depth investigation of particular museum narratives, as well as more extensive comparison of themes and interpretive methods across multiple Western museums. Finally, centering this research on museum narratives has required the development of a new set of analytical approaches which extend content and discourse analysis to more explicitly consider how spatial narratives in museums organize exhibits and relate multiple episodes, themes, and locations within exhibit spaces. Thus, in addition to exploring the narratives displayed in museums in the American West, I hope that this approach can contribute to the application of narrative methods across cultural geography.

### Qualitative Research: Discourses of Museum Narrative Texts

As noted in the literature review, narrative perspectives have been used increasingly frequently across the social sciences (Clandinin 2007). Although narrative theory has lent important perspectives on how stories contribute to the formation and presentation of systems of

social meaning in various media, these perspectives have been inconsistently applied in geography. Narrative is often used as shorthand for other, related theoretical concepts, including the situated nature of knowledge in post-structural epistemology, or for other methodological approaches, including the collection of stories as part of oral history or ethnographic approaches (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 2). These approaches have been used productively in much geographical research, but geographers can nonetheless benefit from a closer engagement with the structure of narratives, particularly in terms of how they are presented in space (Cameron 2012; Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016).

Although narrative perspectives have been useful to geography, it is difficult to reduce these perspectives to a single set of research methods. One key question is whether qualitative or quantitative methods are best suited to analyzing narratives. Quantitative approaches have been used in many projects, particularly those involving mapping and visualization of the locations depicted in literature and films, as well as more location-specific media, such as historical markers (Piatti 2012; Stadler, Mitchell, and Carleton 2015; Hanna and Hodder 2015). However, most extended research on museums and historic sites has employed mixed-methods approaches, which have first worked to explore the range of themes and discourses presented, before counting, comparing, or mapping how those discourses are presented (Modlin 2008; Cooper and Gregory 2010). In this dissertation, I largely employ qualitative methods, extending discourse analysis to more explicitly consider how discourses are often structured as narratives, and how those narratives are structured and juxtaposed in museum spaces. Even so, it is also useful at times to employ more quantitative methods, for instance to map the locations represented in regional-scale museums. Such a quantitative approach is not fully central to the narrative analysis explored in this dissertation, but it forms an important facet of the analysis of state museums presented in Chapter 4.

Because museum exhibits present and arrange a variety of historical episodes and themes in complex and situated contexts, discourse analysis is an ideal methodological foundation for a detailed exploration of museum narratives. Discourse analysis methods already critically examine how relations of social position, power, and control are connected to the making and transmission of knowledge, and have been used to examine some aspects of museum presentations (Dittmer 2010a; Waitt 2010). But museums engage more complicated geographical relationships in their presentations, including the physical layouts of museum exhibits, the siting of museums in significant locations, the media representing diverse places within exhibits, the paths along which visitors are led, and the structure of the stories presented. These relationships are difficult to quantify, but are broadly similar to the range of media in which qualitative methods have been productively applied (G. Rose 2011). Likewise, the more affective dimensions of museum presentations—in which museums present “commemorative atmospheres” as well as historical content—have largely been explored through detailed descriptions of exhibit spaces (Waterton and Dittmer 2014; Sumartojo 2016).

Another aspect of extending discourse analysis methods to museum exhibits is the selection of exhibit texts as the primary frame of analysis. Existing work on museums and historic sites—using a range of methodological approaches--has traced numerous entry points for situating individual sites’ presentations within the broadly framed “narrative economies” described by Hoskins (2010). These approaches can largely be understood as addressing different dimensions of the communication between the “authors” of site narratives—the curators, exhibit planners, and docents who present museum content—and the visitors who read and interpret narrative texts (Figure 1.1). Some studies have documented the construction of exhibits, and used ethnographic methods to probe the experiences of interpretive staff (Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; Rickly-Boyd 2015; Potter 2016). Other work has instead focused on visitors’ experiences, tracing the messages received through exhibits and displays through observations of visitor behavior, surveys

of visitor interests, and reviews of exhibits posted online (Alderman and Modlin 2016; Bright and Carter 2016; Carter 2016). Both of these approaches have worked to illuminate the “co-construction of meaning” in which both staff and visitors draw on a range of circulating stories and discourses, to interpret the content presented in specific museums, exhibits, or historic sites (Chronis 2005, 2012; Rickly-Boyd 2012; Carter, Butler, and Alderman 2014).

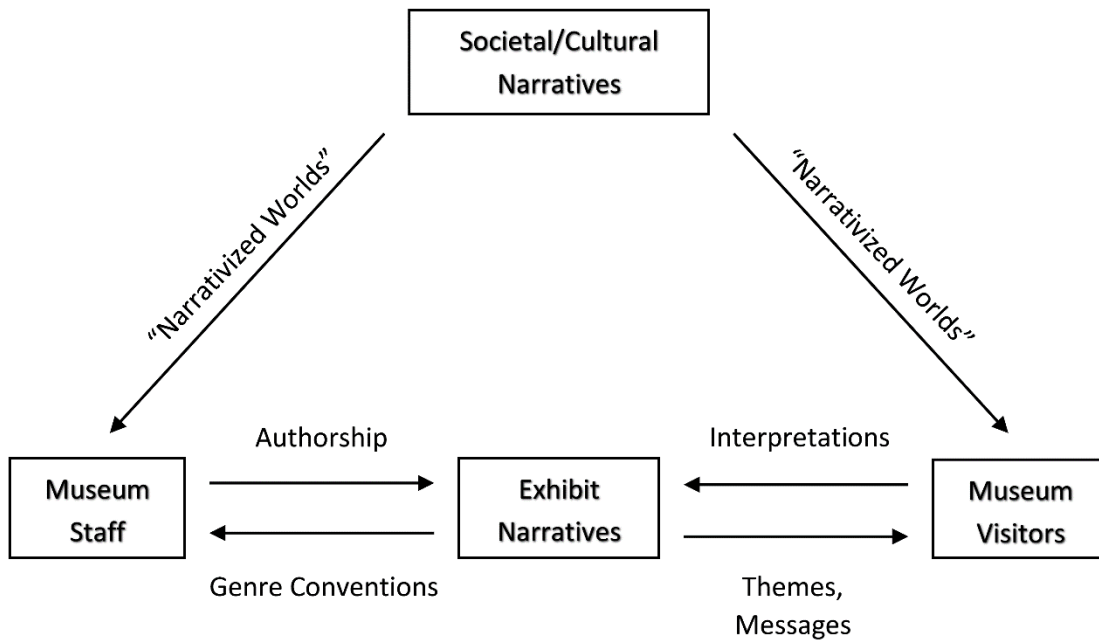


Figure 1.1: Carter et al. (2014) model exhibit narratives as an intersection between how exhibits are designed and authored by museum staff, and how those exhibits are interpreted by museum visitors. Prior work has examined these narratives from the perspectives of both staff and visitors, but has not focused as extensively on the themes and genre conventions which structure exhibit narratives.

My focus is somewhat different: rather than the *processes* through which narratives are transmitted by museum staff or received by museum visitors, I am interested in the narratives presented by the *texts* of exhibits themselves. This focus—in contrast with much other research—highlights how exhibit spaces are structured to tell stories, and how multiple themes, messages, and interpretations are connected within museum presentations. In doing so, it echoes analyses which consider not only which narrative content is presented in museums, but how that content is structured and ordered in those presentations (Rutherford 2011; Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; Hanna 2016). Focusing on exhibit texts thus highlights the ways in which narratives are used in museum exhibits, answering Alderman and Inwood’s call to pay “closer attention to *how* stories are narrated” in museums and historic sites (2013, 192). Although such a focus does not as explicitly address how meaning can be contested or negotiated in museum settings, it enables a more explicit investigation of spatial narratives. Moreover, in contrast to the extensive ethnographic work used in many presenter-focused or visitor-focused studies, a text-centered approach also allows more straightforward comparisons between multiple museums.

### Case Studies and Site Selection

A second key dimension of this dissertation research is that it is explicitly designed as a comparative analysis of multiple museums in the American West. This contrasts with many other analyses of museums and historic sites, which have instead focused on case studies of individual museums. These case studies—particularly those focused on the American South, but also addressing museums in other parts of the country and internationally—have highlighted the challenges of presenting particularly challenging themes to museum visitors and heritage tourists. Moreover, they have illustrated the ways in which museum narratives can present complex articulations of multiple themes, using museum space both to define clear connections, and to articulate more subtle relationships. However, considering only individual case studies is also

limiting. Such case studies offer only single examples of how narratives organize museums and arrange themes; in contrast, exploring the parallel presentation of similar themes across multiple museums highlights a much broader range of narrative possibilities. Such a multi-scalar, comparative analysis is thus extremely well-suited to the complex range of historical episodes, themes, and discourse presented across the American West. By analyzing and comparing a range of themes and settings, presented across a variety of museums, it becomes possible not only to compare and contrast multiple storytelling strategies, but also to assess the presence of different themes and stories across community, local, state, and national scale framings of history and heritage.

#### Preliminary Fieldwork: Exploring Colorado Museums

Although this dissertation analyzes museums in three Western states, the focus of my field research was on a series of museums in the state of Colorado. Several factors make Colorado an ideal focus for studying museums' representations of the West. First, the state was shaped by a wide range of intersecting regional themes and processes. These include such iconic episodes as frontier settlement driven by agriculture, ranching, and mining, and the making of National Parks and tourist resorts. The state's history also includes many themes that showcase counter-narrative readings of Western history, including violent conflicts with Native Americans, historical discrimination against numerous minority groups, a long history of labor organization and resistance, and the environmental legacies of extensive exploitation of natural resources. More significantly, the state government has embraced heritage tourism as a strategy for economic development in both urban and rural areas (Clarion Associates of Colorado 2011b, 2011a; Liverman 2010). This has included both an ambitious state-supported historic preservation program, as well as promotion of a wide range of heritage themes and attractions in state tourism advertisements (Colorado Tourism Office 2016). These promotions have notably included many

sites representing more dissonant and counter-narrative themes, brought to public attention by the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians, and the centennial of the Ludlow Massacre of striking mineworkers (Andrews 2008; Kelman 2013). Colorado's complex history also figures prominently in a new state history museum established in 2012 in downtown Denver (Convery 2012).

Based on the annual state travel guides published by the Colorado Tourism Office (2016), I identified a series of museums and historic for initial exploratory visits and analysis (Figure 1.2). These were selected to highlight a range of geographical settings, institutional missions and ownership structures; and to reflect the interplay between iconic and dissonant dimensions of the "narrative economy" of Colorado, and the West more generally.

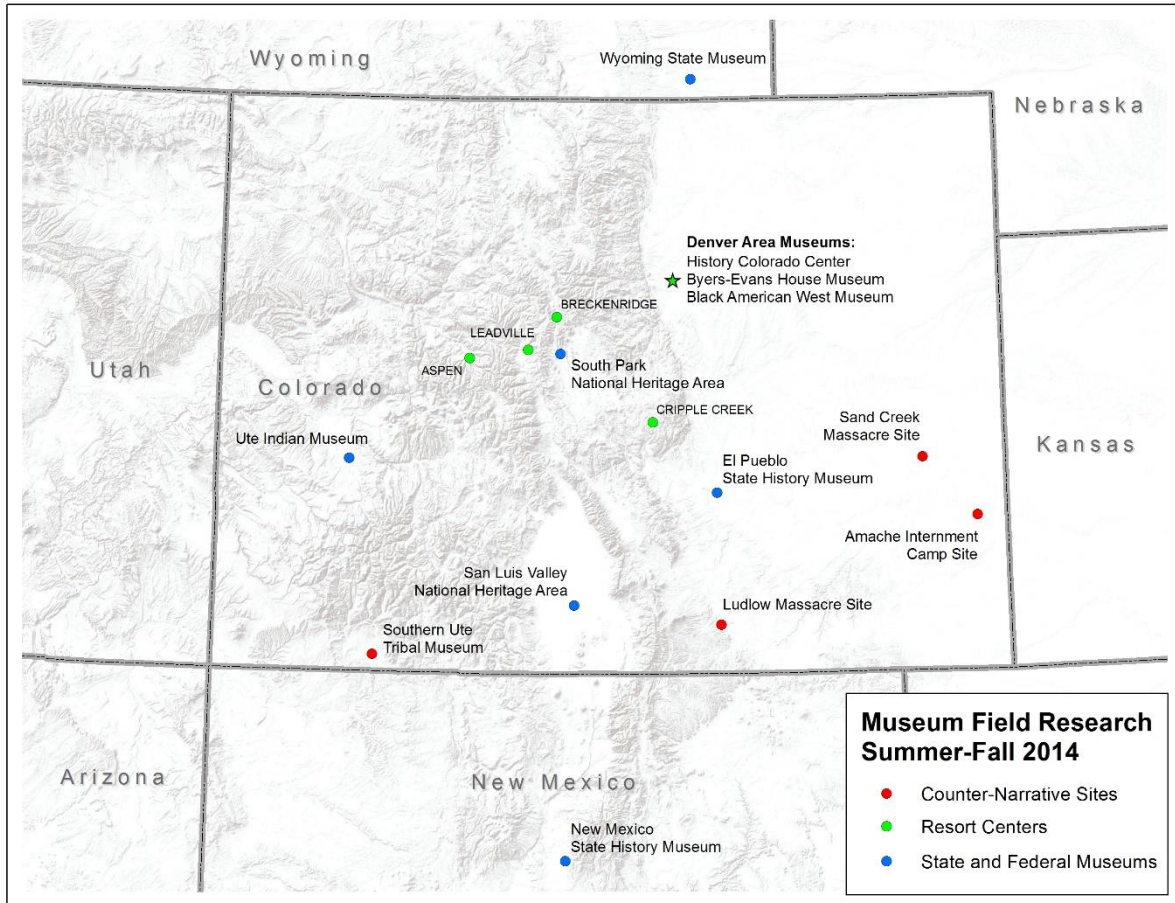


Figure 1.2: The seventeen initial sites investigated by this study included museums in mountain resorts, museums highlighting counter-narrative histories, and museums and historic sites designated by state and federal governments. Cartography by author.



This initial fieldwork, conducted primarily during the summer and fall of 2014, highlighted three intersecting sets of museums:

One set of museums, located in *well-established tourist destinations*, presents heritage largely to out-of-town visitors. Within these communities, multiple museums form “heritage complexes,” displaying local and regional histories generally centered on conventional themes and narratives. However, in some cases, these museums also incorporate more counter-narrative or controversial themes and historical episodes (Table 1.1).

A second set of museums specifically highlight more counter-narrative presentations of Colorado history, generally focused on themes of race, ethnicity, and labor conflict. These museums are generally smaller, and in locations with significantly less tourist traffic. (Table 1.2).

Finally, I also selected several museums operated by state and federal governments. These include Colorado’s new state history museum, as well as comparable museums in the neighboring states of New Mexico and Wyoming. Additionally, I visited additional regional museums operated by Colorado’s state historical society, and explored several National Heritage Corridors, in which the federal government cooperates with local museums and tourism offices to promote nationally-significant regional heritage (Table 1.3)

Table 1.1: “Heritage Complexes” in established tourism destinations. Museums in bold were analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

“Heritage Complex”	Selected Museums and Historic Sites
Aspen, CO	<p><b>Wheeler-Stallard House Museum (Ute Indian Exhibit)</b></p> <p>Holden-Marolt Mining and Ranching Museum</p> <p>Independence Ghost Town</p> <p>Ashcroft Ghost Town</p>
Breckenridge, CO	<p>Breckenridge Welcome Center</p> <p><b>Barney Ford Victorian Home (African-American Pioneer)</b></p> <p>Edwin Carter Discovery Center</p> <p>High Line Railroad Museum</p> <p>Iowa Gulch Hydraulic Mining Site</p>
Cripple Creek, CO	<p>Cripple Creek Heritage Center</p> <p>Outlaws and Lawmen Jail Museum</p> <p>Cripple Creek District Museum</p> <p>“Old Homestead” Parlor House (i.e. Brothel)</p> <p>Mollie Kathleen Gold Mine</p> <p>Cripple Creek and Victor Narrow Gauge Railroad</p>
Leadville, CO	<p>Leadville Heritage Museum</p> <p>National Mining Museum and Hall of Fame</p> <p>Matchless Mine/Baby Doe Home Site</p> <p>Healy House and Dexter Cabin Museum</p> <p>Temple Israel/Leadville Jewish Museum</p> <p>Mollie Brown House Museum</p>

Table 1.2: Museums and historic sites emphasizing counter-narrative presentations of Colorado History. Museums in bold were analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

Location	Museum
Denver, CO	<b>Black American West Museum</b>
Ignacio, CO	<b>Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum</b>
Ludlow, CO	<b>UMWA Ludlow Massacre Centennial Pilgrimage and Exhibits</b>
Eads, CO	Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
Granada, CO	Amache Japanese Internment Camp and Museum

Table 1.3: State history museums and national heritage areas in Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Museums and areas in bold were analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

Location	Museum
Denver, CO	<b>History Colorado Center</b>
Pueblo, CO	<b>El Pueblo History Museum (“Children of Ludlow” Exhibit)</b>
Montrose, CO	Ute Indian Museum
Denver, CO	Byers-Evans House Museum
Cheyenne, WY	<b>Wyoming State Museum</b>
Santa Fe, NM	<b>New Mexico History Museum</b>
Alamosa, CO	Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
Fairplay, CO	South Park National Heritage Area

These museums are a small fraction of the more than three hundred museums in the state of Colorado (Colorado-Wyoming Association of Museums n.d.), yet they highlight a diverse array of historical themes, presented in a variety of contexts and settings. Initial visits to these sites thus illustrated not only a revealing array of themes presented in a range of heritage tourism contexts, but also a wide range of presentation strategies, ranging from displays of artifacts in glass cases, to more innovative interpretations of history using multimedia and immersive architecture, to historic homes with tours led by docents. Moreover, this preliminary fieldwork also revealed numerous overlaps between the initial three categories around which it was initially conceived. For instance, the state museums of Colorado present numerous counter-narrative dimensions of Colorado history, both at the History Colorado Center and in museums elsewhere in the state. In many cases, these echo themes and episodes presented at many of the more counter-narrative focused museums in Colorado, but target more general audiences. Similarly, themes of race and ethnicity are also present in museums operated by the Aspen Historical Society and the Breckinridge Heritage Alliance, indicating that more critical readings of the Western past may be compatible with more conventional presentations of heritage tourism.

#### Sites for Detailed Analysis

This initial fieldwork included over thirty museums, many of which present extensive exhibits that juxtapose multiple themes, geographical locations, and approaches to display. Even though these represented a careful selection from the array of museums present in Colorado, they were a far more extensive array of exhibit texts than could be fully analyzed within the time available for this doctoral project. I therefore further refined the site selection to a series of more specific case studies for extended analysis. These museums, shown in bold type in Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, are analyzed and discussed in the three substantive chapters of this dissertation. They represent a targeted array of case studies, highlighting museums with especially complex narrative

structures, as well as those in which the juxtaposition of iconic and critical narratives about the West are particularly revealing. Although these museums are described in detail in the three subsequent chapters, I briefly introduce them here in order to outline the overall structure of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed analysis of a single museum: the History Colorado Center in downtown Denver. This museum is significant for several reasons. First, it opened in 2012, replacing an older state history museum. With a newly-constructed building, and new exhibits, it reflects many recent trends in exhibit planning and design, especially in its immersive reconstruction of a variety of scenes from Colorado's past. Second, the Center, as Colorado's official state history museum, works to connect a portrayal of the state's history to a set of civic identities. Many of its exhibits therefore reflect Colorado's geographic diversity and numerous iconic settings from the state's past. But many of these "Colorado Stories" also reflect more dissonant episodes and critical readings of state and regional history. These contrasting presentations of Colorado's past are carefully arranged in the spaces of the museum's exhibit galleries. The History Colorado Center is therefore a rewarding first study in exploring how complex exhibit narratives are arranged in space, and how a range of contrasting historical themes come together to suggest an "official" state history. Moreover, it offers a testing ground for extending discourse analysis to more explicitly consider the role of spatial arrangements in a museum centered on narrative storytelling.

Chapter 3 extends the comparison of iconic and critical historical narratives to a series of six museums across the state of Colorado. In this analysis, I focus on three specific counter-narrative themes, highlighting the historical impact and continuing presence of the Ute people of central and western Colorado, the 1914 Ludlow Massacre of striking mineworkers, and the contributions of African-Americans to Colorado's history. I explore these three themes through a set of paired comparisons, between exhibits and museums in established tourist destinations and museums specifically focused on those particular themes. In Aspen and Breckenridge, along with a regional

state museum in Pueblo, exhibits present Ute history, African-American history, and the Ludlow anniversary as part of larger sequences of exhibits presenting other, more conventional, themes. In contrast, the Southern Ute tribal museum, the centennial commemoration and exhibit presented by the United Mineworkers of America Union, and Denver's Black American West Museum are each centered on more critical readings of the Western past. This comparison enables a more detailed look at how more dissonant dimensions of regional history fit into the spaces and settings of heritage tourism. Although some of these museums are not as extensively structured around storytelling as the History Colorado Center, this comparative analysis highlights the importance of museum locations and narrative strategies for emphasizing or downplaying the impact of counter-narratives on dominant regional histories. These six museums thus illustrate some of the "genre conventions" that incorporate these critical themes into overarching conclusions.

Finally, Chapter 4 traces a comparison of the state history museums of Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Although the History Colorado Center and its immersive storytelling is also the focus of Chapter 2, a comparative analysis highlights the unique geographical focus of state museums. In contrast to many museums focused on local histories, or on particular historical themes, state history museums instead link together a wide range of themes and narratives, representing a diverse array of geographical locations. Although these three museums incorporate many counter-narrative or critical themes into their presentations, they also present state histories as the foundation for civic identities. This comparison is thus an opportunity to examine not only how diverse and potentially dissonant themes are juxtaposed within the three museums, but also to see how each museum presents the geographies of its state. Although these museums employ a wide range of presentation strategies—ranging from traditional object-centered displays to immersive reconstructions of historical settings to a continuous timeline of state history, each tells a story that connects multiple places together into both a larger state geography, and a civic identity rooted in that shared space.

These selected case studies represent only a small portion of the narrative content, context, and complexity traced by the initial exploratory fieldwork. Even so, they highlight several of the most revealing aspects of how the complex past of the American West is presented, across a variety of settings. More significantly, these case studies offer numerous approaches to organizing museums around stories and storytelling. Although not all of the selected museums are primarily designed around narrative structures, each illustrates how museum stories and spaces interact, both at the scale of individual exhibits, and in linking together multiple exhibits toward more nuanced and complex conclusions. More generally, these museums highlight how museum narratives can also represent and connect a range of geographical locations, and weave them into complex systems of cultural meaning.

#### Toward a Narrative-Centered Methodology: Key Approaches and Questions

As noted above, this study seeks to extend content and discourse analysis—qualitative methodologies used extensively in cultural geography—to the consideration of museum narratives. However, narrative-centered approaches have not been widely employed by most geographers. This means that the more spatial dimensions of narratives have not been as extensively theorized (Cameron 2012; Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016). Because of this, an investigation of the museums noted above must pursue several simultaneous goals. First, it must identify, compare, and contrast the themes presented in each museum’s exhibits, and situate those themes amid the discursive web of the American West. But more significantly, it must explore the story structures used to present those themes in exhibits, paying particular attention to the use of exhibit space in structuring that narration, and to the ways in which storytelling identifies and rearranges a range of locations in the “folded” space of museums. This means that the research methodology used in this dissertation combines an initial discourse analysis of each museum with a more exploratory tracing of the narrative structures through which museum discourses are presented to visitors.

In order to focus on and compare these structures, I selected exhibit texts as the primary analytical focus of my research, rather than the more extensive co-construction of meaning between museum authors and visitors. These texts include not only the artifacts and material objects presented in museum exhibits, but also the written exhibit labels and interpretive panels, the videos, audio recordings, and interactive media included in exhibits, and the use of architectural elements to partition spaces and create commemorative atmospheres. Such multi-media texts are the focus of conventional content and discourse analysis methods, but I am more interested in how these diverse media are arranged in the three-dimensional spaces of museum exhibits.

I therefore documented each museum and its exhibits in several ways. First, I compiled detailed inventories of the elements comprising each museum exhibit. These included historical artifacts and their labels, as well as the texts of interpretive panels, and the content of videos, interactive exhibits, and other multimedia presentations. Second, I supplemented these notes with photographs of exhibit displays, in order to record the juxtaposition of objects and texts. Finally, I made extensive sketch-maps of each exhibit, noting the location of each display, the juxtaposition of displays and exhibits highlighting different themes, and the pathways along which visitors are directed through exhibits (Figure 1.2). These maps highlighted the ways in which exhibit spaces extend discourses into spatial narratives, leading visitors through sequences tracing temporal or spatial progressions, presenting multiple perspectives on different events, or tracing more complex juxtapositions of historical episodes and themes. In many of the initial museum visits conducted during the first stages of the field research, these inventories, photographs, and maps were brief summaries; however, once case studies were selected for more detailed research, this documentation became quite extensive, highlighting in particular the locations represented in each exhibit (Figure 1.3).





	A	B	C	D	E
1	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Eddie Ross Photograph	Albuquerque, NM	
2	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	DH Lawrence Effects	Arroyo Seco NM	
3	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Tiffany Mines	Cerillos, NM	1900
4	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Photo--Cash mine	Cerillos, NM	
5	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Tiffany Mines	Cerillos, NM	
6	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Turquoise Ore	Cerillos, NM	
7	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Train Robbery	Clayton, NM	
8	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Coal mining colfax co	Dawson, NM	
9	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Coal Town	Dawson, NM	
10	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	George McJunkin	Folsom, NM	
11	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Bandelier Archaeology	Isleta, NM	
12	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Mine	Kingston NM	
13	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Silver Mine	Kingston NM	
14	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Townscape	Kingston NM	
15	4 Becoming the Southwest	D Coming of RR	Main street saloons	Kingston NM	

Figure 1.4: A detailed inventory of locations represented in the New Mexico History Museum.

Following this data collection, I analyzed each case study, following a series of questions which highlight the extension of content and discourse analysis to a more detailed consideration of the spatial narratives presented in each museum. Because of the varying themes, presentation strategies, and ranges of geographical locations presented in each museum, not all questions were equally applicable to each case study. Nonetheless, this consistent analytical framework aided comparison between the nine different museums.

*Preliminaries.* These questions address fundamental aspects of museum presentation. These questions were generally posed during initial exploratory fieldwork, and helped to guide the selection of detailed case studies for further analysis.

1. Where is the museum located? Is this location prominent, or more obscure? Is this a location that is readily visible or promoted to heritage tourism audiences?
2. What is the overall focus of the museum? What group or agency owns, controls, or funds it?
3. What strategies of display and presentation are used in the museum? Are displays focused on historical objects and artifacts, interpretive photographs and texts, immersive storytelling, or interactive multimedia? Are presentations structured through guided tours, or are visitors free to explore the exhibit as they choose?

*Content Analysis.* These questions explore the historical content presented to visitors, at the scale of individual exhibits, and across the museum as a whole.

4. How is the museum presentation structured among multiple exhibits? What themes or historical episodes are represented in each exhibit? How do these themes relate to the overall focus of the museum? What goals and objectives are stated to visitors, either explicitly or implicitly?
5. What material, textual, visual, and other elements comprise each exhibit? How do these elements relate to the overall thematic focus of the exhibit, and the museum as a whole? What themes are represented by these different elements?

*Discourse Analysis.* These questions link the thematic content presented in exhibits to overall interpretations of local, regional, and national history. Moreover, they address how these themes represent the situated viewpoints of different groups, and the negotiation of economic, social, and political power underlying claims to knowledge and authority.

6. What local, regional, and national-scale historical interpretations are invoked or suggested by the museum's exhibits? What conclusions are presented, both at the scale of individual exhibits, or of the museum as a whole? Do these conclusions reflect a conventional or critical historical interpretation?
7. Which groups and perspectives are represented in the museum, and which are absent? Are alternative, potentially contrasting discourses and perspectives also presented within the museum? Are these perspectives highlighted in specific exhibits, or consistently presented throughout exhibits?
8. How are these perspectives and discourses linked to the context of the museum, and the perspectives how it is owned, controlled, or funded?

*Spatial Narrative Analysis.* These questions look directly at how museum narratives work to organize the themes and discourses presented in the three-dimensional spaces of exhibits, and of museums as a whole. In particular, they highlight the structures of those narratives, and how museum spaces are organized to present those structures to visitors.

9. How are texts, objects, imagery, and audiovisual resources organized in the spatial layout of a museum exhibit? How do these spatial arrangements organize the presentation of discourses or the unfolding of narratives? What connections are made, omitted, emphasized, or downplayed? How do these connections and juxtapositions contribute to the explicit and implied conclusions of each exhibit?

10. How are exhibits arranged in the space of the museum? Is there a defined sequence connecting exhibits? What thematic, chronological, geographic, or other links between exhibits are suggested by that arrangement and sequencing?

11. What structures organize these museum narratives? Are stories presented as linear relationships of cause and effect, or do narratives non-linear storylines or contrasting perspectives? How are museum spaces arranged to suggest these narrative structures?

*Locations of and within the Narrative.* In contrast to the previous questions' focus on how exhibit spaces structure museum narrative, these questions instead address which physical locations are represented in museum exhibits. By narratively linking these locations, museum exhibits present meaning not only in the location of each museum, but also extend those narratives and discourses across more extensive geographies.

12. Is there any particular significance to the location and context of a museum's building? Is this location related to the events and narratives presented in the museum, or to the perspectives and discourses underlying that presentation?

13. What locations are depicted within the museum's exhibits? Are these locations from the immediate vicinity of the museum itself, or do they represent more extensive regional geographies? Alternatively, do they represent other spatial structures, such as connections between places, or linear routes? How are these geographies represented in the spaces and narratives presented in the museum?

Not all of these questions are equally germane to each museum explored in this dissertation, or to the different dimensions of museum narratives analyzed in each chapter. Even so, these questions were applicable to many of the museums visited during my initial exploratory fieldwork, and most—though not all—of the museums selected for further analysis employed strong storylines in their exhibits. These questions are thus a useful entry for exploring the geographies of these museum narratives, and for comparing and contrasting how narrative

structures use museum spaces to structure and represent the complex cultural geographies of the American West. Moreover, they offer an entry point for developing a more generally applicable set of methods for analyzing museum narratives. Although this methodology is relatively new, the case studies analyzed here illustrate its usefulness. This is particularly evident in a case study of the History Colorado Center, a museum strongly organized around a series of “Colorado Stories.” Chapter 2, which focuses on this museum, illustrates the potential for extending content and discourse analysis methods to more explicitly address the presentation of these narratives in three-dimensional museum spaces.

CHAPTER 2:  
MUSEUM/SPACE/DISOURSE:  
ANALYZING DISCOURSE IN THREE DIMENSIONS IN DENVER'S HISTORY COLORADO CENTER<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I explore methods for analyzing the narratives which connect and structure “museum geographies” by focusing on the role of space itself within museum exhibits. My analysis rests upon a central claim, explored in Chapter 1, but worth restating here: museum narratives—alongside numerous other discursive formations—*take place within three-dimensional space*. This means that the spatial arrangement, layout, and positioning of these presentations often contribute significantly to their meaning. While cultural geographic studies have often emphasized the significance of the location of particular discursive acts—as in work on monuments, memorials, and the geographies of memory—I go further in investigating how discourses are organized into sequences, connections, progressions, and pathways that unfold across spaces (Foote and Azaryahu 2007; Azaryahu and Foote 2008). I take a set of museum exhibits in which narratives are particularly prominent as an important opportunity to develop the methods for a spatial discourse analysis outlined in Chapter 1.

The spatial discourses and narratives presented in museum exhibits offer an important opportunity to develop methods for considering the spatial form of narratives, but spatialized discourses are also found in other forms of media. Geographers have generally been most interested in discourse as it unfolds through one- or two-dimensional texts, such as books, newspapers, film and television, websites, and other digital formats (Adams 2009). While these

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on an article, coauthored with Ken Foote, published in *Cultural Geographies* in 2017.

discourses often refer to actual places and spaces, the spatiality of their media contributes relatively little to the meanings they present. In contrast, museums, historical sites, and guided tours highlight the importance of layout, positioning, orientation, relative placement, sequence, and other characteristics of the staging of text and narrative to the discourses presented within. These aspects of museum discourse rely heavily on their presentation in three-dimensional space. This analysis therefore contributes both to this dissertation's study of how the American West, and its complex history and heritage, are narrated in museum spaces, as well as working toward a more generally applicable extension of discourse analysis to the narratives presented in museums and other spatial media.

I explore these methodological possibilities through a detailed analysis of the exhibit spaces of the History Colorado Center, a new state history museum in downtown Denver. As noted in Chapter 1, numerous factors make the Center an ideal setting for this initial exploration. The museum, opened in 2012, was designed to be a tourist destination, and a center for research and education, but it also sought to engage the state's diverse populations and to reconsider the state's contested past and contemporary identity (Convery 2012). Its mission is "to ignite imaginations of all ages about Colorado history," and to serve as a hub of civic engagement that "creates a rich experience for visitors through exhibits and programs that blend technology, media, environments and artifacts" (History Colorado n.d.). The Center is thus a good example of recent efforts in the U.S. and elsewhere to create new or substantially upgraded public museum spaces aimed especially at attracting new and larger audiences and using the latest techniques in multimedia exhibit design (Message 2006). More significantly, the History Colorado exhibits are intricately spatial, designed to reproduce the scenes of significant episodes in Colorado's history. Because the museum's content—and the historical reevaluation underlying it—is embedded in the exhibits, it offers a good case for exploring the spatiality of the discourse on display. Finally, the History Colorado Center is a state museum, but instead of emphasizing an overly positive sense of civic, state or national



identity, History Colorado is actively confronting a more dissonant heritage in its exhibit spaces and narratives.

### *THEORETICAL REVIEW*

As noted in the literature review in the preceding chapter, growing interest in what Geoghegan (2010) terms “museum geographies” mirrors an upsurge of research on museums in other disciplines as well. Yet this interest has led to an extremely wide and diverse array of research, spanning many theoretical frames, methodologies, and entry points for research. Within geography, Phillips, Woodham, and Hooper-Greenhill (2015) provide an excellent summary of recent work, identifying eleven themes which they group into three major categories (Table 2.1). In this dissertation, I focus on the themes in the second group: the geographies of museum assemblage, including the geography of collections; the geography of displays, exhibits and galleries, and museum architecture.

Table 2.1: Major themes of analysis relating to the spatialization of museum geographies. Adapted and extended from Phillips, Woodham and Hooper-Greenhill.

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<b>Geographies of museum identity</b>
Origin and history of the museum concept
Imagined and conceived spatialities of museums
Scaled spatial identities: local, regional, national and international

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<b>Geographies of museum assemblage</b>
Geography of collections
Geography display
Museum architecture

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<b>Geographies of museum social location</b>
Museum as agent of economic redevelopment and regeneration
Museums as agents of social inclusion and community building
Museum as agents of social care
Museum as instrument of social discipline
Museums as a nexus of education, learning and teaching

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<b>Other issues not addressed by Phillips, Woodham and Hooper-Greenhill</b>
Dissonant history and contested identities
Museums as sites of reconciliation and reunion
Museums as sites of protest and resistance
Museums and the colonial and post-colonial gaze
Museums as sites of commemorative practice, ritual and remembrance, both public and private
Museums as commercial speculation and promotion
The politics of museums and museum design

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Assemblages are interesting because they frequently express multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contested meanings. In some situations, they may propagate the values of dominant social and economic groups or make claims to political authority. But they can also serve to rally communities around a common goal or serve as sites of protest and resistance. Exhibit spaces—the type of assemblage in which I am most interested—vary greatly in structure, sometimes guiding visitors along specific paths, sometimes not, all the while emphasizing certain stories, themes and objects while obscuring or leaving out others.

My question is how the three-dimensional materiality of these assemblages relates to the underlying discourse—how does the spatial structure of the assemblage relate to the narrative itself? This is not an entirely new question: Hetherington proposed that museums are often designed around linear narratives, but that the straightforward unfolding of time, space, and materiality across these “topological spaces” can be disrupted and “folded” into a “space of multiple and partial connections” (1997, 214) And Crang (1994a) has written about the way time is conceptualized in museums, particularly how it is mapped onto or represented by museum space. My goal is to probe more deeply into this relationship by drawing on discourse and narrative theory.

A range of research techniques have been applied to museum geographies, though only a few are sensitive to the type of spatiality of assemblages that we are foregrounding in this project (Table 2.2). Discourse analysis is perhaps the best suited to the task because it emphasizes the value of looking deeply into written, aural, visual, sign, and non-verbal communication in search of underlying relations of social position, power and control (Dittmer 2010a; Waitt 2010; G. Rose 2011; Hetherington 2011; Lord 2006). A recent innovation in cultural geography that we develop further here is the study of narrative or storytelling as one type of discourse (Cameron 2012; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2012; Rowe, Wertsch, and Kosyaeva 2002). This approach stresses the way social norms are told, taught, and learned as stories about oneself and others, particularly

within social groups. Moreover, these narratives weave places and events into broader structures of meaning, whether in the “small stories” of individual experience, as keys to societal values and geographical imaginaries, or by making connections between scales.

Table 2.2: Some of the methods used to examine museums and museum assemblages.

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1. Observation and performative analysis of visitor experience involving watching and documenting visitor interactions with exhibits and exhibit spaces, often extending over multiple visits.
  2. Content analysis, including counting, totaling, comparing and analyzing the texts, audio-visual, photos, graphics, and other artifacts used in a museum exhibit.
  3. Survey and interview research concentrating on how the information, messages, and perceptions visitors hold or retain following a museum visit.
  4. Chronological or historical analysis of how an exhibit is developed or changes through time.
  5. Locative analysis involving mapping documented events and exhibits to consider how they portray particular places and events
  6. Frame analysis, based upon the work of Erving Goffman, considers the museum experience in terms of how people understand situations and activities based upon pre-existing and expected norms unique to specific social contexts or "frames."
  7. Semiotic analysis, focusing especially on the signs, symbols and other communicative strategies employed in museum displays.
  8. Discourse analysis, a range of methods for analyzing written, vocal, or sign language in realistic or naturalistic settings. As developed in geography and other related fields, focuses especially on how social, economic and cultural power relationships are established, maintained, strengthened and propagated through the use of language.
-

Museum narratives, in contrast with narratives presented in other, two-dimensional media, are especially interesting because stories move off the page or computer screen entirely and instead unfold along pathways through three-dimensional exhibit spaces, such as the interior of a museum or on signs and markers at historical sites (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016). When stories are organized in this way, space and spatial arrangements become resources for emplotment, such that the spatial positioning of text, artifacts, maps, photos, and multimedia are all part of the storytelling process. By focusing on this spatial aspect of narrative structure, I seek to illustrate how the questions outlined in Chapter 1 offer an effective approach to understanding how these narratives juxtapose multiple, and potentially contrasting discourses about the past. This methodology is central to this dissertation, but is also a resource for future research in cultural geography and related fields.

#### *THE HISTORY COLORADO CENTER*

As noted previously, the History Colorado Center is an example of how space and discourse intersect in a major museum (Figure 2.1). Several factors make the Center a particularly productive case study. First, like many prominent new history museums that have been constructed in the U.S. and around the world, it was intended not only to display state history, but also to promote tourism and anchor urban redevelopment (Shilling 2007). As such, these museums seek to make their exhibits, activities and collections accessible, interesting and exciting enough both to draw repeat visits from established audiences, and to attract new visitors, especially from minority populations and visitors from outside the city and state. In the case of the Center, the previous Colorado History Museum was demolished in 2010, leaving a blank slate for new exhibit development. The exhibits at History Colorado were also developed from the ground up to a unified design, unlike museums that developed through accretion over long periods of time.

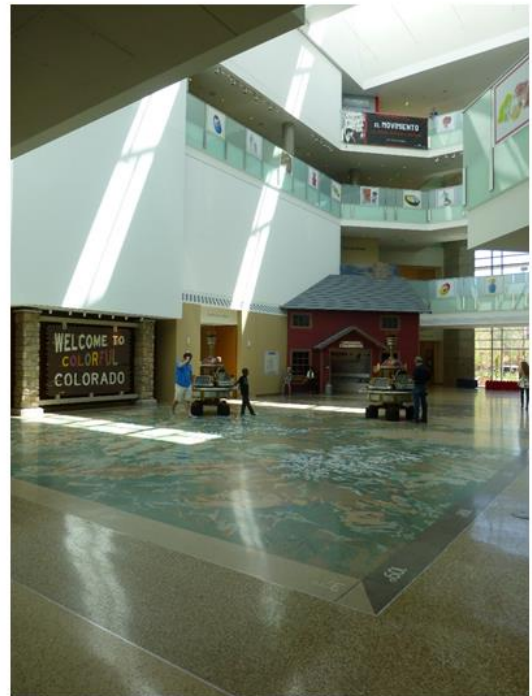


Figure 2.1: The exterior façade of the History Colorado Center was a major addition to the museum quarter of downtown Denver. The four-story atrium at the center of the building is floored with a terrazzo-tile map of the state, and provides access to three primary galleries. Photography by author.

History Colorado also benefits from a new wave of museum design that stresses the role of architecture in articulating the exhibit spaces, themes and stories on display. Rather than a focus on historic objects or didactic instruction, the center's spaces are designed to reproduce the settings of important episodes of Colorado's history, and to invite visitors to immerse themselves in those spaces and stories, and the conflicting perspectives of their characters. Important nuances of meaning emerge as visitors trace sequences of cause and effect, or ponder the juxtaposition of different historical episodes and contexts. This is far different from the prior Colorado History Museum, which had largely focused on display cases filled with artifacts and on aging dioramas.

Second, the museum's exhibits directly confront many dissonant themes in Colorado's past, as part of an ambitious project to renegotiate the state's public history. Although these themes are present in many museums analyzed in this dissertation, and indeed guided my selection of research sites, History Colorado is somewhat unique. The museum is an agency of the state government, funded from revenue generated by legalized gambling, and is framed amid a public-private initiative toward promoting heritage tourism as a strategy for statewide economic development, but its content is not limited to conventional regional imaginaries (Clarion Associates of Colorado 2011b, 2011a; Liverman 2010). While the previous museum displayed celebratory episodes from Colorado's frontier past, the new Center embraces more critical perspectives on state and regional history. This is most clearly reflected in Gov. Bill Ritter's call, at the Center's groundbreaking ceremony, for the new museum to feature the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, in which Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians, who had believed themselves under government protection, were instead killed by members of Colorado's territorial militia (Convery 2012, 12; Kelman 2013). Additional dissonant episodes include the rise of Colorado's Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. This approach also offered the prospect of attracting a broader, more diverse cross-section of visitors, and perhaps encouraging greater public debate about the state's past.



At the same time, History Colorado does still draw upon some of the more conventional images of “Colorful Colorado”: beautiful mountain vistas; the roles of Anglo pioneers, ranchers, and miners in shaping settlement; and the fun of the ski slopes and hiking trails. This juxtaposition positions History Colorado as presenting a more nuanced, comprehensive, and critical portrayal of the state’s history and heritage. At the design stage, the planners saw the museum as place for people to encounter and engage Colorado’s history in new ways. There was no intent to resolve all the dissonant elements of the state’s past, but at least to invite dialog.

Third, the History Colorado center is an unusually well documented museum. Shortly after the museum’s opening, William Convery, the State Historian who had guided the museum’s planning and design, completed a Ph.D. dissertation documenting the extensive public history work that underlay the new galleries (Convery 2012). This included focus groups testing public interest in various themes, as well as meetings with stakeholder groups whose histories were to be presented, and the translation of these themes and episodes into exhibit designs. To bring together these popular and critical histories, museum planners sought to organize the museum around three themes—big dreams, enduring communities, and the effects of humans interacting with their environments—across a range of settings selected according to polls of visitor interest. These themes were then used to make thematic and place-based connections across the exhibit spaces themselves. Even so, many critics questioned this approach, lamenting the lack of artifacts, and finding the new exhibits to be overly targeted to children—their subject matter notwithstanding (Paglia 2012; Calhoun 2013). The Sand Creek exhibit proved particularly problematic, as protests from Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribal officials over their lack of input into the exhibit’s content led to the revision and eventual closure of the exhibit. During the three years in which the Center has operated, its finances have remained shaky, and several of its top executives have recently resigned—calling into question the public appeal of its initial bold plans (Calhoun 2015).

Even so, both the well-documented planning and design of the Center and its subsequent criticism allow me to more easily focus on the “texts” of the museum’s exhibit spaces. I seek not to provide a comprehensive analysis of the center’s exhibits, nor to evaluate their success or failure, but instead to closely examine how the exhibits and galleries are constructed as narrative spaces. In this study, I selected two galleries, which offer somewhat different approaches to narrative organization, as a basis for tracing the spatial narratives that extend the museum’s presented discourse into three dimensions.

### *ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION*

The History Colorado building by Denver architect David Tryba encloses a dramatic four-story atrium, centered around a floor map of the state of Colorado. This atrium offers access to the museum’s three main galleries, each keyed to one of the museum’s themes (Figure 2.2):

- “Destination Colorado” portrays the early years of Keota, a farming town on Colorado’s Eastern Plains. While Keota itself was short-lived, reminiscences by a number of its residents highlight Coloradans’ “*big dreams*.”
- “Colorado Stories” expands the focus from a single time and place to a collage of episodes from Colorado history. These exhibits seek to highlight the “*enduring communities*” Coloradans created through the state’s history, while contrasting “Coloradans at their best and worst.”
- The “Living West” gallery addresses the challenges of living in the American West, presenting three episodes of “Coloradans shaping and being shaped by their environment.” Through these episodes, visitors see the choices communities made in response to the constraints of land and water, and the consequences they faced.

I chose to analyze Colorado Stories and Living West because they are aimed at older children and adults, because they involve a greater range of text and media resources, and because

they present a wide array of settings and stories. In contrast, Destination Colorado is primarily targeted at younger (K-6) children, and presents only a single story and site.

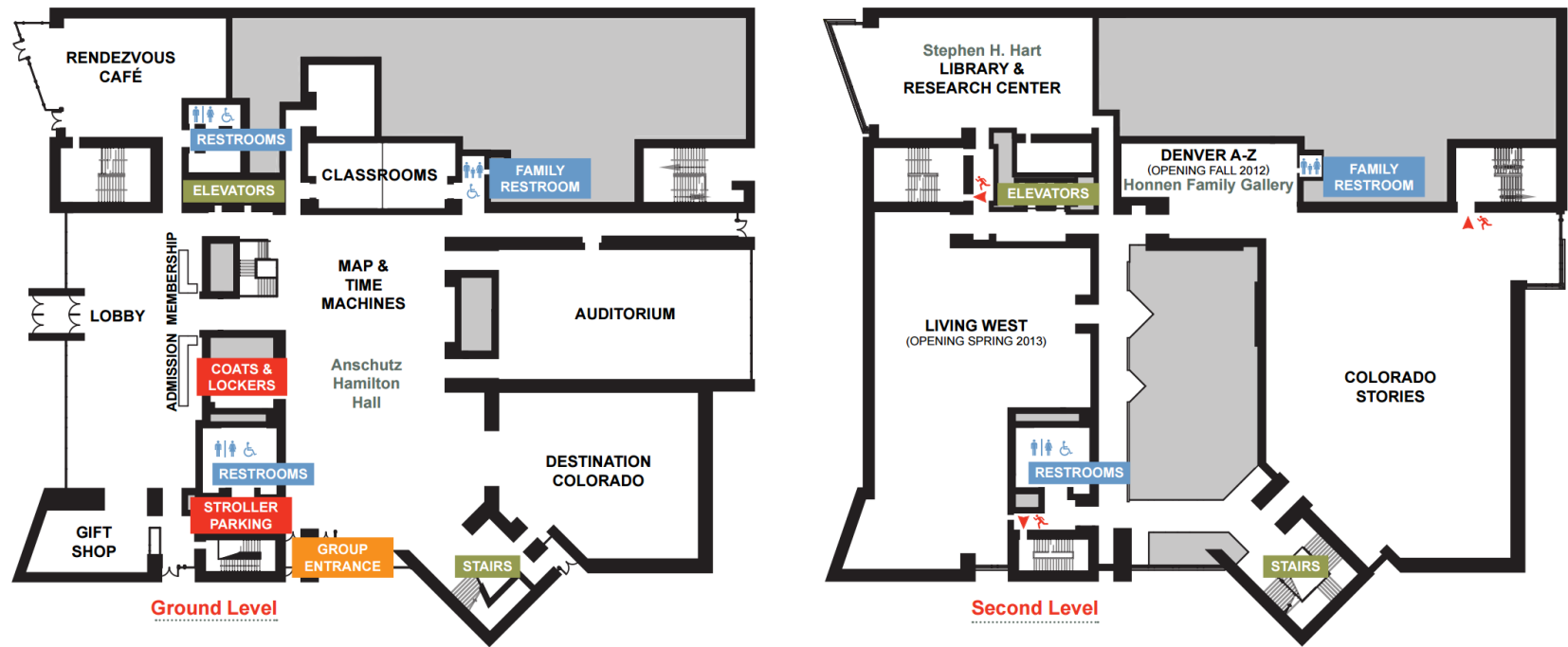


Figure 2.2: Floor plan of the History Colorado Center. The museum's three core exhibits are located on the building's first and second floors, and are accessed from the building's central atrium. Map courtesy of History Colorado.

The arrangement of exhibits within the gallery spaces is a central dimension of how each gallery's core themes and messages are presented. Both Colorado Stories and Living West present a series of distinct historical settings and episodes (Table 2.3), and employ several narrative strategies to engage visitors. These include *extended encounters* with multiple aspects of a place, *binary oppositions* between different views of a historical episode; and *spatial and temporal progressions* that guide visitors through a story sequentially. However, the logic behind these different presentations is not immediately clear: no bold signage or architectural details lead visitors toward a specific progression of galleries, the organizing themes are presented using a limited amount of text, and visitors are offered many options for moving between exhibits. In the next sections, I explore the discourses that unfold in the Colorado Stories and the Living West galleries, beginning each of the two sections with an overview of the gallery spaces then moving toward detailed analyses.

Table 2.3: A summary of exhibits in the History Colorado Center.

<b>Exhibit Title</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Narrative Theme</b>
<b>Gallery: Destination Colorado</b>			
	Keota	1910s	<i>Place Encounter / Temporal Progression.</i>
<b>Gallery: Colorado Stories</b>			
Convergence	Bent's Fort	1840s	<i>Place Encounter</i> (expanded through media)
Top of the World	Silver Mine, Silverton	1890	<i>Spatial Progression</i> within site.
Borderlands	CO Southern Plains and San Luis Valley	1500-Present	<i>Regional Evocation</i>
Collision (Now Closed)	Sand Creek Massacre	1864	<i>Place Encounter</i>
Confined Citizens	Amache Japanese-American Internment Camp	1942-45	<i>Binary Opposition</i> (Political Context of Internment vs. Camp Life)
Mountain Haven	Lincoln Hills (African-American mountain resort)	1920s-Present	<i>Binary Opposition</i> (White Supremacy vs. African-American Refuge)
Jumping for Joy	Steamboat Springs	1914-Present	<i>Place Encounter</i> (weakly developed)
We ♥ Rocky Mountain National Park	Rocky Mountain National Park	1915-2015	<i>Place Encounter</i>
<b>Gallery: Living West</b>			
Mesa Verde	Mesa Verde Cliff Dwellings	1300s	<i>Place Encounter</i>
Dust Bowl	Baca County Farms	1930s	<i>Temporal Progression</i>
Our Mountains	I-70 Corridor: Denver to Breckenridge	Present	<i>Spatial Progression</i>

## Colorado Stories: Discourse across Exhibits

The “Colorado Stories” exhibit is a useful place to begin analysis because it brings together seven stories in a single gallery space. The stories that have been selected are varied and relate to the museum’s efforts to engage New Western history. As noted near the entrance:

The stories of Colorado’s people cover a range of experience....we’ve triumphed, and at times we’ve failed. We’ve overcome adversity and built lasting communities in every part of the state. ... Stories in this exhibit show Coloradans at their best—and worst. ... Come inside, experience Colorado stories, and find your place.

The stories told are among the most challenging in the museum—the internment of Japanese-Americans in Colorado during the Second World War, the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 (until this exhibit was closed in 2013), and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. These are topics that were not included in the previous museum, and remain only sporadically mentioned in many presentations of Colorado history.

As visitors enter the darkened gallery through a narrow corridor, a collage of imagery and an array of audiovisual resources draws them into the exhibit area. Several aspects of the gallery’s narrative approach quickly become evident. First, the gallery is organized as a series of immersive exhibits, each reproducing the setting of a particular “Colorado story” within a well-defined interior space, set apart from the overall gallery (Figure 2.3). Each story in the gallery is introduced by a sign presenting brief details on the location and time period depicted, as well as information about the actual sites reproduced in each exhibit. The first two exhibits that most visitors encounter—the adobe walls of Bent’s Fort, and the entry to the Sunnyside Mine, outside the mountain town of Silverton—are some of the most iconic and recognizable settings within the gallery; other settings are less familiar and more dissonant. Second, the exhibits are not centered on artifacts, but instead assemble a wide range of biographical vignettes, multimedia presentations and interactive activities to tell the underlying stories. These materials are arranged spatially in several ways. Some lead visitors along a single linear path (as in the Sunnyside Mine), others highlight diverging

perspectives on particular historical moments. Still others use media to allow visitors to link to resources outside of the museum so they can explore the stories at different scales from the local to the national.





Figure 2.3: The exhibits within the Colorado Stories gallery are constructed as immersive reproductions of the setting of each narrative. Photos courtesy of History Colorado.

Third, the gallery juxtaposes multiple spaces and times. While Bent's Fort and the Sunnyside Mine are immediate neighbors in the gallery, in reality their stories are separated by four decades and nearly 350 miles. On the other side of the mine, a replica barracks from the 1940s internment of Japanese-Americans in Southeastern Colorado marks not only a further temporal and spatial shift, but also serves as a reminder that not all Coloradans came, stayed or left the state willingly. The exhibits also offer opportunities to link more complex stories about the interaction of Native Americans, early settlers, the race to claim the state's mineral resources, and its subsequent history. A short distance across the gallery, a ski lift from Steamboat Springs highlights the rise of tourism after the Second World War, while nearby a Ku Klux Klan robe and membership ledger point to the role of racism and nativism in the state's history.

This arrangement is partly by design. The gallery was designed to show "Coloradans at their best—and worst" and this is done through the spatial arrangement of the gallery and exhibits (Figure 2.4). Since visitors cannot see all of the exhibits from the entryway, the thematic relations between the individual exhibits may not initially be clear. However, the overall layout of the gallery does suggest certain progressions. Bent's Fort and the Sunnyside Mine present iconic images and conventional stories: the mine exhibit focuses on the work and tools of mining, whereas the fort illustrates a short-lived "convergence" at the intersection of American, Mexican, and Native cultures and territorial claims. However, the gallery suggests, these stories are not as simple as they may seem: a second frame of divergence emerges, tracing a counterclockwise progression through the gallery toward a more problematic, and ultimately violent, chapter in the settlement of the West.

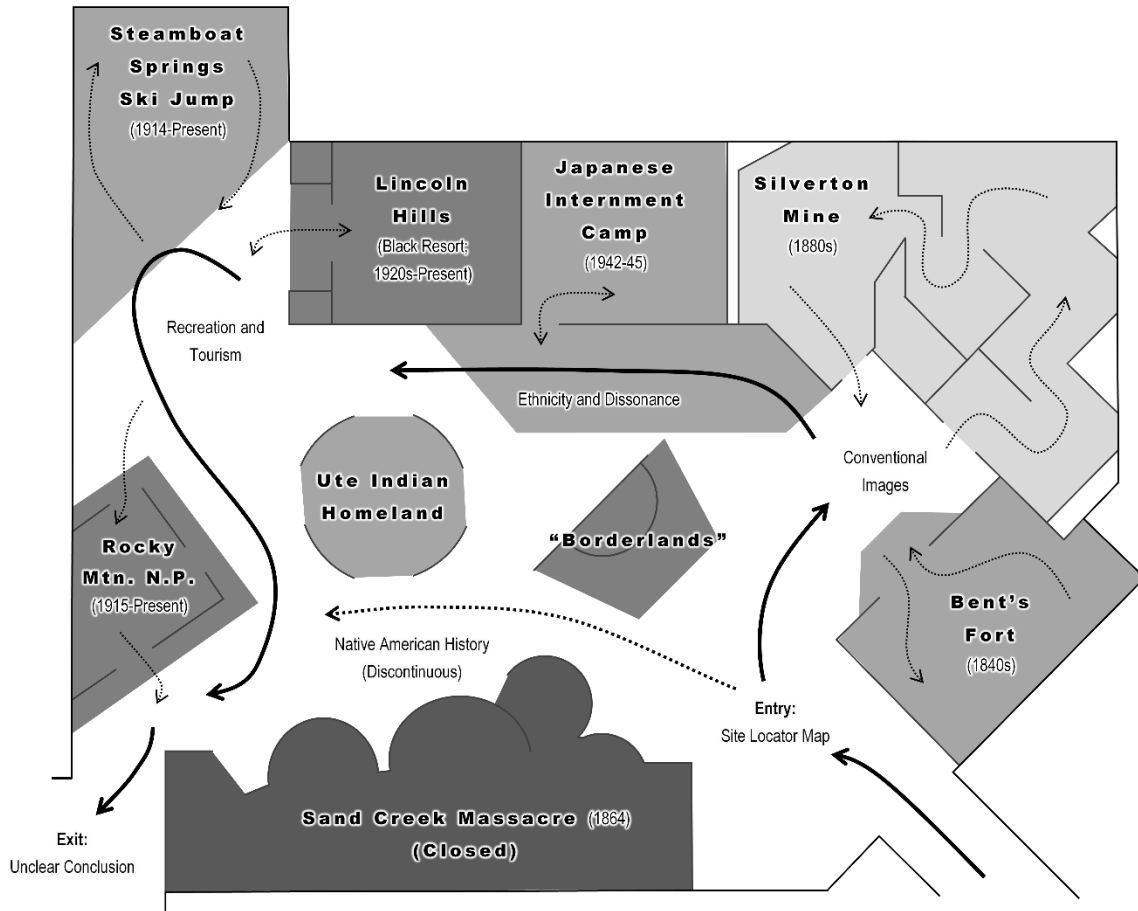


Figure 2.4: The Colorado Stories Gallery at the History Colorado Center. Visitors encounter a collage of settings, reflecting iconic and dissonant narratives of Colorado's history. Few connections among the stories are stated explicitly; instead, overarching themes gradually emerge as visitors move through the gallery. Cartography by author.

Prior to its closure, the Sand Creek Massacre exhibit contrasted with Bent's Fort, offsetting "convergence" with "collision"—a connection made, in part, but mentioning some of the same historical figures in both exhibits. An exhibit on the continuing presence of the Ute Indians in Colorado offered a partial resolution to this Native history of the state. Yet even after the gallery's redesign, "Borderlands"—an exhibit presenting a series of episodes of unclear territorial divisions and cultural loyalties spanning five centuries—suggests that neither Bent's Fort nor Sand Creek were isolated episodes, but part of a longer process of inter-cultural encounter, interaction, and conflict across a large territory. Thus, as visitors progress further into the exhibit, beyond the initial scenes and settings visible from the entryway, the focus of the presentation shifts from familiar, iconic images to more dissonant themes.

For the most part, these dissonant themes of "Colorado Stories" have been left unresolved within the space of the gallery. At the time of the museum's opening, both the Sand Creek exhibit and an exhibit on Lincoln Hills, an African-American mountain resort, led visitors to a large empty space along the gallery's north wall. Two additional exhibits bordered this space: one, noted above, focused on the continuing legacy of the Ute Indians and the other on the ski resort town of Steamboat Springs, but neither offered a conclusion. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the Sand Creek Massacre and the skiing exhibit was particularly jarring. Amid criticism from Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal leaders, who had already engaged in extended debates over how the massacre site itself should be recognized and interpreted, the Sand Creek exhibit was shuttered in mid-2013 (Kelman 2013; Calhoun 2013). Initially, its entrance doors were closed; later the exhibit was walled off from the rest of the gallery. Removing Sand Creek did not change the fact that the stories end quite abruptly. Whereas the gallery opens by raising key themes, no effort is made at the end to ask visitors to return to these issues or reflect on them as they leave.

In early 2015, a new exhibit marking the centennial of Rocky Mountain National Park opened at the gallery's north end, both adding a final "Colorado Story," and suggesting a partial

conclusion to the other exhibits. This new exhibit shifts the focus from dissonance and injustice to stories of recreation and place-attachment. In a subtle transposition of meaning, the centennial exhibit incorporates the recreational themes of Steamboat Springs and Lincoln Hills, and suggests that a love of Colorado—and particularly its mountains—offers a common ground for all, regardless of past wrongs. The implicit message is that Coloradans, whether new arrivals or long term residents, share an identity that transcends their differences. If visitors are to “find their place”, as the gallery’s opening invitation suggests, that place is rendered less problematic, informed by a sometimes dissonant past but not troubled overly by this legacy. Indeed, visitors leave the gallery through an adjacent “Denver A to Z” exhibit—a lighthearted display of civic pride, which sidesteps dissonant themes entirely.

My point is that while Colorado Stories takes on a challenging task with an inventive approach, some difficulties arise when the gallery is examined spatially in three dimensions. That is, History Colorado is ahead of many museums in using New Western history to frame these exhibits. Furthermore, “convergence” and “collision” provide a thematic scaffolding for linking the seven stories. So, *on paper* the plan offers a thoughtful, up-to-date approach to organizing the exhibits. However, *in practice* the layout of the exhibits undercuts its intent for three main reasons. First, weaving together seven stories of such variety in a single gallery space would be difficult in almost any narrative form. In fiction and non-fiction and in movies, television, and video games it is not unusual for writers to employ multiple storylines to advance complex plots and to enhance the overall narrative. There are many literary and cinematic devices that can be used: flashbacks, foreshadowing, cut-scenes, dissolves, cutaways, and jump cuts to name a few. But I would argue that many of these devices are less applicable when space is the main narrative medium, and that spatial narratives employ different—and less well understood—genre conventions.

Second, arranging these narratives in the museum space is particularly challenging, because visitors are free to move at will through the gallery and often spend little time at any given exhibit.

I agree that the approach used in Colorado Stories does produce interesting juxtapositions that can potentially challenge visitors to reconsider elements of Colorado history, but it also has drawbacks. The layout can produce jumps, breaks, and discontinuities that parallel the non sequiturs and dysfluencies which occur in writing and speech. These gaps and discontinuities are not so apparent until all of the stories are considered spatially across the entire gallery.

Finally, it is difficult to bring such varied stories to a meaningful conclusion, particularly when they represent such extremes—“the best and the worst”—of Colorado history, and encompass sometimes jarring contrasts. The gallery themes are introduced at the entrance, but there is nothing comparable at the close. Until the Rocky Mountain National Park exhibit was added, as noted above, visitors reached a blank wall as they exited. What issues should be raised as visitors reach the end? Without forcing particular conclusions, it would be possible to raise questions for further thought—ideas to help visitors think about what they have experienced. The Rocky Mountain exhibit offers one way to do this, by suggesting—however quietly—that Coloradans share common ground that can transcend their differences. This conclusion follows from the theme of convergence and is based on a somewhat positive reading of the exhibits. Yet it would also be possible to suggest less positive readings— following on the theme of collision—that many of the worst episodes have never been adequately addressed. Again, this aspect of the gallery is not so clear until one looks at the arrangement of the exhibits and their discourse in space.

### Living West: Narrating Common Themes

“Living West,” opened in 2013, is the third major gallery in the History Colorado Center, devoted to the theme of Coloradans shaping and being shaped by their natural environment. Here, in contrast, the spatial configuration of the gallery highlights the thematic links between three distinct exhibits, each focused on human-environment interactions during particular periods of Colorado’s history. Each of these three sites is presented in a very different way, but all are

organized around the core themes of land, water, and choices made in each environmental setting and time period. This thematic unity allows the exhibits to build on one another and, in so doing, invites visitors to seek their own solutions to contemporary environmental challenges.

The gallery's spatial organization is essential to this overarching narrative. In contrast to Colorado Stories, in which visitors are able to freely move between exhibits, Living West leads visitors along one path linking three exhibits (Figure 2.5). The entrance is clearly framed and highlighted with three video displays, each introducing one of the three exhibits. In careful sequence, narrators introduce each setting and briefly trace how the gallery's overarching themes relate to that setting. This both shows visitors how the gallery as a whole is organized, and how each exhibit relates to and extends the same central themes and questions.

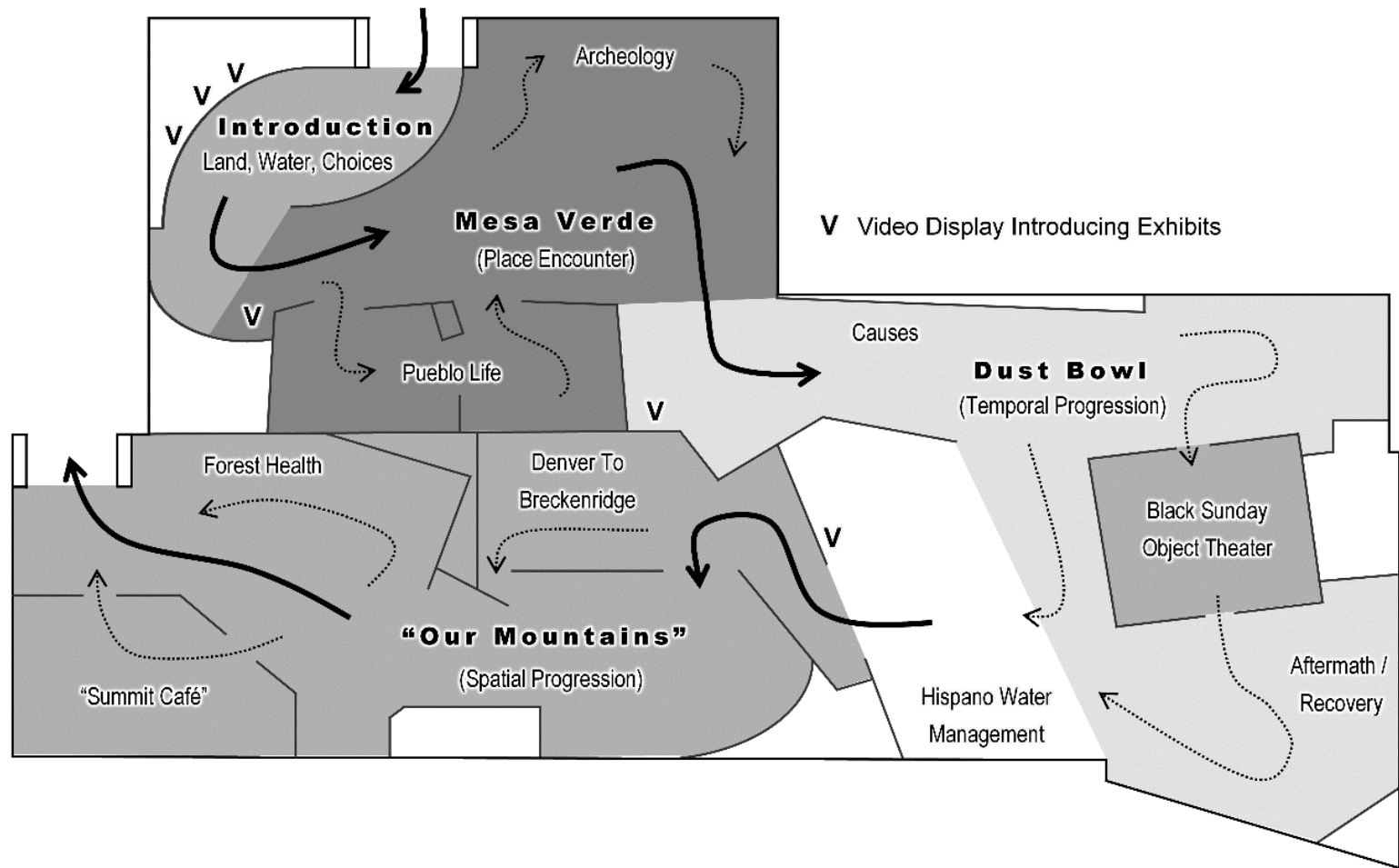


Figure 2.5: The Living West gallery at the History Colorado Center. The three exhibits within this gallery each use different presentation strategies, but their arrangement along a clear linear path helps to emphasize the common thematic links between them. Cartography by author.



The individual exhibits use multiple discursive strategies. The first, highlighting the ancestral Puebloan society, invites visitors to encounter and explore several aspects of the Mesa Verde archaeological site in southwestern Colorado. In this exhibit visitors move freely among the component displays, but the spatial framing of the exhibit underscores its relation to one of the gallery's main themes: the scant water resources of the Colorado Plateau. A range of exhibits then invite visitors to compare their own water use to that of Mesa Verde's population, explore Puebloan agriculture and crafts, and learn how archaeological understanding of early Puebloan society has changed through time. The displays focus visitor attention on the choices and lifeways that allowed Mesa Verde to flourish, as well as the Puebloans' subsequent departure as the regional climate became drier. Even though visitors are free to explore the displays as they wish, only one path leads inward to the exhibit and only one leads outward toward the next exhibit.

The remaining exhibits are structured more linearly. The second, on the 1930s Dust Bowl in Southeast Colorado, traces a clear temporal progression. Visitors first read about the hopes of farmers homesteading the semi-arid grassland prairies of eastern Colorado, and pass a series of displays highlighting what settlers knew and didn't know about the region's ecology. Then visitors enter a simulated homesteader's shack for a multi-sensory ten-minute "object theater" program re-enacting the great dust storms of the 1930s. The concluding portions of the exhibit consider the consequences of the Dust Bowl, the effects of the early farmers' poor choices, and the options faced by settlers as they chose to rebuild, seek assistance, or move on.

The third exhibit—"Our Mountains"—guides visitors along a path tracing a spatial rather than a temporal progression. As a video presentation leads visitors on a simulated journey from Denver to the mountain resort town of Breckenridge, a cartoon wall map illustrates a number of environmental issues found as the journey moves west. Subsequent displays invite visitors to explore some of the scenes and issues presented in more detail. These include changing water and wildlife management practices as well as the challenges of dealing with fire hazards and forests

killed by pine beetles. The final stop in the gallery, “Summit Café,” invites visitors to ponder their own responses to these environmental challenges.

Overall, I would argue that the layout of the Living West gallery helps support its narrative quite effectively. It opens with questions about Colorado’s environmental challenges, explores ways these have been faced in different times and places, and asks visitors in closing to think of these challenges can be faced today. In comparison with Colorado Stories, Living West is more direct in framing its opening and closing sections. But it also uses fewer stories—three rather than seven—and those are not presented as extreme “best” and “worst” examples.

Living West also follows a more linear narrative than does Colorado Stories, although it affords visitors considerable choice of movement to explore exhibits in detail. By highlighting recurring themes—land, water, and environmental choices—common threads can be developed in each presentation. In Living West, the spatial unfolding of the discourse helps to reinforce the storyline as ideas and themes are introduced, developed and linked forward in the gallery space. Rather than bringing each story, or the exhibit as a whole, to a firm conclusion, the exhibit instead works to develop parallels and comparisons, and to ask how questions faced in the past might be addressed in the present and future.

## *CONCLUSION*

This spatial discourse analysis suggests that decisions about the spatial layout and organization of exhibits and galleries can both support and detract from the discourses and narratives they present. In Living West, the spatial organization of the gallery works with the thematic structure of the exhibit to highlight and expand key points. This is done by introducing key themes at the entrance to the gallery, weaving these themes into the component exhibits, and providing spatial cues that help visitors consider connections among the components exhibits. On the other hand, the more free-form space of Colorado Stories undercuts some of the dissonant

episodes and critically nuanced themes the exhibit designers sought to portray. Several explicitly spatial factors further develop this comparison. First, the greater density of stories and settings in Colorado Stories than in Living West means that there is less space to develop contexts that will help visitors understand some of the nuances of the events depicted. Second, limited space restricts the presentation of connections between the Colorado Stories exhibits—especially when there are multiple relationships among the stories, rather than a linear sequence.

Third, the combination of highly emotional and dissonant stories and settings within the Colorado Stories gallery has created juxtapositions and discontinuities that may not have been intended. Upon exiting the Sunnyside Mine, visitors make a sudden shift to stories of Japanese-American internment, sixty years and hundreds of miles away. Likewise, the Sand Creek exhibit initially concluded not with messages condemning the massacre or illustrating possible reconciliation, but with a bare wall in one direction and a ski jump simulator in another. All three of these factors, though certainly others, helped lead to the closure of the Sand Creek Massacre exhibit. Sand Creek is far too significant of an event to be captured in a small exhibit with little contextual detail; the issues of mass murder and frontier violence are hard to place in a gallery like “Colorado Stories.” Yet with the exhibit closed, many of its connections to other exhibits are muted or absent entirely.

More generally, this study extends previous work on how museums arrange spaces to present stories. On the one hand, I follow Hetherington (1997) in reading museum galleries as hybrid spaces, in which exhibits refer to actual sites and locations, even as they juxtapose and “fold” those spaces to support the presentation of discursive content. The remaining chapters of this dissertation work to further explore and theorize this spatial hybridity. However, I disagree with Crang’s assertion that museum narratives reduce history to simplified models of cause and effect, in which present-day circumstances determine how the past is characterized and mapped onto museum space. Although we agree that this can happen in some history museums, this does not

seem to be the case in either *Colorado Stories* or *Living West*. Rather than one singular linear narrative, these galleries offer a series of different stories. Some are straightforward and linear, others much less so. Although the more linear exhibits necessarily preclude some connections while underscoring others, these are not necessarily relations of causality. Instead, more complex narrative connections augment as well as constrain the discourse, keeping possibility open by asking visitors to relate museum content to the present. Additional work is needed to explore the spatial dimensions of the tropes and techniques museums use to articulate these connections, and to identify the genre conventions particular to these three-dimensional spatial narratives.

Beyond my analysis of these two galleries, this chapter highlights the methodological value of focusing on the spatiality of discourse. One of the hallmarks of recent research in cultural geography has been to investigate the spatiality of power and knowledge in forms of social control exerted through societal and cultural institutions. This method is useful for extending this spatiality to the level of discourse and narrative, particularly in the setting of museum narratives such as *History Colorado*. Spatial narrative analysis has highlighted dimensions of the exhibit that would not be immediately apparent from more conventional discourse or content analysis methods. Moreover, these dimensions of meaning are evident from an analysis of the exhibit texts, rather than a full investigation of how these texts were conceived and implemented by museum staff, or are understood by visitors.

However, I hesitate to extend claims as to the usefulness of this methodology too broadly. One limitation seems to be that this method is most useful in only certain situations—such as museums, historical sites, and some tourist destinations. Also, the method is quite time consuming to employ, since diagramming and documenting the three-dimensional aspects of museum assemblages is not easily accomplished with conventional software tools used for textual analysis. These leaves greater room for ambiguity in interpreting the sorts of museum assemblages considered here. From the standpoint of advancing research in museum geography, perhaps the

most important limitation of this method is that it addresses only one of the many aspects of museum discourse, design and mission, as discussed earlier (Table 2.1). Nonetheless, following this proof of concept, these methods were extended to further museum case studies, presented in the remainder of this dissertation.

While acknowledging limitations to this approach, I would also assert the value of extending this focus on the spatiality of discourse to other types of museums as well as to other media and settings. On one level, this means conducting spatial discourse analyses in settings beyond those considered here, and in presentations of narratives addressing both history and other themes and issues. Similar historical narratives are presented at historical sites, in markers and monuments, through guided and self-guided tours, and at a wide range of spatial scales. New developments in locative media and location-based services—such as smartphone and virtual tours and online storytelling—have begun to undermine the distinctions between these settings and more traditional forms of narrative.

Finally, what I have said here about narrative applies equally to counter-narratives. Many acts of political protest and resistance derive their discursive power through carefully chosen spatial settings and references. Chapter 3 therefore considers how some of these counter-narratives, and the critical readings of history and heritage discourses they suggest, are presented in museums, located both in heritage tourism destinations, and in less well-known sites.

CHAPTER 3:  
HERITAGE TOURISM AND NEW WESTERN HISTORY:  
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF SIX COLORADO MUSEUMS<sup>2</sup>

This chapter focuses on how counter-narratives drawn from the New Western History are presented in museums and historic tours in Colorado. As I argued in Chapter 1, this is an important issue, not only because these museums are significant destinations for heritage tourism, but also because critical historiography offers an opportunity to extend recent work in heritage studies, which has highlighted both the emancipatory potential of historical memory and the challenges of confronting difficult memories in heritage settings (Alderman and Inwood 2013). The ‘heritage’ underlying heritage tourism is often problematic: memorials can serve as sites of institutionalized forgetting as well as collective memory, and it is unclear how successfully heritage tourism sites have presented challenging issues to public audiences. Although numerous studies have analyzed sites that explicitly engage dissonant histories and counter-narratives, in order to challenge hegemonic readings of history and practice alternative ways of remembering the past, these sites have not always been compatible with the market driven logic of heritage tourism.

In this chapter, I consider a series of six case studies, in which New Western themes of native dispossession, ethnic discrimination, labor conflict, resource exploitation, and historical episodes of violence and tragedy are presented as part of Colorado’s history and heritage. I argue that an explicit consideration of the narratives presented at these sites—and especially how those

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<sup>2</sup> : This chapter is based on an article, accepted for publication by the Journal of Heritage Tourism. It was published to the journal’s website in March 2018.

narratives are arranged and juxtaposed in space—enables a detailed exploration of how these sites engage contested heritage, and juxtapose conventional and critical themes to create complex new portrayals of the western past. Through close examinations of these sites, I explore how these juxtapositions are presented in the galleries, displays, and exhibits at each site. I employ recent developments in discourse analysis to consider how these sites use spatial narratives to navigate intersecting local, regional, and national scales, and to present these complex and often contradictory stories to visitors. Understanding how museums work to highlight or downplay these counter-narratives is an important goal, both for this dissertation, and more generally for research on how “museum geographies” fit into heritage tourism.

#### *THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT: RECONSIDERING HISTORY AT HERITAGE SITES*

Museums are important arenas in which history and heritage have been conceived, negotiated, and presented to popular audiences (Crang 1994b; Dicks 1997, 2003). The growth of heritage tourism has led both to the construction of many new museums—often developed and promoted as major tourist destinations—and to more critical scrutiny of the content presented in these spaces. Many museums now seek not only to collect and present historic artifacts, but to interpret the past for visitors. In addition to objects and texts, these museums arrange elaborate architecture, immersive exhibit design, and a wide variety of interactive multi-media presentations to create spaces that not only present content, but create affective “commemorative atmospheres” (Sumartojo 2016). Critical museum studies have focused especially on the interplay of exhibits, collections, and museum programming within these hybrid spaces (Geoghegan 2010; Phillips, Woodham, and Hooper-Greenhill 2015; Rutherford 2011; Waterton and Dittmer 2014).

In response to longstanding critiques in museum studies of museums’ role in constructing and legitimizing dominant or hegemonic views of history, museums have begun to call these discourses into question as part of broader engagements with polyvocal public histories (Aden

2014; Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Desforges and Maddern 2004; Hoskins 2012; Lennon and Foley 1999). Yet such efforts do not necessarily guarantee emancipatory perspectives: Waterton (2009, 37) notes that many heritage sites continue to present “authorized heritage discourses” that privilege the perspectives of white middle and upper-class individuals, while excluding perspectives of other groups.

Heritage, moreover, does not cleanly reduce to dichotomies between narratives supporting dominant elites and counter-narratives foregrounding marginalized others (Rose-Redwood 2008). Museums also negotiate a diverse array of potential themes, and reflect the aims of a wide range of public and private agencies and institutions. Scale is an important, if under-explored dimension of this negotiation: while some museums explicitly focus on local events, others draw on implicit regional-scale narratives to frame and interpret their content. Still others explicitly explore disruptive implications for heritage narratives at national, or trans-national scales (Waterton and Dittmer 2016). Yet it remains unclear whether, or how, museums in the American west present dominant or critical readings of history and heritage to public audiences. Despite an extensive literature tracing the role of regional imaginaries in western tourism promotions, contemporary museums in the region have received far less scholarly attention, either in terms of analyses of individual museum exhibits, or larger-scale comparative studies of the strategies through which potentially dissonant themes are introduced or downplayed (Modlin 2008).

These contested histories are at times similar to recent interest in dark tourism” or “thanatourism,” in which sites with violent and tragic pasts have been developed as tourist attractions (Hartmann 2014; Lennon and Foley 2000). While several recent anniversaries—such as the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians, or the 1914 Ludlow Massacre of striking mine workers—highlight the role of violence in shaping Colorado history, my interest is not restricted to episodes of violence and tragedy. My concern is more with issues, peoples, and events that have been overlooked or excluded. Much of this revisionism simply involves questioning



common assumptions about regional history, so the terms “dissonant heritage” and “counter-narrative” are better suited to the issues examined in these museums.

This conceptual framework is also useful, because it is compatible with recent studies highlighting how exhibits create “commemorative atmospheres” linking visitors’ affective responses to presented content (Sumartojo 2016; Waterton and Dittmer 2014). Many of the conventions of museum storytelling include powerful affective components, rendered not only through the choice of content, but also through the architectural design of exhibit spaces, the selection of characters and viewpoints, and the inclusion of material artifacts. This affective dimension of museum presentation can powerfully enhance visitors’ experiences, offering visitors immediate and tangible reminders of painful pasts, and the possibility of extending the work of memory into bodily performances of moving through exhibits (Alderman and Campbell 2008). Yet such experiences are often deeply personal, rooted in visitors’ individual and collective identities, prior knowledge, and expectations. In the discourse analysis presented below, I therefore focus on exhibit texts as the entry point for considering how exhibits negotiate meaning across multiple actors and scales. While this focus does not directly address the meaning or experience realized by each visitor, it highlights the interaction between exhibit narratives and the “narrative economies” in which they are situated, and the “genre conventions” used to link affective and cognitive understandings of the past across multiple scales.

As outlined in Chapter 1, and demonstrated in Chapter 2, I examine how narratives and counter-narratives are negotiated in a series of Western museums and historic sites. Following Alderman and Inwood’s call to pay “closer attention to *how* stories are narrated and the affective connection they create between people of the past and people of the present” (2013, 192), I argue that it is not enough simply to identify whether minority perspectives, dissonant events, or counter-narratives are mentioned in these sites. Instead, it is necessary to assess how extensively these perspectives are incorporated into the thematic focus and development of each presentation, and

how connections are made between dominant and counter-narratives across exhibit spaces. This means a more detailed engagement with the narrative structures in each exhibit or museum, highlighting not only which themes are presented and how they are juxtaposed, but also how their contexts work to accentuate some themes and downplay others (Table 3.1). This approach therefore considers important dimensions of narrative beyond those detailed in Chapter 2. I employ an exploratory case study methodology, focused on identifying sites that showcase particular counter-narratives, analyzing their presentations, and comparing and contrasting sites presenting related themes. This enables not only an analysis of the narratives presented in individual museums, but also a more extensive comparison of how narratives and counter-narratives intersect across multiple contexts. My goal is neither a comprehensive accounting of all Colorado museums, nor a deep inquiry of the co-construction of meaning within any particular museum, but instead an initial survey of the narrative approaches used to present dissonant elements of the Western past.

Table 3.1: Aspects of each museum presentation considered in analysis.

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Museum location and architecture.
Museum ownership structure and intended audience.
Range of exhibits presented at the museum, and what themes/narratives they represented.
Range of locations depicted or referenced within exhibits.
Spatial organization of the museum, and connections/paths between exhibits.
Spatial organization of each exhibit, and narrative/thematic connections and paths presented.
Possible interactions with exhibits (e.g., through docent-led tours, interactive multimedia, etc.)
“Commemorative Atmosphere” created within/suggested by each exhibit.
Conclusions suggested or state by each exhibit, or by the museum as a whole.

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## *TRACING COUNTER-NARRATIVES ACROSS COLORADO*

Heritage tourism in Colorado presents a wide range of intersecting narratives to public audiences, both at individual heritage attractions, and through the “narrative economies” that emerge as similar themes are presented at multiple sites, and across different contexts and scales. As outlined in Chapter 1, I explored these intersecting themes by selecting a series of some 15 sites from the over 325 museums in the state of Colorado (Colorado-Wyoming Association of Museums n.d.). Some of these museums were specifically chosen because they focused on counter-narratives, but others represented major heritage tourism destinations—where I expected to find more conventional heritage narratives—or state museums presenting “official” narratives of regional identity. However, initial analysis of the museums selected for this first phase of fieldwork revealed that counter-narratives were present in a wider range of museums than initially expected. Alongside the museums specifically focused on ethnicity and labor conflict, these themes were also presented in several general-audience museums. For this article, I have therefore selected six of these museums (Table 3.2) that demonstrate the range of ways counter-narratives are presented. These counter-narratives focus on Ute Indian and African American heritage, as well as the 1914 Ludlow Massacre and its place in labor history. These six sites form three matched pairs, allowing direct comparisons between museums specifically focused on counter-narratives, located at sites relevant to the communities and stories they present, and general-audience museums that interleave counter-narratives with more conventional presentations of community, state, and regional history.

Table 3.2: Six case studies were selected, representing three counter-narrative themes in both general-interest and specialized museum settings.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>General-Interest Museum/Exhibit</b>	<b>Counter-Narrative Museum/Exhibit</b>
Ute Indian History	“Seasons of the Nuche” Exhibit, Wheeler-Stallard House Museum, Aspen Historical Society, Aspen, CO. <a href="http://aspenhistory.org/">http://aspenhistory.org/</a>	Southern Ute Museum and Cultural Center, Ignacio CO. <a href="https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/southern-ute-museum/">https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/southern-ute-museum/</a>
Labor History	“Children of Ludlow” Exhibit, El Pueblo State History Museum, Pueblo, CO. <a href="http://www.historycolorado.org/museums/el-pueblo-history-museum">http://www.historycolorado.org/museums/el-pueblo-history-museum</a>	United Mine Workers of America Centennial Pilgrimage, Ludlow, CO. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Ludlow100/">https://www.facebook.com/Ludlow100/</a>
African American History	Barney Ford House Museum, Breckinridge Heritage Alliance, Breckinridge, CO. <a href="http://breckheritage.com/barney-ford-victorian-home/">http://breckheritage.com/barney-ford-victorian-home/</a>	Black American West Museum, Denver, CO. <a href="http://www.blackamericanwestmuseum.org/">http://www.blackamericanwestmuseum.org/</a>

As an exploratory study, this pairing of specialized and general-interest presentations reflects only some of the minority presences and counter-narrative possibilities in Colorado's history. In contrast to African Americans and Ute Indians, other ethnic groups, including Asian-Americans, Latinos, and the Native peoples of the Eastern Plains, were far less evident in the initial sample of museums. Similarly, the events of the Ludlow Massacre were only one episode in a series of "labor wars" taking place during the early decades of the twentieth century. These and other counter-narrative themes--including the environmental legacies of mining and industry, and the histories of women and LGBTQ+ people receive far less attention in Colorado museums. Even so, *some* counter-narratives are presented not only at obscure sites, but also in some of the major heritage tourism destinations in Colorado.

The subsequent phase of repeat visits and detailed analyses of the six museums and sites focused primarily on the artifacts, displays, and media presentations in each exhibit, and on how these were organized to connect themes and present storylines. During these visits, I kept detailed notes documenting the objects and textual components comprising each exhibit, and recorded the spatial arrangement of exhibits through sketch-maps and photographs. Drawing on the auto-ethnographic approaches employed by Waterton and Dittmer (2014) and Sumartojo (2016), I further reflected on my own responses to exhibits' "commemorative atmospheres." In subsequent analysis, I considered multiple aspects of each museum (Table 3.1), in order to trace the thematic and narrative links between multiple exhibits, and the spatial connections between each museum's location and the range of places depicted or described within. The following sections compare and contrast the three pairs of case studies, working through three counter-narrative themes at increasing dimensions of narrative complexity. Although I provide a thumb-nail sketch of each museum in the sections below, additional information can be found online using the URLs listed in Table 3.2.

*“WE ARE THE UTE PEOPLE”: WHO PRESENTS AND WHERE?*

Although conflict between Native Americans and Anglo settlers is a common trope of western iconography, few museums focus on Native histories as part of the “Legacy of Conquest.” These presentations are challenging due to several factors, including questions of who owns Native artifacts and how they should be displayed, debates over whether historical atrocities are appropriate subjects for heritage tourism, and widely disparate Native and Anglo perspectives on a still-contested past. Attempts to commemorate the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, for instance, have faced extended controversy, leading in one case to the closure of a central exhibit at Colorado’s major state museum (Calhoun 2013, 2015; Kelman 2013). In contrast, two exhibits on the history of the Ute People have more successfully presented Native-American legacies to broader audiences (Figure 3.1). In doing so, they highlight contrasts in the perspectives and locations used to present Native histories in the West.



Figure 3.1: The architecture of the Southern Ute Museum draws on tribal designs and situates the museum within the reservation town of Ignacio, Colorado. In contrast, the Aspen Historical Society's "Seasons of the Nuche" exhibit was staged on the second floor of a historic Victorian home. (Neither museum allowed interior photography of its exhibits.) Photography by author.



The Southern Ute Tribe, one of the Native American groups displaced from Western Colorado in 1880, opened a tribal cultural center and museum in 2011. The museum, located just north of the reservation town of Ignacio, is at some distance from Mesa Verde National Park and other major tourist destinations of Southwest Colorado, but is adjacent to the tribe's casino. In the museum's central permanent gallery, media-rich exhibits immerse visitors in a sequence of episodes from tribal history, ranging from early legends to current Ute identities. This presentation emphasizes a distinctly Native perspective on history, inviting visitors to "experience the unique history of the Ute people through their eyes."

In contrast, the Aspen Historical Society has recently publicized the Ute legacy in the mountain valleys from which the Ute were displaced a century ago. The society is extensively engaged with heritage tourism, offering several museums and interpretive programs that present mining, ranching, and tourism histories to both Aspen locals and visitors. As part of its changing exhibitions, a temporary "Seasons of the Nuche: Transitions of the Ute People" exhibit operated from 2013 through 2015. Much like the tribal museum, this exhibit traced the history of the Ute people from the time of legends through the present day; but it also added contrasting timelines of Anglo settlement in the region. However, its narrative development was far more limited—rather than celebrating a continuing Ute identity, it lamented the century-long absence of the Utes from the Aspen area.

Both exhibits emphasize an episodic and chronological narrative, leading the visitor through sequences of displays tracing the legendary origins of the Ute people, their pre-contact lifeways, their removal from the high Rockies to reservations in Colorado and Utah, their post-removal life on homestead allotments and in Indian schools, and their contemporary lives and livelihoods. Each exhibit articulates this story in different ways: the Southern Ute museum uses dramatic interior spaces and sight lines to spatialize and structure the narrative, contrasting an open, expansive gallery exhibiting pre-contact Ute life with a series of confined and narrow spaces

depicting reservation life. While the Aspen exhibit developed a similar linear progression of “seasons,” each emblematic of an episode in the story, it was confined to the more limited spaces of the museum’s temporary exhibits gallery. Yet these presentations also diverge, based on their narrators and the sites in which the stories are told.

The tribal museum opens with clear statements of collective identity—“We are the Ute People”—and ends with profiles of contemporary Southern Ute individuals, laying claim to the full range of tribal history. In contrast, Aspen’s museum juxtaposed each episode of the Ute past with a parallel timeline of Euro-American settlement, anticipating eventual Ute removal from the Aspen area. Exiting the central gallery of the Tribal museum, the visitor enters an expansive atrium, filled with contemporary tribal artwork and windows showcasing the surrounding mountains and town—the spaces of contemporary Ute life. Exiting “Seasons of the Nuche,” visitors encountered a brief presentation on efforts to connect Aspen schoolchildren with reservation youth, but soon returned to the Victorian spaces of a historic home museum within a tony ski resort. The distinction between Aspen’s native past and Anglo present was clear. In contrast, the Southern Ute museum makes a strong statement of continuing tribal presence and identity, presented in a Native space and through Native voices. Even though the basic storyline remains consistent across the two exhibits, the presentations led to dramatically different historical accounts and conclusions. Still greater complexity, however, is possible, when darker pasts are presented from multiple points of view through multiple intersecting narratives.

#### *LEGACIES OF LUDLOW: ONE NARRATIVE OR MANY?*

On April 20, 1914, Colorado National Guard troops set fire to a camp of striking miners and their families, killing approximately twenty men, women, and children. The Ludlow Massacre, and the extended labor dispute that precipitated it, have been described as “the deadliest strike in the history of the United States” (Andrews 2008), yet it has only recently been

officially recognized by either the Colorado or federal governments. Instead, private memory has been cultivated by the United Mine Workers of America, through an annual commemorative gathering at the massacre site. Although the 2014 centennial of the massacre prompted several commemorative exhibits, these differed not only in their methods of presentation, but in the range of viewpoints they assembled as they sought to contextualize labor-related violence and atrocities (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2: The UMWA centennial pilgrimage commemorated the Ludlow Massacre through public speeches, historical reenactments, and a temporary exhibit. The Colorado State Historical Society, in contrast, presented a “Children of Ludlow” exhibit, which narrated the massacre and its aftermath through immersive media, focused on the perspective of a fictional miner’s daughter. Photography by author.

On 18 May, 2014, the UMWA held its centennial pilgrimage to the southern Colorado massacre site, where it has long maintained a memorial. Union organizers and activists joined miners, academics, local politicians, and members of the public for a two day commemoration, held both at the site and in the nearby city of Trinidad. The weekend's events blended memory, ceremony, and education, including public speeches, theatrical performances and historical reenactments, a temporary exhibit of artifacts from the UMWA archives, and a barbecue lunch open to the public. These extended multiple perspectives on the massacre's memory, and the contemporary relevance of the strike's legacy to community identity and labor politics across multiple scales.

In contrast, the State of Colorado's historical society offered a temporary exhibit at the El Pueblo Museum, located 100 miles north of the massacre site in Pueblo. The temporary "Children of Ludlow" exhibit, open from 2013 through 2015, presented the story of Ludlow in a more conventional museum setting. Mirroring current exhibit design trends—and the presentations at the History Colorado Center discussed in Chapter 2—this exhibit focused on a multimedia-based reconstruction of daily life in the striking miners' camps, narrated by the (fictitious) young daughter of one of the miners. While this exhibit presented Ludlow and its legacy to a more conventional museum audience—including the many school groups who visit El Pueblo—its focus on a single narrator emphasized the violence of the massacre while muting its political context.

Alongside the different venues and institutional frameworks noted above, the contrasting approaches presenting Ludlow and its legacy led to great differences in how Colorado's labor history was incorporated into regional- and national-scale narratives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the centennial pilgrimage was heavily rooted in labor politics and activism, but many presenters also placed Ludlow in other spatial and historical frames. Union officials retold stories of strikes in Appalachian coalfields and continuing efforts to organize Colorado workers, while local politicians appealed to mining as local heritage and civic pride. Other speakers framed the massacre in terms

of gender, citing how organizer “Mother” Jones drew national attention to the strike, and noting the transformation of miners’ tent homes into sites of violence against women and children. A performance by Su Teatro, a Denver-based Latino theater troupe, recalled ethnic tensions and common causes among the striking workers. At Ludlow, more than any of the other museums in the study, links between labor, gender, and ethnicity were clearly part of the presented heritage.

In contrast, “Children of Ludlow” was structured around a series of multimedia presentations, focusing on the single perspective of its young narrator. Visitors looked into reconstructed camp tents to see projected videos, in which the narrator described her life in the camp, the armed patrols by National Guard troops, and finally the massacre’s aftermath. Mixed with these videos were other displays of archeological artifacts and textual descriptions of the causes of the strike. However, these details were often peripheral to the media-focused exhibit, and were likely read only by the most interested audiences. “Children of Ludlow” thus emphasized an emotional story, presenting the human tragedy of the strike and massacre in a way that even young visitors could relate to. But in turning away from the broader contexts and consequences of the massacre, it presented Ludlow as an isolated episode, rather than an extension of regional or national scale conflict.

As in the Ute museums, a presentation by an advocacy organization at a site specifically relevant to the events presented allowed for more critical and complex engagement with a contested past. This is especially the case when discussing violent or tragic historical episodes, or addressing themes that remain politically charged today. However, this does not necessarily mean that counter-narratives can only be presented from the perspective of the groups most directly affected by dark pasts—as the final examples will demonstrate.

*AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIES: NARRATIVE BREADTH AND FOCUS*

Despite their contributions to the state's history, many of Colorado's minority groups—including Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispano-Americans—are only sporadically recognized in public-facing heritage exhibits. Moreover, these exhibits do not always connect their presentations of minority histories to larger-scale historical narratives. Two museums focused on African-Americans in Colorado illustrate diverging approaches to this connection (Figure 3.3). One, developed within a historic African-American neighborhood in Denver, seeks to highlight Black presence across numerous aspects of the western past. A second, located in the mountain resort community of Breckenridge, traces the life of a single Black Coloradan in greater detail. Surprisingly, the second museum expands on the genre of biographically-focused historic house museums, instead tracing ethnicity through the connections between Breckenridge and the broader West.



Figure 3.3: The Black American West Museum in Denver, Colorado, presents numerous aspects of Black presence in the American West within its historic but cramped building. In contrast, the Barney Ford House Museum in Breckenridge, Colorado, uses the life of a pioneering African-American miner and businessman to narrate the connections between a western mining camp, Denver, and the Eastern U.S. Photography by author.



Denver's Black American West Museum (BAMW), located in the historic Five Points neighborhood, opened in 1971 as a showcase for founder Paul Stewart's interest in Black cowboys. Now, managed by a small nonprofit organization, it showcases "the contributions of Blacks in the Old West," across a wide variety of themes and temporal and spatial scales. Yet the museum, located in a modest but historic Five Points home, illustrates a mismatch between its organization's expansive mission, the constraints of its building, and the limited resources of the organization. The historic structure of the Justina Ford home not only offers limited space in which to present an expansive history, but also restricts the narrative connections between the museum's exhibits and themes.

The Barney Ford Victorian Home Museum, opened in 2005 in the center of the mountain town of Breckenridge, offers a contrasting portrayal of African-American history in the West. By focusing on the life of Ford, who escaped slavery and became a prominent Breckenridge businessman, the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance incorporates Black history into its portrayal of an early Colorado mining camp. Guided tours of Ford's home, organized around Ford's life, merge ethnic heritage with community history. Rather than tracing all components of Black presence in the west, they highlight Ford's personal role in the early mining camp, and how his business activities helped to connect Breckenridge to Denver. While the Barney Ford Museum is also housed in a historic home, its biographical focus allows it to present a more concise and connected narrative.

The difference between the two museums emerges not only from their contrasting focus, but also from the material spaces in which their content is presented. In the BAMW, housed in the home of Dr. Justina Ford, a pioneering Black doctor, successive rooms are devoted to a variety of themes in Black History (Table 3.3). These include photo collections on Black cowboys and rodeo, as well as exhibits on Black agricultural settlements in Colorado, Jazz-Age Denver, Black soldiers and veterans, as well as Dr. Ford's life and practice. To some extent, these rooms trace a rough

chronology, beginning with early migration and homesteading and leading to contemporary Black rodeo. However, because the connections between rooms reflect the existing house structure, rather than the current museum presentation, links between the rooms are often haphazard—the overall presentation is less an unfolding narrative as an inconsistent thematic collage.

Table 3.3: List of exhibits in the Black American West Museum, Denver, CO.

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Second Floor
Photo Galleries: “The Changing Face of Five Points” “Colorado Black Women’s Hall of Fame”
Homesteading and Westward Migration (1870s-1920s)
Ranching (1870s-1940s)
Black Cowboys
Military Room
Black Miners
Contemporary Black Rodeo

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First Floor
Justina Ford Clinic Room
Five Points Room
Film: Dearfield, CO (Black Farming Settlement)

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In contrast, the Barney Ford museum focuses on the life of its central character and has a clearer storyline. While Ford's biography is also presented within the space of a historic home, this narrative structure is reinforced by docent-led tours, in which rooms and their furnishings are linked to episodes of Ford's life. The parlor, for instance, introduces Ford's early life and escape from slavery, while the study chronicles Ford's business ventures. This narration is not limited to Ford himself—rather, by following Ford's travels from the Eastern U.S. to Panama and Colorado, and between Breckenridge and Denver, the presentation also illustrates the communities and networks in which Ford lived, and his place as a Black man within them.

Neither site explicitly addresses the more dissonant elements of Black history in the West. While the Black American West Museum interweaves Blacks into iconic episodes of Western history, it does much less to confront the *de facto* segregation of Denver and the threat of racially based violence, to document the Civil Rights movement, or to explicitly engage contemporary racial politics. While the story of Barney Ford traces much of the early history of Breckenridge, neither the Barney Ford Museum nor any other Colorado institution discuss the presence of ethnic minorities in the resort communities of the Rockies today—what Coleman (1996) has called “the unbearable whiteness of skiing.”

Even so, it is notable that the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance—a largely white organization in a largely white community—has successfully incorporated minority presence into its presentations of the history of a frontier mining town turned tourism destination. To some extent, this reflects the Alliance's greater funding, resources, and curatorial expertise, as well as its location—the Barney Ford museum is staffed by professional docents six days a week, and is located a block from Breckenridge's Main Street. In contrast, the Black American West Museum is staffed by volunteers, open only on weekends, and is located in a quiet residential neighborhood. Yet this discrepancy also reflects the contrasting narratives at each site. Barney Ford's life story both reflects and extends the broader history of Breckenridge and the High Rockies, allowing

stories at different scales to reinforce one another. In contrast, the Black American West Museum points out Black presence in numerous aspects of the iconic western narrative, but does not develop at length any of the stories it begins to suggest.

### *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS*

The six museums discussed present a range of critical and dissonant histories. In these museums, counter-narratives—including those of Native dispossession, violent labor conflict, and African-American history—have been incorporated into presentations of Colorado and Western history. These are thus examples of what Carter, Butler, and Alderman (2014) term “inversed spatial narratives”, in which dissonant histories are presented not as tacked-on afterthoughts toward inclusivity, but as new frames to organize the West and its heritage. These museums are, admittedly, one set of six case studies in which counter-narratives are particularly prominent, but they illustrate some of the challenges involved in presenting dissonant histories to public audiences. Their approaches vary in terms of how radically they depart from conventional regional-scale narratives, or how explicitly or implicitly they invite visitors to reconsider their understanding and expectations of the region’s past. While these six museums employ different narrative strategies, they all illustrate the work being done to recover difficult moments in the history of the American West and to present them to a broader public audience. It is encouraging to see these perspectives presented not only in museums focused on critical themes and counter-narrative tellings of regional history, but also alongside more conventional imagery at major heritage tourism destinations. As elsewhere, this ‘memory work’ is often a difficult task, but it has apparently found support among both museum curators and audiences, and across a variety of settings.

While it is initially tempting to evaluate the successes and failures of each exhibit, such evaluation is at best premature. This analysis addresses only the spatialized narratives embedded

in museum displays—how texts, objects, and other media are framed to tell stories about Western history. Much of this process, including the co-construction of meaning between designers and visitors, and the relationship between cognitive and affective dimensions of museum experience, remains only partially understood. However, these six museums each illustrate the role of narratives in organizing museum exhibit spaces. By organizing presentations around chronological sequences and recognizable characters, the sites develop counter-narrative themes into recognizable stories about minority groups and unrecognized events. The arrangement of these museum spaces can also open opportunities and impose constraints on how these stories are presented within each museum. As visitors follow clear paths tracing historical sequences, or interpret looser juxtapositions between different themes, patterns emerge from the overall ‘narrative economy,’ supporting some interpretations while downplaying others.

In the six case studies, there is considerable variation in how explicitly these presentations challenge or problematize dominant regional narratives about the American West. No exhibit, for instance, presents as sweeping or provocative a critique as Limerick and other New Western Historians have offered. Instead, most of these presentations initially align—at least to some degree—with familiar images of the West—whether through iconography of Native Americans and cowboys, or narratives of settlement and industry—before including more dissonant themes or storylines. This dissonance, however, is carefully managed, and only rarely are violent and tragic episodes the focus of exhibits. Instead, these museums present violence not as morbid spectacle, nor as somber commemoration, but as an invitation to engage more critical histories. Some presentations—such as the Ute Museum and the Ludlow Centennial Pilgrimage—emphasize more directly their divergence from dominant or iconic historical narratives, while others—such as the “Children of Ludlow” exhibit and the Barney Ford House—instead weave dissonant themes into more conventional histories.

The case studies also highlight more subtle aspects of how museum narratives can be structured and presented. These rely less directly on the spatial arrangements of exhibits and galleries explored in Chapter 2. Instead, the selection of narrator viewpoints, the linking of multiple storylines into an overall narrative, and the broad or narrow focus of a presented story can shape similar sequences of events into very different narratives, with clear variations in tone, affective gravitas, and concluding message. Such distinctions offer exciting prospects for linking narrative analysis to the “commemorative atmospheres” of exhibits, and the affective experiences of visitors. Moreover; they begin to suggest some of the 'genre conventions' through which museum narratives are designed and interpreted. Beyond the three dimensions traced above, a more extensive set of questions (Table 3.4) might extend the questions posted at the end of Chapter 1, offering further possibilities for exploring museum narratives as a genre. These build on familiar dimensions of narrative content and structure, but also explicitly articulate how narratives are situated in spaces. While the questions listed here are an initial entry point rather than an exhaustive list, they represent a first step toward a more detailed and theoretically grounded comparison of museum narratives, and a foundation for analyzing more individual dimensions of visitor experience.

Table 3.4: Proposed analytical questions to extend comparison and contrast of museum narratives. Italicized questions are addressed directly in the case studies discussed in this chapter.

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<b>Narrative Structure</b>
Is there one overall story, or multiple storylines?
How are distinct episodes linked to an overarching storyline?
<i>Are stories told from one point of view or many?</i>

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<b>Narrative Presentation</b>
<i>Who narrates the story?</i>
What media are used to present the story?
Are media static or interactive?
Does the narrative focus on particular characters?

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<b>Narrative Spatial Organization</b>
What is the significance of the presentation site to the story?
How does the narrative progress through exhibit space?
<i>What are the spatial and temporal bounds of the story?</i>

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Finally, this analysis highlights the significance of the American West as an arena for critical heritage tourism research. Although much of this research (at least, of that undertaken within the U.S.) has probed the heritage of the South, the West offers a similar—if not more extensive—array of intersecting narratives and counter-narratives, with ramifications at local, regional, national, and international scales. Such a research program could proceed along several avenues. First, even among the case studies investigated here, this study’s exhibit-centered methodology represents an initial exploratory analysis, rather than a complete analysis of all Colorado heritage museums. This study provides a foundation for further, broader analysis of these museums, but other approaches might also be worth pursuing. For example, the application of a wider range of ethnographic and survey methods could highlight further dimensions of the co-construction of regional heritage in museums. Such a collaborative, mixed methods approach was central to the “Southern Plantation Project,” in which multiple researchers studied how a series of plantations were presented to and understood by heritage tourists (Alderman, Butler, and Hanna 2016). A similar effort could productively be pursued in the West, expanding the relational and multifaceted comparison of narratives begun here. Second, researchers might look beyond counter-narrative focused sites such as those discussed here, to engage questions of presence and absence in heritage tourism. The counter-narratives traced in these six case studies represent only some of the peoples and themes addressed by the New Western Historians. Why have these themes been successfully exhibited as heritage, at least at specific sites, while narratives highlighting women, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and sexual minorities, as well as the non-human world of environmental impacts, have received less interest? Researchers might productively investigate the constructed absence of the latter set of themes in the region’s museums, alongside their occasional inclusion. Finally, this study illustrates that heritage tourism research could benefit from a closer engagement with narrative theory, tracing the effect of spatialized narratives on the construction and consumption of cultural meanings in museums. In addition to tracing the general “genre conventions” of museum exhibits,



as suggested above, and the links between narratives and “commemorative atmospheres”, researchers might follow Modlin (2008) in analyzing the range of “supporting myths” deployed in the narrated heritage of the American West, and tracing how those narratives unfold across the region’s heritage sites. For critical heritage tourism researchers, the American West represents an important new frontier.

CHAPTER 4:  
NARRATING WESTERN HISTORY AND STATE IDENTITIES:  
A COMPARISON OF THREE STATE MUSEUMS

Chapters 2 and 3 focused on Colorado museums and the way they narrate state and local history. In this chapter I move to a different scale again by examining state history museums in Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico to compare and contrast the ways they narrate regional, state and local history and geography. Four questions guide my analysis. First, how do these museums present their state histories by drawing attention to objects, places, historical episodes, narratives, and counter narratives using various media and display strategies? Second, how and to what extent are these materials organized to provide a larger synthesis of state and regional history, which highlights common themes and historical connections, while also allowing visitors freedom to explore and engage with materials and narratives on their own terms? Third, how do these organizational structures address geographical diversity, particularly in the presentation of objects and historical episodes from across the whole state? Finally, what sorts of civic identities or ‘official’ historical narratives do these sites work to develop, whether implicitly or explicitly?

Almost every U.S. state has established an official museum. These are usually funded and administered as units of state governments, although some are operated by private historical societies or through public-private partnerships. Most state museums are located in capital cities, although a few are not. These state museums are interesting because they present history and heritage across larger temporal and geographical scales than local historical museums and heritage sites (the focus of chapter 3), but do not claim to be “national” museums with broader historical and

spatial remit. This study of state museums can serve then as a counterpoint to other studies which have focused either on the presentation of national-scale museum narratives in capital cities (Till 2001, 2005; Waterton and Dittmer 2016; Horne 1984; Oren and Shani 2012; Schorch 2013) or those at the local scale of individual museums and historic sites (Hoskins 2007, 2010; Alderman, Butler, and Hanna 2016; Hanna 2008). I see this “middle scale” of historical presentation as an important topic of research that raises questions about how history is presented to public audiences, not only in terms of the assembly of diverse themes, times, and spaces into a coherent structure at a single location, but also in terms of how that structure shapes narrative progressions and conclusions. This can be a challenge. As Rose-Redwood (2008) notes, governments can be a significant force toward historical inclusivity and the redress of past wrongs, but they also have reason to promote a politically moderate interpretation of heritage that criticizes past wrongs, yet reaches inclusive rather than incisive conclusions.

A few studies have examined individual state museums (Buenger 2002; Ore 2013), but there has been little research that compares and contrasts these museums as a group or examines the ways in which objects, themes, and narratives are organized within these museums to present state identities (Fiegel 2012). While this chapter extends the themes developed in Chapter 2 and 3, it is also a first step in a more extensive analysis of state museums as an important, if underappreciated, category of historical museum presentation.

This is a good time to consider these questions. Many established museums have confronted low or declining visitation, particularly among young people and members of minority groups. Faced with the prospect of marginalization and irrelevancy, many museums have reconsidered established exhibits and practices, focusing less on objects and artifacts, and more on open-ended engagements with the past through new exhibit designs and diverse museum programming so as to attract new visitors (Message 2006). As part of these efforts, many state museums have made efforts to include more critical and dissonant historical perspectives,

including debates on the appropriate presentation of slavery, the legacy of the Civil Rights movement, and the “legacy of conquest” of the American West. State museums, such as those discussed in this chapter, are no exception to this trend. All three of the museums studied here have been substantially redesigned in recent years to update exhibits and attract more visits. Yet as demonstrated in Chapter 3, the mere inclusion of counter-narrative themes does not necessarily transform the overall narrative conclusions presented.

### *THE THREE MUSEUMS*

#### Location and Context

Following the trends identified in the previous section, there are important differences among the three selected museums, and how they are situated amid the changing presentation of Western history. One significant dimension of these differences is reflected in each museum’s location, in relationship to other government institutions and other cultural and tourism venues.

The History Colorado Center is a good example. As discussed in Chapter 2, the museum’s new building, completed in 2012, is only a few blocks south of the state capitol, and situated with other museums in the Civic Center Cultural Complex, a significant tourist attraction. History Colorado, the museum’s parent organization, was rebranded from the State Historical Society of Colorado in the same year, and operates as both an agency of the state government and a public nonprofit institution. Both the building and the organization reflect several intersecting aspects of the history presented within. History Colorado’s exhibits reflect an officially-funded history that seeks to represent Colorado in its entirety, a history that is culturally diverse, engaged, and open-ended, and a history that is interesting enough to attract in-state and out-of-state visitors.

The Wyoming State Museum is somewhat different. Like the History Colorado Center, the museum is located close to the state capitol, but in a building constructed in 1952 that also houses

the offices of the state archives and parks departments. Cheyenne, a city of 60,000, is not a major tourist destination compared to other attractions, such as Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, and a range of vacation and ski resorts. The museum has not changed its name and continues to be operated by the State Parks and Cultural Resources department. Its representation of Wyoming is not focused on Cheyenne, but more on the state as a whole. The museum's building was remodeled in 1997-98, and it has recently opened new exhibits, including a 2015 commemoration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wyoming statehood, and a temporary exhibit focused on the history and renovation of the state capitol building. Still, many of the museum's other exhibits are older, tending to be focused on artifacts and less targeted toward new audiences, or the use of new media.

The New Mexico History Museum, in contrast, is more oriented to tourism. Its location is important because Santa Fe is both the state capital and also one of the oldest nuclei of Spanish settlement in the Southwestern United States. The city's plaza and adobe streetscapes have been preserved, numerous native Pueblo communities are a short distance away, and an artist's colony has flourished since the 1930s. Dubbed the "Land of Enchantment," the state's fusion of Native, Spanish, and Anglo-American cultures has been a tourist draw for many decades. The museum has long been situated in the heart of this heritage landscape. Established in 1909 in the historic Palace of the Governors on Santa Fe's central Plaza, it moved in 2009 to a new building immediately to the north. Today, the Museum and Palace are both operated by the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, and are central to a tourist district full of art galleries, restaurants, and hotels. The state capitol and most other state offices are further away, south of downtown. While the New Mexico History Museum seeks to present an extensive statewide history, it is deeply immersed both in Santa Fe's historic setting, and in its tourism-centered environment. As a tourist attraction, the museum has perhaps raised more controversy than those in Denver and Cheyenne. Tourism is recognized in New Mexico for offering opportunities for economic development, but it has also

been criticized for promoting amenity migration, raising real estate prices, and failing to credit the many Native, Hispano, and Anglo groups that have contributed to the state's history.

### Displays and Strategies

The museums take different approaches to their display spaces. The History Colorado Center is built around eleven exhibits presenting selected moments in Colorado history, using a combination of historical artifacts, multimedia displays, and immersive display spaces. The exhibits are grouped into three main galleries, corresponding to the museum's core themes of "big dreams", "enduring communities," and "Coloradans shaping and being shaped by their environments." As noted in Chapter 2, these themes do not dominate the museum exhibits. Rather, visitors are offered the opportunity to make connections among the varied historical episodes juxtaposed in the galleries. In the "Living West" gallery, these connections are articulated more clearly in the exhibits; in "Colorado Stories," connections and conclusions are perhaps intentionally vague. Yet in each case, and across the museum as a whole, the overall presentation becomes more than the sum of its parts. As visitors encounter exhibits and follow emergent narratives, they also confront questions of how Colorado's present relates to its past, and how Coloradans and other visitors can draw lessons from the past about how to shape the future. These conclusions are open-ended and sometimes ambiguous. Some exhibits appear apolitical and minimize troublesome episodes in state history, while others more explicitly invite audiences to reflect on what they have seen.

In contrast, the exhibits at the Wyoming State Museum emphasize material objects, rather than multimedia presentations and elaborate display spaces. These objects, arrayed behind glass in display cases, are extensively labeled, with details of their provenance, and brief interpretive texts. These objects are arranged in much looser groupings, including a decade-by-decade chronology of the 125 years of Wyoming's statehood and a thematic exhibit presenting the resources and industries that led to the settlement of the state. Yet these exhibits are also less clearly delineated:

the museum's open galleries leave visitors free to move into and out of exhibits, often without clear cues to where one exhibit stops and another begins. Even within individual exhibits, there is no single path or storyline for visitors to follow. Narratives at the Wyoming State Museum thus emerge in a very different way than at the History Colorado Center: rather than tracing a sequence of clearly defined settings, visitors are presented with a more loosely defined storyline from the thousands of objects on display. The focus of exhibits is not so much a single coherent narrative, or the conclusions it leads to, but instead visitors' reactions to a vast array of objects in relation to one another.

The design approach of the New Mexico History Museum initially appears similar to that of the History Colorado Center. The museum's single core gallery is built around a series of immersive spaces, reconstructing New Mexico's past through architectural design and interpretive panels, alongside historical artifacts. However, rather than representing a series of discrete historical episodes, the immersive exhibits in the New Mexico museum are arranged as a continuous timeline, following a twisting path through two floors of galleries. This timeline is divided into six distinct periods, as well as smaller divisions addressing particular themes and historical events. These divisions are clearly signaled, both through signage and through changing color schemes and the architectural form of the interior spaces. In contrast to the episodic exhibits in Colorado, the exhibit suggests a more direct continuity between episodes. The History Colorado Center is also more explicit in representing specific locations, whereas the New Mexico presents themes that range freely across space, with details of locations noted only in passing.

The History Colorado Center

Chapter 2 has outlined the three core exhibits presented at the History Colorado Center. The three exhibits, “Destination: Colorado,” “Colorado Stories,” and “Living West” echo the museum’s core themes, introducing Colorado settlement, presenting an array of iconic and contested episodes from the state’s history, and showing the choices Coloradans have made in arid Western environments. However, the narratives of these three exhibits proceed very differently. Although “Destination: Colorado” traces both a new migrant’s arrival to a Colorado farming town, and the town’s subsequent decline and abandonment, the exhibit is structured more as an exploratory encounter with a place than as a consistent storyline. “Colorado Stories” invites visitors to trace numerous historical episodes--presented with stronger or weaker narrative logic—yet leaves the relationship of those episodes to one another less clearly defined, inviting the visitor to draw his or her own conclusions. Meanwhile, “Living West” traces more strictly defined sets of choices and consequences across its three episodes, drawing direct thematic parallels and inviting visitors to consider their own choices.

Yet while each of these three exhibits operates in a very different manner, each also contributes to a subtler narrative framework spanning the museum as a whole. Visitors initially encounter Colorado and its spaces, subsequently explore its iconic and dissonant pasts, and eventually are invited to join—in some sense—the community of Coloradans confronting collective decisions about a common future. Although this narrative structure is clear, its presentation to visitors is somewhat understated. Some displays offer clues, such as the prominent entrance to “Destination Colorado,” suggesting a progression through the museum space while others are less clear, particularly in the case of “Colorado Stories.” Thus, instead of offering clear and directional



ties between the three core exhibits, the museum positions them as main attractions among its display space and unfolding narrative.

Another important part of this display space is the museum's central atrium, which sets the stage for the narratives presented in the museum's core exhibits. This dramatic space is the first encountered by visitors entering the museum, and its giant terrazzo tile floor map immediately suggests the museum's Colorado identity. Moreover, the interactive "Time Machines" in the atrium also populate Colorado's past with a series of twenty-nine short films, presenting historical events spanning the state's history and geography, and ranging from somber to comical in tone. Many of these events are not presented in the museum's core exhibits; instead, they offer visitors opportunities to encounter sites and themes that might otherwise be absent. Moreover, they offer a more interactive, user-selected approach to presentation. Visitors, whether alone or in small groups, can select locations and topics of interest to them, even though few will have the interest or patience to see all of the films. The time machines are thus an important counterpoint to the permanent exhibits, but they do not shape or structure the narrative emerging from those exhibits. Rather, they work to root that emergent narrative in the geographical space, and shared identity, of Colorado.

### The Wyoming State Museum

In contrast to the History Colorado Center's presentation of historical episodes, the spaces of the Wyoming State Museum are focused on an array of objects. Rather than interpretive signage, multimedia, or storylines that organize exhibits around a single narrative structure, these objects trace a looser set of thematic connections across Wyoming's past. Yet the museum's galleries also suggest a chronological logic in their presentation of Wyoming's natural and human history.

Upon entering the museum, visitors first encounter a gallery that introduces the museum's geographical focus and approach. The centerpiece of this gallery is a large relief map of the state,

on which visitors can press buttons to highlight major cities, highways, rivers, and the sites of major historical events. On an adjacent wall, a diorama presents the flora and fauna of a “typical” Wyoming high-plains landscape. These exhibits are not as dramatic as the atrium of the History Colorado Center, but they serve a similar purpose in providing a geographical orientation and sense of identity for the exhibits to follow. The other display cases in this opening gallery showcase new or unusual objects from the museum’s collections. Though unconnected to the diorama, these exhibits introduce the museum’s object-focused approach to historical presentation.

From this initial gallery, two paths are available to visitors. One leads past the diorama to trace several exhibits presenting Wyoming’s natural history. These include exhibits on the state’s wildlife (“The Wild Bunch”, its mineral resources (“Swamped With Coal”), and its prehistoric fossils (“Rex in Pieces”). In each exhibit, visitors are free to wander among various floor and wall-mounted displays, yet overhead banners and interior walls suggest each exhibit’s beginning and end. This path initially suggests a distinction between Wyoming’s natural history and its human and cultural history, but within the exhibits, this distinction becomes less clear: the prehistoric origins of Wyoming coal are coupled with displays on the state’s contemporary mining industry, and much of the focus of the dinosaur exhibit is on the pioneering Wyoming paleontologists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The second path leads directly from the initial diorama to two galleries further from the museum entrance (although both can be accessed from the end of the first path). These two galleries, focused on human history and culture, contrast sharply with the natural history focus of the other first-floor exhibits. One, entitled “Wyoming at 125,” presents a decade-by-decade timeline of Wyoming’s 125 years of statehood; the other, entitled “Drawn to this Land,” traces the array of reasons why Anglo-Americans settled Wyoming, thematically exploring the state’s economy. Each exhibit presents an extensive array of objects from the museum’s collections, but these are not organized into a strong narrative sequence.

A brief summary of the “Wyoming at 125” exhibit highlights this point. It is organized as a chronological overview of significant events in Wyoming history, and of how national events affected Wyoming. Each decade is marked by a large wall-mounted sign, with a short summary text and a table of significant events taking place at both national and state scales. Most of the exhibit is however made up of objects loosely grouped around each sign. Some objects fill display cases, others are mounted on walls, on the gallery floor, or overhead. Each object is signed, with a brief description of the event or episode it represents. These range widely, including not only iconic moments in Wyoming’s history—such as the Johnson County Range War of 1895 and the designation of Devil’s Tower as a National Monument in 1906—to more localized events, such as the construction or demolition of well-remembered buildings in the cities of Cheyenne and Casper. Yet the exhibit’s focus on events occurring since Wyoming’s 1890 statehood leaves out earlier phases of Wyoming’s settlement—including the extension of European territorial claims to Wyoming, the federally-supported construction of railroads across Wyoming, and the expropriation of Native American lands (though this latter issue is addressed sporadically in other exhibits).

This chronology of artifacts does not automatically create a strong story line. Simply partitioning the exhibit by decade does not do justice to economic, social and cultural issues that stretch widely across time and space. There are several additional reasons for this. On one level, the exhibit chronology is not always clear. Although decades are marked, they proceed along a winding path through an open gallery space, so that it is not always clear which objects correspond to which decade. Additionally, with several entry points to the exhibit, the starting point of the chronology, and the direction of progression through the exhibit, are somewhat unclear. More significantly, the objects and their descriptions only occasionally trace larger patterns of continuity or causality. Historical figures are mentioned, but are not portrayed in great detail; nor are they framed in the context of larger historical events. Furthermore, “Wyoming at 125” offers neither an

introduction nor a conclusion, leaving visitors to provide their own contexts and assemble their own narratives as they explore the materials provided.

Beyond “Wyoming at 125,” the other major exhibit is “Drawn to this Land,” showcasing Wyoming’s economic development, including farming, ranching, mining, transportation, the military, tourism, and urban commerce. Numerous objects, gathered from around the state, showcase these industries’ past and present. The exhibit is less clear on how these themes are related—visitors do not follow a single path, but can move freely among the sections of the exhibit. Moreover, the entryway to “Drawn to this Land” occurs in the middle of the chronological development of “Wyoming at 125,” making it unclear how the two exhibits are related. Similarly, “Drawn to this Land” has no obvious conclusion—visitors return the way they came.

The exhibits on the museum’s second floor include a series of more narrowly defined topics, including a history of the Wyoming State Capitol, an exhibit on the state’s native fish, and several neglected display cases featuring artifacts of domestic life. These are, for the most part, relatively self-contained, without clear relation to the core exhibits below. One exception is “An Unbroken Circle,” a new permanent exhibit that portrays the culture of Wyoming’s Native Shoshone and Arapahoe peoples, and chronicles their removal to the Wind River Reservation in central Wyoming. This exhibit, unlike others in the museum, includes both a clear narrative structure and a defined conclusion, highlighting the continuity of tribal identity and culture. However, this narrative is largely disconnected from the exhibits on the first floor, whether on the scale of the overall progression from natural history to Anglo-American settlement, or the array of themes that fill Wyoming’s 125 years of statehood. Native American individuals and cultural objects appear occasionally in those exhibits, but Native American legacies are not central to the museum’s exhibits.

Similarly, a handful of the objects presented in the first floor galleries present objects that suggest minority presences, or potentially dissonant episodes of violence and tragedy from

Wyoming's past. These include portrayals of ethnic diversity in Wyoming mining towns, artifacts from the World War II-era internment of Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain, and commemorations of civil rights protests by University of Wyoming football players during the 1960s. Several of the themes represented by these objects—including a photograph memorializing Matthew Shepard's 1998 murder, and portrayals of female politicians in the "Equality State," are not portrayed, either in the Colorado or New Mexico museums, or in any of the other museums studied in this dissertation. However, these objects are not necessarily counter-narrative, in that the people, events, and themes they portray are not strongly linked to other objects in the museum. Although they represent events that took place within Wyoming, they are not presented as part of larger historical patterns of cause and effect, or as events that define or challenge Wyoming's historical identity.

#### The New Mexico History Museum

In contrast to the other two museums, visitors entering the New Mexico history museum encounter no map of the state, but a sunny atrium with windows open to the courtyard of the Palace of the Governors (jointly managed with the museum and with a single admission fee). Both this historic space, and the atrium walls, lined with photographs of 'typical' New Mexican landscapes, adobe buildings, and historic scenes of railroad locomotives and rural life, connect the spaces of Santa Fe to the landscapes of New Mexico. From this atrium, prominent doors lead visitors into "Telling New Mexico," the museum's core gallery, which extends over two floors and a mezzanine.

The exhibits beyond offer an extremely intricate set of spaces constructed around a continuous timeline of New Mexico history divided into six periods or exhibits, reflecting successive claims to and government of New Mexico (Table 4.1). These exhibits are arranged along a serpentine path which visitors must follow from one display to the next. Signage indicates not only

the start of each section but also subdivisions of each period. These subsections sometimes reflect further temporal divisions, but they are also used to emphasize different themes and events taking place concurrently in many periods. Although this structure is not initially explained to visitors, the sections and subsections are reinforced through the use of color schemes, wall shapes and textures, and by the openness and constriction of the gallery space. To further emphasize this temporal structure, timelines are positioned in a number of place to summarize and relate objects and events.

Table 4.1: Sections of the “Telling New Mexico” gallery of the New Mexico History Museum.

Exhibit/Subsection Title	Theme	Period
<b>Beyond History’s Records</b>	<b>Native American History</b>	<b>Prehistory-c. 1500</b>
<b>The Far Northern Frontier</b>	<b>Spanish Conquest and Rule</b>	<b>c. 1500-1820</b>
The Way to Wealth and Glory	Initial Spanish Expeditions	1500-1600
A New Order for Heaven and Earth	Spanish Mission Life	1600-1680
The Pueblo Revolt		1680-1693
Neighbors and Strangers		1700-1820
<b>Linking Nations</b>	<b>Mexican Independence and Contact with USA</b>	<b>1820-1848</b>
Mexican Independence		
Trials of a New Nation	1837 Chimayo Revolt	
Santa Fe Trail	Connections between NM and US Frontier	
Trails, Traders, and New Connections	Santa Fe Merchant Aristocracy	
Shifting Boundaries	Territorial Claims on North American West	
The Mexican War / <i>La Intervención Norteamericana</i>		
The Taos Rebellion		
Manifest Destiny	Contested Futures for New Mexico	
<b>Becoming the Southwest</b>	<b>U.S. Territorial Rule</b>	<b>1848-1912</b>
Indian Policy	Native Reservations and Paternalism	
Outlaws and Heroes	Colfax and Lincoln County Land Wars; Land Grants	
The Coming of the Railroad		c. 1880s
Enchantment and “Exploitation”	Tourist Development; Artistic and Anthropological Studies of NM	
<i>Mezzanine: Setting the Standard: the Fred Harvey Company and its Legacy</i>	<i>Harvey Houses and Organized Tourism</i>	<i>1879-1970</i>
<b>Our Place In the Nation</b>	<b>U.S. Statehood</b>	<b>1912-c. 1970</b>
Statehood at Last	State constitution; Pancho Villa Raid	1912-1920
The Great Depression	Federal Relief and Cultural Preservation	1930s
World War II		1940s
New Mexico’s Secret	Los Alamos/Manhattan Project	1940s
The Postwar Booms	Economic Development and Cultural Contestation	1950-1970
<b>My New Mexico</b>	<b>Celebration of Identity and Diversity</b>	<b>Present-Day</b>

A brief description is useful to highlight how space is used not only to divide the timeline into briefer periods, but also to suggest historical connections and possibilities. Entering “Beyond History’s Records,” visitors enter a small exhibit presenting pre-contact Native American life through recordings of Native elders discussing tribal stories. The walls of the circular space are painted in reds and browns, echoing Puebloan peoples’ ceremonial kivas. This exhibit gives way to “The Far Northern Frontier,” an exhibit on Spanish exploration northward from Mexico. A short hallway chronicles initial Spanish explorations, culminating in the Juan de Oñate’s 1598 expedition of conquest into what is now northern New Mexico. Visitors are subsequently led through a low entryway into a dimly lit, low-ceilinged room portraying life in the Spanish missions. This, in turn, opens onto a scene set against a hail of arrows as the mission walls are replaced with charred timbers, symbolizing the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, and the subsequent twelve-year return of the territory to Native control. These spaces trace a stark, often violent uprooting of life in New Mexico during the initial century of Spanish Rule. The exhibit texts and artifacts represent some of these violent events, but they do not celebrate or condemn the depths of brutality that accompanied Spanish conquest and reconquest. Rather, this conflict is addressed indirectly and affectively. The gallery offers some space for contemplation and reflection, but the exhibit narrative quickly moves forward to subsequent events.

This complex arrangement of gallery spaces, even as they follow a largely linear path, can suggest nuanced conclusions. At the end of “The Far Northern Frontier,” for instance, a section entitled “Neighbors and Strangers” presents the 120 years of relative peace between the Spanish, Pueblo peoples, and other Native tribes following the Spanish return. However, this content is presented in an enclosed gallery, set off to the side of the main path through the exhibit space, with no clear exit. In contrast, the main pathway proceeds down a long corridor, into a large open space representing Mexican independence and its administration of this territory. The implication is clear: New Mexico under Spanish rule was stable but somewhat staid coexistence of cultures, while



the Mexican revolution offered a path forward toward dynamic change and new opportunities. Indeed, the open gallery representing Mexican rule presents a set of exhibits addressing the opening of trade with the United States along the Santa Fe Trail and the emergence of a new mercantile class in Santa Fe.

This open space soon constricts, as the exhibit concludes with “The Mexican War/*La Intervención Norteamericana*,” focusing on the annexation of New Mexico into the United States. Subsequent exhibits trace a more linear history of U.S. territorial rule over New Mexico. The first-floor galleries conclude with an exhibit on artistic and anthropological interest of New Mexico’s landscapes and peoples, presented in a gallery adjacent to the exhibit entrance. Although the design of this space invokes the setting of a railroad station, the Native voices of “Beyond History’s Borders” are clearly audible through the gallery’s interior walls. “Telling New Mexico” presents a continuous, cohesive narrative, spanning over four centuries. This narrative is based around a clear structure, even though its central themes are not stated explicitly to visitors as they begin.

The main galleries of “Telling New Mexico” are on the first floor, and many of the museum’s docent-led tours conclude at this point. However, the stories continue downstairs, into galleries presenting twentieth-century New Mexico history, including the debate over New Mexico statehood, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and postwar economic development. In contrast to the exhibits on the first floor, these exhibits are more episodic and self-contained, arranged in strictly linear succession, but drawing only limited lines of historical continuity or causation between events. This is perhaps a result of a reluctance to draw clear conclusions from these more recent events.

The museum’s lower level also includes a more explicit conclusion to the exhibit as a whole. Entitled “My New Mexico”, this final gallery presents a cartoon “postcard map” of the state, surrounded by a collage of place names, photographs, and quotations from New Mexicans describing their connection to the state. These are loosely grouped around six themes: land, water,

tradition, growth, landscape, and lifestyle. Within this exhibit, visitors can select from a series of short videos, grouped by theme and geographic region, featuring people from around the state discussing their experiences, livelihoods, and identities as New Mexicans. Leaving the gallery, visitors are invited to “share their vision” and add their own comments on a bulletin board. This second conclusion to the exhibit thus extends beyond a summarizing echo of the exhibit’s beginning. Rather, it explicitly makes a claim to New Mexican identity, on the basis of common geography, shared experiences, and shared values. The connections between these values and the (frequently contested) memories of five centuries of New Mexican history are left vague, but the state is presented as a space of enduring diversity, vibrant tradition, and dynamic change.

The role of counter-narratives in “Telling New Mexico” is somewhat less clear. The exhibit is structured to highlight the interaction of multiple peoples and cultures during New Mexico’s history, and portrays the societal transformations resulting from several successive conquests of the territory. However, particularly violent episodes are minimized within the narrative, and the museum does not dwell at length on the winners and losers during these transformations. Rather than inviting extended reflection and contemplation on New Mexico’s evolving identity, these episodes are instead portrayed as significant but perhaps necessary milestones in the state’s collective past.

#### *PLACES ON DISPLAY*

So far, I have focused largely on the historical narratives presented in the three museums, both presented in individual galleries and within each museum as a whole. The three take quite different approaches. In both the History Colorado Center and the New Mexico History Museum, these narratives are positioned at the center of the exhibits, though the New Mexico History Museum arranges its content into a continuous and coherent narrative, while History Colorado presents a loose constellation of historical episodes, with the links suggested but not made explicit.

In contrast, in the Wyoming State Museum presents objects in an open thematic array, leaving visitors with the freedom to explore the exhibits as they like.

These narratives are reinforced by the spatial arrangement of the exhibits. Just as I argued in Chapter 2, the placement of objects in relation to one another helps to tell the stories. The configuration of walls, partitions, display cases and pathways as well as the arrangements of exhibits and galleries within the museum does much to suggest certain thematic and narrative connections, while downplaying others. In the cases of History Colorado and the New Mexico History Museum, these connections are central to developing a coherent storyline, while in the Wyoming State Museum, such connections are made between the natural history exhibits, but are less obvious in those presenting human histories. These spatial narratives also work to establish affective dimensions of visitor experience using color, sound and space, as in the dark and confined feel of New Mexico's mission exhibit, or the dramatic contrast between the two halves of History Colorado's presentation of the Dust Bowl. Such affective dimensions are not as central to the galleries of the Wyoming State Museum.

One issue that still needs to be examined are the places that are displayed at these museums. By this, I mean the natural features, regions, counties, cities, towns, and other places that are named or otherwise called out in the exhibits. The remainder of this section, therefore, will map and examine how these geographical locations are represented in each of the three state museums.

The challenge of identifying locations represented in museums can range of very easy to difficult. Many exhibits—particularly those in the three museums discussed here—explicitly identify the provenance of the objects on display as well as the geographical location of particular narrative episodes. Yet these locations can at times be more complex than they first appear. As della Dora (2009) has noted, objects themselves can and do travel, representing their own narrated mobilities rather than static locations. Such is the case with some objects in the Wyoming museum,

including memorabilia from Wyoming troops' overseas service, and a letter from Prince Albert of Monaco's 1913 visit to "Buffalo Bill" Cody's lodge. Even when exhibits focus on narrative episodes rather than objects, these often trace events happening across a region or movement along a route, rather than events within a single location (Azaryahu and Foote 2008). At times, specific locations along these routes can be identified and mapped, but the overall emphasis is on the route as a whole, rather than any specific location. Even so, in the three museums under study, most exhibits and objects are connected to relatively clear geographic locations, such that it is useful to map and compare the locations represented, and how they fit into the larger organization and narrative in each museum.

At the History Colorado Center, twelve of the museum's thirteen immersive exhibits are explicitly tied to identifiable locations (Figure 4.1). The exception is "Borderlands," which traces an extended set of conflicts between Native, Hispano, and Anglo peoples of the Southwest without naming locations. Although the episodes presented in these exhibits were selected based on the museum's thematic goals rather than geographic diversity, the exhibits do feature a wide range of locations across Colorado. These locations are marked on prominent maps in each exhibit, alongside signs inviting visitors to make their own visits to each site. These locations are somewhat skewed toward established tourist circuits, including the mountain communities of Silverton, Steamboat Springs, and Breckenridge, in addition to Rocky Mountain and Mesa Verde National Parks. But locations corresponding to more counter-narrative episodes are also included, such as the Sand Creek Massacre site, Lincoln Hills (a resort for Black tourists) and the World War II Amache Internment Camp. Some of the most culturally diverse regions of Colorado, including the San Luis Valley, are however largely absent from the museum.

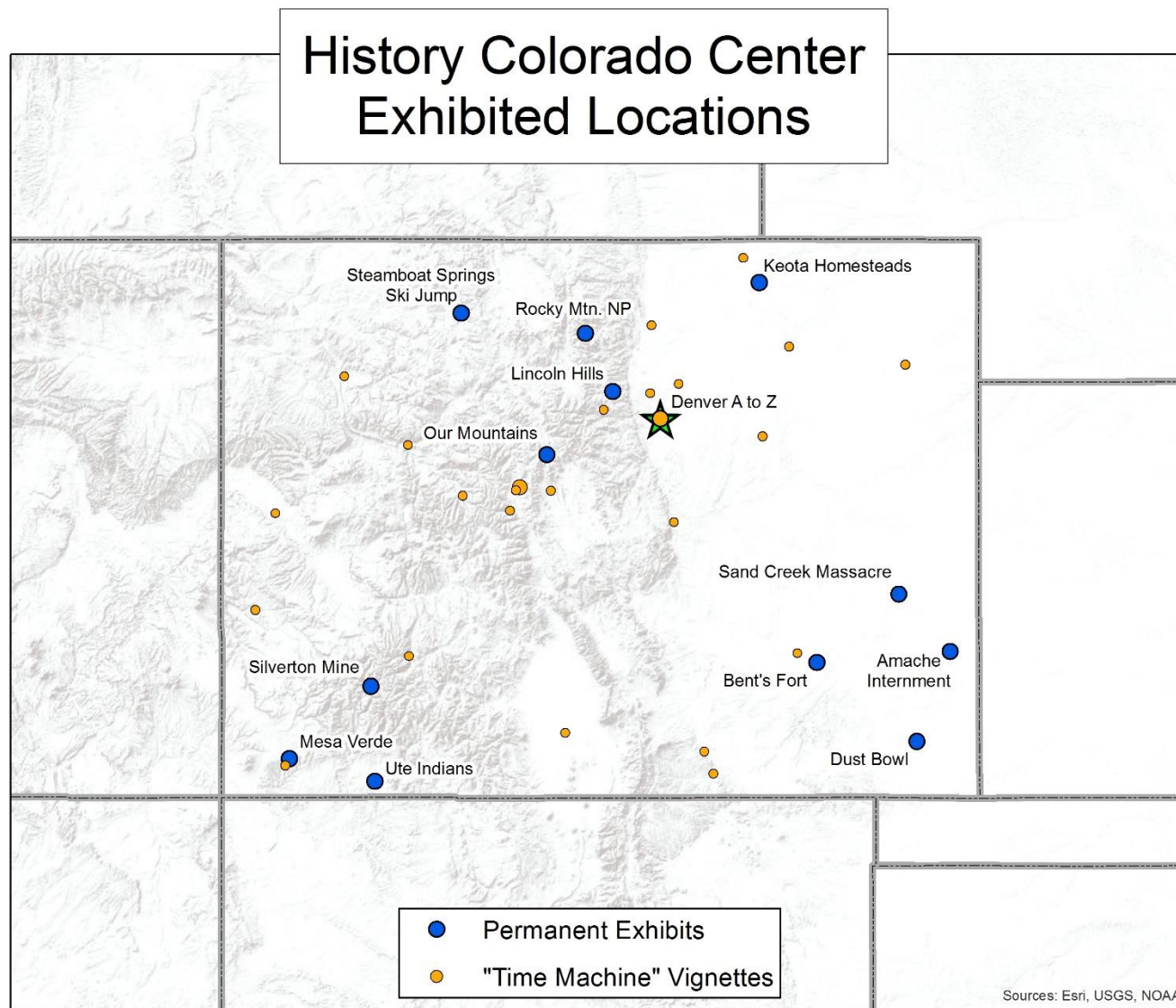


Figure 4.1: Places featured in the exhibits and "Time Machine" films of the History Colorado Center. (Cartography by author.)

This distribution contrasts with the places featured in the “time machines” in the museum’s central atrium. The time machines offer a more geographically comprehensive portrayal of Colorado’s past, since visitors can select vignettes based on a series of predefined regions. These vignettes highlight numerous locations that are not represented in larger exhibits, but are still unevenly distributed (Table 4.2). Locations near Metro Denver, and in the central Rockies are well-represented, but more peripheral areas are showcased by only one or two short films each. These vignettes duplicate many of the episodes—and absences—reflected in the museum’s main galleries—such as those for Mesa Verde and the Sand Creek Massacre. In contrast, the San Luis Valley is mentioned in only one vignette, whereas the central Rockies boomtown of Leadville is featured in three. Moreover, most visitors appear to spend only a short amount of time with the “time machines,” and focus their attention on the main museum galleries. The map on the atrium’s floor focuses visitors’ initial attention on the geographical scale of the state and draws attention to some of the places noted in museum display, but the time machines seem to play a relatively minor role in expanding knowledge of particular places. The museum’s focus is instead on narrating selected episodes of Colorado’s past in its major galleries.

Table 4.2: A tally, by region, of places mentioned in the short films of the History Colorado Center’s interactive “Time Machines”.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Short Films</b>
Northern Plains	2
Southern Plains	3
Central Front Range	6
Southern Front Range	3
Northern Rockies	2
Central Rockies	4
Southern Rockies	3
San Luis Valley	1
Northwest Colorado	2
Grand and Gunnison Valleys	2
Southwest Colorado	1

The Wyoming State Museum, with its focus on objects over narratives, addresses the places and the geography of the state in a very different way. With the exception of two exhibits on the second floor, the museum presentation does not focus on any specific Wyoming locations. Instead, each object's label summarizes its significance and lists a date and location. Mapping those locations reveals that the museum presents objects and events from nearly every part of Wyoming—including all of Wyoming's twenty three counties (Figure 4.2). Some locations are mentioned more frequently, although these repeated mentions do not necessarily add more detail. Some of the places mentioned more than once are major cities, such as Cheyenne and Laramie, as well as major points of interest, such as Yellowstone National Park and Devil's Tower National Monument.



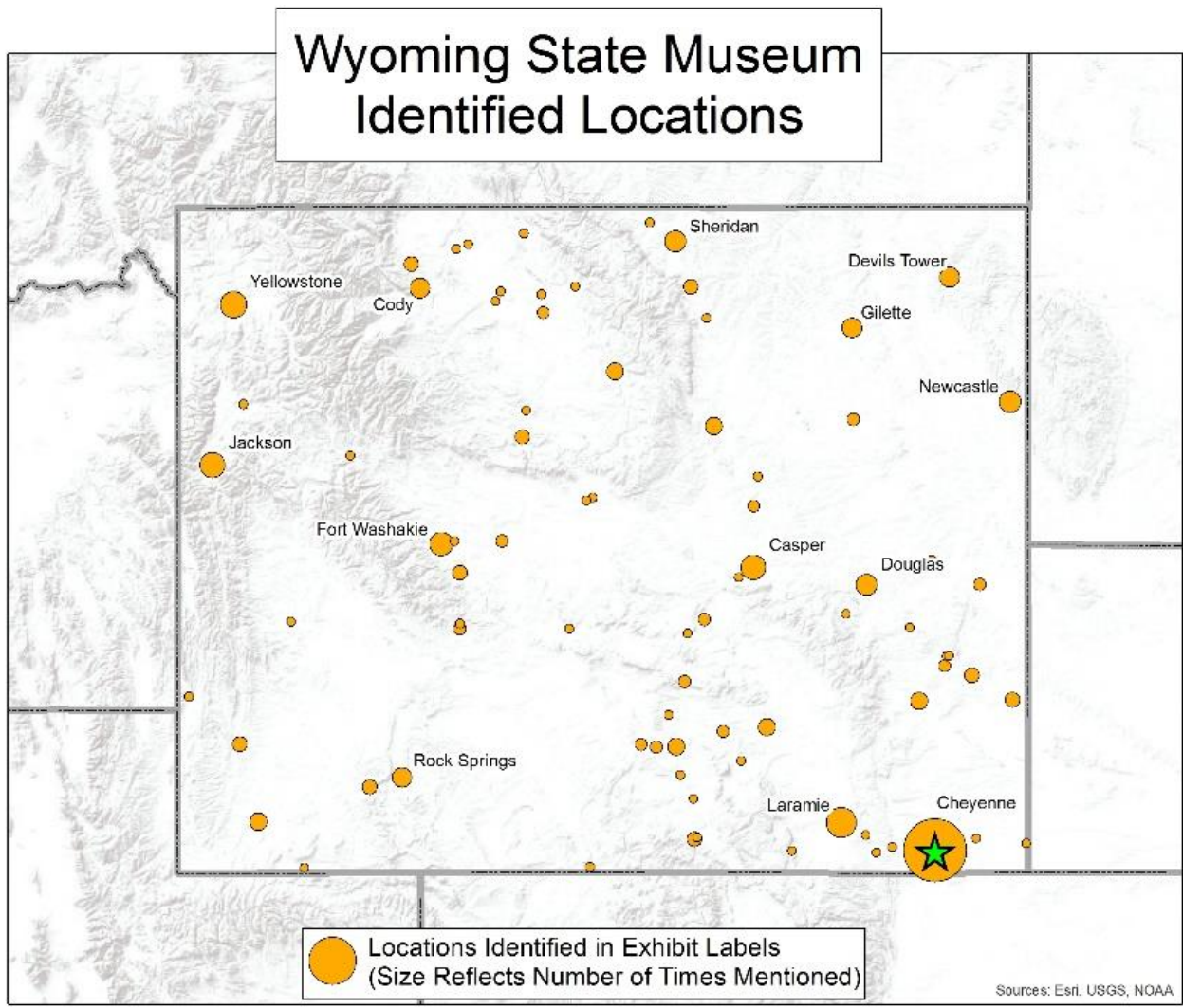


Figure 4.2: Places featured or mentioned in the exhibits of the Wyoming State Museum. (Cartography by author.)

This selection of places means that there is an interesting geographical dimension to this museum's exhibits—the museum presents a geography of Wyoming along with its history. This geographical dimension is not communicated explicitly to visitors. The museum's first exhibit is a large relief map of the state, with prominent places marked, but those locations are not highlighted again in the galleries. This means that even though place names are omnipresent in the object labels, there are few maps to indicate where these places are located, or to introduce less-known places to visitors. Visitors must be familiar with Wyoming's geography to understand some of the locational and spatial connections implied by the captions. Without such familiarity, visitors may miss the geographical and locational contexts of some events and objects.

The New Mexico History Museum has an approach to places different from those of Colorado and Wyoming. While the museum contains numerous historical artifacts, and is organized as a continuous narrative timeline, places are mentioned only sporadically. Although the geographic origins of some objects are noted and some historical episodes are closely linked to specific locations such as the Civil War Battle of Glorieta Pass, many other parts of the story are vague about place and location. Even so, many locations are mentioned in the exhibit, and these outline a fairly comprehensive portrayal of New Mexico (Figure 4.3). These include mentions of a wide range of communities across the state, though it is evident that the exhibit is particularly focused on the northern Rio Grande Valley, stretching north from Albuquerque to Taos. This focus is not surprising given this region's role as New Mexico's cultural hearth, including many (but not all) of the Pueblo communities, as well as the earliest Spanish settlements.



Figure 4.3: Places featured or mentioned in the exhibits of the New Mexico History Museum. (Cartography by author.)

This geographical distribution becomes more interesting upon closer examination. Like the Wyoming museum, the New Mexico Museum is not explicit in using place, space or location as organizing principles in its exhibits. At the same time, the exhibits do address implicitly how the state's human geography has changed through time. By mapping the locations of places mentioned in each of the six periods used in the museum's chronology, it is possible to see a shifting pattern of activity (Figure 4.4). In "Beyond History's Records," the exhibits are strongly centered on Northern New Mexico, linking Native American places extending from the Pueblos westward to Acoma, Zuni, and the Navajo lands beyond. From Spanish conquest until Mexican independence, the geographical focus of the story becomes more and more centered on the Rio Grande Valley, and especially Santa Fe itself. After American conquest and statehood, other parts of the territory become important. This geographical framing of the exhibits highlights a reading of New Mexico history focused on Santa Fe that has long been a staple of New Mexico tourism promotions as a meeting place of cultures.

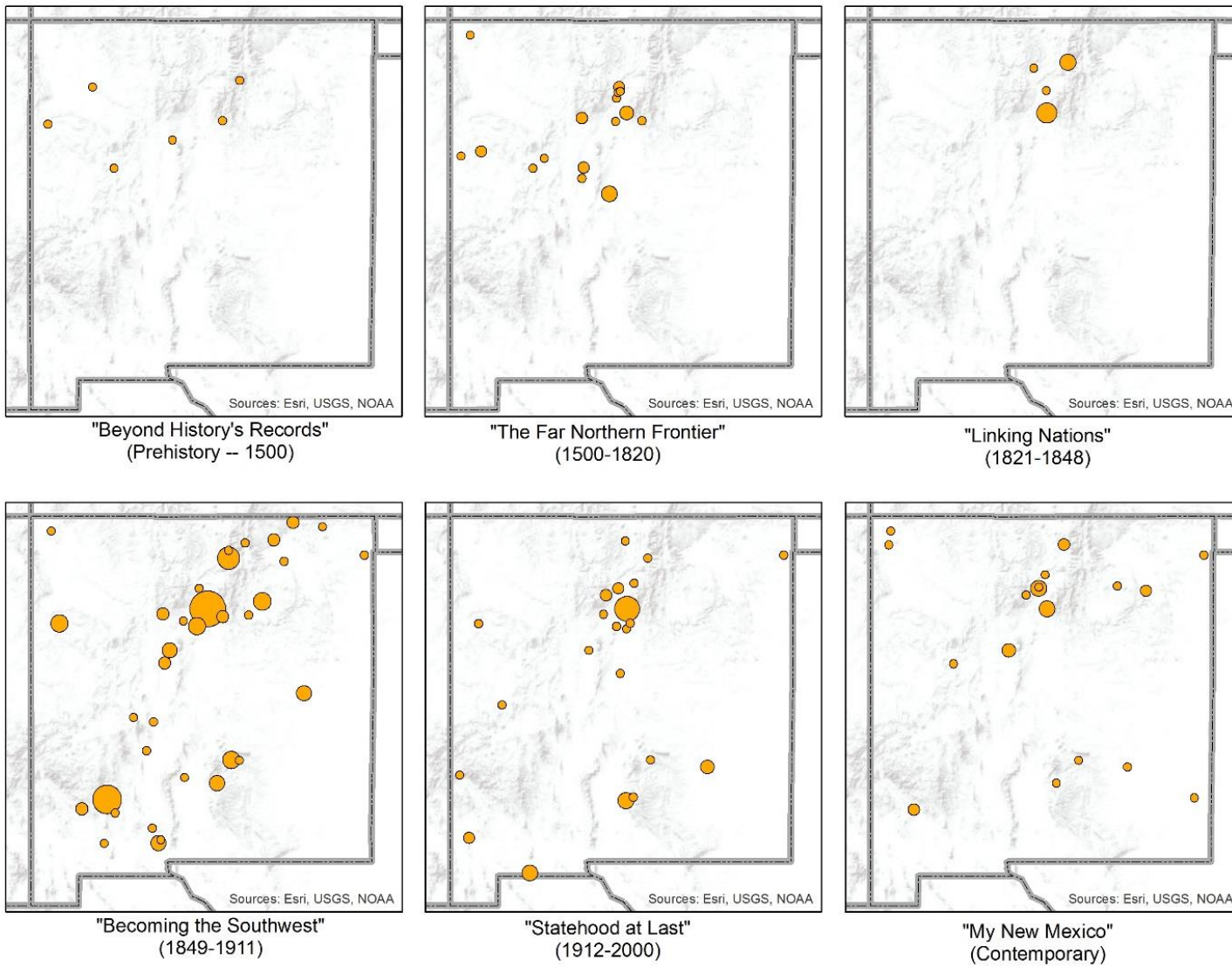


Figure 4.4: Places featured or mentioned in each of the six sections of the core exhibit in the New Mexico History Museum. (Cartography by author.)

Place, space and geography are addressed more directly in the museum's lower level, particularly in the concluding "My New Mexico" exhibit about New Mexico's diversity and common identity. This conclusion is framed in explicitly geographical terms using a state map, a collage of New Mexico place names and photographs, and a geographically structured series of short videos. However, this powerful claim to a common state identity comes at the end of a lengthy narrative rather than the beginning. However, the implicit geographical framing of the museum's first exhibits, coupled with the siting of the museum itself in downtown Santa Fe adjacent to the Palace of the Governors, make the museum's narrative more geographically focused, and less comprehensive, than the map in Figure 4.3 might at first suggest. So although place, space and geography are not dominant themes of the New Mexico museum, they do play an important role in the exhibits, suggesting a state identity originating in Santa Fe, and extending outward to encompass the state of New Mexico as a whole.

#### *NARRATIVES OF PLACE AND IDENTITY*

These three museums present interesting points of comparison and contrast in how they narrate their states' histories and geographies. Each takes a different approach as to what include in the museum, how to arrange and display these materials, and how to link these exhibits together in ways that give visitors a sense of the state's identity. This somewhat vague and sometimes contested notion of "identity" tends to include geographical and historical features that are unique to the state. These may include social, political, economic and cultural accomplishments, as well as foods, music, festivals and other distinctive folkways. Although the role of places in these narratives is seldom made explicit, the geographical framing of each museum's exhibits is an important foundation for articulating and presenting state civic identities. This is evident in several ways in the three museums.

The History Colorado Center and the Wyoming State Museum each present a large state map as one of the first exhibits visitors encounter. But in each museum, state boundaries are largely taken as established historical facts, rather than as outcomes of historical processes and political decisions that could themselves be explored in greater detail. In these exhibits, state boundaries function almost as containers, helping to determine which historical objects and episodes are included in the museum and which are omitted. This means defining both state narratives and identities on the basis of relatively arbitrary decisions about where to place boundary lines on the landscape. In contrast, the initial framing of the New Mexico State Museum lies not in a single map—or a delineated idea of “New Mexico”—but in an array of places (Santa Fe most prominent among them), in a constantly changing set of social, political and historical contexts. These include not only New Mexico’s successive and its changing (and frequently permeable) borders, but also an evolving web of relationships between the places within—an evolving relational geography that is frequently suggested, if never explored in detail.

It is telling that the New Mexico Museum presents visitors with a state map at the end of its lengthy gallery, rather than at the beginning. This is a strong signal about the significance of the more than 500 years of history chronicled in the museum. In this presentation, contemporary New Mexico is the product of—rather than the container for—the historical events and cultural interactions the museum narrates. Yet these changing relations between places are only subtly articulated as visitors move through the museum’s galleries. Far more prominent is the division of the museum’s narrative into sections and subsections, and the chronological and thematic structures they trace. “My New Mexico” is thus more explicit in its conclusions than other exhibits considered in this chapter, whether at the scale of individual exhibits or galleries, or across the museum as a whole. The museum’s overall “Telling New Mexico” exhibit is also organized around an exceptionally clear chronological framework—reinforced at several points by summary timeline

panels—even if the significance of each successive period is not made apparent until the exhibit’s final room.

In contrast, explicit introductory or concluding statements are rare in the Wyoming State Museum and visitors are left for the most part to identify exhibit themes on their own. After an opening focus on the state as a whole, the galleries give way to an array of exhibits whose connection to one another is unclear. Indeed, the “Wyoming at 125” and “Drawn to this Land” exhibits lack clear conclusions, whether articulated in exhibit texts, in the paths along which visitors are led, or in the relationship of the two exhibits one to another. The exhibits of the History Colorado Center fall somewhere between those of New Mexico and Wyoming in narrative structure. In Denver, the narratives are more clearly structured around immersive spaces and episodic narratives, but the relationship between stories is not clearly signaled or explained, especially in the “Colorado Stories” gallery.

Thus, even though all three museums clearly and directly ground the state identities they present in their portrayals of state geographies—though in very different ways—the historical foundations of these state identities are not as explicit. Although all three museums display material objects, narrate historical episodes, and trace overarching themes across exhibits, the identities based on this historical content are generally presented in far more subtle ways. The New Mexico History Museum is perhaps more explicit than most in naming six themes of state identity in its concluding exhibit, but even then it does not clearly link those themes to the events of the previous exhibits. Likewise, the History Colorado Center’s three core exhibits are structured around well thought-out themes, but those themes are not defined or presented to visitors at the scale of the overall museum. Yet even though the Wyoming State Museum makes no explicit claims to how Wyoming’s past shapes its current identity, the link between the two is clearly evident, even as visitors are left to identify and trace some of those connections for themselves.



In all three cases, much of the connection between the past and present is made not through the identification of a set of prescriptive themes, but through historically-framed narration that links the past to the present. Although these narratives are seldom presented as the simple relations of cause-and-effect critiqued by Crang (1994), they nonetheless portray the present as a result of the past, in a variety of direct and indirect ways. Moreover, these historical progressions also frequently suggest *historical progress*—the idea that the relationship between the past and the present has been one not only of historical consequences that give rise to distinctive identities, but also one of material, technological, and social improvements linked to those identities. Such narratives have been extensively critiqued by Limerick and other Western historians, but they continue to circulate widely, and inform the historical narratives displayed at the three museums.

#### Counter-Narratives

In contrast to the broadly applied—but frequently non-specific—suggestions of state identities rooted in the narratives of historical progress presented in the three museums, all three museums also present some objects, historical episodes, and themes that potentially challenge these narratives. Whether in newly designed exhibits or in updates to existing presentation, portrayals of minority presences and contributions, episodes of violence and tragedy, and persistent themes of economic and environmental exploitation suggest alternative readings of state histories. These counter-narratives call into question both the social, economic, and cultural advancement implied in the museums' conclusions, and identities rooted in those narratives of historical progress.

In each of the three museums analyzed here, these more complicated histories do not overshadow the (perhaps implicit) conclusions presented about historical progress or state identities. Instead, each museum portrays a present that is inclusive and politically-neutral, which can be celebrated without difficulty. This resolution is not necessarily a clear or clean one—indeed,

Chapter 3 explored a series of museums in which counter-narrative presentations were explored in greater detail, presenting more challenging implications for local, state, and regional scale historical narratives. In these museums, however, more careful narrative arrangements work to enframe counter-narratives within the politically moderate interpretations of history described by Rose-Redwood (2008). The three state museums analyzed here illustrate several ways in which these counter-narratives are included, but moderated and enframed within each museum's narrative spaces and structures, so as to minimize their dissonance with the other stories on display.

Many of the most dissonant episodes of violence and tragedy are simply not included in these museums, or are not explored beyond brief mentions. Such is the case for several of the most violent dimensions of New Mexico's past, including the punitive mutilation and enslavement of much of Acoma Pueblo's population by the Spanish in 1598, or the siege of Taos Pueblo by American troops in 1846. Although the overall conflicts that included these violent episodes are presented in the museum's exhibits, they simply describe the conflicts, without exploring more contested dimensions of these events, some of which remain bitterly remembered hundreds of years later (Guthrie 2013; Kosek 2006). In contrast, the short-lived Sand Creek Massacre exhibit at the History Colorado Center sought to narrate a violent massacre in a more immersive, extended, and nuanced manner. This well-intentioned effort was intended as part of the museum's portrayal of "Coloradans at their best and worst," but its cramped space did not allow a full exploration of the themes and divergent perspectives it introduced, while its placement in the "Colorado Stories" gallery led to extreme dissonance with the other historical episodes on display. This dissonance was resolved by the closure of the exhibit, leading to a much more straightforward narrative succession between the remaining exhibits.

Even when objects and episodes that suggests counter-narratives are on display, dissonance can be minimized through their juxtaposition with other exhibits and displays, whether at the scale of individual exhibits, or across the museum as a whole. As Chapter 2 noted, the spatial

arrangements of exhibits offer many possibilities for such juxtapositions. The “Colorado Stories” gallery presents several other counter-narrative exhibits, including discussions of Japanese-American internment and violence and prejudice against Colorado’s African-American population. Yet the spatial arrangement of these exhibits suggests that those stories were relatively self-contained, with clear internal conclusions. Meanwhile, the suggested path leads from these past episodes toward more exhibits presenting a more inclusive and apolitical present, suggesting that the dissonant past has left relatively little lasting legacy for the overall narrative.

Similar patterns of enframing dissonant episodes and themes within overall narratives can also be found in the other two museums, even though they employ very different approaches to displaying and narrating histories. Although the Wyoming State Museum does include objects with potential counter-narrative implications—including notable references to LGBTQ+ and women’s histories—these objects do not themselves portray alternative readings of state history. Rather, they are simply additions to the myriad objects on display. The loose configuration of the museum’s exhibits—in which objects are grouped by chronology or theme—does not portray any particular object as immediately reflective of changing times, or suggest that particular objects are especially important as reflections of Wyoming history. Meanwhile, the overall design of the exhibits strongly suggests more conventional narratives, making it easy for visitors to dismiss the disruptions posed by a handful of potentially more dissonant objects, and focus instead on familiar places and Western tropes.

The New Mexico History Museum offers a potentially more challenging set of historical narratives, focused not on a single “Legacy of Conquest,” but on a series of conquests and cultural transformations that have contributed to the state’s current multi-cultural identity. While many of the most immediately discordant episodes of this past are not traced in detail, the museum’s portrayal of successive conquests and cultural transformation is nonetheless selective in linking events to their consequences within its overarching narrative structure. The linear progression of

events in the museum's gallery brings many historical episodes to immediate conclusions, rather than offering opportunities to trace more extended long-term consequences, or to reflect on how these episodes were experienced by different peoples or groups. This also means that transformational periods are often interpreted in light of subsequent events. For instance, Native American lifeways were radically—and often violently—disrupted by Spanish conquest, but the museum portrays that disruption as a necessary precursor to subsequent cultural interaction in later centuries of Spanish and Mexican rule. Moreover, since the narrative is largely linear, visitors often encounter several other historical episodes before confronting the more explicit consequences of earlier events. Although the American invasion and conquest of New Mexico left many unresolved questions surrounding Hispano land rights, the exhibit narrative shifts to the often-picturesque settlement and economic expansion that occurred under American rule, only returning to land-rights issues in the lower-level displays on Twentieth-Century New Mexico. This narration thus portrays New Mexico history as a largely coherent series of events, assembling narratives of cultural change, but not necessarily exploring the long-term ramifications of that change, or how they might remain problematic for New Mexico today. Devoid of those problematic consequences, the overall narrative of multicultural interaction not only supports a strong claim to a distinctive state identity, but also fits nicely into the tourist narrative of Santa Fe.

#### *CONCLUDING THOUGHTS*

This chapter has addressed the presentation of state histories, geographies, and identities at three state museums in the American West. These three museums are a small fraction of the range of museums, historic sites, and other heritage tourism destinations within Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Yet they are particularly interesting from a standpoint of analyzing museum narratives. Not only do these museums link together a wide range of locations, times, and historical themes at a single location, but they do so by assembling complex narratives, which tie together

multiple exhibits within a unified physical and conceptual museum space. These narratives highlight the potential of museums to configure gallery spaces into more intricate spatial narratives, which rearrange and redeploy spatial locations and historical sequences to create and present new frames of meaning.

The three museums analyzed here vary greatly in their approaches to such presentation, display, and narration. The History Colorado Center and New Mexico History Museum tell their stories through immersive architectural environments, signs and interpretive text, and a range of multi-media presentations; in contrast, the Wyoming State Museum offers a more traditional set of presentations centered on historic objects. But these differences also extend to the balance between direct storytelling and allowing visitors to follow their own interests and assemble less structured storylines from the objects and content on display. While The New Mexico Museum leads visitors along a single path through the galleries, corresponding to a single (if not always continuous) storyline, the Wyoming State Museum offers a much looser array of thematic and chronological suggestions for organizing the objects it displays. Visitors are much more able to focus on particular objects, even as those objects may lack geographical or historical contexts, or fit into a more limited and less cohesive framework of narrative cause and effect. And the History Colorado Center offers a mixture of structured narratives of individual historical episodes, along with less clearly defined links between those episodes in presenting its overall thematic goals.

In each case, these museums also present complex geographical relationships. Not only do they explicitly connect a variety of locations into a portrayal of a state as a whole, but they engage a larger “narrative economy” of stories about the American West, and about the United States as a whole (Hoskins 2010). Although all three museums draw on numerous aspects of Western iconography—including frontier settlement, Native American displacement, significant industries, and travel across iconic Western landscapes—none of these narratives are particularly explicit in addressing “Western” histories. Rather, these themes are instead applied at the state level, through

prominent state maps and clearly recognizable locations from across the states. Even so, many of the underlying themes of economic, technological, and social progress from western settlement and expansion are suggested—if not explicitly invoked—in the state identities these museums present. The precise natures of those state identities—whether in terms of defining historical moments, iconic locations, or core values—are seldom made explicit, but they are portrayed as being distinct from neighboring states—and in the case of New Mexico, potentially from the American West more generally. Likewise, none of these museums definitively step outside familiar, positive, and politically-neutral narratives to offer the sort of incisive commentary on contemporary political divides, ethnic inequalities, and environmental challenges sought by Limerick and other New Western Historians.

Even so, these museums also look beyond traditional presentations of iconic heritage, toward portrayals of state history that include representations of minority groups and traumatic historical episodes. These reflect not only the state of current scholarship on the West, but also at times the desire to attract diverse audiences, and to offer more representative portrayals of state history. Yet while counter-narrative perspectives are present in these museums' presentations, they are not a major focus of any of the three narratives. Instead, their inclusion in these museum presentations is mediated, both through narrative structures that highlight some connections and causal relationships while downplaying others, and through the ways these structures are expressed in museum spaces. However, visitors are not necessarily bound by these structures and conclusions—within a free choice learning environment such as a museum, they are free to gravitate toward objects, episodes, texts, or media which are of particular interest, and to draw conclusions separate from those suggested by museum presentations. In this sense, these counter-narrative inclusions offer very important contributions to museum narratives, even if the presented conclusions of those narratives are the comfortable, inclusive, and moderate ones described by Alderman and Inwood (2013, 191) These counter-narratives may not dominate the exhibits, but

they nonetheless allow visitors to choose the depth and tone of their engagement with state histories, allowing nuanced presentations that can appeal to a diverse audience.

These state museums are unique and important, because they have different goals and objectives than many other museums. In contrast to local-scale history museums, state museums present a wide variety of historical content, tied together through a more complex set of narrative, thematic, and geographical syntheses. Similarly, state museums are more geographically restrictive than many of the national museums analyzed by other authors, and more broadly focused than the many museums portraying particular people or historical events. This makes state museums an important opportunity for approaching and understanding complex museum narratives, particularly in terms of how they are spatially articulated, and how the geographies they (re)present contribute to their claims of collective state identities. Because few other types of museums operate at this “middle scale,” further work could profitably consider a wider array of state museums than the three analyzed here. These three museums have illustrated three distinct approaches to historical display and narrative synthesis, each with its own challenges and opportunities. Yet many other approaches appear to be in use in other state museums, and merit further examination. Moreover, although these three museums have included and confronted more counter-narrative readings of the American West in revealing ways, other interactions between state- and regional-scale narratives and counter-narratives could also contribute to a more extensive analysis of how diverse stories are presented in museum spaces, and of how diverse spaces are connected by museum stories.

CHAPTER 5:  
CONCLUSIONS

*REVISITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

The previous chapters answer, at least in part, the research questions posed in Chapter 1. These included, first, examining how museum content is organized through narratives, and how narratives suggest relationships between historical themes, and draw conclusions from the historical episodes presented in exhibits. A second set of questions probed how museums address more critical and counter-narrative perspectives on the history of the American West, and particularly how dissonant episodes are juxtaposed with, incorporated into, or dismissed from, more conventional portrayals of the region's past. Finally, a third group of questions focused on the narratives presented at state museums, and how multiple geographic regions are linked together and presented as a basis for state identities. Each of these lines of inquiry was primarily explored in one of this dissertation's three substantive chapters, using selected case studies of individual museums or groups of museums.

Narratives Organizing a Museum Space

Chapter 2 examined the first set of questions through a detailed analysis of the History Colorado Center in Denver. This museum was an ideal entry point for exploring museum narratives, and a test case for developing the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. This is because the History Colorado Center is fundamentally structured around a



story-based approach to museum presentation and display. Although the museum is also notable for its location, its monumental architecture, and its presentation of an official state history (a theme discussed further in Chapter 4), the Center is most interesting because it is organized around a series of “Colorado Stories,” presented through exhibits designed to replicate settings from across Colorado’s history. These immersive exhibits use a variety of storytelling strategies, including linear progressions, in which movement along a pathway through an exhibit traces movement through space and/or time, as well as less linear frameworks, in which visitors are able to wander more freely as they encounter historical settings, and compare differing perspectives on historical events.

The Center is also significant for its choice of historical narratives to present to visitors: although some of the stories on display represent familiar and iconic dimensions of Colorado’s past, other stories draw on the New Western History to present more dissonant pasts, addressing legacies of racial and ethnic discrimination, episodes of violence and tragedy, and environmental impacts. Telling these stories is not always easy—although they figure prominently in the museum’s goals of engaging diverse audiences by presenting “Coloradans at their best and worst,” they contrast—at times sharply—with the more conventional stories and settings presented elsewhere in the museum. One way the Center resolves these tensions is through carefully selecting the conclusions of many of these dissonant narratives. By ending the narration of these historical episodes well short of the present day, their narrative impact on the overall story of Colorado is left somewhat muted.

More significantly, the arrangement of exhibits within the galleries of the History Colorado Center suggests a more general, if sometimes less precisely defined, set of relationships between the stories and settings on display. In the “Colorado Stories” gallery, for instance, the ordering of exhibits suggests not only thematic links between diverse locations and times, but also arranges those stories into a loose chronological order, traced by visitors as they move through the exhibit

space. Because many of the more dissonant historical episodes are presented relatively early in this emergent narrative, the museum suggests—without explicitly stating—that those more dissonant themes can be left behind, leaving a more inclusive present that is accessible to all. Conversely, the “Living West” gallery is much more structured, offering a more explicit set of unifying themes that link its three narratives together into one, and explicitly inviting visitors to consider their “choices” as contemporary Colorado citizens. Yet these narrative conclusions, whether subtle or overt, both work to suggest state identities—a theme discussed further in Chapter 4. More generally, the questions and methods explored in this case study yielded not only a wealth of insights about the development of narratives and conclusions within the History Colorado Center—admittedly, a museum particularly designed around narratives—but also proved effective in a wide range of other museum case studies. This suggests that these research methods are effective, and potentially applicable in other settings, as well.

#### Incorporating Critical Perspectives into Museum Narratives

Although the History Colorado Center incorporates some dissonant historical episodes—and the critical historical perspectives they suggest—into its presentation of state history and identity, these themes, episodes, and perspectives are also found in a more extensive array of museums in Colorado. Chapter 3 highlighted a series of museums which present a set of Western counter-narratives, focusing on themes of race, and ethnicity, and labor conflict, in more detail. The presence of these counter-narrative presentations is itself a fairly significant finding of this part of this study. Instead of reserving these themes to the “sites of counter-memory” discussed by Kaufman (2009) in his critique of ethnicity and historical commemoration, they are also presented in a number of more general-interest museums, alongside more conventional themes. Many of the agencies involved in these presentations, including the historical societies of Aspen and Breckenridge, as well as Colorado’s state historical society, have taken an active interest in

presenting these themes and stories to general audiences in the settings of tourist destinations. Moreover, museums dedicated more specifically to these counter-narratives have also attracted significant public attention, and in some cases have constructed new and innovative exhibits and displays presenting their stories.

However, these stories are told in different ways in the different cases explored in this comparative study. In dedicated museums and commemorative events, counter-narrative themes literally take center stage. In contrast, in more general interest museums, they are frequently juxtaposed with more conventional themes in ways that limit their potential dissonance and critical impact on regional heritage. In some cases, this is due to the focus of the narrative presentation, as with the expansive and intersecting stories presented at the UMWA Ludlow Centennial Pilgrimage, or the more narrow narrative presented at the History Colorado “Children of Ludlow” exhibit. But in other cases, this difference is less about what is included or excluded from the narrative, and more a product of the context and setting in which a story is told. Although the Aspen Historical Society offers a fairly comprehensive portrayal of the history, and subsequent removal, of the Ute people in the Aspen area, it simply cannot speak for the continuing Native presence in the West as the Southern Ute Museum does. Even so, these case studies do not clearly reduce to a dichotomy between conventional and counter-narrative sites, as illustrated by the Barney Ford Museum in Breckenridge. There, the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance effectively uses one man’s life story to present a clear and compelling narrative linking African-American presence in the West across local, regional, and national scales. Although this museum is the exception among the six analyzed in this chapter, its presentation indicates that effective storytelling is not only a matter of who presents a story, or where that story is presented. Instead, it opens possibilities for considering the “genre conventions” through which narration can connect places and bridge multiple scales. Such connections are further considered in the analysis of state museums in Chapter 4.

## Situating Narratives in State History Museums

State history museums are particularly interesting venues for exploring the role of space, place, and scale in museum narratives. As the analysis of the History Colorado Center in Chapter 2 indicated, these museums present a diverse array of themes—potentially far more diverse than at many other museums. Moreover, they also extend those themes across a more expansive geographical framework than the local-scale narratives presented at many museums and historical sites. State museums also suggest, if not explicitly claim, civic identities rooted in common state histories. This means that these museums not only link multiple historical episodes and themes, but also frequently draw those narratives toward conclusions framed at the geographical scale of states as a whole. This is certainly the case at the History Colorado Center, but it is also relevant in the two additional state museums analyzed in Chapter 4, which highlight very different approaches to narrating history in museums. Although the History Colorado Center is organized around a series of immersive narrative exhibits, the Wyoming State Museum offers very little direct narration, focusing instead on objects organized by theme or in loose chronologies. In contrast, the New Mexico History Museum instead presents a single overarching narrative, structured around a sequence of periods and themes, rather than historical episodes.

In each of the three museums, maps play an important role in linking historical content both to specific places, and to the geographical frame of each state as a whole. These maps are prominently displayed in each museum, offering a geographical shorthand for the state identities being presented. Yet these maps are presented at different points in each museum, and fit differently into each museum's narrative sequence. In both the Colorado and Wyoming museums, state maps introduce geographically disparate stories and objects, and provide a frame for relating these exhibit components to overall state geographies and histories. In the New Mexico History Museum, by contrast, the state map is presented only at the conclusion of an extended history,

framing the state's boundaries as not only a historical product, but also as an extension of the narrative geography from Northern New Mexico to the entire state.

These state museums also extend one of the key questions raised in Chapter 3: how are more critical or dissonant themes incorporated into the state identities on display? All three museums highlight some counter-narrative themes within their states' pasts, but these are not always presented in ways that affect the other themes, stories, and conclusions on display. This is most notable in the Wyoming State Museum. Since its displays focus on objects rather than presenting more extended narratives, the objects representing potentially dissonant themes occur in isolation, rather than presenting alternative interpretations of the state's past. In contrast, in the New Mexico museum, many dimensions of the "Legacy of Conquest" are explicitly presented, but are framed as the foundation of a distinctive multicultural New Mexican identity—an identity that remains marketable and visitable to tourists. Indeed, in all three museums, the implications of critical themes and historical episodes rarely extend to confront the current socioeconomic status quo. Exhibit narratives introduce more dissonant dimensions of the past, but also enframe them, so that they often do not cohere as extended or developed counter-narratives. Even so, it is important that state museums are presenting some of these stories, and confronting these dissonant and challenging themes at all, since they complicate what might otherwise be fairly straightforward presentations of an unproblematic heritage. These state museums may not fully embrace the extended criticism and emancipatory historiography advocated by Alderman and Inwood (2013), but they are actively working to present inclusive, and at times controversial, history from an official perspective.

#### *THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND BROADER IMPACTS*

Although this research has focused on a set of case studies in Colorado and the American West, it also offers more general contributions to the fields of research in geography, museum

studies, and public history discussed in Chapter 1. In particular, the museums reviewed in the preceding chapters highlight the significance of place for many museums, suggesting that “museum geographies” are indeed an important venue for cultural geographic research. Cultural geography highlights how meaning and place are intertwined, and these connections are important in museums in multiple ways. On the one hand, museums are often located in significant places. These include not only locations immediately relevant to historical events, but also places that situate museum content in discursive frames of knowledge, power, and cultural authority. More significantly, many museum exhibits also rearrange places in new, nuanced, and complex ways, and connect these synthetic geographies to situated systems of cultural meaning. This is most clearly evident in the state museums discussed in Chapter 4, but other museums also assemble new geographical relationships, for instance by tracking the spaces of an individual’s life, or by highlighting thematic connections between events occurring in different times and places. This makes museums an important *extension* to previous cultural geographic work on memorials, monuments, and historic sites, as settings where meaning is presented, as well as contested and performed. But unlike many of these other venues, museums communicate these meanings in more extensive and often subtle ways, incorporating contrasting and contested perspectives within exhibit narratives. This means that instead of focusing on how memory is constructed and contested across multiple memorial sites, cultural geographers can—indeed, must—also consider how different dimensions of cultural meaning are presented within individual museum spaces.

These dimensions of cultural meaning—and the complicated geographies they are connected to—become yet more complex when viewed in the context of heritage tourism. Although museums have frequently been promoted as significant destinations for heritage tourism, this does not necessarily mean that these museums reduce complex histories to simple and visitable heritage. Rather than “dumbing down” more controversial dimensions of history, the case studies explored in this dissertation “open up” these complex histories, presenting dissonant

episodes and counter-narrative themes to new audiences. In many cases, growth in heritage tourism has prompted the construction of new museums, and the revision of existing exhibits to include more complex themes, presented using new media, and often employing narrative storytelling as a central frame for exhibit presentations. Conversely, many sites of counter-memory are also more publicized, both for specifically interested communities, and as part of emerging plans for new heritage tourism development (Hartmann 2009). Thus, heritage tourism is less a “devil’s bargain” (Rothman 1998) than a complex web of intersecting interests and agencies. Although such interests remain rooted in unequal dimensions of political, social, and economic power, museums in particular offer opportunities for presenting more complex and critical pasts alongside, and in juxtaposition with, more conventional place images.

The American West is an important and promising setting for exploring this balance between iconic and critical pasts. The West, as noted in the introduction, has long been shaped by tourism, but recent developments have particularly emphasized the region’s heritage. Yet in many of the museums explored here, this heritage specifically included dissonant themes, presented across local, regional, and national geographical scales. This stands as an important contrast to many other studies of how complicated memory is presented in heritage tourism settings. Among the trajectories of research reviewed in Chapter 1, work on the American South has largely focused on the legacies of plantation slavery, rather than juxtaposing that legacy with other dimensions of regional heritage. Likewise, many other analyses of museums and historic sites have examined selected sites and presentations, but not necessarily traced history and heritage across multiple intersecting scales, as the comparative analyses presented here have sought to do. Even so, the case studies explored in this dissertation are only a first foray into exploring how the critical historical meta-narrative presented by Limerick and other New Western historians has been presented to the public. Although some of the most prominent themes highlighted in this work are evident in the museum case studies analyzed here, many others are absent, and no museum

appears to assemble the extended, multi-thematic, and regional-scale critique of the “Legacy of Conquest” pursued by critical historiographers.

The case studies analyzed in this dissertation highlight the significance of narrative structures for organizing museums. Exhibit narratives are a means for juxtaposing a variety of cultural discourses within a museum, and more importantly for applying those intersecting narratives across spatial scales. These narratives, however, are different from many of the texts analyzed by geographers and other social scientists, because they are presented within the three-dimensional spaces of exhibits and galleries. These dimensions of spatial arrangement, connection, and progression are crucial resources for many museum presentations, whether framed explicitly as links of cause and effect, or more subtly as suggestions of similarity among themes or discontinuity between historical episodes. These dimensions of museum narrative are a central—if highly complex—dimension of the systems of cultural meaning presented in museums. Moreover, they are useful for museum professionals, both as a resource for planning and designing new exhibits, and as a tool for identifying unintended juxtapositions and conclusions within exhibits.

New methodologies, such as those explored here, have been successful in extending more conventional content and discourse methods toward considering museum narratives as a distinct form of spatial media. Although nearly all of the case studies examined in this dissertation use storytelling as a central component of their exhibits, many of these narratives proceed along fairly straightforward spatial and narrative paths. Only a few museum presentations—particularly the state museums examined in Chapter 4—highlight more complex arrangements of museum spaces and more intricate possibilities for presenting discontinuous or contrasting narratives. These are not the only relevant aspects of narrative analysis in museums—indeed, Chapter 3 highlighted numerous other aspects of museum narratives, including their context, presenter views, and framing around particular narrators—but they address some of the most intriguing “genre conventions” of museum storytelling. The methods developed in this dissertation are thus an



important beginning for analyzing museum narratives, but they remain somewhat exploratory, particularly when it comes to analyzing especially complex narratives, or as a basis for comparing museum narratives to the geographies of other media.

#### *LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES*

One central limitation of the analysis presented in this dissertation is my choice to focus on museum exhibits as texts, rather than tracing in greater detail how they are constructed, contested, and interpreted. Indeed, much of the cultural geographic research on monuments, memorials, and historic sites in which this dissertation is grounded has examined a much more extensive “co-construction” of cultural meaning between presenters and audiences, drawing not only on the content presented in particular sites, but also on the broader discourses and narratives in which those presentations are situated. This research, however, is intended not as a comprehensive geography of museum narratives, but as a targeted intervention. Through the case studies and comparative analysis presented here, I have sought to highlight the significance of narratives in an emerging field of “museum geography,” to explore some of the geographical dimensions of those narratives, and to begin to develop a methodological toolset for exploring those narratives in three-dimensional space. This research is not, as yet, comparable to the extensive and methodologically complex scholarship on the American South, though I hope that the case studies examined here could offer a useful beginning for a program of mixed-methods research comparable to the studies of Southern plantations developed by Alderman et al. (2016).

Another limitation of this research is its selection of a relatively small number of case studies, representing selected themes drawn from critical “New Western” historical scholarship. These case studies were useful in tracing how these themes were presented to public audiences through museum narratives, across a variety of established and emerging heritage tourism

destinations. This selection has been theoretically productive, but it has not necessarily engaged a representative sample of museums in Colorado and surrounding states. At least two significant dimensions of regional history were absent from this analysis. First, I did not visit many of the smaller, local-scale historical museums present across Colorado, nor did I extensively consider many of the more conventional history museums included in the initial exploratory phases of fieldwork. Although many of these museums do not highlight the counter-narratives and dissonant histories that I explored in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, those more conventional themes are also an important part of the landscape of heritage tourism in Colorado. Not only do those presentations frequently have narrative structures of their own, but those narratives may work to downplay more dissonant themes, similar to the southern heritage “myths” analyzed by Modlin (2008). Additionally, although this analysis examined *some* counter-narratives in depth and detail, numerous other aspects of critical regional history were far less prominent in the museums I studied. These include other dimensions of race and ethnicity, as well as the presence and influence of women in regional history, and the environmental impacts and transformations associated with the region’s settlement. Yet while these themes were not central to any of the museums I visited, neither were they entirely absent from those presentations. It would therefore be potentially revealing to trace the spectrum of iconic and dissonant narratives, not only within the case studies selected for this dissertation, but across a much more extensive array of museums, including modest local museums alongside state institutions, or those with specific counter-narrative focus.

Additionally, having recognized the significance and prevalence of narratives within many museums, future research—in the West and elsewhere—might more explicitly incorporate narrative into some of the other methodological approaches and analytical frames discussed in Chapter 1. For instance, an awareness of the narrative structures present in a museum exhibit could guide more ethnographic research, whether into the processes of exhibit planning and design, or into how those exhibits are engaged and understood by visitors. In particular, several of the case

studies analyzed here appear to use narrative frames and juxtapositions to allow visitors to choose how extensively to engage with different dimensions of presented historical content. A more explicit investigation of how museum narratives lead to, suggest, or downplay conclusions could therefore be an especially useful step in incorporating narrative into the overall “co-construction” of heritage, especially when that heritage includes more dissonant or controversial elements.

Further research could also extend the methodology developed in this dissertation beyond my initial series of case studies toward consideration of additional groups of museums, both individually and in comparative analysis. Both in the West and in other settings, this work could profitably compare and contrast groups of museums and other historic sites, analyzing the broader “narrative economies” in which multiple presentations of heritage inform and legitimize one another. Within the frames of the exploratory fieldwork that led to this dissertation, such research could more closely examine several of the “heritage complexes,” in which multiple museums are clustered in significant tourism destinations. In some cases these museums are operated by the same organization, and are the result of common interpretive planning, but in others, different museums present interpretations of local history that contrast in both dramatic and subtle ways. An additional possibility—explored briefly in initial fieldwork, but not researched in depth—lies in federally-designated National Heritage Corridors, in which the National Park Service cooperates with local museums, preservation agencies, governments, and businesses to encourage heritage tourism in areas of national significance.

A second approach toward extending this research would be to consider sites in which narratives extend over more complex geographical formations. This was addressed, to some extent, in the comparative analysis of state museums presented in Chapter 4. However, the three museums analyzed in that chapter represent only a first look at a category of museums that has received relatively little attention in the literature. As noted previously, state museums are particularly interesting, because they both present state histories across a wide, and often

heterogeneous geographical framework, and because they use history and heritage in support of claims toward a common civic identity. Since nearly all U.S. states have established such museums, there are extensive possibilities for comparative analysis. Moreover, since these museums often have significant resources for exhibit design and interpretation, it is likely that they would showcase a more complex array of narrative structures and “genre conventions.” An additional set of complex geographical formations could include the linear structures of historic trails and other routes, in which narrative presentations might more explicitly link temporal and spatial progressions. Interpretive centers established for designated National Historic Trails, including the routes of Lewis and Clark, and the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express trails, offer an additional set of opportunities to examine how narratives extend across both space and time.

Finally, although this dissertation has identified several distinctive characteristics of museum narratives, in contrast with the systems of meaning presented at monuments, memorials, and other “landscapes of memory,” it is important to remember that museums are only one form of narrative media. Other media, including but not limited to film, novels, non-fiction writing, and even comic books, have been identified and analyzed in terms of their spatial narrative content. Therefore, it would be helpful to include museums within this more general turn toward narrative theory and analysis in the “geo-humanities” (Dear 2011; Daniels 2011). As a beginning, a closer examination of the interactive multimedia exhibits and games present in some museums might highlight common dimensions of spatial storytelling, across real, constructed, imagined, and virtual spaces. Such work could also extend to emerging methods of narration, including virtual tours and large-scale public multimedia presentations. Finally, a closer look at the involvement of audiences in spatial storytelling could usefully highlight not only historical tours, but the enlistment of space in the participatory narratives of historical reenactments and performances.

These research possibilities offer many intriguing suggestions for further engagements between narrative theory and cultural geography, across a wide variety of geographical settings, as well as a diverse array of spatial frameworks and connections. Many of these narrative approaches are only beginning to be explored and applied by cultural geographers. However, I argue that these narrative geographies are fundamentally an extension of some of cultural geography's core concerns with how systems of cultural meaning are connected with, presented in, and contested through places. The intersection of space, place, and story offers not only a theoretically rich perspective on the presentation of the American West and its history in museums, but also an entry point for critically exploring spatial narratives across a diverse array of media.

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