THE SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION:
EXPLORING CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL
PRINCIPLES IN TRANSFORMING
THE MUSEUM THROUGH SPACE AND TIME.

by

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Abstract

Recent trends in critical museology have called for a collaborative approach to the exhibition process. Although generally agreed upon in principle, no clear collaborative model has yet emerged that can be applied across variable institutions, given that exhibits are always mediated by the specific temporal, political, and ideological contexts in which they are created. This thesis suggests that by translating some of the principles, philosophies, and methodologies of critical pedagogy to the sphere of the museum, a more dynamic and effective notion of collaboration will emerge. Through such an application, we can find ways to extend and recreate the role of the museum as an agent in both the production and consumption of cultural ideologies. *"The Spirit of Islam: Experiencing Islam Through Calligraphy"*, a temporary exhibition at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Canada, will be used as a case study to examine the strengths, limitations, and potential of such an approach.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

In the past two decades in North America, museums have undergone dramatic changes, both practically and theoretically. In practical terms, a general decline in governmental funding for the arts has had an impact on large areas of the cultural sector. For the museum, this has combined with demands for an increasingly business-oriented rationale for the utility of museums and exhibitions when funding is made available. The emphasis is on product, with visitor numbers, revenues, and practical utility of exhibits becoming the salient features museums must emphasize when completing funding applications. In addition, museums find themselves competing with other attractions and venues in an increasingly information-saturated culture.

Theoretical issues are more complex. In the wake of major paradigmatic shifts in the academy following the rise of postmodernism and the plethora of critical discourses it spawned, museums have come under fire for using outdated theory and method in both their exhibition practices and consequent displays. Ethnographic museums in particular have been widely criticized for at best, misrepresenting, and at worst, distorting or even silencing groups whose material culture they hold in their collections. In Canada, the most widely discussed examples of such targets of criticism are *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First People* and *Into the Heart of Africa*, both mounted in the late eighties and both having tremendous impact on the way museums saw themselves. Each of these, for different reasons, sparked debate about the kinds of roles that indigenous and oppressed cultural groups should play in the presentation and (re)presentation of their own histories and pasts.[1] *The Spirit Sings*, in particular, began an

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[1] *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, was an exhibit shown at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988 as part of the winter Olympic celebrations. It generated controversy after the Lubicon Lake Cree called for a boycott of the both Olympics and the exhibit due to the fact that the exhibit's major sponsor, Shell Oil, was drilling on traditional land owned by the Lubicon Cree. The boycott gained international attention and led to discussions and criticisms not only surrounding the motivation of the exhibition, but also design elements within it. (For a more in depth treatment see Julia Harrison, 1988. "The Spirit Sings and the Future of Anthropology" in *Anthropology Today*, Vol 4, no 6, pp. 6-9). *Into the Heart of Africa* was shown at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1989 and generated great controversy over the messages it delivered, which were seen by many to misrepresent African peoples. (For a case study of this exhibit, see Shelley Ruth Butler, 1999. Contested Representations: revisiting *Into the Heart of Africa*. Amsterdam: Overseas Publishing Agency.)

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ongoing discussion regarding practice, most clearly articulated through the creation of the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples (Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association, 1992). This document, consisting of a set of guidelines for museum practice agreed upon by both museum workers and various representatives of First Nations groups across Canada, marked the beginning of a significant shift in how museums approached the communities whom they sought to represent. The guidelines emphasized partnership, equality, and collaboration, and led to many museums adopting a practice commonly envisaged as 'the collaborative method'. There have been many attempts at articulating what this collaborative method entails, some derived from projects and partnerships occurring in other disciplines within academia, others being institutionally specific.

Some museum professionals have embraced the concept of partnership whilst others have been reluctant to defer traditional power roles to groups they view as being less qualified to interpret material culture. Previous rationales for the utility of museums (such as the salvage paradigm, the preservation of culture for future generations, and the use of both material culture and the space of the museum to educate and enlighten the public) have proven doubtful and even obsolete in the wake of claims of museums being imperialist, racist, and exclusive. These claims are leveled most often at ethnographic/natural history museums rather than fine art museums/galleries. It should be emphasized that this thesis is specifically concerned with ethnographic museums, though the debates do not exclusively rest within this category.

The multiplicity of competing demands on both museums and their personnel have led to something of a crisis within many museums. Both individuals and institutions now face questions regarding their value and utility, or, in extreme cases, even their necessity. The answers to such questions will vary, depending on whom you ask, but the most common response involves the concept of education. Although previous methods of presentation may have been erroneous, most museums still feel that they are educating the public in some way, and

their 'educational potential' is most often cited as the justification for funding and value. The definition of what exactly constitutes education, however, varies considerably. How is such a concept to be enacted, let alone measured? These are questions that this thesis will explore.

The 'New Museology' and Critical Pedagogy

The precursors, nuances, and implications of the above debates have been much discussed (e.g. Ames 1992; Bennett 1995; Karp and Lavine 1992), culminating in a body of thought that has been termed 'the new museology' (Vergo 1989). The new museology emphasizes critical thinking both about and within museums, and proposes solutions in collaborative work, though, again, clear models describing what this entails are elusive. Different approaches have been used with varying degrees of success, but no clear structural model has yet emerged. The vague quality associated with the collaborative concept would appear to be linked to the fact that collaboration is necessarily institutionally and regionally specific. Local politics, personality clashes between key stakeholders in exhibit formation, and the organizational structures of specific museum and community organizations would seem to defy any set models of 'how to' collaborate. The challenge could perhaps be more fruitfully conceptualized as how to develop a set of guidelines that might facilitate a collaborative approach to the exhibition process. I believe that such a set of guidelines can be found in the sphere of critical pedagogy.

The goals of critical pedagogy originate in the egalitarian visions of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell articulated in the first half of the twentieth century; namely, that the democratic vision of classical liberalism, if implemented into education, could produce humans that were equal, co-operative, and whose goals were based on sharing and equal participation rather than accumulation and domination (Macedo 2000:38).

Essentially, critical pedagogy aims to create environments in which teachers and students can each bring their own experiences to the learning environment and thereby create spaces where marginalized groups are able to engage in a dialogue surrounding issues pertaining to their lives (and eventually be given opportunities to produce their own representations). The role of the teacher is central, as they are of pivotal importance in helping learners to develop their critical capacities.

Structure of Thesis

In translating these ideas to a museum format based on collaboration, both the exhibition space and its contents become relevant as players in the creation of knowledge in that the messages they entail are created through the dialogue of collaborating participants. These expressions of knowledge are further open to mediation and appropriation by visitors-as-learners and by individuals or groups who are actively speaking within the exhibit space. *The Spirit of Islam: Experiencing Islam Through Calligraphy*, a temporary exhibit at the Museum of Anthropology (MoA), at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, serves as a useful case study in understanding how such principles may be played out in both the construction and realization of museum learning environments.

Running from October 2001 to May 2002, *The Spirit of Islam* was the result of a two-year collaboration between the Museum of Anthropology and over one hundred advisors from Muslim communities in the lower mainland of B.C. From its inception, the exhibit was faced with two main challenges. The first was to provide a space in which to confront simplistic stereotypes of Muslim identity presented in mainstream society, or a view that has been dubbed "the three B's: bombers, billionaires, and belly-dancers".[2] The second was to create a dialogue

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[2] Though he did not come up with this phrase, I take this quotation from Dr. Takim, a visiting scholar who spoke at the Museum of Anthropology in February, 2002, as part of the Public Programs Speaker Series for *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit.

not only between the exhibition and museum visitors, but also between different Muslim communities in the Greater Vancouver area. Muslim collaborators for the project were drawn mostly from the larger Muslim organizations in B.C, such as the B.C. Muslim Association, the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council of B.C, and the Shia Muslim Community of B.C. The diversity of opinion on what it meant to be Muslim amongst these different groups presented a particularly strong challenge to the exhibit in terms of coming to a commonly agreed upon content. Ultimately, the commitment to full partnership made by both the museum and the Muslim communities resulted in the exhibition being stronger for having such diversity. It is the nature, function, and some of the implications of this partnership that this thesis will explore.

The exhibit was unique in a great many ways. In terms of following the collaborative method, the level of dialogue between diverse stakeholder parties during the planning and implementation of the exhibit was phenomenal. Several committees were formed to discuss every aspect of the exhibit from its inception to its opening. These smaller units were presided over by an Advisory Committee composed of Muslim community leaders and museum personnel which had final say on any and all decisions regarding the exhibit.

There are several levels on which the exhibit worked according to the principles of critical pedagogy. I will examine how the exhibit planning and implementation process became a dialogic sphere in which learning transpired based on ongoing dialogues between members of the Advisory Committee who created the exhibit. Second, the space of the exhibit itself will be examined, both as an actor in a dialogue between itself and visitors, and particularly as a space used by participants to create their own dynamics of teaching and learning. The latter is of greatest interest with regard to a critical pedagogy perspective and will centre on the official Educational Program that accompanied the exhibit. This program was co-taught by Muslim and non-Muslim volunteers, with a goal of having three educators present, one non-Muslim and two Muslims, each from different local communities. The Education Program itself entailed multiple

dimensions of interaction - between learners and objects, Muslim and non-Muslim volunteers, and students and volunteers, many of which will also be discussed.

This thesis will argue that the reason that the environment created in *The Spirit of Islam* worked in the manner espoused by critical pedagogy was due to the influence of two major factors, namely, the space of the exhibit and the timing of the exhibit. The first relates to the fact that several of the tenets of critical pedagogy informed and became manifest in both the planning process and the resultant exhibit space, most powerfully observable in the Education Program. This was partly the intention of the Chair of the Education Committee, and partly arose independently from the particular ethical convictions of the stakeholders involved. However, the commitment to collaboration and partnership made by all parties from the outset was key in allowing this educative sphere to evolve so uniquely, as the methodology of the collaborative process as undertaken by MoA is complementary with many of the fundamental methodological principles of critical pedagogy.

The second factor, the timing of the exhibit, is more complex, yet derives from the first. Timing became important when terrorist attacks believed to be perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists occurred in the United States of America just a few weeks before the exhibit opened. These attacks and their aftermath became a focal point around which meanings of Islam became publicly debated in a broad range of spheres. The MoA exhibit then became a case of the opportunity for dialogue as a method of learning meeting the preparedness for creating new understandings of Islam. The alignment of the exhibit with critical pedagogical principles created a space where meanings were malleable. This malleability allowed the exhibit space to counter the prevailing ideology surrounding Islam propagated by hegemonic forces in current mainstream Western society.

The reasons behind both the spatial and temporal factors at work here will be explored through examining both the current climate in museology and the current climate in Western

attitudes toward Islam in the wake of terrorist debates, as framed against critical pedagogical articulations of learning, teaching, and knowledge production. Specific reactions will be addressed through looking at some of the publicly sanctioned ideological assumptions surrounding Islam throughout the time the exhibit was on display and how these fed into the meaning of the exhibit. It is necessary to examine these spheres in order to highlight the extent to which museum exhibits and their potential as transformative educative sites are temporally, institutionally, and culturally specific.

Methods and Goals

The intended goal of this research is to explore this potential of the museum as a space that can be appropriated for new articulations of education as conceived by critical pedagogy. It is asserted that such a potential, if harnessed, would lead to an extension and recreation of the museum's powerful position as an agent in both the production and consumption of cultural ideologies, leading to this power being utilized as part of a project to create a more socially democratic society.

There were two methods used to investigate and understand the workings of the exhibit. The first was participant observation, primarily within the exhibit space. Through observing the interactions between volunteers, students, and teachers of varying ethnicities and ages I was able to develop an understanding of how 'education' was being conceived by the various parties involved. I was present for the duration of a total of twelve school group visits over the space of five months, though the majority I attended took place during the last two months of the exhibit run. The number of children involved ranged from approximately twenty to sixty. The youngest group I observed were in grade five, the oldest in grade twelve. There was an extreme diversity of ethnicity within the groups, and in over half of the groups at least two Muslim students were present. I also observed two sessions involving only Muslim students.

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The composition of the volunteers was also varied. There were a total of seven non-Muslim volunteers present at different times across the twelve programs I attended, and nine Muslim volunteers from a variety of communities. I also visited the exhibit space at other times to observe general museum visitors and their reactions. All quotations cited in this thesis by visitors, students, or educators in the exhibit space were seen and heard directly by myself.

I also attended many of the Public Programs Lecture Series that ran in conjunction with the exhibit and was able to hear guest speakers discuss the exhibit specifically and Islam more broadly. In addition, as a UBC graduate student I took part in a Critical Curatorial Studies course which included in its curriculum two seminars with exhibit participants – one in the space of the classroom and one in the space of the exhibit.

Observational evidence was supplemented through conducting interviews (both semi-structured and open ended) with both museum staff and Muslim community members involved with the exhibit. The objective of these was to gain an understanding how participants arrived at the structure of the program and what ethical considerations were brought to bear on the process. Such methods allowed me to compare the theory of the exhibit, in terms of the ways in which it attempted to create a unique learning environment, with the practice of the exhibit and to what degree this was effective.

The above methodological choices were made based on the fact that the kind of learning that *The Spirit of Islam* was attempting to create is not the kind that can be measured statistically or immediately. The concept of visitor studies is a relatively recent one in museum literature, and thus limited. Visitor surveys and questionnaires may well have demonstrated a positive response to the exhibition, but would not have explained how the learning process was occurring, nor if it was successful. Observation of the educators themselves is more fruitful for such research in exploring and articulating different methods of collaboration.

In order to come to such an understanding, the first part of this thesis must undertake two related tasks. The first and more general is to make the case for the museum as an agent of ideological control which is aligned with the dominant hegemonic position of the ruling classes (or bourgeoisie) of contemporary Western society. The second is to examine how critical pedagogical principles might be used to subvert this function and to discuss the potential degree to which the museum could function as a counter hegemonic space. I will first present the theory behind such a notion, and then offer a case study as a concrete terrain to explore how theory here can be translated into practice, or praxis to use the preferred term in critical pedagogy. Praxis is understood as the intersection or interface between theory and practice and it is this space that I am most interested in exploring.

Radical Education and Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy builds on the tenets of radical education, a concept most often associated with the work of Paulo Freire, though his work has connections with that of many other leading scholars, most notably Henry Giroux (1992), Arjun Appadurai (1996; 2000) and Noam Chomsky (2000).

It is difficult to define Freire's radical education. It is not so much a theory as a set of principles. As Giroux describes it:

> Radical education doesn't refer to a discipline or a body of knowledge. It suggests a particular kind of practice and a particular posture of questioning received institutions and received assumptions. I would say in a general way that the basic premises of radical education grew out of the crisis in social theory. More specifically, we can distinguish three traits: radical education is interdisciplinary in nature, it questions the fundamental categories of all disciplines, and it has a public mission of making society more democratic. This last point is perhaps the principle reason why radical education as a field is so exciting. We can take ideas and apply them (1992:9).

Radical education takes the public sphere as its locus of application, however broadly conceived that may be, and this is one of the crucial points of difference between it and other theoretical approaches, which tend to be focused within the academy, and often at a considerable level of abstraction. The focus on the public sphere is also what makes it particularly applicable to the museum, as the majority of museums are public institutions and are accountable as such. Certainly in this thesis when I refer to the museum and its potential, I am discussing public rather than private institutions.

Freire's work is voluminous, beginning with education in literacy (Freire 1976; Freire and Macedo 1987), and moving through studies of educational politics (Freire 1985) and philosophy (Freire and Macedo 1998; Freire 1998). From this foundation has stemmed the larger field of critical pedagogy, which is concerned with examining "the interconnecting relationship among ideology, power, and culture" (Leistyna et al. 1996:3). Freire's final work, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (published posthumously) is perhaps the broadest of his texts and unites many strands of critical pedagogy. It also has particular utility for cultural institutions. As an educator, scholar, and activist, Freire is concerned with pedagogy and its use as an agent of liberation, with the ultimate goal of creating a more democratic society. His essential philosophy is that the only way to empower the oppressed is through education, though the concept of education in the First world is both misunderstood and misused. He rejects the common 'banking' theory of education, where a teacher imparts to the student their own knowledge in order that the student learns by transmission, and instead proposes a more dialectical system of education, where both the teacher and the student bring their own experiences to the learning environment, each learning from the other. Education here is not enacted through transference but through different parties being involved in the production and the consumption of knowledge. The teacher's task then, is not to mold but to encourage human agency.

Central to this process is the idea of ethics. It is impossible, Freire contends, to divorce the human condition from the ethical condition. In other words, that which is said and that which is done must be coterminous. Specifically, Freire is concerned with ideology and how it influences the learning process. He insists that through our inherent 'epistemological curiosity', humanity has the capacity for critical reflection, and through such reflection is able to rise above ideology and instead choose to be ethically informed and motivated.

Apart from the recognition that education is both ethically and ideologically informed, other requirements of educators who aim to be critical pedagogues include humility, a capacity to be critical and to critically reflect, and an ability to recognize one's own conditioning. The broader philosophy behind the articulation of these principles is that if practiced, they will lead to the development of a "critical reading of the world" (to use Freire's phrase) in which the educator is able to make links between ideology, ethics, and education. Uncovering the connections between these will in turn create a more just society, one in which the oppressed will have the ability to usurp the conditions of their oppression. Freire is deliberately vague about the use of the term oppressed, using it to describe any group dominated by another, particularly at an ideologically manifested level. It is a charged term and needs to be defined in relation to my argument.

In the time period under discussion in this thesis, I feel that North American Muslims and Arab Canadians can be placed in the category of oppressed in terms of representation and identity. They are oppressed in terms of representation in the sense that they have limited access to mainstream education and media apparatuses and therefore cannot easily control what is said or taught about their beliefs and identity. They are also oppressed in having to conform to many of the structures of North American society that conflict with both their beliefs and the lifestyle these beliefs entail (for example, the requirement of Muslims to pray five times a day is not facilitated by typical work environments in Canada).

The degree to which individual Muslims or Muslim communities feel oppressed will vary greatly, but I feel that they may be placed in the category as Freire and other critical pedagogues discuss it by virtue of their marginality within mainstream North American society. Examples of this marginality will be discussed further as the thesis progresses and are pivotal to understanding the importance of *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit.

Radical education is not only theoretically but also politically informed. Again, these descriptors also apply to the museum, however much it may attempt to resist such characterizations. Though I intend to discuss some of the specific methodological guidelines espoused by various critical pedagogues and how such methodology impacted *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit, I anchor this thesis in the larger project of transforming museums into more democratic spaces, in order that they in turn can function in society as more counter-hegemonic spaces, a function I will discuss in more depth below.

Exhibition and Marxist Theory

Exhibits are constructed representations that reflect particular ideologies in particular times and places. Critical pedagogy takes the view that humans are conditioned but not determined, therefore both history and future can be seen as possibility. We are all, according to Freire, people that live in a world which is "radically unfinished", and can therefore change, though this can only occur when critique is combined with possibility in a democratizing project. The relationship is dialectical, with the utility and value of such a 'radical democratic project' being that it "provides an ethical referent both for engaging in a critique of its own authority and as part of a wider expression of authority" (Macedo 1996:211).

All of the above ideas are particularly important for museums to consider given their complicated histories and uncertain futures. As repositories of vast stores of cultural heritage of many peoples, particularly oppressed peoples, it is imperative that they find ways in which to

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connect ideology and education toward a goal of equality of representation. Radical education as a field is outlining methodologies for undertaking such a task, and it is my contention that these must be taken into consideration when planning museum exhibits, conceived as learning environments, or indeed when planning museums themselves.

Theorists and practitioners who claim to be critical pedagogues begin with what is essentially a Marxist conception of society. That is to say, they begin with the notion that in society, humans are defined by the work that they do and the institutions they are forced to participate in. Consciousness, then, is determined by societal being. At the time Marx was writing (the late nineteenth century) such a notion was in opposition to the dominant conception of humanity which held that human consciousness determined society and that subsequent cultural institutions were the product of rational thought. Marx held a materialist view of the world, asserting that the relations of production in society created certain subject positions that people were forced into occupying- most notably class relations. The relations of production in a society created the foundation or base of society, which was economic. Resting on this base was the superstructure, consisting of cultural institutions such as political, religious, and legal systems. As the base determined the superstructure, the humans that participated in it were merely occupying already determined positions. Change and progression in society were therefore only possible when the mode of production was changed, which would change the base and the corresponding superstructure. Such change would only be possible through conflict, when the workers (proletariats) who maintained the relations of production by providing labour attempted to overthrow the capitalists (bourgeoisie) who controlled the profits created by this labour.

Marx's base-superstructure metaphor has been much interrogated and interpreted throughout academia, particularly in the transition from 'Marx' to 'Marxism' (Rockmore 2002) and there is little to be gained by relaying these arguments in their entirety. Instead I will focus

on the concepts of ideology, hegemony, and dialectics as they derive from Marxist thought and how they have been amended/understood by theorists relevant to the field of critical pedagogy. Such a detour is necessary in order to understand the origins and emphasis of the terrain of critical pedagogy as a whole.

Dialectics

The pivotal argument surrounding different interpretations of Marxist theory involves human agency. Many have argued that Marx's model is too abstract and categorical, not allowing for the fact that humans have agency in their own lives. The usual counter-argument to this lies in Marx's use of dialectics. The base and the superstructure have a dialectical relationship, that is, whilst being contradictory, they also rely on and influence each other. In fact, the dialectical relationship between the workers and the bourgeoisie is pivotal, being the only way that change can occur. In order to overthrow the ruling class, the working class must recognize their position of subordination, that is, they must develop a 'class consciousness'. Paradoxically, the way they are kept subordinate is through the State's ideological repression of class consciousness. This dialectical relationship is at the core of critical pedagogy, which contends that the oppressed (Freire's replacement term for the proletariat) are oppressed due to the lack of information they have access to with regard to their positions. The formalized educational system as administered by many governments throughout the world is complicit in reinforcing and creating an ideology (currently an ideology of capitalism) that keeps the oppressed *as* oppressed in order that the ruling classes (oppressors) can remain in their positions of privilege. Thus, "the dialectic of 'oppressor' is the reality of the 'oppressed'" (Leistyna et al. 1996:213). Therefore, the role of the educator is pivotal as, rather than being complicit with the dominant ideology, they can subvert it and use education quite differently as a tool for emancipation. Doing so requires the educator to reject their own position of privilege and make

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their beliefs bare as well as commit to the potential of a classless society. Such a vision entails that the educator will willingly give up their power (or "commit class suicide", to use Freire's phrase), giving the oppressed the tools to dismantle the current system of ideological control. This is why the recognition of dialectic is so pivotal to the critical pedagogical vision.

The origins of a concept of dialectics arguably predate ancient Greece. According to Moacir Gadotti, a leading proponent of critical pedagogy, precursory articulations of the concept can be found in the writings of Lao Tse and the paradoxes of Zenon of Elea (1996:136). Popularity increased with the widely used Socratic method of analysis and synthesis, and key historically-oriented extensions were provided by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion that society conditions the individual in terms of freedom and democracy. Ludwig Feuerbach extended this thesis with a rejection of God (conceived as a projection of humanity's lack) that led to affirmation of identity as a human (1996:137). Whilst Gadotti claims that all these theorists can be seen to have used the notion of dialectics in one way or another, he asserts that it was Friedrich Hegel who advanced the notion most significantly in terms of how Marx perceived it. (1996:139).

Hegel emphasized reason, holding that ideas and rationality created the world. Historical change was brought about by ideological change; therefore history was the manifestation of reason at the same time that it was able to be changed. Contradiction was not illogical to Hegel, but:

> the real engine of thought, and, at the same time, the engine of history, as history is no more that the manifestation of ideas. Thought [was] not considered to be a static entity. It evolved through contradictions which have been surpassed, from that of thesis (affirmation) to that of the antithesis (negation), and thence to synthesis (concilliation) (Gadotti 1996:12).

Marx not only inverted Hegelian dialectics, but innovated through his application of dialectics to societal reality, as constituted through political and economic relations (Gadotti 1996:15). Marx

retained the notion of movement but located dialectics in the sphere of the material rather than simply the spiritual.

I include the above history to emphasize that the goals of critical pedagogy are not new and are not implausible, though they are often perceived to be in today's hegemonically rational society. Notions of process, dialectics, and ethics may have been obscured by the positivistic, scientific and objective thinking that have accompanied the rise of Western society to a position of global dominance, but these notions are historically grounded and continue to be vital.

Perhaps the most important point regarding dialectics in a pedagogical context is that it is understood as both theory and method, or praxis, to use the preferred term within the field. Gadotti claims that:

> For Marx, dialectics explained the evolution of the material, of nature, and of mankind itself...Marx's dialectics is not merely a method to arrive at the truth. It is a conception of man, society, and the relationship between man and the world (1996:13).

This also emphasizes the processual nature of a critical pedagogical approach. Carlos Alberto Torres further expands that a dialectical conception constitutes:

> both a method for intellectual inquiry, and as the texture and dynamics underscoring the evolving reality of human beings, culture, and society...dialectical development begins with the assumption that reality evolves from contradictions between antagonistic and nonantagonistic forces. It is always a dialectic of oppositions that constitute the dynamics of transformation of reality. Culture is always the result of the systematic accumulation of human actions and reactions. Hence as a civilizatory artifact, culture- and, by implication, human praxis- is always entangled with moral, ethical, spiritual, and material premises- and, I must add- dilemmas which underscore, but also result from, conflictive (r)evolution of any human or cultural reality. Reality is, simply put, constituted through and an outcome of historical struggles
> (Torres 1996:xix).

Torres here not only reinforces the centrality of a dialectical approach to education, but also points to the dialectical dimension of culture. This is important to acknowledge in terms of this thesis as an anthropological study of cultural phenomena as expressed through the institution of the museum, which I believe is too often characterized as a static space.

In the same way that an understanding of the origins of dialecticism is important in order to avoid getting tied up in the myriad of contemporary debates surrounding human agency and structure, it is equally important to avoid confusion about critical pedagogy's understanding of ideology.

Ideology

There now exist so many distinguishable views of ideology that a standard definition is difficult. The important idea with regard to how critical pedagogy has interpreted the concept lies in its position within the superstructure. Raymond Williams has argued that Marx's notion of 'superstructure' can be seen in different works to denote three things: "legal and political forms which express existing real relations of production" (which relates to institutions), "forms of consciousness which express a particular class view of the world" (which relates to consciousness), and "a process in which, over a whole range of activities, people become conscious of a fundamental economic conflict and fight it out" (which relates to political and cultural practices) (1994 [1977]:586).

Marx's general notion of ideology implies that as ideas are an expression of consciousness, they are therefore determined by the conditions in society that create consciousness. He contends that in order to maintain the reproduction of the means of production (the labour power), that is, to indoctrinate and hold workers into their subordinate positions, ideas are co-opted by property owners to perpetuate their power. Ideology is the

subsequent set of beliefs that both the workers and the bourgeoisie hold, though the workers are unconscious of how they came to hold them.

Louis Althusser (1971) in particular has explored these ideas, asserting that the way ideology is translated into peoples' consciousness is through the "ideological state apparatus" or "ISA" (which is composed of several elements). He draws and extends this definition from the traditional Marxist conception of the function of the State apparatus as a repressive force that prevents the working classes from struggling against the ruling class. The State controls through the "repressive state apparatus" or "RSA" (Althusser's term): the government, laws and law enforcement agents (e.g. police, courts, prisons), and armies (1971:144). The key characteristic of the RSA is that it functions by violence or threatened violence. ISAs, by contrast, function through ideology (1971:146). Examples include churches, schools, media, and, significantly, cultural institutions (1971:143). Both the RSA and ISAs are dialectic - the RSA functioning primarily by repression and secondarily by ideology, and the ISAs in the reverse (1971:146). At the time he was writing, Althusser asserted that the school had replaced the church as being the most influential ISA, primarily due to its having vast amounts of time in which to transmit ideology (1971:154). Today, I would agree with cultural theorist Tony Bennett (1995), who asserts that cultural institutions are gaining in importance on this scale of influence, given both the increasing demand for entertainment in society as well as a world that is becoming at once both more multicultural and more globalized. The immensely influential role of the mass media must also be noted, as Arjun Appadurai (1996) has discussed at length. The implications of both of these forces will be discussed further in my analysis of *The Spirit of Islam*.

Hegemony

It is at this point that hegemony becomes important. The term hegemony, most clearly associated with the work of Antonio Gramsci, refers to the process by which ideology and culture are made to function dominantly. Althusser writes:

> no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses...[which]...may be not only the stake, but also the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle (1971:146).

As the RSA controls the political conditions of society (based on exploitative relations), the ISAs control the way in which these political conditions are translated into ideologies and communicated to the workers, thus ensuring the reproduction of the means of production, or the maintenance of an ideologically controlled workforce in a capitalist society. These conditions are possible to change, but only through changing the institutions that have hegemonic control. Marx's emphasis on conflict as the only way in which to enact change translates here to having to challenge the hegemonic intellectual and moral logic enacted through the ISAs (which, by the nature of ideology functioning hegemonically, would be extremely difficult).

Critical pedagogues tend to focus on how the notion of power (and differential access to it) is implicated in the concept of hegemony. Understanding the transmission of ideology involves more than just identifying elements of the ISA. It also involves looking at "the ways in which power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and cultural forms that function to actively silence people" (Giroux 1992:xxiii). Thus, the notion of hegemony allows a differentiation between and extension of an understanding of ideology as simply a set of ideas and the understanding of ideology as expressed through material practices. As Williams explains it, referring to Gramsci's positioning of hegemony as a 'whole social process':

It is in just this recognition of the wholeness of the process that the concept of 'hegemony' goes beyond 'ideology'. What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values. Ideology, in its normal senses, is a relatively formal and articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a 'worldview' or a 'class outlook'...A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex set of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex.... it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice (1994:595).

The notion of counter-hegemony is taken up extensively by critical pedagogue Henry Giroux, and is of pivotal importance for the practice's methodological outlook. I will later explore the implications of counter-hegemony within a museum environment. Hegemonic control and its specific relevance to *The Spirit of Islam* will be uncovered through looking at how North American media and government bodies conveyed particular messages surrounding Islam at the time of the exhibit.

Museums and Critical Pedagogy

Now that the key concepts have been explored, I will turn my discussion to the application of a critical pedagogical perspective to the terrain of the museum. I will begin by citing Giroux, who notes:

Freire would never argue that his work is meant to be adapted in gridlike fashion to any site or pedagogical context. What Freire does is to provide a metalanguage that generates a set of

categories and social practices that have to be critically mediated by those who would use them for the insights they might provide in different historical settings and contexts (1992: xviii).

I do not include this citation as some kind of disclaimer to excuse a less than rigorous analysis, but rather to situate this thesis as an exploration of how critical pedagogy guidelines can begin to be translated to the site of the public museum rather than as a definitive guide to application.

Broadly conceived as a cultural institution, the museum (and particularly the anthropology museum that explicitly concerns itself with culture) could easily be placed in the category of an ISA, particularly in a historical context. Even today despite ongoing changes in theory, method, and the interface or praxis between the two, museums still play a large role in ideological control (through a variety of means) as has been shown by many cultural theorists.

Tony Bennett, in a study he describes as "a politically focused genealogy for the modern public museum" (1995:5) has comprehensively articulated how the museum (as a part of a wider "exhibitionary complex") has historically functioned culturally not only as a site of learning and knowledge keeping, but also as a site of social reform intended to discipline and enculturate the public into acceptable patterns of behaviour. In addition, it has been responsible for propagating the dominant scientific and anthropological theories contingent with the time periods in which it operated. To draw on a more specifically ideological example of how the museum has fulfilled a hegemonic function in communicating the dominant ideology, Gaby Porter (1996) has traced the ways in which museums have created gendered and hierarchical spaces. Borrowing from poststructuralist theory, Porter translates the relations of text/author/reader into the museological relations of exhibition/curator/visitor to unravel the ways in which meanings of gender are created within the museum. Porter's analysis is particularly relevant to the purposes of this thesis, as she demonstrates that it is indeed possible to take theoretical arguments from one sphere and translate them to another to produce new analyses.

Certainly it is clear from these studies that museums have historically, and continue today to function as ideological agents in how we [the public] understand our world. Given this, let me now turn to a discussion of the intersection of critical pedagogy and new collaborative emphasis currently being espoused within museological discourse.

When embarking upon a collaborative project, many museums in Canada today tend to take as a starting point the themes of partnership, equality, and community involvement. These broad guidelines can and have been interpreted in many ways and need to be supplemented by further methodology. A more developed methodology can be found in an approach that is gaining momentum in both the academy and in organizations - 'Participatory Action Research (PAR)' or 'Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)'. Primary features of this approach include conducting research that is both with and for the people being researched (particularly oppressed or powerless people), a passionate commitment on the part of the researchers toward both conduction of and reflection on the research, the subjection of the research to political and economic analysis, and collaboration and partnership between all participants in the design, implementation, and use of the research in order to effect changes in the social reality of the group(s) under research (St. Denis 1992:55). Approaches such as CBPR and PAR share many similar features and projected outcomes with critical pedagogy, and indeed, are grounded similar philosophies. The difference is simply that critical pedagogy takes education as its primary locus whereas CBPR/PAR are concerned with research. Museums, of course, are concerned with both, but as education is more easily identified with the museum's relationship with the public it forms my focus here. I mention these similar practices to draw attention to the fact that such progressive methodologies are being employed in other sites of cultural production with much success, implying that adaptation to a range of spheres is not only possible, but also logical. Many museums are looking to such applied programs for guidance on how they can create collaborative projects and such methods are becoming more and more

integrated into the ways progressive museums and their staff approach exhibit content, design and implementation (Peers and Brown, in press).

As critical pedagogy sees its terrain as being the public sphere, it is easy to apply some of these principles to the museum, which also resides in the public sphere. Essentially, then, the goal is to democratize the museum, creating an ethically aware and dialogically driven environment. Given the complicated organizational structure involved in the process of moving an exhibition from idea or concept to physical entity, it is essential that these principles are adopted at the level of planning rather than simply implementation. Although the critical pedagogical model uses the classroom as the locus of activity, I believe that within a museum environment both planning committees as well as resultant education programs must adopt critical pedagogical guidelines in order to be democratic and active agents of change.

Giroux has identified two basic assumptions that inform the field of critical pedagogy at large. The first is the necessity for a 'language of critique' or a questioning of preconceived knowledge and suppositions about the world. This is only effective when combined with 'language of possibility', which "goes beyond critique to elaborate a positive language of human empowerment" (1992:11). Therefore, education needs to be transformative and is conceived as a political and reflective project, with the teacher and student learning from one another on the basis that education is just as much a social project as it is individual.

The process is dialogic, which means it goes far beyond the idea of a conversation. As Macedo defines it: "dialogue as a process of learning and knowing must always involve a political project engaged in breaking down the oppressive structures and forms which have become ideologically embedded and socially and practically institutionalized" (2000:204). This is crucial. I believe that the difference between dialogic versus conversational spaces and political versus neutral projects are *the* key differences in current trends in museum exhibitry and

future potentials for museum exhibitry. This will become apparent as I progress with my analysis of *The Spirit of Islam* as a case study.

This is also the facet of critical pedagogy that is most often misinterpreted by educators attempting to enact its principles. Without a political project being intended, education of any kind will only ultimately reproduce the dominant ideology, as processes of domination and power differentiation will be masked. Freire has called such misinterpretations of his work "laissez faire" pedagogy, where educators create a space for dialogue but fail to direct the dialogue toward emancipation. Macedo charges such attempts with creating a "romantic pedagogical mode that exoticizes discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice" (1996:205). He likens such a reduction of pedagogy to:

> a form of middle class narcissism [that] creates, on the one hand, the transformation of dialogical teaching into a method invoking conversation that provides participants with a group therapy space for stating their grievances. On the other hand, it offers the teacher as facilitator a safe pedagogical zone to deal with his or her class guilt (1996:205).

Instead, following Gramsci, critical pedagogues advocate taking "a war on position", constantly negotiating who is oppressor, who is oppressed, and how identities within each of these categories can shift.[3] Museums have certainly been implicated in this war on position, however the laissez faire approach is, I think, the dominant trend in collaborative exhibit work currently being done in museums, leading to their current status of continuing to reproduce the dominant ideology.

Shelley Ruth Butler has proposed "a problematic dichotomy that exists in museum literature between critical and optimistic perspectives on exhibiting culture" (2000:74). She contends that critical museology deals with the politics of vision and is interested in

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[3] For more on the 'war of position' and its implications for critical pedagogy, see Peter Mayo. 1999. *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education: Possibilities for Transformative Action.* London and New York: Zed Books, p. 119.

deconstructing the role that museums have played as agents of domination and colonialism. Optimistic museology, by contrast, attempts to facilitate conversation and education, and emphasizes voice, dialogue and debate. I agree with her that the two such approaches exist, but I propose that a critical pedagogical perspective unites them in its combination of a language of critique with a language of possibility.

Critical pedagogy aspires to deconstruct ideological norms and create a critical awareness of the world as it is named by participants in a dialogue, a similar goal to that of critical museology. However, like optimistic museology, it also (through the role of the teacher) aspires to direct learning toward creating democratic social relations. In the same way that these goals are often misunderstood by laissez faire educators, so too do curators who involve themselves in collaborative work often reduce their role to that of facilitator. While the rationale for this is a noble one, that of lending the museum space to those who have formerly been excluded, it fails to harness the museum's full potential as a dialectic entity in ideological production and maintenance. In order to do this, critical and optimistic perspectives need to be united, and critical pedagogical guidelines can inform such a process. *The Spirit of Islam* successfully created a dialogic environment, due to a combination of planned and accidental factors. It is to these which I will now turn in order to further the discussion toward museums' limitations and potentials as transformative sites.

The Spirit of Islam

According to the museum's website, *The Spirit of Islam* was "an exhibit conceived, through the spirit of calligraphy, to frame the aesthetics, spirituality and principles of education relating to the world of Islam" (MoA 2001a). I will briefly outline the exhibit content and spatial layout before turning to the educational components.

The exhibit consisted of three interconnected gallery spaces - one for prayer, one for education, and one for objects. These were united by the themes of the exhibit - unity, diversity, and knowledge. Upon entry, the visitor was greeted by two photographic panels - one of Muslims and one of mosques from locations around the globe as well as in Vancouver. These panels led into 'The Prayer Space', a quiet space featuring calligraphic panels containing Arabic passages from the Qu'ran (English translations were also displayed). This space mimicked the mosque environment, being oriented toward Mecca and containing a wash basin for ablutions and a gently bubbling fountain.[4]

If visitors moved to the left of the photographic panels at the entrance, they found themselves in 'The *Madrasa*' or orientation/education space. The design of this space again emulated the design of real *madrasas* found inside mosques throughout the world, which added further spatial authenticity to the exhibit. The main features of the *Madrasa* were a time line explaining key events and figures within Islamic history and a CD- ROM featuring interviews with Muslims in Vancouver and focused on local experiences. In addition, the *Madrasa* contained replicas of some of the educational objects in the exhibit that visitors were able to handle and look at more closely, thus facilitating closeness to the real objects. The *Madrasa* was a soft space filled with cushions and carpets to make it more comfortable and inviting to children and to move away from the more general glass case/label aesthetic more commonly used in exhibitry.

The final section of the display, 'The Gallery Space', featured a display of a variety of Islamic objects. These ranged from antiquities to contemporary pieces commissioned specifically for the exhibit. The entrance held a Thirteenth Century lamp that was used to again reinforce the metaphor of light as knowledge. Other objects in the space included a writing desk,

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[4] This particular area is not connected to the museum's plumbing system, and so was not able to function as a tool for the ritual cleansing needed before praying, however the space was used for prayer by both Muslim volunteers in the museum as well as Muslim visitors to the exhibit - they simply used the washrooms nearby.

antique copies of the Qu'ran, decorated armour, ceramics, and coverings from the Khabbah in Mecca. The Gallery Space was intended to showcase Islamic contributions in the history of knowledge in the fields of both arts and sciences, as well as highlight the different styles and applications of calligraphy. To exit the space, visitors walked through a section of the gallery with the title 'Ways of Seeing'. This area consisted of blown up photographs of the decorative details of various objects in the exhibit, and served to force the visitor to think about the ways and contexts in which they were viewing the objects on display.[5]

These interconnected areas were carefully designed to create "distinctions between public and private, communal and contemplative, and active and serene spaces" (MoA 2001b). Such ideas were derived from the beginning of the planning stages from the combined views of Muslim community members and museum staff, the end result being an exhibit space completely different from those one would usually encounter in a museum, and particularly in an anthropology museum.

The commitment of the museum staff to the vision of the exhibit must be underscored here. All the staff associated with the exhibit worked long periods of overtime to ensure the process was an inclusive one and that the exhibit rose to its full potential. Most of the Advisory Committee meetings were held in the evenings, when all members could attend and often took the format of going one by one around the table. Although time consuming, such a format allowed every participant to have a say in the process. Rather than interpreting their role as simply to facilitate dialogue between different Muslim groups, staff at MoA combined their expertise in design, curatorship, and education with the desires of the communities to create the unique space of the exhibit. The end result was a space where complementary rather than competing views were able to be expressed. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to detail how

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[5] In October 2002, MoA launched a comprehensive website as a legacy to the exhibit that includes a virtual tour of the space as well as detailed information on the content and intentions of the exhibit. To visit, go to www.moa.ubc.ca and follow the link to *The Spirit of Islam*.

each section of the exhibit was created and decided upon, but the above sketch of the space should make apparent the uniqueness of the exhibit and give an idea of the desired impact. I will now turn to a more detailed discussion of the educational components to further illustrate the dynamics at work in the exhibit.

The notion of education was, from the beginning, pivotal to how the exhibit was conceived and created. Although calligraphy was the organizing theme, it represented a means through which ideas about Islam could be communicated. The most obvious arena for this to occur in was through the official Education Program offered to students. The program was designed by an Education Committee composed of museum staff, and Muslim and non-Muslim volunteers. Though the volunteers were not explicitly following the methods espoused by critical pedagogy, Jill Baird, Chair of the Education Committee[6] has a history of using Freireian methods in her work, and this, I believe, guided the participants in the committee substantially.

As stated earlier, the timing of this exhibit was particularly important, partially by intent and partially by accident. The genesis of the exhibit lies in the federal government's commissioning of a prayer space designed by Vancouver artist Farouk Noormohamed to be used by Muslim leaders from around the world when they visited MoA for the 1997 Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC) meeting. At the conclusion of the APEC event the museum approached members of the Muslim community in Vancouver for ideas on what to do with the space. These consultants expressed interest in creating an exhibit which would "confront simplistic stereotypes and provide the public with better understandings of Islam and its traditions" (Phillips 2001). This led to extensive consultation and research, culminating in the formation of the Advisory Committee in 1999 which began actively creating the exhibit (MoA 2001c).

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[6] Jill Baird was also a co-chair of the Advisory Committee and is MoA's Curator of Education

The APEC meeting is relevant to this discussion for another reason also, as it represents another occasion where MoA found itself as the site of a struggle over interpretations of power when the government silenced Musqueam representatives who sought to address the delegates. The Museum reacted in a subsequent display entitled "This Is Not An Exhibition" which constituted a "public reclamation" of the Museum.[7]

The APEC meeting represents a key moment in the formation of the identity of MoA as a malleable space which can, through countering prior repressive events with progressive exhibits, begin to transform the museum's influence in ideological production. This again highlights the processual nature of critical pedagogical projects. Exhibits do not exist in isolation as static entities but are played out against museum identities. They have both precursors and legacies, and meanings can be created with, against, or aside such referents. Given such considerations, APEC represents one axis of timing that is pertinent. The second axis is far more complex.

The exhibition opened in October 2001, just weeks after terrorists believed to be from a Muslim fundamentalist sect launched an attack on the United States. These attackers flew hijacked 757 passenger planes into the World Trade Center twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, killing almost 3,000 people. The attacks prompted U.S. President George W. Bush to declare a "war on terrorism" in which he ordered military attacks on Afghanistan in order to capture members of the al-Qa'ida group believed to be behind the terrorism. Although Bush stated that tolerance should be extended to Muslims living in the U.S, inflated and inflammatory media reports and misinformation led to many members of the general public imposing violence on Muslims and those mistaken for Muslims throughout the West.[8]

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[7] For a detailed analysis of these events, see Ruth B. Phillips. 2000. "APEC at the Museum of Anthropology: The Politics of Site and the Poetics of Sight Bite", in *Ethnos*, vol 65, no 2, pp. 172-194.
[8] Although this thesis is specifically concerned with Muslims as they are the group involved specifically with this exhibit, I acknowledge that Canadian Arabs are also a large community which many of these arguments apply equally to in that they are often conflated with the category of 'Muslim'.

In the six months following the September 11 attacks, one agency reported that 1,700 acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians, and Arab Americans were reported to police across the United States (Intergroup Clearinghouse 2002). These hate crimes included six murders, three of which claimed victims of the Sikh religion who were mistaken for Muslims, reportedly because the turbans they wore were reminiscent of those worn by Osama Bin Laden, suspected leader of the al-Qa'ida group (Goodstein and Lewin 2001). Canada also experienced violence, from unprovoked beatings of both Sikhs and Muslims to threatening phone calls, attacks on mosques, and drivers being run off roads (Yousuf 2001).

Such consequences of the terrorist attacks are important to note for two reasons. They indicate not only aggression toward and mistrust of North American Muslims, but also that the perpetrators of many of these crimes cannot distinguish between perceived 'foreign' religions. As a result, individuals were and are being vilified and harmed on the basis of dress or skin colour. Such an attitude is exemplified by Arizona resident Frank S. Roque who, in one afternoon, shot and killed the Sikh owner of one gas station, shot and wounded the Lebanese clerk of another, and fired bullets into the home of an Afghan family. When asked why he had committed these acts, Roque replied, "I'm a patriot, I'm a damn American all the way" (Goodstein and Lewin 2001), thus implying that anyone of ethnic or religious difference was somehow non-American and that he was simply fulfilling a civic duty.

What I am attempting to make clear here is that these incidents and the prevailing public attitudes after September 11 were fed and shaped by a dominant ideology (hegemonic force) that viewed 'Islam' as something foreign. Therefore, it was assumed to be composed of foreign followers who, even if they resided in the West, were still predominantly characterized as holding primary allegiance to their religious values and to the Middle East region. This was viewed as disloyal to the U.S. and Canadian governments and the ideals of freedom and democracy these espouse. Both media and governmental coverage on the issue created and

reinforced such views, allowing hegemonic control to be kept by the U.S. government in order to support its decision (or purported duty) of embarking upon a war in the Middle East in order to protect American citizens. Returning to Williams' processual definition of hegemony (a "whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values"), it becomes clear that the U.S. government and media held hegemonic control over meanings of Islam in mainstream Western society during the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. This was ingested and regurgitated by publics who did not have prior knowledge of the religion. It was then translated into the oppression of Muslims (and those mistaken for them) in terms of both representation and safety.

Returning to the case study under discussion, such misconceptions were clearly held by visitors to *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit. In the introduction of the Education Program delivered to elementary school groups, basic questions were asked to gauge the general level of knowledge surrounding Islam. In the early weeks of the exhibit being open, I observed the following exchange in one such session. In response to the question: "What are people who believe in Islam called?" one student replied, in all seriousness,

"Fundamentalists."

In a later instance, a pair of teens looking at a Khabbah covering decorated with calligraphy had the following exchange:

First teen: "Wow, pretty amazing huh?"

Second teen: "Yeah, but they probably have something sneaky in that carpet man- like 'We're gonna attack you in the year 2010.'"

First teen (motioning to a number of artifacts covered in intricately embroidered calligraphy): "Well, whatever, it's pretty amazing how long it must have taken to do all this stuff."

Second teen: "Yeah, well they didn't have TV or anything so I guess they had more time to spend on stuff."

The youths in this case were clearly awed by what they saw, yet were still clouded by what they perceived as the "sneaky" nature of Muslims. They also did not appear to make connections between local contemporary Muslims and the works, noting that "They didn't have TV", thus "they" are somewhere either so geographically remote as to not have television or so far in the past as to not have had it invented yet.

Misconceptions did not end with the younger generations. I overheard the following conversation between a pair of elderly British women examining the introductory panel depicting various mosques throughout the world:

First woman: "Oh- look at the one in the U.K. Isn't it garish?"

Second woman: "And look at this one in Kosovo - oh it's terrible."

First woman: "Well, in Afghanistan they just leave bodies out to die you know."

This exchange suggests not only that these women have conflated vastly different geographical locations into simply areas where there is conflict, but also that they have little sense of the function of mosques, moving from interpreting them as reflecting the aesthetic of the region to having something to do with violence. The "they" who "leave bodies out to die" have clearly been assumed to be those who use the mosques.

There were many, many more instances I witnessed of blatant misunderstandings that visitors had of Islam prior to viewing the exhibit. Such misunderstandings predominantly centred around beliefs that the religion was oppressive toward women and openly advocated violence. Those I observed most often making statements such as those quoted above were Caucasian, particularly tourists. It was beyond the scope of this study to chart whether the average visitor actually came out with a different understanding as a result of experiencing the exhibit, but I did observe how misconceptions expressed by individuals within the school group

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visits had an opportunity to be countered through face-to-face interaction with Muslim people living locally, an experience that has few avenues for replication within mainstream educational apparatuses. Even in schools that may have Muslim students attending, conversation may not always be easy to facilitate. The exhibit, however, proved as a good spark for conversation. For example, the following exchange between a pair of young boys, one Muslim, on non-Muslim, demonstrates the way in which the Muslim boy was able to use the exhibit to assert his knowledge of Islam:

Non-Muslim boy (reading banner discussing the Prophet Muhammed): What did Muhammed do anyway?"

Muslim boy: "He spread the message of Islam around the world."

Non-Muslim boy: "Is that all?"

Muslim boy: "It's pretty huge... [Motioning to a photograph of thousands of Muslims at the Hajj in Mecca] look at all the people."

Non-Muslim boy (incredulous): "Those are people?"

Apart from statistics related to hate crimes, detailed studies have not yet been undertaken of how broader attitudes among non-Muslims toward Muslims were affected by the events of September 11. However, it is possible to draw a parallel between this situation and the Gulf War in 1991, another American led invasion in the Middle East, this time ordered by Bush's father during his own presidential term.

Journalist Zuhair Kashmeri (1991) has provided a study on this based on interviews with Canadian Muslim families about how they experienced the Gulf War, in terms of how they became identified within society. Kashmeri presents compelling examples of how media, government, and intelligence agencies' (mis)characterizations of people from Arab or Muslim backgrounds led to them becoming "targets of ignorance, hostility, and paranoia" (1991:138).

In a chapter entitled "Educating the Educators", Kashmeri recounts many examples of institutional racism and inequality directed toward Muslims during the Gulf War, particularly in school environments. Kashmeri highlights the reluctance of school boards to take action against teachers who chastised Muslim children for expressing anti-American and Canadian sentiment in response to what they perceived as anti-Arabic sentiment. He also documents several disturbing examples of children being forced to participate in exercises they did not feel comfortable with. One example describes a class being given a compulsory assignment to write letters of support to Canadian troops in the Gulf, despite the fact that some children had families living in Kuwait and thus being targets of U.S. coalition bombings at the time. Such examples demonstrate the ways in which institutions (and particularly schools) become complicit in reproducing and supporting the dominant ideology, which at the time was one of extreme anti-Islamic sentiment.

It can be assumed then, that similar tensions were taking place in Canadian schools following the September 11 attacks. It can also be assumed that official school agencies were no more willing or able to deal with dissent surrounding such tensions than they had been in 1990, as curriculum has not altered significantly since this time. Due to the institutional inequality, the nature of the curriculum and the transmission method of teaching that has already been critiqued here, teachers at this time are largely neither able to subvert the dominant ideology or the hegemony of Western representations, nor create an environment of critical reflection in their classrooms. This is particularly so when dealing with issues that national (and international) media and political apparatuses are so intent on propagating a particular view about.

This is a key element in addressing the function of *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit, in that its presence as a potential counter-hegemonic space was reinforced by its ability to be participated in and interpreted by the oppressed people it sought to represent. That is, the way in which the exhibit was organized and enacted allowed it to be positioned apart from this hegemony that existed elsewhere, due to a built-in malleability based on multiple perspectives and a dialogical

approach. Without this potential for appropriation by the Muslim collaborators and volunteers, it may well have proven to be just as inaccessible as the school environment was during the Gulf War. This can be assumed as museums have historically helped to sustain hegemony rather than subvert it. The timing of the exhibit here worked in tandem with its structure of flexibility in order to allow it to become counter-hegemonic.

Having stated this, it is equally important to point out that this exhibit was just one facet of MoA as an institution, and its presence does not then transform the entire museum structure into a counter-hegemonic space (either with regard to MoA specifically or museums throughout wider society). Indeed the exhibit itself may not necessarily have totally constituted a counter-hegemonic space, as many visitors may have failed to come to any new understandings of Islam after experiencing the exhibit. The point is that it *can* be interpreted as such a space, as it created the conditions under which transformation may have occurred. The following section will elaborate these conditions in their most clearly observable form - that of the Education Program.

Education and *The Spirit of Islam*

The original vision for the Education Program involved having children in groups of approximately thirty visit the exhibit, travel through it with both Muslim and non-Muslim guides, and complete activities within the space itself. For the most part, the program format that was envisaged differed little from the programs that actually took place once the exhibit opened. However, there were important differences in the ways in which information was disseminated, which will be discussed below. First I will outline the basic format that the school visits took.

After being introduced to the themes of the exhibit through an introductory poem beginning with the line "Don't treat me as a stranger, I am your neighbour", and the two panels depicting Muslims and mosques around the world and in Canada, students removed their shoes and entered the Prayer Space. In this space the notion of the niche and the metaphor of light as

knowledge were explained. There, one of the Muslim guides would recite a passage from the Qu'ran in Arabic (the calligraphic version of which was the central feature of the space), and a non-Muslim would subsequently read the panel containing the English translation in the entrance to the space. The idea here was not only to emulate the physical space of the mosque, but also to convey the emotion expressed through the Arabic recitation. Clearly such emotion could not be replicated by simply reading the English version, though this in turn assisted students in understanding what the prayer was actually about.

Next, the students were divided into two smaller groups to complete the two sections of the program, one in the *Madrasa* and one in the Gallery Space. The first group were invited to sit in the *Madrasa* and handed large cards with sections of a piece of calligraphy on them. This was a group exercise where all the children needed to work together to fit the pieces (much like a puzzle) into making a word. Almost all of the school groups (excepting Muslim students) arranged the puzzle backward, not realizing that Arabic is written from right to left, or, from the hand to the heart. The key point of this exercise appeared to be to make students understand the different system of writing and the devotional aspects of calligraphy.

A discussion of calligraphy in general followed, emphasizing education and knowledge within Islam, diacritical marks and different styles of calligraphy, and calligraphy as a form of art. A brief demonstration was given on how to write calligraphy and the children would all write (in Arabic) '*madrasa*' and 'knowledge' with special calligraphy pencils on worksheets they could take home with them. Following this, depending on the length of time left, there ensued a discussion of the selective time line on the far wall and of particular events in Islamic history. After this, the two groups of children would switch places and complete the second part of the program, which involved the Gallery Space.

In the Gallery Space worksheets were handed out with the directions "*Record* your impressions, *collect* information, and *generate* commentary from *two objects* that describe, or

best represent, the above theme." Students could choose from the themes of faith, history, art or knowledge and were encouraged to use objects from all three spaces within the exhibit. A few minutes were allotted to complete the worksheets before the children were given a short tour highlighting some of the objects in the Gallery Space.

At the conclusion of both activities, the two groups were brought back together in the *Madrasa* to discuss what they had learned and were encouraged to engage in a more detailed discussion of the objects they had written about when they returned to school.

Praxis and *The Spirit of Islam*

I have already discussed the position of critical pedagogy as a process, and it is in this process, the praxis, that meaning is made. Set structures cannot be rigidly designed as meanings and education will be created based on the experiences of different parties in the process. The methodological guidelines are intended to create a malleable space for meaning. The structure of the Education Program in *The Spirit of Islam* provided such malleability. Although the basic format outlined above remained similar for most of the school visits, the amount of time spent on each segment varied significantly depending upon both the number and composition of volunteers present. Consequently, the exchanges of information that transpired were also diverse. These variations, I contend, are due to conflicting ideas on what children should take away from their experiences, the very crux of critical pedagogy.

The key difference between the format used in *The Spirit of Islam* and more usual museum education programs was the inclusion of the Muslim volunteers as guides. Generally, school groups are accompanied by general museum guides who are given specific training before each particular exhibit opens.[9] At MoA, the majority of regular museum volunteers are

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[9] It must be added that MoA has offered many innovative education programs prior to *The Spirit of Islam*, most notably the Musqueam Museum School. This is a collaborative effort between members of the Musqueam First

Caucasian, elderly, middle to upper class, and predominantly female. Whilst the work volunteers do cannot be understated, it is also clear that such a specific demographic may not always have the range of experiences/exposures necessary to fully comprehend and convey the specifics of exhibitions dealing with very different communities. In the case of *The Spirit of Islam*, the inclusion of Muslim volunteers in addition to non-Muslim museum volunteers was pivotal. Usually, two Muslim guides would be present, often from different local communities, and it was this above all else that I believe made the exhibit such a unique space for dialogue.

In practice, many of the school group visits were conducted with no non-Muslim volunteers, the frequency of such an occurrence accelerating with the passage of time. When the exhibit first opened there was fairly equal participation by Muslim and non-Muslim leaders, but as time progressed the participation of non-Muslim volunteers declined further, both in terms of contribution made to the dialogue within the program, as well as in terms of actual physical presence. In the final two weeks before the exhibit closed, all of the programs were conducted solely by Muslim volunteers. Though this could have been due to scheduling difficulties, I would suggest that it arose from a combination of two primary factors. The first was that non-Muslim volunteers had a very different idea of what the children should be taking away with them from the experience of their visit, and the second, deriving from this, was that non-Muslim volunteers felt increasingly that they had little to contribute to the discussions that were arising in the exhibit space. Such a situation represented the inverse of the common complaint leveled toward museums, that those who are most qualified to speak about their own culture are excluded by those who are more concerned with the interpretation of the museum.

This result was unfortunate, as from the programs I observed, the most powerful were those that had equal participation by Muslim and non-Muslim members, precisely because both

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Nation and MoA employees who co-teach in a variety of environments and use objects from MoA's collection to facilitate understanding of Musqueam culture.

groups brought different experiences and ideological viewpoints to the discussion, the very goal of critical pedagogy. Several observations can be raised to illustrate this point. The first involves the Gallery Space and the purpose served by the actual objects in the exhibit.

The emphasis of the words 'record', 'collect' and 'generate' on the student worksheets implied both the educational and interactive intentions of the exercise. This was not just about looking at objects, but reading the labels accompanying them as well as trying to think through how they connected to the larger themes the exhibit was attempting to convey. However, there was a large discrepancy in emphasis depending on who was directing the exercise.

I noticed that when explaining the objects, the majority of the Muslim volunteers gave the tour before the students had begun their own worksheets, whereas most of the non-Muslim volunteers waited until afterward. Similarly, the Muslim volunteers focused on the themes, the meanings of objects, and how they related to the Islamic faith, and material not covered in the labels, whereas non-Muslim volunteers tended to focus on more statistical information included in the labels, such as the date the object was made, the material it was made from, or what it was used for. In fact, many of the Muslim volunteers made blatant mistakes in describing the objects, misquoting dates by several hundred years and mistaking real artifacts for replicas. Such information was clearly available in the labels, which would indicate that the Muslim volunteers were not particularly interested in offering concrete statistics about the objects or having students remember such facts. Instead, they were eager to convey how they personally interpreted an object, and why it was important within the scheme of the exhibit. Conversely, the non-Muslim volunteers clearly thought that dates and materials were important, and perhaps didn't want to stifle the students' own interpretations of objects or perhaps did not feel that they knew enough about the objects to discuss their own interpretations.

Predictably, the most fruitful sessions occurred when both explanations were given simultaneously and facts and interpretations were conveyed. This worked best when both the

non-Muslim and Muslim volunteers felt comfortable co-presenting and allowed room for one another to speak. There were occasions where one personality would dominate another so that one volunteer would not get an opportunity to speak, but such instances were relatively rare and tended to occur with individuals that had not been a huge part of the planning process and perhaps did not have much of a vested interest in the program. Overall I would suggest that the Muslim volunteers played a greater role in the programs than the non-Muslims, but it needs to be kept in mind that the Muslim volunteers themselves were divided, coming from different groups and therefore still very much involved in discussing different perspectives. I point this out to demonstrate that although the optimum benefit occurred when as many different parties as possible were co-ordinating, the exhibit still functioned as a powerful space for dialogue and critical education even when non-Muslim volunteers were not present, as the format of the program still lent itself to the creation of a dialogic environment.

Again, the reason such an opportunity was available stemmed from the specific commitment to and understanding of collaboration that was made by the museum from the outset of the exhibit process, combined with the timing. To further articulate how these coincided, I will compare MoA's reaction to the sudden societal focus on Islamic representation with the reaction of another large Canadian museum.

MoA and *The Spirit of Islam*

The Museum of Anthropology expressed a renewed commitment to making *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit a success following the terrorist attacks. Ruth Phillips, Director of the museum, has said of the meeting of the Advisory Committee meeting held the following week:

> To a person, everyone agreed that the project was now more important than ever, and the efforts of all concerned have been redoubled to make the project the best that it could be. As one of the Committee members memorably said, if we hadn't already had the exhibit in development we

would have had to begin it, and it is evidence of God's goodness that we had been moved to begin it early enough to have it ready when it was most needed (2001).

The Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec, by contrast, had the opposite reaction to *The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, an art show designed to "look at the immigrant experience and at metissage, or cultural intermixing" (Kaouk 2001). This exhibit had been scheduled to open on October 19, 2001, just one day before *The Spirit of Islam*. On September 21, the President and CEO of the museum, Victor Rabinovitch, announced that the exhibit was being postponed for at least six months in order that "more context" (CMC 2001) be provided about the Arab world after the attacks on America. The announcement provoked an outcry from several of the artists involved, who wrote to Rabinovitch in an open email:

> We firmly believe that cultural events such as this have an important educational and humanitarian role, and that they are needed at times like this more than ever. We believe that the Museum needs to stand up and show support for the Arab-Canadian community and to exhibit the exemplary works made by Arab-Canadian artists. This will help bridge the divide between Canadians and will assist in bringing about an understanding between the Arab-Canadian and other communities (Hage et al. 2001).

Responses from around the world in support of the email, combined with rebukes by the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien prompted the museum to reverse its decision and go ahead with the originally scheduled opening. Ironically, some Jewish lobby groups criticized the subsequent display for a lack of context and some visitors were angered over one installment in particular. Whether the museum made the correct choice is open to debate, but what is interesting is the fact that it chose to make the decision without the consent of the artists it had collaborated with. This contrasts starkly with the MoA exhibit, where all parties agreed that renewed commitment was necessary. Such

commentary highlights not only the commitment the MoA had to the concept of collaboration and dialogue, but also its willingness to use the timing of the exhibit in a positive way as an opportunity to educate a nervous and misinformed public.

Crucially, it is also a case where the needs of the community were put first, as opposed to the CMC which, whatever their intentions, aligned themselves with the dominant ideology (regarding Arabs and Muslims as foreign and fearful) both when they cancelled the show (presumably for fear of public reprimand of content), and when they reversed this decision (as a result of government and popular intervention). Thus the CMC functioned exactly as museums traditionally have - as an agent of the ISA.

Comparison must be made here also of the content and organization both exhibits. The rescheduled exhibit at the CMC was largely a success in terms of visitor numbers and positive media reviews. However, following the postponement and reinstatement of the show, the museum had already grounded it in representational politics of the time. Because the museum had drawn attention to the lack of context for the exhibit in a post September 11 climate, visitors came expecting that lack of context to provoke a certain reaction, rather than having the installations speak for themselves. Thus the exhibit was co-opted by the museum's uncertainty in its message(s).

The Spirit of Islam and the Muslim Community

In contrast to the CMC exhibit, the genesis of *The Spirit of Islam* lay in the local Muslim communities' desire to address misrepresentations of Islam within dominant society and so such concerns were built into the exhibit structure and content. In fact, the escalation of misconceptions following the September 11 attacks actually allowed the exhibit to be more powerful rather than less so. This was upheld by the museum's absolute partnership with the

communities in the interpretation of theme and content and its refusal to assume domination over these after the context of the exhibit within society had changed.[10]

The Spirit of Islam demonstrates that controversial timing can be used in a positive way to enhance community empowerment within the space of the museum, rather than in a negative way, as controversies surrounding *The Spirit Sings* and similar exhibits[11] have led many museum professionals to believe. The key here is lies in having a space in which the repressed party is able to control representation without fear of that power being usurped by the museum as an institution. Of course, museums are accountable to funding agencies, boards, and governments, but therein lies the difficulty in defining collaboration. If critical pedagogical guidelines are used to inform the process, it stands to reason that the end result will be ethically transparent and have equal and lasting commitment from all involved parties, thus limiting or potentially even eliminating the space for power struggles.

In terms of the ethical commitment of participants being made explicit, the educational programs used in *The Spirit of Islam* provide an excellent example of such an environment. As the Muslim volunteers in the educational programs were there by virtue of their cultural affiliations, which are based on religious beliefs, their ethical stances could not help but be conveyed to program participants. As Islam is a religion which compels its adherents to make particular commitments to the faith (such as ritual prayer, almsgiving, fasting, etc.) the identity

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[10] Although exhibit curator (and chair of the Gallery Committee) Carol Mayer did re-write some of the labels after September 11 as they "read slightly differently", these changes were all discussed at length and agreed upon by the Advisory Committee before being implemented. (Carol Mayer: Lecture to Anthropology 432 class, February, 2002).

[11] A particularly powerful of such timing was *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. This was the title given by the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum to an exhibit which planned to display the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima at the end of WWII, on the fiftieth anniversary of the occasion. The proposal included displaying part of the plane, pictures of the aftermath of the bomb and artifacts from Ground Zero, and documents that explored the reasons for the decision to use the bomb. The exhibit came under fire from the Air Force Association for revising history and being un-American, and, due to the timing, gained much media and popular attention. The result was that the museum cancelled the planned exhibit and instead created a much smaller one showing only a section of the plane and a photograph of its crew. For a detailed analysis, see Steven C. Dubin. 1999. "Battle Royal: The Final Mission of the Enola Gay", in Steven C. Dubin. *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York and London: New York University Press, pp. 186-225.

of volunteers as Muslims already proclaimed the basis of the ethics most pertinent to how they interact with the world on a daily basis. Of course there are many different sub-groups within Islam, but the principles of the faith unite these groups into a common identity. It was agreed by the members of the Advisory Committee that differences in interpretations of Islam held by the various communities in Vancouver would not be the subject of the exhibition. Rather, it would focus on central beliefs that united the various groups - namely, the five pillars of Islam and the themes of knowledge, unity and diversity.

This use of a thematic approach to the presentation of information facilitated difference. By having both unity and diversity as key organizing themes, the exhibit was able to present both unifying beliefs of Muslim identity as well as being able to point to the extreme diversity amongst different Muslim groups and individuals. Again, the exhibit was anchored in local experiences, but its use of objects and photographs from different geographic areas allowed a global sense of Muslim identity to emerge also.

When non-Muslim volunteers were also present, their commitment to the museum as a learning environment and their eagerness to present information about the objects within the museum further enhanced the experience.

The time allocated to each school visit also impacted on how the space worked. The session in the *Madrasa* tended to finish earlier than that in the gallery, leaving a lag which was used in different ways by various volunteers. As there was usually only one non-Muslim and two Muslims, the non-Muslim volunteers generally spent their time in the gallery. It appeared that there was an unspoken agreement that the non-Muslims were equipped to talk about the aesthetics of various objects, yet the Muslims alone could discuss calligraphy and education. On rare occasions when non-Muslims were present in the *Madrasa*, they almost always used the extra time to discuss the timeline. The Muslim volunteers, however, almost always used the leftover time for questions, focusing those questions particularly on current misconceptions

within the media about Islam. Some volunteers were more overt about this than others, but almost all of them wanted to talk about what Islam really was from their perspective and to clear up what they perceived as misinformation that was being propagated elsewhere.

This was a critical facet of the exhibit and was, in my observations, where the most interesting discussions happened. On one occasion a Muslim volunteer asked the group: "What idea do you have of women and education in Islam?" One student replied: "There isn't any." The volunteer then explained her own educational background and the fact that she had a PhD. Following this, she stated, "Please do not mix the tradition and cultures with the religion or formation. So anything you would like to know please ask me now and you will get the right answer, not the answers that you see on CNN." A similar view was expressed at another session by a different Muslim volunteer, again following a discussion of the role of women: "If I want to learn about China, I won't go to CNN or Global News. I will go to the source. So in China I will go to a temple. So here I am – a learned Muslim person and I will tell you what is correct." The idea that what she has to say is 'correct', or that there is a 'right answer' is an important one, particularly in a museum context. As previously discussed, museums in the last few years have shifted away from attempting to offer sweeping narratives and instead are focusing on collaborating and presenting multiple viewpoints. The problem has become one of who to collaborate with and whether a few people will ever be able to represent the diversity of the many. This is a valid question, but the fact remains that, as Itrath Syed, a young female Muslim volunteer associated with the exhibit pointed out: "You can't argue when someone speaks 'Well this is what my lived experience is.' I mean everybody has a right to articulate that and I think that when we are trying to come up with... official statements, that is obviously a much more difficult process" (Interview with author, June 12, 2002). In this case, I would suggest that the exhibit served as a general background against which lived experiences could be articulated by individual volunteers without having to stand for the whole group. As Jill Baird has described

the process: "What was... shown here was that if you have a commitment on both sides...[to] actually working in partnership (and partnership means not asking people their opinions, it's making it safe for those opinions to be negotiated and changed)... then the community sees that commitment and brings their all, and then you know, the sum is larger than its parts. It gets bigger than the people". (Interview with author, April 02, 2002).

As already noted, the key argument here with regard to engaging in a critical pedagogy is to ground lived experience in a language of hope directed toward democratizing rather than simply expressing grievances. I would suggest that given that the participants in *The Spirit of Islam* dialogue (in its myriad of forms) were volunteers, giving of themselves and their time in order to address negative stereotypes and create more positive, diverse articulations of Muslim identity, they have more than fulfilled such criteria.

Non-Muslim volunteers tended to be more concerned not with the malleable format of the program, but with ensuring that all components were completed and given adequate attention. If time was short, they tended to say nothing at all and leave all time for the students to complete their worksheets. Some seemed not to understand that they could play an active role in the discussion, as indicated by one non-Muslim volunteer who, in response to my enquiry of what she saw her role in the program as being, told me: "You don't need to talk to me. I am just a presence from the museum for this group so I don't do the teaching." Overall, the non-Muslim volunteers tended not to be explicit about their ethics, but more concerned with maintaining a neutral environment in which activities could be completed. This is not unexpected, as most of the non-Muslim volunteers were not involved with the project from its conception and perhaps did not share its commitment to the dissemination of knowledge and the demystification of basic Islamic beliefs.

Another layer of the dialogue that surrounded the exhibit occurred within the Public Programs Lecture Series that accompanied the exhibit. Many speakers came, both Muslim and

non-Muslim, and spoke about various aspects of Islam from calligraphy to linguistics to architecture. The Public Programs were put together in an ad hoc fashion, planned around whomever was in town at the time and available and willing to speak, though the emphasis was on actual Muslims rather than scholars of Islam.[12] Although regular museum visitors were invited to attend, the majority of the audience in most cases was composed of Muslims, and often the Muslim volunteers from the exhibit. On several occasions, I noticed that Muslim volunteers in the Education Programs in turn relayed ideas and information expressed by the speakers in the public programs.

For example, a lecture by Dr Ghassan Succaria entitled " 'The Spirit' in *The Spirit of Islam*" discussed how difficult it was to translate from Arabic into English and convey any accurate meaning of many of the words and phrases used in the Qu'ran. One of the terms he discussed at length was *jihad*, commonly translated in the Western media as 'holy war', but in fact meaning 'to struggle'. The following week, one of the Muslim volunteers brought up the same discussion and repeated it almost verbatim in the Education Program, first asking: "You've heard the word jihad in the media- what does this mean?" Then, after a student predictably answered "Holy war", the volunteer proclaimed in a raised voice "Ah- but this is not true! The term has a different meaning in Arabic. Here it means 'the struggle'...so if I say I am a jihadist it doesn't mean I'm a terrorist or out for political gain. It means I'm committed." This particular volunteer was a frequent one and had never mentioned the term jihad to the school groups before hearing the public program lecture. Afterward, it was included in each subsequent visit that the volunteer participated in. This is a clear example of the dialectic nature of the exhibit process (in that the speaker was there because of the existence of the exhibit, and yet the exhibit was affected by the speaker) and the reciprocal knowledge networks that were operating, as well as

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[12] Although a carefully planned, comprehensive program including dancing, storytelling, and speakers from around the globe had originally been envisaged to accompany the exhibit, a lack of funding forced the series to find the

the ways in which Muslim volunteers used the exhibit as an opportunity to educate against predominant conceptions.

The Museum as a Counter-hegemonic Space

In the preceding discussion, I have explored some of the concepts of critical pedagogy as translated into the realm of museum exhibitry. Whilst much of the philosophy and methodology of critical pedagogy can be aligned with that of collaboration in the museum world (and the cultural sector at large), there are limits to the application of such principles at this time. In this final section, I will outline some potential problems and limitations of a critical pedagogical approach in museums, though it must be stressed that I feel these limitations will eventually be able to be overcome. The most pertinent area for discussion here is the notion of a counter-hegemonic space and the liberation of oppressed/repressed peoples, the idealized end goals of critical pedagogy.

Museum theorist Margaret Lindauer has rejected the possibility that the museum can become counter-hegemonic through using a critical pedagogical approach on the basis that museum visitors are the only active agents speaking in the exhibit space, whereas the curator has responsibility for (and authority in) presenting 'knowledge' (2002:145). *The Spirit of Islam* clearly demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case, in that the notion of 'knowledge' was pivotal to the exhibition and was presented on several different levels. Firstly, knowledge about Islam was expressed not only verbally through labels and the CD-ROM, but also in more tangential ways, through spatial and physical relationships of objects to visitors and, moreover, through varying personal reactions to the artworks themselves. Secondly, themes, labels, and content were themselves decided on by the entire Advisory Committee composed of a diversity

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majority of speakers more locally. In the end, this worked well as it turned out that Vancouver had a very rich group of speakers from which to draw. (Based on comments by Jill Baird, in interview with author, April 02, 2002).

of members in terms of background, gender, age, and understandings of Islam. The Advisory Committee itself formed a dialogic environment with its creations then expressed through and worked into the exhibit. Thirdly and most importantly, the formalized undertaking of education through the Education Program included diverse speakers and did emphasize dialogue on many levels, as demonstrated through the above analysis.

Citing Elizabeth Ellsworth, Lindauer also maintains that the ideal of critical pedagogy creating a democratic learning environment is also impossible for the reasons that a) it cannot allow for "asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege" (2002:146) which are already at play in participants social realities, and b) creation of a democratic and just world depends on an assumption that it can be known what 'justness' is and that this entails knowing what knowledge will be produced and thus imposing some sort of presupposition onto the oppressed (2002:147). Freire and Macedo have labeled such criticisms as "misguided relativism" (1995:210) and stress the dialectic process involved in critical pedagogy. Therefore any claim to objectivity necessarily includes a level of subjectivity. They contend that the oppressed are subjects rather than objects of history and therefore, through a process of dialogue can name the world and can enable participatory democracy based on a united vision. In the *Spirit of Islam*, the languages of the exhibit (expressed verbally by volunteers and through labels and expressed spatially through themes, objects, and physical layout) were created by both the museum and diverse Muslim communities. There were many layers of dialogue - some between visitors and volunteers, some between the museum and the Muslim communities, some between visitors and the exhibit, and some between different Muslim communities. The combination of a thematic approach with the unique spatial division of the exhibit allowed different participants to create different representations and direct them toward different ends. The fact that public interest in Islam was so high during the exhibit run served to enhance the exhibit space as one for democratization.

Muslim volunteers were able to use the space to represent their own interpretations of identity and were not forced to conform to hegemonic misconceptions.

It seems to me that the notion of the museum as a public institution becoming a *fully* counter-hegemonic space is perhaps impossible if we accept the positioning of the museum, as I have, as a part of the ideological state apparatus. In such a case, society itself as a product of the dominant hegemonic ideology would have to become counter-hegemonic before the museum could become so. However, the goal of critical pedagogy is to create an informed citizenry that rejects its class positions, rejects the notion of oppression, and demands a fully democratic public sphere. Thus, the museum at this time can be used in this quest as a site of transformation, as a malleable, dialogic and dialectic space which can begin to enact the process of creating such a citizenry.

Although the Education Program specifically allowed for counter-hegemonic views to be articulated, beginning the project of democratizing the museum, a larger challenge lies in completely democratizing the entire exhibit process. I have asserted that for those involved this was a dialogic process, yet it must be borne in mind that communities have diversities of opinion and that the views expressed in *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit do not necessarily represent the views of all Muslims living in Vancouver. Such a task would require even further innovation and dialogue, and at this time is beyond what can reasonably be expected of museums given financial and temporal constraints, however it may well present the next challenge in the process of creating a counter-hegemonic space within the museum. As previously stated, exhibits do not exist alone, and *The Spirit of Islam* here represents the beginning of an ongoing dialogue.

Of course each exhibit at each museum with each community at each juncture will generate its own particular set of challenges, as expressed in both theoretical and practical terms. The amount of time required for dialogue, the funding required for support, and the willingness of various stakeholders to commit to the process will all need to be addressed if museums are

willing to use a critical pedagogical perspective in their collaborative practices. In the case of *The Spirit of Islam*, when external funding failed to arrive, the local Muslim community pitched in and raised the balance needed to complete the proposed exhibit. Not all communities may have the means to do so. Similarly, both the Museum of Anthropology as an entity and the members of the Advisory Committee as individuals were willing to renew commitment to the exhibit following public debate over meanings of Islam. As we saw with the CMC, this too may not always be the case. There needs to be an ideological shift on the part of funding agencies and cultural organizations in understanding the time and money necessary for creating informed and representative exhibits.

However, as critical pedagogy demonstrates, both history and the future are possibilities. Cultural institutions exist in a dialectical relationship with those who they seek to influence. The current climate in cultural institutions is one of openness to change, as expressed theoretically in the 'new museology' discussed at the beginning of this thesis, with its emphasis on collaboration. It is also expressed practically, as evidenced by MoA's recent receipt of a $17.2 million grant from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation on the basis of the museum's proposal to use its collections and expertise to create "a new infrastructure for collaborative research" (Arts UBC 2002). Such funding combined with collaborative practice will allow the museum to create more dynamic educative spheres, thus generating more dialogue, thus enhancing the transformative potential of the museum's various spaces. These spaces may then be used to generate shifts in public understanding of various peoples' positions in society, which will allow room for a critique of the ideological assumptions that sustain hegemony. After such assumptions are critiqued and deconstructed, there will be more room for the creation of even more dynamic educative spheres, and the process of critique and possibility can proceed in dialectical relation.

I believe that these assertions are upheld by the sentiments expressed in the following quotation, again from Itrath Syed, who states of the exhibit:

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This was the first time in my life - having been raised in Canada my whole life, to see a Canadian institution... have a particular representation of Islam. I've never, I've never seen that and this was the first time and I kept thinking to myself about how valuable that is for younger kids who came with their schools who maybe were the only Muslim in their class or the only Muslim in their school, to come with all of their friends and all of their little community at the school and to experience the exhibit and that kind of powerful statement that it makes when a Canadian institution does this, and that this too is a part of what we call Canada. This community, this, you know, this way of living is also part of the Canadian tradition. And that is the single most powerful statement... and if it can just do that then it's done great things. And...for all the thousands of people who came through the exhibit- for them all to sort of get that feeling of demystifying it, de-exotifying it, making it something very normal, very common, you know, like your neighbour next door who is Muslim - this is part of their history, part of their cultural expression. That, I think, is the most powerful part (Interview with author, June 12, 2002).

Observations I made during school visits also support this statement. The students who appeared the most excited by the exhibit were those that were Muslims themselves. One girl was almost in tears when she saw the Khabbah covering, asking a Muslim volunteer "Oh my god, can I please touch this?" After being told she wasn't allowed, she turned to her friend and added "I've been there, it's so beautiful. Oooh, I want so badly to touch it". She then asked the volunteer in amazement: "How on earth did you get to bring this here?" The same student spent a long time at the end of the program asking the volunteers further questions, and left extremely excited promising to return on the weekend with her family. Such passion was common with Muslim students who attended the programs, and greatly excited the Muslim volunteers in turn, and really enhanced the power of the space.

Conclusion

As I have already stated, 'critical pedagogy' constitutes a certain kind of practice, but not a unified theory. Thus it is malleable. The institutional, temporal, and regional specificities of museum exhibitry demand that a malleable approach must be available when planning educational environments, therefore an approach informed by critical pedagogy seems particularly useful. The notion of collaboration is complex, and the idea of a being able to extract a 'collaborative model' seems unrealistic, yet creating an informed practice is within reach, and is even enhanced by defining the aforementioned specificities. Critical pedagogy suggests methods whereby ethical and ideological standpoints can work in harmony. In terms of exhibitry, the timeliness of exhibits, whether positive or negative, cannot be predicted. Yet by developing collaborative practices based on critical pedagogical principles, malleable, flexible spaces can be created within the museum, both physically in terms of the spatial layout of exhibits, and theoretically in terms of having room for dialogue within those spaces. When such conditions are created, as they were in *The Spirit of Islam*, political and social realities and the ideological consequences they entail will be able to be countered by specific exhibit ideologies, which will not be hegemonic.

As Giroux has explained, within critical pedagogy,

> Theory does not dictate practice... it serves to hold practice at arm's length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history. There is no appeal to universal laws or historical necessity here; theory emerges from specific contexts and forms of experience in order to examine such contexts critically and then to intervene on the basis of an informed practice (1992:xxiii).

I believe that *The Spirit of Islam* exhibit drew on the specific contexts and forms of experience of its various stakeholder parties and managed to create something quite unique. Reality coincided powerfully with theory due to the timing of the exhibit and only served to

enhance its transformative potential. *The Spirit of Islam* demonstrates that exhibits based on commitment and ethical openness, combined with innovative educative spaces based on dialogue and dialectic are indeed possible. I would go further and say that they are, in fact, essential if the museum is to use its influential position in society to achieve greater social equality, a purpose I feel they should be pursuing. The new museology has begun the process of generating a language of critique around and within museum practice. Collaborative exhibits informed by a critical pedagogical perspective, such as *The Spirit of Islam*, can dialectically engage with such critiques and further the dialogic process necessary to generate a language of possibility directed toward creating an equality of representation, ultimately aiding in the creation of a more socially democratic world.

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