

The Graduate School of Education
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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin
Anita Sinner

Editor

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Preparing a gallery talk as lived inquiry: Exploring the spaces in-between knowledge in art museum education

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ABSTRACT

As practitioners participating in the educational role of the art museum, art museum educators explicitly or implicitly ask themselves, to quote the terms of H. Spencer's (1860) famous essay, "What knowledge is of most worth?" Instead of thinking in terms of cognitive psychology, communication strategies or art historical knowledge, this lived inquiry aims to explore differently the process of an art museum educator preparing for gallery talks. It explores the in-between of the disciplinary knowledge, the experience of the gallery space, the embodied knowledge, the various museum discourses and, drawing from Rogoff (2010), it inquires about what knowledge does instead of is. The author asserts that a/r/tography is a productive methodology to inquire differently and bring new findings about art museum education, especially how ideas and meanings are created around and in-between the artworks.

KEYWORDS

A/r/tography

Arts-based research

Art museum education

Gallery talks - adults

Art interpretation

Knowledge

*Before we had words
For thoughts and feelings
We had looks and gestures,
Immediate, unclouded
By context or connotation.
Almost lost in words,
That immediacy remains;
Too deep a glance,
Or a glance averted,
Can leave us speechless,
Coveting that unlanguage clarity.*

- S. P. Zitner, *Before We Had Words*, 2002

To be 'almost lost in words' (Zitner, 2002:10) is something I have often felt and experienced in my work as guide-interpreter and art museum educator. Or perhaps should I say that at times I am at a loss *for* words? In the context of the art museum, one would assume that looking, observing and experiencing the art works should come first, yet in many different ways words remain at the centre of my practice when I am in the company of visitors. Words seem to pulsate as the nodes of intersecting networks of interpretations, knowledge and affects. Granted, this situation is certainly not unique in an educational context, but this relationship to 'words' in what is purports, means, reveals or hides in my practice as guide-interpreter, is something I wish to reflect upon.

In this article, my concern is not to analyse or to critique the choice or semantic role of specific words within the dynamic of a gallery tour – or, for that matter, even put into question the need or relevance of gallery tours as part of educational public programs. My key question is to explore, within the field of art museum education, what words stand for; that is, knowledge. Drawing from Rogoff (2010) and her work on 'unframing' knowledge, I am interested to keep in mind how knowledge tends to be inscribed within a dynamic of value: either we 'know', this we associate as an added value, it provides a sense of power, a positive flow; or we 'don't know' thus possibly creating a sense of lack, of insecurity. The now ubiquitous term 'knowledge economy' is very revealing of how knowledge is part of a system of exchange value.

But in this study, I wish to look at the position of knowledge in the development of an adult gallery tour as curriculum content.

As practitioners fulfilling the educational role of the art museum, art museum educators explicitly or implicitly ask themselves, to quote the terms of H. Spencer's (1860) famous essay, "What knowledge is of most worth?" In most Canadian museums the question is answered along two regimes: we find simultaneously the object-centered paradigm with the interpretive focus being on the voice of the artist and the curator and, often simultaneously, a presence of the visitor-centered paradigm with a focus on active pedagogy and constructivist learning theories. Today many museum institutions validate both paradigms and approaches with a diversity of interpretive programs and tools (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004; Villeneuve, 2007; Henry, 2010; Pitman and Hirzy, 2010). Nevertheless and still taking in consideration the varieties of educational paradigms, art museum educators must decide what they – including their department and institution or disciplinary field - consider is 'worth knowing'.

As part of an ongoing research interest, I embarked in this study to explore and better understand the work of guide-interpreter and more precisely the process to actually prepare for and deliver a gallery tour. As a lived inquiry, a/r/tography involves a constant conversation between an artistic production, my thinking as a researcher and the performativity of being in the exhibition space with participants. The *in-between* art and text, word and image, the researcher's own body in relation to what is explored, are the productive spaces where new ideas can emerge. According to Irwin and Springgay (2008, p. xxiv), a/r/tography is "concerned with *creating the circumstances* to produce knowledge and understanding through inquiry laden processes." Therefore, to enable a rich set of possibilities for this study, I decided at first to do inquire research through photography, the constitution of an art journal with numerous field notes and personal reflections. Well into the study, it also occurred to me that the actual performance of the gallery tour was an important stage in my learning process. There is an embodied knowledge that takes place during the gallery talk; the body thinks, observes, feels, integrate. For this reason, the conceptual and performative work of American artist Andrea Fraser greatly influenced my thinking with, along and about my practice in the gallery space.

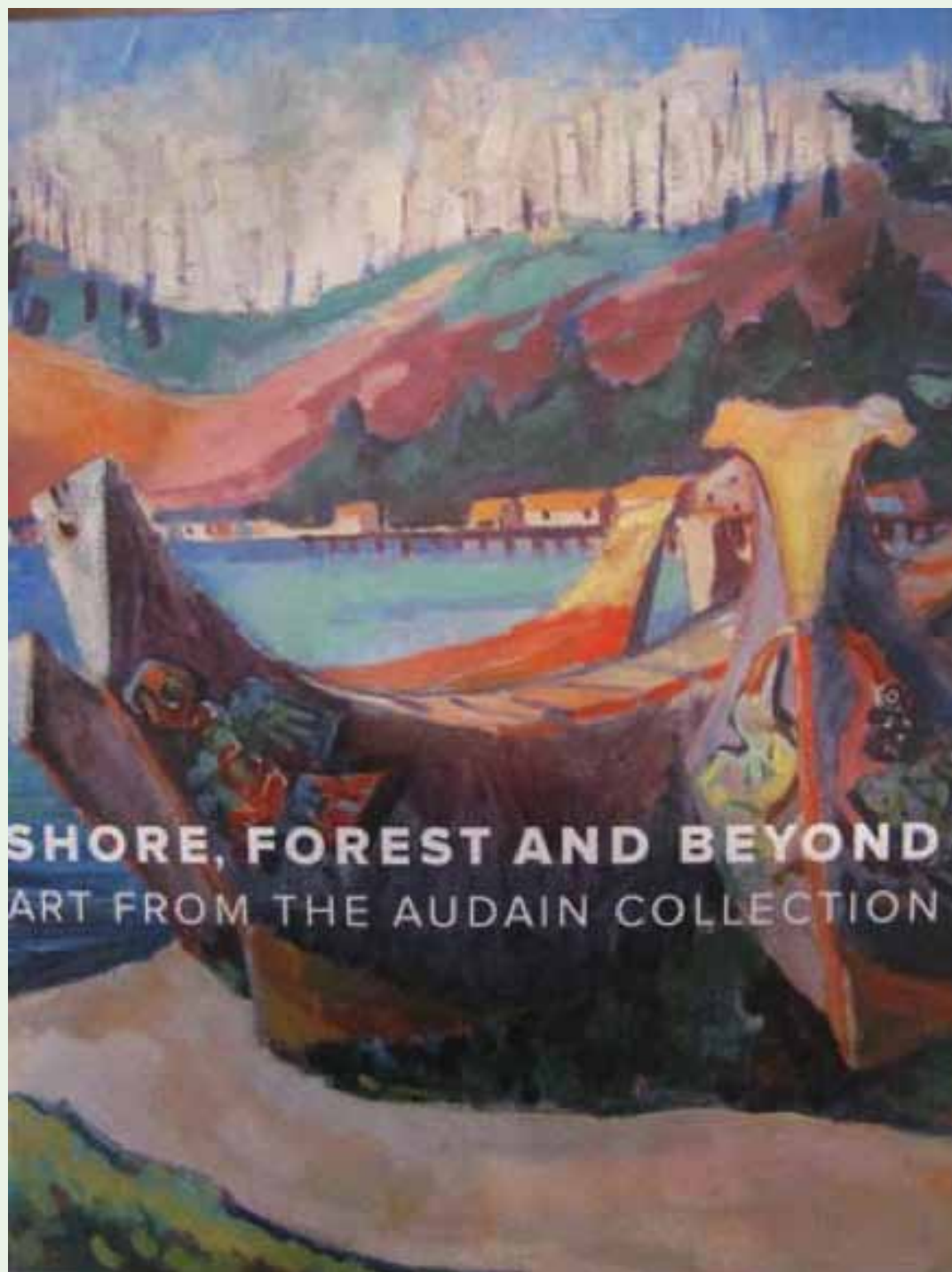
Fraser (2005) is well known for her series of art project from the late 80s and early 90s, such as *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) presented at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in which she impersonated the art museum docent and delivered gallery tours in scripted public performances. Fraser explored how the language, posture, mannerisms and patterns of looking of the docent legitimized a bourgeois subjecthood and reproduced the ideological role of the art museum (Alberro, 2005, p.xxvii). Often inserting quotes from official museum documents, she created a witty, ironic and critical text shedding light on latent discourses of power, status and knowledge inside the art museum; "The Museum wants and needs an informed, enthusiastic audience whose...knowledge of the collections and programming continue[s] to grow." (Fraser, 2005, p.107) While Fraser did not specifically address the issue of "What knowledge is of most worth?" with regards to her choice of words, she did underline how the fine arts museum's hidden curriculum was to teach the public to discriminate between what is different and what is better. (Alberro, 2005) I decided to reflect and inhabit my research data weaving both the role of educator

(guide-interpreter) and academic researcher, playing on both level of ‘acting the part’ and reflecting at a meta-level on my process of preparing a gallery tour through, with, and alongside my photographic work.

A new exhibition was in the making, *Shore, Forest and Beyond. Art from the Audain Collection* at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver, Canada); I seized this opportunity to reflect upon and examine my own learning and meaning-making process. In the first stages of this study, the art component of the research was the development of a visual art journal with photographs and notes, scattered questions and reflections scribbled down along the journey. Yet, referring to Lather’s (2007) and her excellent book title, very soon I started “getting lost” in the process. Data was collected but the gaps in-between the note taking, the journaling, the readings, the floor plan and the meetings remained; I fumbled somewhat and struggled to create a narrative from all the disconnected pieces of information I gathered about the exhibition. It’s not that I was terrified or unable to come up with a ‘good’ tour, I have sufficient experience and, as part of a team, professional support and input. But for the first time in my career as a museum educator, the practice of a/r/tography pushed and challenged me to think in a more embodied and relational way through the production of art and writing.

Spencer’s question “What knowledge is of most worth?” still resonates today and merits further reflection. One such revision has been most significantly brought forward by critical educational theorist Michael Apple (1990) who shifted the terms into, “Whose knowledge is of most worth?” Thus very pertinently reminding us of the deep ideological ramifications embedded in knowledge – such as Foucault (1984) had analysed, and the need to consider the space of the art gallery not as ‘neutral’, as a site of ‘pure’ aesthetic contemplation or appreciation, but also as a space where ideological systems of power operate.

The following text might appear quite messy (Lather, 2007) since it puts in presence traces of the performance through the photographs that were presented and some personal comments as a mode of journaling. I am not quite certain about the status of the photographs: are they documentary records of a team meeting, should I see them as artistic record or constructions of an event. All the above perhaps. From Irwin and Springgay (2008), the image carried by the concept of the fold, folding and un-folding will be productive. Folds bring surfaces closer together; they can touch and influence or change each other by in contact but without becoming one; each surface maintains its characteristics. I have attempted the conceptual folding of my photographs over my notes and the curator’s tour, the exhibition plan, the educators’ discussions and my embodied experience in the galleries. What happens when I unfold and examine the trace, the fold left in-between? In the analysis and reflection, additional meaning is weaved in. To complicate and to see what happens to that question of knowledge and art.

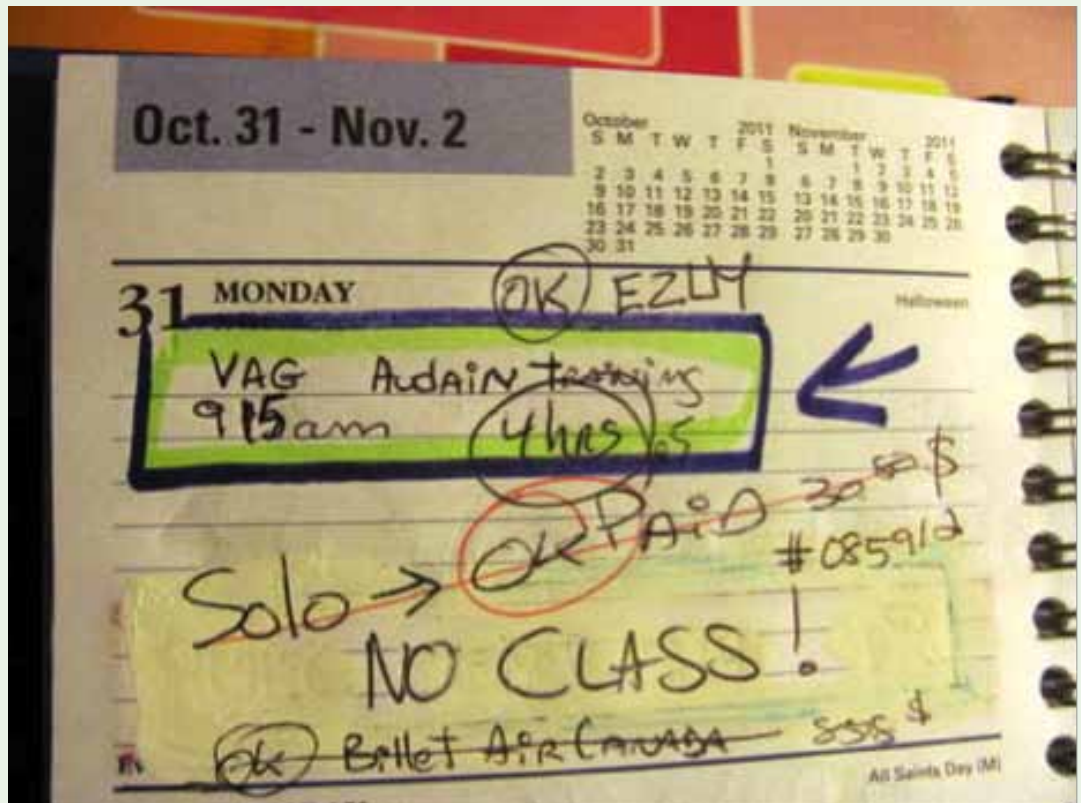


The month of October is already upon us. I feel that August and September have just flown by me; my mind so preoccupied by the readings piling up to research my thesis' topic which I need to refine, the SSRCH grant proposal, visiting my parents in Montreal and my new responsibilities at UBC as a GTA instructor in art education.

I also work as part-time gallery animateur at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Fresh out from the press, a superb catalogue for the upcoming exhibition Shore, Forest and Beyond has just arrived in the Education department. The catalogue provides a comprehensive view of the Michael Audain Collection. I must find time to read it and prepare for the curator's tour at the end of the month.

In the Vancouver Art Gallery, art gallery animateurs are paid staff and predominantly visual art graduates working on a part-time basis. All have been familiarized with the learning theories and developmental theories most frequently found in art museum education such as the Theory of Multiple Intelligences by Gardner (2005) and the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) developed by Housen and Yenawine (1999). More recently, academic discourse and research on constructivist theories of learning have looked at how meaning is co-constructed through conversation (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004), as performance (Garoian, 2001), is relative, historical and socially determined (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007) or is motivated by the situated, temporal identity the visitors embody at the moment of their visit (Falk, 2006, 2007).

Photo: Marie-France Berard



October 31st. One of the curators of the Audain show delivers an extensive two hour gallery tour to the animateurs. This marks the official count down before the team starts working in the exhibition with school groups and adult visitors. From the personal collection of Vancouver businessman and philanthropist Michael Audain, the curators have selected 170 works, displayed on two floors. The exhibition features historical northwest coast indigenous art as well as modernist works from BC artists and significant works from contemporary First Nations' artists.

In a fascinating study, Ebitz (2008) invited art museum educators to make a list of theories that inform their practice and he observed that most were psychological theories of learning. In their work, art museum educators have shown to adopt well-known theories which circulate in education (such as the multiple intelligences) and others considered easy to implement, for instance VTS as a strategy to engage novice viewers in their experience and interpretation of artworks. Albeit art museum educators have shifted from an object-centered model to become extraordinary forceful advocates for the visitor's voice, Ebitz very aptly pointed out the lack of "interest in critical pedagogy or in other critical theories that problematize our understanding of art, art history, or the nature and function of museums." (p.15)

Ian Thom, co-curator of *Shore, Forest and Beyond*. Art from the Audain Collection presenting *Portrait Mask* by Nisga'a artist (c. 1880).



This is such a large exhibition: what is important to say, to point out? What knowledge is of most worth? Our training always begins and emerges out of the curator's tour: that voice of authority acts as a series of fixed marker in terms of concepts and disciplinary facts. While we have much latitude to develop our own discourse, the curator's voice remains, if unconsciously, reassuring due to the aura of expert knowledge. Looking back over my notes from the curator's tour and the public event delivered by one of the curators, it strikes me that I have written down mostly facts about specific objects. I always appreciate hearing the voice of the curator but, as I prepare to deliver my own tours, the scattered words seem almost banal, yet strange and disconnected as I read them on the page.

Words, words, words. Where is knowledge? In the words or in-between the words? Or perhaps, the words are there to take us somewhere else.

As an art museum animateur, I know the 'how' of the guided tour. While each tour is unique, in constant flux due to the changing dynamics within each group, I have the pedagogical tools to adapt and facilitate a conversation. A review of the literature reveals numerous studies on the subject of docent and animateur training (Grinder, A.L. and McCoy, E.S., 1983; Keller, H. and Kramer, C., 2001; Lemelin, 2002; Zollinger Sweney, B., 2007) While those studies and research are extremely valuable and

interesting for their practical information on structuring a tour, providing teaching and learning strategies, developing a sense of community of practice, none consider the epistemological question of knowledge. In the recent publication *Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, Dr. Zollinger Sweney (2007) proposes three elements for a successful tour: touring techniques, information and an authentic theme.

The process of living a/r/tography made me aware that I never really questioned my practice in terms of its epistemological foundations: what 'is' knowledge when considering an artwork, how do we know? What is the difference between knowledge and information? I accept the importance of the curator's and artist's voice and, even if at times, it is in conflict with my desire to let visitors speak for themselves. Another very 'reassuring' assumption consists in my perfect formula for a great tour, rather quite similar to Zollinger Sweney's model (2007) : 1) solid art historical knowledge about the artworks with some artist quotes, 2) socio-political contextualization of the art for production and reception, and 3) efficient learning strategies. This assumption became challenged very rapidly as I started to look, not for fixed answers, but for a deeper understanding of my tour curriculum.

Marianne Nicolson,
*Tunic for a
Noblewoman: In
memory of Wadzidalga,
2009 (detail)*

Source: Catalogue
*Shore, Forest and
Beyond. Art from the
Audain Collection,
Vancouver Art
Gallery, 2011*

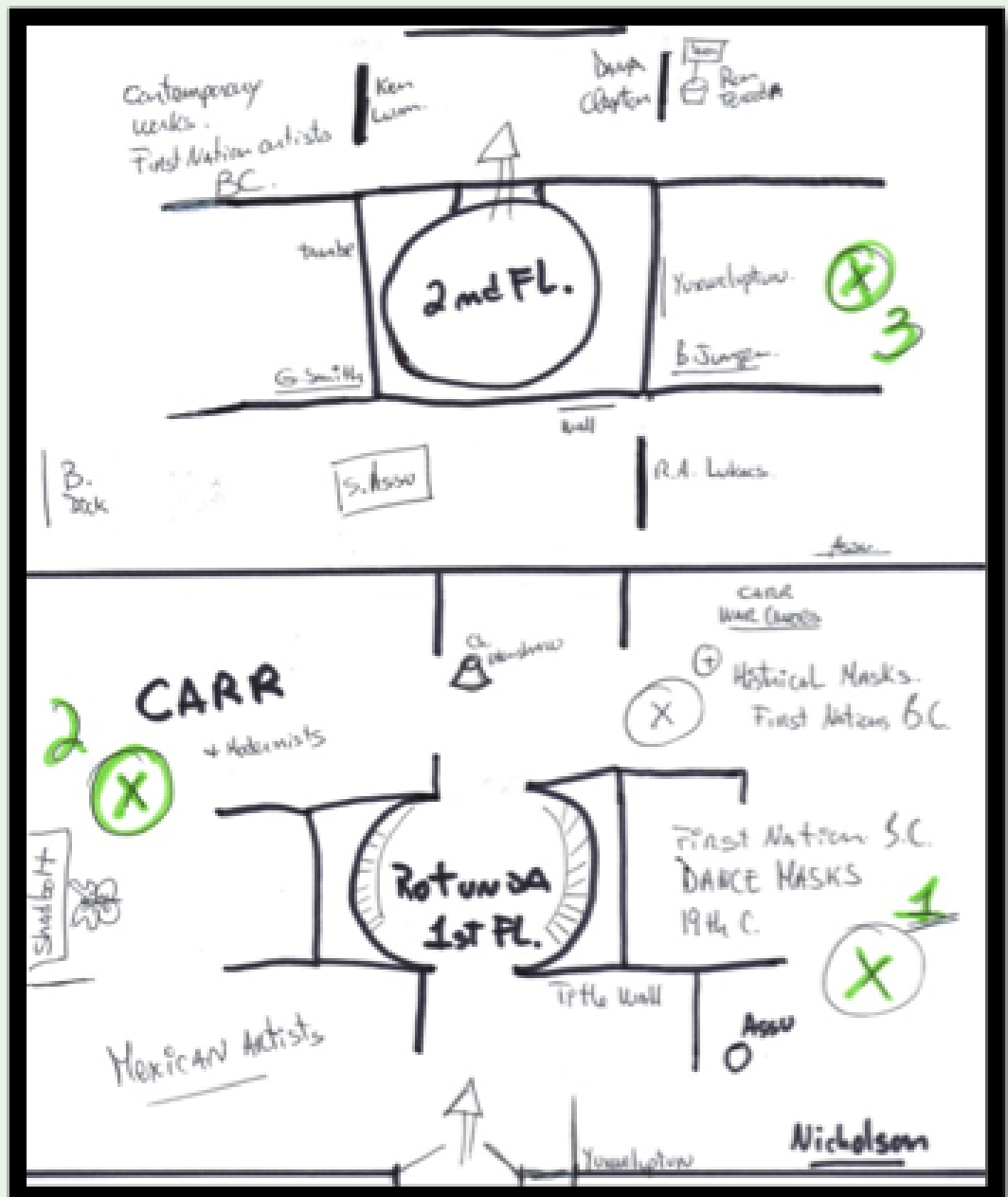


About the work of First Nation artist Marianne Nicolson, I read in my notes from the curator's tour: "About her grand-mother/copper shields/ plus reference to currency/ honouring/facing historical works. Front and back garment". Drawing from my understanding of cognitive psychology, I recognize that these words do trigger a chain of thoughts and facilitate memorization. Nevertheless, while I acknowledge their value and relevance to the piece, I wonder: is that it? What knowledge is of most significant?

I will probably repeat this information to my public and, like me, they will think: "Oh, how interesting" and yet, what about the metallic glimmer of the copper coins against the matte black paint or being confronted with the flat design of the woman's robe; the signifier of a voice silenced by the weight of colonial history.

While I am versed in all the postmodern theories in art museum education pertaining to the critique of the museum's authority, the need for visitors' active participation and the most recent cognitive models; I always feel compelled as a guide-interpreter to learn the 'right' words. Certainly, there are different categories of words: some deal more specifically with the emotional life of the visitor, to encourage and facilitate a rich museum experience, while others are more closely linked or associated to propositional knowledge and information. For visitors and the public of a gallery talk and even I who trained as an art historian, when seeking the significant words and concepts with the most intellectual weight and validity, we still turn to the words of the artist, the curator and scholarly art theory. In terms of the economy of knowledge, specific actors of the art world have for long been considered beholders of the correct and most valued knowledge about the artworks, the expert voice of the museum remains a constant presence whether in the exhibition space or as shared by the exhibition catalogue and educational print outs. Nonetheless, as the literature in art museum education can attest, many institutions actively endorse various programs to entice and invite viewer's involvement in the interpretative process (Roberts, 1997; Denver Art Museum, 2007; Cutler, 2010; Fischer and Levinson, 2010; Hirzy and Pittman, 2010).

My aim is not to deny the importance of the expert's voice, as I reflect on my performance and the gallery tours, I strongly maintain that facts and concepts are important to ground my interventions. I fully support Meszaros' (2004, 2006) critique of the 'whatever' interpretation. In the late 1990s, museum education has witnessed the rise of a discourse that shifted the interpretive authority away from the museum (the curators and educator's voices) to the visitors who were invited to build their own personal narratives (Roberts, 1997). Meszaros (2006) argues that by placing by telling visitors that 'whatever' they think of interpret is the end point of their experience indicates that the museum, "absolves itself of any interpretive responsibility for the meanings it produces and circulation in culture" (p.13). While I do have a commitment to art historical and contextual knowledge, drawing from the work of Rogoff (2010, p.1), I maintain that art museum education needs to emphasize the 'performative faculties of knowledge'. How can we think about what knowledge *does* rather than *is*.



One hundred and seventy artworks on two floors dating from the mid-nineteenth century to 2010. The curator's tour had lasted two hours. The exhibition became a walk into an art history text book – or should I say, a Western art history text book with some post-colonial revisions. The museum has transformed a personal collecting project into a well entrenched disciplinary discourse. Where did the curator pause and specifically focussed our attention? What were the conceptual, historical or thematic threads? During the meeting, I drew a map of the rooms. I need to visualize the space to help me think about the content of my tour. The art historian in me wants to structure the gallery tour according to post-colonial theory for the historical section, the received canons of BC artists (Carr, Shadbolt, Wall) and well-known contemporary First Nations artists such as Yuxweluptun and Jungen..

I did not posit Spencer's interrogation as the point of origin of my study; rather it emerged, slowly taking shape as I embarked, lived and performed a/r/tographical research. Contrary to scientific and positivist research, I did not have an initial hypothesis for which I envisioned to find a body of answers, rules and prescriptions

in order to define ‘What knowledge is of most worth’. According to Barone and Eisner (2012, p.166) arts based research is, “designed to enable readers and viewers to see aspects of the social world that they might have overlooked otherwise”. My principal aim is to approach and think differently, raise questions about how knowledge is conventionally thought of in the art museum. New meanings can emerge. As Springgay, Irwin and Kind (2005) assert, a/r/tography is grounded in a visual and textual methodology of living inquiry through the arts. Thus,

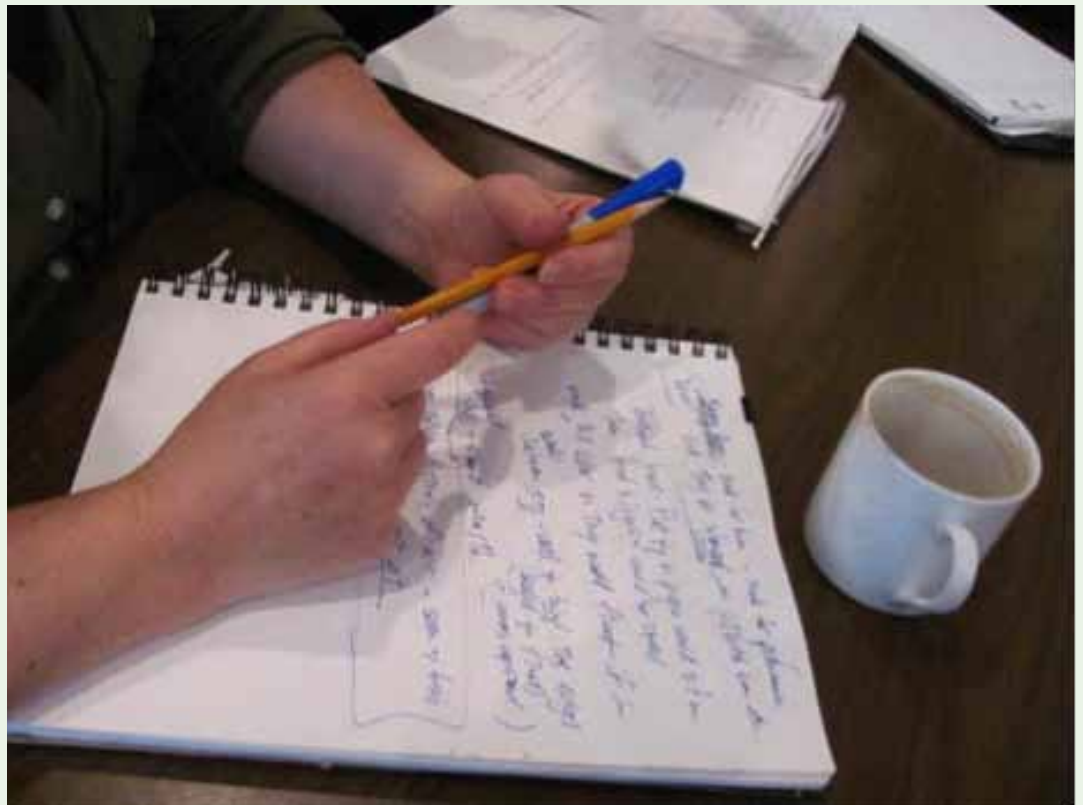
To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through a process of art making and writing. It is a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other but instead, are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings. (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005, p.899)

Photo: Marie-France Berard



The team for the school programs gathers after the curators’ talk. I do not deliver school tours anymore but I will provide the teacher’s orientation tour on November 8th. While I do have individual study time to read scholarly texts and all the extended labels produced by the curatorial department, I find that working with the school team is crucial in my process of ‘meaning making’. We certainly have different objectives due to the various age groups we address and yet our curricula share similarities and concerns: not only about what is knowledge of most worth but also the lived curriculum in the physical space of the exhibition and how it is articulated in time.

How can this study effectively describe, represent how an animateur prepares an adult gallery tour? During the research process, I often felt on the verge of confusion; I was “getting lost at the limits of representation.” (Lather, 2005, p.1) Amongst the photographs, notes taking, mapping and exploring the gallery space, doubts emerged about being able to ask the ‘good’ questions, provide an ‘accurate’ account of my process in shaping a tour and create an artistic form to make those questions resonate.



During the first two hours, the meeting table becomes an arena where words and ideas in turns compete, support, enrich and bounce off each other. Considering that a time constraint of about sixty minutes, much thinking goes behind every choice of work, the travels from one area to another, the ways to engage the visitors and facilitate an active meaning making process. A colleague writes down key words and ideas, she draws a concept map attempting to visualize the tour. The educator in me thinks of works that will engage the viewers and might trigger a good discussion. How can I make sure that they learn about the ban of the potlatch by the Canadian government from 1884-1951 without feeling lectured? And while I invite visitors to make their own interpretations, I am conscious that I also project on my visitors the desire for them to get the 'right' interpretation.

Being engaged with the practice of a/r/tography pushed me outside the boundaries of linear thinking and, instead, I started to look at contiguities, openings, reverberations and excess. Springgay, Irwin and Wilson Kind (2005) describe each of those terms as renderings.

Each rendering is not an isolated event but rather, formed in relation with each other through aesthetic inquiry. [...] Renderings offer possibilities of engagement. To render, to give, to present, to perform, to become—offers for action, the opportunity for living inquiry. Renderings are not methods. [...] renderings are theoretical spaces through which to explore artistic ways of knowing and being research. (p.899)

In this study I pushed one against the other, the exhibition gallery floor plan and the photographs, my notes and questions about how to structure my tour and the experience of our bodies in space as the team of educators moved through the galleries. I literally observed the gaps and openings between the stacks of books and articles I had to read and made it reverberate against the floor plan or my experience of the curator's tour. Just to see what would happen.



I feel, momentarily, at a loss unable to write down a tour outline. What knowledge is of most worth? Is it: the art historical context, the historical and political references, the collection as narrative, the museum display, artistic intentions, art concepts and strategies, aesthetic concerns, ideas and creativity, personal interpretations or feelings and emotions triggered by the art experience? All are important but choices have to be made. Once again: what knowledge is of most worth? What do I need to know in order to do my work as an interpreter? Sitting at the table, I am conscious of knowledge that is: the catalogue, my notes from the curator's tour, first-hand comments by fellow artists and yet the 'knowledge' I need to prepare my tour is not a juxtaposition or addition of those facts, concepts, words.

Exploring contiguity, openings, reverberation and excess does not serve to explain and illustrate. By forcing a conversation between, *with* the visual record of the art educators discussing in the gallery space and the floor plan or my journal entries makes possible a different kind of encounter; one that offer an opening into new meaning. And this practice of weaving art and writing is pursued further in this text you are reading, which does not constitute an illustration or an explanation of the performance. Drawing from Rogoff (2000), Springgay, Irwin and Wilson Kind (2005) assert that this weaving of art and text does not simply transfer meaning from one to the other; it makes possible a conversation *with, in, through* art and text. (p.899)

My initial question: “What knowledge is of most worth?” started to shift throughout the a/r/tography process. When preparing the curriculum content for my tour, a solid base of propositional knowledge about the artwork or the exhibition is necessary but, at the point, I still don’t know what knowledge is of most worth for a particular group, at a particular moment.

Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock (2011) insists that, “rather than finding out what art is *about* – a project leading back to the artistic subject in whom it is thought to originate – we need to ask *what artistic practice is doing* and *where* as well as *when* that doing occurs.” Likewise, drawing from Irit Rogoff’s (2010) need to question what knowledge does; I would argue that the knowledge which is of most worth is not an accumulation of concepts and facts – how ever cleverly organized – but an *event* triggered in, within and by the work.

Art museum educators
observing Lawrence
Paul Yuxweluptun,

*An Indian Game
(Juggling the Books),
1996. Exhibition Shore,
Forest and Beyond.
Art from the Audain
Collection at the
Vancouver Art Gallery.*



Pause. After two hours we decide to pursue our discussion in the galleries. While to my knowledge there is a lack of research on the subject, I would argue that most art museum educators need to experience the physical layout of the exhibition and be with and around the works to develop their tours. While in many instances, art museum educators have no choice but to develop the tour outline on paper if the exhibition space is not accessible, yet the content and pedagogy will irremediably change and evolve once it is lived in the gallery space.t

As I lived the research process, the photographs and journal became integral elements to bring in other layers and allow me to play with the folding of one medium onto the other. As I looked at the photographs, I noticed a recurring pattern amongst the group of educators in the gallery: most of the time, we form a circle, some kind of unit of discussion. What is important is happening *away* from the work, while at the same time being connected and related to it.

In the background:

Emily Carr, *War Canoes*,
Alert Bay, 1912 (detail).

Exhibition Shore,
Forest and Beyond.
Art from the Audain
Collection at the
Vancouver Art Gallery.



*What do we gain from being in front of the works? Attentive looking and experiencing the formal qualities of the work certainly participates in the meaning making process but being in the space is also like entering the exhibition as discourse. This discourse is multilayered: it is both connected to the art market, the socio-political context of the works and the history of art as it has been written in BC. Yet, there are other stories that can be created as we walk through the space. In the background, a detail of *War Canoes* by Emily Carr: do we concentrate on the adopted art historical discourse (focus on Carr and questions of modernism in art) and/or read his work in relation, in dialogue with the First Nations dance masks displayed in the same room therefore raising issues of politics and representation.*

Still, for a moment I wish to go back and think about words. What about the gallery talk or tour? I often wonder: do I give, provide, animate, offer, deliver, facilitate, engage in, impose or perform a gallery talk? While each of these verbs carry different semantic implications, the guide-interpreter still needs words; to describe, name, question, entice, interrogate, engage, trigger, converse, respond and discuss. And what about the ‘without’ words; the silences –which as animateur I have a deplorable urge to fill in, and yet are tremendously important to create spaces of possibility and allow some “unlanguage clarity” (Zitner, 2002). Without neglecting that knowledge

that is, I would argue that educators need to focus on what knowledge *does*; yet a major shift in the disciplinary practice of museum educators is necessary because my view is that this doing of knowledge is not a matter of learning strategies or ‘how to look’.

Art museum educators discussing works by Rufino Tamayo and David Alfaró Siqueiros presented in the exhibition Shore, Forest and Beyond. Art from the Audain Collection at the Vancouver Art Gallery.



I realize that my knowing of the exhibition – and what the visitors will experiment – is not simply about knowing facts and concepts about/concerning the works. Ideas and meanings are created around, in between the works. Through relationality, something else is happening.



I love this photograph. A colleague wondered why I bothered taking pictures of feet. I wasn't quite sure at the time; partly for reasons of research ethics, I needed to take some anonymous images but, albeit I could not articulate it at the time, I see now that this picture is very much a visual representation of a meaning making process; it's in the discussion about, with, the work.

Rogoff (2010) asked the question “what would be knowledge that is free?” Of note here is that she is not addressing the importance of free access to the gallery, neither is she referring to the transformative or emancipatory conception of knowledge. What if knowledge had nothing to do with value, worth, having or not having, of being in a position of credit or lack. What would happen then?

Art museum educators in front of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Burying Another Face of Racism on First Nation Soil, 1997 (detail). Exhibition Shore, Forest and Beyond. Art from the Audain Collection at the Vancouver Art Gallery.



Dialogue and conversations on/about and beside the works. Looking at my photographs, I notice the constant presence of the works but they are not the sole focus. To ‘know’ the works and the exhibition encompasses the artist’s voice and that of the curator but it inhabits another undefined space outside of the work. Or perhaps, in between the various disciplinary discourses. In this image, Yuxweluptun’s monumental painting seems to trigger something, possibly open a second space outside of itself where viewers are invited to enter to feel, think and reflect.

Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's painting of 1997, *Burying Another Face of Racism on First Nations Soil* is seductive, challenging and intellectually complex. Visually arresting and colourful, it nevertheless deals with the painful colonial past, First Nations lands and racism in British Columbia and Canada. There is a history about this work; it has its own narrative. As we were in the gallery, talking together about, with, because of the work, something else was happening. A multitude of lines of flight emerge: affects, conversations, connections difficult to predict in advance. Rogoff (2010) claims that when knowledge is not inserted within an 'economic' paradigm,

[...] it has the possibility of posing questions that combine the known and the imagined, the analytical and the experiential, and which keep stretching the terrain of knowledge so that it is always just beyond the order of what can be conceptualized. (p.4)

Thinking in terms of what knowledge 'does' involves the idea that it should not be conceptualized in terms of 'possession' and gain but perceived as movement, as embodied as happening outside of the object.



We are wrapping up after a long meeting. The final tour outline is not complete but we have developed an embodied knowledge of the space. We have a sense of the architectonic of the tour; deciding our movements and travels in space creates a certain narrative and, therefore our curriculum. What knowledge is of most worth is not fixed and absolute. As an animateur, this is no longer the right question for me: knowledge is a process and it emerges in relationality, it activates the relational.

As a research process, a/r/tography has brought new insights in the way I think about the planning of my tours and my curriculum. Stuart Hall (2001) asserts that museums have to risk saying 'this is important'. In accordance to a department or institution, I will make choices; choices which should be revealed to the viewer and myself, not only for what they are but also to recognize what has been left out. What I need to learn about Yuxweluptun and his painting is only one way of thinking about knowledge. A further significant part emerges in the gallery space; hence as I plan the content of my tour, I have no idea what knowledge will *do*, activate, stimulate or entice in interaction with the visitors.

I particularly love the blurry photograph of the art museum educators walking from one artwork to the other, as they experience, discuss, think and inquire. Some might find it too blurry and out of focus; what information does it provide? Not much besides a strong sense of participation and movement. One could say that it is at the opposite spectrum of a documentary photograph, one that would provide sound knowledge. And yet, it made me notice the importance of seeing knowledge as process and as embodied. What knowledge does rather than is. Rogoff (2001) has identified this concept as the 'participatory' which is the way viewers come to take part in culture instead of just inhabiting the viewing mode allocated to them by museums. What is important is not happening in/within the object of our attention but in the "involved ways of looking away from it" and what it might say about the experience of art. (Rogoff and Phelan, 2001, p.35)

From a methodological perspective, I did get lost as I engaged in a/r/tographical research but the meanderings in/within images, art and text have been extremely insightful. My initial question 'What knowledge is of most worth?' has not been answered, but complicated and refocused. Through the creative process of taking photographs and the writing and reflecting on my practice as guide-interpreter, I became deeply aware of the spaces in-between all the knowledge that I have – whether about the art objects or how to engage viewers. As Irwin and Springgay (2008) explain, by folding and exploring in contiguity the visual, artistic and textual elements of my study I did not come up with a definite answer but rather an excess. That excess opens up possibilities for 'complexifying the simple and simplifying the complex" (p.xxx). My concerns have shifted to the in-between space of the art object and the viewer, to the embodied curriculum as lived-in the gallery space and to the value of the event and the not-knowing in advance 'what is of most worth'.

Some preliminary ideas developed in this paper were explored in Lenz-Kothe, E.; Berard, M.F. (2013). Performing Interpretation. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*. 14 (SI 1.12).

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