Displaying Truth and Reconciliation:

Experiences of Engagement between Alberni Indian Residential School Survivors and Museum Professionals Curating the Canadian History Hall

by

Bradley A. Clements
BA Anthropology, University of Victoria, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Anthropology

© Bradley Clements, 2018

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.
Supervisory Committee

Dr. Andrea N. Walsh
(Department of Anthropology)
Supervisor

Dr. Michael I. Asch
(Department of Anthropology; Department of Political Science)
Departmental Member
Abstract

Supervisory Committee
Dr. Andrea N. Walsh
Supervisor
Dr. Michael I. Asch
Departmental Member

The re-curated Canadian History Hall (CHH) opened at the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) in Gatineau, Québec, on July 1st, 2017, becoming the first Canadian national narrative to exhibit the history, experiences, and aftermath of Canada’s genocidal Indian Residential School (IRS) system. Through interviews and participant observation, this case study considers experiences of CHH curatorial engagements between Alberni IRS Survivors and museum professionals. Their experiences illustrate practical challenges, structural limitations, and complementary interests of Western museums and Indigenous source communities attempting to collaboratively curate difficult history. Despite having limited capacities for indigенization or decolonization, this thesis demonstrates that museums like the CMH can be complicated but beneficial partners for some Indigenous source communities and their anti-colonial engagements with Canadian society.
Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ........................................................................................................... ii
Abstract ................................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables .............................................................................................................................. vi
List of Figures ............................................................................................................................ vii
Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................... viii
Dedication ................................................................................................................................. ix
Introduction: Displaying Truth and Reconciliation ................................................................. 1
  Setting and Background ......................................................................................................... 4
  Displaying Truth and Reconciliation .................................................................................... 8
Outline ..................................................................................................................................... 10
  Methodology ........................................................................................................................ 10
  Context ................................................................................................................................ 11
  Experiences and Structures ................................................................................................. 11
Institutional and Community Framings .................................................................................... 12
  The Importance of Relations in Representation .............................................................. 14
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 17
Chapter I: Methodology .......................................................................................................... 19
  Purpose ................................................................................................................................ 19
  Contributing to Exhibit Case Study Literature ................................................................. 20
  Understanding Communities and Institutions: Theory to Methodology to Methods ... 23
    Theory ................................................................................................................................. 23
    Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 26
    Methods .............................................................................................................................. 27
    Ethics ................................................................................................................................. 29
    Interpretive Framework ................................................................................................. 31
    Politics and Reflexivity ................................................................................................. 31
Chapter II: The Canadian History Hall in Context .................................................................... 36
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entering the Canadian Museum of History</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Canada’s National Museum</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contested Indigenization: The First Peoples’ Hall</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canadian Museum of History’s New Mandate and its Politics</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canadian History Hall</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery 3.3: “First Peoples: 1876 to the Present Day”</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing the Canadian History Hall</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter III: Experiences and Structures** ......................................................... 60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachings from Experiences, for Structures</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience: Time and Tension in Public Programming Turned Ceremony</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure: Institutions, Communities, and Communication</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences: Testimonial Boundaries and Difficult Histories</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures: Self Care and Community Support</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences: Transformation through Relations, Testimony, and Witnessing</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures: Relations as Accountability</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion: Museums, Colonialism, and Truth-Telling** ............................... 104

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museums are Colonial, What Now?</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating Across Difference</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth-Telling, Witnessing, and Change</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bibliography** ........................................................................................................ 116

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews, Personal Communications, and Public Presentations</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum and Gallery Exhibitions</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Experiences and Lessons by Collaborative Factor .................. 102
List of Figures

Figure 1: The opening of the IRS section of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017. (5)

Figure 2: Community in the institution: the Alberni IRS Survivors group visiting the completed CHH. © Deborah Cook, 2017. (12)

Figure 3: Gina Laing recording her testimony in the CMH. © Andrea Walsh, 2015. (15)

Figure 4: The CMH. © Tourism Ottawa. (37)

Figure 5: The FPH IRS display. © Bradley Clements, 2017. (43)

Figure 6: Sketch of the layout of Gallery 3. © Bradley Clements, 2018. (50)

Figure 7: Opening of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017. (51)

Figure 8: Sketch of the layout of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2018. (51)

Figure 9: Charles August (left) and Dennis Thomas (right) watching August's video interview in Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017. (53)

Figure 10: "Affirmation" section of Gallery 3.3. © Canadian Museum of History, 2017. (54)

Figure 11: A dance during the naming ceremony at the CMH. © Bradley Clements, 2017. (64)
Acknowledgments

This research is the culmination of relationships that extend beyond its initiation and completion. Without those who I have learned from, been supported by, and have come to love, I would be a very different person and this thesis would not exist.

Most fundamentally I am thankful to the Lekwungen, WSÁNEĆ, Nuu-chah-nulth, Snuneymuxw, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, and Kanien’kehá:ka nations in whose territories I have conducted this research, sometimes with and sometimes without permission.

Dr. Andrea Walsh has been more than an excellent supervisor to me. Working with her and the Residential and Indian Day School Art Research collective as an undergraduate researcher changed the course of my education, career, and life. I met many of the others who I must thank through Andrea and our work together.

Learning from Dr. Michael Asch through conversations, a one-on-one course, and his generous acceptance to join my committee, has been a privilege. Michael’s interventions continue to form my approach to the study and practice of anthropology.

I may not have entered graduate studies without the encouragement of David Parent, Dr. Jennifer Robinson, and Shaina Humble. My cohort of graduate students has been incredibly mutually supportive. Jindra Belanger and Cathy Rzeptinski, our department secretaries, go above and beyond to support us and ground a sense of home in our department. Developing this thesis has been a pleasure thanks to the support and feedback of friends, family, and reviewers, notably members of Heidi Stark and Phil Henderson’s Indigenous Research Workshop. Thanks also to Dr. Michelle McGeough (UBC Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory), who examined this thesis.

I especially thank all who have contributed their knowledge and experiences to this research. James Trepanier has been vital in making the Canadian Museum of History part of this research. I am so grateful to the Survivors and intergenerational Survivors who have engaged this research. You have transformed me among many through your testimony; your courage and strength are humbling.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Victoria are recognized with gratitude for their financial support of this research.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Elders and residential school Survivors who have taught me so much, in and beyond this research.

ƛ̓eeḵoo Ṣeeḵoo.
Introduction: Displaying Truth and Reconciliation

I want to tell my story. I want people to hear right from the victim and find out what happened. To understand what I went through, and feel it too.

Gina Laing, Uchucklesaht Survivor of the Alberni Indian Residential School (interview 19 January 2018)

Educating Canadians for reconciliation involves [...] dialogue forums and public history institutions such as museums and archives.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a:234)

Museums are important reference points in Canadian history and culture, and while these institutions need to rethink the limits of their mandate, they do serve to affirm the very nature of this country.

Julia D. Harrison (1993:347)

In June of 2015, Survivors and intergenerational Survivors of the Alberni Indian Residential School travelled from British Columbia to the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) in Gatineau, Québec. Part of the reason for their trip was to share testimony for display in the new Canadian History Hall (CHH) that would open on July 1st, 2017. This thesis is about the experiences of Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors1 and museum professionals as they partnered to tell IRS history2 in the new CHH. It is guided by the question of what can be learned from these experiences, and from the interlocutors3 who share them. I share experiences that I have heard and been a part of4

---

1 I include intergenerational Survivors in my use of this term. Although not all who attended the Alberni IRS refer to themselves as Survivors, all who I have spoken with for this research do. I choose to capitalize this term as an honorific, similar to the common capitalization of “Elders.”

2 This thesis does not provide a background of the IRS system. For this background, see the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). For background of the Alberni IRS, see the report of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (1996).

3 An interlocutor is “one who takes part in a dialogue or conversation” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2018). I use this term to refer to those who substantively inform this research, because it is quite literally who these individuals are in relation to this thesis and its methodology (see Chapter 1). Key interlocutors have been the IRS Survivors, community members, and museum professionals with whom I have formally or informally discussed this research. They have not only informed this research, but also motivated it and its design, framing, and intended applications.

4 Interviews and participant observation are the primary methods of this research. I engage this work as a settler Canadian of English and Scottish decent, born and living on treated and unceded Lekwungen territories (see
with an aim to make them useful to museum professionals, source community members, and scholars as they try to engage in and understand museum collaboration.⁵

This research demonstrates the colonial bounds of Western⁶ museums (Boast 2011:66-7). Within these bounds, museums can take measures to “indigenize” (Claxton 2017; Phillips 2011:10) to better accommodate and heed Indigenous peoples and governance systems. However, Western museums in their current institutional form cannot be governed by Indigenous governance: especially those like the CMH which are under the jurisdiction of a colonial state. Therefore, while practically and legally acting as an owner, authority, or caretaker of Indigenous cultural materials and/or being situated on Indigenous lands, a museum under Western governance cannot function as such in a way that is Indigenous (Claxton 2017) or decolonized (Tuck & Yang 2012).

Far from being a theoretical or defeatist endeavour, however, mapping colonial structures and limits of a Western museum can allow for a practical assessment of its role and capacity for hosting Indigenous peoples, source communities, protocols, belongings, and representations (Onciul 2015:159-60).⁷ Where the requirements of Indigenous

---

Asch [2014] and Claxton [2015] for implications of this positionality). I have worked with the Alberni IRS Survivors group since 2013. It is important for my readers and I to recognize my positioning as an individual who unfairly benefits from local and global colonialism and other sorts of oppression. I also recognize the teaching and admonishment that Alberni IRS Survivors have raised when I have highlighted my privileged position: hisukničawaak, “we are all one.” This teaching, central to Nuu-chah-nulth – and many Indigenous – ontologies, recognizes difference and unique backgrounds while noting the entangled, ongoing, co-reliant reciprocity of all relations (Umeek 2011:ix, 81, 94, 117). In contexts that this teaching has been shared with me, I have been told not to allow my outlying background to distance myself from relations and experiences that I have witnessed or shared.

⁵ These three primary audience groups are not necessarily separate: some interlocutors are members of two or of all three of them. Source community members in this research are Survivors of the Canadian IRS system and their close relatives. This thesis focuses primarily on a small group of directly represented Alberni IRS Survivors, as will be described presently. I move slightly away from definitions of source communities that are based primarily on objects in museum collections, such as the following:

_The term ‘source communities’ (sometimes referred to as ‘originating communities’) refers both to these groups in the past when artefacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today. These terms have most often been used to refer to indigenous peoples in the Americas and the Pacific, but apply to every cultural group from whom museums have collected [...]._ (Peers & Brown 2003:2)

In studying a new exhibit of recent history in which there are few “artefacts” – most of which are loaned – I see “source community” members as those who are represented, or who are closely related to those who are represented, through the material (including text, image, audio, and video) on public display as well as in stored collections.

⁶ This thesis does not consider Indigenous-run museums, although they may face similar constraints (Onciul 2015:81-2, 159). For more on these institutions, see Lonetree (2012).

⁷ It is important to highlight that museum professionals who are Indigenous are doing substantial work to transform the Western museums in which they work. While Western museums are governed by colonial legal regimes, however, there will be limitations to anyone’s work to decolonize them.
source communities lie outside of what a museum is capable of accommodating, or *vice versa*, and where the museum is unable to adapt its structure accordingly, the museum is unlikely to be a viable partner. Despite these limitations, if the museum and source community have compatible goals for collaboration they can pursue them in mutually beneficial ways, even if occasionally confronting irreconcilable differences. In this case study, the source community and museum shared the goal of telling IRS history to a broad Canadian public, although their reasons and visions for doing so differed in informative ways. Small but illustrative moments became flash-points at the bounds of irreconcilable territory (A. Simpson 2014:33-5). Mutually beneficial areas of collaboration can be identified through shared experiences and conversations within and between partnering groups, where relationships are sufficiently trusting. Informed by such conversations, this research identifies mutual goals of collaboration between Alberni IRS Survivors and CMH museum professionals, and it navigates tensions between these shared goals and their irreconcilable bounds.

The CHH is the largest, most comprehensive, and most expensive\(^8\) telling of Canadian history in exhibition form, and the first to include the history and legacy of the Canadian IRS system in a national narrative (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017; Moses 18 October 2017). Because of the timing of its opening – two years after the release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Canada’s IRS system, and the controversial opening of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights\(^9\) – the CHH and its curatorial processes\(^10\) contain insights for other Canadian heritage

---

\(^8\) $25 million was provided by the federal government. The CMH was required to raise $5 million, although they were ultimately successful in raising $8 million, according to CEO Mark O’Neill’s (30 June 2017) announcement at the CHH opening ceremony. ~$3 million additional federal government dollars helped to accommodate loans from other institutions (Butler 2016; CBC 2012; CMH 2012a).

\(^9\) Several Indigenous nations and groups protested the opening of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, the newest federal museum, on various grounds. Most relevant to the IRS history in the CHH was the relatively minimal engagement with IRS history which posed recognition of the genocidal nature of the IRS system as a societal debate and a question to visitors. Less than a year after the Museum’s opening, the TRC (2015b:1) stated that the IRS system was one of cultural genocide. Amy Lonetree’s (2012:109) words about the National Museum of the American Indian echo here: “For a national museum of such prominence to reinforce the nation’s historical amnesia is tragic, and that this site has such potential to create new understandings of [the country’s] history makes the tragedy only greater.”

\(^10\) I use the phrase “curatorial processes” in this thesis to refer to the curatorial work of exhibit-creation, with an aim to highlight its dynamic and socially relational motivations and practices.
institutions that engage difficult histories in an “era of reconciliation” (Lehrer & Milton 2011; Stark 18 March 2017).

This thesis’ original research is based on semi-structured interviews with eighteen individuals who were actively involved in curatorial relationships as museum professionals and IRS Survivors, as well as casual participant observation of their collaborative work at the CMH and elsewhere. All interviewed interlocutors made decisions relating to the content or presentation of the IRS section of the CHH. Most of these individuals are museum staff or directly represented IRS Survivors, and others were involved in supporting roles as family, contractors, or advisors. Despite overlap and diversity within and between them, primary interlocutors form two groups: Survivors whose stories are exhibited and museum professionals who created the exhibit. My aim was to speak with all museum staff who have made curatorial decisions (decisions which manifested in exhibit content or its presentation) and IRS Survivors who contributed their own stories or were otherwise involved in their collective representation. Following advice from Ruth Phillips (2011:299), Bryony Onciul (2015:71), and Alberni IRS Survivors who engaged with the CMH, I spoke to a variety of involved individuals. As Jennifer Robinson (2017:iii-iv) notes, “[w]orking with survivors of trauma is not just about creating a successful exhibition; in the end, the exhibition is but one part of the museological process.” My approach in this research is concerned with the process of creating the exhibit, not with the exhibit itself.

**Setting and Background**

Walking into the CHH, a visitor finds the spacious, circular central Hub. The long entrance hallway is confined and introspective, adding to the sense of expanse when it opens to the Hub under the ethereal, subtly blue-lit dome, designed to evoke vast prairie skies (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:12). Three Galleries can be entered

---

11 Interviewed Alberni IRS Survivors are: Jeffery Cook and his daughter Sherri (Huu-ay-aht), Dennis Thomas (Ditidaht), Gina Laing and her daughter April Martin (Uchucklesaht), Arthur Bolton (Tsimshian), Jack (Huu-ay-aht) and Deborah Cook (Nisga’a), Mark Atleo, and Tim Sutherland Sr. (Ahousaht). Interviewed museum professionals are: James Trepanier (CMH Curator: Post-Confederation Canada, Euro-Canadian), John Moses (Aboriginal Advisory Committee member, Six Nations), Kathryn Lyons (Canadian War Museum interpretive planner, Euro-Canadian), Jonathan Lainey (CMH Curator: First Peoples, Wendat), Jeremy Taylor (designer, Euro-Canadian), Heather Montgomery (CMH public programmer, Euro-Canadian), Frank Wimart (CMH film director, Euro-Canadian), and Eric Demay (designer, Euro-Canadian).
from here, two at the same level and the third up a flowing ramp to the mezzanine. The first presents Indigenous memory and archaeology from time immemorial, followed by early colonial history and the consolidation of French and British Canadian colonies. The second relates to colonial entrenchment and expansion up to the early 20th Century. The third and final Gallery recounts from the First World War up to the time of its curation in 2016. Each Gallery is made up of a series of “stories” which are considered important to historical and current Canada. The third story of Gallery Three – Gallery 3.3 in shorthand – is devoted to Indigenous peoples’ “struggle for their rights and the preservation of their cultures” (CMH 2017) from 1876 to present. It presents the Indian Act, followed by a journey through experiences and legacies of the IRS system, and concludes with 20th and 21st century political movements and cultural re-assertion. The sub-section of Gallery 3.3 on IRS history is the focus of this thesis.12

Figure 1: The opening of the IRS section of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017.

The relatively small display of IRS history and legacies is the manifestation of histories of suffering, resistance, resilience, and resurgence – and of curatorial engagement – that are much larger than meet the eye. The IRS section of the CHH works to represent the general experience of IRS: of over 150,000 children in 139 institutions, from the 1880s to 1990s, and from coast to coast to coast of Canada (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:186). This is an impossible but necessary aim in an exhibit mandated to

12 A more thorough description of the CHH and Gallery 3.3 is provided in Chapter 2.
tell Canada’s history. An engagement group of Survivors, brought together and facilitated by the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF),\textsuperscript{13} guided the exhibition team in the layout and content-planning of the IRS section. This group was made up of Survivors and intergenerational Survivors from communities and residential schools across Canada, but who resided in the Ottawa area at the time of the engagement sessions. The second group of Survivors who were engaged in the CHH project had re-claimed childhood paintings that they or their parents had created at the Alberni IRS in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This second group’s involvement included providing testimonies of their experiences of IRS, and of creating and re-claiming their childhood paintings, for video-display in Gallery 3.3. More broadly, General and Aboriginal Advisory Committees of academic, community, and other experts oversaw the curation and content of the CHH.

Due to my relationships with the involved Alberni IRS Survivors and their interest in being a part of this research, this thesis focuses on their experiences of engaging with the curation of the CHH. This group came together around the repatriation of some Alberni IRS Survivors’ childhood paintings to them in 2013. Group members or their parents had attended the Alberni IRS as children. Those with paintings (others were involved as family members, friends, or Elders) had created them in an extracurricular art class led by Robert Aller, an artist and volunteer art teacher, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Those who remember these classes speak of them as rare moments of safety and cultural and individual expression (Clements 2016:104; Laing 19 January 2018; Thomas 19 January 2018). Aller kept some of the children’s paintings until he passed away in 2008. That year, Aller’s family bequeathed his collection to the University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries. At this time, Andrea Walsh (an Associate Professor in the University of Victoria’s Anthropology Department who had previously done community-based work with children’s artwork from the Inkameep Indian Day School) spearheaded a group of

\textsuperscript{13} This partnership was made possible by a memorandum of understanding between the LHF and the CMH. The LHF (2015) describes itself as:

\textit{…a national Indigenous-led, charitable organization founded in 2000 with the goal of educating and raising awareness about the history and many legacies of the Residential School System. These include the direct and ongoing impacts on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Survivors, their communities, and their descendants. Our mission is to educate towards creating just and equal relationships of reconciliation and healing for all Canadians, to expand awareness of and access to the rich legacy of the contributions of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the world, and to make known the histories of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, including the histories of injustice.}
faculty, students, staff, Elders, and community leaders to make connections with those who had created the paintings, or their next of kin.

The paintings from the Alberni IRS were repatriated to their proper owners at a feast in the Port Alberni Athletic Hall in 2013.14 Walsh was surprised when many of the Survivors asked for her to partner with them to display their paintings – their only childhood belongings, for many of them – to educate the public about their IRS experiences. As such, the paintings have had formal gallery exhibits twice in Victoria, once in Penticton, once in Port Alberni, and at many events and presentations at the request or permission of their owners. The group was experienced and willing to share their stories in the CHH when they were invited to by David Morrison, one of the CHH research directors, via Andrea Walsh. Of the group eight individuals contributed testimonies to the CHH: six Survivors of the Alberni IRS – Jeffrey Cook (Huu-ay-aht), Gina Laing (Uchucklesaht), Dennis Thomas (Ditidaht), Arthur Bolton (Tsimshian), Charles August, and Mark Atleo (Ahousaht) – and two intergenerational Survivors – Shelley Chester (Ditidaht) and April Martin (Uchucklesaht). Other group members travelled with them on each trip: a total of 19 individuals on the 2015 trip, and 18 in 2017. I have personally been involved in various research and support capacities since shortly after the repatriation feast in 2013. My involvement has been important for building the relationships that have enabled this research.15

I have discussed the engagements16 that curatorial staff had with the LHF-facilitated Survivor group, with relevant interlocutors, including two LHF staff members, and I have reviewed the LHF’s written notes from them. The Survivors who were part of these conversations were invited to speak with me about their experiences, via an LHF staff member, but none were able to do so within the time that I had to conduct interviews. As

---

14 There are paintings from another IRS and other communities in the Aller collection which have ongoing repatriation processes at the time of writing.
15 For further background on the RIDSAR collective and this Alberni IRS Survivors group, see Clements (2016), Robinson (2017), and the TRC Final Report (2015b:184-186).
16 “Engagement” is the term used by museum professionals. Trepanier (24 October 2017) explains: *The word “consultation” is a bit tricky. [...]n the museum context, especially for an institution like ours, on the term “consultation” carries with it a legal process that is another part of what the Museum does, in terms of repatriation and treaty obligations and these sorts of things. So, within the context of the History Hall, the small “c” consultation is definitely what we were doing, but we were reluctant to use that term because of what it triggers in the public eye in other settings. So quite often we re-framed it as “engagements” and as “conversations.”*
a result, I have heard the perspectives of museum professionals and LHF staff on these engagements, but not of the Survivors who took part in them. This allows me to include these engagements in my analysis in a very limited way. For the engagement of Alberni IRS Survivors, on the other hand, I have been able to hear the perspectives of both museum professionals and of Survivors, whose understandings I attempt to foreground. Because of my positionality (addressed further in Chapter 2) as someone who has relationships with the Alberni IRS Survivor group but not with other engaged Survivors, my research is largely restricted to the subset of engagements of which they were a part.

**Displaying Truth and Reconciliation**

The title of this thesis, “Displaying Truth and Reconciliation,” is intended to communicate that it is about telling relationally important stories in ways that have potential to be powerful or hollow. Firstly, this thesis is about the social processes of “displaying.” It does not focus on the completed, solidified “display” that now exists in the CHH. The IRS section of the CHH references truths about the IRS system as well as the work toward reconciliation. The display of video interviews about the return of childhood paintings to Survivors of the Alberni IRS is about both: Survivors’ experiences of IRS, the struggles since, and the healing that has more recently begun, in part by reclaiming their artworks.

Since Canada’s TRC was mandated through the 2008 IRS class action settlement, academic and societal discourse on the meanings and applications of “truth” and “reconciliation” have proliferated. Many institutions, including the CMH, have been called upon to undergo reconciliation actions and processes by the TRC (2015a:247-52) and related social movements. The TRC (2015b:3) defines “reconciliation” as:

> [...] establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

Liberal readings of “reconciliation” tend to see it as apologising to citizens whose liberties have been historically infringed, making final amendments to passive victims of specific past wrongs, or as compromise between settlers and Indigenous peoples within Canada (Coulthard 2014:22; Gordon-Walker 2017:49; Lonetree 2012:122; Million
2013:170-2; Regan 2010:60). Others worry that “reconciliation” can act as a “second chance at assimilation” (Kinew, quoted in TRC 2015b:82). The word can literally mean “to make consistent with,” and critics contest processes that may work to domesticate Indigenous nations into and under the still-colonial state (Garneau 2016:27, 30-4; Lonetree 2012:121; Million 2013:171; Regan 2010:60). These and other scholars have asked: if reconciliation means “to make consistent with,” who does it make consistent with whom? If political processes work to reconcile Indigenous nationhood to the existence and authority of Canada, they are colonial in effect; if they work to reconcile Canada to the pre-existence and authority of Indigenous nations, they can be decolonizing and just (Asch 2014:4-5, 11-12).

Many activists in movements of Indigenous-settler relations argue that truth must come before reconciliation (Gibbons 2015:126; Lonetree 2012:119-20). “Truth” signifies societal understanding of genocide of distinct Indigenous peoples and nations. The Canadian government partnered with churches to commit this genocide on behalf of settler Canadians, as part of ongoing Canadian colonialism (Million 2013:168, 172; Regan 2010:62). Although truth and reconciliation can hopefully be pursued in just and anti-colonial ways, current scholarship is critical. Many Canadian institutions and governments are talking about and working to implement what they call “reconciliation,” but scholars and activists caution that they often do so in ways that suggest that they have not yet understood the truth (Regan 2010:62). This concern drives many of the Survivors with whom I have spoken to share their truths: so that settler Canadians understand their lived realities, and so that Canadian institutions can understand the harmfulness of their actions (Deborah Cook 20 January 2018; Laing 19 January 2018).

The value-judgement of the phrase “displaying truth and reconciliation” is intentionally ambiguous. Struggles between colonial and anti-colonial implementations of “reconciliation” have not yet been resolved in Canadian or Indigenous societies, or in my assessment of the CHH. Many people and motivations are involved in the processes of “displaying” that I study, some who prioritize “truth” and others who turn to various understandings of “reconciliation.” “Displaying” itself is a morally ambiguous concept and action. It can refer to the literal activity of curation which, here, is a process of engagement between Survivors and museum professionals to create and maintain
physical displays with an aim of communicating truths to viewers. As a verb, it can be a dynamic action that is willing to accommodate others and do work, rather than remain a reified, passive noun that is easily commodified and consumed by the “tragedy-porn” hungry or indulgently guilty. Simultaneously, practices of “displaying” can connote a hollow performance akin to a forced but unfelt apology; they can be experienced as a flimsy facade that the displayer felt obliged but unwilling to present. The social processes of displaying truth and reconciliation in the CHH lie somewhere between these conflicting interpretations. Without triangulating the CHH’s position precisely between these axes, I will work to identify where museum professionals’ practices and aims have aligned with Survivors,’ and where they have been in tension.

Outline

This thesis’ research relates to the question of what museum professionals, source community members, and scholars can learn from experiences of IRS Survivors and museum professionals engaging to represent the history and legacy of Canada’s IRS system in the CHH. Interactions between the CMH and IRS Survivors demonstrate the colonial structural bounds of Western museums, but also show mutually beneficial and imperfect ways of navigating them. In the coming chapters I will relate the approach that I have taken to this research and its implicated relations (Chapter 1), some of the history that led up to the manifestation of the CHH in its current form (Chapter 2), and the experiences that have been shared with me and how they may indicate beneficial or reformable structures in museum and source community relations (Chapter 3).

Methodology

I conducted this thesis’ original research through semi-structured interviews with eight Survivors of the Alberni IRS, two intergenerational Survivors, and eight museum professionals in a diversity of roles, all of whom had experience related to Gallery 3.3.17 Chapter 1 will explain this approach and its rationale. Considering as many involved perspectives as possible – not limited to the institutionally-defined decision makers – is

17 My personal perspective is also informed by off-record discussions with others who were involved in and knowledgeable about the CHH or the processes around it. I have since received permission to reference some of these conversations formally; others I have not but am nonetheless appreciative of them.
based upon interlocutor recommendations, and Ruth B. Phillips’ (2011:299) call to “reimagine the museum as a networked system.” To understand how interlocutors can form, reform, and be formed and limited by institutions, these recommendations align well with social theory of the production and reproduction of institutional structure (Bourdieu 1977, 1989; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). I conclude this chapter with a reflection on the positionality, politics, and philosophies that have influenced my approach and relationships in this research.

Context

When I asked John Moses (a Six Nations museum professional, intergenerational Survivor, and member of the Aboriginal Advisory Committees of the First Peoples’ Hall, which opened in 2003, and of the CHH) about his experience of advising on IRS content, he chose to take me on a tour of both Halls. The tour illustrated Moses’ description of how social, institutional, and curatorial conditions relating to IRS representation had changed over the course of the Museum’s modern manifestation. I recount Moses’ tour, supplemented with perspectives from other interviews and research, to contextualize the recent curation of the CHH.

Experiences and Structures

The experiences of a diverse array of interlocutors illustrate various possibilities and limitations for partnerships between Indigenous source communities and Western museums to share difficult history. Western museums are colonial institutions, a seemingly theoretical definition which manifests in pervasive, quotidian, concrete ways. However, recognizing that Western museums cannot become Indigenous and that Indigenous source communities cannot become Western is not an argument for incommensurability. Instead, recognition of Western museums’ structural barriers opens possibilities to navigate, restructure, and form relationships across them. This chapter details some limitations and possibilities of collaborative work between Indigenous source communities and Western museums through engagements between Alberni IRS Survivors and CMH museum professionals, and their subsequent reflections on them.
On the afternoon of October 13th, 2017, I was hauling stacks of office chairs into a meeting room at the CMH with James Trepanier, Curator: Post-Confederation Canada. Earlier that day, Andrea Walsh had reminded members of the Alberni IRS Survivors group about the upcoming informal meeting with various CMH staff regarding a possible research and exhibition partnership between the University of Victoria and the CMH. “Initially in the morning [Walsh told me], ‘oh, Jeff and Jack might come [to the meeting],’” Trepanier (24 October 2017) later recalled.

I was like, “ok, that’s fine!” I booked a slightly larger room. And then literally as I met her downstairs – I met her about twenty minutes early – she goes “oh, so I was talking to the group just before lunch and they heard about the meeting and they’re all coming now.” And I kind of went, “oh, ok.” And my brain’s going: “crap.” My managers […] who were coming to the meeting didn’t know this. And I kind of looked at Andrea and I said, “I don’t really have a choice in this, do I?” And she was like, “nah.”

So Trepanier had booked a larger meeting room and now we were filling it with enough chairs to accommodate the unexpectedly large group. “[T]he arrival of the group like that, I think, caught our managers very off guard, and I would love to have briefed them a little bit,” Trepanier explained. As the liaison between the Alberni IRS Survivors group and the CMH, Trepanier had to facilitate relations between two groups with very different backgrounds and ways of relating and operating. Obligations to both groups sometimes put him and his colleagues in awkward positions. Relationships and increased
awareness of how each group operates has helped Trepanier, Walsh, myself, and others to better engage and facilitate engagements with each other, as presented in this research.

It has been a challenge to understand the intersections of various interlocutors’ ways of relating, and to privilege appropriate ones in this thesis. All went well in the meeting room, crowded with community members and CMH managers and staff, but it did illustrate two relational frames: that of the institution, and that of the source community.\(^{18}\) The ideal type of institutional relations appears to be formalized into organizational charts, policies, memoranda of understanding, job descriptions, mandates, email correspondence, established meeting schedules with attendee lists, and the like. Differently, the modes of relating that I have become accustomed to in my relations with Alberni IRS Survivors, the source community in this case study, tend to require group gatherings, often attended based on availability over a meal and coordinated via Facebook Messenger or casual phone chats. Survivors have not only common experiences of IRS, but also often live in or are from the same communities, having kinship and friendships. Here, accountability and trust are established over time and communal observation of solidarity and honesty rather than through contractual documents. This source community’s ways of relating juxtaposes the institutional frame, with which it occasionally articulates and/or conflicts.

Curators and other museum professionals frequently find themselves in liaison positions: between expert knowledge-holders and lay publics, between stakeholder groups, and between the institution that they work for and the source communities with whom they work (Lainey 16 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017; Taylor 20 October 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017). A curatorial framing must thus try to account for both institutional and source community framings. Because institutional framings tend to be structurally privileged and commonly understood, I attempt to foreground source community framings in this thesis, as much as I am able. Ultimately, museums and source communities collaborate for (better) representations (Cooper 2008:15-6; Gibbons

\(^{18}\) I do not present this as a general theory but as a simplified understanding of the specific circumstances that I observed. Institutional relations are bureaucratically organized, potentially with less reliance on personal relationships like those that bind Survivors’ community solidarity.
As such, the institution should modify its practices to better accommodate the source community, rather than vice versa. But while it may be important for institutions to be flexible, their structure can make this difficult. Here, case studies like this one may be helpful: to assess and learn from other possibilities and experiences when preparing or evaluating collaborations of one’s own (Phillips 2011:21).

Broadly but practically speaking, attempting to frame this research on the source community’s parameters rather than institutional ones requires an understanding of the CHH in terms of the relationships which have been implicated in it, rather than in terms of institutional milestones such as legislative mandates or opening ceremonies. For some Survivors, the relationship is as important as the exhibit itself (Sutherland 18 January 2018; Laing 19 January 2018). Although the CHH project officially began with an announcement from a federal heritage minister and culminated with a ribbon-cutting, the Survivors were not involved in either of these events. For the CMH as a whole – if not for its involved staff – there was nothing ground-breaking about days when the Survivors first visited, or the day that they came to witness the completed project. If there was – or will eventually be shown to be – anything institutionally transformative about these events, it occurred on relational, not institutional, terms.

The Importance of Relations in Representation

The halls of the CMH Curatorial Building, away from public exhibitions, have the stark utilitarianism of white paint on cinder block walls. Dollies, exhibition macquettes, plinths, discontinued text panels, various sizes of glass exhibit cases, and massive wooden crates waiting to hold artifacts line the inside wall, within bounds marked by tape on the pale linoleum floor. Ventilation piping and florescent lights hang, exposed, above. But even here the serpentine contours of Douglas Cardinal’s design lulls me into a simultaneous sense of ease and heightened awareness, as might a walk in the woods.

On June 2nd, 2015, I walked down these halls with Gina Laing and April Martin (a Uchucklesaht Survivor of the Alberni IRS and her daughter), Andrea Walsh, and James Trepanier, who used a key-card to pass through multiple doors. There was a sense of

---

19 Another common forum of engagement is around repatriation, although that is not the case in this case study.
being led into unknown territory for those of us unfamiliar with the CMH’s depths, venturing into its hidden, internal organs. Eventually we reached the temporary filming studio, set up to record Laing’s and other Survivors’ testimonies of their IRS experiences to be shown in the CHH. The studio was darkened, apart from the strange glow of studio lights on a raised green-screen stage. Trepanier introduced us to the film crew, who promptly got Laing a preferable chair and set about helping her feel comfortable in the artificial and bizarre-feeling setting.20

![Figure 3: Gina Laing recording her testimony in the CMH. © Andrea Walsh, 2015.](image)

Laing, Martin, and the entire Alberni IRS Survivors group who were visiting Ottawa to share their testimonies for the CHH and attend the closing of the TRC, had spent previous days with CMH staff to visit and tour collections. However, the interview recording experience was the most intensive and intimate engagement between CMH staff and Alberni IRS Survivors, and it tested their young relationships. Eight Survivors – Jeffrey Cook, Charles August, Shelley Chester, Arthur Bolton, Dennis Thomas, Mark

20 I later interviewed Frank Wimart (18 October 2017), the director of the film team who explained the logistics and rational for the setting, but also regret for the awkwardness of the resulting set-up. Both he and James Trepanier (24 October 2017), who conducted the interview, said that if they could re-do this process they would have arranged it differently (see “Experiences: Testimonial Boundaries and Difficult Histories” in Chapter 3).
Atleo, Gina Laing, and April Martin – made the journey to the film studio over several days. Despite months of correspondence between the CMH and the Survivors group, largely moderated by Trepanier and Walsh, entering the CMH to share testimony had the sense of beginning a process and solidifying a relationship for many involved (August 12 October 2017; Laing 7 June 2015, 19 January 2018; Trepanier 24 October 2017; Wimart 18 October 2017). This process would not truly conclude until the Survivors had the opportunity to return, two years and four months later, to see how their testimonies had been incorporated into the CHH.

Despite the disconcerting setting and profoundly difficult subject, Survivors who I asked about their experience in the CMH felt able and determined to share their testimony. The ability and willingness to share in an uninviting situation was enabled by incredible personal conviction to have their stories heard, their development of trusting relations with present museum staff, and the presence of friends and relatives. There were many times that the filming had to be paused because interviewees and interviewers were in tears, or in laughter. Although Survivors may have shared testimony differently in another setting or with other people (Laing [7 June 2015] later told me that she would like to have a long conversation with Trepanier over a pot of tea in her Port Alberni living room), the extent to which Survivors chose to share both difficult testimony, some of which had not been shared before, and practical jokes speaks to their relative sense of comfort with the people in the room.

The nature of relations is central to testimony sharing, when it is traumatic and emotionally difficult, but also when it is not. Just as Survivors might not have shared testimony in the basement of the CMH without sufficiently trusting relations with all involved, I could not have conducted this research without relations to the Survivors and museum professionals who have shared their time and knowledge. In both contexts, relations determine if and how representation can ethically occur. James Trepanier has gone above and beyond to graciously and quickly facilitate my access to the CMH. All

21 Trepanier has readily answered my questions, relayed my research interests to his managers and colleagues, secured permission for my research where necessary and possible, recommended and introduced me to colleagues to interview, and provided me with access to the invite-only CHH pre-opening ceremony, exhibit spaces, and other individuals and parts of the CMH I might not otherwise have known or been able to access.
the museum professionals with whom I have spoken have been generous with their time and willingness to share. The same has been the case of the Survivors group. When I travelled to Port Alberni to conduct interviews, I did not expect that many people would be available to speak with me as all have busy schedules and travel often. To my surprise, so many people wanted to meet that I nearly ran out of consent forms and gifts! Even after days filled with interviewing were over I was invited to spend evenings visiting in living rooms, attending cultural events, and going on driving trips.

From its beginning, this thesis research has been driven by relations. After our 2015 trip to Ottawa, I drove home to British Columbia with Gina Laing and her family. Driving late one night after a long, serene Saskatchewan sunset, Gina (7 June 2015) asked me about my plans after my nearing Bachelor’s Degree graduation. At the time I had been offered full-time employment in artisan book restoration, which had long been a hobby of mine, and I told her this. There was a pause. “You’ve been part of our group since the beginning,” Gina told me. Was there a way that I could continue with their work, she wanted to know?

For context, Gina is my hero. Whenever I am faced with a challenge in my life, I think of her: she has overcome incredible trauma, and she helps others overcome theirs with grace, compassion, intelligence, and gentle kindness. I considered her question, and mentioned Master’s research as one possibility that might facilitate my continued involvement. In the darkness of the prairie road she replied quietly: “I would like it if you did that.” To this day, that moment has been my directive.

Conclusion

In June, 2012, Mark O’Neill (quoted in TRC 2015a:248-9), the CEO of the CMH, addressed the CHH project before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. He presented that “perhaps the most egregious flaw in the [original] Canada Hall is its starting point [which] begins not with the arrival of First Peoples but with the arrival of Europeans […].” He made a commitment to amending this in the new CHH, which was followed through. He went on to say that “the voices and experiences of First Peoples must have a place in any narrative of Canadian history” and that Canadians “want us to examine both the good and the bad from our past.” Although this
thesis examines the engagements and other curatorial processes that produced this exhibit, rather than the exhibit itself, it can give insights to how the CMH sought to meet O’Neill’s commitments, and – to a degree – how successful they were.

Museum work in Canada builds on an ongoing history of conflict and partnership with Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. Improved models of engagement and collaboration have been developing since the beginning of the 1990s (Cooper 2008; M. Simpson 1996:261; Phillips 2011:13). The necessarily relational and unique nature of relationship building, however, entails that approaches – sometimes called “collaborative” or “new” museology22 – have no teleological end. Curation that best embodies the collaborative turn may always be grassroots and experimental: it seeks to learn from past experiences and continues to take risks and experiment for the future, without assuming that an ideal model can or should be reached (Phillips 2011:297).

Case studies are among the means for curators, academics, and source community partners to reflect on, learn from, and be inspired by projects of the past or in distant locations (Lonetree 2012:174; Phillips 2011:13; Smithsonian 2002:iii). This thesis contributes to the case study literature as one source in the documentation of the CHH curatorial process and Canadian museum engagement with difficult histories. Situated at a junctural moment for the CMH and the societal understanding of the IRS system in Canada, I hope that this thesis can be beneficial to those who work to tell this history, or to understand institutions that do.23 Having delineated this thesis’ intentions, guiding questions, basic context, content overview, and epistemological framing, I now turn to more thoroughly describe its research methodology.

---

22 “New museology” re-interrogates the purposes, rather than just the methods of museums (Vergo 1989:3), but this self-examination must soon return to methods, in that purposes and representations should occur collaboratively with those being represented (M. Simpson 1996:71; Lehrer & Milton 2011:5).

23 The strength of this case study’s precision mitigates its generalizability (Knell 2011:4). While considering broader processes, the focus on one display in a sub-section of a large exhibition prevents me from a holistic documentation of the exhibit or its curation, or from making direct recommendations for other projects. Such a scope would be beyond that of an MA thesis, will likely become more visible through the articulation of various other exhibition studies, and is documented in some capacity by the CMH itself. This thesis does not uphold the CHH as an ideal example of good or bad curatorial practice. Instead, I approach CHH curatorial engagements as manifesting in a way and context that makes it informative if tactfully investigated.
Chapter I: Methodology

Purpose

What can museum professionals, source community members, and academics learn from the experiences of museum professionals and Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors as they engaged to represent the history and legacy of IRS in the Canadian Museum of History’s (CMH) Canadian History Hall (CHH)? How can these experiences inform museum and source community practices and relationships? These concerns have guided my research. As indicated, I hope that the answers to these questions will be useful to museum professionals,24 source community members, and academics – in that order. Museum professionals firstly because they are the group best able to apply this research, and because I believe that expectations of adaptation should be put more heavily on representational institutions than on the communities who they seek to represent. Members of other source communities who are partnering with the CMH or other museums can hopefully benefit from hearing the experiences and reflections of the Alberni IRS Survivors who have told their stories at the CMH and shared their experiences of doing so with me. Although different communities and museums will partner differently, this case study may nevertheless provide a reference point in navigating those relationships. Finally, those who study museums, or organizations more broadly, may find the relational processes of the CHH’s curation – and my approach to understanding it – useful to articulate with their own studies. The findings of this research are grounded in both practice and theory, as the connection between its methods and theory in this chapter illustrate.

This chapter is dedicated to my methodological approach to the research at hand. I re-state my research questions and recognition of my audience here because they motivate the methodology described in this chapter. Had this research been intended for only one of these groups, its process and presentation would be different. To explain how this research has been formed as it has, this chapter situates it within the relevant

24 I recognize and hope that this research may also be of value to the many other sorts of organizations that seek to conduct collaborative projects with Indigenous communities or Western institutions.
literature and its methods within their informing theory. The chapter concludes with some reflections on this research and my personal and political relation to it.

**Contributing to Exhibit Case Study Literature**

The Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Policy and Analysis (2002:iii) states that “[t]he use of case studies as a tool for better understanding exhibitions is relatively new in the museum field, although cases have been the core of study in a number of other fields including cultural anthropology, law, and sociology.” They are useful, the Smithsonian suggests, because they “demonstrate that exhibits take place in different contexts even within a single museum” (iii), and because they allow those contexts to be documented and understood. Canadian exhibit case studies emerged in the same period as the collaborative turn in the country’s museum practice in the 1980s and ‘90s (Phillips 2011:20). Attention was not overwhelmingly brought to the Canadian museum community’s representative practices until the late 1980s, and the decisive intervention arose in Indigenous resistance in the streets, rather than in the pages of academic discussions (Phillips 2011:208). There has been much to learn as museums have worked to transform their exhibition and collections practices in response to these critiques, and case studies have helped to document changes and projects in ways that can be learned from and built upon elsewhere (Phillips 2011:21; Robinson 2017:157). In the forward vision of Ho-Chunk museum scholar Amy Lonetree (2012:174), through “this comparative process, […] we can gain many insights into the best practices […] that our Native communities need in order to develop museums into ‘places that matter.’”

Case studies have been developed with a variety of depth, foci, and methodologies, from observations of exhibit spaces (Phillips & Phillips 2005), to visitor studies (Gibbons 2015; Krmpotich & Anderson 2005), to interviews with museum professionals (Smithsonian 2002), to interviews with museum professionals and source community members (Onciul 2015), to volumes written by both in collaboration (Conaty 2015; Krmpotich & Peers 2013). The nature of these studies may reflect expediency, but also the nature of research questions and of the examined exhibits.

---

25 The dynamic and unique circumstances of source communities should be equally noted (Asch 2009:405; Innes 2013:197; Peers & Brown 2003:3; Robinson 2017:142-3).
In an era with an important focus on repatriation, source community-museum relations and their case studies have tended to be centred on collections, objects, and ancestors (Bell & Napoleon 2008; Bell & Paterson 2009; Boyd & Hass 1992; Clifford 1997; Conaty 2015; Kimberly 2011; Kramer 2004; Krmpotich 2014; Krmpotich, Howard, & Knight 2016; Krmpotich & Peers 2013; Matthews 2016; Noble 2002; Peers & Brown 2003; M. Simpson 2009). At the same time, however, repatriation and increased awareness of the sensitivities of displaying Indigenous belongings may be leading to less object-centred curatorial practices (Robinson 2017:iv). If museum representation that is less reliant upon object display, or more based on object loans, becomes a trend – as the curator of Gallery 3.3 and I agree can be productive (Clements 2016:111-2; Lainey 16 October 2017) – this new transformation in curatorial practice may have few case study examples to build from. This potential literature and exhibition gap is one that this thesis helps to fill, as the Alberni IRS display on which it focuses developed out of a repatriation project and contains no objects.26

Another potential contribution of this thesis is its focus on collaborative practices in a large museum. Although reasonably large museums do engage in collaborative practices (Harrison 2005; Krmpotich & Peers 2013), as the CMH has in its Indigenous content and collections, there are size-associated challenges to collaborative practice in museums (Robinson 2017:iv). The CMH faces these challenges not only as Canada’s largest museum but also as Canada’s federal history museum which has a mandate for national scope. Collaboration and local stories are part of the CMH and CHH, but their number and geographic dispersal can make the costly, intensive, and relationship-based processes of collaboration overwhelming and perhaps impossible in the depth that it occurs in more locally-focused institutions.

The CHH is the first exhibit to significantly display IRS history within a Canadian national narrative. Its curation, between 2012 and 2017, straddles the time of the release

26 The broader IRS section of Gallery 3.3 contains only six objects, three of which are on loan. Canada’s newest federal museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, is similarly not object-centred. Speaking to Memory, a small but innovative and impactful exhibit at the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology in 2013, contained only a single object (Gibbons 2015:115).
of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) calls to action in 2015. By examining a curatorial process that began before and completed after the release of these calls to action, this thesis considers directions that the curatorial field may – or should – be starting to turn in response to the TRC (2015a:247-52). Interestingly, the CMH’s last signature exhibit was the First People’s Hall, curated after the release of the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples: another major set of recommendations for Canadian museums in their relations with Indigenous peoples. That exhibit was documented by Ruth Phillips (2006; Phillips & Phillips 2005), a leading Canadian museums scholar. Her case studies (like mine) are not predictive in nature, but they are (like mine) descriptive of an exhibit at an historical disciplinary junction, and modestly prescriptive in their implications.

More recently, Phillips has called for a scholarly approach to museums that is more based in their social networks and processes than her earlier studies were able. In her impactful volume, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*, Phillips (2011:299) suggests that we “reimagine the museum as a networked system” to understand and enact its operations and relations. This way of seeing museums appears to follow in the tradition of James Clifford who previously applied the concept of the “contact zone” to museums and art galleries to describe the “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically [and socially] separate come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Mary-Louise Pratt, quoted in Clifford 1997:192). To study museums as networks extends the relational understanding of museums beyond simple ties to source communities, looking at the constellations of relations that comprise museums and are undefinable by their institutional bounds. My general approach to the CMH and my

---

27 This research also shows ways in which the CHH lives up to CMH commitments regarding colonial history (TRC 2015a:249). The exhibition team did not feel that the TRC reports held many direct prescriptions for their project that went beyond those of the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples which they were already guided by (Lainey 16 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017). The CMH is currently developing policy to bring it into accordance with the TRC’s calls to action (Trepanier 24 October 2017).

28 Phillips (2011:298-299) draws on the Actor Network Theory of Bruno Latour to understand this network. Although Latour (2005:155) himself rejects any compatibility with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, I have found Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) approach to habitus and field comparable and useful to understand these
specific methods have roughly followed Phillips’ recommendation. For example, my sampling has included individuals in diverse roles throughout the curatorial network, which extends not only beyond those who carry the label of “curator,” but beyond the bounds of the institution as a whole. Phillips’ and Clifford’s approaches to museum research can bear descriptive, prescriptive, and cautionary implications for museum practice which arise throughout this thesis.

**Understanding Communities and Institutions: Theory to Methodology to Methods**

**Theory**

An early intervention by my Committee Member, Michael Asch, has become a mantra in my research: this is a human story, not a theory story. We both recognize the place of theory in understanding social processes, and I will of course draw on some, but this research is about, informed by, and intended to contribute to peoples’ experiences. It is not about theory or particularly contributive to it. This said, social theory can provide useful starting points to thinking about institutions, their relations, and their abilities to change. I will describe the approaches that seem pertinent to museum processes and change that undergird my research.

As the social sciences have swung from social evolution to structuralism to poststructuralism, and between innumerable sub-schools besides, the conceptual balance of continuity and change, structure and agency has been a perennial paradox. Most poststructuralists concede that agency is to some degree mitigated by structure, just as most structuralists see various amounts of room for agency within structure. Indeed Claude Lévi-Strauss (1965), the founder of structuralism, came to see structures as agentively planned, while Michel Foucault (1997:27-9; Chomsky & Foucault 2006), forerunner of poststructuralism, was notoriously dismissive of agency. For the purposes of this thesis, I have no horse in the race of which theoretical school should direct social inquiry. As social scientists have found particular theoretical approaches that suit their networks and the limitations and capacities that they have for change and agency. This will be discussed further shortly.
research contexts, I have also followed a theoretical lens which has helped me to understand the circumstances which are being brought to my attention.

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1989:14) “constructivist structuralism” approach to organizational studies appears well suited to the circumstances of the CMH. As described in the following chapter, this Museum is the structured and bureaucratized national heritage institution of a colonial state. Simultaneously, though, it has recently been through a period of potential for change with a new name, mandate, and signature exhibition, along with an influx of new staff and the attention of a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The convergence of these forces of continuity and change illustrate what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:139) call “structuring and structured structure.” The confusing phrasing can take a moment to digest. What they are getting at here is, firstly, that assertions of agency are pre-structured by how the ability to think and act out agency are learned (Bourdieu 1977:78-9, 88). Elsewhere Bourdieu (1989:18) explains that social “construction is not carried out in a social vacuum but subjected to structural constraints; …structuring structures, cognitive structures, are themselves socially structured because they have a social genesis…” In other words, we cannot act within a structure in a way that is not formed by and responsive to that structure (Bourdieu 1977:82-3). Secondly and simultaneously, though, the asserted agency is structuring. That is, by being asserted within it, the agency is forming the structure. This is the constructivist part of Bourdieu’s (1989:14) constructivist structuralism, which he describes as “a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus,29 and on the other hand of social structures…” The structure is an assemblage of its history but also of the actions of the agents within it (Bourdieu 1977:81); it must find ways to accommodate these assertions. But, because the agencies enacted within the structure are themselves formed by it, this tends to be a readily accomplishable challenge.

29 Bourdieu (1977:72) defines habitus as: systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.
Consider Bourdieu’s theory in action as the federal government, then held by the Conservative Party of Canada under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, attempted to reform the then-Canadian Museum of Civilization.30 As discussed further in the upcoming chapter, the heritage minister of the day had personal and political interests in Canadian history and commemoration. Opposition party politicians, public history scholars, and civil society responded on a range from skeptic monitoring to aggressive counter-attack (CBC News 2012; Inglis 26 May 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017). Concern about government and partisan meddling with public history is always warranted, and the more so considering the far-reaching and revisionist Conservative heritage agenda (Richler 2012).

Fears for the fate of the CHH, however, did not come to fruition. One former curator at what was then the Canadian Museum of Civilization, who had been involved in the curation of the original CHH, told me mere months before the opening of the new Hall that he was wary of its partisan motivations (Inglis 26 May 2017). Speaking with him after the opening, however, he found that his concerns and those of his peers had not come to pass (Inglis 19 October 2017). Another museum scholar who was looking at the CHH was concerned about a stealthier influence: the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers sponsorship (Robertson 26 May 2017). She was relieved and surprised to report, after she had visited the exhibit, that she could not detect any content that might have been curated in reciprocity to the organization (Robertson 25 August 2017). During the curatorial process one curator told me that he was doing as much consultation with Indigenous communities as he could so that their voices could not be shut out (Forin 2014). However, curators later told me that they had never felt the sense that there was any message being imposed,31 and that they had always insisted this to the surprise of their colleagues at other institutions (Lainey 16 October 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017).

A recognition of the forces of “structured and structuring structure” appear to have formed the system that the exhibit directors put in place to produce the CHH.

30 For other examples, see Knell (2011:10) and Onciul (2015:118-134).
31 Managers and directors did ask for some changes which were negotiated, sometimes intensively. These negotiations could be contentious but not out of the ordinary (Lainey 8 June 2018; Trepanier 29 June 2017)
Chantal Amyot, Lisa LeBlanc, and David Morrison (2017:18) put in place a series of advisory committees in charge of vetting content and curatorial process for the CHH, primarily made up of history and museum scholars of a variety of opinions and backgrounds. In this way, any Conservative intent to restructure the heritage institution in their own image was mitigated by an institutional counter-structure. Despite the general failure of the Conservative agenda, it remains a structuring force of actions as well as reactions. Changes to the federal *Museums Act* and the Museum’s name may be subtly formative structures for the foreseeable future.\(^{32}\)

**Methodology**

Considering how to understand structured and structuring processes in the CMH, two approaches seem readily available. The first could broadly be called a traditional sociological or institutional approach, of locating decision-makers on an organizational chart. The second is a more anthropological or cultural approach that privileges emic perspectives of interlocutors. It seeks to understand who decision-makers relate to as fellow decision-makers. The second approach has been predictably messier. I chose it nevertheless because it quickly highlighted decision-makers whose input was relevant to the processes that I am concerned with (if not to the CMH as a whole), and who were rendered invisible in an institutional perspective. To understand how structured and structuring processes have been at play during the CHH curatorial process I had to consider the multiple positions from which structure is buttressed and from which agency is asserted. Here, Bourdieu’s methodology usefully articulated with Phillips.’

As the CHH directors recognize, the curatorial dialectic “often occurred through informal conversations with peers and colleagues” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:17). To determine such agents, I began with convenient relations (Menzies 2 October 2017) and, through correspondence and interviews, they recommended others who I should speak with in a variety of related positions, as in snowball sampling. The spread of these networks was valuable for a practical understanding of institutional functioning, but this was only the primer for my focus on the institution’s relationships.

\(^{32}\) This may be partially responsible for most of the many new curatorial hires being historians.
For a balanced understanding of relations, it was important to hear from Survivors’ perspectives as well as those of museum professionals (Onciul 2015:219). Survivors came to their own understandings of who important people were based on their interactions at the CMH. By speaking with interlocutors who Survivors identified to me – who were sometimes surprised or unavailable to be asked for an interview – I was able to better understand museum structures and relations: insights that might not otherwise be obvious.

Methods

To enact this networked approach, I employed what might be best described as restricted and informal snowball sampling. Where the network of sampling began and where it ended were determined by my positionality as a researcher affiliated with the Residential and Indian Day School Art Research collective (RIDSAR) and, thus, having relationships with the Alberni IRS Survivors represented in the exhibit, Andrea Walsh, and James Trepanier who acted as RIDSAR’s liaison with the CMH. I followed their guidance, leading me in a way that I might not have had I come from an unaffiliated, or differently affiliated entry point (Hall forthcoming; Menzies 2 October 2017).

I individually asked each of the Alberni IRS Survivors who had recorded video interviews for the CHH if they would like to speak to me about their experiences of doing so, and I made an open invitation in the RIDSAR private Facebook group to all group members. I was able to conduct formal semi-structured interviews with Mark Atleo, Arthur Bolton, Gina Laing, April Martin, Tim Sutherland, Sr., Dennis Thomas, and Deborah, Jack, Jeffrey and Sherri Cook. Prior informal conversations with various Survivors had explicitly or implicitly suggested that I speak to an interpreter who one of them had spoken to (who I was unable to meet with), Frank Wimart (Video Team Director), Heather Montgomery (Public Programmer), and James Trepanier (Curator: Post-Confederation Canada).

At the CMH, the RIDSAR group liaised with James Trepanier who became a key interlocutor and suggested that I speak with Jonathan Lainey (Curator: First Peoples), Kathryn Lyons (Creative Developer), and other museum professionals. When I mentioned that I would like to speak to design contractors, he put me in touch with
Jeremy Taylor and Eric Demay at GSM Project. Trepanier also generously introduced me or otherwise facilitated my connection to almost all CMH-affiliated interviewees. Other CMH interlocutors also helped in similar ways. I reached out to John Moses (Aboriginal Advisory Committee member) individually as I had previously met him at a museum anthropology conference, along with various informal interlocutors. James Trepanier also suggested that I speak with Jane Hubbard at the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) when I expressed my interested in learning more about their engagements. Hubbard then put me in touch with the Survivors who had taken part in these engagements, and Trina Cooper-Bolam who had helped to facilitate them. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to formally interview LHF-associated individuals, although I did have candid informal conversations with several of them.

It was important to speak with interlocutors where they felt comfortable. I remember a conversation with Gina Laing (7 June 2015) when she mentioned how she appreciated telling her story in the CMH interview, but how she would prefer a more comfortable, long, and casual conversation over tea in her Port Alberni living room. Laing’s preferences reflect those of other Alberni IRS Survivors speaking about their experiences (NTC 1996:6-8). My goal to have interlocutors feel as safe and comfortable as possible meant that I always asked when and where they would like to meet. Based on interlocutors’ location preferences, most of our conversations took place in museum professionals’ offices or Survivors’ favorite restaurants.

I made two research trips to Ottawa, the first to view the opening of the exhibit from June 28 to July 4, 2017, and the second to accompany the Survivors group and conduct interviews and museum professionals from October 11 to 24, 2017. As part of this trip I also went to Montréal to interview one of the exhibit design contractors. An interview with a second designer was done by telephone from Victoria in November, 2017. Finally, I made one trip to Nanaimo to visit April Martin on December 22 and 23, 2017, and one to Port Alberni to interview most of the Survivors group from January 18 to 20, 2018. Two interviews were also conducted in Victoria, where I live: one on February 3, 2018, with Mark Atleo, who also lives here, and one with Arthur Bolton while he was visiting from Vancouver on November 20, 2017.
Many interlocutors have shared perspectives with me that I was unfamiliar with and had not anticipated, leading me to an increasingly flexible and conversational interview approach. I included potential interview questions in my preliminary correspondence with interviewees, described my research interests, and gently guided interviews with pre-formulated or responsive questions, but generally found the directions chosen by interlocutors to be the most enlightening. I sometimes joked that my unrefined interviewing skills had served me well, because vague and half-formulated questions allowed interviewees to take whatever direction they wished, often to more enlightening results than I had hoped for.

Participant observation informed and provided context for formal research, as well as informal and off-record conversations and visits. My general involvement with RIDSAR since late 2013 has allowed me to build relationships and spend time with many of the involved Survivors, and in the museums and art galleries that they have partnered with over the years. My research and work in museums and galleries has given me access to professional conferences and other venues to form relationships and broader understandings of the field. Spending time in the CHH has given me a familiarity with it and a sense of visitors’ interactions with it.

Ethics

Casual interview conversations sometimes had awkward beginnings with the necessary intervention of institutional consent forms. Especially when talking with people who are otherwise like friends to me, this struck a strangely formal tone. The intense interest in these forms by museum-affiliated interlocutors was rarely shared by IRS Survivors, illustrating by and for whom these forms are designed. They were, nevertheless, useful starting points for discussing and establishing our relationships and my responsibilities and accountability as a researcher. These conversations sometimes

---

33 Question themes for museum professionals included curator understandings of IRS history and how it had changed through the CHH project, their visions and motivations for content and collaboration, experiences of working with IRS Survivors, how their approach had changed through the project, challenges and highlights of the project, and what feedback they had received about the project. Questions for IRS Survivors were about their visions and motivations for contributing CHH content, their evaluations of the CHH and experiences of engaging with museum professionals, and challenges and highlights of the project.
gave rise to concerns that I had not previously considered, allowing me to make verbal commitments which went above and beyond those in the institutional paperwork.\footnote{For example, some museum professionals asked to be able to review and give feedback on their interview quotes before public dissemination. After this was requested in my first interview I committed to doing so for all interviewed interlocutors. Interestingly, most IRS Survivors with whom I conducted interviews were not interested in reviewing their interview materials. Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018), for example, told me “I’m pretty confident in what I say and what I mean. I don’t want to analyse what I say!” I have provided interviewed IRS Survivors and intergenerational Survivors with recordings and transcripts of their interviews for their own uses, as well as for museum professionals who have requested them.}

Conversations with museum professionals generally happened in their offices and, although the conversations were sometimes casual, the setting was one that could revert to the safety of formality. These interlocutors kindly volunteered their time; as they were being paid by their institutions they did not need or expect to be reciprocated. My gratitude was expressed by my words and the hand calligraphed thank you cards that I gave almost all formal interlocutors. Visits with Survivors, on the other hand, generally happened in restaurants where I provided the meal and a gift of a $100 gift card. Despite my consent forms and questions, our visits tended to be casual.

A relatively unstructured interview approach – which I have increasingly come to casually refer to as “visiting”\footnote{See Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (1996:6-8).} – has been productive for me and seems to have felt comfortable for my interlocutors. I have sought feedback on my research approach when the opportunity has arisen, which I have largely learned by mimicking my supervisor (any shortcomings are, however, my own). When I mentioned the possibility of communication by email or phone, Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) told me that “I think it’s better for me that we sit down, one on one.” Jack Cook (20 January 2018) spoke about ways of learning, stressing the importance of looking beyond text-based research:

> It’s nice to be able to see the books and see what the books say, but you got to look outside that box when you’re out in the field. Because those books don’t really see what’s going on out there, and don’t know why. And that’s where you have to find out, why is this happening?

Mark Atleo (3 February 2018), responded to my usual method of conducting interviews over a meal that I provide, followed by a gift and thank you card. “It’s a good way, what you’re doing,” he told me. “It’s a good way. It’s like what they call sharing, you know.
Shared meal, shared stories. That’s what all our gatherings were about too, was sharing. Our knowledges are shared verbally.”

*Interpretive Framework*

Factors for relationships between source communities and museums have been identified by Laura Peers and Alison Brown, with the fourth added by Julia Harrison: “the nature of the source community; the political relationship between the source community and the museum; the geographical proximity of museums to these communities ([Peers & Brown] 2003:3) [and] the unique culture of the individual museum” (Harrison 2005:195). A fifth relevant factor that I venture to add is the reason for the collaboration at hand. The political relationship which Peers and Brown reference factors existing conditions which define current and future collaborations. Despite the contingency of this factor, the reason for a given collaboration is likely to be separate and to have different influences that are additional to – not the same as – historical relations. If the reason for a collaboration is curation (rather than, say, repatriation), actual or imagined exhibit visitors will also be stakeholders influencing the relationship and its outcomes.

These five factors are intertwined and co-dependant but are distinct and recurrent enough to provide a categorization of interlocutor experiences. As I present these experiences in the third chapter, around the question of what can be learned from the social processes of Survivors and museum professionals engaged in the curation of the CHH, these five relational factors help to identify the ways in which museum-source community relations are at play.

*Politics and Reflexivity*

“Please come right to Parliament Hill,” the text on my phone read at 7:48 pm of June 28, 2017. “They are blocking people taking Tipi to Parliament, many arrests.” I was standing at the Ottawa International Airport bus stop, my connection from Victoria having recently landed for my preliminary research trip to attend the Canada Day

---

36 Atleo’s comparison between our casual meeting and the protocols of a ceremonial feast are reflective of his nation’s relational expectations (Umeek 2011:81-2).
opening of the new CHH. I was not surprised by the message: my friend who was hosting me during my visit is an Attawapiskat Cree activist who I met at the welcoming feast for the Nishyuu Walkers when they arrived in Ottawa in January, 2013. Now, three nights before the celebration of Canada’s 150th anniversary of confederation, my host was helping to lead a ceremonial re-occupation of Parliament Hill in resistance to the celebration’s erasure of colonialism and Indigenous nationhood.

I disembarked into the rain at the Metcalfe Street bus stop in downtown Ottawa and arrived at the gate of Parliament Hill where a struggle between the re-occupiers and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had recently lulled. Security had installed movable barriers inside the decorative fence along Wellington Street, in front of Parliament, and our group was at an unmoving standoff with the RCMP between the two. It was not long before someone called “they’re pulling the poles!” and I rushed to help hold the lodge poles up, prohibited from touching the ground until their erection. The struggle was short-lived, but we held the large bundle of heavy tipi poles steadily at shoulder height for several hours while negotiations took place. When they eventually reached an impasse, we put up the tipi where we stood, following the directions of Chief Isodore Day of the Serpent River Anishinabe First Nation. We celebrated briefly, made sure that the fasters who would be living in the tipi for the duration of the re-occupation were well provided for the night, then my host and I took a taxi to her place in the early hours of the morning. We dried off and prepared for the coming dawn: I for my meeting with curators and her to face the media in the Parliament press gallery.

My next few days were a back-and-forth between heated conversations with RCMP and Canada Day revellers in the mud and rain of the Parliament Hill re-occupation, and cordial curator tours and opening ceremonies at the CMH, changing from mud-soaked running shoes and Gore-Tex into patent leather dress shoes and sports jacket. Both arenas were sites of solidarity, where I sought to stand not only as myself but also as an ally to others. I was at Parliament Hill to support Indigenous friends and activists and the nationhoods that they were asserting, and I was at the CMH to witness on behalf of the Alberni IRS Survivors who could not be there themselves. Being at both

---

37 A group of Cree youth who walked to Ottawa from their homes near the shore of James Bay, trying to get Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s attention at the height of the Idle No More movement.
places as – but only partially for – myself, I had to suspend aspects of my own politics at each.

Although my politics are what brought me to both situations, as an ally I have found it occasionally necessary to suppress my individual opinions and agency prior to the opportunity to discuss them with those who I am present to support. Another political engagement taught me this lesson when, in a blockade supporting Heiltsuk protection of their herring stocks in 2015, I gave in to the maudlin plea of someone wanting to pass our blockade. Being personally moved I decided to let the intruder through, only to see her turned back by an Indigenous woman in the second line of defence. Not only had I betrayed the reason for my presence by acting without consultation, I had put the work that I was supposed to be doing on someone who I was supposedly there to support. Although I obviously act as myself in all circumstances, I am learning to govern myself more effectively on the terms of those who I hope to support in my activism and research. I do this research as an act of honouring the Survivors who I have worked with, and their stories. As such, I must sometimes be pushed out of my political comfort zone, acting and speaking more radically or more moderately than I might otherwise.

This research – like most – is politically motivated but is conciliatory, moderate, and reformist in its methods and results. The controversial anthropological research approach of cultural relativism has been useful. I feel that attempting to briefly restrain my judgement to consider interlocutors’ responses on their own terms helped them to feel more comfortable to share openly, as well as my ability to honestly consider their perspectives. I have occasionally felt frustrated and guilty for holding my tongue in situations that I might not otherwise, but often I have been surprised to learn new ways of seeing things that I had not previously considered, leaving interviews with more sympathetic and informed views.

Notably, some of the things shared with me under these conditions were dictated as much by my identity and presentation as by my approach. Some of the sentiments shared with me, on and off record, might not have been had I not presented as a young, white, middle class, heteronormative man. Conversely, other things might have been shared with me had I embodied a different identity. Association with RIDSAR and my supervisor, Andrea Walsh, gave me access to many conversations that I had, but also
tempered them. Undoubtedly some, if not all, of the responses relating to our group were formulated with my association to it in mind.

An important reflexive recognition is that I am only fluent in English, a second language for many interlocutors. All interlocutors are fluent English-speakers, or very nearly so, but occasionally they relied on phrases in their mother tongue to express ideas that could not be easily articulated in English. I have only basic capacity in French, the first language of many museum professionals, and only a scattering of Nuu-chah-nulth vocabulary. Even limited capacity in these languages was useful, but the ability to communicate fluently in interlocutors’ language of choice would have been beneficial to my research and analysis. I urge readers to keep language in mind when reading interview transcripts and my analyses of them. Grammatical errors, for example, are often due to my imposition of English as the interview language. I have corrected transcripts where appropriate and unobtrusive.

A final caveat in this overview of the lenses that are inherent or applied to my perspective: I am an anthropology student working with IRS Survivors and other Indigenous peoples, but I am studying a museum and its relations, not Indigenous cultures or IRS experiences. This can be a blurry line to walk, because relating with IRS Survivors and trying to understand museum relations with them has required me to learn a bit about their cultures and experiences. The little knowledge that I have been taught in this area has helped me understand what I have been told by Indigenous interlocutors and to try to work – as it is often put on the Northwest Coast – “in a good way.”

38 Most or all of the first-generation Survivors with whom I spoke have Nuu-chah-nulth, Nisga’a, or Tsimshian as a first language, although some learned English simultaneously or were forced to learn it early in life at IRS. Due to IRS, many of the Survivors no longer have fluency in their first language. Many used Nuu-chah-nulth phrases to communicate ideas that are hard to express in English, but all are fluent in English. The intergenerational Survivors with whom I spoke all have English as their first language, and some understanding of Nuu-chah-nulth. Half of the museum professionals who I formally interviewed had French as their first language, although all were fluent or close to fluent in English: James Trepanier, Jonathan Lainey, Frank Wimart, and Eric Demay.

39 Working “in a good way” is based in Coast Salish teachings of “gaiʔata ?eyʔʔqal’o’wen” (as expressed in Lekwungen) meaning “to work with good mind and feelings” (Songhees Nation 2013). Among the many teachings that emerge from this phrase, I understand and try (and fail) to embody it in relating to land and human and non-human relations with integrity, respect, and reciprocity. Because the University of Victoria-affiliated RIDSAR members began much of their work on Coast Salish territories, the group’s operations have been guided by teachings from Coast Salish Elders, namely Deb and Ron George (Cowichan) and Victor and the late Joyce Underwood (T’sawout).
knowledge is not a deliverable of this research. Nuu-chah-nulth friends have informed me that scholars have too often disseminated Nuu-chah-nulth knowledge inappropriately or have failed to show good manners and reciprocity in doing so (Clements in print; Sayers 1 February 2018; Happynook 3 November 2017). When I hear Indigenous teachings in the context of this research I generally consider it as teachings to inform my relationships rather than my scholarly deliverables. If I share them I try to do so discriminatingly and with due credit. Despite trying, I cannot assume that I am working in a good way. I follow my intuitions based on the small teachings that I have been gifted by various relations, and the advice and good example of my supervisor, who I have often heard praised for her work and relations. Feedback is always solicited and welcome.

This research and the relationships involved in it have been transformative for me, personally. It is an ongoing project, but over the course of this research I have grown more in touch with my own emotions and have been learning to listen and speak more carefully, to bring gratitude and prayer more consistently into my daily life, to make myself more open to giving and receiving love – including with my own wonderful family and our own intergenerational trauma – and to recognize, honour, and reciprocate my relations better. In these ways and more, I have much to learn. That is not what this thesis is about, but I state it here to recognize those, especially the Survivors and intergenerational Survivors, who have guided me to this path. With this recognition of my experiences and learning, I turn in the coming chapters to those of my interlocutors.
Chapter II: The Canadian History Hall in Context

The federal history museum (now the Canadian Museum of History [CMH]) has curated substantive Indian Residential School (IRS) content twice in signature exhibits, both of which are currently on display. The first was in the First Peoples’ Hall (FPH), which was curated through the 1990s and opened in early 2003; the second is the new Canadian History Hall (CHH) that opened in 2017, the focus of this thesis. By comparing the curatorial contexts of these two exhibits, the political, social, and institutional influences on curation becomes clearer. The context of the CMH and how it has developed as a museum can aid understandings of how IRS history is represented in its exhibition halls. This chapter also provides descriptions of these exhibition spaces, particularly the IRS section of the new CHH.

John Moses led me on a tour of the FPH and CHH to explain the history of the Museum. A Six Nations intergenerational Survivor – his father and other family members having attended the “Mush Hole” or Mohawk Institute (R. Moses 1965) – Moses has a thirty-year career in the CMH and Department of Canadian Heritage. As someone who had an active advisory role in the curation of both the FPH and the CHH, Moses was an ideal person to orient me to the institutional and societal context that has formed today’s CMH and its signature exhibits. Having learned from Moses’ tour, I describe it in this chapter as a background to this thesis.

Entering the Canadian Museum of History

Approaching the CMH entrance in Gatineau, Québec, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg territory, I am struck by two architectural features. In the foreground, the organic and earth-toned curvilinearity of the Dene and Métis architect Douglas Cardinal’s museum complex rises from the earth in two main buildings, in a way that somehow enhances the expanse of space around them while seeming to cradle me in the terrain of its palm. Undulating with reclaimed grassland and water features, the strangeness of the design feels simultaneously soothing and unsettling. In the background, on the Ontario side of the Ottawa River, rises the neo-gothic Peace Tower and Canada’s parliamentary precinct. The line of sight of this architectural landmark holds it in uncompromising centrality to
the landscape. Parliament Hill towers, architecturally and topographically, on a promontory that contrasts with the otherwise low landscape, surrounded by a spread of the major institutions of Canada’s national capital: The National Gallery of Canada, St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Cathedral, the Embassy of the USA, the Chateau Laurier Fairmont Hotel, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Canadian War Museum, and Victoria Island, nestled among the rapids of the Chaudière Falls.

Entering the Museum, I pass through its glass doors and foyer into the spacious Entrance Hall of Cardinal’s impressive building. The interior’s resonant ambiance is one that I associate with monumental museums. Here in the Entrance Hall I met John Moses on his lunch break from his current job at the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate at the Department of Canadian Heritage. He felt that, to appreciate the 2017 CHH on the third floor, it was best to begin with the 2003 FPH on the first floor.

Establishing Canada’s National Museum

Figure 4: The CMH. © Tourism Ottawa.

As we walked toward the FPH, Moses (18 October 2017) explained the CMH’s history.

---

40 Like the CMH, the National Gallery and almost all of the other federal museums had major new renovations and signature exhibits developed in or around 2017, the year of Canada’s 150th anniversary of confederation.
The Museum itself actually pre-dates confederation, because historically it started off as a small anthropology collection within the Geological Survey of Upper Canada. So this goes back to the 1840s. And just as the geologists were travelling up to various parts of the country, taking mineral samples, so too did they have a mandate to collect anthropological specimens to give them some idea of the populations of that area.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Museum prepared to inhabit its prominent new location.

Even before the Museum was constructed in its current location, throughout the decade of the 1980s people knew that there was a new museum of history or museum of civilization under development, and that there would be significant Indigenous content. But this was in an era that pre-dated the era of [recognizing] Indigenous experts on Indigenous issues. These were all non-Indigenous ethnologists and archaeologists who specialized according to geo-cultural groups. [...] At that point, through the 1980s, when they started making maquettes and that kind of thing of what the new First Peoples’ Hall at the new Museum might look like, it was exclusively the standard ethno-historical approach. When we’re talking about the people of the Great Lakes of course that’s going to be replica of wigwams around the waterfront. We’re talking about the Plains, well, those are the buffalo hunters. If we’re talking about the West Coast, those are the people of the totem pole.

Everything hit the fan at the time of the Spirit Sings controversy and its outcome, which was the Joint Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples. And one of the major outcomes, in museum circles anyways, [is that] we had to dispense with this idea of identifying modern day Indigenous populations according to these geo-cultural groups. [...] So, as a nod to the Task Force Report and how this Museum would respond to it, basically for the first time ever,

---

41 The Geological Survey of the Province of Canada was launched in 1841 and began to display its collection in the Geological Survey of Canada Museum in Montréal in 1843 (CMH 2018). In 1881 the Survey and its museum moved from Montréal to downtown Ottawa. Anthropology was added to the museum’s official mandate in 1907, and the corresponding division, which encompassed ethnology and archaeology, was founded by Edward Sapir in 1910. Around the same time the Museum moved to the Victoria Memorial Museum Building on Ottawa’s central Metcalfe Street. In 1927 it was renamed as the National Museum of Canada and placed under the Museum Branch of the Department of Mines. After many reorganizations, the Museum was divided in 1968 into the National Museum of Natural Sciences, the National Museum of Science and Technology, and the National Museum of Man, which would carry on the anthropological and human history branches. Plans for a new building for the Museum of Man were revealed in 1982, and it was renamed as the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1986 before reopening there in 1989. The Museum became its own crown corporation in 1990 under the federal government’s new Museums Act. Finally, as will be discussed further, the Museum was renamed to the Canadian Museum of History in 2013, along with changes to its legislated mandate.

42 Although over-reliance upon extended quotations with minimal analysis is generally frowned upon, I will do so with interview quotes frequently throughout this thesis. In doing so I heed admonishment of the anthropological habit of re-hashing the words of interlocutors (Happynook 2010:26; Menzies 2 October 2017). If their words effectively encompass and conclude the points that need to be made, I feel no need to explain them with my own interpretation.
the Museum started recruiting Indigenous experts on Indigenous issues to work with Indigenous subject matter within the Museum.

In this context, Moses took up an advisory role in the FPH’s development. “I first started getting term employment as an artifact conservator going back to June of 1988, and that was at precisely the same time that this building was being constructed” he explained (Moses 18 October 2017). “I got my training from a conservation point of view because everything that eventually wound up on public display passed through the hands of conservation, even if it was for very basic cleaning and stabilization.” As such, Moses provided expert guidance around collections and material availability.

We descended the escalators from the Entrance Hall to the Grand Hall and walked past its iconic row of house fronts and poles from six Northwest Coast First Nations. Instead of the Northwest Coast shoreline, the houses and poles face the Ottawa River through 3-storey tall glass windows. On the far end of the row of house fronts is the entrance to the FPH. Moses (18 October 2017) continued:

Finally, after many, many years of delays and that kind of thing, the First Peoples’ Hall opened to the public in January of 2003. But it had been under development throughout the decade of the 1990s. It was basically under development, I would say, for ten whole years, eleven whole years, from roughly – what would we say – 1992 up until 2002, 2003. And it was developed very much in the context of the Joint Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples.

The Task Force Report was developed in 1989 and released in 1992 between the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Canadian Museums Association (CMA), which included curators from the federal Museum. The Task Force was in response to the Lubicon Cree and Canadian Ethnology Society (CESCE) boycott of the Glenbow Museum’s 1988 exhibit The Spirit Sings \(^{43}\) (Phillips 2011:208). This period saw great

---

\(^{43}\) Prior to The Spirit Sings, “[p]ossession of collections was assumed to give museums the power to present and interpret them” (Harrison 1993:340). The Spirit Sings proved to be a pivotal moment for Indigenous engagement with museums, museum engagement with Indigenous source communities, and anthropological engagement with both. Much of the engagements between museums and source communities discussed in this thesis are a result of the re-directed course of museums that arose from the Spirit Sings controversy and the negotiation of its resolution. Much has been written on the Spirit Sings controversy and its role in museum work, including by the AFN & CMA (1992), Ames (1992), Harrison (1993), Clifford (1997), Cooper (2008), Phillips (2011), and more. There has been less conversation about the controversy’s relations to the discipline of anthropology. CESCE (the forerunner of the current Canadian Anthropology Society/La Société Canadienne D’Anthropologie) was an instigator of the Spirit Sings boycott, and members were important players in the public discourse around it (Harrison 1993:346-8). Some thought that the discipline’s role in boycotting The Spirit Sings would do irreparable harm to Canadian anthropology and museums, and the
controversy and resulting transformation in the Canadian museum sphere (Phillips 2011:156). Emerging at this time, the Task Force calls on museums (although without the backing of law) to meaningfully consult with Indigenous peoples about their representation, to hire Indigenous people in decision-making capacities, and to repatriate appropriate materials (AFN & CMA 1992). Although work is occurring to update and surpass the role of the Task Force in the CMH’s relations with Indigenous peoples, it remains the primary guiding document for working with Indigenous subject matter and materials for many museum professionals in Canada today, including for curators of the CHH (Trepanier 24 October 2017, 4 June 2018).

At the time, though, the Task Force Report was not readily accepted by all. 

*There was a lot of push-back. A lot of [people] at that point were saying, “well, we can’t do that because if we start going that route we’re nothing more than a platform for the National Indian Brotherhood or for the political organizations and that kind of thing.” Sounds strange by today’s standards, but these were deeply held beliefs […] But long story short is that the First Peoples’ Hall itself is very much a reflection of the Joint Task Force Report.* (Moses 18 October 2017).

The establishment of the new Museum was resisted but came to constitute what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant (1992:100) might recognize as a restructuring of both field (the disciplinary and institutional parameters of the Museum) and habitus (the individual agents and their ways of acting within the institutional field). This was neither the first nor the last moment of contested restructuring at this Museum, but it may have been the most profound in relation to presenting colonial and Indigenous history. The ground-up creation of a new building, signature exhibitions, and legislative mandate coincided with the transformation of the Canadian heritage landscape.

**Contested Indigenization: The First Peoples’ Hall**

Struggles of this era’s disciplinary transformation are frozen for observation in the FPH, whose galleries alternate between experimental expressions of contemporary...
Indigenous voice and conservative ethno-historical dioramas. Some of the experimental breaks from curatorial tradition appear in the first gallery, embodying the idea that “[w]e’re here, we’re people of the present world, we contribute, and we have an ancient and ongoing relationship to the land” (Moses 18 October 2017). Indigenous involvement brought previously uninterrogated dilemmas and creative solutions to the fore (Onciul 2015:188). For example:

One of the tricky mandates that we were given, and it’s still an issue within museums and galleries today: on the one hand they wanted us to talk about Indigenous spirituality, but on the other hand we aren’t able to actually put on public display a lot of the ritual paraphernalia that speaks to that. So, one of the means of addressing that is using existing or specially commissioned artworks by recognized Indigenous artists who are already well known for addressing sacred or ritual themes in their artworks. (Moses 18 October 2017)

This includes iconic works by Norval Morrisseau (Anishinaabe) and Shelley Niro (Six Nations).

Upon entering the very next gallery, however, the dimmed lighting and dioramas – figures in past environments with material culture around traditional structures, representing significant events like a plains trade fair – felt so different that I had to confirm that it was part of the same exhibition. Here the ethno-archaeological curators had been given free reign. “This represents, in vestigial form, the classic geo-cultural approach,” Moses (18 October 2017) explained. “So, we’ve got the Arctic Whalers, we’ve got the Maritime Coast. We have the trade fair among the people of the Plains. And we’ve got the People of the Longhouse.” I mentioned how, in the chronological curation tradition, one would expect this archaeologically and ethno-historically based presentation of the pre-contact past to precede the contemporary presentation that we had already seen. “This was part of the thing,” Moses replied, “we wanted to confront people, right off the bat, that Indigenous people aren’t frozen in this ethnographic past that may or may not have existed as modern-day ethnologists and anthropologists like to frame it.” He described how, without the interventions of the Task Force and the resulting Aboriginal Advisory Committee that guided the FPH’s curation, the entire exhibition might have looked much like this section.

A small third gallery marks the moment of contact between Indigenous peoples and early European explorers, featuring Indigenous carvings and petroglyphs depicting
European peoples. Notably this was the point where the original CHH, in place during the FPH’s curation, opened: with the landing of Norsemen in Newfoundland.

“From this point onwards we get into the fourth and final zone that essentially talks about 20th century era political and legal developments,” Moses explained (18 October 2017) as he introduced the fourth and final gallery.

*There are nods here and there to the fur trade economy and the central role that that continued to hold in some parts of the country right up until the 1920s [...] Different references to the rising sense of Métis nationalism. [...] Some issues having to do with traditional spirituality and representations thereof. [And] talking about the Indian Act and government political relationships.*

This final gallery of the FPH attempts to represent roughly the same subject matter (apart from about twenty years of recent history) that Gallery 3.3 of the new CHH attempts to do in a much smaller space. Space allows for depth and breadth of representation but, Moses (18 October 2017) explains, the political context placed barriers on what could be displayed, particularly around the IRS history that was ongoing during the period of curation.

*When the First Peoples’ Hall was under development [in the 1990s] the whole issue of to what extent, if at all, to address the residential schools experience was really, really loaded. Because, you know, the last residential school, boarding school, didn’t close until 1996. So when it became known [...] that we were going to be dealing with the residential schools experience we immediately had calls from people [...] saying, “well what are you going to be saying about the residential schools? Because earlier on in my career I worked in a residential school [...]” [...] But we operate under guidelines from time to time, we operate under [concerns about] legal action, and we were still working in an environment throughout the 1990s when the Hall was under development, where there are still many former people who had started off their public service careers working on residential school files who were still working with the government but now had achieved much higher rank within the Federal public service.*

The display features various materials that are symbolic of key tenants of the IRS system, notably a baptismal font (not all schools were Catholic, but this symbolized the centrality of missionization and Christianity within and outside of the IRS system), traditional and modern Niisitapiikwan young men’s clothing to reference assimilation and adaptation, and archival photographs of children in schools.
I asked if other museums had IRS content at the time of the FPH’s curation. 

Not at that point. Even canvassing other existing collections. Like, everything is in the context of what museums had circa, call it 1996 for example. No, no museums to that point had made a point of collecting anything associated with the residential school experience. [...] So, really, it’s only been in our current era of reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that anybody’s dealt with the residential schools in a museum setting.\(^4\) (Moses 18 October 2017).

When Moses was on the CHH Aboriginal Advisory Committee he offered to loan an object for display. It was a ceremonial rattle, modeled on a Haudenosaunee cow-horn design, made of soldered scrap metal and used by his father, Russel Moses, to practice his culture in secret at the Mohawk Institute in the 1940s (R. Moses 1965; Moses 18 October 2017). The loan was accepted for the new CHH and displayed with a photo of Russel and Thelma Moses, John’s father and aunt, and a summary of their story. Interestingly, John Moses (18 October 2017) had offered the same material to the Museum for the FPH IRS display in the 1990s, at which point the museum had refused the loan “in light of all these other concerns that we’re being confronted with.”

The FPH concludes with the release of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, and other important political documents of the era, and with a small movie theatre highlighting Indigenous cultural and political vitality. Moses felt the benefit of showing me the FPH as a backgrounder to the CHH because – as has hopefully been communicated here – it demonstrates the institutional setting early in the

\(^4\) There may be small but significant exceptions to this trend, such as the Shingwauk Project that began in 1979 (Children of Shingwauk 2018).
institution’s current manifestation, allowing a sense of the politics that have continued and changed in institutional genealogy. Not only has the institutional setting shifted, but the general social context also has over the past fifteen years in relation to expectations of the representation of IRS history.

The Canadian Museum of History’s New Mandate and its Politics

On October 16th, 2012, James Moore, the Minister of Canadian Heritage in Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Conservative government, announced a new name, mandate, and exhibition for what was then known as the Canadian Museum of Civilization. As did the name change to “the Canadian Museum of History,” Moore’s announcement made clear that the Museum’s new mandate would compel it to focus more explicitly on Canadian history. “Our children need to know more about Canada’s past,” he stated (quoted in CBC 2012). When the associated changes to the Museums Act were passed into law on December 11th, 2013, “[t]he purpose of the Canadian Museum of History” was changed to “enhance Canadians’ knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures” (Government of Canada 2013: c. 38, s. 2). Previously, it had been to “increase, throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behaviour by establishing, maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical or cultural interest, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada […]” (Government of Canada 2002: c. 3, s. 8). The Museum’s role in public pedagogy is more centred in the revised mandate and Moore’s stated interest than it was previously.45 Nevertheless, the legislation’s inward (but not self-critical) turn is evident, and it is as indicative of a

---

45 Public education has been an explicitly or implicitly central focus of public museum exhibitions for as long as they have existed. Despite political and class conflicts over who should have access to or be a primary audience of museums, the education of lower classes was often among the goals of early public museums. For example, when General Pitt Rivers donated his personal collections from his global exploits in the British colonial military to the University of Oxford, the collection became the centre of the University’s new anthropology curriculum and public education. The stadial theory of the de-localized thematic curation was explicitly intended not only to teach anthropology students the popular theory of the day, but also to assure working class visitors that progress would occur naturally over time, discouraging socialist and revolutionary agitation (Stocking 1987:232).
conservative ideology as was the universalizing liberalism of the previous mandate. Although the Museum was quick to state that it would “continue to present international exhibitions from museums around the world that present world history and cultures” (CMH 2012a), concern over the Conservative heritage agenda prompted headlines like “Museum of Civilization to […] focus only on Canadian history” (LeBlanc 2012).

Concern over the Harper Conservative heritage agenda had good reason. Criticism of the administration’s revisionist management of the public service and public knowledge was widespread: from muzzling government scientists whose records, research budgets, and ability to speak publicly were curtailed (Turner 2013), to the scrapping of Statistics Canada’s mandatory long-form census (Hulchanski et al 2013), to a turn away from Liberal-associated history like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms anniversary in favour of military heritage like the Battle of Vimy Ridge (Richler 2012:56, 68). When asked whose idea the reform of the federal history museum was, Minister Moore responded “well, it’s kind of a project of my own that I’ve been really championing and pushing” (quoted in CBC 2012). Many of the CMH staff and contractors with whom I spoke for this thesis recalled the public concerns about political meddling of the time. “[A]t the very beginning of this [CHH] project, when I was first hired, there was a lot of skepticism about this place,” James Trepanier (24 October 2017) recalls.

And it was a product of that particular political moment with the government of the time making announcements [...] James Moore, the minister at the time, was very passionate about history, had particular views. But then those perspectives just got accelerated and exacerbated and turned into this big ball of suspicion. And I remember going to academic conferences two months after I was hired and good colleagues of mine that I had studied with and had studied under [...] wanting to know, like, “how bad is it? What’s going on there? My god, it must be awful.”

Because the funding and directive for the new CHH was announced with the name and mandate change, the development of this new signature exhibition and its content were subject to public and professional concern (Aronczyk & Brady 2015; Frenette 2014). However, “in terms of the History Hall, we had a very clear path ahead of us” Trepanier explained (24 October 2017). While academics and the media wanted to know specific content in order to scrutinize it for political influence, “[t]he challenge was
that the ability to bring that out publicly, early, wasn’t there” because the project was still in consultative development.

Those involved with the project told me without hesitation that they had no sense that political meddling was attempted in the curatorial process. Jeremy Taylor (20 October 2017), a design contractor, recounts:

*I was pleasantly surprised to find [...] that from my limited but fairly involved perspective [...] I didn’t actually have a sense that anyone was guiding the narrative other than the people who should’ve been doing it: the curators, the historians, the consultation process, the real Canadians that were being asked to tell their own story. I never got a sense there was any sort of puppetry going on at a Federal level or even from the directors of the Museum [...] And I even had fairly candid conversations with some of the curators and some of the historians about exactly that, and they all reflect the same thing, that there wasn’t any of that.*

Jonathan Lainey (16 October 2017), CMH Curator: First Peoples who was responsible for Gallery 3.3, also had no sense of inappropriate interference from above:

*There was one group from Kitigan Zibi that came [to preview the CHH] and they really liked it. And one woman, she really asked us – haha, it was funny! – she was reading the wall, what we wrote on the panels, and she said, “they let you write that?!” “They let you...” Who is “they?” High management? The government? I’m just trying to make a link. You know this suspicion, when they changed the name of the Museum, it was under the Harper government, and then we heard all kinds of stories, like, “it will become the Military Museum, or the Royal Museum of Canadian History,” and stuff like this. And, yeah, in the news or in the social networks people thought that we were going to be censored, that we could not say what we want. And I guess it was part of this, the reaction of the visitor saying, “wow, they let you write this.” Because, in some cases, the wording is very strong. When we said that the government’s role was to get rid of the Indian, politically and legally, it’s very strong. Because we are a national institution, and we’re basically saying that the government was very, very colonial.*

Ironically, the very consultation process that made content announcements difficult to make was a force in ensuring an exhibit based on academic and community knowledge and not partisanship. The Museum’s first statement on Minister Moore’s announcement explained that new content would be “developed by the Museum’s historians and researchers, in collaboration with renowned historians from across the country. In addition, the Museum will seek input from Canadians across the country”
Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017), a Creative Development Specialist focused on visitor experience who worked on the new CHH project, explains:

The [...] Canadian Museum of History, undertook a public consultation process right at the time that the name and mandate were changing. So 2012. And it was multifaceted and very wide-ranging. About 24,000 Canadians participated in one way or another in this consultation. It sought to answer a couple of questions that were, and remain, relevant to how we develop a hall. And even the component that you’re particularly interested in [the IRS section]? So it was looking at what kind of stories should a history museum be telling, how should those stories be told, what things should be included or left out, what were people broadly saying that they were expecting to see out of their Canadian Museum of History? Big picture answers that bubbled up to the top in terms of statistical significance, as well as relevance for our project, was an overwhelming mention of telling “the good and the bad.” The people who responded to this consultation were overwhelmingly saying “do not tell a single heroic narrative.” They were saying, “yeah, it would be great to feel proud about Canadian accomplishment and/or success, but it can’t come to the exclusion of the negative, the more tragic, the more difficult, the suffering that may have happened through this narrative.” Additionally, make sure that history is told from multiple perspectives.46 [...] They were saying, “we need to hear voices that we haven’t heard very much before in the Museum and in other tellings of history. We need to see them represented in the content, in the objects, and in the photos.” And there were strong and frequent mentions of women, Indigenous people, people of different ethnic backgrounds than are traditionally represented in the national narrative. This came out pretty strongly. And again, as one of the things that we retained as highly relevant to our telling of the story.

CMH CEO Mark O’Neill (quoted in TRC 2015a:249) recognized that:

Canadians made it very clear to us during the public engagement process that the voices and experiences of First Peoples must have a place in any narrative of Canadian history... Canadians want us to be comprehensive, frank and fair in our presentation of their history.

A set of expert advisory committees, including for specific historical periods and for women’s history, constituted the overarching consultation model of the CHH project. However, the number and size of committees proved cumbersome and they were soon

46 The multi-perspectival approach became central to the CHH’s curation (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:22). Although attempting to be pluralistic, the multi-vocal approach has been critiqued as being read hegemonically by most visitors because it does not sufficiently challenge such readings (Gordon-Walker 2017:63; Lonetree 2012:168-9; Phillips 2011:200). However, the CHH may effectively mitigate this threat in some ways, such as by highlighting Indigenous origin stories at the outset even though archaeological perspectives are also displayed (Lonetree 2012:111).
consolidated into two: a General Advisory Committee and an Aboriginal Advisory Committee (Lyons 17 October 2017).

Although not the final say on the CHH’s politics and quality, early skeptics’ assessments are indicative that it avoided partisanship. Speaking prior to the opening of the new CHH, Stephen Inglis (26 May 2017), a former Canadian Museum of Civilization curator, expressed concern about the intentions, mandate, and form of the project. Having seen the exhibition first hand, however, he recognized that these fears had not come to pass, and that many of his peers had come to similar conclusions (19 October 2017). Kirsty Robertson (26 May 2017), a researcher investigating potential influences of sponsorship upon exhibition content, worried that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers’ funding could manifest in content that positively highlighted colonial extraction. Corresponding after she had seen it, Robertson expressed with some surprise that she was impressed that the CHH showed little impact of the corporate influence that she had expected (25 August 2017).

The Canadian History Hall

Ascending the escalator to the CMH’s third and final floor, the monumental white plaster cast of Bill Reid’s Killer Whale bronze rises into view. Turning at the top of the rise, an ethereal hallway of mirrors etched with Canadian national icons is entered next to the large sign marking the “Salle de L’Histoire Canadienne | Canadian History Hall.” When James Trepanier (29 June 2017) gave me a pre-opening tour of the CHH, he explained the concept of this entrance was for visitors to see themselves reflected in their country. The hallway leads to a large open space called “The Hub” where a satellite image of the territory claimed by Canada is represented in colour over the wide, open floor. Douglas Cardinal’s consciously Indigenous architecture features his characteristic flowing contours, and the space designated for the CHH is topped by an atmospheric 110- by 30-meter dome, with a maximum height of about 18 meters, designed to evoke the landscape’s vast skies. However, the original CHH imposed a grid-like structure into this space and obscured the dome. The creation of the new CHH entailed a full renovation and re-design of the physical hall, led by Cardinal himself, to ensure the realization of his architectural vision. The Hub glows subtly under the dome, and a
winding ramp up to the Hall’s mezzanine reflects the nearby sacred Chaudière Falls on the Ottawa River (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:11-2).

The CHH is structured into three Galleries, entered from The Hub. Gallery One is called “Early Canada: Earliest Times to 1763,” about how “First Peoples create prosperous and vibrant societies, and are confronted by newcomers from Europe” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:32). It opens with a full-wall projection screen showing the Anishinaabe story of the creation of Turtle Island, told through speakers in Anishinaabemowin by Elder Joan Tenasco and animated by Jay Odjick, both local Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. The winding passage of this Gallery narrates from time immemorial to 1763. Jeremy Taylor (20 October 2017), a Content Director with GSM Project,47 the contracted exhibition design firm, had a high-level design capacity and assisted the curation team in organizing the 15,000-year narrative of the CHH into digestible parcels. He explained to me that “you can see the three Galleries, […] what you can’t really feel is that it also divides into nineteen stories.” In Gallery One, these stories include oral and archaeological histories of the peopling of North America, adaptation to new environments, formation of nations, various moments of contact with Europeans, resulting exchange, epidemics, and conflict, the founding of New France, and the conflict between the French and British that eventually consolidated the colonies under the British (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017; Taylor 20 October 2017). The flow of the Gallery then returns to the Hub, from which Gallery Two can be entered.

Gallery Two, “Colonial Canada: 1763 to 1914,” is subtitled “Canada becomes a nation within the British Empire” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:82). This Gallery begins with a theme that arises throughout it: the “uneasy accommodation [between the “new British rulers, First Peoples and former French subjects”] that has endured up to the present” (83). This section, which addresses various conflicts and treaties, then moves into a section about mass anglophone settlement and its implications, then the conditions that led up to and surrounded confederation. The next section is on the fur trade and its role in diplomacy between Euro-Canadians and Indigenous peoples further to the West, and the emergence of the Métis nation. This section leads into the next, with the

47 Jeremy Taylor clarifies that his contributions to this research are personal, and not made on behalf of GSM Project. Such is the case for all professionally-associated interlocutors.
expansion of Canada to the Pacific coast and transcontinental connections like the Canadian Pacific Railway. Negotiating the numbered treaties, the 1885 Métis resistance, and impacts of settler contact on the Northwest Coast are discussed further here. Gallery Two then concludes with the urbanization and industrialization that occurred throughout the country around the turn of the century, including implications for labour, gender, and ethnic relations.

Figure 6: Sketch of the layout of Gallery 3. © Bradley Clements, 2018.

Climbing the undulating ramp from the Hub to the mezzanine, we reach Gallery Three, representing “Modern Canada: 1914 to the Present Day” in which “Canada strives for prosperity, independence and increasing inclusiveness” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:152). This final Gallery begins with the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression and formation of the welfare state, the forging of a national identity with the maple leaf flag, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and National Film Board, the patriation of the constitution, Expo ’67 and the centenary of confederation, and relations with the USA. An empty space offers the opportunity for curators to add content, and for visitors to speculate what it could be as history continues.
Gallery 3.3: “First Peoples: 1876 to the Present Day”

Figure 7: Opening of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017.

Gallery Three begins chronologically but – unlike the first two Galleries – it concludes with four thematic sections for special treatment. The first of these is the “First Peoples” section (being the third story of the third Gallery, this section is referred to in shorthand as Gallery 3.3), about how “Indigenous peoples struggle for their rights and the preservation of their cultures” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:179).

Emerging from the chronological treatment of 20th century Canada, the Gallery retreats from the 1990s back to 1876. Here the Indian Act is introduced with its assaults upon indigeneity, such as the potlatch ban and the extension of Canadian colonialism into the North. The space becomes visibly darker, a black mesh ceiling shuts out the sky-like dome and weighs a feeling of confinement upon the space: design features that are unique to this section of the Hall. Here begins the narration of Canada’s history of IRS.

Figure 8: Sketch of the layout of Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2018.
The IRS section begins with Sir John A. Macdonald’s 1879 quote as Canada’s first Prime Minister instating the assimilative, genocidal IRS policy into the Indian Act: “Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from parental influence” (CMH 2017). The visitor is immediately faced by the defiant stare of a young Niisitapiikwan girl, Rosie Running Rabbit. In the photograph, printed larger-than-life on the wall, she is wrapped in the painted deerskin robe which is displayed in a case below her. This is the beginning of the journey through a child’s experience of IRS. The curators, guided by an engagement group of IRS Survivors and Legacy of Hope-associated curators, “situate the children in a whole family environment with an intact and distinctive culture” (Cooper-Bolam 23 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017).

The following content is presented primarily in text and period photographs. Quotes from Survivors describe aspects of the IRS experience that were stressed by consulted Survivors and the TRC Reports (Lainey 16 October 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017). These include experiences beginning with arrival at IRS for the first time, followed by those of insufficient and culturally alien food, forced evangelization, child labour, inadequate education, segregation from family and culture, language eradication, punishment and dehumanizing physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse. After this journey through children’s experiences of IRS, a large map of Canada plots 130 IRS that operated across the country, under a 2015 quote from Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin reading: “Canada committed ‘cultural genocide’ against Indigenous peoples through policies like Indian residential schools, which were created to wipe out the languages and cultures of pre-existing nations” (CMH 2017). A small panel tells of Dr. Peter Bryce’s attempted intervention in the IRS’s epidemic and lethal health conditions.

Following this section based on text quotes of Survivors, the legacy of IRS continues in more visual format. A large display panel of approximately 2x3 feet features Survivors speaking in a series of videos. In each video a Survivor shares the effects of

---

48 See Chapter 1, Figure 1. Original photograph taken in 1928 by Harlan Ingersoll Smith.
49 The discussion of how and whether to use the word “genocide” in federal museums had been fraught, notably in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights which failed to use this framing in relation to the IRS system when it opened in 2014.
IRS experiences on their lives, and how they have sought to heal. Small panels speak to the ‘60s Scoop as a continuing effect of IRS, and the TRC. One of Métis artist Christi Belcourt’s stained glass windows speaks to the theme of reconciliation, the twin of which is installed in the House of Commons. Also in this theme, a display case features the headdress that Phil Fontaine (the former- AFN National Chief and Survivor who spearheaded greater awareness of IRS abuses) wore during the official government apology for the IRS system in 2008.

Figure 9: Charles August (left) and Dennis Thomas (right) watching August’s video interview in Gallery 3.3. © Bradley Clements, 2017.

Between Belcourt’s stained-glass window and Fontaine’s large headdress a horizontal video touch screen features the stories of eight Alberni IRS Survivor artists, under a photo of them and their peers holding their paintings during their repatriation. The home screen shows images of seven paintings (one shown twice to represent different sets of interviews) that can be touched to open more information about the Survivor and painting, and their video interview. A toggle in the corner of the screen translates the text and audio between English and French. Most of the videos contain traumatic subject matter and thus begin with a unique advisory message, and the audio is only available through headphones, for visitor “choice and control” (Lyons 17 October 2017).
One thing that we strive to do with advisories is to be precise. That’s not universally done. Often a blanket advisory is used, [about containing] difficult subject matter. Well, that isn’t actually all that helpful. What’s difficult to one person may not be difficult to another. So we’ve tried to be as precise as we could in the advisories.

In each of these videos the Alberni IRS Survivors speak about their IRS experiences, and about their painting’s return and meaning to them. A screen about Robert Aller, the volunteer art instructor who facilitated the art sessions, is also available, included at the Survivors’ request.

Emerging from the IRS section the space becomes brighter and more open as audio of Survivors’ testimonies from the larger video screen merges and fades into a soundtrack of contemporary Indigenous musicians: Tanya Tagaq, A Tribe Called Red, and N’we Jinan in Grassy Narrows. Curators speak of this section of Gallery 3.3 as “Affirmation.” The low, dark mesh has given way to the calmly-lit dome again, the walls have brightened from black to earthy orange. A mannequin, posed in mid-shawl-dance, arms outstretched and wearing associated pow wow regalia, stands in a raised case in the

---

50 The traditional practice of the shawl dance, as briefly described by Lil’wat hoop-dancer Alex Wells (22 June 2018), is to end mourning. As such, the figure of the shawl-dancer in this space may be a reference to the theme of resurgence or affirmation in this part of Gallery 3.3.
middle of the circular space. Circumambulating her, we see the examples of achievement, tragedy, vitality, and struggle: early Indigenous political organization, modern treaty processes, Frank Calder’s Supreme Court win, Elijah Harper’s Meech Lake stand, great modern artists such as the Indian Group of Seven, the Red Dress campaign for missing and murdered Indigenous women, the importance of women and their leadership, and more.

Like the FPH, Gallery 3.3 closes with a video portraying contemporary Indigenous social movements, cultural revitalization, and breakthrough. The following and final sections of Gallery Three are dedicated to Québec nationalism, human rights struggles of women, LGBT2Q+ people, ethnic minorities, refugees, and people with disabilities. Finally, a closing section entitled “An International Canada” discusses diplomacy, conflict, migration, and trade from the early 20th Century until the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016. The final object in the Canadian History Hall is a backpack with the feel-good Canadian flag badge sewn to it, displayed in a case across from a screen featuring visitor-submitted messages about various areas of Canadian life.

Assessing the Canadian History Hall

I believe that visitor studies hold the greatest potential in assessing exhibit effectiveness, because what tends to be learned from an exhibit is generally a better measure of its value than a researcher’s content analysis. The CMH did not allow me to conduct a visitor study as part of this thesis research and I have therefore chosen not to assess the CHH’s pedagogical effectiveness. My one contribution is a sense that such an assessment should not be based on a single part of the CHH, as this thesis does. Any one of the nineteen stories encompassed in the three galleries may or may not be effective, problematic, nuanced, or representative. However, when articulated with the CHH as a whole and a common visitor experience of it, these assessments may change.

The strength of historical comprehensiveness allows visitors to gain more holistic and historical understandings of past and present issues, and of their development. There are missing stories, but context illustrated by select stories fosters visitor understanding.

51 For some of my opinions on CHH presentations, see footnote 77.
Applicability to the present was designed into the curation of the CHH narrative by focusing on human experience, multiple perspectives (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:21), and the use of “the legacy principle,” that each story should, in some way, “answer some fundamental question about ‘what is Canada?’” (Lyons 17 October 2017). Although this principle is applied across a range of issues and demographics, the CHH’s temporal depth and attendance to multiple voices allows it to apply to Indigenous and colonial pasts and presents.

The only visitor learning information about Gallery 3.3 that is available at the time of my research is anecdotal, but it suggests that

\textit{at a fairly high level, people get the story [and] the biggest picture messages that we set out to communicate for the First Peoples’ story in Gallery 3. That is that there was an oppressive, assimilationist [...] set of policies and practices that were put into place by the government of Canada, with the goal of assimilating or eradicating Indigenous cultures in Canada. They understand that this was dark. And then they understand that there’s a shift, there’s a change, and that we’re in a period that is complicated but overall is more affirmative, it’s more assertive, it’s more – put broadly – positive.}^{52} \ (Lyons 17 October 2017)

Heather Montgomery (23 October 2017), who develops and runs educational programming through the exhibit space, said that the CHH and her programs can teach about dynamic and ongoing Indigenous presence and jurisdiction:

\textit{One of the main goals of my program that I designed for the Grades Three to Five about the Anishinaabe Algonquin is just to say, “these people still exist.” They are a culture that has existed since time immemorial that has traditions that continue today that have changed, but every culture changes over 300 years. [...] And they’re still here. And this is still their land. And if that’s all that these students get out of it, that they’re still here and this is still their land, then I feel like I will have succeeded. [...] I’m just so happy that the History Hall tells that story in that way, because I feel like it will change the way a lot of people see Canadian history.}

A concern that Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) had heard about the story arc that she described is that some “have said ‘[Gallery 3.3 is] too positive;’ the second half of the story is overly optimistic.” The exhibition team felt compelled by their consultative

---

\textsuperscript{52} This model may evoke liberal teleologies of progress, but it may also match what Amy Lonetree (2012:110-1) and others have identified as lacking in the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC: long and meaningful pre-contact history, “hard-truths” of colonization, and the impressiveness of survival in this context.
partners to take a more value-laden, empathetic approach to Gallery 3.3 than they generally would: a necessary but complex undertaking. Continued but less overt oppression, responded to by often-effective resistance and resurgence, is a complex circumstance to understand let alone to display in condensed form to a lay public.

The temporal priority\(^{53}\) and relationship of Indigenous peoples to their lands are thoroughly stated through the first three of the CHH’s nineteen stories. Compared to the original CHH, which began with early European contact, or other exhibits with little depth of pre-contact history, this approach provides a foundation for the rest of the Hall and its narratives of colonialism and indigeneity (Lonetree 2012:111). In all, eight of the nineteen story-sections of the CHH are prominently about Indigenous peoples or their relations to Canada,\(^{54}\) and many others feature Indigenous involvement with various degrees of substance (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017). For some who had pre-opening concerns about the CHH’s approach in part or as a whole, the infusion of Indigenous and other often-marginalized voices throughout the CHH stands as a primary indicator of its relative success (Inglis 19 October 2017; Taylor 20 October 2017; Robertson 25 August 2017).\(^{55}\)

Interlocutors had a variety of assessments that were sometimes conflicting. Some felt that the IRS section should have been more separate from and/or integrated throughout the flow of the exhibit (Jack Cook 20 January 2018; Cooper-Bolam 23 October 2017) while others appreciated its situation in recent Canadian history (Deborah Cook 20 January 2018; Jeffrey Cook 19 January 2018; Lyons 17 October 2017). Although many Survivors reported that the exhibit did not look as they had expected it to, most felt proud of their representation nonetheless (August 12 October 2017; Jeffrey...

---

\(^{53}\) See Asch (2014:44) for the importance of this to a Western understanding of Indigenous sovereignty.

\(^{54}\) Stories 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, and 3.3. Respectively, the first peopling of North America, adaptation to the post-Ice Age environment, development of Indigenous nations, post-contact impacts on Indigenous cultures and population, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and early treaties, the rise of the Métis nation, the Métis resistance and the numbered treaties, and Indigenous peoples in modern Canada.

\(^{55}\) An inherent problematic of telling Indigenous history in the Canadian History Hall is its name. Although not without its issues (the lack of artists of colour throughout is troubling, for example), the name of the new “Canadian and Indigenous Galleries” at the National Gallery of Canada, which opened just months before the new CHH, shows one potential solution. This name ensures the inclusion of Indigenous art, artists, curators, and perspectives, but does so without threatening to subsume them into what may be – or be perceived as – a single colonial state-crafting narrative. See the Conclusion of this thesis for more on this.
Cook 19 January 2018; Thomas 19 January 2018). Interlocutor assessments will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

The tension of a federal government institution (the CMH) exhibiting the genocidal history of the IRS system, another federal government-mandated institution, is obvious but vague. In the quotidian of habitus, however, these tensions come into focus. Concerns about opinions and repercussions from museum professionals and senior public servants during the curation of the FPH in the 1990s, and the initial hesitancy of curators to take a political stand in the representation of IRS history in the new CHH both exemplify this tension (Moses 18 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017). Although compromise did occur, the degree to which the assimilative and violent histories of the IRS system are told in both the FPH and CHH evidences commitment to telling this history, despite earlier tendencies toward a more oblique and de-politicized telling of Canada’s colonial relations (Trepanier 29 June 2017; Moses 17 October 2017).

20th Century Indigenous movements demanded improved (self-)representation as they fought for and continue to contest the era of reconciliation (Cooper 2008; Gibbons 2015:118; Lonetree 2012:1). When asked to compare his experiences on the Aboriginal Advisory Committees of the FPH and the CHH, John Moses (18 October 2017) said that the CHH experience “went fairly smoothly. Things were much more contentious back in the days when the First Peoples’ Hall was under development.” Compared to concerns about repercussions of being overly political in the 1990s, it was clear that the current context would not allow for a Canadian history that did not substantively deal with IRS history and aftermath. As the TRC reached its conclusion, mid-way through the CHH’s curation, “residential schools [were at the] top of everybody’s mind,” Moses told me. “You know, there’s no way we’re going to be able to pull off what they pulled off in the First Peoples Hall. We would be publicly crucified if they opened up the new Canadian History Hall and there wasn’t a more or less detailed treatment of the residential schools experience.”

56 This was directly demonstrated to the exhibition team in the controversy surrounding the opening of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights and its treatment of the topic (Taylor 20 October 2017).
This is not to say that there was not opposition to a Survivor-directed representation of IRS history. Several curators recounted that there were members of the academic [advisory] committee who did not endorse, support, or otherwise believe in the approaches that we wanted to take. So it was a challenge balancing that kind of push-back with what we perceived to be our mandate and our objectives. Because it meant defending them against, in some cases, some pretty significant stake-holders. Internally and externally. (Lyons 17 October 2017)

Jonathan Lainey (16 October 2017) expressed his feelings on this push-back:

There’s one member of the General Advisory Committee who said that Gallery 3.3 was totally biased. He did not like it. [...] His comments were difficult to read, because I felt they did not have a place. He was basically saying that assimilation was ok, and that what happened in IRS was common elsewhere, et cetera. [...] if someone tells me that the section is totally biased towards the Indigenous perspective, to me it [means] “good job, Jonathan!” It means that I was able to bring forward the Indigenous voice.

Curators had the evidentiary, societal, stakeholder, ethical, and personal conviction to remain true to their mandate, despite opposition. In terms of the commitment “to examine both the good and the bad from our past” (O’Neill, quoted in TRC 2015a:248-50), as mandated by public consultation, James Trepanier (24 October 2017) expresses that “[t]he proof will always be in the pudding as we move forward. But I think the History Hall was a very tangible demonstration of that intent.”
Chapter III: Experiences and Structures

Teachings from Experiences, for Structures

Experiences that interlocutors have highlighted are presented in this chapter, along with reflections and insights about institutional structures. Experiences are indicative of the structures in which they occur, and which they can co-constitute (Bourdieu 1977:78). I present these experiences around three themes of relations between Western museums and Indigenous source communities as they share difficult histories. The tensions between governing structures of Western museums and Indigenous source communities, and how they can be identified and mutually navigated, is the first theme. Another paradox of sharing difficult history is that of appropriate impact: profound affect that helps to understand past harm and prevent future harm, without causing or inspiring harm in the process (Robinson 2017:141). The theme that arose in relation to appropriate impact is that of self- and community-care for those telling and hearing difficult history, be they survivors of trauma, visitors hearing their stories, or curators who facilitate their interaction. The final theme is transformation. Despite the limits of institutional and societal structures that they engage within, individuals can be affected by witnessing and being in relation to others. Shifting relational habitus and accountability may result in dialectical changes to institutional structures.

Tensions between potentially irreconcilable needs of Western museums and Indigenous source communities were illustrated to me and interlocutors on multiple occasions, including an event at the Canadian Museum of History (CMH). The event was understood by CMH staff as an instalment in a public programming series, but by the

57 I use the term “appropriate impact” to describe the ideal of intellectually and emotionally interacting with content, especially by exhibit visitors, in ways that are meaningful and safe. What is appropriately impactful will vary by person: for some it may be appropriate to be shocked and unsettled by content, for others it may be appropriate to be comforted and affirmed by it (Lehrer & Milton 2011:4, 12). Further discussion of this term and its relevance to Indian Residential School content in the Canadian History Hall is provided in the section entitled “Care.” Visitors are necessarily a group to consider in experiences of museum curation, and issues like appropriate impact apply at least as much to them as to interactions behind the scenes. However, this research does not include a visitor study.

58 I imagine that such transformative interaction can be experienced by museum visitors, but this study has only effectively addressed those of museum professionals and source community members.
Alberni Indian Residential School Survivors group as testimony and ceremony. Tensions appear to arise where colonial and Indigenous ontologies and sovereignties are put into practical – more so than ideological – conflict. Far from being an incommensurable situation, understanding these tensions can improve abilities to navigate structural limits of Western museums as they work to host or indigenize in relation to Indigenous peoples and practices. Where the structural bounds of Western museums cannot co-exist with the necessities of Indigenous sovereignty, they must be structurally reformed or dismantled to be reconciled with that sovereignty. However, there are many areas in which the operation of Western museums and Indigenous sovereignty are not existentially opposed. With growing self- and relational awareness, there is a significant territory within which museums and source communities can positively relate to each other and complement each others’ goals, however imperfectly. Continuing reformations to better accommodate collaboration between Western museums and Indigenous source communities are challenging, but they continue to be useful.

Five contingencies of collaborative work are woven through the experiences presented here: geographical distance between the source community and museum, their existing political relations, the culture of the source community (Peers & Brown 2003:3), the culture of the museum community (Harrison 2005:195), and their various goals for their collaborations. Because these factors are so intertwined, they arise in the events described throughout this chapter, as demonstrated by the table at its conclusion.

**Tension**

*Experience: Time and Tension in Public Programming Turned Ceremony*

After a full day of viewing the Canadian History Hall (CHH), having lunch and speaking with local high school students, and having dinner with curators in the CMH restaurant on October 12th, 2017, the Alberni Indian Residential School Survivors group was scheduled to give an evening public presentation. Because the CHH budget had been exhausted by the time that the group was able to travel to Gatineau in October, 2017, over three months after the exhibit’s opening, there was no immediately available budget to bring the Survivors to see the exhibit. However, curators found and told them,
money could be accessed through the public programming budget if the Survivors were interested in giving a public presentation, which they were.

Before an audience of about fifty people in one of the CMH’s multi-purpose rooms, the event began with an introduction by James Trepanier, Curator: Post-Confederation Canada, and by Huu-ay-aht Tyee Ha’wiih Yaalthuu-a, Jeffrey Cook. Cook spoke on behalf of the group and introduced Tim Sutherland, Sr., their Elder and ceremonialist who had been asked to accompany the group as their spiritual support. Sutherland opened the event by singing a ciciqink, a prayer with a sacred rattle. Then Andrea Walsh, one of the group’s liaisons with the CMH, gave an introductory talk, explaining how the paintings had been created by the Survivors as children in extracurricular sessions at the Alberni Indian Residential School that were led by artist Robert Aller. She described how the paintings had come to the University of Victoria as part of Aller’s estate, from whence they were repatriated by a team, led by Walsh, back to the Survivors who had created them.

The fourteen Survivors sat listening to these opening remarks on and around a small stage created from temporary risers. After Walsh’s talk, they each spoke, one by one, about their experiences of Indian Residential School (IRS). After a substantial period of sharing, the floor was opened for questions. Several Indigenous audience members rose to thank and honour the Survivors. Then, Walsh (12 October 2017) was given the mic to explain what would happen next:

One of the things that serendipitously came about today, our Elder [Tim Sutherland, Sr.] who is with us, his grand-daughter lives here in Hull. And he came to me and he said, “I would like to do something very special today.” [... He wanted to pass on names to his grandchildren. And we felt that this would be a beautiful closing for our night. We heard all of these stories about what was taken away [at IRS...] names were taken away and numbers were given [... But] we close tonight by witnessing the passing on of a family’s name from a grandfather to his [great-]grand-daughters.

Tim Sutherland, Sr. (12 October 2017) then began:

As was mentioned, we have gone a wee bit over time. To me, that’s normal. When the place locks up we’re here for another day! [general laughter] My girls live here – grand-daughter and her two girls – they live here. My grand-daughter has a name from her nation. [...] She’s Nitinat, she’s got relatives in Kyuquot, she’s got relatives in Hesquiaht, relatives in Ahousaht. And her family and
relatives would more than fill this room if they were all here. So someday we plan on bringing them home and saying, “they have names.”

Sutherland proceeded to bestow names upon the two girls. There was laughter in response to the younger girl’s name, Tsi’equa. “It’s a family name for little girls that has been going on for many generations,” Tim explained, “Tsi’equa means ‘talks a lot;’ ‘little girl that talks a lot.’ She’s shy but she talks a lot!” The older girl was named Tsi’a’ak’sa. Sutherland explained that Tsi’a’ak’sa “means ‘a girl – a lady – from far away.’ And the name holds no matter which way she goes. […]Because s]he’s got two homes that are far away [from each other].”

Honourary witnesses were called forth in Nuu-chah-nulth and paid. They included many of the Ahousaht and Ditidaht members of the group and Walsh, each recognized as relatives and asked to share the names and proceedings with their communities. After this, Sutherland continued. “That’s our way in a nutshell. We could celebrate all night for the names for the girls with the family, but we will go home someday with them, to their other home, and do a celebration with the family over there. Ču; ƛ̓ee koo.” Another Ahousaht Elder, Wally Samuel, Sr. (12 October 2017), then stood and spoke:

You know, the intent for residential school was to break our spirit, to take away our culture. […] And my friend here [Tim Sutherland, Sr.], he’s one of our cultural leaders. He survived residential school, too. I survived residential school. We teach our grandchildren that we’re not broken, many of us. We stood strong. Carry on our ways, which we believe in. […] The Catholic Church, Protestant Church, split our community. But we’re all together in the potlatch. We’re all together in our traditional ways.

To general laughter Tyee Ha’wiith Yaalthuu-a, Jeffrey Cook (12 October 2017), then added, “Like Tim has said, we would have been going for one or two days, but we’ll hold it up for another couple of hours I guess.” Drums and regalia were fetched, and the men sang while the women and girls danced. After the ceremony concluded, audience members and Survivors mingled together in friendly conversations before being ushered from the room.
From my perspective, seated close to the front of the audience, the event went perfectly. But I could not see from the stage where Survivors sat, or from the side of the room where the organizing curators stood. There were tensions that I was unaware of until later that night. Sitting back in the hotel lobby with Charles August (12 October 2017), an Ahousaht Survivor and potlatch worker, he expressed frustration that some people, including the museum staff who were hosting the event, had been glancing at their watches. Other Survivors later echoed and helped to explain August’s frustration. Uchucklesaht Survivor Gina Laing (19 January 2018) explained the importance of giving space and listening to all that a speaker has to say:

> [W]hen we had meetings, they would last anywhere from two days to a month. Until everything is settled. And I know nowadays they don’t have time for that. And it’s too bad because things get misunderstood. [...] Time is a big thing.59 And you know what, when they give someone an opportunity to speak, in our ways, it’s the polite thing to sit and to listen until they are finished. And it’s not like that now, people are doing this, right? [Tapping the back of her wrist with an index finger] “Your time is up!”

---

59 Although obviously diverse, ontologies and legalities of time appear to be very different for Indigenous and Western peoples. Vine Deloria, Jr. (1973:61-2, 72) notes that injustice in Western culture is often understood as taking too much of someone’s time, such as through labour, whereas Indigenous peoples have often experienced the injustice of theft of space. Time, space, and resources have all arisen as issues for many interlocutors regardless of background, but in relation to this event CMH representatives were concerned about too much time being taken whereas Survivors were concerned about not enough time being allowed.
Huu-ay-aht Survivor Jack Cook (20 January 2018) felt that “the fact that there wasn’t enough time for the discussions for the students and the general public later on that evening […] definitely needed some changes to that, for me anyway.”

James Trepanier, the curator primarily responsible for hosting the event in the CMH, also heard these concerns. August expressed his frustration to Trepanier similarly to how he had to me. Trepanier (24 October 2017) was sympathetic, but his position came with its own concerns of logistics and the expectations of his superiors.

Small discomforts [of being criticized] that happen for us, on the other side of the conversation, that is a key part of what decolonization is. However [...] I was at a point now where I felt like I could [...] respond. And say “you know Chuck, [...] thank you for sharing that with us, and there were many of us in the room who may have been looking at our watches, but there’s a variety of reasons why that could be. [...] Personally, I had to think about, like, there are a number of staff in the museum who had to stay late. And they don’t know why. They’re just hanging out in the coat check and they’re told ‘the event downstairs isn’t finished yet.’ So we don’t know their stories. They may have kids in childcare.” Every time this sort of thing happens – when an event runs late, or doesn’t happen on time, or the way we expect, or whatever – there are ripples. And my job is to worry about those ripples, and I’m going to hear about those ripples afterwards. [...] But that’s the reason why I may have looked worried and fidgety, was because I was thinking about that. And I would never have said that to him [earlier in our relationship]. I think if he had come out with his firm assertion like that the first time [the group visited] I would have been like, “yes, you’re right.” And I would never have thought to offer – not a counter-response or a rebuttal, I didn’t want to offer it that way – but it was more of a sense of like, “well here’s where I’m coming from.” Right? And Chuck was like, “yeah; ok” [nodding with a thoughtful tone]. And it felt like a really good moment of exchange.

I think that August’s frustration and Trepanier’s response are important to consider in improving relations between museums and source communities. The fact that August (an IRS Survivor, potlatch worker, formerly homeless man, and Ahousaht artist) and Trepanier (a PhD-holder, historian, white Canadian settler, and curator) felt able to frankly express their feelings and circumstances to each other is not sufficient in itself, but it is a relational breakthrough. It shows that trust, communication, and mutual understandings can be developed. It also helps to illustrate how colonialism structures museum spaces, and how it can be recognized, navigated, and challenged.
Colonial museum structures become clear in the naming ceremony and similar experiences, because tensions between museum and Indigenous authority become practically irreconcilable and viscerally felt. Trepanier understood the importance of Survivors having the time to conduct their business. He chose to use his position of authority to avoid contesting the temporary claim to the Museum space, despite likely repercussions for him and his colleagues. His accommodations – despite mis-suited institutional structures – was evident to some of the Survivors present. When the event came up at a later Survivors group meeting, the following exchange occurred (Laing, Jack Cook, & Martin 29 June 2018):

**Gina Laing:** [Trepanier] did it our way. *You start something, you see it through.*

**Jack Cook:** [...] He stepped out of the box, I guess you could say.

**April Martin:** He stepped out of his box into our box.

**Jack Cook:** What he’s doing is reconciliation.

The tension that Trepanier found himself within was that of Indigenous culture and governance being asserted within the Western institution that he was responsible for during the event. The CMH and other Western museums operate on Western cultural ontologies and governance systems in fundamental senses, including ways of regulating time, space, and resources (Deloria 1973:61-2). By being governed by Western structures on unceded Indigenous land, with Indigenous physical, intellectual, and spiritual material, and under the mandate of a colonial state, the CMH (and perhaps all Western anthropological museums) is a colonial institution. Because of museums’ ethnological mandates and collections, some Indigenous cultural and governing business needs to be conducted within them, and the ability to host Indigenous protocol can be strenuous (Clifford 1997; Conaty 2015; Krmpotich & Peers 2013; Raibmon 2000).

Despite the challenges of sharing representational space for both parties, both feel that the opportunities of doing so outweigh the difficulties. One of the event organizers, Heather Montgomery (23 October 2017), hopes to foster similar opportunities in future:

*The event we had [...] with the high school students and then the public event, they were both very powerful events for me. It was a very long but very excellent day that we spent, and I think that talking to [Survivors] – hearing them talk, talking to them, and spending the day with them was a very changing experience.*
And I really hope that that is something that we can provide in the future for our programming. Because I think you just can't replace the power that that created. Like their videos are awesome and we've watched the videos beforehand and things like that, and that was really neat. But talking to them and hearing them and hearing their stories, just the way that they did it with so much care and deliberate action with the prayers and the music. And I got some feedback from the students and that was their favorite part was the songs and the prayers and the being able to speak with the Survivors themselves. They felt really privileged to be able to do that.

The mutual benefits of source communities engaging in museum spaces demonstrate that Indigenous and anti-colonial politics can be enacted in colonial spaces, despite the limitations and discomforts of their sometimes conflicting structures and protocols.

Both the Survivors group and the CMH representatives incorrectly assumed that they shared an understanding of the nature of their co-hosted event. In hindsight, more communication might have avoided some of the surprises that had to be responded to as the event unfolded. CMH staff might have avoided some discomfort by asking if the planned time, venue, and advertised program matched the Survivors group’s needs, while the Survivors group might have better notified CMH staff of their plans which had been made earlier on the same day. At some point, however, such measures fail to accommodate either the museum’s governance (and/or that of the state which overarches it) or that of Indigenous source communities (Oniul 2015:71-2). Although the length of the event might have been moderately extended, for example, it could not have been kept going all night as it might have if conducted in a setting governed by Nuu-chah-nulth authority. Eventually colonial organizing structures become governing factors where they form and authorize access to the space, time, and resources that they have jurisdiction over, legitimately or otherwise.

A simple but important recognition here is that – despite their overlaps – Indigenous source communities and Western museums are different entities. This limits the nature of the activities that a Western museum can act as a host for, but it productively requires discussion of how it can be in relation to source communities that are organized by Indigenous forms of governance. Many Indigenous and Western legal and philosophical traditions, such as those of treaty, are based on solidarity across difference (Asch 2014:124-5; Innes 2013:7, 72; Umeek 2011:80-1). As such,
recognizing and understanding self and others in relation, and working together to define those relations positively, can be mutually possible and beneficial for groups that might otherwise assume subsuming or oppressive relations (Clements 2016:111; Umeek 2011:36, 80-1). Western museums, in a recognizable institutional form, are not and may never be Indigenous. As such, to make non-oppressively relatable to Indigenous governance (Garneau 2016:28-9) may be a more salient definition of museum indigenization than hybridization (Phillips 2011:10), although also potentially at play.

The idea that the CMH is an “other,” but one which can be related to on Indigenous terms, reflects how the Alberni IRS Survivors group immediately assumed relations with the CMH and its people. When the primarily Nuu-chah-nulth group arrived at the CMH for their return visit on October 11th, 2017, and were greeted in the Entrance Hall by a group of staff, they immediately followed their protocol for visiting as guests. Tyee Ha’wihih Yaalthuu-a, Jeffrey Cook, spoke on behalf of the group. He thanked the staff for the welcome to their House, and distributed gifts of salmon jerky to them. Elder Tim Sutherland, Sr. chanted a ciciqink with his sacred rattle to open the floor and protect those present, then the group sang a song of thanks.60 By arriving in this way the group demonstrated recognition of their position as respectful guests, their interest in peaceful and reciprocal relations, and their uncompromising identities and protocols as Nuu-chah-nulth, Tsimshian, and Nisga’a people while entering other territories (Asch 2014:119, 125; Laing 19 January 2018; Regan 2010:127; Umeek 2011:81). By visiting in this way, the group did not recognize the CMH as an Indigenous entity, but they did recognize it as one with which they could relate through Indigenous protocol.

The Alberni IRS Survivors group’s arrival demonstrates the importance of understanding Indigenous protocols, of which the CMH is well aware (Robinson 2017:143-4), but also the importance of museums understanding their own protocols

---

60 The CMH staff seemed to be caught off guard by the role that they had found themselves in, but were nimble and knowledgeable in their collective response. They expressed regret that they did not have more reciprocal gifts, but they gave out packages to the Survivors who had conducted interviews, or to the correct representatives of those who had not been able to be present. The packages contained thank you cards signed by all of the associated staff, and USB sticks with copies of their interviews. Although these usefully and serendipitously came to act as gifts in the moment, the intent had been to distribute them later. They served the necessary role of gifts in the reciprocal exchange of the welcome, but I would advocate against the use or framing of materials that the receivers have meaningful claim or contribution to – such as these interviews, or anything that has originally come from the source community – as “gifts.”
which generally hold hegemony and privilege by being assumed as given (Asch 2009:396, 401). A museum and its staff can better know who they are, their historical and aspirational relations with their partners, and their capacity to engage in reciprocal internal and external relations across difference (Asch 2001:205; Brown & Peers 2003:3; Garneau 2016:28-9; Million 2013:168, 171; Onciul 2015:71-2; Regan 2010:33-4). A refrain among Indigenous activists reflects a need to reconcile the traumatic effects of colonialism within their own communities before or instead of working on reconciliation with Canada, the ongoing perpetrator of that colonialism (Coulthard 2014:48; Million 2013:171).61 Perhaps Canadians and Canadian institutions also need to reconcile with ourselves as part of the process of doing so with others (Regan 2010:33-6). As Trepanier (24 October 2017) suggested to August about the people working the coat check or security shift: “we don’t know their stories.” But perhaps “we” museum professionals and scholars should know their stories, and they should know ours.

Sherri Cook (19 January 2018), a Huu-ay-aht and Tsimshian educator and intergenerational Survivor, explained how the Alberni IRS Survivors group came to know each other well and form a community in which they all felt safe to hear and share their stories. She compared this to her experience of a trusting work environment:

_As an educator, when we changed from junior high to middle school, we were a bunch of new staff at a school. Some of us had eight years experience under our belts, some of us were fresh out of university. But what the brand-new principle did was he took us all on a retreat so that we had time to bond. And then when it came to classroom time when we’re both stuck teaching tough subjects, it gave us that trust. I can talk about my experience and bring my life background into what I’m doing, but I can trust [the other teachers and staff]. I can trust you that you understand where I’m coming from and you’re going to support what I’m teaching the kids. And vice versa. I know where you’re coming from, you’re married, you have several children – you know – you’re coming from a different place. Which is great. But I can trust you. It allows them to have a bond of trust. So [similarly, in the Survivors group], when [someone] is talking about his abuse, no one else in the room is judging him. Because they’ve built that trust._

---

61 Related to the importance of reconciling within communities that is often raised is the need to tell truth within communities, where educational and dialogue building initiatives are less focused under the model of “reconciling with Canada” (Krmpotich & Anderson 2005:381; Deborah Cook 20 January 2018; Jeffrey and Sherri Cook 19 January 2018; Regan 2010:225).
By telling this allegory, Cook explains how the Survivors bonded as a group, the importance of doing so for mutual understanding, trust, and support, and the possibility and benefit of similar relations in a professional setting. Are there ways that this sort of communication, understanding, and support can happen between staff in very different roles in a large museum? In short, can an institution become more of a community?

The staff at the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF) realized the importance of engaging the exhibition team as a community (Cooper-Bolam 23 October 2017). When they organized engagement sessions between the exhibition team and IRS Survivors they encouraged attendance by diverse museum professionals. Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017), an Interpretive Planner at the Canadian War Museum who was on the CHH team and present for these sessions, expressed her appreciation for LHF’s approach:

*Legacy of Hope drove [the engagement session] and were fairly clear that as many people who were involved in the actual exhibition project should be present at the encounter. Which is something I really appreciated, because usually it’s the content expert, occasionally the interpretive planner, but often it’s just the content people who hear, when in fact [LHF was] absolutely right that it’s every person who interacts with the development of the content in this space that influences what it ultimately looks like.*

As discussed in Chapter 1, I have attempted to take a similar approach in this research for the same reason that “it’s every person who interacts with the development of the content […] that influences what it ultimately looks like.” As such, this may be good guidance for scholars studying the development of exhibit spaces, as well as for museum professionals and those who engage with them.

Communication is, of course, important and difficult as a factor in relationships and community solidarity. Although only one Survivor expressed disappointment with the exhibit, he could understand the circumstances which led to the curatorial form that it had taken. More than issues of display, though, he was frustrated that the final curatorial decisions were not more effectively communicated to him during the process, being left instead until his trip to see the finished exhibit (Jack Cook 20 January 2018). This feedback can be valuable for curators who – from their perspective – tried to be very

---

62 Further benefits of this approach will be considered in the “Transformation” section of this chapter.
conscious about what was communicated and felt that they had done so effectively (Onciul 2015:219; Trepanier 24 October 2017).

Like the challenges of the public event, the exhibition team sometimes had difficulty communicating with the broader CMH about the intricacies of the communities and content with which they were engaging. James Trepanier (24 October 2017), the Alberni IRS Survivors’ liaison with the CMH, explained these challenges:

> I’ve had to translate to the rest of the Museum who this group is, why we want to be part of [their] project. [...] Enmeshed with the group I’m always aware of what they’re doing and why they’re trying to do it, but at every point of contact with the broader Museum setting – and this is both the opportunity and growth that these sorts of relationships can create – it can be bumpy. And so [...] the bigger the circle gets, the more times you have to kind of go back to the beginning and [explain the partnership] over again. Sometimes [understandings of the partnership] gets lost, on both sides.

What Trepanier describes here is the work of building mutual understanding of partnerships within the CMH. As the refrain that “we are all treaty people”63 alludes to, museum partnerships may work best when the entire institutional body has a sense of what partnerships they are an extended part of, and how they are implicated.

Because of a Western museum’s virtual inability to become “Indigenous” – or to make Indigenous peoples “Western” – museums need to reform themselves to become more safely and effectively able to relate with Indigenous nations and communities. The value of constituting a museum as a community, as well as or instead of as an institution, was illustrated by the mild tensions around some of the CMH’s engagements with Alberni IRS Survivors. The work of building understanding relations within the CMH is already happening, spurred on by external and internal expectations, and by the difficult history that the museum professionals working with IRS history had to address. The next section of this chapter will recount how they have been changing how they relate with those inside and outside of the CMH in relation to curating difficult histories.

---

63 This refrain is often shared by Indigenous treaty partners to tell all settlers on treated territories that they are implicated in the relationships that they often relegate to their governments and to Indigenous people.
Care

*Experiences: Testimonial Boundaries and Difficult Histories*

Audra Simpson (2014:34) has coined the concept of “ethnographic refusal,” where informants choose not to inform and participants choose not to participate. The concept is useful, provocative, and part of a history of anthropologists interacting with informant agency (Evans-Pritchard 1976:247; Foucault 1997:29; O’Reily 2005:154; Scott 1985:29; Tsing 2004:3). The terminology of “ethnographic refusal” might sometimes be mitigated by the superficial binary that it appears to imply: acceptance or refusal, rather than the relational calculations of agentive boundary setting that it also defines (Simpson 2014:102). In museums and other representational contexts, the practice of “displayed withholding” (Garneau 2016:21; Lawlor 2006:5; Onciul 2015:187-190; Townsend-Gault 2011) can productively bridge the refusal-acceptance divide. This practice of showing material that cannot be understood by outsiders, showing limited information, stating that some things are not shown due to their secrecy or sensitivity, or similar strategies allow source community members to understand meaning and to use the exhibit agentively as a teaching space. It also shows outsiders that there is more meaning than can be displayed, that they are not getting the whole story, and that they may not be entitled to it: important pedagogy in itself (Clements in print; Garneau 2016:26-7).

When it comes to telling testimonies of difficult history, sharing and refusing to share often occur simultaneously. In the language of consent, this might be more effectively framed as boundary setting: there is a refusal to go beyond these boundaries, but also willingness and dedication to sharing within them (Garneau 2016:27-9). As such, Simpson’s (24 March 2016) – and anyone’s – refusal to show vulnerability before settlers must be respected, however uncomfortably. Simultaneously, it is important to respect and honour the choice of IRS Survivors who choose to share their stories. As their choices and discussions of them show, testimony is often vulnerable, but it can also be powerful (Capitaine & Vanthuyne 2017:8-9; Robinson 2017:127, 146).

When the Alberni IRS Survivors re-claimed their childhood paintings in 2013, many of them – including those who tell their stories in the CHH – proposed a partnership with Andrea Walsh, the University of Victoria, and the Residential and Indian
Day School Art Research collective (RIDSAR) to share their paintings and stories (Clements 2016:104-5; TRC 2015b:184-6). The degree of engagement that each individual has chosen has been self- and communally-empowering. In Gina Laing’s (19 January 2018) experience:

When I first met Andrea I couldn’t even talk, really. I couldn’t hardly say anything. And she asked me what it is I would like to do. And I told her, “I want to tell my story. I want people to hear right from the victim, and find out what happened, to understand what I went through, and feel it too.” And I wanted to use my paintings for that. [...] And the more I talked the more I realized that I have something valuable to contribute. And it’s first hand. I’ve told my story to my kids as they get old enough to understand, all my children, my grandchildren. And my whole idea is that I don’t want them to ever forget what we went through at that residential school. Generations of us, you know. I don’t want them to forget. And this gave me a vehicle to go do all of this and to build my courage and to help me to be able to express it.

Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) simply states how sharing his story is helpful for him, and for other Survivors who hear him. “I did find it was a good experience, actually I think for all of us, not just me, for all of us. I think when you tell your story you relieve yourself, I guess. [...] So I think once we start telling our story, I think other people will be more comfortable.”

As enthusiastic as Alberni IRS Survivors in the group are to tell their individual stories, they are careful about what and how to share. Much thought is given to what information is educational, beneficial, and safe. Survivors are constantly negotiating how and how much to share their stories, as individuals in relation to the groups that they are in, and with whom they share. Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) describes this as “one thing that I think about all the time.” A dialogue on this began when his daughter, Sherri Cook, a teacher, mentioned that some of her Nuu-chah-nulth students do not know about their community’s IRS history. “Because nobody talks about it,” Jeffrey Cook replied, indicating the importance and difficulty of discussing such painful history within the

---

64 Several Survivors gave examples of peers who have come to “acknowledge [their] own experience” (Sherri Cook 19 January 2018) and process it, having heard others do so. Other Survivors have given close friends and family who are fellow Survivors permission to speak on their behalf, because they want to be able to share but do not feel able to do so personally. I do not reference them, for potential privacy reasons.
communities most affected by it. I asked if Jeffrey Cook still struggled with questions of what the right messages and ways of telling them are, and he responded:

Kind of. Because if there’s a group of people, how do I convey my message, we can say, of reconciliation, what it’s about? Talking to young kids about life at residential school. How do I convey properly so they understand, and also have an impact? [To understand what life was like. Without getting too graphic. You don’t want to leave an impression that, when they go back home, that they might start doing stuff like that too.]

This concern of having what I refer to as “appropriate impact” – an impact that is affective but not harmful – was raised by other Survivors and seems to be a constant theme of presenting difficult history (Deborah Cook 20 January 2018; Laing 19 January 2018; Lehrer & Milton 2011:4, 12; Trepanier 24 October 2017).

Other Alberni IRS Survivors shared similar concerns about how their testimony would be taken up by witnesses in a societal context where violence, racism, and simplistic (mis)understandings of history are common (Gibbons 2015:117-8; Lonetree 118, 120). Deborah Cook (20 January 2018), who experienced the Alberni IRS as a respite from the violence that the preceding generation of IRS Survivors inflicted in her home community, finds the balance of how to give her testimony challenging. “I could have a different story about it being a god-send for me, how my experience is very different, [but] it would kind of wash over the horrors that took place and that I knew were taking place there,” she explains. Despite her own experiences, she recognizes the violence that occurred to many of her friends and relatives, that the violence she experienced at home was an extension of others’ IRS experiences, and that the intent of the IRS system was to split up families. She does not want her experience to be used to claim that the IRS system was acceptable (Deborah Cook 20 January 2017).

When sharing testimony, Survivors consider how telling their stories will impact those who are listening and how it will impact themselves, and they set boundaries accordingly. Arthur Bolton (20 November 2017) enthusiastically shares about his art,

---

65 Concern that witnesses might copy recounted abuses was shared by at least one other Alberni IRS Survivor.
66 This is a very fraught concern in the current Canadian context where discourses of denial over-ride complexity (Regan 2010:170). In 2017 Conservative Senator Lynne Bayak attracted national attention in the form of both support and critique for her outrageous claims that the IRS system was benevolent and positive for most who attended them, based on her claimed personal relationships with former students (CBC 2017a).
from his childhood and his ongoing professional practice but, at the time of this
research, he avoided discussing his other IRS experiences for health reasons. Boundary
negotiation to what individuals are willing to share is ongoing, personal, and measured in
relation to who they are sharing with and who they have standing in solidarity at their
sides (Sherri & Jeffrey Cook 19 January 2018; April Martin 22 December 2017). These
boundaries are also defined by and in relation to the ceremony (or lack thereof) which
provides protection to witness and speakers, illustrating the important role of
ceremonialists like Tim Sutherland, Sr. (18 January 2018). When I asked Mark Atleo (3
February 2018) how he decides what to say to an audience, he told me

To me, it’s just the teachings of my parents and grandparents. Power of prayer. I
used to wonder why my dad, when he was carrying the title [of ha’wiit], used to
go sit by himself for awhile. Mom used to say, “don’t bother him.” He was
preparing himself in prayers, for what he had to do that day. So I learned. Used
to always say, “pray, before you’re going to do anything. If you’re going to talk
to people, you pray. Prepare yourself.” That’s what I did. When people ask me,
“don’t you write anything down?” I say “yeah, it’s right here.” [Motions to body
and laughs] I just pray for the right words to come out, and what comes out
comes out. Always grateful to my grandparents and parents for their teachings.

As the Alberni IRS Survivors shared testimony to include in the CHH, boundary
setting was directly and indirectly at play: in relation with museum professionals, the
camera and other recording technology, and – through them – to museum visitors.
Although Survivors were sharing testimonies for display to a general public, in an
immediate sense they were sharing with James Trepanier, who was interviewing them,
and the present film crew. Besides the signing of consent forms, the technology of the
camera and lapel microphone in the setting of the film studio made it obvious that the
interview was for broader dissemination. The interaction at play was a one-on-one
conversation in a sense, but the recorded, alien, and highly technologically-mediated
space imposed barriers of its own. What could be shared in this setting would set limits
for what could be shared publicly in the CHH.

When preparing to conduct interviews, CMH staff determined that it would be
most resource efficient to facilitate Survivors’ travel to the CMH to film their interviews,
rather than transporting the curator, film crew, and equipment to Port Alberni (Trepanier
24 October 2017). Partially because of this distance, interviewees had less control over
the setting and set-up of their interview, which was prepared before their arrival. The film director, Frank Wimart (18 October 2017), made great efforts to make the set-up comfortable for Survivors and, secondly, able to be developed into impactful videos for visitors. Some of these attempts were successful – such as ensuring that interviewees were as physically comfortable as possible even if it involved compromising the shot – but others were later regretted. For example, Wimart and Survivors had a mutual vision of a sense of a direct conversation with exhibit visitors. This, Wimart (18 October 2017) felt, would require eye-contact, but he recognized that some of the Survivors had little experience on film and might have difficulty speaking directly to a camera. Instead, he installed a screen that would project James Trepanier, the interviewer, over the camera in real time as he conducted the interview. Although a good idea in theory, the result was a strange sense of distance and artifice that did not suit the difficult subject matter that made embodied human interaction irreplaceable (Trepanier 24 October 2017; Wimart 18 October 2017). Gina Laing (7 June 2015) later told me, she would rather have spoken to Trepanier over tea in her Port Alberni living room. Other times when the Alberni IRS Survivors have shared their stories they have done so with the protection of ceremony, hence their accompaniment by Tim Sutherland, Sr. on their second trip (Robinson 2017:144-5; Sutherland 18 January 2018). Ceremony, community support, or a familiar setting may have been missing factors in the film studio.

Survivors chose what to share within these technologically mediated interviews, but this was not the only boundary setting that occurred. Approximately hour-long interviews were edited down to clips of less than five minutes. Length is a matter of access in exhibit content, be it text, film, or the size of the exhibit as a whole. As Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) – an expert on visitor access – explained:

[…] editing for length is important. It was a bit of a balance in some cases about saying how long is too long? Or how long is long enough to get at the story? So that’s a question, for me, of accessibility. Because if something is too long, it will not be accessible; if it’s too short, it may not be comprehensible.

67 Having intimate familiarity with what the Survivors felt more and less comfortable speaking about, Andrea Walsh suggested questions to ask or avoid in advance. Trepanier tried not to overly guide the interviews, which was recognized and appreciated by interviewees (Laing 19 January 2018; Trepanier 24 October 2017; Wimart 18 October 2017).
Although drafts were reviewed by interviewees, geographic distance and inconsistent access to large files transferred via the internet made them unable to be actively involved in editing. This left difficult decisions up to the film director and curator.

Editing is often fraught, risking mis-representation, as the film director Frank Wimart (18 October 2017) explained. He intentionally avoided any tricks of the trade that could result in sharing anything other than Survivors intended.68

When you edit, when you shoot, you choose the angle. Well, they were on a greenscreen but if you have a background you choose the framing, you choose what’s in the background, you choose the lighting, you choose what you show and what you don’t show. And after that you go editing and you choose again. So, for me it’s very important that at the end the person that has been interviewed recognizes themselves, and recognizes the message, that we didn’t change it so much that they’re like, “no, this is not what I said, that's not what I meant.” If someone would ever tell me something like that, we failed.

Wimart described some standard but deceptive documentary interviewing, filming, and editing tricks.

But for the Survivors, there was no playing. There was no playing games. We were not trying to. We were totally open minded, that we would get what we would get. And as soon as they wanted to stop, we would stop. And if they wanted to erase things we would erase things. So it was a very honest shoot in a very dishonest technical setting [...].

With this sort of dedication to the validity of the production, and his familiarity born of shooting and many hours of editing, Frank Wimart (18 October 2017) – along with James Trepanier, the curator who he primarily worked with – became an advocate for the stories that he had personally witnessed and was charged with sharing.

For Chuck, at one point he talked about the fact that he hated the food at residential school, that he hated – in particular – Cheez Whiz, that he had to eat every day. And after that he tells that now, after all these years, where he couldn’t eat Cheez Whiz, he eats that food again, because it’s the thing that he can make for himself.69 So, for that clip, I know one of the directors said, “we don’t want to put that, because Cheez Whiz is so far from the drama of everything that happened to Chuck that it shouldn’t be there.” And I kind of fought a bit to

---

68 All Survivors who spoke to me about films that they were in, or that their friends or relations were in, claimed to be happy with them.

69 This is a story of overcoming trauma to the point that one’s life is less governed by it, of gaining independence from both the trauma and its financial impacts in which affordable food has traumatic associations. The issue of IRS food is raised by other Alberni- and LHF-affiliated Survivors who engaged with the CHH, as well as by the TRC reports. This is reflected in the CHH exhibit text, which has a sub-section about IRS food.
keep it. [...] If, for [Chuck], he puts Cheez Whiz, or the food at – not the same level comparing to what happened to him but – if he feels that it’s noteworthy, [then] for me it was important to have it there.

The concern that Survivors express for their emotional impact on those who hear their difficult stories extends to the museum professionals who are charged with relaying them. When I told Gina Laing (19 January 2018) that I had interviewed some of the CMH staff who had recorded her interview, her immediate response was “I feel sorry for those people that had to listen to me. You know, I really do.” I reassured her that the staff reported being happy and honoured to be able to hear her stories, even though processing traumatic stories was a challenge for many of them.

“One of the biggest things that I think that we’re learning, and we’re still grappling with as an exhibition team, is the weight of working with this material, and the impact it has,” James Trepanier (24 October 2017) shared with me.

*The specificities of this topic, the fact that it happened in Canada, the fact that it happened in a context sanctioned by the Canadian state, but also that, you know, there are a diversity of experiences around it. But in this particular instance of the Alberni material there were some very very vivid descriptions of sexual assault. It’s something that we all intellectually knew was coming. But the weight of it you never really anticipate. I know for me personally, shortly after the Survivors were out here in 2015, I had to take some time off. It manifests itself in different ways. It can be anxiety, it can be, you know, you can’t sleep. And it’s not even just like feelings of guilt necessarily, but just… it’s exhausting. And I’m sure you know this. In my mind I was more worried about the Survivors initially, and I remember [one of them] telling me, like, “how are you doing?” And I was like, “ah, fine, fine!” But then a week or two later, the exhaustion level is just huge [... A]nd then again, the second wave of it was when we were editing the videos to try to get them down to two or three minutes, having to engage with that stuff over and over and over again. But also in a context where [snaps fingers] “we need to get this to deadline! Here’s the latest edit, can you get back to me by 2 o'clock this afternoon?” So that framework at some point is for staff and by staff. I mean everyone that engages it: people like Frank [Wimart], our translators, anyone who might come in contact with this material. The need for time and space to process it and what it means mentally is huge. Every institution has to decide how to do it.

A CHH curatorial meeting became the flash-point for the issue of self- and community-care in relation to curating emotionally heavy history. Several museum professional interlocutors spoke about this event, indicating its importance. Trepanier (24 October 2017) described the meeting as follows:
We had a very particular moment on our team, sort of towards the tail end [of the curatorial process]. We were getting close to the final cuts of those interviews [with the Alberni IRS Survivors], and [...] in these particular interviews there’s very graphic content. [...] But we hit a point where we said, “ok, we have to have a discussion of what we’re comfortable with [showing].” And we made a request [to the broader exhibition team, particularly managers] saying “please try to watch the most recent version of these videos before coming to the meeting.” [...] And in that meeting – of course people arrive at meetings not having done their homework – so somebody made a suggestion: “well, let’s just watch them here. They’re only four minutes, why don’t we just watch them now?” And there’s about ten of us in the room that day. And somebody said, “no, I can’t.” And [the response was], “oh no no, we have time, it’s not a big deal! What’s the big deal?” And the person had to say, “no, if we go any further with this I have to leave the room. I can’t – this is too close to my own experience, and what it will do to me and the time it will take me to recover is just not worth it. Please don’t.” And there were a few people around the room being very puzzled, like, “what do you mean?” I am still processing that moment [...]. But it was a collective moment of “oh crap.” Talking about this material – and dealing with it – isn’t just about, you know, “are there other [IRS] Survivors in the room?” It is “are there other people who have had experiences of this kind of abuse?” Or any kind of abuse! So it raised the flag for me in a huge way. Maybe it’s my male privilege that I haven’t had an encounter like this yet. But I think for all of us, in that moment, in that room – for many of us – we said, “holy crap, we have to do better at this.” And so we started working on ways of allowing people to opt in or out in terms of how deeply they engage with the material, without excluding them from being able to do their work. And even though people know and hear what they’re getting into, when they get to that moment of having to confront the material, giving them the option of engaging in ways that they are comfortable with. And that has to be worked out at the individual level. Since that moment, it’s been in the back of my mind for a huge amount of time.

As Trepanier explains, the lessons from this flash-point are continuing to be learned and applied in the team’s curatorial practice. They are now part of team members’ consciousnesses and practices where they might not have been previously.

Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017), an interpretive planner who was present at the curatorial meeting, has also continued to work on applying the lessons learned from it.

Working through content which is traumatic in its very structure – the very origins, the very frame in which it exists, is traumatic – has to be acknowledged. And then, within that, exposing [oneself] out of professional necessity, to material

---

70 This meeting is indicative of the CMH’s boundary-setting, separate from and potentially at odds with the boundaries pre-set by interviewees.
that is traumatic in a range of forms is also very challenging. And to do it within an environment, a project environment that is high-demand, that has multiple competing priorities at the same time, and that is schedule-driven – so this is not a project on which you can take under your own leisure. [...] So already the context under which this work is happening has its own stressors; to me [this] amplified the challenges of working on the material. So something that I’ve started advocating for is [that] the same degree of respect that we aim to show our visitors – in terms of informing them about the content and empowering them to make choices – should be allowed to employees, to people who will be encountering the material, who will be working with it. It’s not something that, historically, we’ve ever done.

Jonathan Lainey (16 October 2017), Curator: First Peoples who was responsible for Gallery 3.3, elaborated on the stressors that he experienced. He was hired late in the curatorial process, to his first curatorial position with an ambitious mandate:

[I]t’s something I tried to not think about, but when you think about it – can you imagine the responsibility that was on my shoulder? I mean, I was not alone. We were a team, creative developer, other colleagues, directors, I was not alone. But when you think about it, I need to talk about difficult subjects for about 150 years of history. The section is recent Indigenous history. You need to try to satisfy or please 600 communities from a huge territory, coast to coast to coast. Métis, Inuit, women, older, politics, arts, music, rights, treaties, residential school, Indian Act. That’s a lot to cover for a newbie, you know. I’m just new. I’m late in this project. I have a few months to find objects, to build that up. It was a big responsibility. It was difficult. I try to not think about it, because I don’t know if I would have slept. But I just put that aside, and I did what I thought I should do.

Based at the Canadian War Museum, Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) had some familiarity in working with traumatic content, and she took “a role in advocating for [addressing these issues] within the team.” This included an educational role in informing her colleagues and superiors who were “one step removed from the content.”

So people who, for example, were responsible for approving it. They weren’t the ones immersed in the content, but they were the ones signing off on it. So they needed to be educated about the nature of it, about best practices for working with it, about particular challenges that some team members may have, and that the same person might not have the same challenges on any given day.

When I asked Frank Wimart (18 October 2017), who had to work with the Alberni IRS Survivors’ testimony on a regular basis, whether he had any formalized emotional support he told me:
I don’t think the Museum realizes what we have to go through, sometimes. The things we see. The number of times where I had to keep my hands on my eyes, just like, looking through the fingers. Because it’s not diluted but it’s filtered for sure before it’s shown to the public. So no, I really don’t think the Museum is putting money aside for our treatment or something like that.\textsuperscript{71} And for me, like I said, I felt pain during it [...].

Being momentarily but disruptively confronted, in a curatorial meeting for example, was not the only way that traumatic material had to be navigated in daily practice. Frank Wimart (18 October 2017) had to work with the Alberni IRS Survivors’ testimonies thoroughly and regularly as the film director and editor. Wimart’s experience demonstrates how boundary-setting to appropriately impact those telling their own stories, those displaying them, and those witnessing them can be co-configurative:

\textit{It was a hard two days of shooting. I didn’t expect all this. At the Museum, we sometimes have to see archival footage that is pretty harsh or pretty hard. And we need to just keep just the essential, and always walk that line: you don’t want to be gory but, then again, we don’t want to judge. [...] So just to say that we see some things that are not pretty pretty. But it’s rare that we shoot interviews as poignant, as difficult, as we did with the Survivors. How can I say. We cried a lot. [...] So I would sit on the side so that Survivors wouldn’t see me cry too much. Jamie [Trepanier, the interviewer], I could see it was really hard for him to contain, but he did it very well. But you [...] want to keep talking. You want to have the information to understand why is it so difficult. So, it was one of the hardest, I’d say, interviews I’ve done.}

When it came to editing, Wimart told me:

\textit{I have to admit, I wasn’t eager to do it, to be the one having to go through [the interview footage]. Because that means that you got to watch it again, and again, and again, and again, and again. Which is kind of hard. And also you don’t want to get desensitized. This is something I don’t want. I don’t want to watch it so much that in the end it’s just something you get used to. I want to keep that raw feeling of uneasiness, and I want that to stay. [...] To remember what happened to these children.}

However, Wimart did not want to back down to his fear that “difficult knowledge” might become “comfortably horrible” (Lehrer & Milton 2011:7):

\textsuperscript{71} Wimart (11 May 2018) later learned and clarified that the CMH does indeed have a program to aid with emotional distress, which he had been unaware of at the time of the interview.
But I want to be in the action too. I don’t want to be someone who turns from the things that I fear. Because being in the action is somewhat reassuring. Rather than trying to avoid something [...] I don’t want to be a victim of things. If I have to be scared a little bit, I’d prefer to do it fighting. (Wimart 18 October 2017)

Jonathan Lainey (16 October 2017) also expressed the difficulty of curating the IRS display, for which he was primarily responsible, and his dedication to this important task:

You know, you spend a Friday afternoon looking [through the TRC reports] for terrible quotes about kids? When I have myself kids? It was rough. You know, it’s not happy story, it’s a difficult story. [...] But I felt that... I guess I was able to put aside these feelings, knowing that my job was important. To make even more public, more known, these stories. It’s like if I had a role. Because curators and historians, we do have a role to tell stories. So even if it was difficult it was at the same time rewarding, knowing that I could contribute to making these stories known.

As Trepanier’s, Lainey’s, Lyons,’ and Wimart’s struggles show, balancing the risk and pain of exposure to traumatic material with the professional and relational duties of sharing and witnessing is not easy. Setting boundaries around what to share and what to make oneself open to hearing at a given moment, in relation to particular people, is often a necessary and fraught practice where there is a depth of traumatic experiences (Garneau 2016:29). Relational boundary-setting that is carefully negotiated and communicated may increase the capacity for safely and collaboratively sharing within mutually recognized parameters.

Structures: Self Care and Community Support

Since its negotiation in 1989, museums have been responding to the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, including the call under the heading of “Access” that “[a]ll museums and art galleries with ethnographic or Aboriginal art collections should develop programs which encompass legitimate opportunities and encouragement for the employment of Aboriginal peoples at all levels of their operations” (AFN & CMA 1992:17). This commitment has continued to be re-stated, most recently with a Canadian Museums Association resolution of “CMA Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion.” The resolution is, in part, “to redress many injustices including the legacy of residential schools and to contribute to the process of reconciliation” with “a renewed commitment
to promote reconciliation and to determine the level of compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (CMA 2018). In general, Indigenous and other people who are more likely to have experienced gendered or racialized discrimination or violence are increasingly entering museum employment (Cooper 2008:6; Lonetree 2012:1; Moses 18 October 2017). At the same time, recognition of the importance of telling difficult histories, and doing so in collaborative ways with source communities and museum professionals of similar backgrounds, is growing (Peers & Brown 2003; Lehrer & Milton 2011; Phillips 2011:10). At the CMH, more Indigenous experts began to be hired and consulted shortly after the Task Force Report was released, the ongoing RBC Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Practices was launched, and more Indigenous curators have recently been hired to work on the CHH project (Lainey 16 October 2017; Moses 18 October 2017). Concerning difficult history, the CMH received a resounding public consultation mandate to engage both “the good and the bad” of Canadian history (O’Neill, quoted in TRC 2015a:249).

Considering the changing dynamics of who is working in museums, the communities who they work with, and the sorts of stories they are increasingly trying to tell together, it is important to have ways of safely and effectively sharing difficult knowledge. Sharing this knowledge should have appropriate – not harmful – impact for museum professionals as well as source community members and visitors (Robinson 2017:131, 141). It may not be possible to guarantee that any telling of traumatic stories will not cause (re-)traumatization, but mitigating measures have been and can be taken.

Group solidarity has been important for many members of the Survivors group and their ability to comfortably share (Sherri Cook 19 January 2018; Martin 22 December 2017; Laing 19 January 2018). Museums should recognize the importance of group support, particularly when working with communities that are not geographically local to them. Although it may initially appear excessive to bring groups with individuals who do not contribute content, those who are contributing in visible ways may not be able to do so without the support and council of others who they ask to accompany them. Further, individuals do not only represent themselves in exhibition spaces. Particular stories are told to index other related stories which cannot all be included (Lainey 16 October 2017). Because an individual’s story stands in for others, those who accompany
content-contributors are often represented *themselves* by relation. Given this double-justification, museums should do their best to accommodate source community stakeholder groups that are as large as the source community deems appropriate, through travel budgets and other logistics.

Family, ally, and culturally specific spiritual support was important to the Alberni IRS Survivors group (Sherri Cook 19 January 2018; Martin 22 December 2017). Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) shared his thoughts on this:

> So here’s an observation. We take our families [with us]. Obviously they’re grown up and [they live separately...]. I think no matter how old they are we treasure our family because we were never treasured. Well, maybe I shouldn’t say that, we were never treasured. But we were never with our parents when we were kids, right? And I guess we don’t want to see that happen again, so, like Robin went with [her parents] Wally and Donna [Samuel], [my daughter] Sherri went, [Arthur Bolton’s daughter] Pam was there. [Gina Laing’s daughter] April was there, and I’m sure if Chuck [August] had the resources he would’ve brought somebody with him. [...] And for support too, from your family, from your younger family. When you look back at [the trip], reflect back on it, that’s right, we did all have our siblings there, our family there, or whatever. And even Tim, to a certain extent, had his grandchild, grand-daughter. So we all try to keep connected somehow, make sure we’re not separated too much, like we were [in IRS], from our families.

Mark Atleo (3 February 2018) did not have family accompanying him but he did appreciate the group solidarity, especially as he lives in Victoria and has fewer regular opportunities to spend time with his peers who live in Port Alberni: “I found the trip rewarding for myself, personally. For sharing my story, to put it in the video. And travelling with the co-students was even better. It’s like I wasn’t alone, so it was good.”

Tim Sutherland, Sr. (18 January 2018) was asked to accompany the Survivors for spiritual support. He explained his role in the trip:

> I brought my [...] rattle with me. That was there to help support the group. [...] If anyone needed me on the side I’d be there, or if the whole group needed me. I have a chant that covers the sli’mux’sti, their feelings. If [something] leaves them kind of down, I pick them up with a chant. [...] Being that person to go over to a different town, or even locally, to support people, I’m always ready with whatever it may be. We have other rituals other than the chant that I use. But it is very important for the uplifting, for the protecting of the floor that we are doing our ceremonies or whatever it may be. To protect the people who are present. [...] So it’s a very important thing in our life.
The whole Survivors group expressed appreciation for having Sutherland accompany them as their Elder and ceremonialist (Atleo 3 February 2018; August 12 October 2017; Jeffrey Cook 12 October 2017). From the beginning of RIDSAR’s work with the Alberni IRS paintings, the collective has been guided and supported by Coast Salish Elders Deb and Ron George (Cowichan), and Victor and the late Joyce Underwood (T’sawout). Their support and teachings have been beneficial to Indigenous and non-Indigenous collective members alike (Samuel, quoted in University of Victoria 2016).72

The Gallery 3.3 exhibition team also benefited from group support. When referencing difficult tasks that they had to do, they always recognized the supportive and collaborative role of their whole team. The discussions of self care in working with difficult materials benefitted from team members having open minds and willingness to revise their personal and institutional practices to establish a safer work environment for themselves and their colleagues.

When I interviewed museum professional interlocutors they frequently expressed their appreciation for the interview as an opportunity to debrief. Although these interviews were conducted over three and a half months after the exhibit opening, it was their first – and possibly only – thorough debriefing opportunity. As in similar studies (Robinson 2017:142), museum professionals expressed varying degrees of frustration with the product-driven curatorial process that required intensive dedication to a project for multiple years up to its opening, after which it was effectively deemed complete and rarely engaged with further. For example, Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) and I concluded our interview with the following exchange:

**Kathryn Lyons:** Thank you. It’s been helpful, actually, for me to be able to talk and reflect; I appreciate the opportunity.

**Bradley Clements:** Do you ever get that opportunity professionally?

**KL:** Not really. Not really. We are operationally-focused. And the role that I have in particular, because, like I said, we’re project-oriented and outcome-driven. It’s very busy. Very, very busy.

---

72 I am thankful to Elder Ron George, and other friends, for emotional and spiritual support during my time in this work.
BC: You’re not like one of the academic curators who goes off and writes these long papers and books!

KL: No. No. I’ve had the rare occasion to do that and it’s great, it feels terrific to be able to do it. And I know, I know that my historian and curator colleagues would say that they don’t get enough time to. But whatever! [laughter]

Debriefing can provide simple but valuable closure to projects that require much emotional dedication, especially the curation of difficult knowledge. Debriefing can also be a valuable way to instill and document lessons from the curatorial process, to mitigate its potential shortcomings, and to build future project capacity.

Closing projects with intention is important for museum staff, and potentially more so for source community collaborators. Alberni IRS Survivors expressed that concluding the partnership with a second trip was important (Atleo 3 February 2018; August 12 October 2017; Chester 30 June 2017; Jeffrey Cook 19 January 2017; Martin 22 December 2017). However, interest in closure or ongoing relations varies by source community and may not always be desired or possible. For reasons not known by my interlocutors, few of the LHF Survivors group who consulted with the Gallery 3.3 exhibition team were able or interested to reconvene at the end of the CHH project.

Especially where a museum disproportionately benefits from collaboration, courtesy seems to dictate that it facilitate closure for the source community. This likely includes hosting them to visit the finished exhibit, with the financial assistance that many cultures consider inherent to this role. Restrictive funding models and institutional structures often place museum staff in the awkward position of playing hosts on behalf of their institution without the support or resource capacity that the role requires. Curators frequently appear to do an admirable job in this role despite an apparent lack of institutional backing.73 Considering curators’ positive representation of their institutions, they should not be expected to represent their institution without its material support.

73 I heard only positive feedback about the CMH’s role as host, although being a respectful guest might discourage critique. Much of Survivors’ feedback was about their hosts’ courtesies and supports. Tim Sutherland, Sr. (18 January 2018) told that the group worked well internally and that the CMH was thoughtful of their needs. This included things like providing wheelchairs, giving free access and tours to the exhibits and collections, being kind and helpful, and the like. Several museum professionals also spoke to the courtesies and care that they sought to take to ensure the group’s comfort (Trepanier 24 October 2017; Wimart 18 October 2017).
Deb and Ron George (3 November 2017), two Cowichan Elders and protocol advisors to the RIDSAR collective, explained the importance of consciously opening and closing a project. As with a feast – an important social, political, and ceremonial event throughout the Northwest Coast – other important social processes like curatorial projects should be conducted safely and properly by intentionally “opening the table” at the beginning and “closing” it at the end. For similar reasons of safety and resolution, local exhibits that the Alberni IRS Survivors group have been involved in have generally been opened and closed with ceremony, including a cleansing cedar brushing of the exhibit space and museum staff. Besides the cultural importance of communally beginning and concluding social processes in indigenising institutional practice, involving collaborators in the closing of a collaboration seems to be basic courtesy. If the museum and source community are truly creating representations together (Ames 1999), it seems insulting to fail to conclude that project together and allow the source community to see, comment on, and celebrate the fruits of their labours.

Museum resource structures are a mediating factor throughout this discussion. “[T]he way the funding system works in a lot of museums and research institutions is it’s often frontloaded, and it’s for the production,” James Trepanier (24 October 2017) explained, echoing Kathryn Lyons’ (17 October 2017) sense of “outcome-driven” projects leaving little opportunity for activities that do not perceptively forward those outcomes. “Even SSHRC [the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada] and other funding agencies, it’s the generation of something that is funded, not necessarily the follow-up” (Trepanier 24 October 2017), so only tangible outcomes are funded, and funding is exhausted once the product has been delivered. As others have noted (Ames 1999; Clifford 1997; Phillips 2011:10), collaboration and indigenization requires change in institutions, but also in their funding models which are often (in part) external to them.

Although Trepanier worked hard to procure CMH funding for the Alberni IRS Survivors group’s trip to Gatineau, his institution’s funding capacity and structures were too limited to be able to provide all necessary funds. The only accessible funds were

74 As Trepanier noted, more resources were available during the curatorial process, allowing the CMH to substantially support the Alberni IRS Survivors for their initial trip in 2015. The CHH was an exceptionally
from a public programming budget. As such, they were contingent on the group’s participation in public programming, not technically for their travel or as reciprocity for their collaboration. One of the group’s intergenerational Survivors felt that it was inappropriate that the CMH did not provide more for their trip and restated this on multiple occasions (Chester 30 June 2017). For Trepanier (24 October 2017), “the idea, even the possibility of not being able to provide funding for the second trip […] sucks, but it’s kind of the nature.”

Museums and their financial supporters should be aware that insufficient funding can have repercussions beyond perceptions of museums as impolite and failing in reciprocity. Because the Alberni IRS Survivors group is diverse with some economically marginalized members, differential capacities to afford and contribute to group travel can be internally divisive and overwhelming or disempowering for some members. Although some group members were happy to pay their own way, this caused others who were unable to do so feel less worthy of attending or contributing. When these feelings were expressed by economically marginalized members, the group immediately re-affirmed their integral role and assured that everyone would have what they needed to attend. Everyone contributed in ways that they were capable, whether through personal funding or fundraising efforts, and all contributions were recognized. The integral nature of each member and their contributions were exemplified when the group’s fundraised money was equally distributed to all members, including myself and the other University of Victoria-affiliated members. Foolishly and guiltily, I decided to give my funds back (contributing to Wally and Donna Samuel’s upcoming potlatch, at Walsh’s suggestion), and the other university-affiliated members decided to do the same. When we did so, however, Jeffrey Cook spoke on behalf of the group in reminding us of the teaching of hišukniš čawaak (“we are all one”). He told us that everyone is a part of the group and contributes to it. None should have exception from the group or its support.

Although the circumstances that required fundraising and the tensions which arose due to them were unfortunate, the group effectively overcame these challenges, strengthening their solidarity in the process. The entire group engaged in extensive well-funded project. This may have improved capacity for collaboration, but its structure remained restrictive of post-opening activities.
fundraising activities in which all members could play important roles. This was empowering for those who felt marginalized in financial discussions but were skilled volunteers. Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) explained that fundraising activities strengthened group solidarity.75

**Jeffrey Cook:** One thing I thought that bonded us together was the fundraising that we did. [...] For the people that were there it brought us closer together. Other than the first trip when we got on a plane and went to Ottawa and everything and come back [with funding]. Because we fundraised it had more meaning to it, I think. For me anyway. [...] But I can understand how people just [thought that] it was good the first time: we were all funded to go, that was good too.

**Sherri Cook:** Yeah you kind of got to know each other outside of the project [through fundraising activities].

**Jeffrey Cook:** I think this time we got to know each other, yeah. Because we were really involved in the fundraising. [...] So that was a good experience.

Fundraising provided opportunities for broader associated communities to materialize their support for the group through donations and volunteer assistance.76 Note, however, that these dynamics were very particular to the circumstances of this trip. I would generally advise avoiding the expectation that source communities should have to engage in extensive fundraising, if at all possible. It may have been a positive experience for the Alberni IRS Survivors group to fundraise together, but it might have felt more balanced, relatable, and indicative of reciprocity had the CMH or its staff also fundraised for their shared experience of this trip (Chester 30 June 2017). This might have lessened the burden for Survivors, created a greater sense of reciprocal relations, and helped to bond and educate the CMH community in relation to their curatorial partners and guests.

On a final point about safety and support in the face of difficult truth-telling and

75 Jeffrey Cook is proficient in fundraising and community engagement. As such, he spearheaded some of the fundraising efforts and helped others. Those who initially felt more overwhelmed may have had neither the financial resources nor the fundraising experience.

76 This included associated First Nations and their community institutions, the Port Alberni community, the Department of Anthropology, the Bureau of [Undergraduate] Anthropology Students, the Native Students’ Union, and the broader University of Victoria community. Various local businesses, artists, and other community members donated silent auction items and food for concessions. In my personal experience, it was incredibly heartwarming and re-assuring to see my cohort, professors, friends, and other colleagues help organize, advertise, contribute to, and attend fundraising events on which I worked.
-witnessing, it is important to ensure that museum visitors safely receive important messages (Lehrer & Milton 2011:4, 12). The balance between safety and understanding is difficult where, as noted earlier, Survivor testimony should be left as untouched as possible but edited and displayed to make it as accessible and safe for visitors as possible. I think of this as “appropriate impact:” working toward representations that have impact appropriate to content and audience. These considerations are prominent where, through audio-visuals and text, it is “Survivor voice, almost exclusively in fact, talking about legacy impact,” as Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) explained. “[W]e felt it was important at that point to show living, relatable people reflecting on the experiences that had happened in the past, so that visitors could start to understand that the legacies of this story are still very much present.” Because an exhibit must be safe and should be pedagogically impactful for anyone passing through it, curators must consider visitors who might be children, survivors of physical or sexual assault or abuse, people who do not have English or French as a first or second language, blind or deaf people, people who know nothing about IRS or colonial history, people who would seek to deny or justify that history, history buffs, tourists, families, school groups, and IRS Survivors and intergenerational Survivors with similar or different experiences. People of these and many other descriptions will pass through the CHH, so it must be accessible to all of them. However, several targeting mechanisms were also put in place.

Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017), the interpretive planner, noted that although diverse visitors were considered, the largest audience group was prioritized:

*We know that the Canadian Museum of History primary audience [is] sight-seeing Canadians who come to the Museum to learn something about Canada, usually as part of a tourist visit to the national capital area. They’re often coming in family groups, and when they’re coming with kids their kids are, on average, between the ages of 8 and 12. We certainly get younger, we get older, we get adults, we get people who are more interested in history and those who are more interested in objects. It’s a range. But we knew that that was our target and our largest audience group.*

The knowledge of this primary audience group informed curation and “influenced placement and means,” Lyons explained.

*So, for example, in the discussion of sexual abuse, the quote that is printed on the wall is slightly higher than it might be for another quote [to be at an adult’s eye-level but not a child’s], and it is more oblique. An adult visitor will understand*
why the quote says the person was terrified at night, that the person would come for her next, but a child may not understand it in the same way. So there was some decision-making that had to be made to achieve that kind of balance. To be truthful and respectful.

The concern for harmful impact needed to be balanced with the importance for all visitors to understand the violence of the IRS system and its integral place in Canadian history. For this reason the IRS section can only be avoided by exiting and re-entering the flow of the exhibit, which is possible but counter-intuitive. Further, the open-viewing video display of Survivors from across Canada talking about the impacts of IRS can be heard throughout the general area.77

Lyons (17 October 2017) described the opposite but concurrent approach as “visitor control,” in which:

[…] the visitor has the most degree of control. So my approach – and it’s one that I think, broadly, the [Canadian History and War] Museums endorse – is wherever there is content that is likely to be challenging, difficult, or traumatic, our aim is to inform visitors of its presence and empower them to make the most number of choices possible about whether or not they’ll expose themselves to it, and how they will expose themselves to it. So, video can be turned on or off. We can control the sound by requiring visitors to listen to it [on headphones] or to read it as a transcript. We can put in multiple layers of warnings, if we judge it necessary.

In the entire CHH, the Alberni IRS Survivors’ video interviews had the most mediations.

[T]he testimonies of the Alberni Indian Residential School Survivors [is] where we concentrated the most difficult material. Because the means, the video that we had, is one that is probably most appropriate for giving visitor choice and control. But achieving that balance and locating that within the flow of the story is definitely a challenge for that content.

The CMH says that the “commitment to audience needs” is “fundamental” in the CHH. “[I]n practice this has meant a more deliberate and closer attention to […] a conscious management of sensitive material, and the use of advisory labels to assist in decision-making” (Amyot, LeBlanc, & Morrison 2017:25). The Alberni IRS Survivors’ videos

77 These videos are from the TRC archives at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. They were chosen for use in the CHH because they had sufficient quality, the Survivors who had given the testimony had given consent for it to be public, and because they addressed a range of themes and perspectives (Trepanier 24 October 2017). The screen is situated between the parts of the IRS section on children’s experiences, and that on the legacy of the IRS system. The screen is prominent in the confined space, and its audio can be made out throughout the IRS section of Gallery 3.3.
are available on a touch-screen at a low table height with a chair to be seated at, due to the number and length of available videos. Visitors can choose between the original English sound and subtitles, or switch to French subtitles and voice-over. They can also choose between eight video interviews and textual information about the Alberni IRS and Robert Aller, the volunteer art instructor at the Alberni IRS. If the selected video contains graphic content, an advisory warning of the specific nature of that content will be displayed and require the viewer to confirm that they wish to view it.78

78 Although visitor studies are the best method to assess the effects of these strategies (Gibbons 2015:116; Lehrer & Milton 2011:9; Phillips 2011:202), I have some personal observations regarding the video interview display. As IRS history enters school curriculum across Canada, discussion has spread about what parts of this traumatic history can be explained to children and at what ages. Although this is a difficult balance, I feel that the childhood art that Survivors have chosen to share publicly is an ideal way of relating to children of all ages. I remember being a child who liked to draw and feeling excitement, empathy, revelation, and connection to other children upon seeing their drawings and their innovative ways of expressing their worlds. By seeing Survivors’ childhood paintings along with their childhood memories, I believe that children and adults alike can empathize with childhood experiences and how sad and oppressive those of IRS are, without requiring exposure to traumatizing detail. However, by showing these details together with the rest of the stories and art, they become inappropriate for children.

Upon casual observation of the display, it seems that it is appealing to children despite its inappropriate content. In the context of an otherwise text-heavy display, children are drawn to the low-elevation video touch-screen showing children’s paintings. In a society now full of click-to-accept screen pop-ups, even children are quick to click through on-screen advisories without giving them much attention.

Apart from the unintended appeal of the touch-screen to children, it is otherwise less engaged. A focused study that is more thorough and sustained would give a better sense of viewership, but the intensive attendance of opening day may be indicative. I kept a tally of visitors passing the display and visitors stopping at it over a thirty-minute period on the CHH opening day when CMH entrance was free and popular. During this time 145 visitors passed, eight of whom stopped for various amounts of time to watch videos. In the later twenty minutes of my observation I began to count those who stopped to read the associated text but not to watch the video. In the break-down of these twenty minutes, four people stopped to watch videos, twenty-one read the text but did not watch videos, and seventy-two passed without doing either. This observation period is a small and abnormal sample, chosen for expedience and convenience over generalizability. On the one hand, visitors attending on opening day may have been exceptionally interested in the exhibit and thus more likely to stop to watch the videos than the average visitor. On the other hand, the number of visitors in attendance on this day probably caused them to keep moving through the confined space, rather than stopping as they might have under usual circumstances.

The apparently low number of viewers may be appropriate. Because the testimonies in the interviews are more detailed and complex than those in the rest of the IRS exhibit, they take a supplementary role. If visitors do not stop to watch the videos, it may be because the amount of information in the rest of the exhibit is sufficient or overwhelming for them. If they do, it may be because their interest has been piqued by the rest of the exhibit or that they otherwise feel able to go beyond what the average visitor is willing and able to intake. In public consultation, Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) found that there was great curiosity but little knowledge of Indigenous history among Canadian museum-goers. Hopefully this curiosity and ignorance will inspire more visitors to expand their knowledge through less prominent aspects of the display, especially as public awareness of IRS history grows.
Discomfort has important pedagogical value in relation to difficult history (Regan 2010:13). However, this discomfort must be balanced and targeted appropriately to avoid being harmful. Here curators need to return to the etymological root of their profession: “caring for” (Lehrer & Milton 2011:4). Curators, as hosts on behalf of their institutions, have responsibilities to care for those telling their stories in museums, for those hearing them, and for each other as colleagues. My sense of such pedagogy is that those who are comfortable should be discomforted and those who are uncomfortable should be comforted. Those who have been impacted by this history or who otherwise know it should be cared for to avoid further disturbance; those who are comfortable in ignorance, privilege, or denial must experience some discomfort to understand the realities in which they are unconscious participants. Lehrer and Milton (2011:4) also discuss the paradoxes of curatorial care:

*When do we need to be protected and nurtured, and when might the new truths [that stories of suffering] give rise to themselves become ossified, calling for “tough love” to re-activate their ethical potential? Is the goal of curation to settle, or rather to unsettle established meanings of past events? Is it to create social space for a shared experience of looking, listening, and talking, creating alternative relationships and publics, for constructive meaning making and action taking? How can we manage the tensions among these impulses?*

This is the appropriate impact that must be balanced for diverse audiences, a central challenge of curating difficult history.

**Transformation**

*Experiences: Transformation through Relations, Testimony, and Witnessing*

Despite Western museums’ limitations to change identified throughout this thesis, disciplinary conservatism does not stifle the personal transformation of relations and witnessing that can occur in and through museums and collaboration (Clements 2016:108-10; Phillips 2011:201, 211; Robinson 2017:156-7). Gina Laing’s (19 January 2018) experiences of transformation through telling her stories and re-claiming and showing her paintings are profound, and other Survivors have similar experiences:

*Gina Laing: When I first met Andrea I couldn’t even talk, really. I couldn’t hardly say anything. And she asked me what it is I would like to do. And I told her, “I want to tell my story. I want people to hear right from the victim, and find*
out what happened, to understand what I went through, and feel it too.” And I wanted to use my paintings for that. And I didn’t think anything was going to happen. I thought, “here I am just spouting off and trying to be really brave here.” [...] But you know, from that little start to now, it made a huge difference in my life. The whole experience. I told her at that time, “yeah, I want to learn how to speak out, and make sense.”

**Bradley Clements:** Oh man, and now you do so well! It’s amazing, because of course I didn’t know you that early, but when Andrea told me [how much you have changed] I didn’t believe it. How could somebody change so much?

**GL:** Oh, I have. I was ready, I guess, to try and make a change. I was putting all my courage behind everything I was doing and saying. I was so uncertain as to what I should be saying, and what I shouldn’t be saying. And it was hard, it was really hard actually.

**BC:** And it was just that you got the chance and were slowly able to build up?

**GL:** Yep. Oh yeah. And the more I talked the more I realized that I have something valuable to contribute. And it’s first hand. I’ve told my story to my kids as they get old enough to understand, all my children, my grandchildren. And my whole idea is that I don’t want them to ever forget what we went through at that residential school. Generations of us, you know. I don’t want them to forget. And this gave me a vehicle to go do all of this and to build my courage and to help me to be able to express it. So, it was a lot of encouragement from a lot of people. And Andrea having faith in me to do this, I couldn’t believe it. Nobody ever had that in me, ever. It’s kind of emotional for me.

Survivors’ courage and generosity in telling their stories has not only been transformative for themselves, but also for many who hear them and see their childhood art. Many Survivors have stories of people who they have spoken and formed relationships with, and who have been changed by the experience. Mark Atleo mentioned someone who he came to know after a public presentation that he gave with Andrea Walsh about his painting. “She didn’t want anybody to know that [she was Indigenous],” Atleo (3 February 2018) recounted. “Now she’s changed. I’ve been sharing all my stories with her, and everything about life. Really changed her.”

Evidence of impact on visitors in the CHH is only anecdotal as the exhibit has not been open long, but other case studies of other exhibits on IRS history demonstrate their potential (Clements 2016; Gibbons 2015:119, 125). My own first experience of the art – in *To Reunite, To Honour, To Witness*, the 2012 Legacy Art Gallery exhibit in Victoria,
BC, a year before my involvement with the group began – I spent much of my long visit stunned to silence before the paintings. When the Survivors group displayed their artworks in *We Are All One*, an exhibit at the Alberni Valley Museum in 2014 and 2015, I conducted a visitors’ focus group interview and heard moving feedback (Clements 2016:108-9). I regularly sat the front desk of *There Is Truth Here*, the 2017 show of the artwork in the Legacy Art Gallery, where I again witnessed and engaged in conversations between visitors which demonstrated the impact of the art and stories. I also spent some informal observation time in the CHH. It jubilantly opened amid the 150th Canada Day celebrations, but even the reveling first visitors became quiet and sombre in the IRS section. When a small group of Alberni IRS Survivors and I re-visited the IRS section in a quiet moment of our trip in October 2017, one of the exhibit docents approached me to ask if they were the people in the videos. When I confirmed this she asked Mark Atleo if she could hug him, then burst into tears.

The power of the art and stories is also felt by the museum professionals who work intimately with them. James Trepanier (24 October 2017), who was the primary liaison with the Alberni IRS Survivors group, was particularly impacted:

*I was asked by family* last week, “*what’s the coolest thing you got to work on on this exhibition project?*” Well “*cool,*” I don’t know if that’s *the word.* But “*meaningful,*” I use the term “*meaningful*” a lot. There’s a term in French, valorisant, which is slightly different than “*meaningful,*” but it basically gives you a sense of purpose and provides a sense that you’re doing something meaningful, but it means all those things. [...So] when they asked me “*what’s the coolest thing you worked on?*” I said, “*well the most meaningful thing has been this Alberni project.*” And describing it to them, it’s been probably the part of the exhibition that has been the most stimulating and, during the really really difficult times, either related to this topic or not, just when your energy is flagging, it’s where the motivation [comes from]. When I had to go back to the well for that sort of inspiration, [it] is their stories. So it’s been the most meaningful part of the project for me.

Although Frank Wimart only had the opportunity to spend about an hour with each interviewed Survivor during filming, the extensive editing process made him familiar with and impacted by their stories, to the point that he wrote personal greeting card messages to each of them. Wimart (18 October 2017) explained the shift in perspective that he experienced over the project, which reflects the empathy that the exhibit itself sought to foster:
It’s such a life-changer. What happened to them, I can’t imagine this. [...] I was walking with a script-writer in the History Hall. And when we arrived at the Aboriginal part... Well, it starts really dark and it’s very about trying to “kill the Indian in children,” I think there’s a quote like that on the wall. And there’s this image of the little girl who’s wrapped in a blanket and she’s just looking at you directly. And my wife is Métis. So my kid looks a bit like me, my daughters look a little bit like her. And I had to just [say] “ok! So this is the section.” And I had to walk, walk, walk [through the exhibit quickly]. It’s only when we were in another part of the History Hall that I was able to talk about that part. So that’s what I mean in the sense that now it’s very about – it’s horrible to say – about me, about my family, that all this testimony, like, brings things. And before it was really only [about] “them,” what happened to them. So you see, it’s a different... it evolved, it evolved very much in me.

The balance between empathizing and identifying can be a fraught one, but it seems that Wimart, who is not trained in this subject matter, has come to simultaneously recognize that he “can’t imagine this” and that he can empathise with their experiences by witnessing the history and their experiences to the point that it is no longer feels like a separation of “them” from “us.” Jeremy Taylor (20 October 2017), an exhibit design professional, was not involved with the Alberni IRS Survivors but attended the first of the two LHF Survivors’ engagement sessions as part of the exhibition team. After discussing his feelings on the session’s role in the curatorial process, he spoke to how it affected him personally:

And personally it was – well, I can’t imagine – it would be a top five moment of my entire life I expect, in terms of my relationship with my country and understanding of history. It changed me profoundly and it made me feel very differently about a lot of things. It made me want to change things, it made me want to do good, it made me want to hug all those [Survivors in the session], it made me want to, made me really want to re-think what I think I know about this country. And I knew, obviously, what residential schools were, and I understood what they had done and sort of the legacy of these things, but what it did was a rare opportunity for me to hear from the mouths of people who experienced it themselves, and that was an incredibly powerful thing, very crucial.

Next, I will consider how these experiences relate to and can be disseminated through the exhibits that impacted museum professionals go on to create.

Structures: Relations as Accountability

Although some museum professionals with whom I spoke tried to keep distance between the personal and professional impacts that working with Survivors and
Survivors’ stories had on them, the divide appears to be challenging and shallow. Where museum professionals’ institutional roles required them to work more closely with Survivors these relations seemed to be stronger, but I noticed that the Alberni IRS Survivors spoke of museum professionals based on their personal relationships and personalities, not by their professional affiliations.

The value of the relationship that was formed between the Alberni IRS Survivors and James Trepanier became clear when the opportunity came for them to switch to working with another curator who specialized in Indigenous history and is Indigenous himself. Having shared so extensively and effectively with Trepanier, the Survivors expressed the desire to continue partnering with him rather than forming a new relationship. Identities aside, this made sense for all parties. Although Jonathan Lainey’s (16 October 2017) late hire as Curator: First Peoples resulted in him having limited capacity, the work that had occurred prior to his arrival could generally be carried forward, sometimes with and sometimes without the involvement of previous curators.79 He told me:

*I really really appreciated what Jamie [Trepanier] did. Jamie said, “ok, you’re the new curator for that [Gallery], you will be responsible for that in the following years, so I am passing the torch.” He really did that, I really appreciated it. But, at the same time, he needed to stay in touch and stay involved, because he was the one who made the contacts with all these people. And in terms of relationship building when you’re working with the institution, continuity is really important. So he maintained the contacts with these people and he stayed involved in the rest of the process. But he was responsible for other sections of the Hall, so he was really busy. I’m sure he was happy that I could work specifically on [Gallery 3.3]. But no, he kept in touch with people and he made sure we could follow up with Survivors, and it was much appreciated.*

Gina Laing (19 January 2018) expressed her experience of working with Trepanier and his team during her 2015 trip, and her feelings seemed to be shared among Alberni IRS Survivors. When I asked what it was like to work with the CMH staff, she replied:

*Everything was really great in that area. [...] Oh, [James Trepanier] was awesome. And so busy and he was trying so hard! He needed ten of him to do what he wanted to do. Haha! He has some good assistants there too. I*

79 Jonathan Lainey, Curator: First Peoples, was hired in September 2015, about three months after the Alberni IRS Survivors’ visit.
appreciated that they treated us so well. And we weren’t led [during the interview], if you know what I mean. A lot of when you’re being interviewed people like to lead you. And he didn’t try to lead. He let me, anyway, go ahead and say what I wanted to. So it was good. [...] Yeah [being able to express myself freely,] that’s what’s really important to me, and I’m hoping that what I’ve said kind of gets through to people. That they get to understand. I want them so badly to understand what we went through.

As Gina’s account demonstrates, her relationship with museum professionals and her ability to communicate her message to museum visitors are connected. The contact zone (Clifford 1997) between museum professionals and Survivors in the interview filming studio creates a certain contact zone with visitors in the CHH exhibit. Jeremy Taylor (20 October 2017), an exhibit design professional involved with the project, expressed his vision for such a contact zone visitor experience:

[In the engagement session with the LHF and IRS Survivors] I thought, “oh my god, what I would love to do in this Gallery, [...] all I want to do is give visitors this opportunity [to hear from Survivors].” So what I would love to do is find a way to create some sort of immersive theatre space [...]. You just go in there and sit down and listen to people talk. And they’re just talking to each other. Because [in the session] they just traded stories. And the guy from Saskatchewan said, “you know, I remember this and that,” and the woman from Nunavut [...] said “I had the same experience! I did the same thing! Only it wasn’t quite like that, it was more like this...” And then they’d talk and they’d laugh and they’d remember specific details. And then it was interesting hearing it re-bound with the [...] younger generations as they said “I remember my mother saying that, my grandmother saying that. [...] And she wept when she talked about it.” And everyone around the table would cry. It was just crazy hearing them talk about it and the incredible weight, even as they said it with a smile or bravely. [...] If there’s any take away that I think [...] us non-Aboriginal Canadians need to hear, it’s just that. Them reflecting themselves. Like, we don’t need a fucking textbook to tell us what happened or why. Some of that is, I suppose, useful information to be able to deal with all this stuff. But [...] what that session, that involvement with Legacy of Hope, gave me professionally was a profound sense that [...] here was an opportunity, here was exactly the kind of experience that we should’ve offered visitors [...].

The professional commitment “to get it right” came in part from the personal engagement with Survivors and was shared by other museum professionals who had this experience. Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) felt that attending the LHF engagement session with her curatorial colleagues “helped to share the responsibility for the knowledge, and for
the awareness of the topic and the experiences that were shared, […] what to me became sort of a shared responsibility.”

Alongside the CHH’s powerful public consultation mandate, the personal relations and intimate sharing between museum professionals and IRS Survivors likely had a subtle but important role in solidifying accountability to meaningfully Survivor-centred representation (Gibbons 2015:119; Phillips 2011:201-2). As an interpretive planner, Kathryn Lyons (17 October 2017) is “generally fairly cautious when it comes to telling visitors how they should feel.” However, after engaging with Survivors at the LHF-facilitated session, she learned “the importance of building empathy with visitors, and doing it [actively].”

I know less detail of the curation of the First Peoples’ Hall fifteen years earlier, but my sense is that the resistance to IRS history representation there was more effective than in the CHH.80 There are various reasons for the relative success of the insistence to tell IRS history and centre Survivor perspectives in the CHH: the social and political context, public consultation mandate, and less influential nature of the resistance to this history after the TRC and associated activism. However, the personal engagements and contributions of Survivors also appears to be a factor in museum professionals’ dedication to centre them and avoid compromising their stories (Lyons 17 October 2017; Taylor 20 October 2017; Trepanier 24 October 2017; Wimart 18 October 2017).

Despite the hard work of all parties, some felt dissatisfied with aspects of the exhibit. Jeremy Taylor (20 October 2017) reported the exhibition team’s heightened dedication to IRS content:

[A]bout the same time the Museum of Human Rights opened in Winnipeg, and there was a huge amount of discussion around that, as I’m sure you remember, including [the failure to use] the word “genocide” […] So then it was interesting to see how our [exhibition] group responded to that, and there was a lot of excitement. Around that time I remember about three of us from the core group saying to each other, “if we get one thing right, it has to be residential schools.”

As a contractor whose involvement concluded prior to the project’s completion, however, Taylor was unable to personally see his vision through, and it did not live up to his hopes:

---

80 See Chapter 2.
[T]here’s a few serendipitous reasons why I think we didn’t end up having [a] better experience in the Hall. One of them [...] is the fact that I left the project. Quite frankly, that’s part of it. That I would’ve brought a drive to that idea [of an immersive testimonial space] that I think then lacked, that people sort of found safer ways to do it. And number two, as I said earlier too, it was at a time that the project was moving toward safe [approaches]. And it was late in the process. So doors had to be closed quickly, and budgets had been spent. So I think those are the reasons we didn’t get it right, I don’t think we didn’t get it right because it was censored [...] I don’t think we didn’t get it right because people didn’t try hard enough. I think to a large degree it was just sort of bad luck [...] and bad timing. But it certainly is a regret of mine that we didn’t get that part right.

Jack Cook (20 January 2018), one of the Alberni IRS Survivors, had also expected a different exhibit presentation:

Over all [the CHH] was interesting with information, but for what the intent or the information provided, it didn’t meet what we were led to believe it was going to do. It’s, I think, in part because of the change of the curator maybe. [The intent] got changed with the changing of the guard so to speak, like anything else. Things sort of roll out a different way when you get somebody new in. It’s understandable but still, as you were saying, probably should have been a little more communication about it. But other than that [it was good].

Jack Cook was not one of the Survivors interviewed for the CHH display and thus had less engagement with the CMH. However, his feelings help to illustrate the importance of good communication with source community members. In the experience of several curators, engaging some Survivors for curatorial guidance and others for content was an effective approach, because it did not taint consultation with requests and negotiations for content materials (Trepanier 24 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017). After hearing from Jack Cook, however, I feel that this may have been a problematic approach. Having relationships that were not dependant on content development, like those through the LHF, were valuable, but those who contributed content should also have been involved in curatorial discussions. Having multiple and similar advisory groups may be complex and challenging, but to display content that Survivors have contributed in contexts which they have little knowledge of or input into risks misrepresentation and disappointment of the type that museum professionals otherwise fought to avoid. Jack Cook (20 January 2018) suggested that “they needed [more] communication, and even getting a few people in there to help, suggest some ideas on display [...]” I recognize the challenges that prevented such an approach from being taken in the CHH – the delayed timeline,
workload of curators, geographical distance and unavailability of many partnering Survivors entailed a synched capacity for in-depth collaboration. Had such an approach been planned for, however, it may have been possible.

As a ha’wiih and community leader, Jeffrey Cook (19 January 2018) likely heard more grievances than I did. “I’ve heard it said that our display was fairly small,” he reported, “you know, in relation. They felt it should’ve been larger.” He, however, saw the group’s stories in the space as an accomplishment:

But you know, Canada’s got a long – well not that long, but – a history. I imagine you want to display a lot of it. My thought was that we were a part of [the CHH]. Of all the projects across Canada on Aboriginal issues, we got to be chosen, just one small group. So that’s an accomplishment in itself. So that was what my thought was on that, because even though a lot of our people said it wasn’t displayed big enough or whatever, or it should’ve been more. But when you really think about the big picture, it was pretty impressive that we got to be there.

Had Survivors had a better understanding of the CHH’s curatorial aims and limitations from the beginning there might have been an improved mutual understanding of the project and a reduced likelihood of disappointment (Onciul 2015:71-2).

Museum professionals involved in Gallery 3.3 were relatively new, contracted, or visiting from other institutions, having been hired for the CHH project. Although there may not have been time to implement all lessons that they learned during the CHH project, these experiences and the personal and professional transformations implicit in them will inform their young and ongoing careers, at the CMH or elsewhere. Despite the concerns that have been addressed throughout this chapter, most interlocutors felt proud of their involvement with the exhibit. When I asked Charles August (12 October 2017) how he felt about the display and his video interview in it, he gave me a double thumbs-up and said with a wide grin, “if I had more thumbs, I’d put them up too!”

**Conclusion**

The following table attempts to summarize experiences that interlocutors have explained to me, and lessons that I have interpreted from them, organized by the five relational factors that Laura Peers, Alison Brown (2003:3), Julia Harrison (2005:195), and myself propose:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1: Summary of Experiences and Lessons by Collaborative Factor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Museum Community Culture** | 1. Difficulty for liaising curators to communicate source community relations to other members of the CMH.  
2. Product-oriented project timeline and funding models make collaborative project closure challenging. | 1. Increased internal understanding of source community partnerships and roles as partners could help museum accommodations and operations.  
2. Need for increased community support and space for self care and debriefing. |
| **Source Community Culture** | 1. Some source community members initially felt overwhelmed or excluded by financial expectations.  
2. Traveling and fundraising together strengthened source community solidarity. | 1. Ensure that group activities are accessible to all members, and that all members can contribute.  
2. Working to increase group capacity together builds empowerment and solidarity. |
| **Political Relationship** | 1. Perception that each party was being disrespectful with their expectations of public programming schedules.  
2. Sense among some Survivors that the exhibit did not match expectations or communications. | 1. Mutual understanding of each partner’s expectations and limitations can improve collaboration and avoid disappointment.  
2. Recognizing source community authority over material should extend to curatorial decision making where possible. |
| **Geographical Distance** | 1. Long distance between BC and the CMH entailed expensive travel and may have limited attendance. However, the ultimate size and composition of the Survivors group facilitated group support and the ability to conduct community business. | 1. Source community collaborators can benefit from the presence of family and culturally-specific support people.  
2. Museums should try to financially support and host all visiting source community members. |
| **Goals for Collaboration** | 1. All collaborators aim to tell history to a broad public with appropriate impact.  
2. Although most interlocutors were pleased with the exhibit, some were not. | 1. Visitor studies will be useful to assess project goal success. Responsive exhibit adaptation should occur.  
2. Increasingly communicative and collaborative curation with those who contribute content would help to meet goals of all collaborators. |

Because this research had no pre-identified issues to interrogate, it has produced a survey of relevant issues rather than an in-depth investigation of them. During interviews I
asked about issues identified by interlocutors in previous ones, but a second round of interviews would have been needed to rigorously delve into the issues identified here.

The responses to challenges that I have identified are reformative, not revolutionary, of museum practice.\textsuperscript{81} I recognize the structural limits of institutional change, and the need to continually evaluate ways to productively stretch them. Such reforms can make Western museums better able to relate with Indigenous source communities, facilitating their attempts to claim space and amplify their voices in ways that can be revolutionary beyond museums (Phillips 2011:157). The practical limitations that Western museums run up against in their own attempts to indigenize are often indicative of their fundamentally colonial structures, but even colonial institutions can function – however imperfectly and haltingly – as anti-colonial platforms and forces. Indigenous peoples have long claimed representational spaces that were intended to be about but not for them, and they will continue to do so as museums recognize the importance of collaboration and reconciliation. The challenge for museums now is to learn to function well in relation to equal or privileged Indigenous source community partners.

\textsuperscript{81} This research is unlikely to be directly transferable to all museums. All other Canadian museums are smaller than the CMH and have somewhat different experiences (Robinson 2017). I hope, however, that this case study can be adapted to other circumstances in an era of reconciliation.
Conclusion: Museums, Colonialism, and Truth-Telling

What can museum professionals, source community members, and academics learn from the experiences that museum professionals and Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors had as they engaged to represent the history and aftermath of IRS in the Canadian Museum of History’s (CMH) Canadian History Hall (CHH)? As a researcher related to each of these groups, this research has taught me that Western museums are colonial structures which have concrete, quotidian barriers to decolonization and indigenization, but which can nevertheless be reformed and engaged with in anti-colonial ways. Museums can be “places that matter” (Lonetree 2012:174) to Indigenous peoples: places where they can represent themselves and tell the histories that they want their communities and broader publics to know. When Alberni IRS Survivors recounted the violence that they endured at IRS to audiences in the CMH, they demonstrated the usefulness of museums to “speak the hard truths of colonization” (171). Then, when they claimed space in the CMH to conduct a naming ceremony, the same Survivors not only demonstrated that they have survived despite this ongoing history (110) but they used the very space of their representation to live that survival. This enactment happened in the Museum despite its colonial structure. That structure placed limitations on the enactment but, illustratively, the inconvenience was greater for the Museum than for those claiming space in it. Indigenous polities have long claimed and contested the colonial spaces that have been intended to represent them, and they continue to govern themselves as sovereign relations to the institutions that are structured on the implicit presumption of their subjugation (Asch 2009:397; Cooper 2008; Phillips 2011; Raibmon 2000). Reform can help museums function more capably in their colonial shortcomings and collaborative aspirations, in the face of the calmly insistent sovereignty of their Indigenous partners.

This case study has contemplated ways that Western museums can (better) engage in anti-colonial relations with source communities and visitors. Firstly, museums and their staff can honestly recognize and communicate their own colonial structures and (in)abilities to change them. They can commit and work to change where it is possible, and to mitigate harm and expectations where it is not. As I have written previously,
repatriation can be an important means of equalizing relations between museums and source communities (Clements 2016). The present thesis expands on that earlier research by demonstrating that structural limitations to museum indigenization can exist even in collaborations where jurisdiction over collections is not an issue.

This thesis also suggests collaborative strategies for telling difficult histories with appropriate impact. Where possible difficult history should be told by those who are most affected by it – in terms of voice, but also in how that voice is made heard through collaborative curation. Museums can better relate to outside source communities when they can better relate internally. As they take up the tasks of telling difficult history and of diversifying their staff, visitors, and collaborators, museums must ensure that they are facilitating and providing necessary care in the process. Difficult history must be told impactfully, but that impact should be as safe and audience-appropriate as possible. Telling and hearing difficult history should not be easy, but neither should it cause harm to those telling or hearing it.

These are conclusions from the experiences that I have had and heard through this research. I hope and expect, however, that others come to their own conclusions based on their experiences in relation to this or other curatorial collaborations. In the remainder of this Conclusion, I expand on these reflections in relation to larger themes of colonial spaces, representation, and witnessing.

**Museums are Colonial, What Now?**

Western museums are colonial spaces. Response to this colonialism has been a productive call to indigenize and decolonize their relations and operations (Lonetree 2012; Phillips 2011). However, there are limitations to this possibility (Asch 2009:396; Onciul 2015:124; Gordon-Walker 2016:49). Western museums cannot indigenize to the point of becoming Indigenous, as Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton (2017) explains in his assessment of Western educational institutions. He explains that indigenization can productively change “mainstream” colonial institutions, but that “Indigenous” ways of being are “rooted in community knowledge,” “time immemorial,” and Indigenous governance. Western museums cannot independently be decolonized because they are governed by colonial systems that claim sovereignty over them and are beyond their
control, preventing their legal operation under sovereignties that compete with the colonial state. The foundational Western-ness of museums is not necessarily colonial, but the fact that most museums that deal with Indigenous material do so outside of Indigenous authority is (Asch 2009:394; Clements 2016:103; Garneau 2016:29, 35; Lonetree 2012:1; Onciul 2015:119, 159).

Despite being colonial institutions, and because they are, museums have roles to play in anti-colonial reconciliation (Moses 12 May 2018). In the partnership between Alberni IRS Survivors and the CMH in this case study, both partners were motivated by an interest in educating Canadians about the history and experiences of IRS. Both partners saw museums as effective places to tell this history, and to address social issues beyond museums (Garneau 2016:39; Gibbons 2015:118, 127; Phillips 2011:201, 208). To fulfill these mutual goals of collaboration, which were strategically but imperfectly matched to museums, both partners had to compromise. This compromise was not out of courtesy or fairness which – I contend, based on their colonial imposition – would require museums to make most or all necessary compromises. The reason that Indigenous source communities may need to compromise some non-essential expectations or practices when working with Western museums is that, beyond a certain point, the museum’s colonial structure may make it existentially incapable of compromise (Boast 2011:66-7). If museums are unacceptably rigid, source communities should perhaps ignore, avoid, unilaterally claim, or advocate the dismantling of Western museums as institutions related to Indigenous culture. Failure to compromise colonial structures is a colonial imposition, but one that may be unavoidable in the current structure of the field. If the structures of museums are wide or flexible enough to allow them to be agentively and productively related to by Indigenous peoples, then doing so can be fruitful despite being – to various degrees – tense and controversial.

Collaboration between entities as different as Western museums and Indigenous communities can bring relational expectations to light that might otherwise be taken for granted. The opportunity to recognize structural and ontological underpinnings is a valuable one, because it is important for collaborative partners to be mutually aware of

---

82 The bounds of acceptability will vary by project and community (Innes 2013:197). For one Nuu-chah-nulth approach to acceptability, see Umeek (2011:93-4).
what they are able and willing to accomplish together (Robinson 2017:135). Museums have not always been self-aware or communicative of their limitations in relations with Indigenous source communities (Cooper 2008:11; Onciul 2015:124). I hope that this case study, among the case study literature, is useful to staff at the CMH and members of the Residential and Indian Day School Art Research (RIDSAR) collective in reflecting upon their own relational requirements and expectations. The events in which Alberni IRS Survivors and CMH staff felt tension, discomfort, empathy, or joy together, and their reflections on those moments with each other and myself, help to identify where relational practices, expectations, or structures might benefit from replication or reform.

Western museums have much work to do. As colonial institutions they require fundamental restructuring to ever be truly indigenized or decolonized. However, from my positionality and that of my interlocutors, it is possible to suggest relatively short-term, pragmatic, and constructive criticism which I believe to be beneficial before and through the process of radical indigenization or decolonization. As James Trepanier (24 October 2017) reflected to me:

_Understanding – trying to understand – the universe we work in is a huge thing and I know we all really appreciated it [when the Alberni IRS Survivors did this], because it doesn’t always happen. Sometimes the dynamic is “your institution has to change.” And then that’s it! And you’re like, “well, how? And what’s reasonable? And how can we do it in a pragmatic way?” I think the flexibility and pragmatism and the sort of “let’s see how this goes” [attitude of the Alberni IRS Survivors group] was hugely appreciated on our end._

I do not suggest that internal incremental reform is a solution to colonialism in any institution. I worry, however, that simply identifying Western museums’ colonial governing structures fails to provide useful critique for those trying to engage in and with museums in more anti-colonial ways.

**Relating Across Difference**

To conclude this thesis, I step back to the general political context of colonialism in which the CHH and its networks exist. A broader and possibly irreconcilable issue of colonial politics within and outside of museums is that of *inclusion* (Gordon-Walker 2017:49). Canadian history is Indigenous history to the extent that neither Canada nor
Indigenous nations can be presently understood without also understanding their historical and ongoing relations. This is a truth of Canadian history. The difficulty comes in how to reconcile this truth with its representation (Coulthard 2014:22; Lehrer & Milton 2011:11; Phillips 2011:156-7). As discussed in this thesis’ Introduction, reconciliation can function and be interpreted in several ways, including compromise between two positions, making Indigenous nations consistent with the Canadian state, or making Canada compatible with prior and ongoing Indigenous nationhood and jurisdiction. Display, and collaborations that enable it, can be reconciliatory in any of these ways.

Edward Said (1993:209) explains that:

*The slow and often bitterly disrupted recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded – as empire had been – by the charting of cultural territory. After the period of “primary resistance,” literally fighting against outside intrusion, there comes the period of secondary, that is, ideological resistance, when efforts are made to reconstitute a “shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system,”* [...] 

Benedict Anderson (1983:182) notes the role of museums and heritage in this process:

* […] colonial regimes began attaching themselves to antiquity as much as conquest, originally for quite straightforward Machiavellian-legalistic reasons. As time passed, however, there was less and less openly brutal talk about right of conquest, and more and more effort to create alternative legitimacies. [...] Museumized [local heritage subsumed by colonial regimes was] repositioned as regalia for a secular colonial state.*

This cultural struggle – between distinction and consumption of Indigenous nations – makes state-associated representations fraught. Could the genocidal goal to “assimilate the Indian people in all respects” (Macdonald, quoted in TRC 2015c:126) be facilitated by incorporating Indigenous history into Canadian heritage and its institutions? As quoted by two museum scholars, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias worries that “‘[w]hen someone else is telling your stories, […] in effect what they’re doing is defining to the world who you are, what you are, and what they think you should be’ (Ames 1991, 8)” (quoted in Cooper 2008:1).

Inclusion relates through assimilation under the umbrella of the Self, rather than relating across the differences of Self and Other. It allows and requires the representative
to relate as and on behalf of those subordinated by them (Foucault 1997:29; Hobbes 1968:229); “the establishment of Indigenous rights regimes […] within the settler states that now encase them” (Coulthard 2014:2). The inclusive nation:

[...] requires the acknowledgement of certain minority histories and cultures in order to illustrate the benevolent inclusivity of a mainstream national culture while at the same time affirming its dominance. [...] It is articulated through diverse media, including representations of national history and culture found within public cultural institutions. (Gordon-Walker 2016:5)

These assimilative moves require the suspicion – and, where the suspicion proves warranted, the resistance – of which Said speaks.

Indigenous movements for recognition have historically been the very forces that have been mis-appropriated to entrench colonial jurisdiction (Cooper 2008:11; Coulthard 2014:6), but they have also seen success. Indigenous activism around representation has been powerful in reshaping the North American museum landscape, in part by demanding to be part of it (Cooper 2008; Gibbons 2015:118; Lonetree 2012:1; Phillips 2011:157, 208). The TRC (2015a:246) states that “museums and archives in settler colonial states […] have interpreted the past in ways that have excluded or marginalized Aboriginal peoples’ cultural perspectives and historical experience.” The report then goes on to quote the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 11:1 that “Indigenous peoples have the right […] to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures” (quoted in TRC 2015a:246), and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Recommendation 3.6.4, which is oriented in part towards Indigenous access and decision making (TRC 2015a:247-248).

The problem might be stated as inclusion of Indigenous materials and belongings but not of self-determining Indigenous peoples, as seen in recent debates sparked by the appointment of a white consulting curator of African art at the Brooklyn Museum (Salam 2018). In any history that matters and has diverse interlocutors, contestation will happen in curation and visitor reception.

Assimilative inclusion and colonial recognition may be at play in parts of the CHH, but these are not the only ways in which Indigenous peoples are agentively representing themselves and each other in it. Apart from the pre-European-contact
portion, all of the Indigenous content in the CHH is in some way about relationships between or mediated by settler and Indigenous peoples and polities. This is illustrated most strongly in the video displays of contemporary Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers explaining these relations throughout the CHH. Notably, in Gallery 2.1, “Anishinabe knowledge keeper Alan Ojiig Corbiere explains how the 1764 Covenant Chain wampum belt and the Treaty of Niagara Alliance medal represent the enduring relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown” (CMH 2017), and Wilfred Yellow Wings recounting the negotiation of Treaty 7 in Gallery 2.5. Even in videos, “[i]t’s far more powerful to have Aboriginal peoples talk about the impact of assimilation and hope for reconciliation than having words written down in a report” (Fontaine, quoted in TRC 2015a:242). Although in a context imbalanced by colonial power rather than Indigenous nationhood, collaboration increases the space for contestation (Clifford 1997; Phillips 2011:157). Like in the October 12th, 2017, public event turned ceremony, Indigenous peoples are generally offered highly structured and minimal representational spaces, but those who choose to take them up nevertheless do so on their own terms (Raibmon 2000).

Concerns of inclusion may not apply to IRS history in the same way as general Indigenous history because it is so fundamentally a Canadian story (Regan 2010:116-7). The experiences of IRS belong to those who had them, and there are limits to which they should be shared (Garneau 2016:29; A. Simpson 24 March 2016). Simultaneously, the responsibility for IRS – and for remembering and ensuring that it is never repeated – lies on the shoulders of the settler Canadians on whose behalf the genocidal system operated (Million 2013:169; Regan 2010:32-6). There are certainly institutional reasons for the inclusion of IRS history in the CHH, notably of public pressure to tell “the good and the

---

83 Which, itself, appears to respond to the TRC’s (2015a:235-236) view that “all students – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – need to learn that the history of this country did not begin with the arrival of Jacques Cartier,” that “[t]hey need to learn about the Indigenous nations the Europeans met […],” and that “Aboriginal peoples’ oral history must be ‘placed on an equal footing’ with written historical documents [in] national museums and archives […].” (TRC 2015a:247).

84 Yellow Wings (quoted in CMH 2017) concludes his story by potently bringing it into the present: “Mr. Laird got up, turned around, pointed to the sun. ‘As long as the sun gives light, As long as the rivers flow. As long as the green grass grows. The treaty will be strong.’ We’re still holding ours. The British Empire went home. Canada took over. So where’s our treaty?”
bad” of Canadian history (Lyons 17 October 2017; Moses 18 October 2017; O’Neill, quoted in TRC 2015a:249).

Despite institutional motivations for inclusion, the motivations of those choosing to include their own stories should be privileged in this discussion. Deborah Cook (19 January 2018) describes her motivation, in part, to push back against rampant refusal to understand IRS history. Although exhibiting the story may be insufficient, it tells important truths that might not be otherwise:

I guess to be honest, when you’re looking at Canada’s history, I’m glad that they were actually able to fit it in. [...] And if it were not for our involvement it would always be a little bit of a quiet thing in there that, “this is where we sent the First Nations kids.” Not allowing [settlers] to realize that, a lot of the damage that they’re seeing within First Nations kids, there’s a reason for why. And they don’t want to hear that it was because of the institutions that we got sent to.

Gina Laing (19 January 2018) says that “[...] the whole point of my paintings is to help people understand what we went through and to know the truth. [...] That’s what I want, I want to teach people, I want them to feel it.” Collaboration in an exhibit should be based on legitimate expertise in its subject matter, and visitors should recognize that it is these voices – voices that visitors might encounter on the street or in the news on a daily basis – that are authorities of their own experiences, not the Western museums in which they might occasionally represent themselves.85

Definitions of “indigenization” as “hybridization” (Phillips 2011:10) can improve Western museums and their relations with Indigenous peoples, but without changing governing structures and ontological foundations even “indigenized” museums may remain colonial. Hybridization can be an Indigenous process if it is conducted through Indigenous governance (Stark 18 March 2017), but Western museums in Canada are

85 Unfortunately, this sort of recognition is difficult to achieve. Even in an exhibit curated through exceptional collaboration, which visibly credits and discusses that collaboration, visitors have difficulty recognizing it (Krmpotich & Anderson 2005). Jeremy Taylor’s (20 October 2017) idea of an immersive theatre that allows the visitor to witness a Survivors’ sharing circle, if appropriate, might accomplish the feat of displaying collaboration. This idea reminds me of one of the most impactful moments that I have had in a museum, in the Vodou exhibit that was displayed at the then-Canadian Museum of Civilization in 2012. To enter the second room the visitor had to pass through an enclosure where audio of voices debating about if, what, and how to show the controversial aspects of vodou secret society practice that the second room displayed (CMH 2012b). Presumably this audio reflects curatorial discussions that reached acceptable resolve, but a glimpse of this discussion made me, as a visitor, aware that what I was seeing was contested, limited, and alive, and that I was privileged to bear witness to it.
under colonial governance. In this context, hybridization may menace – like colonial forms of “reconciliation” – as an insidious method of making indigeneity “consistent with” Canadian colonialism (Coulthard 2014:22; Hobbes 1968:209; Million 2013:171; Regan 2010:60; TRC 2015b:82). To “indigenize” in ways that are understandable and achievable in both Western and Indigenous traditions and structures, it may be beneficial to re-define the term as “to make Indigenous and Western communities and institutions more relatable to each other on Indigenous terms,” rather than to make them consistent with, hybridized with, or the same as each other (Asch 2014:124-125; Garneau 2016:27, 30-4). This way of relating can be seen in the Alberni IRS Survivors’ arrival at the CMH. They conducted the protocol of guests, recognizing that they were entering the CMH’s jurisdiction which they saw as legitimate but different from their own. But the need to conduct this protocol also asserted themselves as in relation to and sovereignly separate from the CMH, and from the population and state that it represents (Asch 2009:397).

Some ways of making Western museums more relatable to Indigenous communities and governance have been demonstrated in engagements between Alberni IRS Survivors and the CMH. Tensions between the two groups – such as when staff or managers were unaware of the relational expectations of the Survivors group during the public programming event or partnership meeting – might have been more navigable had the Museum been more structured as a community. Where this or other relational conventions are not possible, it is important for honest self-reflection and communication to make the limitations of the source community and museum mutually understood before they come into conflict (Harrison 2005:210; Lonetree 2012:172; Onciul 2015:124). These healthy modes of relating were in practice in engagements between the CMH and the Alberni IRS Survivors group: enough so to build healthy relations and demonstrate their benefit, but not enough so to avoid moments of frustration. Such moments may be inevitable in engagements and early relationship building, especially in contexts of asymmetrical power (Clifford 1997:192), but hopefully observing this case study can assist in future and ongoing relations.

Prioritizing Survivor voices has been affective in display and pedagogy (Clements 2016:108-10; Gibbons 2015:115, 125; Lainey 16 October 2017; Lyons 17 October 2017;
Montgomery 23 October 2017; Taylor 20 October 2017). In keeping with the collaborative turn, bringing those voices more into the production and decision making of their own representations where they are able – as individuals and as groups – should be recognized as representationally beneficial and just (Asch 2009:394; Cooper 2003:15-6; Gibbons 2015:119; Lonetree 2012:1). Being explicit and reasonably flexible about everyone’s goals for collaboration can help to ensure that they are realistic, mutually beneficial, and reasonably well met.

**Truth-Telling, Witnessing, and Change**

Friends sometimes ask me, like other anti-colonial museum scholars (Lonetree 2012:173), why I invest myself in such fundamentally colonial institutions as Western museums. My answer is that I do not engage with Western museums *despite* their colonial structure, but *because* of it. If they were not colonial, and if they had no capacity for improvement, I would have nothing to contribute to Western museums or their study. As this thesis and the broader literature on the history and practices of museums demonstrate, however, museums are colonial, and they have proven and ongoing capacities to improve and accommodate anti-colonial work and relations. I believe that there are limits to the ability of Western museums to reform themselves beyond colonial bounds. As such, there may be a point at which they have exhausted their potential for anti-colonial work, and they may no longer have a just role in relation to Indigenous culture and nations. In the meantime, however, there is much productive relational work to be done in and through museums that can make them, the colonial societies in which they function, and their relations with Indigenous peoples less violent and more just.

As the museum professionals and Survivors informing this thesis describe, truth-telling changes the witnesses and the truth-tellers. There are many important discussions of “decolonizing” (Lonetree 2012), “indigenizing” (Phillips 2011), “opening” (Kimberly 2011), or “reconciling” (TRC 2015a:183) institutions. The limitations in this and other case studied exhibitions demonstrate the importance and challenge of institutional change, but they also show that institutions do not change as monoliths. The

---

86 See “Transformation” in Chapter 3.
people within those institutions have capacity for dialectical change. The process of
collaboration and relationally telling difficult history can be both personally
transformative and institutionally restructuring (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:139;

For relational transformations to remain healthy and sustainable for all involved –
those sharing testimony, those witnessing it, and the museum professionals who facilitate
the exchange – witnessing and truth-telling should be appropriately impactful (Amyot,
histories are as difficult and traumatic as those of Canada’s IRS system, for some
Canadians it may be appropriate for the impact of witnessing it to be forceful (Lehrer &
Milton 2011:7; Regan 2010:18). However, for impact to be meaningfully manifest in
changed habitus and structures, they must be sustainable (Robinson 2017:141).

Providing space to prepare for and to digest from witnessing difficult knowledge can
make doing so safer, as well as ensuring opportunity to integrate difficult knowledge in
productive ways, as opposed to dismissive and self-centred guilt, denial, pain, or
justification (Gibbons 2015:125; Regan 2010:4, 170).

I relate to many accounts of personal transformation that I have heard based on
my own experiences of engaging with IRS Survivors and museum professionals during
this research. These experiences align with the TRC’s (2015a:241) statement on the role
of research in reconciliation, that “there are rich insights into healing and reconciliation
that emerge from the research process itself.” As Kwagiulth artist Carey Newman (7
March 2018) believes, reconciliation is separate from the basics of what he calls “social
repair.” Self-representation – along with more pressing concerns like access to drinkable
water – should be a basic expectation for everyone (Asch 2009:394; UN 2008). It is only
through the historical entrenchment and normalization of colonial dehumanization that
we come to a circumstance in which the absence of such basics is apparently permissible
and structurally difficult to rectify. Newman’s (7 March 2018) view of “reconciliation,”
on the other hand, is of relationships which cease, heal, and reverse historical and
ongoing disparity, antagonism, and disrespect.

I am frequently cynical about whether meaningful or just processes of
reconciliation are happening or will ever happen. It is simple relationships – and the
intergenerational perspectives of IRS Survivors – that give me hope that change is possible. The first time that I gained this sense was at the 2013 TRC national event in Vancouver when I asked if I could sit at the opposite corner of a picnic table from an IRS Survivor to eat my lunch. He gruffly told me that I could, and we ate in silence. Eventually he asked me, “why are you here?” I said something about my responsibility as a Canadian, and he grunted an unimpressed recognition. Then, after a pause, he told me, “ten years ago, we wouldn’t have been sitting at the same table like this.” What it means to sit at the same table remains to be seen, but while it does not guarantee to be ethically transformative, it does hold that potentiality. By agentively telling their stories if and how they chose to, in exhibits and elsewhere, Survivors are inviting more people to that table, to hear and speak with them and their communities, indirectly and – when the capacity is there – directly.

By agentively telling their stories, IRS Survivors are transforming people, relationships, and society (Capitaine & Vanthuyne 2017:5, 8). In her experiences of sharing her testimony, for example, Gina Laing (19 January 2018) has helped many to understand truths of IRS history, and to begin their own healing journeys. Recalling one transformative exchange that she facilitated, Laing says “I was really proud of that. Because I accomplished, right in front of my face, what I wanted to do. I changed someone’s mind. You know. It’s just a truth. You just tell the truth. It works.” She remains worried about and dedicated to the struggle to tell her truth at a societal level, to counter prevalent Canadian racism. “[I]t’s really sad that they label you according to what society says,” Laing laments, but, through the hard work that Survivors like herself have been doing, “[i]t’s changing. I notice that it’s changing.” For doing the work that you are doing to heal yourselves, your communities and mine, and all of your relations, in whatever ways are right for you, I say to all Survivors of Indian Residential Schools: ḣeeḵoo ḣeeḵoo; huy tseep q’u Siem; thank you, Honoured Ones.

Ču.
Bibliography


Happynook, Tommy. 2010. “i’n siiʔaʔnís k’ií sii yuk mit kin: The End of One Journey is the Beginning of Another.” Supervised by Andrea Walsh, Peter Stephenson, & Jeff Corntassel. MA thesis, University of Victoria Department of Anthropology.


Onciul, Bryony. 2015. Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising
Richler, Noah. 2012. What We Talk About When We Talk About War. Goose Lane: Fredericton.


**Interviews, Personal Communications, and Public Presentations**

Asch, Michael. 20 July 2018. Email correspondence to Bradley Clements.


Chester, Shelley. 30 June 2017. Facebook correspondence to Bradley Clements.


Cook, Deborah, & Jack Cook. 20 October 2017. Interview by Bradley Clements. Port Alberni.


Cook, Jeffrey, & Sherri Cook. 19 October 2017. Interview by Bradley Clements. Port Alberni.

George, Deb, & Ron George. 3 November 2017. Personal communication to Bradley
Clements & Tommy Happynook. Cowichan.
Happynook, Tommy. 3 November 2017. Personal communication to Bradley
Clements. Victoria.
Stark, Heidi Kiwetinopinesiik. 18 March 2017. “Resurgence is Our Tradition.” Public
presentation. Indigenous Resurgence in an Era of Reconciliation Conference.
University of Victoria: Victoria.
----. 8 June 2018. Email correspondence to Bradley Clements.
Laing, Gina. 7 June 2015. Personal communication to Bradley Clements. Highway 16,
Saskatchewan.
Menzies, Charles. 2 October 2017. “Against Discovery: A Manifesto for the Ordinary
and Mundane; or, Learning the Ways of the Ancestors by Walking the Paths of
Mountain Goats.” Public presentation. Department of Anthropology Colloquium.
University of Victoria: Victoria.
----. 12 May 2018. Email correspondence to Bradley Clements.
Artists are Re-imagining the Story of Canada.” Public presentation. University of
Victoria: Victoria.
O’Neill, Mark. 30 June 2017. “Canadian History Hall Opening Ceremony.” Public
Robertson, Kirsty. 26 May 2017. Personal communication to Bradley Clements.
Montréal.
----. 25 August 2017. Email correspondence to Bradley Clements.
Samuel, Sr., Wally. 12 October 2017. “Survivors’ Stories.” Public presentation. Canadian
Museum of History: Gatineau.
on 8 May 2018 at <https://jeremyjschmidt.com/2016/03/24/audra-simpson-
Sutherland, Tim, Sr. 18 January 2018. Interview by Bradley Clements. Port Alberni.
Museum of History: Gatineau.
Thomas, Dennis. 19 January 2018. Interview by Bradley Clements. Port Alberni.
Trepanier, James. 29 June 2017. Personal communication to Bradley Clements. Gatineau.
----. 4 June 2018. Email correspondence to Bradley Clements.


----. 11 May 2018. Email correspondence.

Museum and Gallery Exhibitions

Alberni Valley Museum. 2015. We Are All One. Port Alberni.


University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries. 2017. There is Truth Here: Creativity and Resilience in Children’s Art from Indian Residential and Day Schools. Victoria.