AFTER WORDS
THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

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"Enshrined in a language is the whole of a community's history and a large part of its cultural identity."

- David Crystal
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“IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY,
PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCE.
TO BE ABLE TO SIGNAL
‘WHO IS WITH ME’ AND ‘WHO IS NOT WITH ME’
IS EXTREMELY SIGNIFICANT FOR HUMAN BEINGS.”

- EMMA GREEN
English is the contemporary lingua franca, used internationally for trade, politics, and even air travel. More than a universal system of communication, the English language is central to the American culture. Shaped by uniquely American phenomena, English is a reflection of our society, for better or for worse. As a lexicon it has absorbed our history; colonization and slavery, technology and innovation, music and culture.

This exhibition, After Words: the American Language, explores the evolution of English in America, through the lens of the systems which shaped it, using the concept of sociolinguistics, or the study of the relationship between language and society.

This exhibition is designed around the following concepts...

1. Language is the fabric of our society.
2. We should celebrate community through common language.
3. The way we speak reflects who we are.
“...it was speech that clung to the ears, the link that tingled in the blood; U.S.A.”

- John Dos Passos, 1938
English has many distinct accents and dialects.

English is a constantly evolving language.

There is no correct way to speak English.

Visitors will leave this exhibition with a better understanding of the following key learning objectives...
“LANGUAGE HAS NO INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE
APART FROM THE PEOPLE WHO USE IT.

IT IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF; IT IS A MEANS TO AN END
OF UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU ARE
AND WHAT SOCIETY IS LIKE.”

- DAVID CRYSTAL
AUDIENCE

Standard American English Speakers

These visitors will benefit from understanding why other American’s sound different from themselves, and what that signifies in our society.

Non-Standard American English Speakers

Visitors who speak with an accent or dialect will benefit from seeing the way they speak represented in an exhibition in a normalized and accepting way.
An international city that is socio-economically diverse, Washington is also the most educated city in America, boasting most bachelors degrees per capita. Twenty-three language other than English and Spanish are spoken in Washington. The convergence of English with such a diverse variety of foreign languages results in manifold accents and English dialects.

Museums in Washington are well attended by tourists and locals alike. The Smithsonian Institution published a study which found that tourists visiting Washington, D.C. have the personal resources which enable them to travel and seek intellectually stimulating experiences, specifically with non-traditional subject matter.

These unique qualities make Washington the perfect city to host an exhibition which addresses issues of education, privilege, and diversity.
A forgotten D.C. historic landmark, the Franklin School Building was designed by Adolf Cluss in 1869. Alexander Graham Bell successfully tested his invention called a ‘photophone’, which transmitted sound via light-waves, on the roof of the building in 1880.

The building is centrally located in downtown D.C. and easily accessible by public transportation. It is slated to reopen in the winter of 2019 as the Planet Word Language Museum.
“There is no divine sanction in language, it is a tool of the people who use it.”

- David Skinner
“Language is what makes us human. From earliest childhood we weave our words into speech to communicate. At Planet Word we inspire and renew a love of words and language through unique, immersive learning experiences.”

www.planetwordmuseum.org
“TODAY’S DIALECT
IS TOMORROW’S LANGUAGE”

- JOHN MCWHORTER
EXHIBITION CONTENT | SECTIONS

Section 1: You Say Tomato, I Say Tomato
- Identifying regional U.S. accents and dialects
- How accents and dialects formed in response to migration, systemic oppression, exposure to other languages and cultures
- How our accent creates our identity and shapes how we interact with other people

Section 2: Through the Grapevine
- Development of dialectical grammar and slang through music, specifically hip hop
- Intersection of knowledge and power, how artists use music to subvert traditional power structures in language
- Music as prophesy, how to predict the future of language through pop culture

Section 3: Stating the Union
- How social media and technology are pushing language forward faster than ever before
- The language of politics, watching the news, and the dissemination of information
- Preservation vs. Progress, what will English sound like in the next generation?
Section 1: You Say Tomato, I Say Tomato

Section 2: Through the Grapevine

Section 3: Stating the Union

Hall of Voices
EXHIBITION CONTENT | FLOOR PLAN
Visitors begin their experience in the stairwell or elevator, as they ascend to the Great Hall on the third floor of the Franklin Building. A gobo projection fills the stairwell with a textured composition of English words and fabric. The projection spills off the walls and onto the visitors themselves, immersing them both physically and mentally in language. The words are representative of all varieties of English; some are more casual and vernacular, while others harken back to a time of formality and tradition.
YOU SAY TOMATO, I SAY TOMATO

The first section of the exhibition introduces the visitor to the concept of accent as it relates to personal and community identity. There is an interactive map which traces the development of English and migration across the country, audio bubbles where visitors can try to identify distinct regional accents and dialects, and a recording booth where they can recite a piece of supplied prose and leave their voice to be projected in the Hall of Voices.
YOU SAY TOMATO, I SAY TOMATO

While in the first exhibition gallery, visitors may notice the use of semi-transparent fabric instead of solid wall structures. This creates an airy and ethereal environment, allowing exhibit-goers to observe each other as they experience what After Words has to offer.
YOU SAY TOMATO, I SAY TOMATO

Accent and Identity

Accent is the intonation pattern of a language, and identity is the concept of who one is and how one is perceived. The two are often intertwined, with accent being used to express and reinforce identity. This is especially true in English-speaking countries, where accent can be used to indicate a person's nationality, class, or social status. For example, a person from the United States may have a different accent than a person from the United Kingdom. This difference in accent can be used to create a sense of identity, as people may associate certain accents with certain identities. For example, a person from the United States may be more likely to identify with a particular region within the United States, while a person from the United Kingdom may be more likely to identify with a particular region within the United Kingdom.
HALL OF VOICES

In order to move from gallery to gallery, visitors must pass through an interstitial tunnel known as the Hall of voices. The tunnel is constructed of a slightly darker stretched fabric, still permeated by light. As they walk through, visitors encounter highly controlled pockets of directional sound, audio recordings of different American accents and dialects. Some are from previous archives, and others were provided by fellow exhibit-goes at the recording booth in the first gallery. This provides participants with the opportunity to appreciate the marvelous diversity of the American language, and find their own personal interpretation and meaning.
Through the Grapevine, the second content section of the exhibition, explores the relationship between language and culture, specifically music. The visitor has the opportunity to write their own poem or lyrics, relax and watch video clips of music videos, and even try to rap along to some of our country’s most famous songs karaoke style.
THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

The visitors' curiosity remains piqued throughout the entire exhibition, as they can observe the enticing interactives through the fabric dividers.
GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

I said a hip hiphip, hooray to the hip hip hop
you don't stop the rock
with the bang bang boogie
did you jump the boogie
to the rhythm of the boogie
the beat
STATING THE UNION

In the final section of the exhibition, visitors learn about the effect and consequences language has on our country today, through social media, news sources, politicians, and technology. Exhibit-goers can compare clips of different presidents’ speeches, try to decode text abbreviations, and learn how technology has influenced English through an interactive timeline.
STATING THE UNION

The last activity visitors will encounter in this exhibition is a comment wall where they are encouraged to share their thoughts, from a favorite or least-favorite English word, suggestions for the museum, or their heartfelt opinion about the language of our country.
EXTERIOR

Leading up to and for the duration of the exhibition, the exterior of the building will be lit at night with a similar projection to the one visitors encounter at the entrance treatment. The lights are branded specifically for After Words, but also double as advertisement for the newly opened Plant Word Language Museum.
“IF YOU WANT INSIGHT AS TO WHAT MAKES ALL HUMANS WORLDWIDE THE SAME, BEYOND GENETICS, THERE ARE FEW BETTER PLACES TO START THAN HOW LANGUAGE WORKS.”

- JOHN MCWHORTER
Immersive audio environments where visitors can be surrounded by the complex landscape of American English accents and dialects.

Interstitial spaces in exhibits can be hallways, doorways, and other spaces that typically aren’t used for content. By activating these interstitial spaces, the exhibit can maximize its potential. This exhibit is divided into three distinct content areas, separated by interstitial hallways. In order to enter the next content area, visitors must pass through a hallway that stretches the length of the gallery, no more than 5 feet wide. Pockets of audio recordings will be projected into the space, creating an immersive environment where visitors can delight in the variety of American English accents and dialects.

1. Interactives designed for individuals and group experience

2. Visual metaphors:
   - adaptive reuse—achieved through incorporation of site architecture into design
   - the fabric of the English language—utilizing fabric elements throughout the exhibit

3. Immersive audio environments where visitors can be surrounded by the complex landscape of American English
“Head-In”, Magma Architecture, Berlin, 2009

- Employ the main architectural feature of the exhibit as a storytelling device, the tool through which to experience the exhibition
- A transformed physical space can enhance the visitors engagement with the content

“Archeology of the Netherlands”, Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, Kinkorn, 2011

- A narrative device for visitors to follow throughout the exhibit, which also physically supports the exhibit itself
- Bringing movement to a typically rigid material or device
The Franklin School Building combines two genres of architectural style, modern Renaissance, also known as Renaissance Revival, and a German style called “Rundbogenstil,” which is characterized by rounded archways and smooth building facades.

Choosing a historical landmark for the exhibit poses a unique set of challenges. No significant changes can be made to the structure of the building, meaning no walls can be altered or removed. Designing an exhibition in a building with narrow doorways can be problematic; visitors can easily become crowded in a bottleneck and become discouraged from entering an exhibit, visitor flow can become interrupted and awkward, exhibit floor plans must be reworked for smaller spaces.

Hosting the exhibition in the Franklin School also presents the opportunity to capitalize on its educational origins and beautiful architecture. When Planet Word Language Museum moves into the building, the Franklin School will be given a new purpose.
“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN UGLY ACCENT,
LIKE THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS AN UGLY FLOWER.”

- DAVID CRYSTAL
Adaptive reuse refers to the architectural theory of repurposing a historical building for a use. As visitors engage with the exhibit content, they will find themselves with a historically educational environment juxtaposed with a modern exhibit design aesthetic.

The graphic design was inspired by monotone compositions, and echoes the use of fabric throughout the exhibition. Fabric is representative of fluidity and the continuum of language.
AFTER WORDS

The American Language

English is the lingua franca of planet earth, the preferred language in business, politics, and international meet. It is the most widely learned second language and dictates popular culture all over the world. In America, the varied accents and dialects of English speakers correlate class and status.

In the past few years in particular, America's current political and socio-economic climate has come to an ominous precipice. Communities which have long felt abused and neglected are beginning to confront each other in their search for equality and recognition. Aspects of social discord and disconnectedness can be traced back to differences in education, upbringing, and values which are reflected in the way we speak. These disparities in vocabulary and grammar help enforce the damaging misconception that we are better than them.

After Words: The American Language explores the evolution of the English language through the lens of the systems which shaped it, using the concept of sociolinguistics, the study of the relationship between language and society. By examining the influencing factors that shaped English, the language that all Americans experience, this work calls attention to privilege as it relates to language and the role it plays in systemic inequality.
GRAPHICS | ELEVATION

STATING THE UNION

CHLOE ALEXANDER | EXHIBITION DESIGN THESIS PACKAGE
The interstitial tunnel, or Hall of Voices, is constructed out of stretched scrim around an aluminum frame. It stands at approximately 16 feet tall, with hallways at 36 inches wide. The entire exhibition is contained in a tent like structure made in a similar style, which also tops out at 16 feet.
For this exhibition, we propose using Barrisol products and services to construct the unique environments which are crucial to the overall experience.

- Barrisol sheets are classified as Class I in the USA.
- Barrisol sheets are made of non-toxic polymer and are 100% recyclable.
- Microperforated stretch ceiling to absorb the sounds and to reduce noise pollution.
After Words will offer a free app download upon entrance of the exhibition. Visitors can use the app to navigate through the galleries and activities, learn more about language privilege in America, or visit the accent archives collected during the exhibition.
Social media plays an important role in advertising and publicity for the modern museum. A custom SnapChat filter with After Words branding is a fun way for visitors to share their experience with their friends and family through social networking avenues.

A trending hashtag, #AfterWords, can collect photos and videos taken while at the exhibition. This can prove to be a powerful tool for evaluation for the duration of the exhibition, as well as determining its success after it has closed to the public.
CONCLUSION

By examining the influencing factors that shaped English, the language that all Americans experience, this exhibit calls attention to privilege as it relates to language and the role it plays in systemic inequality. These interactives engage the visitors in an unassuming way that creates a more accepting and relaxed state of mind, so that the audience does not feel persecuted or threatened. After Words: The American Language gives visitors the tools to start important conversations within their own communities. Through effective exhibition design, museums have the ability to break down social barriers that reinforce misconceptions about class structure in the United States.
THANK YOU