OPEN TO INTERPRETATION: MOBILIZING HISTORICAL THINKING IN THE MUSEUM

by

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Abstract

This study adopts an historical thinking pedagogy to examine how museums “make history”. An historical thinking pedagogy supports learners in shaping their own ideas about the past by simultaneously engaging them with substantive history (the facts, dates, events of history) and procedural history (the processes that go into constructing histories). I hypothesized that a greater understanding of visitors’ and exhibition makers’ historical thinking could help museum practitioners create new forms of public engagement with the past that resonate more significantly with contemporary audiences.

The research design evaluated the usefulness of two frameworks related to historical meaning-making of exhibition makers and visitors. These frameworks were initially designed to examine the work of historians (in the case of Jörn Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix) and students (in the case of Peter Seixas’ historical thinking concepts). The investigation, informed by a phenomenographic methodology, consisted of a qualitative case study, which focused on a single exhibition, its makers (n=6) and its visitors (n=36). The selected exhibition, Being Irish O’Quebec, was presented at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal in 2009–10. The exhibition proposed a complex notion of Quebecois identity by demonstrating the ubiquity of Irish culture in Quebec’s cultural and genetic makeup.

The analysis demonstrated how both frameworks could help conceptualize the experience of exhibition makers and museum visitors, and describe their agency as historical interpreters. Historical thinking concepts were instrumental in pursuing their distinctive interpretive tasks. The frameworks provided two robust sets of interconnected questions that could promote reflexive practice among museum practitioners and inspire new museographic approaches. Having demonstrated the visitors’ interest in the processes of doing history, I propose the creation of porous narratives, exhibition environments where design and textual elements expose the construction of the historical narrative and explicitly invite visitors to take a more active role as interpreters. Such a strategy would firmly position the educational function of museums as promoters of historical consciousness, while contributing toward more democratic and reciprocal relationships between museums and their publics.
Preface

The following statement is a requirement of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at The University of British Columbia (UBC) for research that required the approval of a UBC Research Ethics Board. Ethics approval for this research was provided by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate number: H08-03121.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1 Setting the Stage

The need for museums to become civic spaces that facilitate public dialogues and reflections on topical issues is a theme widely discussed in museum circles (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Janes, 2009; Janes & Conaty, 2005; Silverman, 2010; Weil, 1999, 2002). To address this need, history museums must create new interplays between the past, historical knowledge, and contemporary realities. As a way to participate in this transformation, this study explores the application/appropriation of an historical thinking pedagogy to rethink how museums “make history”.

For the past thirty years, academics and educators have been exploring how to foster the growth of historical understanding in ways that transcend the demands of factual memorization. In this process, they have learned to pay particular attention to how students and adults, but also teachers, relate to the past. In the museum field, on the other hand, little is known about the way museum visitors’ conception of history influences how they engage with exhibitions or historic sites. The same can be said of the exhibition as learning environment. We do not have a strong grasp of how this medium stimulates and nurtures historical thinking and historical literacy. These are important questions, as museums are one of the few public institutions mandated to facilitate lifelong learning about the collective past.

This research investigates how historical meaning-making is provoked and inspired by exhibitions in history museums. Although historical meaning-making can take place in all types of museal institutions, this study focuses on exhibitions whose producers intend to convey historical knowledge and whose public intends, partly at least, to learn about past events, people and places. The motivation for exploring an interdisciplinary perspective (drawing from the work of history educators and museum theorists) stems from my professional experience in museums. Over 15 years of developing exhibitions in British Columbia, I have become increasingly fascinated and at times perplexed by this medium’s ability to support the historical explorations of visitors. Formal education has different parameters with regard to content delivery, setting, audience and performance expectations. In the preliminary stage of my investigation it became apparent, however, that research on historical learning and thinking
could stimulate discussions about new forms of exhibitionary practice and new avenues for museum studies research.

1.2 Research Questions

Since the late 1970s, research in museum studies has intensified and contributed to a better understanding of the educational capacity and social agency of this public institution. This area of research, however, has not explored the usefulness of historical thinking frameworks to investigate how visitors make sense of the past in the exhibition space. The aim of my doctoral research is to propose an enlarged definition of the museum exhibition as a “meaning-making environment” by exploring how it mobilizes the historical thinking of multiple actors (visitors and exhibition makers) with different and yet sometimes convergent roles. Such exploration takes the form of an empirical study, which involves examining the exhibition through the perspectives of its makers and visitors. The public reception segment of the study investigates how historical knowledge is grasped in the context of a non-facilitated visit—that is, without a guided tour or school program. This is an important distinction because most visitors experience museums as a leisure activity and have only sporadic contact with museum staff. In this context, the exhibition’s physical and textual characteristics are critical in generating meaning-making opportunities.

This empirical inquiry employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from key ideas and theoretical frameworks used in museum studies, historiography and history education. Both the museological and historiographic perspectives support my exploration of the complex and dynamic exhibitionary performance (the production and public reception of exhibitions) as a dialogical process that is both educational and cultural in nature. Specifically, this study explores the pedagogical and heuristic potential of two analytical frameworks. The first one consists of a disciplinary matrix developed by historian Jörn Rüsen (1993), who examines the inner workings of history as an intellectual and cultural pursuit. The second framework consists

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1 In social sciences and humanities, the term “performance” is used to convey the idea of the “art of producing the now” and the notion of improvisation. In the same way, I employ “performance” to describe the active work involved in both making and visiting exhibitions. The term also emphasizes the unpredictability of the event (all exhibition projects are unique and generate different meaning-making experiences on the part of museum staff and visitors). Lastly, the term also refers to the emotional and physical experiences associated with making and visiting exhibitions.
of six concepts underpinning historical thinking, namely: continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical significance, historical perspective, evidence, and ethical judgment.

The analysis emerging from studying historical thinking in the museum connects with scholarly discussion on historical consciousness, in that it examines people’s ability to engage with the exhibition’s historical narrative and make sense of their individual and collective lives. Thus, the research questions structuring this inquiry are:

To what extent can historical thinking frameworks be useful in understanding and assessing the meaning-making of the exhibitionary performers (exhibition makers and visitors) in the museum?

and, as a sub-question:

To what extent can these emergent understandings of the visitors’ and exhibition makers’ historical meaning-making suggest new orientations/new practices in exhibition development and museum studies?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Western societies are undergoing fundamental changes as the intensification of global economic systems, the increased mobility of people, ideas and goods, and the proliferation of new communication technologies change the way people relate to time, space and others. The implications for museums are far-reaching. For instance, how do museums make the past relevant to a public that no longer shares cultural memories? And how are museums to position themselves in relation to more accessible historical sources and productions found on the Internet? My approach to studying exhibitions and their publics will provide insights and propose tools to conceptualise and hopefully enhance the changing role of museums in contemporary culture.

To situate the relevance of this doctoral research, I refer to four recent large-scale survey findings related to Canadian museums:

- Over 27 million people visit Canadian museums annually (Statistics Canada, 2010);²
- Despite talk about increases in private-sector funding, museums in Canada continue to be largely funded by government, which accounts for 67% of museum revenues (Hill

² For the most recent annual statistics concerning heritage institutions in Canada (year 2009), consult the Statistics Canada website http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/87f0002x/2010001/part-partie1-eng.htm.
Strategies
Research, 2008);³

- Although 97% of surveyed Canadians say they believe that museums play an important role in preserving objects and knowledge of Canada’s history, 60% believe museums could play an even more significant role in Canadian society than they do now (Canadian Museum Association, 2003);

- The large national survey Canadians and their Pasts, studying the significance for and use of the past by Canadians, indicates that 85% of Canadians highly trust museums’ ability to generate trustworthy historical information. Museums in that survey were the single most trusted source of information about the past for 40% of Canadians, regardless of age, gender, education, socio-economic status, and cultural background. If one includes the respondents who selected historic sites, this figure increases to 53% (Conrad, Letourneau, & Northrup, 2009).⁴

How can we interpret these figures? Although it is safe to say that most Canadian museums and historic sites would like an increase in the size and demographic diversity of their audience, the substantial figures on annual museum attendance tell us that these institutions, both large and small, have the potential to influence many Canadians’ understanding of the past. In addition to the attendance figures, the high level of public trust in the museum’s ability to convey reliable historical knowledge is another reason to consider the critical role of the museum as a place for historical meaning-making. Because historical learning is an under-theorized area in museum studies, it is difficult to assess the nature of this role. As many historians and philosophers have reminded us, the work involved in historical interpretation is as much about making sense of the present and future as it is about resolving past realities (Létourneau, 2009; Lowenthal, 2000; Nora, 1989; Tutiaux-Guillon & Nourrisson, 2003). Indeed, several scholars have made the case that the nature of historical thinking or historical consciousness influences actions carried forward (Gadamer, 1987; Rüsen, 2004a, 2004b; Smith, 2006; Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000). For this reason, understanding how historical meaning-making takes place in the museum helps us to appreciate how people make

³ The private sector represents only 9% of total revenue, while earned revenue accounts for 23% (Hill Strategies Research, 2008).

⁴ Other sources of historical information presented to the respondents, with corresponding “most trusted” percentages: Internet, 8%; fact-based history books, 19%; family stories, 17%; teachers, 30%.
sense of their individual and collective lives and how this understanding shapes contemporary culture. Such knowledge may determine new directions for museums to enhance their role as public sites of historical consciousness.

The Canadian Museum Association survey of 2003 revealed that despite the public’s satisfaction with the role of Canadian museums in disseminating knowledge about the collective past, a large number of Canadians declared that museums might play a more substantial role in such projects. The nature of these expectations ought to be more fully investigated in qualitative terms.

As recent statistics on museum revenues tell us, Canadian museums rely heavily on government funding. This support indicates the willingness of the state and its citizens to consider cultural services, such as those performed by museums, as important for the well-being and development of the collective. Because this support can never be taken for granted—as we can see with the latest provincial and federal budget cutbacks in the cultural sector—the more museums understand and articulate the nature of their social and educational value, the better they can make the case for sustaining and increasing public funding (Janes, 2009; Sheppard, 2010). The recent collaborative research effort involving museum scholars and the British MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives) gives weight to this idea (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 15–30). Just as importantly, adopting a reflective practice assists museums in recalibrating their views about themselves in relation to their public.

My research program addresses issues and questions emerging from these surveys. These issues relate to the nature and substance of historical knowledge generated through museum visits and the public’s understanding of the role of museums as sites of history education. My conjecture is that the use of an historical thinking framework to interpret both visitors’ and exhibition team members’ thoughts and understanding of an exhibition can shed new light on these questions. More specifically, it produces new insights into:

a) visitors’ historical meaning-making experience in museums; and

b) museum exhibition makers’ interpretive work.

Possible implications for research findings are:

a) the expansion of the analytical repertoire for the critical examination of exhibitionary performance (production and public reception);
b) the identification of a conceptual framework for exhibition that supports the historical explorations of visitors; and
c) a greater understanding of the educational and, by extension, social role of museums in contemporary culture.

1.4 Conclusion and Structure of the Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, I delineated the context, aim and significance of this study, and presented the research questions. The remaining chapters are organized as follows.

In chapter 2, I explore key discussions about the evolving role of museums as institutions of public education and identify in the museum studies literature three predominant approaches to analysing exhibitions as learning environments. In the final section of that chapter, I locate more specifically work that informs the theoretical and methodological scaffolding of my inquiry.

In chapter 3, I review the principles underpinning an historical thinking pedagogy and introduce the six dimensions of historical thinking, as one of two analytical frameworks shaping this study. I locate points of convergence between the principles underpinning an historical thinking pedagogy and key elements found in the discourse on critical museology.

In chapter 4, I provide a rationale for developing a case study research design employing a phenomenographic methodology to investigate how museum exhibitions mobilize the historical thinking of visitors and exhibition makers. I describe how analytical tools were deployed to generate data and ultimately answer my research questions.

In chapter 5, I describe the museum institution and exhibition selected for my case study. I also introduce the exhibition team members interviewed for the analysis of the making of the exhibition.

In chapter 6, I analyse the production of Being Irish O’Quebec. I examine how historical thinking was implicated in the making of the exhibition, using Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix as a structural element.

In chapter 7, I analyse the public reception of Being Irish O’Quebec. I examine how historical thinking was mobilized when making sense of the exhibition, using Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix as a structural element.
In chapter 8, I discuss the use of the two theoretical frameworks, return to my research questions and provide a summary of the study and its findings. I discuss the implications for museum practice and suggest avenues for future research arising from this study. The concluding portion reflects on the research journey and puts it in the context of a search for understanding and participating in the changing role of the museum as a public institution promoting lifelong learning about the past.
Chapter 2 Making Sense of the World in the Museum

Although the museum as we know it has been with us for some two hundred years, we are only in the foothills of learning about the ways in which the museum’s visitors respond to the objects it shows. (Weil, 2002, p. 205–206)

The museum’s claim to educate the public for the betterment of individuals and society via its exhibitions has been under intense scrutiny for the past four decades. Although few scholars would disagree with the centrality of public education in contemporary museums, views on the substance of this core function vary significantly. To address the notion of the museum exhibition as learning environment, this chapter examines scholarly research on museum education but also refers to the more implicit discussions of its educational role. To this end, I review critical works in museum studies that have investigated the public reception and the production of exhibitions, to establish how visitors and knowledge representation in the museum are conceptualised by museum scholars.

The first section of this chapter explores the educational function of public museums as an evolving role that has moved from imparting knowledge to an audience to mediating and co-authoring meaning with the public. The second section examines the conception of visitors in museum studies literature interested in the public effect of exhibitions. My argument is structured around two polarized approaches within this literature: while one stream of research tends to emphasize the historical/structural forces informing the production of exhibitions, the other concentrates on the visitor agency. Within this spectrum, a median position on studying exhibitions emerges. In the final portion of this chapter, particular attention is given to work located within the median position, as it informs the methodological scaffolding of my inquiry.

2.1 Museum Education: From Teaching to Mediating and Co-producing Knowledge

An appreciation for the museum’s historical developments from the eighteenth century contributes to an understanding of the museum’s educational role in contemporary society

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5 The scope of the literature referred to in this paper is limited to museum publications written in or translated into English or French.
and its enduring influence in Western culture. The museum has been depicted as a creature, an archetype, or an instrument of modernity’s project, supporting its nation-state building, colonialisat and capitalist endeavours (Barringer & Flynn, 1998; Bennett, 1995; Carbonell, 2004; Duncan, 1995; Knell et al., 2010; Macdonald, 2003; Preziosi & Farago, 2004). Numerous studies have explored the relationship between the emergence of a positivist-empiricist stance that characterized modernity, and the philosophical and pedagogical approach of the early modern museums (Bennett, 1995, 2006; Deloche, 2007; Huyssen, 2003; Knell, 2007; Pearce, 2010). These analyses have demonstrated how exhibitions became spatial, visual and tri-dimensional representations of scientific rationalism. The belief in a universal, fixed body of knowledge, and in the existence of an objective reality and natural laws that captured this reality, dictated the museum’s educational program. The study of the world having been conceived as divided into separate fields of knowledge, the task of educational institutions like schools and museums consisted of “grasping the world” through the transmission of the tenets of disciplinary knowledge to their public (Gurian, 2006; Willinsky, 1998). Knowledge transmission in the museum often meant making visible to the layman the objective structure of scientific knowledge by means of display—taxonomic exhibits of natural history specimens, or ethnographic presentations of “primitive societies” epitomizing such concepts. Successful learning was accordingly assessed by the learner’s ability to uncritically absorb these notions, presented as truth (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, 1994, 2000).

As museum historians have pointed out, alternative ways of considering knowledge in the museum emerged more persistently in the second part of the twentieth century. The radical reconsideration of culture by scholars in social sciences and humanities, referred to as the “cultural turn”, had a far-reaching impact upon the way Western museums considered knowledge and its dissemination to the general public (Deetz, 2004/1980; Munslow, 2007; Pollock, 2007; Shanks & Hodder, 2007). Two world wars, the brutal violence of European colonization, and the environmental effects of overconsumption contributed to a shake-up in Western culture’s beliefs about the ideals of rationalism and progress. The ensuing scepticism, summed up in Lyotard’s expression “the incredulity for the grand narrative” (Lyotard, 1979/1984), pressured researchers in most scientific fields (to a lesser extent in the natural sciences) to reconceptualise the notions of truth and knowledge as social and cultural constructs rather than absolutes or fixed entities. If knowledge was a construct, it could no
longer be considered context-independent and objective—and consequently, scientific claims had to be relativised as defensible propositions bound to be partial and contingent. Teaching and learning could no longer be considered a transmission of the truth, but rather the sharing of meaning that was historically and culturally situated (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007a; Leone & Little, 2004; Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996; Meijer-Van Mensch & Mensch, 2010).

A shift in conceptualising learning emerged concurrently, inspired by the work of scholars in the field of psychology initiated in the first half of the twentieth century. Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, to name a few, helped change the focus from learning based on behaviour to acts of meaning- and sense-making, and as individual and socio-cultural processes (Stearns, et al., 2000). This perspective opposed the transmission model of teaching, whereby learners were expected to absorb the content of well-crafted lessons. Thus, the recognition that people did not absorb new knowledge but rather constructed it by adjusting mental models to accommodate new experiences forced institutions associated with public education, like schools and museums, to reconsider what learning meant (G. Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002; Roschelle, 1995). A number of museum theorists have argued that this radical change in perceiving knowledge (how it is made and how it is apprehended) has destabilized modernity’s ideals rather than replaced them, producing a range of theoretical accommodations that facilitate new ways of thinking about knowledge production and learning processes in everyday life, in schools and in museums (G. Hein, 2006; H. S. Hein, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 2006, 2007a; Pollock & Zemans, 2007; Robert, 1997). This idea was clearly demonstrated in George Hein’s book Learning in the Museum (1998), in which he explained the possible coexistence of traditional and more progressive approaches to knowledge and learning in contemporary museums. For instance, in plenty of examples of recent exhibitions, visitors were conceived as passive recipients of information, while their makers recognized that knowledge is a social construct. Hein’s point is that, knowingly or unknowingly, museums have rarely completely abandoned past practices

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6 The authors trace a good historical development of the “cognitive revolution” in their introduction, p. 1–15.
7 Thus, the reluctance to refer to these developments as postmodern, a term that suggests that modernity is a thing of the past. Some critics have underlined the distinction by naming these two periods “early and late modernity”, while others have used the term “liquid modernity” to describe contemporary times. Although I subscribe to the idea that there is no definite rupture between the two historical periods, for the sake of clarity I shall term “postmodern” epistemologies that conceive of knowledge as mental and social constructions.
and the notion of objective and value-free knowledge, and the transmission model of teaching and learning continues to inform (some) museum practice today. Nevertheless, the sweeping changes in knowledge and learning theories have resulted in museums generally becoming more inclined to consider their role as mediators of learning experiences rather than providers of authoritative knowledge. This interest in conceptualising and creating learning experiences in the museum corresponded to the intensification in the 1990s of visitor studies informed by socio-constructivist theory (Allen et al., 2007; Blud, 1990; Dufresne-Tasse, 1996; Falk & Adelman, 2003; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000), and more recently, socio-cultural theory (Ellenbogen, 2002; Kelly, 2010a; Leinhardt, Crowley, & Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004). From this perspective, the institution’s prime educational goal is to create opportunities for meaningful encounters between material culture, ideas and people in ways that take into consideration the visitors’ diverse experiences, prior knowledge, and identities.

Another key outcome of the cultural turn was the unsettling realization that museums had until then exclusively favoured a Eurocentric/white/male/heterosexual perspective. This caused museums to gradually revise how they collected, studied and displayed their collections, to develop practices that were more inclusive, explicit and self-conscious. This state of self-awareness led to the emergence of a more reflexive approach to museum theory and practice, often referred to as critical museology.

Critical museology questions what a museum is, what it does and what it can become. The term has been used in multiple contexts, and also interchangeably at times with “new museum theory and practice”, “critical museum theory” and “new museology”, but consistently involves the notion of critical evaluation of museum practices and histories (Lindauer, 2006; Macdonald, 2006; Teather, 1983; Van Mensch, 1992). Its aim is to interrogate the methodologies underpinning historical and current museum practices. Hooper-Greenhill suggested that critical museology is the enactment of the tension and negotiations between the modern and postmodern epistemologies, as museums attempt to move away from the more static, linear, singular viewpoint associated with modernist epistemology (2006). She argued, “The ambition to provide a single unified objective explanation of the world and its people that would be applicable in all circumstances has been exposed as the embodiment of a limited Eurocentric masculinist perspective” (p. 370). Thus, critical museology has been primarily employed to examine the politics of domination, with a particular focus on Western
museum collections and exhibitions representing non-Western cultures, in the hope of
decolonizing the museum (Ames, 1992; Butler, 2000; Clifford, 2004; Karp, Kratz, Szwaja, &
Ybarra-Frausto, 2006; Karp, Kreamer, & Lavine, 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Shelton, 2001). This
critical examination can be applied in other exhibitionary contexts to raise questions about
normalized societal values, myths, the national past, and directions for the future (Carnegie,
2006; Corrin, 2004/1994; Gable, 2006; Hawes, 1986). Critical museology wants to make explicit
that museums are not neutral spaces, that they are informed by the cultural, historical and
political agendas of their stakeholders. These commentaries take the form of textual analyses
as well as actual museum interventions in the form of exhibitions, programs and events. Such
performances often address controversial or taboo subjects to generate public debates. These
works often criticise dominant practices and at times propose alternatives—that is, new
museum models, promoting more democratic exchanges, inclusion and diversity (Cameron,
2005; Cameron & Kelly, 2010; Golding, 2009; Marstine, 2006; Porter, 2004). For instance,
Mieke Bal (2006) suggested visual strategies that could interfere with the conventional displays
of the art gallery space, while Lindauer (2006) proposed a set of questions for visitors to query
tacit values embedded in the museum environment. Cultural anthropologist Saloni Mathur
captured the aim of this engagement with museum theory and practice: “Critical museology
should teach the capacity for social justice in our cultural institutions” (Mathur, 2005, p. 706).
Within the practice of critical museology, education is viewed as supporting new forms of civic
engagement, often through provocation.

A trend at times overlapping with but distinguishable from critical museology has been
described by Meier-Van Mensch and Van Mensch (2010) as the “participatory paradigm”.
Groups and communities whose voices had been absent from official narratives insisted on
having their stories and perspectives presented in the museum. This development was
associated with multiple emancipation movements of the 1990s, including third-wave
feminism, queer rights, post-colonial resistance, post-apartheid, capitulation of communism,
aboriginal rights and sovereignty, and the growing multiculturalism of Western countries
(Bodo, Gibbs, & Sani, 2009; Meijer-Van Mensch & Mensch, 2010; Silverman & O’Neill, 2004).
Previously marginalized voices co-opted the curatorial program or collaborated in the rewriting
of their narratives, whether critical or celebratory (Karp, et al., 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991;
Robert, 1997; Sandell, 2002). These forms of interactions between museums and various
community groups have also encouraged scholars to explore the museum’s educational potential for fostering a culture of inclusion, for embracing the notion of interculturalism and shared imaginaries, and for facilitating new forms of community participation in the museum (Bhabha, 2004; Clifford, 2004; Preziosi & Farago, 2004; Shelton, 2001).

The recent emergence and intensification of Web-based technologies and social networking have supported new forms of public participation in the museum. These new technologies of communication have radically changed the relationship between institutions and the public regarding knowledge production and dissemination, and power relations. Individuals and small organizations, alongside public institutions, can now generate knowledge, voice their concerns, and share their perspectives and insights publicly. This digital revolution has created new platforms for civic engagement, and engendered new needs and expectations from the public (or segments of the public) to be included in some capacity in the development of museum productions, online or in situ. This influence has manifested itself through some exhibition teams adopting an increasingly collaborative process, encouraging crowd sourcing, and supporting citizen-curator initiatives (Kelly, 2010b; Kelly & Russo, 2010; Simon, 2010). Museum researchers and practitioners are currently trying to harness the potentials of these new technologies (at pragmatic and philosophical levels) for the benefit of their educational mandate. They are also grappling with the implications of these new developments. Balancing professional expertise, specialized knowledge and popular wisdom, and sustaining dialogue between online communities and museums are two key issues related to these technological developments (M. Anderson, 2008; Lally, 2010; Simon, 2010). The co-authoring of knowledge involving visitors is considered a form of public engagement that can effectively support learning and meaning-making in the museum.

2.2 The Exhibition Effects

The preceding section described the changing conceptions of knowledge and learning, and the implication of these changes for museum research and practice. In the following section, I categorize a vast and diverse body of literature that examines exhibitions from various theoretical frameworks. Because this museum literature is motivated by different sets of questions, it generates a wide range of understandings about the exhibition’s ability to
provoke “distinctive and desired impressions”⁸ in an audience. The museum literature examining the exhibition as a meaning-making environment is immense. The aim of such groupings is to understand the trend in current discussions, and is by no means a comprehensive listing of publications by category.

2.2.1 Considering the visitor as passive recipient of knowledge

The museum literature in this grouping tends to study exhibitions as cultural artefacts and as historical and social phenomena. Scholars involved in these types of study are cultural critics, anthropologists or sociologists investigating the meaning of exhibition visiting as social, cultural and historical practice, while examining the naturalized conventions of collecting and displaying objects (Bennett, 1995; Krauss, 2004/1990; Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996). These studies attempt to understand the “what and why” of the exhibition’s educational function in Western society. Their aim is to locate the cultural and political functions of exhibitions and modes of representation in relation to power structures. For many of these scholars, the influential nature of the exhibition is often understood as a “technology of power” (Bennett, 2004; Duncan, 2004/1999; Knell, et al., 2010; Willinsky, 1998). It is instrumental in perpetuating and consolidating (or educating the audience about) existing power relations by normalizing certain values and beliefs endorsed by dominant groups (Bennett, 2006; Duncan, 1995; Fraser, 2007).

As a result of this focus, exhibition analyses in this category consist of readings of the exhibition that take into account the curators’ intent and the larger cultural and sociological context of production. In these analyses, the visitor response is largely absent from the discussion, implying a passive assimilation of the museum intent by the public. It is striking that in anthologies such as Thinking About Exhibition (1996), Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum (2004), Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts (2004), A Companion to Museums Studies (2006), and Museum Frictions (2006)—all key museum literature references—most essays describe the public’s response to exhibitions only in generic terms. The analyses tend to focus on conditions of production—that is, on the tensions and negotiations that influence the conceptualising of exhibitions in particular socio-cultural contexts. The physical outcomes of the decisions thereby made (the exhibitions), and the public’s reception, are discussed only superficially. Indeed, neither the individual visitor nor the public in general has much agency in

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⁸ From the Merriam Webster dictionary definition of “effect” (2004).
these essays. Little importance is placed on the individual’s reflexivity and meaning-making. These studies rarely include the perspectives of visitors or of front-line staff who are in direct contact with the public. The visitors are thus too often treated as a homogenous group that will be affected by a given exhibition in predictable ways related to their gender, ethnicity, and class identity.

The literature in this category can be interpreted as pessimistic in the way it often depicts the museum institution at the mercy of powerful historical and political undercurrents. Visitors are commonly seen as passive recipients of values endorsed by dominating groups. However, many of these authors also acknowledged the potential of contemporary exhibitions to denounce the status quo and to transgress by “denaturalizing” normative values and common-sense beliefs. Given its privileged position (close to governing power and yet responsive to pressure from the public sphere), the exhibition space in the later part of the twentieth century came to be considered a site with a potential to subvert and critically engage with issues of power inherent in the very act of collecting, studying and displaying objects. When citing examples of resistance and critical engagement, which tie in with the earlier discussion on critical museology, I would argue that two aspects have often been overlooked or assumed: (a) the adequacy of rendering these critical ideas in the exhibition media and (b) the nature of public understanding and receptivity of this critical museology (as opposed to the response of experts familiar with these ideas). In other words, a curator may possess a good theoretical grasp and a desire to critically engage with culturally sensitive ideas, but these intentions may not be effectively represented in the exhibition. The text panels may reflect the intentions, but for many reasons the exhibition environment may not convey such concepts to an audience of non-experts. It is accurate to say that the sheer presence of certain topics—for instance, the exhibitions on AIDS at Sweden’s Museum of World Cultures (2004), on menstruation at the Powerhouse Museum in Australia (2005), and on sexuality at the Centre de Sciences de Montreal (2010)—has been indicative of a desire to enact the role of provocateur. These exhibitions were symptomatic of a desire to engage in debate on topical issues. This desire did not guarantee, however, that the communicative potential of the exhibition media would be utilized to its full potential. While it is justifiable to assume that certain topics, themes or types of spatial arrangement will appeal to visitors’ cultural sensitivities, curatorial intent and public response are two entities that cannot be equated—
hence the necessity to develop research methodologies that are attentive to the visitors’ sense-making in the museum.

2.2.2 Considering the visitor as active learner

The works reviewed in the above section are concerned with societal values and norms embodied in the aesthetic of the exhibition. The body of literature falling under the following category addresses the transformation of the visitor as individual. These investigations are interested in the visitor’s meaning-making in the exhibition space and are generally supported by theory in the fields of education and psychology. As a result, the educational role of the museum in these studies is explicitly addressed.

In many of these studies, museum learning is described as lifelong learning or free-choice learning, emphasizing the informal, self-directed nature of the museum visit (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Robert, 1997). Acting as a backdrop to these discussions is an acknowledgement that understanding visitors’ learning has become a matter of survival. The intellectual and social accessibility of exhibition contents is not only viewed as a necessary step toward the democratization of the museum but is also recognized as a matter of financial sustainability (Leinhardt, et al., 2002, p. 301). In response to these pressures of democratization and competition, museums see an intensification of visitor studies as a way to measure museums’ ability to perform as educational public facilities. In this category of literature, the visitor is not imagined but is in direct contact with evaluators and researchers. Learning in and from exhibitions is not assumed; it is assessed, measured and qualified.

Exemplifying the discourse encountered in this literature is the widely cited Contextual Model of Learning developed by Falk and Dierking (2000). It identifies characteristics that influence learning experience, mediated through three overlapping contexts (personal, social-cultural, physical). The model’s underlying principle is that all learning is context-dependent and is the result of the interaction between these three contexts. Although it recognizes that the museum visit is situated within a larger educational and social infrastructure, the concept of culture—in Falk’s work and subsequent studies employing this model—is addressed in generic terms (Astor-Jack, Whaley, Dierking, Perry, & Garibay, 2007; Blud, 1990; Borum, 2002). Although some studies have been useful in determining the influence of the visitor identity on learning (Ellenbogen, 2002; Rounds, 2006), most studies in this category have not been helpful
in understanding how museum visits are negotiated through visitors’ positionalities—that is, how gender, class and ethnicity influence meaning-making. Exhibitions are viewed as “learning labs”. The exhibition environment is valued as a place where people not only learn something about a particular topic but also learn to socialize, learn about themselves, and learn to learn. These research endeavours are often used to optimize learning and to engineer exhibitions as lifelong learning mediators. Learning outcomes are valued, whether or not they are connected with the exhibition makers’ intent. For instance, some studies have determined that exhibitions can enhance the development of skills related to team-building and collaborative learning about one’s learning strategies (Crowley & Jacobs, 2002; Ellenbogen, 2002), the emphasis being on the visitor’s personal learning curriculum rather than the institution’s.

These studies contribute to understanding the capacity of museums to foster individual learning in informal settings. They take the form of a “zoom in” on the visitor learning experience. Such focus, however, runs the risk of atomizing the visitor; that is, the visitor learning experience is contextualized in the confines of her/his life experience as a learner. These studies tend to value visitor learning for learning’s sake and do not question the value or nature of such learning in relation to larger questions raised by the museum itself, or topical social and cultural issues.

2.2.3 Considering the individuality and social agency of the visitor: the median position

The first two categories of literature study the exhibition effect, focusing almost exclusively on either the historical and structural forces informing the making of the exhibition or on the individual learning capacity of the visitor. Within this spectrum, I situate a “median position”, with literature that takes into consideration elements of both types of exploration. The “median position” conceptualises the exhibition as a meaning-making environment by acknowledging the following aspects:

- the exhibition’s public reception is mediated by the visitor’s multiple characteristics and unique ability to make sense of the exhibition;
- the exhibition’s form, content and public reception are to be situated historically and culturally; and
the participation of the exhibition in contemporary culture will be enacted in large part through the visitor’s intellectual and physical engagement with the exhibition media.

The following sub-sections examine the work of seven scholars whose analyses of exhibitions exemplify this category. They present both methodologies and key ideas that have informed my research project. I want to stress here that museum scholars engaging in these conversations are often directly involved in the development of new forms of exhibition. This characteristic of museum research suggests that it maintains an active relationship with academia and disciplinary fields (MacLeod, 2005; Teather, 1983).

**Judith Mastai: the museum’s public responsibility and the public’s path of desire.**

Two interdependent ideas presented by late museum scholar and educator Judith Mastai are particularly helpful in furthering our understanding of the exhibition as a learning environment: the museum’s public responsibility and the visitor’s path of desire (Pollock & Zemans, 2007).

Mastai described the role of visual art and art exhibitions as “a form of thought and a provocation of thoughts”. To view any exhibitions (whether historical, scientific or artistic) as a form of thought and a provocation of thoughts implicates both the producer and the audience. Mastai recognized that the role of museum as provocateur is played in a context where museums must cautiously navigate around marketing pressures and the demands of consumerism. She discussed the museum’s ability to negotiate the tension between its multiple accountabilities toward its publics, funding agencies and scientific/scholarly communities. She acknowledged how unrealistic it is to presume that a museum can act outside the power relation from which these multiple accountabilities originate. Amidst these pressures, she insisted the museum must remain responsible for exposing the public to a particular body of discipline-based knowledge. Mastai did not view disciplinary knowledge as an end in itself but rather as cognitive schemes, cultural and contingent representations, designed to make sense of the world and act upon it, individually and collectively. She valued the structure of disciplinary knowledge, and the agency of the learner engaged in connecting with particular curricula. The museum’s responsibility does not reside in pleasing the
“customer” at all costs but rather in remaining responsive to visitors’ sensitivities and knowledge while exposing them to new, inspiring, and at times difficult ideas.

Her second idea was the notion of the visitor’s *path of desire*. This expression, borrowed from the field of urban planning, describes the individual’s preferred use of space in relation to a planned environment. Mastai compared the visitor’s *path of desire* in the exhibition space with the logic of hypertext, which expects the jumping from one layer of information to another, guided by the visitor’s curiosity, aesthetic response, identities, interests and social setting. By linking the idea of the institution’s *public responsibility* with the visitor’s *path of desire*, we observe the emergence of an “exhibition pedagogy” that is responsive to the demands of critical engagement with disciplinary knowledge (as a form of social engagement) and visitors’ unique ways of manoeuvring within the exhibition space and making sense of its content.

**Richard Sandell: the “exclusive” and “inclusive” exhibition spaces.**

British museum scholar Richard Sandell clearly considered the *poetics* and *politics* of exhibitions (Karp, et al., 1992; Lidchi, 1997; R. Mason, 2005). The *poetics*, a descriptive analysis drawn from semiotics, considers exhibitions as systems of significations operating through their own internal logic. The *politics*, on the other hand, is inspired by Foucauldian theories, and concentrates on the interplay between knowledge and power. From this perspective, Sandell argued that a central educational program for exhibitions should be the promotion of social equity (Sandell, 2002, 2007; Sandell & Frost, 2010). He stressed that while not able to guarantee specific understandings by the visitors, the exhibition team should, by employing a set of spatial strategies and visual cues, favour certain readings designed to counter social inequality. In his essay “Constructing and Communicating Equality”, he established a typology featuring the attributes of the “exclusive” and “inclusive” exhibition spaces, insisting that the spatial organization of objects in museums is influenced by a specific set of values and beliefs about the worth of displayed cultures in relation to the exhibition makers and audience (2006). Sandell identified interrelated modes of display that act as markers of differences, signifying exclusion (exaggeration of difference, exotification by means of relative placement within the museum building and/or the exhibition space, and the “marked absence” of particular groups). Sandell has recognized that while these exclusive tendencies in modes of representation are
still used in museums today, they are increasingly challenged by criticism and demands for inclusion or “representational parity” by government policies and vocal community groups. Based on existing exhibition cases, he has proposed three types of spatial strategies developed to help museums achieve their socially driven educational goals (spatial allocation, parity and balance, differentiation and integration). Sandell’s analysis has emphasized the subtle power of the poetics of exhibition in assigning symbolic meanings through physical placements of objects, silences and omissions. Sandell noted that these spatial strategies are the exhibition makers’ intentions and not actual audience response, hence the need to assess empirically how visitors’ meaning-making is shaped differently by exclusive and inclusive museographies.

**Jem Fraser: the visitors and exhibition makers as performers.**

Another conversation gravitating around the question of social equity and democracy is found in the work of Scottish researcher-practitioner Jem Fraser. Unlike Sandell, however, Fraser has been more concerned with the relationship between the museum and its visitors than with how the representation of power relations manifests in museography. Central to Jem Fraser’s argument is that the production of exhibitions should be inspired by critical pedagogy (2007). Drawing on the work of critical pedagogue Henry Giroux and post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, she has focused her attention on the potential for exhibitions to facilitate identity shaping (confirmation and interrogation of identities) in the context of coexisting divergent histories. She proposed a framework conceptualising the visitor experience based on the analogy of drama, in which the visitor and the museum staff are performers (playing different parts) and the exhibition is the production. The originality of Fraser’s TRIP model (Transaction, Ritual, Identity and Power) lies in its merging of several museum discussions that have rarely been connected. Fraser has used socio-constructivist principles to make more salient the visitor’s ability to construct meaning, while employing a post-structural theoretical framework to discuss how power relations are enacted, perpetuated and challenged. The aim behind this proposed museum pedagogy is that the exhibition-as-performance becomes a motivator for social transformation and emancipation by becoming a site simultaneously accommodating collaboration and contest. Of importance is that the nature of museum drama is largely based on the exhibition’s ability to connect with dimensions of the visitor’s identity to increase knowledge (cognitive, aesthetic, experiential).
For visitors to engage, they have to recognize themselves in the museum by means of display strategies, voices, aesthetic, language or objects.

The exhibition as a dramatic production involving the exhibition makers and the visitors as performers is a compelling metaphor. It suggests a built-in dialogical, power-sharing relationship between museum staff, the institution and visitors.

**Kate Gregory and Andrea Witcomb: the exhibitions as possible worlds.**

Australian museum researchers-curators Kate Gregory and Andrea Witcomb (2007) investigated the role of affect in the context of the visitor’s meaning-making experience in historic sites. They introduced their research by stating that traditional ways of producing and disseminating knowledge are inadequate in equipping contemporary citizens for a world “increasingly defined by experiential and immersive technologies” (p. 21). They noted that contemporary museums have the potential to contribute to new *performativemodels* of democratic engagement, based on the capacity of museum objects and spaces to stimulate memory and sensory engagement to provoke meaning-making. Gregory and Witcomb were inspired by the work of cognitive theorists investigating the relationship between affect and narrative as readers engage with fiction. They have been particularly interested in the work associating intellectual engagement with fiction, and the resulting production of “possible worlds” in which affect plays a central role. The authors proposed that historic exhibitions be viewed as “possible worlds” in which affective, physical and imaginative engagement facilitate historical understanding in historic sites. They insisted that a sense of shock or surprise is necessary to enable historical understanding. This notion of shock as a form of confrontation between the past, present and future they described as a “sense of historical differences”. The past becomes another possible world rather than part of a linear understanding of time. They applied this theoretical framework to a comparative study involving two historic sites located in Australia. The analysis examined how these two sites, designed with different intentions, stimulated different bodily and affective responses, resulting in different relationships to the historical content. The older historic site involved the reconstitution of the interior of an historical home furnished to convey a sense of authentic representation or time-travel, an interpretive approach typical of 1970s heritage practice. It made visitors feel affectively closer to the historical inhabitants of the house. Yet, the inability to penetrate the cordoned off
rooms diminished the corporeal experience, thus limiting the range of emotional responses to nostalgia. They argued that the display romanticized the past, depicting an overly uncomplicated, aseptic and flattering image. They attributed this aesthetic to the producers’ intent, which largely consisted of educating and inspiring the public to participate in heritage preservation. The site became a theatre set designed to elicit positive memories about a particular past. The researchers pointed out that such a setting “works” with audiences sharing the same cultural memory.

The second case consisted of a recently created historical site that functioned independently but, in reaction to the earlier interpretive approach, made no attempt to recreate the past. The emptiness of the space, according to the authors, negated the idea of refurbishing. The authors suggested that by eliciting initial feelings of alienation and disorientation, this method “demand[ed] a more inquisitive approach from the visitor, requiring them to produce their own interpretative narratives as a means to breach the gaps left open” (p. 269). Multiple perspectives, allusion to past users of the building, and soundscape nevertheless created a complex picture of the past, the intent being that by provoking feelings of shock and surprise, a new awareness of the past was produced by challenging received ideas about the past and by communicating a sense of radical difference from the present moment. As a result, the authors argued, the interpretation countered nostalgia. It established the conditions for a new rapport with historical events: clues were given, and dark histories; the consequences of colonization in this case were exposed. The researchers postulated that the use of humour and irony “clearly alert[ed] the visitor to the constructed nature of all heritage sites. It warn[ed] the visitor not to take everything at face value, to read beyond the immediately obvious” (p. 273).

Gregory and Witcomb’s argument has the merit of interweaving visitors’ cognitive and affective modes of engagement with historical mediation in the museum. Their work proposed that particular staging of the past (whether it takes the form of a reconstitution or an art installation) provokes different emotional responses that impact on the historical understandings of visitors. They illustrated how exhibition narratives (spatial and textual) can encourage an uncritical and inward consumption of the past, while other more abstract forms of staging the past can project past events into the visitor’s present and future. The work of Gregory and Witcomb, however, was as much, if not more, about the exhibition makers’ new
ways of conceptualising historic spaces for a contemporary audience as it was about the audience’s understanding of the past. Undoubtedly, the researchers’ concerns were attuned to emergent visitors’ behaviours and sensitivities, shaped by cultural hybridity and new information technologies. In addition, their reference to the notion of “shock” as being necessary for making sense of messages countering normative values and ideas about history matched the conclusions of several scholars who conducted visitor studies (Dicks, 2000a; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004; Macdonald, 1998, 2002). These studies based on empirical data insisted that challenging cultural assumptions of visitors cannot be done in subtle museographic terms. However, Gregory and Witcomb’s discussion of visitors’ historical understanding was entirely based on the researchers’ use of findings in the fields of human psychology and cognition (and their own reading of the exhibitions), rather than on actual visitor experiences. Despite this shortcoming, their work remains a rare attempt to frame and locate the visitor (physically, affectively, cognitively, culturally) in relation to historical exhibitions.

**Bella Dicks and Laurajane Smith: the re-conceptualisation of heritage.**

The terms “history” and “heritage” in museum literature often coexist. The relationship between the two is complex and contested. They oppose each other, are used interchangeably, or act in a complementary fashion. Whereas history tends to be viewed as the product of a rigorous inquiry about the past, based on the study of evidence, heritage tends to be associated with a more explicitly political and emotional process of relating to the past (Divall, 2003; Gable, 2006; Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000; Hems, 2006; Hodgins, 2004; Huysen, 2003; Létourneau, 2005; Lowenthal, 1996, 1998; Lumley, 2005/1994; Urry, 2004). Bella Dicks (2000) and Laurajane Smith (2006) have studied the work of the makers and visitors of historic sites, historic homes and history museums without insisting on a clear division between history and heritage. In neither case does “heritage” exclude a critical examination of the past by the public. The authors’ insistence on using the term heritage comes from a desire to signal the identity formation/construction aspect associated, more often than not, with the act of looking at the past.
Scottish museum scholar Bella Dicks has demonstrated the usefulness of Stuart Hall’s theory on the communication of encoding or decoding for analysing the work of exhibition makers and visitors at a heritage site (2000a, 2000b). In a visitor study taking place in Rhondda Park, a heritage site in Scotland commemorating the history of its mining industry, Dicks adopted a social model of communication that was attentive to the site’s political, economic and cultural contexts, and its practice of production and consumption. This theoretical framework acted as a counter-argument to critical theoretical discussions on heritage, which she argued “are often informed by an underlying and unexamined ‘effects model’ of communication in which heritage texts are assumed to inculcate a particular understanding of the past” (2000, p. 63). Because these discussions assigned to visitors the role of being passive recipients of exhibition messages, she suggested that they utterly failed to examine how meaning produced through the creation of exhibitions is negotiated and consumed by visitors. Dicks’ study also recognized the importance of a “vernacular aesthetic” and aimed to understand the significance of a collective interest in heritage, and the manifestation of this interest at the visitor level.

Dicks’ ethnographic case study investigated both the producers and the consumers of the heritage site. The data analysis examined the “encoding phase”, with a rich description of conditions that characterized the development of the heritage site. It discussed, for instance, the political struggles that influenced the constitution of the exhibition team, the research, and the context of cultural policy in the UK. The study also related how these negotiations affected the design solutions. The “decoding phase” of the communication involved data generated through semi-structured interviews with 20 groups of visitors (45 individuals). These interviews included a brief pre-visit meeting in which participants talked about what they knew about the history of the site, and a longer interview immediately after the visit. In their post-visit interviews, visitors were asked to recount what they had seen and heard. They were also asked to describe how they would characterize the site and who lived there, and the history of the area. Dicks identified common themes in visitor narratives as “preferred readings”. She established commonalities and differences between museum staff and visitors (encoding and decoding commonalities and discrepancies) and addressed the nature of these discrepancies. She discussed historical distance (without using the term) by defining the relationship visitors
had with the historical actors. She explained, for example, how most visitors related to the historical agents as “other”—that is, as individuals removed both temporally and culturally from their own lives. However, she recognized a substantial number of visitors whose reading of the site brought historical actors into relations of equivalence in their own lives. The visitor responses indicated a wide range of perceptions about history’s relevance to their lives. Dicks’ conclusion made no claim to generalization, but the results demonstrated the diversity and richness of visitor responses. The study acted as a powerful counterpoint to the influential work of sociologists Bourdieu and Darbel (1991/1969) by demonstrating that there is no direct equivalence between production and reception, and that it cannot be assumed that a vernacular aesthetic is simply appropriated by dominant regimes of meaning. “There is no single preferred reading that reflects a hegemonic worldview and which is passed directly from text to reader” (Dicks, 2000, p. 74). Dicks’ analysis demonstrated that visitors do not necessarily come away from historic sites with a romantic view of the past, as many heritage critics assume. This use of a case study with a small sample was effective in challenging particular assumptions made by cultural sociologists, in that it highlighted the agency and resourcefulness of both museum professionals and visitors in crafting narratives

Laurajane Smith.

Laurajane Smith’s *Uses of Heritage* has called for a reconsideration of what constitutes heritage (2006). She defined heritage as “a culturally directed process of intense emotional power [that is] both a personal and social act of making sense of, and understanding, the past and the present” (p. 304). Smith described heritage as an “inherently political and discordant” practice that enacts the cultural values and power relations of the present. Individuals and different interest groups use heritage for a range of purposes and with varying degrees of authenticity and authority. The way people, communities and nations care about, define, and select elements of the past to define a collective in contemporary time says more about the present than the past, more about the interpreter than the interpreted. In other words, how we want to remember says a lot about who we are.

By drawing on cultural studies theory, Smith demonstrated how certain uses of heritage have historically been and continue to be intimately connected to power relations. Powerful/dominant groups have been successful at imposing their views of what is and is not
heritage and what qualifies as the nation’s official story. She called this legitimizing process the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD). AHD, she explained, “takes its cue from the grand narratives of Western national and elite class experiences, and reinforces the idea of innate cultural value tied to time depth, monumentality, expert knowledge and aesthetics” (p. 299). She identified the various conventions, charters, recommendations and other texts enacted by UNESCO, through ICOMOS, as authorising institutions of heritage who play a key role in maintaining the authority of heritage discourses. The AHD discourse promotes the idea that heritage is about a common national inheritance and lineage. It also tends to favour one manifestation of heritage over many forms of expressions, through monuments and other material assets. She explained how the 1980s heritage critics mistook AHD for heritage itself, and in the process dismissed other heritage practices.

To build her argument, Smith relied on an extensive multi-site visitor study undertaken in country houses, archaeological landscape sites in Australia, as well as industrial social history museums and community events in the UK. Analysing each heritage site provided in-depth contextual information to situate the conditions of production and reception. Her analysis revealed that the effect of AHD was more predominant in historic homes recounting the story of a ruling class than at sites emphasizing the agency of the working class. Similar to Dicks, Smith insisted that heritage should be viewed as a cultural process rather than as “things”. Heritage, she advanced, is found in the process of individuals and groups taking position in relation to sites, buildings, events and histories. “It is the utility of a place or artefact in invoking, signifying or otherwise connecting with people’s wider social experiences, memories and knowledge that is important and what determines if it becomes used as a place or object of heritage, rather than any innate quality” (p. 305).

Smith’s visitor studies demonstrated that in engaging with heritage, people are constructing a sense of their own identities that may oppose, correspond to or simply remain outside of the terms of the AHD. Smith stressed that this positioning is complex and involves remembering, forgetting, communicating and asserting identity.

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9 ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) is an international non-governmental organization of professionals dedicated to the conservation of the world’s historic monuments and sites.
2.3 Conclusion

This critical review of museum literature has focused on the role of exhibitions as learning environments. It referred to a broad spectrum of museological studies to demonstrate that even analyses considered outside the “museum education literature” can enrich this discussion. Indeed, museum scholars have told us that exhibitions can seduce, inspire, entertain, transform, indoctrinate, empower and convince the visitor; they can shake or affirm cultural and individual assumptions. We saw how paradigmatic changes in Western epistemologies have profoundly affected the museum’s understanding of its educational role, and how it evolved from provider of authoritative knowledge to mediator of learning experiences. Museum practice has generally become more self-conscious and reflective, moving toward models that are more inclusive, democratic and participatory. I suggest that “the median position” proposes an effective analytical standpoint to examine the nature of these changes and to advance the distinctive role of museums as informal learning institutions.

This median position considers exhibitions as material representations of cultural worldviews. From this perspective, visiting museums is a cultural performance wherein visitors are learners and social actors with unique abilities to discriminate and to construct meaning from the exhibition narrative. Scholars located in this category are concerned with the museum’s responsibility toward its visitors, the poetics and politics of exhibitions, and the role of exhibition makers and visitors in making sense of the past. My research will contribute to these “median conversations” in multiple ways. To begin with, it will further investigate the notion of visitors as participants. By “taking part in” and “being part of”, each individual contributes to shaping the exhibition as a public event. The social significance of the exhibitions and, by extension, the museum is enacted through its encounter with visitors. Paradoxically, despite much attention being given to the role of the visitor as actor, scholars in the “median position” most often imagine the visitor’s response through their own reading of the exhibition. Very few of these studies undertake empirical research with visitors as a way to consolidate or revise their argument. Part of my research agenda will be to demonstrate the power and necessity of visitor studies for making claims about what an exhibition “means”. I will locate the visitor studies as part of the exhibitionary performance, rather than as an isolated evaluative activity. If we are to consider visitors as important actors in the museum drama, to use Fraser’s analogy, we must analyse the exhibition spaces through their public use
and understanding. My research program will also investigate the exhibition makers as historical interpreters and builders of learning experiences, an approach that considers the agency of individual exhibition team members in influencing the course of museum productions. Methodologically, this study is a response to emergent needs for new research programs, articulated by museum scholars interested in the public reception of exhibitions:

- to embrace the complexity of learning with qualitative, open-ended inquiries that use mixed methodologies in an interpretive paradigm (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004; Macdonald, 2006);
- to develop a theoretical framework and methodology capturing how visitors make sense of the past in history museums or historic sites (Bagnall, 2003; Carnegie, 2006; Dicks, 2000a, 2000b; Gielen, 2004; Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002; Smith, 2006);
- to construct analyses of exhibitions, taking into account the exhibition makers’ beliefs and attitudes towards the public, disciplinary knowledge and the exhibition topic (Crooke, 2007; Gielen, 2004; Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004; Lindauer, 2005a);
- to understand visitors’ use of historical understanding to make sense of an exhibition (Castle, 2001, 2002; Dicks, 2000b; Paris, 2002);
- to develop longitudinal visitor studies that take into account the incorporation over time of new knowledge stimulated by the exhibition (D. Anderson & Shimizu, 2007; Benton, 2008; Falk, Dierking, & Foutz, 2007; Medved, 1998; Medved, Cupchik, & Oatley, 2004) (D. Anderson & Shimizu, 2007; Benton, 2008; Falk, et al., 2007; Medved, 1998; Medved, et al., 2004)
- to analyse the public’s understanding of museum projects, presenting knowledge as contingent, problematic and pluri-perspectival (Bonnel & Simon, 2007; Knutson, 2002; Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996).

My research program can be situated at the confluence of these identified gaps in museum research. The paucity of published studies investigating the historical meaning-making of exhibition makers and visitors by using a disciplinary framework is perplexing when considering the number of museums engaging their public with historical narratives. To be sure, the findings of several studies taking place in other types of museum settings are
transferable. However, numerous visitor studies have demonstrated that visitors’ agendas, prior knowledge, and predispositions toward certain topics and museums influence the learning experience. Hence, it seems imperative to capture the exhibition makers’ and visitors’ historical explorations in the museum to better understand the museum’s capacity to mobilize the historical consciousness of its actual and potential users.
Chapter 3  On Historical Thinking

This chapter first reviews the principles underpinning an historical thinking pedagogy, which has recently gained momentum in history education circles in Canada and abroad. Second, it maps out the concepts of historical thinking. Lastly, it highlights points of convergence between the historical thinking pedagogy and elements of the critical museology discourse.

3.1 History, A Brief Definition

Before delving into a discussion about historical teaching and learning, a definition of history is required. The past is everything that has happened. History is the selective recounting of what happened, based on the study of traces and accounts of the human past. The elaboration of historical accounts involves studying particular events in time and space from a specific viewpoint. Historian Frank Ankersmit (2005) has explained that the past is not an “untold story” and that historical narrative is “the cognitive instrument we rely on for understanding the past. It should not, however, be elevated to the linguistic equivalent of past reality itself” (p. 208). The stories that collectives tell themselves about the past provide material for self-definition (individual and collective), give coherence to communal experiences and inspire future actions (Seixas, 1996). The need to write and rewrite the past is a constant task, since “our interest in history is to contextualize the present” (Seixas, 1996, p. 767). A systematic and careful analysis and assessment of evidence (primary and secondary sources) forms the basis of the historian’s interpretation. This investigative work relies on theories and methods of inquiry that are themselves historically and culturally situated. The act of selecting particular events, people and places in historical narratives does speak of the power relations (who gets to tell the story) as well as the worldviews and sensitivities (what story we tell and how we tell it) of the people/collective being represented. Education scholar Penney Clark has pointed out that “[m]ost professional historians now recognize that their interpretations, like those of their predecessors, are shaped by present biases and interests” (2011, p. 9). As a result, their claims to objectivity tend to be modest. Clark even put forward the idea that this self-conscious approach makes all good historians historiographers, in that they endeavour to consider their motivations and biases and to understand those of previous historians, and,
finally, “they concede that exploring the past from a variety of perspectives is the closest they can come to the idea of objectivity” (2011, p. 9). But historical representations ought to be, as Gadamer qualified, “real enough for being the stake of rational debates about their merits and shortcomings” (cited by Ankersmit, 2005, p. 208). History forges explicit relationships with the past. It reminds us that we are historical beings sharing a humanity with those who preceded us. Historical explorations enhance our capacity to grasp the implications of past actions on our lives, and make us more resourceful at envisioning new possibilities for the future.

### 3.2 Historical Thinking Pedagogy

Having in mind this explanation, the first thought when coming back to the question of historical education is: how does formal education support learners in (a) understanding the complex nature of history and (b) making sense of historical claims inside and outside the classroom? In her introduction to *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada* (2011)—a collection of essays examining the current landscape of history education in Canada—Clark underlined that historical education has always been a contested terrain. One of the persistent issues of contention identified by Clark, and of particular interest for my research, centres on the purpose of and approach to history as a school subject. At the juncture of several perspectives on how best to teach history is one pedagogical approach promoting *historical thinking*, and referred to in the education discourse as a discipline-based approach to teaching history (Levesque, 2008; Osborne, 2011; VanSledright, 2004). It can be summarized as a pedagogy supporting learners in making sense of the past in ways that are inspired by the work of historians. It requires considering history as a series of accounts that must be constructed, interpreted and assessed based on the use of evidence. It is also about connecting the past with the present—putting in relation how things used to be with why things are the way they are now, to eventually decide what shape we want our future to hold (Seixas & Clark, 2004). In order to achieve this, learners must become familiar with not only the “facts” of history, but its organizing principles and mode of inquiry. Without this intellectual apparatus, people (young and old) are vulnerable to the constraining forces of dogma, stereotype and convention (Castle, 2002). This pedagogy opposes the many forms of *memory-history* or a grand-narrative approach, which focus on the acquisition of factual knowledge, and tend to propose a unifying, unproblematic, uncontested version of history as a way to
reinforce a sense of collective identity and belonging. Such an approach is viewed by the promoter of historical thinking as undermining the interpretive and investigative nature of historical knowledge. Supporters of an historical thinking pedagogy believe that if students are made aware of how historical claims are crafted, learners both inside and outside of school will likely take a more critical approach to competing historical claims. Helping individuals to shape their own ideas about the past is viewed as essential to promoting a free and democratic society (Sears, 2011). These conceptual underpinnings resonate with issues discussed in the museum field, which are concerned with notions of institutional responsibility toward a public in need of “intellectual self-defense” for tackling information overload and misinformation, and resisting a consumerist ideology that is endangering the future of our societies (Janes, 2009; Worts, 2006).

No educators believe they can turn students into professional historians. However, based on empirical studies conducted on young children and adolescents, education scholars are confident that they can expose students to complex concepts to enhance their ability to think historically. Education scholar Peter Lee proposed a useful way to conceptualise historical knowledge, based on two types of interdependent historical knowledge: substantive and procedural history (Lee, 1983, 2004). Substantive history refers to historical data, events, actors, places—the “facts of history”. Procedural history, also called “meta-history”, refers to the many processes involved in constructing historical interpretations. These concepts provide meaning and structure to our ideas about history. To understand that history is not fixed but must be reconstructed by historians or any other “consumers of history” requires familiarity with these meta-historical or procedural concepts. This type of historical knowledge allows students to understand the nature of historical accounts, the distinction between the past and history, the use of evidence, and the relationships between objectivity, interpretation and criteria to determine the validity of historical interpretations. As Levesque explained, “These concepts are rarely apparent in use, they are often left hidden in historians’ investigations and even more so in school textbooks, thus leading to the naïve assumptions that they do not influence historical inquiry and are unworthy of study” (2008, p. 30). Multiple studies supporting this take on history education have determined that the acquisition of procedural history encourages a greater level of engagement with history (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Leinhardt, Beck, & Stainton, 1994; Levstik & Barton, 2005). As Lee pointed out, whether or not students
are exposed to competing versions of the past at school, they are bound to encounter other versions outside school. The mastery of procedural concepts therefore makes individuals more resourceful when they are required to judge these clashing versions of history and make decisions that require consideration of past events.

3.3 The Historical Thinking Concepts

In the last 20 years, extensive empirical studies have analysed the mental processes at play when individuals attempt to make sense of the past. Procedural concepts or dimensions that allow people to make sense of historical content were identified through these investigations. In his influential paper “Conceptualizing the Growth of Historical Thinking” (1996), education scholar Peter Seixas, an advocate of the discipline-based approach, identified six concepts or dimensions that can be enacted when individuals, whether novice or expert, attempt to make sense of the past. Seixas insisted that these concepts are not fixed, are always partial, and are informed by the individual’s own historiographical culture (Seixas, 1997, 1999, 2000).

Seixas’ initial six concepts were refined and modified through subsequent research. They now include: evidence and epistemology, historical significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective, and ethical judgment (2011). Because these six concepts are instrumental in framing this study, I describe them individually and refer to some empirical work that has advanced our understanding of particular aspects of these concepts (see Table 3.1 for a brief description of each concept). A longer discussion on the concept of evidence and epistemology is deliberate and necessary, given its significance in the context of this research on historical meaning-making in the museum, where access to primary sources is so central to the exhibitionary performance.

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10 My research has been particularly inspired by the work of history education scholars Rosalyn Ashby, Robert Bain, Keith Barton, Peter Lee, Linda Levstik, Stephane Levesque, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Thinking Concepts</th>
<th>Definition of Concepts at Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish Historical Significance</td>
<td>Questions why we care about certain issues, events and trends in history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Use of Primary Source as Evidence</td>
<td>Focuses on how to locate, select, contextualize and interpret primary sources for/in an historical argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Continuity and Change</td>
<td>Determines what has changed and what has remained the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse Cause and Consequence</td>
<td>Identifies how and why certain conditions and actions led to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider Historical Perspective</td>
<td>Adopts the viewpoint of historical individuals and groups in an attempt to understand the social, cultural, intellectual and emotional contexts that shaped people’s lives and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pose an Ethical Judgment</td>
<td>Decides how we, in the present, judge actors in different circumstances in the past, and how different interpretations of the past reflect different moral stances.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3.1 Evidence and epistemology

This concept refers to the learner’s ability to locate, select, contextualize and interpret primary and secondary sources in an historical argument. Lee stressed that “[w]ithout an understanding of what makes an account historical, there is nothing to distinguish such an ability from the ability to recite sagas, legends, myths and poems” (Lee, 1991, p. 45, cited in Levesque, 2011). Engaging with and interrogating historical evidence thus implies a particular understanding of what history is.

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11 Primary source in the context of historical enquiry refers to the natural records, artefacts, visual and textual documents that are “first-hand”, that is, closest to the historical phenomenon under study. Secondary sources have originated from sources of information with no direct access to the past.
Some research has greatly contributed to our understanding of people’s conception of history. The work of British scholars Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby has been the basis for much of Seixas’ work on the growth or progression of historical thinking. One of their key studies, involving 300 students between the ages of 7 and 14, mapped out changes in students’ ideas about history (2000). Lee and Ashby’s point of departure and central interest was the students’ ability to engage with historical accounts. Their analysis identified six different levels of ability in assessing the credibility of historical accounts, based on the accounts’ use of evidence. The less advanced levels of historical thinking range from equating history with the past, to denying the possibility of ever knowing what happened, to conceiving a one-to-one correspondence between the stories and information available, where any difference between accounts can be explained by distortion on the part of the historian. More advanced levels conceive differences in accounts as being the result of selection and differing viewpoints. The identification of gradients and of a possible progression in historical thinking helps situate the learner’s ability to discern the contested nature of accounts, while providing markers to help envision the growth of historical understanding.

Adding to this discussion was a recent study on adults’ understanding of historical epistemology, by Seixas, Ercikan, and Gosselin (2009). Using the response to one interview question in the national survey Canadians and Their Pasts, the authors examined the strategies employed by non-historians to work through the problem of conflicting historical claims. Inspired by Lee and Ashby’s research on progression in historical thinking, the authors identified three levels of sophistication in people’s responses, associated with different ideas and assumptions about history and the use or non-use of evidence.

Level 1: The Dead-Ends and Dismissals. People in this category were not capable of answering the question. The problem posed was conceived as an impasse—i.e., the past is gone, we will never know.

Level 2: A Beginning Epistemology. The largest proportion of responses was located in this category, which corresponded to a capacity to view the necessity of consulting sources, without being able to explain how to use them.

Level 3: Actively Interrogating Sources. People using the more sophisticated strategies to address the historical problems were aware of the constructed nature of historical interpretations. They understood their agency as interpreters and the necessity to question
the sources to arrive at some conclusion. This category tended to have a higher level of education and more active engagement with different historical activities.

This study provided rare insights into the ordinary Canadian’s capacity to engage with conflicting histories. The study concluded that about a quarter of the adult population “can do pretty well” in that regard. What becomes apparent when comparing the results of both studies is that even though Ashby and Lee’s study established that older children were likely to have more sophisticated conceptions of history, age did not guarantee more sophisticated thinking. The study on Canadian adults is a case in point. These studies also demonstrated that learners, both children and adults, may have a shaky understanding of the past but are not historical blank slates. Epistemological beliefs play an important role in historical thinking; hence, learners’ ideas about history must be confronted to foster the growth of historical understanding. Lee (2004) concluded that helping people to understand that interpreting the traces of the past will not produce one true story about the past but will generate a multiplicity of complementary, competing or clashing stories is not an easy task.

### 3.3.2 Historical significance

This concept refers to what is considered worth including in an historical narrative. The process of selection is unavoidable. Employing this concept while engaging with historical accounts means considering how and why historians select certain events or issues and not others. Hunt (2000), inspired by the work of Partington (1980), identified five criteria used by students, historians or teachers when ascribing significance to a particular historical event, person or development:

- **importance**: the degree to which the phenomenon was important to people in the past;
- **profundity**: the extent to which people’s lives were affected by the phenomenon;
- **quantity**: how many people were affected by the phenomenon;
- **durability**: how long people’s lives were affected by the phenomenon; and
- **relevance**: how past events or developments help us understand contemporary life.

At an advanced level, engaging with the concept of historical significance also means understanding that historians are social actors—just like learners—influenced by the forces and concerns of their own time.
Numerous studies have also shown how the ethnic/cultural identities of high school students and adults tend to influence the way they ascribe historical significance to various events and historical actors, thus creating differing narratives of the same historical moments (D. Anderson & Gosselin, 2008; Epstein, 2000; Létourneau, 2004; Peck, 2011). These culturally-informed patterns of interpretations have been identified as “narrative templates” (Wertsch, 2004).

3.3.3 Cause and consequence
This concept involves enquiring about “who and what” provoked changes in the past, as well as the repercussions of these changes. The “who” refers to individuals, groups and social movements. The “what” is associated with the ideologies, institutions and other systemic factors defining the historical moment, and means establishing links of causality between events, changes and agents, and identifying the underlying factors influencing changes. Some studies have underlined the tendency of high school students to locate the source of social change in heroic individual actors rather than in group or collective actions (Barton, 2008; Barton & Levstik, 2004; den Heyer, 2003; Seixas, 2000). These studies have recommended that historical teaching stress how historical agents operate within a particular socio-cultural context. Indeed, learners must grasp this notion not only to appreciate the historical actions but to understand their own. “Understanding these influences makes it possible for students to see the structural and individual factors that shape their world and to begin to imagine their own role as citizens in shaping history” (Denos & Case, 2006, p. 5).

3.3.4 Historical perspective
Engaging with this concept means adopting the viewpoint of historical individuals and groups in an attempt to understand the social, cultural, intellectual and emotional contexts that shaped people’s lives and actions. Without being able to understand how people in the past saw themselves in time and space, learners are limited to a simplistic viewing of historical agents and their experiences, and fall into presentism, a view toward the past skewed by present-day attitudes and experiences. On the other hand, extreme unfamiliarity with the past can suggest that the foreignness of those people and circumstances is so detached from the circumstances, concerns and needs of the present that history becomes irrelevant (Wineburg, 2001). To identify with the past requires that we negotiate this tension between the familiar
and unfamiliar past, to appreciate the striking differences between the historical frame of mind while acknowledging a shared humanity transcending time, space and culture (Levesque, 2008).

### 3.3.5 Continuity and change

This concept encompasses one fundamental challenge encountered when trying to make sense of an historical phenomenon: determining elements that have changed and aspects that have not. Such a notion resists two opposite misconceptions about the past that either nothing or everything has changed. One way to avoid these simplistic assumptions is to use a continuous backdrop or a trans-historical element of comparison to identify the presence of historical change within a given sequence of time (Seixas, 1996; Levesque, 2008). Empirical studies have shown that students’ understanding of historical change is dramatically influenced by the socio-cultural and political contexts in which the school curriculum is produced (Barton, 2008; Epstein, 2000). Change and continuity can be identified by comparing different historical periods or the past and present. Often embedded in this concept is a notion of progress and decline. This demands a value judgment that assesses how things have changed for better or worse. As Levesque has contended, progress and decline are not only relational, they are mutually compatible, an idea that must be emphasized to learners (Levesque, 2011, p. 149).

### 3.3.6 Ethical judgment

This concept involves making an ethical assessment about the relative merits or downfalls of historical actions, while considering the historical context in which these actions took place. It is also about assessing responsibility for past actions to historical figures or, at times, collectives (Seixas, 1996; VanSledright, 2001). Assigning responsibility may require that collectives today take responsibility for the actions of past generations. This may involve taking some form of remedial action as a way to perform this recognition. The processes of collective reconciliation and reparations are some of the outcomes of ethical judgment. On a cautionary note, researchers have reminded us that there is value in students’ refraining from offering an ethical judgment about past events until sufficient information has been acquired (Denos & Case, 2006; Oldfield, 1981; Sheehan, 1985). Lastly, engaging with ethical judgment in the
context of historical learning and thinking also involves recognizing the presence of judgment in historical narratives, i.e., distinguishing purely descriptive claims from judgment.

3.4 Conclusion: Meshing Two Parallel Discussions

In this section, I identify where the historical thinking discourse intersects with discussions concerned with knowledge representation and public reception in the museum. I make the case that these intersecting ideas may stimulate new perspectives in museum praxis.

We observe that the proponents of an historical thinking pedagogy hope to equip their students with an intellectual apparatus that allows them to become critical consumers of history. By familiarizing students with the interpretive tasks of historians, the advocates of this teaching approach want to develop, over time, their students’ understanding of the contingent and constructed nature of historical knowledge. Critical engagement with historical claims is viewed as an effective way to make educated decisions about current affairs—social issues and problems being inevitably rooted in the past. Underpinning this pedagogy is a desire to develop the historical consciousness of the learners.

The term “historical consciousness” requires a definition. It is often used to define the many forms of individual and collective relationships with the past (Duquette, 2009). I have been drawn, however, by more specific and, I find, more productive definitions of historical consciousness that encompass multiple elements. These are summarized in Seixas (2011) and (Wilschut, 2010).

   a) The term suggests an awareness of one’s own history by identifying how developments in the past explain the present.

   b) These developments may or may not be the intended consequences of human action.

   c) It requires that we appreciate the striking differences between the frames of mind of historical actors and ours, while acknowledging a shared humanity transcending time, space and culture.

   d) Historical consciousness involves an ethical dimension: that past actions considered wrong (even criminal) by today’s standards require specific remedial actions in the present.
e) It involves reconsiderations of traditions and myths through new sets of questions, and the study of traces from the past.

f) It is a means to recognize our own historicity, i.e., that a collective’s understanding of reality (present and past) is historically and culturally situated and will continuously change. This idea was best captured by German historian Schieder in the following quotation:

> Historical consciousness means the permanent presence of knowing that man and all institutions and types of societies created by him, exist in time, which implies that they have an origin and a future, that they therefore do not represent anything stable, unchangeable and without conditions. (1974, p. 78, cited in Wilschut, 2009)

The historical consciousness of individuals develops in various degrees of acuity. What is important to note is the conviction of various educators that exposure to an historical thinking pedagogy is one way to sharpen the historical consciousness of individual learners and, by the same token, that of a collective. This pedagogical perspective converges with the more innovative museum practices and theoretical discussions that seek to make more explicit the construction of knowledge, the polysemic nature of artefacts, and the presence of gaps involved in historical representations in museums. Indeed, by insisting that meaning is plural, partial and negotiable, and by wanting to challenge cultural assumptions about certain historical developments (especially in the context of a post-colonial, social history and feminist discourse), I would argue that various museum practices are attempting to transform museums into sites of historical consciousness, where visitors can posit and contemplate the tensions between history and memory, between the familiar and the foreign past, between previous and current ways of relating to time, space and others. However, this trend in exhibition practice and theory is more concerned with issues of knowledge representation (how do we stage these ideas in space) than with pedagogy (how do we support visitor engagement with these ideas), which would partly explain the lack of in-depth discussion on public reception. Therefore, my research agenda could be summarized as follows: Since history educators, museum practitioners and researchers share a theoretical concern for making the process of knowledge production more explicit, my work connects elements of the historical thinking discourse to processes involved in creating and sharing historical knowledge in museums. The hope is that an interdisciplinary framework may
complement/inform current curatorial and exhibition design practices interested in creating productive encounters between historical knowledge and the public. The proposition established by education scholars (to use procedural and substantive historical knowledge to empower students) could enrich these museum discussions by offering a new conceptual framework to discuss these ideas. The uniqueness of this framework resides in it being both specific to the history discipline and learner-centred.

From a museum studies standpoint, can an historical thinking pedagogy provoke new questions about visitors’ engagement with historical narratives in the museum? How do visitors think historically when visiting the exhibition? Do exhibitions ever address the “how” of history explicitly with their public?

To complicate the picture, numerous empirical studies, as the ones reviewed above, have concluded that students can understand historical thinking concepts, which enhance their ability to think historically, but the process is long, arduous and requires multiple exposures (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Duquette, 2009; Rüsen, 2004a; Wineburg, 2001). Given the nature of the museum experience (short duration, sporadic visits, self-directed, leisurely group learning), to what extent is it possible for museums to envision themselves fostering a culture of historical thinking? How is a museum to position itself in relation to procedural knowledge that is so critical to historical meaning-making?

This notion of expectation about what contemporary museums should offer to their public has to be addressed, although briefly. As discussed in chapter 2, the educational function of the museum as institution has been present since its early beginnings. The nature and substance of the educational project, however, has changed. Museums today are more inclined to conceive of their role less as providers of authoritative knowledge and more as provocateurs, mediators of learning experiences, and co-producers of knowledge (Bal, 2006; Golding, 2009; Gregory & Witcomb, 2007; Haacke, 2004/1987; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 2007a, 2007b; Janes, 2009; Kelly, 2010a; Knell, Macleod, & Watson, 2007; Macdonald & Basu, 2007; Marstine, 2006; Robert, 1997; Sandell, 2007). As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill noted, “Learning is a serious activity that needs to be fun” (2007, p. 67). This could not be truer for museums, which have to create highly enjoyable learning experiences in order to maintain their existence. Museum-going is not compulsory and is meant to be primarily a leisurely cultural activity enjoyed within a social context—i.e., a visit with a friend or family member(s), or a field trip or
tourist activity. During their visits, people expect to learn something about their culture, their history and that of others (Black, 2005; Canadian Museum Association, 2003; Falk, 2007; Kelly, 2007). Interestingly, studies have shown that people from various Western countries in general, and Canadians in particular, trust museums over other sources of historical information (Hamilton & Ashton, 2003; Northrup, 2008; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Keeping in mind the pressure for the museum to propose “highly enjoyable learning moments” within a context in which they benefit from a huge capital of public trust, how should museums convey historical knowledge to the communities they serve? Should they provide updated stories that create common references? Or should museums provoke visitors to think about “the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others”, and nurture a certain intellectual apparatus on the part of visitors? The aim would be to support visitors in sifting through information and passing informed judgments on historical accounts encountered both in and outside the museum. This study will examine to what extent the museum can do both: tell the story and provide clues about how the story has been crafted. To some extent, museums have already been attempting to do this. I believe that the appropriation of discipline-based concepts for exhibitionary practice may further this idea.

I should clarify that discipline-based applications have made an initial entry into history museums and historic sites via the development of school programs (Bain & Ellenbogen, 2002; Castle, 2002; Nakou, 2003). This partnership between schools and museums is not surprising, given the long-standing relationship between these two educational institutions. To date, the use of historical thinking concepts in the museum is limited to serving the needs of the school curricula. That is, museum educators, aware of a growing interest by schools in a discipline-based approach, have started offering school programs that use these concepts. However, the study and development of the exhibitions (themes, storylines, artefact selection) remain uninformed by this conceptual framework. In what follows, I consider a broader, more integrated approach to historical thinking pedagogy in the museum, one that could possibly implicate the early phases of exhibition development. My research design was elaborated with this aim in mind.
Chapter 4  Methodology

In this chapter, I describe how research tools were deployed to generate data and an analytical approach to answer my research questions. I map out the research design and attend to issues of ethics and the trustworthiness of findings. The last section describes in detail the data analysis.

4.1 Case Study Research

The research agenda of this study is exploratory and evaluative, attempting to understand the museum exhibitions’ ability to mobilize the historical thinking of their makers and visitors. It also considers the usefulness of models derived from historiography and history education to help qualify the historical meaning-making experienced by these exhibitionary performers.

My inquiry derives from an interpretivist philosophical position, in the sense that “it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced” (J. Mason, 1996, p. 4). My research embraces a socio-cultural perspective on learning and knowing; that is, it views learning in the museum (whether by exhibition makers or visitors) as the process of constructing meaning from experiences that are socially and culturally mediated. From this perspective, learning is viewed as nurturing complexity and multidimensionality. To enact this philosophical and theoretical position in my study, I designed a case study employing a phenomenographic methodology to investigate how museum exhibitions mobilize the meaning-making of visitors and exhibition makers.

4.1.1 Defining case study research

My understanding of case study research has been shaped by the work of several scholars. Writing about the qualitative case study, Merriam noted that “it can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). Case study research is particularistic in that it deliberately focuses on the characteristics of a phenomenon within its real-life context by first carefully defining its contours. This delineation in time, context and circumstances, often referred to as the boundedness of the case, provides a fertile ground for intense observation and rich
description. The purpose of such a description is to probe deeply and analyse intensively the various aspects of the phenomenon under study, using multiple sources of evidence. The interpretation of data based on inductive reasoning aims at creating fresh understandings of the phenomenon.

This form of investigation is particularly effective in answering the “how” and “why” questions about complex social phenomena, as Yin has pointed out (1984, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 9). In other words, case study research embraces the complexity of a social phenomenon, trying to understand multiple aspects more deeply. I would add to this definition Alderman’s explanation: “A case study is a step to action. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use” (Alderman, cited in Bassey, 1999, p. 23). This emphasis on reflective practice converges with phronesis, or “practical wisdom”. This is a notion extensively used by social scientist Bent Flyvbjerg (2006), who has insisted on the value of context-dependent knowledge to study phenomena and to generate interpretations that are trustworthy.

4.1.2 Defining phenomenography

Adopting a phenomenographic methodology served my desire to study the production and public reception of a museum exhibition from the perspective of people involved in making and visiting the exhibition. Phenomenographic research investigates the awareness or ways of experiencing a particular phenomenon, in this case, the exhibition as site for historical exploration. It is a research approach developed in the 1970s to help identify, formulate and tackle certain types of research questions about learning and understanding in an educational environment (Marton & Booth, 1997). It is concerned with the differing ways in which people “experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, [and] conceptualize various phenomena in and aspects of the world around us” (p. 3). Proponents of this methodology share the ontological view that there is one world that people experience differently. Phenomenography’s focal point is on description. It is through descriptions of the phenomenon (by the “experiencer”) that meaning and ideas about the world are constructed, and that similarities and differences in meaning emerge. From the close examination of the study participants’ explanations, different ways of experiencing a phenomenon (the exhibition) will appear and themes will emerge, forming thematic clusters, called “categories of description”, within one individual
“experiencer” and eventually across the group of participants (Marton & Fai, 1999). This process of building categories or “structures” is highly iterative, going back and forth between individual interview transcripts and the collection of transcripts, focusing on the structural components of the categories of descriptions (Akerlind, 2005). Qualifying the nature and substance of these categories constitutes the way by which we gain understanding of the phenomenon under study.

My research is informed by phenomenography, in that my understanding of the exhibition’s potential to foster historical thinking is almost entirely based on the experience of exhibition makers and visitors. My analysis of data in chapters 6 and 7 is firmly grounded on description, which leads to the analysis of emergent themes in and across participants’ experience. Although I have recourse to an existing framework in my analysis (see Rüsen’s matrix in section 4.6), this was not determined at the onset of the study. It appeared during the process of establishing the categories of description. Its heuristic potential emerged as I started interpreting the data. In the case of the six historical thinking concepts, another established framework, I had to create borders, categories within each concept. My use of existing historical thinking frameworks was more playful than prescriptive. I did not make my data “fit into rigid boxes”; instead, I used the two frameworks (Rüsen’s and the six concepts of historical thinking) as a springboard to study the phenomenon. They helped structure my analysis, while my interpretation of each element of these two frameworks was responsive to the experience of exhibition makers and visitors.

4.1 Introducing the Case: Being Irish O’Quebec

My case study focuses on a single exhibition, its makers and visitors. The exhibition was entitled Being Irish O’Quebec\(^{12}\) (BIQ). It was a temporary French/English bilingual exhibition produced and presented at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal from March 2009 to October 2010. The exhibition explored the integration of Irish immigrants in Quebec from the era of New France to today by addressing the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which this integration took place.

My case selection is described as an instrumental case because its aim is “to provide insight into an issue and redraw a generalization”; that is, I examine the historical thinking of

\(^{12}\) Irländais O’Québec is the French title of the exhibition.
people making and visiting an exhibition as a way to better understand the role of museums as history educators (Stake, 1995, pp. 3-4). The choice of the exhibition Being Irish O’Quebec could be considered an intensity sample, selected on the basis that it is an information-rich case that exemplifies the issue I wish to investigate (Patton, 2002). The units of analysis are the exhibitionary performers: the individuals who made the exhibition (exhibition team members) and those who visited it (individuals or small visiting groups). The core of the data was acquired through opened ended, semi-structured interviews with both exhibition team members and adult visitors. Key exhibition team members were interviewed three months after the exhibition opening. Visitors were interviewed twice: immediately after their visit in the exhibition (personal interview with researcher) and a few weeks later (through phone interviews or email correspondence). The aim was to capture how the historical thinking of these exhibitionary performers was mobilized while developing or visiting BIQ. The following points outline the suitability of the case in the context of my research objectives:

- The exhibition narrative is largely historical. Hence, the expectations of producers and public to relate to the past are high. Being Irish O’Quebec could be seen as an “extreme case” (Yin, 2009); that is, if little or no historical thinking takes place in a history museum (highly favourable conditions), the likelihood of other types of museums to stimulate historical thinking is low. This is an important point, since a large contingent of museums tend to portray their role as providers of historical knowledge and collective memory.

- The exhibition was produced under favourable financial conditions. An adequate budget ($500,000) allowed for the hiring of specialists to execute the research, design and production.

- The institution is a modest size. The McCord is considered (by Canadian museum standards) to be a medium-sized institution, with 50 staff members and operating with an annual budget of $5 million. It may be easier for museum professionals to envision the transferability of the research findings because they can relate to the scope of the project and institution.

- The project is well documented. A series of textual and visual working documents produced throughout the development of the exhibition was available for research purposes.
• The institution’s mandate and vision include explicit learning outcomes related to historical understanding and citizenship education. The mandate reads as follows: “The McCord Museum helps individuals connect with generations, cultures and communities, inspiring them to become informed, open-minded and engaged citizens.” The vision extends this idea by underlining the necessity to make historical narratives relevant to people’s lives: “A unique forward-looking and thought-provoking museum, exploring contemporary issues relevant to Canadians of all backgrounds, engaged with communities at the local, national and global level.”

• The exhibition was positioned by the museum’s directors as participating in an important societal discussion on intercultural exchange and new collective identities. In a conversation preceding the study, the Director of Collections explicitly situated the exhibition as a response to the call for the creation of shared cultural references, recommended in the Bouchard–Taylor Commission report.

4.2 Data Sources and Collection

To capture how historical thinking is implicated when one engages with the exhibition (as an exhibition maker or visitor), three main sources of data were used for this study: the researcher’s reading of the exhibition and associated documentation, the interviews with exhibition makers, and the interviews with visitors. This section outlines the nature of the data and the collection method (for an overview of data sources, see Table 4.1). The interview questions for both exhibition makers and visitors were piloted with members of the exhibition team and visitors of The Unnatural History of Stanley Park, a temporary exhibition produced by and displayed at the Museum of Vancouver in 2008, where six exhibition team members and 17 visitors were interviewed. This resulted in the refinement of the formulation and sequencing of the questions for both interview protocols.

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14 The accurate name for this commission is the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. Its motivation was a call to review interculturalism, immigration, secularism and the theme of Quebec identity. The report of the Commission was the subject of highly public and controversial issues in Quebec. The Commission was established in February 2007 and closed in June 2008.
4.2.1 The exhibition environment

In addition to spending several hours in the exhibition space to experience it first hand, I collected key working documents used to create the exhibitions: the exhibition scenario, design brief, exhibition texts and photographic documentation of the exhibition space. These became reference material to study BIQ.

4.2.2 The experience of people who made the exhibition

Six key members of the project agreed to share their experience of creating BIQ: the Guest Curator, the Project Manager, the Designer, the Head of Exhibitions and Programs, the Museum Director and the community representative. Data capturing their experience were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview questionnaire was distributed to the participants several days prior to the interview session (See Appendix F). The interview questions focused on the participant’s interpretive work associated with the development of the exhibition, the participant’s conception of history, and his/her understanding of the public’s ability to engage with the past. Although exhibitions are the product of intensive teamwork, it was felt that individual interviews would yield rich data and make salient the presence of divergent and convergent perspectives within the team. Most of the interviews took place in the exhibition space, and were between 50 and 90 minutes long. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in French or English, based on the interviewee’s language of choice. Following the interviews, the researcher corresponded by phone or email with the interviewees to clarify aspects of the discussion.

4.2.3 The experience of people who visited the exhibition

Recruiting and sampling.

I conducted 24 exit interviews with 36 adults. The participants were recruited on site as they exited the exhibition. After introducing the research project and myself, I solicited the participation of visitors (Appendix C). If people accepted, they were supplied with a consent form that they were given time to read, and they also had time to ask questions about their participation (Appendix E). To thank them for their time, participating visitors were offered a
choice between the reimbursement of their museum admission tickets or two complimentary tickets for a future visit at the museum.

My selection of visitor-participants consisted of a purposive sampling that aimed at capturing a diversity of learning experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindauer, 2005b; Yin, 2009). As many visitor study researchers have argued, demographic data is not necessarily the best predictor of the museum experience (Falk, 2009; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004). However, in the context of an onsite, post-visit recruiting strategy, assembling a demographically diverse group of participants with a range of language (French/English), age, place of residence (local, national, international), and education provided an effective means to assemble a group of people who would provide as wide a range as possible of responses to the exhibition. The interviews took place during a two-week period. Interview time varied and included one free admission day. Upon the completion of interview 24, I was satisfied with the sample, which included a range of experience, level of interest, and knowledge about the topic (See Table 7.1). A diversity of museum experience was also sought by interviewing various types of visiting parties; I conducted 14 interviews with single visitors, 7 with parties of 2, and 2 with parties of 3. Of the visitors asked to participate in the study, 12 visitors declined, equating to a participation rate of 67%. The reasons evoked for declining to participate were: they didn’t have enough time (8), they were tired or didn’t feel like it (2), or they felt they hadn’t spent enough time in the exhibition (2).
### Table 4.1 Being Irish O'Quebec Visitor Profile (Research Participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Participating Visitors</strong>:</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Interviews</strong>:</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned Visit of BIQ</strong>:</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unplanned Visit of BIQ</strong>:</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong>: Women</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language (Most) Used:</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English:</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish: (interview was conducted in English)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Four Montreal-based participants were fluent in French, English and other languages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Distribution by Category</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–45</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–55</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–65</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66–75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Post-secondary diploma (one-year program after high school in Quebec)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>College diploma/CEGEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Undergraduate university degree (or enrolled in one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residency</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Metropolitan Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quebec region (Sorel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Canadian tourists (Ontario, BC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>International tourists (France, US, Sweden, Jamaica, British Virgin Islands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Museum Visits</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; than 1/yr:</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 visits/yr:</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6 visits/yr:</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–10 visits/yr:</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irish Background</strong>:</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irish Background Who Had Planned Their Visit</strong>:</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My group constitution is not representative of the visitor profile at the McCord Museum (which is considerably older). The linguistic sample (50% English and 50% French) is also not representative of the Francophone majority in Montreal. It is, however, indicative of the large proportion of tourists visiting the museum in June, who constituted nearly half the sample. Also, 14 of the 36 participants reported having Irish roots. Of this group, 9 had planned to visit BIQ. This ethnic affiliation with the exhibition narrative is taken into account in the analysis.

**Data collection for the visitor experience.**

The interview protocol was semi-structured, with a series of open-ended questions. Using open questions has proven to be very helpful as a way of generating visitors’ accounts and perceptions of their museum experience (Macdonald, 2002; Sandell, 2007). A short preliminary segment of the interview was aimed at gathering demographic and background data. The core portion of the interview included 16 open-ended questions about the exhibition (see Appendix F). The duration ranged from 10 minutes to 35 minutes. Questions were not always asked in order and followed the flow of the conversation. Some questions were designed to observe whether and how historical thinking would manifest spontaneously, as visitors shared their overall impressions of the exhibition, their preferences in regards to objects, texts or displays, their feelings toward Irish immigrants, and their understanding of the exhibition’s “big idea”. Interviewees were also asked whether and how they related the historical topic to the present (via their personal lives and the contemporary reality in Quebec). The second set of questions, on the other hand, attempted to provoke historical thinking. The aim was to observe how visitors would respond to questions that encouraged them to think about the historical significance, causes and consequences, or historical perspectives related to the exhibition narrative. A third set of questions aimed to probe visitors on their conceptions of historical epistemology.

The interviews took place in the exhibition space. This decision was supported by the pilot study, which had given me the opportunity to observe how comfortably visitors discussed the exhibition in the gallery space (as opposed to being interviewed in a separate room, as is often the case for exit interviews). This approach also acknowledged that museum learning is
an embodied, multi-sensory experience, and that consequently, conversations in the exhibition environment can produce compelling data. Upon starting the interview, participants were given the digital recorder to make them feel freer to move around in the exhibition. This simple interview strategy was fruitful in that it helped share some control over the interview process. Rather than the researcher setting the pace, visitors would zigzag in the interview space, touring me through their experiences.

**Longitudinal study parameters.**

The methodological rationale for interviewing visitors several weeks after their museum visits is supported by the growing literature in museum studies on longitudinal studies. These studies have demonstrated that capturing memories and impressions a few days, weeks and even several years after the museum visit gives us a greater sense of the learning impact, as the experience is constructed and reconstructed over time and subsequent experiences (D. Anderson & Shimizu, 2007; D. Anderson, Storksdieck, & Spock, 2007; Stevenson, 1991).

The follow-up phase of the visitor study took the form of a telephone interview or email correspondence (depending on the participant’s availability and preference). Follow-up was conducted three to six weeks after the visit to the museum, the majority of visitors being reached a month after seeing the exhibition (with the exception of one visitor, who responded 14 weeks after his visit). The questionnaire was inspired by Medved’s studies (1998; 2000) and probed visitors on four aspects (Appendix H):

- most vivid memories about the exhibition;
- subsequent conversations with people about the exhibition;
- connections established between the exhibitions with things they had done or seen after their visit; and
- things they did as a result of visiting BIP.

Of the 36 visitors, 33 responded to this follow-up activity. These brief individual encounters with participants ranged from three- to eleven-minute telephone conversations or one- to two-page written responses sent electronically. These conversations were audio-recorded (using a speaker-phone) and transcribed. (Choice of language for interviews and translation was the same as indicated above.) These data were added to the visitor interviews
gathered at the museum. They provided additional context to the individual or small-group museum experience.

Table 4.2 Overview of Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition</td>
<td>- Multiple visits to the exhibition over a 2-week period in June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading of exhibition documentation: exhibition scenario, design plan, exhibition text, photographic record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition team interviews</td>
<td>- Interviewed 6 key members of the exhibition team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Audio-recorded interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Interview length ranged between 50 and 75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 4 interviews took place in office and in exhibition space in June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2 telephone interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor onsite interviews</td>
<td>- 24 interviews with 36 visitors (included 14 individual interviews, 7 with visiting party of 2, and 2 with visiting party of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Conducted over a 2-week period in June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Length of interviews ranged between 12 and 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor follow-up conversations</td>
<td>- 33 respondents: 28 were telephone interviews and 5 were email correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Length of conversation: 5 to 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Research Ethics

In this section, I first describe how the issues of protection of research participants and trustworthiness of findings are situated within the larger discussion of research ethics. I then describe how these two aspects of research were considered and applied in my research.

Michael Bassey has characterized research ethics as three interconnected elements: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons (Bassey, 1999, pp. 73-79). Respect for democracy refers to the researcher’s right in a democratic society to probe and to ask questions, to give and be given information, to express ideas, and to critique the ideas of others. Respect for truth refers to the researcher’s obligation to be truthful when gathering data, analyzing it and sharing findings. The researcher should not deliberately misinform, nor should he/she involuntarily mislead him/herself or others. This is why demonstrating the trustworthiness of a study plays such a critical role in the process of reporting findings. Respect for persons refers to the recognition on the part of the researcher that study participants must be treated fairly and with dignity, and are entitled to privacy.

Bassey has emphasized that during the research process, these elements are in constant interaction. A researcher, for instance, can expect to have her study published if she successfully passes the peer review process set up by a scholarly publication, even if she often disagrees with the editor of this particular publication (respect for democracy). Her paper will carefully describe the methodological approach of the research for peer review purposes (respect for truth). She will take time whenever possible to review the results with study participants as a way to reciprocate the privileged access to information. This may also involve masking some details at the request of participants (respect for persons).

In this subsection I describe the approach adopted to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner, by focusing the discussion on respect for the study participants and respect for the person.

4.3.1 Respect for study participants

This study met all the requirements concerning protection from harm and was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia. Several types of permissions were sought to conduct this study.
Institutional permission and exhibition makers’ informed consent.

I initially contacted the person responsible for the production of exhibitions at the McCord Museum to discuss the aim of my research project. I sent the museum a written description of my research objectives, questions, methodology and data gathering procedures (Appendix A). Upon receiving the institution’s approval to proceed with the study, I sent the exhibition team members an electronic invitation to participate, mentioning they should not feel obligated to participate. The invitation included a detailed outline of the study (Appendix B). Upon expressing their interest in participating, exhibition team members were sent electronically a consent form and the interview questionnaire to read ahead of time if they wished to, and a consent form (Appendices D and F). The consent form underlined issues related to confidentiality of information and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Informed consent of museum visitors.

The recruiting method was designed to make visitors comfortable to decline to participate. I approached them as they exited the exhibition under study. First I introduced myself and gave a short description of my work. If the visitor was willing to hear more, I described the study and its participation requirements in greater depth (see Appendix C). If the visitor was still willing to participate, I gave the visitor a consent form to sign (see Appendix E). The consent form provided an overview of the study, and it underlined issues related to confidentiality of information and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were conducted in English or French, based on each participant’s language of choice.

4.3.2 Participants’ privacy

Visitors’ identities remain strictly confidential. Each visitor was assigned a research code number. All research materials are identified only by code number; no research files include the visitor’s name. The recorded interviews and transcripts as well as the telephone interview notes are kept in a locked filing cabinet. Visitors are not identified by name in any reports of the completed study. In the study reports and publications, members of the exhibition team are referred to by their titles, not by their names. Because the study includes an in-depth description of the exhibition and museum profile, it is impossible to keep the identity of participating museum professionals and contractors entirely confidential. The
exhibition team members were made aware of this aspect in the initial invitation to participate and in the consent form.

The exhibition team had privileged access to information. As a way to reciprocate this access and solicit feedback, I sent to the museum staff the full transcripts of a few visitor interviews and the preliminary analysis of three questions on the topic of museum visitors and trust. My correspondence encouraged museum staff to “ask for more” if they wanted to. The aim was to not overwhelm these study participants, and to direct this type of information to interested parties only. In addition, five months after the interviews, all participating exhibition team members were invited to an in-person meeting that took place at the McCord, where I shared some preliminary findings and solicited feedback.

4.4 Trustworthiness of Data

In the context of an interpretivist paradigm, the search is not for the “right” interpretation but for an interpretation that is defensible (Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Marton & Booth, 1997). Throughout the research process, I established the trustworthiness of findings based on the criteria of credibility, authenticity and comprehensiveness (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Museum scholar Andrea Lindauer (2005) eloquently identified how the application of these three interpretivist-based criteria are employed in the study of museum exhibitions. This section provides succinct descriptions of these criteria and their applications in the context of my research.

4.4.1 Credibility

The credibility of a research process and outcome is achieved when it is demonstrated that the interpretation is grounded on data (observations, interviews and written documents) rather than a simple opinion. The analysis for this research relies on data from multiple sources (one pilot study, written documentation, detailed description of the exhibition, interviews with exhibition team members, multiple interviews with visitors), as described in section 4.3 of this chapter, which also explained the suitability of the selected case. Chapter 5 provides a detailed description of the exhibition under study (the selected case), while chapters 6 and 7 aim at describing, analyzing and understanding the ideas and perspectives of exhibition visitors and exhibition developers as they relate to historical meaning-making. While not having
predetermined, definite indicators of success, these participants’ ideas and perspectives provide the substantive element to explore the usefulness of historical thinking frameworks.

4.4.2 Authenticity

Authenticity defines the process through which trustworthy data are generated. In an interpretivist research inquiry, the researcher is the instrument for collecting data. In several occasions throughout this study report, I position myself in the research, referring to my cultural background, professional experience and motivations (in chapters 1, 4 and 8). Authenticity also refers to the researcher’s ability to bring forth the participants’ opinions, interpretations and values. I strived to make visitors and exhibition developers at ease by talking in their own terms about their expectations, opinions and experiences. This meant adjusting the pace and rhythm of a conversation based on the interviewees’ comfort level, and shifting the content or order of interview questions to address what the interviewees were saying. As a result, each interview is unique because each visitor and exhibition team member is unique. Thus, the analysis is based on data that are perhaps more attentive to the participants’ constructions than data generated through standardized questionnaires.

4.4.3 Comprehensiveness

Comprehensiveness articulates the relationship between collected data and the breadth of the analysis. This investigation examines carefully and methodically (in chapters 6 and 7) the application and usefulness of two frameworks to gain a greater understanding of the exhibition’s ability to promote historical thinking. The demonstration is achieved using a range of data sources, including the researcher’s own reading of the exhibition, written documentation on the exhibition process, in-depth interviews with individuals who produced the exhibition, and interviews with visitors. The argument for this exploration is substantiated with a literature review, which identifies critical discussions at the intersection of historical thinking and museum studies research. The final chapter presents the implications of the findings for both museum practice and research in museum studies, and includes sufficient detail to accommodate case-to-case transfer—that is, the interpretation will make it possible for the reader to recognize general ways in which research findings from one context can be applied to another context.
4.5 Researcher’s Position

An important component of interpretivist research is to acknowledge the subjectivity of the researcher’s analytical frame. This segment outlines my level of familiarity with the museum field and the topic of the exhibition under study, and suggests how these two aspects have influenced my research.

I situate myself as an insider of the museum culture. I have been working in museums for over 17 years, predominantly in British Columbia. My work in museums has focused primarily on education, project management and exhibition development in art galleries, history museums, historic sites and one science centre. I have pursued a master’s degree in museum studies, and have been involved in several peer review committees that familiarized me with institutional trends in Canada. These experiences are central to my inquiry, in that my research questions emerged from problems observed in and from the field and in my own practice. My research agenda is also motivated by practical concerns: to incorporate interpretive practices in the museum that reflect a greater understanding of the audience’s historical sense-making and of an historical thinking pedagogy.

My first-hand knowledge of the museum field, and exhibition development in particular, influenced the nature and substance of interviews with exhibition team members. I presented myself and related to these participants as “one of them”. Sharing a professional experience and language made the conversations fluid, with participants quickly pointing out the peculiar, “salient bits” of the exhibition project that stood out from a museum professional’s perspective.

My cultural background and upbringing, as Quebecoise of French-Canadian descent, influenced my perception of the exhibition discourse. I was vaguely familiar with the historical moments, people and places evoked in the exhibition. My historical knowledge of Irish immigration and settlement in Quebec could be described as vernacular, acquired through films, novels and conversations. I was acutely aware that many aspects of the stories were meant to destabilize the received national narrative of Quebec’s story of origin. Indeed, the notion of cultural hybridity is not part of the official historical narrative of Quebec, which tends to focus exclusively on the shared French ancestry of its people (Létourneau, 2004; Nemni, 1998). When interviewing visitors for my study, I acutely related to the Quebecois of French-Canadian descent’s reactions. I shared their cultural and historical references, their questions
and astonishment at some of the stories presented in the exhibition. As a researcher, I observed empirically the workings of collective memory in my initial responses as much as in the visitors’—i.e., how shared stories support the construction of “imagined communities” and national identity. This realization sensitized me, during the subsequent phase of data analysis, to notions of collective memory and identity in visitors’ historical meaning-making.

4.6 Data Analysis

4.6.1 The structural and heuristic role of Rüsen’s matrix in the analysis

While the six concepts of historical thinking (or the metahistorical concepts) discussed in chapter 3 have determined my preliminary theoretical perspective and informed the conceptual underpinning of this study, this framework was revised and complemented with another one in light of data emerging from the interviews with both exhibition team members and visitors. Indeed, it became apparent in the early phase of the analysis that examining the articulation of historical thinking concepts would become more productive when placed within a larger framework that attended explicitly to issues of motivation, epistemological understanding, and institutional role and impact.

German historiographer Jörn Rüsen developed a disciplinary matrix designed to explain the paradigmatic changes that characterized modern historiography, identified as Enlightenment, historicist, and social science histories (1993). The model (see Figure 4.1) offers the flexibility necessary to accommodate the study of contemporary historical productions, whether developed by historians, filmmakers or museum professionals. The strength of Rüsen’s model lies in its ability to recognize the relationship between the internal logic of the historical discipline and everyday life, what he calls the practical world. The matrix describes how the historical narrative is generated through the use of specific methods of inquiry, guided by certain conceptions of history. Although it highlights the unique scaffolding of historical productions, and the intellectual autonomy of the discipline, the matrix presents the practical world as both history’s inspiration and ultimate beneficiary. History narratives emerge from a societal need for temporal orientation (as opposed to strictly intradisciplinary needs) and contribute back to societal developments in the form of identity formation and guidance.
Rüsen’s matrix consists of dynamic connections among five factors or principles of historical thinking:

- The Interests: humans have a need for temporal orientation; historical consciousness emerged out of this need.
- The Theories factor or “leading views”: historians’ conceptions concerning human actions—their epistemological perspective regarding history.
- The Methods of empirical research: the study of traces and accounts of the past and the use of “history universals”, i.e., concepts like progress, decline, historical agency, process and structure.
- The Forms of representation: the substantive outcome of historical inquiry, its concrete manifestation in the world.
- The Functions of orienting existence: history contributes back to life-practice, constituting identities and offering guidance for future actions.
This matrix was helpful to my inquiry in two significant ways. First, it afforded enough flexibility to be applied to and theorize both the museum’s historiographic project expressed in the words of the exhibition makers and the historical meaning-making of visitors. Second, it was aligned to the “median position” that I favour for conceptualising exhibitions as meaning-making environments (see section 2.2.3). This position recognizes that meaning derived from engaging with the exhibition (as producer or visitor) must be situated historically and culturally. It also considers that the participation of the exhibition in contemporary culture is enacted in large part through each visitor’s intellectual and physical engagement with the exhibition. That is, the cultural function of an exhibition is directly related to its “public life”, activated by the visitors’ interactions with the exhibition.

4.6.2 Qualifying the historical thinking of the exhibition makers

The following describes in specific terms how Rüsen’s matrix was used to analyse the historical thinking of the BIQ makers. With each of Rüsen’s five elements, categories were created inductively, based on the sorting and re-sorting of exhibition makers’ perceptions and understandings. Manual coding was conducted through multiple readings of individual interview transcripts. Emerging themes across exhibition team members were identified for each of the five elements. See Table 4.2 for a summary of data analysis and data coding.

Interest.

The genesis of the exhibition as historical project was examined through the exhibition makers recounting the circumstances that led to the creation of BIQ and the factors that influenced the directions of the project. Any explanation throughout the interview (not limited to one question) offering a rationale or justification for developing the exhibition was coded “interest”. The analysis emerged from the variations and similarities within this code.

Theory.

This element focused on the participants’ ideas about history, which largely manifested when they were asked to define history (question 5 on the interview questionnaire). The recounting of the exhibition development also led participants to express their views on this topic. Any explanation defining what history is and is not, and how BIQ qualified as historical
work, was coded “theory”. The analysis emerged from the variations and similarities within this code.

Method.

This element focused on the account of the team players directly involved with the research phase of the project. It established how the motivation for and framing of the historical inquiry (the Interest and Theory elements) informed the research process. Explanations related to the search, selection and study of primary and secondary sources were coded “method”. The analysis emerged from the variations and similarities within this code.

Forms (of representation).

This element examined the construction of BIQ as historical account and learning environment. The first portion of this analysis discussed emergent themes across participants’ experience and understanding of the conceptual and design phases of the project (questions 1, 9, 11, 12 and 13). These themes consisted of three key negotiations, were identified as “conceptual knots”, and were coded as “form/conceptual knots” that were critical in shaping the exhibition. The second portion brought to the fore the range of team members’ conceptions about the capacity of exhibitions (in general and in the case of BIQ specifically) to mediate historical knowledge. Responses to questions 7, 17 and 18 of the interview questionnaire provided the data for analysing this element and were coded “form/exhibition design”. The analysis of this element focused on the articulation of the concepts of historical thinking in participants’ explanations.

Function.

This section examined the exhibition team members’ perspectives on the museum’s educational and social role enacted through historical exhibitions. The interview didn’t pose this question directly. Instead, explanations related to the exhibition’s objectives, the significance of exhibition messages (questions 10, 15, 20 and 21), as well as BIQ’s ability to encourage visitors to think critically about history (question 22) were designed to tease out these ideas. These responses were coded “function”. Themes within this code emerged in and across the participants’ explanations and formed the basis of the interpretation. The analysis emerged from the variations and similarities within this code.
## Table 4.2 Summary of Approach to Data Analysis – The Interpretive Task of the Exhibition Makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Rüsen’s Matrix</th>
<th>Data Generated Through Interview Coding</th>
<th>Sample of Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest</strong></td>
<td>Explanations recounting the circumstances and decisions that led to the creation of the exhibitions were coded “motivation”.</td>
<td>“I was one of the instigators because I had been approached by the two historical societies to ‘celebrate’ the Irish. OK, well you always get these requests. And I said: ‘That sounds interesting.’ And so we started talking with them. I told them from the beginning that they would have to help fund the project. . . . And they did.” Museum Director BQ-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>Participants’ ideas about history (interview question 5) were coded “historical epistemology”. Patterns of understanding emerged from the variations and similarities within this coding.</td>
<td>“From a practical point of view, what people thought happened is often more important than what really happened.” Community Representative BQ-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>Explanations related to the search for, selection and study of primary sources were coded “research”. Patterns of understanding emerged from the variations and similarities within this coding.</td>
<td>“I don’t think the exhibit was any weaker because of the way we ended up finding stuff. It just felt surprisingly more intuitive through networking, so it was just a different way of doing research.” Curator BQ-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form (of Representation)</strong></td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: Explanations related the planning and design of the exhibition and the staging of exhibition messages. References to key negotiations were coded “form/conceptual knots”.</td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: “We accepted to work with them [Irish historical societies] but we refused to do a commemorative exhibition.” Director of CRP BQ-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 2nd portion of the analysis examined the participants’ conceptions of how exhibition design is implicated in the historical narrative. These explanations were coded “form/exhibition design”. Patterns of understanding emerged from the variations and similarities within this coding.</td>
<td>2nd portion of the analysis: “I wanted to take this square footage to destabilize the visitor.” Designer BQ-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>Team members’ perspectives on museums’ educational and social role, enacted through historical exhibitions (questions 10, 15, 20 and 21). Team members’ perspectives on BIO’s ability to encourage visitors to think critically (question 22). These explanations were coded “function”. Patterns of understanding emerged from the variations and similarities within this coding.</td>
<td>“It creates a certain awareness, like ‘I didn’t know that the Irish were that present in my personal history,’ but not to the extent of providing tools for visitors to make their own idea of history. Not more than other exhibitions, I would say.” Designer BQ-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.3 Qualifying the historical thinking of the museum visitors

The following describes in specific terms how Rüsen’s matrix was used to analyse the historical thinking of the BIQ visitors. With each of Rüsen’s five elements, categories were created inductively based on the sorting and re-sorting of exhibition visitors’ perceptions and understandings. Manual coding was conducted through multiple readings of individual interview transcripts. Onsite interviews constituted the data for the first four principles; the data generated from the follow-up conversations with visitors were analysed under the “function” element. See Table 4.3 for a summary of data analysis and coding.

Interest.

Visitors’ implicit and explicit references to why they came to BIQ were coded “interest”. Various categories of motivations for visiting BIQ were identified. In some cases, multiple motivations were assigned to the same visitor.

Theory.

The visitors’ rationale for trusting BIQ (question 8) and for trusting historical sources in general (question 15), and their explanations for resolving conflicting historical interpretations (question 16) formed the data capturing visitors’ ideas about history. Visitors’ perceptions about the trustworthiness of information presented in BIQ were collated, emerging criteria were identified, and categories were formed. These were then compared to the visitors’ choice of most trusted source of historical information. This understanding in visitors’ historical epistemology was enriched through the analysis of their response to the question about resolving conflicting historical interpretations. The coding and typology developed by Seixas, Ercikan & Gosselin (2009) to analyse the public response to the same question was used in this study.

Method.

This portion of the analysis establishes how visitors resorted to historical thinking as their “method” for engaging with the exhibition. I examined whether visitors used the six concepts of historical thinking in their interpretation of BIQ and, if so, how each concept manifested. Categories of descriptions were created to qualify the use of each concept. The frequency of use of each concept within the visitor sample was quantified. The method
principle also included an analysis of “visitor problems” with the exhibition, which came to be defined as a form of historical thinking. Visitor criticisms were inventoried, categories created, and correspondence between visitors and exhibition makers established. Finally, as a way to further the exploration and contextualize the manifestation of historical thinking, I included an entire interview transcript, the raw data, and qualified the articulation of historical thinking of one visitor.

**Form (of representation).**

This section examines the visitors’ understanding of the substantive history. Visitor identifications of the exhibition’s main messages were coded “big ideas”. A visitor typology based on their local, national or transnational curiosity for the exhibition topic was created to interpret patterns across visitors’ meaning-making.

**Function.**

This section seeks to further explore questions of learning impact by capturing visitors’ thoughts and memories of *BIQ*, weeks after their visit at the museum. The analysis of the visitor follow-up interviews and emails is structured around the questionnaire structure—i.e., the responses to each of the four questions were analysed individually, collated and categorized.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Rüsen’s Matrix</th>
<th>Data Generated Through the Identification of Patterns and Interview Coding</th>
<th>Sample of Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest</strong></td>
<td>Visitors’ implicit and explicit references to why they came to <em>BIQ</em> were coded motivation (throughout the interview).</td>
<td>“I’m crazy about hockey and I always try to understand its beginnings . . . how the sport has developed . . . and the Irish were affiliated with the Quebecois because of the religion. So I was looking for these kinds of connections because I know that the Shamrock hockey club started in Griffintown.” (P6 BQ-1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>Visitors’ rationale for trusting <em>BIQ</em> (question 8) and historical sources in general (question 15), and their explanations about resolving conflicting historical interpretations (question 16).</td>
<td>“Yes, certainly, because it tells [the story] with real objects, posters that were used at the time. It’s authentic.” (P36 BQ-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: Manifestation and qualification of visitors’ use of the six concepts of historical thinking (throughout the interview).</td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: Use of the concept of evidence: “See something like, say, Thomas Darcy’s walking stick and suitcase from Grosse Isle, that’s AMAZING!” (P4 BQ-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd portion of the analysis: Identification and qualification of visitor criticism (throughout the interview).</td>
<td>2nd portion of the analysis: “I would have liked to see more public figures of Irish ancestry, alive today, featured in the exhibition: the Johnson family, Charest, Mulroney. . . . And maybe this could have been done with some visuals.” (P23 BQ-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of Representation</strong></td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: Identification and qualification of the exhibition’s “Big Idea” (question 12 and throughout the interview).</td>
<td>1st portion of the analysis: “Well with this title . . . it was about integration and maybe to convince the Quebecois that the Irish are part of Quebec. It’s a catchy title, that says something like ‘Listen, we are also part of Quebecois identity.’” (P27 BQ-12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd portion of the analysis: Identification and qualification of meaning-making patterns. Creation of a visitor typology based on a local, national and transnational curiosity for the exhibition topic (throughout the interview).</td>
<td>2nd portion of the analysis: national curious meaning-making: “[T]he merging with the French Canadians. I hadn’t realized this so much before, between the food, the music, and the intermarriage and even religion, a kind of blending.” (P14 BQ-2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>Learning impact of <em>BIQ</em> explored by capturing visitors’ thoughts and memories of <em>BIQ</em> weeks after their visit through follow-up interview or email. Responses to each of the four questions were analysed individually, collated and categorized.</td>
<td>“We were driving and I said: ‘Hey, this is where we are. This must be part of Griffintown because this is where that photograph [at the McCord] was taken.” (P3 BFQ-3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I identified how an interpretivist research paradigm informed my search for qualifying how museum exhibitions mobilize the historical thinking of their makers and visitors. I explained my decision to adopt a qualitative case study research design and phenomenographic methodology as a means to gain new understanding of the exhibition as a site for historical exploration. I presented and proposed the rationale behind the case selection of *Being Irish O’Quebec*, an exhibition produced and displayed at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal, and provided a detailed account of data sources and collection. I explained how ethical considerations guided the making of this research project, and qualified the criteria of credibility, authenticity and comprehensiveness. Finally, I clearly demonstrated and exemplified the structural quality of Jörn Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix in my analysis of the historical thinking experience of exhibition team members and visitors.
Chapter 5 *Being Irish O’Quebec*, the Case

This chapter is a preamble to the analysis of my case study and can be used to situate the research participants’ comments about the exhibition. It provides descriptions of the McCord Museum and the exhibition *Being Irish O’Quebec*. This chapter also introduces the exhibition team members interviewed for this research and the consultation process that helped shape the exhibition.

5.1 *Being Irish O’Quebec* in the Context of the Institutional Vision

The McCord Museum of Canadian History is a mid-sized museum with a large reputation. Its collection is made up of over 1,440,000 objects, images and manuscripts that embody aspects of the social history and material culture of Montreal, Quebec and Canada. With a relatively small staff of 50 and a modest annual operating budget of $5 million, the museum has sustained a substantial number of exhibitions (9 to 11 annually) and has been recognized by peers and the public for the quality of its online collection and exhibitions, with a considerable web audience of 2.25 million visits a year.\(^{15}\)

Located in the business district of Montreal, housed in an historic building across from the main campus of McGill University, the McCord Museum welcomes over 72,000 visitors annually. A recent survey indicates that a majority of visitors do not live in Quebec, that they come in small groups (family, couple or friends) and that people of all ages visit the museum.\(^{16}\) On most days, entrance to the museum is by paid admission.

As a public research and teaching museum, the McCord’s mission is to preserve, study, disseminate and foster an appreciation of Canadian history. It conceives its role as helping “individuals connect with generations, cultures and communities, inspiring them to become informed, open-minded and engaged citizens.”\(^{17}\) Four words on the McCord’s website encapsulate its vision: “INCLUSIVE – ENGAGED – PROVOKING – RELEVANT.” The vision statement makes explicit its intent to engage with a wide audience locally, nationally and internationally to tackle issues shaping contemporary society.

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\(^{15}\) For a list of awards given to the McCord, see http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/info/awards/.

\(^{16}\) Statistics provided by the McCord Museum’s communication department, September 2011.

\(^{17}\) http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/info/mission/
The museum’s programming record includes numerous exhibitions in collaboration with ethnic communities based in Montreal (the Chinese, Scottish and Jewish communities, among others). The outdoor project *Inspirations* (2008), pairing historical and contemporary portraits, and *Revealed or Concealed* (2008–9), an exhibition on fashion that explored the notion of a woman’s body as contested terrain for changing social attitudes and practices, are some of the recent productions connecting elements of critical history with contemporary realities.

The McCord Museum opened its doors in 1921, the culmination of private collector David Ross McCord’s lifelong passion for Canadian history. A jurist from a well-established Montreal family, McCord spent decades assembling over 15,000 objects illustrating the history of Montreal, Quebec and Canada, from different spheres of activity: domestic, urban, religious, artistic, political, aboriginal. The museum was founded following the donation of his collection. Since then, the museum has entertained a relationship with McGill University, the building landlord since its opening. McGill University was responsible for its administration until 1971, when the McCord became a private museum. This institutional association has likely contributed to the development of a robust tradition in historical research, which extended to the development of state-of-the-art collection management practice. The origin of its collections, its relationship with McGill University, and the Canadian history focus help to explain the strong bilingual (French/English) culture in the institution. This is significant, given its location in predominantly French-speaking Quebec.

*Being Irish O’Quebec* is aligned with the mandate and vision of the McCord in many respects: the product of collaboration with a cultural community based in Montreal, it features part of the museum’s collection, proposes an original examination of an historical topic, and intends to resonate with pressing issues concerning Quebec’s population. As the exhibition brief states:

Being Irish is not just about being Irish. It is about the construction of identity over time in a world that has always been globalized. It fulfills the Mission of the McCord to connect people and the desire of the Irish communities to commemorate their experience.

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The key contextual factors and motivations of the McCord Museum for producing BIQ are evoked in the following segment and are further examined in chapter 6.

5.2 The Exhibition – Descriptions

5.2.1 The exhibition topic

Being Irish O’Quebec was launched at the McCord Museum on March 17, 2009 (St. Patrick’s Day) and was open until October 2010. It recounted the many stories and facets of Irish immigration to Quebec from the New France period to the present, while insisting on the integration aspect of the settlement experience of this ethnic group. An overarching theme of the exhibition consisted of the encounter during the historical periods between the Irish (or people of Irish descent) and the Quebecois of French-Canadian origin. The exhibition was presented in terms of the meeting, the blending, and ultimately the métissage of Irish-Quebecois culture. BIQ shared stories about the distinctive contributions of this group to the collective, while exploring the ubiquity of the Irish presence in Quebec’s genetic makeup and cultural identity today. The exhibition could be described as an attempt to problematise the notion of the Quebecois Pure Laine 19 at a time when immigration influx and resulting government policies on cultural integration were the subject of intense debates at both local and international levels.

5.2.2 Formal description (See Figure 5.1 to Figure 5.19)

The exhibition was located on the main floor of the museum. 20 It comprised one central open space and two adjacent smaller areas, one acting as the introductory gallery, the other as the closing stage, with a total floor space of 353 m² (3800 ft²) (Figure 5.1). The entrance area introduced the topic with large text panels, a geographical map situating Ireland in relation to North America, and a short video featuring an intergenerational conversation about cultural identity, between two Quebecois of Irish descent, an older woman and a young boy (Figure 5.2).

19 The term “pure laine” literally means “pure wool” in French, and refers to people of French-Canadian ancestry. It is a politically charged expression, considered obsolete by many.

20 All visitors were informed by the admission staff of the topic and location of the various exhibitions upon their entrance to the museum.
From this point, visitors were funnelled into a short passage filled with long vertical white banners suspended from the ceiling, which blocked the view of the main exhibition area. Without knowing what to expect on the other side of the banners, visitors had to walk slowly around the banners and along a short corridor, listening to the sound of the sea and boats creaking. Despite the dim light, visitors could see images of people printed on the white banners. They were faces and scenes from another time and another place, evocative of the Irish immigrants’ voyages when they sailed to the New World (Figure 5.3).

Upon entering the main exhibition gallery, visitors could apprehend the entire open space at a glance. Dim light across the room darkened the many shades of green on the walls and panels, creating a solemn ambiance. On the south wall hung a large timeline with three different histories, including parallel courses that intertwined from time to time: the history of Atlantic crossing, the history of Ireland and the history of Quebec, from 1500 to the present; the arrangement signalled the meeting and braiding of these histories across time (Figure 5.4).

The main display area, organized into smaller clusters, offered a thematic and chronological configuration. Four clusters, referred to by the museum staff as the lieux de mémoire, represented cultural spaces evocative of even larger themes defining the Irish–Quebecois chronicle. First was Grosse Ile, a quarantine station outside Quebec City. It received thousands of Irish immigrants from 1837 to 1937. Visitors could circulate around the island-shaped low platform display to view objects that belonged to people who sojourned at Grosse Ile: a shawl, dilapidated shoes, a suitcase (Figure 5.5). The jacket of young orphan Patrick, from 1847, was a poignant reminder of the predicament of thousands of children who survived the trip alone (see Figure 5.6). This story led to the theme of adoption by French-Canadian families, and the intermediary role that French-speaking Catholic congregations played in this process (Figure 5.7).

On the south wall was the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, the emblematic celebration embodying both Irish culture and the Diaspora of the Irish around the world. Text and illustrations informed visitors of the origin of the St. Patrick’s Day festivity. A long wall of silhouettes made of mirrors evoked a crowd of spectators celebrating the parade in Montreal (Figures 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10). A parade that was “distinctive for its inclusiveness” underlined the text. Visitors were cleverly included in the festivity through their reflections in the large mirrored surface. They could look through various holes dotting the wall to discover the
parade’s memorabilia and view historical film footage. The *lieu de mémoire* exemplifying the Irish rural settlement was Saint-Colomban, a small rural community outside Montreal (Figure 5.11). This section addressed how Irish settlers transformed the landscape from forest to farms in several regions of Quebec. It discussed the role of religion in providing structure and meaning to these communities, both Protestant and Catholic. It hinted at the mutual culture shock between French Canadians and Irish Catholics, and recounted humorous episodes of these encounters and the eventual intermarriages between the two communities. It also demonstrated how Irish traditions in music, storytelling, food and beer flourished in rural Quebec.

The Towns section described the creation of a distinctive Irish–Quebec urban culture and the role of Irish communities in developing modern cities (Figure 5.12). This theme was exemplified in the story of Griffintown, the Irish historic district in Montreal, which a text panel explained was Canada’s “first industrial slum”. It discussed the poor living conditions of the area but also the Irish people’s ability to self-organize to improve working conditions and to develop local industries, community churches, schools and sports. A counterpoint to the rapid disappearance of Griffintown today was a reference to the mobilization of former residents and other citizens to “commemorate the neighbourhood’s past and design its future”.

Interspaced between these *lieux de mémoires* were the *biographies*, which featured the stories of individual historical actors. The exhibition contained ten biographies, or historical actors selected as examples of the many facets of cultural interactions and Irish integration. This selection included a few celebrated Irish-born Quebec politicians:

- Guy Carleton, governor of Quebec, who worked on obtaining liberty for Quebec’s Catholics and signed the famous Quebec Act in 1774, giving rights to the French Canadians to hold public office, own property and retain much of the civil code (Figure 5.13).
- Edmond Bailey O’Callaghan, a supporter of the *Patriotes*, a national and anti-colonist political party and popular movement that initiated the Lower Canada Rebellions of 1837–8 (Figure 5.14).
- Thomas Darcy McGee, a prominent politician in the mid-nineteenth century who became a Father of Confederation in Canada (Figure 5.15).
The exhibition also introduced lesser-known individuals from various historical periods who acted as leaders in their own social sphere of activities:

- **Tec Aubry** (Tadhg Cornelius O’Brennan), the first known Irishman to arrive in New France, around 1630, who worked as a trader and a farmer and married a *Fille du Roi* (Figure 5.16).
- **Marie Louise O’Flaherty**, an Irish-born nun kidnapped as a baby by the Iroquois. She was eventually raised by the Soeurs Grises and joined their congregation in 1776.
- **Patrick McMahon**, a Catholic priest who celebrated mass in both French and English in Quebec City. He became the curate of the first Irish Church in Quebec in 1833.
- **William Hales Hingston**, a doctor twice elected as Montreal’s mayor, and a passionate advocate of public health reforms in the second part of the nineteenth century.
- **Yvonne Duckett**, a French diction and dramatic arts teacher to generations of Montreal children and high-profile actors, who represented a “classic Quebec mix of Catholic Irish and Catholic French Canadian”.
- **Mary Travers**, known as La Bolduc, another person of mixed heritage who was a French-Canadian music icon in the 1930s and incorporated Irish musical traditions in her art.
- **Marianna O’Gallagher**, the only living historical actor featured in the exhibition, a historian who assumed a leadership role in researching and promoting Irish–Quebec history.

Visitors could listen to the stories of five historical figures upon entering large sound booths made of glass walls (seating up to two people) and activating a sound capsule that related key aspects of the historical actors’ lives (Figures 5.17, 5.18). For each of the four *lieux de mémoire* and all ten historical figures, objects, archival and photographic documents, film, anecdotes, and exhibit texts attested to their significance and convergence toward cultural integration.

As visitors moved from one end of the main gallery to the other, they also moved across time, from the first Irish settler, Tec Aubry, to present-day Irish–Quebecois realities. When exiting, the visitor crossed a row of small banners, echoing the large ones encountered at the entrance. These banners bore titles such as “shared histories” and “vibrant cultural
blend”, as if to recapitulate the themes and help visitors to relay such concepts from the exhibition to the outside world. The small conclusion area was organized around a bar counter and stools, evocative of the Irish pub atmosphere today. Visitors were welcomed by a large wall projection featuring comments from previous visitors. The text “Share your Irishness” encouraged visitors to take part in this mosaic of electronic testimonials by posting their comments on their experience using a digi-pen, resulting in immediate posting (Figure 5.19). A comment book, a more conventional outlet, was available for those who wished to leave written comments.

An interesting tension occurred between traditional and innovative museographies in *Being Irish O’Quebec*. On one hand, we recognized the lexicon of traditional museum static displays with clusters of objects behind glass, accompanied by multiple text panels placed in dimly lit rooms. On the other hand, we appreciated the poetic quality of the passage at the entrance of the exhibition and the compelling use of oral tradition through soundscape, video and sound booths. These large glass boxes, simultaneously welcoming in and displaying visitors, were in themselves ironic museological moments. The exploitation of new digital technologies enhanced the interaction between visitor and exhibition, and enabled visitors to access and manipulate images (tactile screens) and leave their mark more publicly (in the conclusion area), provoking a plethora of comments on the large digital screen (over 1,000 within a few months of the exhibition’s opening). The visit could also be extended by going to the museum’s website to access a virtual tour of the exhibition and the exhibition texts in their entirety.

The tone of the exhibition text was non-categorical. Sentences starting with “we think” or “it is possible” implied the interpretive nature of historical work, and may have had the effect of encouraging visitors to assess the legitimacy of the historical claim.

The exhibition became this performative space, carefully crafted to convey and generate specific understandings about the past. The exhibition makers’ intent will be

21 This irony was not directed to museum visitors but was discussed among team members during the development phase (interview with designer).
22 For a substantial photographic record of the exhibition, see http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/expositions/expositionsXSL.php?lang=1&expoid=55&page=intro.
23 For the exhibition text, see http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/pdf/exhibits/Texte_Irish_EN.pdf.
examined in chapter 6, whereas the public understanding of this environment will be investigated in chapter 7.

**Figure 5.1 BIQ floor plan**

![BIQ floor plan](image)

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.2 Entrance area, showing the introductory video

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.3 Introductory figures at the back of entrance banners

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Figure 5.4 Overview of exhibition space, with timeline in the background

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Figure 5.5 *Lieu de mémoire* Grosse Ile zone: shoe, shards of pots and fragments of shawls from the quarantine station

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Figure 5.6 *Lieu de mémoire* Grosse Ile zone: jacket worn by child in a Montreal orphanage (1847)

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Figure 5.7 *Lieu de mémoire* Grosse Ile zone: Grey Nun costume. Several Catholic congregations in Montreal helped the “famine orphans”.

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Figure 5.8 *Lieu de mémoire* St. Patrick’s Day Parade zone (drawing)

![Diagram of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade zone](image)

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Figure 5.9 *Lieu de mémoire* St. Patrick’s Day Parade zone: protocols and notables

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Figure 5.10 *Lieu de mémoire* St. Patrick’s Day Parade zone: photograph of parade watchers, by Burt Covit (1988)

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Figure 5.11 *Lieu de mémoire* St. Colomban zone: stories of families who settled in rural areas in the 1820s

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.12 *Lieu de mémoire* Griffintown zone: overview of the exhibition area, featuring the early urban Irish settlements

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.13 Overview of exhibition space, with Guy Carleton listening station at the forefront

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.14 Biography zone: Edmund Bailey O’Callaghan (1797–1880)

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.15 Biography zone: Thomas d’Arcy McGee (1825–1868). Plaster cast of McGee’s hand and commemorative ribbon for his funeral.

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.17 Biography zone: drawings of listening station

Biography Type 1
Cabine d’acrylique autoportante avec système audio intégré, graphisme sur les parois extérieures, vitrines de petites vitrines.

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.18 Biography zone: Mary Bolduc (1894–1941), with view of listening station

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
Figure 5.19 Digital Comment Board

Copyright McCord Museum. Reprinted with permission.
5.3 The Interviews with Team Members as Core Data for the Analysis of BIQ’s Production

The interviews with exhibition team members played a crucial role in the analysis of BIQ’s production. The six members of the exhibition team interviewed included: the Museum Director; the Director of Collections, Research and Programmes; the Head of Exhibition; the Designer; the Curator; and the Community Representative for both Irish societies. Here is a short description (not an analysis) of their work experiences and roles in the development of BIQ. Issues related to the range of experiences within the team in regards to developing exhibitions, and of divergence in perspectives, are addressed in chapter 6. It should be noted that contracting curators and designers is common practice at the McCord, which operates with a limited curatorial team and no designer on staff.

**The Museum Director** negotiated the terms of collaboration with the Irish community. The Museum Director worked closely with the curator in the early phases of research and concept development. She also reviewed all exhibition texts. The Director had extensive experience creating exhibitions in various Canadian museums and has been director of the McCord for over 10 years. She holds a PhD in European renaissance history.

**The Director of Collections, Research and Programmes** oversaw the unfolding of the project from an administrative point of view. The Director was ultimately responsible for the completion of any exhibition produced at the museum. Her involvement began a year prior to the opening of BIQ. She participated in discussions concerning the final conceptual approach and assisted, when required, in the development of interpretive strategies. She had been newly appointed to this position but has worked in various aspects of collection management and exhibition development at the McCord for over 15 years. She holds a PhD in ethno-history.

**The Guest Curator** contracted by the McCord was responsible for conducting the research, for the sourcing of artefacts and archive material, and for developing the exhibition scenario of BIQ. She is a professional historian with extensive experience working with community groups; she had worked neither with the McCord Museum nor with the two Irish historical societies involved in the project. She had no experience of working on exhibition projects of this scale. As a result, a museologist was hired on a short-term contract to help her consolidate the scenario. The Curator holds a PhD in Canadian history but does not specialize
in Quebec–Irish history. Inviting content experts or researchers to participate as guest curators is common practice.

The Head of Exhibitions ensured that the exhibition would be produced within the approved budget, schedule and quality standards set by the institution. The Head of Exhibitions has worked with the McCord for 18 years, occupying various positions related to exhibition development. A year prior to the opening of the exhibition, she was promoted to Head of the Department, an organizational change prompting the hiring of a project manager who would take over the daily coordination of BIQ.

The Community Representative represented a joint committee formed of Irish–Catholic and Irish–Protestant historic societies based in Montreal, the organizations responsible for initiating the exhibition project. The Community Representative was responsible for ensuring that the vision and perspective of these two societies (historically the umbrella societies for the Irish in Montreal) were communicated and taken into consideration throughout the development of the project. He was a practising lawyer in a Montreal firm with two master’s degrees in European history. Although he was not familiar with exhibition development practices, he felt comfortable participating in committee discussions on historical research and interpretation.

The Designer project-managed the design and implementation phases. The Designer worked on behalf of a well-established design firm in Montreal, specializing in museum exhibitions and working on projects all over the world. He had limited experience managing museum projects but possessed over 10 years of experience designing exhibitions in various kinds of settings: history museums, science centres, children’s museums, and art galleries. He has an academic background in industrial design.

The Larger BIQ Team—my research focuses on the work of the core exhibition team, but the creation and success of an exhibition such as BIQ relies on the work of several professionals and museum staff in the areas of fundraising, marketing, conservation and education, in addition to requiring the service of a wide range of construction and installation specialists. The tables “Areas of Responsibilities” and “Timeline” hint at the complexity of this process and are a reminder of the considerable resources dedicated to the creation of museum exhibitions. The BIQ is not considered a large exhibition project by Canadian museum standards, and yet it required approximately two years to complete and a budget of
approximately $500,000 (excluding staff time and marketing costs). The credit panel acknowledges the participation of 52 individuals, 8 partner organizations and 41 lending institutions or individuals.

5.4 Processes of Exhibition Development as They Relate to BIQ

In the context of this study, when referring to the historical meaning-making of exhibition makers, I necessarily refer to the practice of exhibition development. The terminology associated with various phases of exhibition development and documentation varies to some extent across professional publications and institutions, but most agree to distinguish the following three as key phases (Belcher, 1991; Dean, 1994; Lord & Lord, 2002; Vranckx, 2006):

- **Development Phase:** This phase involves the creation, research and fine-tuning of the exhibition concept. During this phase, all the information is organized in the form of an exhibition brief or scenario, from which an interpretive approach is created for the particular goals of the exhibition.

- **Design Phase:** This phase involves the adaptation and transformation of the exhibition scenario into a three-dimensional reality in a specific spatial environment.

- **Implementation Phase:** This phase involves the building and installation of the exhibition, which includes tendering, project management and construction.

Decisions pertaining to the development of any exhibitions were made by committees and were ultimately approved by the two directors. Here are three decision and consultation processes to keep in mind when reading the analysis of BIQ’s production:

- The Programming Committee at the McCord (formed of one representative from each department) approved the exhibition proposal submitted by the two Irish historic societies.

- All key phases of development (themes selection, scenario, design concept) had to be approved by the museum director and director of collection, research and programmes.

- The Advisory Committee included representatives of the two partnering Irish historic societies and several scholars in public history, history, geography and
digital design, based in Montreal and Ireland. They were consulted during the elaboration of themes and design solutions, as well as for content accuracy.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a robust introduction to Being Irish O’Quebec. It outlined the rationale for selecting BIQ for the case study, and situated the exhibition in the context of the institutional vision of the McCord Museum of Canadian History. It offered a description of BIQ’s physical environment, supported by visual documentation. Finally, it outlined the review process adopted during the development of BIQ and introduced the role of key exhibition team members interviewed for this research.

These descriptions add context to the discussion on data analysis, and as such, constitute an essential preamble to the next two chapters, which analyse the experience of people who made and visited BIQ.
Chapter 6 The Historical Exploration of Exhibition Makers

This chapter focuses on the making of Being Irish O’Québec, doing so by examining the historical meaning-making involved in the exhibition’s development. As elaborated in chapter 4 on methodology (section 4.7), I employed the disciplinary matrix developed by historian and historiographer Jörn Rüsen as a structural element to analyse the historical meaning-making of both exhibition makers and consumers (see Figure 4.1). The application of such a disciplinary framework to analyzing the making of an exhibition does not imply that all exhibition team members are historians. Rather, it emphasizes the notion that as a collective, the exhibition team does engage and generate historical knowledge, and as a result, the exhibition constitutes and participates in an historiographic project.

I largely based my analysis of BIQ’s production on interviews of exhibition team members. Discussion about the making of BIQ is assessed in light of the matrix’s five elements: the Interest, the Theory, the Methods, the Forms of Representation, and the Functions. These elements can be applied to the reality of “doing history” in the museum. By this I mean taking into consideration the specific requirements of an institution mandated to generate and disseminate historical knowledge to a large and diverse public of non-experts.

6.1 The Interest Element and the Elaboration of BIQ

This section identifies how the production of BIQ can be interpreted as an expression of particular societal needs and interests for temporal orientation. BIQ must be understood as an historical production informed by an institutional vision. The museum, in general terms, is one of few public institutions whose very existence signifies a collective desire (that is culturally and historically situated) to invent spaces for the reflection, preservation and mass dissemination of knowledge about the past, the aim being to provide shared temporal and cultural references, and consolidate imagined communities. But museums are not a homogenous group of institutions. Each museum develops a different set of expertise related to their unique collections and mandate. Their size, location, governance, budgetary constraints, and philosophical positions in regards to research and education are important factors, amongst others, that affect the way they interpret societal needs for temporal orientation. The questions raised in the context of this analytical element are: Why, in 2009,
create an exhibition on the historical role of Irish immigrants in the development of Quebec? What needs for temporal orientation was this project serving? Based on the exhibition team accounts, I identified two main motivations underlying this historiographic project: community recognition and institutional responsibility to discuss “integration stories”.

6.1.1 A community need

It is critical to understand that *Being Irish O’Quebec* was not at the onset a “McCord idea” but a community initiative. Several years prior to the start of the project, encouraged by an exhibition on the history of the Scottish in Montreal,24 produced by the McCord, a few representatives of the Irish community informally approached the museum director to suggest the Irish–Montreal history as an exhibition topic. In 2006, a formal proposal was submitted to the museum from a joint committee representing two Montreal-based Irish historic societies, the St. Patrick’s Society of Montreal and the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society. These associations were eager to collaborate with the McCord to create an exhibition commemorating the contribution of the Irish in Montreal, and were willing to contribute financially toward its production and participate in the fundraising campaign. These associations felt the exhibition would constitute an ideal way to mark the 175th anniversary of the existence of the two Irish historical societies in Montreal. As the community representative summarized: “We came with money and the basic idea.” The McCord accepted the proposal, pending some modifications; enlarging the geographic focus from Montreal to Irish history in Quebec was one of them. This new geographic scope was quickly accepted by the Irish societies, enhancing in the process the historical significance of this community—not only had the Irish been important in Montreal, but their impact could be felt throughout Quebec.

The motivation at stake here is a desire expressed by a cultural community for public recognition of their historical contribution to a larger collective. The admittance of the story of the Irish in Quebec into the museum, in the form of an exhibition, was a powerful way to validate and signal the significant historical role their community played in shaping Montreal/Quebec society. Their participation in the project underlined their continued presence in contemporary Quebec and a desire to control the representation process. Up to that point, no museum had dedicated an entire exhibition to the history of the Irish in Quebec.

spanning 400 years. Such an historiographic project had a legitimizing effect: in light of the increasing cultural diversity in urban centres, the community was positioning itself as an important group in Canadian history, a group whose past actions continued to shape Quebec, with an impact that could be measured by time span, geography, number of people, and the singular contribution of individuals.

6.1.2 The institutional responsibility to discuss “integration stories”

The motivations underlying the McCord’s decision to act as host and producer of the exhibition differed predictably from those of the Irish community. The creation of the exhibition was deemed worthy of the substantial investment it required, because the topic had the potential to resonate with pressing issues and questions shaping contemporary Quebec. Indeed, with important waves of immigration reshaping the cultural makeup of Quebec, Canada, and most developed countries, discussions about “reasonable cultural accommodations” are omnipresent. How does the established population (in the case of Quebec, largely white of French-Canadian origin) negotiate differences with new immigrant populations to live together harmoniously? The production of an exhibition highlighting various aspects of cultural integration (taking the Irish community in Quebec as a compelling exemplar) was viewed by museum staff as a way to respond to this challenge.

On the subject of institutional vision and social responsibility, it is necessary to make reference to a public commission that received much attention in 2008 and that eventually played a determining role in the character of the exhibition. The Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences—the “Bouchard–Taylor Commission”, as it came to be known—was initiated by the provincial government following a series of incidents and heated public debates concerning Quebec society’s ability to handle cultural differences (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). Its motivation was a call to review interculturalism, immigration, secularism, and the theme of Quebec identity. An important part of this commission, co-chaired by renowned historian Gerard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor, included regional consultations inviting individuals and groups to voice their opinions on these matters. The commission was established in February 2007 and closed in June 2008, producing a lengthy report of 370 pages and an abridged report of 95 pages, both
accessible online.\textsuperscript{25} The report included an analysis of the current state of mind of Quebec residents (of all backgrounds) and cultural organizations, relative to the question of cultural integration. The document concluded with a series of recommendations for policy makers, organizations and institutions to “combat discrimination and promote reconciliation in the realm of accommodation practices.”\textsuperscript{26} In the last section of the report, eight avenues were proposed to achieve a common identity in the context of interculturalism. In this interview excerpt, the museum director explained how these avenues became instrumental in the development of the exhibition concept:

And so we came up with the idea [of incorporating] the Bouchard and Taylor “thing” because it was in the air at the time, as you can imagine. So we went online, and read, found seven or nine ways in which societies build a common culture which Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard thought about. I thought OK, this is not your usual government bureaucrats. This is Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard! Both are eminent thinkers. If they think this is how communities can build collectivities, I am going to take this seriously. So we took the seven “moyens” [recommendations] from the report. Seven means by which communities build collectivities. For each mean, we found examples in which the Irish figured. (Museum Director BQ-3)\textsuperscript{27}

The historical chronicle of Irish immigration and integration with the local populations offered proof that not only was interculturalism possible, but it also enriched all cultural communities involved in the process and constituted a constructive force for the collectivity in general. An excerpt from the introductory text encapsulates this desire to feature the history of the Irish in Quebec as an “integration story”:\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{Being Irish O’Quebec} explores how, for over three centuries, Irish people have shaped and been shaped by this place. Ireland’s emigrants and their descendants brought with them collective memories and symbols that have helped build the province’s common identity. Their history and their contributions show how newcomers, living within their host societies, can create new traditions and shared histories.

The conclusion panel reiterates some of these points, citing concrete examples addressed in the exhibition, and proposes the Irish-Quebec stories as a model of cultural integration for today:

Why do these stories of Irish Quebec matter?

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} See Appendix I for explanations of the citation method for interview excerpts.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Exhibition texts can be found on the McCord’s website under “Past Exhibitions”. The introductory panel text is at: http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/expositions/expositionsXSL.php?lang=1&expold=55&page=images_expo.
\end{itemize}
They matter because they provide a glimpse into the vast—and crucial—process of creating a common culture. Whether through small individual choices, like Sister O’Flaherty signing her name as Flertez, or joint action, like Irish labourers agitating for economic rights alongside their French-Canadian co-workers, the Irish gradually came to belong in this place, and in so doing helped build Quebec’s distinct national identity. Through effort and negotiation, sometimes peaceful, sometimes turbulent, the great ragout of Quebec’s New World society absorbed an Irish flavour.

Perhaps Quebec’s Irish stories, taken as a whole, should serve as a model of how people can come together to create shared histories and diverse, tolerant communities. The essence of the text, and the use of terms such as “common identity”, “common culture”, and “new traditions and shared histories”, echo the ideals expressed in the Bouchard and Taylor report and, like that document, the framing of this historical account implicitly suggests directions for future actions. The explicit linkage between positive immigration stories from the past and the current lived reality of intercultural relationships insists on the social relevance of the exhibition, indirectly justifying its existence and need for provincial funding.

The identified “needs” of the Irish community and the McCord for temporal orientations could be viewed as complementary and at times divergent—complementary because the stories as a whole demonstrated how the Irish helped build and transform Quebec’s nation through resourcefulness and resilience, divergent because the community’s need for recognition could lean toward an exclusionary discourse, i.e., “look at what the Irish accomplished”, while the museum’s intent tended to pull toward the more inclusionary notions of the building of a nation through the métissage of cultures. Embedded in the museum’s intent was also a more thought-provoking component: it asked visitors to reconsider the nature of Quebec’s cultural identity as exclusively French-Canadian in origin. 

*BIQ* falls squarely into the category of “academic exhibitions” in Gordon’s typology of history exhibitions, characterized by its makers’ interest in referring to contemporary topical issues facing the collectives and in sharing authority with communities, while relying on academic research methods and suggestive language.

29 Conclusion text can be found on the McCord’s website: [http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/expositions/expositionsXSL.php?lang=1&expId=55&currSectionId=7](http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/expositions/expositionsXSL.php?lang=1&expId=55&currSectionId=7).
6.2 The Theory Element: The Team’s Epistemological Understanding of History

To better understand the shaping of BIQ as historiographic project, I asked members of the exhibition team to define their conceptions of history, and attempted to establish relationships between these conceptions and the interpretative approaches adopted in the exhibition. The question asked to team members was very direct: “In your own words, what is history?” It should be noted that all exhibit team members were familiar with “doing history” or developing historical exhibitions through formal education, professional experience or both. None of the historians in the group, however, were experts in Irish-Canadian history.

Most responses from members of the exhibition team alluded to the interpretive nature of history, as noted in the Community Representative’s explanation: “In a sense, there are two meanings: everything that really happened; and what people think really happened. What people thought happened is often more important than what really happened” (Community Representative BQ-5). This statement stressed the selective process and viewpoint necessary to generate historical accounts. The responses of both the Designer and the Head of Exhibitions, on the other hand, were more generic—“It is the study of human actions throughout time” (Head of Exhibitions BQ-5)—and did not clearly refer to the contested and partial nature of historical research: “It’s about things that took place. It’s what we do with it. It’s the teaching of it, the interpretation of it, the understanding we have of it. It’s things that happened in the past” (Designer BQ-5).

The other definitions were more elaborate and emphasized the public use of history. Both the Museum Director and the Curator, the two public historians of the team, emphasized the need for ongoing scholarship, and for ascribing to a particular methodology. Interestingly, they also felt the need to differentiate history from heritage. According to the Museum Director, heritage has a tendency to be exclusive and parochial:

So we can share a history but we cannot share a heritage. You will never be a fifth-generation Irish Canadian with an American father. Never. So you can’t possibly have my experiences. So often, heritage is identified with history. So the danger is that you make it a “heritage exhibition” that only speaks to people who share Irish-Quebec identity. (Museum Director BQ-5)

To make it relevant to a larger audience, she insisted, history has to be structured around overarching concepts, rather than a particular group’s interests. Historical interpretation, she
explained, must focus on “shared experiences” rather than ethnicity, such as the meeting of people, coping with cultural differences, a framing of history that affords a sort of bridging between people who belong to a group and those who don’t. The Director also stressed the ties that historical research entertains with present-day sensitivities:

Always the questions we asked of history are questions based on our own time. So it’s about present preoccupations. There is lot of work right now on history of tolerance, history of ethnicity, of accommodation, because it is a huge question for our own time, immigration, history of immigration. (Museum Director BQ-5)

The Curator acknowledged the exclusive tendency of heritage, but in more implicit terms. She viewed heritage as an interest for the past, connected to particular traditions that find direct resonance in the present. Because traditions are transmitted from one generation to another through members of the same culture, heritage considered from this perspective does have the potential to be most meaningful to those who belong to that culture. The historical research, on the other hand, involved, as she stated, “a rigorous methodology” that allowed for a more disinterested examination of the past, one that didn’t necessarily require an immediate use in the present either. She recognized, however, that the two have commonalities. This excerpt captures the nuance:

Heritage, as I understand it, is the knowledge and memory and culture related to traditions in the past that people have today. Whereas history can be something that is not carried and pertinent to today’s people and an example could be ancient Roman history, that few cultures would find it personally pertinent but it’s valid historical facts. An extreme example would be people who no longer exist. Their history still exists, while heritage is something that is living, valuable and useful today, the two overlap many times. (Curator BQ-5)

The use of history in the present was also discussed by the Director of Collections, Research and Programmes:

It [history] provides references about your daily life at different levels. You can’t fall into the cliché: “it defines who we are.” It’s more about how history brings something to our understanding of our daily life. . . . To me, history is not something with a big “H”. History is something that can be “conjugated” to everyday life and when we talk about the history with capital H, it should be able to situate us in our little “h” . . . . [laughs] In fact, I think I’m making reference to material culture here. Somehow, we always end up doing the “grand history”/grand narrative. It’s a big debate between material culture, ethology against the Grand Narrative. For me, history is not about dates and big events. (Director of Collections, Research and Programmes BQ-5)

History here is viewed as useful for helping people make sense of their personal lives. The big “H” history refers to national histories, viewed as bearing little relevance to people’s daily lives.
This juxtaposition of definitions reveals that people working on the same history project operate with a range of epistemological understanding. The notions related to the constructed, contingent nature of history were present in several responses but not all. Individual responses captured in one interview cannot render a comprehensive picture of the historical competence of team members, but hint at the team members’ level of comfort (or lack thereof) in discussing this question. The question also became a platform to discuss philosophical positions about the use of history. For instance, the definitions of the museum director and curator leaned toward a concept of public history as an examination of past events, framed in ways that resonate with present-day topical issues. Somewhat aligned with this concern was the staff’s eagerness to distinguish history from heritage. Their experience working on a project initiated by a community group (whose past was being interpreted) may have heightened the need to distinguish the two. In their view, “doing heritage” was equated with an outcome that was less scholarly, overly celebratory, and exclusive, in that heritage stories would speak predominantly to people whose heritage was featured—hence the decision to expand the frame of reference of BIQ and adopt more universal themes such as “departure”, “arriving”, “settling” and “mingling”. As the curator was quick to add, heritage and history can overlap, making the line between the two fuzzy. I tend to agree with this position. Was BIQ, which was largely concerned with one ethnic group’s experience of immigration and settlement, exempt of the heritage label because it was the product of solid reflection and research? This question is further explored in section 6.4.1. At this point, however, I want to stress how the perceptions of what is history and what is not guided the framing of the exhibition topic.

The interviews also exposed that no group discussion on the meaning of history had taken place throughout the development of the project. It is impossible to establish that the exhibition would have differed or been enhanced as a result of a group conversation on this topic. Using as a basis the influential work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) on communities of practice and the value of shared understandings, we could conjecture that such conversations might have revealed complementary and divergent points of view, and enriched individual definitions to ultimately inform the outcome. These tacit epistemological understandings do not simply coexist with each other; they are enacted, interact and at times collide with each other during
the developmental and design phases of a project, as noted in other studies examining exhibition team members’ ideas concerning museum learning (Knutson, 2002; Lindauer, 2005a).

6.3 The Method Element: The Rules of Empirical Research

As with most historical enquiries, the BIQ project sought to respond to emergent questions about the past. These questions were largely attributed, earlier in this text, to two complementary and at times divergent societal needs for temporal orientation (community recognition and a perceived need for “integration stories”), and could be formulated as follows: How did the Irish contribute and integrate in Quebec’s society? How did they change Quebec and how did Quebec change them?

The research therefore began with some basic assumptions on cultural integration. The Curator, a professional historian, used the methods of historical discipline to assess primary and secondary sources and to locate evidence supporting or challenging (to some extent) these research assumptions. Search for archival material and artefacts took place initially in the McCord holdings, later expanding to other institutions and to the Irish-Quebec community at large. The larger exhibition committee, comprised of experts in Canadian and Irish history and representatives of the local Irish community, had significant influence in the research program. Indeed, the investigative tasks proved to be highly iterative and collaborative: after locating sources, weaving an initial narrative or storyline, the Curator proposed the narrative framework to a committee formed of academics, historians, museologists and representatives of the Irish-Quebec community. Committee feedback was taken into consideration, prompting new investigative work and a revised storyline. In the following interview excerpt, the Curator explicitly identifies how her professional interest for women’s labour history influenced the exhibition narrative, while discussing how the consultative and collaborative aspects of the project also impacted the selection of material culture and, ultimately, the historical argument:

a preoccupation of mine is to make sure men as well as women were represented so that women’s work, paid and unpaid, would be represented. So you can see that in the choice of objects in the rural section, humble domestic cooking, table objects. Same goes for Griffintown; we made an effort to have a variety of experiences represented, religious, sports, male/female activities, and then there was the pure snowball effect of putting out a call asking people if they had material. People
approached us and so we might have had five objects from a person and we chose what was most visually interesting or most pertinent.

_Interviewer:_ The response was good?

_Curator:_ Good enough. It wasn’t overwhelming. It was enough to populate what we needed. It was very challenging. I would say I am a very rigorous A to Z person, and found it challenging because it wasn’t an A to Z process. I would have done differently, knowing the structure. I would have contacted all Quebec museums, all major institutions to see what they had. (Curator BQ-11)

I want to locate the negotiations between the Curator and the various committee members as part of the method employed in the research phase. Rather than devaluing or “contaminating” the historical research, collaborations in the context of exhibition development played the role of a critical review process that enriched the outcome. In the case of B1Q, the curator had to propose and defend to her peers and other community stakeholders a solid historical argument designed for public consumption, which had to meet various criteria (in addition to that of historical accuracy)—that is, the criteria of “resonance” with community needs and institutional mandate, and the storyline’s ability to be staged in space (the scenographic capacities). As Divall argued in an essay on the historiographic potential of museum productions: “it [public history] differs from academic history, narrowly defined in its purpose and hence in some of its methods and techniques but it need not be any the less scholarly, rigorous or challenging” (2003, p. 259). This collaborative and trans-disciplinary approach to creating the exhibition-as-historical-account produced an original contribution to the historiography of Quebec. Indeed, the theme of cultural integration of the Irish community in Quebec may not have been novel, but the selection of themes and unique juxtaposition of historical periods (a 300-year span), places, historical figures, objects and archival material (found in institutions and in homes) in space was where the original historiographic contribution resided.

6.4 The Form of Representation Element: The Conceptual and Physical Building of B1Q

This section examines aspects of the politics and poetics of knowledge representation embedded in the exhibition. I identified three themes across team members’ responses as they recounted their involvement in the making of the exhibition. These emergent themes constitute key negotiations, referred to as “conceptual knots” that were critical in shaping the
exhibition. In the second portion of this analysis, I explore the exhibition team members’ understanding of the communicative capacity of the exhibition medium. Both sections are helpful in understanding the conceptual and physical building of BIQ as both historical account and historical learning environment.

6.4.1 Conceptual knots: key negotiations among team members and stakeholders

The nature of these three key negotiations points to power relations embedded in collaborative projects, the enactment of divergent epistemological views, and the challenge of building historical arguments based on material culture.

*Conceptual knot #1: A celebratory narrative versus an integration story.*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, BIQ was the initiative of two Montreal-based Irish historic societies. These representatives of the Irish community initially envisioned the exhibition as a form of tribute to the Irish immigrants. While the museum staff recognized the potential of exploring the Irish-Quebec history, they openly resisted a celebratory focus.

Statements by museum staff and the Curator alluded to the presence of competing agendas:

We did want to highlight the presence, and complexity, value and contribution while not falling into the historical error of only representing the positive aspect of the great and glorious contributor. I have a very strong background in social, women’s and labour history. I certainly had no qualms about reminding people of the importance of representing labourers and women, the unsung heroes. (Curator BQ-13)

The Head of Exhibition expressed similar thoughts:

We are a history museum. We are not here to say how extraordinary, how fantastic they are and how much we love them. For sure the community made some suggestions. . . . Let’s say that the message was always clear with the community. (Head of Exhibition BQ-13)

The Director of Collections emphasized the social significance of the integration story over a commemorative exercise:

We accepted to work with them [Irish societies] but refused to do a commemorative exhibition. We told them it was a vision of history that could be too reductive and that we preferred to situate the discourse in a more global way by presenting the Irish story in the context of integration and interculturalism. Places like Canada, the States and countries in Europe are host nations that welcome immigrants who eventually integrate. (Director of Collection, Research and Programmes, BQ-10)

These comments point to tense situations commonly encountered in collaborative projects involving community groups and established museums (Archibald, 2004; Crooke, 2007; Karp, et
al., 1992) We have on one hand a community group wishing to use the museum as a vehicle to create a memorial project, a project focusing on the historical significance and contribution of a specific minority ethnic group and acting as counterpoint to a national narrative that has too often ignored them. On the other hand, museums tend to be more concerned with aligning historical interpretations with a larger vision of civic education. The former was operating within a logic of recognition and remembrance, while the latter was aiming for resonance with cultural policies and contemporary societal debates. In the case of B1Q, the Irish community group representatives were receptive to the museum’s counterproposal of presenting a more nuanced and inclusive narrative.

As the preliminary research and concept phase developed, the museum staff suggested situating the story of the Irish immigration within a larger story of cultural integration. The Community Representative explained the evolution of the exhibition’s interpretive aim:

Initially it was more like your typical ethnic group sense: All primary ministers of Canada are Irish, and the Irish are responsible for everything that’s good in Canada. Despite being the victim of discrimination and prejudices, they contributed massively to the country. [laughs] Your standard ethnic group narrative, you kind of just fill in the blank. The narrative is always the same. It’s always the same. . . . Not necessarily consonant with historical reality but it’s very common. I suspect it’s a very standard immigrant narrative. . . . We moved away from that fairly early. . . . When did they come over? What did they do? So we asked those sort of questions. Some of the discoveries made in that phase of the exhibition, plus the need for presenting the Irish as an intricate part of Quebec society from a long date sort of meshed together. You find there were Irish in New France, from 1763 on they come over in increasing numbers. Were a considerable portion of the population during the nineteenth century. That was almost spontaneous . . . a fairly natural development, then we started looking at the facts. . . . we could construct the fine motives rising from the evidence that the Irish had had an important role in Quebec society in the sense of being quite pervasive, mayors of Montreal, premiers of Quebec. (Community Representative, BQ-3)

In this rather self-conscious account, the Community Representative acknowledged the limitation of a “celebration focus”. He viewed the professional input of the museum as something positive, enhancing and providing credibility to the project. The terms of collaboration seemed to have been explicitly laid out as a result of discrepancy of visions. It would, however, be oversimplifying the terms of collaboration between the museum and the Irish community to advance that the community groups submitted to the vision of the McCord. The two Irish historic societies did play a significant role in the conceptual orientation of the exhibition project under different modalities:
They proposed the involvement of an historian (with an Irish background), who eventually became the guest curator.

The storyline continued to have a predominant “Irish contribution” theme.

Although the Irish community did not dictate content or the specifics of the exhibition “look and feel”, the committee insisted on the inclusion of some elements: a balance between Protestant and Catholic Irish, the inclusion of the story of the rural Irish settlements.

In line with the last point, they felt strongly about the inclusion of the timeline in the exhibition, as explained by the Director of Collections: “It was fundamental for them [the Irish historic societies] to include a timeline and to talk about important historical figures. It was important for them to associate names with their successes. So this, if you want, was supporting their ideas of commemoration” (Director of Collections, Research and Programmes BQ-13).

The participants’ statements demonstrated the presence of compromises, but also of a mutual awareness of the diverse needs, motivations and perspectives of the parties involved in the making of this story. A good example of this is a pivotal discussion that took place with the Exhibition Advisory Committee, comprised of Irish community representatives and experts in the field of historical research, based in Canadian and Irish universities. This particular discussion involved the representation of conflicts in Irish-Quebec history. An excerpt from the Executive Director’s interview provides insight into how committee discussions can stir the historical argument in unexpected and significant ways. The Director recounted the intervention of a committee member, an academic historian based in Ireland, in response to the McCord enquiring about how to best address the topic of Irish-related conflicts in Quebec:

I’ll never forget it. She said, “No, you guys, don’t do this to yourself. The topic [of this exhibition] is not about violence. The topic is how did you not have it. I live in a society which up to six years ago had people killing each other in the streets.”

When she said that I had goose bumps. I said this is the story of the exhibition. This is when we started thinking about the Commission Bouchard and Taylor. Community, about tolerance, what it means to be tolerant. . . . What is it that allows this accommodation? Bouchard and Taylor, at first, thought that this willingness to accommodate was threatened but at the end they said it wasn’t. That it was a deep current in Quebec’s society. The exhibition reflected this deep current from the seventeenth century. (Executive Director BQ-1)
Reframing the history of Irish immigration into an “accommodation story” became the larger meaning to which the museum aspired, to be congruent with its conception of history and its public education mandate. It did take shape in the context of committee deliberations. And yet, the exhibition did allude to conflicts (the Fenians, the assassination of Darcy McGee, the Orange Riots in the Eastern Townships, among others), but they weren’t central to the historical thesis. Or rather, they became instrumental in explaining that in the context of tolerance, such issues could be resolved. Furthermore, the exhibition provided an historical explanation for the contemporary context of cultural accommodation in Quebec—i.e., it grew from the meeting of different cultures in the early days of the colonies.

The story of the Irish immigrants became an exemplar, demonstrating the origin of accommodation and the enriching possibilities and necessity of cultural métissage, the porosity and fluidity of cultural identity (an alternative to coexistence where no exchange takes place, resulting in isolation, division and conflicts). And yet, an inherent tension was embedded in the final revision of the exhibition narrative. Both the Curator and the Museum Director eloquently discussed the responsibility to be both true to the institutional vision and receptive to the stakeholders’ needs, interests and specific contributions:

> It [the exhibition] was initiated from a community so it had to be responsive and respectful of community priorities, which are different from museum priorities. Communities have a direct interest in celebrating. So there is that negotiation that affected many levels of the project, the design, everything. Also, because the effort was to work with community members in obtaining objects. . . . Quite a few objects on display here were from private homes and I would expect it was a fairly rare experience for an exhibit. . . . That implied going to homes. Having tea, sangria, coffee. I met people at community meetings. I love doing things like that. (The Curator BQ-19)

The Director defined the necessity to work with both community stakeholders and visitors as a characteristic distinguishing the project from academic history:

> Unlike academic historians, public historians are client-centered. In two ways, with the community stakeholders and with [the] visitors. The show had to satisfy the community stakeholders. It may not be exactly what they thought they wanted. So you spent a lot of time convincing them they wanted this, the donor client groups, the government money. But we also had to make sure this exhibition read well, whether you were a 67-year-old Irish Quebecker, a Bangladeshi on holiday or a Chilean who has been living in Montreal for 40 years. It has to read very well to the clientele the museum serves. (Museum Director BQ-3)

These comments legitimized the Irish community’s interests rather than dismissing them as “non-historical” concerns. For the museum staff, these discussions were part of the program
and became part of the story they told, albeit an implicit aspect of the story. From an historical thinking point of view, these key negotiations around museum staff’s and stakeholders’ perspectives were tied to the concept of historical significance, in that they determined which stories and which emphases were more worthy of public consideration at a given time and place.

**Conceptual knot #2: How do you tell the story of Irish integration?**

Once the overarching theme of the “Irish integration into Quebec society” story was defined, the Curator began developing the exhibition scenario. The scenario is the conceptual framework, informed by preliminary research. It helps refine the last phase of research and starts the process of organizing the historical argument in space. The scenario precedes the design concept and provides the parameters for design to develop in ways that are congruent with the exhibition’s central idea and themes, the historical thesis and argument.

The Curator initially proposed an interpretive treatment, or a scenario that was highly thematic. It was a storyline structured around culturally significant spaces: the kitchen, the church, the pub. The Advisory Committee responded that the scenario wasn’t historical enough. A second scenario was then developed around a periodization associated with historically significant moments in Irish-Quebec history. The Advisory Committee considered this approach overly chronological. Another specialist came on board to help formalize the scenario. As the historian explained: “A museologist was hired to help me. The scenario was kind of ungainly and too big. I’m a historian, not a museologist” (Curator BQ-9). A third scenario was then produced, encompassing elements of both previous proposals. It was articulated around a temporal and spatial axis, with an emphasis on the agency of historical actors. The Director of Collections, Research and Programmes recounted the process of staging an historical argument into space:

> Between history and scenario, there is a huge difference. Before coming up with the idea of a timeline, places . . . and to ground the scenario around four elements, the quarantine site, the rural setting, the urban setting, the parade, and the biographies that are intermingled and that also connect with these settings, there is a huge amount of writing and a huge amount of reflection. At one point we almost went, thank god we didn’t do it with a very historical approach, seventeenth century, eighteenth century, nineteenth century, etc. . . . When the museologist came on board, he was advocating a chronological approach. . . . I had a lot of problem with this. For me, that’s not history. (The Director of Collections, Research and Programmes BQ-9)
This statement illustrates how research methods and interpretive approaches were deeply influenced by competing epistemological perspectives. An emphasis on historical agency and social changes (in all four Irish-Quebecois lieux de mémoire) over chronology not only indicated an affiliation to a specific historiographic tradition, but was also closely aligned with the museum’s aim to explore the creation of a common culture through the process of integration. The exhibition narrative woven around iconic spaces and historical actors was thus employed to examine the causes and consequences of cultural transformation diachronically.

**Conceptual knot #3: The scarcity of material culture.**

Below is a collection of quotes from various exhibition team members discussing one point: the lack of exhibition artefacts available and how it impacted their work and the final result:

We did a lovely exhibition out of unpromising artefacts. They are not what people associated with museum elegance. Very simple, humble artefacts. And they are very disparate, you have a sculpture here, a teapot there. How do you put this together?
(Museum Director BQ-19)

The Museum Director’s statement pointed to the artefacts’ disparity and their unexceptional nature. The Head of Exhibition explained how the decision to turn to the Irish community for artefacts was due to the scarcity of objects in institutional collections:

It was very difficult to find objects, much more than in other projects because a large proportion of the Irish who came here, came with almost nothing. Several of these people weren’t very well off. . . . I mean these were not people who bought exceptional objects that were handed down from one generation to another and that were eventually donated to a museum. So there weren’t too many objects in the [museum] institutions. We had to find them in private homes. That is not easy at all.
(Head of Exhibition BQ-12)

Given the essential role of artefacts in forming and exhibiting the historical argument in the museum, the paucity of material culture was problematic. The late consolidation of the exhibition scenario exacerbated the situation, in that it resulted in the Curator having to locate artefacts within a very short timeframe:

It was a dialectical process where we chose our sites and people for the biography section on the basis that this material was available but when push came to shove I tried to find anything I could. . . . To tell you the truth, in many cases it was a challenge to find anything. Not in general but of the people we chose we thought were interesting and somewhat representative. . . . In terms of the places there is actually

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30 This historiographic approach was identified as the “social science history” (Megill, 1994).
amazingly little that was available. I contacted Parks Canada and all they had is now on display, virtually. . . . One thing that came up several times was making the decision whether the material on display came from the period or whether it was post period but reflected upon it. That was something that came up several times. With the earlier people it was a challenge, to find directly pertinent material from the period. Not only the period but the extent to which it was directly related to the person. (Curator BQ-11)

Previous groundwork had been carried out but the actual securing of loans for artefacts and archival material could only be formalized once the scenario was approved. These situations are more frequent when exhibitions are theme-based rather than collection-based. Objects in the latter type of exhibitions support ideas and illustrate the themes discussed rather than objects determining the narrative. Hence the “dialectical process” referred to by the Curator.

The scarcity of artefacts and archival material also impacted the design strategies significantly. Several design solutions had to be modified. The designer recalled his disappointment at not finding enough material to create an immersive environment for the St. Patrick’s section as originally conceived:

[for the St. Patrick’s Day parade] we initially thought that we’d have objects floating and that visitors would walk through the crowd, feel the cacophony of the parade and filling a narrow passage with objects. When we saw the collection, we shed a tear. . . . we also wanted a huge projection of historical films of the parade. When we saw the archives, we shed another tear. (Designer BQ-17)

The design was reworked into a long wall with cut-out silhouettes of spectators, and mirrors as a way to include the visitors in the parade. Holes at different heights invited visitors to look at the few parade memorabilia and archival footage on display. It was an adequate solution responding to a need for creating a sense of space and participation but far less dramatic and enveloping than the initial proposal.

Undoubtedly, the difficulties of locating material culture as evidentiary basis for the historical claim created a tense relationship between final design and text writing, which depended on the selection of artefacts. The actual historical thesis remained the same but the rhetorical force of the overall display was certainly altered. In other words, the scarcity of material culture morphed the historical project by intensifying the participation of the Irish community and developing an exhibition that gave, for example, a more prominent role to orality through the use of soundscape and storytelling.
6.4.2 Exhibition design and historical meaning-making

Predictably, the “scenography” or exhibition design was a central theme throughout the exhibition team interviews. The formal qualities of the exhibition environment are a critical and tangible outcome of all negotiations and collective vision. It is the public interface that embodies ideas and concepts about the historical topic. Interestingly, though, none of the members of the exhibition seemed to consider the exhibition design as part of the process of “doing history”. It was viewed as a literal transfer of ideas from textual content to spatial and multi-sensorial environment. But as any discourse analysis divulges, form and content are inextricably linked in creating meaning. In the process of mediating the exhibition scenario using the exhibition morphology and syntax, new meanings emerged and others were obscured. The process of transforming the exhibition concept into a spatial and multisensory environment, I argue, constitutes “doing history”. Here is how the Designer described the aim behind the introductory passage in the exhibition: “I wanted to take this square footage to destabilize the visitor” (Designer BQ-4).

Using visual, tactile and sound devices, the Designer sought to evoke the Irish journey across the Atlantic, the experience of migrants, facing the unknown and leaving loved ones. By creating clues about the experience of historical actors, by wanting to disorient the visitor, the Designer was working with the concept of historical perspective as a portal to discuss the foreignness of the past. This intervention was not dictated by the historian or the museum but came through discussions such as the one alluded to in the following statement, where designers demanded clarifications in order to grasp the vision and proceed into developing the design concepts.

When we came on board, we proposed an exhibition design that integrated all of these elements, the lieux de memoire, and biographies, but we also confronted them with aspects that they had outlined but remained very vague, like how to introduce the subject and how to conclude it. (Designer BQ-8)

These exchanges required the Curator to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the historical project for the team. We can deduce from this dynamic between the design team and other members of the team that the Designer not only created an environment that

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31 The term is borrowed from the French “scenographie”, which means scenic design. The term is more broadly used in European museum literature. The use of the term emphasizes the idea of spatial staging of knowledge. The visitors in this context are viewed as performers.
meshed with the historical topic but also extended it in ways that were particular to the exhibition media. Even the unavoidable editing of exhibition text panels, where the Curator was required to cut down the number of words, had to do with ensuring that the exhibition did not become a “book on the wall”. In other words, the role of some members of the team was to advocate for the creation of a particular engagement with the past—a multisensory experience rather than a literary one.

**How people best connect with history.**

I asked exhibition team members to share their perspectives on how people best connect with historical knowledge in the exhibition space (in general). These questions allowed me to examine their ideas about “visitor learning” and best practices in historical interpretation, in the context of exhibition design.

The exhibition is one of the worst media . . . to efficiently learn about history. If you compare it with say . . . a documentary that is constructed for that, with a controlled narrative framework or, better, reading a book, the driest but most efficient way, there is no better way to be permeable to information: you start where you want, you stop when you want. . . . In an exhibition, you are standing up, you have limited time and there are people all around that will disturb you. (Designer BQ-7)

This response (other team members made similar comments) may appear paradoxical coming from a professional specializing in the design of museum exhibitions. What transpires from such a comment is an acknowledgment that the nature of public engagement with historical knowledge in museums is complex and like no other. For instance, although team members recognized the structural value of exhibition texts, none recognized this element as the exhibition’s strength. As the Museum Director commented,

The labels are always tricky. You know many people don’t read them. They skip them. On the other hand, you have people who read them and make it all worthwhile. Probably the least successful medium is text, but on the other hand, if you are a serious museum, you have to have them. (Museum Director BQ-18)

Despite acknowledging the limitations of the exhibition in conveying in-depth historical knowledge, team members also recognized the power of the medium in supporting the historical explorations of visitors: the direct contact with authentic traces of the past, the dramatic and multi-modal quality of the scenography, were perceived as compelling ways to stimulate the curiosity and emotions of visitors, which, in their view, would result in knowledge acquisition. Reference to the “Exhibition Scenario” is helpful in this discussion. The Exhibition Scenario was a working document authored by the curator, museologist, and museum staff
(O'Donnell, Wilson, Leclerc, & Gastonguay, 2009) that contained an exhaustive description of all key exhibition components. The main portion of the document was structured around the exhibition’s six zones that spatially and conceptually embodied the overall narrative. For each zone, the sub-theme, the specific mood and the means by which to convey the exhibition messages were described. I want to draw attention to the “atmosphere” element of the exhibition scenario. As seen in Figure 6.1, the presence of this element in the document illustrates how the exhibition team was concerned with the creation of an emotional and physical environment to support the public’s multi-modal engagement with the past. The ideas of provoking “a feeling of being far from home”, creating “intimate encounters with historical characters”, recreating “iconic geographic places”, and conveying “the festive ambiance” demonstrate that the exhibition makers were deeply committed to creating historical learning experiences.

Although none of the exhibition team members made reference to any theoretical framework supporting their interpretive work for engaging the public, they seemed inspired by socio-constructivist theories of learning. Proposing compelling and direct encounters with the “real thing”, while honouring the visitor’s prior knowledge, emotions and identity, are theoretical underpinnings associated with the work of socio-constructivists who have deeply influenced the field of museum education (as discussed in section 2.1).
| Zone 1. | Produce an impression of being far from home; mark the beginning of the exhibition with the suggestion of a sea voyage in time and space; feel Ireland being left behind, the crossing, the arrival in Québec. (p. 7) |
| Zone 2. | A tool presented as background to the exhibition’s various components, it offers complementary factual information and should not compete with what are meant to be the principal elements of the presentation. However, it will be rich in imagery and meaning, with a design based on Irish visual culture and an interactive approach to add a fun element. (p. 12) |
| Zone 3. | Create an intimate space conducive to encountering one character at a time; convey his or her personality, contribution and period as if the character were really there. (p. 13) |
| Zone 4. | Recreate in miniature the iconic geographical places in the history of Irish Canadians; create a distinct atmosphere for each place and period evoked. (p. 50) |
| Zone 5. | Highly evocative, this part of the central space in the path of the exhibition uses sound and moving images to convey a festive atmosphere and a sense of the ever-present oral and musical tradition in Irish culture. (p. 91) |
| Zone 6. | High tech, humorous and user-friendly. This zone’s clearly contemporary look puts it in contrast with the rest of the exhibition. It appeals to the emotions through the presence of people who respond to questions with their image and testimony: a participative act that brings people together. (p. 107) |
**Best and weakest interpretive strategies of BIQ.**

The team members were largely satisfied with the design solutions, and for this reason, their responses concerning *BIQ*’s most successful interpretive strategies largely echoed their ideas of effective public engagement with the past. In other words, the *BIQ* project reflected the team members’ conceptions of what constitutes a “good” historical exhibition. The *BIQ*’s design strengths identified by team members were: the seamless use of technology, the sound booths, and the poetic quality of the entrance and conclusion areas.

With the exception of the Designer, who found the timeline visually crowded and difficult to read, team members did not identify any major weaknesses to the exhibition. Interestingly, several allusions were made to interpretive solutions deemed more daring and compelling that had to be eliminated or modified due to financial constraints. Some of the preferred design solutions included: a large Google map displaying the Irish diaspora, a tri-dimensional timeline featuring artefacts from various periods, an immersive St. Patrick’s Day parade experience, and an interactive comment space that would have allowed the uploading of visitors’ comments and images onto the museum’s website. Interactive digital technologies were viewed as an effective means to support visitors’ historical meaning-making in a context where the audience members are increasingly technology-savvy, are appreciative of immersive experiences, and expect to be involved in some capacity as co-producers of content.

To conclude this segment on the representation principle: the identification of the three conceptual knots was helpful in understanding how the exhibition team created historical meaning. The analysis of these key negotiations underlined the agency of both the Irish community and the museum in articulating the narrative in space. It demonstrated how epistemological perspectives influenced the exhibition concept. It also examined how the lack of artefacts played an instrumental role in intensifying the community participation, altering design solutions while giving a more prominent role to orality.

The discussion on exhibition design made it apparent that although most exhibition team members may not have viewed themselves as influencing the historiographic project, they were very much involved in “making history” through the process of transforming the exhibition concepts into scenographies. The exhibition was not only a representation of historical knowledge—it was also the representation of the exhibition team’s ideas of what
constitutes “good” engagement with the past. These ideas were supported by a rich collective experience of exhibition development but no comprehensive approach to history education.

6.5 The Function Element: How BIQ Oriented the Public

Rüsens’s matrix emphasizes that since historiography and historical productions have emerged from socials needs or interests, they are designed to contribute back to life practice by means of identity formation and guidance for future actions. Megill stated when explaining this aspect of Rüsens’s model: “Ideally, it [the historical narrative] should serve to facilitate human interaction generally” (2001, p. 49). In this section, I review the staff’s perspectives on BIQ’s aim and its ability to foster critical engagement in light of the “function principle”.

Exhibition team members when formulating their definition of history obliquely discussed their views on the function or social use of history, i.e., its ability to enrich the definitions of identity, to situate people in their daily lives and to respond to topical issues. They also implicitly discussed the desired “BIQ impact” on visitors when explaining the exhibition’s objectives and “big idea”. Despite slight differences in emphasis, communicating the idea that “the Irish are part of us” was prevalent among staff members:

[We wanted] to show that the integration process is so strong, and so realized and so realistic that visitors had no idea that many of the individuals featured [in the exhibition] were Irish. I’m thinking about La Bolduc, among others. (Director of Collections, Research and Programmes BQ-12)

In her explanation, the Director of Collections evoked the impact that the exhibition was expected to have once the circulation of meaning was underway: to propose fresh interpretations to the public, new stories that would replace or complement others about Quebec’s past. The Curator’s explanation converges toward this idea while underlining the notion of cultural specificity: “The narrative wants to show the value and complexity of the continued presence of a minority cultural group within Quebec society” (Curator BQ-15). From the exhibition team members’ perspectives, the exhibition acted as a counterpoint to historical accounts focusing exclusively on the French origin of Quebecois culture. The narrative focal point being the creation of a common identity, the exhibition would presumably have prompted visitors to think about the process of cultural integration today, while stressing that integration did not equate to cultural assimilation. These were expected or anticipated outcomes expressed by the exhibition producers (mostly museum staff). The actual public understandings generated by the exhibition could only be captured through visitor feedback.
The visitor meaning-making, which could be conceived as a critical assessment of BIQ’s orienting function, constitutes the topic of the following chapter.

The museum’s self-perception of its social role is crucial to the way it designs learning experiences. Based on the interviews and exhibition documentation, I would argue that members of the BIQ team tended to view their social function as that of credible storytellers, as brokers of substantive historical knowledge. They saw their work as relaying historical knowledge to the general public in ways that could inspire, influence and transform the visitors’ views on specific historical topics. Throughout the discussions about the making of BIQ, there was no spontaneous mention of the value or possibility of explicitly conveying the metahistorical or procedural aspects implicated in the BIQ project as a way to support the visitors’ interpretive tasks. To address this topic, I inquired whether team members thought the interpretive approach adopted in BIQ encouraged visitors to be critical consumers of history. Their first reactions to the question indicated that they hadn’t really considered this educational possibility but weren’t dismissive of it:

"It creates a certain awareness, like, “I didn’t know that the Irish were that present in my personal history”, but to the extent of providing tools for visitors to make up their own idea of history? Not more than other exhibitions, I would say." (Designer BQ-22)

This statement conjectured on the transformative capacity of the narrative while pointing out that the exhibition wasn’t providing a framework to think critically about the proposed interpretation:

"The museum is not bold in the way it entices people to think about sources. It’s not a prime objective but I would say it is part of the mediation process in which the museum participates." (Director of Collections, Research and Programmes BQ-22)

The Director acknowledged here that sharing the nature of historical work wasn’t at the forefront of their preoccupations when producing exhibitions, but that it was an important issue addressed in other public programs. She alluded, for instance, to their school programs. The Curator held a similar view, while entertaining the idea that specific features of BIQ could possibly foster a critical engagement with history:

"Overall, I’d say no. It’s not structured or worded in such a way as to develop a critical historical consciousness. It’s not an overall focus but it’s less purely authoritative than other exhibits I’ve seen in my life. But it’s presented to them as the facts. . . . As you will have noticed, quite a few objects are very humble. I’m looking at these two brown jugs. I think that it can actually be a shock for some people. In fact, I had a comment from someone who wondered where I had found some of the stuff. I think it confronts people. It forces them to think who are the history makers: “Why would you include
that? Why would you include some woman’s school book” kind of thing. I’m a little bit revisiting what I said. I think it may encourage not a critical questioning of what’s there but an awareness of the creators of the historical records. You know, for most people, those who haven’t been in grad school, history is about “great dead white men”, and this is really not what’s on display. There are some of them but they are not the majority, so I think this actually may invite a more nuanced understanding of what history is. (Curator BQ-20)

The Curator demonstrated great attentiveness to the visitors’ ideas of history and how these ideas may be destabilized by the selection of artefacts in BIQ. These artefacts, she pointed out, simultaneously told two stories: they helped build the historical argument while challenging (some) visitors to rethink what history means.

I will conclude this segment on the Function element by stating that integrating the “how” of history in exhibitions was not considered part of the social function of BIQ’s historical and educational project. The team’s efforts were invested in delivering the “what” of history. Their perception of BIQ’s potential as historical consciousness “enhancer” was that such an outcome was mostly incidental as opposed to resulting from a deliberate attempt by the museum to do so.

6.6 Conclusion

I analysed the production of BIQ predominantly through the experience of those who made it. Interviewing key players provided opportunities to examine tacit knowledge and the decision-making process in ways that weren’t possible through the reading of the exhibition or its documentation.

My analysis demonstrated how historical exhibitions are the embodiment of a collection of ideas and assumptions (both convergent and divergent) about a particular topic, historical epistemology, and education. They are also the tangible manifestation of genuine creativity and resourcefulness on the part of exhibition producers. To create these learning environments, the team has to manage several sets of constraints related to the medium itself, the availability of material culture, the stakeholders’ agenda, and limited financial resources.

Rüsen’s model was helpful in unpacking the complex process involved in producing historical narratives in the museum. The use of his five elements made me pay particular attention to the interrelationship between disciplinary work (investigating the past through the study of evidence) and life practice (everyday affairs). Indeed, using the case of BIQ, we saw how this project was instrumental in fulfilling the needs for temporal orientation felt by both
community groups (Irish societies) and a museum institution (the McCord). The tension of “doing history”, not “celebrating heritage”, was an ongoing concern with the McCord staff, who were receptive to the Irish community’s interests while eager to preserve the integrity of their vision of history (what it is and the purposes it should serve). We saw that the historical methods and rules were applied by the Curator to generate research material from which to build the exhibition narrative. However, the analysis recognized the agency of exhibition producers in constructing this historical project and was able to demonstrate how the historiographic project is not limited to curatorial work. Although the work of the Curator in exhibitions was central, “doing history” continued through all levels of negotiations among team members, community members, expert committees and the designers’ work. The identification of conceptual knots and the elaboration of design solutions demonstrated that exhibition team members were involved in identifying historically significant themes and sub-themes, locating and selecting artefacts as historical evidence, and creating an environment that supported the understanding of different historical mentalities and the causes and consequences of cultural encounters in the making of common/hybrid culture. The interviews revealed that despite being heavily involved in creating these contexts for historical understanding, team members did not have a strong history education framework from which to build the exhibition as a site of historical learning.

The interviews made apparent that the exhibition team viewed themselves largely as rigorous storytellers, providing fresh historical interpretations with the potential to influence people’s perceptions on issues pertaining to identity formation. This position is aligned to a use of history as an informational subject rather than as an educational subject. This approach seems at odd with the museum’s mandate to “engage and provoke” its public. The lack of consideration for encouraging a critical engagement with historical interpretations may have been due to differing perspectives about what constitutes productive public encounters with history. Addressing museum professionals’ assumptions related to historical education is key to the development of exhibition-making practice informed by an historical thinking pedagogy.
Chapter 7 The Historical Exploration of Exhibition Visitors

This chapter reports on the public reception of Being Irish O’Quebec. The term “public reception” here refers exclusively to the visitors’ responses to the exhibition. This analysis aims at understanding the historical meaning-making of visitors in relation to and beyond the exhibition makers’ intent. I do so by applying Rüsen’s five elements composing his disciplinary matrix: the Interest, the Theory, the Method, the Forms of Representation and the Function. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the analysis of BIQ’s public reception could be considered the ultimate means to assess the Function element of this historical production, that is, through the exploration of BIQ’s impact on life practice. However, the public reception can constitute a unit of analysis when examining the visitors’ interpretive work as a form of historiographic performance. I do not imply here that visitors’ historical meaning-making is equivalent to that of academics’ or public historians’, but rather that visitors, too, share a need to situate themselves in time to understand their present, construct their identity and orient their actions.

7.1 The Interest Element: The Visitors’ Need for Temporal Orientation

What needs or interests motivated these 36 participating visitors to engage with BIQ? (See visitor profiles in Table 4.1.) Numerous studies indicate that people visit museums to learn something new, be entertained and be inspired (Black, 2005; Kelly, 2007; Weil, 2002). BIQ visitors were no exception (see Table 7.1). The majority responded that they usually visited museums to see specific exhibitions. Others explained that going to museums was one enjoyable way to learn about history or places while travelling. A few cited going to museums for pleasure, ambiance and culture. At the most basic level, we can assume that by choosing to come to the McCord Museum of Canadian History, the majority of visitors sought to align a leisure activity and an encounter with the past. I also want to contextualize this alignment with the distinctive cultural value ascribed to learning about the past in museums. As many recent studies have shown, museums in Western societies are considered the most trusted sources of

32 Online audience, exhibition reviews and public response to BIQ’s media promotion are only discussed to the extent that they contribute to an understanding of the visitors’ experience.

In addition to interest in a topic, and prior knowledge, the motivations for coming to see an exhibition are important considerations to understand the level of engagement and are not always explicitly articulated by visitors (D. Anderson, et al., 2007; Falk, 2006b, 2009). For instance, visitors who came as a group rarely mentioned that they visited the exhibition for the purpose of spending time with friends or family, but based on the conversation, the social aspect of the museum visit was clearly something that participants were seeking. Table 7.1 juxtaposes the reasons articulated by participants for coming to museums in general, with the participants’ motivation(s) for visiting BIQ. These motivations were identified or implied by visitors during the interviews.

Table 7.1 Comparison Between Reasons Provided for Visiting Museums and Motivations for Visiting BIQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominant Reasons Provided for Visiting Museums in General (1 per participant),</th>
<th>30 Respondents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 to see/learn about specific exhibitions and topics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to learn about history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to learn about the places we visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 for pleasure and ambiance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 for cultural activity</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominant Motivations Identified or Implied for Visiting BIQ (1 to 3 per participant),</th>
<th>36 Respondents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 to experience and get to know the city, the province, the country I am visiting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to be in contact with history and culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to spend time with friends and family doing something educational/cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to identify and connect with my Irish heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to learn more about our shared history (Quebec-Irish history)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to learn something that I’m passionate about that is peripheral but connected to the main exhibition topic</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The motivations are more helpful for understanding people’s frame of mind when experiencing BIQ. It is easy to imagine, for instance, that visitors who chose to see BIQ because the topic held special significance for them entered the exhibition with a different frame of mind than those who just happened to come across BIQ while at the museum. Almost half the visitors interviewed had planned to see BIQ. They had come across ads and media coverage featuring BIQ. Some had prepared for their visit by going to the museum website or by reading exhibition reviews. The motivations provided by participants for visiting BIQ varied from wanting to see their heritage on display to learning about this specific chapter of history because it intrigued them. Interestingly, some visitors came because BIQ connected with a subject they were passionate about, i.e., for three visitors, it was their passion for Irish culture that attracted them to BIQ, and for another, it was his passion for hockey that made him seek the Irish connections with the development of his favourite sport. These types of reasons often overlapped. For instance, for one participant who was part Irish and loved going to the McCord, seeing BIQ that day represented one of the activities planned by her boyfriend to celebrate her fortieth birthday. In this case, ethnicity, social outing and interest in history were compounded factors defining her motivation for seeing BIQ.

From the perspective of temporal orientation, we could advance that those who visited primarily because of their Irish ancestry wanted to locate themselves in a story that implicated them directly. As one Francophone woman with Irish roots, put it: “This is why I came here today: to see everything we’ve done” (P11 BQ-5). We could conjecture that those francophone Quebecois with no Irish connection who were keen to know more about the Irish-Quebec past were curious to learn about a collective with whom they were sharing cultural and/or geographical affinities. Those who came to BIQ because it related to a specific topic of interest viewed the exhibition as a means to further engage with their passion through an historical lens.

Several visitors who hadn’t planned to see BIQ were national or international tourists who were frequent museum visitors. Museum visiting was considered a particularly valuable and pleasant thing to do to “experience” and learn more about the cities and countries they were visiting—whatever the historical topic may be. The locals who hadn’t planned to visit BIQ came because they were interested in history in general. Although visiting the McCord that day was a deliberate act, several contingencies explained the reasons for these unplanned visits.
Some contributing factors expressed by visitors were: free admission, bad weather, or work reasons. One visitor even came to the “wrong place”, thinking the McCord was hosting an exhibition that was shown at a different museum. Although these mundane reasons had very little to do with a need for temporal orientation, and did not necessarily make the museum experience less meaningful, they helped understand the visitors’ expectations and predispositions for engaging with the exhibition narrative at the time of the visit.

People do not visit museums to learn about the historical discipline. They come to engage with stories about the past (theirs and that of others). The terms of this individual and voluntary investment are bound to be identity-driven—i.e., they come to the museum, to the exhibition, because it means something to them. When identifying the circumstances of the visits to BIQ, it became apparent that the need for temporal orientation was inherently intertwined with other “life practices”, i.e., travelling, social outing, interests in ahistorical topics, among other things. These became part of the visitors’ context for historical meaning-making in the museum.

7.2 The Theory Element: The Visitors’ Understanding of Historical Epistemology

Several empirical studies in historical education have underscored the necessity to pay attention to the relationship between people’s historical sense-making and their understanding of historical epistemology (Evans, 1990; Fink, 2004; Lee, 2004; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004; Yeager & Davis, 1995). This section investigates BIQ visitors’ responses to three interview questions designed to tease out their conceptions of history as a way of knowing about the past that is no longer (see interview questionnaire, Appendix G). Asking people to consider and discuss the reliability or trustworthiness of historical accounts or sources was a means to get at the fundamental question of historical epistemology, as it required respondents to express and reveal the extent of their understanding on the interpretive nature of history (Conrad, et al., 2009). The first question asked visitors to discuss the reliability of the information presented in the exhibition, the second asked them to choose the most trustworthy source of historical knowledge, and the third required them to consider the

33 These two terms are used interchangeably in this discussion.
possibility (or impossibility) of resolving conflicting historical interpretations. Here are the questions as given in the interview:

Question 8: How reliable do you think the information presented in this exhibition is? And why?


Question 16: When people disagree about historical interpretations, how do you think they can find out what is most likely to have really happened?

The first question was asked in the middle of the interview, as it related directly to the exhibition. The two others, taken verbatim from the Canadians and Their Pasts survey, did not connect to the exhibition specifically and were asked at the end of the interview. The origin of these two last questions was explained to the participants.

The vast majority of respondents (33) thought the information presented in the exhibition was reliable, with the exception of one group of three visitors, who were ambivalent. By and large, the visitors’ responses converged toward the results of large-scale surveys that have indicated that a significant percentage of the populations in Canada, the United States and Australia trust museums (Conrad, et al., 2009; Northrup, 2008; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). The survey question, however, asked people to identify the most trustworthy source of historical information; it did not refer to a particular claim. Asking participants to consider and qualify the reliability of one exhibition at the end of their visit created an opportunity to examine (a) how visitors viewed the elaboration of reliable historical accounts they had just encountered and (b) how they viewed museums as providers of those reliable accounts. From the analysis, ten discrete criteria by which to judge this reliability were identified in the participants’ explanations. Table 7.2 lists the criteria and provides visitors’ quotes to illustrate each one. Several visitors (nine) employed two criteria or more to qualify their answer.

From these criteria, three overarching themes qualifying the visitors’ trust emerged: the objectivity of the museum as storyteller, the nature of the museum’s work in building

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reliable interpretations, and the visitors’ self-reference to their own ideas and knowledge about history in the museum. The aim of extracting criteria and clustering them into broader themes was not to establish a hierarchy but rather to observe both the diversity and commonality across visitors’ expressions of trust and judgment, while discussing the reliability of sources and interpretations. It is worth noting that while some visitors’ explanations referred to the museum institution in generic terms—for instance, all museums are neutral—a majority of responses (27) considered specific aspects of BIQ and its makers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Themes</th>
<th>Criteria of Reliability</th>
<th>Visitor Quote Illustrating Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(#): Frequency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P#: Participant number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith In the Museum (2)</td>
<td>“Basically people who are doing this are doing it from the goodness of their heart. I don’t think people have too much to hide. I don’t feel so.” (P30 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic of Reliability (2)</td>
<td>“I have no reason to question it. It is certainly beautifully displayed. I feel confident it is well done... just the presentation!” (P34 BQ-8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factual (4)</td>
<td>“Yes, generally I do. At the political level, it should be quite neutral. ... Mmmm I would like to know who gave money for this exhibition. The McCord is mostly English. ... But still, it must be neutral.” (P9 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Artefacts-as-Proof (4)</td>
<td>“Yes, certainly, because it tells [the story] with real objects, posters that were used at the time. It’s authentic.” (P36 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reputation-Specific (9)</td>
<td>“I would trust it here. I have a lot of respect for the museum. I trust the McCord. Based on other exhibitions I’ve seen.” (P4 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence of Experts (7)</td>
<td>“Having been on exhibition committees, I know they have to make sure it is accurate, and double checking, triple checking everything. They are associated with universities. They are academically connected.” (P33 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Collaboration (3)</td>
<td>“It [the McCord] collaborated with Irish societies in Montreal—they are reliable sources. It’s not taken from nowhere. It’s not made up. They took the information from the societies and the objects on loan are a sign that people trust them.” (P21 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Good But Lacked Thoroughness (3)</td>
<td>“Where is the research coming from...? Is it anecdotal? Or what is this green glass? It says that it’s been passed down and down but it doesn’t say how old it was. It could have been passed down for three, four generations, it could have been from the 1870s. But there is nothing that says that. It is like the woman in the video, is what she says based on her experience or is it accurate? It is not necessarily the same thing as what people remember. Is what she is saying accurate?” (B-P26.Q8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corroborate (3)</td>
<td>“It matches some of the information I already knew about Irish immigration. It kind of parallels the history of the Irish in the States.” (P2 BQ-8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Consciously Trusting (4)</td>
<td>“It’s true that we tend to think that in the museum, everything is objective. I have to say that when I go to museums, I don’t tend to question the information in them. I know it sounds a bit stupid, I could think more critically but I don’t. I trust.” (P15 BQ-8)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
7.2.1 The museum’s objectivity

This overarching theme includes implicit or explicit notions of the museum’s impartiality and disinterestedness in telling the story. The faith criterion, albeit rarely used, expressed unconditional trust in the museum and did not relate the idea of reliability with the nature of museum work or specific features of BIQ (2). Responses, coded “aesthetic of reliability”, ascribed authority and intellectual rigour to the formal qualities of the displays—i.e., because it looked professionally done, it couldn’t be false (2). Some responses discussed museums’ general ability to deliver factual information because of their neutral stance, as opposed to that of the media or politicians, identified as biased sources (4). Explanations associating the artefacts’ authenticity with the objectivity of the account were coded “artefacts-as-proof” (4).

7.2.2 The museum’s work

This overarching theme includes explanations concerned with the making of the exhibition and with notions of authority and authorship. The McCord’s reputation was mentioned by visitors who knew the institution (9). They trusted that BIQ would maintain the same high level of quality and rigour of past exhibitions. Seven participants emphasized the museum’s competence in conducting in-house research and seeking expertise externally. For some, the participation (through loans and consultation) of the Irish community, whose heritage was represented in the exhibition, was an important aspect of the project that either provided or enhanced the credibility of the historical account. One group of three visitors, who described themselves as detailed-oriented people, believed the information provided was overall reliable but lacked thoroughness at times. They expected to learn more about the provenance of artefacts and the nature of accounts (Is it just somebody’s memory? Has it been verified?).

7.2.3 Reference to visitor knowledge

This grouping includes responses evoking visitors’ own knowledge or perspectives about history. Some visitors trusted the exhibition because it corroborated information learned from other trusted sources (3). Some responses denoted a self-conscious attitude toward the visitor’s own lack of critical stance toward the reliability of the exhibition-as-historical-account (4).
It is important to reiterate that several responses employed multiple criteria. One participant, for instance, used the criteria of reputation, competence and community collaboration to make his case:

Absolutely! I’ve been coming here for years and you can’t go wrong. Especially, that they specialize in Canadian culture. They have great collections. It’s impressive . . . and on top of that I think they did a sort of “call for artefacts” for people to bring forward their things. So people participated. The population participated a lot. They have done that with other exhibitions but this one they really put a lot of effort into it. (P6 BQ-8)

The visitors’ responses to the question of reliability had much to do with their ability to assess the source of historical knowledge (the museum) and the historical account (the exhibition), both being essential aspects of historical meaning-making. By and large, the participants’ assessment was not a blind vote of confidence in the museum’s aptitude in mediating historical knowledge. The analysis demonstrated that the majority of visitors used some criteria other than faith by which to judge the reliability of the exhibition. It also underscored the visitors’ attentiveness to the work entailed in creating historical accounts in the museum (the aesthetic of the exhibition, the lacunae, the expertise of staff, the community participation).

We could advance that museum exhibitions should indeed be deserving of the public trust when meeting multiple criteria identified by the participants: to conduct rigorous research, seek expertise outside the museum walls, include the people/communities being represented, locate physical evidence, and create environments that are conducive to sharing their claim with a wide public. Basing the reliability of the claim on the use of artefacts alone or on the fact that an exhibition team consulted with a community group is, however, insufficient to make a case for the reliability of an historical claim. What happens when information found in the exhibition does not corroborate the visitor’s prior knowledge of the subject? Rather than feeling challenged and intrigued by differing information, the visitors who based their trust solely on the corroboration of information may automatically have dismissed any new interpretations. Interestingly, the group of participants (Participants 24, 25 and 26) most critical of the perceived lack of thoroughness in the information was the most engaged in assessing the use of evidence in the exhibition and, as a result, the reliability of the historical claim.
Table 7.3 List of Sources of Historical Information Most Trusted by BIQ Visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Trusted Sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Sites</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Of interest in this segment of the analysis is a comparison between the visitor responses on the question of reliability and their responses to the question of trust in sources of historical information (see Table 7.3). To this question, a majority of participants (25) selected books.\(^{36}\) Their reasons varied from having access to the authors’ references, to the research and collaboration involved in the production of books. Participants (10) who selected museums or historic sites as the most trusted sources justified their choice with reasons echoing the categories of objectivity and museum work. That most participants trusted books more than museums and historical sites is revealing in that it helps us assert that they considered the qualities of *Being Irish O’Quebec* in order to respond to the question of reliability, and as such the participants’ responses may be interpreted as a conditional vote of confidence in museums rather than an unconditional one.

7.2.4 How the question of reliability is important in discussing historical meaning-making in the museum

Although we cannot assess the visitors’ interpretation of the exhibition based on their responses regarding the reliability of accounts or sources, their take on the reliability of information can be useful in understanding the level of receptiveness toward ideas and themes presented to them. If, for instance, visitors tended to rely on the information they acquired from the exhibition, they would likely incorporate this knowledge and use it. The follow-up

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\(^{36}\) Interestingly, the response to this question from this visitor sample contrasts significantly from the Canadians and their Pasts survey result. Specifically, 40% of survey participants trusted museums while only 19% chose books as the most trustworthy sources of historical information. However, the size of this study’s sample is too small to comment on the nature of this discrepancy.
interviews and emails with the participating visitors demonstrated that some participants used and thought about the information presented in the exhibition weeks after their visit (see section 7.5). The nature and use of this new knowledge likely varied based on each visitor’s definition of history as a way of knowing the past.

Whether visitors envisioned the historical work of the museum as uncovering the past and relaying facts to the public, or whether they viewed the museum’s role as being a producer and mediator of historical knowledge proposing defensible claims (rather than an absolute truth), affected the way they considered the museum’s interpretive work. In the former conception of history, the criteria of competence and reputation would relate to the museum’s ability to uncover that better or “true” story. In the latter case, the same criteria would be viewed as contributing to the construction of a valid argument.

Table 7.4 Level of Visitors’ Understanding of Historical Epistemology Using Seixas’ Categorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Understanding of Historical Epistemology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Number of Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dead End and Dismissal</td>
<td>Incapable of answering the question. The problem posed is conceived as an impasse.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Beginning Epistemology</td>
<td>View the necessity of consulting sources but don’t know what to do with them.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Actively Interrogating Sources</td>
<td>Aware of the constructed nature of historical interpretations. Understand their agency as interpreters and the necessity to question the sources to arrive at some conclusion.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to question 16 of the interview provided further insights into the visitors’ understanding of historical epistemology. In their answers to the question (“When people disagree . . . how do you think they can find out what is most likely to have really happened?”) I located the presence of the three levels of understanding of historical epistemology established by Seixas et al. (2009) (see Table 7.4). Of all the replies, only one corresponded to level 1. Responses at this level are characterized by an inability to deal with the problem.
posed: “I have no idea. I don’t have a clue. None of us are going to live forever. So . . .” (P30 BQ-16).

Most visitors’ responses (18) were associated with level 2 of epistemological understanding, coined the “beginning epistemology”. Their explanations reflected a certain sense of what is required to judge conflicting interpretations. Most of them referred to the necessity of doing research and consulting one or multiple sources, but weren’t able to specify what to do with them: “Mmmm . . . I guess people will now use the Internet to research the facts. If available, go back to where the event happened or go to the museums to see what they have to say” (P8 BQ-16).

Others favoured the corroboration of information to reach consensus:

The simplest is to search on the Internet, go to Google and then do your research. At one point, you see that everybody says the same thing. Unless there is one [interpretation] that sticks out, and that will prompt you to ask more questions. . . . we have a tendency to say that when most people agree it’s the truth. But really . . . . There is always a little question mark!! (P29 BQ-16)

Interestingly, although this visitor didn’t really say how he would question competing interpretations, he did hint at their potential for provoking new queries. A reply coded level 3 (most sophisticated type of response) suggested a similar idea but provided more context to the explanation:

It depends if the information is really precise. Is this [the conflict] about a date? Is it about a fact or is it an historical interpretation? In this case, is there one version that’s erroneous and one that isn’t? It depends of your point of view. In the case of the Irish, the Catholics will interpret the history one way. I could see in the case of the assassination of Darcy McGee that the interpretation of the museum was that the Fenians did it. . . . Well, there are lots of people who believe this and others who don’t believe this at all. It’s not resolved. What it does though is that it encourages people to deepen their understanding on the subject, to see the different sides and to make their own opinion about what happened. (P27 Q-16)

The nine participants whose responses were associated with level 3 elaborated on what to consider and how to go about analyzing competing interpretations. They distinguished facts from interpretations and referred to the necessity of questioning the viewpoint of historians or any producers of historical accounts. They also underlined the constructed and changing nature of historical interpretations and often added that in the end, “you have to make up your own opinion”. Most people in that group had a university graduate degree.

It is worth noting that most participants in the study expressed a keen interest in pursuing this question, including the few participants who did not engage much with the
exhibition. Of interest is also the consistency between responses to the three questions; visitors who had several criteria for trusting the reliability of information in BIQ and for explaining their choice of most trustworthy historical source generally provided more sophisticated answers to the question about competing interpretations.

In forthcoming sections of this chapter, I will be drawing on the “epistemology and trust data” to examine the relationship between the visitors’ interpretations of BIQ and their understanding of history as a way of knowing the past.

7.3 The Method Element: The Articulation of Visitors’ Historical Thinking

A central aim of this study lies in the application and adaptation of the six concepts of historical thinking in the museum. These concepts involved in Seixas’ model include: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective and ethical judgment (see section 3.3 and Table 3.1). Through the following analysis I locate and qualify the use of the six concepts as they apply to the exhibition-visiting context, while illustrating their articulation using excerpts of visitor interviews. Generally speaking, the form of engagement with historical content in an exhibition space is unique; the “exposure” to the historical matter is brief, happens alone or within a small social group, and varies from a few minutes to a few hours. Although it takes place in a public space conceived for people to engage with historical knowledge, the exploration of historical content is non-systematic, self-motivated and not bound by disciplinary methods. Consequently, the articulation of historical thinking in the museum cannot be expected to mimic the work of historians or history students. The interest of this inquiry therefore lies in establishing how adult visitors resort to historical thinking as their “method” for making sense of the past when they are put in an exhibition situation but are not required to apply historical thinking. Hence, the term “historical thinking freestyle” seemed most appropriate to describe the phenomenon.

Individual historical thinking concepts are examined in the first segment of the analysis and are presented from the most to least employed by visitors when making sense of BIQ. A second segment examines the nature of the visitors’ criticism or “problems” with the exhibition to establish how it disrupted or provoked historical thinking and, consequently, the use of historical thinking concepts. The last segment examines how historical thinking concepts and criticism were enacted in the context of a complete onsite interview with a visitor.
7.3.1 Historical thinking freestyle: visitors’ use of the six concepts of historical thinking

The concept of evidence (61 utterances from 33 visitors).

Visitors made abundant use of the concepts of historical evidence when engaging with artefacts and archival material on display to respond to and construct interpretations that may or may not have been directly related to the exhibition’s main themes. Given the physical and instrumental role of primary sources in shaping the historical argument in exhibitions, it is not surprising to observe the visitors’ attentiveness to the displayed objects. Several forms of artefact readings contributed to the visitors’ historical meaning-making. When attempting to articulate these interpretive approaches, I located four different and overlapping variations of the concepts of evidence as it applied to the public reception of BIQ. These are not “hard categories” but help express the range of visitor engagement with primary sources in the exhibition. Below I define and illustrate these variations.

The artefact-as-proof comments (13) established how artefacts related to or were used to make a point in the historical narrative. An American tourist recalled considering the videotaped conversation between two Irish-Quebecois (oral testimonies) as evidence of an Irish-Quebecois culture and history: “We watched the video; it was the first indication of the Irish presence and their involvement” (P34 BQ-10).

Associated with this variant are the comments that questioned the validity of sources or quantity of proofs substantiating the argument:

Where is the research coming from? . . . Is it anecdotal? . . . What is this glass? It says that it’s been passed down for three, four generations; it could have been from the 1870s. But there is nothing that says that. (P26 BQ-8)

The presence of artefacts-as-authentic-trace made the museum narrative more convincing and exciting. To be in contact with authentic objects meant to have a privileged, first-hand encounter with history: “I already knew Mary Travers but there were the texts, the books, the visual, the big chest, the cauldron, it reinforces that it’s real!” (P11 BQ-8). Or, “See something like say, Thomas Darcy McGee’s walking stick and a suitcase from Grosse Ile, that’s AMAZING!!” (P4 BQ-4). Not any nineteenth-century cane or suitcase would have provoked such an enthusiastic response. An aura enveloped these relics because of their unique associations with iconic historical actors and events in Canadian history.
The notion of authenticity was also appreciated as a form of engagement dictated by the formal quality of the object. In the act of deciphering a letter, these two women felt the past seemed closer and the presence of the Irish in Quebec more “real”:

Participant 17: I thought the letter was very interesting. I was surprised. I could actually read. It is from . . . 1883. You can’t usually read [she reads the text of the letter]. You kind of get the feeling of how they were.

Participant 16: It’s real! It’s so old and you can read so well. (P16, P17 BQ-4)

It could be said that the aesthetic dimension of historical artefacts pervaded all discussions on artefacts. However, the responses coded aesthetic were comments that focused on the formal qualities (texture, colour, beauty, the patina of time, the iconography) while not tying these observations to aspects of the exhibition narrative:

I love this cloth here. It’s exquisite. I do embroidery so I kind of know how much work this would be. And this is metal thread so it’s even harder to work with. It’s just gorgeous. I can’t get over it. The intricate details. Wow! (P1 BQ-1)

This visitor was drawn to the chasuble because of her personal interest in embroidery. She was not discussing the “larger story” about the role of religion in the Irish immigration, a topic she and her husband discussed later in the interview. During this interpretive moment, the craftsmanship of the artefact was the “larger story” because of its direct resonance with the visitor’s personal biography. Its evidentiary role in the larger narrative was not negated, but it was playing a secondary role in her study of the object.

*The concept of historical significance (27 utterances by 24 visitors).*

Several visitors elaborated on the historical significance of the story of the Irish in Quebec and on the significance of having this story told in the museum. Question 5 of the interview (“Do you think it is important for the museum to present an exhibition on the history of Irish immigration in Quebec?“) explicitly asked visitors to elaborate on this notion. The analysis did not examine whether they considered the historical phenomenon significant (all respondents agreed on this point) but rather how they ascribed this significance as a result of their interpretation of the exhibition. Answers that simply agreed with the significance of Irish Quebec history without justification were not considered in this analysis. On the other hand, responses from any other parts of the interview that addressed the notion of historical significance were included in the analysis. The five criteria identified by Hunt (2004) and Philips (2002) to ascribe historical significance (see discussion in section 3.3) were useful in mapping
out how visitors assigned historical importance to events, people or specific developments present in the exhibition narrative. Several responses (9), for instance, recognized the profundity and durability of the impact of Irish immigration and settlement on Quebec’s population and the continued influence of the Irish in contemporary Quebec:

La Bolduc was of Irish descent. Same with Brian Mulroney and Jean Charest... I had no idea. That surprised me. When you look at all the descendents! If we could all go back 200 years, many people today would find out they have Irish roots. (P29 BQ-11)

Others (7) noted the importance of Irish immigration for the historical development of Quebec:

Well I am specifically thinking in terms of the... vast number of nationalities that are here now. Maybe from a viewpoint why would the museum talk about the Irish? Well I guess I don’t want to say they were the founding families but between the French and the English, there were the Irish and they went both ways. There were Irish Protestants and there were Irish Catholics. (P30 BQ-7)

For this visitor, one of the characteristics that distinguished the Irish from the French and British settlers was that they had contributed to both colonies—in other words, they were capable of mingling with both major “founding groups”, making their role significant and unique in the history of Canada.

Some responses (5) were linked to the criteria of quantity by referring to the large number of Irish in nineteenth-century Quebec’s population: “It was such a huge part of the population—1 in 5 was Irish then intermarried with everybody else” (P26 BQ-5).

The identification of exclusions or omissions in the exhibition’s historical narrative was also considered under this category because such identification signalled the visitors’ ability to question the museum’s decisions to report and study specific historical events and agents but not others. A few participants (3) identified stories absent from the exhibition narrative. These critical comments relied on prior knowledge to argue for the importance of certain missing historical developments or how these stories could have been relevant and insightful in helping visitors understand contemporary realities:

All this other history. I haven’t seen anything about the building of St. Patrick and St. Anne’s demolition. I couldn’t see. I didn’t see anything about today. What happened after St. Anne was demolished? I would like to see it more recently. (P14 BQ-4)

Some responses (4) concerned with the notion of commemoration could not be matched with the above criteria and were much more aligned to Counsell’s (2004) criteria of remembrance, a need to remember a phenomenon that was key for the collective memory of a group:
Yes [it’s important to tell the story of the Irish in Quebec] because it’s been lost, you know, there is less and less English-speaking people here for one thing . . . and Griffintown has disappeared. It was a place different from everything else. (P7 BQ-5)

**The concept of causes and consequences (24 utterances by 22 visitors).**

Many visitors considered the “who” and the “what” that caused the Irish immigration to happen and evolve, and the resulting consequences. In the context of BIQ, the emphasis on Irish places and individual actors and how they connected to the French-speaking population drew several visitors to consider the various impacts (small and large) of Irish integration on historical and contemporary Quebec:

It’s so nice to see multiculturalism reflected. I think it had a nice little wrap up over there at the end of the exhibit with the marriage of cultures. I loved the Celtic music, by the way. Do you know the [group] Fire in the Kitchen, have you heard about this album? [INT. No] It’s like Big Blue Sea in the Atlantic and la Bottine Souriante? [INT. Yes, yes, I know them.] Well, it’s the sort of thing they talked about in here, in the marriage between Irish and French culture and that’s like, ya, that’s where it started. (P.3 BQ-7)

We can observe here that while discussing the overarching theme of the exhibition (multi/interculturalism), the visitor was prompted by the soundscape to associate the “marriage of cultures” with the emergence of a contemporary musical group like Fire in the Kitchen. The musical group in this interpretation exemplified the positive and concrete (albeit unintended) repercussions of the early Irish immigration.

Several interpretations addressed the underlying causes of a successful integration of the Irish immigrants into Quebec’s society; common religion (Catholicism) and common enemy (the British) were often evoked by the Quebecois francophone participants. Because of their familiarity with Quebec’s history, it may have been easier for these participants to identify these broader influences in the exhibition narratives. Repercussions of this integration were felt and placed into a contemporary context by this middle-aged francophone couple from a Montreal suburb:

P22: The Irish didn’t come as conquerors here. They lived in the countryside. They were more integrated [than the British].

P23: It’s true that they were more like “second-class citizens” when they first arrived. Even today, the English are more part of the Establishment.

P22: I felt that here in the exhibition . . . that they were the “little people” that integrated with the locals. Today, when we meet people with Irish roots, they often married with the Quebecois and you don’t even suspect their origins, whereas the
English married amongst themselves and have remained anglophones. (P22, P23.Q-11)

**The concept of continuity and change (13 utterances by 10 visitors).**

Almost a third of interviewed visitors used the concept of continuity and change while discussing their understanding of the exhibition. They considered how some aspects of the past had remained constant and others had changed. They made comparisons between points in history or between the past and the present. At times, visitors assessed whether the change or continuity was positive or negative. For instance, this participant deplored the declining sense of community and service manifest in contemporary society and contrasted it with the caring actions of Irish historical actors in *BIQ*:

> Take Joe Beef, for example. I didn’t know him before. . . . These people helped each other. I think we could do even more today because we have more money. I don’t know where the money goes. . . . We should teach people at a young age how to help others. We should go back to solid bases and nurture mutual aid. There was another one . . . Hingston! This doctor wasn’t always paid because people didn’t have any money so they would exchange services. Today, this would never happen. (P32 BQ-7)

For another participant, the continued relationship between the French and Irish nations became a point of interest:

> For me, what I discovered is the continuity of the relationship between Quebec and Ireland. The presence of the Irish in New France . . . for me, it was something I knew. . . . Maybe I had read it somewhere but really, it wasn’t really concrete or present. I also have friends who are of Irish descent and it intrigues me every time they talk to me about it. I always try to see how they came to Quebec. I think that this exhibition has given me more references to explore this issue, and ask more specific questions. (P28 BQ-2)

Prior to viewing the exhibition, this visitor had not been aware of the Irish presence in the early days of the colony of New France. In other words, the continuity in the relationships between Irish and French settlers went back much earlier than expected. She also alluded to the continued presence of the Irish in Quebec’s society by mentioning her interest in her friends’ Irish roots.

**The concept of historical perspective (8 utterances by 6 visitors).**

A few visitors, when sharing their thoughts on the exhibition, imagined how people must have thought and felt as products of their time. The concept of historical perspective manifested in very sophisticated ways, in that visitors were able to sense the “foreignness” of historical actions (motivated by different mentalities and belief systems) and could interpret
them within a larger socio-political, historical context. Central to some of these utterances (3) were references to the visitors’ biographies as points of comparison. One visitor, for instance, referred to the plight of her ancestors as a way of qualifying the notion of “leaving home”:

I felt a bit envious. Because they [the Irish] seem to have chosen to come to Quebec. I know that they had problems in Ireland, that’s why they came. But my background is slavery in Jamaica so my ancestors . . . they didn’t choose. . . . It makes them proud that they have settled. (P5 BQ-2)

Despite the exhibition being filled with tales of hardship experienced by Irish immigrants, that participant focused on the notion of choice (however grim) these immigrants had about leaving their country. This idea was put in stark relief with the comparison of the experience of the participant’s ancestors, forced to leave their home because of slavery. To this historical choice she attributed a sense of achievement and pride on the part of the Irish-Quebecois community today.

To assume (at least partially) the perspective of historical actors, visitors who did not use their biographies as central reference had to use other entry points. For the remaining visitors, familiarity with some aspects of the historical phenomenon played that function:

It seemed that any time you have very different ethnic groups, that between the established and incoming group you’ll have initial tensions and lack of acceptance, but it seemed that tremendous blending later on, sharing their place of worship, and their recipes and their children [laugh]. Eventually, the music, Quebecois and Irish and dancing, but seems initial resistance, all the Irish coming here were sick. And local people coming to their aid and dying in the process, we saw that in Grosse Ile but also here . . . in Montreal, religious people taking people with typhus and they died. (B-P14 Q-11)

This visitor’s knowledge of other “immigration stories” helped her understand the evolving relationship between the Irish settlers and the French-speaking population in Quebec.

_The concept of ethical dimension (5 utterances by 5 visitors)._  
This concept manifested the least in visitors’ talk about BIQ. However, five visitors did pronounce evaluative statements on the relative merits of certain historical events or situations. They did so by drawing upon contemporary values and norms while taking into account the historical context:

This man at the beginning [of the exhibition], who was Protestant but he worked with the Catholic Irish and the French. That was very . . . I read the panel. It was nice to see that he made that effort already back then. That’s something we struggle with nowadays. He didn’t make a choice. He did both. It was interesting. (P17 BQ-14)
In this statement, the participant, a tourist from Sweden, judged the actions of the historical actor in a very positive light. Her judgment was largely based on the comparison she established between the action of the historical agent (Guy Carleton), whose actions demonstrated “reasonable accommodation”, and the current tensions in Europe related to recent waves of immigration. Her comment implied the following conclusion: “If this man 200 years ago can do it [accommodate], we should be able to do it too today.” The final segment of the statement, “He didn’t make a choice. He did both,” is striking in that the participant recognized the challenges that Guy Carleton had to overcome to work with both the Catholic and Protestant communities:

They contributed enormously to the collective. . . . during the industrial era we used these people and I mean used them. Because they were poor and vulnerable, we had them work under very difficult conditions. . . . The living and working conditions were atrocious . . . just like what we did to the Chinese who worked on the railroad and mines . . . Again, the people in Griffintown, I read it here, had huge problems with the latrines. It shows that we neglected them . . . . These conditions with these immigrant communities eventually got better, but coming to Canada for these two groups was particularly difficult. (P32 BQ-5)

For this local visitor, the more established communities of the time exploited the early Irish immigrants. This visitor, who was a Quebecois of French decent, had earlier in the interview identified affinities between the “French Canadians” and the Irish (common religion and shared experience of British domination). Despite this acknowledgment, by stating “we neglected them” she attributed a collective responsibility for the plight of the Irish immigrants.

**Conclusion.**

We can see that as a “group”, visitors employed all the historical thinking concepts, and some visitors used a range of these concepts multiple times throughout their interpretation of BIQ (see Table 7.4). The overview points to the intense engagement of visitors with objects and archival material as a way to assess and connect the historical evidence in relation to the museum’s claim or their own lives. Ascribing significance to the Irish immigration in Quebec was also a key aspect of visitors’ meaning-making with BIQ. Identifying and speculating on the relationship of causation and repercussion to this historical phenomenon, with respect to historical and contemporary society, was also a frequent event in visitors’ talk. On the other hand, visitors did not seek as predominantly to determine the nature of continuity and change between the historical and present situations. Similarly, visitors seemed less inclined to view
the past through the social, emotional or moral lenses of the time, or to attempt to make ethical assessments. Why is that? I suggest that that the poetics of the exhibition (the assemblage of objects in space to create specific understandings), which favoured certain interpretations, resulted in the specific use of some historical concepts. BIQ’s discourse, which was heavily illustrated through material culture, led visitors to engage with historical evidence. The biographies and the lieux de mémoire also encouraged visitors to focus on the historical contribution of Irish individuals and the breadth of the Irish presence in Quebec’s landscape. The ubiquity of the Irish in Quebec’s culture also led visitors to explore the implications of this influence today. On the other hand, the historical narrative, which spanned over 300 years and introduced multiple actors, may not have provided sufficient narrative elements to encourage visitors to adopt the collective mindset of the various periods presented (historical perspective). BIQ’s narrative, which deliberately focused on the positive aspects of Irish immigration and settlement history, did not incite visitors to pose ethical judgments in the same way traumatic historical episodes may have. This is not to say that all six concepts should be evenly solicited in any given exhibition, but rather that the exhibition scenario and physical environment suggest certain patterns of public engagement.
Table 7.5 Historical Thinking Concepts (HTC) Manifest in Visitor Talk, from Most to Least Used, with Corresponding Number of Utterances and Visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Thinking Concepts</th>
<th>HTC Utterances</th>
<th>Number of Visitors (Total: 36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Significance</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Consequence</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity and Change</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Perspective</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Dimension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Visitors’ problems with the exhibition.**

As the analysis of visitors’ conceptions of history revealed, a majority considered the exhibition claim a valid proposition worthy of engaging with, not as an absolute truth. This doesn’t mean, however, that visitors weren’t critical about some aspects of the exhibition. After making an inventory of the visitors’ “problems” with the exhibition, I was able to establish that several were manifestations of historical thinking (see Table 7.6). For example, comments on the lack of artefacts related to a need for more physical evidence to substantiate the museum’s claim. The identification of “missing stories” — e.g., visitors asking why the exhibition didn’t make more references to the tense relationship between Irish and French Canadians — pointed to issues of historical significance. Another category of criticism focused on the exhibition’s rhetoric, i.e., the effectiveness of the exhibition medium in communicating ideas convincingly or compellingly. They drew attention to the specific nature of this embodied learning experience. At times, these two types of criticism intertwined:

I found it was quite . . . dark, I couldn’t read the signs; I needed better maps [laugh]. I wanted to understand more about Griffintown. I have a background in city planning and so I know about the controversy. I understand they have the map here but they have exhibit boxes on top. So I can’t see it. I would have liked to see this more clearly.
All this other history, I haven’t seen anything about the building of St. Patrick and St. Anne’s demolition. I couldn’t see. I didn’t see anything about today. What happened after St. Anne was demolished? I would like to see it more recently. (P14 BQ-1)

The visitor initially expressed how design issues impeded her engagement with the historical matter. In the second portion of the quote, based on her professional background and her awareness of local issues regarding urban development, she critiqued the absence of information she deemed significant. The comments were resisting not the historical thesis but the quality of the argument. In other words, she agreed on the historical role of Griffintown in the narrative but implied that the argument would have been stronger (and more interesting and relevant to the visitor) if the museum had included the recent history of Griffintown.
Table 7.6 Repertory of Visitor Criticism, Recurrence and Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Criticism Related to the Historical Narratives</th>
<th>Recurrence</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Emergent Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Info too thin, not detailed enough (did not mean more text)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>P1, P3, P25, P26, P31, P32</td>
<td>In need of more evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too familiar, not enough new material</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>P3, P7, P8, P10</td>
<td>In need of new evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough objects on display</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>P3, P8, P24, P25, P26</td>
<td>In need of new evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would have liked to know where the research was coming from: was it based on people’s memory or “real facts”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>P24, P25</td>
<td>In need of new evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some dates were inaccurate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>P25, P26</td>
<td>Questioning evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy between text and objects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>P26</td>
<td>Questioning evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would have liked to see more about the Irish today</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P11, P13, P23</td>
<td>Continuity and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were stories that should have been included, e.g., Irish/French Canadian conflicts, hockey stories, the role of Irish educators</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10, P13, P22, P28, P29</td>
<td>Historical significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t see the common thread between the stories featured in the various display sections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Form of representation problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should have been more historical, less anthropological</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>P31</td>
<td>Form of representation problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Criticism Related to the Physical Characteristics of the Exhibition</th>
<th>Recurrence</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Emergent Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text-heavy exhibition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>P9, P24, P35, P36</td>
<td>Design and rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would have liked to see more visuals, more films, more interactives, better maps, hear La Bolduc sing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>P9, P13, P23, P25</td>
<td>Design and rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text was difficult to read due to small font, low lighting, placement of objects and props</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>P2, P4, P9, P27, P28</td>
<td>Design and rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The space was too dark</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>P9, P12, P13, P18, P21, P24, P25, P26</td>
<td>Design and rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial orientation problem</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Design and rhetoric</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a majority of participants, visiting BIQ had been a satisfying experience. These critical comments were expressed amid positive observations. In many cases, these concerns were signs of deep investment in and inquisitiveness toward the exhibition’s conceptual and physical features. An important point: the critical comments identified by the yellow background in Table 7.6 corresponded to the exhibition makers’ three “conceptual knots” discussed in section 6.4.1 and were associated with the lack of artefacts, and the nature of the historical narrative (thematic or chronological, the absence of conflicts). This correspondence between exhibition producers’ and visitors’ concerns is explored in the next chapter.
7.3.2 The enactment of historical thinking in the visitor interview

This first phase of the analysis zoomed in on the articulation of the various historical thinking concepts by visitors in BIQ, as well as the nature of their concerns with the exhibition. As a way to further this exploration and contextualize the manifestation of historical thinking concepts within the visitor experience via the visitor talk, I would like the reader to “meet” one visitor by reading the onsite interview transcript in its entirety. I selected Charles [pseudonym], a francophone man in his late twenties living in Montreal. I chose this participant because he didn’t meet the typical “history museum visitor profile” (Reach Advisors, 2009, 2011). He was young, late twenties, wasn’t overly enthusiastic about the topic at the onset (came to the museum because of the free Saturday morning), had not completed a university degree (had a CEGEP degree in administration) and was not Caucasian.

He visited museums fairly frequently (three times per year). He came to the museum with a friend but visited the exhibition alone. He hadn’t been to the McCord for years. He had not planned to see BIQ but reported spending 75 minutes in the exhibition. The participant hinted at his Catholic background and gay identity when discussing artefacts that caught his attention. Interestingly, the participant never referred to his Asian ethnicity (including in his follow-up interview). The cultural/ethnic identity that he put forward was that of a francophone Quebecois. Although he stated he knew little about the exhibition topic, the participant was at ease making new connections in the exhibition space. It is worth observing how these new connections were formed—specifically, how the concepts of historical significance, continuity and change, and relationship of causality interacted with Charles’ life story, knowledge and interests in urban planning, religion and Quebec’s history.

Interviewer: What did you think of the exhibition?

Charles: I thought it was very interesting. I learned lots of things. I had prejudices [laugh]. I was wondering, well the Irish, mmmm . . . what will the museum be talking about? I learned about the conflicts in Ireland. I didn’t know anything about it. . . . There is also Griffintown. I work in real estate and I commute by bus every day. I follow the news. I live in that neighbourhood. . . . And La Bolduc, her name was Mary Travers, I didn’t know she was Irish!!! Quebec’s heritage, at the very root . . . the Irish are really part of it!

Interviewer: How did the exhibition make you feel about Irish settlers in Quebec?

Charles: Mmmmm compassion, I would say. From what I was able to understand, their history was terrible. In the end, the history of Irish immigration in Quebec was really
dramatic, like Grosse Ile. They were also among the first settlers in Quebec, and they cleared the land like the Quebecois, like the others. I had the impression that between Catholics and Protestants . . . I don’t know. . . . You can feel there was a rivalry but when the flooding occurred, for example, everybody worked together. There was no distinction. This is a little bit the same today. It’s one of Montreal’s characteristics, the multicultural aspect . . . in a way, it has always existed. . . . Two hundred years ago—we can still feel it!

Interviewer: Before visiting, how much did you know about Irish Immigration in Quebec?

Charles: Not much. I did know about the politicians. I know U2 [laughs], the conflicts with the IRA, the peace act. I know the music, the pubs, and the St. Patrick’s parade.

Interviewer: Could you show me objects, images, texts or displays that you found particularly interesting? Then tell me why you think [visitor selection] struck you more than other aspects of the exhibition?

Charles: Maybe Yvette Audet-Duquet. She was super involved. I didn’t know her at all! Even on the picture, you could tell that this was somebody who was doing a lot, I think. She was very involved. She loved the French language and she was a polyglot. . . . There is also the monstrance here that is very impressive. [Bends over to read the label.] Sometimes there is not enough light. There are a lot of texts and it’s difficult to read.

Interviewer: Do you think it is important for the museum to present an exhibition on the history of Irish immigration/settlement in Quebec?

Charles: Yes, well the McCord is about Canadian history and the Irish are . . . mmmmm “founders” of Canada [he emphasizes the word “founders” to signal that it is an unusual way of thinking about the Irish].

Interviewer: Does this exhibition connect with your own life in any way?

Charles: Because of my work, I’m in real estate, and we’ve been hearing a lot about the redevelopment of Griffintown these past few years. They are talking about taking the Bonaventure Highway down. It’s under study. This is worldwide; everybody wants access to the water. People want to be able to access the River [St. Lawrence] from downtown. It would give access to pedestrians. Because let’s face it, right now, it’s ugly! [laughs] . . . The Catholic religion. . . . There is also St. Anne Church that was destroyed in the 1970s. There is also St. Patrick Church that is totally related to the Irish and then in the gay village, there is St. Brigid Church. I visited it. It’s worth seeing.

Interviewer: Do you think this exhibition reflects Montreal or Quebec today?

Charles: Yes [no hesitation]. The language, first and foremost, the French and the English. The bilingualism is still here and the much talked about St. Patrick parade.
Interviewer: How reliable do you think the information presented in this exhibition is? Why?

Charles: Yes, generally I do. At the political level, it should be quite neutral. . . . Mmmm I would like to know who gave money to this exhibition. . . . The McCord is mostly English. . . . But still, it must be neutral.

Interviewer: Did any information in the exhibition surprise you?

Charles: La Bolduc as Mary Travers . . . Darcy McGee, I learned how he was killed. The history of Ireland.

Interviewer: Do you think Irish immigration transformed Quebec in some ways?

Charles: I think so. With the Catholics especially, when they came over. They supported the French Canadians. It’s the Catholic Church that saved the French language in Quebec, after all. And so this was an additional input that supported the cause. There was also the conflicts with the British. . . . They have even transmitted musical traditions. . . . In regards to religion, it was about working together in “co-partnership” with the Quebecers. And I can’t remember who, oh ya, Carleton with the Quebec Act, despite opposition in relation to the Act, not everybody was OK with it, he’s the one who supported the French laws, religion, the “fait Français” in Quebec at the time.

Interviewer: Do you think there was one big idea behind this exhibition?

Charles: That the Irish existed . . . that they are part of the Montreal landscape and of its history. We can see their contribution, what they brought and how they influenced the history here.

Interviewer: Do you think there was parts of the exhibition that made the history of the Irish settlers in Quebec look very foreign to you?

Charles: I knew nothing about the subject. I didn’t have any expectation. I went with the flow.

Interviewer: Which source of historical information do you find must trustworthy: books, museums, historic sites, teachers, family, the Internet?
Charles: Books but it depends. You have to read several. From there, you can get more information in the museum, but books are more complete. There is a bibliography at the end. The further the history is . . . the more debatable it is.

Interviewer: When people disagree about historical interpretations, how do you think they can find out what is most likely to have really happened?

Charles: I assume that there are documents, oral tradition . . . Sometimes you never get the truth. I’ll give you the example of the Samuel de Champlain statue in Quebec City, the famous statue; I was told that the face was not of Champlain. They relied on somebody else’s portrait, of the era, and based his clothing on the fashion of the time. So it was inspired from . . . it’s not definitive. Don’t forget geography, there are always physical traces, and then there is science. We can’t forget all these other fields; it creates a whole picture to talk about the past, and then finally good old common sense! [laughs]

Through his exploration of the exhibition, Charles gained a new appreciation for the depth and breadth of the Irish presence in Quebec history and culture, resorting to historical thinking. He discussed their presence with the first New France settlers and their work clearing the land, “just like the Quebecois did”. The importance of their contribution made him reconsider their historical significance in Quebec’s history. In both the onsite and follow-up interviews, he identified them as “founders” of Montreal and Quebec, something he hadn’t contemplated before. He was struck to learn that La Bolduc, an icon of French-Canadian culture, was Irish. This information seemed pivotal in making him realize that not only had the Irish built Quebec alongside French Canadians, they had also become Quebecois. Displays of solidarity between Catholics and Protestants partly explained the presence of multiculturalism in Montreal today, attributing continuity to this openness toward differences. Bilingualism and the celebration of St. Patrick were also seen as manifestations of the pervasiveness of the Irish influence. He recognized the historical agency of the Irish in the preservation of French language in Quebec, through the work of Guy Carleton and the Irish Catholic community, which, he explained, had bonded with the French Canadians because of a common religion and dislike for British power.

His engagement with the exhibition provoked a range of emotions: compassion for the quarantined Irish immigrants, surprise to realize the ubiquity of Irish culture in Quebec’s heritage, enchantment to discover a new historical actor, admiration for the monstrance, which seem to link up with a larger interest in religion, or at least church visiting. He also
expressed frustration with the amount of text, lack of light and lack of interactive exhibits, something that came back in his follow-up interview.

Charles trusted the reliability of information presented in the exhibition, likely because he viewed the museum’s stance as neutral. Although he associated neutrality with reliability, he ranked books as the most trustworthy historical source of information because of their depth of content and accessibility of sources. Interestingly, he recognized the interpretive and contingent nature of history in his response to the question of conflicted interpretations. As he stated, history is not “definitive”, it changes as new scientific evidence surfaces. We could deduce from Charles’ response that it is not the perspective of the historians as much as new tools to discover new evidence that can justify emerging interpretations.

Charles didn’t take a critical stance toward the exhibition makers’ perspective, evidence or overall interpretation. This could be explained partly by his trust in museums, but also perhaps by the fact that it didn’t radically contradict his beliefs and understandings about Quebec’s history. He was, in fact, so receptive to the argument that he reconsidered the importance of this cultural community in Quebec’s culture, and as a result modified his definition of Quebecois identity.

The exhibition “worked” in many ways for Charles. It exposed him to new material that connected with his life, which prompted him to think historically about the exhibition. In many ways, Charles became the “ideal” visitor who trusted the museum’s work, invested time reading text panels and engaged with the ideas proposed by exhibition makers. He also evidently incorporated material to make sense of his life outside the museum. However, in both onsite and follow-up interviews, Charles mentioned his preference for more interactive forms of engagement with the exhibition, going as far as saying he “had seen better” in other museums. His criticism was not concerned with the historical argument but with the type of engagement. It is not likely that his dissatisfaction with these aspects of the exhibition will discourage him from visiting other museums. But his response points to the fact that the engagement with the past in museums amounts to more than substantive learning about the past—or rather, that in order to be highly enjoyable, learning about the past in museums must connect with preferred ways of apprehending knowledge, an issue that is paramount in the context of informal learning.
The articulation of historical thinking concepts, the nature of the visitors’ critical comments, and Charles’ interview were helpful in furthering our understanding of the “methods” employed by visitors to make sense of the past in the museum. We were able to observe that the historical thinking concepts (positively or critically framed) were provoked by the interaction between the exhibition and the visitors’ own history, knowledge and interests. The engagement was largely “identity-driven”. This explains the visitors’ attentiveness to some aspects of the exhibition narrative over others. The level of critical engagement with the museum’s interpretation seemed directly linked to the visitors’ interest in and conception of history, and their trust in the museum. Finally, from Charles’ perspective, the pleasure derived from the museum experience became an important criterion, as much as the learning outcome, on which to judge the encounter with the past.

7.4 The Form (of Representation) Element: The Visitors’ Historical Meaning-making

Unlike academic and public historians, the interpretive work of visitors does not involve the production of a report or statement for peer reviewing and public consumption. I have come to consider the visitors’ historical explanations and understanding of the exhibition thesis as a form of representation of historical knowledge. The sense-making performance in this analysis is viewed as an expression (or form) of people’s historical consciousness. The first segment examines the visitors’ understanding of the exhibition’s “big ideas”, while the second analyses cultural patterns of interpretive strategies employed by visitors to make sense of these key messages.

7.4.1 Visitors’ engagement with the exhibition’s big ideas

Whether they spent 20 minutes or two hours in the exhibition, BIQ visitors clearly grasped its key idea or thesis. They either spontaneously acknowledged the central themes and messages intended by the exhibition makers, or did when asked to identify the exhibition’s “big idea”. “I didn’t know La Bolduc was Irish!”, “I hadn’t realized the blending that went on between French and Irish”, “I didn’t know at all that the Irish were present in Quebec’s history” were frequent responses, indicating that the museum obtained the “surprise effect” it wanted from most visitors once they were confronted with the exhibition’s central thesis of successful cultural integration.
Overall, two themes clearly emerged from the visitors’ identification of the exhibition’s thesis: the contribution of the Irish to Quebec’s history and society, and the cultural blending of Irish in Quebec’s predominantly French-Canadian culture. These themes clearly overlapped but had different emphases; one underscored the agency of Irish communities in Quebec’s past, the other drew attention to the outcome of the meeting between French and Irish Quebecers. The response of a Vancouver-based couple to the question about the exhibition’s “big idea” illustrates this distinction among visitor perspectives:

P14: I think it is the idea of homage and respect and recognizing . . . the idea of reverence toward the Irish people for what they have done for the city of Montreal and for Quebec to some extent.

P13: Mmmm I was thinking that it was more about the notion of pervasiveness of the influence at so many different levels and so many different details, and there are so many dimensions to the influence of the Irish. The breadth of the contribution I would theorise they were trying to get at.

Rarely did visitors question the historical thesis of the exhibition:

The bias of the exhibition is toward a story of integration and that is true to an extent. Now as I was telling you earlier from my family background, it was an area of Quebec where integration was probably minimal. The language and religion being Protestant in that part of Quebec. My experience of it [integration] was a bit different. (P5 BQ-11)

In this statement, the visitor tackled the exhibition’s big idea, “the story of integration”, by acknowledging that the museum’s standpoint was valid, but used his own family history as a referential point to situate it and add an additional perspective. These types of critical comments were infrequent.

Another important theme that emerged from the analysis was the visitors’ ability to connect the exhibition with present-day realities. Several references were made to the continued presence of Irish culture/influence/ethnicity in Quebec. Fewer visitors, however, extended these thoughts to how the creation of common culture, exemplified in BIQ, applied to today’s reality in Quebec or elsewhere, outside the Irish case. In other words, this successful accommodation story was not, for the most part, used to shed light or provoke conversations on the current context of cultural accommodation—an outcome that is understandable given the few explicit references to this issue in the exhibition. There were, however, some exceptions. We saw earlier the Swedish tourist who compared Guy Carleton’s work with the challenges encountered in her country (section 7.3.1). A Montreal-based francophone
contrasted the inclusive nature of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade with the recent actions of some organizers of Quebec’s national day festivities (St. Jean Baptiste), whose decision to withdraw the participation of English-speaking singers for a concert had provoked a public controversy. One history student suggested that the exhibition helped demonstrate that cultural métissage was possible. He attributed the relevance of such discourse to the necessity of preventing interracial conflicts, like the Parc Extension riot.

7.4.2 A visitor typology

Cultural memory, or memory shared by a collectivity, is implicated in the way people engage with historical narratives. Beyond the particularities of individual meaning-making with BIQ, I located cultural patterns in interpretive strategies that helped form the participants’ meaning-making. These patterns are envisioned as a visitor typology, based on three distinctive ways of engaging with the exhibition-as-historical-account: the local curious, the transnational curious and the national curious. This segment explores how each visitor type and associated historical meaning-making is motivated by a culturally-informed curiosity toward the historical content, and how the historical thinking concepts are implicated in this process.

The local curious were people who had been living in Quebec for a few years or more. In general terms, their curiosity consisted of a desire to learn about the place they lived in (their city, their province, “their history”). By virtue of living in Quebec, the local curious tended to be more knowledgeable about the presence of the Irish in Quebec’s past. Some of that knowledge was acquired in the context of Quebec history classes in high school or university, but most of it was gained through readings, conversations with friends and family, visiting (or hearing about) historic sites like Grosse Ile, or having grown up in or close to the Irish-Montreal community. There was a general cultural awareness about the “potato famine” and the mixed-marriages between French Canadians and Catholic Irish, alliances often explained by their religious affiliations and common dislike for the British government. The presence of Irish pubs and the participation in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Montreal were

37 This incident had taken place in early June 2009.
38 Parc Extension in Montreal-North was the scene of a riot in August 2008, likely triggered by the death of teenager Freddy Villanueva, killed by policemen.
also identified as markers of the Irish influence in Quebec. When these visitors apprehended the exhibition, it was done with a certain sense of familiarity (however flawed or limited) with the topic. Their encounter with the exhibition could be characterized by two poles of a continuum, from seeing the known to locating the foreignness in the familiar. Let us examine how historical thinking was implicated in the experience of the local curious at both ends of this continuum:

Unlike the Irish, the Scottish were rich. They knew how to make money when they came here. So their artefacts in the exhibition were quite, you know, it showed. The only thing here that is really spectacular is this marvel here [the monstrance]. It is absolutely, totally spectacular. It stands out almost above anything else [laugh]. Which shows you how important the religious factor was and that if there was any wealth, it went into the church, which is the way it went. (P8 BQ-4)

In this statement, the humble nature of the artefacts on display was utilized to substantiate the visitor’s knowledge about the widespread poverty of the Irish immigrant populations in Quebec. The only exception, a richly ornate monstrance, was attributed to the religious devotion of the Irish Catholics. Even her reference to a previous exhibition at the McCord, on the Scottish community in Montreal, reinforced her idea that the Irish were a have-not people in Quebec. The assertive tone of her final comment, “which is the way it went”, emphasized her authority on the subject, acquired through her Irish background, her active participation within the Irish-Montreal community, multiple readings, and visits to historic sites. The exhibition provided an opportunity for this visitor to validate her knowledge on the topic. Locating foreignness in the familiar is exemplified in the response of an older Irish-Quebecois man based in Montreal and born in Griffintown: “Seeing the layout of Griffintown . . . what the confines were, interested me. I never knew the boundaries” (P30 Q-14). This visitor, who knew very well Montreal’s old Irish district, took advantage of having access to primary sources (old maps) to identify unknown aspects of this familiar place.

Situated at the other end of the continuum, some remarkable attitudinal shifts took place within this category of historical interpreters. In response to the question “What do you think the big idea behind the exhibition was?” the response of a young francophone Quebecois student exemplifies this far-reaching impact:

To open our eyes! Personally, I knew there were lots of Irish in Quebec but I didn’t know there were that many. I didn’t know they had been here for that long. The fact that they married with Les Filles du Roi and all. For me, the Filles du Roi are tied to the
French, the Irish were not part of the equation. That part mainly opened my eyes about the role they played in our French-Canadian or French-Quebecois culture.

(P36 Q-12)

In this case, observing a shift in her understanding, she revised her views about the importance of Irish influence in Quebecois culture. She did so upon learning about the considerable number of Irish immigrants in Quebec (more than she had ever thought) and the intermarriage of Irish with the early French settlers (at an earlier historical period than she had thought).

The transnational curious were people residing outside Canada who had come to the museum as part of their trip to Quebec, or people who had recently settled in Quebec (within a few months of visiting the exhibition) who were not yet familiar with their new home. In general terms, these individuals came to the museum to acquaint themselves with the place they were visiting or settling in. They had no prior knowledge on the subject of Irish immigration and settlement in Quebec. Most were aware that Irish populations had immigrated to the United States, and made some connections between the American and Quebec context of Irish immigrations. Several expressed their astonishment upon learning about the significant influence of Irish culture in Quebec. When making sense of their experience of BIQ, the transnational curious’ interpretive strategy often aimed at identifying the familiar in the foreign:

I was amazed to read about this man [Hingston] whose mother was Protestant and father was Catholic and then grew up in the Protestant faith and married Presbyterian. I mean, that’s amazing to me that this took place more than a hundred years ago. I mean, in the States, from what I know, you could get your head cut off if you weren’t from the right denomination. Protestants and Catholics did not get along!

(P2 BQ-4)

This American tourist was surprised by the liberalism of people living in Montreal in the nineteenth century, demonstrated by the presence of inter-faith marriages. As a way to justify her amazement, she contrasted this form of cultural tolerance with the opposite scenario that would have taken place at the time in her country. The visitor realized that the attitude of religious intolerance observed in her country at that time may not have been as widespread as she thought.

The following comments are from a French policeman touring Quebec. His experience of BIQ seemed to have helped him better appreciate traits of Quebecois culture observed outside the museum. Throughout the interview, this participant kept expressing his astonishment at the presence of Irish influence in Quebec’s history and present:
It’s like in Paris . . . the street names. I have explored the city [Montreal] by foot. I saw Shamrock Street and Griffintown Street. Before, I would have said: “it’s British”; now I know these names are of Irish origin and I prefer that! [laugh]

He continued soon after:

I find that the blending of different cultures works very well here and this is due to the specificity of your culture and the use of both languages. In France we only speak French. Even when people come from different cultures, they mainly speak in French. We don’t have . . . people don’t switch to a different language. We cannot adapt with people from Africa or from the Maghreb. There is just too much difference between languages. Here, however, when I walk in the streets, I hear people speaking almost Frenglish, in French and in English—both and a lot. I was really surprised. (P15 BQ-7)

In both comments, the participant referred to life in France to explain what he took from BIQ. In the first comment, he associated the toponymy of streets with the Irish presence. In his second comment, he made direct connections between the historical and contemporary meeting of cultures in Quebec, perceived as harmonious, and a currently tense relationship between French and immigrant populations—as if to say that a hybrid language (Frenglish) may be both a cause and evidence of better relationships and integration between cultural groups, the history of Irish immigration acting as exemplar.

The national curious were identified as Canadians visiting Quebec. These individuals were somewhat familiar with Quebec culture and history, through a combination of previous visits, family history connections, history classes and the news. The national curious came to the museum expecting to learn something about the regional history relating to their nation’s past. Their engagement with the exhibition’s big idea oscillated between grasping the exotic in the familiar and seeing the familiar in the foreign.

To the question “How did the exhibition make you feel about the Irish immigrants?” this tourist from Vancouver stated:

P.14 Very sympathetic and very much like many immigrant groups. I think you could have done much of the same kind of thing except for the title [chuckle] with other immigrants who have come here, but of course we are reminded of the tremendous percentage of the Irish people who were here that largely disappeared with the current make-up of Montreal.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

P.14 Well, the merging with the French Canadians. I hadn’t realized this so much before, between the food, the music, and of course intermarriage and even religion, a kind of blending a little bit . . . How much connections they have with the French Canadians. (P14 BQ-2)
Here the visitor initially emphasized a sense of commonality and continuity across time and cultures to comment on the historical thesis, i.e., it is the story of many immigrants who came to Canada, a story familiar to her because her parents had emigrated from Europe. However, she acknowledged the specificity of this immigration story by stating that the extent of merging and blending between French and Irish, an historical aspect new to her, caused the Irish to “disappear” in Montreal. The latter statement is another example of the use of cause and consequence to negotiate meaning.

When attempting to qualify the meetings of French-Quebecois and Irish immigrants in Quebec, this Toronto participant explained:

In the ’50s, ’60s if you were Irish Catholic you weren’t getting anywhere in Ontario. You would not get a job . . . you would not get ahead because it was very Orange. And it doesn’t seem that it happened here as much . . . because you had all this intermarriage. You had the Catholic Church that was predominant. How did that affect the difference between the experience of Irish Canadians in Quebec and the Irish Catholics who settled in Ontario? I think it was very different. (P26 BQ-10)

Her interpretation was based on understanding the differences between Irish immigration in Ontario and Quebec. She concluded that because of the predominance of Catholicism and the resultant mingling between French and Irish Quebecois, it might have been easier for Irish Catholics to settle, integrate and thrive in Quebec than it was in Ontario.

The exhibition confronted several visitors’ conceptions of Quebecois identity. The visitors’ identification with a particular collectivity or “imagined community” largely framed the way they engaged with the exhibition narrative. Their historical thinking was repeatedly oriented to satisfy this “culturally-bound” curiosity.

7.5 The Function Element: Revisiting the Exhibition – the Follow-up Study

This section examines visitors’ thoughts and recollections related to BIQ a few weeks after their visit to the museum. Of the 36 visitors interviewed at the McCord Museum, 33 participated in this follow-up study. The analysis was designed to capture some of the exhibition’s impact outside the museum walls and as such addressed the question of Rüsen’s function principle, i.e., how the visitors’ interpretation of the exhibition contributes back to life-practice through constituting identity and guiding actions. This follow-up segment should be viewed as part of the effect of engagement at the museum—what is left of or what has been created from these fleeting encounters with historical knowledge. If museums play a role
in shaping the memory and historical consciousness of a collective, as so much of the museum studies literature claims, we should be able to identify evidence of this impact in individual visitors’ recollections, reflections and actions resulting from their experience at the museum, weeks after their visit.

The methodology adopted is inspired by the recent and growing literature on longitudinal visitor study, which in turn draws on the research on psychology and memory retention (D. Anderson, et al., 2007). The follow-up study with visitors took the form of telephone interviews or email correspondence conducted a month after their visit to the museum. The four open-ended questions were inspired by studies on visitors’ long-term memory, which aimed at capturing visitors’ episodic and semantic memories months, and even years, after the museum experience (D. Anderson & Shimizu, 2007; Benton, 2008; Knapp, 2005; Medved, 1998; Stevenson, 1991). The interview questions invited visitors to: a) share what they remembered most vividly about the exhibition; b) report subsequent conversations with people about the exhibition; c) evoke connections established between the exhibitions with things they had done or seen after their visit; and d) discuss things they did as a result of visiting BIQ (see questionnaire Appendix H). This analysis identified the themes that emerged from the participants’ responses to these four questions and established relationships between these post-visit reflections and the discussion about historical thinking associated with the museum experience.

7.5.1 Visitors’ most vivid memories of BIQ

All respondents, with the exception of one, remembered several aspects of the exhibition vividly. Over 62 spontaneous memories were cited. Vivid memories were identified by the level of details and affect associated with the description provided by participants. These episodic memories touched on four aspects of the exhibition (the frequency appears in brackets):

- the exhibition’s main ideas (8): these memories captured the essence of one or several exhibition key themes;
- specific stories and facts (17): these memories focused on specific information about historical figures, places or events, without referring to the larger themes;
• specific artefacts (16): these memories offered detailed descriptions of artefacts that were not always linked to the exhibition narrative; and
• the exhibition design and interactive displays (21): these memories provided a depiction of the exhibition’s physical and auditory attributes.

Recognizing that the substance of individual memories at times encompassed several of these aspects, each memory was categorized by the predominant aspect defining the visitor explanation. What this emerging categorization suggests is the prevalence of memories associated with the physical representation of history in the museum (artefacts and exhibition design), pointing to the specificity of the exhibition-as-medium in shaping historical memories, i.e., remembering the material evidence and built environment that made up the historical narrative. The analysis also points to the visitors’ ability to recall particular historical stories and facts associated with the exhibition topic, and seems to underscore people’s ability to recall knowledge more easily in the form of narratives (Robert, 1997). A smaller but significant proportion of these vivid memories was more conceptual in nature and revolved around key messages, i.e., the historical significance of the Irish in Quebec, or the ubiquity of Irish influence in Quebec’s contemporary culture.

A majority of vivid memories (51) were of aspects of the exhibition previously discussed during the onsite interview with more or less the same intensity. For example, Charles (whose interview transcript appeared in section 7.3.3) went further in his criticism of the lack of interactivity in BIQ by comparing it to exhibitions he had seen in other institutions. This assessment did not prevent him, however, from elaborating on the nature of the exhibition’s main themes and historical figures, and drawing from the exhibition’s content to understand his surroundings. Some memories (11) referred to aspects of the experience not mentioned during the onsite interview, demonstrating the benefit of capturing visitors’ thoughts after their visit to increase our understanding of their meaning-making (McManus, 1993; Stevenson, 1991). When describing these spontaneous memories, visitors explained how these aspects of the exhibition had delighted (31), surprised (14), moved (6) or frustrated (8) them, and connected to their lives in special ways. This observation converges toward the findings of other longitudinal visitor studies, which established how affect and identity were tied to the museum experience and subsequent memories of visitors (D. Anderson, Lukas, & Ginns, 2003; Ellenbogen, 2002; Falk, 2006a):
Well, I think the thing that I remember most is when I saw the glass booths and listened to the explanation or story of the people. There was one about Guy Carleton. I’m sure I recognized the voice [of the narrator] because I think it’s the man who tells the story at Hurley’s Irish Pub. He’s an absolutely wonderful storyteller and that’s the voice that I could hear in my ears and that was very nice because it wasn’t just looking, it was hearing, which was very good. There was Mary Travers, known as La Bolduc. She was like many people partly Irish and French-Canadian and she sang, and started to make records and supported her family in the 1920s, I think. (P7 BFQ-1)

A sense of comfort and familiarity underlies the recollection of this visitor, a UK-born, long-time Montreal resident of Irish descent. Her memory clearly focused on the design and auditory component of the exhibition, which then branched out with prior knowledge on the subject. She was a volunteer tour guide in another local museum, had visited historic sites, and had read much on the history of the Irish and Quebec’s history, in addition to being involved with the local Irish community. To some extent, she was so familiar with the topic that the exhibition was, as she coined it during this follow-up interview, “a no-brainer” for her. She recognized that she had not been able to get as much from BIQ as she had from previous McCord exhibitions. We could argue that for this local curious, there was not enough “foreignness in the familiar”. What was most novel and striking (and memorable) about the exhibition were the rhetorical strategies—the sound booths. Although the visitor may have generally favoured exhibitions where she “discovered” new things, her memories suggest a pleasant, social, aesthetic and sensory encounter with the known, one confirming both her identity and her grasp on the historical topic. It is worth noting that the Irish identity of several respondents (12) did play a role in the substance of the memories but not in the frequency or vividness. The same could be said about the visitor typology (local, national and transnational curious). For instance, some non-Irish, transnational curious had more salient memories about BIQ than some Irish locals. Conversely, some non-Irish locals had more vivid memories than other Irish nationals. In other words, Irish ethnicity or the geographic affiliations of visitors determined the way participants encoded the memories but not how much they remembered. Other dimensions of identity, including prior knowledge, interest and the nature of the motivation at the time of the visit, seemed to have been at play.
7.5.2 Conversations about the exhibition

Of the 33 respondents, 29 reported having conversations with friends, family members or colleagues. These conversations were categorized into four groupings, presented in ascending order of interest for this study.

“We went to the museum” conversations (9) were discussions with family and friends about what they had done over the weekend or during their holiday, with no attempt to explain their take on the exhibition.

“You’ve got to see it!” conversations (8) were to encourage others to attend the exhibition. They spoke positively of the exhibition, without giving much detail or their take on it.

“I just learned something interesting” conversations (10) were discussions reporting specific aspects of the exhibition, like the young woman who discussed with an Irish colleague the significance of the “O” preceding Irish names, or the Vancouver tourist who described to her musician brother-in-law the Irish influence in Quebecois music.

“I’m using this knowledge” conversations (5) were in-depth conversations about the exhibition’s big ideas, which are most relevant in the context of this study. For instance, the Toronto-based visitor who had critically assessed the focus of the McCord (the integration of Catholic Irish in Quebecois society and how it differed from his Protestant family’s experience) pursued this discussion with his daughter and wife. He reiterated his position concerning the historical claim, from his national curious sensibility. Another visitor, who had returned to France, was happy to correct his friends during a conversation in which Quebecois culture was believed to be of French origin exclusively. An email excerpt from another transnational curious clearly demonstrates the depth of some of these post-visit discussions:

I explained to her [the participant’s friend] the far-reaching impact of this community in the development of Quebec. Then we talked about the importance of migratory waves in history and the way it shaped culture and people’s character. We came to the conclusion that this phenomenon allows harmony and growth between cultures because this understanding of the other prevents xenophobia. We found that the blending of cultures had more positive than negative points although many want us to believe otherwise, especially in times of crisis. The keyword for me that came out of this discussion was the word “exchange” between cultures. (P12 BFQ-2)

This visitor had not linked BIQ with issues of contemporary immigration during the onsite interview. This was a man in his early twenties from France on an extended work stay in Montreal, who was very aware of his status as a “newcomer” and likely very receptive to ideas
of cultural exchange in the context of immigration. Like other transnational curious, prior to his visit he did not know of the Irish contribution to Quebec’s history. His experience at the museum became both the backdrop and illustration to launch a meaningful conversation with a friend about the value of immigration and resulting cultural exchange for past and contemporary societies. The conclusion became a sort of counterpoint to today’s intolerant attitudes toward immigration.

These self-reported discussions confirmed the findings of similar studies stating a high proportion of visitors having conversations about their visit (Le Marec, 2007). The analysis considered specifically the nature of these conversations and revealed that almost half the sample of visitors (15) had conversations that dealt directly with aspects of the exhibition, indicating that the ideas proposed in the museum were still “living and evolving” in people’s minds after their visit, and that the exhibition’s impact was extended through conversations with others. Interestingly, what people said they shared with others and what they said they remembered most (elicited in the previous question) often varied. Hence, the necessity of probing memories through various forms of prompts. Clearly, the post-visit conversations constituted the articulation of lasting impressions (or memories) about the exhibition. These exhibition memories became “conversation material”, a catalyst of cultural production, provoking the consolidation and/or renewal of historical knowledge in the visitors and people around them.

7.5.3 Further connections with the exhibition

This question asked visitors whether, in addition to talking to people about the exhibition, they had made further connections with aspects of the exhibition while doing or seeing something. Although a majority of visitors (23) responded that they had not, a third reported they had (10). I distinguished two groupings from the various types of post-visit connections.

The “exhibition flashbacks” (4) were fleeting connections with daily activities, such as the visitor who thought of the little orphan’s jacket when buying children’s clothing. The “renewed interpretation of surroundings” (6) were connections that enriched the visitors’ understanding of their environment or prompted new questions (cultural, familial). Charles (our visitor in 7.3) explained,
Following the visit, I was visiting the city with tourists from France. I was showing them the Montreal flag and the Montreal emblem and we actually saw the cloverleaf, which means that among the first . . . founders [hesitantly used the term founders] of Montreal, there were the Irish. So I made the connection with the exhibition. . . . Following that, there was la St-Jean Baptiste and, well. . . . It made me think of . . . the people, that we actually had similarities with the Irish at the beginning, and I paid more attention to this in the media. Jean Charest is of Irish origin; there are lots of people that are of Irish descent . . . with their names. Our premiers in Quebec, to start with: Pierre-Marc Johnson, Carl Johnson in the nineties, names like that. . . . This week on the Web, I actually came across a review about the restaurant Joe Beef, a tavern. I remember thinking, “I did see this in the exhibition.” At the time, it was a man who welcomed the poor. I think he even fed them. People who were going through a hard time . . . new immigrants. . . . The restaurant continues to exist but it’s a restaurant that is an expensive one in Old Montreal. (P9 BFQ-2)

These reported connections indicate that some visitors drew on exhibition-related substantive knowledge to add meaning to their everyday life, and that new images, objects, stories and sensitivities were integrated into these visitors’ historical consciousness. As previous memory studies have established, the degree to which people recall and use episodic and semantic memories is conditional upon reinforcing activities, or opportunities to rehearse and rework them (Anderson 2007; McManus 1993; Medved, 2000). Not surprisingly then, most of these “further connections” were made by local curious whose cultural and physical surroundings acted as memory prompts.

7.5.4 Doing something as a result

The majority of participants reported not doing anything specific as a result of visiting BIQ (23). A third of the visitors, on the other hand, did or intended to do something. Of the two visitors who intended to do an activity, one was planning to go back to the exhibition, the other to explore Griffintown (Montreal’s historic Irish district) and look up the websites of the two Irish historic societies that collaborated in the exhibition. Eight visitors extended their exploration of the subject by reading books (2), verifying some information online (2), downloading podcasts on a related topic (2), uploading pictures of the exhibition on an Irish website (1) and listening to the music of a singer featured in the exhibition (1):

It’s funny; I remember something I didn’t even mention [during the onsite interview]. I remember a sign that spoke of . . . that gave an introduction of the exhibition and that mentioned a bunch of small things. One of the things it mentioned in passing was the potato. To me, it didn’t say enough. The exhibition didn’t say anything about how the Irish were the ones who made the potato popular in Quebec. I didn’t even know they were responsible for this. So when I came back home I researched it on the Internet. (P10 BFQ-1)
In the case of this visitor, the missing story was the impetus for conducting a search on the Internet. Overall, these reported and intended activities indicate the exhibition’s capacity to inspire further investigations on historical aspects that resonated with the visitors’ interest and curiosity.

In summary, the follow-up study identified a total of 105 self-reported memories, conversations, connections and actions directly related to BIQ. It is important to remember that the follow-up interviews and email correspondences were themselves snapshots of these post-visit engagements. However, they tell us part of the “impact story” and are helpful in addressing the question of function—that is, how the historical interpretation contributes back to life-practice. As some museum researchers have noted about museum experiences: “They can fade to oblivion, they can be rehearsed and thus sustained, they can be redirected or changed” (D. Anderson, et al., 2007, p. 204). Even with a limited sample of 33 participants, we were able to observe these varied outcomes.

The act of visiting may be viewed as a small life event, but because “museum stories” are trusted, they can be influential in shaping people’s ideas of who they are and what they think about questions they find interesting. We could observe across visitors’ responses that the notion of “identity-work”, as conceived by Jay Rounds (Rounds, 2006), was apparent in the way people remembered the exhibition, made connections and acted as a result of the exhibition. That is, they appropriated ideas proposed in BIQ in ways that helped build, reaffirm and consolidate aspects of their biographies. Supporting this notion is the fact that the local, transnational, and national curiosity informed the way people encoded their memories and created subsequent meanings.

The reported post-visit conversations generated particularly valuable data in the context of this research. Almost half the respondents focused on and/or contextualized aspects of the exhibition for their interlocutors, putting emphasis on the historical content and perspectives that were most meaningful to them. Historical thinking was often implicated in the way visitors reinterpreted the exhibition for others. Importantly, these conversations also meant that the exhibition-as-historical-account gained an extended public.

The results of this longitudinal study contribute to the research on museums’ long-term impact by underlining how visitors continued thinking about their encounter with historical knowledge in the museum. It suggests that an exhibition can be a vehicle for gaining historical
culture. It also demonstrates that the exhibition expanded (in a modest way, in most cases) the visitors’ repertory of images and concepts associated with the historical developments of Quebec, and the effect of Irish immigration on this society. This was evidenced by the construction of episodic and semantic memories. The exhibition generated new, substantive historical knowledge, ranging from simple awareness to, in some cases, highly conceptual understanding. Finally, we could say that the longitudinal study was instrumental in determining that the exhibition provided, to some participants, new material for thinking about the dynamic and fluid nature of Irish-Quebec identity, and in some cases, such reflection was expanded and transposed to other ethnic/cultural communities. Perhaps because of the nature of the follow-up interview questions, the data generated were more insightful in telling us what people thought, connected and did as a result of the exhibition, rather than how historical thinking was implicated in the construction of these long-term historical memories. In other words, the follow-up study helped us realize that visitors learned about the past substantively following their visit, but it did not necessarily help us determine how BIQ supported the way visitors thinks about history as a way of knowing the past.

7.6 Conclusion

The onsite and post-visit interviews generated rich data from which to examine how visitors “played” with historical matter in the exhibition space, and how they engaged with the stories and interpretive strategies proposed to them during their time at the museum and subsequently.

Employing Jörn Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix to analyse the interpretations of non-historians was both productive and paradoxical. It became an opportunity to appreciate the interrelation between the visitors’ needs and motivations for temporal orientation, their conceptions of history, and their terms of engagement with historical knowledge in the museum. However, dissociating the visitors’ historical methods and representations of historical knowledge felt at times artificial. Visitors do not adopt formal, systematic and explicit methods, like historians do, to make sense of the past, because their interests and motivations differ. And yet, the “methods” and “forms” segments were helpful in determining that when engaging with the past, BIQ visitors did not simply capture isolated or serial historical facts, or reminisce about their lives. The analysis helped identify how visitors were operating and
constructing meaning by resorting to cognitive strategies associated with the historical discipline. Historical thinking concepts played a key role in the elaboration of visitors’ interpretations of BIQ (in and outside the museum). Indeed, despite the casualness of the encounter with the past (amalgamated with other life-practices), visitors were very responsive to ideas proposed by the museum. Whether they had mild or strong emotive reactions, whether they were locals or international tourists, of Irish descent or not, most visitors engaged meaningfully with the exhibition's key themes. This speaks of the exhibition makers’ ability to effectively communicate their historical claim to a wide range of the public. It is also indicative of the visitors’ investment in creating meaning. The visitors’ use of historical thinking concepts, unlike the historians’ method, was explicitly and persistently intertwined with various dimensions of their identity (ethnicity, biography, interests). This reality only reconfirms that the museum experience is not “content-driven” but “identity-driven”.

Although visitors identified the exhibition’s “big ideas”, and in most cases accepted them, many were critical of some aspects of BIQ. The analytical framework enabled us to view the visitor identifications of “exhibition problems” as the manifestation of historical thinking, i.e., interrogating evidence, questioning omissions, proposing a better argument. Moreover, some of these criticisms corresponded to the exhibition team’s three “conceptual knots” or points of tension that had shaped the making of BIQ (lack of objects, memory versus history, chronological or social arrangement). This signals that the visitors’ reading of the exhibition was attentive to the procedural dimensions (the how of history) of the exhibition project. These observations came, though, from visitors who had more a sophisticated understanding of historical epistemology.

Based on this analysis, we could propose that the use of historical thinking in the museum can contribute to building, reaffirming, enriching and making more complex the visitors’ identity. Historical exhibitions’ specific contribution to visitors’ identity could be viewed as providing additional material (new images, new stories, new references) from which to build their own personal histories in relation to and through larger collective narratives. The interplay between personal and collective memory and identity was made evident in the visitor typology discussion. The affiliation of the visitors’ cultural memory, sensitivity and geographic proximity to the historical narrative informed the way they made sense of the exhibition. We observed how the local, transnational and national curious used the historical thinking
concepts to negotiate the foreignness and familiarity embedded in their interpretations of the exhibition. This idea finds resonance with historian Jocelyn Létourneau’s conception of the dialogical relationship people entertain between private and public histories (2009). Létourneau postulated that non-historians’ engagement with the collective past found their prime motivation in the construction of self-identity, and a need to historicize their life. From this perspective, visitors tended to project their personal narratives and historicity into the reading of the collective history of BIQ, meshing the small and “big” narratives together.
Chapter 8  Discussion

In chapters 6 and 7, I analysed the experience of exhibition team members and visitors by applying two historical thinking frameworks, namely, Jörn Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix and the six concepts of historical thinking as conceptualised by Peter Seixas. This chapter addresses the research questions, suggests implications for museum practice and situates the discussion in relation to larger museological questions and future research. To reiterate, my research question was:

To what extent can historical thinking frameworks be useful in understanding and assessing the meaning-making of the exhibitionary performers (exhibition makers and visitors) in the museum?

and my sub-question was:

To what extent can these emergent understandings of the visitors’ and exhibition makers’ historical meaning-making suggest new orientations/new practices in exhibition development and museum studies?

8.1 The Heuristic Qualities of Rüsen’s Matrix and the Historical Thinking Concepts Frameworks

I describe my approach to using the two historical thinking frameworks as more playful than prescriptive. I interpreted each element of the two frameworks in ways that were responsive to the performance of the exhibition makers and visitors. By interpreting the experience of the exhibitionary performers, the analysis tested the flexibility and adaptability of the frameworks to a museum reality. It demonstrated that these frameworks, initially designed to examine the work of historians (in the case of Rüsen’s) and students (in the case of the historical thinking concepts), have the capacity to assess other forms and contexts of engagement with the past, namely the making and visiting of history-based museum exhibitions.

8.1.1 Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix

At a primary level, the use of Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix requires the evaluator to consider the exhibition, the making and visiting, in relation to history as a way of knowing.
Rüsen’s matrix insists that we think of the internal logic of the discipline alongside its larger socio-cultural and historical context of production and public reception. As a result, this framework affords a rich set of questions to examine exhibitions, as historical and cultural productions, from the makers’ and visitors’ perspectives:

- **(INTERESTS)** Why are exhibition makers/visitors interested in particular questions about the past? Who does the experience benefit and what are the motivations?
- **(THEORIES/HISTORICAL EPISTEMOLOGIES)** How do exhibition makers/visitors define history? What does it mean for exhibition makers/visitors to interpret the past?
- **(METHODS)** How do exhibition makers/visitors explore emergent questions about the past?
- **(FORMS)** How do the exhibition makers convey their historical argument using the exhibition medium, and what are the visitors’ representations of the exhibition’s big idea?
- **(FUNCTIONS)** What impacts do these new understandings about the past have in terms of identity formation and temporal guidance for the collective and for the individual visitor?

Together, these five questions attend to issues of the poetics and politics of exhibitions (how meaning is created and power relations are implicated in the construction of knowledge), of institutional responsibility (the perceived educational role of the museum in relation to knowledge dissemination), of agency (that of the exhibition makers and visitors in interpreting the past), and of social impact (the perceived and actual effects of exhibitions on individuals and collectives). This framework accommodates the examination of key ideas identified in the “median position” of museum studies literature.

### 8.1.2 The historical thinking concepts

This study contributes to scholarly conversations examining how museum institutions are implicated in the identity formation of individuals and collectives. Various studies have already demonstrated how multiple dimensions of visitor identity inform their meaning-making. What the concepts of historical thinking framework accomplishes like no other is to indicate how historical thinking can be implicated in the construction of identity when engaging with museum exhibitions. Examining the historical thinking of exhibition makers and
visitors makes apparent how non-historians can resort to cognitive strategies associated with the historical discipline. The analysis demonstrates how the use of the historical thinking concepts was instrumental in pursuing their distinctive interpretive tasks: building an historical narrative for a collective, and building an historical narrative for the self. We see how the historical explorations of exhibition makers are enacted through the negotiation of a wide range of constraints, while cultural memory, personal histories and individual interests primarily inform the historical explorations of visitors. Individual concepts of historical thinking become portals to the exhibitionary performers’ historical sense-making. Indeed, these concepts generate another set of questions that can lead to reflexive discussions among team members during and after the development of exhibitions:

- **(EVIDENCE AND EPISTEMOLOGY)** How do exhibition makers/visitors locate, select and contextualize primary sources and assess evidence used to substantiate a claim?
- **(HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE)** How do exhibition makers/visitors address the issue of selection, inherent in any historical accounts?
- **(CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE)** How do exhibition makers/visitors establish links of causality between events, changes and agents, and identify underlying factors influencing changes? How do they identify the agency of historical actors?
- **(HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE)** How do exhibition makers/visitors negotiate the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar past? How do they attempt to adopt the viewpoint of historical individuals and groups?
- **(CONTINUITY AND CHANGE)** How do exhibition makers/visitors determine the elements in an historical phenomenon that have changed and those that have not?
- **(ETHICAL JUDGMENT)** How do exhibition makers/visitors make ethical assessments about the heroism and culpability of historical actors, considering the historical context in which they acted?

Together, these frameworks provide two robust sets of interconnected questions that help conceptualise the historical explorations of exhibition makers and museum visitors.
8.1.3 The seamless and porous exhibition narratives: two pedagogies

The present study demonstrates how an exhibition not only proposes a narrative about the past, but simultaneously proposes a way to engage with the past. *BIQ* was the embodiment of an historical claim and a perspective on history and its function. The analysis makes clear that exhibition makers considered themselves “rigorous storytellers” proposing fresh interpretations about the past to the public, with the capacity to influence the visitors’ ideas of substantive history. The McCord proposed a more complex notion of Quebecois *Pure Laine* by demonstrating the ubiquity of Irish culture in Quebec’s cultural and genetic makeup. This discourse deliberately engaged with larger debates shaping its region, that is, the role of interculturalism in the shaping of Quebecois identity in a post-Bouchard–Taylor Commission era. To achieve this, exhibition makers focused on the substantive history. Making reference to the constructed nature of the historical interpretation was not part of their program. The exhibition consequently presented a compelling and seamless historical narrative. This form of public history is closely aligned with an informational perspective on historical teaching and learning (Denos & Case, 2006; Levesque, 2008; Stearns, et al., 2000). The exhibition informed. It created a novel story about the Irish in Quebec, but its storyline did not hint at the criteria and negotiations that had informed the final outcome. I argue that exposing the rationale for key decisions that shaped the exhibition could have provided context and substance to the historical argument. The analysis of the experience of both exhibitionary performers provides material to pursue this discussion.

The research design afforded the opportunity to observe the dialogical relationship at work (between exhibition makers and visitors) and exposed dynamics that would have otherwise remained unnoticed. With *BIQ* we saw that three conceptual knots (the tension between doing a celebratory versus an integration story; the thematic axis versus the chronological storyline; and the paucity of artefacts) corresponded to criticism visitors had about the exhibition. This is indicative of the visitors’ responsiveness to the exhibition’s physical characteristics and to procedural aspects informing the narrative. Alluding to the rationale behind certain of the exhibition team’s decisions (discussed in section 6.4.1) could have possibly furthered the visitors’ understanding about key exhibition themes. For instance, the influential comment made by the Ireland-based professor on the advisory committee—“I
live in a country where up to recently people killed each other in the streets!!! The real story here is, why you didn’t fight. How did you do it?”—would have constituted a compelling explanation as to why exhibition makers decided not to make the tensions between Irish and Quebecois of French origin more prevalent in B|Q. In the same way, indicating that the exhibition was “artefact light” due to the poverty of the early Irish settlers could have illuminated the story for some visitors.

Two other sets of data give weight to the idea of sharing the exhibition makers’ key negotiations with visitors. On the one hand, the presence of multiple criteria to assess the reliability of information in the exhibition indicates that visitors were attentive to aspects that were related but peripheral to the main story—i.e., the provenance of artefacts, the track record of the McCord Museum, the collaboration with the Irish community and with scholarly groups. This material supported their interpretation. The last set of data is found with the visitors’ responses to the interview question about resolving conflicted interpretations. The visitors’ enthusiasm for and interest in expressing their ideas on the subject suggest an appreciation for pursuing complex historical explorations.39

These three sets of data support an argument in favour of a museography that includes elements of the scaffolding and framing of the historical claim, that is, an exhibition environment where elements of design, graphic solutions and texts refer to the construction of the historical narrative. This is what I conceive as a self-conscious approach to historical interpretation and public history: a bi-focal museography that includes both procedural and substantive knowledge, one informing the other. The following section furthers this idea by discussing the implications of this study for museum research and practice.

8.2 Implications of this Study for Museum Research and Practice

The concept of bi-focal museography involves the adoption of an historical thinking pedagogy during the conception of the exhibition. This implies a team operating with a shared understanding of what “doing history” means for them and for the visitors who will be engaging with the exhibition. This is not an easy task. With the exception of history curators, most museum professionals involved in developing historical exhibitions do not have formal

39 The public’s interest in this question was also noted with a larger sample of respondents within the analysis of the Canadians and their Pasts survey (Seixas, Ercikan, & Gosselin, 2009).
training in history. Conversely, except for museum educators, very few professionals have formal training in education. Just as in the BIQ case, a typical exhibition team involved in a mid-to large-size exhibition project includes a curator, graphic and exhibit designers, a project manager, an exhibit fabricator and an educator, along with numerous community members and consultants who help produce and validate various aspects of the exhibition, from the research to the fabrication stage. This means that more non-historians than historians are involved in the process of historical interpretation, and that more non-educators than educators are involved in creating this learning space. Though the curator’s authority is still prominent in most museums, we have seen how significant decisions about graphic design, 3-D design, and educational strategies are still generated by other members whose understanding of history education will ultimately affect the final product. Discussing the exhibition themes and messages in terms of substantive and procedural historical knowledge with the team members renders tacit knowledge explicit and may facilitate a shared understanding of the interpretive and educational task of the exhibition team.

Education scholar Robert Bain’s thoughts on teaching students and history teachers are insightful in this regard (Bain, 2005). As he observes, it is not realistic to attempt to train students or teachers to become academic historians. In the same way, we cannot expect all museum staff (given their multidisciplinary academic and professional qualifications) to become professional historians or history educators. It is possible, however, to familiarize exhibition team members with the disciplinary perspective—this “unnatural act”, to use Samuel Wineburg’s expression (Wineburg, 2001). Through a consistent use of history-specific tools (procedural concepts such as historical significance or causes and consequences) and vocabulary (differentiating history from the past, memory from history), team members can acquire over time a history-specific culture. This shared lexicon among team members may increase coherence between the interpretive vision and the various physical attributes of the exhibitions, to create history-considerate exhibitions. This new repertory can be used to bridge interdisciplinary concerns over issues of education, history and design. This is not to suggest that any exhibition inspired by an historical thinking theoretical framework will automatically generate a more critical engagement with the past. Nor is it fair to claim that a traditional museum exhibition (based on memory history and a transmission model of education) could not solicit an active and critical response on the part of visitors. As demonstrated with the
analysis of the public reception of BIQ, visitors create their own experience, and as such, they choose their own terms of engagement with the exhibition. Adopting such a framework would signal the museum’s intention to create environments that support an investigative approach to historical content without imposing it. Doing so would also indicate a new attentiveness to visitors’ capacity to make sense of the past.

An exhibition team sharing a common culture of history education may be able to experiment with an historical thinking pedagogy. For instance, historians and educators could work together to resolve questions around new ways to emphasize the notion of continuity in a particular story, so that visitors do not get the impression that “everything has changed” between the present and a certain historical period. It is also possible to imagine designers recalibrating their design solutions to help visitors negotiate the tension between the familiar and the foreign past, so that visitors realize the striking differences between the frame of mind of historical actors and their own, while also appreciating a shared humanity with them.

The idea of calibrating procedural knowledge in museographic terms (in this case, the concept of historical perspective) could be expressed through the example of a display at a war museum that I recently visited. In it, visitors enter a reconstituted First World War trench. Without any written texts, this form of display provides a sense of scale, as well as a level of detail rarely discussed in history textbooks, such as the holes carved by soldiers for extra protection. It envelops the visitor with its dim light, sound effects, and walls of artificial dirt. Visitors can pretend they are soldiers by peeking at the enemy through a periscope and crouching beside mannequin soldiers. In another gallery of the same museum, a discreet film display consists of a series of small screens showing vintage medical film footage of soldiers suffering from various post-traumatic syndromes, such as uncontrolled shaking and the inability to keep their balance. The screens are small and flat on a wall. The film’s topic alludes to a less than romanticized aspect of the war. There is a physical and psychological distance between the visitors and the sick soldiers. Now let us imagine a reversed emphasis: the life-sized trench becomes a small model contained in a display case; the sick soldiers appear on a series of large screens on multiple walls surrounding the visitors. The impression of proximity with the historical events and actors would change and would likely affect the meaning derived from the experience. The capacity of the exhibition design to emphasize or de-emphasize the “closeness” of the past to visitors is significant. In this sense, historical thinking concepts may
help museum professionals articulate the learning experience they are creating—in this case, by manoeuvring between the dreadfulness of and fascination with war.

The idea is not to teach historical thinking concepts to visitors. Team members can discuss those concepts during the conceptual phase, such as in the example above. Those concepts can also become an explicit part of the exhibition narrative. If, for instance, an exhibition team wants to emphasize the polysemic nature of objects and the use of objects-as-evidence in making historical claims, a display could consist of a row of artefacts with short text panels for each object, telling a different story on each side of the row. Each side would have a different interpretation using the same objects. In notifying the public that each side has competing but valid stories, the museum could stimulate visitors to think about what makes these two stories different.

I am not suggesting that historical thinking concepts become the driving force behind all exhibition projects. I do think that once conversant with them, an exhibition team can generate new interplays between their public, the collections and history. For example, in an historical storyline, one display could allude to the notion of selection inherent in the interpretive work. Here are five objects that could have expressed and illustrated this event. *We selected this one because of reasons x, y, z. Which one would you have chosen?* Such a display simultaneously conveys that history is open to interpretation, that it involves a selection process based on criteria. That process may slightly interrupt the flow of the story, but it is not tangential. The idea is to create historical narratives that are *porous*, as a way to invite visitors more explicitly to engage in building their interpretations.

Familiarity with what it means to think historically can enlarge the conceptual repertory of museum staff; this in turn may change the ways they tell stories in the exhibition space and ultimately influence the ways their audience considers history. This pedagogical approach would not prevent museums from providing enjoyable experiences. In fact, it would enhance the museum’s ability to produce exhibitions that are compelling, poetic and inspiring—and, when the topic allows, whimsical and playful.

We can relate this to museums’ motivation for promotion historical thinking. The degree to which such a framework would be of interest to museums has to do with how they envision their social and educational role. Though the focus of this text has been on the potential uses of historical thinking concepts in museums, I believe strongly that a museum’s
commitment to promoting intellectual curiosity through disciplinary knowledge is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means for museums to achieve social relevance. The museum’s aim to communicate specific forms of knowledge—in this case, history—has to do with providing the public with a set of common references that help people adapt, understand and critically engage with the dramatic social transformations shaping their lives. Historical knowledge is one way to contextualize these transformations and envision our future.

My study is part of an ongoing conversation in the museum field about the kind of storytellers museums ought to be and for whom. More often now, we are hearing that a museum should be a “house of critical thinking” (Mastai, 2006, p. 12), a place that supports learning by “enabling the sifting and judging of useful material” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006, p. 267). Museums say they want to “help individuals connect with generations, cultures and communities, inspiring them to become informed, open-minded and engaged citizens.” The act of connecting past and present means setting the stage, not to determine history’s relevance for visitors, but rather to create opportunities that enable them to establish relevance between the past and their own lives.

Going back to Jörn Rüsen’s work, we recall that his disciplinary matrix insists that the function of historical interpretations is to provide an orientation for the present and the future, one that has moral implications. In other words, our ability to understand the past affects our individual and collective course of actions. I want to connect this orientation function with the idea of wayfinding used by exhibition designers. Wayfinders are strategic elements in the exhibition that help visitors navigate spatially during their visit. They are “visual, tactile, auditory clues or devices that assist visitors in orienting themselves within museum facilities and surroundings, inform the audience of their options and help locate destinations” (Dean, 1994, p. 166). As a way to guide visitors during their historical explorations, museums could provide “historical wayfinders” to give options to visitors with various levels of historical understanding to engage more critically with historical accounts. As in Dean’s definition, these conceptual wayfinders could orient visitors about their surroundings (right here, right now, with this exhibition team, this is our interpretation of what happened, based on this set of questions and criteria), inform them of their options (you can engage with this historical account in many ways), and help locate destinations (What are the implications of these past
actions on our lives today? Do they still influence our decisions today, and do we wish to revise these decisions?).

If museums are to deserve the public trust and their status as sites of history education, they ought to create environments that support a critical engagement with historical narratives.

8.3 Critical Museology and Future Research

As demonstrated in section 3.4, historical thinking pedagogy intersects with key ideas underpinning critical museology. We saw in chapter 2 how critical museology interrogates museum traditions and advocates a reflexive practice to transform the museum into a more inclusive, collaborative and democratic public space. However, I argued that critical museology is often more preoccupied with knowledge representation than with the public understanding of these new practices. I suggest that an historical thinking pedagogy may be able to attend to this gap. It is attentive to both the constructive nature of historical narratives in the museum, and to visitor meaning-making, and as such, this pedagogy can support the agenda of critical museology in novel ways.

Critical museology encourages multi-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches as a way to displace positivist epistemologies and address the complexity of topical issues and social phenomena. As a result, historical interpretations in exhibitions have often come to play an explanatory role within a broader conversation involving other fields of study. It will be important to assess how the two frameworks used in this research can be adapted to respond to exhibitions involving multiple disciplines. Conversely, it will be exciting to explore how exhibition makers and visitors resort to historical thinking to make sense of exhibitions involving artistic and scientific phenomena.

I concur with Silverman and O’Neill that the museum discourse that sets up an opposition between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches is unhelpful (Silverman & O'Neill, 2004). Strict adherence to one set of disciplinary interpretive strategies can be limiting when creating exhibitions and other programs. Interdisciplinary approaches to exploring questions, however, do imply familiarity and engagement with individual fields. In other words, it is more productive to think in terms of disciplinary fields as both autonomous and interconnected. For that reason, fostering a working environment at the museum that is
“history-considerate”, to use Bain’s expression, should be viewed as supporting the idea of interdisciplinarity.

8.4 Limitations of Research

In this section I identify some limitations of the study and suggest avenues of research that could address them.

The case study featured an exhibition already open to the public. Its team had not worked with either Rüsen’s matrix or the historical thinking concepts framework when elaborating it. As a result, the study does not allow us to determine how best to apply these frameworks to foster more critical engagement with history on the part of exhibition makers and visitors. Hence, examining the process of implementing these two frameworks within the context of exhibition development constitutes a logical next step for a research program concerned with the appropriation of an historical thinking pedagogy in a museum setting. An action research methodology may be particularly well suited to meet this goal. This approach to research is grounded in practice and encourages the exploration of new courses of actions to support communities of practice in improving and renewing their performance. It also promotes a critical reflection throughout the entire implementation process (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Sherman & Torbert, 2000). The use of the five questions inspired by Rüsen’s matrix could become the basis of exhibition team discussions in the early phases of the project. The questions inspired by the six historical thinking concepts could be applied to revisit aspects of the exhibition’s storyline at a fully formed but not finalized stage. These questions could also structure a front-end visitor study to qualify the visitors’ initial understanding and assumptions about an historical topic. They could also form the basis of a formative evaluation to assess the visitors’ understanding of design solutions before undertaking fabrication.

Secondly, the data representation focused on identifying the manifestation and articulation of the “framework elements”—the five elements of Rüsen’s matrix and the six dimensions of historical thinking—in the participants’ interviews. To achieve this, the analysis reported on salient aspects of individual experiences as they related to the frameworks, but in the process lost some of the texture of individual experiences. Conducting the same analysis by investigating the journey of one exhibition maker and one visitor would provide interesting material to contrast with the results of this study. Conversely, conducting a quantitative study
involving hundreds of visitors would allow us to determine trends and frequencies related to the use of the historical thinking concepts.

Finally, this case study was based on a single exhibition, to facilitate in-depth observations on multiple museum professionals and visitors. A multi-case study contrasting a number of historical exhibitions, or a comparative study featuring the articulation of historical thinking in one history-based and one non-history-based exhibition, would provide data to determine how different exhibition environments solicit different historical thinking responses.

8.5 Epilogue

My doctoral research was an exploration into the realm of history education, motivated by a desire to better understand and ultimately take part in the changing roles of the museum in contemporary culture.

The literature reviews in both museum studies and history education made salient the convergence of ideas between the principles underpinning historical thinking pedagogy, and the museum studies discourse on exhibitions as meaning-making environments and on critical museology. I made the case that museum analysts can draw from this pedagogy to further their understanding of the museum exhibition’s potential to promote a critical engagement with stories about the past. Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix and the historical thinking concepts played a central role in pursuing this inquiry. BIQ became instrumental in this investigation, in that it provided an opportune stage (the exhibition and its larger context of production) and performers (the makers and visitors) with which to apply these frameworks to a museum reality.

The use of two frameworks for assessing the experience of both exhibition makers and visitors made apparent that more non-historians than historians practice history. Historical thinking is deeply connected to actions in the present and future, whether it is used for designing the introductory zone of an exhibition or for striking up an inspired conversation with a friend after a visit. A brief look into the work of prominent Italian architect Marco Casamonti is helpful in the context of this conversation. Casamonti produced numerous international award-winning projects. His work, involving the building of public institutions, government buildings, and private businesses, is informed by both transnational sensibilities

40 See http://www.archea.it/home.html.
and regional histories. He explains how the conceptual phase of his architectural projects always involves understanding the places and people associated with his projects. Working closely with local historians, he familiarizes himself with significant periods and events, examines the characteristics of local material culture, and establishes elements of continuity and change between historical and contemporary culture (Casamonti, 2011). His historical knowledge becomes “construction material”, not to mimic the past but to create new forms that speak deeply of identity and place. Nurturing this form of “historical resourcefulness” in the exhibition space while sharing historical narratives in the museum would be an exciting new task for museums. The adoption of an historical thinking pedagogy by museums is a means to perform this role.

Museum visits are small events in people’s lives. And yet, when we multiply these brief meaning-making moments by millions of visits to Canadian institutions annually, and consider the privileged place museums hold in our cultural imagination as well as the considerable resources committed to create public programs, we can see that museums continue to hold a significant role as cultural markers in contemporary society. Museums are dynamic cultural agencies, having to negotiate political pressures and public expectations while repositioning themselves in relation to highly engaging and accessible historical sources and resources on the Web. The aesthetic and immersive quality of the exhibition environment, as well as the capacity to nurture social exchange and enchantment, remain potent and complementary attributes of the museum experience. Yet a chorus of blogs, journals and professional associations have identified a pressing need to rethink museums’ engagement with their publics. A research group recently examined emerging technologies for their potential impact on and use in education and interpretation within the museum environment (Johnson, Witchey, Smith, Levine, & Haywood, 2010). They reiterated that traditional museology based on an informational and lecturing model of communication might not be sustainable with the public’s emerging needs and interests for driving their experience at the museum. They concluded that “[m]ore important to today’s audiences is advice on how to find, interpret, and make their own connections with collections and ideas” (p. 4). Creating porous narratives that highlight key decisions of exhibition makers, emphasizing that museum productions are open to interpretation, and making apparent the agency of the visitor as historical interpreter and
actor can contribute to rebuilding a more democratic and reciprocal relationship between the museum and its publics.
References


Appendix A: Permission to Conduct Research at the Museum

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 5, 2009

To XXX XXXXXX, Director of Collections Research and Programs

This is a request for permission to conduct research in the McCord Museum of Canadian History and more specifically on the exhibition titled Being Irish O’Quebec/Irlandais au Quebec. I am simultaneously applying for approval for this research from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, and will send you their approval as soon as it is available.

Researcher name: Viviane Gosselin, doctoral student supervised by Dr. Peter Seixas
Researcher e-mail: xxxxxxxx

Phone number: 604 XXX XXX

Study Completion date:
Data gathering: June 2009
Analysis and writing, July-September 2009

Study Title:
Historical Thinking in the Museum

Target Study group:
From the public reception end: Adult visitors who viewed Irish O’Quebec
From the exhibition production end: Key players (museum staff and contractors) who worked on the development of Irish O’Quebec

I plan to submit the result of this study to the McCord Museum of Canadian History staff and Irish O’Quebec exhibition team in the fall of 2009.

Sincerely,

Viviane Gosselin
STUDY PURPOSE AND QUESTION:
The purpose of this study is to examine how exhibitions stimulate the historical thinking of individuals involved in producing and visiting exhibitions. It will attempt to grasp how people (visitors and exhibition team members) make sense of the exhibition topic and themes. This research will employ an interdisciplinary approach drawing from the work museum studies theorists and from a conceptual framework drawn from recent history education scholarship. Particular attention will be given to six concepts underpinning historical thinking which are at play during any encounter with the past, whether the learner is a novice or expert historian. To think historically means to consider history as consisting of accounts that must be constructed, interpreted and assessed. It is also about connecting the interpreted past with present-day realities; putting in relation how things used to be with why things are the way they are now, to eventually decide what shape we want our future to hold. The research design is inspired by the work of museum scholars specializing in studying the learning impact of museum exhibitions. Thus the research question is: To what extent can the concepts of historical thinking be a useful framework in understanding and assessing the meaning-making of the various actors involved in the “exhibitionary performance” (exhibition production and public reception) in the history museum? The research will take the form of a qualitative case study and focus on one temporary historical exhibition in which visitors (n=20) and exhibition team members will be interviewed. The selected case is the exhibition titled “Being Irish O’Quebec/Irlandais O’Québec” presented at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal from March 20, 2009 to April 4, 2010.

STUDY BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY: An extensive review of current museum education literature confirmed that exhibition production and reception are rarely discussed dialogically in analyses concerned with the social and educational impact of museums. In addition, the literature review has identified several important and interrelated gaps in the museum literature: a) the paucity of visitor studies conducted in history museums and historic sites; b) the lack of theoretical framework assessing specifically how people make sense of the past in/through the exhibition (whether they are visitors or exhibition producers); c) the paucity of research examining the exhibition design’s ability (or lack of) to foster historical thinking. This study will be addressing these identified gaps through a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis located within the interpretivist tradition and will carry out the following activities: a) in-depth/semi-structured interviewing with both visitors and exhibit team members using two different sets of questionnaires; b) employing the concepts of historical thinking as central framework to the study of participants meaning-making strategies and outcome; c) interviewing study participants in the exhibition space to examine how visitors make use of the exhibition’s physical environment to interpret the historical topic and how staff makes use of the same environment to recount the making of the exhibition. This study is not an “exhibition evaluation” seeking to establish if the exhibition fails or succeeds in communicating specific messages. The study’s aim is to propose an enlarged definition of the museum exhibition as “meaning-making” environment by exploring how it mobilizes the historical consciousness of multiple actors (visitors and exhibition makers) with different and yet at times, convergent roles.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
- To explore the heuristic potential of a historical thinking framework to study exhibition production and reception.
- To contribute to an emergent body of museum research concerned with reviewing methodological approaches to the study of museum productions;
- To stimulate new debates and museum practice concerned with the participation of history museums in contemporary culture

HYPOTHESIS:
The researchers believe that the specific use of historical learning concepts to interpret both visitor and exhibit team members’ responses will generate new insights into a) visitor’s learning experience in history museums and b) museum exhibition makers’ interpretative work.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: The research design has two major components: the first component consists of two sets of interviews with the visitors. The initial semi-structured interview with individual visitors will be recorded and conducted in the exhibition space (approximately 30 minutes) and the second interviews will be conducted over the phone three weeks after the museum visit (approximately 20 minutes). The second part of the study will be a semi-structured, recorded interview with individual members of the exhibition team (approximately 30-40 minutes).

RECRUITING METHOD:
a) Recruiting method for visitor participant: the researcher will be conducting all interviews. The researcher will approach visitors exiting the exhibition under study, in a two-stage manner. First she will introduce herself and give a short description of her work. If the visitor is willing to hear more, she then describes the study and its participation requirements in greater depth. If the visitor is still willing to participate, the researcher give the visitor a consent form and have it signed. To increase the reliability of the data collected, the researcher will approach every third adult visitor (individual or small groups of 2 or 3 adults may be interviewed as a unit) exiting the exhibition, after the completion of an interview.

b) Recruiting method for exhibition team participant: The researcher will send an invitation to participate in the study through the list-serve provided by the Mc Cord Museum of Canadian History. The electronic message will provide a brief description of the project and explain the nature of their participation. It will underline that team members should not feel obligated to participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Visitor’s identities will be kept strictly confidential. Each visitor will be assigned a research code number. All research materials will be identified only by code number: no research files will include any visitor’s names. The recorded interviews
and transcripts, and telephone interview notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Visitors will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. In the study reports and publications, members of the exhibition team will be referred to by their title and not by their name. Because the study will include an in-depth description of the exhibition and museum profile, it will be impossible to keep the identity of participating museum professionals and contractors entirely confidential. Participating museum professionals will be made aware of this aspect in the initial invitation to participate and in the consent form.

RESEARCHER BACKGROUND:
Viviane Gosselin is a SSHRC-CGS recipient and doctoral student at the University of British Columbia at the Faculty of Education. She has an academic design background and has produced and led several exhibition teams in museums for the past fifteen years while serving on peer review committees to identify the best practices in Canadian museums (Canadian Museum Association and Canadian Heritage). BodyWorks II an exhibition project she led at Science World in Vancouver, was awarded best science exhibition in Canada for 2007 by the Canadian Association of Science Centres. She is currently the Program Coordinator of THEN/HIER (The History Education Network). She also works with Dr Peter Seixas in analyzing the data of a national survey and pan-Canadian research project titled Canadians and Their Pasts. She was recently invited to four European conferences to discuss her research work (Leicester & Oslo, 2007; Stockholm & Oslo, 2008). She is currently working with the Museum Studies program at the University of Leicester (UK) co-editing a book on national museums to be published by Routledge in 2010. Her doctoral research supervisor is Dr. Peter Seixas.

Peter Seixas is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Education at the University of British Columbia and Director of the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness (www.cshc.ubc.ca). He taught high school social studies (mostly in Vancouver) for 15 years and earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of California at Los Angeles. He is editor of Theorizing Historical Consciousness (University of Toronto Press, 1994), and co-editor, with Peter Stearns and Sam Wineburg, of Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives (New York University Press, 2000) and author of many journal articles on history education.
Appendix B: Recruiting Advertising For Exhibition Makers

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 6, 2009

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-8104

INVITATION EN FRANÇAIS SUIT:

INVITATION for the BEING IRISH O’QUEBEC EXHIBITION TEAM MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

HISTORICAL THINKING IN THE MUSEUM-
Case study: Being Irish O’Québec

We are currently conducting a study on the exhibition Being Irish O’Québec. We are soliciting the participation of members of the exhibition team, whether staff members or contractors.

Principal Investigator: Peter Seixas, Associate Professor, Dept. of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, UBC
Co-Investigator: Viviane Gosselin, doctoral student, Dept. of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, UBC

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to examine how exhibitions stimulate the historical thinking of individuals involved in both producing and visiting exhibitions. It will attempt to grasp how people (visitors and exhibition team members) make sense of the exhibition topic and themes. This study will contribute to research in museum education.

Participants: Any staff and contractor that was considered a key member of the production team (curator, researcher, educator, designer, project manager) of Being Irish O’Québec exhibition at the McCord Museum of Canadian History.

Research Procedures: The study is seeking voluntary exhibition team member participants who are willing to discuss their specific contribution to the exhibition and their thoughts on visitor response and the interpretive solutions developed by the team. The interview will last between 30 and 40 minutes. All interviews will be administered in a relaxed conversational manner and audio taped for subsequent data analysis.

When: Interviews and discussions will be conducted at the McCord Museum of Canadian History or your office (your choice) between June 4 to June 16, 2009

If you are interested volunteering in this study or desire further information please contact:
Viviane Gosselin
email: xxxxxxxxxx
UBC Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

Gosselin, 06/04/2009

Page 1 of 2
INVITATION AUX MEMBRES DE L’ÉQUIPE D’EXPOSITION IRLANDAIS O’QUEBEC- A PARTICIPER A UN PROJET DE RECHERCHE

LA PENSEE HISTORIQUE AU MUSEE-
Étude de Cas : Irlandais O’Québec

Nous entreprenons présentement une étude sur l’exposition Irlandais O’Québec. Nous sollicitons la participation des membres de l’équipe.

Chercheur principal : Peter Seixas, professeur et titulaire de chaire de recherche du Canada Département de programmes de cours et de pédagogie, UBC

Chercheure associée et chargée de l’étude : Viviane Gosselin, étudiante au doctorat, faculté d’éducation, UBC

Adresse courriel de la chercheure : vivianeg@interchange.ubc.ca
Numéro de téléphone : 604 xxx xxxx

But de l’étude:
Cette étude vise à examiner comment les expositions stimulent la réflexion historique de personnes qui participent à la réalisation d’expositions et de personnes qui les visitent. L’étude tentera de saisir comment les gens (visiteurs et membres de l’équipe chargée d’une exposition) comprennent le sujet et les thèmes d’une exposition. Cette recherche contribuera à la recherche en éducation muséale.

Participants: Tout membre du personnel ou contractuel ayant été considéré comme membre clé de l’équipe de production (conservateur, chercheur, éducateur, designer, chargée de projet) d’Irlandais O’Québec au Musée McCord d’histoire canadienne.

Méthodes de collecte de données
Nous recherchons la participation bénévole et volontaire des membres de l’équipe qui sont prêts a discuter de leur expérience reliée a la production de l’exposition Irlandais au Québec présenté au Musée McCord d’histoire canadienne. La collecte de données s’effectuera surtout durant une entrevue et correspondances électroniques si nécessaire. Il s’agira d’une rencontre d’une durée d’environ 30 a 40 minutes pour situer votre contribution a l’intérieur de ce projet, votre perspective sur le public et la muséographie développée par l’équipe. L’entrevue sera enregistrée (enregistrement sonore) pour permettre l’analyse des données.

Quand : Entrevues et discussions prendront place au Musée McCord d’histoire canadienne ou votre bureau (au choix) entre le 5 et 16 juin, 2009.

Si vous êtes intéressés à participer a cette étude, ou désirez des renseignements supplémentaires, veuillez nous contacter :

Viviane Gosselin
courriel : xxxxxxxxxx
UBC Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

Gosselin, 06/04/2009
Appendix C: Recruiting Script for Museum Visitors

Recruiting (English/French) Script For Visitor Participation

Historical Thinking in the Museum Study @ the McCord Museum

Bonjour, Hello my name is Viviane Gosselin.
[if response in English, continue conversation in English, if response if French, continue in French]

ENGLISH SCRIPT:
I am a doctoral student at the faculty of education at UBC and I am conducting a visitor study with the exhibition Irish O’Quebec. Have you visited the exhibition?

If yes, pursue

I am looking for research participants, would you have a minute so I can explain the research project?

The purpose of the study is to understand how people make sense of the past in history museums. The visitor study consists of two interviews. The first one takes place in the exhibition where I ask the participant to discuss how they understand or connect with their favorite sections of the exhibition. This is not a test to know how much people learned from the exhibition. The second interview is a telephone interview that will take place 3 weeks after the visit. This will be a short conversation (20 minute max) to see if you have further thoughts about the exhibition. At any time of the study, you may decide to withdraw from the study without consequence.

Would you be interested in participating in this study?

If so, hand out the consent form.

(Upon Accepting) As a token of our appreciation, upon the completion of your first interview, you will receive two complimentary passes for the McCord Museum or receive a reimbursement for one adult admission. Thank you so much!

FRENCH SCRIPT:
Je suis étudiante au doctorat à la faculté d’éducation de l’Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Je suis responsable d’une étude des visiteurs de l’exposition Irlandais O’Québec. Avez-vous visité l’exposition?

Si oui, je poursuis la conversation.

Je suis à la recherche de participants, auriez-vous une minute pour que je vous explique mon projet de recherche?

Version 1- Recruiting Script for McCord Exhibition Visitors English and French – Created 06/04/2009 Page 1 of 2
Le but de ma recherche est d’étudier comment les gens comprennent le passé dans les musées d’histoire. L’étude avec le visiteur consiste en deux entrevues. La première se déroule dans l’exposition. Je demande aux participants de parler des aspects de l’exposition qui leur a plu particulièrement. Je n’évalue pas la quantité des apprentissages. Ce n’est pas un test pour connaître la quantité d’information dont vous vous souvenez. La deuxième entrevue est une conversation téléphonique de 20 minutes maximum, pour voir si vous avez réfléchi à l’exposition quelques semaines après votre visite au musée. En n’importe quel temps vous pouvez vous retirer de l’étude sans aucune conséquence. Seriez-vous intéressé à participer à notre étude?

*Si le visiteur accepte, je présente le formulaire de consentement.*

Pour vous remercier de votre participation, nous vous remettrons deux billets d’entrée gratuite au musée ou un remboursement de votre billet d’entrée à la fin de cette première entrevue. MERCI !
Appendix D: Consent Form for Exhibition Makers

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 6, 2009
Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-8104

Consent Form

Exhibit Team Member Study Participant

*Historical Thinking In The Museum*
*Case Study: Being Irish in Quebec*
*At the McCord Museum of Canadian History*

Principal Investigator: Peter Seixas
Professor and Canada Research Chair
Dept. of Curriculum and Pedagogy
Faculty of Education, UBC

Co-Investigator: Viviane Gosselin,
doctoral student, Dept. of Curriculum and
Pedagogy
Faculty of Education, UBC

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to examine how exhibitions stimulate the historical
testing of individuals involved in both producing and visiting exhibitions. It will
attempt to grasp how people (visitors and exhibition team members) make sense of
the exhibition topic and themes. This study will contribute to research in museum
education.

Data Collection Procedures:
You have been invited to participate in this study because you have been a key
player in the production of the exhibition titled *Being Irish in Quebec*
presented at
the McCord of Canadian history in Montreal and are willing to share your thoughts
on the making of the exhibition. Data collection in relation to you will consist of
one interview. It will be a 30 to 40 minute face-to-face interview concerning your
specific contribution to the exhibition and your thoughts on visitor response and the
interpreting solutions developed by the team. This interview will be administered in
a relaxed conversational manner and audio taped for subsequent data analysis.

Confidentiality:
In the study reports and publications, members of the exhibition team will be
referred to by their title or simply “a team member” and not by their name. Because
the study will include a detailed description of the exhibition and museum profile,
it will be impossible to keep the identity of participating museum professionals
entirely confidential. In addition, we may use some of your verbatim comments to
elucidate the findings of the study in forums such as scholarly conferences,
websites about the study and journal articles. The researcher will be sending you a
copy of your interview transcript. You will be able to remove section of it if you
feel it is needed.
Inquiries
Questions related to this study are welcome at any time; please direct them to:
Viviane Gosselin, Education Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, University of
British Columbia,
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC. V6T1Z4 CANADA.
Telephone (604) 822 4331,
Fax (604) 822 4714, e-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Freedom of consent
Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without consequence.

Name: _____________________________________________________________

1. The data collection procedures involved in this study have been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this project and my involvement.

2. I acknowledge that:
   • The confidentiality of the data collected will be safeguarded;
   • My identity will remain anonymous in the dissemination of the study’s findings and will be made known only to the principal researcher and the study’s research assistant(s);
   • The study is for the purpose of research and not for treatment;
   • I have been informed that I am free to decline to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without consequence;
   • I do not waive any of my legal rights under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of British Columbia (http://oipcbc.org) by signing this consent form;
   • If I have any concerns about the treatment I received or my rights as a research participant I may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance, e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.
   • I have been given a copy of this consent form.

3. With my anonymity preserved by use of a the term “a team member”, I consent to the use of the following in the dissemination of the research findings of the study:
   • Verbatim quotation of sections of my interview(s) in publications;

4. I consent to my participation in the study.

Signature: ___________________________   Date:______________
Appendix E: Consent Form for Visitors

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 6, 2009
Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-8104

Consent Form

For Visitor Study Participant
Historical Thinking In The Museum
Case Study: Irish O’Québec
at the McCord Museum of Canadian History

Principal Investigator: Peter Seixas Professor and Canada Research Chair
Dept. of Curriculum and Pedagogy Faculty of Education, UBC

Co-Investigator: Viviane Gosselin, doctoral student, Dept. of Curriculum and Pedagogy
Faculty of Education, UBC

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to examine how exhibitions stimulate the historical thinking of
individuals involved in both producing and visiting exhibitions. It will attempt to grasp how
people (visitors and exhibition team members) make sense of the exhibition topic and
themes. This study will contribute to research in museum education

Data Collection Procedures:
You have been invited to participate in this study because you have visited the exhibition
titled Irish O’Québec presented at the McCord Museum of Canadian History and are
willing to share your impression of the exhibition. Data collection in relation to you will
consist of two interviews: the first will take place upon signing the consent form. It will be
a 20 to 30 minute face-to-face interview concerning your impression and interpretation of
the exhibition. During this time you will be asked to talk about your preferred parts of the
exhibition and their possible connections to your life. The second will be telephone
interview approximately 3 weeks after your visit where you will be ask to think about the
exhibition. This session will last 20 minutes. All interviews will be administered in a
relaxed conversational manner and audio taped for subsequent data analysis.

Confidentiality:
Data collected in this study remain confidential between the investigator and you. When
results of the study are published and disseminated we will ensure that data collected from
you remains anonymous. However, we may use some of your verbatim comments to
elucidate the findings of the study in forums such as scholarly conferences, web-sites about
the study and journal articles. In all cases your identity will be concealed by use of a
pseudonym.

Version 1- Consent Form for McCord Visitors– Created 06/04/2009 Page 1 of 2
Compensation:
Upon the completion of the first interview, you will receive two complementary passes or a reimbursement for one adult admission at the McCord Museum of Canadian History.

Inquiries:
Questions related to this study are welcome at any time; please direct them to:
Viviane Gosselin, Education Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, University of British Columbia,
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC. V6T1Z4, CANADA. Telephone (604) 822.4331,
Fax (604) 822 4714, e-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Freedom of consent:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without consequence.

Name: _____________________________________________________________
Phone number: _______________________( for telephone interview only)
1. The data collection procedures involved in this study have been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this project and my involvement.

2. I acknowledge that:
• The confidentiality of the data collected will be safeguarded;
• My identity will remain anonymous in the dissemination of the study’s findings and will be made known only to the principal researcher and the study’s research assistant(s);
• I have been informed that I am free to decline to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without consequence;
• I do not waive any of my legal rights under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of British Columbia (http://oipc.bc.org) by signing this consent form;
• If I have any concerns about the treatment I received or my rights as a research participant I may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca
• I have been given a copy of this consent form.

3. With my anonymity preserved by use of a pseudonym, I consent to the use of the following in the dissemination of the research findings of the study:

• Verbatim quotation of sections of my interview(s) in publications;

4. I consent to my participation in the study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date:__________________________

Version 1- Consent Form For McCord Visitors– Created 06/04/2009
Appendix F: Interview Questionnaire for Exhibition Makers

Participant Number _____

HISTORICAL THINKING IN THE MUSEUM: STUDY
Interview Questionnaire for Exhibit Team Member
Irish O’Quebec
At the McCord Museum of Canadian History

Duration: 1hr

1. Could you describe your role in the exhibition team?

2. Had you worked with other team members prior to this exhibition project?

3. Could you briefly describe your professional experience?

4. Could you briefly describe your training (academic, trade school etc) ?

5. How would you define “history”?

6. Did you, as a team, have at any time a general discussion of what history is? If so, how was it discussed?

7. Based on your experience how do the members of the public best connect with or make sense of historical knowledge presented in exhibitions?

8. What was your knowledge of the exhibition topic before you started working on the project?

9. Could you take me through the various phases of the project from the beginning to end of your involvement?

10. What were the main goals and objectives of this exhibition project?

11. How did you choose the artefacts and themes in the exhibitions?

12. What were the main interpretive challenges for this exhibition project?

13. Do you recall aspects of exhibition development that required a lot of negotiations among team members i.e particular design concepts, problematic text content etc

14. How did the team imagine/conceptualize the exhibition public? (Attitudes and beliefs about the topic, itinerary, interpretive skills)

15. Is there one “big idea” about the topic that needed to be communicated to the public?

Any other important ideas conveyed by this exhibition?

Gosselin, 06/04/2009
16. How are each of these “big ideas” communicated in the exhibition space *(show me in the exhibition)*

17. In your mind, what are the most successful interpretive strategies in this exhibition *(show me in the exhibition)* and why?

18. In your opinion what are the least successful interpretive strategies in this exhibition *(show me)*, and why?

19. How would you situate this exhibition with other exhibition development practice in museums, Does it include any new ways of interpreting the past?

20. Do you think the stories in this exhibition are relevant to present-day realities (issues, socio-cultural problems) in Montreal? In Quebec? _______ If so, how: _______

21. Do you think this exhibition links/ties with Montreal, and or Quebec identity? ______ If so, how:

22. Do you think that the interpretive approach in *Irish O’Quebec* encourages its visitors to be critical consumers of history? (i.e question sources, make informed judgment etc), is it within the museum mandate to do so?
Appendix G: Interview Questionnaire for Museum Visitors – In situ

Participant Number ______

HISTORICAL THINKING IN THE MUSEUM
Interview Questionnaire for Visitor Participant
IRISH O’QUEBEC
At the MCCORD MUSEUM

Duration: 20-30 min
City of Residence: ________________________________
Telephone and/or Email: __________________________
Age Group: 18-25  26-35  36-45  46-55  56-65  66-75  76 +
Language Spoken at home: __________________________
Country of Origin: ________________________________
Country of Residence: ________________________________
Highest Level of Education: highschool  college  university (undergrad level)
university (graduate level) : __________________________

How often do you go to museums? __________________

What are your main reasons for visiting museums? _____________

Had you planned to see this particular exhibition? ______________

Approximately how much time did you spend in the exhibition? ______

1. What did you think of the exhibition?

2. How did the exhibition make you feel about the history of the Irish in Quebec?

3. Before visiting, how much did you know about Irish immigration in Quebec? How did you acquire this knowledge?

4. Could you show me objects, images, texts or displays that you found particularly interesting. Why do you think [selected objects/images/displays] struck you more than others?

5. Do you think it is important for the museum to present an exhibition on the history of Irish In Quebec?

6. Does this exhibition connect with your own life in any way?

7. How do you think this exhibition reflects Montreal today?
8. How reliable do you think the information presented in this exhibition is? Why?

9. Did any information in the exhibition surprise you?

10. Do you think the exhibition emphasizes changes, or ways that it has remained the same? Can you show me an example of each?

11. How would you describe the encounter of the Irish with people from other cultures when they first settle in Quebec?

12. Do you think there was one big idea behind this exhibition?

13. What was the most enjoyable aspect of the exhibition?

14. Are there parts of the exhibition that made Stanley Park looked very foreign to you?

15. Which source of historical information do you find must trustworthy? Books, Museums, Historic Sites, Teachers, Family? Could you explain your choice (Based on the Canadians and Their Past Survey question)

16. When people disagree about historical interpretations, how do you think they can find out what is most likely to have really happened? (Based on the Canadians and Their Past Survey question)
Appendix H: Questionnaire for Museum Visitors – Weeks After Visit

Participant Number ______

HISTORICAL THINKING IN THE MUSEUM: STUDY
Visitor Telephone Interview/Email Questionnaire for Irish O’ Quebec,
WEEKS AFTER THE VISIT

PREAMBLE: Hello my name is Viviane Gosselin from the University of British Columbia. A few weeks ago you took part in an interview at the McCord Museum of Canadian history as part of a visitor study. If you remember part of the study involved a telephone/email interview a few weeks after the study. Are you still willing to participate in this interview interview to discuss your thoughts on your visit at the museum? It will take no longer than 20 minutes.

1. What are the things you remember most clearly from your visit at the McCord Museum, and more specifically the exhibition Irish O’ Quebec?

2. After your visit, did you talk to anyone about the exhibition? If so, to whom? And where? What was the subject of the discussion?

3. Since you visited the Being Irish O’ Quebec exhibition, did you do or see something, in the news for example, that made you think about what you saw in the exhibition?

4. In the past three weeks, have you done anything as a result of this exhibition? Prompt if necessary, i.e bought/read a book, watched a documentary, visited

5. Anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for you time and for participating in this study.
Appendix I: Citation Method for Interview Excerpts

Explanations about interview excerpt citation method used for this study:

1. Example of citation with exhibition team interview transcript: **Designer BQ-5**

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<td>Role</td>
</tr>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Exhibition title: <em>Being Irish O'Quebec</em></td>
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2. Example of citation with visitor interview transcript: **P13 BQ-6**

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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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3. Example of citation with visitor follow-up interview transcript: **P13 BFQ-7**

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