

CURATORIAL PRACTICE IN ANTHROPOLOGY: ORGANIZED SPACE AND  
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

by

Shelby Richardson  
BFA, The Ontario College of Art and Design University, 2010

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## ABSTRACT

Much of the curatorial and anthropological literature on museology has oversimplified museum spaces as monolithic colonial entities. However, recent developments in museum practice as a process of collaborative and public cross-cultural exchange are changing the way these spaces are interpreted and used. In this thesis, I examine contemporary curatorial endeavors at a number of museums and galleries in Vancouver, British Columbia, that attempt to revitalize the ways in which the cultural expressions of Indigenous artists and their communities are represented. The artists whose works are examined in this thesis locate their traditional territories along the coastline of B.C. As both separate and similar institutions, museums and art galleries are useful venues from which one may examine and chart ongoing processes of cross-cultural exchange. A curatorial exhibition project of my own: *Understanding Place in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge* will explore some of the obstacles and benefits of engaging in cross-cultural conversations of cultural representation. The exhibit looks at a selection of prints by Indigenous artists from the Smyth and Rickard Collections of Northwest Coast Prints from the University of Victoria Art Collections (UVAC) chosen specifically because they concern the artists' perspectives of place as it relates to physical locations, identity, and cultural practice. The relationship between the organization of knowledge and culturally specific attachments to space and place are central to understanding how we think about, and engage with, the world around us. The relationship between places and local knowledge connects the content of the images with the space in which they are to be exhibited: the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery in the McPherson Library at the university. Through interviews with artists and curators, and a review of the literature surrounding these issues, I have attempted to create an argument for the importance of space and place in support of an agentive curatorial practice. As an attempt to decolonize the museum/gallery space, this thesis argues that diverging perspectives of place are essential to the way we understand the world and our position within it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE .....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND PROBLEMS IN REPRESENTATION .....	7
The Politics of Space .....	7
Indigenous Space: The problem of boundaries.....	11
Inalienable Landscapes: Visual Representation of Place.....	16
Problems in Representation .....	22
Visual Descriptors of Difference .....	23
CHAPTER 2: CURRENT PRACTICE AND IDEAS.....	31
Collaboration.....	34
Breaking Down and Setting Up Boundaries .....	43
Sensorial Space .....	57
Conclusion .....	62
CHAPTER 3: PRINTS AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS AND CONVEYORS OF PLACE .	65
The Exhibition Space .....	70
Particulars of Place .....	73
The Specifics of Institutional Space .....	88
Prints as Learning Tools .....	99
CHAPTER 4: CURATORIAL AGENCY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE	106
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	114
APPENDIX A: SELECT EXCERPTS FROM ARTIST INTERVIEWS .....	125

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 <i>Map of the Northwest Coast</i> .....	12
Figure 2.1 <i>Crooked beak Hamatsa Mask by Kevin Daniel Cranmer</i> .....	46
Figure 3.1 <i>Wanx'id: To Hide, To be Hidden by Marianne Nicolson</i> .....	55
Figure 4.1 <i>Salish Portals by Susan Point</i> .....	59

## INTRODUCTION

The topic of curatorial practice and its relationship to anthropological methods is not a new one. In fact, the role anthropological curators have played in mediating cultural representations in museum exhibits is a widely discussed topic, and an essential part of the framework of its own discipline, museology (Ames 1986; Clifford 1997; Duffek 1987; Jessup and Bagg 2002; Martin 2002; McLoughlin 1999; Nemiroff 1992; Philips 2005). The history of critical museology reflects some of the major changes in both the social and cultural perspectives of cultural exhibits that have transformed over the years, a full account of which is far too extensive for this particular thesis. The aim of this research is to chart recent and local curatorial projects in Vancouver, British Columbia that demonstrate dramatic shifts in the cultural representations of Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast, while at the same time analyzing the relationships between these curatorial endeavors and changes in the context and creation of museum/gallery spaces.<sup>1</sup> After this discussion, I place my own exhibition project into the context of this critical curatorial movement.

This thesis places a major emphasis on a notion of *curatorial agency*. Curatorial agency pertains to the pivotal role curators play in the way in which culture is created, read, and

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<sup>1</sup> I have used the term 'Indigenous' because of the association this term has as a relational concept from which to understand ontologies of land use and dwelling. In response to Tim Ingold's (2000:151) criticism of the term in relation to its dependency on a 'colonial narrative of conquest,' I do not use it to necessarily identify peoples as 'being there first.' Rather, I have chosen this term because of its dynamic ability to speak to the notion that cultural ontologies are born out of, and continue to grow, through a relational experience with the land. In terms of the many diverse Indigenous peoples in British Columbia today, these relationships go back to time immemorial.

experienced in a museum/gallery context. In a nutshell, the curatorial process involves creating and developing a theme for a given exhibition, selecting and organizing artworks in relation to that theme, and making sure that all aspects of the exhibition speak to the vast array of mandates that insure its existence (i.e., institutional, educational, public, artists, etc.). The role of curators in affecting public perceptions of cultural expressions or traditions via exhibitions in galleries is undeniably substantial. Curatorial *practice* is a way of creating and performing knowledge, using art as a medium from which to explore human relations and perceptions of the everyday.

Therefore, the curator's active role in the creation of knowledge produces a complex web of negotiations that curators must mediate in order to conceive of, and create, exhibits. This mediatory role positions the curator as an *active agent* in the production and distribution of knowledge throughout the exhibition process. Throughout this process, curatorial positions that reflect the hegemonic power in society at large are frequently upheld, whether consciously or unconsciously. Even in cases where greater collaboration is at play between curators and Indigenous communities or artists, these dominant power structures may still be visible through methodological practices in consultation and exhibition.

The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to relay all the problematic issues of the past in terms of the misuse and misappropriation of cultural expressions. Rather, I seek to identify new movements and initiatives by curators today who attempt to make apparent the imbalances of power inherent within museum practice. The thesis also takes on a reflexive role in the examination of my own curatorial project, *Understanding Place in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge*, which attempts to destabilize the spectators' somewhat

passive acceptance of the experience of space and place as finite. I argue in this thesis, and in the curatorial project, that our relationships to place (both physical—lakes, rivers, mountains, etc.—and intangible—identity, and memory) are transformative in correlation to both personal and collective perspectives and experience. The Indigenous artists who make up this exhibition portray their perspectives of place through their works, using the medium of art as a powerful descriptor of the multi-layered and transformative spirit of place.

Museums have always been a germinating ground for misrepresentation, the history of which is long and extensively covered (Bal 1996; Barringer 1998; Cole 1985; Duffek 1987; McLoughlin 1999; McMaster 1996; Townsend 2004). Chapter one of this thesis examines these histories in relationship to the current practices of curatorial practitioners in urban Vancouver, analyzing positions of power in association to spatial constructions and manipulations of the museum/art gallery space.<sup>2</sup> The analysis of space as an outcome of socio-cultural experience also comes into play here, especially in terms of how we engage and experience public spaces, such as the art gallery and museum. The misconception that space functions as an inert universal container is challenged by Edward Casey's (1997) reasoning that space and time are created within place and local knowledge. It is therefore the relational qualities of place that produce our ontologies of being, including our conceptualizations of 'space' (Casey 1997). According to

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<sup>2</sup> By 'curatorial practitioner' I mean those public museum and gallery staff who take on the role of producing an exhibition. Specifically, I am speaking about curators in both public museums and art galleries who attempt to make some comment on the cultural characteristics of a given community, nation, or group. I have chosen to focus on curatorial practitioners because of their role in the mediation and translation of cultural knowledge. Although for the most part I am referring to public museums and galleries, commercial galleries are not necessarily excluded, as they too serve to create identities of culture that are presented to a public audience. In the thesis, I make note of the specifics when referring to commercial galleries.

prominent philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1974), spaces (built environments such as architectural space) are to be perceived as active environments that transform in direct correspondence to the dwelling bodies that inhabit them. Therefore, the construction of exhibition spaces by curators speaks directly to processes of knowledge transfer and production. These arguments provide the theoretical backing for the central concept of this thesis, which aims to place the discussion of curatorial agency in the larger literary arenas of curatorial practice and anthropological theory.

Chapter two examines the ways in which our understandings of museum/gallery spaces are disrupted by curatorial endeavors in British Columbia, particularly in Vancouver. The separation between the defined spaces of the art gallery and the anthropology museum will be examined in relation to recent curatorial projects that aim to disrupt these boundaries between disciplines through the integration of Indigenous perspectives. Through interviews with three prominent Vancouver curators, Dr. Sharon Fortney, Karen Duffek, and Dr. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, I address questions of the changing spaces of exhibits that aim to represent cultural aspects of the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast. For instance, how has the space of the museum changed to increasingly reflect the opinions and perspectives of the peoples being represented? How have the displays, didactic panels, videos, performances, and images changed? The role collaboration between Indigenous artists and curators has played in the creation of new exhibits is extremely significant to this discussion as it provides a gateway into an increased awareness of cultural differences and shared knowledge. The contradictions of boundaries are particularly important in the exploration of curatorial collaboration and agency in three ways: (1) the erosion of bounded definitions and categories of contemporary versus traditional; (2) the use

geographical boundaries to determine cultural exhibition models; and, (3) the ways in which sensorial boundaries are being challenged by way of an increased concern for the phenomenology of perception and cultural knowledge.

The curatorial aims and tactics discussed in chapter two direct my own exhibition project, which is discussed in chapter three. As such, chapter three focuses on the exhibition of serigraphs from the Smyth and Rickard Collections of Northwest Coast Print Collection that include works by artists Francis Dick, Maynard Johnny Jr., Edward Joe, Stan Greene, Floyd Joseph, Tim Paul and Joe David. This exhibition, *Understanding Place in Culture*, will be exhibited at the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery at the McPherson Centre Library. The exhibit looks at the artists' perspectives and representations of place and its meaning, resonance or essence for them in their art practice and in the pieces in the exhibition. Place, in the context of this thesis and the exhibition includes both physical and intangible constructions of meaningful locations. In this context, Casey (1997) and Lefebvre's (1974) articulations of space relate more substantially to architectural constructions or organized spaces (buildings, schools, libraries, museums, galleries). The meanings attached or inherent within architectural spaces are largely dependant on the cultural dwelling and use of those spaces. The more subtle and complex definition of place refers to the artists' renditions of places (particular mountains, rivers, valleys, etc.) that are of significant value. The physical places represented in the artists' images are constructed out of a phenomenological experience of that place, which can be experienced both physically and conceptually. In relation to these expressions, intangible or ephemeral connections refer either to a memory of place or an individual's conceptualization of himself or

herself as attached to a particular place. An example of this could be emphasized as one's attachment to a certain practice (fishing, whaling, storytelling) that takes place within certain spaces (the longhouse, the cultural centre, etc.) and places (on rivers or the sea, etc.). My conversations with three artists (Francis Dick, Maynard Johnny Jr. and Edward Joe) are continually called upon in order to address questions of space and place as discussed in chapters one and two. In chapter three, I also create a critical framework for thinking about the serigraphs chosen for exhibition, analyzing their roles as both access points for cross-cultural engagement and deflection points for the protection of sacred cultural knowledge.

The concluding chapter attempts to resolve questions/problems that arose in my curatorial project with information from the critical debates surrounding museology and negotiations of space. In order to truly understand and make use of the critical ideas surrounding contemporary exhibitions, I must attempt to exercise them in my own practice. I consider the limits and successes of the project from my perspective as a facilitator of curatorial agency and dialogical engagement. Here, curatorial agency is utilized as a productive force in analyzing the potential contemporary art exhibits have to engage in our current socio-political environment. The use of anthropological methods of engagement, such as collaborative practice, an emphasis on socio-cultural contexts, and phenomenology of perception are central to this discussion.

The exchange of meanings between people, spaces and objects ties us to a shifting and unfixed cogitation of organized space and its relationship to knowledge production. An increased awareness of these relationships is essential to a greater understanding of the purpose of museum and gallery practices of representations and the transformation of their corresponding values.

## CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND PROBLEMS IN REPRESENTATION

### *The Politics of Space*

The museum is a conceptually, socially, and physically charged space. The knowledge transmitted in museum spaces reflects fluctuating power dynamics between those who are exhibiting, those who are being exhibited, and the audience; simultaneously manifesting the assumptions and conventions of the dominant society at large (Ames 1986; Brown and Peers 2003; Clifford 1988, 1997; Jessup and Bagg 2002; Mauzé 2003; McLoughlin 1999; Phillips 2005; Weil 1990). If museums continue only to pursue modes of display that promote the dominant views of culture, such as an emphasis on visual points of access, they will not be able to speak sufficiently to the needs of those being represented.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, curatorial endeavors, as I shall discuss later, that attempt to destabilize the imbalance of power that is perpetuated through constructed spaces of exhibition, such as galleries and museums.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Visual points of access refer to sites of engagement that privilege ‘sight’ as the central axis from which to exchange cultural information (i.e., images, pictures, dioramas). Exhibitions that privilege sight over the relational quality of the senses as sensorium, as I shall demonstrate later in the thesis, fall short of representing any phenomenological aspect of being, relying on conventional hegemonic forms of representation.

<sup>4</sup> The types of museums and galleries that I speak of here are located in urban centres that are accessible to the general public and have a large influx of visitors. These institutions are different from Indigenous museums, such as the U’Mista Cultural Centre or the Haida Heritage Centre, in that they are not run or directed by an Indigenous board or committee that constitutes the Indigenous communities represented. Public galleries in urban centres that represent the material culture of Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples often endeavor to represent many Nations at once, and through a variety of strategies. In some cases, as I will demonstrate in chapter 2, these strategies involve

I first examine the theory of space as a social construct, or space as a multi-textual field in which various ways of ‘being’ are reflected in its conceptualization.

In *The Production of Space* (1974), social theorist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre articulates the ways in which space is produced, and, in turn, produces subjects. Lefebvre privileges a simple-to-complex model of human social evolution made apparent in his articulation of the ‘primitive phases’ of humanity, in which we (humans) simply traverse over natural spaces with minimal social interaction (see Lefebvre 1974: 141–142). Despite the fact that he privileges such a model, his theories on the production of space are still useful in considering diverging ontologies of space.

Lefebvre (1974: 73, 83) conceives of the conditions of space as produced through both past and future actions, and, it is therefore a production in flux. It is a process or ‘set of relations between things,’ rather than a simple product, outcome, or neutral receptacle. This relates to Martin Heidegger’s (1971) concepts on the relationship between dwelling and building, in which we build in order to create locations, allowing for the connection between spaces, so as to pursue dwelling. Lefebvre (1974:94-95) explains that space does not work as an objective ‘frame’ or inert container but instead reflects the biases and conditions of the dominant society. That is, it morphs and transforms according to dominant values, and produces subjects in relation to its interrelationship with the privileged ontology. He makes a perceptive example of such interrelationships by noting the ways in which we measure space—such as inches or miles, perspective and so on—that are reflective of the dominant power or conceptual authority of those

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consultation with Indigenous community representatives over the accurate and sensitive display of their culture. This includes consultation over how the material is presented in the exhibition.

in control (Lefebvre 1974:11). In this way space is in fact produced, as Edward Casey (1997) argues, out of place. The local position of cultural knowledge produces the architectural spaces we inhabit, therefore embodying the local conventions, or 'habitus' to use Bourdieu's term, of the acting society (Casey 1997). Exhibitions in the colonial capitals of 'mother' countries, such as Britain, historically displayed confiscated cultural objects of colonized communities as examples of the 'primitivism' that was to be subdued, conquered, and surpassed (Breckenridge 1989:209; Classen and Howes 2006:208; Thomas 1991). Therefore, the museum space *was* fashioned in respect to Lefebvre's theory, to reflect the dominant ideologies of the period: the power and conquests of colonial forces.

Though space is socially constructed, it also produces its own subjects; as Lefebvre (1974) argues, living bodies are produced through interactions with architectural spaces. "The animating principle of such a body, its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it re-produces itself within those who *use* the space in question, in their lived experience" (Lefebvre 1974:137). The architectural space commands the activity of those who interact with it; their bodies are *produced* through interactions with space. In relation to museum spaces, we can think of the ways in which the body is both physically controlled by the museum space, and cerebrally controlled through the consumption of authenticated knowledge structures. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach (2004) have explored the ways in which bodies move through the gallery space, describing this movement as a kind of 'ritual' performance. In relation to physical control, Reesa Greenburg (1994:351) has noted how the exhibition space dictates movement, referring to the lack of seating in a gallery space as an

emphasis on the space as a place of work. The seating around the catalog section of an exhibit encourages one to sit and read, to consume the knowledge presented in the exhibition through a textual form (which is also a privileged source of knowledge). The barriers (e.g., barricades, railings, glass) created between people and objects also speak to this aspect of control, stifling any sort of physical interaction between the audience and the objects on display. Miles

Richardson (2003:75) talks about the social relationships to the settings of a space:

What people respond to in a setting are the overt messages that objects present through their appearance and arrangement and the more implicit theme that the setting in its totality conveys... in this, material settings resemble a series of semantic domains, domains which, as people literally enter them, provide a preliminary understanding of the interaction going on around them and, consequently, of the situation developing before them. (Richardson 2003:78)

In the spaces of Canadian public museums, the interactions between people, objects, and spaces are constructed and controlled through Western conceptualizations of knowledge production, such as the so-called 'objective gaze' (McLoughlin 1999:76–77). Libraries are excellent examples of spaces that, both physically and ideologically, reflect Enlightenment engagements with objective learning through observation and the acclamation of the written word. The written word has become a dominant authority in the designation of fact versus fiction.<sup>5</sup> Library organization reflects this dichotomy (i.e., fiction versus literature and non-fiction), and designates certain spaces within the library as spaces of 'fact' and therefore 'truth.' Lefebvre

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<sup>5</sup> We can think of the way documents have come to represent authority, such as treaty papers, court documents, etc. Written history is privileged over oral agreements and histories in our present day legal system. Julie Cruikshank's article *Invention of Anthropology in British Columbia Supreme Court: Oral Tradition as Evidence in Delgamuukw v. B.C.* (1992) is an extremely important article in relation to a court's decision to reject First Nations' oral histories as evidence in a land claim. As the law system is entrenched within European values, Indigenous communities are most often asked to shape their defense in terms of western ideologies, such as 'organized society' (Cruikshank 1992).

(1974:134) himself comments on the use of words as ‘weapons,’ explaining that the danger lies in the way they “assume the properties of things.” In connection to library systems, the museum functions similarly, in that one is encouraged to explore it as a representation of ‘reality,’ even though that representation is the product of a set of values imposed from the outside. Of course, the viewer is aware that the exhibits within the museum are *reproductions*: it is the fact that they are seen as *reproductions of the real* that can be problematic. Although we are encouraged to think of the museum in this way—as a set example of a fixed reality, a place in time (a kind of time machine)—Lefebvre’s (1974) and Casey’s (1997) ideas persuade one to think about such spaces as transformative in relation to the changing criteria of those in power and local contexts.

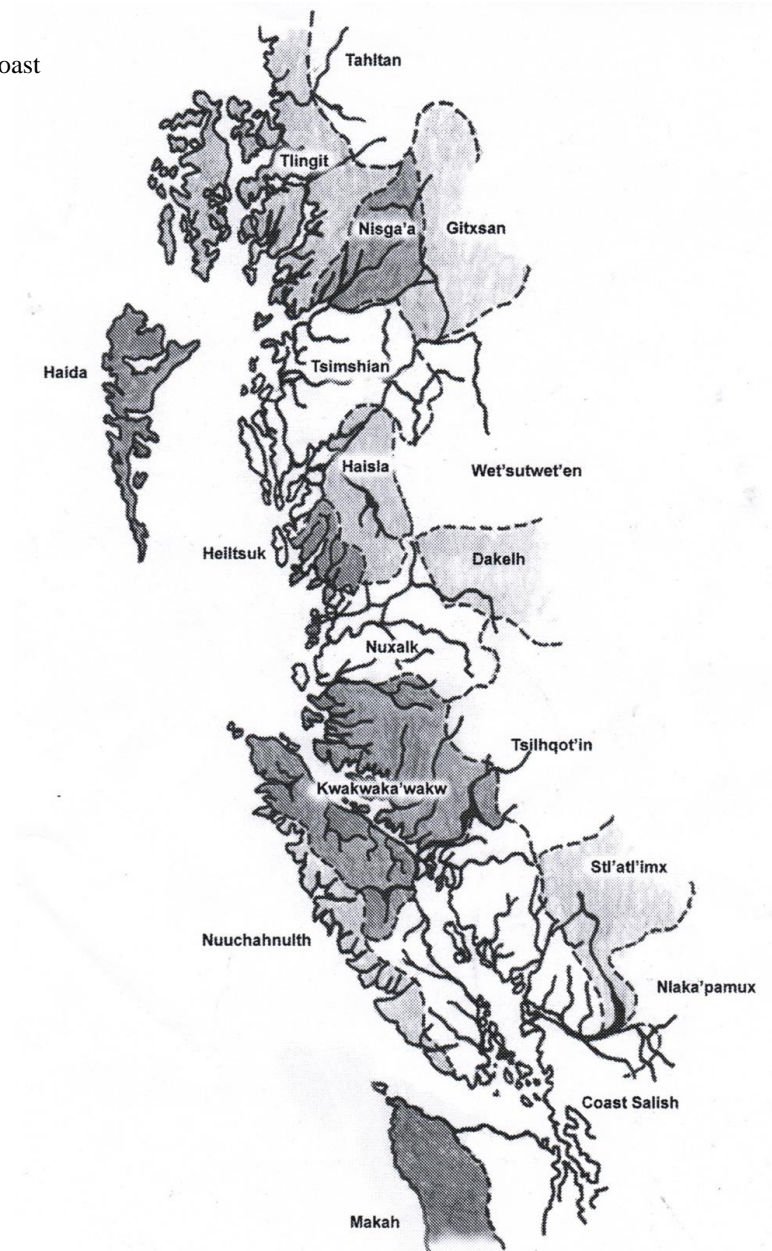
### ***Indigenous Space: The problem of boundaries***

Hegemonic ideologies encourage us to think about place as bordered and contained within concrete boundaries. Of course, peoples will always belong to particular places; however, the ways in which those boundaries become fixed as markers of identity vary widely between cultures and peoples. The process of ‘fixing’ a people to a single representation of space is exemplified in the construction of territorial maps.

The following map serves as an example: Figure 1 represents a map of the Northwest Coast (2012) that also attempts to represent cultures in relation to bounded geographical territories.

**Figure 1.1**

Map of the Northwest Coast  
Authors Own (2012)



This is not to say that many communities do not have secure boundaries that designate their home territories. What is at issue here is that when these representations are disseminated in order to authorize a particular designation of geographical space, such as in legal/ government documents, all those involved may not necessarily agree on that designation.<sup>6</sup> Territorial maps like the one featured above are represented in museums and galleries, and they attempt to secure specific images of cultural relationships to place, the same way legal documents in the court system do (Thom 2009). Beyond gallery walls, research has shown that these geographic borders are in no way fixed or secure.<sup>7</sup> In 2003, Nancy Munn's research in Australia explored the ways in which Australian Aboriginal spatial taboos are produced and transformed through embodied interaction, challenging notions of fixed physical boundaries. Munn (2003: 93–95) explains that relationships to spaces can change and are constantly mobile in correlation to itinerant actors, and she compares this to Lefevbre's ideas about the duality of space through body and place. One of her examples on the mobility of spatial boundaries refers to the regulations surrounding motor travel in the northern territories west of Alice Springs. For Indigenous peoples in these spaces, trucks carrying people involved in certain ritual performances must always move ahead

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<sup>6</sup> Such discrepancies over geographical boundaries are prolific in treaty negotiations in terms of comprehensive land claims and overlapping claims by multiple First Nations. An example of such overlapping claims can be found in the case of *Cook v. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation* in 2007, in which the Semiahmoo First Nation, Tsawout First Nation, Tsartlip First Nation, and the Pauquachin First Nation attempted to prohibit the signing of the Tsawwassen First Nations Final Agreement until sufficient consultation over overlapping land claims was completed.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Thom's *The Paradox of Boundaries in Coast Salish Territories* (2009) lays out the complexities of negotiating land claims and treaty agreements that are based on relational Indigenous epistemologies. Thom argues that the firm borderlines represented in the statement of intent maps of treaty negotiations speak to a non-Native view of territory. At this point in time, these maps are essential to the state-relegated land claims process, creating palpable territorial boundaries around shared spaces. As Thom explains, these territorial cartographies do not speak to the permeable boundaries that are active in regards to the kinship ties and resource sharing between Coast Salish communities.

of everyone else, and this shapes the boundaries of authoritative space both ahead and behind them as they travel (Munn 2003:99). Therefore, sites of power can be mobile as they continually interact with particular subjects, and, as Michael Harkin (2000) has established, these sites are, in fact, subjects themselves.

In his article *Sacred Places, Scarred Spaces* (2000) Harkin establishes how both Heiltsuk and Nuu-chah-nulth landscape phenomenologies connect the past and present through landscape forms. Practices of dwelling, that is, the ways in which we live in space, involve constant interrelationships among people and places that denote past actions and present conditions (Basso 1996; Harkin 2000). As Harkin suggests, the signs embedded within the landscape may serve as representations of moral values or historical markers. He compares the relationship between ancestors and the land with Munn's work with Australian Aboriginal peoples, explaining that the interactions between ancestors and the land continue to affect present-day communities (see also Colleen Boyd 2006 and Cruikshank 2002).

Harkin and Munn's contextualization of past actors functioning in the present compares to Tim Ingold's (2000) relational model that addresses the ways in which Indigenous ancestors continue to effect and nurture those in the present. In Ingold's (2000:141–151) account, it is not only the ancestors who are implicated in the process of nurturing those in the present; rather, it is the whole system of interactions between beings in a given space that give way to what he calls 'progeneration.' It is through these nurturing interactions—between humans, plants, animals, ancestors, etc.—that knowledge is created and transformed; cultural knowledge is the outcome of 'lived experience' (Ingold 2000:145).

Ingold's phenomenological concern for a perceptual ontology of being is operative in Casey's (1997) theorizing of local knowledge. The ongoing knowing and sensing of place is productive of cultural knowledge and identity, continuously creating the corporeal subject (Casey 1997:17–19). Culture, according to Casey, is embedded within perception, which is inextricable from place. It is embodied knowledge that makes us who we are, that contextualizes how we relate to and construct the world around us (Casey 1997).

In her Coast Salish ethnography, Crisca Bierwert (1999) discusses the role of transformation stories in contemporary Stó:lō understandings of landmarks and sites of power. In one example, she notes Sweetie Malloway's account of a dangerous Indian doctor who was transformed into a rock near her fishing site by transformers. The rock's place in the middle of the river makes it a dangerous space to access; therefore the agency of the doctor is an inherent power of the site. Bierwert (1999:55) explains:

The Transformer stories as a genre suggest a way of reading the landscape from the physical ground out, telling of events that led to a present where beings are physically incorporated into the landscape. The idea that lives here is quite different from that of a metaphorically inscribed signifier found in an intellectualized landscape. The story of the medicine man may seem like an anthropomorphizing of natural dangers. Within the terms of the story, the process of analogy is reversed; the narrative is one of naturalizing a medicine man's danger.

In Bierwert's analysis, what ethnographers would traditionally consider 'a metaphorical translation of place' is actually the bond between embodied cultural knowledge and the perception of place. The agency of places and beings anchors Julie Cruikshank's hypothesis in *Do Glaciers Listen: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (2005). In her text, Cruikshank (2005) posits that what researchers, such as anthropologists, think of as

natural entities (glaciers), are for many Indigenous communities sentient beings whose physical histories are entwined within the social histories of the local people who experience them. Western attempts to simplify cultural difference in terms of metaphoric analogies are not sufficient in order to understand the active and sentient roles these places and beings play in the creation of local Indigenous knowledge. As brokers of cultural representation, ethnographers and curators cannot risk attributing these complex relationships between physical and conceptual worlds as mere metaphor. Rather, in attempting to understand these places as real sites of power, as sites connecting ancestors to present realities, we must try and come to terms with cultural difference (Bierwert 1999). Conditions of difference are important vehicles for creating cross-cultural understandings, especially in terms of museum and gallery exhibits.

### ***Inalienable Landscapes: Visual Representation of Place***

In relation to the capacity for objects to take on aspects of the lived landscape, Munn (2003:101) has studied the way that Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara paintings that represent topographical landscape features are reproduced in order to mobilize these places from their fixed location for a time. Keith Basso (1996) notes the ways in which people use culturally mediated images in order to convey senses of dwelling. The individual and collective experiences with specific places that are mediated through the production of images was a prevalent topic in the discussions I had with the artists for the *Understanding Place in Culture*

exhibition. I discuss these conversations in detail in chapter three. In such representations of place, aspects of the experience of Indigenous spaces are transferred to objects like serigraphic prints. Therefore, the serigraphs themselves become representative sites of knowledge in which the embodied experience of the artist is both encapsulated and expressed.<sup>8</sup> This process challenges Western epistemological concepts of what a reproduction may mean, or the art gallery/ museum's ability to alienate cultural objects from their cultural contexts. The subtle and everlasting connections between the artists' cultural knowledge and their representations of place are indicative of inalienable notions of belonging, calling into question hegemonic structures that privilege solitary notions of ownership (see Noble 2009).

In order to connect these thoughts to the social construction of the museum, we must look at the ways in which certain values work to *produce* the spaces in museums. These spaces reflect the hegemonic ideologies of the collectors and curators and their views of culture through a practice of attempted alienation.<sup>9</sup> Collection and exhibition strategies often embody aspects of control and conquest (Breckenridge 1989:209; Classen and Howes 2006:208), which are founded on alienating people from their material property. The confiscation of ceremonial objects from

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Ingold (2000:22–24) provides an interesting account of the ways in which art, specifically music, gives “form to human feeling.” This idea is particularly important in the context of this thesis in that sound is represented *as* knowledge. Representing the mode of expression (sound, image, etc.) as representative of knowledge is the key to understanding the serigraphs in the exhibition *as* knowledge. These ideas will be explored in more depth in the third chapter.

<sup>9</sup> In many cases (but not all), collectors are often not descended from the cultures they endeavor to collect. In my experience working in commercial galleries, private collectors who are members of the public are often those of a particular class within dominant Canadian and European society, who possess both the financial means and ‘education’ to participate in collection activities. The same can be said of the locations of power in society from which curators in both commercial and public galleries operate. Both collectors and curators are well versed in the popularity of current artists and are imminent in the distribution of ‘taste’ in relation to their ongoing patronage and exhibition of particular artists, works and styles.

Indigenous communities through the potlatch ban is a definite example of this process.<sup>10</sup> Objects either taken by force or collected by settlers and colonial officials in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were transferred to institutions, such as publicly funded federal and provincial museums, under colonial authority. The knowledge surrounding those objects was then translated through a colonial lens of conquest and display, transmitted to the viewer by way of didactic information and images of ‘successful’ colonization (Breckenridge 1989). Such museological processes serve to cultivate viewer engagement, and aims to control the production of knowledge over the values of a given society or culture. Engagement with displays/exhibition driven by or rooted within colonial agendas and ideologies positions the viewer to be in a position of assumed control in which they may reproduce and redistribute knowledge presented in the exhibition (see Feldman 2006; Breckenridge 1989:211).<sup>11</sup> Such a process of knowledge transfer indicates how spaces work to create viewing subjects: viewers are given a position of ‘control’ through their gaze, and this affords them a status of knowledge consumption. This consumption of value proves to be dangerous when the knowledge being absorbed is situated in outsider perspectives to those of the culture represented in the exhibition, especially if those perspectives condone ideologies of colonial conquest. Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson (1986: 260–

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<sup>10</sup> The Potlatch Ban inaugurated by the Canadian government through the Indian Act sought to ban Indigenous communities from practicing their ceremonies and feasts. Gloria Cranmer-Webster (1990), formerly chief curator at the U’Mista Cultural Centre, has a detailed report on the confiscation of ceremonial objects that corresponds to the bust on her father’s, Dan Cranmer, potlatch in 1921. Many of the objects confiscated from Dan Cranmer’s potlatch ended up in museums all over North America and the UK. Cranmer-Webster and the Kwakwaka’wakw community have worked extremely hard over the years to get these objects back and their endeavors have resulted in the repatriation of many of these pieces back to their respective communities.

<sup>11</sup> As Breckenridge (1989) notes, the term ‘cultured’ is not a new one. It references ones repertoire of knowledge, what they ‘know’ about the world. If the viewer is an active agent in this process they then have the ability to pass that knowledge on to others through a reproductive process.

261) note that these processes are not only activated through a simple visit to the museum, but are operative in our understandings and conceptualizations of what museums and their exhibits *mean*; specifically—representations of past and present cultural ‘realities.’ Such claims of authority dictate the legitimacy of representations of Others’ ‘realities’ (Gable and Handler 2003:376). Objects represented in a museum space are socially empowered through their careful placement and organizational structure within the exhibition itself (Duffek and Townsend-Gault 2004). An emphasis on these sites as ultimate re-producers of ‘reality’ is a testament to the dependency of the so-called ‘modern’ world on visual representations, rather than lived experience (Fortney 2009:39).<sup>12</sup>

As many scholars have explored, the production of scientific knowledge is largely bound up in ideas of truth production (Haraway 1988; Hinsley 1981: 87; Lutz 2007; Stepan 1993; Stocking 1987). The efforts of museum or world exhibitions to construct exhibition-based ‘realities’ of places in time rely on an assumption that the scientific, academic, and state support of these institutions and exhibits are situated in ‘objective fact’ (Haraway 1989; McLoughlin 1999; Stocking 1987; Thomas 1991). In Canada, state (both federal and provincial bodies) prerogatives have been the impetus for the creation of many of our national and provincial museums (Gillam 2001; Key 1973; Mackenzie 2009). Therefore, state ideology is called upon as the authority on the so-called exhibited ‘realities’ of peoples and places in time (see

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<sup>12</sup> Melanie Townsend (2004) makes some interesting insights into the relationship between collecting and the consumerist drive of collecting. Townsend (2004:18) points out that the onslaught of the Industrial Revolution and the uprising of consumerism through a capitalist mentality fueled the ‘compulsive collecting’ of new and exotic goods. The commodification of these goods comes about through their entrance into the public realm, influencing mainstream tastes, values, and donor benevolence (Townsend 2004:18).

Breckenridge 1989).<sup>13</sup> For example, in the 1800's, the intermixing and hybrid identities (both settler and Indigenous) that were forming in the small local communities along the coast of British Columbia were not the identities exhibited in museums or manifested in Canadian government legislation and policy (Perry 2001; Raibmon 2000). An emphasis on colonial concocted realities of isolated and ancient Indigenous communities works to instill a sense of separation between local colonial communities and global systems, and between cosmology and history (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992), obscuring any sense of relational quality between those doing the viewing and the representations being viewed. Historically, didactic panels in Indigenous exhibits have tended to authenticate outsider perspectives on the ways in which particular practices (e.g., fishing, hunting, pottery, etc.) were done at particular points in time (chronologically) and place (geographically), thereby drawing lines around the authenticity of a particular practice or method which extend to concepts of a designated cultural space or territory. This temporal disassociation with the contemporary present overlooks the continued presence of these cultural practices in the everyday lives of Indigenous communities. At the same time, the 'authentication' of historical practice can distance current practice into a realm of in-authenticity, assimilation, or contamination (see Clifford 1988; Fabian 1983; Crosby 1991).

Lefebvre's concept of socially constructed space links to the discussion here of museum spaces and curatorial practice in the following ways: (1) The museum space is specifically constructed in order to reflect particular values and produce subjects who in turn embody those

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<sup>13</sup> In Canada the impetus for many of our national and provincial museums was in the creation of institutions that capitalized on the rich natural resources of the nation; Indigenous populations were included under this banner (Cole 1985; Gillam 2001; Key 1973; Mackenzie 2009; McLoughlin 1999).

values through interactions with the space. Curatorial decisions in the physical and conceptual constructions of museum/gallery spaces speak to these power dynamics. (2) Because space is created through present interactions and past experiences, there are many differences in the ways different peoples and communities construct, define, and interact with space. (3) Language and dwelling are connected through the use of space and place: our interactions within certain spaces and places determines who we are as people and cannot be alienated from our life experiences. These are powerful notions because they frame the ways in which we may change the museum space as a colonial authority. If institutions and their curators can transform their authority on representation through improved consultation and collaborative approaches with Indigenous communities and individuals, they can challenge the imbalance in power and create further explorations of intercultural and inter-relational understanding.

The view of the museum as a colonial institution is changing; collaborative exhibition projects in Canada are moving in new directions to challenge conventional perceptions of the museum as a monolithic colonial entity. The cultural representations found in museums today encourage (in some cases) a new or more thorough incorporation and relationship with Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and cultural experience, in order to cultivate a deeper *respect* for cultural difference. Respecting the fact that different peoples have different ways of organizing the world around them is not the same as simply acknowledging that these perspectives exist (Ogden 2007). Respecting cultural difference involves listening and accepting Indigenous perspectives, making those perspectives the priority of exhibition projects, and putting them into practice within the very constructs of the exhibition.

In the following portion of this chapter, I discuss the transformation of museums from spaces where Indigenous cultures have been represented in exhibitions through the eyes and actions of curators alone, to museums and galleries that use exhibitions as a platform or space for cultural exchange, where it is assumed many voices are heard, including those of the artists and their communities.

### ***Problems in Representation***

The problems of cultural representation in museums represent a long and unpleasant history. With the onset of World Fairs during the late 1880s and early 1900s, Indigenous peoples and their cultures were part of exhibitions that sought to represent the success of colonialism through the accumulation of different forms of wealth and domination of peoples.<sup>14</sup> Taxonomic and temporal categories of difference form an epistemological basis for anthropology (see Fabian 1983 and Wolf 1982), informing the museological practices of present curators. However, museums are not fixed objects, and they are not mere extensions of a monolithic colonial superstructure. Rather, they are complex institutions that reflect the ongoing entanglements between transforming contexts and definitions of the colonized/colonizer (Borsa 2004; Comaroff

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<sup>14</sup> There is a vast amount of material on the exhibition of Kwakwaka'wakw peoples at World Fairs. Douglas Cole's text, *Captured Heritage* (1985) covers, some of the event, while Paige Raibmon's article *Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and the Chicago World's Fair* (2000) examines the colonial environment leading up to the event and the Kwakwaka'wakw's utilization of the Chicago exhibit as world stage in which to protest against the colonialist strategies of the Canadian government. There is also considerable historical document on the event itself (Johnson 1897; World's Columbia Exhibition Chicago III, 1894).

and Comaroff 1992; Silliman 2009; Stoler 1989; Thomas 1994). Recognizing the history of these institutions is important if we are to understand how certain ideologies are privileged over others. An awareness of the changing values of museums over time offers an optimistic view in their ability to transform in new directions towards a deeper respect of Indigenous views and perspectives on representation. My focus on Vancouver museums and galleries is aimed at understanding recent challenges to traditional curatorship around Indigenous art, and it is *how* these changes are occurring that I find most pertinent to building an understanding of the best practices.

### *Visual Descriptors of Difference*

Processes of ‘civilizing’ were the key impetuses of early exhibitions of empire, promoting the intellectual cultivation of both spectator and ‘primitive specimen’ (Cole 1985: 126; Barringer 1998; Breckenridge 1989; Watts 2009:778). Early exhibition strategies of cultural representation served as technologies from which taxonomic and temporal categories could emerge in relation to one another. The Columbian Exhibition, also known as the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, stands as a good example of these ideological impulses. This particular exhibition stressed the spectacle of Franz Boas’ ‘life-groups,’ which attempted to exhibit Kwakwaka’wakw communities in their ‘own habitations,’ demonstrating daily rituals and tasks: their *dwelling* (Cole 1985:123–126; Raibmon 2000). Such productions are artificial

constructions, couched in a colonial gaze of the exotic, reflecting the larger simulacra of image producers like Edward Curtis, Paul Kane, and Langdon Kihn (see Dawn 2006; Reid 1988; Sweet and Berry 2002). A visual emphasis on notions of difference, through reconstructions of dwellings or ceremonial practices, serves to emphasize a conceptually constructed separation between those viewing (i.e., ‘self’—the present, the society, the civilized) and those being viewed (i.e., ‘other’—the past, the primitive, the uncivilized). Cultural reproductions like this were aimed at creating ‘objective’ experiences, even though such expressions were deeply embedded in empirically situated knowledge systems of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ (McLoughlin 1999). These objective constructions are representative of the exhibited ‘realities’ that I refer to in the previous pages, a ‘factual’ representation or reality that illustrates colonialist views rather than localized experience.

Scientific ‘objectivity’ served as a source model for the collection and representation of objects. The curator’s role in such a process was to remove the object from its social or Indigenous context, to ‘purify’ it within the museum display (Turgeon 1997:19–20). In these cases, the viewer is positioned to view emblematic objectifications of culture, through both the objects and the organization of the exhibits themselves (Breckenridge 1989; Thomas 1991). The visual component of museum practice is highly representative of an emphasis on objectivism. A focus on visual sensation forms the basis of museological practice in relation to cultural representation (Classen and Howes 2006; Feldman 2006; Ouzman 2006). Although museums have not always singularly emphasized the visual, this came to be the primary feature of exhibitions, stimulating a distinction between the sophisticated sense of sight and the lower

senses of touch and smell (Classen and Howes 2006). ‘Civilizing’ objects into fixed visual forms reflects a Western appropriation of Indigenous objects into a Eurocentric epistemology, privileging sight in correspondence to the rational mind and the objective observer (see Haraway 1988; Classen and Howes 2006). This objectivity is a chimera; rather, the objects and displays are characteristic of ‘contact points’ in which aspects of ideological exchange are constantly in progress (see Feldman 2006). Concepts of objectivity are always situated in the perceiver’s ontological biases (Haraway 1988; Fortney 2009). In the case of museum practitioners, these biases are not simply located in imperialist views, but emerge in relation to the specific historical periods and local entanglements of particular contexts.

An example of such historically dependent situations would be the West Coast Exhibition at the National Gallery in 1927. This exhibit has been contextualized by a number of authors and one of its aims was to include Pacific Northwest Coast art into the genre of ‘Canadian Art,’ in order to promote contemplation of its aesthetic values (Dawn 2006; Moray 2001; Nemiroff 1992: 416; Whitelaw 2006). By placing various objects produced by Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast (the names of individual artists were not listed) alongside the work of Canadian artists, such as Emily Carr, these works were positioned in a new discourse of assimilation and outside values.<sup>15</sup> As Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Karen Duffek (2004:13) have noted, placing such objects into a category of art “only expands on an external set values and significance....” Applying hegemonic values, such as the notion of ‘high Art’, is similar to the processes of

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<sup>15</sup> The Aboriginal works in this exhibition were placed in relation to a particular geographic location, which was attached to a specific culture. This is similar to the boundary-making we see in the geo/territorial maps mentioned earlier.

legalizing geographic boundaries mentioned earlier in the chapter. The application of external values that privilege hegemonic ideas of ownership and autonomy negate the complex inalienable connections Indigenous peoples may have to both objects and spaces. This is not a conversation that remains in the past, as it continues today through exhibits that further misrepresent and appropriate cultural expressions through designations of ‘high Art’ (for a critique of this practice see Ҕi-Ҕe-in in Townsend-Gault 2000).

It has been argued so far in this thesis that museums transmit the values and priorities of the state through their exhibitions. Although a curator in a public gallery or museum attempts to maintain control over the given messages of an exhibition, those messages must give way to the priorities of the institution (mandate), dominant society (donors), and the state (funding, policy, and legislation) to ensure the exhibition of its existence. The very *positioning* of objects in an exhibition by a curator—where they are on the wall, how much text is provided, the lighting—all have meaning, which is entwined within the power dynamics between the curator, artist, institution, and state (Ferguson 1994).

There are changes now occurring in museums and art galleries that challenge the conventional framing of Indigenous objects, images, and ideas by way of hegemonic ideologies (such as sight, geographic area, and historic-contemporary timelines). In Canada the exhibitions *Land, Spirit, Power* (National Gallery of Canada) and *Indigena* (Canadian Museum of Civilization) in 1992 sparked a change in the museum industry that criticized normalized European views on the display of Indigenous cultural heritage (Walsh 2002). Since then, exhibition spaces in Canada have been transforming into conversation spaces of respect for a

diverse cultural heritage that address Indigenous concepts of space, place and cultural expression. Many of these changes are the products of a more balanced and communicative relationship between institutions, curators, artists, and Indigenous communities. Major changes in institutions are not necessarily the outcome of forced decisions, but rather consequences of a combination of events and changes in conditions (Nemrioff 1992:433). As is discussed in the next chapter, the fundamental changes in museum/gallery pragmatics have a palpable impact on the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, especially in an exhibition's ability to convey complex expressions of cultural difference.

The importance of engaging with cultural difference is an essential aspect of cross-cultural exhibits today. The curatorial work of with three prominent Vancouver curators—Dr. Sharon Fortney, Dr. Charlotte-Townsend-Gault and Karen Duffek—explore these tensions in engaging in cultural difference and representation. Sharon Fortney (2009:43) explains that museums and other such spaces are today taking an increased multi-vocal approach to their exhibitions, in which multiple voices and histories are made palpable, especially those of the local Indigenous community. Collaborative practice serves as a strategy to make cultural difference known (Fortney 2009:57), and, in learning about difference through converging and diverging perspectives, comes closer to breaking down the wall in cross-cultural understanding (Townsend-Gault 2000:210; Duffek 1987:66). Charlotte Townsend-Gault has explained that increased Indigenous participation in the expression of Indigenous knowledge better facilitates Indigenous communities “to determine the limits of disclosure and cultural trespassing...”(2004a:230). Examples of this kind of disclosure and expression of Indigenous

knowledge comes through in both Townsend-Gault's curatorial project with Ron Hamilton (ᑕᑖ-ᑕᑖ-in) —*Backstory:Nuu-chah-nulth Ceremonial Curtains and the work of ᑕᑖ-ᑕᑖ-in* 2010 (Belkin Art Gallery at UBC)—and Karen Duffek's project with Peter Morin—*Peter Morin's Museum* 2011 (Satellite Gallery, Vancouver BC)—which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter two.

Importantly, differences in the expression or organization of knowledge through oral histories and storytelling can be realized through the incorporation of Indigenous representations of space and place into the framework of the curatorial project. The organization of exhibition spaces and what counts as knowledge in the museum is changing in relation to these practices. Indigenous peoples on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia conceptualize and organize space in many different ways, and these ontologies differ greatly from the way the state tends to organize space (see ᑕᑖ-ᑕᑖ-in in Townsend-Gault 2000: 226, 229; Thom 2009; Townsend-Gault 2011: 41)<sup>16</sup>. The organization of cultural knowledge is inherently linked to concepts of belonging and relationships to space and place (West 1998:11). The hegemonic or conventional framing of cultural representations by curators is therefore not fully capable of capturing the complexity inherent within diverging and converging Indigenous perspectives. As artist Joe David (with Duffek 2000:358) has explained, “Culture is the way you *live*. Culture is a way of life.”

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<sup>16</sup> As I pointed out earlier in the chapter, the state tends to organize space in terms of bordered categorizes. For example, in many provincial museums such as the Royal British Columbia Museum, a timeline of pre-contact/post-contact, historic/contemporary is often used to organize Indigenous exhibits, emphasizing Western notions of ‘cultural contamination’ and the ‘primitive.’ If Indigenous perspectives are utilized in the planning of an exhibit, new avenues emerge from which to explore exhibit arrangements that correspond to Indigenous ways of organizing knowledge, such as storytelling and oral histories (to name only a few).

The curatorial projects I focus on in the next chapter seriously consider Indigenous perspectives on the organization of knowledge in relation to space and cultural exchange. These exhibits rely on the creation of new understandings between people, especially in terms of a relationship to place. As a concept and a reality, we all understand space differently (Harkin 2000; Townsend-Gault 1998: 43). Creating new understandings often involves the use of multiple languages (Indigenous and English) that, through their juxtaposition, demonstrate a variety of positions of one's place in time and space (Nicolson 2005:4). Curators are increasingly placing a focus on sensorial tactics (sound, smell, touch), moving beyond the privileged visual sites of exchange, opening the possibilities for intercultural exchange to occur on a phenomenological level (Townsend-Gault 2011).

By default, curators are agents in the transmission of cultural knowledge. As mediators in the process of cultural expression, curators are responsible for creating accurate and sensitive exhibits that speak to the needs and desires of the represented community. The level of exchange between community and curator is constantly transforming, reflecting the fluctuating power dynamics at hand. By bringing Indigenous perspectives into the exhibition space, community members have the power to decide how, and in what way, they would like to be seen and understood. Instead of constructing museum and gallery exhibits purely on the basis of hegemonic prerogatives, the integration of Indigenous concepts of space and the organization of knowledge can, and does, reshape the public's view of Indigenous peoples. Contemporary exhibits that aim to emphasize an Indigenous perspective often use Indigenous expressions of oral histories, storytelling, concepts of space and place, and language as the basis of the

exhibition framework. All of these expressions are tied to one another in a complex web of cultural knowledge and experience that can only be found in the local communities to which they belong. The next chapter examines steps made by curators in the last couple years in Vancouver that reflect these major changes in representation. The curators implement these changes through the integration of Indigenous perspectives, and acknowledging the different ways knowledge is organized in space.

## CHAPTER 2: CURRENT PRACTICE AND IDEAS

The ways in which dominant/historical uses of space are disrupted through shifting boundaries of taxonomic representations is essential to examine if we are to understand how a gallery-going public deciphers museum space. Shifting definitions of what designates social or cultural space, have been critical to the refiguring of museum space, and our experiences within it via exhibitions. Curators working in public museums and galleries have utilized a number of methods to re-think the space of the gallery, including collaborative consultation with Indigenous community members on how and if they wish to be represented.

I have chosen to focus on five recent exhibitions in the urban centre of Vancouver that deal specifically with three different topics:

(1) *Collaboration with Indigenous communities*. In this analysis I focus on exhibitions about the current trends of exhibitions in Vancouver since the 2010 Olympics and take the exhibition *S'abadeb: the Gifts* (2008 SAM and 2010 RBCM) as a case study of an exhibition that attempted to showcase the material culture and oral traditions of Coast Salish communities. The curatorial staff for the *S'abadeb* exhibit publicly emphasized the collaborative aspect of the exhibition, thereby influencing the ways curators working with Indigenous communities today engage in, and broadcast their collaborative processes. Part of the objective in this chapter is to analyze how exhibitions

showcasing Indigenous art in Vancouver galleries today are engaged in collaborative action with Indigenous communities.

*(2) The problematizing of geographical and cultural boundaries, i.e., issues arising from the setting up and breaking down of boundaries between the institutions of the art gallery and anthropology museum.* Art and anthropology institutions have historically created fundamentally different representations of culture in the form of exhibitions. Both institutions have historically created exhibitions in relation to different concepts of what makes art and what makes an artifact. Such separations have been relentlessly critiqued and challenged (Duffek 1987, 2000; Martin 2002; McLoughlin 1999; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Townsend-Gault 2000), and today it is evident that the divide between these disciplines is weakening. However, as my discussions with Karen Duffek and Charlotte Townsend-Gault revealed, regardless of the challenge to hegemonic forces a definite distinction between the art gallery and museum still exists today, especially in terms of the constrained notion of ‘Northwest Coast art.’

*(3) Sensorial exhibits that emphasize an Indigenous experience of space and place.* The third portion of this chapter reviews the ways in which sensorial exhibits (those that emphasize a relationship between the senses—that is sound, touch, smell, experience) can produce an understanding of cultural difference and engagement through the experience of Indigenous spaces. The ways in which phenomenological anthropology can assist in the destabilization of hegemonic constructions of the ethnographic subject are central to this discussion. How we frame Indigenous art within the institutions of the

museum and art gallery is very important to understand in order to unpack specific issues of cultural representation and the distribution of cultural knowledge.

Designations of art—contemporary, modern, Indigenous, or historical, for example—have been historically tied to specific criteria that designate what it is they represent and how they are understood by the public. These designations stem from the same historical contexts of objectivism and ideology that I discussed in the previous chapter. Our ideas of space and place are entangled within those designations, especially when art is attached to a particular spatial designation or people, e.g., the art of Africa, art of the Northwest Coast, etc. In these examples, art is tied to a particular geographic location entrenched within a colonial logic that tends to overlook the complex web of exchange that goes along with cross-cultural interaction and contemporary use. Furthermore, due to the particular political environment here in British Columbia, where title to Indigenous territories is largely unextinguished, public and contentious (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011; Townsend-Gault 2004), geographic boundaries are increasingly entrenched into our classifications of difference and constructions of space. Territorial designations are important to cultural representations in exhibitions because they are attached to our conceptualization of space *outside* of the museum and art gallery. If Indigenous concepts of space and place are brought to the fore in contemporary exhibitions, the public may begin to understand why it is that certain places (i.e., natural resources such as lakes, rivers, mountains, etc.) are so essential to particular Indigenous life-ways, thereby encouraging a greater appreciation for Indigenous uses of land. Indigenous concepts of space, place and knowledge can

also assist the public in understanding that Indigenous perspectives are not static or tied to one particular place; rather, they are fluid and transformative, corresponding to the contemporary issues of the moment.

Collaborative action between museums, curators, and Indigenous communities is an essential strategy in dismantling colonial ideologies and restructuring cultural representation. Collaborative action involves consulting with Indigenous community members, especially Elders, on what is appropriate to display, what is not appropriate to display, how the exhibit should be organized, what the underlying message should be and how the exhibit can speak directly to the needs of the community. Dismantling dominant colonial ideologies includes breaking down the public's perception of the contemporary/historical dichotomy of the arts. If culture is to be argued as a process in flux, then we must understand material culture in a similar fashion, as a continuum of cultural exchange.

### ***Collaboration***

Collaboration is a complex term; it can mean many different things, especially in terms of curatorial practice. Similar to anthropological methods of engagement like ethnography, curatorial practice endeavors to accurately and sensitively portray cultural practices and traditions. Anthropologist Luke Lassiter has extensively researched collaborative processes, and his work is an important indicator of the level of commitment it takes to create a true

collaborative work of ethnography. Lassiter (2005) looks at collaboration as a process in which the consultants are involved from the project's initial conception to the very writing of the text, thereby making the ethnography a more valuable project to the community. The ways in which anthropologists have conventionally arranged and expressed knowledge, and the audiences they consciously or unconsciously address in their ethnographies, speak to the particular power dynamics in the politics of representation, where the ethnographer is often placed above and the informant below (Lassiter 2005:4–5). However, as Lassiter (2005:4) points out, some ethnographers today are challenging these hierarchies, and are moving into a position of 'writing alongside natives.' True collaboration entails the creation of ethnographic projects that both begin and end within the parameters delegated by the consultants, positioning consultants side-by-side with the ethnographer in a position of co-authorship (Lassiter 2005). The collaborative exchanges pointed out by Lassiter can, and do, function in the museum/gallery context, through the continual involvement of the community in every step of the curatorial process.

Many public anthropological museums have taken action to integrate collaborative processes into their core initiatives; this includes recognizing Indigenous perspectives and desires as the principal concern for any exhibit. One such example is the Memorandum of Understanding between the Museum of Anthropology at UBC (MOA) and the Musqueam First Nation.<sup>17</sup> Public art galleries and art museums operate within a very different framework than

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<sup>17</sup> Sharon Fortney provides a detailed account on the history of the MOA's relationship with Musqueam Nation in her PhD dissertation *Forging New Partnerships: Coast Salish Communities and Museums* (2009). The relationship between the Musqueam and the museum grew during the eighties and nineties, with the Musqueam School (a month long program for Musqueam Weavers) in 2000, which continues today (Fortney 2009:156–164). Fortney

that of university-run museums such as the MOA. The idea of ‘art’ as an autonomous subject forms an epistemological basis for this differentiation. Revered for its originality and break from the past, art takes on the enigma of the avant-garde and contemporary, bound by its aesthetics (Krauss 1981). Ideas of autonomy and aesthetics can distance a work of art from its social context, alienating a work from any significance it may have for a particular community.<sup>18</sup> Collaborative practices can, and do, work to dismantle this cultural distancing, and indeed, the MOA has demonstrated this in many of their contemporary art exhibitions.<sup>19</sup> The process of collaboration involves constantly shifting interpretations of values, negotiations of space, and cultural experience. When culturally sensitive material is represented, Indigenous community members need to be involved in every step of the process, from the conceptualization of exhibit goals and themes, to final publications and installations.

Sharon Fortney, a free-lance non-status First Nations curator in Vancouver, is one practitioner who aims to include consultation at every level of her practice. Fortney’s (2009) recent research on the intricacies of collaborative processes has provided valuable insights into the process of a collaborative curatorial practice. As a non-status member of the Klahoose community, Fortney first and foremost defines her curatorial practice as listening to the desires of Indigenous community members, thereby establishing guidelines and protocols that help her

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(2009:164–169) explains that this partnership has greatly increased over the last few years to include a multitude of museum programs that directly involve Musqueam, such as collections management and youth internships.

<sup>18</sup> If a work of art is solely recognized for its aesthetic values, the social values of that piece may be lost. The social aspects of a piece are often responsible for the aesthetic choices made by the creators; therefore obscuring the social context of any given work of art negates a full analysis of both its formal attributes and contextual framework.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Duffek’s *Border Zones* Exhibit at the MOA is a definite example of the blurring of boundaries between ideas of the universal and the cultural specific. This particular exhibit is discussed in more detail in the second section of this chapter.

form the basis from which she may translate cultural knowledge through an exhibition (Fortney, in interview, July 16, 2011). Fortney is very much aware of the limits and benefits of collaborative practice within museum programs and exhibitions. In our interview, she explained:

Because I work with Coast Salish communities, and I have Klahoose ancestry, I am sometimes positioned differently than a non-native curator. However, I never lose sight of the fact that I am not a member of the community I am working with and that my job is to help them share their stories, not frame them through my own experience. [Fortney in interview, July 16, 2011]

She notes (in interview, July 16, 2011), that even though she tries to separate her experience from the process, that experience is always ‘entwined’ in the final product of an exhibit. Such recognition of the exhibition process positions it as a ‘non-objective space,’ a space of constantly evolving discourses between multiple subjects. Fortney is also critical of museum institutions that preach of collaborative efforts but at the same time are unwilling to relinquish their control over exhibit outcomes. In both her doctoral dissertation *Forging New Partnerships* (2009), and our interview, she used the *S’Abadeb: the Gifts* (2008) exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) as example of this power struggle.<sup>20</sup>

Fortney is critical of the collaborative processes between Coast Salish communities and the SAM in the creation of the exhibit *S’Abadeb* (2008). Although the curator and staff at the SAM publicized the exhibit as a new move in the direction of collaborative museum practice, Fortney expressed that she and other Coast Salish community members actually had very little input in terms of the final product of the exhibition (in interview, July 16, 2011). She specifically

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that, although the collaborative limitations of the *S’Abadeb* exhibit are something that the curators and exhibits mentioned in this thesis attempt to counteract, the scale of the *S’Abadeb* exhibit was much larger than those exhibits that I focus on in the following pages. The massive scale of this project is sure to have impacted the ways in which the curatorial process progressed and developed.

notes that the consultants had wanted to approach the exhibit through a framework of oral traditions (2009:58). However, in the end, these oral traditions were relegated as an addition to the western-tied storyline of pre-contact-contact-contemporary chronology (Fortney 2009:58–59). The limited consultation process resulted in an exhibit that positioned the consultants as respondents to the desires of the curatorial staff and institution, instead of responding to and representing the needs of the community (Fortney 2009:59). Fortney’s experience is reflected in her writing and comments, where she explains that there is still a substantial incapacity for museums to relinquish full control of exhibition creation to their informants, who are in fact the experts on their own history (in interview, July 16, 2011; Fortney 2009).

Challenges around the control over exhibition creation can be addressed through the appointment of a co-curator from the community in order to establish important boundaries within the exhibition (Fortney in interview, July 16th, 2011). This was the case for both Fortney’s exhibit *Entwined Histories* (2011) and Charlotte Townsend-Gault’s *Backstory* (2010) exhibition.

*Entwined Histories* was an exhibit at the North Vancouver Museum from January 5, 2011 to November 6, 2011, curated by Sharon Fortney and Damara Jacobs of the Squamish Nation. The exhibit showcased the collection of Maisie Hurley, a First Nations activist and the founder and editor of the “Native Voice” newspaper (North Vancouver Museum 2011). Fortney (2011: 12) notes that the emphasis for this exhibition was the concept of gift-giving, as many of the objects in the collection were gifts from local Indigenous community members to Maisie Hurley herself. In their collaboration, Fortney and Jacobs had decided to exhibit a replica *sxweyxyway*

mask from the Squamish community, the showing of which is highly contested by community members (see Roy 2002:84). In our interview Fortney noted the following:

We featured the Squamish pieces most prominently because they were partners for the exhibit (and the museum), but also because their proximity made research into those pieces much easier. There were objects from northern communities and the Plains, which we just didn't have the funds to research in depth through community consultation. Another important factor was that Maisie had a special relationship with the Squamish community and wrote down specific makers for some of the pieces. We tried to use photographs of artists and gift givers as much as possible to show the people behind the objects—the family relationships and the friendships... For *Entwined Histories* I worked closely with Damara Jacobs of the Squamish Nation for the last 5 months of the exhibit and then on school programs afterwards. On this project we were co-curators ... On some matters, I deferred to Damara—specifically when it came to discussing the exhibition of the mask, which was later removed from the exhibition. This was because Damara is a member of a mask family, and a descendent of August Jack Khatsahlano (the maker). This was a conscious choice on my part. At a later time in the process, the community specifically asked that any inquiries regarding the exhibition of the mask be directed to their media department, and that was the protocol put in place and respected by all involved in the project. [Fortney in interview, July 16, 2011]

Not only did this exhibit speak to cross-cultural understanding by means of an emphasis on the reciprocal nature of gift-giving, but because of the widespread media coverage on the issues of the mask, it also emphasized the collaborative process between the museum, the curators, and the community.<sup>21</sup> This example relates to Crisca Bierwert's (1999:76) analysis that cross-cultural collaborations of knowledge exchange, work both to communicate ancestral knowledge, while simultaneously engaging with contemporary socio-political issues. By focusing on community members as the experts on their own culture and protocols, the exhibit and the curators were

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<sup>21</sup> In an unpublished research project, I examined the media coverage over the display of *sxweyxcway* mask in the *Entwined Histories* exhibit. The extensive media coverage of the removal of the mask and community concerns highlighted public awareness of the changing dynamics of museum authority, and the importance of Indigenous voice. Also, this coverage commented on the role the curators played in collaborative processes, bringing curatorial roles to the forefront of the discussion rather than delegating them to the behind-the-scenes action they are accustomed to. The North Vancouver Museum and Archives has a number of links to this coverage on their website.

making a clear political statement as to the position of authority on the transfer and representation of Squamish cultural knowledge and conduct.

This process of cultural exchange in curatorial practice relates to Charlotte Townsend-Gault's *Backstory* exhibition with Ron Hamilton, ƛi-ƛe-in, at the Belkin Art Gallery. Curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault has a long-established friendship with Nuuchahnulth artist ƛi-ƛe-in, and their conversations often stress both the protection and distribution of certain kinds of cultural knowledge (Townsend-Gault 2000). The recent exhibit *Backstory: Nuuchahnulth Ceremonial Curtains and the Work of ƛi-ƛe-in* (2010) at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at UBC focused on *thliitsapilthim*, or ceremonial curtains, painted by ƛi-ƛe-in and the curtain histories. During the symposium for the exhibition special guests from the Nuuchahnulth community, such as Naasƛuu-isaƛs, Shaunee Casavant Chief Councilor of the Hupacasath First Nation, ƛa'wehtuu-is, Chief Benson Nookemis of the ƛuu-eyat-h Nation, and Chuuchƛamaltnii (ƛi-ƛe-in), came to talk about the *thliitsapilthim* and their family histories. Townsend-Gault (in interview, July 11, 2011) explained to me that through this exhibition she was attempting to find a different way of getting at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationship. She explained that the cultural components of the exhibit were to be explained by the Nuuchahnulth representatives, while she focused on the 'art' aspects. Townsend-Gault expressed (in interview, July 11, 2011) that her position did not go unchallenged, as some were baffled by her 'art speak,' expecting a more ethnographic approach by the curator. However, Townsend-Gault emphasized (in interview, July 12, 2011) the importance of privileging 'Nuuchahnulth blocking devices' established by family members to protect certain knowledge. As the Nuuchahnulth

representatives worked as the ‘ethnographers’ in this project, they could make the decisions of what was shared, and what was not shared in terms of the histories of the *thliitsapilthim* and Nuuchahnulth knowledge. The role of “cultural blocking devices” will be elaborated on more in the next chapter in relation to serigraphs; however, important to this discussion is the collaborative process demonstrated by Townsend-Gault and ƛi-ƛe-in in order to find a way of ‘cutting across’ the tension of the appropriate sharing of knowledge; that is, which information can be learned by anyone, and which cannot (or should not) be transmitted to non-Indigenous, or non-Nuuchahnulth, audiences (Townsend-Gault in interview, July 12, 2011). Townsend-Gault has explored this tension in much of her work (2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2010, 2011). Museums and galleries can work towards creating a greater public awareness of cultural difference, and respect for the protection of certain knowledge, by acknowledging and representing Indigenous community members as the ultimate authorities on the translation and publicizing of their ancestral knowledge.

Positive collaborative processes are not restricted to the above examples. Both Sharon Fortney (2009) and Jonathan Clapperton (2010) provide thorough coverage of such practices over the last 30 years, especially in terms of the MOA.<sup>22</sup> Karen Duffek (in interview July 14, 2011) spoke to me regarding the ongoing discussion about the ways objects in the MOA’s collection are displayed through renovated visible storage. She noted one particular instance

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<sup>22</sup> In her PhD dissertation, Sharon Fortney (2009) extensively covers Coast Salish exhibitions over the last 30 years; this includes exhibits in both the United States and Canada. Her research also covers the role collaboration has played in these exhibits and how it has changed over time. Jonathan Clapperton’s article *Contested Spaces, Shared Places: The Museum of Anthropology at UBC, aboriginal peoples and postcolonial criticism* (2010) covers the collaborative practice of the MOA since the mid to late 1980’s.

where a mask was wrapped in gray blanket and exhibited on a platform by Mikael Willie from Kingcome Inlet.<sup>23</sup> This strategy, Duffek explained (in interview, July 14, 2011), was a good example of the tensions between displaying and not displaying sacred historical objects and the debate within the community itself over how these representations should be made.<sup>24</sup> Lee-Ann Martin (2002:52) has noted how curatorial collaborations help “enhance the knowledge and expertise required for the project,” while at the same time strengthening relationships between Indigenous communities and institutions. These insights into collaborative practice have helped shape my own practice and are addressed in the exhibition component of this thesis, the success and limitations of which will be examined in the later chapters. Importantly, ideas about collaboration between Indigenous communities and curators have radically shifted curatorial practice into a more culturally aware position. Rather than working as isolated representatives of cultures other than their own, curators are operating as cultural mediators and collaborators. By mediating I mean a form of translation, one that posits Indigenous knowledge in conversation with the dominant society’s experiences of belonging. Creating points of access is a central tenant of this mediation, for example, the creation of visual points of access (i.e., didactic panels or videos that are used to describe Indigenous oral histories, orthographies, language translations, etc.) and sensorial access points (sounds, smells, textures, etc.). Visitors who come to see the

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<sup>23</sup> A similar installation was in place at *The Down From the Shimmering Sky* Exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1998, curated by Peter MacNair and Robert Joseph. This installation spoke to similar issues over representation and the accessibility of certain cultural objects.

<sup>24</sup> Duffek (in interview, July, 14, 2011) noted that Willie wrapped the mask as a statement to the visitors of the museum that conveyed the authority of his people over their own representations. Willie was claiming his right to decide what of his material history was appropriate to show and what was not. He was also making a strong statement that the debate over what should and what should not be represented is active within his own community as well (Duffek letter to author, 16 August 2012). The display of the mask positioned the MOA staff as active participants in this dialogue of authority and representation.

exhibit are operating on an assumption that they are going to learn something, but in order for them to learn they need access to the ideas and perspectives that are being represented. Whether the conversation between Indigenous community members and the exhibition space is abrupt, harsh or even smooth, what matters is the visibility of the conversation in the exhibition. Collaborative action acts as a key tool in this conversation and can work to break down the taken-for-granted separations placed between institutions, disciplines, practices and people. There also exists the possibility that collaborative methodologies may work to reinforce these disciplinary and institutional distinctions. It is to this latter point that I now turn.

### ***Breaking Down and Setting Up Boundaries***

Many anthropologists and curators speak about the need to dismantle boundaries between the institutions of art galleries and anthropology museums (Ames 1999; Duffek 1987, 2004; McLoughlin 1999; Philips and Steiner 1999). Yet in reality, this is a difficult task. Despite the critical discourse surrounding the disciplines of art and anthropology, certain objects such as rattles, masks, drums, etc. are generally not shown in art galleries while others, such as paintings, photographs and serigraphs tend not to be shown in the main/permanent exhibits of anthropology museums. These conventional systems of categorization are distinctions MOA curator Karen Duffek is adamantly working to disrupt. In the commercial markets involved with the sale or promotion of the bounded entity of 'Northwest Coast art,' there is a higher value placed on the

visual aspects of the work rather than a deep-seated analysis of its socio-cultural contexts (Duffek 2004:73).<sup>25</sup> Duffek aims to counter this discrepancy in her curatorial practice, placing social issues and a concern for Indigenous perspectives at the forefront of her projects.

Duffek explains (in interview, July 14, 2011), that art galleries are often viewed as spaces of neutral ground and artistic freedom, while anthropology museums are perceived of as something different—a notion she believes not necessarily to be true. Although often seen as separate spaces, both museums and art galleries catalogue according to a predetermined set of taxonomic designations: style, period, artist, culture, medium, location and origin. The anthropology museum is widely criticized for this, alienating contemporary cultural expressions and fixing them in time and space (Kramer 2006:50–52). The art gallery however is not as commonly critiqued for this kind of cataloguing and is often viewed as a neutral space (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). The art gallery functions as an authority on what defines ‘contemporary’ and ‘historical’ artworks. The word ‘contemporary’ is very limiting, explains Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011), because it creates boundaries on the basis of visual prerogatives rather than cultural and social significance. She uses the example of a contemporary ‘traditional’ Kwakwaka’wakw Hamatsa mask stating the following:

We don’t think of that mask as being a really contemporary object of contemporary cultural practice. What it has is very much an aspect of contemporary expression, like it’s about the moment we live in right now... I tend to consider it a contemporary thing. I consider it a kind of challenge to figure out a way of being inclusive of that type of work within contemporary art shows...”

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<sup>25</sup> Commercial art galleries that sell ‘Northwest Coast art’ often attribute cultural differences in regards to aesthetics. The formation of eyes or other facial features, for example, would be one way to distinguish Coast Salish artwork from Kwakwaka’wakw. This is not to say that these differences are not present, but rather, that the deep cultural logistics for depicting a figure in such a way are absent from the discourse.

Duffek's statement designates the public art gallery as a space in which particular messages are framed around objects that places them within a distinct visual trajectory of contemporary art.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault experienced similar challenges in her plan to speak about the works in *Backstory*. Townsend-Gault focused on a contemporary arts-based discourse, while her colleagues in art history thought an ethnographic approach would be more appropriate (Townsend-Gault in interview, July 11, 2011). When historical objects such as the *thliitsapilthim* are placed into a public art gallery context, they are often talked about in relation to their historical ethnographic significance (relegating them back to the space of the anthropological museum), a method from which to associate them with the past rather than the present. There are also contemporary artworks that do not fit into the contemporary visual trajectory of form and experimentation; therefore, they are not often incorporated into public exhibitions of contemporary art, as evident between the contemporary conceptual works and those that are seen as 'traditional'. Dunne-Za artist Brian Jungen's *Cetology* is a sculpture of a whale composed of a number of lawn chairs, expressing a contemporary form, which, at first, may not be attributed to the visual trajectory of 'traditional' artwork. 'Namgis/ Mamlilikala artist Kevin Cranmer's *Crooked Beak Hamatsa Mask* (fig. 2) on the other hand is overtly expressive of Northwest Coast design conventions, which are often labeled as 'traditional.' Although Cranmer's design is certainly contemporary—and indeed he often creates masks that are used by the 'Namgis community today—it is still labeled as 'traditional.' It is these so-called 'traditional' objects that Duffek is referring to in her critique, contemporary work of 'traditional' form but contemporary

content, the lot of which is not commonly seen in large exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art.

**Figure 2.1**

Crooked-Beak Hamatsa Mask  
By Kevin Daniel Cranmer  
Courtesy of Coastal Peoples Fine Arts Gallery



The placement of objects into new spaces of meaning does not necessarily detract or degenerate their value. Jennifer Kramer, a museum anthropologist at UBC, talks about how the display of Nuxalk objects in non-Nuxalk venues contributes to their meaning, adding value to the work and helping to form contemporary Nuxalk identity (2006:101–103). It is important for Nuxalk work to be seen at non-Nuxalk venues because it is through these venues that Indigenous authority and control can be observed and demonstrated to a non-Nuxalk audience (Kramer 2006:96).

However, Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) explains that it would take a total reconsideration of how we construct the boundaries of ‘contemporary’ work in order to have artworks that reflect traditional or culturally repetitive visual or formal aspects (such as a ‘traditional’ looking mask, rattle, drum, etc.) included in contemporary exhibits. Such reconsiderations would make apparent the important cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences, bringing to light the necessity for community consultation in contemporary curatorial practice and the significant topical socio-political contexts that are imbedded within all art objects.

Confronting difference is an important marker of cross-cultural exchange, opening avenues for inter-cultural dialogue and respect. Sharon Fortney explained (in interview, July 16, 2011) how Skwxwú7mesh Snichim, the Squamish language, was used in the *Entwined Histories* exhibit. She said visitors were shocked to see the language in written form because Indigenous communities are so often perceived to be primarily oral cultures (Fortney in interview, July 16, 2011). Fortney (in interview, July 16, 2011) states: “I think when visitors confront things beyond their expectations, they gain a greater awareness of cultural difference and begin to perceive what they don’t know.” In these instances, it is apparent that while some boundaries should be

broken, or rather re-thought, others need to be emphasized and made visible. For example, the boundaries of contemporary art need to be expanded in order to include differentiating designations of formal attributes (aesthetic), while at the same time incorporating contemporary socio-political contexts. Alternatively, boundaries on the accessibility of cultural knowledge need to be secured and established by Indigenous representatives—especially by Elders—in order to protect private cultural knowledge that is essential to cultural continuation and practice. If viewers are permitted to view these points of contention—by observing Indigenous language at work, or relationships to place (Thom’s radical cartography)—viewers may be encouraged to see Indigenous knowledge as a contemporary force, active within today’s turbulent socio-political environment.

*Peter Morin’s Museum* (2011), an exhibit curated by Karen Duffek in collaboration with Peter Morin at the Satellite Gallery in downtown Vancouver, included performances and installations that worked towards alternative conceptions of the museum space. In this exhibit, Peter Morin created his own museum, a Tahltan place of knowledge and practice, a museum that transformed over the two-month duration of the exhibition. In the exhibition catalogue Duffek elucidates the following:

*Peter Morin’s Museum* is built on the assumption that ‘museum’ is also a Tahltan idea—and that the indigenous concept be a structure that supports the practice of Tahltan knowledge, whether on land or in urban, “Western-located” spaces... These objects are not only contained *within* the museum, but through the process of their gathering, dreaming, making, using, and even re-location may be understood to *be* a kind of museum. [Duffek in Morin 2011: 10–12]

The catalogue for the exhibition includes a short manifesto written by Morin that outlines the ideology of his museum and the objects included within it. Line 20 of that text states, “[t]he objects are philosophy. The objects are organized structures which support the transfer of Tahltan knowledge. You have to read the objects in order to understand Tahltan history” (Morin 2011:17). This statement underlines the prospect that objects are inalienable structures, essential in the transmission of cultural knowledge and heritage.

Performances throughout the installation of *Peter Morin’s Museum* spoke to the idea that Tahltan knowledge is being created everyday (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). Duffek gives an account of one particular transformation of the gallery space through a performance that was given during the exhibition. The performance was centered on a group of Peter Morin’s family photographs. These small-sized photographs were displayed in one section of the gallery on the wall, and were wrapped in red fabric. Everyday one of the photographs would be unwrapped and the red cloth was left on the ground. When all the photographs were unwrapped, Morin’s mother came in and did a curatorial talk on the photographs. The framed photographs were re-ordered on the floor, in the same sequence in which Morin’s mother spoke about them. Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) explains that the curatorial lecture emphasized Morin’s mother as the expert on this particular history, integrating her perspectives as the curatorial authority on the meaning of each photograph. The organized placement of the framed photos on the ground created a visual map of her knowledge, a kind of cataloging that related directly to Morin’s mother’s processing and transmission of cultural knowledge (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). In contrast to the conventional cataloguing and organization of cultural objects (by date, time, photographer,

location, etc.), the direct conversation between Morin's mother's talk and the placement of the small framed family photographs connected these objects directly with the cultural knowledge that they were associated with.<sup>26</sup> As a performance piece used to demonstrate the significance of Indigenous perspectives and the organization of knowledge, I find this piece extremely successful. As a curatorial lecturer, Morin's mother controls the meaning of those photographs, manipulating the traditional power dynamics of the informant/curator dichotomy. As a strategy, this performance puts into play the collaborative conversations that are necessary in order to create increased cross-cultural engagement in the gallery space.

Art is therefore a medium through which Indigenous perspectives can be communicated (Morin 2011:13). Exhibitions like *Peter Morin's Museum* and Sonny Assu's recent exhibit *Longing* (2011), curated by Petra Watson at the West Vancouver Museum, demonstrate the way artists are challenging boundaries between art and anthropological discourses, and how these discourses are transferred into exhibitions. Assu's exhibition featured a group of wood off-cuts from a log cabin company located on leased WeiWaiKum reserve land in Campbell River.<sup>27</sup> These off-cuts, Assu (2011) explains, resemble the initial chainsaw cuts of masks. The off-cuts were exhibited in the gallery on traditional museum mask stands. A collaborative photography project between Assu and Eric Deis was a part of the exhibition. Deis took three photographs of a performance project by Assu, in which one of these 'would-be' masks was placed in what the

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<sup>26</sup> The catalog of this exhibit is available online on the Gallery's website:  
<http://www.moa.ubc.ca/pdf/sourcebooks/Peter-Morin.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> In the artist statements accompanying the exhibit, Assu (2011) explains that the wood product amalgamated here goes off to be constructed into luxury log cabins for wealthy Europeans, instead of being used by his community on the WeiWaiKum reserve. By setting these off-cuts up as masks, Assu is allowing the wood to speak to its inner *longing* to be something indicative of the WeiWaiKum community.

pair described as the ‘three eyes of authority,’” which were: (1) the anthropological museum (the Assu’s mask amongst Kwakwaka’wakw objects at the MOA); (2) the commercial art gallery (the same Assu mask amongst ‘traditional’ looking Northwest Coast objects); and, (3) the tourist shop (the same Assu mask amongst a variety of commodity objects, such as Northwest Coast mugs, scarves, umbrellas, etc.) (Deis and Assu, didactic panel, *Longing* 2011). The placement of these masks in these locations/contexts raises the same questions Duffek speaks about in her curatorial practice regarding disciplinary and cultural boundaries. Although Assu’s artwork is exhibited in many contemporary art shows, this particular project calls into question the placement of contemporary Indigenous art across different contexts and the way it is visually consumed/understood by different audiences. Petra Watson (2011), the curator of the show, explains that the fluid position of the mask raises questions of authority on who or what is considered Indigenous and authentic. The spaces in which the masks were placed and photographed are constructive spaces that frame, and even produce, meaning for the objects and their contexts. By using the same unconventional mask in these three locations, Assu is challenging the designations of ‘authentic artworks’ attached to these particular spaces, or at least disturbing the visual trajectory associated with what is deemed to be authentic/traditional Native Northwest Coast art. Both Morin and Assu’s exhibits challenge conventional museum approaches to cultural representation, shifting Indigenous perspectives of value into the centre of their practices.

Boundaries between disciplines or institutions are not the only concerns in curatorial considerations such as Duffek’s; geographic boundaries are also a substantial issue. Duffek (in

interview, July 14, 2011) notes that because of the current political environment in British Columbia today (i.e., treaty negotiations and land claims), territorial and geographic boundaries are very important. Indigenous artists and communities voice their concern that care should be given by curators in the depiction of territorial boundaries (including those in dispute) if such graphics or descriptions are part of museum exhibitions (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). Professor Brian Thom at the University of Victoria works closely with Coast Salish communities to record the names of places and the histories of boundary negotiations. Thom (2009) has explained that the boundaries depicted in geographical and territorial mapping often represent the state's concept of the cultural group's territory. State representations often overlook a phenomenological understanding of the use of land, neglecting significant descriptions of usage that often include extended kinship relations and resource sharing (Thom 2009). As I explained in chapter one, Canadian museum protocols are often linked to state control and dominance, and this linkage informs a geographic-culture model of exhibiting Indigenous material culture.<sup>28</sup> Concerns about incorrect boundary placement between First Nations territories remains a significant issue. Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) explains that even though curators question the fixing of geographic boundaries in relation to ideas about permeable borders, they are still aware that territorial guidelines are important to the current political discourses happening outside the museum. She explains that, to some communities, it is very important that

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<sup>28</sup> In terms of the geographic-culture model, I am referring to Franz Boas' development of an exhibition model, which came into use in the 1880s. Boas' model came as a reaction to Otis Mason's exhibition strategy, which emphasized the superiority of cultures in relation to the sophistication of their material production. Boas' model supported the idea that cultural traits were attached to specific geographic locations; therefore museum representations of cultural groups were organized according to geographic area, very similar to how we see exhibits arranged today by area (e.g., Northwest Coast, Plains, Maritimes, etc.).

their culture be represented as a whole, with firm territories established, e.g., the Haida display clearly depicts only Haida perspectives, representations, and expressions (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the nuanced and complex exchanges between communities need to be carefully considered and multiple representatives must be consulted in order to create a framework that respects as many viewpoints as possible.<sup>30</sup> Although there are many exhibitions that celebrate ‘boundary breaking’ today Duffek (in interview, July 16, 2011) notes, there are some situations, like the treaty process, where you do not want boundaries broken, and so these articulations become very complex and challenging.

Museums need spaces (such as the MOA’s Audain Gallery, Multiversity Galleries, Great Hall, and museum programs) where questions concerning geographic and cultural boundaries can be raised (Duffek, in interview, July 14, 2011). Relationships to land are points from which the complexities of certain subjects, such as cultural difference, can be worked out. This involves concepts of dwelling and being-in-the world that cannot easily be translated from one culture to the next (see Casey 1997; Harkin 2000; Ingold 2000; Nicolson 2005; Townsend-Gault 2011).<sup>31</sup> However, curators and artists may prompt a greater sense of engagement with difference in the

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<sup>29</sup> Duffek (letter to author, 16 August 2012) clarified the role of geographic boundaries in the following statement: “the point with the treaty process is that the process of boundary fixing is FORCING the construction of a rigid sense of boundaries as opposed to a flexible, and probably more historically accurate, one (because people moved across territories and intermarried, moved communities, etc).”

<sup>30</sup> As another example, in my consultation with the artists for my own exhibition (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), the artists did not seem to mind that they would be included in a exhibition with individuals from different nations along the coast of British Columbia. What was important to them in this case was that their collective/individual perspectives were represented in regards to their own work.

<sup>31</sup> I will return to this concept of dwelling and being-in-the world in chapter three in regards to my own exhibition project. One major aspect of my exhibition is to challenge the way in which we understand space and place through the utilization of different Indigenous perspectives on the significance of particular places and the knowledge attached to those places.

audience by creating windows of understanding through exhibition projects that speak directly to the fissures between ontologies (such as understandings of place and territory).

In terms of exhibits that speak to the concept of ‘borders,’ the exhibit *Border Zones* at the MOA curated by Duffek in 2010, focused on a broad theme of cross-cultural understanding of borders and boundaries. Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) explained that the inclusion of Northwest Coast artists in the exhibit related to broadening the definitions of the categories in which Northwest Coast art was understood and represented. By placing the work within global themes, such as how we deal with concepts of culture and cultural difference, Northwest Coast art can be understood as part of a global dialogue (Duffek, June 29, 2010 MOA Curators Blog). Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) noted Marianne Nicolson’s piece in this exhibit as a significant artwork that demonstrated the mediation of cultural knowledge, highlighting the ways in which museums siphon off certain modes of experience and knowledge. Nicolson’s piece, *Wanx’id: to hide, to be hidden* (fig. 3), was created from glass boxes that were blackened on the outside, with formline designs and personal photographs of her family etched on the inside. The only way to see the images was if one came up close and peered inside the boxes, prompting an active viewer engagement that goes beyond a passive glance. Nicolson’s piece asks one to look deeper, beyond the boundary of the blackened walls. The glass portion of the boxes metaphorically represents the mediated control of the museum, which physically restricts access to the knowledge that is housed within (Nicolson 2010). Nicolson’s piece demands that we, as viewers, play an active role in the process of learning, that we must continue to question the ways in which knowledge is framed and how the access to that knowledge is mediated and

controlled. Curator Karen Duffek also included work from other Indigenous and international artists, such as Edward Poitras, John Wynne, Ron Yunkaporta, Rosanna Raymond, Thamoatharampillai Shanaathanan, Laura Wee Láy Láq, Gu Xiong, Hayati Mokhtar, Dain Iskandar Said, Tania Mouraud and Prabakar Visvanath, whose work extended into global themes of access and boundaries.

### Figure 3.1

Marianne Nicolson

*Wanx'id: to hide, to be hidden*

Courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology, UBC

Photograph by Ken Meyer, 2010



Boundaries are important in order to signify and communicate culturally significant spaces, such as traditional territories and resources. To add to this paradox, academic discourses that use blanket terminology such ‘Northwest Coast art,’ ‘contemporary art,’ and even ‘Native art,’ obscure the significance of those culturally charged spaces and distance important cultural connections to the work. For example, I am aware of many commercial art galleries that would never sell certain contemporary Indigenous artwork simply because it does not fit into the rubric of ‘Northwest Coast art’ that they are promoting.<sup>32</sup> The Northwest Coast art market has created a bounded definition of what the work should look like and represent, leaving some Indigenous artists isolated, regardless of the cultural content of their work. The recent curatorial projects I have focused on in this chapter raise questions about these formal designations, while at the same time extending and reinforcing boundaries that serve to protect Indigenous knowledge and territorial rights.

To return to the earlier discussion about arrangements of space we can now rethink Lefebvre’s ideas around social space and the ways spaces are constructed and are constructive of socio-political power dynamics in the context of Indigenous art exhibitions. If spaces in the museum and the art gallery are changing to call into question hegemonic voices, then as the exhibition space transforms it in turn transforms the events, interactions, interpretations, conversations, and actions that occur in those spaces. It can even transform our very experience of that space and those experiences beyond it.

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<sup>32</sup> Working with a commercial art gallery I have often questioned why they do not carry certain contemporary artists, mostly getting the following responses: ‘it would never sell,’ ‘he has an attitude,’ ‘it’s not authentic’ or ‘it’s not Northwest Coast enough.’ All these descriptions point to the fact that there is a certain ‘idea’ of Northwest Coast art that aims to include and reject certain art forms and political commentary, regardless of their cultural content.

## *Sensorial Space*

An important aspect of curatorial practice in British Columbia is the consideration of how cultural experience is translated through museum exhibitions and spaces. The incorporation of the sensorial into an exhibition entails incorporating non-tangible aspects of knowledge into the exhibition process, such as sound, touch, sensation, etc. This relates to what Fortney has called a new desire expressed by the public to personally connect to an exhibit; people want personal encounters (meeting artists or curators or having personal connections to the work) in their experience of the show (Fortney in interview, July 16, 2011). Representations of cultural experience are valuable in producing cross-cultural engagements; recent moves in phenomenological anthropology uphold this theme.

Sarah Pink's (2009, 2011a) work on the potential of sensory ethnography is important to discussions of phenomenological perception and visual anthropology. As Pink (2011a: 268) explores: "Phenomenological anthropology appreciates the importance of human perception and experience and seeks to understand this as inextricable from the constitution of cultural categories and meanings." Cultural perceptions or experience cannot necessarily be limited to singular sensorial modes (such as sight); rather, our senses are interconnected in a complex web that frames how we understand and perceive the world around us and are dependant on specific cultural contexts (Howes 2008; Pink 2011a). Pink's theories on perception are largely influenced

by the work of Tim Ingold, especially his text *Perceptions of the Environment* (2000). Ingold (2000) holds that perceptions of the environment are constantly transforming in relation to reciprocal interactions with the land. Therefore, all modes of expression (images, sounds, memories) are active embodiments of generated experience, to which the senses are an essential part (Ingold 2000; Pink 2011a). The last portion of this chapter analyzes the ways in which phenomenological sensibilities have been applied to exhibition projects here in Vancouver.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault broadens the discussion of cultural experience through exhibition in her article *Not a museum but a cultural journey: Skwxwú7mesh political affect* (2011). Here Townsend-Gault discusses sites of engagement in cross-cultural relations that go beyond the conventional art exhibit, identifying the *Squamish Cultural Journey Project* on the Sea-to-Sky Highway as a fitting example. In this project, viewing stations and information huts were placed along the Sea-to-Sky highway to persuade passers by to stop and consider the space/territory through which they were driving. In her article, she explains that, “[t]he display modes now adopted are directed to spatial concerns, with the invitation *not so much to look at as to experience*, a direct phenomenology of Native space” (Townsend-Gault 2011:40, emphasis my own). Distinct from the art gallery, which often promotes a singular mode of sensory engagement (sight), the Squamish Cultural Journey Project encourages learning through phenomenological understanding—a multi-modal engagement with Indigenous space. Such a concern for spatial experience, says Townsend-Gault (2011:47), articulates a move away from art as depiction and into experience within real space. The Squamish Cultural Journey project emphasizes a notion of *being-in-place* that directly corresponds to Casey’s (1997) notion that the

perceiving of place is the stimulus for ontological thought, locating and creating our sense of being. The sharing of ‘Native space’ in the Squamish Cultural Journey project, visitors are positioned in order to perceive of—and engage with—Squamish cultural knowledge.

In the same article Townsend-Gault (2011:48) uses Musqueam artist Susan Point’s Salish Gateway or ‘portal’ installation (fig.4) at Stanley Park as an example about art works as statements of Indigenous concepts of space and their relationships with land. Susan Point’s portals mark the park as a Musqueam space, welcoming and at the same coercing the public to recognize the political and cultural significance of that space<sup>33</sup>.

#### **Figure 4.1**

##### **Salish Gateway**

Susan Point  
Authors Own Image



Another example Townsend-Gault uses in her article *Struggles in Aboriginality* (2004a) involves Marianne Nicolson’s *Cliff Painting* piece in Kingcome Inlet, where a relationship to place is

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Point’s Salish Gateway installation at Stanley Park makes an important comment on the recognition of not only Coast Salish space, but on Indigenous ownership and belonging. Originally, when the park was constructed in the 1880’s it caused the displacement of a number of Coast Salish communities from the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Wauthuth Nations. Later, in 1922, a series of totem poles from non-Coast Salish communities were erected in what is now known as ‘Totem Park.’ For the Coast Salish, the installation of the Northern poles completely disrespected and disregarded their claim and right to the parkland. Point’s installation not only challenged the idea that all Indigenous communities on the coast of BC can be represented by totem poles (a monument not traditionally constructed by Coast Salish peoples), but also constructed a visible claim to the space that was unjustly taken from her community in the years past (Fortney 2009: 218–219).

demonstrated at the same time as manifesting a particular experience of ‘Native space’ and embodied knowledge (Townsend-Gault 2004a: 234). Nicolson’s pictograph painting of an origin myth within a copper design stands as an important marker of her people’s right and relationship to the territory of Kingcome Inlet. In her book *Two Wolves at the Dawn of Time* (2004), Judith Williams extensively covers the process of the Nicolson’s cliff painting; she also provides the reader with a detailed record of pictographs in the area and subject matter. Williams’s (2004) text encourages one to understand Nicolson’s painting as an ongoing cultural practice that takes place within a Kwakwaka’wakw space, representing an immensely powerful connection between the cultural expressions of her community and their homeland. The experience of ‘Native space’ therefore must communicate—on multiple levels: historical, sensorial, metaphysical—a sense that cultural knowledge, or experience, is in everyway entangled within the very space in which it occurs. These phenomenological attachments to land are manifest in Ingold’s (2000:148) statement that, “Memories may be forged with words, and artifacts with tools; both, however, are the fruits of a certain way of living on the land.” Townsend-Gault (in interview, July 11, 2012) noted that it is not really possible to convey this kind of phenomenological engagement in a museum or gallery setting, but she did say that many curators today are at least attempting to. If notions on the experience of space can be shared between people, then they can convey important lessons on differences of ontology or concepts of being. For the audience, this shared experience can establish why it is important that we recognize and respect Indigenous perspectives in *all* aspects of representation, both inside and outside the museum/gallery space.

*Peter Morin's Museum* serves as a successful example of an exhibition that attempts to speak to sensorial perspectives on 'Native space'. In relation to the unwrapping of family portraits mentioned earlier in the chapter, and the idea that all *cultural practice* is a museum, Duffek explains the following:

What it was for me was a movement away from our focus always on the surface in Northwest Coast art, which is really, really limiting to our understanding of the art...it is so much about the intangible... 'Museum' is a Tahltan idea, it's an Indigenous idea as well... that the song is a museum, that a pair of snowshoes is a museum, the language is a museum because they are all structures for carrying and transmitting knowledge. [Duffek in interview, July14, 2011]

Peter Morin's concept of the museum space as an intangible structure of knowledge breaks apart hegemonic notions of objectivity and the alienable object. Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) talks about this as one of the failures of the Western museum; she charges that the Western museum concept is a tool for separating us from the objects it displays, through separation tactics of both display (glass, ropes, security) and intellectualism (academic art speak etc.) those objects are alienated from everyday life. As Fortney (2009) explicates, expressions, such as oral narratives (we can also consider songs, dances, dreams, etc.), do not fit into Western museum frameworks, and so museum goers must confront difference and the unfamiliar in seeing these embodied within an exhibition; which is exactly what Morin's project asks them to do through the consideration of performance and the everyday practice and production of knowledge.

The representation of intangible, and embodied knowledge is a goal for many galleries and museums (Blanchard and Davenport 2005; Brotherton et al. 2008), but not all institutions with such goals have necessarily taken into serious consideration the full potential that

collaborative and sensorial expressions of Indigenous knowledge have to offer.<sup>34</sup> Sensorial projects, like *Peter Morin's Museum*, show cultural knowledge in the process of being produced, revealing and illustrating embodied knowledge.<sup>35</sup> In performances, like those produced by Morin, the audience, the artist, and the curator are all actors engaged in the process of knowledge transmission (Ames 1999: 12). Depending on individual commitments of engagement, we are connected to one another through our experience of the space of the exhibition. This is part of what Bruce Ferguson has titled 'the material speech of the exhibition' (Ferguson 1994: 182); where all players create the dialog of the exhibition, and we all contribute to the outcomes of the exhibition process.

## ***Conclusion***

Contemporary curatorial aims actively re-negotiate and broaden concepts of space and place within exhibitions. Many curators today who focus on the work of Indigenous communities of the Northwest Coast of British Columbia are aware that their perspectives play into these representations and so they take careful steps to acknowledge and respect the authority Indigenous communities have over their own representations. This includes creating new

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<sup>34</sup> I am using the term 'sensorial' as a tool to describe artworks/ performances/ exhibitions that go beyond the utilization of the visual sense; that would be sound, touch, smell, and taste. Sensorial methods tend to emphasize a greater level of experience and connection between the viewer and the exhibition space.

<sup>35</sup> Crisca Bierwert provides an interesting analysis of embodied knowledge in relation to Coast Salish, specifically Stó:lō, cultural knowledge (See Bierwert 1999:182).

museum/gallery spaces that take the initiative to demonstrate boundaries of difference and understanding. Curatorial aims that venture to expand the viewers cognition of the museum space and what it means to them, attempt to correct what has been mis-represented but only up to certain point, protecting that knowledge that is deemed sacred and private (Townsend-Gault in interview, July 11, 2011). Susan Roy (2002:90) explains that we must look at inter-cultural performances (and I include such exhibits under this banner) as deeply entrenched within political concerns. Exhibition projects that emphasize viewer experience and take on a collaborative process have the opportunity to speak directly to the social, political, and economic needs of the concerned Indigenous community. At the same time, the community is able to obscure or conceal those aspects of their cultural knowledge they do not believe are suitable for public consumption. The collaborative process decides on the defining lines of who, and what, is ‘contemporary,’ of who, or what, is ‘authentic,’ and of who, or what, is ‘important.’

In order for exhibitions to move into new areas of intercultural exchange and understanding we need to look beyond simply the sharing of visual components and forms, towards the sharing of those experiences that are entangled along with objects on display (Hill 2004:194). The curators and exhibitions mentioned in this chapter have attempted to make the audience aware of cultural difference through an emphasis on one, or more, of the following tactics: collaborative processes and inter-cultural dialog; the negotiation of both geographical and cultural borders (including those between the art gallery/anthropological museums); and sensorial or phenomenological connections to space. An awareness of difference makes room for cross-cultural engagement or an understanding of relational difference. It allows one to observe

what he or she is capable, and incapable, of understanding. Stimulating an awareness of these factors can change how one thinks about the hegemonic systems that govern our bodies today. If the audience is encouraged to think about understanding cultural difference and relationships to place, they may be persuaded to see that there are ways to govern certain places and spaces that respect corresponding Indigenous relationships and perspectives.

In the next chapter I will deconstruct the curatorial process of my own exhibition *Understanding Place in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge*, drawing on practices of consultation with Indigenous artists while focusing on multiple concepts of place and greater sensorial engagement (specifically sound). In my conversations with both artists and curators, we discussed the ways in which serigraphs can become sites of engagement and knowledge transmission, while simultaneously demonstrating the artists' control over what information is exchanged or protected.

### CHAPTER 3: PRINTS AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS AND CONVEYORS OF PLACE

The previous two chapters have theorized anthropological and art historical curatorial practices in relationship to exhibitions by three prominent curators in Vancouver. Dr. Sharon Fortney, Karen Duffek and Dr. Charlotte Townsend-Gault have all endeavored to create new ways of representing the cultural expressions of Indigenous peoples on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia through integrating Indigenous perspectives and increasing collaborative methods with Indigenous community members. The potential advantages of implementing anthropological methods of engagement, such as collaboration, consultation, and relational concepts of difference, are valuable tenets of these curators' work and have been an inspiration to my own curatorial practice. In this chapter, I consider my own attempt to implement some of the strategies used by Townsend-Gault, Duffek, and Fortney into the process of the exhibition *Understanding Place in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge* (November 2012). This exhibition showcases serigraphs by Indigenous artists, and are part of both the Smyth and Rickard Collections of Northwest Coast serigraphs at the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery at McPherson Library in Victoria, BC. Seven artists from different Indigenous communities are represented in the exhibition: Francis Dick, Maynard Johnny Jr., Edward Joe, Stan Greene, Floyd Joseph, Tim Paul, and Joe David. Through consultation with artists and extensive research, a selection of 30 prints were chosen from the 1300 prints

comprising the Smyth and Rickard print collections that are part of the University of Victoria Art Collections (UVAC).

In my interviews with the artists they picked the serigraphs they thought best represented their relationship to different concepts of place and commented in-depth about those interpretations.<sup>36</sup> As I was unable to contact four of the artists in the exhibition in time for interviews, their work is framed within my own understanding of their process and my extensive research into the subjects represented. This research included field visits to the places illustrated in the serigraphs (such as the Fraser River, Stawamus Park, Sawish (base of Stawamus) and the Squamish village of Stamis), archival research (including past exhibition catalogues, artists statements, and interviews with artists Tim Paul, Floyd Joseph, Joe David and Stan Greene), and topographical research (Stawamus) of the locations addressed in some of the images. Field visits of these sites included visits to the places themselves and a personal active engagement with the land, such as hiking or camping. Topographical research comprised looking at the geological research concerning the landforms and physical features of a given place, particularly Stawamus as I lived in this area for an extended period. In November 2012, these prints will be displayed in the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery, which is located on the lower ground level of the McPherson library on the University of Victoria campus. All of the serigraphs selected from this collection represent or convey a sense of place in some way, either through a direct

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<sup>36</sup> Choosing work from a collection limits the selection curators are able to use from an artist. The Smyth and Rickard collections were selected because of the vast array of works involved, and to celebrate the inauguration of the Smyth's recent donation to the Maltwood Museum and Gallery. As additional note, the work that was available for the artists to select was contained within the parameters of the collections available. In this way, the artists' choices were restricted to that which was available in either the Smyth or Rickard Collections.

representation of a physical location; an image that translates a story about a specific place; or images that, on multiple levels, connect the artist to a sense of belonging (through memory, dreams, etc.) to a specific place.

Along with the serigraphs, selections of audio from the interviews with two of the artists, Francis Dick and Maynard Johnny Jr., will be available to listen to in association with their images. The audio clips will be accessible to the visitors via cellular phone, and will add significantly to the dynamics and interactive space of the exhibition. In these ‘soundscapes,’ the artists talk about the experiences that lead to their creation of particular representations of place, and so their narratives frame the serigraph as a direct representation of the experience of that specific space.<sup>3738</sup> The soundscapes also convey a sense of storytelling that disrupts the authority of the written word by placing an emphasis on the intangible processes of knowledge transmission and expression. These narratives are not positioned as objects, but as intricate foundations and performances from which we may begin to understand the multi-layered meanings of the serigraphs.<sup>39</sup> Framing the selected narratives as performances of cultural experience rather than objects attributes meaning to the interviews beyond that of source data. It places these narratives as meaningful expressions in themselves (see Ingold 2000:22–24),

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<sup>37</sup> The artists were asked in advance what narratives they would like included with what pieces, and their selections comprise the narratives available in the exhibition and online catalogue.

<sup>38</sup> I use the term ‘soundscape’ in terms of its definition as the sounds of a particular location. The artists spoke in relation to the memory, and so experience, of a particular place. Therefore, the sound is a direct embodiment of the expression of the space represented in the serigraph.

<sup>39</sup> Both Sharon Fortney (2009) and Julie Cruikshank (1992) problematize the idea of representing oral histories as objects. This comes from an understanding that oral histories or stories are often perceived as having one meaning, rather than complex systems of knowledge that convey new and different meanings with each telling (Cruikshank 1992:33–34). The idea that viewers at the exhibition can access the audio repeatedly over time corresponds to this idea of multiple retellings.

embracing an ethnographic method that ‘implicates listening as cultural practice’ (Samuels, Meintjes, Ochoa and Porcello 2010). All of the serigraphs chosen for this exhibition are active in the transmission of important cultural knowledge; they each have something different and important to say about our (the artists’ and the public’s) current relationships to space and place. As the serigraphs chosen for this exhibition are significant sites of knowledge, these representations act as a conceptual gateway into the artists’ relationships with both physical and intangible places that are culturally significant.

The conversations I was had with three of the artists—Maynard Johnny Jr., Francis Dick, and Edward Joe—offered me an experience that transcended what I have normally been accustomed to in a less dialogical curatorial approach, including a deeper awareness and respect for the artists’ cultural perspectives on the notion of place and desires about the outcomes of their work.<sup>40</sup> Although collaborative co-authorship practices, such as Lassiter, Fortney, Townsend-Gault, and Duffek’s, inspired the foundation of this project, my collaborative efforts were constrained due to time restrictions, budget and limited artist contact.<sup>41</sup> In regards to this, the exhibition that unfolds is more an ethnographic project that speaks to a dialogical framing of the serigraphs. The artist’s perspectives on their images, found both in interviews and past

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<sup>40</sup> In some curatorial projects no contact with the artist whatsoever is needed or mandated by the hosting institution. In these cases, curators simply refer to past art historical texts and research, or engage in a primarily aesthetic-based discourse. This is what makes anthropological based methods of engagement so important to curatorial practice, prompting a greater involvement between the artist and the exhibition project.

<sup>41</sup> As an MA thesis constricted to research grants and student research, the exhibition project was limited to a few artist interviews and the University of Victoria’s Art Collections timeline for the project. The limited contact information for the artists also restricted the project in terms of interviews and collaborative involvement.

statements, therefore greatly enriches the knowledge and information shared through the exhibition.

The question of whether or not to prepare an exhibition on one cultural grouping/ nation or of individuals from different Indigenous communities came up in the initial discussions for the project. However, as one artist pointed out to me, the serigraphs represent artistic expressions that are bound up in both collective and individual experiences. Further, as many of the artists in the collections individually belong to multiple nations along the coast, it was impossible to restrict the choice down to one select nation. The question was also posed in the interviews with the artists in which they all responded that it is not necessary to confine the exhibition to a single representation of one cultural group or nation. Rather, the dialogue focused much more on the experience of place as a collective/ individual process, in which personal interpretations of place are bound up in the individual histories of families and collective articulations that come from a long-standing relationship with place. Individual expressions are intricately and powerfully tied to cultural communal understandings of place, and the idea of 'Nation' is firmly present in many of the artists' narratives. The perception of being is a relational process that involves a connection to a particular locality (Casey 1997; Ingold 2000). At the same time, that relational process is unique to every individual who experiences it. Therefore, it is the artists' explicit individual/ collective expressions of place, both in dialogue and aesthetic representation, which frame the groundwork for the themes of the exhibition. In the space of the library, the images and narratives created by these artists work to transform the space from a hegemonic

documentation of Indigenous realities to a space of cross-cultural engagement and understanding between peoples.

### ***The Exhibition Space***

Library spaces, similar to those of museums and art galleries, have historically conveyed a sense of authority in terms of representing knowledge that is largely informed by hegemonic perspectives. The written word has an authority born out of the Enlightenment ideal of scientific observation, a power dynamic that resonates within the space of the library walls. Of course, there are ideas and contents within some of the texts in the library that challenge these historically privileged ideals of objectivism; however, it is the overemphasis of text as the leading authority on representation that I aim to challenge in this exhibition. The Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery is not a traditional gallery space; it is located on the lower level of McPherson Library, near microforms, special collections, and the archives. These sections constitute areas of access to important historical documentation, uniquely positioning the gallery as a corresponding site of documentation and historical information. As a challenge to the hegemonic authority of written words and their ability to document history, the serigraphs, and corresponding soundscapes chosen for the exhibition, create a contrasting environment for the documentation of important historical and cultural knowledge. These narratives represent Indigenous understandings of place that cannot be found in an archival document. Visiting the gallery is a phenomenological practice in which the viewer can see and hear the artists'

recordings of their life experiences. The stories and knowledge associated with these serigraphs positions the viewer as a witness to alternative perspectives on the ways knowledge is organized and transmitted amongst generations and between cultures.

The conversations I had with the artists for this exhibition form the basis of the layout for the present chapter. I present three main themes that emerged from the interviews:(1) I first discuss the *particulars of place* represented in the serigraphs. The ways in which the artists have incorporated their own knowledge into these images are examined, along with a thorough discussion of the works themselves. An important aspect of the selection process was that the artists often picked serigraphs that spoke to a specific location, or a story that related to a particular place or time, or an event that expressed a particular connection to a place for them. In these discussions, contemporary relationships to place are considered a key factor in the aim to represent Indigenous perspectives on the importance of place to cultural continuation; (2) I follow up on these discussions of place in the art with a consideration of the ways in which the *gallery/library, as institutional space*, is activated by the exhibition. How the serigraphs serve as expressions of the cultural knowledge associated with the places represented is an important aspect of this discussion. The curatorial decision to activate the library with diverging perspectives on place, by way of Indigenous serigraphs, is also examined. The soundscapes and curatorial text available at the exhibition will prompt the viewer to become conscious of the space he or she occupies by asking them to carefully consider these mediated relationships. The role the soundscapes play in demonstrating these relationships to place, along with the extension of these ideas into the digital realm of the online catalogue, are principal elements of this

analysis; (3) Lastly, I examine how these prints work as valuable *learning tools* in the transmission of cultural knowledge. It is important to both the artists and me as a curator that the meaning of these serigraphs is not framed solely by their worth or value as commoditized or marketable art objects. Rather, it is essential that the serigraphs are understood as important markers of cultural knowledge that have something crucial to say about contemporary Indigenous relationships to place and cultural continuation.

The positioning of these serigraphs in a contemporary exhibit about Indigenous perspectives on place challenges the conventional art/anthropological divide by combining both traditional and contemporary Northwest Coast aesthetic forms with contemporary socio-political concerns (i.e., fishing rights, treaty negotiations, inter-relational and ontological understandings). Here, the current narratives and transmission of cultural knowledge associated with the serigraphs are central to the exhibit rather than the privileging of an aesthetic formula that poses the work as ‘contemporary art’ versus ‘traditional artifacts’. Producing serigraphs are a way of organizing Indigenous knowledge, demonstrating multiple avenues from which the artists may transmit valuable cultural information. The artists represented in *Understanding Place in Culture* are exploring their everyday relationships to place through the medium of art, creating new conversations surrounding the constructed spaces of art, knowledge, and the politics of representation.

## *Particulars of Place*

Place determines who we are in that it establishes our relationship to everything around us. Our cultures, including our aesthetic productions, grow out of that relationship to place. I say relationship rather than ‘connection’ because the latter’s meaning seems too mechanical to express the rich intermesh between person and place in Native life. It is not simply a ‘connection to the land,’ but a multi-dimensional interdependence between place and community that shapes the way we live and think. [Richard West 1998: 11]

The selection of serigraphs and title of this exhibition was determined in a particular way. I chose to focus on the artists and their own interpretations of place, rather than simply selecting a variety of prints that spoke to strictly collective notions of physical place in correspondence to different communities. In cases where I was able to speak to the artists, I asked them to select the serigraphs they thought best represented a valuable or significant relationship to place for them. In other cases, where I was unable to do interviews, the selection process involved comprehensive research (site visits, topographical and archival research) of the titles and places listed or represented in the serigraphs, and the images’ relationship to documented reports, ethnographies or stories. Although the artists are from different cultural backgrounds, and from different places along the coast of British Columbia, the organization of their work in the exhibition does not follow the conventional geographic-cultural model of nation by nation; instead, it focuses on the individual artists’ interpretations of place and the corresponding stories expressed in the serigraphs.

In conversations with the artists and through my research about their images, it became apparent that ‘places’ are not always depicted by their physical characteristics. There are a

multitude of levels and perspectives from which a 'place' can be considered (Casey 1997). Place cannot be understood as a formal universal and therefore representations of specific places take shape in a variety of forms (Casey 1997). These include depictions of a place or time in the memory of the artist, the changes of a given site over time, the activities (fishing, whaling) or stories associated with certain sites (like rivers or mountains), or considerations of belonging to a particular place. As opposed to simply focusing on notions of place in terms of my own understanding (such as readily discernible physical sites and their history), I realized it was much more important that the artists choose their own prints and that their perspectives of place, both tangible and intangible, be apparent in the exhibition. In cases where interviews were not possible, past artist statements and commentary was consulted and employed in order to facilitate the artists' voice in the exhibition.

Although the idea of choosing serigraphs from a collection set boundaries around the selection of prints, it gave us a departure point from which to think with and explore. My curatorial intentions lay not in a desire to explain the entirety of messages and layered meanings of these images, but rather to locate points of shared experience/knowledge that could be exchanged in our conversations, and in the viewing of the prints in the gallery. Viewers will be able to sense connections to place through both visual and audible cues, and this, I hope, will promote intellectual and emotional engagement with the exhibit. Although the audiences' levels of involvement will decidedly vary, the serigraphs and their corresponding narratives, ask the viewer to consider different connections to place. These connections include the ways in which space is phenomenologically experienced; this may include memory, song, dance, performance,

sounds, smells, feelings, etc. These connections do not rely simply on visual descriptors; rather, they involve embodied knowledge that is central to cultural continuity and knowledge transmission. Perhaps the emphasis of these phenomenological connections will prompt the viewer to differently contemplate the ways in which they experience the spaces closest to themselves.

A sense of place is an important aspect of an individual's knowledge about self and history.<sup>42</sup> As I have discussed in the previous chapters, our relationships to place define and create who we are as people (Harkin 2000; Ingold 2000; Lefevbre 1974). Many of the serigraphs used in the exhibition address particular 'places' of significant meaning for the individual artists. 'Place' could mean a number of things in this context: it could be a physical place, such as Francis Dick's depiction of Kingcome in *Gwa 'yi* (U990.14.226), Floyd Joseph's *Stawamus* (U990.14.701), the rivers referenced in Maynard Johnny Jr.'s *Leader of the Fisherman* (L010.3.311), or the waters in Edward Joe's fishing prints (U998.7.40 and U998.7.41). The serigraphs could also be markers of intangible places, such as Dick's *Galadzi* (L010.3.151), which speaks to an inner place of self, a tangible expression of an intangible place. These prints offer important conceptions of place that are different from the descriptions found in a historical anthropological text or geographic atlas. Most public comprehension of place is based on the descriptions found in these historical documents, not on those found in Indigenous serigraphs. The stories and relationships depicted in these serigraphs are expressions of phenomenological connections to place, direct experiences: smells, colours, the tangible and the intangible, the

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<sup>42</sup> As is described in chapter one, place is constructive of space. It is our experiences of place that facilitate who we are and how we frame the world around us (Casey 1997).

indescribable feelings of space. Place is not always bound to one particular designation of a geographic territory of a nation; rather, it expands and contracts in direct correlation to the artists' motives, desires, and experiences. The artists in this exhibition use images to convey these complex senses of place, especially the transformative nature of place. The serigraphs themselves are the learning tools for understanding these concepts of place, simultaneously expressing individual/ collective perspectives. The following provides a few examples of the serigraphs that the artists and I chose as markers of these relationships.<sup>43</sup>

As was discussed in the previous chapter, mainstream audiences often think of geographic borders as indicative of the divisions of space. It is difficult for non-Indigenous people to conceptualize borders as transforming over time; not that they do not exist, but that they transform in relation to multiple fields of engagement and cultural contexts. Geographic borders also work to distance us from one another, especially in terms of national boundaries, which in turn create nationalities: peoples defined within those territorial borders. At the same time, these geographic boundaries can be important defining features of a community, giving significant reference marks for negotiations with the government, like the treaty process (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). The complexity of this issue is accounted for in the following statements made by Kwakwaka'wakw/ Coast Salish artist Maynard Johnny Jr.:

I've always been wary of libraries and anthropologists' books, especially in the early years, like 1900 – to probably as late as '88. I've seen books where, you know, they say they have an artifact they found in the Cowichan territory, or they would say in the Duncan area, '[an] unknown artist, unknown tribe.' Well, it's obvious it's Coast Salish,

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<sup>43</sup> Many of the comments written here also appear as sound clips within the exhibition itself. Further, the excerpts from the interviews with Maynard Johnny Jr. and Francis Dick are available in the appending documents to the thesis.

you can see from on the design work it's Coast Salish, and if you found it in Duncan, there's a good chance its Coast Salish [laughs]. And this is a book from, I think, made in 1974 or something, so, I mean, as late as then they weren't sure who was what. So I think, for the most part, like, I mean I've been told stories by elders and even as young as my uncles, who are in their fifties and sixties now. They were told stories from their father or their grandfather that happened all around this whole area, from Comox to Seattle. Our people had traveled that far on canoes.

My uncle used to joke about it. He used say, you know, like, 'I remember when, you know, my son came up to me, and he goes 'Hey dad, you wanna go to Seattle?' And then he'd sit there and whine about it, saying 'Oh and then I gotta catch the ferry, then I gotta pay for the food, then I gotta go... You know, Seattle. Find a place to stay,' blah blah blah. And then he remembers our people did all this in canoes—lets go to Seattle. 'Oh okay, let's get in the canoe and travel onto Seattle.' No problem, right? And here we are, whining about ferries and places to stay and things to eat, but they did this for a living, you know they had to do this. It's pretty neat, too, and people don't realize that the Cowichan had traditional territories in Tsawwassen, and Halat had traditional territories in Cowichan. You know, so, we're all different Coast Salish people, but we also came into each other's territory and we'd hunt and fish—whatever we had to do. So books don't really reflect that stuff, but our elders do, and it's up to us to find a way to keep it going. [Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011]

This narrative is extremely important to think about in terms of how borders are negotiated in Coast Salish communities on an on-going basis. In relation to kinship ties, some families may have access to multiple resource sites in other territories, and so boundaries are dependant on a whole range of factors that change over time (Ingold 2000; Kennedy 2002; Miller 1998; Thom 2009). Consequently, it is very difficult to pin down secure geographic boundaries that designate one area for one cultural grouping of people. As Thom (2009) has explored, the arbitrary boundaries associated with treaty processes and resource claims do not accurately address relational based territories and may perpetuate colonial ideologies of designated spaces. These complexities must be explored in depth as many communities may have overlapping land claims

(see *Cook v. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation* 2007).<sup>44</sup> The narratives represented in Maynard Johnny Jr.'s images can help the audience to understand the complexities of spatial designations and the ways in which they to affect land claims today. Concepts of place are an intricately networked part of our daily lives, and must be addressed as such. Johnny's serigraphs of *Thunderbird and Whale Canoe* (L010.3.408) and *Protecting Mother* (L010.3.390), speak to the kinship ties and relationships between nations and the concerns of fluctuating boundaries and resource sharing—all essential elements of his perspectives on the sharing of space. Maynard Johnny Jr. shared a wonderful story about his Coast Salish family's relationship with his Kwakwaka'wakw family, in relation to his serigraph *Protecting Mother*. His mother is Kwakwaka'wakw and a member of the Wolf Clan, but in his narrative, he speaks about how his familial relationship with the Kwakwaka'wakw goes back even further in time in relation to his great-great-great-grandfather (see Appendix Pp 128–129). In this instance, Johnny's serigraphs represent a connection between places by-way of kinship ties, an interconnection that transverses many of the boundaries we see in cartographic maps of the Northwest Coast (see fig.1).

Places are indicative of knowledge production and phenomenological learning, Johnny's print *Leader of the Fisherman* (L010.3.311) relates to a personal experience Johnny had with his father while fishing on a river:

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<sup>44</sup> By 'complexities' I am referring to the complications between different First Nations in terms of designating territorial spaces through land claims. Often many First Nations communities will have contesting views over what space belongs to whom and the ways in which these spaces should be allocated. This occurs, as Thom 2009 explores, largely because complex kin relationships and extended family systems often governed the way in which space was divided and shared. Phenomenologies of place in Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast therefore often regard the division of territorial space as both transformative in nature and debated between peoples.

So, I remember one day my dad and I were fishing and I was about 12 or so, maybe thirteen, and we were walking up and down the river, just trying to fish. And we couldn't catch anything at all. So we ended up walking down the river, and further down up on the tree was an eagle. And we're like, 'Oh wow check it out—an eagle!' You know, being amazed by this bird, and we're looking up and all of sudden he swoops down and catches a fish. And you know, it kind of, like blew us away. We're like, wow, that's really cool. My dad's like, 'Well let's fish here,' and we caught three fish that day. [Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011]

This particular serigraph is very important to the artist, and is reflective of a place in time through which he and his father engaged in a learning experience that was productive of the place in which it occurred. Practices that are indicative of the environments in which they occur are characteristic of Harkins' (2000: 62) comments that places have power as symbols, often through their utility, such as fishing or whaling, as places of prosperity or danger. In Johnny's story the eagle and its interaction with the river is the source of knowledge about where and how to fish. Johnny's image of the eagle as part human and part eagle reflects this relationship (Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011).

Coast Salish artist Stan Greene's images, *First Hunter* (U993.26.10), *First Fisherman* (U993.26.12), and *First Carver* (L010.3.189) relate to Johnny's story, as they are expressions of living with, and learning from the land. In Greene's images, one can see that certain animals act as teachers in lessons of the land. Greene's designation of the woodpecker as the 'First Carver,' for example, demonstrates a way of learning that comes directly from an experience of acquiring knowledge from the places in which we dwell. These three serigraphs explore how active engagements with the land create who we are: how we learn to survive and nourish our communities. Although these stories are often retold and explored in Stó:lō ethnographies (Duff

1952; Hill-Tout 1978), Greene's visual interpretations of these ethnographies offer a different way of learning that is emphasized through images. Greene's depictions are, in a way, like a carefully crafted film still or photograph, where a multitude of messages about the environment, teaching, and knowledge are suspended within one frame. The serigraphs in this way are constructions of knowledge; they are crafted in a specific way to represent the truthful realities of the artists' perspectives on being. As Pink (2011b) has described, visual descriptors of place, like photographs or images, are important phenomenology's of place, that acknowledge our connections with our environments as being constantly constructed and sensed.

Edward Joe's serigraphs of fish and his uncles' fishing boats also reflect a relationship to the practice of fishing and knowledge. When talking about the serigraphs, Joe brought up stories about his uncle fishing and his ancestors' relationship with the fish, explaining to me that they had a much better relationship with the fish than people do today (Joe in interview, August 10, 2011). Joe's Elders have been the first-hand witnesses of the depletion of fish and the changes made to fishing practices by government regulation. As witnesses, these Elders have seen how colonialist tactics of government control have changed Cowichan relationships with the resources of their community, including their knowledge of the fish. Joe's Fish serigraphs, *Pawee* (L010.3.385), *Aeght* (L010.3.386), and *Tuqw tuqw* (L010.3.387), are repatriations of cultural knowledge about local Cowichan resources, reflecting an inalienable relationship with the natural resources of the land and his ancestors. At the same time, these images also stand as testaments to those who have witnessed the transformation of fishing rights over time, and the loss of cultural knowledge in correspondence to this.

Bodies of water, such as lakes, rivers, bays, etc., have significant ties to Indigenous cosmologies of space, often forming a powerful foundation of community identity and a sense of belonging (Bierwert 1999). Two of Stan Greene's prints included in the exhibition, *Lost in the Fraser* (U990.14.686) and *People of the River* (L010.3.193), are important representations of the Fraser River. Greene belongs to the Stó:lō and Semiahmoo Nations, both of which have an incredibly strong relationship with the Fraser River. In her ethnography *Brushed by Cedar* (1999:39), Bierwert contextualizes Coast Salish cosmologies about place as an emphasis on being *before* culture, in which the power of place is inherent within the place rather than being inscribed upon it (i.e., by way of a conceptual attachment). In speaking specifically about Stó:lō relationships to place, Bierwert (1999:44) talks about the Fraser as a constantly transforming place, a "vortex" in which Stó:lō world views and knowledge are created. A crucial aspect of the Fraser, Bierwert (1999:44–45) notes, is that its power has not been hindered, and the that fact that people still actively engage with this place on a daily basis, quickens the transformation of that knowledge into present day actions and ideas. Greene's serigraph *Lost in the Fraser* illustrates the power of the Fraser and the continuation of Salish knowledge through the utilization of Salish design elements (Gibson 1994). In an interview with Brian Thom in 1996, Greene states the following:

This one here is "Lost in the Fraser." This is one of my own designs. After I did the "Spindle Whorls" I was working with a company in Vancouver. They were people that...the public was like sucking up, here is a Salish artist finally and doing Salish work. And they were buying up my work pretty good all of the time. Then I wanted to do a square, rectangular picture, I says. All of the artists, they said "no, just stick to the spindle whorl design the people know you of your people [Salish]. I said "well all of the other tribes do rectangle, they do any kind of picture they want to do." They said no. So I went

home, I had this one piece and I brought it down to them and showed and explained to them what it was. They thought it was a strong design and a nice design and what it is the background is out in the Fraser River. The fish in the front here are the sturgeon. The man in the middle here holding on to the sturgeon with his hands forming the fins on the surgeon. Is pushing himself out. There was a man that drowned in the Fraser River and he lost his life. A lot of the people along the side of the river, the fishermen, a lot of them lost there lives. They had to learn to respect the river. If you didn't respect the river then it take your life. To ease the people's minds, there's a sturgeon that went up, if somebody got lost in the river, they were alright. But the sturgeon people went and they took them. They took them to the bottom of the river. The bottom of the river was a village there and he lived there then, that fisherman. And he was alright. That was the only way of easing the peoples minds that "all my sons drowned in the river and ... there's a lot of stories like that the animals taking the man to the other world where the people go and they die. But they say that when you die, we go the other world and I'm going to be with my grandmother, my mother, my father, I'm going to be there with them when I leave this world. We will all be together. And so our life goes on, on and on again. It's a part of the way of life, a part of belief. [Greene in interview with Thom, May 1996]

His serigraph *People of the River* depicts a similar iconography, including a jumping sturgeon and ancestral figures generated through the landscape imagery. Greene's serigraphs illustrate this idea that the river is a powerful force that dictates his people's lives, their actions, and their gains: it is an intrinsic component of their *being*. This point is important to recognize because his images create a dialogue on contemporary Indigenous connections to place and their active position within the social, political and economic relations of the day.

Oral histories are important markers of current negotiations of identity, resources, and land claims (Bierwert 1999; Cruikshank 1992). Tim Paul, a Hesquiaht artist born in Zeballos on Vancouver Island, explains, "Through my art, by introducing our cultural, spiritual, and environmental perspective, I validate our oral history" (Paul qtd. in MacNair 2000:372). Paul has worked hard in his artistic practice to convey a clear sense of his Hesquiaht cultural knowledge and ideology. His works emphasize important stories, such as *Earthquake* (U990.14.611), and

the transmission of cultural knowledge through practices such as fishing and whaling (U990.14.585 and U990.14.587).<sup>45</sup> Joe David, of the Tla-o-qui-aht Nation of the Nuuchahnulth peoples, puts a similar emphasis on his work as markedly characteristic of Tla-o-qui-aht artistic history and cosmology (see David with Duffek 2000). One of his works included in this exhibition, *Life on Meares Island* (U990.14.496), represents Meares Island, home to the Tla-o-qui-aht community at Opitsaht in Clayoquot Sound, where David was born. David endeavors to create an aspect of cultural experience in his artworks, something that conveys his people's history and who he is (David with Duffek 2000). He defines culture as “not something that is yours because your grandma or great-grandpa had it. There's a power in the old stuff that comes from living in that energy-field system...” (with Duffek 2002:358). As was discussed in relation to Stan Greene's work above, and is evident here in David's image, the power within place creates every aspect of these artists' being: it facilitates their experience and ability to envision the world. The oral histories conveyed in Paul's images, and the emphasis on homeland in David's, stress how perceptions of place are intricately tied to our cosmology and the ways in we explain and express the world around us.

Francis Dick is from the Dzawadaenutw people of Kingcome Inlet, one of the many nations of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. The artist identifies the village's name as *Gwa'yi* and her relationship with her homeland forms the epistemological basis for much of her artwork.

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<sup>45</sup> Peter L. MacNair shares Drucker's rendition of the *Earthquake* story as follows: “There were dwarfs, who had houses inside mountains, where they enticed the unwary to dance with them and around and around and around a great wooden drum. Sooner or later he stumbled against the drum, and become afflicted with a peculiar disease called ‘earthquake foot’—every time he took a step, the ground shook” (Drucker in MacNair 2002:366).

Dick made important comments on the translation of her relationship to place through her paintings:

When I first started out, it was all about where I came from and my identity as a Kwakwaka'wakw person... and by doing that I'd be painting images of stylized Northwest Coast clouds up in Kingcome or the mountains up in Kingcome, and how we talked about the story that was attached to the lake or an area in Kingcome. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011]

In relation to her first painting of *Gwa'yi* (U990.14.226), Dick asked herself how she would come to paint Kingcome:

I'd never done landscape before, this is my first time. I'd been doing wolves, that was my first piece. 'How am I going to do this?' This was really interesting. So I did the river, I did the mountains and did *Gwał'gwáyam'nukw*, the mountain owning whales, and then the tree line, the tree line and a wolf in it. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011]

Francis Dick represents place in relation to her experience of it, her history, her knowledge of the river and the surrounding landscape and its inhabitants. It is not a quintessential landscape image; it is an image in which all kinds of stories and layers of personal expressions and entwined histories are embedded (Dick in interview, August 4, 2011). Narratives of the landscape fill this image, representing the life and the histories that compose that place. In interviews about this particular serigraph, Dick expressed the two following statements:

When I paint something, like *Gwa'yi* for instance—a painting I did when I first went back... I had a wolf in the painting and then I had a whale because there is a mountain, that was called *Gwał'gwáyam'nukw*, and what that means is 'a mountain owning whales,' and during the great flood, when the flood was going down, back down, these whales got stuck in the mountain and they turned to stone. And now my uncle says that up there, *Gwał'gwáyam'nukw*, that mountain, it looks like there's a whale stuck in the mountain. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011].

I can remember clearly riding up the river to the village. The ride was beautiful and very special. The river was a pale olive green, and eagles sat on the trees at the edge of the

river as we rode up to the village. Being back in the village was an incredible feeling for me. I could feel the strength, in the mountains, the trees that surrounded the village and especially the river. The place was surrounded with legends of the past. [Dick 1987]

The lived landscape is embodied through the stories that make up the land, histories that take place over time and that can only be known and fully understood by those individuals who have lived in those places. Dick also talks about the mountain, *Xwap'tso* or 'Noisy Mountain,' in regards to her painting of *Gwa'yi*:

So already I had in my mind that I was going to paint Kingcome Inlet. And I was like 'what am I—how am I going to paint Kingcome Inlet?' You know, it's like when I think of Kingcome I think of ... *Xwap'tso*, the big mountain, where there is this wonderful big mountain with a cave in it, and even on a hot sunny day it's got snow on it. And, when I was just up there we were driving along a field and I hear this rumbling, a hot sunny day, there's this rumbling and I'm like "whoa shit." The snow would slide, and it would pass through the cave and it would make this amazing noise, this rumbling, the sound would be really enhanced because of the cave. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011]

*Xwap'tso* is an important feature in other stories and ethnographies about Kingcome Inlet (see Craven 1967 and also Wilson 2004), and is visible on the right-hand side of Dick's image, where a huge crack can be seen slicing down the face of the mountain. The mountain is an important marker to Dick of her relationship to her home and her people; its memory and image help keep her attachment to that place alive. It is also an important marker of her sensorial relationship to Kingcome, in that the very sound of the mountain is a significant marker of place. In her serigraph *Kankulahukw* (U990.14.227) Dick tells another story about her relationship to Lake *Kank'alahuk* and its corresponding attachments to her cultural heritage:

I was having a conversation with my dad. He was talking about, to me about, this lake up in Kingcome and this lake had a name, *Kank'alahuk*, is the name of this lake, and it's got moving islands on it. It's got these big patches of grass, they are huge, like half the size

of the living room, you know some of them the size of the table, and they just, like, float around on the lake. But you have to know where you're going. It's, like, a 2-hour drive on this logging truck like to find this, like. I went to look for this lake, nobody really knew where Kank'alahuk was; nobody ever talked about it. I heard it from my father; my father is a historian, everything that he knows is passed down to me. It's that oral history, right? [...]

The first lake we found was Kank'alahuk, and sure enough, it was very cool. And I got out—there was about seven of us and it was just amazing. Like, I just sat there and there were, like, exactly like my dad said, there were these moving islands.... There were these moving islands, and there is a potlatch that happened hundreds of hundreds of years ago—like my people are really amazing with theatrics within the potlatch system—but during this potlatch this family created [a] big loon, wooden loon, and it would go under water and come up and come up and they would—a man, a couple men, could get in there and they could make this loon go under [the water]. Anyways, the mechanics got all messed up, and the men drowned in the bottom of the lake. And so I decided that I was going to paint the lake. How am I going to paint the lake? [...] How am I going to paint moving islands? Right? But anyways, I had a loon that was diving under, and I told my story about going up to the lake, and I told the story about the men drowning. I know it's the saddest thing, but how amazing it was that there were people... I don't want to say 'committed' because it wasn't something you were committed to, you just were, you were this nation and what you did was you expressed your spirit, your 'nalakw,' your connection through these potlatches, and in these potlatches you had these masks for, well, they tell stories, dances, and songs. And so I talked about that... in my paintings. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011].<sup>46</sup>

Dick's statements again reflect on the idea that considerations of space and place are part of our daily lives, especially in terms of what she says about the men drowning: it is not simply that these men were 'committed' to their culture; what was important was how they expressed their connection to their people, to their land, to their *being*. These visual representations of place are not just recordings, they are active engagements with what these places mean to the artist here and now. This engagement with the embodied experience of place is also active in Floyd

Joseph's representation of *Stawamus*.

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<sup>46</sup> Dick further describes her journey to find the lake in our interview. This section of text will be included in the sound clips for the exhibition and catalogue.

Floyd Joseph's serigraph of *Stawamus* (U990.14.701), a massive granite dome also known as 'The Chief,' depicts a clear relationship to place. In Joseph's image, an eagle and the mountain are one in their designation of the sacred space of *Stawamus*. *Stawamus* gets its name from the Skwxwú7mesh village that was located at the base of the rock face near Shannon Falls, in Squamish, B.C. The granite structure is now a popular location for hikers and rock climbers from all over the world, and the Skwxwú7mesh First Nation has expressed some concerns about the overuse of the area and its possible restoration in the Skwxwú7mesh Xay Temixw (Sacred Land: Land Use Plan).<sup>47</sup> The story of *Te Qoitcital, the Serpent Slayer* (L010.3.419), another serigraph of Stawamus by Floyd Joseph, takes place in this area of Skwxwú7mesh territory.<sup>48</sup> The scratches left by *te sinotlkai* (a large two-headed water-serpent) on the surface of the cliff face are visible today from the valley (Hill-Tout 1978:73–76; Townsend-Gault 2011). Living in Valley Cliff (the residential area at the western base of Stawamus) for an extended period myself, I strongly identify with Joseph's depictions of the site, observing the power of this place on a daily basis. The variety of distinct landforms on the site of Stawamus and the corresponding lakes and rivers in the area all have significant ties to Skwxwú7mesh oral history (Hill-Tout 1978), and Joseph's serigraphs are an important re-telling of the creation of these places and their relationship to the Skwxwú7mesh people.

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<sup>47</sup> The Skwxwú7mesh Xay Temix Land Use Plan identifies Stawamus as a key restoration area, meaning that the First Nation would like to restore the location back to its natural state, which has been compromised due to the overuse and development of the area. The Xay Temix Land Use Plan is available on the Skwxwú7mesh First Nations webpage at <http://www.squamish.net/files/PDF/XayFirstDraft.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed retelling of the legend of *Te Qoitcital, the Serpent Slayer* that Floyd Joseph is referring to in his serigraph see Charles Hill-Tout's *The Salish People*, Volume 2, 1978:75–76. There are also important records of this legend in Chief August Jack Khahtsahlano and Major J.S. Matthews *Conversations with Khahtsahlano* 1969: 199 and Domanic Charlie and Chief August Jack Khahtsahlano *Squamish Legends* 1966 (prepared by Oliver Wells).

Everyone has some sense of a relationship to place in reference to his or her own ancestry and cultural histories (Harkin 2000:66; Townsend-Gault 1998:43). The serigraphs included in *Understanding Place in Culture* represent places of great value to the artists, places that shape the artists' understanding of themselves and their place in the world. On behalf of the artists, the serigraphs work as knowledge producers in that they carry meaning, transmitted on multiple levels to the audience (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous). It is essential that these serigraphs and the artists' narratives be recognized as significant markers of knowledge transmission, because they contain important cultural information on the histories and embodied knowledge of these places. If these representations can coerce the audience to be further engaged in what these artists are trying to say about these places in particular, the viewer may have a better understanding of why current socio-political negotiations on the importance of place are so pivotal for the continuation of cultural knowledge.

### ***The Specifics of Institutional Space***

The location of the exhibit prompts following questions: What does the library mean to us? What does a gallery in the library mean to us? What does this specific exhibit in the library mean to us? The location of *Understanding Place in Culture* in McPherson library is important because, like the prints in the exhibition, it also says something specific about the relationship between knowledge production and the construction of socially empowered spaces. Here it is

pivotal to reference Henri Lefebvre's (1974: 115–121) idea that the construction of space is rooted in the dominant ideologies of a particular historical period.<sup>49</sup> Buildings such as libraries, universities, and museums reflect dominant ideologies.<sup>50</sup> I would argue that the ideologies of the museum and library go hand in hand when we consider them as storehouses of knowledge, the architectural trophies of Enlightenment ideals of an objective organization of knowledge. Written words are accepted as authoritative representations that work to fix reality (Lefebvre 1974). Likewise, it could be argued that museums, too, attempt to arrest decay, to freeze time and space (see Haraway 1989:55).

Lefebvre's ideas on the construction of space connect to Casey's (1997) comments that place is constructive of space in terms of its ideological attachments. What is missing, or perhaps not as clearly addressed in Lefebvre's text as it is in Casey's, is that place functions as the epistemological and phenomenological basis for those very ideologies. It is therefore place that produces culture, which in turn designates and builds spaces (Casey1997). An understanding that local/ historical ideologies are instructive of the architectural spaces that we create as society demonstrates how spaces, such as museums and libraries, are positioned as institutions indicative of a colonial logic. However, an emphasis on the transformative nature of place and diverging ontologies of space and place can in-turn reconfigure these spaces as dialogical platforms rather than colonial monoliths.

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<sup>49</sup> One can think of Greek and Roman temples, or the Neoclassical design of the banks and libraries, etc. of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. These are all examples of architectural spaces that conform to the values and political ideologies of a particular time and place: a glorification of the rational mind and conquest.

<sup>50</sup> In terms of modern architecture, institutions are constantly undergoing renovation projects that are reflective of a 20<sup>th</sup>-and 21<sup>st</sup>-century avant-garde mentality. New star architect renovation projects allow these institutions to demonstrate that they are on the cutting edge of the most recent knowledge, taste, and developments.

The placement of an art gallery inside the McPherson library attests to the expansion of interdisciplinary knowledge and the incorporation of new discourses over the consumption and creation of knowledge. The serigraphs in the exhibition add to these discourses by emphasizing perspectives that focus on different ways of organizing and representing knowledge. These perspectives involve looking at the ways in which knowledge is incorporated into an image through formal qualities; they demonstrate how an image reflects (or deflects) cultural knowledge. We can think here of Harkin's (2000:59) description of Laurence Paul Yuxweluptan's work in which the artist integrates Northwest Coast design elements into the landscape. Dick does something similar as she illustrates stories that are part of the landscape in and around Kingcome Inlet, such as the serigraphs *Gwa'yi* (U990.14.226), *Kank'alahuk* (U990.14.227) and *K'akalikam* (U990.14.225).

The sound recordings that accompany a few of the serigraphs allow the viewer to sensorially engage with the artists' personal connections to the places and stories they talk about. The historical concept of the art gallery supports an emphasis on visual understanding, which goes along with concepts of written (and therefore visual) authority. However, there are ways of utilizing the gallery space that promote sensorial engagement and therefore break down hierarchical inequalities of knowledge consumption, such as sight over other forms of experience (e.g., sound, smell, touch). By incorporating multiple levels of phenomenological understanding (i.e., the connection between sight and sound) into an exhibit, curators or exhibit designers stimulate the interconnections of the senses and experience. The incorporation of sound disrupts the conventional understanding of the library as a place of 'silent learning,' as it requires

increased involvement from the viewer. Narratives corresponding to specific images are broadcast in the respective artist's own voice, connecting the viewer to a contemporary Indigenous voice, a voice that has the authority to speak about Indigenous perspectives and the knowledge to wisely select what information he or she is willing to share. Therefore, the dialog between the artists and myself are more evident to the audience in connection to these sound clips because they directly assert Indigenous voices within the exhibition framework.

An online catalogue, which will accompany the exhibition, further extends the exhibition site as an agentive source of knowledge transmission by bringing those stories and perspectives into the digital realm for others to see and begin to understand. The combination of these serigraphs and the artists' corresponding perspectives on place create new conversations around the organization of space and knowledge production, commenting on the ways in which knowledge is embodied and, in fact, performed through our being-in-the-world.

If the ways in which people organize knowledge are intricately tied to the places in which we dwell (Basso 1996; Casey 1997; Harkin; ƛi-ƛe-in in Townsend-Gault 2000:226), then descriptions of such are in no way simple. The expressions of the experiences of place are multi-layered, much more complex than a description in a short didactic panel, says Francis Dick (in interview, August 4, 2011). She explains that in order for her, as an artist, to reflect place in her work, she believes one "has to be very conscious, very conscious of the place, of the site; very aware of what's going on with self as you create that site and the meaning of that site to you" (in interview, August 4, 2011). Her statement reflects on some poignant concepts of place, and importantly, that representations of such places are not static; they change and transform in

relation to one's own experience and history of that place. In her print *The Dragon* (fig. 26) Dick reflects on a trip she made to China:

I was in Beijing for three and a half weeks, and everywhere I went—I mean on Christmas Day, I climbed the Great Wall of China—it was amazing, and so just to be there, you know, going to the Forbidden City and being on the ancientness of their territory. That place and that culture is really cool, and being able to share with them our work, what we do, and coming back and creating this dragon, because everywhere we went there were these dragons, right. So that's about traveling to another place, another whole other country, and going to their sacred sites, their sacred places. And being there and really feeling and really trying, really connecting, being mindful, having consciousness around where you are, where you're standing and what you're feeling as you're standing there. [Dick in interview, August 4, 2011]

In many cases, the experiences of spaces and places can be shared, but we must be aware that all experiences are shaped in relation to who we are as people and how conscious we are of these spaces. This quoted example of Dick's relationship to place is significantly valuable because one of the aims of the exhibition is to make visitors conscious of the place he or she occupies. As Basso (1996) has said, the sensing of places can make us more aware of who we are in connection to that place, of our own dwelling, and of the changing state of our identities in relation to the experience of place.

Along with the physical space of the gallery and library, there is also the digital space of the Internet as experienced through the online catalogue. The digital space brings up notions of the ephemeral, and raises questions concerning the extension of meaning through intangible, yet palpable means of communication and knowledge transfer. The online component of this exhibition will include a curatorial essay that speaks to the exhibition's aims to represent

Indigenous concepts of place. This essay will help contextualize the exhibition for those viewing online and who are perhaps unfamiliar with the various methods of curation, clarifying the issues of cultural representation and emphasizing the ongoing necessity for dialogical and ethnographically informed research. The addition of the online catalogue assists the exhibition in extending the curatorial discussions surrounding the constructed space of art, knowledge, and the politics of representation into a digital environment, maximizing its presence in the public realm of engagement.

How do we then translate this understanding/experience of space (in relation to the architectural space of the library and the spaces represented in the prints) to the digital realm of an online catalogue? One way to get at this translation of space is to have the sound clips in the exhibition available online and coupled with the images. This way, individuals in other places will still be able to connect with the individual perspectives on place exhibited in the show. The digitization of the catalogue is also a wonderful way for people across British Columbia to see and begin to understand the importance of Indigenous concepts of space and their direct correlation with contemporary socio-political concerns. Distributing these audible soundscapes online provides a digital platform for an exhibition that attempts to tap into the individual/collective paradox of mapping that Thom (2009) endeavors to tackle in his radical cartography. The soundscape narratives indicate a framing and mapping of the places represented in the serigraph through the contextualization of the artist's experience that evades a collective/individual binary. A central tenant of this online catalogue is to make the project more

accessible, bringing the discourse of space and place to a wider audience, and working as a resource for those seeking more information about the show.

Although the creation of an online catalogue may seem simple, the online exhibition of Indigenous ideas and perspectives is a complex project involving careful considerations of the desires of the artists and their corresponding Indigenous communities. Anthropologist and curator Kate Hennessy has been involved in online exhibit projects that create electronic resources for Indigenous communities, allowing greater access to images, video, and audio recordings, and other information that detail their history.<sup>51</sup> Her research looks at how digital and hyper technology can document, mediate and protect Indigenous knowledge. She is particularly interested in the ways Indigenous communities in Canada can use online resources to access their cultural heritage and property (Hennessy 2012). Her digital projects, including the *Dane Wajich: Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers of the Land* virtual exhibit, provide new opportunities “for the sharing of curatorial and ethnographic authority,” where diverse cultural protocols and practice of Indigenous communities are respected (Hennessy, Wallace, Jakobsen, and Arnold 2012). The ‘ethical paradox’ of exhibiting Indigenous ideas online, Hennessy (2009: 6) notes, is that in making this information available, communities, curators, and/or individual owners have less control over the circulation of such media in the virtual realm. Therefore, information that some Indigenous communities may not want shared may be made accessible to the world if not properly protected. Virtual exhibitions and digital cultural projects require significant

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<sup>51</sup> See the Doig River First Nation’s virtual exhibit with Amber Riddington and Kate Hennessey, *Dane Wajich: Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers of the Land*. The project aims to share the oral histories, songs, and stories that connect the Dane-zaa and their land. <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich/>

collaborative research and time within the very communities they seek to represent in order not to distribute any sensitive or private information.

Hyper technology and the digitization of art collections can expand upon Indigenous claims to property rights and community accessibility to cultural heritage (Hennessy 2010). The online component of *Understanding Place in Culture* provides a digital foundation for a plethora of future possibilities. At this stage, the online catalogue is a place to begin thinking about the digitization of Indigenous collections and to bring this exhibition into that conversation. The digitization of the catalogue is also a way to bring the concerns and perspectives of the artists to a virtual audience.

One central contribution of the online catalogue involves an expansive contextualization for the serigraphs and artists intentions. Many images of the serigraphs are already available online through commercial gallery websites, which often use information that is concocted from receptacle of knowledge that is not specific to the community or the artist represented. This can at times misrepresent and misappropriate community-specific knowledge by disregarding the specificity of their material culture and iconography.<sup>52</sup> Francis Dick (in interview, August 4, 2011) noted some dissatisfaction with the restrictions of small, short didactic panels or texts that attempt to encompass all the things going on in a given image, or limit the information to one simple iconic symbol. Because of the restricted nature of the didactic panels, the scope of these

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<sup>52</sup> My work with commercial galleries has confirmed that the write-ups concerning works of art represented by the gallery are often conceived of through generalized knowledge about the Northwest Coast. These generalizations will often capitalize on one aspect of the piece—the representation of an eagle for example—and provide an overarching meaning of the piece that may or may not be the intention of the artist. This can be confusing and problematic if the piece in question is depicting a legend, story, or history of cultural significance that is specific to that nation and its own perspectives and cosmology.

texts is often limited to one story about an image, and one that has often been overly objectified to the point that the multiplicity in meaning is lost. My aim in this thesis is not to devalue these stories, as they are important; rather, I would like to broaden the scope of understanding in these serigraphs in relation to personal expressions of place, moving away from conventional visual representations through the use of sound. In the interviews with Maynard Johnny Jr. and Francis Dick, the artists agreed that it was important that their voices be heard and their own perspectives inform the contextualization of the serigraphs, the serigraphs therefore speak—both in the exhibit and online—to specific and particular contexts related to the experiences of the artists. Because the descriptions of places and contexts are done from the position of the artist, private cultural knowledge is protected. As Maynard Johnny Jr. (in interview, August 10, 2011) explained, the serigraphs are a way for him to share the aspects of his culture that can be shared. Importantly, the online exhibit is capable of sharing these articulations of place with a wider audience beyond just those who are able to physically visit the gallery site. It will allow family members and others to experience an aspect of what the exhibition is all about and what the artists are saying through their prints. The online catalogue is a place for a curatorial discussion of these prints and their relationship to the exhibition space. Like the medium of the serigraph itself, the digital catalogue presents a learning opportunity by providing a wider distribution of the ideas and objectives of the exhibition.

Not only is the use of the Internet an important component of contemporary exhibits, but it is also an important space through which we understand the world today. We are constantly exploring spaces and places on the Internet: looking at pictures, watching webcasts, and going on

‘virtual tours.’ These ventures speak to an exploration of space on a virtual level that disrupts our conventional notions of space as a physically fixed entity. The digital aspect offers an experience of the exhibit that opens up the structured and restricted physical interaction we encounter in gallery exhibitions. In this way, the audience is prompted to explore the exhibit on their own terms, positioning the gallery not as a static entity but as fluid map of ideas and representations of cultural experience. In the virtual world, spatial representations are always changing. The digital space better situates us in order to understand the complexities of negotiating spaces, especially if we are to experience them as constantly shifting in relation to power dynamics and the politics of representation.

The connections these serigraphs have to place go beyond the discussions happening in the gallery; they speak to multilayered associations such as songs, stories, and oral histories, aspects of culture, that Francis Dick explains as a “whole different reality and existence that isn’t tangible, but you can feel it” (Dick in interview, August 4, 2011). It is an existence and understanding that has been passed down through art forms that are always changing, whether or not we would like them to (Dick in interview, August 4, 2011). Because these translations are not static and they are very much a part of the world today, the digital realm serves to extend those histories and perspectives, within representations determined by the image-makers. In this way, we can think about the museum and art gallery (and their virtual counterparts) as public meeting places (Borsa 2004).

As a public meeting space, the art gallery has the power to recontextualize objects and their meanings. As I explored in the earlier chapters, this can have a negative impact on the

material represented, as it may distance the work from the cultural context in which it was created. However, as a socially active space, the art gallery also has the power to reverse that alienation, as we saw in many of the exhibits examined in chapter two. In reference to the curatorial aims outline in the previous chapter, one of the objectives of *Understanding Place in Culture* is to subtly disrupt the ways art works are conventionally contextualized in the art gallery, focusing both on the ways their formal and cultural attributes speak to the contemporary present. Although some of the serigraphs may reflect formal design patterns that may be considered too ‘traditional’ for a contemporary art exhibit, this does not negate the fact that they themselves are contemporary works and have something important to say about contemporary socio-political events. Tim Paul’s *Grey Whale and Nootka Whalers*, for example, consists of traditional formline attributes; however, placing this piece into a contemporary framework of considerations of space and place urges viewers to think about contemporary issues over fishing and whaling rights in Nuu-chah-nulth Territory. In addition, Paul’s works, when placed alongside Edward Joe’s *Fishing Adventure* and *Troller*, say something significant about the ways in which cultural traditions are very much alive today, changing over time just like anything else does. Rather than working separately, aesthetic and socio-political attributes (those attributes often separated between art and anthropology museums) of the serigraphs are positioned as inseparable elements that create an important contemporary dialogue. Regardless of how spaces and places change over time, or how our relationships to them change, certain locations will always continue to have meaning for us. As the artists in this exhibition recognize in their work,

certain places continue to influence and impact the ways in which we live our lives, persistently teaching us important lessons about the past, present, and future.

In representing important places in their work, the artists use the serigraph medium as an important learning tool, transferring that knowledge about place into the public realm. The virtual aspect of this exhibition extends that knowledge to a global audience, broadening the site for critical engagement and understanding. The artists decide the limits of this understanding by choosing what and what not to represent in their images. The ways in which the serigraphs included in this exhibition operate as important learning tools about Indigenous concepts of place is a central tenant of this exhibition; however, it is one that works against the grain of critical discourse that often frames these works as ‘commercial,’ ‘marketable,’ or ‘exploitable’ (Townsend-Gault 2004a; Dawn 1984; Stewart 1979).

### ***Prints as Learning Tools***

The classification ‘Northwest Coast prints’ remains a strong point of contention between artists, curators, and the art market. Critiques and discussions of the serigraph medium often problematically contextualize prints as a form of commoditization, frequently relating their production to a form of Native essentialism (Dawn 1984; Duffek in interview, July14, 2011; Dick in interview, August 4, 2011; Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011; Townsend-Gault 2004a; Stewart 1979). Prints have become, through their continual proliferation, a way of

designating and defining marketable Northwest Coast art (Duffek in interview, July 14, 2011). As Leslie Allan Dawn discussed in *The Northwest Coast Native Print* (1984:5–6), the relationship between articulations of visual form in Bill Holm’s book, *Northwest Coast Art: An Analysis of Form* (1965), and the initial surge of Northwest Coast prints, resulted in a public education of form that shaped public reception, understanding, and experience of Northwest Coast work. Such conventionalizing of form set guidelines or parameters within which artists worked, and still work today. Dawn argues that such parameters limit practice in terms of subject matter, form, colour, and design (Dawn 1984). Some of the artists I interviewed for this project, however, explained that they wanted to move beyond these conventional representations, beyond “European ideals” of “black and red” Northwest Coast art, broadening the exploration of the serigraph medium (Joe in interview, August 10, 2011).

The marketable aspect of Indigenous serigraphs is essential to deconstruct if we are to understand the serigraphs included in *Understanding Place* as valuable learning tools. Conversations around ‘Northwest Coast prints’ largely circulate around their marketability or their construction as a ‘non-traditional’ medium (Rickard, Hall and Blackman 1981; Stewart 1979). Indigenous serigraphs are also often criticized by the art world as a consumer product for non-Aboriginal patronage (Berlo 1999).<sup>53</sup> A view that serigraphs are simply created as units of

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<sup>53</sup> Janet Berlo has an interesting piece, *Drawing (upon) the Past: Negotiating Identities in Inuit Graphic Arts Production* (1999), in which she talks about the complexities of contemporary versus traditional subject matter in prints. Here, she acknowledges that many critics of the art criticize prints that contain traditional subject matter, saying that this does not depict a contemporary ‘reality.’ Berlo notes, however, that southern consumer tastes have shaped the market, and that they expect these kinds of representations. Further, she writes that the depictions of traditional themes allow the artists to explore and disclose their identity and relationship to subsequent generations of traditional production.

commercial exchange does not acknowledge other values, such as the crucial utility of this medium as a significant cultural learning tool. In my conversation with Maynard Johnny Jr., he contested these critiques of the print medium, explaining:

So when I create a print I want it to sell, you know. But at the same time, like I said before, it's like we did traditional graphics, we did graphics on drums, we did graphics on regalia, on our house fronts... so this is just a way to share that.... I mean, I can paint a house front, [but] I can't sell it to you, I can't give it to you, you can't share it with people unless you come to the house. But this is a way for you to take a piece of that culture home with you. [Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011]

Johnny and the other artists I interviewed for this project also noted that much of the critique concerning prints might have to do with their relationship with non-Indigenous printmakers.<sup>54</sup> This identifies a relationship that often repeats aspects of the native-artists and white-marketers/colonialist curators conversation (Dick in interview, August 4,2011). One artist commented that, although he and a printmaker split the production of serigraphs 50/50, the printmaker had greater access to customers and other galleries, and was therefore able to make a larger profit. This positions the printmaker as the voice of the market, and the artist often responds in relation to those demands. For example, Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) explained that “The funny thing about print markets is—and the funny thing about being an artist for a living is—you try and relate, do what the market wants.” Although the print market may make certain demands based on subject matter and taste, the artist still has an opportunity to decide what information is or is not available in terms of his or her design. This negotiation of

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<sup>54</sup> This is an interesting contrast to Berlo's (1999: 80) comments that in the north, Native specialists do most of the print pulling for Inuit prints.

agency is similar to the discussions in the previous chapters around curatorial agency, in which curatorial decisions and collaborative projects must be negotiated in relation to certain institutional prerogatives. In this case, the artist has to negotiate his terms within the larger structure of marketability, subject matter, and design style. Therefore the artist, like the curator, is not necessarily denied his or her agency; rather, he or she is set within a systemized framework from which to act, making the work all the more engaging.

A very interesting aspect of the artists' agency is the way in which, as Townsend-Gault (in interview, July 11, 2011) has termed it, cultural "blocking devices" are set up by the artist. In the creation of blocking devices, some cultural knowledge is made public while other aspects are kept private. Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) mentioned that there are certain aspects of his Coast Salish heritage that he happily shares with the non-Coast Salish world; however, there are sacred aspects of his culture that are meant to be kept secret (certain ceremonies, dances, and images—for example, the *sxweyxway* mask). These sacred elements circulate within the images; they are inalienable aspects of Indigenous culture that remain inaccessible, or non-exchangeable with a non-Indigenous audience (Townsend-Gault 2004b:97). As Francis Dick said, she could teach me the ins-and-outs of Northwest Coast design, but I do not have the experience, knowledge, history, or lineage that goes along with those images. For example, I, as a non-Indigenous individual, do not have the same access to an image of Kawadelakala, an ancestral wolf of Dick's family, as other members from her family or the *Dzawadaenutw* community do. Dick and her family have a shared history and an inalienable connection with this image; they have sacred access to knowledge about this image to which I will never have access. An

Indigenous access to the work protects that sacred knowledge: it keeps it within the confines of the community, while those on the outside have the opportunity to relate to the public messages of the work.

This accessibility/ inaccessibility aspect of Indigenous serigraphy conveys a strong sense of cultural difference, one that creates the kind of jarring of cultural perceptions that Fortney (2009) describes in her work. These protective mechanisms, or cultural ‘blocking devices,’ demonstrate that the powers of authority over meaning do not necessarily all lie in the hands of the curator, institution, or tourist shop that exhibits a piece.<sup>55</sup> As artist Edward Joe pointed out, the printed images are not the whole story; they are the parts of the story that can be shared (Joe in interview, August 10, 2011). However, just as Indigenous images, such as the serigraphs included in this exhibition, may distract the non-Indigenous audience away from private Indigenous knowledge, they can also share important cultural information that can broaden our perspectives on engagements of cross-cultural understanding.

An important operative aspect of serigraphs is their utility as a learning tool. Duffek (in interview, July 14, 2011) mentioned this in our interview when she referred to the “Joe David generation,” in which many Nuu-chah-nulth artists learned about their specific art style through working with and studying serigraphs. Serigraphs pass down specific knowledge about the use of design that is specific to particular Indigenous communities. Edward Joe (in interview, August

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Roy (2002:86) has explained something similar to the exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the way First Nations communities use public events to create specific representations of themselves and their stories, while other aspects of their culture remain closed to outsiders. These representations distract the attention of non-Indigenous audience away from the sacred and private work that goes on within the community (Roy 2002).

10, 2011) explained that there are specific guidelines in design that his ancestors left for him, things need to be placed in a particular way and that “culturally, they mean something;” at the same time, he tries to make these forms new and different. An example of his process can clearly be seen in his work included in the exhibition, especially the serigraphs *Fishing Adventure* and *Troller*, where he combines traditional formline designs with photo-realistic depictions. Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) talks about how art was used to record his Coast Salish peoples’ history, explaining that certain people were paid to witness important aspects of that history, and the art was used to reflect these events. Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) also explains how some of his prints reflect the current political environment for Coast Salish peoples. He uses his *Ate Salmon* (L010.3.404): serigraph as an interesting example

I did one called ‘Ate Salmon.’ It’s the number eight because there [are] eight salmon heads, but the title is ‘I *Ate* the Salmon’—past tense. So it’s a play on words, and at that time, there was a lot of depletion of salmon, whether it was Coho or you know, any of the salmon. The population just wasn’t there as much as it was, you know, back in the 50’s, 40’s and 30’s. It was, you know, an enormous food supply, and before European contact, it was a huge food supply for the west coast. So that was kind a political statement of eight salmon, we don’t eat it as much anymore because you can’t get it as much anymore. [Johnny in interview, August 10, 2011]

The serigraphs shown in this exhibition are important markers of points in history, but also establish connections to current events and an inalienable relationship to certain resources (such as fish, land, forestry, etc.). Serigraphs, Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) states, are “a great way to speak from who we are—not from a book, not from a magazine or whatever. We need to personally reflect who we are.” Johnny (in interview, August 10, 2011) explains that a number of stories can be attached to a given image, and although this multiplicity may be

critiqued by the art world as commoditization, it does not change the fact that these images reflect his cultural heritage. The use of one image to convey a multitude of stories or connotations reflects the complexity and dexterity of the serigraph medium.

It is extremely important to recognize, not only the serigraphs included in this exhibition, but all Indigenous serigraphs, as important expressions of Indigenous knowledge and perspective. As contemporary learning tools, Indigenous serigraphs communicate cultural knowledge about design guidelines, as well as inalienable connections between the images and the artists' ancestry, history, lineage, and life experiences (Dick in interview, August 4, 2011). As critical contemporary engagements with concepts of place, these serigraphs challenge mainstream assumptions of the 'print' as a fundamentally commercial or commoditized object. At the same time as these Indigenous perspectives are being expressed in the art works, they are engaging in a critical dialogue with the audience, who are interpreting and attempting to understand that information. Therefore, the meanings in these serigraphs are not static; they are in constant dialogue, shifting in response to the bodies that occupy the physical and digital exhibition space. This follows Townsend-Gault's (1998:41) important statement in *Reservation X* that "All the time all of this—what the art is and who it is for—is worked out in a continuous dialogue with its audiences." The conversations surrounding the serigraphs represented in *Understanding Place in Culture* are not only about perspectives of place; they are dialogues about multiple points of access, diverse audiences, and the entwining of historical and contemporary histories and perspectives of identity.

## **CHAPTER 4: CURATORIAL AGENCY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

Curatorial practice is a process of multiple engagements; it is a transformative process that takes on a variety of forms in response to its dialogical entanglements. It is, by definition, an agentive practice, but not one that is representative of a single mode of access or pursuit; it is a collaborative/ dialogical effort. In creating cross-disciplinary collaborations, between anthropological methods and curatorial art processes, crucial points from which to deconstruct hegemonic forms of representation and exhibition emerge. Not only do anthropological methods of engagement speak to a more inclusive conversation between the disciplines of art and anthropology, but these methods also prompt art curators to work collaboratively with the communities they seek to represent. The intersections of curatorial collaboration are critical points of inquiry, exposing the levels of cross-cultural engagement that are occurring throughout the exhibition process.

Anthropological methods of engagement, such as community consultation and an emphasis on the socio-cultural context of an object or artwork, assist curators of art in identifying pressing issues that are of primary concern to the Indigenous communities in question. Analyzing the extent to which collaboration is happening, and at what level, provides key insights into the success of any given exhibition or method of cultural representation. The curator's sights of engagement—the community, the artist, the institution, the audience, etc.—all

relate to ethical questions of representation: what is being represented, who is it for, and what is it that we are trying to say?

This thesis' themes of space and place and the transmission of knowledge provide a critical gateway into discussions of the curatorial process and its ability to adapt to new motives in the discourses of cultural representation. As I discussed in chapter one, the constructs of architectural spaces are indicative of the hegemonic forces that construct them (Lefebvre 1974). Museological representations of culture follow that same trajectory, often translating or transfiguring cultural contexts through historically dominant modes of display and appropriation (Breckenridge 1989; Thomas 1991). My endeavor to represent Indigenous concepts of place in the exhibition was an attempt to destabilize these dominant modes of display, not by obscuring my own curatorial voice, but by making its vulnerability visible. The dialogical activity of selecting serigraphs with the artists and inputting their narratives into the exhibition itself consciously forced me to re-think and re-determine the original structure of the exhibit, and led to a representation of multiple conceptions of place and space, rather than purely physical representations. Although the exhibition represents a more dialogical ethnographic approach as opposed to a full-on collaborative ethnography, the process helped me to understand the commitment and depth of research that is potentially necessary for a true collaborative, co-authored exhibition. Subsequently, the perspectives on place voiced by the artists in the exhibition persuaded me to recognize the impermeability of certain experiences, such as Francis Dick's connection to, and understanding of, the many significant spaces of Kingcome Inlet. It is in these dialogical elements of the exhibit that I would, indeed, say that curatorial agency is both

transformed and displaced. By emphasizing the artists' role in the production of the exhibition, and by showcasing the artists' own perspectives, the mediatory role of the curator is more inclusive of the desires of those who are represented.

Another principal element in this thesis' discussion of space and place is the way in which geographical and disciplinary boundaries of space are constructed, and, in turn, fabricate notions of belonging that are circumscribed to a designated territory or field of research. Hegemonic processes of constructing and legalizing boundaries, such as national and provincial borders, negate the complex relations between Indigenous peoples and the land that are constantly transforming and being born anew (Casey 1997; Ingold 2000; Kennedy 2002; Thom 2009). Implementing narratives, such as Johnny's description of his family's trips to Seattle, challenge these boundaries in space, much the way Duffek's *Border Zones* (2010) exhibit challenged the exclusiveness of Northwest Coast subjects. Both these motives seek to expand the ways in which the public understands the classification of 'Northwest Coast art' as the product of a particular designation of time and place. The conversations I had with artists and curators made visible the vulnerable and unstable state of such taxonomic categorization. Rather, images of the Northwest Coast, such as those represented in the exhibition, speak to a phenomenological understanding of these spaces that is a direct expression of the artists' experience. Neither the spaces nor the places that we occupy are neutral or static, nor are our curatorial attempts at representation. Contemporary art galleries and museums have the power to transform conventional hegemonic understandings of boundaries, as long as they respect the intricate socio-political contexts of the objects and the concerns of the peoples they seek to represent.

Recognizing the socio-political imparities of Indigenous perspectives of place is relevant to a multitude of issues in British Columbia today, especially in terms of land claims and treaty negotiations. Broadening the understanding of how certain places can inform a community's identity and sense of belonging can have a definite impact on the way people engage with the socio-economic issues of land use and cultural heritage. If an exhibit emphasizes different modes of sensorial learning, such as *Peter Morin's Museum* or *Understanding Place in Culture*, viewer-participants have an opportunity to connect with these ideas and perspectives on unfamiliar ground. The audience is not forced to read a lengthy, convoluted text or the historical documentation of a given people; rather, they are exposed to interactive narratives that directly correspond to the ways in which that knowledge is created and experienced. If those connections can be felt, and, perhaps, even understood in some way by the viewer, that viewer may begin to think differently about the ways in which Indigenous land and resources have been, and are, allocated, managed, and related to. The lessons implicit in this thesis and the curatorial efforts examined in chapter two are *that people have different ways of organizing knowledge and connecting to places*. Further, active engagements with those places are essential for the process of cultural continuation and knowledge transmission (Ingold 2000:147–148). If the audience is positioned as a witness to these experiences, then it may be easier for them to see that hegemonic structures, such as provincial and national governments, have played, and continue to play, a pivotal role in alienating Indigenous communities from those spaces.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In this sense, we do not need to necessarily confine 'hegemonic structures' only to governing bodies. We can also extend this thought to large corporate bodies that, through limited consultation efforts with Indigenous communities,

Messages on the importance of certain resources and places were implicit in all the conversations I had with the artists throughout the curatorial project. The idea of knowledge transfer, in reference to their cultural heritage (which includes site-specific knowledge), was an indispensable aspect of their artistic practice. Whether this is done through the incorporation of traditional design elements, the re-telling of important oral histories, or the utilization of personal narratives of about belonging, the artists' aims are to share something of themselves, something of their identity (Dick in interview, August 4, 2011; Johnny in interview, August 10, 2012; Joe in interview, August 10, 2011). In reference to Ingold's (2000:24) account that the story is a performance, a way embodying human feeling, we can understand that both the narratives and the serigraphs in the exhibition as crucial constructions of knowledge *in the making*. On a reflexive note, it would have been ideal for me to correspond directly with all the artists represented in the exhibition; that way, the exhibit would have conveyed a deeper and more inclusive outlook on the variety of Indigenous perspectives on place. Further, it would have been wonderful to correspond directly with community Elders on their relationships with some of the places represented in the images. This would have provided a wider framework for discussing the serigraphs, and would have greatly increased the Indigenous community involvement in the project. However, time and monetary constraints being what they are, my consultation efforts were limited. In respect to these constraints, I attempted to focus intently on the indispensable personal knowledge and information the artists chose to share with me, and I thank them again for this valuable experience. As I mentioned previously, the result is an ethnographic curatorial

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misappropriate natural resources that, in turn, distance and alienate Indigenous communities from an essential aspect of their identity.

project that attempts to create a dialogical framework for thinking about the serigraphs and Indigenous expressions of place.

I see this thesis and corresponding exhibition as an important documentation of the ways in which art is used to express converging and diverging notions of identity and relationships to place. The serigraphs included in this exhibition are themselves a carefully crafted way of organizing knowledge. Perhaps in the future, the online catalogue component could be extended to a web-forum or website that includes contemporary artists' representations of places that are in deep debate with regards to current land issues and resource claims. Because of an artist's ability to both extend and limit access to particular knowledge through his or her work, this kind of online collaborative exhibition would be a great way to approach these issues without revealing any protected or sacred knowledge. Such a project would, of course, require extensive community collaboration and consultation in order to represent issues that directly represent and speak to the needs and desires of those communities.<sup>57</sup> The collaborative action of engaging directly with artists and community representatives is key to any process of cultural representation today, and the examples found in this thesis are directly reflective of this principal.

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<sup>57</sup> The use of particular images to locate places of importance can be controversial, even in regards to reproductions. Fortney (in interview, July 16, 2011) has noted that, at times, community members may be concerned about certain imagery that is presented in a public space. In creating a learning tool that speaks to locations and relationships to place, greater consultation with the concerned communities would be needed in order not to misrepresent or misuse any sensitive cultural knowledge.

The idea of the museum as a monolithic entity is changing to include multiple voices and perspectives, in terms of what is being seen and heard. The curatorial role of ‘cultural mediator’ has also transformed, as many museums and art galleries are taking on collaborative projects that are curated or co-curated by members of the represented community. If the voices and perspectives of Indigenous communities are increasingly called upon to inform culturally sensitive exhibits, then the space of the gallery transforms, traversing the hegemonic systems that have, for so long, misrepresented and misappropriated Indigenous objects and ideas. In this way, curatorial agency is used to better inform and formulate exhibitions that speak directly to contemporary socio-political issues, and, importantly, they are issues that each community in question deems valuable.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the ways in which curatorial practice informs the knowledge produced in exhibitions of cultural representation. Anthropological methods of engagement displace the assumption of the museum space as finite, positioning it as a site for public exchange and dialogue. The application of these methods in an exhibition project about Indigenous experiences of place served as an experiment, in which the socio-cultural implications of this research could be practiced, measured, and evaluated. Exhibitions serve as critical points of engagement where the phenomenologies of being are expressed and confronted; offering a multi-textual experience that goes beyond what a conventional anthropological text can offer. Curatorial agency can be used as a productive force in the dispersing of perspectives that challenge the hegemonic forms that have for so long dominated the cultural representations

of museums. As phenomenologies of perception continue to transform and rejuvenate, so will the spaces that aim to represent those very experiences.

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## APPENDIX A: SELECT EXCERPTS FROM ARTIST INTERVIEWS

The following is a short selection of excerpts from the interviews with artists Francis Dick and Maynard Johnny Jr. that were not included in the main body of thesis. The interviews themselves are withheld from this the publication of this thesis in order to protect any private/ confidential statements made by the artists.

Francis Dick

Interview with Francis Dick, conducted by Shelby Richardson.

August 4, 2011 3:00 PM

Victoria, BC

Recorded Session: 56 mins

Preface: The following excerpts are from an interview that took place on August 4, 2011 between the artist, Francis Dick and the interviewer, Shelby Richardson. The interview covers a conversation about a selection of serigraphs in the University of Victoria Art Collections that were created by the artist. The prints discussed in this interview will be exhibited in an exhibition entitled *Understanding Space in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Knowledge* at the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery at the McPherson Library.

So, I think in my paintings, it's not just sort of, its not one dimensional, or as much about two different things. It's about layers of things. When I paint something, like *Gwa'yi* for instances, a painting—I did when I first went back. I had a wolf in the painting, and then I had a whale because there is a mountain, that was called *Gwał'gwáyam'nukw*, and what that means is a 'mountain owning whales,' and during the great flood, when the flood was going down, back down, these whales got stuck in the mountain, and they turned to stone. And now my uncle says that up there, *Gwał'gwáyam'nukw*, that mountain, it looks like there's a whale stuck in the mountain. And, so, I like that, that story, and wanted to take that story and whatever way I was able too do that. But then it was about, it was about the wolf, his name is *Kawadelakala* and that wolf—there is a whole other legend about that wolf, and my family is direct descendants from that wolf. I wanted to put a wolf to signify Kingcome. And Kingcome Inlet is all, or all the people in Kingcome, are part of the wolf clan, but not necessarily *Kawadelakala*, so, do you know what I mean? There are so many layers too it, so when your looking at the piece, it's very involved, everything can [mean something]. It's not just a painting, it's not a painting about, 'Oh I really like how this person looks,' or 'I want to talk about my Grandmother,' or 'I want to talk about my brother.' It's a whole incredible ancestry and lineage that is in there, and of course I can't, when I do a painting, I have all, in these small little write-ups, and it doesn't encompass all of that in a little paragraph....

There is this mountain called *K'axsidzé*, that I used to hear about when I was little, and my grandmother told me this story, so *Kawadelakala* again, the wolf, who put all his treasures in a

box and put it on top of this mountain. And when the flood was coming down those turned to stone. So, there's this spot up on the mountain and there is like this box on it....

Kingcome's really interesting, it's like all the houses are on the river, by this amazing river, and the village is, there's this field in the middle of the village, and that's the main part of the village. They have a new health centre now, they have a new school, and they have a new band office, but the field is, I don't know, it is this essential part of the village. You know some places you go into and the school is the most amazing place because its big and its really? They kind of made it a traditional building site, and they got poles or native designs and stuff. But it's not in Kingcome, it's the field....

(In relation to the following question: Do you think site-specific knowledge can be mediated through a something like a print?)

For sure I think so, I do believe so. I think though, I think its not just one thing. I think it's a combination of things though. I don't think it's just somebody going, 'I think I'm going to paint that how I see it.' I think for me to really, be able to do what you just said, I think one has to be very conscious. Very conscious of the place, of the site, very aware of what's going on with self as your creating that site, and the meaning of the site to you. To me that's an artist. That's what an artist is. There are very few artists in the world, I think—at least in the aboriginal world—I think people can really emulate well. Like, I can hang out with you for a month and half and teach you all the basics, and then you would have, you'd be able to create and make these beautiful forms, but your not from my nation. I can train you enough, I believe, and this has been done over and over and over again, where you can create something that is absolutely beautiful, probably be really successful in the art world, right. I mean, but for me, the art process is really about knowing self, really knowing who you are, where you come from. And all the in-betweens from there to here, and with some vision of where it is going. You have to be really mindful and thoughtful to do that. Most people don't because it is too scary, it's too scary to, to really just be with self.

Maynard Johnny Jr.

Interview with Maynard Johnny Jr.

August 10, 2011

Duncan, Vancouver Island

Recorded Session: 48 mins

Preface: The following are excerpts from an interview that took place on August 10, 2011 between the artist, Maynard Johnny Jr. and the interviewer, Shelby Richardson. The interview covers a conversation about a selection of serigraphs in the University of Victoria Art Collections that were created by the artist. The prints discussed in this interview will be exhibited in an show entitled *Understanding Space in Culture: Serigraphs and the Transmission of Knowledge* at the Maltwood Prints and Drawings Gallery at the McPherson Library.

Well I think for the most part prints reflect a piece of our culture that is passed down. Stories that have been told to our people, you know, as generations went through. You kind of take that into your work, and I often found that I've taken stories, and used them in my own way, adding my own touch to the story, or adding, or taking a story out of my life. And I've got a few prints that, they're not necessarily traditional stories, but they're experiences I've had in my life. That's kind of what First Nations—most west coast anyways—First Nations cultures reflect their history through song and dance and art. And then Coast Salish aspects of things, we never had tape recorders, or paper and pen to record our history, and we paid people to witness what was going on at ceremonies and stuff, so in a way, its kind of a way to reflect history, you know? I can do a painting of a Thunderbird and come up with a story that's totally about the Thunderbird, and you kind of put that along with the design; you just create it. That's the tricky thing about art today [that] I think you can do almost anything and call it art. In a sense, and I don't mean that in a disrespectful way. It's like I can paint a raven no problem, I can design a raven or a bear with my eyes closed right? But the trick is to do it different—like as speaking from a market point of view. I'm an artist for a living so I can always just pop out something if I want, but the trick is to do it in a different way, and then take what you've learned about the bear, or what you've learned about whale or...., and then to reflect that in your design, so that you spread your culture a bit to other people that don't necessarily know it —Why we like the bear, why we like the eagle, so on and so forth. And so that's kind of how I kind of view art, is a way to show people our culture, because there is a lot we can't show, especially non-First Nations people. We can't show some of the stuff that we do traditionally, like ceremonial wise and stuff like that. So, I mean there's a lot of stuff that I can't, I'd love to be able to paint and design to show people who we are, but I can't because its secret, like its forbidden. But yeah I think it's a great vehicle to reflect who we are as Coast Salish people. And I'm sure all up and down, all over the world, you know people have their own way of showing who they are and sharing their culture....

(The following quote falls in referencing the print as a contemporary medium)

And you know, I think that's the next, the print, the silkscreen printing was a contemporary form of a painted drawing, or you know a painted regalia. Somebody painted an apron or a cape. So that was sort of the next step, to reproduce what the original work was, and now you get gicleés....

(The following quotes fall in reference to creating prints about specific places or sites)

Well I mean there are certain things like, *Leader of the Fisherman* was obviously about the day I spent with my dad on the river, you know. It doesn't reflect that we were on a river, and that we were fishing on the river, but the story, once you've described being a part of the eagle and holding the salmon, you kind of get that aspect, once you have told the whole story. So, I mean that has happened, then there is the story about the Killerwhale and the Thunderbird, and so I have you know, *Answer to the Call*. The reason it's: *Answer to the Call*, is because the Cowichan people had a whale caught in the bay at the mouth of the river eating all the fish before the fish could come out of the river, and they called upon the Thunderbird to come take the Killerwhale away because Thunderbirds prey upon Killerwhales. So, this is basically a Thunderbird carrying a Killerwhale away. So the Thunderbird was the answer, you know *answer to the call*. The people who come get the Thunderbird. And so that's a point in time, and I guess you could put as a place, that was a part of the Cowichan's people's history.

I can't say that I could, because I never personally went to any 'sites.' I mean for me all these images I've done have been a reflection of stories that have been told, a lot of them are old, and like I say, some of them are personal experiences. You know, like it's kind of neat that—like I did one *Protecting Mother*, and there's two wolves around a woman, and the reason I did that is because my mom had two sons. So, the wolves represent me and my brother and the woman is my mother, so the *Protecting Mother*. On my mom's side of the family, she's Kwakwaka'wakw and my dad's Salish, two completely different tribes. Two completely different cultures. Meanwhile, there are some similarities and—but on my mom's side you know, this is a Salish design on her side, one of her crests is a wolf so it's kind of how I reflected that part of me, is from my mother's side, even though I do a Salish style design. This is me and my brother protecting my mother. So, those are the kind of things I reflect. So in terms of a place it's not really related to but it's related to my mother who is from a different culture right? A different place. Around Cape Mudge, that's where my mother's from. And it's funny, I just learned a story, which I guess can be related to place, if I ever come up with an image. A long, long time ago—my uncle told me this story—that once basically, my great-great-great-great Grandfather, long before [European] contact happened, the people from Cape Mudge, where my mother is from, would come down to our territory, around this Island, around Chemainus, and basically rape and

pillage our villages. So, finally my Grandfather, who was great-great-great-great so far down, right; decided, you know, 'I'm getting tired of this, these people coming and doing this to us, let's stop this.' And he went around to different villages, Lyackson, you know Pauquachin, and all those villages around that area and said: 'look, I'm getting tired of this, let's do something about it,' and people agreed. So, they went and met these people coming down and they slaughtered them. And then they took, he took, he was—we didn't have chiefs but we had, that's the best word for it, was chief, so he was sort of 'the chief'—he took his eldest son to Cape Mudge and said: 'I don't want to raise my axe to you anymore and to show you that I mean that I want to offer you my eldest son. Just to prove that I am willing to call a truce,' basically, right? And then the eldest son married the chief's eldest daughter. So, I could be closely related, well not closely, but related in some way, more than being my mom, but more so the people up the valley as well. But that's a story in time, you know, not necessarily place. I mean there is a sense of place, of a certain place in the ocean, but there's stuff like that. So I don't know, maybe I went somewhere that all this took place [and] that might be a place that reflects, you know, it would help me come up with the image, you know tell the story so.

(The accompanying quote follows my question about his interest in being a part of the exhibition *Understanding Space in Culture*)

Yeah, no, I think it's a great idea, especially if—it doesn't even matter if it's only Coast Salish or a bunch of different tribes—its definitely always, I think, a great way to speak from who we are, not from a book, not from the news, not from a magazine or whatever, we need to reflect personally who we are as people.

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