

**OPEN TO INTERPRETATION:
MÉTIS HISTORIES AT
THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM**

by

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ABSTRACT

In museums, teams of skilled professionals are working to turn museological theory and ethical standards into practice. When faced with contested histories and often-conflicting perspectives, curators and educators must balance their guiding principles and mandates with the practical demands of public representation. By investigating the work of the people responsible for this process at the Royal Alberta Museum, I explore how appropriate museology is practiced using the example of Métis history in Canada. The representation of contrasting histories within adjacent but isolated spaces results in a rift between curatorial intentions and public comprehension; however, in the spaces between exhibits—within practical limitations—there is room to encourage visitors to make critical connections. In this thesis, I emphasize the need for museum professionals to create holistic museum experiences out of disparate exhibits.

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For Carolyn

1 INTRODUCTION

‘Are you a Canadian Citizen?’, I sometimes think to answer, *yes, by coercion, yes, but no ... there’s more*, but no space provided to write my historical interpretation here, that *yes but no*, really only means *yes* because there are no lines for the stories between *yes and no*

-from *It Crosses My Mind* by Marilyn Dumont (1996:59; spacing original to poem)

Histories—and the people and communities that perpetually invoke and recreate them—are deeply entangled with ever-changing cultural, political and personal contexts. In the last twenty years, museums—institutions charged with representing ‘truth’ to their public—have worked to create increasingly democratic, multivocal and critical representations of histories. Through collaboration with the communities and people represented, sensitive and responsive methodologies, and engaging educational and public programming, several museums have begun to deconstruct some of the residual colonial structures that have hindered attempts to nurture respectful relationships with originating communities.¹ In Canada, this is especially pertinent for relationships between anthropological museums² (which have been criticized for culturally violent, patronizing, exploitative and insensitively rigid policies)³ and First Peoples.

Museums sit at the confluence of the public, the represented communities, and the

¹ Throughout this thesis, ‘originating community’ will be used to describe the community whose material and history is represented in the museum. I have avoided using ‘source community’ (Peers and Brown 2003) as I feel it invokes an image of the kind of exploitative extraction of cultural resources that precipitated many of the current issues faced when working towards respectful relationships.

² For the purposes of this thesis, ‘anthropological museum’ will refer to museums in which human histories and cultures figure prominently in either the museum’s stated mandate, or in one or more of the museum’s permanent galleries. In Canada, this includes not only UBC’s Museum of Anthropology, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Glenbow Museum, but also institutions such as the Royal Alberta Museum.

³ Michael Ames (1994:9) outlines some of the major First Nations critiques of museums: *To the Source* (Mercredi, Mosquito, and Sioui 1992), the Assembly of First Nations contribution to the continuing debate about the Canadian constitution; *Indigena* (McMaster and Martin 1992), the catalogue published in association with a 1992 exhibition of contemporary First Nations art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization; *Land Spirit Power* (Nemiroff, Houle and Townsend-Gault 1992), the catalogue accompanying the National Gallery of Canada’s 1992 exhibition of contemporary First Nations art; “In Celebration of Our Survival” (Jensen and Brooks 1991) a collection of First Nations essays; and “Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice” (Campbell, et al., 1992), a special issue of the West Coast women artists’ monograph, *Gallerie*.

academic (though these categories are decreasingly mutually exclusive), and are thus the sources of often-prolific discussions on nationalism, cultural identity, and history. Beginning in the 1990s (in the wake of *The Spirit Sings* controversy, which will be discussed below), such discussions flowed through anthropological museums across Canada. Curators (e.g. Ames 1999, Conaty 2003, Phillips 2006), conservators (e.g. Clavir 2002) and other museum professionals then began to retrofit their institutions with policies and permanent exhibits that attempted to redress the injustices inherent in pre-existing policies. Due to increasing First Nations participation, museums are now viewed as sites of education for people both within and outside of the originating culture (e.g. Conaty 2003). However, without preparation, can the public⁴ navigate this new paradigm?

Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp state that museums are “essential forms through which to make statements about history, identity, value, and place and to claim recognition” (2006:4). If the museum presents a series of incongruent histories, it runs the risk of alienating its audience. For visitors carrying an expectation of witnessing ‘authenticity’, unaddressed discrepancies can rupture the trust between visitor and museum: “authenticity—authority—enforces the social contract between the audience and the museum, a socially agreed-upon reality that exists only as long as confidence in the voice of the exhibition holds” (Crew and Sims 1991:163). But can the audience attend to new modes of representation, such as multivocality, when the museum itself has changed, and a cacophony of coexistent voices fills exhibit spaces and the spaces in-between? By investigating the work of the people driving this process, I examine how museum professionals put the principles of *appropriate museology* (as described in Kreps 2008) into practice when confronted by contested histories. To investigate

⁴ Here, ‘public’ is an inclusive term that comprises the many audiences—tourist, local, educational—of the museum, members of originating communities, and the public at large (both museum-going and non-museum-going).

my central thesis—that if Canadian museums are to become redemptive spaces then their publics must be prepared to witness the shift to appropriate museology—I conducted a case study at the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in which I explore previous and current representations of Métis⁵ history within museum spaces. First, I investigate the opinions and actions of some of the people and groups involved in exhibit development. Second, I examine if and how the museum has attempted to engage their audience through interpretive programming. I conclude by outlining how museums might—through simple strategies—prepare their audiences to observe museological reform.

Conaty hopes that, ultimately, “open debate of...models and the ideals which underlie them...will help us understand ourselves as a community in a world of ever-increasing complexity” (Conaty 2003:240). Museums can demonstrate that—like exhibits—distinct cultures and peoples with distinct histories live side-by-side. With this in mind, many Canadian museum professionals (e.g. at the RAM) have responded to changing standards for museum practice by welcoming perspectives from First Peoples into exhibit spaces. However, they have yet to invite their visiting publics to actively experience this ‘open debate.’ In this thesis, I emphasize the need for museum professionals to create holistic museum experiences out of exhibits that are successful individually but the sum of which may not comprise a meaningful experience of a complex history.

⁵ I have chosen to use a spelling of Métis that includes an accent agout. This spelling is used by the Métis National Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta in their titles, as well as in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, Section 35. Variants of the word ‘Métis’ are used throughout official websites and within publications. There does not appear to be a consistent consensus (in practice) on the spelling of Métis.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 First Peoples and Museums in Canada

Early museum practices in Canada centred on colonial methods of collection and display, and often led to what was, when considered in hindsight—misrepresentation of Canada’s First Nations and their histories. Although museums occasionally worked with the people and communities represented within their collections and exhibitions, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that formal, working relationships with First Nations communities began to redress pre-existing colonial practices; however, the relationships are not without tensions and serious obstacles. Many scholars have examined the history of these relationships at length (e.g. Ames 1992, Clifford 1997), and what follows can only be a brief review of this complex history.

Recently, attempts have been made to redress—through consultation, collaboration, intervention, and active involvement—the colonial history of the museum as an institution. Contemporary Canadian museum anthropology has emerged as a unique tradition within global museological and anthropological discourses (Harrison 2009). Although there are issues and obstacles specific to certain provinces or regions (e.g. Alberta’s legislated return of sacred bundles or the unsettled land claims in BC), Canadian museum professionals work within a national ethical framework unique from the guidelines that direct or influence institutions outside of Canada (e.g. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA; 1990, Public Law 101–601), the legal guidance system for the United States; or the controversial Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums (Cleveland Art Museum 2002), to which 18 major art institutions—none Canadian—are signatories). To understand the development of this tradition, though, it is necessary to explore the history of

collecting and early museum representation in Canada.

2.1.1 Colonialism and Collecting in Canada Before 1950

Some of the early treatments of First Peoples and cultures were part of the colonial project—some actively, some passively—that endeavoured to place Aboriginal ‘traditional’ cultures in the past, and place communities of First Peoples in an integrated present. Cynthia Callison elaborates on some of the actions implicated in this process:

The Canadian state and society have deprived Aboriginal peoples of much of what defines our cultures—laws and governance by legislative sovereignty; languages and traditions by residential schools; children through control over education and child welfare; land bases through settlement and treaties; spirituality through missionaries and religious influences; and art, artifacts and sacred sites through common law notions of property. [Callison 1995:165]

Each of these differed in intention, scale, and magnitude of effect, but the consequence of each was similar in their culturally erosive capacity. I discuss, below, the history of Métis communities in Alberta, including the creation of the Ewing Commission Report (1936). Although the recommendations of this report opened the door for an ongoing negotiation process for the rights of Alberta’s Métis, the prevailing attitudes that underlay the actions of the government are telling, and are made explicit in the report:

...the logic of the situation would seem to be that he [the Métis person] must either change his mode of life to conform with that of the white inhabitants or he must gradually disappear. This is a hard alternative. Considerations of humanity and justice forbid that we should calmly or indifferently contemplate the latter alternative. Such a change as is required by the former alternative is not easy. A long process of education and training is necessary. [Ewing Commission 1936:4]

Salvage ethnography, including the collection of artifacts, was a part of this process. The active collection of Aboriginal artifacts in Canada, as promoted by ethnologists such as Marius Barbeau and (for a short time) Edward Sapir was an attempt to salvage the physical remnants of cultures perceived to be “dying” (Nurse 2006:54-55). In Barbeau’s ethnographic

method, the collection of artifacts was part of a greater project of salvage ethnography. Barbeau and his students also collected cultural ‘traits’ such as songs, legends, and oral histories (Nurse 2006:55). The resultant collections were intended for museums and archives, and the organization of these collections was the responsibility of trained ethnographers.

The consequences of salvage ethnography cannot, ultimately, be disentangled from the multitude of factors that have affected the course of First Peoples’ histories in Canada. Andrew Nurse provides example of the consequence of Barbeau’s interpretive treatment of a Tsimshian narrative (2006:61-62). In his interpretation of the “Salmon-Eater” tradition, Barbeau took liberties with the translations of certain words to make the narrative match his understanding that the story represented real events (Nurse 2006:62). He was convinced that the stories he had collected were “coloured with individual interpretation” but would be of great value when stripped of their “imagery or mysticism” (Barbeau 1950:58). Nurse summarizes the somewhat self-defeating consequences of this interpretive decision: “Barbeau did not simply record an oral tradition but actually altered it in the name of recovering its authentic meaning” (2006:62). Understood in a broader context, salvage ethnography—by its systematic transfer of “authentic” artifacts to museums and archives—altered the very cultures it was trying to capture.

2.1.2 Making Space for Canadian Museological Reform: 1950 to 1987

Throughout the 20th century, academic anthropology and Canadian museology continued to develop alongside each other while Canada attempted to build a national identity. Of the several trends influencing museum practice during the mid-20th century, I focus on two: first, I look at some early approaches to the involvement of originating communities (in this case, Canadian First Peoples) in museums; and second, I focus on the positioning of the

ethnographic museum as a place for public education by looking at some early attempts to create a ‘democratic’ museum.

Early in the twentieth century, collections of First Nations artifacts were typically displayed using “culture area divisions and typological approaches” (Phillips and Phillips 2005:696). This organizational method persisted until the mid-twentieth century when there was a shift in attitudes towards First Peoples’ place in museums. UBC’s MOA provides an example of this kind of shift. In 1947, Audrey Hawthorn arrived in Vancouver with her partner (UBC’s first anthropologist) Harry Hawthorn. She assumed the role of the first (Honorary) Curator of UBC’s Museum of Anthropology under then-director Philip Stepney. Work then began on expanding the museum’s purpose, having identified that there was a “need for a museum in Vancouver oriented to teaching and to public enjoyment, which was to be firmly linked to the Native people of the province” (Hawthorn 1993:5). At almost the same time in the United States, Ewers identifies the museum as “the most democratic of all educational institutions. It demands no prerequisites of age or understanding for admittance” (Ewers 1955:5).

Over the next decades, MOA expanded to include such ‘democratizing’ features as a ground breaking visible storage area, touchable artifacts such as Bill Reid and Doug Cranmer’s Sea-Wolf carving, and extensive public programming. This new style of museology influenced other Canadian institutions, although “the occasion for a comprehensive rethinking of the installations did not arise until the early 1980s” with the introduction of new federal funding initiatives (Phillips and Phillips 2005:696)⁶ and a host of opportunities associated with the approaching 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, Alberta.

⁶ Phillips and Phillips are referring specifically to the Canadian Museum of Civilization; however, I think the observation is true of many institutions throughout Canada. A study that traced the availability of funding for heritage institutions and the ability of institutions to be responsive to changes in museological practice would be illuminating, but is outside of the scope of this study.

2.1.3 Collaboration, Multivocality and Other Great Ideas

In 1983, preparations began for *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* (1988) at the Glenbow Museum. Development of this exhibit triggered a formative crisis for contemporary Canadian museology. Running concurrently with the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, this exhibit was to feature pieces borrowed from institutions worldwide, many of which had not returned to Canada since their export generations earlier. Meanwhile in Northern Alberta, the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation was attempting to work through stalled land claim negotiations with the provincial and federal government while Shell drilled for oil in areas claimed by the Nation as traditional lands. Shell Oil Canada Limited and both levels of government sponsored the exhibit, thus appearing “supportive of native peoples whereas they were actually destroying their very existence with drilling activities and taking a hard line stance on the Lubicon land claim negotiations” (Harrison 1988:6). The Lubicon staged a widely publicized boycott of the exhibit and of the Olympics. As a result twelve of the 110 institutions approached by the Glenbow chose not to participate in the exhibit. In response, the federal government established a Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (the Task Force), which involved 25 members of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association.⁷ The Task Force examined the history of the relationship between First Peoples and museums in Canada, and worked to identify some of the outstanding issues requiring attention from museum professionals. Three major needs were identified by the initial working group: “(1) increased involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the interpretation of their culture and history by cultural institutions; (2) improved access to museum collections

⁷ Interestingly, although the stated mission of the Task Force was “to develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions” (AFN and CMA 1992), the collaborative effort was, ironically, limited to the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). Formally, the AFN does not represent Métis, Inuit and Non-Status peoples, but the resultant document is intended to represent all of Canada's First Peoples.

by Aboriginal peoples; and, (3) the repatriation of artifacts and human remains” (AFN and CMA 1992:12).

The resultant report set out principals and practices museums could employ to address these issues. The intention is to alleviate some of the existing tensions between First Peoples and museums while working towards ongoing respectful engagement with First Nations communities and people in museums. Bruce Trigger identifies that although “Canadian museums have made substantial progress in involving Native People in their activities, [it is] often still in a rather patronizing way” (Trigger 1988:10). Following the publication of “Turning the Page: the Report of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples” (“Turning the Page”) in 1992, collaborative museum practices began to challenge the historical lack of Aboriginal voices in museum exhibits. A decade after the publication of “Turning the Page,” there were still many challenges facing the development of working relationships between museums and First Peoples (e.g. Bolton 2004:9; and Turgeon and Dubuc 2002). Nonetheless, museums throughout Canada, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) and the Glenbow, have successfully (to some extent) employed different strategies to nurture respectful relationships between the museum and the First Peoples represented therein.

Built in the early twentieth century, the Victoria Memorial Museum—the first incarnation of a Canadian national museum—and its monumental gothic architecture served to reinforce its “role as a cultural–educational arm of the federal government” (Phillips and Phillips 2005:696). In the 1980s, the Trudeau government released funds for the construction of a National Art Gallery and National Museum (CMC) in Ottawa/Gatineau. The CMC (designed by Métis architect Douglas Cardinal, who later designed the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian) officially opened in 1989, but construction was ongoing. The *Grand Hall* exhibit, featuring houses in the style of different First Nations living along British

Columbia's Northwest Pacific Coast, opened at this time. From thematic development beginning in 1984 to the opening in 1989, the *Grand Hall* involved members of the First Nations represented (Laforet 1992:5). By the 1992 publication of "Turning the Page" (AFN and CMA 1992) the CMC (with help from MOA) was already actively involving First Peoples in their exhibits. However, the style of this Hall is reminiscent of the monumental style of the Victoria Memorial Museum and, despite Aboriginal involvement, "does not allow Native people any obvious sense of history" (Phillips and Phillips 2005:697). The *First Peoples Hall*, following the publication of "Turning the Page," was co-developed with the help of an appointed Aboriginal advisory committee. Phillips and Phillips discuss how this process led to an inherent multivocality in the exhibit:

The curators of archaeology, all non-Native, were involved throughout the process, whereas the non-Native curators of ethnology participated at the beginning and the end but were sidelined during the middle phase. These comings and goings undoubtedly increased the polyphony of the finished exhibitions, which, thus, reflect not only the input of the Advisory Committee but also the internal politics of the museum's process and the different cultural, disciplinary, and professional formations of the individuals who worked on its component installations. [2005:698]

The CMC's *First Peoples Hall* and other recent First Nations galleries across Canada act as records of their respective museums' attempts to translate the principles of "Turning the Page" into practice. The resultant multivocality (not present in the pre-Task Force *Grand Hall*) is celebrated as evidence of a shift away from authoritative, didactic museology: "instead of the hushed quietude that fosters an appreciation of aesthetic singularity, or the typological groupings that promote analytical clarity, the *First Peoples Hall* presents us with a party—cheerful, noisy, and crowded" (Phillips and Phillips 2005:699). But the gulf between the depth of curatorial intentions and that of public comprehension is vast. As major institutions across Canada find new ways to interpret and incorporate the recommendations of "Turning the Page," evaluation of how this process is understood by the public is essential.

The permanent gallery of Blackfoot culture—*Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*—at the Glenbow Museum was developed in close collaboration with members of Blackfoot communities from around southern Alberta. In his review of the process involved in the development of the exhibit, Glenbow curator Gerald Conaty suggests the museum was successful in its endeavour to work collaboratively as “the Blackfoot were able to say that the museum had ‘got it right’” (2003:234). However, a detailed visitor study by Cara Krmptich and David Anderson suggests that this successful collaboration was not widely perceived by visitors to the exhibit (2005).

Despite the extensive involvement of Blackfoot collaborators, and the presence of Blackfoot voices (through text, audio and other media), “visitors were still imagining museum staff as the primary creators of the exhibition, and Blackfoot as more peripheral to the process” (2005:400). This result is not necessarily a failure of the collaboration *if* the collaborative process itself was the goal, rather than the public’s awareness of this process. However, this exhibit—and the collaborative process that led to its development—provides an opportunity for the diverse, visiting public to learn how to encounter this new kind of museum. Even when First Peoples and museums are successful in their collaboration, the museum must then acknowledge their responsibility to their public, and consider ways of communicating the changes taking place behind the scenes.

The above examples demonstrate that it is impossible to disentangle politics, repatriation, representation and issues of control in museums. Many museum professionals across Canada have “worked with great diligence—and I might add achieved very positive results—to ameliorate aspects of the tensions resulting from this problematic history, but the point remains that it continues to be problematic” (Harrison 2005:196). Miriam Kahn, speaking of the Burke Museum’s exhibit *Pacific Voices*, states “the issue seems not really to

be one of representation and whether, or how, the addition of multiple voices reduces bias... The issue, instead, is really one of authority and control” (Kahn 2000:72). Ambiguity on the part of the museum—an institutional authority whether they like it or not—is politically dangerous, and multivocality should not be considered a lively ‘party’ of voices, but a public discussion about the practical reality of contested histories.

2.2 The Métis Pursuit of National Identity

2.2.1 The Origins of Métis Nationalism(s) in Canada

During the century preceding Canadian Confederation (1867), untold numbers of children were born from the unions of French fur traders and Aboriginal women. By the late eighteenth century these families and their descendants were being referred to as *Métis* “an old French adjective meaning ‘mixed’ ... to refer to a population of French-Indian descent which was noticed as culturally and socially distinct from its parent communities on either side” (Brown 1993:20). By 1869 a vibrant and politically active community of Métis was well established in the Red River area of Manitoba. Between October 1869 and March 1870, the Métis of the Red River Settlement staged their first resistance to the Canadian Government in response to the unchecked westward expansion of the Dominion of Canada. The Resistance prompted negotiations between the Canadian government and a delegation of Métis leaders including Louis Riel. The result was the Manitoba Act (1870), under which “the Métis were to defer political control of the new province of Manitoba to the federal government and concede control of land and resources in exchange for 1.4 million acres of land” (Reid 2008:11). For his role in the Resistance, Riel was eventually exiled and spent five years in the United States (Reid 2008:18). Riel returned to Canada (an American citizen) in 1884 amidst rising tensions between the Anglo-Canadian government and “all segments of the population of the North-

West” (Reid 2008:18), including Métis communities outside of Manitoba. After several failed attempts at petitioning the federal government to protect the rights of Métis communities in the North West (Reid 2008:20), Riel and fellow Métis leader Gabriel Dumont led an armed resistance which ended in defeat for the Métis at Batoche on May 9, 1885. Riel was arrested, charged with high treason, and executed on November 16, 1885 (Reid 2008:30); these events, suggests Reid, catalyzed the Anglo-Saxon nationalist movement (Reid 2008:90). Meanwhile, many Métis “made themselves as invisible as they could.... Some became white and others Indians; some became Americans, as had Louis Riel himself” (Brown 1993:20). Though many families did not identify as Métis at the time, they founded distinct communities across the Prairies.

Active participation in the fur trade brought many Métis westward to Saskatchewan, Alberta, and even British Columbia. When the fur trade contracted, numerous Métis families settled throughout the Prairies, but many were left landless after a poorly implemented land settlement involving *scrip*. Camie Augustus describes the process:

Scrip was designed to extinguish Métis Aboriginal title, much as treaties did for First Nations. However, the Métis were dealt with on an individual basis, as opposed to the collective extinguishment of title pursued through the treaty process...The basic premise to scrip was to extinguish the Aboriginal title of the Métis by awarding a certificate redeemable for land or money – the choice was the applicant’s – of either 160 or 240 acres or dollars, depending on their age and status. [2008]

Scrip was implemented across the province of Manitoba between 1876 and 1885 in response to the Manitoba Act (1870) prior to its implementation in the North-West Territories⁸ (mostly in the area that would later be known as Saskatchewan) between 1885 and 1889. The temporal proximity to the 1885 Resistance is not coincidental; the Métis Resistances of

⁸ At that time, the areas that later became Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon Territory and Nunavut were part of the North-West Territories. The scrip process was limited to Métis people, so although scrip was implemented in the North-West Territories, it mainly applied to the area that became Saskatchewan.

1869/1870 and 1885 were both in response to the federal government's approach to settlement of the North-West, which neglected the rights of the First Peoples living in the area (Augustus 2008). Several unaddressed concerns from Métis communities, compounded by an application process that was arduous and impractical for many Métis people, meant that the Métis were effectively dispossessed of their land throughout the North-West. As a result, many Métis families moved westward to Alberta where some settled and began to work the land in and around pre-existing Métis communities (MSGC 2005:3).⁹

2.2.2 Alberta's Land-Based Métis Communities

Between 1895 and about 1909, Métis families were farming north of Edmonton (in a community called St. Paul des Métis). According to the province, the area would remain theirs so long as they were 'successful' in farming the land. However, these families were not given the equipment and supplies that would have helped them succeed, and in 1909 St. Paul des Métis was made available to homesteaders while the Métis settlers were forced to uproot their lives and move elsewhere (MSGC 2005:7).

In 1932, at the first convention of L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest—precursor to the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)—members of Métis communities (notably Joseph Dion, Jim Brady, Malcolm Norris, Peter Tompkins and Felix Calihoo) petitioned the provincial government of Alberta for a secured land base: “Our first objective...is to see that adequate provision is made for homeless and destitute families” (MSGC 2005:9). The government responded by creating the Ewing Commission (formally

⁹ Interestingly, although there are several distinct Métis communities throughout Canada, there is little published in the way of anthropological literature. Current exceptions include Michael Evans of UBC Okanagan, who has been working on oral history projects with Métis in British Columbia (e.g. Evans 1999), and Denis Gagnon of the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, who is the current Canadian Research Chair in Métis Identity (e.g. Gagnon 2006). I have not conducted a thorough review of French literature on this subject as it is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, a comprehensive bilingual literature review would be both necessary and telling if one were to pursue anthropological work with Métis.

known as the Half-breed Commission, though this title is rarely used) in 1934. After extensive consultation with Métis communities throughout Alberta, the Commission's final report (1936) led to the creation of the 1938 Métis Betterment Act. This act recognized twelve Métis settlements in Alberta (MSGC 2005:10; these settlements are: Big Prairie, Caslan, Cold Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Marlboro, Paddle Prairie, Touchwood, and Wolf Lake), and established the first and only land base for Métis in Canada. Following a series of changes to the act, there are now eight settlements (MSGC 2005:19-27; Buffalo Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Paddle Prairie, and Peavine) administered by the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC), which is distinct from the MNA.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Métis continued to work toward economic and political autonomy through negotiations with the Alberta provincial government. In 1989, the Alberta-Métis Settlements Accord was established between Alberta and the MSGC. This accord, enacted through legislation in 1990, was “to achieve unprecedented levels of social, economic, community and political development” (MSGC 2005:17).

2.2.3 Negotiating a Definitive Métis National Identity

In the 1938 Métis Betterment Act, “Métis” is defined as “a person of mixed white and Indian blood but does not include either an Indian or a non-treaty Indian as defined in the Indian Act” (Alberta 1938:41). However, this definition appears to have been a formality, but not a contentious issue at the time. The Ewing Commission Report clearly states: “we are not concerned with a technically correct definition. We merely wish to give a clear meaning to the term as used in this report” (1936:4). The definition in this report is different: “By either term [Métis or half-breed] is meant a person of mixed blood, white and Indian, who lives the life of

the ordinary Indian, and includes a non-treaty Indian” (Ewing Commission 1936:4). These definitions leave space for confusion, and it is not surprising that the clarification of legal definitions have become increasingly important as Métis across Canada assert their rights.

The current challenges faced by Métis communities across Canada were brought forward in a recent court case surrounding the hunting rights of Métis in Ontario (*R v. Powley* [2003]). Over the course of the trial, Métis groups across Canada were inspired to examine their own notions of national and regional identity. The dialogue continues as National and regional Métis associations examine the tensions that defy a unified definition of ‘Métis.’ Since a museum can act as a hub for community discussion, it is an ideal venue in which to consider the mercurial nature of Métis identity. When approaching the history of Métis communities, though, it is necessary to simultaneously accept several different, and sometimes-conflicting understandings of Métis. Denis Gagnon asks “qui sont les Métis et qui est Métis” [who are the Métis and who is Métis?]¹⁰ (2006:181). This question identifies a crucial distinction and a dilemma for national and provincial Métis organizations (including the MNA, the Métis Nation of British Columbia, the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, the Manitoba Métis Federation, and the Métis Nation of Ontario). As membership in one of these organizations is now taken as a legal requirement for legally-binding Métis identity, strict membership requirements are being set (e.g. MNA 2007 and MNBC 2007). Currently, the Métis National Council provides the following definition of Métis: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation” (MNC 2002).

Political and legal consequences of museum representation are not mentioned in the specific recommendations of “Turning the Page.” However, one principle (of the seven

¹⁰ The author is responsible for all translations from French to English.

outlined in the original document) is worth invoking in light of the Métis pursuit of Aboriginal rights: “Museums and First Peoples will work together to correct inequities that have characterized their relationships in the past. In particular the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves should be recognized and affirmed by museums” (AFN and CMC 1992:17) When the voices of Métis across Canada are publicly and widely engaged in a discussion of identity and Aboriginal rights¹¹, then there is some impetus for museums to respect those voices, whether consultation is feasible or not. Museums working under the auspices of “Turning the Page” are endowed (ironically) with a new authority: because of their dedication to respecting previously marginalized voices, museums may now be considered even *more* authoritative than they were at the time Kahn (2000), Ames (1994), and Crew and Sims (1991) were writing. So, museums attempting to adequately represent histories entangled with a contested present must consider (within reason) the real political consequences of assertions being made.

¹¹ The discussion of Métis identity has been directly broached in such forums as the Ontario Supreme Court (*R. v Powley* [2003]) and public television (MNBC 2007).

3 METHODOLOGY

On a visit to the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in 2005, I encountered Hoof Prints to Tank Tracks (HPTT). This temporary exhibit chronicled the 100-year history of the South Alberta Light Horse (SALH) Regiment, including its inception as protector of Albertans during what the exhibit referred to as the “Riel-led uprising,” “1885 North West Canada campaign,” and “the tense spring of 1885.” Located directly above this exhibit was the permanent Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture (SGAC), which meanders through the complex history of the Aboriginal Peoples who have and continue to live in Alberta, including the Métis. Here, the events of 1885 were referred to as the “Riel Resistance,” and Riel was described as a “powerful symbol of resistance against oppression for Métis everywhere.” The juxtaposition of these exhibits was arresting, and through my research I have explored the development and management of these pertinent locations of incongruity.

3.1 Approach to Research

3.1.1 Theoretical Guidance

Julia Harrison identifies that “organizations (even those with parallel mandates) express their own unique identity...in such things as their institutional norms, values, and practices. As each source community is seen to have its own character...so do institutions such as museums” (2005:197). It seems unlikely then, that there could be a “best” practice satisfying the dynamic needs of individual institutions and situations. Christina Kreps has presented an alternative to this problematically superlative concept. “Appropriate museology,” she suggests, “is defined as an effort to refashion professional museum practices and technologies to better fit local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions” (2008:23).

Given that each institution and each situation would develop a unique approach, I have chosen to speak of appropriate museologies in place of appropriate museology.

A long-standing disregard for “the actual relationships and entanglements of cultures that took place during the imperial and colonial ventures” of the modern period, suggests Charles H. Long, has led to ignorance of the “gross realities of economic exploitation, tyrannical practices, terrorization, and enslavements” (2003:169). The recent trend toward postcolonial praxis in museums is immediately met with practical constraints that limit the extent a museum can become truly ‘postcolonial.’ Guided by postcolonial principles, museum professionals have worked to appropriately portray the Métis people and their history—a history that is deeply entangled with Canada’s colonial roots. “Canada,” as Jennifer Reid explains, “has exhibited an internal tendency toward unusually complex forms of modern sociopolitical relations” (2008:242). It is not surprising, then, that Canadian curators have struggled to address the inherent multivocality of histories (Phillips and Phillips 2005) in a manner that is meaningful to the public.

In her attempt to locate the philosophical search for meaning within the discipline of anthropology, Ann Brower Stahl identifies how “efforts to probe meaning—particularly in past contexts—often falter on several counts: (1) the need to account for the multiplicity of meanings in social life; (2) the analytical practice of reflectively gauging meaning, which separates meaning from practice; and (3) the privileging of linguistic formulations of meaning” (Stahl 2002:829). But where Stahl examines “taste as an embodied form of practical knowledge” in order to “explore the cultural terrain of colonial entanglements without privileging the ‘intervention of language’ (Bourdieu 2000:136, citing Bouveresse)” (Stahl 2002:828), I examine the construction of meaning by museum professionals through the representations of complex, contested histories (in this case the Métis in Canada) in a public

domain. I approach Stahl's three challenges and discuss how museums provide a venue for the public to explore complex histories not through exclusively linguistic encounters, but through total museum experiences. Interpreters are privileged with the ability to guide these experiences and participate in the construction of meaning for visitors. This relationship will be discussed in greater detail below.

History, seen as a series of layered Stories (writ large), is not exclusively textual in a museum context; rather, curators and interpreters in the museum locate objects, narratives and experiences within the physical space of the museum to create a dialectical space. Therefore, the treatment of historical narratives as 'entangled' is appropriate. The concept of 'entanglement' (especially colonial entanglement) is increasingly prevalent in the work of postcolonial archaeologists (e.g. Thomas 1991; Stahl 2002; and Martindale 2009). Given our similar interest in the relationship between cultural and object worlds, we, as museum anthropologists, can find great utility in this concept as it relates not only to the objects in our collections, but also to the museum itself (e.g. Henare 2005). When analyzing the efficacy of multivocality in the exhibit *Pacific Voices* at the Burke Museum Miriam Kahn (2000) reiterates the inevitable entanglement¹² that confronts museum professionals: "every museum object implicates historical realities of unbalanced power" (72).

As postcolonial theories are integrated into museum practices throughout Canada, it is crucial to remember that it is only what is *done*, and not necessarily what is *intended*, that will make the postcolonial museum a reality. Anthropologist Michael Jackson, inspired by phenomenology, suggests "the meaning of practical knowledge lies in what is being accomplished through it, not in what conceptual order may be said to underlie or precede it"

¹² In *Pacific Voices*, the focus was on the representation of ethnic groups that had not (like Canada's First Peoples) been colonized on the North American continent. However, Kahn's focus of the importance of addressing the historical imbalance of power and authority in the relationship between museums and originating communities makes this discussion—and her conclusions—relevant to my study.

(1996:34). Reid's interpretation of the significance of Métis leader Louis Riel reinforces the impact that transparency (or at least translucency) in museum practice may have: "He is one among countless voices who have ceaselessly called for an end to the concealment of the condition of multiplicity that undergirds the formation of the Americas, and the violence that has been its correlate" (2008:8).

3.1.2 Research Design

The experience described above directed my interest toward and inspired research on the representation of contested histories in Canadian museums. To approach this topic I chose to conduct a single, instrumental, exploratory case study after Berg (2007) of how a contested history has been represented and interpreted at a Canadian institution. The purpose of this case study was to provide a detailed look at how professionals in museums apply the principles of appropriate museology and convey this to the public in a Canadian institution.

To date, museum anthropologists writing about Canadian Museums have focused almost exclusively on a handful of museums (such as the Royal Ontario Museum, UBC's MOA, the CMC, the Glenbow Museum, and the McCord Museum), or on a few cultural centres such as the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum (see Clifford 1991; Saunders 1997; Mauzé 2003). But what is happening in the institutions that do not receive such international attention? Dozens of Canadian institutions—museums, heritage sites, and families of smaller institutions—with significant collections and high public visibility have been working to engage the public under their highly varied mandates. Some of these are provincially or municipally mandated and operated (e.g. the Nova Scotia Museum, the Museum of Vancouver and the Royal Alberta Museum), while others operate under the auspices of non-profit, private or academic organizations (e.g. the Whyte Museum of the

Canadian Rockies, the Bata Shoe Museum, and the Simon Fraser University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology).

In light of institutional diversity as identified by Harrison (2005:197), if the historic “Turning the Page” (AFN and CMA 1992) has been effective, then its effects should be visible across a great variety of institutions. Likewise, the manifestations of its principles should be varied but ethically consistent. For these reasons, I chose to examine an institution that has been peripheral (despite being an important and well-visited cultural institution in Alberta) to the mainstream Canadian museological discourse, especially in contrast to its Albertan counterpart, the Glenbow, which has often been at the very centre.¹³

Until recently, the Métis were often peripheral to central discussions of Aboriginal rights in Canada. For over a century, the Métis have been publicly negotiating their contested history, politics, and even their very existence. Despite Alberta’s unique designated Métis settlements, tensions that have long characterized Métis history continue to challenge Métis people in negotiating their place in Alberta’s history. Approaching Métis history in a public institution requires sensitivity, given this divisively and publicly contested history and the controversial work of the nineteenth century Métis leader, Louis Riel. So, in searching for an appropriate case study for an examination of the representation of contested history in Canada, the representation of Métis history at the Royal Alberta Museum was a fitting choice.

3.1 Course of Research

The goal of my case study at the RAM was two-fold: first, I hoped to learn about the development of exhibits in light of the museum’s mandate and current trends towards

¹³ Curators from all departments at the Royal Alberta Museum appear regularly in academic publications. For example, in 2006, Susan Berry, Curator of Ethnography, published “Voices and Objects at the National Museum of the American Indian.” However, this contribution to North American museology is not directly related to work conducted at the RAM.

Aboriginal involvement in the process; second, I was interested to learn if and how interpreters in the museum translated the theory and politics underlying contemporary museology into publicly accessible programming. To examine these two dimensions, I conducted three interviews, analyzed exhibit text, and reviewed the breadth of current public and educational programming (including online educational resources).

3.1.2 Interviews

Because of my interest in how theory translates into practice in museums, I chose to conduct interviews with the people driving this process. To learn more about the development of the SGAC, I interviewed Susan Berry, Curator of Ethnology at the Royal Alberta Museum. Along with Curator of Archaeology, Jack Brink, she helped organize the development of the SGAC. I also received considerable assistance accessing exhibit text from Assistant Curator of Ethnology, Ruth McConnell. I had hoped to interview Pete Ladouceur, the lead Métis consultant in the development of the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture (SGAC); unfortunately, due to a health emergency, he had to withdraw from this research. Curator of Military and Political History, Sean Moir, who collaborated with the SALH Master Warrant Officer, Jim Ogston, in the development of HPTT, was not available for an interview; however, he generously provided the exhibit text for HPTT.

I conducted a thirty-minute interview with Berry in September 2008. It was not recorded at the request of the interviewee. Interview questions can be found in Appendix B. The purpose of this interview was to learn about the RAM's approach to First Peoples' involvement, including the collaborative process (especially as it related to the development of the SGAC), and also to understand the institutional practices shaping exhibit development. This interview, supplemented with exhibit text, a few personal communications with the staff

mentioned, above, and the SGAC exhibit catalogue, *Aboriginal Cultures in Alberta: Five Hundred Generations* (Berry and Brink 2004) comprise my research into the process of exhibit development as it relates to First Peoples in the permanent exhibits at the RAM.

To learn more about educational programming, I interviewed Aline Lemay, the Head of Interpretive Planning, and Melissa-Jo Belcourt Moses, Aboriginal Interpreter for the SGAC. Lemay's position as Head of Interpretive Planning is directly related to my interest in museum-wide, integrated interpretation. The position was fairly new at the time of our hour-long, semi-structured interview in September 2008 (a sampling of interview questions can be found in Appendix C). Through this interview, I learned how interpretation is developed alongside temporary exhibits such as *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-Year Journey* (2007), and how interpretation can incorporate major trends in museology such as multivocality into programming or effective exhibits.

Lastly, in an hour-long, semi-structured interview with Belcourt Moses (for examples of interview questions, please see Appendix D), I learned about some of the challenges facing interpreters in the SGAC. Belcourt Moses, a Métis artist and part-time interpreter in the SGAC, reflected on her experiences as both an interpreter and an Aboriginal artist working in a museum. The interview was conducted in the SGAC, and was helpful in fostering an understanding of the space and its constraints. Neither Lemay nor Belcourt Moses consented to having their interviews recorded. My interviews with Lemay and Belcourt, in addition to my review of available programming (see section 3.1.2, below) comprise my research into the current interpretive methods at the RAM.

My participants preferred not to be recorded, therefore, I wrote notes during the interview and later summarized the main points discussed, pulling out key quotations and paraphrasing comments. I then identified the main themes that emerged during each interview.

From the seven themes I identified in my analysis of the interviews, three all-encompassing themes emerged. This analysis is described in greater detail in chapter 4 (see section 4.1, below).

3.1.2 Online Research

A review of programming at the RAM was conducted in the spring of 2009. The purpose of this review was to develop an overview of the organization of interpretive programming found on the RAM website. I was interested in the details of the programming only insofar as they indicated where—in which galleries, that is—the programs focused their attention. I outlined the learning objectives, curricular coordination with Alberta’s educational standards, and the target audiences for each educational program offered. I also reviewed the non-educational programming, such as a lecture series, outreach programs, and summer programming. This review helped identify some of the ways interpreters are working with multiple sets of expectations and guidelines. In the following two chapters I will describe and analyze this research.

4 INTERVIEWS, EXHIBITS AND PROGRAMMING

4.1 Interview Thematic Analysis

Following my interviews with Belcourt-Moses, Berry and Lemay, I reviewed the topics that arose and identified the main themes that were specific to each interview. These are identified in Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1 Interview Thematic Analysis

Interviewee	Interview-Specific Themes
Melissa-Jo Belcourt Moses	(1) Living History (2) First Nations presence in the Galleries (3) Limited capacity to fully understand and convey the depth of cultural knowledge and understanding associated with museum objects
Susan Berry	(4) Organizational/Managerial Constraints (5) First Nations involvement at the museum
Aline Lemay	(6) The capacity for visitors to absorb information (7) Combining practicality and creativity

From the seven themes I identified in my analysis of the interviews, three all-encompassing themes emerged: practical limitations in museum practices; respectful treatment of histories; and visitor experiences. The first, *practical limitations*, was the most comprehensive, encompassing interview-specific themes (3), (4), (6) and (7) as identified in Table 4.1, above. These practical constraints include human, financial, and organizational limitations. When working with idealistic models of collaboration or representation, staff in all areas of the museum must work with limited resources to develop practical solutions to the abstract problem of portraying contested history to the public.

Lemay, the Head of Interpretive Planning, discussed the limitations of in-gallery interpretation, and of exhibit design. For example, she mentions the importance of “giving visitors perspectives that are digestible.” In a discussion of how multivocality might be

conveyed to visitors, Lemay mentioned that, “the concept of ‘voices’ is quite theoretical. It’s important to ask: ‘how does it work?’”

As the only First Nations interpreter working in the Aboriginal Gallery, Belcourt Moses focused on the depth of cultural understanding that can be expected from interpreters in a gallery representing several Nations and multiple perspectives. She identifies that it is a “huge responsibility to be an interpreter for all these people.” Ideally, she says, there would be “monies enough to have each Nation represented by member of that Nation.” She notes that without the appropriate first-hand experience, interpretation “loses something.” For Belcourt Moses, the museum experience is about “learning more than the history; it’s about living it.” Here, she is speaking about her role as an educator in the museum. As a result, she has put a great deal of effort into “making friends” from Aboriginal communities throughout Alberta.

For Berry, Curator of Ethnology, decisions affecting the development of exhibitions and interpretive directions are heavily influenced by existing managerial and organizational structures. The relationship between management and curatorial is not adversarial; rather, as Berry notes, “management realizes the importance of collaborators.” Each gallery has an advisory panel comprised of experts from within and outside of the museum. This helps ensure that an “emic” perspective has been considered, whether of an originating or academic community.

These three interviews highlight the importance of considering the many dimensions of feasibility requiring consideration in the pursuit of museology that incorporates multiple perspectives. From conception through exhibit development, design and interpretation, organizational, fiscal, and human constraints must be considered. Fortunately, practicality and creativity are not dialectically opposed. Rather, they are dependent on each other to create effective and innovative exhibits and programming.

The second overarching theme, *respectful treatment of histories*, includes interview-specific themes (1), (5) and (7). The 2007 RAM exhibit *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-Year Journey*, was discussed by all three women interviewed. The exhibit centred on “an extraordinary collection of artifacts collected by Scottish nobleman James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, a poet, novelist and big-game hunter who travelled through Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1859” (Edmonton Journal 2007). Lemay worked closely with Berry and McConnell (the curators of the exhibit) to develop a respectful and engaging storyline. Documentation of Southesk’s original visit provided an “entertaining, concrete story” (Lemay 2008). However, in pursuit of a respectful exhibit, Berry noted the importance of avoiding exclusive focus on Southesk by providing a “counter-narrative” (2008). The hope was to “introduce a series of Métis and First Nations people who had met Southesk” (Berry 2008). This pursuit appears to be an interpretation of ‘multivocality,’ although this was not made explicit. Responding to my mention of ‘multivocality,’ Lemay raised a pertinent question: “how do you mediate in a way that honours the voices and yet gives the visitor something they’ll get?” (2008). Within the same exhibition space, there is a limit to how many voices can be ‘honoured’ simultaneously before the exhibit becomes not only cacophonous, but also incomprehensible and disrespectful. It would be equally disrespectful and misleading, though, to present a unified, romanticized voice to represent a complex history. So, to answer Lemay's question, honour is not bestowed upon voices merely by adding more voices. In particular, those mediating the visitor's experience need to ensure that the addition of their own voices and actions serves to amplify rather than mask the voices being represented in the exhibition. The most respectful and comprehensible representation would be through direct interactions with the people being represented within an exhibit.

As part of the interpretive programming for the exhibit, Belcourt Moses recreated a

beaded Métis firebag in the gallery. For Belcourt Moses, this experience was an opportunity to celebrate and share her heritage while developing as an artist (Edmonton Journal 2007). While discussing the Southesk collection with a local reporter, Belcourt Moses moves between her roles of museum interpreter, Métis artist and Albertan: “we can share it as part of the legacy of Canada. It’s come back. And it’s ours. It’s our story” (Edmonton Journal 2007). For the visiting public, notes Lemay, “the experience is totally different if someone is showing you” (2008).

Lastly, the theme *visitor experiences* was approached through interview-specific themes (2), (5) and (6). Given Lemay and Belcourt Moses’ professional focus on public interactions with exhibits, it is not surprising that both spoke extensively on the visitor experience. Lemay mentions several situations in which it is important to open doors and create opportunities for visitors to experience the stories being shared. For example, “it is important to give visitors the opportunity to say ‘Hm, that’s different’” (2008). When the average visitor spends about two hours in the museum (Lemay 2008), not every learning opportunity will be seized. The goal, says Lemay, is to have the audience interact with the exhibit and say: “this is my history” (2008).

Working in the SGAC, Belcourt Moses has the opportunity to represent her own history. While walking me through the SGAC, she stopped to explain: “This gallery tells a story. Not about an object...It tells a story of a people” (2008). Although focusing on curatorial and organizational responsibilities, Berry mentions the importance of having visitors meet Aboriginal employees at the admissions desk or in the galleries (2008).¹⁴ This is an important opportunity for the museum to publicly acknowledge voices of First Peoples, bringing them out of the gallery and into the living, interactive present. Returning to the idea

¹⁴ These employees are in addition to the Aboriginal Liaison, occasional Aboriginal summer student employees, and other employees who happen to be Aboriginal.

of a democratic museum, it would seem that the museum is as much for the visiting public as it is for the staff and members of the originating community, and sometimes all three simultaneously.

4.2 Representation of the Métis and Their Histories in RAM

Exhibits

The RAM operates with a bold vision “to help Albertans play an active and informed role in shaping their world by encouraging understanding and appreciation of Alberta’s natural and cultural heritage” (RAM 2008). The corresponding mission statement, “to preserve and tell the story of Alberta - the experience of people and places over time - and inspire Albertans to explore and understand the world around them” (RAM 2008) is practiced through the four main galleries: the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture (SGAC); Wild Alberta; the Natural History Gallery; and a large feature exhibition space. There are also two small exhibit spaces, the Showcase Gallery (a small temporary exhibit space adjacent to the SGAC), and the Orientation Gallery (in the front lobby area, for primarily photographic and archival exhibitions), which are used for small travelling and in-house exhibits. Most public spaces at the museum, including the café corridor, front terrace and front lobby, have been temporarily used as exhibit spaces.

In order to “depict as accurate and full a view of Aboriginal people as possible” (RAM 2008) in the SGAC, an Aboriginal Advisory Committee was established with four representatives from around Alberta: Reg Crowshoe of the Piikani from Brocket; Rita Marten of the Cree from Fort Chipewyan; Russell Willier of the Cree from High Prairie; and Pete Ladouceur of the Métis from Fort McMurray (RAM 2008). This committee, along with over 300 other consultants—individuals and groups—helped to develop the many dimensions of the

gallery. Métis heritage, history and contemporary culture are explored in seven sections: The New People: The Métis; Their Own Boss: The Plains Métis; “A Spirit Within”: Métis and Spirituality; Riel’s Resistance; Taking Scrip; Métis Settlements: Winning a Land Base; and Grassroots Movement for Social Change. Also, according to RAM Assistant Curator of Ethnology, Ruth McConnell, “there are many other examples of Métis material being used in other areas of the gallery” (e-mail to author, April 2, 2008).

From May 7 to September 18, 2005, Hoof Prints to Tank Tracks (HPTT) occupied the feature space. Created with the intention of presenting the history of the South Alberta Light Horse (SALH) Regiment, HPTT was co-curated with the RAM’s curator of Military and Political History, Sean Moir, and the SALH Master Warrant Officer, Jim Ogston. Officers from the SALH interpreted this collaborative exhibit as docents on site, providing context and a first-person experience of the exhibit for visitors. This was a positive and educational opportunity for both the interpreters and the visitors.¹⁵

The exhibit was organized chronologically, starting with a section pertaining to the precursor organization—the Rocky Mountain Rangers—whose members would later become the founding members of the SALH. Text panels from the related section, entitled Armed to the Teeth: The Rocky Mountain Rangers, makes reference to “public fears stemming from the Riel-led uprising” and how the “non-aboriginal population was anxious and established home guard units” such as the Rocky Mountain Rangers in Southern Alberta. According to this same text panel, in recognition of the efforts of this group at that time, all 114 rangers were awarded “the 1885 North West Canada campaign medal, along with \$80.00 in cash or a 320-acre land grant.” At 320 acres, the land grant was larger than even the most generous scrip (240 acres).

¹⁵ As with the Native Youth Program at the University of British Columbia’s MOA, however, the implications and purpose of including First Nations youth in the museum is decidedly different from those of including officers of the SALH. First Nations have a unique history with museums in Canada and their involvement in the museum is, to some extent, a form of redress where it is not for an organization such as the SALH.

The Métis, as depicted in this exhibit, were considered a threat to Alberta and Albertans; their suppression was worthy of accolades from the Crown.

4.3 Interpretive Programming at the Royal Alberta Museum

Programming at the RAM can be divided into two categories: educational programming and public programming. The first—educational programming—is designed to meet the needs of students registered with Alberta Education. This includes: students in kindergarten to grade 12; students in a registered university, college, or English as a foreign language program; and registered home-schooled children (RAM 2008). Programs in this category are developed in conjunction with Alberta Education’s provincial curriculum. The second category—public programming—is tailored to individuals, families, and groups who are not affiliated with Alberta Education.

As outlined on the publicly-accessible educational programming section of the website, seven subsections were identified: interpretive programs; the Discovery Room; self-conducted tours; guided tours; Museum School; Edukits; and distance learning.

The majority of educational programs appear under the subcategory of “interpretive programs.” Each of the eighteen interpretive programs advertised at the time of this review was associated with one of the three permanent galleries. Six programs—precisely one third—of these programs were associated with the SGAC: Aboriginal People and the Fur Trade; Alberta’s First People; Broken Promises—Renewed Hopes; Kanata: Stories of the Land and its People; Our Learning Paths; and Stories of the Earth. The Discovery Room is an educational space located within the Natural History Gallery; however, the programs conducted within this space are not associated with any particular gallery. The four programs are designed for students from kindergarten to grade two.

In addition to guided interpretive programs, resources are available to help teachers conduct self-guided tours of various galleries. For a more structured experience, guided tours are offered for students in grades seven through twelve. Two of the three advertised tours are focused on the SGAC, the third being associated with the Wild Alberta exhibit. Both SGAC tours are presented from a “First Nations perspective” (RAM 2008).

A comprehensive program is also available for teachers looking to immerse their students in the museum environment while working on their writing skills. The Museum School program runs all day for five consecutive days at the museum, and is available for students between grades two and twelve. The teacher develops learning outcomes, and conducts in-classroom preparation and reflection both before and after the program. Students are given the opportunity to work with and learn from curators and other museum staff throughout the week. According to the description, this program is intended to act as a “catalyst for learning back at school” (RAM 2008).

Educational programming is not limited to in-museum experiences. Through *Edukits* and video conferencing, museum educators reach out to their audiences. Six *Edukits* covering a wide range of topics are available for teachers to borrow. They are designed for students in grades one through four, and include hands-on materials, ideas for activities, and other media to help create a multi-faceted learning experience. A Distance Learning program was launched in the fall of 2008. At the time of writing, this was limited to one video-conferencing program. Outside of formal educational programming, children are welcomed at the RAM through summer and extra-curricular programming for groups such as Girl Guides. There are also public programs and activities associated with temporary exhibits. For example, for the HPTT exhibit (in addition to a special opening event) activities included: a Family Activity Book; Collect a Cap Badge Button; Morale by Mail; and Origami (paper cranes).

For visitors to the museum's website there are also several downloadable "Info Bytes" (fact sheets) covering both natural history (eight sheets), and human history and culture (seven sheets). Most sheets are related to previous temporary exhibits, but the "Alberta Aboriginal History Timeline" is not. This timeline includes information about Métis history, including the 1885 "Métis armed resistance against the Federal government" (RAM 2008). Also available online are 46 short audio clips (between one and six minutes) about the Natural History Gallery. These were produced in 2007 and 2008 for the program "Our Natural World," which is broadcast on local radio stations throughout Alberta.

Initiated in 1994, the Time Travellers Lecture Series is a long-standing series for adults with a well-developed "loyal audience" (RAM 2008). The series is designed to connect "visitors with ancient stories, from here in Alberta and from exotic locations abroad, that have shaped our modern world" (RAM 2008). The Edmonton Film Society also draws a mature audience. The Society hosts four film series each year. Each film is paired with a "short informative talk about the film" (RAM 2008).

Six travelling Reminiscing Kits are available to facilitate "storytelling, group discussions, and family therapy" for seniors and families who are otherwise unable to visit the museum. These include artifacts and a manual of programming suggestions.

Clearly, the RAM has worked to provide a range of programs to address the many interests and abilities of its diverse public. Speaking of her role at the museum, Belcourt Moses recognizes the 'huge responsibility [of] being an interpreter for all these people' (2008). The RAM has a similarly huge responsibility to originating communities, the public, and staff members in its mandate. Belcourt Moses "sees the [Southesk] collection as a group of puzzle pieces, the links of our past" (Edmonton Journal 2007). Reconstruction of the puzzle of our past—entangled in a complex colonial history—requires cooperation and respect between all

participants in the process, and an appreciation of the layers of practical constraints. Just as an object comprises only a part of the collection of narratives within a gallery, one gallery comprises only a part of the whole museum. In the following chapter, I will examine some of the ways a museum (such as the RAM) might feasibly connect disparate pieces of history to create a holistic museum for its public.

5 CRAFTING A HOLISTIC MUSEUM EXPERIENCE: FINDING SPACE FOR REFLECTION BETWEEN EXHIBITS

In 1955, Ewers recognized that it was “patently impossible to illustrate the entire range of traits of a culture in the space available,” and added: “nor would it be desirable to try to do so had we unlimited space” (11). Since the publication of this statement, museums have both modified both their representational goals and broadened their understanding of their audiences to fit with changing museological standards for inclusion of previously repressed voices. In this way, Ewers’ work is dated; however, if we understand his statement to mean that it is not only impossible but also undesirable to capture a total phenomenon in a limited space, then his discussion of the practical limitations (physical and intellectual) of representation are entirely pertinent in a contemporary review of representational issues. A ‘total phenomenon’ might mean an entire range of cultural traits or a detailed account of a complex and contested history.

Visitors arrive at the museum with sets of expectations not only in terms of content, but also in terms of experience. Over the last twenty years, the content has changed in response to changing participation of First Peoples in museums. At the RAM, the SGAC is the only permanent exhibit in the museum dedicated to human history. Its juxtaposition with the Natural History and the Wild Alberta Galleries is problematic as it unintentionally naturalizes the First Nations histories discussed in the SGAC, and immediately undercuts the significant and genuine attempts by the exhibit development staff to redefine the position of First Nations in Alberta’s history.

At the RAM, Lemay (2008) recognizes that there is a limit to how far you can guide the visitor’s experience. Outside of guided interpretive programming, once a visitor is in the

gallery, it is a matter of providing opportunities to make connections (Lemay 2008). The recognition that minute details of exhibit development are secondary to visitor experience was evident in Ewers work, where he was "...less concerned with whether or not the visitor stops in front of every exhibit or reads every label than with whether or not he derives healthy entertainment and instruction from his total experience in the hall" (Ewers 1955:12). Here, I would like to draw attention away from the vague and problematic concept of 'healthy entertainment' and didactic 'instruction' and focus on his identification that there can be a 'total experience' of an exhibit. This 'total experience' is derived from interactions with a series of exhibits that can only be (if we follow Ewers) fragmentary glimpses of the total phenomena they represent. Working with the museum's mandate, Lemay suggests the goal is for the audience to interact with the exhibit and say: "this is my history" (Lemay 2008). Beyond the exhibit, though, a visit to the museum becomes a total experience. Each exhibit is experienced in relation to the others, and each unique approach to Albertan history must be understood not only within its own context, but also in relation to the alternative histories adjacent to it.

5.1 Clearly Respectful: Preventing Cacophony in Multivocality

In the exhibition site, as in the theatre... a narrative is being constructed by the audience, whether the exhibition developers like it or not... The political choice to be made by the exhibition maker is, then, in what way, when, and how much to intervene in the shaping of this event. [Crew and Sims 1991:173]

Within exhibits, there have been consistent and dedicated efforts on the part of curators and collaborators to accurately portray the complexity of cultures. The introduction of multivocality to exhibit spaces has helped improve these representations, insofar as it acknowledges the complexity of the histories they endeavour to represent (e.g. Phillips and Phillips 2005). At the RAM, multivocality emerged from the collaborative process in the

development of the SGAC. Practically, though, extensive consultations and multivocality are not desirable for every mention of an originating community. For example, in the temporary exhibit, *Hoof Prints to Tank Tracks*, it would have been confusing (and disrespectful to the complexity of this history) to include a small label about the plight of the Métis when the 1885 Resistance is only briefly mentioned in the exhibit.

Different institutions have been working out models for creating respectful exhibits in cooperation with originating communities. Those involved in the process are tasked with managing the burgeoning confusion that results when multivocality approaches cacophony both in the exhibit and in the process of its development (e.g. Ames 1999; Kahn 2000). Flexibility and patience are key as new relationships are nurtured between museums and originating communities through collaborative exhibit development. The relationship, though, with the visiting public—which, by my definition, includes members of the originating community—will require a corresponding renegotiation with the museum.

To sensitively develop the SGAC, RAM staff created space for the voices of the originating communities, and of the curatorial team. Unique communities in Alberta also exist in separated spaces (First Nations reserves, Métis settlements, Hutterite colonies, sprawling cities, isolated farms, etc.). This allows for some measure of freedom, but does not foster cross-cultural understanding. This requires the creation of bridges between communities and, at the scale of the museum, between exhibits. If the museum's vision is "to help Albertans play an active and informed role in shaping their world by encouraging understanding and appreciation of Alberta's natural and cultural heritage" (RAM 2008), then the encouragement of such a dialogue is desirable. In this way, the museum could function as a microcosm of Alberta's sometimes-contentious complex of natural and human histories. As Phillips and Phillips (2005) observe, when "debates over history, land, and sovereignty remain unresolved

outside of the museum, it would be dishonest to pretend to resolution inside the museum” (702).

5.2 Practicing Inclusive Interpretation

Although consultations with communities are not required for the development of educational programming at the RAM, Belcourt Moses mentioned that she had travelled throughout the province, building friendships with people in several Aboriginal communities. Although this helped her better represent the many cultures represented in the SGAC, she would like to see monies allocated for a representative from each community (2008).

Educational programming at the RAM is extensive, though, and includes several programs relating to Alberta’s First Nations peoples, including the Métis. Although the majority of programming is directed to school groups, there are several programs designed for the general public, seniors and children outside of school. The educational programming is divided equally between the three exhibit spaces (i.e. one-third of the programs available are devoted to each exhibit), and other interpretive programming is similarly distributed. Temporary exhibitions pose several interpretive challenges due to limited funding, staffing, and time. Public programming associated with temporary exhibitions can include ongoing activities, special tours and demonstrations. These programs are usually intimately connected with the temporary exhibition and are not actively associated with the permanent exhibits.

Earlier, I outlined Stahl’s limitations for previous models for the construction of meaning: “(1) the need to account for the multiplicity of meanings in social life; (2) the analytical practice of reflectively gauging meaning, which separates meaning from practice; and (3) the privileging of linguistic formulations of meaning” (2002:829). Interpretation involves the construction of meaning, not just the conveyance. Here, I will outline some

methods employed by interpreters—and some suggestions for other methods that could be employed—that address the limitations of text-based models for the construction of meaning.

An experienced interpreter works on several levels to dialectically develop meaningful experiences with their audience. Each program is a narrative consisting of layers of meaning through text, experience, dialogue and reflection. The multiplicity of meanings is best interpreted through a multifaceted approach. The programming currently available at the RAM (through the work of their skilled interpreters) does this. However, it does not make obvious (as I argue it should) the interconnectedness of the histories represented in disparate spaces at the museum. Constructing meaningful experiences for people, not just interpreting the meaning of any one exhibit, will help move the construction of meaning into the conscious present. Small changes to exhibit text are not going to make the difference. Rather, it is the reformulation of museum experiences, from disparate events (visiting a set of disconnected exhibits) to a holistic experience (which incorporates text, space, and human interaction through respectful narrative), helping bring appropriate museologies into practice. Making these connections should not be a complex task. Although it would be interesting to develop a pan-museum exhibit, a brief and skillfully delivered mention of (or visit to) another exhibit, or the posing of a stimulating question would suffice.

6 CONCLUSION

The RAM's mission statement does not fully capture the reality of Métis, nor Albertan, history. In order to “inspire Albertans to explore and understand the world around them,” the RAM needs to move beyond its quest to convey “the story of Alberta” and “the experience of people and places over time” (RAM 2008; emphasis added), and work towards a discursive representation of the stories of Alberta and the experiences of peoples and places over time. However, this pluralism is less important in writing than in practice. Given the diverse “local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions” (Kreps 2008:23) within Alberta, the curators and interpreters at the Royal Alberta Museum are working towards one practice of appropriate museology within individual exhibits and programs that broaches contested histories.

Ultimately, the individual exhibits, and the extensive programming and interpretation available in the museum are (considered independently) sufficient. However, given that there are limitations to the extent to which visitors can and will engage with exhibit spaces (as identified by both Lemay and Belcourt-Moses), there is a deficit in clarity. The underlying principles guiding the museum's actions and accounting for the tremendous diversity of histories presented are not clear. If we consider the RAM as an edited collection of essays by different authors, with its mission statement as the central theme, the exhibits as the individual essays, and interpretation as editor (negotiating understandings between authors and audiences), then it seems that the foreword and the editorial reflections between the exhibits are missing. Phillips and Phillips' (2005) reflection on the images used in the First Peoples Hall at the CMC touches on the issue at hand:

As in a stereoscopic projection, the doubling of the images has given the viewer a new depth of perception. But the lack of identity between the particular images that are overlaid—the early 19th-century Aboriginal family and the 20th-century seat of government—prevents their perfect registration. [702-703]

Earlier, I noted Kratz and Karp's observation that museums are "essential forms through which to make statements about history, identity, value, and place and to claim recognition" (2006:4). But when the statements are oppositional (or at least incongruent), as was the case when HTPP was installed below the SGAC, the visiting public cannot be expected to hear what the museum (not just the exhibit) is trying to say. The current configuration of the museum separates the galleries in a way that allows visitors seemingly neutral time and space between exhibits. Occasionally used for small photographic or archival exhibits, these spaces, or interpretation that pauses for reflection in these spaces, could engage visitors with the larger context in which the museum is situated. By extending an invitation to participate in the "open debate" (Conaty 2003:240) surrounding museological practice, the museum can create a more engaging total museum experience for the visiting public. This engagement would not necessarily require significant expenditure of time, funds, or human resources on the part of the museum. Comprehensive understanding of any culture, history or issue is impractical and, as we have seen, rarely the goal. Sparking public awareness of the immediate relevance of museum narratives should be simple and clear. By suggesting a simple process, I am not promoting oversimplification of complex issues; rather, I am suggesting inviting the public to have a brief but arresting glimpse into the intellectual space of the museum. This will not be done by inserting a window, but by punching a hole in the wall: although messier and riskier, it is more likely to be noticed than a standard window.

In the 1950s, Ewers discussed how museums had not adapted to new methods of graphic representation and were thus "seeking to hold the attention of new generations of museum visitors by polishing the old Rolls Royce [while] visitors were vainly looking for some evidence of streamlining" (Ewers 1955:1). Today, the visiting public is looking for the old Rolls Royce—searching for 'truth'—while the museum streamlines its methodology

behind the scenes—adapting to contemporary theory and needs of originating communities. Successful collaborative processes are the beginning—decidedly not the end—of the process of transforming the museum. If Canadian museums are working to become redemptive spaces—and it is clear that many are—then they must prepare their diverse publics to witness the shift to appropriate museologies. Strategies such as allowing multivocality in exhibits are effective for entreating participation from disparate knowledge communities, but are not yet sensitive to the needs of the diverse visiting public. Before multivocality can become evidence of a successful shift to an appropriate museology, the inherent contestations and interruptions need to be integrated into a total museum experience for the visiting public. When a visitor’s museum experience is punctuated by human interactions (especially with members of originating communities), the fragments of history are woven into a meaningful ‘total experience’ that respects the voices of the peoples being represented.

Jennifer Reid describes Louis Riel as a “man who was profoundly enmeshed in the tenuous—often torturous—space between...dichotomies” (English/French, Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal, east/west) (2008:7). How better to respect the complexity of Métis history and the vital issue of Métis identity than to provide space “for the stories between *yes and no*” (Dumont 1996:59) and for conversations between contrasting exhibits? As I have demonstrated, the Métis have a long history of resisting—and successfully lobbying for changes to—unjust policies and systems. Juxtaposing different representations of this history (with its many layers of contestation and political salience) provides an opportunity for the museum to invite public consideration of the spaces between past and present, theory and practice, and museums and the worlds beyond their doors.

“If you’re going to honour a people’s history,” says Belcourt Moses, “then you’re telling about the present too” (2008). By *the present*, Belcourt Moses is not just referring to the

(respectful and well-written) contemporary sections of the SGAC. Rather, she is creatively incorporating history, art, and her own life into her stimulating narratives about a present extending beyond the exhibit's space. Just as she skillfully moves between narratives about the SGAC, her work as a Métis interpreter, and her life as an Aboriginal artist, so too must the museum allow their visitors to move between exhibits; not by lulling them into passive acceptance (or negligence) of dissonance, but through thought-provoking transitions that demand a double take.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

 <p>The University of British Columbia Office of Research Services Behavioural Research Ethics Board Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3</p>		
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK		
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Sue Rowley	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Museum Anthropology	UBC BREB NUMBER: H08-01039
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution		Site
N/A		N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: The Royal Alberta Museum, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Jennifer Joanne Kienholz Patrick Moore		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: Metis Representation and Contested Histories at the Royal Alberta Museum		
CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: September 2, 2009		
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: September 2, 2008
Document Name	Version	Date
Protocol:		
Approved Thesis Proposal	1	June 12, 2008
Consent Forms:		
Interview Consent Form	1	August 24, 2008
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
Sample Interview Script	1	August 24, 2008
Letter of Initial Contact:		
Letter of Initial Contact	1	August 24, 2008
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.		
<p>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</p> <hr/> <p>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</p>		

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Susan Berry

- 1) As an exhibit such as the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture is developed with an expansive team of collaborators, are the collaborators involved in the development of educational programming and other general operations of the museum?
- 2) How will the role of collaborators be the same or different in the planning of the new First Nations gallery than in the planning of the Syncrude Gallery?
- 3) Are collaborators given the opportunity to review incoming temporary exhibitions? What are some of the factors that limit the extent to which collaborators or consultants are involved in the museum?
- 4) Noting that as the number of collaborators increases, the complexity of decision-making processes increases, who outlines the allowable or desirable extent of collaboration?
- 5) What is involved, then, in the review process of temporary exhibits at the museum?
- 6) How are temporary exhibitions selected for the temporary exhibition space? Is there an impetus to include Albertan content, Canadian content, First Nations perspectives, or themes of public interest?
- 7) If I am interested in examining representation of the Métis, what other temporary exhibitions do you think I should examine? Who else might I speak with to learn more about these issues?
- 8) Do you have any questions, or is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Aline Lemay

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your current position at the museum? I hear it is a new position for the museum, do you know what led to the creation of it? What other positions make up the educational team at the museum?
- 2) How does the government fit into the educational picture, through curriculum, goal setting or any other means?
- 3) You mentioned that you were involved with the recent exhibit *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-Year Journey*. What did your involvement entail?
- 4) What is involved in the in the development of interpretation and educational programming for temporary exhibits at the museum? Is there any impetus to associate these temporary exhibits with the permanent galleries?
- 5) A permanent exhibit such as the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture is developed with an expansive team of collaborators, are the collaborators involved in the development of educational programming?
- 6) Are collaborators given the opportunity to review incoming new educational programming? What are some of the factors that limit the extent to which collaborators are involved in the museum?
- 7) Do you have any questions, or is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Melissa-Jo Belcourt Moses

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your current position at the museum? What other positions make up the educational team?
- 2) As an interpreter, how does the Museum's mandate affect your program development and your interactions with visitors?
- 3) I heard that you were involved with the recent exhibit *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-Year Journey*. What did your involvement entail?
- 4) What is involved in the in the development of interpretation and educational programming for temporary exhibits at the museum? Is there any impetus to associate these temporary exhibits with the permanent galleries?
- 5) A permanent exhibit such as the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture is developed with an expansive team of collaborators. How do you respect their contributions while following the museum's, and your own, directions in the development of educational programming?
- 6) Do you have any questions, or is there anything else you'd like to add?