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Chapter 12

Balancing acts

Science, *Enola Gay* and History Wars at the Smithsonian

Thomas F. Gieryn

A pair of still-smouldering exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution of Washington provide the occasion to consider defensive epistemologies available to historians and curators whose scholarly representations of the past come under fire. *Science in American Life* opened at the National Museum of American History in April 1994, to mixed reviews: some believe that the exhibition superbly shows the interactions between science and American society since the 1860s; others believe that it concentrates on the risks and horrors engendered by science while giving short shrift to its benefits. Across the mall at the National Air and Space Museum, an exhibition planned as *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* was never built. It was to have displayed the *Enola Gay* (from whose bomb bay the atomic age was born) as the pivotal moment between hot war and Cold, revisiting the justification for dropping bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while also considering its legacy – from the immediate victims to 'mutually assured destruction'. After contentious fits and starts, the *Enola Gay's* fuselage eventually made it into the Air and Space Museum in June 1995, but relatively naked, wrapped only in a video showing pilots and crew.

These controversial museum exhibitions are strategic sites for exploring bothersome epistemological-cum-political issues of metahistory because, in the end, only one Smithsonian exhibition of science (or of the *Enola Gay*) could be built.¹ The negotiation of contents could not be a permanent solution, and while it is surely the case that finished exhibitions always lend themselves to diverse readings, those readings must be extracted from only one finite collation of artefacts and captions. In this sense, history in museums becomes a kind of zero-sum matter:² who decides what is to be shown about science or about the *Enola Gay*, on what grounds, and what happens when selections are contested?

Absent from these debates is big Truth: facts whose transcendent validity is grounded in their unmediated correspondence to historical reality before we got back there with concepts, theories and interpretative frames. Everywhere instead are little truths whose legitimacy rests not on reality but on normatively enforced standards of evidence, argument and purpose consensually shared

among a bounded community of knowledge makers. But museum exhibitions like *SAL* and *Crossroads* bring into play *several* epistemic cultures (Knorr Cetina 1997) from within and outside the academy – historians and sociologists of science and of the Second World War, natural scientists, veterans' associations – each with a stake in how our pasts are represented. Ensuing controversies shift from debates about what really happened to debates about the conditions of legitimately knowing the past and about the fidelity of its knowers. The two cases raise troubling thoughts about the vogue relativism implied when 'facts' are replaced by 'stories'. How *will* history be represented in public museums when it must become the conjoint product of several competing epistemic cultures with incongruent standards of evidence, argument and purpose?

It may never have been possible for museum curators to defend a certain representation of history with appeals to 'the way it really was'; I don't know.³ I do know that such realist or positivist or essentialist discourse disappears almost completely from efforts by Smithsonian curators at *SAL* and at *Crossroads* to legitimize the artefacts they chose to include and the interpretative scripts they wrote to give meaning to things. But, interestingly, neither is an appeal to 'what really happened' found much in passionate efforts by *critics* of these exhibits to change their content or interpretative spin – for *SAL*, its erstwhile patron the American Chemical Society, along with other professional associations of scientists; for *Crossroads*, the Air Force Association, allied veterans' groups and journalists enrolled to the cause. When the language of historical realism does enter the fray, it gets inverted – as an invective stuck to one's adversaries in the 'Museum Wars'. *They* (curator, critic) insist that the Smithsonian tell only one history, what actually happened. *We* (critic, curator) seek a *balanced* display that reflects the diversity of opinions and beliefs about what happened and why, invites multiple readings of artefacts and encourages museum visitors to decide history for themselves. *Their* insistence on True history, getting all the facts straight, when set down next to *our* modest request for balance, shows *them* for what *they* really are: an interest group seeking to ram some political or professional agenda disguised as History down the throats of Smithsonian audiences. Once, maybe, facts entered such controversies as support for the legitimacy of a historical representation; now they enter only to delegitimize opponents' claims.

I am intrigued both by these post-realist attempts to attach authenticity to a particular representation of history, and by the symmetry in rhetorical moves by curators and critics. War may indeed be a dance, where enemies are forced by the requirements of combat to become alike. One side responds to charges that they have imposed History by claiming to seek only balance – just what their opponents claim to seek. This mutual embrace of balance creates problems of an Orwellian kind: some exhibits evidently are more balanced than others. How do curators and critics legitimize their preferred exhibit as balanced while persuasively showing the adversaries' exhibit to be off-balance – without a historical reality that seemingly could decide the matter simply by the facts

alone? Both sides replace Truth with hues of objectivity: *we* can be trusted, *they* deceive; *our* perspective is unfettered, *they* wear blinkers; *we* are disinterested, *they* are political. When history as it happened is no longer available to settle contests over its public representation, curators and critics in these controversies turn to other registers of authenticity and credibility: trust, privileged perspective, disinterest. Decisions about exhibitions must, it seems, be reached via decisions about exhibitors.⁴

I cannot gloss the contents of *SAL* and those proposed for *Crossroads* without appearing to take sides in battles that never reached consensus and where few were persuaded by good argument or reason to change their minds. I prefer to let the exhibitions emerge from and through debates among curators and critics while I remain agnostic about the verity of anybody's claim to what the exhibition really is or should be. I pursue a symmetric analysis of the symmetric rhetoric, using the same interpretative concepts from the same outside unattached epistemic standpoint to explain identical positionings and moves of both curators and critics.⁵ Such agnosticism and symmetry will be hard for me to enforce. I was a member of the advisory committee for *SAL*, appointed by Smithsonian curators to bring in a sociological or science studies perspective (i.e., to provide them with ammunition to lob back at advisers appointed by the American Chemical Society (ACS) who might wish to make *SAL* into better living through chemistry).⁶ And, as a resident of academe for two decades, I find the standards of truth-telling in 'my' epistemic culture of sociologists and historians far more compelling than those of the Air Force Association or American Legion (I petitioned for conscientious objector status as a pacifist during the Vietnam War).

Can I avoid doing an inside job on *SAL* and *Crossroads*? You decide, after reading this agnostic analysis of the Museum Wars. I offer a textual display⁷ of both sides (in each case) seeking balance, putting opponents off-balance by accusing them of ersatz Real History, securing authenticity via registers of trust, perspective and disinterestedness. I end pessimistic about the possibility of consensual representations of history in museum settings where stakeholders (i.e., everybody involved) live in rival epistemic communities and lack trust in the credibility and sincerity of the other side. Little truths are no match for power, which carried the day both at *SAL* and at *Crossroads*. To conclude that the survival of the curators' preferred exhibition at *SAL* is a triumph of good scholarship over power, and that the *Enola Gay* is a story about how good scholarship was crucified by political power, is exactly the asymmetric reading I hope to avoid.

'EVERYBODY WANTS BALANCE'

'Desperately seeking balance' becomes the mantra of Smithsonian curators charged with the task of telling tales of American science and the *Enola Gay* – and of their critics. To repeat and repeat again what *SAL*'s lead curator and

historian of science Arthur Molella said of his exhibition would quickly bore – ‘it is true that we deal with some controversial topics, but “Science in American Life” presents them in a balanced way’.⁸ Roger Kennedy, Molella’s former boss at the National Museum of American History, chants: ‘The NMAH exhibition team reaffirms its commitment to the goals and balanced tone of the exhibition’.⁹ As does I. Michael Heyman, who became Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution *tout court* in September 1994, and who promised that changes in response to criticism by the American Physical Society would ‘render the exhibition a lot more balanced’ (in Macilwain 1996: 95).

‘Balance’ seems to refer both to the substance of materials to be displayed in the exhibition and to the process through which they were selected. Looking at the finished product, Molella and his assistant Carlene Stephens write that *SAL* represents ‘not only the benefits but also costs, consequences and social responsibility’ (Molella and Stephens 1996: 99) that attend the growing significance of science in America. A member of the advisory board, its only sociologist, says much the same thing in a letter to *The New York Times*:

For every example of where . . . science [is] tied to unspeakable horrors, visitors will find an example of accomplishment and human betterment . . . In this exhibition, science does not come off to us as [a] . . . demon behind environmental degradation, nuclear fear and social injustice, but neither does it become a blameless panacea for these and other ills.

(Gieryn 1995: 14)

A balanced representation of the good and evil wrought by science is said to result from a process of exhibition-negotiation that was itself balanced – in appreciating and reflecting diverse interpretations of the past. Molella says that ‘the final narrative was the product of open and vigorous debate’ (Molella 1994a: 13) among curators, advisory board members and scholarly consultants. It was important to arrive at an exhibition that ‘avoids taking sides’, even though ‘consensus among the curators on the team was not easily achieved’ (Molella and Stephens 1996: 97, 100). Molella is at pains to suggest that the issues covered by *SAL* are ‘highly debatable’, and that respect for the multiplicity of framings was achieved by enlarging the number and background experiences (and interests) of those who participated in its making. Neither ‘members of the American scientific community’ nor ‘scientists, sociologists, historians and educators on our exhibit’s advisory committee’ (Molella 1994b: 13) believe that there can be only one reading of science in American life, but their presence at occasionally contentious deliberations about the exhibition ensured that it would depict both the up-side of science, and its down.

For *SAL* curators, a balanced exhibition is also one which invites visitors to draw their own conclusions from a rich display of materials that does not steer them in only one direction. The goal is to raise questions rather than provide answers: ‘the exhibit does . . . force the visitor to confront questions about the relationship between science and society – questions that were, presumably,

precisely the ones that the curators wanted us to consider’ (Lewenstein 1996: 12). Molella suggests that *SAL* invites visitors themselves to participate in controversies over the place of science in American society, as he draws a self-exemplifying connection between science as an orderly debate about reality and democracy as an orderly debate about political principles: ‘our goal was not to stir up controversy but to provide challenging and balanced information about the fascinating entanglement of science in society’ (Molella 1994b: 2); ‘Far from being detrimental, dissent and debate are essential to scientific progress, as they are to the health of a democratic society’ (Molella 1995). Audience surveys conducted since the exhibition opened suggest that *SAL* may have succeeded in its goal to provide a display so balanced that visitors would be able to make their own informed judgments. Most visitors enter the exhibition feeling generally positive about science, and ‘their views were reinforced rather than changed in either a positive or negative direction’ (in Macilwain 1996: 95). One reviewer found *SAL* so successful in reaching what (evidently) everybody wanted for it that it came out ‘balanced to the point of being innocuous’ (Kleiner 1995).

Identical themes turn up in defence of the never-built *Crossroads* exhibition, with its *Enola Gay*. Martin Harwit, astrophysicist and historian of science, was ‘relieved’ of his position as Director of the National Air and Space Museum in the wake of the controversy, and has been the most vigorous defender of both the aims and achievements of the exhibition. In one of many letters that he wrote to explain the aims of *Crossroads* to increasingly hostile critics from veterans’ organizations and eventually Congress,¹⁰ Harwit suggests that ‘this exhibit will give a balanced account of the decision to drop the bomb, the 509th Composite Group, the missions themselves and the aftermath’ (Harwit 1996: 137). The proposed script went through many revisions and the exhibition changed its name more than once as balance proved to be elusive.¹¹ Secretary Heyman was, early on, convinced that a revised script ‘now strikes the appropriate balance’ (in *ibid.*: xii), although he would later kill the elaborate display of the *Enola Gay* in favour of a stripped-down version. In the wake of mounting criticism that *Crossroads* lacks balance (discussed shortly), Harwit formed a ‘Tiger Team’ review to ‘be certain that the exhibition we mount is indeed balanced’ (*ibid.*: 280). At times, even military historians such as Alfred Goldberg, Historian for the Secretary of Defense, could endorse *Crossroads* as a ‘balanced presentation’ (in *ibid.*: 307); or former Air Force historian Richard H. Kohn, who praised the text as ‘cautious and balanced’ (Kohn 1996: 148).

As with *SAL*, the goal of balance blurs substantive content and process: incorporating diverse perspectives becomes the means for telling a whole story. For its defenders, *Crossroads* is substantively balanced because it anchors the *Enola Gay* in the history that came before and in the future that was to come. Harwit replies to his arch-critic John T. Correll, editor in chief of *Air Force* magazine: ‘it will show the circumstances that led to the development and

ultimate use of the atomic bomb. It will show the immediate consequences of the bombings, the rapid increase of nuclear arsenals over the forty-year-long Cold War, and the present-day dismantling of nuclear weaponry' (Harwit 1994: 4). Such a balanced tale cannot be told from the vantage-point of one but only from those of many: scholars, documents, diplomatic eye-witnesses, veterans, the Japanese. Thomas L. Freudenheim, Assistant Secretary at the Smithsonian, puts the *Enola Gay* squabble in a broader context of the political mandate of the museum, which, 'as a national museum . . . cannot therefore take only one point of view on this question, given the diversity of opinion in this country' – and ends with the predictable invocation of 'balanced and thoughtful' (in Harwit 1996: 130). Harwit 'wanted to make sure we also included the point of view of the vanquished as well as the point of view of the victors' (in Correll 1994a: 28), and not just to avoid a diplomatic incident in then-declining relations between the United States and Japan. He knew 'how careful we would need to be to respect Japanese sensitivities' (Harwit 1996: 56). But balance also demanded that Harwit respect the sensitivities of veterans' groups and historians, something he was surely willing (but, in the end, unable) to do. In a letter hoping to cool out Donald Rehl, a B-29 pilot in the 509th Composite Group that was trained to deliver the atomic bomb, Harwit writes: 'This exhibit will give a balanced account of the decision to drop the bomb . . . All points of view will be represented, including of course the viewpoint of veterans such as yourself' (ibid.: 137). *Crossroads* was to have featured video-taped recollections from various players, including Paul Tibbetts (pilot of the *Enola Gay*, named by him after his mother), Japanese and American soldiers, scholars, survivors of the blast and – to emphasize interpretative diversity – Curtis LeMay and Kurt Vonnegut (ibid.: 107, 181).

A balanced exhibition invites visitors to participate in scholarly and political debates over the bomb, by providing them with the historical wherewithal to decide for themselves. Questions are posed; answers always hedged. In the earliest proposal for an *Enola Gay* display, Michael Neufeld (he and Tom Crouch were the curators in charge) admits that 'controversy is nonetheless unavoidable', but the purpose of the exhibition remains 'to convey to the general public some of the moral and political dilemmas of the decision to drop the bomb' (in ibid.: 121). Harwit assures Robert McC. Adams, Heyman's predecessor at the Smithsonian's helm, that 'the exhibit will deliberately avoid judgement or the imposition of any particular point of view, but will give visitors enough information to form their own impressions' (ibid.: 108). Evidently concerned that his curators did not get the point, Harwit wrote to Crouch: 'Where is it that a visitor ever has a chance to formulate an independent opinion? Where does a visitor have a chance to see for himself whether the war in the Far East differed from that in Europe, or for that matter from other wars throughout history? . . . But the headings seem to be overly dramatic and one-sided . . . If anything, the labels must be dispassionate, perhaps even bland . . . so that visitors will not be forced into one particular line of thinking' (ibid.: 184).

There is little news, I suppose, in hearing that scholars/curators hope to achieve exhibits that reflect a diversity of opinion about science and the *Enola Gay*, that refrain from imposing a party line on museum visitors, that present events as having both good and evil consequences. Such attitudes towards the representation of history are enshrined as norms governing this community of scholars and knowledge makers – disinterestedness, scepticism, detachment and multi-valency. It may be more surprising for historians and sociologists in particular to learn that they have no monopoly on such an appreciation of balance. Chemists who criticized *SAL* and veterans' organizations which criticized *Crossroads* took up the same language in defence of the different exhibitions they hoped to see at the Smithsonian (and, in the case of the *Enola Gay*, did see). Neither curator nor critic fought these battles with the weapon of Truth, or History as it really was: everybody pursued balance.

Very little criticism of *SAL* has yet made it to print. Unlike the controversy over *Crossroads* (which quickly moved into the mass media), organizations of scientists unhappy with the Smithsonian's emerging portrait of science voiced their concerns in letters to curators and museum executives or in meetings behind closed doors. The American Chemical Society did not believe that it received a good return on its \$5 million investment in *SAL*, and one year after the exhibition opened the ACS formed a special committee of its Board of Directors to negotiate changes. After another year of apparently futile efforts to reframe *SAL*, Joan E. Shields (chairman of the Special Board Committee on the Smithsonian Exhibition) wrote in *Chemical and Engineering News* that the ACS had in effect washed its hands of *SAL*: 'further negotiations would be unproductive'. All along, the ACS desired only balance in the public representation of science in American life. The 'specific changes' requested by the ACS 'would provide more balance', but when left unchanged 'the Smithsonian still does not provide the desired balance in the exhibition' (Shields 1996).

This hope for balance echoes what critics of *SAL* had been saying from the start. Minutes of the first meeting of the *SAL* Advisory Board show several members arguing that 'the script needed more balance'.¹² At the ceremonial opening of the exhibition, ACS chairman of the Board, Paul H. L. Walter, was constrained by norms of celebration to declare in his after dinner remarks that *SAL* presents 'millions of people with a balanced view of what science and chemistry have done'.¹³ Later assessments by scientists were less charitable: Burton Richter, president of the American Physical Society, volunteered the assistance of his society to work with the Smithsonian toward refashioning 'a more balanced portrayal of the impact of science and technology on American life' (in Holden, 1994).

Critics suggest that the as-built *SAL* plays up the unwanted and often disastrously unanticipated by-products of science at the expense of its many salutary accomplishments – and so lacks balance in its substance. Robert Park of the APS gently reminds the Smithsonian 'that advances in science have a potential for harm as well as benefits' (Park 1994: 209), while chemist Ned

Heindel of the Advisory Board is less gentle: 'there are a handful of places in *SAL* where the negative impact is not adequately balanced by good things' (in Nemecek 1995: 2). Park then pulls off his gloves for some serious slugging: 'The atomic bomb [*SAL* has a mushroom cloud] is the ultimate symbol of science as an instrument of death and terror. What could an exhibit possibly offer to "balance" nuclear weapons? Surely not nylon stockings. Perhaps the development of antibiotics . . . No hint that penicillin, along with the other antibiotics that followed, has saved many thousands of lives for every life taken by nuclear weapons and radioactive waste' (Park 1994: 208). To rebalance *SAL* as an even-handed display of good and bad outcomes of science would accomplish what Shields presents as the ACS's interest in becoming financial backer of the exhibition: 'to improve the public understanding of science' (Shields 1996). Just as curator Molella conceived of balance as providing the opportunity for museum visitors to reach their own informed conclusions about science in American life, so does Heindel believe that the point of *SAL* is 'to give the public at least some of the basics to help it make informed decisions about such issues as recycling, safety of genetically engineered foods, and the risks and benefits of having a manufacturing plant in its community' (in Ross 1994: 4). But it failed, says biologist Paul Gross, who sees *SAL* as sickened by the same anti-science virus that afflicts academic science studies, because 'people were not given the chance to judge for themselves'.¹⁴

The same theme emerges from the more voluminous criticisms of *Crossroads*. Editor Correll's exposé of goings-on at the National Air and Space Museum elicited a letter to his *Air Force* magazine: 'We had been assured that the *Enola Gay* exhibit sought only to show a balanced view of the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – the horrors of war for all participants' (Lambert 1994: 5). But such was not on the drawing board: Air Force historian Richard Hallion believes that the reason Harwit, Couch and Neufeld 'came under heavy pressure' was 'because the *Enola Gay* script was not in balance nor context' (in Correll 1994b: 64), and because they offered 'a vastly unbalanced visual presentation' (in Harwit 1996: 262). Well after Harwit and his curators sought to accommodate changes requested by the Air Force Association, the AFA's Executive Director Monroe W. Hatch, Jr. believed that 'the exhibit still lacks balance and context . . . You can't give visitors to the museum and students of history a balanced perspective of World War II if you only show the "last act"' (in *ibid.*: 303). In a letter to Harwit, Hatch writes that the script 'seems even less balanced . . . than the earlier concepts were', and 'balance is owed all Americans, particularly those who come to the exhibition to learn' (in *ibid.*: 200). Members of Congress beat the same drum in a letter to the Smithsonian, finding 'the original exhibit and accompanying script to be lacking in balance and context' (in *ibid.*: 257); and on the Senate floor: 'the script continues to lack balance and context' (Senator Kassebaum, in Thelen 1995a: 1137).¹⁵

For critics of *Crossroads*, balance most often refers to equivalent displays of potent images and artefacts that would recreate the whole moment in which the

Enola Gay was asked to make its historic run: if photographs of atomic bomb victims are shown, so too must the atrocities of Japanese war camps; if numbers of lives lost at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are reported, so too must the numbers of Allied lives lost in the Pacific campaign and the numbers of lives saved (both American and Japanese) by the bomb's bringing the war to a quick end. After an early meeting with museum officials, Correll writes in a memo to file:

We said the concept paper was not balanced, and that it did not provide adequate background or accurately depict the context in which the decision to drop the bomb was made . . . We made an issue of the emotional impact of the school child's lunch box [retrieved from Hiroshima, with charcoal food in it] and pointed out that there was nothing on the other side for balance.

(in Harwit 1996: 207)

Plainly, veterans' organizations hoped the exhibition would provide a sufficiently balanced historical context so that the decisions to drop atomic bombs would at least appear reasonable, legitimate, justifiable and perhaps even necessary – avoiding the unbalanced inference that they were (definitively) atrocities or a second Holocaust. Navy historian Kathleen Lloyd proposed several changes to bring the proposed script into greater balance:

For balance, more details should be included on the Japanese treatment of the Asian countries that they conquered and of the Allied prisoners of war . . . Also for balance it should be made clear that no one knew the effect that the bomb would have or the lasting effect that radiation would have on individuals.

(in *ibid.*: 264)

Consistently, critics call for balance, for completeness of the story, rather than for accuracy or fidelity to what happened in fact. The critics appreciate as much as *Crossroads*' curators that artefacts to be displayed and the captions attached to them are chosen *now* rather than determined by events *then*.

Neither do Correll and his allies insist that the exhibition tell just one story about the *Enola Gay*: as with *SAL*, a balanced display would allow visitors to reach their own judgments about what happened, how and why. Hubert R. Dagle II of the American Legion's Internal Affairs Commission said that the aircraft should be 'put . . . in context and let the erudite visitors make some decisions themselves' (in *ibid.*: 333). Everybody in the controversy over *Crossroads* seems to agree that the decision to drop the atomic bomb invites a variety of interpretations, and critics emphasize that interpretations by those who made that choice then may not square with the several interpretations available now. W. Burr Bennett, Jr., a Second World War veteran, asked in a letter to Adams of the Smithsonian: 'Is it honest to judge what happened in 1945 by the morality of today?' (in *ibid.*: 131). As the dispute wore on and as a common understanding of balance proved enduringly elusive (the Air Force Association concludes that 'a fair and balanced presentation of the *Enola Gay* is not possible

with the present director-curator team' [in *ibid.*: 391]), critics came to prefer a display of the aircraft in minimalist interpretative dress – precisely because they did not want to impose any particular reading on museum visitors. Pilot Tibbetts prefers a naked *Enola Gay*: “This airplane was the first one to drop an atomic bomb”. You don't need any other explanations. And I think it should be displayed alone' (in Correll 1994b: 64).

I do not mean to suggest that the word 'fact' never appears in debates over these exhibitions, nor is it the case that a concern for 'accuracy' is altogether absent. My point is this: just as matters of fact did not precipitate the controversies, neither could History as it happened (rendered accurately) settle them. The contentious issue is always balance, or its lack: is the story an impartial whole and does it allow visitors to reach their own interpretations? Rare instances of realist discourse stand out against the pervasive background of arguments over balance, as when Harwit wants *Crossroads* 'to provide the public as accurate a historical picture as we can' (Harwit 1996: 205) or when B-29 pilot Benjamin Nicks wants the *Enola Gay* to be shown 'as an artefact of history as it was – not as some would have it' (in *ibid.*: 70). Even when accuracy becomes the concern, it is situated in the context of a perspectival epistemology in which what-really-happened radically underdetermines the representations of it. For Harwit, museums assume the scholarly responsibility 'to teach the truth' – but 'as best they understand it' (*ibid.*: 341); for Dagley of the American Legion, the goal was 'to achieve an exhibit that was historically accurate' – but one that 'could be evaluated from all perspectives' (in Linenthal 1996: 53).

At least in the *Crossroads* case, both sides evince ambivalence about whether matters of accuracy can be separated neatly from those of balance. Harwit seems to know the distinction in principle: 'Accuracy concerns factual information. Are the facts, figures, names, ages, dates, weights, measures, all correct? . . . Balance refers to the selection of facts and objects included in the exhibition' (Harwit 1996: 52; emphases in original). The Air Force Association's Hatch is also able to differentiate a just-completed “technical” review of the script' from remaining 'issues of context and balance [which] need to be addressed' (in *ibid.*: 306). But what could be more factual – raising the technical question of accuracy – than a *number*:¹⁶ the number of American casualties from the planned invasion of Japan that was obviated by the two atomic bombs. A higher number makes the bombs all that much more justifiable in terms of American lives saved; a lower number, especially when coupled with casualty figures from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, makes alternatives to the bomb more reasonable. The heated debate between curators and critics over this number was not framed in terms of getting it right, but in terms of balance – it became a matter of negotiation, not discovery or veracity. In a meeting memo to his files, Correll notes that Neufeld had admitted that his low (20,000–30,000) casualty estimate referred to the 'invasion of the southern island only', but added that 'higher casualty estimates – such as the often-cited 500,000 – could not be used because veterans groups use a figure of 1–2 million (??!) and would not be satisfied with anything

lower'. Correll believes that Neufeld's proposed solution at that meeting – to mention no casualty estimate at all – eliminates 'the impact of a key point in the decision to drop the bomb', and – significantly – 'just happens to tilt the balance toward the point we believe they [the curators] are trying to make' (in *ibid.*: 208). Edward T. Linenthal, scholar of battlefield memorializations and a member of the Advisory Board, also makes the number into a question of balance: 'The August 1994 revised script offered a new label, "Invasion of Japan – At What Cost?" and tried to balance lower and higher estimates ("from 30,000 to 500,000")' (*ibid.*: 55). Historian Stanley Goldberg, a Smithsonian curator displeased by the process through which history was horse-traded, was discouraged that 'Harwit and the American Legion representatives eventually negotiated a figure – 229,000 – for the expected number of U.S. casualties' (Goldberg 1995: 32; emphasis in original).

In general, and not just in the case of casualty estimates, it seems that even if curators and critics could agree on every instance of accuracy, the controversy would scarcely cool, as Harwit realizes after it is over:

I believed the historic facts brought out in the exhibition script to be largely correct . . . The exhibition's opponents instead appeared upset by the way these facts were presented, the choice of laudatory or pejorative wording, the juxtaposition of evidence implying certain conclusions, and the choice and balance of artefacts, images, and factual material.

(Harwit 1996: 274)

'EVERYBODY ELSE IS OFF-BALANCE'

To defend a proposed exhibition, or attack it, curators and critics present the show they prefer as balanced – and that of the other side as dangerously off-balance. Off-balance seems to mean a display that is one-sided because it steers visitors towards only one of several available interpretations of historical events and processes. Despite otherwise huge differences between *SAL* and *Crossroads* – differences in subject-matters, organizational cultures at the two Smithsonian branches, personalities, interested parties, stakes, symbolic significance and, most notably, outcomes – the substantive content of 'being off-balance' is remarkably consistent. Critics accuse curators of preparing an exhibition tipped towards a demonic representation of science and of the *Enola Gay*. Curators accuse critics of seeking to replace the proposed script with something unabashedly heroic. The scale used to weigh the two exhibitions is more or less the same:

Critics accuse curators of • $\xrightarrow{\quad \wedge \quad}$ • Curators accuse critics of
 DEMONIC HISTORY A HEROIC HISTORY

Everybody involved puts themselves in the safe middle – Harwit and the Air Force Association, Molella and the American Chemical Society. But everybody also gets accused by somebody else of being inclined towards a partial history (in both senses: incomplete and biased).

Philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers helped bring the controversy over *SAL* into the public eye with an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, which prompted an exchange of letters. She joins the ACS and other professional associations of scientists in criticizing ‘the perverse decision to highlight the failures of American science and to downplay the triumphs’. Sommers believes that *SAL* presents an ‘overwhelmingly negative view of American scientific achievement’, and that ‘head curator Arthur Molella was unmoved by the ACS’s complaint that the exhibit lacked balance’ (Sommers 1995a, 1995b). Richter of the American Physical Society (APS) ‘directed a formal blast’ at *SAL* in *Science* magazine, ‘on grounds that it “trivializes [scientific] accomplishments and exaggerates any negative consequences”’ (in Holden 1994: 1327). Robert Park, also of the APS, catalogues the woes blamed on science: ‘pesticide residue, air pollution, acid rain, ozone holes, radioactive waste, food additives and nuclear bombs’ – but ‘no mention that life expectancy in the United States has more than doubled in the last century’ (Park 1995a: 15).

Other critics suggest that this demonic science is not in History but only in the minds of Smithsonian curators granted the authority to tell it. The problem is not science but Molella, who is said to want ‘pollution and death’ (in Flam 1994: 729), whose exhibition ‘betrays hostility to natural science . . . in the form of horror stories’ (Gross 1996: 118), and whose staff included those ‘in influential positions . . . who . . . wanted to thumb their noses at the scientific establishment’ (in Gifford 1996: 6). The language of balance pervades criticism of *SAL*, as from Advisory Board member Marcel LaFollette: ‘the lead curators seemed so fearful of building a “pro-science” exhibit . . . that they wound up creating a largely negative one’ (LaFollette 1995: 237). Those critics, though, are wary of tipping too far the other way: ‘Richter denies that the APS insists that science should be portrayed heroically. “Of course, science can be misused . . . what’s missing here is balance”’ (in Macilwain 1995).

Curators for *Crossroads* are accused of doing much the same thing to the *Enola Gay*. Sacrificing subtlety for impact, one member of a review panel said that he would leave the proposed exhibit ‘with a strong feeling that Americans are bloodthirsty, racist killers who after beer parties and softball go out and kill as many women and children as possible’ (in Correll 1994c: 12).¹⁷ In the *Crossroads* seen by its critics, the United States military (and its government) is demonized for its decision to use the hydrogen bomb, becoming by turns ‘brutal, vindictive’ (in Correll 1994a: 26), ‘ruthless invaders, bent on revenge’ (Correll 1994c: 8), and ‘the culprits’ (Correll 1994b: 64). *Air Force* editor Correll divorces this representation from History and marries it to the Smithsonian, whose curators had previously displayed their ‘hostile view of airpower’ in an exhibition on the First World War, which emphasized ‘carnage on

the ground and the unwholesomeness of military aviation . . . the military airplane as an instrument of death’ (Correll 1994a: 26).

So off-balance is *Crossroads* that its only heroes are Japanese. Kamikaze pilots are portrayed as ‘valiant defenders of their home land’ (ibid.: 29), and, generally, for the AFA’s Hatch, the exhibition ‘gives the benefit of opinion to Japan’ (in Correll 1994a: 26).¹⁸ When the Japanese are not depicted as heroes, they become victims of American ruthlessness. The Air Force Association believes that the curators ‘are so sensitive to the *Hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bombs) that a museum visitor might think these Japanese are the only ones for whom suffering continued after the war’ (in Correll 1994c: 10). Correll suggests that balance could be achieved if images of the *hibakusha* were counterpoised with those of disabled American veterans. The Japanese who are given voice in exhibition videos and captions are, Correll says, those who had ‘suffered injuries’, and who ‘talk about pain and suffering’ (Correll 1994a: 28). William M. Detweiler from the American Legion identifies the missing counterweight – Japan’s own aggressiveness:

It prompts the unmistakable conclusion that America’s enemy in the latter days of World War II was defeated and demoralised, ultimately the victim of racism and revenge, rather than a ruthless aggressor whose expansionist aims and war fervour yielded more than a decade of horror and death for millions of the world’s people.

(in Linenthal 1996: 47–8)

In the earliest scripts, little was said about ‘years of aggression and wanton atrocities and brutality’ (Correll 1994b: 64) by the Japanese, and even when something was added: ‘aggressiveness on their side is depicted as the province of a few military fanatics’ (ibid.: 62). All this added up to the ‘distinctive ideological tilt’ (ibid.: 62) of the script.

Curators’ defences of their preferred exhibitions mirror all this: it is the *critics* now who are off-balance, weighted down by desires for a one-sided *heroic* tale of American science or the *Enola Gay*. It is quickly apparent that critics are not the only ones to stereotype the others’ tilt, to exaggerate balance into skew. Molella and Stephens write that critics of *SAL* ‘press their cause for their own version of history’ (Molella and Stephens 1996: 97), and, according to Bruce Lewenstein (who reviewed the exhibition from the perspective of science journalism), the ACS was never really comfortable with the balanced idea that ‘history is precisely the telling of multiple stories about the past’ (Lewenstein 1996: 12). In exchange for \$5 million, chemists (as constructed by defensive curators) hoped for ‘heroic science’ and a ‘trade show’ (in Gifford 1996: 6). Even though museum officials were ‘very frank in telling them [the ACS] that the exhibit we had in mind was not celebratory, but analytic’,¹⁹ critics still seemed disappointed that *SAL* did not become ‘something about the triumphs of science’ (Molella in Flam 1994: 729) and that the Smithsonian Institutions did not become ‘boosters’ of American science (Macilwain 1995: 207). The

curators' goal instead, was, of course, balance: 'to show how society has changed and use that to show something about how science works' (Flam 1994).

Ditto, for the failed defence of *Crossroads*. The veterans' groups would settle for one story only, their story, precluding the multiple readings invited by the curators' script – or so said the Smithsonian people. Critics 'would never be satisfied with a dispassionate exhibit reflecting a variety of perspectives' (Harwit 1996: x) – but, remember, Correll and friends accused Harwit, Crouch and Neufeld of exactly the same partisanship (while denying that they insisted on 'only one history' [Bernstein 1995: 215]). In contrast to Harwit's advisers and staff, who admitted their differences of opinion and sought to work those disagreements into the exhibition itself, the military historians and other critics are said to demand consensus to a party line: 'if there was even one dissenting voice . . . every one else fell in line' (Harwit 1996: 270). Curators had proposed a series of displays featuring 'Historical Controversies', which would emphasize historians' multiple and merely provisional understandings of events. MIT professor John W. Dower, author of several books on Japan and the Pacific theatre during the Second World War, suggested that these displays of controversy were, for the American Legion, 'the very antithesis of simply telling history "like it was"', and obviously suggested that no single "truth" could be proclaimed regarding the decision to drop the bombs'. That was an anathema for the veterans: 'Heroic narratives demand a simple unilinear story line' (Dower 1996: 80).

And that is what the Air Force Association and American Legion expected from the *Enola Gay* exhibition, as these desires were constructed by Air and Space Museum curators – who feared (and loathed) 'straightforward celebration' (Harwit 1996: 184). As Harwit saw it, the American Legion 'wanted their membership to feel heroic and have the nation's enthusiastic approval for the atomic bombings' (ibid.: 398). 'They want the Museum to tell their story the way they have always told and retold it . . . a story of a powerful new aircraft, designed, built and first flown in just 24 months; a story of ordinary citizens, men and women, working together to defeat a ferocious enemy' (ibid.: 311). Harwit collapses his critics' exhibition down to a simple tale lacking polysemy: 'the *Enola Gay* had not only ended World War II, but had also saved millions of lives' (ibid.: 148). Critics wanted to 'force [this] view of the war . . . on fellow Americans . . . American virtue and victory *were* to be celebrated' (Sherry 1996: 103). But that heroic tale already required curators to censor history, hiding details from the public who would be less able to draw informed lessons. Tom Crouch was quoted in a syndicated column, talking about the veterans' criticisms: 'What we're really looking at here is a reluctance to really tell the whole story . . . They want to stop the story when the bomb leaves the bomb bay . . . [censoring] what happens when it hits the ground'. In a rhetorical tour de force, Crouch (via a letter to Harwit) seizes the balanced middle ground for the curators while pushing the veterans' associations off on the extreme: 'Do you want to do an exhibition intended to make veterans feel good, or do you want an exhibition that will lead our visitors to think about the consequences of the

atomic bombing of Japan? Frankly, I don't think we can do both' (in Harwit 1996: 309, 189). Missing is the other extreme, the demonic story of what Americans did with their bombs, which turns up of course only as critics' characterization of what Crouch really wanted.

'NOBODY BUT US IS OBJECTIVE'

Stalemate? Real History is nowhere around for either curators or critics to use in efforts to dismiss as just *wrong* the exhibitions favoured by the other side. Assertions of historical accuracy are deconstructed by opponents into evidence instead of off-balance – they reveal a desire to compel just one True story in the name of what really happened, precluding the possibility that visitors could make their own informed judgments about artefacts, events and their significance. Nobody's claim to balance goes unchallenged, but rather all are equivalently torpedoed by charges that a proposed exhibition tends towards the heroic (if we listen to curators) or demonic (according to critics). Are there any useful arguments left still standing – with historical realism only a liability, and balance rhetorically undermined with apparent ease – through which curators and critics might still legitimize and justify the exhibitions they prefer? The discourse of objectivity in its manifold meanings – trust, uniquely privileged perspective, disinterestedness (pinned to oneself but denied to foes) – moves the Museum Wars further from History and even beyond its balanced accounting. Victory hinges on the credibilities of the *people* who would make *SAL* and *Crossroads* into very different representations of the past.

Trust

It is usually difficult to declare without irony, in public or academic debate, 'trust me – I'm honest'. Instead, curators and critics provide grounds for denying trust to their opponents by describing them as dishonest, double-dealing and duplicitous scoundrels who will stoop to the unethical in defence of a certain exhibition they like. Arthur Molella accuses Robert Park, loud critic of *SAL* from the American Physical Society, of 'obviously [having] never seen the exhibit at all'.²⁰ To defuse Sommers's criticism that *SAL* plays up the *débâcles* of science, Molella says that she 'utterly distorts the exhibit', and ends with: 'I hardly recognized the show [she] attacked' (Molella 1995). Some of the attacks on *SAL* occurred in cyberspace, and Molella and Stephens suggest that the internet version of the exhibition – in his judgment, 'an electronic straw man' – justifiably angered scientists with its misrepresentations. On the Web, even the exhibition's title was routinely miscast as 'Is Science the God that Failed?' (a label introduced by Park 1995b: A11). Turnabout is fair play. Sommers writes that Molella and other Smithsonian officials stonewalled *SAL* by refusing to negotiate in good faith: 'Molella was unmoved by the ACS's complaint that the exhibit lacked balance' (Sommers 1995a: 414), and Park writes that 'advisory

committee members complain bitterly that their recommendations were ignored by the chief curator' (Park 1995b). More evidence of bad faith is given by the ACS's Shields, who suggests that the ACS trumped up the cost of making requested changes in the exhibition: adding one sentence to an extant label would cost \$4,205.

Accusations of untrustworthy conduct become high art in the controversy over *Crossroads*. Harwit 'was convinced that General Tibbetts had never read our script' (Harwit 1996: 290), but relied on deliberately massaged but bogus versions provided him by the Air Force Association – a serious problem for the museum because of Tibbetts's symbolic authority as the *Enola Gay*'s pilot. But Tibbetts was not alone in criticizing what he putatively had not read. Harwit justifies his desire to have the full text of *Crossroads* published (indeed it was, but only after the final decision to kill the exhibition), because 'so much had been written and said about this exhibit, by people who had never read the script or who quoted it out of context' (ibid.: 415). 'Significant misinformation and unfounded rumor' (ibid.: 246) constituted the foundation for the veterans' criticisms of *Crossroads*, a point made as well by one of Harwit's few allies in the military. Lt.-Gen. C. M. Kicklighter, Executive Director of the 50th Anniversary of WWII Commemoration Committee argues that 'the NASM's opponents have gone out of their way to misrepresent the Museum's intention' (in ibid. 1996: 305). Harwit gives one instance of this: having been accused of trying to mount an exhibition that would portray the United States and Japan as having had 'morally equivalent' positions in the Second World War, he says that this idea 'would clearly be outrageous and never entered any of our minds' (ibid.: 203).

Critics' supposed misrepresentations of the evolving *Enola Gay* script take several forms. Some critics seek to manipulate legislative charters defining the mission of the Smithsonian Institutions in order to show that the proposed exhibition falls outside its mandated purview. But Harwit points out that Second World War veteran W. Burr Bennett relied on 1961 enabling legislation for a 'National Armed Forces Museum' which was authorized but neither funded nor built (ibid.: 148). Another tactic is to fabricate misleading images of *Crossroads* by statistical legerdemain. In response to Correll's assertion that the still-unbalanced revised script contained 97 images of Japanese suffering, not the 32 actually in the script, Harwit writes: 'how he obtained those particular numbers was not clear' (ibid.: 253). But even if Correll and other critics had read the proposed script accurately, they would still be prone to misleading misrepresentation because they would not be able to take into account the specific juxtaposition of differently-sized images and artefacts (or lighting, the videos, voice-overs) – which may be more consequential for visitors' take-home messages than details on a label (ibid.: 215).

Deceitful misrepresentations of the curators' intentions and of the exhibition's contents do not exhaust the sins of the critics. Air Force historian Hallion is in effect accused by Harwit of double-dealing when – in the course

of later denunciations of the exhibition as unbalanced – he denied that he had praised the proposed script. In the posthumous defence of *Crossroads*, Harwit includes the full text of Hallion's favourable assessment, in which three type-script pages of minor suggestions are followed by the handwritten note: 'Again – an impressive job. A bit of "tweaking" along the lines discussed here, should do the trick' (in ibid.: 224). When Harwit learned later that the Air Force Association had enlisted Hallion to its camp of critics, Harwit assumed at first that they must 'surely be misquoting' him (ibid.: 249). Harwit also accuses the Air Force Association of 'stirring up public protest' (ibid.: 277) by falsely accusing the curators of wilful bias, and worse, by disclosing the substance of delicate negotiations to the mass media. 'We no longer could openly talk with each other without fear of having our conversation reported and analyzed in the newspapers the next day' (ibid.: 305).

Critics see just this issue in a different light. For them, timely access to information is vital for accountability, ensuring democratic accessibility to the negotiations over the public's museum in Washington. Correll accuses curators of stonewalling when – under protection of copyright – they would not allow photocopying of a revised script for *Crossroads* 'without permission from the Smithsonian Institution' (Correll 1994b: 61). Charles D. Cooper, editor of the *Retired Officer*, specifically regrets the curators' 'early stonewalling' (in Harwit 1996: 334) which fast became a perennial theme in efforts to depict Harwit and other museum officials as unwilling to compromise in good faith. Curators 'waved off the rest [of the criticisms] as "disinformation"', 'were not to be dissuaded' (Correll 1994c: 8, 12), offered up 'the usual regimented response' (Nicks in Harwit 1996: 71) and generally were 'unwilling to repair' (Hallion in ibid.: 262) an obviously broken script. In response to a *New York Times* editorial that presented curators instead as adjusting the script responsively to diverse criticism, Correll denies their co-operativeness by pointing out that 'the curators shrugged off appeals for change until the pressure became too much to ignore' (Correll 1994c: 9). This admission by critics of their ability to put pressure on the Smithsonian opens the door for Harwit's defence: they 'do their best to hide from the public the enormous influence they wield' (Harwit 1996: vii). Harwit declares that he has nothing to hide from the public, and that it is the Air Force Association really who 'never did cite . . . that the script had already undergone five months of revisions' involving veterans' organizations as well as scholars (ibid.: 301). For Correll, Harwit's stonewalling is not the result of a principled defence of a better exhibition, but rather a feature of his customary duplicitous conduct designed only to keep critics at bay. After Harwit admitted that the script contained too many gruesome ground-zero photographs from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and after directing his curators to remove about two-thirds of them: 'that did *not* happen' (Correll 1994b: 60; emphasis in original). When Harwit revised casualty estimates back downwards – after 'previously agreed language' – he is accused by the AFA of a 'breach of faith' (in Harwit 1996: 386). Following an agreement on 7 June 1994 to take 'about a year' to remove

perceived imbalances, Harwit announces but two weeks later that the curators had reached 'a final product, minor wording changes aside' (Correll 1994b: 60). Such double-dealing is of a piece with Harwit's 'imaginative interpretation of what we [the Air Force Association] actually said', and with his conjuring of a mythical exhibition when describing *Crossroads* for public audience (ibid.). Worst of all, Harwit is accused of defaming the iconic General Curtis Lemay – whom he attempts to use, 'without merit', 'as a crutch' (Lambert 1994). Diogenes and lantern would have been frustrated walking among those who argued the fate of the *Enola Gay*.

Privileged perspective

The very idea of objectivity implies that not all standpoints are equally well-ventaged for looking out at nature or back on history. Some perspectives are clouded, either by ignorance or prejudice – and the two Smithsonian controversies are fat with both accusations. Here I consider just the first sort: the standpoint of the other side lacks perspicuity – which is located uniquely in scholarly *expertise* for the curators and in personal *experience* for the critics. In the end, there probably is no Archimedean point from which one could decide that 'being well read' is a more privileged perspective on the past than 'being there' (or vice versa) – and so the argument went unquelled.

Curators ground their defence of the scripts on what they have the most of – skill in deciphering meaning from historical documents and artefacts, and fluency in ever-contentious academic interpretations of them. That already-introduced sociologist on the *SAL* Advisory Board wrote a letter to Molella's predecessor, historian Jeffrey Stine, to say that he 'shall write as a practitioner of science and technology studies [STS] seeking to shift the main messages of that line of inquiry from the pages of scholarly journals to corridors of the Smithsonian', because 'STS opens up new ways of looking at science in American life'.²¹ He was evidently convincing, for Lewenstein – in a review of the completed *SAL* – praises it for its ability 'to inject insights of recent scholarship in history and sociology of science' (Lewenstein 1995: 3). But it was a struggle to fend off the know-nothings on the Advisory Board and elsewhere – those who lack the penetrating insights of recent academic scholarship *about* science. Molella and Stephens write that 'stakeholding interest groups' 'will not tolerate a "master narrative" crafted behind the scenes by "experts" who exclude their experiences' (Molella and Stephens 1996: 105). The implicit contention is that *SAL* is a better exhibit precisely because it incorporates the views of STS and other scholarly research, and would only be weakened if criticisms were heeded from those who are ignorant of it.

In the same way, *Crossroads* is defended as embodying the latest scholarly understandings of the Second World War and of the atomic bomb. Harwit distances the exhibition from his own personal opinions, anchoring them instead 'in a committee that includes some of the nation's leading military

historians and experts on the war' (Harwit 1994: 4).²² Curator Michael Neufeld says that a revised script is 'consistent with the latest scholarship' (in Harwit 1996: 300), as it exploits an academic expertise that is distinguished (in the early proposal for an *Enola Gay* exhibition) from private views held by exhibition critics: 'Almost everyone has an opinion on this matter, but these opinions are often shaped by limited knowledge and personal prejudices' (ibid.: 122). To replace mere opinion with certified knowledge is in the Smithsonian's charge: "The increase and diffusion of knowledge", [and] to make this scholarly research accessible to the public' (Neufeld in ibid.: 281).

The exhibition is improved by the accumulated wisdom of historians who have unearthed previously unknown or inaccessible documents that 'show the problem to be more complex' (ibid.: 134). Scholars have been able to revise their understanding of events in light of new empirical materials: 'Often a much clearer view of events is available years later, when many secret actions and documents have come to light' (ibid.: 132). Availability of a previously classified 'Memo discussed with the President, April 25, 1925. Top Secret: Original and 3 carbons made', written by Truman's Secretary of War Henry Stimson (which lays out in hazy but frank ways what the post-atomic world might be like), is for Harwit 'like breaking through the fog of historian's opinions to personally glimpse fragments of the truth' (ibid.: 225). The significance of these recently released documents would be lost on veterans and others outside academe, who are more concerned about protecting traditional tales of glory: 'declassified information must not be permitted to change the way this story has always been told' (ibid.: 427). At first, Harwit seems blissfully optimistic that veterans too would get excited about new interpretations allowed by these documents, holding out for the possibility that knowledge based on personal experience might be corrigible: 'We were sure that veterans would find such an exhibition revealing of detail they had never known' (ibid.: x). The hindsight of Stanford historian Barton Bernstein, after *Crossroads* was killed, is closer to the mark: '[Correll] seemed unconcerned, and perhaps largely uninformed, that the scholarship of the last thirty years . . . had challenged important parts of that orthodox history' (Bernstein 1995: 215). That Correll would persist in his critique of *Crossroads*, choosing to ignore historical evidence that subverted his views, is a 'chilling broadside' threatening 'the lifeblood of serious intellectual inquiry . . . a constant willingness to entertain serious challenges to entrenched and orthodox views' (Dower 1996: 76). The stakes in this Museum War for curators and academic historians are becoming more clear: not just personal ambition or improved public understanding and certainly not Truth, but professional authority over history: 'For better or worse', writes Wisconsin historian Paul Boyer, 'it is the historians, at the end of the day, to whom society delegates its custodianship of the past' (Boyer 1996: 139).²³ Only on some days.

On the other side, exhibition critics (also) valorize what they have the most of: personal experience with events and processes to be displayed, and first-hand memory of how things were. It is altogether unexceptional (and even boring) to

hear curators and historians insisting that the declassification of pertinent documents has forced historians to develop new interpretations of the end of the Second World War – until this rhetoric is set aside another discursive register that challenges the connection between such expert readings of empirical evidence and truth. Veterans are endowed with a presumptive authority to recall correctly what happened when they were there. ‘We’re vets, we’ve actually been in a Cold War – they haven’t’ (Giese in Sherry 1996: 100). Typical is a letter to *Air Force* magazine from retired Lt.-Gen. James V. Edmundson:

I commanded a B-29 group on Tinian . . . As an American who was stationed at Hickam Field on December 7, 1941, who fought at such places as Midway, Tulagi and Guadalcanal . . . I deeply resent an agency of my government telling the American people that the war aims of the Japanese were more noble than those for which so many of my friends died.
(Edmundson 1994)

Paul Fussell’s essay ‘Thank God for the Atom Bomb’ is invoked by *Crossroads* critics – for example, B-29 reconnaissance flight photographer Burr Bennett – as possessing the privileged insider’s insight:

There are two mutually exclusive positions on the *Enola Gay* and its bombing mission. There are those assigned to wade ashore in the scheduled invasion of Japan, and those who were unborn, too young, or back home in their job. Paul Fussell . . . doesn’t demand that the anti bomb folks ‘experience having their ass shot off, I merely note that [they] didn’t’. Those on their way to the invasion *knew* that the *Enola Gay*, *Bockscar*, the hasty entry of the Russians, and the atomic bombs saved their lives.
(in Harwit 1996: 145; emphasis added)

So unbalanced is *Crossroads* that its producers must surely have had ‘light regard for military perspectives . . . on a military subject’ (Correll 1994b: 63), choosing to ignore or dismiss ‘firsthand reports from veterans who fought the war’ (Hatch in Harwit 1996: 307).²⁴ If curators had listened to the eye-witnesses, they would not have proposed an exhibition that became for Paul Tibbetts ‘a package of insults’ (in *ibid.*: 243).²⁵ Senator Ted Stevens from Alaska asked Linenthal during committee hearings: ‘On what basis do you justify an interpretation of the history of this event so different from those of us who lived through it?’ (in Thelen 1995b: 1034).

The expertise of scholars is delegitimized: those who were not there to see and feel cannot know what happened, no matter how carefully they pore over documents.²⁶ The deep currents of anti-intellectualism in American life rise to the surface in criticisms of *Crossroads*. Edmundson continues in his letter (started above) to say that he does not blame the Smithsonian Secretary personally for the off-balanced script, because ‘after all, he is the product of his environment and typical of some of the educated idiots who crawl out from under the wet rock of academia from time to time’ (Edmundson 1994). Such a

blanket criticism of academic expertise elsewhere gives way to *ad hominem* attacks on the supposed credentials of Neufeld (‘a Canadian citizen who spent his years at the University of Calgary between 1970 and 1974, when Americans were fleeing to Canada to escape the Vietnam war’) and Crouch (‘took his graduate courses at Miami University and Ohio State during the Vietnam War’) (Ringle in Nobile 1995: xxxvi). The wrongs of the exhibition are traced back to one credential of supreme value to critics but absent in these two curators: experience at war.

Insiders are also accorded a privileged perspective in the controversy over *SAL*: it takes a scientist to know science. Chemist Marvin Lang described his time on the *SAL* Advisory Board as a ‘gut wrenching experience’ because he was asked to work in close company with ‘social scientists and pseudo-scientists who had no idea how science worked’ (in Macilwain 1995: 207). *Scientific American* reporter Sasha Nemecek notes that although the history of science was ‘once the province of scientists with an interest in the past, the field has evolved into one in which practitioners may know more about society than about, say, chemistry’ (Nemecek 1995: 24). Such a demographic transition helps Robert Park of the APS to account for the failures of *SAL*: social constructivists believe that ‘science is just another narrative and has no greater claim to authority than any other narrative. On that basis, a Native American folk legend of the origin of humans should be taken as seriously as the theory of evolution’ (in *ibid.*: 24). *SAL* Advisory Board member Marcel LaFollette uses scare quotes to ironize the supposedly privileged perspective afforded insiders: ‘The scientists “know” what science is all about; the veterans “know” what they remember from World War II’ (LaFollette 1995: 238). Veterans and chemists would just as easily put scare quotes around LaFollette’s academic ‘knowledge’, if her expertise conflicted with their experiential memory.

Disinterested apolitics

A final strategy for denying authenticity and credibility to others’ claims is to reveal their ulterior motives of a political kind, to suggest that behind the script they prefer lies a hidden agenda that goes beyond the pursuit of balance or improved public understanding. Those on the other side have these political or economic interests that compel them to push for an exhibit not necessarily congruent with the interests of the general public and, moreover, they are part of some wider political or intellectual movement that leans precipitously to the Right (when curators attack critics) or to the Left (when critics attack curators). At the same time, everybody accused of playing politics displays the empty hands they bring to the controversy, and insist that they have only one goal – a balanced exhibition. With all the symmetry found in the rhetoric of curators and critics alike, it is important not to lose sight of the asymmetries on which each argument depends: *they* have politics, *we* don’t; *we* can be trusted, *they* cannot.

The language of 'political correctness' runs throughout criticism of *SAL* and of *Crossroads*. Curators are said to toe the liberal line, as they sully American achievements in science or in war by recalling without end the many who suffer beneath the triumphs. For the *Wall Street Journal*, the National Air and Space Museum was 'now in the hands of academics unable to view American history as anything other than a woeful catalog of crimes and aggressions against the helpless people of the earth' (in Correll 1994c: 8). A boundary is placed between the politics of *Crossroads*' curators and the high-minded disinterestedness of its critics. Correll writes that the exhibition is 'more political than aeronautical' (ibid.: 8), while veteran Benjamin Nicks is 'suspicious that the Smithsonian is more interested in sending a political message about strategic defense and nuclear weapons' and concludes that the proposed exhibition would 'deal not with history, the eminent domain of any museum – but instead, pure politics' (in Harwit 1996: 69). *Crossroads* is impugned as a 'politically rigged horror show' (Correll 1994c: 12), a 'countercultural morality pageant put on by academic activists' (Correll in Wallace 1996: 173) organized by 'bleeding hearts who have belabored us . . . with the message that it was immoral to drop the bomb' (Edmundson 1994) and who will 'not give up on their radical political agenda' (AFA in Harwit 1996: 391). Veteran Burr Bennett makes explicit the risks the Smithsonian takes in 'its decision to join the "PC forces": 'as disgust of this rewriting of history builds, it could erode both your credibility and your financial support' (in ibid.: 131).

Critics seek to show that the curators' politics are extreme and at variance with the mainstream American flow, while at the same time suggesting that their own views are widely and enthusiastically shared. Republican Bob Stump (Arizona) is quoted in the *Washington Post*: the museum has elevated 'a vocal but tiny minority of politically correct opinion to the level of the beliefs of an entire generation' (in Correll 1994c: 12). Historian Newt Gingrich wants this revisionism to get back to the ivory towers where it belongs: 'Political correctness may be okay in some faculty lounge, but . . . the Smithsonian is a treasure that belongs to the American people and it should not become a plaything for left-wing ideologies' (in Harwit 1996: 394). An oft-cited *Washington Post* editorial from February 1995 simultaneously denies political motives to critics of *Crossroads* while attaching them to its curators, securing (it hopes) truth and authenticity for the views of veterans and their spokespersons:

It is not, as some would have it, that benighted advocates of a special-interest or right-wing point of view brought political power to bear to crush and distort the historical truth. Quite the contrary. Narrow-minded representatives of a special interest and revisionist point of view attempted to use their inside track to appropriate and hollow out a historical event that large numbers of Americans alive at that time and engaged in the war had witnessed and understood in a very different – and authentic – way.

(in Correll 1995: 21)

As evidence of the broad-based disaffection with *Crossroads* among the American people, 'more than 11,400 signatures on petitions of protest' (Correll 1994b: 64) were presented to the Smithsonian.

And so it is with critics of *SAL*. Robert Park believes that visitors to the exhibition will take home this message: 'Ring the bell of evil, and . . . automatically blame a scientist' (in Nemecek 1995: 21). *SAL* is full of 'politically correct, postmodern social constructivism' says Park (1994: 207), a view endorsed by Shields speaking for the ACS: the 'deconstructionist view of history' leads to a 'politically correct, revisionist historical display of science as a litany of moral debacles, environmental catastrophes, social injustices and destruction by radiation, while at the same time ignoring the many triumphs, achievements and contributions of science to our lives' (Shields 1996: 40). Henry Allen, staff writer at the *Washington Post*, says that the 'god of science' is 'largely forgotten in favour of paying homage to environmentalism and political correctness' (Allen 1994: B1). Paul Gross suggests that the curators were swept away by 'ideological fervor' (Gross 1996: 119), and Christina Hoff Sommers asks rhetorically: 'who, pray tell, will save us from the self-righteous politics of Smithsonian curators?' (Sommers 1995b: A11).

The American Chemical Society, however, admits to no political stake in *SAL*. Its \$5 million was donated, Shields reminds everybody, for noble ends. 'The society's goal in providing the financial sponsorship for the exhibition was to improve the public understanding of science and encourage young people to pursue careers in science' (Shields 1996: 40). As evidence of its disinterestedness (or its misplaced trust in *SAL*'s curatorial team), the ACS has 'always acknowledged that the Smithsonian has control over the content of any exhibition that it produces' (ibid.).

In accusations of playing politics with history, it takes two to tango: curators insist that it is them – the critics – who have hidden agendas, not us. Sophia Vackimes, reviewing *SAL* positively for the *American Anthropologist*, suggests that tucked behind the ACS's \$5 million was more than altruism:

At the Smithsonian Institution, special interest groups are seeking to eliminate the questioning of scientific research and its consequent technological applications. The gifts of money the American Chemical Society has given for the exhibit are being used as a lever with which to force the curators to change the exhibit.

(Vackimes 1996: 391)

Exactly the same point is made by Harwit about the critics of *Crossroads*: 'For whatever it costs to buy influence, you can now have your own version of our nation's history displayed and opposing views suppressed at the Smithsonian Institution' (Harwit 1996: viii). The Air Force Association is labelled by Harwit a 'competing interest group' who 'sought to impose their views and perspectives on the exhibition, the museum, the Institution, and ultimately, the visiting public' (ibid.: 193). Professional historians were appalled at the fate of *Crossroads*,

calling the orchestrated criticism 'a transparent attempt at historical cleansing' (in *ibid.*: 345).

Harwit knew he was at war with a 'partisan campaign' that would pursue 'victory by any means' (*ibid.*: vii). The means chosen by Correll were the routine stuff of American politics: scare tactics, ad campaigns, publicity and lobbying on Capitol Hill. The AFA enlisted allies by 'fanning the fears of aging veterans by telling them that [*Crossroads*] would dishonor their wartime service to the nation' (*ibid.*: 427). A 'media blitz' was launched to elicit broad public support: 'twenty-eight radio interviews . . . international CNN coverage . . . thirty further television interviews . . . print coverage [exceeding] 330 articles' (*ibid.*: 239, 250). Correll successfully buttonholed members of congress: speaking of a letter that came to him straight from the Hill, Harwit suggests 'the hand of the Air Force Association could not have been clearer if this letter had been written on AFA stationery' (*ibid.*: 257). All of this politicizing was said to be in the service not of balance but of perpetuating a 'conservative mood' or an 'extremist right wing' (*ibid.*: xi, 198) by 'patriotic bullies who used words like *liberal* a bit the way Nazis had once used *Jew*' (Sherry 1996: 113; emphasis in original).

But such politics stop at the door of the Smithsonian, or so its curators would have us believe. Harwit does 'not consider himself "politically correct"' (in Correll 1994a: 27), and would not admit to 'any deliberate bias' (Harwit 1996: 63) in making *Crossroads*. The Smithsonian is 'not an organization that made political statements' such as calling 'for the abolition of all bombs' (*ibid.*: 165). The exhibition would not 'take a stance in the debate' over whether it was justifiable to drop the bombs, nor does it 'intend to pass moral judgement' (*ibid.*: 236, 205). Historian Mike Wallace defends *Crossroads* by writing that 'the only political correctness . . . was the censorship that shut down the real exhibition and prevented people from judging it for themselves' (Wallace 1996: 133). With that outcome, says Harwit, 'the losers . . . are the American public' (Harwit 1996: vii), not Truth, his career or professional authority: his motives are altruistic. Nowhere is the asymmetry between our truth and their power so neatly exposed than by Harwit looking back on the exhibition that never was: 'true knowledge is not determined by votes, or money or power; it is shaped by careful research, respect for facts, and dispassionate discourse. I like to believe that we fought valiantly but were badly outgunned' (*ibid.*: 318).

'SO MUCH FOR TRUTH'

I have tried to step outside of the controversies over *SAL* and *Crossroads*, better to see what they consist of – but I have failed. My failure is not to do with an inability to shed epistemic attachments to the community of knowledge makers I belong to: scholars, on the curators' side. I believe that I have delivered, as promised, a symmetric analysis of the symmetric rhetoric used by curators to defend their exhibition – and by their critics to attack it. I may have found something out about the framing of debates over public representations of

history at museums like the Smithsonian: curators and critics alike claim to seek balanced exhibitions, where sufficient materials are displayed for visitors to reach their own informed judgments about the place of science in society or the justifiability of dropping atomic bombs. But it is a precarious balance, undermined rather easily by counter-assertions that one is really using History to push a party line, squelching multiple interpretations in order to legitimize a reading that advances political interests.

It is instead the very idea of an agnostic standpoint that fails me – Mannheim's free-floating intellectual (1936) is a chimera not even worth pursuing, Haraway's god-trick (1991: 191) is something for mortals to avoid. Stepping outside gets me nowhere.²⁷ Out here, there is nothing *in the rhetoric of anybody* that enables me to assign virtue, credibility, honesty, fair play, interpretative prowess, objectivity, sincerity and balance to one side or the other. Every defence of an exhibition – and every attack – has been deconstructed down to dust. When the rhetoric of curators and critics is laid down like double-entry bookkeeping, as I have done, it does seem to cancel itself out. But this of course overlooks what the rhetoric was designed to accomplish from the start and what really settled things: to get more powerful allies on your side than your enemy has – which is what veterans' organizations were able to do, and the American Chemical Society was not. It is a delusion, in other words, for 'us' to think that it was noble principles or objectivity or truth that permitted Molella to resist the chemists' assault: persuasive rhetoric and powerful allies did as much for *SAL* as it did for veterans' organizations.²⁸

It is only from some epistemic inside that Good Guys and Bad become visible,²⁹ that truth is separable from power or method from politics, that trust can be extended or denied, that History is worth fighting for. So I go home, to an unruly community of sociologists and historians, some of whom (like me) study scientists, plying our trade at museums and universities, most of the time disputing among ourselves. I return unconvinced that the inevitable world of multiple epistemic communities is something to celebrate (but rather, to struggle through), depressed by the realization that none of our sometimes well-intentioned rhetorical weapons (objectivity, interpretative skill, dispassion) are fail-safe in convincing everybody else to accept our stories over different ones better aligned with their interests and faiths,³⁰ discouraged about the prospects for common ground or deliberative democracy or universal principles of reason,³¹ cheered only by the score at half-time: a one-to-one draw.

NOTES

- 1 In the burgeoning scholarly literature on museums, I have found especially useful: Bud (1993, 1995); Crew (1996); Crew and Sims (1991); Harris (1995); Macdonald (1996); Finn (1990); Fyfe (1996); Macdonald and Silverstone (1992); Silverstone (1992); Clifford (1997).
- 2 Although historian Gerald Zahavi could at least imagine a 'multiple script' exhibition of the *Enola Gay*, with one corridor representing the views of critical revisionist

- historians and another representing the views of conservative veterans' organizations (Zahavi 1995).
- 3 'The notion that once upon a time there were "neutral" museum exhibits or artefacts that "spoke for themselves" is, of course, illusory' (Linenthal 1996: 26).
 - 4 'OUR KNOWLEDGE of what the world is like draws on knowledge about other people – what they are like as sources of testimony, whether and in what circumstances they may be trusted' (Shapin 1994: xxv–xxvi).
 - 5 Such symmetry is part of the 'strong programme' in the sociology of knowledge developed initially by David Bloor. In seeking causal explanations for how and why different groups hold to different representations of reality (natural or historical), analysts must refrain from starting out with *a priori* assumptions about which claims are true or false, factual or ideological, rational or irrational (Bloor 1991).
 - 6 I have elsewhere (Gieryn 1996) published an account of my experiences on the SAL Advisory Board, written from within the epistemic culture of sociologists, historians and professional curators of science – and frankly unagnostic about chemists' criticisms, which I dismissed as an exercise in scapegoating and blaming (obviously impotent) science studies for the apparent decline in public enthusiasm for the support of big science. I did not, in that piece, level my critical guns at defences of SAL by its curators and by me, so that the controversy comes off as our Truth against their Power. Because of that, I was able to end the paper optimistically if Pollyanna-ishly, by inviting the critical chemists and physicists to work with us, with our obviously superior standards of evidence, argument and purpose, toward a consensual representation of science in American life.
 - 7 My own analysis will be 'unbalanced' in seeming to give greater attention to *Crossroads* than to SAL. This is a measure of how much more ink has so far been spilled over the *Enola Gay* (three books [Nobile 1995; Linenthal and Engelhardt 1996; Harwit 1996], two theme sections of journals [Thelen 1995a; Hein 1995], along with hundreds of articles and editorials) than over *Crossroads* (no books and a handful of articles). The extracts come from a mixed bag of texts: confessionals, quotations in the mass media, reminiscences, meeting minutes. It would be quite wrong to assume that battle lines are necessarily as neatly drawn as this analysis would make them seem. The American Chemical Society did not always agree with the American Physical Society, nor did the American Legion necessarily pursue the same goals as the Air Force Association (Goldberg 1995), nor was consensus reached among the historians on the Enola Gay Advisory Board (Sherwin 1995: 1088). On the dangers of exaggerating polarization and essentializing 'sides' in scientific/political debates, see Wynne 1996. Zolberg 1996 provides a different sociological analysis of the *Enola Gay* flap, centring on American vs. Japanese constructions of national narratives.
 - 8 This comes from a posting by Molella on the History of Technology newsgroup titled 'Smithsonian Institution response to "What's New" by Robert Park, American Physical Society', 1 July 1994.
 - 9 Kennedy is quoted in 'Science in American Life: a management review', prepared by the SAL Exhibition Development Team, December 1990, p. 2, typescript.
 - 10 An accessible reprint of Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum's resolution on the *Enola Gay* exhibit, followed by excerpts from testimony and debate, may be found in Thelen (1995a: 1136–44).
 - 11 In a 1993 planning document, the proposed exhibition was titled *Fifty Years On . . .* After settling on *Crossroads* for the first draft script in January 1994, the exhibition idea evolved into *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* by May 1994 (after much material about the Cold War implications of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was deleted). To keep matters simple, I shall refer to the exhibition consistently as *Crossroads*, even when this is anachronistic. I do so because the published version of the script (Nobile 1995) comes from the time when the exhibition was known as *Crossroads*.
 - 12 'Minutes: Exhibition Advisory Board Meeting', 1 June 1991.
 - 13 Paul H. L. Walter, 'Remarks: Opening of Science in American Life', Washington, DC, 25 April 1994. In my insider's account of SAL (Gieryn 1996), I suggest that Walter's speech was in fact damnation with faint praise, as he uses the occasion to warn gathered dignitaries of the spectre of postmodernism and anti-reason – which, in the ensuing controversy, would be used as scapegoats blamed for SAL's enduring unbalance.
 - 14 Gross is co-author with Norman Levitt of *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (1994). From posting on Science and Technology Studies newsgroup, titled 'Who Owns History?', 8 May 1995.
 - 15 In questioning historian Edward T. Linenthal during hearings of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, Senator Wendell H. Ford from Kentucky says that 'the role of the Smithsonian management, I think, [is] to balance the perspectives' (in Thelen 1995a: 1141).
 - 16 This impassioned dispute over a number does not conform to historian of science Theodore Porter's argument that 'reliance on numbers and quantitative manipulation minimizes the need for intimate knowledge and personal trust'. Indeed, neither curators nor critics trusted the others' numbers, and for that reason it was impossible to 'produce knowledge independent of the particular people who make it' (which, says Porter, is what the 'highly disciplined discourse' of quantification should yield) (Porter 1995: ix).
 - 17 In less heavy-handed language, Correll writes in *Air Force*: 'Another theme of this postwar section is to show the American victors celebrating merrily in contrast to the anguish and suffering of the defeated Japanese' (Correll 1994b: 63).
 - 18 'The new script, like the last one, avoids showing warlike images of the Japanese armed forces . . . Indeed, they are the only military members on either side who appear in heroic roles in this exhibit' (Correll 1994b: 63).
 - 19 Stanley Goldberg, historian at the National Museum of American History, posting on the Science and Technology Studies newsgroup, 11 July 1995.
 - 20 Posting on History of Technology newsgroup, titled 'Smithsonian Institution Response . . .', dated 1 July 1994.
 - 21 Personal correspondence, Gieryn to Stine, 12 October 1990.
 - 22 At least one member of *Crossroads*' advisory committee agrees that the task of the project 'was to reflect, in part, the nature of scholarly thinking – and not to impose the curator's own historical judgement' (Bernstein 1995: 225–6).
 - 23 'those who make history and those who write it are, or should be, two different kinds of people' (Sodei 1995: 1122).
 - 24 Harwit, of course, suggests the opposite: that in spite of veterans' typical unawareness of the latest scholarship and recently available documentary evidence, the exhibition would include 'the voices of those who have special knowledge based on having been there' (Harwit 1996: 214).
 - 25 As an illustration of the curators' obliviousness to the sensitivities of veterans who were there, Correll writes: 'The new script . . . no longer says that the B-29 aircrews who flew the atomic bomb missions against Japan were "only following orders." Dr. Harwit told *Air Force Magazine* in August that it never occurred to the curators that this line might suggest an insulting parallel to the classic war crimes defence at Nuremberg' (Correll 1994c: 10).
 - 26 Scholars too sometimes use the language of 'being there' to legitimize their accounts – as in ethnographic fieldwork – but Geertz reminds us that the credibility of anthropologists' stories is not inherent in their experiential contact with the other

- but a literary accomplishment of skilful rhetoric practised back home, e.g. 'We were surrounded by crowds of naked chattering youngsters' (Geertz 1988: 12; here quoting from Raymond Firth's *We, the Tikopia*). Joan W. Scott identifies risks in essentializing 'experience' as a privileged source of authoritative knowledge, and restates in a different way what was at issue between curators and critics: 'What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straight-forward; it is always contested, always therefore political' (Scott 1992: 37). See Linenthal 1995 for more discussion of this issue in the *Enola Gay* controversy.
- 27 The idea of analysing competing representations of reality agnostically and symmetrically took hold in the sociology of scientific knowledge during the 1970s, but it took almost two decades for my tribe to consider systematically the political implications of our constructivism and (shades of) relativism. A special issue of *Social Studies of Science* (volume 26, no. 2, May 1996) gathers up a provocative set of papers which suggest that situating beliefs in social contexts makes for good sociology but impotent politics, and that agnostic detachment may make a sociologist of science vulnerable to having one's research exploited for ends that the author might not endorse.
- 28 If this is so, then (sociologically speaking) historians or curators may be placed into the same analytic category as veterans' organizations or the ACS: interest groups all (a point made by John Rumm, historian at the Smithsonian, before the Organization of American Historians [Rumm 1995: 1116]).
- 29 Evidently, this conclusion will come as no surprise at all to professional politicians: Senator Ford, noting that Linenthal was writing a paper about the *Enola Gay* controversy, said during committee hearings: 'Whoever reads it is going to have his interpretation of who the bad guys are and who the good guys are . . . I think I have a pretty good idea from listening to your comments this morning who the white hats are going to be and who the black hats are going to be . . . You start interpreting what happened here from all the reading, and we have some information, you have other information. Maybe we both do not have the same information. *So you write yours from yours, and we make our judgements from ours*' (in Thelen 1995a: 1142–3; emphasis added).
- 30 'What if a realist theory of the correspondence between history as written and the actual past is abandoned for a constructionist view of history as a form of representation? . . . [Answer:] If disciplines and written histories are socially and temporally located, then their ability to persuade others of their representations of texts, events, or subjects is severely constrained or eliminated' (Berkhofer 1995: 3). Other works in metahistory (not elsewhere cited) that take up the implications of Berkhofer's question include: Davis 1996; Le Goff 1992; Novick 1988; Scott 1997, who mentions the *Enola Gay* case.
- 31 Some readers will no doubt believe that I have ended this essay just when it got interesting. I do not know how Gutmann and Thompson's (1996): 1 'core idea' of deliberative democracy – 'when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions' – could have provided guidance for resolving differences between curators and critics, when reason was always in short supply and mutual satisfaction never achieved.
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