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STRIVING TO KEEP HIDDEN AND STRIVING TO TELL:
MUSEUMS AND THE COLONIAL GAZE

By

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ABSTRACT

Canadian museums are transforming to become relevant in an era of Indigenous Resurgence but their strategies are being undermined by the persistence of the colonial gaze. The colonial gaze positions Indigenous peoples as ever-disappearing and white settlers as the righteous inheritors of their land and legacy. This paper traces the history of the colonial gaze in Canadian museums and analyzes strategies used by the Glenbow Museum and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre to present Indigenous artifacts in new and emancipatory ways. It argues that the considerable efforts being taken to give rightful place to Indigenous voices, leadership, and survival cannot flourish if museums don't also confront settler moves to innocence. With these dynamics in mind, theorists and practitioners involved in museology and decolonization will be better equipped to make effective transformations.

Striving to Keep Hidden and Striving to Tell: Museums and the Colonial Gaze

The barricades, real and symbolic, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will not fall until we understand how they were built ... Studying the past tells us who we were and where we came from. It often reveals a cache of secrets that some people are striving to keep hidden and others are striving to tell.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996

The museum is a significant site to study, as a location where people interpret our individual and collective identities. Ruth B. Phillips suggests that Canada has moved into the Second Museum Age, a time of significant public investment in grand new museums and expansions of existing ones beyond what we have seen since the Great Depression. Phillips celebrates this development but issues a caution: Without direct engagement with what she calls the “intellectual energies” of postmodernism, post-structuralism, and decolonization, the Second Museum Age risks looking very much like the first one, with some exciting new architecture (“Re-placing” 84).

With this paper, I take up Phillips’ challenge and bring together insights from decolonization theory and museology to better understand how Canadian museums have interpreted their Indigenous artifact collections and how their

practices could change for a new era. My particular focus is on the colonial gaze, a way of interpreting the world that re-inscribes the entwined notions of ever-disappearing Indigenous peoples and ever-innocent [white] settlers. I examine how museums of the first era are profoundly informed by the colonial gaze and how contemporary reform efforts are being stymied by its stubbornness. My argument is that adding Indigenous voices and even Indigenous leadership is crucial but not enough; we also need deliberate and concerted efforts to confront [white] settler innocence before we can truly dismantle the colonial gaze and bring museums from sites of colonization to sites of liberation.

Methodology

The paper uses an interdisciplinary approach because the fields it draws together - decolonization theory and museology - are themselves interdisciplinary. The moment we step into this work, we are situated outside of disciplinary boundaries. As importantly, it takes a problem-solving approach. While this paper is informed by theory, it is equally interested in taking theory into practice. These two factors are hallmarks of an interdisciplinary approach (Tayler 26).

This paper is interested in issues of power and resistance. It draws on critical, feminist, and anti-racist theory and approaches, particularly discourse analysis which operates on the assumption that language constructs rather than simply conceptualizes social inequality (Comeau 151). The paper applies discourse

analysis quite liberally to the many forms of communicative acts that museums perform, from the words of site interpreters, to the spatial design of exhibits, to the silences of official museum histories. It aims to problematize the ways of thinking and communicating that stem from the colonial gaze.

In practical terms, I conducted internet searches of the two interdisciplines and then for more specific terms as I learned them. I tracked commonalities and disjunctures between and within the interdisciplines, seeing those spaces as nodes for the most fruitful and provocative insights. I visited the Glenbow Museum and reviewed my notes from an earlier visit to Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre to see if and how insights gleaned from the dialogue between the two interdisciplines were relevant to what I take to be happening on the ground. I determined that they were, that theory helped illuminate what was happening at the museums and that what was happening at the museums helped illuminate theory. My hope is that this paper adds a little to the slow accumulation of knowledge generally associated with interdisciplinary research (Szostak 6) and that it has practical application on the ground.

Language Use

Language preferences change over time as meanings accumulate. In this paper, I aim to let stand the terms used in source material. My own preferences for the terms I think will be most contentious are white, settler, and Indigenous. These are all problematic categories because of their power to hurt, depending

upon the associations individual readers may have with them, and because they seem to preclude the existence of hybrid and shifting identities. I apologize for these problems at the outset and assure readers that I use them only because I have yet to find better ways to express what I want to express. The term “settler” may be particularly uncomfortable for those new to the deliberate conceptual blurring between literal settlers (people who came to Canada in the pre-Confederation era) and those of us who are their descendants or later immigrants and their descendants. The blurring is ideological; it aims to unsettle any simplistic notion that time alone solves the essential problem of how non-Indigenous peoples got to be in Canada and stay here, and at what price to Indigenous peoples.

I periodically make one stylistic amendment to try to express a complexity that I cannot seem to manage otherwise. I use the phrase “[white] settler” to disrupt the Indigenous/white binary and acknowledge non-white non-Indigenous Canadians, those who immigrated early to Canada such as Chinese and Sikh people, those who came not on their own volition as people enslaved by the Atlantic slave trade, and those who came in contemporary times as immigrants (like my two sets of white grandparents from Europe) and refugees. This phrasing aims to encompass all settlers while still drawing attention to Canada’s complex racial hierarchy that privileges whiteness. I hope this phrasing is helpful.

Colonization and the Colonial Gaze

Colonization is defined as one group of people dominating another group or groups through invasion, subjugation, and dispossession of land and resources. Colonization differs from other forms of imperialism through its tactic of *settling* people into an area to displace or outnumber the original inhabitants and develop land and resources for the benefit of the colonizing country (Stanford Encyclopedia). Contemporary decolonization scholars and activists argue that very little changes when a colony moves into what they call settler statehood if non-Indigenous people continue to dominate in population and rule (Veracini). The problem resides in the colonial gaze, the interpretive lens through which contemporary settler states, like Canada, understand, represent, and justify their existence. The colonial gaze rests on two tropes: the disappearing Indigenous and the innocent [white] settler. In this paper, I examine these concepts as tropes, as rhetorical devices that are so deeply rooted in Canadian sites of national mythologizing, including museums, that they have become naturalized and invisible. But I treat them as not-tropes too, as concepts that structure activity in real life, with real consequences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Given the significance of abstraction to the colonial gaze, as I'll discuss below, deliberate references to life experience will be a useful and potentially decolonizing practice. First though, some theory.

Wolfe suggests that what he calls colonization's *logic of elimination* informs the policies, practices, and legislation of colonies and later settler nations that literally and figuratively aim to eliminate Indigenous peoples so that [white] settlers can keep, gain, and justify their control of land and resources (387). Tac-

tics range from acts of overt violence that kill Indigenous people (slaughter, blockades of food and water, deliberate introduction of diseases) to acts of political and cultural disenfranchisement that aim to psychologically, legally, and spiritually “kill” their Indigeneity. Expressions of this second tactic in the Canadian context are numerous and span the eras of colony and statehood. They include residential school (LaRoque “When the Other” 99) and child welfare (Monture-Angus 141) systems that separate Indigenous children from their families and cultures and inculcate them into [white] settler culture; blood quantum regulations that reclassify Indigenous people as non-Indigenous if certain of their ancestors were (Monture-Angus 141); suppression of Indigenous languages and laws against conducting Indigenous ceremonies (Lawrence 29); and policies against Indigenous harvesting rights that make it more difficult for people to stay and make a living in their nations (Lawrence 32). Further, these are not discrete categories: The psychological suffering and physical deprivation of generations of disenfranchisement result in higher suicide rates for Indigenous youth than non-Indigenous (Bastien 32). They also lead to significant targeting of Indigenous people’s heightened vulnerability, such as the sexual predators who have killed at least eighteen women, most of whom were Indigenous, along Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia, and an ineffective government and police response (“Highway of Tears”).

Just as Wolfe’s theory of elimination provides a cogent explanation for these kinds of what I must characterize as heartrending actions of colonies, settler states, and their citizenries, Ritskes’ theory of *erasure* explains why many

non-Indigenous Canadians would have trouble accepting this list as accurate or fair. For Ritskes, “the very legitimacy of settlers is based on the erasure of Indigenous peoples” to lay claim to their land (259). Erasure has deep roots. The foundational Canadian conceit is that the land it now occupies was “discovered” as virgin land, unoccupied, and *terra nullius*. How non-Indigenous Canadians reconcile our founding national myth with the contemporary reality of approximately sixty unique Indigenous nations scattered across six hundred communities (H. King 150) comes down to the colonial gaze.

The colonial gaze erases Indigenous peoples by positioning them as ever-disappearing (Smith 69), inhabiting a kind of magical space that holds them on the brink of extinction despite 500 years of post-first-contact endurance, and puts their oppression and their resurgence as tangential to Canadian life. In its related and equally magical move, the colonial gaze positions [white] settlers as the natural and righteous inheritors of Indigenous land and experience (Smith 69) and as ever-innocent for the acts of elimination and erasure done on our behalf. Its discursive and other representational practices position settler society and its people, in the words of Razack, as “innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchical societal relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present” (“Looking” 10). For Tuck and Yang, settler moves to innocence attempt to relieve our feelings of guilt or responsibility without having to give up land or power (10).

Museums and the Colonial Gaze

Public museums have been major sites for the propagation of the colonial gaze since the late 1700s when governments in imperial centres and subsequently in their colonies first began to build and stock them (The Canadian Encyclopedia). Until then, it was the purview of private collectors and churches to turn the everyday and sacred (and everyday sacred) items of Indigenous peoples into artifacts, objects, and commodities. In 1841, the British Crown funded pre-confederation Canada's first artifact collection department as part of the Geological and Natural History Survey of the Province of Canada (The Canadian Encyclopedia). The Survey jumped into what critics term the "museum scramble" due to the frenzied competition between collectors for what they positioned as a finite amount of items from Indigenous communities that were in irretrievable decline (Francis 116). When Canada became an independent nation, it bolstered the Survey into an official government department for ethnography and the practice of collecting carried on into contemporary times. The Survey is the direct forebear of today's preeminent national museum, The Canadian Museum of History, according to the timeline on its website, and all other museums that span the country, including those of particular interest to this paper, Head-Smashed-in Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre and the Glenbow Museum.

The *point* of these collections is a source of agreement and contention between the fields of decolonization theory and museology, and within museology itself. Their point of agreement is that a museum houses and interprets its collection to foster a sense of identity for the public it sees itself as serving. Museolo-

gists contend that museums serve as “cultural memory banks” (Dean 1) and “publicly acknowledged memory” (Bolton 1) for their audience. For Ames:

The museum is where you would go to compare your own private perceptions of reality with what was the accepted and approved, and therefore ‘objective,’ view of reality, enshrined within the museum. (21)

Where consensus falters is on the notion of ‘objective,’ as problematized by Ames above through his use of quotation marks.

For conventional museologists, the public memory is the objects themselves; the museum simply collects and safeguards the objects that are what Lewis calls “the world’s cultural property” (1), Boylan the “physical evidence of the culture and environment of the museum’s chosen territory” (vii), and Dean (2) “the ‘real thing.’” In their interpretive role, the museum provides instruction and entertainment for the public and research material for researchers (Lewis 4) but the content of the instruction seems almost (pun intended) immaterial. In Cruikshank’s critique, “objects are primary and words illustrative” (66). Those who hold this viewpoint demonstrate a modernist faith that the science of ethnography and archaeology will tell the truth about an item. According to Curtis, most museum practitioners claim this kind of “ideology-free objective viewpoint” (118).

Theorists of decolonization and the emergent sub-field of museology called the new museology operate from a stance influenced by postmodernism and critical theory and reject the claim of objectivity. They suggest that identity-

making cannot be objective, it must root somewhere. Their analyses tend to diverge at how museums are implicated.

For new museologists, the problem rests not in what the official version says about identity but that museums restrict themselves to an official version and a pedagogical format that instructs and authorizes rather than invites people to engage and question. They argue that museums can and should engage in identity-making but the identity must be multi-vocal and diverse. For this reason, the new museology represents a twist on conventional museology rather than a fuller departure. If conventional museology believes museums can objectively present artifacts, the new museology believes museums can objectively open up dialogue on contentious issues, from their position as “neutral places” who maintain editorial control of museum material so that visitors can be assured of its veracity (Black 137). The new public museum sanctifies the state, makes it innocent, while releasing it from what Clover and Bell argue is its democratic obligations of providing “quality, collective, critical education” (40). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that if an exhibit is not deeply rooted in an anti-oppressive framework, the results can re-inscribe racial hierarchies and intolerances (Lynch & Alberti 20).

For decolonization theorists, the starting place to examine how museums relate to Canadian nation-building rests with Indigenous peoples’ experiences. Simply put, Indigenous peoples lack the faith in museum objectivity and neutrality prized by the conventional and new museologists. Adding more voices to the mix will not address the damage; a more profound decolonizing response is required.

Decolonization theorists continue to critique how museums obtained Indigenous artifacts and what their loss has meant to Indigenous communities. They argue that artifact collection is directly implicated in colonialism, not as a blameless beneficiary but as an active force. Bastien, for example, notes that museums directly profited from the 1920 enactment of the Indian Act. When Indigenous peoples were forbidden to hold traditional dances and ceremonies and their children compelled into residential schools, missionaries and police in Western Canada confiscated Blackfoot ceremonial bundles and turned them over to museums (19). Conaty's summary of more contemporary museum collection practices reads as a sad testament to the duress Indigenous peoples were experiencing and the museum's willingness to capitalize on it:

During the 1960s and 1970s museum staff made collecting trips to First Nations communities in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta where they bought a variety of items including sacred material, directly from the residents. Sometimes the reasons for selling were recorded and these range from a need for money to a concern that the sacred bundles were no longer safe, and that few people were learning the ancient traditions. First Nations people who visit our collections sometimes express concern that some of this material was acquired inappropriately or from individuals who did not have the right to dispose of it. (247)

My point is not to demonize Conaty and the Glenbow, especially since they are willing to write quite openly about their practices and efforts at change. My point

is to unsettle the claims of neutrality and innocence that museology holds for itself, and to note that museums have been willing to accept and seek out Indigenous artifacts under dubious conditions and set themselves up as the guardians of those items and their meanings.

The end result of the decades of museum acquisition is that so many objects were traded, purchased, and stolen from Indigenous communities in Canada that Doxtator can write that:

most of the required cultural information about objects isn't in the communities anymore, because it's in museums in far flung places. We have been experiencing a process of being continually disinherited and disconnected from our past. (59)

This disinheritance and disconnection is one deepest ontological wounds that colonization has inflicted on Indigenous peoples. As Bastien explains:

Colonization can be described as a process that disconnects tribal people from their kinship alliances. After the initial physical violence, it becomes a process that is slow, insidious, and often abstract in nature. The explicit or implicit objective is to alter the identity, the self, and the sense of humanity of the colonized. This is done by redefining identity, self, and humanness as abstractions instead of defining them through the specific lived realities of natural alliances. It is through the use of these abstractions that the experiences and minds of the colonized are altered. This process changes the con-

sciousness of tribal peoples as it changes the world in which they live. It has created unprecedented conditions of dependency by virtue of the destruction of kinship alliances and the emergence of isolated, individualistic selves. (27)

By turning everyday and ceremonial items into what Wakeham calls “trophies, commodities, and scientific specimens” (51), museums tore at the heart of Indigenous communities and individuals.

Decolonization theorists also critique the *content* of the identity that Canada creates for itself through public museums and other venues, arguing that this identity hinges on [white] settler ascendancy over Indigenous peoples and its belief in the relative peaceableness of its ascendancy compared with history of the United States (Wakeham 30-31). As Doxtator writes:

In the nineteenth century, when most of the native collections in museums were brought together, the act of building Canada involved asserting a nation literally over the top of the native cultures. There was no room in Canadian nineteenth century nationalism for the separate survivals of aboriginal peoples. (60-61)

There was room for representations of Indigenous peoples in ways that served the emerging Canadian state. As a settler state with little history of its own, nineteenth-century Canada appropriated the material culture of Indigenous peoples to create its own identity. Simply put, museums allowed and allow Canadians to say something like: We have canoes so we aren't France, we have teepees so

we're not Britain, and we don't have the Trail of Tears so we're not American.

Wolfe argues that settler states engage in the “ostentatious borrowing of Aboriginal motifs” for their own nationalist purposes (390). The motifs are generally severed from the specific Indigenous nation that created them, de-Indigenized as it were, and turned into an abstraction that Bastien warned against.

LaRocque documents a tradition of textual devices that demonize, infantilize, and dehumanize Indigenous peoples in what she calls a “war of words” (“When the Other” 4). Museums are similarly implicated as creating text, displays, and practices that serve colonialism and its racial hierarchies (Schmidt 291). Museum displays tend to be themed as a march of progress (Phillips and Phillips 698), depicting Indigenous peoples as part of pre-modern static culture and white settlers as the agents of progress, achievement, arts and science (Schmidt 288, Neufeld 107) and civilization (LaRocque “When the Other” 24). Museums have focused on “the frontier as origin story” for [white] settler culture to continually revisit to bolster its sense of itself as a superior civilization (Wakeham 42).

Theorists also look at museums as sites of forgetting. Dickinson et al., contend that:

In functioning as sites of forgetting, museums have the potential to cleanse, absolve or relieve visitors of painful, conflictual histories. (89)

Thomas King suggests that stories told one way can cure and told another way, can injure (92). The extent that conventional museums neglect to foreground Indigenous resistance to colonialism turns them into sites of what Lonetree calls the re-inscription of Indigenous victimhood (6). Museums also often deploy a rhetorical device that US political analyst William Schneider depicts somewhat wryly as a new tense for the English language, “the past exonerative” (Broderick pg.). “The disappearance of the bison” and “the arrival of the horse and gun” (Corbett 40) are stock phrases in museums and guidebooks across Canada, and they elide the question of who decimated the bison millions and who brought the horse and the gun. As Dickinson et al. suggest, if museums defer acknowledgement of the true violence of colonialism and the accountability of [white] settlers and their state, visitors are invited to defer their own responsibilities as well (101).

My assessment of the state of Canadian museums leads me to agree with theorists who suggest we are at a “historiographical impasse” (Veracini 23) and in urgent need of a “re-storying” (McLean 92) of Canadian history and identity. I am moved by the struggle of practitioners to do something useful and honourable with the anachronistic and tainted collections we amassed to “exhibit empire” (Aldrich 153). This empathy leads me to the next section on decolonization.

Decolonization and the Colonial Gaze

Indigenous and non-Indigenous theorists write with urgency about the need to decolonize and their definitions consistently insist that the twin logics of eliminate and erase must both be addressed. In other words, decolonization must involve both the repatriation of Indigenous lands and the reaffirmation of Indigenous “ways of knowing” (Bastien 8). McMahon succinctly expresses this simultaneous embrace of both political and ontological matters when he writes: “Without the land and without my bundle, I am nothing” (141). Other Indigenous theorists advance similar practical and ontological goals but reject the word “decolonize,” seeing the term itself as a non-Indigenous imposition, a centring of [white] settler experience, that needs to be, as it were, decolonized (Alfred n.pag; Simpson 17). *Indigenous Resurgence* has become their preferred term. Others insert another kind of caution into the decolonization movement, stressing the need to simultaneously and deliberately confront ideologies of white racial superiority while reclaiming Indigenous culture. St. Denis argues that the two strategies are not interchangeable and both are necessary (1085).

Decolonizing for non-Indigenous people involves decentring white experience, learning to recognize and confront systemic racism, and unlearning practices of domination (MacLean 93). Most of all, for Tuck and Yang, decolonization demands that settlers resist their urge to appropriate the concept and abstract it; they emphasize that:

When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things

we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym. (3)

Decolonization in the settler colonial context, they insist, must involve the repatriation of land.

Decolonizing the Museum

To pick up the story where I left off, the literature suggests that not much changed in Canadian museums until the 1988 controversy surrounding cultural programming at the Calgary Winter Olympics. Protesters seized the attention of international media covering the games to object to how the Glenbow exhibit *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* represented Indigenous peoples and to the exhibition's corporate partner, Shell Canada, drilling operations on the unceded lands of the impoverished Lubicon Lake Cree despite the Lubicon's efforts to make treaty and stop the drilling. As Bolton explains it, the protest:

focused international attention on the topics of Canada's appropriation and glorification of traditional indigenous cultural symbols while the country's policies concurrently destroyed the means enabling continued cultural production by modern Native groups through encroachment on traditional lands (6)

The protest - and the decades of decolonizing work by Indigenous peoples across the country that helped inspire it - led to the establishment of The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, a joint effort of the Canadian Museum Association & The Assembly of First Nations, though not to a resolution of the Lubicon's land claim or a severing of the Glenbow's ties with Shell Canada, both of which continue to this day. The Task Force's 1992 report is often cited as a turning point in museology (Krpmotich and Anderson 377), though the report is not currently available in print or online. According to Bolton (22), the report, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*, identifies three broad areas most in need of reform:

1. Increased involvement of Indigenous people in the interpretation of their cultures and histories by public institutions
2. Repatriation of artifacts and human remains
3. Improved access to museum collections by Indigenous peoples

Anticipation for the report was so great that the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) paused development of its inaugural exhibits to await its publication (Phillips and Phillips 699). Little is documented about the results of the report since no post-report meetings or evaluations have been done, and its recommendations were not binding (Conaty 246).

While I would not argue against any of those recommendations, I note that none reference the need to address the [white] settler sense of perpetual inno-

cence. In the next section, I look at ways two museums have incorporated the spirit of those recommendations and the implications for the colonial gaze.

Reflections on Two Museums

The two museums I visited for the purposes of study are closely associated with the Blackfoot people whose original territory I live in. The term Blackfoot is a recent concept they adopted as part of organizing a political entity, the Blackfoot Confederacy. They more commonly refer to themselves as Peigan (including the Blackfeet in Montana and the Piikani in Alberta), Kainai, and Siksika.

The museums are Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre, a Government of Alberta museum located 90 minutes south of Calgary and a few kilometres east of Brocket, the main town of the Piikani Nation, and the Glenbow, a non-profit charitable organization located in downtown Calgary. Head-Smashed-In, as it is popularly known, opened in 1987, a few months before and two hundred kilometres away from the Glenbow's *Spirit Sings* controversy. Built under leadership of staff identified as non-Indigenous and who were seconded from the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, the interpretive centre celebrates the buffalo jump and the Blackfoot people. The Glenbow is a museum, archive, art gallery, and library about Western Canada, that began as a foundation in 1954 to house the collections of oilman and lawyer Eric Harvie. My focus is on its permanent Blackfoot gallery, *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*, developed through a partnership between the Glenbow and the Blackfoot people and opened in 2001.

The first element concerns the recommendation that Indigenous people tell their own stories and interpret their own experiences in museum spaces. The decolonizing potential of this strategy, and its limitations, became apparent to me when I learned in 2009 from a side conversation with a Piikani site interpreter at Head-Smashed-In that the interpretive centre was built in the wrong location¹. I saw no admission of this rather astounding error anywhere at the interpretive centre and I still check occasionally to see if it will appear on its website, promotional material, or in academic literature. So far, other than in project leader and archaeologist Jack Brink's book, it has not. How Brink discusses the matter is an illuminating example of how [white] settlers construct innocence. Brink introduces the matter by emphasizing what the centre designers got right: He writes that the Blackfoot people "assert that the story of how Head-Smashed-In got its name is quite correct but that the location is wrong" (26). He then turns to his patient response:

I sat in many meetings where I was lectured on how we go the wrong name for the place. Patiently I tried to explain that perhaps this was the case, but the name is now enshrined on numerous road signs, plaques, brochures, in travel information, the World Heritage list, and throughout the displays inside the interpretive centre. I hinted at how difficult it would be to change it now. Inevitably I was met with knowing smiles and nods of heads. The elders understood

¹ While I told the site interpreter that I was doing research for a school paper, I did not seek his permission to use his name. I acknowledge and thank him for his generous contribution to my understanding and I respect his privacy by offering no identifiers.

the economics and politics of the situation. They knew the name was likely fixed for good. They just wanted to make sure I knew that we got it wrong. Of course I had to ask, so what did you call this place? I only ever got one answer: "We always just called it the buffalo jump." Which seemed to make sense: if there was one jump that stood out from all the others, if there was a Mother of all Buffalo Jumps, I think that's what it might be called. (26)

Piikani critical viewpoints may be available on site if the visitor accepts the site interpreters invitation to talk or approaches them with questions, and, I suspect, is as fortunate as I was to meet someone as candid and generous in his opinions. But Piikani critical viewpoints are not documented in the texts that Canadian society privileges and are not widely circulated or known, compared with the dominant [white] settler versions. This might be less egregious if the [white] settler version more openly acknowledged its mistake and turned it into an opportunity to critically engage with power relations and new possibilities for the future, as decolonization literature advises (Trofanenko 51).

The Glenbow fares significantly better, in the academic and popular literature they publish, sometimes co-written with Blackfoot partners, concerning mistakes and also their decolonization efforts such as creating some of the first protocols for returning sacred items to the Blackfoot community and for changing storage and viewing practices to better align with Blackfoot values and interests (Conaty 248).

The second element concerns the strategy both museums use to represent Blackfoot voices in the display materials on site and, for the Glenbow, on the website that accompanies the Blackfoot Gallery: The use of first- and second-person present-tense voices. [An example from the website: “Our World: In order to understand us you need to understand the world around us.”] The literature suggests that this is likely a strategy to counter the typical museum representation of Indigenous peoples as past-tense, archaic, always disappearing, and always represented by a non-Indigenous voice explaining “their ways”. It is likely a response to the request of Indigenous peoples to have their cultures represented as continuous and living (Phillips and Phillips 697) and to tell their own stories. It also serves as a counterpoint to the other voice in the displays at both sites, the voice the museums are not yet ready to completely let relinquish, the third-person past-tense voice of what I take to be the non-Blackfoot ethnographer who provides supplemental information to help visitors understand or perhaps accept the Indigenous voice.

Unfortunately, there is evidence to suggest that the strategy is ineffective, at least for non-Indigenous visitors. From their survey at the Glenbow Blackfoot Gallery, Krmpotich and Anderson learned that visitors, most of whom were non-Indigenous, overwhelmingly did not interpret the Blackfoot voice as belonging to contemporary people (397). Krmpotich and Anderson surmise that the context of “history museum” is responsible as it sets up visitor expectation for experiences of the past. I find their reading too generous, given our capacity to visit other museums - of war or the car, perhaps - and fail to come away with a similar conclu-

sion. Furthermore, the same study also found that most visitors did not notice that the Blackfoot Gallery is a collaborate effort, despite the prominence of that information on site. Most visitors thought it was the museum's work alone, with Blackfoot people serving strictly as informants, as raw data, rather than co-developers. The two findings are compelling examples of the colonial gaze and its tenacity.

The third and final element from my visits concerns the efforts both museums are making in the important decolonizing move from objects to people (Krpmotich and Anderson 386). Francis' depiction of his visit to Head-Smashed-In serves to illustrate this point. For Francis, the mere presence of Piikani site interpreters and other staff posed the most effective challenge to the trope of the disappearing Indigenous and the centre's unfortunate reliance on dioramas and what Wakeham calls "taxidermic representations" (that is, plastic mannequins) of Indigenous peoples. These conventional museum display techniques are now very much passé, understood to simultaneously create a sense of "historical immediacy" and "a crucial distancing effect" that dehumanize Indigenous peoples (Wakeham 42), but they endure in museums nevertheless, perhaps due to costs to replace them with new exhibits. As Francis writes from the not-too-distant past of 1992:

... my attention shifted from the display cases to the people who were tending them. I became aware that the facility was staffed entirely by Indians (Peigan, as it turned out, from a nearby reserve). but I found myself thinking that they didn't look like Indi-

ans to me, the Indians I knew from my school books and from the movies, the Indians in fact who were depicted inside the museum displays I was looking at. That is where most of us are used to seeing Indians, from the other side of a sheet of glass.

But at Head-Smashed-In, they were running the place. 18

In important ways, the Piikani site interpreters served as site hosts, transforming the provincial government space into Indigenous space, and the non-Indigenous visitor into their guests. In the Canadian context, where colonization has “set Aboriginal people apart, both geographically (on reserves and residential schools), and as inferior peoples” (LaRocque “Colonialism and Racism” n. pag.), this time together, in this way, has significant decolonizing potential. In this sense, Head-Smashed-In is following a tenet of the new museology, where museums become “hubs of permeable cultural interfaces and connections where cultural power and rights are not so clear cut” (Gibson 208).

At the Glenbow, my experience of the move from objects to people came not through conversation with Indigenous or other site interpreters but with the Glenbow’s exhibit of Joanne Cardinal-Schubert’s performance installation piece *The Lesson*. Created as a residential school classroom, the visitor is invited into the classroom to see the artifacts of that era in-situ, not as a diorama and not with mannequins but as an immersive performance piece that informs through evocation rather than instruction. The artifacts are given life, given new meaning, as the viewer wanders through the installation and peoples it from their imagination, and I found myself looking at the pieces, responding to them, with more

compassion and sadness than if they were behind cases that often I would breeze right by. Cardinal-Schubert's piece gave me what Crane (49) calls a "confounding" response to a museum exhibit, one that so troubled and disrupted my memory of previous museum trips that I was able to see objects, and people's experiences with them, anew.

Conclusion

If there is one thing I hope this paper demonstrates it is that "exhibitionary strategies have ideological stakes" (Wakeham 3). Phillips' notion of a Second Museum Age provides a useful opportunity to acknowledge the scale and scope of work underway on the ground to reshape museums into public institutions that can serve an era where Indigenous Resurgence and decolonization efforts can bear fruit. In 2004, Phillips studied the decolonization measures of the largest national museums in Canada and the United States and determined that it was still too early to know what the results would be. I think we are still in that same position, still sowing seeds for a future that we cannot quite imagine. But our strategy is clarifying and worth pursuing. Let us continue, in Phillips' words, to "deconstruct and supersede the histories that visitors already 'know'" ("Disrupting" 79). In Canadian museums of past and present, what we know is the colonial gaze. In museums of the future, if they give rightful place to Indigenous voices, leadership, and survival, and if they unsettle settler claims to innocence, the gaze can be disrupted, and we can see and be seen anew.

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