A PARTNERSHIP OF PEOPLES: UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATION AT THE
MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

by

ELAINE RUTH SCHULTZ

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Abstract

The goals of museum collaboration are several, as are its intended beneficiaries. Assuming the success of the practice, local communities can gain the opportunity for self-representation and self-determination, museums can contribute to the creation and dissemination of new kinds of knowledge, and visitors can take home better understandings of cultural difference.

While these are the ideals of collaboration, they frequently go unrealized, in large part because, as research indicates, the visiting public fails to recognize the active involvement of communities at museums. This raises the question as to whether, in the absence of this audience awareness, museum collaboration can fully contribute to the realization of the tolerant society that it purports to support. The purpose of this research is to examine the role of museum visitors in achieving the goals of museum collaboration, as well as to consider why this public has difficulty recognizing community involvement at museums and how this may be remedied.

"A Partnership of Peoples" is an extensive renewal project underway at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), designed to facilitate collaborative research at the museum. It also serves as a case study for my consideration of the relationship between museums and the visiting public as a part of the collaborative process. By speaking with both MOA staff and visitors, I gained insight into the intended goals of the renewal project with respect to the museum's relationship with communities and the general public, as well as visitor understandings of collaboration.

With this fieldwork, in addition to a literature review, I found that the significance of collaboration rests in the personal interactions that occur between individuals. As the majority of visitors do not benefit from these interactions during their time at the museum, they are at a disadvantage when it comes to recognizing the engagement of others in the creation of displays or the facilitation of research. The task for museums, then, is to make contemporary peoples visible and audible, connecting objects to communities and increasing opportunities for visitors to experience these personal meanings.

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And, of course, many, many thanks to my parents, for absolutely everything.

Dedication

To the Problem Solvers. Keeping me problem free since 2006.

Introduction

The perceived social role of museums, as places for education and research, has shifted in recent years, with professionals striving to position their activities within moral frameworks of social inclusivity (Sandell 2002; Janes and Conaty 2005). This is part of a larger reaction against social exclusion, defined broadly as "the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society" (Walker 1997:8; quoted in Sandell 1998: 405). Museums are capable of countering social exclusion in two primary ways:

> On the one hand, museums are working as agents of social regeneration to deliver positive social outcomes to defined audiences, often through direct contact and ongoing project work with small groups of people who are considered to be disadvantaged, socially excluded, or living in poverty. Secondly, it is possible to identify museums acting as vehicles for broad social change by exploiting their potential to communicate, educate and influence public opinion… Although the two approaches involve different methodologies, both share a common thread: the goal is not simply to create access to the museum and develop a particular audience but rather the museum is viewed as having the potential and the capability to contribute directly towards the combating of the causes and symptoms of social exclusion (Sandell 1998: 412-413).

In combating exclusion, the museum must take on two tasks simultaneously: firstly, it must be an agent of empowerment for marginalized communities by providing them access to resources; secondly, it must serve as intermediary between local groups and mainstream society by acting as a point of contact between different peoples and by disseminating information. Individually, both of these tasks provide important services. However, I argue that it is only when the two work in concert – when the knowledge disseminated by museums includes information regarding its direct involvement with local communities – that museums can fully realize their potential in combating social exclusion.

Museum collaboration – the practice of working with communities in the production of knowledge through research and displays – bridges these two tasks, enabling communities to utilize collections for their own purposes while also producing something of benefit for the museum to share with others. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of museums in promoting social inclusion by exploring the relationship between collaboration as a means of reaching out to disadvantaged peoples and collaboration as a means of influencing public opinion. In particular, I consider the significance of visitor understandings of collaboration, using the renewal project of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British

Columbia (UBC) as a focal point. The section *Context* sets the background for the discussion to follow, introducing the relationship between museums and their visitors and discussing its implications for learning about collaboration. In this section I also link MOA's long-standing commitment to collaborative museology to its renewal project, setting the stage for my subsequent consideration of the museum's ability to communicate this dedication to its visitors. *Research Purpose, Methods, and Analysis* outlines my approach to my inquiry, based on visitor surveys as well as visitor and staff interviews.

Collaborative Theory and Learning in Museums examines the goals of collaboration, as expressed by museum associations internationally, and explores the challenges that visitors pose to these ideals. While museums play an important educational role in promoting cultural understanding, visitor learning there is informal and voluntary, with the result that museums are not always the best locations for delivering set messages. In *A Partnership of Peoples: Collaboration at the Museum of Anthropology*, I discuss MOA's relationship with its various audiences by providing a more detailed history of the renewal project and its objectives. The purpose of this project is expressed primarily in terms of "access," a word with several meanings that requires unpacking.

In *Three Collaborative Exhibits*, I consider the implications derived from previous museum collaborations and the effects they had on visitors. As described, visitors to two of these exhibits largely failed to recognize the collaborative nature of the displays despite the museums' efforts to communicate otherwise. By contrast, visitors to the third exhibit appear to have had less difficulty recognizing community voices, suggesting avenues for making collaboration visible.

Visitor Expectations at MOA and MOA's Expectations for Visitors returns to the topic of learning at museums, discussing what participants in my research learned about collaboration during their time at MOA, as well as the impact of my own intervention in their experiences there. Finally, the *Conclusion* of this thesis speculates on the future success of the renewal project in achieving its goals of collaboration, considers the various means available to museums for communicating collaboration, and recommends topics for future research.

Context

Museums and Communities, Museums and the General Public

As I will discuss throughout this paper, collaboration has become a critical concern for museums in recent decades. More than a shift in methodologies, the growing emphasis on collaboration represents a change in the self-awareness of museums, as they assess their social relevance in relation to their ability to respond to the needs of diverse communities. In particular, discussions of the practice focus on its ability to reach marginalized peoples, providing services to frequently under-served populations. Susan Krouse marks this transition, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the development of a "new museology," one that "seeks to be more inclusive, more democratic, more representative of diverse communities" (2006: 170).

> …[The] new museology represents a particularly anthropological approach to museum work, emphasizing the collaboration of museums and communities, the importance of multiple voices, and the recognition of the rights of peoples to be included in and consulted about the presentation and preservation of their heritage (ibid.).

As both a theoretical and a methodological orientation, this new museology reflects a rising sentiment that acknowledges the responsibility of museums to work with local peoples and to provide them with increased access to museum collections and greater opportunities for self-determination and self-representation. These goals of "determination" and "representation," however, indicate the complex relationships implicated in collaborative museology, referring to the need for actors in the process as well as an audience. Collaboration sits at the center of the museum's ability to instigate social change in part because the museum can be understood as a reflection of the society of which it is a part, promulgating images of who people are and who they want to be (Ames 1992: 15). By engaging in collaboration, museums can reflect back to society its own aspirations of cross-cultural understanding and inclusivity.

The literature on the relationship between museums, communities, and representations is extensive (for some of the most influential texts, see Karp and Lavine 1991, Karp et al. 1992, Ames 1992; more recent literature includes Simpson 2001, Sandell 2002, Peers and Brown 2003). A frequent critique of museums addressed in this literature relates to their history as colonial institutions, storing objects collected (or stolen) from subjugated peoples. As communities have begun, with increasing volume, to challenge the authority of museums to represent their cultures, people have come to question the continued political, social, and moral

relevance of conventional museum practices. Responses to these critiques, also a part of this museum literature, explore possibilities for the development of new standards of practice that would address these concerns.

Discussions of collaborative museology fit, then, into this debate over the politics of representation. Perhaps because collaboration can be seen as a response to those who challenge the right of museums to put other cultures on display, scholars who write about the practice tend to focus on the relationship that develops between museums and local communities (see, for example, Hedlund 1994, Holm and Pokotylo 1997, Ames 1999, Kahn 2000, Conaty 2003, Harrison 2005a). However, there is one other significant partner in the collaborative endeavor that is not always adequately discussed, and that is the general public, which I define here broadly as anyone not actively engaged in the museum's daily tasks.[1] Only where there is public recognition of community involvement at the museum can the full benefits of collaboration be realized:

> If museums are to be agents of social change…then they need to translate their contact work into effective means of replacing colonial representations of passive indigenous peoples with representations that make explicit the agency with which these peoples have always engaged their own and other worlds (Nicks 2003: 27).

Collaboration is an example of this active engagement, and it is therefore important to reveal this process to visitors; as my research below indicates, not doing so risks perpetuating the belief that voices of authority come only from the museum.

Acknowledgement of collaboration is also the basis for change because, "if recognized by museum-goers, collaboration within the museum can act as a metaphor for self-representation and self-determination in social, political, and economic spheres" (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 378). Alternatively, "since collaborative exhibits model an ideal that the partners would usually like the public to take home and apply in other social interactions, such silences [regarding the constructive pluralism of these exhibits] are, in the end, self-defeating" (Phillips 2003: 166). It is significant, then, that visitors remain largely unaware of collaboration (as I will discuss below), even as it is becoming a normative practice for museums with community-based collections. For various reasons, visitors often do not recognize when exhibits are created

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[1] Several members of MOA's staff were careful to remind me that the museum serves many "publics," distinguished by any number of variables such as age, gender, social background, and education. For this reason, I am using a very broad definition of the term "general public" to refer simply to those people who are neither museum staff nor partnering with the museum on a specific project.

collaboratively, and, when they do, they are frequently ignorant of the social relevance of the process, thereby compromising the impact of the endeavor.

In acting as intermediary between its collaborators and its visitors, museums must make themselves into places that are comfortable and promote learning for both sides, negotiating in turn the needs or expectations of local communities and the needs or expectations of the general public. The nature of the relationships that communities and visitors develop with museums in the process of these negotiations, however, is entirely dissimilar, with great consequences to their results. Museum collaborations with communities involve prolonged, repeated interactions between individuals, whereas museum interactions with the public are short, often one-time affairs with little to no first-hand engagement between staff and visitors. As I will argue further on in this paper, it is during these personal interactions, whether between visitors and representatives of communities whose cultures are on display or visitors and other museum staff, that learning has the greatest opportunity to occur, as people navigate one another's perspectives and come to new understandings. These interactions aid in the communication of complex ideas, such as those relating to the practice and significance of museum collaboration. Thus, we find that the intended audience for these messages of collaboration is also the one least likely to engage in the processes that help convey them.

The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia
The major benefit of research undertaken in the new infrastructure will, then, be the improvement of social and cultural health in originating communities and the creation of respect and awareness in the wider society (MOA 2001: 10B).

Since its inception in 1949, the Museum of Anthropology, located in Vancouver, British Columbia on traditional Musqueam territory,[2] has made engagement with communities a priority (MOA Staff 7). Audrey and Harry Hawthorn, MOA's first curator and director respectively, built the museum on a foundation of "useful anthropology," defined as a discipline that serves the people being studied as well as the academy (Amaral 2004: 327). The Hawthorns, and subsequent MOA staff, applied this ideology through their consistent engagement with indigenous artists, such as Mungo Martin and Bill Reid, and their development of strong relationships with the Musqueam and other local communities. With the opening of its new building in 1976, MOA continued to expand its commitment to ideals of democratic access and community involvement at the museum, in particular through its innovative system of Visible

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[2] The Musqueam Band is one of the First Nations of British Columbia; its traditional territory includes much of what is now Vancouver and its surrounding areas, including UBC and MOA.

Storage, an open storage plan designed to make collections publicly accessible rather than kept behind scenes.

In process at the time of this writing, MOA has once again embarked on a project designed to enhance its ability to serve various communities. Officially entitled "A Partnership of Peoples" and more commonly referred to as "the renewal project," the plan is to create a unique infrastructure that will facilitate the production of new knowledge through the promotion of interdisciplinary and collaborative research (MOA 2001). Preparation for the project began in the late 1990s, with a planned completion date of early 2010. In its successful 2001 funding application to the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), MOA indicated the benefits of its proposed infrastructure, arguing for the generation of knowledge for its own sake as well as the promotion of inter-cultural understanding capable of contributing to the social and cultural health of Canada's various communities (ibid.: 3B). At the heart of the project are the Multiversity Galleries (MVG), also commonly referred to as the Research Centre (RC). The MVG are comprised of an updated version of MOA's Visible Storage as well as separate research rooms designated for Ethnography, Culturally Sensitive Artifacts, Ceramics, and Textiles. Areas separate from the MVG but related in purpose include suites for Archaeology Research, Community Research, and Research Services.

In addition to these physical spaces, interdisciplinary research will be fostered in a virtual space known as the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN). The RRN is an online site where object images and records from multiple institutions will be made available to indigenous peoples and other researchers alike. The RRN is being co-developed with three First Nation communities (Musqueam Indian Band, Stó:lō Nation/Tribal Council, and U'mista Cultural Society), while the MVG are being developed in consultation with these and other local communities, primarily from within British Columbia, thereby enabling the use of inclusive processes in the very creation of these physical and virtual infrastructures.[3]

The purpose of the renewal project extends far beyond the construction of a larger building or the development of an online database. "A Partnership of Peoples" represents the

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[3] It is important to distinguish processes of consultation from those of co-development and collaboration, as they each imply very different forms of relationships and structures of authority and, therefore, should not be confused. Nonetheless, while the primary topic of this paper is collaboration, I have chosen to include consultation in my discussion of MOA's renewal for the reason that it can and does contribute to the creation of relationships based on trust and respect that often are prerequisites for collaboration. Thus, consultation can be seen as a step in the process of collaboration.

next step in MOA's own history of working with communities, developing those relationships so that the museum can become more welcoming, more useful, and more accessible, in particular for those whose cultures are represented by the museum's collections. Accordingly, I believe that if MOA can disclose these relationships to its visitors, it has the potential to transform objects from relics of the past to items of significance to contemporary peoples, signaling that not only do their cultures still exist but also that they are active and contributing members of society.

A significant challenge to this potential, however, rests in the very nature of MOA's MVG and their collective use as a focal point for communicating collaborative practice. As an area for inspiring and conducting research, the MVG are intended as places for people to find their own meanings, with only limited interpretations provided (MOA Staff 12). While the purpose of museum collaboration is, in part, to encourage greater understanding of various communities and cultures, one objective of MOA's MVG is also to encourage visitors to be independently motivated in pursuing their own lines of inquiry (ibid.). This is both the strength and the burden of the space. Its purpose is to provide access to objects, resources, and, importantly, ideas – ideas regarding the histories and cultures of contemporary peoples, of different ways of viewing the world, and of the different ways in which people can engage with the museum. It is this last form of access that is the most significant when it comes to involving the general public in realizing the full benefits of museum collaboration. Yet, as studies on museum learning indicate (e.g. Leinhardt et al. 2002; Anderson et al. 2007), it is also the most difficult to achieve without the aid of human interactions that give meaning to the objects on display – something that visitors do not tend to experience. This leads me to my inquiry into the importance of making individuals as well as objects available to museum visitors, thereby maximizing opportunities for people to connect with one another.

Research Purpose, Methods, and Analysis

The purpose of this research is to consider the relationship between museums and visitors and its bearing on the goals of collaborative museology. In order to do so, I use the renewal project at the Museum of Anthropology as a case study. Robert E. Stake distinguishes between two research approaches utilizing case studies: the first is the intrinsic case study, where the aim of the research is to learn about a particular situation or program. Here, cases chosen for study are those that provide the greatest opportunity to learn (1995:3-4). The second is the instrumental case study, where a particular case is used to understand a more general research question or issue (ibid.). In intrinsic case studies, the case is dominant, whereas in instrumental case studies, the issues involved are dominant (ibid.: 16).

With its renewal project, MOA seeks to deepen its commitment to collaborative museology, to the idea of de-centering its authority and decolonizing knowledge by facilitating access to the museum and its collections. The project is unique in its size and scope, thereby recommending MOA as a site for an intrinsic case study, providing me with an opportunity to learn about the collaborative process as it occurred, the meaning of the project to the staff members involved, and its potential impact on visitor experiences. At the same time, several important secondary questions motivated my approach to understanding MOA's renewal project. These related to the assumed social benefits of museum collaboration as derived from literature on the subject, questions regarding the transparency of museum practice to the average visitor, the current conditioning of visitors in the ways they view and use museums, and the challenges that may arise in changing expectations and helping people to see museums as locations for working with marginalized communities. Thus, while my research utilizes an intrinsic case study in order to understand the meaning of MOA's renewal project as it relates to goals of collaborative museology, I have used an instrumental case study to illuminate broader issues for further inquiry into the ability of museums to communicate messages of collaboration and social change to the general public.

With visitor experience at the heart of my research question, engagement with MOA visitors was an integral part of my project. I spent approximately three weeks during February and March of 2008 within the public galleries of the Museum of Anthropology. There, I observed tours given by Volunteer Associates, as well as solicited visitors just before they left the museum to respond to a questionnaire regarding their knowledge of the renewal project. The purpose of speaking with visitors was to learn what they, as representatives of a general public

not professionally engaged in the museum world, could recognize of the collaborative practices in use at MOA. The visitors I targeted were all over the age of nineteen and spoke English, though not all were native speakers. I sought to speak with a range of people of various ages, male and female, who had come to the museum alone, with friends, or with families. In total, 31 visitors volunteered to answer my survey questions. I recorded their responses in an excel spreadsheet, a summary of which is provided in Appendix III.

The benefit of using surveys rested primarily in their brief nature; they did not require much commitment from people otherwise engaged in leisure activity. I found that visitors rarely volunteered for interviews when I solicited participants at the end of each tour I attended, whereas they rarely refused to answer my survey questions. Consequently, the surveys allowed me to reach a larger sample of people than I would have using interviews alone. More specifically, with these short surveys, consisting of approximately nineteen questions (available in Appendix II), my intention was to gain a general sense of the transparency of collaboration at MOA both as a whole and as a part of the renewal project.

The surveys alone, however, permitted only limited insight into individual backgrounds, interests, and experiences at the museum. For this reason, I persisted in seeking volunteers for interviews as well. My requests for participants following the museum tours were untargeted, whereas I requested interviews from select survey participants in order to achieve a degree of diversity in age and gender among my respondents. The table below provides a breakdown of interview participants according to age and gender:

Visitor Interviews: Gender	M: 4 F: 8
Visitor Interviews: Age	20s: 5 30s: 1 40s: 2 50s: 1 60 +: 3

Seven visitors completed both surveys and interviews, while five participated only in interviews, for a total of twelve visitor interviews. These longer, less structured conversations with visitors, each approximately half an hour in length, provided me with an opportunity to learn more about their individual expectations of the museum and their visit, what they knew about museum collaboration in general and at MOA in specific, where they felt community perspectives were visible in the museum, and what they believed MOA could do to make community voices more easily heard if they were not already.

It should be remembered that I conducted this fieldwork during a period of transition for the museum, after construction for the renewal project had begun but well before the new building and the MVG had opened. With many aspects of the renewal project still in the planning phase and not visible to visitors, it was inevitable that I would be unable to address the full impact of the project on visitor understandings. By speaking with members of MOA's staff, however, I was able to gain insight into what, from their perspectives, the project could or should be. Staff members also provided me with necessary background information regarding the history, process, and progress of the museum's renewal project. These interviews, all but one of which I conducted following the completion of my visitor interviews, afforded me an "insider's perspective" into the project, as well as a point of comparison between the experiences of those visiting the museum and the experiences of those working there. In total, I spoke with twelve museum personnel, including MOA's seven curators,[4] the director, the communications manager, the information manager, the designs/exhibits manager, and the design/productions manager.

Finally, while not formally a part of my fieldwork, my study was also greatly informed by my experiences working for two years at MOA as a research assistant on a grant entitled "Bridging Knowledge Communities." A part of the renewal project, this grant enabled MOA's curators to work with members of several indigenous communities of British Columbia on researching their collections and determining their display in the MVG. The work I did with MOA staff and community members as part of this grant provided me with a richer understanding of the renewal project and the processes of consultation and collaboration that it entailed, an understanding that I took with me during my thesis fieldwork.

Where individuals agreed, I recorded visitor and staff interviews for subsequent transcription. These transcripts were coded for relevant themes and tabulated in order to analyze topics most frequently discussed by research participants. Due to a lack of uniformity in the language with which people discussed the renewal project or their experiences visiting the museum, the task of coding was qualitative as well as quantitative in nature, based on my own interpretation of meanings.

Because I promised confidentiality to all people interviewed, in this paper I identify each visitor simply as "Visitor," and each museum staff member as "MOA Staff." Visitors and staff are further distinguished by numbers.

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[4] There is now an eighth curator at the Museum of Anthropology, who joined the staff just as I was completing my fieldwork, and whom I therefore did not interview.

Collaborative Theory and Learning in Museums

The Purpose of Museum Collaboration

As mentioned, museums are increasingly self-defined as institutions serving the communities from which their collections originate as well as society at large. Collaboration is identified as a significant practice in realizing this role, as is explicitly stated in section six of the International Council of Museums *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2006), establishing that "Museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve"[5] as a minimum standard of practice. With exhibition and representation, as well as education, at the center of museum activities, justifications for engaging with communities reflect two associated principles: 1) that the very act of collaboration benefits communities by providing opportunities for their self-empowerment and self-determination; and 2) that collaboration results in better representations of others, thus benefiting society at large by promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. These are ideas articulated globally, as evidenced by the three policy documents below, from three separate museum associations. Together, they indicate the ongoing commitment of museums to engage in collaboration as a form of social activism, and they reflect the belief that the relevance of collaboration extends beyond those immediately participating in the process.

In 1992, the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations came together and produced *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples* (Hill and Nicks 1992). Referred to more simply as the Task Force, this document sought to define the work necessary for museums and indigenous communities to unite as partners in representing Aboriginal history and culture. According to the Task Force, museums are implicated in communities' aspirations of self-determination, as collections are sources of learning, pride, and self-esteem for First Peoples. Furthermore, by showing these collections to the public, museums are able to educate society regarding the cultural contributions of Aboriginal peoples, thereby fostering respect for these communities. With this cooperation from museums, objects can be made to represent living, vibrant cultures (ibid.: section III. A.). Thus, we find an expression of the dual purpose of collaboration, as the development of equal partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous communities and institutions is intended for the purpose of improving public perceptions of indigenous peoples. Consequently, while the Task Force directs its recommendations towards establishing better relationships between

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[5] Available at http://icom.museum/ethics.html#section6; accessed 25 May 2008.

museums and First Peoples, its mission is "to develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations *to represent their histories and culture* in concert with cultural institutions" (ibid.: section I.; emphasis added).

In 1993, in purposeful conjunction with the International Year of Indigenous People, the Council of Australian Museum Associations (CAMA) launched the policy paper, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: policies for museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. This paper became the flagship policy for Museums Australia Inc., a united professional association for Australian museums formed the following year. *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* was a "landmark document at the time," clearly articulating the self-defined role of museums and galleries in creating relationships of respect and cooperation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Museums Australia 2005: Preamble). Specifically, the document asserted that "museums support the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination in respect of cultural heritage matters" (CAMA 1993: Principles). It also promised that

> Museums will actively promote recognition of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in their varied forms and recognise the full range of cultural activities in programs regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures must be presented as vital, living, diverse and changing (ibid.: Detailed Policy 4.4).

Similar to the Task Force, the CAMA affirmed Aboriginal rights to self-determination in conjunction with the goal of promoting better understandings of these cultures among non-Aboriginal Australians.

In 2000, Museums Australia commissioned a review of *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* in order to determine its impact on Australian museum and gallery practices. This was in preparation for a revised document, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*. Completed in 2005, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities* reaffirmed the association's commitment to relationships with indigenous peoples while reflecting the progress that had occurred in the field since 1993 (Museums Australia 2005: Preamble).[6]

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[6] This progress included not only changes within Australian museum structures and practices, but wider social movements as well. Examples of factors that influenced *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities* include the realization of Native Title legislation that came into effect 1 January 1994, and the publication of the guide *Our Culture our Future: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights* in 1998 (Museums Australia 2005: Preamble).

The year 2000 also saw the Policy Guidance on social inclusion, *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*, released by the United Kingdom's Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The premise of this document is that

> Museums and galleries... can play a role in generating social change by engaging with and empowering people to determine their place in the world, educate themselves to achieve their own potential, play a full part in society and contribute to reforming it in the future (DCMS 2000; quoted in GLLAM 2000: 23).

In response, the Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) – a network of 120 museums and art galleries located in England, Scotland and Wales – issued its own report, *Museums and Social Inclusion*, validating the policies of the DCMS by affirming that "Museums and galleries can, and have played a significant role in combating social exclusion" (GLLAM 2000: 5). GLLAM further argues that

> …museums can not only tackle the four widely recognised key indicators linked to exclusion (health, crime, unemployment and education) but can also play a wider, and even, unique role in tackling disadvantage, inequality and discrimination (ibid.: 8).

The report also asserts that "partnerships [with a variety of agencies including educational, cultural, community, and government] are essential to the socially inclusive museum" (ibid.: 14).

Interestingly, GLLAM makes these claims specifically because, despite all that is already happening in museums, "it is not always noticed by anyone apart from those immediately involved" (ibid.: 16). It names the Government as the intended audience for its report, with the hope that people will recognize the accomplishments of museums as leaders in the pursuit of social inclusivity and will offer their financial support (ibid.: 5), thereby indicating the necessity of making museum work visible to others.

Reaching Museum Visitors

St. John and Perry argue that just as the economic health of a nation depends on the strength of its transportation and utilities infrastructure, so too the educational health of the nation depends upon its educational infrastructure, including museums. This infrastructure supports the educational activities of the community and constitutes a network of resources, information, and learner support (Falk and Dierking 2000: 129).

Given the importance of an audience for museum collaboration and the potential significance of what people can discover from these activities, the process of visitor learning requires examination. Falk et al. explain that

The emphasis on learning experiences and growth in museum visitorship and visitation comes at a time when the mission of museums is shifting from a focus on collecting and preserving to one of educating the public. The late Stephen Weil (2002) described this as a movement from being *about something* to being *for somebody* (2007: xvi; emphasis in original).

In this light, education is central to the social role of museums, just as education is central to the impact of museum collaboration. According to Léonie Rennie and David Johnston, "if museums and similar institutions are to have an impact on people's lives, then they must change people in some way… We argue that these changes, or impacts, involve learning" (2007: 58-9).

In particular, collaborative exhibits provide the opportunity for visitors to gain insights into the cultures of those around them and new perspectives as told to them from other viewpoints. In allowing visitors to hear the voices of marginalized communities, museums can demonstrate the active engagement of these peoples with the larger world. Nurturing these ideas is particularly significant considering that the knowledges generated during a museum visit are capable of having wider impacts; that is, the process of learning can continue well past the time span of the actual visit itself, and, thus, knowledge gained at the museum can be applied to broader political and social debates. Léonie Rennie and Terrence McClafferty in fact question whether learning can be said to have occurred at all if visitors are unable to "link that knowledge to situations beyond their visit" (1996: 74; quoted in Anderson et al. 2003: 178).

Arguing that the museum should be "for" a community rather than "about" them is, however, a deceptively simplistic statement, as the ways different publics benefit from the museum depend upon who they are and what they learn. "Learning" is itself a deeply subjective process based on an individual's personal history and development, leading Anderson et al. to assert that "no two visitors will have the same prior knowledge or learning experiences in the museum" (2003: 196). "The Contextual Model of Learning," developed by John Falk and Lynn Dierking, posits that "all learning is situated within a series of contexts" (2000: 10). Specifically, these contexts include the personal, the sociocultural, and the physical. Learning is understood as both the process and the product of interactions occurring between these three frameworks. Somewhat more simply, learning is "a personally and socially constructed mechanism for making meaning in the physical world" (Falk et al. 2007: xix).

In sum, while we often speak of "communities" or "publics" in reference to museums, when it comes to learning it is more useful to think of the individual:

Among the myriad psychological constructs that psychologists have identified as influencing our perceptions of ourselves as learners and ultimately affecting what, how, and why we learn, probably one of the most important is our sense of self.

Given the constructive nature of learning, having a sense of self – an awareness of personal needs, interests, and abilities – is fundamental to all learning. It is this sense of self that serves as the primary filter of experience, enabling the mind to focus on those issues and events perceived as relevant and to ignore those perceived as irrelevant (Falk and Dierking 2000: 21).

As institutions seeking to address a multitude of audiences simultaneously (refer back to the MOA staff who corrected me when I tried to refer to a single "public"), museums cannot communicate in direct response to the individual learning needs of each visitor. Personal interactions, however, such as the ones I discuss below, do allow for unique encounters that can aid people in their own learning process and direct them toward making new connections. This suggests that the increased use of personal interactions may assist visitors in receiving specific messages intended by collaboration.

Collaboration and Learning
Comments from students suggest that exhibitions that attend to real-life connections and ground content in socially and personally relevant contexts potentially enhance visitor learning (Pedretti 2007: 127).

Understanding the nature of museum learning is relevant to our discussion of museum collaboration not only because the value of collaboration can be expressed in terms of what visitors learn from it, but also because collaboration is itself a form of learning. According to sociocultural researchers, "learning is much more about process than product" (Falk and Dierking 2000: 109). So, too, as noted by Ruth Phillips, descriptions of collaborative exhibits spend much time depicting the process of the creation of these exhibits and what was learned as a result of these cross-cultural engagements (2003: 160). In particular, these discussions describe the interactions between individuals – what Michael Ames calls the "to-ing and fro-ing" of negotiation and consultation (1999: 48) – that makes each partnership unique and meaningful.

In short, human interaction is a significant aspect of learning. Studies into museum learning indicate the extent to which visitors are affected by communication with individuals both within their own social group and without – that is, with their peers and companions, as well as with museum guides, demonstrators, performers, or other visitors (Falk 2007:4-5). In particular, encounters with museum personnel have the greatest effect on visitor perceptions: "…Investing effort in having knowledgeable and skilled interpreters available to assist visitors is one way to communicate that the museum is a place for learning, a community of practice" (Falk and Dierking 2000: 107). With regards to visitors, the goal of museums should not be to

entertain or to teach, but to engage (ibid.: 76). Human interactions, and the emotions they inspire, are effective means of engaging people, grounding their experiences in real-life connections:

> Sharing experiences with others through conversations…or by expressing emotions of the visits such as enjoyment, curiosity, frustration, and anger…helps shape and enforce memories and therefore the subjective impact of a museum visit. Visitors tend to rehearse memories of their museum experiences when they discuss and relive their visits with others. Visits that spur conversations are thus more likely to create sustained memories (Anderson et al. 2007: 202).

Conversations with people working at the museum are likely to make the idea of collaboration more relevant, more interesting, and more memorable. In other words, people best learn *about* others through the process of collaboration, and people best learn *from* others about the process of collaboration. At times, this is because conversations draw out a person's latent knowledge, allowing them to express ideas they were not necessarily aware they already had, something that I witnessed during some of my visitor interviews. Other times, the experience of interaction is itself unique and therefore memorable. In Julia Harrison's discussion of the collaborative exhibit *Huupukʷanum/Tupaat*, prepared by the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, B.C. along with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, the author quotes an argument from Ruth Phillips (2003) in favor of collaborative exhibits. According to Phillips, the constructive social benefit of collaborative exhibits lies in the small seeds of change they plant and that are realized incrementally; over time, they will impact what Elizabeth Edwards calls visitors' "horizons of expectations" (2001: 195; quoted in Harrison 2005b: 39). Harrison attributes the success of *Huupukʷanum/Tupaat* as it traveled to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum in Los Angeles to the presence of Nuu-chah-nulth interpreters (ibid.). According to one reviewer, these community members successfully dispelled negative stereotypes associated with First Nations, "helping visitors make a personal connection to the art and culture of the Nuu-chah-nulth people" (Sinclair 2001: 48). The Tribal Council had, in fact, required that each museum support these interpreters for the duration of the exhibit as a condition for its traveling, believing that their presence would bring "life into the exhibit" (ibid.: 49). It was, therefore, this human interaction that deepened visitor learning from the exhibit, which in turn contributed to the impact of the collaborative process.

Leinhardt et al. approach the question of visitor learning "by focusing on *conversations* as both the process and the outcome of museum learning" (2002: ix; emphasis in original). In doing so, they make the helpful observation that learning occurs not only as a result of people's

conversations, but that conversations are themselves products of learning. One purpose of collaboration is to open up dialogues between individuals or groups, promoting their understanding and awareness of one another. Unfortunately, more frequently than not exhibits are shown without the presence of community interpreters, and visitors frequently do not have this opportunity for conversations with someone who could aid them in seeing something they might not have otherwise. In the absence of this to-ing and fro-ing challenging visitor expectations, people may be more likely to reaffirm their prior conceptions of museums as storage places of vanished cultures than to recognize collaborations with contemporary peoples (as researchers found to be the case with at least one collaborative exhibit, discussed in more detail below; Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 399).

A Partnership of Peoples: Collaboration at the Museum of Anthropology

A Brief Description of the Renewal Project[7]

The mission of the Museum of Anthropology is to investigate, preserve, and present objects and expressions of human creativity in order to promote understanding of and respect for world cultures.
The Museum strives:
i) To provide information about and access to cultural objects from around the world, with emphasis on the achievements and concerns of the First Peoples and British Columbia's cultural communities;
ii) To stimulate critical thinking and understanding about cross-cultural issues;
iii) To pose questions about and develop innovative responses to museological, anthropological, aesthetic, educational, and political challenges.
As both a university and public institution, the Museum of Anthropology is committed to balancing research, teaching, public programs, visitor services, and the development, documentation, and preservation of collections through its unique blend of professional and academic staff, students, and volunteers (MOA Mission Statement).[8]

As indicated by its mission statement, the priorities of the Museum of Anthropology are several. Among its goals are the creation of knowledge and facilitation of research; the promotion of cross-cultural understanding; engagement with academic and non-academic communities; and innovation within the field of museological practice. In accordance with these priorities, MOA has a long-standing commitment to the careful representation of others, to building positive relationships with indigenous and other communities, and to developing standards of practice that are responsive to issues that extend beyond its own walls. These concerns remain at the heart of the museum's renewal project, and they all hinge on the idea of "access."

Discussions for the renewal project began in the late 1990s and were inspired by a widely-felt lack of space. The need for room impaired people's physical access to collections, which in turn impeded their ability to do research.[9] When a member of the CFI board brought to

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[7] The following summary of the development of the renewal project is an amalgamation of descriptions provided by MOA staff over the course of my fieldwork, some of whom were at the museum from the very start of the project's development, and others who joined the museum at various stages in the process.

[8] Available at http://www.moa.ubc.ca/history/mission.php; accessed 30 April 2008.

[9] MOA has always taken a broad definition of who is a researcher and what constitutes research. "We started very early on making distinctions that, to us, 'researcher' was everything from an elder and their grandchild wanting to share some information about something, to somebody who had a piece of paper that said they were a university type" (MOA Staff 12). From the museum's perspective, anybody with an interest and a desire to learn from collections is a potential researcher. The use of "research" and "researcher" in this paper reflects this definition.

then-museum director Ruth Phillips the idea to apply for a grant, staff saw in this a means for improving the museum's physical infrastructure and, through that, their ability to further their engagement with communities and other researchers.

While MOA's immediate need was for space, funding would go to innovation, not renovation, prompting staff to consider not only the kind of work that the museum did already but also the kind of work that was yet unrealized: "I think the need to expand, in a way, got us to rethink and revisit who we are and what we do and our relationships that have been built to date with First Nations and [other communities]" (MOA Staff 9). In one offered metaphor, the museum's potential was a spring that had not yet sprung, and renewal provided the trigger (MOA Staff 6). Plans began to expand as members of the staff explored both more broadly and concretely what they wanted to be able to provide for the museum's various users, making the place more welcoming to researchers, communities, and visitors alike.

MOA's CFI grant application[10] had to convince the review panel of the ways in which its new infrastructure would enable new kinds of research to occur. Specifically, the proposal focused on the facilitation of collaborative research. MOA was successful in its application by proposing the creation of two integrated spaces, one real and one virtual:

> The proposed infrastructure will be the first in the world to forge links among scholars, originating communities, and research museums through the creation of an electronic Reciprocal Research Network integrated with an innovative, built facility designed to support collaborative research (MOA 2001: 3A).

Thus, we find two critical components of the renewal project relating to the promotion of collaborative museology: the RRN and the MVG (plus associated research suites). As already mentioned, it is significant that both these virtual and physical spaces are being developed either alongside of or in consultation with local indigenous partners. Musqueam Indian Band, Stó:lō Nation, and U'mista Cultural Centre were included among the researchers named in MOA's CFI grant application, and members of these and other communities have been active participants in

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[10] Because of its generous size, and because the opportunity to apply sparked the idea of the project, the CFI grant is most often cited by museum staff in reference to MOA's renewal. However, funding for the $52 million project does come from other sources as well, most notably the British Columbia Knowledge Development Fund, Canadian Heritage, the University of British Columbia, the UBC Faculty of Arts, and MOA itself, as well as some public sector donations. Source of funding is relevant as specific monies may be used only in specific capacities, affecting what the museum can and cannot afford to develop.

several of the decision-making processes of renewal.[11] Examples of community member input include the components of the Community Research Suite, participation in the design of the four passages in and out of the MVG, and the layout of individual collections within the MVG.

The RRN consists of an online database of museum collections, the plans for which anticipate the inclusion not only of those at MOA but also those found in museums around the world, focusing on objects from the Northwest Coast and British Columbia. The site includes records of each individual object, media such as photographs, video and audio derived from or about objects, and documentation such as research papers, publications and citations. The purpose of the RRN is to enable easier access to museum collections despite geographic distance, in particular for originating communities. More than that, however, the RRN is a networking device, bringing together communities, researchers, and cultural institutions and allowing them to collaborate in the production of new knowledge:

> The RRN will facilitate the reciprocal sharing of information between users and the institutions holding objects associated with the cultural background of those users. It will provide new methods for both community and academic researchers to conduct collaborative research projects. It will also bring the ability to undertake research projects currently primarily within the domain of universities, museums and other international institutions, to originating communities (RRN Microsite).[12]

In other words, the purpose of the RRN is not simply to unite people with objects but to unite people with people. Among other features, the site offers a space for discussion between users, promoting learning through dialogue and personal (albeit virtual) interaction.

Unlike the MVG, however, the RRN was never conceived as a tool for the general public (MOA Staff 1). For this reason, it is MOA's new built facilities, rather than its virtual ones, that are of particular relevance to the remainder of this paper. As mentioned, the MVG replace the museum's previous Visible Storage Galleries. Like Visible Storage, the MVG will house the museum's research collections, which other institutions typically put behind scenes. Unlike Visible Storage, collections here will be organized according to emic classification systems, where MOA has the ability, knowledge, and time to do so (MOA Staff 1), thereby returning objects to their cultural context. In addition, adjoining the MVG are a series of suites designed to facilitate multiple projects suitable for people's diverse needs. The Ethnographic Research

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[11] I should note that, to date, MOA has not been able to consult to an equal extent, or at all, with every community represented in the museum's collections; this is not to say, however, that these relationships will not be built in the future.

[12] Available at http://www.moa.ubc.ca/RRN/about_overview.html; accessed 30 April 2008.

Suite includes laboratories and storage areas that will make collections accessible and permit research on material culture as well as culturally appropriate museological practices (MOA 2001: 3B). The Archaeology Research Suite provides specialized laboratories and equipment for archaeological analysis (ibid.). The Community Research Suite, intended to meet the cultural needs of community researchers, consists of an oral history language lab, a culturally sensitive materials research room, and a community lounge for visiting scholars and community members (ibid.). The Research Services Suite contains digital processing laboratories, as well as the museum's archives and library. It provides resources in several forms of media, such as books, recordings, and photographs, as well as the equipment necessary to use these resources and to record research results (ibid.). Finally, the MVG will utilize interpretive display nodes and computer workstations, many of which will be logged in to the RRN, in order to enhance visitor access to ever-expanding knowledge of the objects held in collections.

With all of the resources made available within the MVG and their associated suites, the question still remains as to what the visiting public will experience within these spaces. Remembering that visitors will be self-guided as they go through the MVG, it is difficult to predict whether they will recognize the contributions of communities in the galleries' design without the intervention of human contact. I will return to the complexity of this issue later in this paper.

Making the Museum Accessible
[The idea for renewal] was about making the museum more accessible to researchers, aboriginal communities, other communities whose material was at the museum. We were wanting to have people feel more comfortable in a museum environment, to do research, to have better access to collections, to have access to different resources. It was primarily about access in different areas (MOA Staff 2).

As indicated above, "access" is the key concept of collaborative museology generally and of MOA's renewal project specifically. "Access," however, is far from a simple term and, as used by various MOA staff members, can have multiple meanings in a variety of contexts. While the individual uses of the word do not always receive equal emphasis, they do each reflect the values of collaboration and of the renewal project.

Perhaps most simply, the word "access" is used by staff members to refer to the physical ability to see and study objects. Eight of the twelve people I spoke with mentioned this need as an instigator for the renewal project. On a practical level, MOA's 1976 building had become inconvenient: "We were cramped. We couldn't take in another object, we couldn't do

community research because we were fighting over table space… Everything was just on top of everything else" (MOA Staff 3). In this context, "access" refers to the addition of space and the improved mobility of objects. The Collections Research Enhancement Project (CREP), for example, was born of this need to reach collections, responding through the construction of specialized object supports and mounts.[13] With better mounts and more research rooms, people at MOA will no longer have to worry about the handling of objects or the need to "baby sit" visiting researchers (MOA Staff 4).

Through its years of experience working with communities, MOA staff also came to discover unexpected space requirements necessary to support these activities, which the previous building was unable to meet:

> We host groups all the time; we had no place to have coffee. We really couldn't manage elders in wheelchairs very well. And we didn't have quiet places for communities to have their own interactions with the objects, without our kind of oversight. And there's ceremonial practices that we were all very familiar with, and comfortable with them happening at a museum, but there was no facility here for that. So when we meant "collections access," we didn't mean, "let's get some groovy new cases for Visible Storage…" (MOA Staff 12).

The need for more space, and for new uses of space, overlaps with a second meaning of improved access that has particular resonance for indigenous communities: that is, making the museum psychologically comfortable as well as physically. This was a theme that, while not always identified by the word "access," came up during ten of my twelve staff interviews. Commitments to collaborative research reflect not only a belief that the world's knowledge benefits from the inclusion of multiple perspectives, but also that there exists a moral responsibility to address histories of colonialism and exclusion, the legacies of which are still felt today. The need to make the museum more accessible to originating communities means providing spaces that accommodate different uses of collections – for example, rooms with appropriate ventilation for smudging, or designated storage areas for culturally sensitive objects – and also that create a welcoming, comfortable environment for people who may feel troubled entering an institution that is itself a vestige of colonial practices. "If you see all your things there, you just feel sort of sad. [Seeing] all these things from communities that are gone…people feel really sad when they come to museums" (MOA Staff 2). For this reason,

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[13] CREP is, in fact, a supporting part of the renewal project and is responsible for improving physical and virtual access to objects. Its activities include managing the move of collections during construction, digitizing collections, conducting a survey to enhance the level of information available in MOA's collections database, and, as mentioned, constructing specialized object supports and mounts.

> Things that perhaps the West sees as not as significant to research, like a place to put up your feet and have coffee, are crucial! Being able to eat, being able to communicate privately with objects in the culturally sensitive space, where you can smudge (MOA Staff 3).

These are things that can transform museums into institutions that feel relevant to communities, making them accessible because they are more positive places to visit.

As we can start to see, different kinds of access often refer as well to different types of museum users. Physical access to objects and associated documentation is relevant to researchers, whether academic, community, or other. Emotional access, or making the museum a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment, is relevant primarily to marginalized communities. A third kind of access – access to ideas – is significant to another museum audience: the general public. This access for visitors is no less a priority for renewal than are the other types of access, as indicated by its repetition during ten staff interviews.

There are several concepts that museums in general and MOA in specific wish to convey to their visitors. The first is that museums are public resources:

> One of the most discouraging concerns among museum professionals is the ongoing lack of public awareness about the breadth of what a museum can bring to community life…Few of our visitors think about us as resources to tap into in ways similar to how they visit libraries – seeing us as resources for countless ideas and information for the gathering (Sheppard 2007: 192).

This was, in fact, an argument that MOA had to make in its application to CFI, demonstrating that museums "are not just a container of things" but that their collections are similar to a library, and that, accordingly, MOA's proposal did fit under CFI's funding criteria (MOA Staff 8).

In order to make this idea available to the general public, MOA's Multiversity Galleries counter the traditional structure of museums where research and other daily museum activities occur behind the scenes, instead making these "backstage" areas visible: "It's really about opening up what we do" (MOA Staff 11). Conservation labs and community and research spaces, among other areas, will all have windows so that, even if visitors are themselves unable to enter, they will know that these places are there and can see people at work. "You can view into them and get a sense of an active, working museum" (MOA Staff 10). In this way, it is not merely the collections that are meant to be accessible to visitors, but the museum itself. Putting visitors at ease provides another sort of emotional access, one that then enables them to learn. As five staff members stressed to me, it is important that at all times visitors know where they are and feel comfortable so that they are then capable of focusing on the ideas being presented to them. MOA Staff 10 expressed this most succinctly, explaining, "we want to make sure that

you're not lost so that you're actually interested in whether it's a research infrastructure or not…Making people comfortable makes them want to look more about what it is that you're doing."

The idea that the museum should be "accessible," in the sense that the kinds of work that occur there can be known to its visitors, ties into the practice and goals of collaboration: "Collaboration offers many significant outcomes – not the least of which is an opportunity to create public awareness about the value of museums as learning institutions" (Sheppard 2007: 192). In other words, the idea of increasing access to the museum includes making the fact of collaboration transparent to visitors: "It's really critical. What's the point of having done the project if the public doesn't see something new and different? And that's part of what they should see" (MOA Staff 1). Five members of MOA staff emphasized to me this need for visitors to see a change at the museum as a result of renewal.

With all these different types of access, we find a shift from practical definitions – objects that are made physically available through the use of new mounts, rooms where collections can be laid out and studied, and so on – to abstract ideas that include the kinds of work that can occur at museums, the people doing research, and the process of collaboration. In line with the goals of collaborative museology, visitors in particular are the intended recipients of these more theoretical ideas in order to aid them in understanding the people that collections represent. At the same time, visitors are also generally the ones who are spending the least amount of time at the museum and who are not benefiting from direct engagement with either staff or community members. Thus, the most complicated notions of access are, by necessity, directed towards an audience at the greatest disadvantage for receiving them.

Three Collaborative Exhibits

The theory of collaborative museology promises improved cross-cultural understanding as a result of the inclusion of more voices at the museum. Research in Australia has shown that there is a lack of awareness within non-indigenous communities regarding the social, political, and economic issues faced by aboriginal peoples (Kelly and Gordon 2002: 158). Research has also shown that this lack can be attributed to a failure of the public education system to address these topics and that, given the opportunity, people are willing to listen and to learn (ibid.). This presents an opening for museums to assist in projects of reconciliation by providing the public with access to information, objects, stories, and indigenous voices so that non-indigenous peoples can better understand the contemporary realities of others.

The promise of this potential in museums, however, is predicated on visitors' somewhat sophisticated understandings that the representations they are viewing are products of the active engagement of communities with the museum and with the objects on display – understandings that often go unrealized. Examples of collaborative exhibits indicate that visitors frequently miss the messages of collaboration that are made available to them. In 2001, after three years of preparation, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta opened the Blackfoot exhibit *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*. It was one of the first permanent galleries in Canada to be built using a fully collaborative approach (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 379). The term "fully collaborative," as defined by Ruth Phillips, refers to the fact that both partners in the project – representatives of the Blackfoot and members of the Glenbow Museum staff – approached the exhibit with their own goals and motivations in mind, the two groups working together but each toward its own purposes (2003: 159). The primary goal of the seventeen Blackfoot teachers and leaders who joined in the development of *Nitsitapiisinni* was to create an educational place where future generations of Blackfoot youth could learn the fundamentals of their own culture (Conaty 2003: 231). The primary goal of the Glenbow was to address a more general audience, introducing people to Blackfoot culture and aiding them in connecting the past with the present (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 384).

Despite their different perspectives, both Glenbow staff and Blackfoot representatives desired to convey the process of collaboration to all visitors of the exhibit (ibid.); the participation of the Blackfoot in the creation of *Nitsitapiisinni* was, I would argue, one of the most important messages the exhibit had to impart, creating as it did a more inclusive environment within the museum. The use of signs, maps, and first-person narratives within the

exhibit all attempted to convey the collaborative nature of its creation. Nonetheless, a study of visitor reactions concluded that despite the exhibit's overt expression of self-representation, non-indigenous visitors frequently failed to recognize Blackfoot authorship or participation in the development of *Nitsitapiisinni* (ibid.: 399).

Miriam Kahn, curator at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Washington, describes a similar experience working on a collaborative exhibit of the Pacific Rim. Finally opening in 1997, *Pacific Voices* took eight years to complete and included the participation of over 150 advisors from Seattle's Asian, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, and Northwest Native American communities. By all reports, the exhibit was a success. Community members felt the museum had been supportive of their needs and had listened and responded to their concerns, resulting in better relationships with the museum and an exhibit of which they were proud. Newspaper reviews were positive, recognizing *Pacific Voices* as a departure from the "traditional case-by-case, culture-by-culture curatorial approach of anthropological museums" (Lyke 1997: C8; quoted in Kahn 2000: 70). Academic reviews commented on the ways in which the exhibit involved communities in the curatorial process, de-centering the museum's authority and allowing people to speak for themselves (Kahn 2000: 70). Yet, despite these positive reviews, Kahn wonders

> how much the average visitor benefits from *Pacific Voices*. Based on the summative evaluation of the exhibit (Korn 1998), one-third of the visitors thought that the exhibit was about people of the past and only one-third realized that it was a collaborative effort with community members (2000: 70).

Admittedly, *Pacific Voices* represented seventeen different cultures, and members of these communities did have different goals from one another. Specifically, some looked to emphasize their past, while others chose to focus on their contemporary lives (ibid.: 59-61). Nonetheless, the fact that some visitors thought that *Pacific Voices* was about the past cannot be attributed to the museum's lack of trying to communicate otherwise, nor can the fact that many did not recognize the exhibit's use of collaborative processes. To provide just two examples, *Pacific Voices* included a welcome video, placed in the gallery's entranceway and featuring members of the Community Advisory Board greeting visitors in their own native language (Kahn 2000: 64). The very title of the exhibit, "*Pacific Voices*," further underscored the idea that the communities were telling their own stories (ibid.). Given the amount of information available, one might expect that a larger percentage of visitors would grasp the collaborative nature of the exhibit, or at least that no one should believe *Pacific Voices* represented only people of the past.

Elaine Heumann Gurian suggests that "while visitors expect to see the authors of works of art, music and fiction identified, they are not used to perceiving exhibitions as the personal work of identifiable individuals" (1991: 187). A consequence of this blind spot is that visitors also may not perceive collaborative processes when they occur.

> If visitors are not accustomed to thinking critically about who is creating exhibitions in the first place, they are unlikely to consider the processes of exhibition building and hence not fully appreciate the cultural representations embodied in collaborative exhibitions (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 399).

At the Glenbow, Krmpotich and Anderson found that, despite visitors' attunement to Blackfoot voice, they still assumed the museum was responsible for creating *Nitsitapiisinni*. According to Miriam Kahn, recent academic anthropology has focused on questions of representation and the inclusion of multiple voices as a means of addressing cultural bias. As a result of her experiences with *Pacific Voices*, however, she concludes that these are not the issues that truly need to be addressed. "The issue, instead, is really one of authority and control" (2000: 72). Western institutions must be prepared to relinquish some of its power and privilege if it is truly to collaborate with others (ibid.). According to Loretta Todd, this will only occur when the West "wakes up to see that it is part of many cultures, rather than at the centre of culture" (1992: 60; quoted in Kahn 2000: 72). Making processes of collaboration visible to visitors, I would argue, can contribute to this effort of "waking people up" to the active cultures around them and of shifting structures of power.

Having visitors recognize collaboration also requires changing people's understandings of just what collaboration is. In general, the public equates "collaboration" with "cooperation," the museum joining forces with some partner such as another museum or a government sponsor (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005: 390), a definition shared by nine of the twelve visitors I interviewed over the course of my own fieldwork. With this understanding, visitors often do not see collaboration as a process relating to self-representation or self-determination relevant to ethnic communities or cultural groups (ibid.). Museums, then, find themselves in the difficult position of trying to challenge visitors' expectations regarding the participation of communities in museum activities even as those same visitors tend from the start to ignore questions of authorship.

One final example provides a useful contrast to *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices* and indicates a successful approach in drawing visitors' attention towards community collaboration. *Proud to be Musqueam* was shown at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC from May-October of 1988; like *Nitsitapiisinni*, the exhibit represented the voice of a single community, rather than

the plurality of communities on display in *Pacific Voices*. *Proud to be Musqueam* was developed by two women who came to MOA for a four-month work placement as part of their training under the Musqueam Band's Job Re-Entry Programme. As their special project for this program, the women chose to research their band's history, using the personal photographs of community members and interviewing elders. *Proud to be Musqueam* represented the product of this research and was executed by the visiting Musqueam curators with the guidance of MOA staff.

The resultant exhibit consisted of fifty-four photographs, dating from 1890 to 1960, provided by members of the Musqueam Band and representing every family in the community. The images showed people engaged in a range of typical community activities. Individuals represented were identified by name, as were their connections to present generations at Musqueam. In addition to images of people, there were photographs of three thousand-year-old basketry fragments archaeologists had recently excavated from Musqueam territory, connecting people to objects and demonstrating their long-standing ties to the area. Exhibit labels were written in the first person, using excerpts from transcripts of the Musqueam curators discussing each photograph and reporting what they had learned from their elders. When the exhibit was taken down at MOA, it was presented to Musqueam for permanent display in its Elder's Centre (Ames 1990: 164-166).[14]

Although there was no formal visitor study of *Proud to be Musqueam*, then-museum director Michael Ames describes the popularity of the exhibit, attributing it to the fact that "both photographs and text were informal, personal and direct, 'from the heart' as it were" (1990: 165). This assessment undoubtedly comes in large part from the exhibit's visitor comment books, available now in MOA's archives.[15] Typical comments include, "Thank you for inviting me into your home and family"; "Thanks for sharing your heritage with us"; and "Your love for your heritage comes through."

The use of the second person, "you," is noteworthy. Visitors understood that this exhibit came from the Musqueam. Their remarks indicate that people responded positively to seeing MOA work with the First Nation, and to the use of photographs and first person narrative: "What a wonderful idea to have a people do their own exhibit. Their love and pride in their families shines through each panel!"; "Photographs of people and their faces speak to me. This exhibit

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[14] *Proud to be Musqueam* remains on display in the Elder's Centre even today, twenty years later.
[15] Box 2, file 1.

spoke to me." In many ways a traditional exhibit in its use of images and text rather than live people and sound, the photos and narratives mimicked real-life interactions that resonated with viewers. "I got tears in my eyes. Thank you for putting this exhibit together. I appreciate learning of your heritage as a fellow Vancouverite"; "At last we get to hear from and about the people 'behind' the artifacts. It would be great if it happened more often."

The contemporary presence of the Musqueam community at MOA was recognized by visitors to positive effect: "This exhibit was a very good idea for those of us who are now beginning to appreciate our native peoples." In the words of another visitor, "Looking at this family, makes us realize how we are all part of the same family." Visitor comment books do not provide a true assessment of an exhibit's impact, representing as they do only the views of those people so moved to share their reactions. Nonetheless, a comparison with comment books from other collaborative exhibits mounted at MOA, such as *Written in the Earth* and *From Under the Delta* (both displayed in 1996),[16] highlights the qualitative difference of the responses people were inspired to record at *Proud to be Musqueam*. Thus, while my analysis here cannot be definitive, more people did appear to respond to the use of Musqueam voice in this first exhibit, thanking the community and not the museum for the exhibit and expressing a far more personal response to the display. As well, visitors seem to have left the museum with an insight into Musqueam history and culture that extended not only into the past but into the present as well. Visitors saw members of the Musqueam community as active participants at the museum, as people with a pride in their identities and a love for their families that was similar to their own.[17]

The three collaborative exhibits I have highlighted here provide several points of interest, as well as questions, that are important to remember in my discussion of visitor experiences at MOA to follow. From *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices* we see that the presence of first-person narratives and images, despite being relevant exhibition techniques, do not ensure that visitors will pay attention to the voices they represent. In collaborative exhibits, people typically see the objects on display and not the people responsible for their arrangement. As one MOA staff explained to me, the static nature of displays often overpowers the intended representation of dynamic cultures (MOA Staff 4).

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[16] These exhibits were both significant to the history of collaboration at MOA. To learn more about them, see Ames 1999 and Holm and Pokotylo 1997.

[17] Another collaborative MOA exhibit, *To Wash Away the Tears*, displayed from 2003-2007, incited similar visitor responses, as recorded in their comment books. The exhibit represented a memorial potlatch for Maggie Pointe of the Musqueam Nation, and people's comments reveal the emotional impact evoked in response to personal images and narrative. Because it provides an earlier example, however, I have limited my discussion here to *Proud to be Musqueam*.

We can, therefore, wonder at the success of *Proud to be Musqueam*, which used similar techniques as *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices* to convey Musqueam voices to MOA visitors, yet to a much different effect. While it is unclear from the comment books whether visitors to *Proud to be Musqueam* recognized MOA's side of the collaboration, it is notable that visitors saw and responded to the Musqueam whose images and narrative were on display. I would propose that this success can be attributed to the fact that in *Proud to be Musqueam*, the photographs and narratives did not supplement the exhibit but were, in and of themselves, the subjects of the display. In this way, Musqueam voices were not obscured and could not be overlooked by visitors, who were then able to respond to the people represented though not physically present.

The presence of people in an exhibit has a powerful impact on learning, as it helps visitors make a personal and emotional connection to what they are seeing.

> Data strongly suggests that emotional elements of exhibitions (coupled with highly personal references) play a central and memorable role in visitor experiences. Evoking emotion potentially enhances learning by increasing engagement and motivation, thereby opening up possibilities for learning (Pedretti 2007: 128-129).

During exit interviews conducted at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science with people leaving *Huupukʷanum/Tupaat*, visitors reported that contact with Nuu-chah-nulth hosts contributed to a greater sense of "intimacy" (Sinclair 2001: 50), drawing our attention to the emotional impact of these personal interactions. Sinclair's exhibit review concludes that "by creating an environment where visitors can create their own meaning through one-on-one contact with a Native person, this exhibition succeeds where others do not" (ibid.: 53).

This, then, perhaps represents the ideal for collaborative exhibits, where real human beings are available as interpreters to help guide visitors through their experience of the museum. While *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices* indicate the inadequacy of media as replacements for human contact, *Proud to be Musqueam* provides a counter example, where relatively simple exhibition techniques evoked strong emotional reactions from visitors. It is important to consider the success of this exhibit given that, most frequently, museums are unable to provide human interpreters in their galleries. The effective use of media, as it relates to the importance of fostering human connections, becomes a particularly significant concern in a space such as the new MVG, as we will see below.

Visitor Expectations at MOA and MOA's Expectations for Visitors

Here's my view of what we're doing:
...Underlying the entire RC[18]...is the fact that a display storage system is about the organization and classification of objects. We are all working with communities now to unravel the categories and ways of knowing that tend to dominate in museums, and to make room for diverse knowledge systems...We need to make the recognition of diverse and intersecting knowledge systems visible and central to the visitor experience of the RC...A focus on the diverse ways that the objects are named, classified, and understood by originating communities will be the most innovative aspect of the new RC, because it presents a radical challenge to ourselves and to our visitors – it raises questions about one's own knowledge system and subject position in relation to alternative and parallel ways of knowing the world (MOA Staff 5).

One of the most important goals of MOA's renewal project, as well as one of the greatest obstacles to making collaboration accessible, is changing visitor expectations.

> Visitors come to museums with a wide range of motivations and expectations that can and do affect learning. In fact, in many ways, by the time a visitor arrives at the front door, the nature and quality of the visitor experience have already been determined to a large degree. However, museums need not passively accept whatever attitudes the visitor comes with. Instead, we advocate actively seeking to frame appropriate expectations and motivations for visitors prior to their arrival (Falk and Dierking 2000: 179).

For staff at MOA, the aim is to have visitors situate themselves and their knowledge systems within their own cultures, recognizing that they, too, have their own heritage and that it may differ from those of other people. The hope for the MVG is to engage visitors differently, so that

> a person doesn't just wander through the museum as kind of an entertainment, that it's interesting to see these other people and how they lived, or what they did, and the uniqueness of it, and how different it is, and somehow not make a relationship to themselves. Or somehow have an actual experience in the museum that connects them to the history, and to see it as kind of a history they were in together. To see themselves kind of implicated somehow in either the history of First Nations or the idea that they themselves have a culture. That there are different ways of seeing the world, different ways of classifying things and experiences and knowledge. And that I, too, as a museum visitor have a way of seeing things, so my way isn't the normal or the neutral, but that it's also a cultural perspective…That you reflect upon yourself in some way (MOA Staff 5).

This was a sentiment echoed by five other staff members during my interviews.

At the same time, staff are acutely aware that while there are things they would like visitors to learn, they cannot simply talk at people and impose their priorities. During nine of my

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[18] While the Multiversity Galleries (MVG) is the official name for MOA's redesigned Visible Storage area, staff more frequently refer to this space as the Research Centre (RC).

interviews, staff explained to me the difficulty of conveying what are often complex and subtle ideas to people who may not be interested. As one person expressed it,

> I have less faith in the public's ability to absorb the message [of community collaboration]. But I don't think that's from a lack of us doing something; I think it's just there's such a dearth of understanding. You know, how much can a museum create social change? We do the best we can, but people visit museums on vacation. They're not wanting to be lectured (MOA Staff 3).

Unlike the classroom or even a television program or film, museum experiences are unstructured. They are sites of "free-choice learning," which Falk et al. define as "learning that occurs in settings in which the learner is largely choosing what, how, where, and with whom to learn" (2007: xix). Galleries are less textbooks than "choose your own adventure" series. As a result, museums must strive to be educational without being didactic, working with the public when it has certain messages to convey:

> From a communications point of view, we have to understand what the visitor is looking for, and not give them a bunch of stuff that we think they should have necessarily. We have to find out what they want and meet them halfway, perhaps. Give them what they should have and also what they want (MOA Staff 7).

Put succinctly, "we can set goals, but whether or not people have those experiences, that's always the challenge… We can't fully determine a visitor's experience" (MOA Staff 5). The difficulty of delivering set messages is compounded in a space like the proposed MVG, where the collections on display are not an exhibit:

> We're not staging something that says, "here are the five things you need to know; start at number one and work your way through, and when you're at number five you can go to the café"…The most successful would be if MOA could let go of controlling information and instead have these places where there could be some type of engagement or self-direction, as opposed to us, or these kinds of institutions, controlling information (MOA Staff 12).

This balance, between challenging visitor expectations and giving them something new while also allowing them to decide their own points of exploration, adds a layer of difficulty in asking people to recognize community participation in the design of the MVG. As we will see below, visitors often fail to recognize evidence of collaboration already available in MOA. As we will also see, however, interactions with other people can be useful in introducing these concepts.

Reaching the Visitors

Although the general public knows MOA for its indigenous Northwest Coast collections (and its iconic Arthur Erickson building), it is largely unaware of its engagements with

indigenous and other communities. None of the visitors I interviewed were familiar with MOA's reputation within the museum world as a leader in collaborative museology. People are not prepared to see collaboration because they are unaccustomed to it as a museum practice. In addition, some people may be unaware that such a partnership is even possible. In particular with First Nations communities, visitors do not always recognize contemporary peoples *inside* the museum because they do not realize that these peoples can be seen *outside* the museum.

> I think we will have a measure of success [with the renewal project] if the public comes away from the museum with an idea that the communities represented in the museum still exist. Which is, interestingly, you'd think that that wouldn't be, but it's still a big issue for the museum. I talk to the volunteers and they still say it's a struggle to get people to understand that the people associated with the objects they're seeing are still around… That's what the public believes. So even though they might hear every day about issues around First Nations treaty process, or naming the Salish sea, or the Kelowna Accord, or fishing issues or, even that that's there, they don't connect that to what they're seeing when they come to the museum (MOA Staff 4).

Even though appropriate messages are in the museum, they are not getting through to visitors, at least in part due to the static nature of displays. As discussed above, people are dynamic, but objects are not. "The counter message is more powerful" (ibid.).

This poses a challenge for MOA to overcome. My surveys and interviews with visitors confirmed that people were, in fact, missing explicit messages at the museum regarding collaboration. In particular, they seemed not to recognize the presence of contemporary peoples, despite their visibility in the galleries. This was evidenced by their inability during interviews to affirm their knowledge of collaboration at MOA, although three of the twelve visitors I interviewed did, on reflection, feel they could speculate even without having first-hand knowledge. This silence of indigenous peoples was noted even by one visitor who had specifically sought to find these voices:

> I thought there was very limited collaboration with communities, and that's why I wanted to talk to you. In particular, I was quite offended almost, and I found that there was extremely limited opportunities to understand perspectives from community members (Visitor 1).

That visitors did not see collaboration cannot be explained by a lack of information in the museum. The following are three prominent (though not the only) examples where this evidence was available during the time of my research: a) the Musqueam Bay, b) *The Great Raven Hamsiwe*, and c) *Meddling in the Museum*. At the very entrance to the museum's exhibit galleries stands MOA's Musqueam Bay. This space features a welcome to Musqueam's

traditional territory, on which the museum stands; a Musqueam house post; a loom; a blanket woven by contemporary artists Debra and Robyn Sparrow; and photographs accompanied by quotations from named individuals. Elsewhere in the museum is the exhibit, *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, produced in collaboration between William Wasden Jr., a Kwakwaka'wakw researcher and a MOA curator as part of a joint MOA/U'mista Cultural Centre internship. Wasden did research both at MOA and with knowledgeable elders from his community in order to document the history of ownership and use of an extraordinary mask in MOA's collections. The exhibit features the mask itself, a photo of Wasden, a description of the mask's history, and a video showing the mask being danced in a contemporary ceremony. Finally, on temporary display throughout the time of my fieldwork was an intervention by Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, entitled *Meddling in the Museum*. The artist created three site-specific installations for his exhibit, featuring stylized car hoods, Haida manga artwork, and an entire car conspicuously positioned with an iconic Bill Reid canoe from MOA's collections tied to its roof. Nicoll's work provides a sense of movement at the museum and challenges the notion, among others, of the timelessness of First Nation cultures.

Each of these three examples, produced by members of three different First Nations, exhibit people's diverse activities and engagements with MOA. The Musqueam welcome visitors using their own language, and they assert their continuing ties to their land and culture. With *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, visitors get a sense of the kinds of research that community members can (and do) do with collections, as well as some perhaps unexpected uses of objects, such as when they are loaned back to communities for ceremonial purposes. Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas contests meaning and authority at the museum, raising questions and encouraging dialogue. For alert visitors, these exhibits indicate that MOA is not merely about the past but about the present as well; that the museum is a sight of active engagement for communities; that collections are about people and not just objects.

These are messages that MOA wants to convey to its visitors, and wishes to make even more clear when its new building opens, but they are not messages that visitors are necessarily receiving. Of the twelve visitors I interviewed, only two mentioned any of the above exhibits as an example of collaboration at MOA. One remembered *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, commenting that although he could not say for certain what sort of activities occur at MOA, "because the museum owns the piece and yet it is being used [in contemporary potlatches] makes me think that there is some sort of collaboration" (Visitor 3); another pointed to Nicoll's car as

evidence of MOA's work with different artists (Visitor 4). Otherwise, visitor awareness of collaboration at the museum remained limited.

As we have seen, the fact that visitors do not necessarily receive these messages is not a result of the fact that they are not made available. However, it is probably in part a result of a lack of human interactions directing people's attention to these displays and making them feel personal. While all public tour guides bring visitors over to the Musqueam Bay, they each choose their own points of interest to discuss. On the tours I attended, guides chose to point to the house post in the Musqueam Bay in order to highlight stylistic differences between nearby Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw posts. I did not personally observe any of the volunteer guides use the Musqueam Bay as an opportunity to discuss the community's activities at the museum.[19] Similarly, guides did not discuss Mike Nicoll's artwork, other than to point out briefly the car carrying the Bill Reid canoe. Though, doubtless, all visitors coming into the museum must have noticed Nicoll's work, it is likely that many of them did not understand it. Not all visitors are able to interpret contemporary art without the aid of others.[20] For people who did not pick up the pamphlet explaining Nicoll's work (or for those who did but did not read it), much of the significance of the artistic statements being made may have been lost. Interestingly, the one visitor who did mention Nicoll's work during her interview had, in fact, been on a tour, and it was the car specifically that she remembered. Like *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices*, then, these exhibits point to the necessity for more direct human interventions in the museum.

While only one visitor remembered *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, it does stand in contrast to the other two examples, as the impact that it had on this person was significant, based on his own strong memory of the display. Similar to *Nitsitapiisinni* and *Pacific Voices* in its use of media including video and photographs to connect the object on display to contemporary peoples and practices, *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'* was also similar to *Proud to be Musqueam* in its narrow focus, using only one object so that the connection between it and the people for whom it holds meaning remained visible.[21] Why more people did not mention this exhibit during their

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[19] Though at least one guide did name the Sparrow sisters as the artists responsible for the blanket on display

[20] I myself was only able to understand Nicoll's incredible work because I attended a tour given by the artist himself, where he explained his own intentions for each piece.

[21] The same can be said of *To Wash Away the Tears*, which, as indicated above, produced a comparable response to *Proud to be Musqueam* but focused on objects rather than photographs. The limited size and scope of the exhibit, as well as its universal message of mourning and loss, likely helped people to concentrate on the connection being made between those objects and the contemporary people from whom they came.

interviews does, of course, require examination. Two possible explanations are that it sits opposite the far more imposing and famous Bill Reid sculpture, *The Raven and the First Men*, which perhaps diverts people's attention away from *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, and that this latter piece is not included on the public tours.

The presence of community members was only one message I found had not effectively been conveyed to many visitors during their time at MOA. Another of my interests while doing my fieldwork was to learn whether the general public was aware of the purpose of the renewal project. With construction having closed off the museum's parking lot as well as Visible Storage, I could assume most people would be aware there was something happening at the museum; my question was whether they knew what that "something" was. MOA has made information regarding renewal available to visitors in several places throughout the building, in order to help orient them through the confusion of construction. This information includes multiple signs, one posted in the parking lot and others scattered throughout the museum, as well as "A Partnership of Peoples" pamphlet distributed at the admissions desk that explains the structural plans for the new building. In addition, there is a small exhibit on the renewal project tucked into a corner of the museum, with a large banner announcing "MOA Renewal Project: A Partnership of Peoples" in order to attract people's attention. This display provides a glimpse into the construction process through the use of scale models and picture boards showing architectural plans, blueprints, and drawings of the various parts of the new building. In addition, the exhibit is located alongside MOA's digitization studio, where a window allows visitors to watch museum staff engaged in the task of digitizing collections.

For the most part, these signs and signals are meant simply to assist people in knowing what to expect from the museum during their visit and why there are areas closed off to them (MOA Staff 7). Whatever else the content of these messages, each one provides the official name of the project, "A Partnership of Peoples." However, when I asked visitors whether they, in fact, knew the official name of the renewal project, not a single one did.[22] Despite the availability of this information, the visitors I spoke to did not take notice of it on their own. This

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[22] Many of my surveys took place in MOA's lobby, not far from a sandwich board welcoming visitors to the museum and informing them "We invite you to explore our galleries and learn about our current expansion and renewal project. Known as *A Partnership of Peoples*, this project will increase the size of MOA by nearly 50% by 2010!..." One visitor did think to look at this sign and read the name to me; he was the only one to do so. Another visitor began to laugh when she failed to recognize the name of the renewal project; she works at Stuart Olson, the construction company responsible for the work at MOA, where they simply refer to the job as "the MOA project."

is not trivial, as the title of MOA's renewal conveys a significant message about the purpose of the project. Once I told them this name, 21 of 31 respondents recognized that the "people" in the "partnership of peoples" were First Nations. This was despite the fact that when I had previously asked them about the purpose of the renewal project, no one related it to indigenous concerns.

One visitor confessed that she did not initially realize MOA would collaborate with local communities; as a student of Classical archaeology, this represented a different approach to research from what she was accustomed to seeing. One thing that helped her recognize this alternative methodology was the name of the renewal project: "That in itself explains that, or reveals how much the local indigenous community is participating in the renewal project…To me, [A Partnership of Peoples] cannot be interpreted any other way" (Visitor 2). Simply visiting MOA did not similarly disclose this community participation: "As far as the way the museum is set up right now, it's not obvious that they had an input when it was first being constructed. They may have, but it's not overly evident. At least to me" (Visitor 2).

Hearing the name of the project helped to change this visitor's conception of the kind of work that the museum does and the way research there is conducted. Yet, it should be remembered that when I first approached her, she did not know the name of the renewal project, and she claimed to have learned nothing about renewal during her time at the museum. It was only over the course of our subsequent conversation that she began to think about the use and value of collaborative practices, and to begin to associate these ideas with some of her own prior knowledge.[23] It was our personal interactions that inspired her to make these new connections.

While the visitors I spoke with may not have thought about collaboration at the museum when walking through it on their own or with companions, this changed as a result of my interactions with them. Five of the people I interviewed began to express interest, or even enthusiasm, as I told them about the renewal project, and started to ask me questions of their own. I would argue that this was less a result of my own powers of persuasion as to the importance of the project than that I was able to provide people with information about the

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[23] For example, this visitor knows an employee at UBC's Laboratory of Archaeology (LOA) who had explained to her the ways in which even non-indigenous staff will engage in indigenous practices when handling native human remains, out of respect for community wishes. When I asked this visitor whether she was aware of collaboration at MOA, she supposed that, given the size of MOA's First Nations collections, the museum would work with local communities to ensure that objects were treated properly, not because she had first-hand knowledge of this, but because she knew this to be the case at LOA.

museum's activities they otherwise would not have known, and that then prompted them to think about things they might not have considered. People's own interest in collaboration or excitement over renewal subsequently grew (or did not) in accordance with their own priorities or values.

Researchers have long been aware of the impact they may have on the subjects of their study, and they strive to develop methodologies that will mitigate these effects:

> The very act of probing visitors about their experiences has the potential to change their experiences and the overall impact of these experiences (Palys, 1997). This is an age-old problem in the social sciences – if one wishes to truly understand the impact of a museum experience on visitors, one cannot entirely discount the impact of the assessment procedures that visitors participate in on their overall museum experiences. The fact that we ask opinions or get visitors to reflect on their experiences actually changes their experiences in ways that would have ordinarily not occurred if we had not asked them (Anderson et al. 2007: 206).

Consequently, many museum evaluators try to make their assessment interventions as naturalistic as possible so as to make their engagement with visitors a harmonious part of their museum experience (ibid.). For the purposes of my study, however, I was interested in the ways in which my own interactions with people appeared to make concepts of museum collaboration more accessible to them. As one man explained, his understanding of collaboration had indeed changed since prior to his visit, but not as a result of the time he had spent at MOA: "My understanding of collaboration has changed since speaking with you, but not since visiting the museum" (Visitor 3). It was our conversations that contributed to the creation of new understandings containing personal meanings.

As we have seen above, engaging with people is a significant component of museum learning:

> We always tend to look at exhibits, but I actually think programs are probably the most important thing in the museum. Like the actual people-interaction opportunities, for getting cross-cultural experiences happening. Because they actually involve and engage people. We've done so much really great stuff – not even that we've done but that's happened in the museum over the years, the knowledge of which gets lost, or the records, or people don't know, because we're dominated by this visual thing. The museum is this visual, architectural statement, and we've got all this stuff in there, like all these dramatic works of art and sculptures and things, and so we focus on this visual. But it's actually all about people (MOA Staff 5).

Seven of MOA's staff members repeated to me their desire to show visitors not just objects but the people they represent, in particular through the use of media such as photographs,

video, and audio recordings. Eight of the twelve visitors I spoke with expressed a similar desire, suggesting that if MOA wants to make collaboration more visible and the connections between objects and communities more obvious, it ought to provide people with increased opportunities for personal engagements. Examples of their comments include:

> I guess I'm thinking about having information that is in some way presented by the communities rather than by the museum. So, rather than having sort of an objective third-hand description of an artifact that says, you know, this is what the artifact is, this is where it came from, this is how people used it, you might have a community that talks about an artifact, that this was an artifact from our community, this is what it meant to us, this is how we used it. Whether or not that was through the signs or through having community tour guides, that would be sort of one way of definitely building collaboration, making it more visible… I think the obvious way to show collaboration is to have your collaborators present in some way, right? (Visitor 3).

> I had heard of [MOA] first of all through the Capilano Suspension Bridge, over on North Vancouver. Because there were actual aboriginal people carving and singing songs, and I thought that was something really beautiful that maybe the museum could incorporate more of. Not only just seeing pictures, but maybe having like an audio information room…The tours are very important, but I would have liked to have a little room where I could go in and hear the language told, and the stories told by someone from that clan, or something… And also to have performances and special speakers, or something like that (Visitor 6).

> For example, the [First Nations dance] troupe that was there [performing on the day of the visit]; that was excellent, because there you're actually experiencing something. It becomes first hand, it becomes very personal, it becomes very empowering and very rich, to be able to look at that. Because then you're actually looking at, as opposed to pictures of a culture, you're then actually experiencing that culture (Visitor 10).

> There's something about being able to watch things happen and the dynamic of that, I think could be really good in terms of maybe understanding the *community* better (Visitor 8).

While emphasizing the importance of providing access to people as well as to objects at the museum, it cannot be forgotten that even with this access there is no guarantee that people are going to recognize its significance. We have already seen how messages of collaboration and community participation can be ignored, at the Museum of Anthropology and elsewhere. People respond to information and to experiences in ways that cannot be controlled or predicted. At the same time, we have also seen how the presence of other people can have the greatest impact on museum learning. This suggests that for the ideals of collaboration to be realized, museums ought to maximize, both in quantity and in quality, visitor opportunities to engage with others.

Conclusion

Programmatically, the jury's out on are we going to actually be publicly a different face (MOA Staff 4).

MOA's renewal project is not yet over, and its new building has not yet opened. At the time of my research, members of the staff had only just reached the point in the project's development where they were converting the goals of renewal into concrete plans; as a result, they could not tell me just how objects would appear in their cases, what text would accompany them, or how the passageways to the Multiversity Galleries would be marked. Ideas had not yet taken physical form. It is therefore not within the scope of this research to assess the impact of "A Partnership of Peoples." Opening day will only be, as one staff member puts it, Day One, a beginning of what will hopefully be a meaningful, and ongoing, learning process for the museum in its relationships with communities and the general public.

Nonetheless, visitor comments do indicate that MOA is on the right track with its renewal project. Visitor 2 suggested that collaboration would become more overt if the new Visible Storage were organized by cultural theme, with objects arranged by community and categorized according to use within their cultural context – inadvertently describing one of the organizational plans for the MVG. As I explained the various aspects of the renewal project to Visitor 6, she started to wonder how indigenous peoples viewed their objects in contrast to Western systems of classification; in speculating that indigenous displays would be drastically different in appearance from traditional exhibits, she began to consider her own worldview in comparison to those of others, just as MOA hopes the MVG will inspire people to do. Visitor 8 confirmed MOA's belief that

> just reflecting the priorities, I think, is going to be something that would be
> probably a really interesting step to take. Because to reflect the priorities gives a
> nice additional dimension to those artifacts themselves, because it helps you
> understand them within a network, that they belong in those people's eyes
> (Visitor 8).

Finally, Visitor 9 recommended having windows so that people could observe school groups learning at the museum, again not realizing that this was a plan already being implemented. Visitor recommendations for audio recordings of people speaking about objects similarly echoed MOA's own plans for a media area in the MVG.

At the same time, the fact that visitor ideas for renewal, given in response to my own description of the project, parallel many of the museum's does not promise that the ideals of

collaboration will be realized. While Visitor 9 found windows into museum activities helpful, Visitor 10 described them as "glass bubbles" that made him feel sealed off and detached. Different people will respond differently to what they view in the museum, and, as we have seen repeatedly, visitors often ignore information available to them. Too often, visitors remain unaware of collaboration in museums despite the presence of signage and other evidence.

Perhaps most significant, then, will be the work that MOA does to develop its relationships with the public. Human interactions can help people to make personal and memorable connections to objects on display, and they are effective means of communicating specific messages. The best way that MOA can convey collaboration to its visitors, then, is by making people present in the museum. Ideally, this would be in actual terms, with real human beings physically in the museum and available for conversations with visitors. In particular in a space such as the Multiversity Galleries, which are unique in their blending of various functions – serving simultaneously as storage, research areas, and displays – it would be beneficial to have people available to explain to visitors how they can use this space based on their own personal needs. In much the same ways as reference librarians, these people can help visitors make the most of their time at the museum. Remembering the impact of my own conversations with individuals about the renewal project, it is not only the presence of indigenous peoples that can influence visitor learning but also non-indigenous museum staff. Members of collaborating communities are arguably the most important people to have in the museum. However, anyone can make a considerable difference in conveying the importance of collaboration, provided they are prepared to speak with visitors about the process of working with communities and the relevance of collections to people today.

In a perfect world, MOA, and all museums, would be able to provide hosts to take each individual or family group around the galleries, allowing for a spontaneous exchange of conversation and personal meaning making that would greatly enhance the visitor's ability to learn from the museum. The benefit of real human interactions is that it allows for tailored responses to individual learning needs. In the real world, however, where such personal attention is not always possible, the use of media such as audio and video recordings, written narratives, and photographs still can provide valuable learning experiences for some visitors. The Musqueam were brought to life through the images provided in *Proud to be Musqueam*. Visitor 3 remembered the video in *The Great Raven Hamsiwe'*, and other visitors similarly suggested that the increased use of audio and video would help animate the objects they saw on display. The evidence provided in this paper suggests that the use of such media is particularly

effective when it is the focus of the display rather than a supplement, thereby guiding visitors' attention directly towards the people represented in the images. These are techniques that merit further exploration, both for use at MOA and elsewhere.

MOA's own engagements with communities require deep commitment to establish, as well as a lot of work to maintain. The very fact of the renewal project, developed alongside of three indigenous communities, is itself testament to the museum's long history of engagement with First Nations:

> …Co-development is not something that you can start cold. It comes out of the fact that there are existing trust relationships with communities… It's those existing relationships that enable you to have that degree of trust that you can then move to [co-development], and, really, co-development is a logical step out of collaboration…There's all the ways communities – particularly communities involved in the Partnership of Peoples project, the named communities – have driven the museum forward. The museum is regarded by many people as being on the cutting edge of what collaboration in the museum world is, and they're there because communities have pushed them and have helped them, and been really generous to them in having to teach them how to move beyond the way things were in the past (MOA Staff 1).

Yet, even with this established history of successful collaborations at MOA, none of these relationships can be taken for granted.

> It's very hard to sustain relationships, even with First Nations. They're often sort of project based, and you have this – I've always referred to it as the cycle of seduction and abandonment. And we have to be careful with that with the renewal as well… My fear with the renewal is whether we can sustain it… What you have to do on Day 1 is to demonstrate that things have started. That there are parts of this that are a product of a very strong and intense and appropriate and meaningful collaboration. Other parts are not, but it doesn't mean they're not forever. And that's part of my, "can we keep it going?" There's always that evil little devil on my shoulder that worries about that. Because this museum is based on individual – not personalities, but sort of individual ability to push things forward. We were once described as a group of freelance consultants under the same roof. That's the strength of MOA and the weakness of MOA. It's both. We're strong because we have that ability, and we're weak because we have that ability (MOA Staff 9).

The renewal project, the museum's collaborations with communities, the visitor's ability to learn – all of it depends on individuals and their interactions with one another, as well as their commitments to each other. The presence of people in the museum is key to making transparent the connection between communities and objects, and the connection between communities – indigenous and non-indigenous alike – to one another.

Recommendations for Future Research

Just as the renewal project is only now gearing up towards the start of Day One, so too is this research into visitor understandings only at its starting point. A much more in-depth study following the re-opening of the Museum of Anthropology is necessary to assess the meanings people derive from their time there, what they have learned about themselves and others, and how they have used the new facilities. Such a study should involve a large sample of visitors, including a diversity of people based on variables such as gender, age, companions at the museum, place of residence, and proficiency with spoken and written English. It would also be relevant to include people who have participated in collaborations or other such activities at the museum to understand their priorities at MOA and their opinions of the MVG.

Of primary concern will be to learn how people are using the MVG and whether (and how) the space impacts what they learn about other cultures and their conceptions of museum activities. Alongside of this, there should also be a direct focus on visitor experiences of people in the museum, in particular through the museum's use of media such as computers, videos, and audio recordings. While I have discussed how these media are not always as effective an educational tool as real human interactions, they are frequently a more practical solution for museums looking to represent people in association with objects. Furthermore, from their study of *Nitsitapiisinni*, Krmpotich and Anderson concluded that "The audio-visual components [of the exhibit] in which people tell personal and traditional stories and the first-person text were most often identified [by visitors] as evidence for collaboration" (2005: 392). Though the researchers were careful to note that they could not conclude that hearing voice could be equated with understanding self-representation or self-determination in a political sense (ibid.), their observations reinforce my own regarding the importance of media in the museum, in certain contexts, as providing useful representations of contemporary peoples. Accordingly, further research at MOA should focus on the impact of media in the MVG in animating collections.

Once renewal has finished and MOA enters a new routine of daily activities, the museum may also want to assess: are the windows into research and other areas successful in imparting the impression of MOA as an "active, working museum" as promised? What media have the curators included among their displays and are visitors stopping to use them? Do visitors find images and recordings of individuals helpful in bridging their understandings of objects in cases and contemporary peoples? It is important now that, just as MOA puts great effort into strengthening its relationships with indigenous communities, so too it should focus on its visiting communities, providing them with a more personal and meaningful experience at the museum.

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Appendix I: UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:	UBC BREB NUMBER:
Sue Rowley	UBC/Arts/Museum Anthropology	H07-02670

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:	
Institution	Site
N/A	N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia	

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

N/A

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Visitor Knowledge of the Museum of Anthropology Renewal Project

REB MEETING DATE:	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:
January 10, 2008	January 10, 2009

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: January 28, 2008

Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
main study consent	N/A	December 3, 2007
visitor consent sheet	N/A	December 4, 2007
Advertisements:		
request for interview	N/A	December 3, 2007
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
moa script - tour	N/A	December 4, 2007
semi-structured interview questions	N/A	December 3, 2007
moa script - questionnaire	N/A	December 4, 2007
moa questionnaire	N/A	December 4, 2007
Other Documents:		
moa request for fieldwork	N/A	December 4, 2007

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair

Appendix II: Survey Questionnaire

Visitor Knowledge of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) Renewal Project Survey Questionnaire
Date and time:
Gender: M   F
1) What age group are you? Choose one: 20-30   30-40   40-50   50-60   60+
2) Where are you from? Where do you live now? Have you ever lived in Vancouver?
3) Approximately how long was your visit today?
4) Is this your first visit to MOA?
5) If no, when did you last visit the Museum? How often do you come? (Once a year, once a month, other)
6) If no, are you a member of the Museum?
7) Did you know before visiting that the Museum was undergoing a renewal project?
8) If yes, what did you know about the renewal project before visiting, and how did you know this? Did you visit the Museum website, and did you see the renewal portal?
9) Can you remember the name of the renewal project?
10) Did you take a guided tour of the Museum? If no, skip to question 14.
11) Was your guide employed by the Museum or was s/he a Volunteer Associate?*
12) Did your guide take you through the Partnership of Peoples exhibit? If yes, what did s/he speak about there?*
13) Did your guide mention "collaboration" during your tour? If yes, what did s/he say?
14) Did you look at the Partnership of Peoples exhibit on your own, without a tour guide?
15) What did you learn about the renewal project during your visit to the Museum?
16) Who do you think are the people in the Partnership of Peoples?
17) What do you think is significant about the renewal project?
18) What are you excited to see in the new Museum?
19) Are you willing to participate in a longer interview about the renewal project? If yes, please provide name and contact information, to schedule an interview.

*These questions turned out to be irrelevant, as I was able in the end to observe only public museums tours, which are given by Volunteer Associates (as opposed to private tours, which are given by MOA's private tour guides). The Partnership of Peoples exhibit is not included on the public tour guide route.

Appendix III: Summary of Survey Results

Total number surveys	31
Gender	M: 10 F: 21
Age	20s: 13 30s: 6 40s: 2 50s: 4 60+: 6
Location of origin	tourist: 19 local: 12
Average visit length	1.5 - 2 hrs
First visit	Yes: 18 No: 13
Knew of renewal project prior to visit	Yes: 8 No: 23
Knew name of renewal project (A Partnership of Peoples)	Yes: 1 No: 30
Went on museum tour (this visit specifically)	Yes: 11 No: 20
Guide mentioned "collaboration"	N/A: 20 Yes: 1 Yes, but can't remember what said: 2 Possibly?: 3 No: 5
Looked at Partnership of Peoples exhibit	Yes: 18 No: 13
Knowledge of renewal project	No knowledge: 17 Bigger museum: 6 More space for exhibits, labs, etc.: 4 Digitization of objects: 3 Visible Storage closed: 2 Other: 4
People in Partnership of Peoples	First Nations: 21 No idea: 5 People of Vancouver: 4 Local communities (indigenous or other): 3 UBC: 2 Province of BC: 2 Other museums: 1
Significance of renewal	No idea: 11 Relationship with First Nations: 7 More space: 5 People can see artifacts: 4 Expensive: 2 MOA should be easier to visit: 2