Ethnographic Research of the Museum of Vancouver (MOV): Critically Examining an Institutional Shift towards an Engagement-based Model

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Overview of presentation

✧ Research Contributions
✧ Ethnographic Fieldwork Methodologies: Intersections
✧ Museum Ethnographic Findings at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV):
  1) MOV Paradigm Shift from 2008 onwards
  2) Embracing an Engagement-based Model: Effects on Collections Work
  3) Reflections on Tracing the Development of *All Together Now*, A Case Study
Research Contributions

- My research follows the disciplinary stream of critical museum anthropology that examines the ‘behind the scenes’ of how western museum institutions function.

- Focus on the recent paradigm shift in 2007/2008 from the Vancouver Museum to the Museum of Vancouver (A deeper historical context is also considered).
Research Contributions

- My research lies both in **behind the scenes of the transition itself and how this transformation manifested itself** (i.e. case studies)

- How this contributes to a new paradigm manifesting in urban museums by thinking about the benefits, challenges, pitfalls and lessons learned for museums going through similar transitions
Fieldwork Methodologies

Ethnographer
- Staff Meetings
  participant observation
- Collectors Show
  participant observation
- Former & Current Staff
  semi-structured interviews
- Archival research
Fieldwork Methodologies

Museum Work
- Blog writing/photographer
- Museum Interpreter and Visitor Studies Work
- Museum Auxiliary Staff (Opening/Closing Museum, Front Desk)
Museum Ethnographic Findings at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV)

MOV Paradigm Shift from 2008 onwards
- Examined the institutional work behind the Re-envisioning and Rebranding of MOV:
  1) Organizational Restructuring of Staff
  2) Staff challenges, successes, tensions in this restructuring including its effects on collections
2015 MOV Organizational Chart
From a Collections-based Model to an Engagement-based Model

Nancy Noble, CEO (2005-2016) states:

“Some people may argue that the collections had been neglected but in fact when I got here there was almost nobody looking after the collections...this is a resource we need to use to engage the community...this is how we are going to tell the stories...so we actually have put more resources into the collections then before I got here...individual curators did that [before]but off the sides of their desks” (Roy, 2015: Interview Data)
Embracing an Engagement-based Model: Effects on Collections Work

- Conservation (minimized staff and work)
- Collections Management Focus:
  Deaccessioning (Fiercer or not?)
  Accessioning and Digitization (Olympic Collection)
- Curatorial: Embracing a Civic Museography
- Repatriation (Engagement on their terms)
Curatorial: Embracing a Civic Museography

“a form of curatorial action designed to identify and address issues of public concern and interest while seeking public participation and involvement” (Gosselin, 2013: 21)
MOV’s Engagement Turn (2008+)

*Home Grown: Local Sustainable Food, 2010-2011
*Bhangra.me: Vancouver’s Bhangra Story, 2011-2012
*Sex Talk in the City, 2013
*Rewilding Vancouver, 2014
*Our Future Homes: Creating a New Vancouver, 2016
*All Together Now, 2016
In late 2013, MOV received a request from the Sts’ailes First Nation for the repatriation of the Sasq’ets [Sasquatch] mask and “was pleased and honoured to be able to follow through with the repatriation in 2014” (MOV, 2014: 28)
All Together Now: 
Vancouver Enthusiasts and Their Worlds 
(June 23rd 2016-Jan.8th 2017)

*All Together Now* explores the act of collecting, the collector’s vision and the role collections play in building identity, public memory and social connections. The exhibition will explore the questions: *Why do people collect*, and *how do private collections touch public consciousness*?

Vancouverites were invited to submit their collections for inclusion in the exhibition. Although the collections have now been chosen for the exhibition, the public can still contribute photos of their own collections to be included on a projected wall of photo. *To submit your photo, share it on Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #MyCollectionatMOV.*
All Together Now: Vancouver Enthusiasts and Their Worlds
(June 23rd 2016-Jan. 8th 2017)

*All Together Now: Vancouver Collectors and Their Worlds* features 20 beautiful, rare, and unconventional collections. In this exhibition, both collector and collected are objects of study, interaction, and delight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectors and their Collections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angus Bungay: Action figures and toys</td>
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<td>Art Lingren: Fly fishing lures and gear</td>
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<td>David Moe: Prosthetics</td>
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<td>Gabriele Whiteley: Taxidermy</td>
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<td>Gerry Parsons: Juice Boxas and toasters</td>
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<td>Harold Stoves: Seeds</td>
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<td>Imogene Lim: Chinese restaurant menus</td>
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<td>Ken Stephens: Ramp walker toys</td>
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<td>Kyle Seller: Pinball machines and arcade games</td>
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<td>Lyanne Smith &amp; Angus McIntyre: Transit memorabilia</td>
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<td>Major James Matthews: Vancouver history</td>
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<td>Marie Allen: Artificial eyes</td>
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<td>Maurice Guibord: Expo '67 memorabilia</td>
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<td>Melanie Tallington: Corsets</td>
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<td>Nancy Bondsten: Chairs</td>
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<td>Neil Whaley: Vancouver memorabilia</td>
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<td>Rob Frith: Concert posters</td>
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<td>Willow Yamauchi: Drag queen costumes</td>
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<td>Yosef Wosk: Circus toys</td>
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<td>Anonymous: Pocket watches</td>
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Tracing the Development of All Together Now

1) MOV staff brainstorming meeting
2) Accessioning a new collection: Categorizing, Culling, Organizing
3) Visiting potential collectors
4) Photoshoots with collectors and their collections
5) Design Team Meetings
Three Sources of Inspiration for the project (among others)

Major Matthews: Vancouver’s First Archivist

16th century Cabinets of Curiosities

Interactivity embedded in design solutions
ATN Project Inquiry & Collections

What/Why/How do people collect?

Collections:
- Early Vancouver History Collection
- Drag Queen Costumes Collection
- Vancouver memorabilia & packaging
- Vintage Prostheses
- Pocket Watches
- Plant Seeds
- Circus-themed toys
- Ramp Walker Toys
- Pinball & Arcade Machines
- Action Figures
- Artificial Eye Collection
- Chairs
- Chinese Restaurant Menu Collection
- Expo 67 Collection
- Music Poster Collection
- Public Transit History/Ephemera
- Juke Boxes Collection
Accessioning a new collection: Categorizing, Culling, Organizing
Visiting Potential Collectors
Collector Photoshoots

Photo taken by Rebecca Blissett
Design Team Meetings
Exhibition Tour and Sneak Peak with Collectors
What’s Next? Conversations with the Public and Local Cultural Organizations on **Redefining** what an **Engaged form of Collecting** Means

**The Result:** MOV Collections Plan on what Vancouver-based collecting means moving forward
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My PhD Committee:
Anthony Shelton, Director of MOA (Museum of Anthropology)
Carol Mayer, Head of Curatorial, MOA
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