Visitors' discursive responses to hegemonic and alternative museum narratives:

a case study of *Le Modèle Noir*

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Abstract

Recent reflection on the role of museums and galleries has focused on their socially situated nature; and that as a social construct, co-produced with its audiences, heritage is in part discursively constituted. This has included acknowledgement that the inherited discourse is hegemonic and exclusive of divergent narratives, leading to moves to create alternatives to contest it, which include temporary exhibitions. These provide a potentially democratic space for discursive incursions freed from the constraints of the permanent museum. But they are also spatially and temporally peripheral, occupying a discursive space outside the standard visit. This raises questions as to whether, once the exhibition is over, the alternative will be subsumed once more. This article explores this issue using a dataset of TripAdvisor reviews to analyse the discursive responses of visitors to temporary and permanent collections, using the Musée d'Orsay's 2019 exhibition *Le Modèle Noir* as a case study. Analysis shows that *Le Modèle Noir* reviews exhibit greater discursive fragmentation, reveal a relative lack of appeals to collective identity, and do not connect the exhibition with the permanent collection. Potential implications of this for initiatives that seek to counter the hegemonic narrative are discussed.

Keywords: exhibition, museum, TripAdvisor, visitors, hegemony, heritage, decolonization

Introduction

> The Heritage […] is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter. […] It is long past time to radically question this foundational assumption.
>
> *Stuart Hall, keynote speech at conference 'Whose Heritage? The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Britain's Living Heritage', November 1999*

More than twenty years after Stuart Hall's call for the heritage sector to question its assumptions of homogeneity, questions surrounding how heritage can become more democratic, inclusive, and pluralistic are still being asked. Since the emergence of 'new museology' in the late twentieth century, museums' and galleries' reflection on their role and epistemological status has increasingly focused on their positionality as inseparable from the social and political constructs that founded and perpetuate them (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). The narratives[1] on which this positionality is constructed have entrenched a status quo, since 'museums function through exclusion in order to make sense of the material to hand', and so 'problematic, superfluous or redundant associations are dismissed in favour of a predetermined script, thus ensuring the delivery of a singular, coherent and audible, intellectual narrative' (Winchester 2012: 145; Hanks, Hale, & MacLeod 2012). These 'scripts' comprise the authorised heritage discourse: a 'hegemonic discourse…which acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage [and] naturalizes the practice of rounding up the usual suspects to conserve and 'pass on' to future generations' (Smith 2006: 11). In naturalising ways of seeing and understanding, this hegemonic discourse 'promotes a certain set of Western elite cultural values as being universally applicable. Consequently, this discourse validates a set of practices and performances, which populates both popular and expert constructions of 'heritage' and undermines alternative and subaltern ideas about

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[1] I use 'narrative' to refer to collective narrative (Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva 2002: 98) inscribing macro-histories or overarching stories resulting from 'authorised heritage discourse' (Smith 2006), the 'interpretive frameworks which present a dominant version of history, silencing the experiences and values of others in the process' (Hanks, Hale, & MacLeod 2012: *xx*); or 'alternative narratives' that seek to contest these.

'heritage'' (Smith 2006: 11). Heritage institutions, as Hall points out in the quotation above, are therefore not politically neutral. Yet the continuing debates and movements for change, and the increasingly divisive and contested nature of the public discourse into the 2020s around ownership and representativeness of heritage, suggest that the hegemonic narrative is proving intransigent, and impactful change elusive.

Contesting the narrative: temporary exhibitions

There is no lack of initiatives engaging with the implications of this self-awareness. Recent years have seen moves to contest the hegemonic narrative, by dismantling 'foundational assumptions' or pluralising voices that constitute it. These include repatriating stolen items (Fforde, Keeler, & McKeown 2020); permanent additions to the museum landscape such as the International Slavery Museum, which 'increases the understanding of […] enslavement' (National Museums Liverpool 2021); time-bound, funded projects such as *Beyond the Binary* at the Pitt Rivers Museum, which 'challenge[s] historical interpretations of the museum's collections' (Pitt Rivers Museum 2020); or numerous temporary exhibitions telling stories that fall outside the museum's standard content (e.g. Macdonald 2008; Sandell 2006).

Temporary exhibitions may not only be practical (Aldrich 2005; Silberman 2013), but confer advantages in adding new perspectives on any topic, often directly contesting 'the power and authority' noted by Hall. They 'not only expand the traces of the past it is possible to encounter in museums, but also set the terms on which they are to be engaged by visitors' (Bonnell & Simon 2007: 80) insofar as they offer freedom from the standard discourse of the museum (Jacobi 2013: 4; Golding 2013). In so doing they have potential for openness and dialogue where permanent collections may signal discursive closedness. There is democratic potential in this fluidity: as Nguyen observes of pop-up LGBTQ+ exhibitions, their impermanence comprises 'attempts to shock cultural institutions out of heteronormative

complicity and complacency. They elude co-optation into mainstream narratives by appearing and quickly packing down' (Nguyen 2020: 3). This resistance to co-option is noted by Luke, who describes a Smithsonian exhibition that displayed rubble from Hiroshima as a '*discursive countermove* against the American state's ordinarily normalizing impulses' (Luke 2002: 227, *my emphasis*).

However, this democratic discursive fluidity may also have its drawbacks. By definition, a temporary exhibition is spatially and temporally located on the periphery (Sandell 2005). As a result, 'perceived cultural authority for audiences may well be diminished by their tendency to occupy peripheral locations and for shorter periods of time than their mainstream display counterparts' (Sandell 2005: 191). These caveats indeed chime with broader tokenism concerns about decolonising and diversifying work (e.g. Naidoo 2004, 2011). Many temporary exhibitions have broader aims, but if part of their agenda is to seek to change the hegemonic narrative then 'the way people talk about, discuss and understand things, such as 'heritage', have a material consequence that matters' (Smith 2006: 14). Interpretive acts (Noy 2018: 33) have the potential to become the point at which the 'dominant social values and beliefs which become written into, concretised and rendered visible within exhibition narratives' (Sandell 2006: 3) are reshaped, rewritten, or wholly transplanted.

Heritage as discourse

To better understand the dynamics of these interpretive acts, much analysis has considered the heritage narrative from a discursive standpoint. As a social construct, heritage is in part discursively constituted (Hall 1999: 5; Smith 2006), and analysis of museums as 'texts' has considered 'questions about production (encoding/writing) and consumption (decoding/reading), as well as content (text) and the inter-relationships between these'

(Macdonald & Bennett 1998: 179). Texts imply an audience (Bal 2010) and the museum as a means of communication (Silverstone 2012) is 'a complex multimodal text/message [that] provides a complex set of signs for the visitors who come to engage with it, and from it they construct for themselves an infinite series of promptings for interpretation' (Kress 2011). Inevitably, visitors' individually and socially moulded perceptions of a particular museum, exhibition, or artefact influence their responses, which in turn designate them not as passive recipients but co-creators of meaning (Smith 2006; Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva 2002). As such, the 'discursive construction of heritage is itself part of the cultural and social processes that are heritage' (Smith 2006: 13). These processes are at work at both societal and museum level, since visitors' responses 'may be recorded and displayed publicly as part of [the museum's] narration itself' (Noy 2018: 3; Macdonald 2005). But, in the context of contesting the hegemonic narrative, the multiplicities, impacts, and processes through which these societal interpretations are formed are often overlooked (Noy 2018: 20), particularly in favour of describing the initiative from the museum's perspective (e.g. Lynch and Alberti 2010). To know what effect discursive countermoves are having, 'more needs to be done to provide a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of how users experience and 'make sense' of museums' (Jones 2015: 543). It is not only museums broadly as permanent institutions where greater understanding is needed, but also the temporary exhibitions within their walls, since they potentially generate and constitute a separate discourse. Put another way, consideration of temporary museum displays has not been accompanied by a commensurate focus on the discursive product of the 'translational process' (Bal 2010). Yet better understanding the effects of these discursive countermoves is important in understanding the processes by which hegemonic heritage narratives are contested, and their effectiveness.

This study addresses this by analysing and comparing discursive strategies responding to, respectively, a visit to the Musée d'Orsay's permanent collections, and to one of its temporary exhibitions acting as a 'discursive countermove' within the broader decolonising movement. It will analyse visitors' discursive responses to the permanent and temporary museum experiences, ask how they compare, and consider potential implications for temporary exhibitions that seek to contest hegemonic narratives in a social justice context. The study is underpinned by a Bakhtinian view in which the museum as 'text' is understood as dialogic, socially situated and engaged, and contextually contingent. Such an approach is adopted by other recent museological literature that considers curatorial and interpretative processes (e.g. Francis 2015; McKay & Monteverde 2003). Bal suggests that 'a museum is a discourse, and exhibition an utterance within that discourse' (Bal 1996: 153), which therefore offers a contained and discursively delimited object for analysis (Bakhtin 1987).

Le Modèle Noir: from Gericault to Matisse (hereafter *LMN*), staged at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 2019 (previously at the Wallach Art Gallery, New York), will provide the case study example of a 'discursive countermove', the presentation of an alternative narrative within the hegemonic museum context. The exhibition's stated aim was:

> … to give [Black models and artists] back a name, a history, and a visibility. From stereotype to individual, from an unrecognized figure to a recognized one, this exhibition aims to retrace this long process and to cast light on one of the most overlooked and least mentioned areas of art history… (Musée d'Orsay 2019 [*my trans.*])

The exhibition garnered positive publicity and attracted around half a million visitors over its four-month opening period, according to *Le Monde* (2019). But media interest, positive reviews, and visitor numbers – evident and compelling measures of success – reveal little about *how* visitors received and interpreted the alternative narrative. Was it incorporated into

their visiting experience and existing narratives, and if so, how? Once the light of visibility shines on this 'most overlooked and least mentioned' area of art history, will its subjects disappear back into the normative narrative of the museum's business as usual? What can this alternative perspective contribute to a shifting the narrative to a pluralistic, inclusive one?

Materials and methods

The discursive construction of visitors' reactions to art and heritage has been analysed in a range of contexts (e.g. Chronis 2012; Carter 2015). Increasingly, those interested in visitors' experiences are looking to user-generated content (UGC) as a data source: for insight into marketing strategies (e.g. Kladou and Mavragani 2015) or interpretive outcomes (e.g. Alexander, Blank and Hale 2018; Hodsdon 2020; Owens 2012), just as visitors' books have been similarly deployed (Macdonald 2005, 2006; Noy 2018). TripAdvisor is one such source that offers reviews with spontaneity and affective immediacy (Ramirez-Gutierrez *et al.* 2018), where:

> …the value of the review is based on the personal expression of feelings and emotions brought about by the travel experience […] [C]ontributors … take on a more personal and unpretentious tone. They express 'raw' positive and negative emotions such as pleasure, discontent, anxiety and relief. Most of these emotional expressions are not long, guarded reflections, but short, expressive exclamations of immediate pleasure or displeasure. (Munar and Ooi 2012: 8)

Though 'raw', they are not un-curated. The implied reader (Iser 1978), or imagined/presumed audience (Litt 2012) – likely comprising other tourists, affluent enough to travel (but in search of good value), and with the cultural capital to visit an art museum (Bourdieu 2010) – endows TripAdvisor with the characteristics of an imagined community (Kavoura and Borges 2016). There is also a performative element as reviewers curate their desired online identity

(Papacharissi 2012), with a positionality implying they are an "expert witness" (Jameson 2017: 121). Testimonies of 'fellow travellers' combined with its rating system mean that TripAdvisor is 'able to engender discursive authority at both the individual and collective levels' (Jameson 2017) and indeed is widely used as a decision-making tool by prospective visitors (Zeng and Gerritsen 2014). Reviews are thus a highly visible narrative of a destination, and reviewers' '[p]ersonal feelings and memories, whether accurate or appropriate or not, indeed are always a factor in the contexts in which historical consciousness is made, because they shape how an experience is remembered' (Crane 1997: 48). As potential additions to a destination's 'storyscape' (Chronis 2005), they offer a perspective on whether and how new narratives are added (or not) to that storyscape and the hegemonic narrative more broadly.

The data for this analysis comprises TripAdvisor reviews of the Musée d'Orsay written during the period of the exhibition (26 March-21 July 2019). They include all reviews in English (N=359), of which 83 (23%) mention *LMN*.[2] To increase the sample size of *LMN* reviews, a secondary dataset comprises all 134 reviews that mention the exhibition on other countries' TripAdvisor sites (e.g. tripadvisor.fr). These are primarily in French, with a very few in Dutch, German, and Italian. The two datasets were combined and coded into themes, removing metadata except for country of review (indicated where available or 'n.p.' when no location given).

TripAdvisor's accessible metadata includes limited demographic information, obscuring potentially interesting factors. Indeed, there is little consensus about who leaves reviews, although it has been suggested that they are predominantly young (Yoo & Gretzel 2011), male, and affluent (Yoo & Gretzel 2008). Of particular relevance here is that while the

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[2] In the English results below, therefore, the comparison is not between two distinct sets of individual reviewers, but between two distinct sets of data coded as 'permanent' or 'LMN': thus one review may contribute content to both datasets.

responses of people of colour and white visitors are likely constituted differently, ethnic identities are not evident in the metadata. Thus ethnicity is considered only when the reviewer states their own ethnic identity. While many French reviewers were evidently regular visitors of the museum (e.g. 'the organized exhibitions are **always** very interesting' (France)) and visited to see this exhibition, in line with the aims of TripAdvisor most reviewers appear to be tourists. We might assume that reviewers take these characteristics as cues to their imagined audience (Litt 2012) who, while likely possessing a certain degree of cultural capital, is not niche: the Orsay appears in most lists of 'top things to do in Paris' and received 3.6 million visitors in 2019 (www.musee-orsay.fr). This writing and reading community can thus be taken as broadly representative of those likely to engage with heritage narratives in general.

Results

The Musée d'Orsay was founded in 1986, combining existing collections 'to show the great diversity of artistic creation in the western world between 1848 and 1914' (www.musee-orsay.fr) in an extensive Impressionist and post-Impressionist collection. Housed in a large Beaux-Arts former railway station, it commands a view over the Seine, famously viewable through its clock tower. Enthusiastic comments on the building abound in the reviews, along with advice on practicalities (which ticket to buy, accessibility, restaurants, and queues). This is in keeping with the "expert witness" focus of TripAdvisor, and although it is likely that the touristic and museal discourses are not so distinct from the reviewer's perspective, the former will not be considered further here. To assess the discursive strategies of the permanent and temporary narratives relative to one another, I first consider discursive strategies pertaining to the Orsay's permanent collections, and then compare them with those used to respond to LMN.

'What you want to see'

A common discursive strategy in response to the permanent collection adopts an acquisitive, tabloid-esque focus on 'spotting' artists and works. Lists are a frequent means of conveying this. These may belie a certain enthusiastic acquisitiveness arguably alluding to a discourse of advertising – 'Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir **and more**' (Mexico [*bold text my emphasis here and throughout]*). Many lists are much longer. Ostensibly to endorse the prestige of the museum to prospective visitors, these are also a way for the reviewer to display their cultural knowledge and ability to speak in the high cultural currency of the museum: '…take in the splendor of the talent of Matisse, Renoir, Monet, Manet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Rodin, Pissaro, Cézanne, Degas' (UK). A set of 'tick-box' mini-experiences (Thurnell-Read 2017), Bal observes that this repetition is 'a particular strategy of cultural imperialism', where 'recognition is the basis for imagination; we cannot imagine what has no relation whatsoever with what we know already...' (Bal 1996: 147), and comprises an interpretative framework to the visit (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997). It is also a means of signalling social capital: as Noy observes, '[t]hrough articulating addressivities visitors are able to construct themselves as different types of social actors' (Noy 2018: 27), and the self-consciousness this implies is evident here.

The strategy of 'spotting' manifests itself too through personification of, and apostrophe to, the paintings, such as: '…you are **in the presence of** famous works of art and get that feeling of "Aha, **I know you!**"' (Canada). Some reviews construct artists as physically present: 'You can't go to Paris without **visiting Van Gogh**…' (US). This mere presence can evoke affect: 'To see Degas, Monet and Van Gogh **in person brought tears to my eyes**' (US). If 'feeling emotional involves the declaration of one's inner identity'

(Prentice and Andersen 2007: 662) then such highly affective responses reveal a cohesion between these artefacts of Western culture and the individual identifying with them.

Apostrophe is also used towards the reader of the review: 'All **your** impressionist artists are here' (Australia) – the second person pronoun colluding with the implied reader to evoke an assumed collective identity. This is understandable since, as Crane observes, 'Visitors are interlocutors without discussion partners in the museal conversation: they usually have only objects and text to respond to…' (1997: 48). The action of writing the review may thus itself form part of the interpretative process (Noy 2018: 27). Apostrophe is used to leverage collective identity with the imagined audience in a universalising conception of what *all* visitors are likely to want: 'Firstly, let me save **you** some time. **What you want to see** is probably on the 5th floor' (California). Indeed, one reviewer's normalizing perspective is so all-encompassing as to be expressed as universal: 'people from **all the world** and **if possible from other worlds**: do not hesitate 1 minute' (Italy). Another's normalizing strategy seeks to restrict rather than universalize their imagined audience, warning that there are 'Americans everywhere' (n.p.). Given that many reviewers are American, this belies an underlying assumption that the implied reader resembles themselves, even when this is demonstrably not the case.

The implied reader is similarly deployed as an interlocutor in the interpretative process in assumptions about Western cultural knowledge, or the 'artists **everyone has heard of**' (US). Alongside recognition lies the postmodern *frisson* of seeing the originals of such well-known works: 'some of **the biggest names are here** […]. It was **mesmerising** to […] **be confronted with** these famous images' (Ireland). A declarative tone indicates the non-negotiability of the canon: '**These are** masterpieces and **important to see at least once**…' (n.p.). Works outside this hegemonic, collective cultural currency act as a counterpart: 'Walk up to the 5 floor immediately as **you will recognize** the impressionist work […]. We did not

like the furniture exhibits […] - **these are a waste of time** (Canada)'; or '**Many instantly recognisable paintings.** Alongside this though a lot of **pretty naff** stuff' (UK). The reviews that juxtapose the recognizable with the unfamiliar manifest recognisability as an interpretative strategy (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997), here offered to prospective visitors to emulate. In these quasi-universalizing reviews is evident a normative response (re)constructing 'a certain set of Western elite cultural values as being universally applicable' (Smith 2006: 11).

This normatively constructed institutional knowledge of the 'usual suspects' (Smith 2006: 11) that comprise the hegemonic narrative is also evoked via a discourse of school, education, and learning. Allusions to educational experiences serve not only to display an individual's cultural competence (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997), but also to establish the collections as naturalized via the curriculum: one reviewer describes 'a work of art that **you had perhaps studied in school**' (US); another 'It has been decades **since I took Art Appreciation in college**' (US), seemingly downplaying their cultural capital even while affirming it. This discourse of education is even a path to affect, perhaps since it evokes the cohesive identity noted above. One reviewer states 'My daughters were **thrilled** to see many works of art that **they had learned about in school**' (US), while, for another, enacting formal knowledge emotively connects the abstract, intellectualized 'art history' with the 'in person' reality: 'I […] **walked into my art history books**. I had no idea **how moved I'd be** seeing the works in person' (US). This discourse of learning for another reviewer provides the key to a successful visit: '**By doing some homework and reading up** about the impressionists we really enjoyed this visit' (UK). Indeed, enjoyment may also lie in "objective" knowledge authorized by an expert: 'Sandrine took us to the **seminal** pieces and **explained what we were looking at**, **what we needed to notice and why it was important**' (Australia).

The hegemonic narrative inherent in the canon thus provides a route to successful interpretation of the display for those steeped in the 'discourse of school' (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997: 57), and its importance is clear in references to '**greatest hits** type artwork' (n.p.) at a museum where '**All the major** artists are exhibited…' (US) and you can see 'all the **biggies**' (Canada). Added to the authority of the museum, this establishes an 'authoritative regime of scientific discourse' (Luke 2002: 223). Reviewers fashion themselves as culturally elite consumers and connoisseurs of traditional Western art. These normative, institutionally sculpted encounters provide the impetus for a positive experience. The strength of the cohesion with the hegemonic narrative in these reviews might lead us to suspect that, in the face of the strength of this construction of fame and canon, visitors do not come to the museum to have this construction disrupted, but rather to have it confirmed (Bal 2010: 1099).

The discourse mechanisms of 'celebrity spotting' and institutional authority, together with constructions of a Western collective identity, comprise a clear hegemonic narrative of the museum experience (cf. Noy 2018) relayed to an imagined audience that shares these values. The importance of heritage in forging collective identity is well established (Anderson 2006) and in the coalescing normative reviews here is the 'discursive practice' of heritage actively forming and perpetuating a collective social experience (Hall 1999: 5) appropriate within the normalised narratives of the mainstream art museum (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997). The normative urge towards cultural conformity and individual capital constitutes a clear, collective voice that marks reviews of a standard visit to the Orsay as discursively consistent. Given the cultural context and content, none of this is surprising. The question is to what extent this coherent, consistent, and positive experience persists in the *LMN* context, and what *LMN* reviewers' discursive strategies reveal in comparison about how they process and present content that disrupts, rather than confirms, the recognizable.

Le Modèle Noir

LMN was based on archival research by Denise Murrell (Murrell 2018), and explores the depiction of Black models and artists from abolition to the present. The exhibition acknowledges that the history of art is inextricably linked with the history of society (Ndiaye & Madiner 2019) and comprises art from a variety of genres focusing particularly on the works of artists and models who are *méconnus* (unknown).

Perhaps as its challenge to hegemony was arguably more provocative than polemic, and perhaps too due to bias in this dataset (with negative or indifferent reviewers less likely to mention it), very few reviews of the exhibition are negative. One sees it as tokenistic: 'Less sure about […] the "efforts to give them a name" **are many white models named**? Is this **just an effort** to be **pc** [politically correct]? (UK)' – the dismissive 'just an effort' undermining the exhibition's programme, as of course is the function of the phrase 'pc' itself. Another (France), whose main review constitutes an extraordinarily long, quasi-formal catalogue (out of place in TripAdvisor and a strong performance of cultural capital), also suspects an agenda of 'political correctness' and is incredulous that re-titling will have an impact. This re-titling involved, for example, re-naming Marie Guillemine Benoist's *Portrait d'une Négresse* as *Portrait de Madeleine*, or a bronze bust by Charles Cordier *Vénus africaine* in place of *Vénus noire.* It is interesting, indeed, that media reporting seeking eye-catching headlines focused on the renaming[3], since this comprised only a small part of the narrative of the exhibition. This interest in the act of re-labelling even non-canonical works speaks to the understated radicalism of making even the slightest discursive incursions into the hegemonic narrative. This despite the fact that such re-naming is only in the context of

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[3] e.g. 'French masterpieces renamed after black subjects in new exhibition' (Guardian 2019), 'Paris museum renames masterpieces after black subjects' (france24.com).
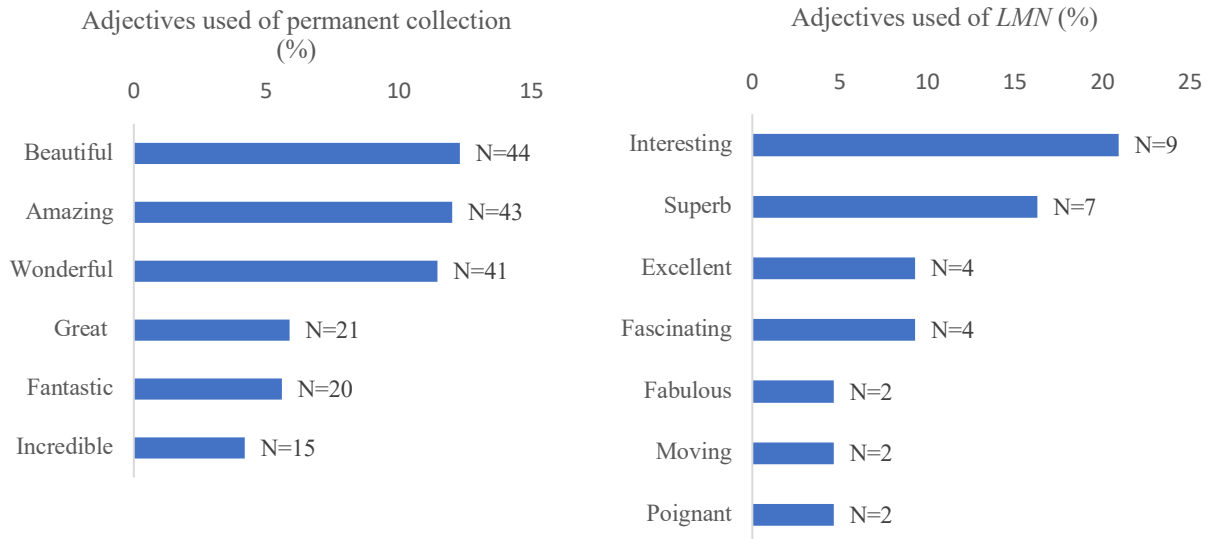
the exhibition, and as such is a temporary act of discursive rebellion rather than a substantive change to the hegemonic norm.

LMN reviews – in contrast to those of the permanent collection – are notable for their variability, even in apparently factual observations. Terminology about the exhibition's subjects varies: 'people of colour', 'dark-skinned models' (n.p.), 'Africans' (n.p), 'le noir' (France). This inconsistency in vocabulary points to a lack of common linguistic resource even at the most basic level of just *who* is being seen (resounding with broader societal issues when it comes to discussing race and ethnicity[4]). Other constructions of *LMN*'s subject matter vary: 'histoire de l'esclavage' (France), 'Black Identity' (Canada), 'African representation in Art' (Australia), 'Abolitionist Art' (US). Far from the coherent narrative describing 'all your favourites', the variation in terminology and content description is indicative of the lack of a collective cultural lens through which to view a narrative that does not conform to the norm.

At an experiential and affective level, too, there is lexical variation between the standard Orsay and *LMN* reviews. Comparison of the adjectives most commonly used in each context reveals a contrast between an emotive discourse in the former and cognitive in the latter:[5]

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[4] It may also point to a socially awkward reticence to mention race at all. Jameson notes that only one of 111 TripAdvisor reviews of Black Harlem tours mentions the words 'racist' or 'segregation', despite their being mentioned in the tours (Jameson 2017).

[5] The terms in French (from the *LMN* secondary dataset) are not included in the graph since there are no French reviews in the general dataset, but are comparable to the English in sentiment, '*belle*', '*magnifique'* and '*riche'* being most common. To include only words used more than once, all adjectives used in more than 4% of each sample are shown.

Adjectives used of permanent collection (%)

Beautiful	N=44
Amazing	N=43
Wonderful	N=41
Great	N=21
Fantastic	N=20
Incredible	N=15

Scale: 0, 5, 10, 15

Adjectives used of *LMN* (%)

Interesting	N=9
Superb	N=7
Excellent	N=4
Fascinating	N=4
Fabulous	N=2
Moving	N=2
Poignant	N=2

Scale: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25

Not only are there no words in common, but 'Beautiful', 'Amazing' and 'Wonderful', while equally superlative as 'Interesting', 'Superb' and 'Excellent', are arguably more emotive and visceral than the latter. Those used of *LMN* do evince enthusiasm but (except for 'moving' and 'poignant', the least frequently occurring) suggest an intellectual response. This may be an inevitable – and indeed desired – outcome, representing the change from usual patterns of thinking that is needed for a lasting shift in perspective. The cognitive shift in engaging with a hitherto unknown, untold story may be a function of the lack of familiarity, and 'Respondents unfamiliar with a destination have been found to use largely cognitive evaluations, whereas those familiar with the destination have been found both to use affective evaluations' (Prentice and Andersen 2007: 662).

Indeed, longer reactions vary in the extent to which they bely a personalized, emotive engagement with the subject matter. Some reactions are focalized through the reviewer, expressing a personal reaction. For example, one reviewer who identifies themself as a person of colour highlights the disruptive potential of gallery walls dominated by Black figures. The generalizing second person pronoun this time addresses other people of colour, evoking a collective identity additional to that of the hegemonic:

the truth is **you** can go your entire life walking through museums […] and not see **yourself** ESPECIALLY painted by a nonBlack artist. So, **for me**, walking through this exhibit was sort of **an out of body experience.** (US)

The embodied – or rather disembodied – affect of this reviewer's experience contrasts with the intellectualized distancing described above. Another reviewer of 'European and American' heritage adopts a similarly personal perspective:

Helped **us** to **reflect deeply** on the artistic contributions of Blacks and on the **horrors** of slavery and discrimination. **We** could only **imagine** what Black people attending this are thinking — and would have appreciated a dialogue, which **we are sure would be transformative for us European and American types**. (Mexico)

Immersed ('imagine'), affected ('horrors'), empathetic ('imagine what Black people…are thinking') and open to the transformative potential (though not actuality) of such initiatives, this reviewer owns their reaction and their heritage ('we' and 'us'), the self-effacing 'types' arguably serving as a rhetorical effort to downplay their ethnic identity. Another is explicit about their own reactions, both positive and negative: '**I'm embarrassed** that I never knew Alexandre Dumas was black, but **was proud** that the French have a history of welcoming people with different color skin' (Israel). Another review's first-person perspective goes into no detail about the nature of their engagement: '**Nous** avons tous été **captivés**' ['we were all captivated'] (France). The personal experience as discursively constituted in these reviews reveals self-reflective engagement in the alternative narrative, and hints at a potentially impactful meaning-making process. And yet, these four comprise the sum total of *LMN* reviews (1.8%) that adopt the first person.

Others, conversely, construct their reaction using the third person as general, rather than personal:

The visitor witnesses the battles about slavery (n.p.)

On apprend énormément de choses sur l'esclavage et la colonisation [We learnt [*lit.* one learns] a lot about slavery and colonization] (France)

Temporary exhibition of blacks **made an impression** (n.p.)

Alternatively, second person apostrophe rhetorically shifts the response away onto an imagined interlocutor: '**You have never seen** this narrative and material presented before' (US). The seemingly spontaneous reaction is thus placed at arm's length, assumptions about the implied reader comprising the reviewer's articulation of the novelty of the subject matter whilst absolving them of the responsibility for that novelty. It is not that reviewers do not own or personalize their reactions to the *museum* experience; they do, and examples in responses to the permanent collections include:

It was a **religious** experience **for me** (n.p.)

I am mesmerized by the impressionists... (US)

I was surprised to find myself being somewhat emotionally affected… (Canada)

The normative discourse's embodied, focalized perspective, through use of the first person and highly personal and emotive vocabulary ('religious', 'mesmerized', 'affected') stands in clear contrast to the second and third person distancing in reactions to *LMN*. This intellectual, cognitive stance is also manifest in reviews that offer quasi-critical appraisal:

Interesting, rather than great, **material** (n.p.)

Une exposition très diversifiée et **pédagogique** [A very diverse and **educational** exhibition] (France)

The current "Black Models" exhibition is superb with **a very strong historical presence and a careful selection of important works** to help tell the story (US)

These references to the act of curation impose the habitualised patterns of seeing of the gallery (Bal 2010: 1120), as well as possibly the role of the TripAdvisor reviewer as 'expert' (Jameson 2017). Even other reviews' affective reactions are couched in evaluative terms:

'The special noir exhibit that was on at the time was good, **the standard of art** on show was **breathtaking**' (UK). Nevertheless, there are indications that this may comprise the opportunity to discover new artists:

> **découvrir ou redécouvrir** de très belles **oeuvres** [discover or rediscover really beautiful works] (France)

> On y **découvre** des **merveille de peintres connus ou moins connus** [We discovered gems of well-known and less well-known artists] (France)

The use of the verb 'to discover' in these reviews (interestingly both from French reviewers who are more likely to have sought out the exhibition than tourists) stands as a pro-active counterpart to the discourse of acquisition so distinctive of the general Orsay reviews, and points to the potential shift in knowledge and thought processes that the exhibition seeks to achieve.

Overall, however, reviews that construct a self-conscious alternative narrative are relatively few. One such notes that the exhibition is 'en dehors des schémas convenus' ['outside conventional schemas'] (Martinique); another, generalizing into the second person, reflects: '**Makes you realise** that in fact every large museum should have a department for black art' (Austria), interestingly qualifying only 'large' museums, and stating that the 'permanent exhibition […] is **precious and unique**', not considering that the overarching discourse itself might be subject to change. Interrogation of the normative museum clearly comprises additive rather than disruptive adjustment. Notably, in the entire dataset there is *no* review that reveals whether the reviewer's visit to *LMN* influenced their perspective on the rest of the museum (cf. Naidoo 2019: 34). This despite, for example, Blanchard's bronze bust *Femme Arabe* in the 'Orientalism' gallery in the room next to the exhibition, or the racialized and sexualised paintings and carvings by Gauguin in the room directly above.

Discussion

This analysis has shown greater variation and fragmentation in discursive constructions of the *LMN* experience than that of the permanent collection. The difference itself is not necessarily surprising: the 'discursive countermove' is by definition positioned to effect change, and uniform responses across the temporary and permanent collections would arguably constitute a failure to disrupt the hegemonic narrative. However, the ways in which the discursive strategies have been shown to vary in this case study raise questions about temporary exhibitions' role within the wider museum experience, particularly as it pertains to broad conversations about social justice. Specifically, this analysis has revealed the lack of a shared language or collective identity that reviewers can appeal to or co-opt in the alternative discourse context of the exhibition as compared with the permanent collection. Reviewers describe *LMN* using disparate language and terminology; react intellectually rather than affectively; and use distancing pronouns and descriptions rather than embodying their reactions.

This is in some ways an advantage. Recalling that unfamiliarity lends itself to cognitive evaluations, and familiarity affective (Prentice and Andersen 2007: 662), it is perhaps inevitable that a disruption to the expected, hegemonic discourse is processed differently. The language of discovery (*découvrir*) deployed by two French reviewers also points to this openness to the new and represents the potential of processing new narratives into existing ones. There are also indications that more casual visitors' narratives may also be open to change – as those reviews in the first person expressing and owning emotive reactions suggest.

Other differences between the two discursive strategies, however, might give more pause as to the potential efficacy of the temporary in contesting the hegemonic narrative; or at least point to the need for more explicit consideration of this approach, particularly in the context of measuring impact and to inform future countermoves. The stark contrast between

the discursive unity and assumed collective identity of reviews of the permanent collection, and the fragmented, more hesitant and disparate discourse of the temporary, may be in part a function of the novelty of the latter, as well as the comparatively small sample size of the *LMN* dataset. Nevertheless, it may also point to more fundamental issues that need to be better understood if temporary exhibitions are to address issues of justice and hegemony. *LMN* indeed gave 'all these people back a name, a history, and a visibility' (Musée d'Orsay 2019): but for how long?

Without recourse to the culturally homogeneous, normalised context and the canonical, hegemonic narrative of Western society bolstered by homogenous discourses of collective identity, it is easy to see how fragmented constructions in response to *LMN* emerge. *LMN's* collection was arguably, with the exception of Manet's *Olympia*, non-canonical, so the discursive strategy of listing famous artists or paintings, with its implicit appeal to collective Western knowledge, cannot manifest itself. Relatedly, the relative lack of famous artists means that the *frisson* of recognition (Culler 1990) that reviewers of the prevailing narrative evince does not form part of the discursive response to *LMN* in this dataset. Further, since marginalised narratives are rarely taught in the Western school system (an omission that contributes to the status quo (Salinas, Blevins, and Sullivan 2012)), the discursive strategy of appealing to shared education and the authority of the institution does not cohere around (an assumed) shared understanding of what is on display, as is enabled in the standard visit.

If the aim of an exhibition is to re-write or supplement the 'script' (Winchester 2012) to contest the hegemonic narrative, we might assume that some shift in the discourse that constitutes that narrative is necessary for lasting change. On the basis of this analysis at least, this does not appear to be the case: the discursive divergence suggests that the temporary exhibition may lack the discursive power here to achieve substantive change to the hegemonic narrative. This is of course a case study only, limited in size and in representativeness of the

sample, as well as in the data source: more in-depth interviews with visitors, for example, may well yield discursive constructions of a different kind. Nevertheless, the unmediated reactions here are in themselves revealing through what is and also what is not said. Rather than shifting the narrative, what can be seen here is not an addition or change but a new separate, fragmented discourse. The divergent discursive constructions of reviewers are indicative of divergent cognitive and affective experiences in a way that leads us to question the relationship of the two in constituting the hegemonic narrative as a whole; and it is revealing that no reviewers of *LMN* connect their visit to the exhibition with their experience of the permanent collection of the Musée d'Orsay.

Implications

Returning to Stuart Hall's challenge to the heritage sector quoted at the opening of this article, the role of such discursive countermoves can be considered. Reflecting on the impact of museums' responses, Naidoo asks whether 'there is a sense of simply 'fixing' exhibition practices to make them more in tune with current sensibilities around 'race' and colonisation' (Naidoo 2004: 40). The alternative – a systemic re-evaluation of prevailing narratives – would involve the daunting challenge of interrogating and overcoming 'immovable' (Hall 1999: 8) truths inhabited as natural, timeless, and inevitable. During a revision of displays at MoMA, the chief curator of painting and sculpture suggested that there would be a "revolution" if Monet's *Waterlilies* were removed (*The Guardian* 2019); and the so-called "culture wars" during 2020 surrounding the removal of contested heritage such as statues seem to justify such stark predictions. There is thus a balance to be struck between structural dismantling of the narrative and countermoves against it: for a silenced or marginalised group, counter-storytelling has long been acknowledged as a valuable resource (Nguyen 2020; Golding 2019). But it is possible that the spatial and temporal separateness of the

exhibition may act as a barrier to discursive formation of a more solid and lasting alternative narrative. Despite the freedom and 'democratic potential' (Nguyen 2020) afforded by the temporary, the fragmentation observed here suggests that temporary discursive countermoves risk becoming subsumed by the prevailing narrative precisely by dint of being spatially and temporally located on the periphery (Sandell 2005: 190). This is perhaps inevitable when 'oppositional discourses are […] confined to places where they can be acknowledged (grudgingly or otherwise) but [do] not cause us to rethink the building-blocks and foundations of the rest of our knowledge' (Naidoo 2004: 34). *LMN*'s discursive presence among reviews reflects its physical space within the gallery itself: smaller, separate, and outside the standard visit.

This points to the possibility that harnessing the discursive power of the prevailing narrative could influence how audiences co-construct alternatives: including more 'famous' works may result in more cohesive discursive responses, co-opting the normative museum experience to this complementary narrative context; or an exhibition might highlight objects within the permanent collection using the lens of the exhibition (Golding 2013: 95). Thus the two narrative strands may become linked within a coherent offering while acknowledging that the temporal, spatial, and substantive separation of the hegemonic and alternative narratives is practical, not epistemological.

If, as this analysis suggests, the alternative narrative and its effect (and affect) is potentially rendered less powerful by this more ephemeral discourse world (Tolia-Kelly 2006: 6); and if, once a story is told, it disappears into the silence from which it came, then what is the lasting value of the temporary exhibition as discursive countermove? If visitors' interpretive strategies to permanent and temporary displays are distinct, then these different ways of co-creating meaning need to be better understood, particularly in the context of measuring impact and to inform future exhibition practice.

Conclusion

The analysis in this article is of course a small piece of the puzzle, as it is a snapshot of a self-selecting sample of reactions to one exhibition at a single point in time. Triangulating this across different discourse contexts and different exhibitions, particularly taking into account varying demographic groups, would be a fruitful avenue for further investigation. This would offer a deeper and broader understanding of the discursive construction of alternative narratives, and provide further clues as to how the hegemonic narrative can be meaningfully and sustainably impacted. And if, as is likely, the impact is felt in other ways – such as influencing future curatorial praxis; in individuals becoming increasingly open to alternative narratives; or in multiple fragmented narratives in different fora gradually cohering and coalescing over time – then change may emerge rather by increments than by individual museums' utterances. As Winchester observes, alongside the singular hegemonic narrative, 'over a long trajectory, museums throng with change as the ideas, displays and objects that are considered important are modified over time' (Winchester 2012: 145).

This article has suggested that analysis of visitors' discursive constructions of the temporary exhibition is a potentially rich and nuanced source of insight into the relationship between it and the permanent collection, and its potential for impact on the hegemonic heritage narrative. If the aim of temporary exhibitions as discursive countermoves is to systemically and sustainably refigure the 'largely unconscious and thus unreflective, cognitive templates of how the world functions' (Carter 2015: 3), then better understanding discursive reactions to alternative narratives could contribute to addressing the elusiveness of sustainable narrative change.

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