



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service · Services des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

CANADIAN THESES

THÈSES CANADIENNES

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30.

**THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED**

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30.

**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE**

**Visiting an Art Museum:
An Inquiry into the Experiences of Eight Adults**

Rose Montgomery-Whicher

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Art Education
and Art Therapy**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

July 1987

© Rose Montgomery-Whicher, 1987

Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

L'autorisation a été accordée à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur (titulaire du droit d'auteur) se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation écrite.

ISBN 0-315-37100-5

ABSTRACT

Visiting an Art Museum: An Inquiry into the Experiences of Eight Adults

Rose Montgomery-Whicher

In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature and "lived" meaning of the experience of visiting an art museum, descriptions were collected from adults who were asked to describe their own "best" or most meaningful museum visits in interviews or written descriptions. A thematic analysis of descriptions selected from eight informants revealed 12 common themes of museum experience which represent some of the taken-for-granted characteristics of museum visiting, including: the affect of the museum environment; the relationship between looking at art and making art and the ways in which visitors are attracted to and attend to works of art in a museum. The informants' descriptions suggest that a sense of personal "well-being" is a significant outcome of a meaningful museum experience and is associated with an attitude of openness and ease; the recognition of ideas or images which are already meaningful; experiences of being completely absorbed in looking at a work of art and experiences of reverie, reverence and the aesthetic, in the context of museum visiting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I look out of the window of the library at McGill University where I have been writing for the past several months, my gaze falls upon the trees, with their leaves full and green fluttering in a July rain. When I first came to this library, the view out of the window was very different: there was no greenery anywhere in sight and the leaves, like my thesis were still in potential form. Just as the leaves came into being while the sun and the wind and the rain nourished and watched over the trees, so too, there have been many people who have contributed to the manifestation of this thesis, which, like the July leaves, has now taken its full and final shape.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and acknowledge the special contribution of each of the following people:

Dr. Cathy Mullen, who as my thesis supervisor has maintained a truly super-vision: the ability to see the whole amidst so many parts and the ability to envisage a finished product while sustaining my interest and involvement in the process of research and writing. She has consistently and generously given me her time, her energy, her interest, and above all, her wisdom and humour and the freedom to follow the direction of my own inspiration; through her guidance I have learned as much about research and writing and about myself as I have learned about museum visiting and museum visitors.

Professors Elizabeth Sacca and Stan Horner who, through their participation in the thesis committee, have helped to shape and refine the finished form of this thesis by offering their expertise and suggestions.

There are two more people in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University who deserve special mention: Professor Leah Sherman, who taught a course about art education in the museum context, which rekindled my interest in museums to such an extent that I decided to pursue museum visiting as a topic for thesis research.

Joanna Black, who as a friend and fellow graduate student in art education has shared with me the challenges of thesis writing: her company has always provided an insightful reflection of my ideas as well as encouragement. I must also thank her for introducing me to two of the teachers at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts who, in turn, introduced me to some of the informants.

All of the informants have been partners in my research; it is through the words of Lorna, Lindsey, Andy, Louise, Elkana, Lisa, Laurence and Sean that I have been able to gain insight into the "lived" experience of museum visiting. I hope that my writing has done justice to the liveliness and the meaningfulness of their descriptions.

In particular I would like to thank Lindsey, whose involvement in the creation of this thesis has been two-fold: as an interviewee, she has given me especially vivid and insightful descriptions of museum experience; also, she has typed every word of this thesis with care, precision and consistent cheerfulness in the face of every deadline and every meticulous little detail.

I am grateful to Dr. Lynn Hart of McGill University who introduced me to two of the informants and to the work of Csikszentmihalyi.

I would like to give credit to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

which was the setting of many of the interviews, and as such, is the object of many of the informants' descriptions; in their words, the Museum has become "an old friend" to me over the past year.

My acknowledgements would not be complete without thanking my parents for their loving support and interest, for it is they who first introduced me to museums.

All those who have visited and who have shared the house on Montclair Avenue have contributed to my thesis through their friendship.

I am especially grateful to my husband, Ian, who has patiently and lovingly helped me to discover that it is through attentiveness, clarity of mind and perseverance that understanding and excellence are achieved.

Finally I would like to thank Swami Shyam who has been and continues to be my inspiration to be a master of life as well as a master of the arts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	<u>Introduction</u>	1
Chapter 2:	<u>A Critical Review of the Literature</u> <u>Related to the Experience of Museum Visitors</u>	7
Chapter 3:	<u>The Method of Research</u>	30
	Phenomenology as an Approach to Research.....	30
	Collecting Descriptions of Lived Experience.....	36
	Preliminary interviews.....	36
	Selection of informants for further interviews.....	39
	Further interviews with three informants.....	41
	Collection of written descriptions and another interview.....	51
	Summary of the five ways of collecting descriptions and the distinction between the resulting five kinds of descriptions.....	53
	An Introduction to the Eight Selected Informants.....	56
	Analysing the Collected Descriptions for Common Themes.....	62
Chapter 4:	<u>A Discussion of 12 Common Themes of Museum Experience</u> ...	70
	Theme 1: Attraction to the Familiar.....	72
	Theme 2: Returning to Old Friends.....	80
	Theme 3: Attending to Works of Art with Concentrated Attention.....	83
	Theme 4: Feeling Right There, In the Painting.....	86

Theme 5: Wanting to Prolong the Experience of Looking.....	91
Theme 6: A Sense of Well-Being.....	93
Theme 7: Noticing Details and Formal Qualities	103
Theme 8: Looking at Art Recalls and Inspires the Practice of Art.....	109
Theme 9: Considering How a Work of Art could be Changed or Improved	112
Theme 10: The Presence of Others in the Museum	114
Theme 11: The Importance of Museum Architecture, Exhibition Design, a Comfortable Environment and Lighting.....	119
Theme 12: Habits of Museum Visiting.....	126
 Chapter 5: <u>Conclusions</u>	 134
 References	 147
 Appendix 1: <u>Consent Form to Participate in Research</u>	 153
Appendix 2: <u>Request for Written Descriptions</u>	154

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: <u>Excerpt from a Three Part Thematic List Showing the</u> <u>Relationship between Informants' Descriptions</u>	69
Figure 1: Tom Thomson, "In the Northland" (detail)	73
Figure 2: Nicholas Roerich, "Himalaya"	75
Figure 3: Leonardo da Vinci, "Cartoon: The Virgin and Child with SS. Anne and John the Baptist"	79
Figure 4: Claude Monet, "Water Lilies"	88
Figure 5: A.J. Casson, "Summer Hillside, Kamaniskeg"	97
Figure 6: Nicholas Roerich, "Pink Mountains"	99
Figure 7: Auguste Renoir, "The Dance at Bougival" (detail).....	101

Chapter 1

Introduction

Dutch still-lives - masses of Dutch still lifes. At first they all look the same. Suddenly, I notice a harpsichord in the centre of the room; two older women approach it, cooing with delighted admiration. The harpsichord is covered with painted flowers matching the proliferation of flowers on the walls. Walking over to the harpsichord, I glance momentarily through the glass door into the next room; my attention is caught by a purple stockinged foot - the only visible part of a woman sitting near the doorway. She must be a security guard. The security guards here are very unobtrusive: they have chairs to sit on - that's nice; they don't even wear uniforms and the only way they can be distinguished from the visitors is that they are looking at the people rather than the paintings. I look back at the harpsichord and notice the label which tells me that it's Venetian. Echoing footsteps and the ticking of an old clock punctuate the stillness. I look around the room waiting for one of those still-life paintings to attract my attention. Big red flowers: no, not that one. My glance falls downwards to a china tray covered with flowers - of course. My gaze is interrupted by a woman who walks quickly through the room with only a glance at the paintings and then clack, clack, clack, down the marble stairs. Suddenly, to the sound of her footsteps is added a delightful ping, ping, ping from the old clock: it's a quarter after three at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Two women drift, almost noiselessly, through the room. And then a security guard, walking quickly and deliberately into the next room. My attention returns to the china tray; as I look closely, I see that it's not china at all; it's made from thousands of tiny beads. I glance at the label: "Bead Work Basket". Seventeenth century kitsch: elaborate three-dimensional flowers all made out of beads surrounding the edge of the tray which is also made entirely from beads. Corny, but somehow I like it, especially the pea pods with peas made from big green beads; someone must have put hours of careful, patient work into that. I look again at the label: 1680. I am curious about what the beads are made from; they look like plastic, but they can't be - 1680 - glass perhaps? The label does not say. Given by Miss Eddington - now that looks just like something that a woman named "Miss Eddington" would own - I wonder if she was the one who made it?

... Amid the chattering and murmuring of other visitors, the clatter of high heels and rhythmic squeak of tennis shoes on wooden floors, I make my way back to the French Impressionist paintings, passing and almost ignoring hun-

dreds of paintings on the way. Despite my efforts to move quickly and deliberately, a painting depicting the virgin and child, surrounded by angels beckons me to stop and look. It's old and Italian, cool and still. I want to look at it closely, but as I approach it the reflection on the glass, from overhead lights, completely prevents me from seeing anything at all. Now I know what Lorna means by lighting that creates blind spots.

... Another ping, ping, ping - this time with a higher pitch from the clock in the French Impressionist room. My eyes are drawn to the left and into the blue of one of Monet's rock and water paintings. It is Monet, isn't it? I look at the label; yes, of course it's Monet. What wonderful blue-light like cornflowers and swirling into green, then purple, with a thread of white dancing over the blue. I momentarily sink into the colours, immersed, wordlessly. But only for a moment; a couple approaches the Monet painting; the man looks at the label and exclaims: "the cliffs at Etretat! We were there just a couple of weeks ago!"

It is appropriate, it seems, to begin a descriptive study of museum experience with my own description of a few moments of a museum visit. The above description is constructed from notes, scribbled on the spot, into a tiny notebook during a recent visit that I made to an art museum. After many months of examining other visitors' descriptions of their experiences in museums, I felt inspired to turn again to the source of my curiosity about museum going, which is my own "lived experience" in museums. Over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to visit many museums and to experience diverse roles or ways of being in an art museum: as a painter and a student of art and art education; as a tourist; as a researcher and as a museum educator.

Several months before I wrote my thesis proposal, I wrote a narrative account of my own experience of being in a museum in conjunction with a graduate course about art education in the museum context. As I reread this description, I am struck by the way in which this account shares many of the patterns and qualities of experience that I later found in descriptions from other visitors, reaffirming the validity of intersubjective agreement

and reassuring me that the following chapters do describe, and in describing, disclose something of the essential and often taken-for-granted characteristics of museum experience. Here are a few excerpts from my description written after a visit to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts:

...I walked quickly from room to room, just looking to see what was there, and soon decided to spend my time in the Lismer exhibition, which had just opened. I was attracted to look at this exhibition because it was new and because I am already familiar with some of Lismer's work and felt curious to see more.

... I was attracted to look at a small drawing just to the right of the entrance. I moved quite close, perhaps within a foot of the drawing. I liked the large round shapes of the cliffs; I liked the way they were drawn, and I was looking at the drawing for several seconds before I saw it as a picture of a harbour. In other words, I was appreciating the drawing for its shapes and lines first, and then I recognized it and appreciated it as a picture of something. At this point, I glanced at the label, and discovered that it was a harbour in Newfoundland. I immediately thought of two friends who are now living in Newfoundland, by the sea. For a moment, my mind was flooded with the thought of these two friends and my affection for them. Although I was still looking at the drawing, my attention was on a view created by an inner eye: I could see their faces and feel their presence; with the visual information I had just received from the drawing my imagination filled in the colour, atmosphere and sounds, trying to imagine the place where these friends are living. In the very next moment, I was back to the drawing in the museum, and thinking: "I didn't know Lismer painted in Newfoundland." Then I noticed the frame in relation to the drawing... the way in which this little drawing had been framed looked awkward to me; the drawing was humble and the frame was pretentious and their combination seemed to be a statement about the monetary value of the drawing; about art objects as costly things.

... My first sensation as I entered the next room was of feeling overwhelmed by the number of paintings, as though suddenly confronted by hundreds of images all competing for my attention. In order to counteract this feeling I immediately looked for something to focus my attention on, and turned to my left where I was attracted to a painting of a pond. I remember liking the colours, the reflections and the lily-pads which appeared to be floating on the surface of the painting. I glanced at the label, noticing that it was painted in Georgian Bay and that it was "oil on aluminum" - oil on aluminum?! I

4

looked back to the painting and sure enough, there were little bits of aluminum showing through the surface of the paint. I wondered whether the aluminum had been the only available surface for Lismer to paint on at the time, or if it had been a deliberate choice to accentuate the reflecting quality of the water. As I looked at this work, I was reminded of a small pond in Cape Cod, of which I had made several drawings last spring; I compared my memory of these drawings with Lismer's painting and thought that Lismer's was much more successful. I looked at the painting for a few more moments, delighting in the way the reflections seemed to dance on the surface of the painting.

My visit to the Lismer exhibition, described above, is one amongst many experiences of being in a museum which led me to wonder about the nature of museum visiting.

Each visit that I have made to an art museum has been, in one sense, a unique and unrepeatable event: the relative details of what I looked at, how much time I spent looking, how I felt, what I thought and so on are completely different for each visit. Yet, as I reflect on my own experiences in museums, I recognize that through their diversity, there are characteristic patterns or themes of my museum visiting which, like threads running through multi-coloured beads, are the means by which these experiences are connected and understood. This recognition inspired a curiosity about the museum experiences of others: do the ways in which other visitors experience an art museum have something in common with the ways in which I experience an art museum?

Some of the idiosyncrasies of my patterns of museum-visiting are certainly exposed in the above descriptions. Like most visitors to art museums, I have my own artistic tastes and preferred ways of visiting a museum, the details of which are not important to discuss here. However, there are more significant themes of my museum-visiting which can be traced through my experiences in museums and which, quite naturally, have

shaped and guided my inquiry into the museum experiences of adult visitors. These are the biases that I have brought to this research. First, I consider participation in the study, practice or enjoyment of the arts to be not just valuable, but central to the expression, understanding and spiritual well-being of human life. The second point, a natural outcome of the first, is that I value art museums and I see museum visiting as a life-enhancing activity. Third, I see visitors and the quality and meaning of their museum experiences as the most significant aspect of museums, indeed, as the life of museums, without which museums would be meaningless. Finally, through my education and through the experience of visiting museums, making and teaching art, I perceive the phenomenon of museum-visiting with a certain degree of expertise, which colours but hopefully does not cloud my vision.

I share Patterson Williams' (1964) belief that "the most vital and interesting reason for a museum's existence is the potential that objects have for stimulating meaningful human experience" (p.10). What is the nature of these experiences and how do such experiences arise in the presence of works of art? In what ways do visitors give meaning or value to museum objects or to their experience of being in a museum? Are there shared patterns and qualities of experience that could be found in visitors' descriptions of visiting an art museum?

In order to find out what it is like for adults to visit an art museum; that is to say, to gain insight into the nature and "lived meaning" of this experience, I have carried out a project of research based on the collection and thematic analysis of descriptions of actual museum experiences by adult visitors.

In the ensuing chapters, I hope to offer insight into the nature of

museum-visiting which will be of some practical significance for art educators, museum visitors and the many museum professionals who contribute to the quality of the visitor's experience.

An understanding of the nature of the visitor's experience in an art museum can be seen as a potential basis upon which to establish meaningful and responsible museum education programs, especially since the quality of the visitor's experience of works of art is both the aim and the fundamental, indispensable ingredient of many museum education programs.

The descriptive analysis (in Chapter 4) of some of the taken-for-granted aspects of museum visiting will, hopefully, encourage those who are interested and involved in museum-visiting to examine their own assumptions about museum experience, and in doing so, see museum-visiting "with fresh eyes", (Barritt et al, 1983, p.57) and create the conditions which allow for the possibility of meaningful experiences with works of art in museums.

Chapter 2

A Critical Review of the Literature Related to the
Experience of Museum Visitors

It would be very presumptuous of me to think that I am the only one who has ever been curious about the experience of museum visitors. Just as my curiosity led me to wonder about the experiences of others and to seek out descriptions of lived experiences in museums from other visitors, so too, my curiosity led me to seek out what other writers and researchers have written about museum visiting. This chapter is, by no means intended as an exhaustive review of all the relevant literature; rather, it is my intention to place the present research in a context which will enrich its meaning and significance by providing the reader, first, with a survey analysing and evaluating a fairly extensive body of research and writing which is related to the topic in question, and then a summary of the salient points of the literature which I have found most helpful and most relevant to understanding the nature of museum experience.

The literature which is related to museum visiting is written by museum professionals, as well as researchers from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, education and art education and can be divided into two major areas: research and theoretical literature. There exists a large quantity of writing about research, of varying quality, which deals with studies of museum visitors, their attitudes towards museums and behaviour and experience in museums, as well as numerous museum audience surveys. There exists as well, some insightful theoretical literature about aesthetic experience, artistic perception and museum visitors'

experience.

In the following pages, I will discuss research and theoretical writing which deals with : 1) the importance of understanding the nature of the museum experience; 2) the role of the museum; 3) literature about responding to art; 4) useful bibliographies of research related to museum visiting; 5) examples of some of the literature which describes museum visitors and visiting and finally, 6) literature directly related to the qualitative nature of museum- visiting, including research based on visitors' personal descriptions of their experience in museums.

The importance of understanding the nature of the museum experience is discussed by Kurylo (1976), O'Toole (1985), Folds (1968) and Screven (1969). Recognizing that the kind of learning processes which take place in the museum setting are different from the processes which characterize learning in a school environment, Kurylo (1976) argues for "the need for a theory of museum learning" that is based on a "deep understanding of the nature of the museum experience" (p.21). O'Toole (1985) also points out the uniqueness of the museum experience, stating that the visitors',

...reason for being in the museum, the quality of their experience there, the way they act there, the way they learn there - all this is different from any other educational institutions. (p.30)

Defining "education" as the "exhibition and interpretation of collections", O'Toole (1985, p.31) argues that not only those with the title of "educator", but all the museum professionals including curators, researchers and exhibit designers are responsible for the "museum's fundamental mission, which is to educate" as well as, or perhaps equivalent to, "making the visitor's experience in the museum as rich and meaning-

ful as it can be": He describes the experience of the museum visitor as "a special sort of experience" which is "enjoyable, stimulating, thought-provoking and recreational in the best sense of these words" (O'Toole, 1985, p.31). As a step towards understanding the role of education programs in museums, O'Toole (1985, p.31) proposes an "agenda for study, discussion and action"; the first item on this agenda is a call for understanding "the nature of the museum experience". O'Toole (1985, p.31) asks: "What do people like about museums, how do they behave in museums, what and how do they learn in museums?"

Screven (1969) laments the lack of "serious scientific effort" to "measure" changes in visitors' "beliefs, aesthetic sensitivities, interests and perspectives" which might occur during a museum visit (p.8). He writes that,

Unfortunately, little is known about what happens - in terms of education - to museum visitors. Museum people have strong feelings that something is happening, but have difficulty defining exactly what that is, much less measuring it. (p.8)

Folds (1968) asks: "but what about adult visitors?" and goes on to point out that, "actually we know very little about most of them, for attendance surveys tell nothing about backgrounds or habits, why they have come to the museum, or what parts of the collection particularly interest them" (p.50). Clearly, these articles by Kurylo (1976), O'Toole (1985) Folds (1968) and Screven (1969) support my claim that an understanding of the visitors' experience of a museum is a necessary foundation for museum education programs.

The nature and quality of the visitors' experience will naturally be influenced by the way in which the art museum presents its public role. Two fundamental attitudes are discussed in the literature (Gluek, 1971;

Low, 1948, pp.3,27,62,94; Newsom, 1975; Rawlins, 1978). One view sees the museum as the guardian of culture, a place that is reserved for the quiet contemplation of works of art and for scholarly research; the other regards the museum as being more like a circus than a temple; an institution that is for the people, that concerns itself with social issues, entertainment, popular appeal and mass education. Low (1948, pp.28-63) discusses this issue from an historical point of view, showing how these two basic attitudes emerged in American museums during the first thirty years of this century. Gluek (1971) confronts the issue in his critical exposé of the apparently contrasting attitudes held by Sherman Lee at the Cleveland Museum of Art and Thomas Hoving at the Metropolitan Museum. Gluek (1971) exaggerates the opposition of these views, and even the title, "The ivory tower versus the discotheque" alludes to the two viewpoints as being mutually exclusive. Gluek (1971) does, however, point out that a museum can be both an instrument of mass education that emphasizes popular appeal and social concerns as well as a quiet place for the enjoyment of art, as long as these two functions are clear and separate. Rawlins (1978) discusses the contrasting roles of the museum as a theme that runs through the history of American museum education, and insightfully points out that the assumption made by both viewpoints is that great works of art are neither relevant nor meaningful to the general public.

Within literature about responding to art, there are step-by-step methods for approaching works of art which have been devised by art educators. Chapman (1978), Feldman (1970) and Williams (1984) outline methods which are based on art criticism and Lankford (1984) proposes an approach which is derived from phenomenological description.

There are aspects of the four "procedures" of Feldman's (1970) method of art criticism which can be found in the approaches to looking at works of art suggested by Chapman (1978), Williams (1984) and Lankford (1984). The first step for viewing a work of art, as suggested by Feldman (1970, p.348) is "description"; this is similar to the "looking", "perceiving obvious and subtle qualities" and "receptiveness" suggested as first steps by Williams (1984, p.10), Chapman (1978, p.67) and Lankford (1984, p.156) respectively. The next two stages of Feldman's (1970) agenda are "analysis" and "interpretation" (pp.357,362). These steps are paralleled by: Williams' (1984, p.11) suggestions for "reacting" and "considering cultural contexts"; Lankford's (1984, p.156) stages of "orienting", "bracketing" and "interpreting" and Chapman's (1970, p.72) stage of "interpreting qualities as sources of feeling." The final stage for Feldman (1970 p.370), Chapman (1978, p.75) and Williams (1984, p.11) is "judging" the work of art, and Lankford (1984) describes the final stage of his method as a "synthesis ending in judgement" (p.157). Berrson (1984, p.34) cites Feldman's step-by-step approach as an example of how "aesthetic education has come to be closely associated with the teaching of art criticism and, in fact, largely employs the working method of the art critic - especially the formalist art critic - as its model", which may in fact preclude "a direct aesthetic experience".

Foss and Radich (1984, p.6) address some of the "conceptions and assumptions about art held by the public" which may affect the way in which museum visitors respond to works of art, in a study of discourse about the "Treasures of Tutankhamen" exhibition shown in several cities in the United States between 1976 and 1979. They analysed reviews, reports and articles published in newspapers, popular magazines and art journals. Metaphors, they argue, are not only a means by which a phenomenon can

be known, but also serve to shape, and often limit, the way in which a phenomenon is understood. Foss and Radich (1984, p.10) found that there were six metaphors which emerged, like common themes, from the writing about this popular exhibition; these were: art as - "entertainment, wealth, volume, antiquity, superlative and technique". Foss and Radich (1984) go on to discuss the implications of these metaphors, two of which stand out as sharing meanings with some of the common themes of museum experience which I found through examining descriptions of lived experiences. Art as "entertainment", according to Foss and Radich (1984, p.10) implies that art "is pleasing, enjoyable, and preferably beautiful... and it is encountered only on special occasions". The implications of the "art as technique" metaphor are an assumption that "art is supposed to be a technical representation of something familiar"; a tendency to attend to the "style and parts of a work rather than ... responding to the work holistically" and a celebration of the "time and self-discipline" involved in making a work of art (Foss and Radich 1984, p.11). Foss and Radich (1984, p.11) conclude that art educators would do well to examine their own discourse about art for metaphors which may help or hinder the "aesthetic awareness" of the public. It is worth noting that while Foss and Radich (1984) address the metaphors of these who write about art, they do not address, at least not directly, the metaphors implicit in museum visitors' discourse about art.

Hamblen (1984) develops a theoretical basis for the argument that art is perceived according to "socially specific learned expectations" (p.25). Her argument is constructed with meticulous scholarship and is based on perceptual learning theory and on pragmatist philosophy which posits that both perception and interpretation are "highly dependant on past experiences, training, and intentions" (Hamblen, 1984, p.21). Hamblen (1984), like

Foss and Radich (1984), focuses on assumptions about art, which, she proposes, precede response to works of art and "allow for or prepare for the aesthetic" (p.21). Since "learned expectations" can limit as well as enhance the perception of art, it is important that art educators emphasize "socially relative visual literacy", so that an exhibition of "draped fabrics or rows of bricks on the museum floor will not be mistaken for a janitorial oversight" (Hamblen, 1984, p.25).

There are several well-researched bibliographies which provide a useful overview of the quantity, quality and variety of research which has been conducted on the subject of museum visitors. Most of this research uses quantifiable "objective" data taken from surveys of museum visitors in order to "measure" demographic and attendance data, motivation for attendance, the popularity and cognitive comprehension of exhibits, and observable visitor behaviours, (Loomis, 1973). The results of such research, although impressive, tend to conceal rather than reveal the nature and meaning of the visitor's experience in the museum.

In response to the expanding role of education in museums, Screven (1979) as chairman of the Working Party on Visitor Research of the Committee on Education and Cultural Action (ICOM), compiled a fairly comprehensive bibliography on "Visitor education research". Most of the papers selected for this bibliography are by American or Canadian researchers and were published in the 1960's and 70's; however, there are a few examples of earlier research, the oldest of which is an article by Benjamin Ives Gilman of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, entitled "Museum Fatigue", published in 1916. It is important to note that the research included in this bibliography discusses museums of natural history,

science and technology, historical museums, aquariums, zoos and world fairs as well as art museums.

Other useful bibliographies have been compiled by Draper (1977), Elliot and Loomis (1975), and Borhegyi and Hanson (1968). All three bibliographies emphasize American research although studies from international sources are cited. These bibliographies have included studies of visitors to all kinds of museums, exhibitions and fairs. The museums which are most frequently cited as having conducted extensive research about their visitors are the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale and the Milwaukee Public Museum. Some of the researchers whose names appear repeatedly throughout these three bibliographies as well as in the Screven (1979) bibliography are: Stanley Bigman; Stephan de Borhegyi and Irene Hanson; Duncan Cameron and David Abbey; Ross Loomis; Arthur Melton; Edward Robinson and Chandler Screven.

The bibliography compiled by Draper (1977) contains the greatest number of sources which are relevant to the experience of the museum visitor, covering diverse topics including: visitors' participation in and attitudes towards the arts and specific exhibitions; studies measuring visitors' attention, span, movement through a gallery and aesthetic preferences; psychological studies of visual perception; methods and techniques for evaluating visitor behaviour; anthropological approaches to the study of museum visitors; a museum visit as a social activity and the relationship between museums and the public. Draper's (1977) bibliography covers visitors research between 1930 and 1977 with an emphasis on research in the 1960s and 1970s, while Elliot and Loomis (1975) include research dating

back to 1897 - a German study which "attempts to measure visitor reactions to works of art" (p.12). This 1897 study is also included in the bibliography compiled by Borhegyi and Hanson (1968) along with research up to 1966, with an emphasis on studies done between the 1930s and 1960s.

According to Cameron and Abbey (1961) museum visitors in North America have been observed and interviewed by researchers using "scientific methods" since the 1930s. However,

...in spite of these and many varied endeavours, the useful knowledge accumulated is slight and the value of such investigations remains a matter of diverse opinion in the museum profession. (p.34)

Cameron and Abbey (1961) carried out extensive audience surveys at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto during the late 1950s and early 60s and are advocates of quantitative research methods.

The survey of museum visitors conducted by Cameron and Abbey (1960) at the Royal Ontario Museum is typical of some of the quantitative "audience research" which, although it contains an abundance of statistics, actually says very little about the nature of museum visiting. One of the strong points of this survey however, which was designed to "define the museum's attending population", is that the researchers accounted for the number of visits as well as the number of visitors; they found that one in every four visitors was visiting the museum for the first time and the "typical" visitor goes to the Royal Ontario Museum twice a year (pp.5,7).

In an article entitled, "How do we know what our visitors think?" Cameron (1967) claims that "the study of our audiences is a prerequisite to the ethical management of our museums" (p.31). Cameron (1967) points out that information such as what visitors think about museums; their likes

and dislikes; their previous knowledge; what they are learning; the role of museums in visitors' lives and visitors' use of leisure time is difficult to obtain with any degree of "reliability" because many people have difficulty articulating their feelings, and might hesitate to express negative feelings for fear of offending an institution which is generally considered to be "morally good" (p.32). He cautions researchers to be aware that the "questions that are perhaps the most important of all" are the very ones which are "hard-to-get-at"; these are questions concerning the "effectiveness" of exhibitions and visitors' motives for going (or not going) to museums (Cameron, 1967, p.32). Nevertheless, Cameron (1967) concludes that with "resourcefulness and determination", it is possible to obtain answers to these questions through "intelligently planned and conducted audience research" (pp.32-33).

In an attempt to probe some of the "hard-to-get-at" questions of visitors' motivation, behaviour and reactions, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts conducted surveys of random samples of both winter and summer audiences (O'Hare, 1974). The purpose of this survey program was to provide information about "visitors who were self-directed ... adults - with or without accompanying children - not in organized groups", which could be applied to museum decisions for "physical and program planning" (O'Hare, 1974, p. 126). To this end, the Boston Museum wanted, as well as demographic facts, information about what visitors "expect ... what they do and how they feel about it". There are some results from this study - that are particularly noteworthy because they correspond with characteristics of museum visiting which emerged from descriptions collected for this thesis. Museum visitors in Boston showed concern for the need for more signs and maps to direct their visits; O'Hare (1974) claims that two-thirds of the

"many visitors who come ... with a specific goal in mind" do not find what they came to see; however, because so few of these visitors report disappointment about missing specific collections, O'Hare infers that many visitors "are open to the museum's influence - however exerted - in planning their visit", and points out that the "main reason for missing things was time... many, if not most, of these visits ended because the museum closed" (p.139). The visitors who were surveyed expressed a concern for comfort, improved lighting and more information. O'Hare (1974) also notes the "enormous relative popularity of impressionist paintings" among visitors to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (p.138). Since over half of the visitors surveyed participate in "an art hobby" and over fifteen percent of all visitors have "a professional commitment to the arts", O'Hare (1974) declares that, "people obviously come to art museums because they care about art" (p.131). In the winter, visitors to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts come alone or with one other person; this pattern changes with summer visitors who generally visit in groups of two or three (O'Hare, 1974, pp. 134,141).

Based on her own experience as the Director of the Junior Art Centre in Los Angeles, Isaacs (1977) emphasizes the importance of visitors' comfort in museums. When visitors feel good about museums and comfortable in them, she argues that they are better able to learn and "far more likely to 1) stay longer, 2) explore more deeply, 3) read labels, 4) make an extra intellectual effort, 5) compare objects, 6) make one's own sense of the material presented, and 7) internalize new information and concepts" (Isaacs, 1977, p.39). She offers several practical suggestions for exhibition design and museum education that could add to visitors' sense of comfort. Visitors' initial orientation to the museums could be made much easier if there were signs and floor plans designed with the "newly-initiated, the afraid-to-ask"

and "the reluctant-to-read" in mind, as well as an inquiry desk "staffed with people who truly enjoy helping the public" (Isaacs, 1977, p. 40). It is important that exhibitions are designed to allow "freedom of choice, to wander and meander" and that labels are designed to be "comprehensible" to the lay person; Isaacs (1977) advocates "direct, non-technical language" for labels (p.40). Finally, she suggests the union of "viewing and creating art" in "improvisational" tours which combine "arts activities, theatre games and discussion"; such tours, as well as the opportunity to participate in art-making in the museum would promote "the sense that design and creativity can be an ongoing and satisfying aspect of our daily life"(Isaacs, 1977, p.40). Isaacs concludes that the comprehension and appreciation of art can be fuller and deeper, "if visitors enjoy the art and feel good about themselves enjoying art" (p.41).

Screven (1969) describes the behaviour of museum visitors as "exploratory and investigatory", noting that, with the exception of school groups, museum visitors are "voluntary; they are there on their own terms and not necessarily motivated to devote the time and energy needed to learn new ... ideas" (p.8).

Silver (1978) makes a similar point when she states that the museum visit is characterized by "freedom of movement and choice" and that the visitor's "time and effort" are required to attend to works of art. She also claims that, according to museum audience surveys, "the average visitor spends less than 30 seconds in front of a work and rarely longer than two minutes" (Silvers, 1978, p. 81).

A fairly recent study carried out by the National Museums of Canada (1977) used questionnaires sent to 32,139 people across Canada, to find out factors that might distinguish museum participants from non-

participants. Education was found to be the most significant variable affecting museum participation: it appears that people who have a university degree are more likely to attend a museum than those who do not have such a high level of education. Age was also found to be an important factor: there seems to be a distinct lack of participation in museum going by those who are over sixty-five years old, regardless of their level of education. This study concludes that, "The profile of the museum participant as being relatively well-educated, young and an urban dweller is the same profile which defines high level participation in all leisure activities with the exception of radio and television viewing" (National Museums of Canada, 1977, p.8).

This image of the museum-goer is supported by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts study (O'Hare, 1974), and by the Hirshhorn study (Wolf & Tymitz, 1980); the latter states that museum visitors are "likely to be in the upper education, occupation and income groups, younger than the population in general and active in other community and leisure activities" (p.15)..

Hood (1983) and Morris (1968) approach the study of museum visiting from a sociological point of view, seeing a museum visit as one among many possible leisure activities; people choose to go - or not go - to museums based on their criteria for how to spend their leisure time. Hood (1983, p.51) has identified "six major attributes underlying adults' choices in their use of leisure time" based on a review of research in museum studies, leisure, science, sociology, psychology and consumer behaviour. These attributes are: "being with people, or social interaction; doing something worthwhile; feeling comfortable and at ease in one's surroundings; having a challenge of new experiences; having an opportunity to learn and participating actively" (Hood, 1983, p.51).

Both Annis (1980) and Graburn (1977) attempt to understand the meaning of visitors' experience in museums by constructing a conceptual framework as a means to distinguish qualities of experience. Graburn (1977) emphasizes the need to understand the "lasting effects" - the "aesthetic, historical and humanistic" effects of museum visiting (p.5). To achieve this, he says, museums must be viewed in the context of contemporary culture. The meaning of a museum visit can only be fully grasped in relation to a visitor's other activities: a museum visit can be seen as an enjoyable recreational activity which is voluntary and spontaneous, or, as "onerous" if it is "work-related, overly repetitive or subject to coercion" (Graburn, 1977, p.9). Meaning, according to Graburn (1977) can be constructed out of "selected parts and associations of our total life histories"; the "meaningfulness" of a museum visit is the result of a "fusion of the debris of previous events and the new event of the museum experience itself" (p.11).

For Graburn (1977), the museum as a "cultural production" must be itself a "work of art" (p.12). Similarly, Annis (1980) describes the museum as an "expressive medium", "a kind of warehouse for symbols" which serves as "a physical and symbolic linking place between the here-now visitor and other realms, other times, other places" (p.2). The symbols of the museum can be approached in many ways; the museum visitor is "like the star and writer in a play of his own creation" in a theatre that has a "sprawling stage with motionless object-symbols" (Annis 1980, p.3). This view of the museum is echoed in the words of Lloyd Hezekiah, Director of MUSE in Brooklyn, New York, who claims that the "museum as theatre" surpasses the outdated image of the museum as a temple (cited in Hudson, 1975, p.120). He views "the content of a museum as the play that's running

in the theatre... the design of the exhibits as being analogous to the props the actor uses on stage... the museum visitor is the actor, who has to... get the production to come alive" (Hezekiah, in Hudson, 1975, p.120). The image of the visitor as an actor presents a significant contrast to so much of the literature which speaks of the visitor as an "audience". The image of the theatre is found in Graburn's article (1977) as well as when he writes, "the museum is a stage on which a production is presented which allows the visitor the freedom of movement, thought and timing, to interpret the representations in their own familiar terms" (p.18). Graburn (1977) suggests that visitors will find more satisfaction in explanations - on labels, or from guides - given, "on their own terms, immediately relatable to the totality of their previous experience and understanding of life" (p.10). According to Graburn, a museum visit is a way to make sense of the complications of the modern world and "involves the magic of a 'trip'" (p.10).

Graburn (1977, p.10) has based his analysis of the "functions of the museum experience" on (what appears to be) an earlier version written in 1974 of Annis' (1980) article.

Annis (1980) proposes a theory of visitors' "levels of perception" in museums in terms of three "spaces" experienced by visitors (p.4). "Dream space", according to Annis (1980) is the "the field of subrational image formation" in which the visitor is immersed in "a flow of images and meanings - highly personal, lulling or surprising" which arise when the visitor's memory or recognition is jolted by the sight of a particular object in the museum (pp. 4-5).

The equivalent of Annis' (1980) "dream space" is found in what Graburn (1977) terms "reverential experience". This is the "visitor's need for a personal experience with something higher, more sacred, more out of

the ordinary, ... something purer, more eternal, a more sure authority, somehow above the work day world of tasks and decisions" (Graburn, 1977, p.13). This function of the "reverential experience" may be fulfilled, claims Graburn (1977) in churches, parks, libraries or the wilderness just as easily as in museums (p.13). Graburn (1977) emphasizes that it is the "freedom" of the museum experience that is sought by visitors, quoting Annis who says that "the attractiveness of the museum is in the freedom of its dreaming spaces" (in Graburn, 1977, p.13). Solitude, or "the ability to be alone even in a crowd" is an important aspect of this quality of experience in which the visitor feels directly connected to "what is central in his or her universe - to whatever is not mundane, temporal, compromised or troublesome" (Graburn, 1977, p.13). The "reverential experience" is associated with museum architecture that is "monumental" and conveys a sense of the enduring; such architecture can however, Graburn (1977) points out, convey a sense of "elitism and traditional values" which may be threatening to some visitors (p.14).

The "pragmatic space" according to Annis (1980) is the "level of physical activity" experienced by the visitor (p.6). He notes that among the many possible meanings of physical movement within the museum, some of these meanings are "social", having to do with the relationships between visitors (Annis 1980, p.6). Annis (1980) points out that,

there is no rigid time-frame or formal script imposed upon the visitors' attention in the museum. In drift, the visitor finds a speed and direction appropriate to his own roles and expectations. He can seek out quiet/noisy, filled/empty, child/adult, or serious/frivolous spaces. He may freely ignore curatorial didacticism. Very simply, museum objects are like living room "conversation pieces": entry points into realms of more important human matters (p.7).

The above statement reveals a fresh and perhaps even radical atti-

tude towards the museum: Annis (1980) seems to be suggesting that the visitor's perception and experience of a museum object might be more significant than the object itself.

The "pragmatic space" corresponds with Graburn's (1977) "associational space", in which the museum is, above all, the focus for a social occasion, in which the "contents of the museum may be irrelevant" and "shared experience, a comfortable environment and a minimum of physical and intellectual constraint" are essential for an experience in which visitors are likely to spend "more time responding to each other than to the contents of the museum" (p.15). Museum visitors may experience something of the "associational space" at exhibition openings at which the "crowds are indeed part of the show, more than the exhibits themselves" and when they visit museums as a "tourist attraction", returning with souvenirs to extend the reality of the experience to the place where it really counts - back home" as a "symbol of social prestige or evidence of having visited a city or a country" (Graburn, 1977, p.16).

The "cognitive space" is described by Annis (1980) as "the field of rational thought", in which a visitor might employ methods of art criticism to look at works of art or consider aspects of art history, social history, art theory or studio techniques when looking at works of art in a museum (p.7).

For Graburn (1977) the museum's "educational function" is roughly equivalent to Annis' (1980, p.7) "cognitive space"; Graburn however, disagrees with Annis' view that only "rational thought" is involved in the educational aspect of museum visiting: for Graburn this is a "process", a way of being in a museum which is "usually linear, progressive and should 'make sense' in some explicable way" (p.17). Here the museum visitor becomes a "bricoleur", one who constructs meaning from the "debris" of past

events, and the museum visit becomes an event from which the "lasting elements will be incorporated into the search for meaning in life" (Graburn 1977, p.18). Graburn (1977) points out how the "educational function" of the museum has its basis in a belief, prevalent in western culture since the Renaissance, that "the truth lies outside rather than within the individual" (21). This outer directedness, argues Graburn (1977) has led to a view of the world as "'out there' to be studied, understood, conquered"; once conquered, objects as symbols of knowledge and meaning, are "put in museums... pinned down like a dead bug, there to study, or to leave, as we see fit"(p.21).

Graburn (1977) concludes that,

A museum is a strange place in that the subject matter, the objects and exhibitions, slide past the walking visitor like a kaleidoscope, demanding attention, reading, change of focus, at a pace not experienced elsewhere: it is the burden of the decision making that falls upon the visitor, because unlike a church or school, the tempo is not usually controlled by the person who orchestrates the event, but by the attendee himself: the visitor has to decide to move on or to stay, to avoid the crowd or to be pushed on at a difficult pace, to read or not read the labels, to glance at or to study the exhibit - no wonder many children just prefer to play games behind the exhibit cases (p.23).

Hudson's A Social History of Museums (1975) as well as in an article by Coles (1975) and a study by Wolf and Tymitz (1980) are based on research which, like my own, gives importance to the words of museum visitors as a way of understanding museum experience.

Wolf and Tymitz (1980) report on a study of visitor reactions to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., undertaken to better understand "the Hirshhorn as a total experience for the visitor" (p.21). The researchers call the study a "Naturalistic Evaluation" in which 743 people were informally interviewed and there were over 300 hours of "systematic" observa-

tion of visitors during a period of eight months (Wolf and Tymintz, 1980, pp. 2-3). The report includes a "behavioral analysis" of what visitors do in the museum and a "perceptual analysis" of what visitors say about their experience in the museum; the latter is divided into visitors' comments about the Hirshhorn as a "Holistic and Aesthetic Experience" and as a "Learning Experience" (Wolf and Tymintz, 1980, pp.15,22). This report includes many examples of positive, negative and ambiguous comments from visitors and the analysis and suggestions are based entirely on visitors' comments and observations of their behaviour. (Wolf and Tymintz, 1980). concluded that, among other things there was a need for a wide range of printed and audio-visual information about the works in the museum, "roving guides" available to answer questions in the gallery, an artist-in-residence, an indoor café and more seating and lounge areas (p.51). The researchers also emphasize that what one visitor described as the "serene, calming experience" felt in the museum is related to an ambience of spaciousness and ease which pervades the museum, creating an environment in which learning and appreciation can take place (Wolf and Tymintz, 1980, p.53).

Hudson (1975) traces the social history of museums from the 17th century when art collections were intended only for the eyes of connoisseurs and scholars, to the 20th century, when audience surveys abound. Hudson (1975) writes in a rambling narrative style; what this book lacks in scholarly precision, it makes up in witty entertainment. Hudson (1975) does, however, include numerous well-documented quotations from museum visitors through the ages, and connects these comments with the social, political and moral values of the time in which they were spoken or written; some of these comments are worth quoting for their relevance to the topic in question. A visitor to a collection in Mannheim in 1777 describes how he - like

some of the visitors who described their experiences to me - first looked at the whole room and then at the works which appealed to him the most:

Here I stand exposed to the most wonderful impression in a square and roomy hall with the most glorious statues of antiquity ... a forest of statues. After I had submitted for a time to the effect of this irresistible mass, I turned to those figures which attracted me most, and who can deny that the "Apollo Belvedere", through its moderated immensity, his slender build and free movement, his victor's look, is beyond all the rest and also victor over our feelings. (cited in Hudson, 1975, p.23)

The following is a list of "Useful Rules to keep in mind on Visiting a Museum" published in the 1880's (although Hudson does not tell us in which museum this list was posted). Some of these "rules" are, perhaps, still relevant today and could be understood as eternal verities of museum visiting:

- Avoid attempting to see too much.
- Remember that one specimen or one article well seen is better than a score of specimens casually inspected.
- See slowly, observe closely, and think much upon what you see (cited in Hudson, 1975, pp. 63-54).

Coles (1975), while working as a child psychiatrist in Boston, conducted an informal, but significant study of the lived experiences of disadvantaged children and their families visiting art museums, a study which began with a visit to the Gardner Museum prompted by a shy young patient's suggestion to go for a walk, during which the boy's request for a drink of water led them to the nearby Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum. This 13 year old boy had never been inside a museum; Coles (1975) was intrigued by the social and psychological implications of the boy's perceptions

and subsequently incorporated museum visiting into his work with children.

Although Coles (1975) writes mostly about the experiences of children, he includes descriptions of experiences with art and museums, spoken by adult members of these children's families. I would like to call attention to one of these descriptions in particular as it shares a striking correspondence with a description from one of the museum visitors that I interviewed. Louise's description of the "special kind of happiness" and "real feeling of well-being" that she experienced while looking at Renoir's "Dance at Bougival" (quoted in Chapter 3) is echoed in the words of a black woman who was given a small reproduction of this painting by the wealthy art collectors who employed her mother to do housekeeping. She talks about the meaning of Renoir's picture that hangs on the wall of her Boston ghetto home:

I stop every day, once or twice, and look at the two of them, and somehow I feel better. Don't ask me why. I'll be tired and I'll be sitting on a chair with my head down nearly to the floor, and suddenly I'll look up and they'll still be there, holding each other and looking happy, and so I feel a little happy myself. I don't do any dancing myself; no time or money for that. My husband locks himself in the closet when the welfare lady comes, never mind dance with me, ... I wish that welfare lady and her supervisor would have this picture in their office; maybe then they would be in a better mood...

You need to stop every once in a while. You can't just be driving yourself. I tell my children please to quiet down and let me pray. I have to talk with Jesus, and ask Him to give me strength. Then I'll begin to feel stronger; so I look at the picture, and I tell myself that maybe that woman, she had a lot of trouble in her life. But she still could go on dancing. And the man, he could have been all upset about something. You wouldn't know it though, by the way he is there; and the artist, he could have been poor, like some artists are, but he painted a happy picture. Of course, he must have made a lot of money, or his children did, because, look how they've made this copy of his picture and there probably are thousands and thousands of copies, just like it.

... if you own something [an original painting], it doesn't mean it's going to bring you the happiness you want, and if you have a copy like we do, you can still put your mind to it, and your spirits can get a lift, no matter how bad things are for you. And don't you think that's what the painter would like to know - that he could affect you, something like that? (cited in Coles, 1975, pp.194-195)

Her husband also speaks about the reproduction of Renoir's painting:

Now I tell you: if you look at that picture real close you'll see that those two are not only having a good time dancing, but they're feeling good. That's important; if you feel bad about the life you're living, you're in trouble. (cited in Coles, 1975, p.196)

Most of the research about museum audiences, for all its sophisticated language and impressive statistics has neither the eloquence nor the impact of these "personal descriptions which are a good example of what Graburn (1977, p.13) means by "reverential experience" or of what Annis (1980, p.4) would call "dream space".

In conclusion, it could be noted, that from a phenomenological point of view, a "review of literature" can be seen as an exposing of existing "assumptions, pre-understandings, beliefs, biases, presuppositions and theories" (van Manen, 1984, p.46) in such a way that it becomes clear that much, although not all, of the existing "knowledge" about a phenomenon, (in this case, the visitor's experience of an art museum) is at a rather superficial level that in fact precludes the possibility for revealing something of the depth and fullness, the "qualitative wholeness" (Beittel, 1970) of the lived experience.

However, the literature that I have found which is related to the experience of museum visitors does help to set the stage for my own research by providing information about the traditional roles of the museum, some of the existing theories about responding to art, as well as the variety, nature

and quantity of research that has been undertaken to study museum audiences and museum visiting. Furthermore, the literature as a whole demonstrates an active interest in this topic expressed by researchers and writers from varying disciplines and professions, an interest that suggests the importance of further research which aims to disclose a deeper level of understanding of the experience of museum visitors.

Chapter 3

Method of Research

Phenomenology as an Approach to Research

I chose phenomenology as an appropriate "method" to serve as a guide and inspiration in the process of research, analysis and writing since the focus of my research is the "experience" of an art museum, and because the purpose of my inquiry has been to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of that experience as it is "lived" by actual museum visitors. However, recognizing the diversity and complexity of phenomenology as a development within twentieth century western philosophy, I have not used a phenomenological methodology in any strict sense of the term; rather, I have adopted certain aspects of phenomenology that some educational researchers have used to gain insight into pedagogical issues.

I have made extensive use of A Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education (1983) written by an American, Loren Barritt and three Dutch researchers, Beekman, Bleeker and Mulderij; their handbook has served as a practical guide in the "how-to" aspect of collecting and analysing descriptions, and has offered a clear explanation of phenomenology as a philosophy and as an approach to research that has as its basis acceptance of subjectivity, lived experience and a descriptive use of language as trustworthy means for understanding human experience. Phenomenology is a philosophy with which I feel an affinity and an approach to doing research that makes sense to me.

Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker and Mulderij (1983) point out that "phenomena are experiences" and so phenomenology means, quite literally,

"the study of experience" (p.50); a "phenomenological approach" to research, "is one that fixes on conscious experience and tries to understand how it happens and what it means" (p. 73). In order to do this, the phenomenologist follows Husserl's maxim, "go to the things themselves" (quoted in Barritt et al., 1983, p. 50) and studies the experience as it is lived in everyday situations. According to Max Van Manen (1984),

phenomenology is the study of the life-world - the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it. It asks "what is this or that kind of experience like?" (p.37)

Phenomenology attempts to understand the nature or meaning of a particular human experience by examining it as a whole, "in its completeness", and declares that "consciousness is a process... an activity, a moving bubbling stream. And this activity is inherently intentional"; which is to say that the process by which we experience something - "consciousness" - cannot be separated from the object of our experience - "the world" (Barritt et al., 1983, pp.59, 67-69). Therefore, phenomenological studies, based on a conviction that "the important information lies in the situation itself" are "necessarily context bound, studies of situations rather than a set of pre-selected variables" (pp.67,59).

"Phenomenology begins", according to Barritt et al. (1983, p.69), "with experiences as people have them, consciously, though not always with awareness, in a world which is both personal (we are alive) and intersubjective (we are with others)." Therefore, the subjects of experience, that is, the people who have the experience which is to be studied, are of the greatest importance to the phenomenologist, for it is they who can describe what a particular experience is like. In phenomenological research, "subjectivity is essential"; it is not problematic, rather it is to be recognized

and valued, because without subjectivity, neither the experience, not the research would take place; "objectivity", on the other hand, "observing the world without being there, isn't possible" (p. 70). In fact,

in the world of human experience objectivity isn't possible or advisable. Treating subjectivity as though it would be made objective distorts understanding. If science means above all taking reality seriously, as it presents itself to us; if it means being as honest with ourselves and others as possible, then we have no choice but to rely on the subjectively constituted experience, my experience, your experience or experiences... we have been taught not to trust ourselves when in fact there is no other choice but to do exactly that. Objectivity is a misleading illusion. (pp. 34-35)

In a phenomenological approach to research, subjectivity is not dismissed, but is welcomed and "put to use in the service of understanding" (Barritt et al., 1983, p. 70). One way in which the researcher can use subjectivity to enhance the quality of research is to examine and make explicit his or her own prejudgements, personal commitments or knowledge about the experience to be studied. To "bracket" out all of one's biases, previous experience and knowledge may not be possible; one can however, at least present these as being part of the research, as the coloured lenses through which the experience is viewed. Once the researcher's biases are exposed and understood, it is at least easier for the researcher to attempt to set these aside and "look with fresh eyes at what occurs" (p. 57); it is also easier for the reader to accept the researcher's subjectivity, as an undeniable part of the process of research.

Intersubjective agreement is another way in which subjectivity can be used to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of a particular experience. While each experience is in one sense completely unique and unrepeatable, it may also share a structure, a pattern, or meanings with other experiences. By examining subjects' descriptions of experiences, the re-

researcher can find those aspects of the experience that are shared or agreed upon by several subjects; this is the discovery of "intersubjective agreement" on "common themes" of experience. Barritt et al. (1983, p. 62) point out that in a phenomenological study, "generality" is the result of "the shared understanding of an experience that the researcher describes and the reader responds to"; they go on to say that,

phenomenologists believe that in most cases there are very likely to be similarities in the reactions of different people to similar circumstances. Not in all aspects but in many of them. (p. 62)

We argue for understanding, even though it may not generalize. Phenomenological research focuses on the specific situation and the individual experiences of those in it. There is no methodological guarantee that the results will apply to another group. (p. 189)

In order to find "shared meanings" or "common themes" of experience, the researcher can examine descriptions of a particular experience, spoken or written by those who "lived" the experience in question. Through careful study and analysis, the researcher can call attention to those aspects of the experience which are usually taken-for-granted, which tend "to be obscure... to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude" (van Manen, 1984, p.41). Barritt et al. (1983) point out that,

the ordinary is full of the extraordinary which we never see until we look... What was background to the "important" movement of our lives becomes on second look, on re-search to be quite wonderful. Having a sense of wonder about the ordinary events of life is a natural consequence of taking them seriously, of examining them (p: 60,61).

A phenomenological approach to research then, implies a re-searching of a particular experience, in this case, the experience of museum visitors. It implies an attentive "second look" at that which is usually overlooked: experience as it is lived by actual subjects in everyday life - muse-

um-going as it is experienced by visitors. The aim of a phenomenological study is not theory-building but rather, "a reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance" (van Manen, 1984); an uncovering of "common themes" of visitors' experiences in museums, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of what it is like and what it means to visit an art museum.

Both van Manen (1984) and Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 19, 191) advocate what could be called a methodless-method for doing phenomenological research: although they make specific suggestions about how to "generate data" about a particular experience, they emphasize a creative, fluid approach to research in which remaining open to change and discovery of method for the sake of deepening understanding is more important, more relevant, than rigidly adhering to prescribed methods. Barritt et al. (1983) claim that their Handbook

is not another research recipe book... in almost every case when doing research, we had to make changes on the spot based upon events of the moment... our prime goal is... to free you to pursue your best hunches about how to better understand the phenomena you will be investigating. (p.19)

At another point in the Handbook, Barritt et al. (1983) emphasize that because research is a creative and exploratory process which takes place over a period of time, it,

must be free to pursue its own course as it tries to understand what previously was not understood since we can't know before what will work best, and that procedures shouldn't be prescribed or proscribed; that research, in other words, is a creative enterprise which should be open to a variety of methods. (p.191)

For Barritt et al. (1983) understanding human experience is the goal of educational research; method is a means to achieve understanding and

never an end in itself:

We think it would be exciting and beneficial if everyone did research about the things in the real world which puzzled them... Methodological requirements which strait-jacket researchers change and diminish the investigation's value, and in addition make the exiting-to-contemplate less than exciting.

The concern for method has been overdone. (p.79)

Van Manen (1984) writes about "generating data" as an exploratory process, and says that,

From a phenomenological point of view it would be more appropriate to see this part of the research process as the educational development of the researcher: that is, finding ways to develop deeper understandings of the phenomenon being investigated. (p.50)

In a phenomenological approach to research, "method" is not something to be followed, rather "method" - and perhaps in this context the word "method" is not even appropriate - is made, invented or found, by the researcher, during the process of research. This way of doing research can be likened to a journey, in which the best route is found only after the roads have been well-travelled. The destination however, remains constant: "the goal is awareness, appreciation of the other's situation" (Barritt et al., 1983, p. 189).

Phenomenological research is consistent, not in a slavish adherence to a single method, but rather in fluidity, openness and a masterful capacity to find or invent a variety of means which will yield the most revealing insights.

A phenomenological approach to research is consistent in maintaining an attitude which guides the use of method, an attitude that is best expressed in van Manen's (1984 p.38) phrase, "the attentive practice of thoughtfulness"; "awareness" then, becomes the means as well as the goal.

I have emphasized the freedom and fluidity with which a phenomenological study can be conducted because in researching the experiences of museum visitors, I found the most appropriate "methods" by exploring different ways of collecting descriptions from visitors, and by constantly questioning and reflecting upon the quality of the data that each process of collection generated. Thus, it was through my own experience of researching that I came upon the most fruitful ways to research the experience of others.

Collecting Descriptions of Lived Experiences

Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 81, 114-117) and van Manen (1984) suggest the collection of personal accounts of specific experiences through interviewing and written descriptions as a means to "gain access" to the subjective nature and meaning of a particular experience. "We gather other people's experiences" writes van Manen (1984),

because it allows us, in a vicarious sort of way, to become more experienced ourselves... it allows us to become "in-formed", shaped or enriched by this experience so as to better be able to render the full significance of its meaning. (pp.56-57)

Preliminary interviews.

In order to obtain a view into the phenomenon of art museum visiting, I chose to collect experiential descriptions from museum visitors through interviewing. Van Manen (1984) discusses the advantages of interviews or "taped conversations" as a way of gaining access to the experiences of others:

Sometimes it is easier to talk than to write about a personal experience because writing forces the person into a more reflective attitude which may make it difficult to stay close to the experience as it is lived. (p.56)

When I proposed to undertake the "fieldwork" stage of my thesis research in June (1986) my intention was to begin by asking 12-15 adults to describe a recent or memorable visit to an art museum in an interview.

During the next three months, I set out, tape recorder in hand, to find out "what it is like" to visit an art museum. I interviewed 17 people; I asked friends, acquaintances, teachers and students of museum education workshops for adults, and several senior citizens attending a leisure-time art classes at a community centre to tell me about their experiences in art museums. My goal, at this stage of the research, was to collect a substantial body of descriptive accounts of museum visits from a variety of people who take an active interest in art and in museums. (For information about the lives of the informants whose descriptions I eventually selected for analysis, please see the section entitled An Introduction to the Eight Selected Informants later in this chapter).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.135) define an interview as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people... that is directed by one in order to get information". As a way of gathering "descriptive data in the subject's own words", I chose an "unstructured" and "open-ended" approach to interviewing in which, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982),

The researcher, ... encourages the subjects to talk in the area of interest, and then probes more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues that the respondent initiates. The subject plays a stronger role in defining the content of the interview and the direction of the study... (p.135, 136)

As a way to encourage the expression of "phenomenological" or experiential descriptions, van Manen (1984) suggests asking subjects to de-

scribe, "a direct account of a personal experience as you lived through it. Avoid causal explanations or interpretive generalization" (p.55).

Although I did not use van Manen's exact words, I asked informants for descriptions of their experiences with questions such as this one from Louise's interview:

if you could perhaps ... just choose one particular visit that you've made to a museum, that's either recent or very memorable and then try to describe that to me in detail, especially in terms of how you experienced it - your own thoughts or feelings or sensations, as you were walking through, of things that you noticed...

While the interviewees described their experiences, I asked questions or made comments in an attempt to draw out more descriptive details and remind the informants to speak about their own feelings and perceptions; here is an example from my first interview with Lorna in which she describes her visit to a museum in San Paulo, Brazil.

Lorna: Instead of hanging them on walls, they had them on glass panels, so you could trot around to the back end of the painting, read all about the painter and the painting - when it was done, when it was shown, how they got it and so on - and trot around to the front and take a look at the painting. Well, that sounds like a superb teaching situation, right? It's all there; you don't have to, but -

Rose: But - how did you find it though?

Lorna: Well, yeah, - there was no class. It had no class! I cannot stand looking at paintings... with... no classic background, just on a sort of blank wall... they had some very good stuff, but it was all stuck around like in a huge supermarket...

During these initial interviews, I had planned to ask the informants to describe their experiences as though they were telling a story; that is, in a narrative form, describing events, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and so on in the time sequence in which these were experienced. However, during

the interviews, I found that once the informants started speaking about their experiences, the order in which they described the events of their experiences was guided not by the chronological time sequence in which events occurred, but by the intensity with which each aspect of the experience stood out in each informant's memory. For example, at the Marmottan Museum and at the museum in San Paulo, Brazil, Lorna was very impressed by the exhibition design; in her descriptions of her visits to these museums, she describes her perception of the way in which the paintings were exhibited first, and then she goes on to talk about the other aspects of her experience.

For Lindsey, on the other hand, the most memorable aspects of her visit to the Roerich Museum were the familiarity and spiritually uplifting quality of Roerich's mountain landscapes as well as her interest in Roerich's life; it was natural and easy for her to begin a description of her experience there by starting with what first came into her mind and then going on to fill in the details in response to my questions.

The 17 preliminary interviews were all tape recorded and each one lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Each informant signed a consent form (see Appendix A) agreeing to participate in an interview (or interviews) for research purposes. The interviews were conducted in Montreal, in the places that were most convenient for the informants: homes, a community centre, an office, a studio, and even in the museum - in a quiet place away from the works of art.

Selection of informants for further interviews.

After conducting preliminary interviews, I planned to select from the

interviewees, four people, with whom I would conduct further interviews in order to thoroughly explore their experience of a series (two or three) of museum visits in which each informant would engage over a period of several weeks.

The criteria that I used to select informants for further interviews were: (1) that each interviewee would be willing to volunteer some of their own time and energy to the research process; (2) that each interviewee is fairly articulate and capable of describing their experiences in a "phenomenological" manner; (3) that the four interviewees represent a variety of life experiences and knowledge about art and (4), that each interviewee has some previous experience of and enthusiasm for visiting art museums; that is to say, I was interested in the experiences of regular visitors rather than the experiences of those who never or hardly ever attend museums.

From the 17 people with whom I conducted preliminary interviews, I selected 3 for further interviews, which were carried out in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The three informants were: Lindsey, Lorna, and Laurence. (Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations from these three informants are in reference to experiences and works at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).

I kept the descriptions of museum experiences obtained from the 14 informants who were not selected for further interviewing, because I felt that these initial interviews may contain valuable descriptive accounts which, later in the research process, could and indeed, did, serve to illuminate the data generated from the three selected "visitors".

Further interviews with three informants.

I planned to conduct an interview with each of the selected informants after each visit in a series of two or three visits to an art museum. I intended to conduct these interviews immediately after each museum visit, hoping that the details of the experience could be easily recounted by the visitors.

However, in keeping with a phenomenological approach to research, I remained open to discovering and inventing alternative ways of interviewing throughout the process of collecting experiential descriptions.

During my second interview with Lindsey it became obvious that my original plan might not necessarily be the best or the only way to conduct an interview that would allow me to explore the visitors' experiences in more depth. I interviewed Lindsey on the patio of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts café, immediately after she had visited the Miro exhibition. Although she was able to articulate much of her experience in a vivid, descriptive manner, towards the end of the half-hour interview she said,

I think quite a lot was just experiencing through the senses which is why I don't remember that much on a lot of it. It's just - an impression remains with me now whereas one or two [works] that I actually thought about I can say about afterwards. ...My impressions of paintings are now shapes and squiggly lines in black and red and bright green on white. ...I'm left with the kind of feeling of what the different things look like; and also my impressions of my humour and my appreciation of the artist and what he was saying and doing. That's what I've come away with rather than a specific memory of what this painting was like this or this - I don't actually remember that much... In fact I've noticed this before. If I want to remember something I put it into words and I can remember it. ... to be able to speak of something I almost have to convert it into words at the time, otherwise there's no kind of impression I can draw on.

Lindsey's apparent forgetfulness of the details and chronology of her

experience during the second interview prompted me to try another approach for the third interview: this time, I carried the tape recorder and walked with Lindsey through the 19th and 20th century Canadian section of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, which she had just visited. This way of interviewing allowed her to "relive" her experience, to go through the motions of moving through the gallery, pausing, looking and telling me about her visit as she went along. Being in the gallery and seeing the paintings and sculptures helped her to recount where she went, when, what she looked at and perhaps most importantly, her perceptions of the works she had looked at and the quality of her experience as a whole. I found this way of conducting an interview to be very successful because it enabled her to give a rich, detailed description of her moment-to-moment experience.

After retracing her steps through 19th and early 20th century Canadian galleries, Lindsey asked me if she could carry the tape recorder. I consented and then, in a very spontaneous manner, without any prompting from me, she began to speak of her present experience as she lived it, talking into the tape machine as thoughts and perceptions passed through her mind. We had just come into the section of the museum which houses 20th century Canadian abstract paintings; Lindsey's somewhat cynical response to the works, coupled with the unusualness of this new mode of interviewing made for a hilarious beginning. After two or three minutes of laughter interspersed with Lindsey's spontaneous satire on a Kenneth Clark style of commenting on "great" works of art, and some bewildered and amused looks from other visitors, we settled into this new style of describing a museum experience in which Lindsey switched on the tape recorder whenever she had anything to say about her experience. My role shifted from an interviewer to an interviewer-observer; this manner of in-

interviewing allowed me to observe the experience as it was happening and to question her about her movements, gestures or facial expression which indicated that something was happening, even though she chose not to speak about it. For example, at one point I said, "You walked by here and all of a sudden you looked at this painting of this kind of Greek goddess or whatever she is, for a couple of moments. What was happening?" Lindsey responded:

I liked the colours and I liked the look of it. I couldn't think of a lot to say about it which is why I didn't say anything. She looks like she's got everything but isn't happy yet. I just looked at that. I thought: well, she's sick of her instrument ... I don't know what it is. She sort of put it to one side and she's just gazing out over the water. I don't know what it's called [she looks at the label] - Sappho?

This way of conducting an interview allowed me to be a witness to a visitor's experience of being in a museum, and although many of Lindsey's comments were very revealing, her tendency in speaking about her experience in the present, was to describe the work of art, rather than her experience of the work of art or her visit as a whole, a subtle but important distinction. Here is an excerpt from the transcript in which Lindsey is recording her experience as it is happening:

I really like this: Isadore Kauffman, "Interior of a Synagogue". You've got two sources of light perhaps, whereas this is the same source that's lighting over here. It shouldn't actually be - there must be another source. Very meticulous. You can feel the grain of the wood and you can almost smell the old parched leather in the books...

And in the following excerpt, Lindsey is reliving her visit:

And round the corner we have this brightly coloured one which I liked even though it has all the colours that I don't usually like. But, there's something bright and creative about it. And although there are very many objects I felt it was kind of homely.

Rose: What do you mean by "homely"?

Lindsey: When you've got your clutter around you and you know it all, like all the objects have been painted in a way of feeling familiar in some way - that could feel like my kind of clutter....

The reliving or retracing the visitor's steps way of conducting an interview appeared to me to combine the advantages of recalling a museum experience from a different time and place with the advantages of recording a museum experience as it unfolds in the present. That is, retracing the visitor's steps was a way of interviewing that allowed the visitor to have a museum visit uninfluenced by my presence, and to have the necessary time gap which transforms present experience into a memory; in the process of transformation from present to past, experience seems to be condensed such that the essence of the experience, the meaning, can be most easily recalled. At the same time, while reliving a museum experience, the impact of the immediate, visible presence of works of art and of the museum building helps to trigger the visitor's recollection of the details of his or her perception and experience. While each of the four ways of collecting a description of museum experience that I had tried so far; (1) recalling from the past (in the preliminary interviews); (2) recalling from the immediate past (in Lindsey's second interview in which she talked about visiting the Miro exhibition); (3) reliving and (4) recording an experience, each offered different advantages and different kinds of descriptions, reliving appeared to be the most practical and the most revealing of the particular details, character and quality of the visitor's experience. Therefore, I chose to use the reliving way of conducting an interview when I did further interviews with Lorna and Laurence.

The reliving method of interviewing worked well for Lorna's second and third interviews in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Her experience

was very much her own; sharing it with me afterwards appeared to be quite effortless. Lorna's ease of expression was the result of her natural unself-consciousness about revealing her own thoughts and feelings. She was remarkably candid and delightfully unpretentious; at times she would even laugh at her own comments or ways of being in a museum.

During my second and third interviews with Lindsey and Lorna I found that my role as an interviewer included being with each of them in a personal way, as two women visiting a museum together; the time spent together was a "visit to the museum", an outing on a summer afternoon as well as an "interview". This is evident in the following excerpt from my third interview with Lorna, in which we are standing in front of a 17th century Dutch still-life (Cornelis de Heem, "Still Life"),

Lorna: [looking very closely at the painting] What is this little business in there?

Rose: it looks like a snail to me.

Lorna: yeah, that's what I thought too. And I don't appreciate that, thank-you very much. Yeah, I thought they were snails too. They had strange ideas didn't they? Well, [she looks at the label] - what do you expect in 1631? ... And then I came over here [to "The Children of Altetus Tolling" by Grerbrand van den Eeckhout] and thought: what an ugly bunch of kids, which is kind of funny isn't it? They really are ugly! I mean kids are not ugly, really, because they're - you know - cute and fresh and young and so on, but you know, they're not very good looking! [we both laugh]

Rose: [laughing] No! - that was mostly your thought when you were looking at it?

Lorna: [also laughing] Yes, that was it. Yeah - that really did it for me in this end of the room! I thought I'd try to get out of here!

Lorna's second interview took about 55 minutes and the third interview lasted for almost an hour and a half. After listening to the tapes from

these interviews, I wanted to explore more deeply some of the comments she had made about her experience of particular works of art; I was curious as well, to know more about her life's story and experience with art and museums. We therefore arranged a fourth and final interview session, conducted at her apartment. At the end of this interview she said that she had enjoyed the interviews, that it had made her think about how she looks at art, although, she added, she hadn't come to any conclusions.

I also asked Laurence for a second interview, which we conducted in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Laurence's way of being in a museum is significantly different from that of both Lindsey and Lorna. For Laurence, visiting a museum is part of his study of religion; he often goes to the museum to look at specific works of art, as a researcher, taking notes, and as an instructor, taking groups of university students. His manner of speaking about art, at the beginning of the interview, in which he described his visit to medieval and early Canadian religious art, was analytical and somewhat distant; he was informing me more about the works of art than about his personal experience of them. However, later in the interview as he was describing his visit to the 19th and early 20th century Canadian galleries, his description took on a far more personal tone; perhaps this was prompted by the change in the subject-matter of the art work, or perhaps it was the effect of speaking for half an hour to a receptive listener. As an example of how Laurence expressed more of his subjective experience while speaking about Canadian paintings, the following is an excerpt from the interview in which he is referring to a street scene by Hébert, entitled "Hyman's Tobacco Store":

I can imagine that world. I can actually be there because I lived at a time when horses were used to pull bread wagons or

milk wagons. When I was a kid, that was a normal way of delivering bread and milk. And the way people dressed and so on: those fashions are a little bit before my time but nevertheless there was enough of it - of the whole atmosphere left over that I can't help feel for it. And it's - it's a mixed feeling I have and I don't feel entirely positive - to me it feels like a time of constriction and restraint. So my own personal feelings about my early childhood, or my childhood in general for that matter, enter into my reaction to a painting like that.

The manner in which I conducted these interviews at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts with Laurence, Lorna and Lindsey was open-ended and guided by the informants' experiences rather than by pre-determined questions. Van Manen (1984) points out that because of the exploratory nature of an interview which aims for the fullest possible description of a personal experience, "it is impossible to offer ready-made questions" (p.56). Therefore, the exact wording of my questions was constructed on the spot and in direct response to the visitors' descriptions. Barritt et al. (1983) advise interviewers that,

Since you have asked for this talk, your informant will expect you to be prepared with questions. This should not be a list from which you read; that can be stultifying. Best is to have a clear idea of what you hope to learn from the session and to use those ends as your guides to your questions. (pp. 114-115).

The general direction of my questioning was to draw out a personal description of a specific museum experience, and to this end, I asked the interviewees to clarify, elaborate and give more examples while describing their experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) write that,

The interviewer may ask for clarification when the respondent mentions something that seems unfamiliar... The interviewer also probes the respondent to be specific, asking for examples of points that are made ... Informants ... need encouragement to elaborate. (p.136)

The following excerpt from Lorna's third interview is an example of the way in which I asked the informants to clarify or explain what they re-

ally meant by a particular word or phrase:

Lorna: And the leaves: every last leaf, and the little blueberries or whatever they are - little blue flowers; he hasn't fudged a one: they're all in there, isn't it?

Rose: By "fudged" you mean faking it or - ?

Lorna: Yeah, just sort of put a blur and putting the odd one to let people know what you mean by it, you know.

At other times during the interviews, it was necessary for me to ask the informants to elaborate on what they said in order to fill out and enrich the description; the following interaction is taken from Lindsey's third interview:

Lindsey: But I like to look at that. I find it very, very pleasing. And even the colour that he painted it, I find pleasing, though I think any colour would look good.

Rose: Can you describe a bit what it feels like to feel "pleased".

Lindsey: Um - it brings out a higher quality within myself. I guess that's what is pleasing .. what pleases me is that I reach for a higher ideal rather than to be content with the mundanity of life.

It was also important to remind the informants to give me specific examples of kinds or qualities of experience; this is illustrated by the following excerpt from my interview with Andy:

Andy: I think the most important thing at museums for me was if I could go in and be free to roam and come out feeling a little different as if something fascinating happened, or .. something now in my head or mind that made me just think a little bit more or made me wonder a little bit more or, feeling that I'd want to go back. If I wouldn't leave with those feelings, it's just something that I'd basically forget about.

Rose: Can you think of a specific time - can you remember a specific time when you felt that way, like that - feeling a little changed or having some sense of wonder when you came out?

Andy: You mean - any specific time?

Rose: Any specific time.

Andy: [pauses and then says] Yeah! [We both laugh] One year - I told you about this a bit ... Michael Snow... it was at the gallery in Montreal, the Fine Arts Museum ... [Andy goes on to describe his visit to the Michael Snow exhibition in detail].

Although the informants had difficulty narrating their museum experiences in chronological order when they were recalling visits to museums in the preliminary interviews, they could speak quite effortlessly about the time sequence of their museum visits when they retraced their steps through the museum in their second and third interviews. I encouraged the informants to narrate the story of their visit and asked questions which invited a narrative response such as these from Lorna's second and third interviews:

- Anything else in this room?
- Did you look at some of these?
- So, when you came along here did you look at the label first? Do you remember? Or did you look at all these little pieces?
- And so you just came up here as you usually do and you stopped here; was there a reason why you stopped?

At one point during the second interview, Lorna adopted my "what happened next?" manner of questioning and the following interaction ensued:

Lorna: So then what happened? What did I do next? I looked at these, and oh, Cullen...

Rose: Did you recognize it from a distance as being by Cullen or did you -

Lorna: Yes, I think I did, because I went by this whatever; I went by that and headed right for this. So I don't know whether I recognized it - I recognized it as being by somebody I knew, but I don't know whether I labeled it Cullen right away - no, I wouldn't have done that...

I found that silence, as well as the choice of appropriate questions, was an effective way to elicit descriptions of personal experience from the informants. Barritt et. al. (1983, p. 114) write about the importance of the interviewer "learning to be silent so an informant can speak". Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 137) advise interviewers not to "fear silence", because a silent pause "can enable subjects to get their thoughts together and to direct some of the conversation". Van Manen (1984) suggests that:

Often it is not necessary to ask so many questions. Patience or silence is a more tactful way of prompting the other to gather recollections and proceed with a story. But if there seems to be a block, then it is often enough to repeat the last sentence or thought in a questioning sort of tone and thus trigger the other to continue. (p.56)

Most of the people that I interviewed were naturally talkative and needed little or no prompting to keep the flow of their descriptions going. However, I did make an effort to allow silence, that is to check the natural tendency to ask a question or make a comment as soon as there was a pause in the informant's talking. I also made frequent use of Van Manen's suggestion (1984) to trigger the interviewee to continue speaking by repeating a few of their own words in a questioning tone; this technique, as well as that of allowing silence is illustrated in the following excerpt from Lorna's third interview:

Lorna: It's done in wood and - uh [she pauses] - I thought it was [she pauses again] - I rather liked it. A bit corny, but I - I don't know, I like it [another pause].

Rose: "A bit corny"?

Lorna: Corny.

Rose: Yeah - what made you think it was corny, or what aspects of it -

Lorna: Well, you know, the two angel heads up there, coming out of the cloud, coming out of the rafters or whatever they're doing. And he's a bit careless with his book, or is he doing this with his arm? And, you know, the perspective is off and he's just too beautiful-looking for words. But I thought it was - uh, [she pauses] - I thought it was a fun thing. I wouldn't mind doing something like that...

The use of silence and repetition of the informants' own words, as well as a way to encourage speaking, are the outcome of a phenomenological approach to research, which by its very nature requires the researcher to be non-evaluative, to drop previous knowledge and opinions in order to truly hear the informants. By conveying my interest in the informants' descriptions through eye contact, and the occasional nod, "uh-huh" or "that's interesting", I let the interviewees know that I accepted their perceptions, thoughts and feelings and considered these to be both valid and important. By consciously making efforts to maintain an attitude of acceptance and neutrality, I established a trusting rapport with each one of the informants, which was the basis upon which they could give me such candid and personal descriptions of their experiences.

Collection of two written descriptions and another interview.

Through the process of conducting 17 preliminary interviews and a series of further interviews with Lorna, Lindsey and Laurence, I had gathered, in three months, over 18 hours of taped interviews about the lived experiences of museum visitors. Therefore, I felt it would be wise to take some

time during the subsequent two months to transcribe the most relevant of these interviews after listening to all the tapes and reflecting on their contents, a process which led me to question the value of conducting a series of interviews with three or four museum visitors.

My proposed approach to interviewing generated a great deal of data which offered an in-depth view into a variety of museum experiences as lived and described by three or four people. While interviewing and especially while listening to the tapes of all the interviews, I realized that I was most interested in the phenomenon of what, for lack of a better term, I would call visitors' "most meaningful moments" or "best" experiences in museums. Therefore my interest having been shaped and refined - "informed" - through the experience of interviewing, focused on one particular phenomenon as lived and described by a variety of people. The emphasis of my inquiry had shifted from three or four museum visitors to one particular museum visiting phenomenon or quality of experience. Naturally this implied a similar shift in my method of collecting descriptions: at this point, while keeping the valuable data that I had already collected, I enriched it by collecting more descriptions from adult visitors of their "most meaningful" or "best" experiences in art museums. The method of collection could now be less structured and opened up to include the collection of written descriptions as well as more interviewing.

To use the metaphor of a journey, since I had found one very fruitful area, I felt it was appropriate to take a variety of paths from which to approach it, thereby making a more truly phenomenological focus and approach for my research: I had allowed myself to be guided by the inner "logic" of the "phenomena" of museum visitors' lived experiences to examine one specific aspect of a "phenomenon" from many points of view or

"profiles". Barritt et al. (1983, p. 187) write that, "What we want to stress about phenomenology is its consistently critical reflection about itself." It was in the spirit of phenomenological self-reflectiveness and openness that I changed and refined the method of collecting experiential descriptions from museum visitors.

I asked several university students who were participating in a psychology of art seminar to each write a descriptive account of an especially meaningful, personal experience of a visit to an art museum (please see Appendix B for a copy of my instructions for writing this description). I selected two of these written descriptions to analyze for common themes of experience; these were the particularly rich and lively accounts written by Lisa, who described a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and Elkana who wrote about his visit to the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario.

Because I wanted to have one more description of an especially "meaningful" museum experience, I conducted an interview with Andy in which I asked him to recall and describe his experiences in art museums which stood out as being the "best".

The two hour interview with Andy concluded the process of collecting descriptions of visitors' lived experiences in museums.

A summary of the five ways of collecting descriptions and the distinction between the resulting five kinds of descriptions.

Over a period of five months I collected descriptions of "lived experience" in museums from 20 people: these descriptions were collected in five ways and each way produced a slightly different kind of description. The

following is a summary of the ways of collecting: and the particular character of each of the resulting descriptions.

(1) recalling an experience from the past in an interview (the 17 preliminary interviews, including those with Lindsey, Louise, Lorna, Sean and Laurence as well as the interview with Andy).

These are descriptions of an experience from another time and place, filtered through memory, so that the most meaningful or memorable aspects of the experience are described: details and chronology are frequently forgotten, but the significance of the experience is remembered.

(2) describing a museum visit, immediately after it has taken place, in an interview (the second interview with Lindsey, in which she describes her visit to the Miro Exhibition).

This is a description of an experience which is recalled from the immediate past, rather than from the distant past and as such, a vivid "impression" of the quality of the experience as a whole can be easily communicated, although specific details might be forgotten.

(3) reliving a museum visit in an interview in which the informant retraces his or her steps through the museum and describes the visit which has just taken place (part of Lindsey's third interview, Lorna's second and third interviews and Laurence's second interview).

This way of collecting a description resulted in a narrative account in which both the meaning of the experience as a whole as well as its particular details and chronology could be easily expressed. From time to time, the informants would slip back and forth between narrating the experience of the immediate past and describing the experience of the present; their comments tended to alternate between a description of how the works of art were perceived and the recollection of events, ideas or other works that were

brought to mind while looking at a particular painting or sculpture.

(4) recording the moment-to-moment experience of a museum visit as it happens in the present, in an interview, a way of describing an experience that Lindsey spontaneously initiated during her third interview.

In contrast to recalling an experience from either the distant or immediate past, the emphasis in this way of describing an experience is on the narration of the details of the informant's perception of specific works of art, at the expense of a description of the overall impression or felt quality of the experience as a whole. However, this method of description does reveal the actual sequence of the visitor's thoughts in response to a work of art; it was as though Lindsey was thinking out loud while she recorded her experience.

(5) writing a description of a particular museum visit which was especially meaningful.

Because they are written rather than spoken, Lisa's and Elkana's descriptions have a more reflective and less spontaneous quality than the descriptions obtained through interviewing. Writing is a slower process than speaking: both Elkana and Lisa chose their words carefully, even artfully; their descriptions are perhaps more clearly articulated than some of the spoken descriptions. However, through writing, experience becomes crystallized into a definite, albeit more precise, form and loses some of the fluidity which characterizes a spoken description.

While I was aware of the distinctions between descriptions which were the outcome of different ways of asking for them, I treated all the descriptions simply as "descriptions of lived experience" during the process of analysis, because what the descriptions share is more significant than what distinguishes them from one another. In other words, the value of the

descriptions of lived experience is the way in which each one can serve to inform me about the nature and meaning of visiting an art museum.

An Introduction to the Eight Selected Informants

From the descriptions collected from a total of 20 people; from these I selected descriptions from eight informants to analyze for common themes. I chose to work with a selection of descriptions which represent diverse, yet meaningful experiences expressed in articulate and candid terms that tend to reveal the nature of the experience as it was lived. I made an effort as well, to select descriptions from several informants who, as a group, represent a variety of age, personality, profession, social and ethnic background, formal education and experience in the study and making of art.

Since it is the life experience of these eight informants which gives meaning to their museum experience, it is both appropriate and relevant to describe some of the details of their lives which have direct bearing upon how they visit art museums and on the way in which they describe their experiences.

Lindsey grew up in a town in Surrey, England and as a child she was "brought up with paints and paper and drawing"; art-making was encouraged by her mother who painted and exhibited as a "kind of hobby". Although she did not "go to art museums that much" with her family, Lindsey did go on frequent school outings to art museums in London.

As she grew older, she began visiting museums on her own and in her late teens and early twenties she traveled extensively throughout Eu-

rope, India and Sri Lanka. This period was, as she puts it, her "main museum going spree", visiting four or five museums in each city that she traveled through.

As well as visiting art museums, she remarked,

I traveled always with a sketch pad, and everywhere I went I would sit on the corners and draw; not so much for the sake of drawing, but I liked to sit on corners and look; and it was a kind of an excuse to be there and not look odd... So I sketched constantly; I had piles of drawings; I'd come back with drawings of where I'd gone as opposed to photographs; not that I was good [she laughs], but I liked to do it.

Despite her enthusiasm for art and museum-visiting, Lindsey did not take any studio or art history courses when she attended university in England; instead she studied psychology, completing a Bachelor of Science degree. She later held a position in a Technical College lecturing in biology.

She is now 28 years old, living in Montreal and working as a teacher of yoga and meditation.

Sean, a 62 year old eye surgeon, was also born and raised in England; his parents however, were both Americans. He was educated in English and European schools and although he does not recall doing art in school, he remembers collecting dried flowers as a child and he was introduced to art by his parents who both did wood-engraving.

While he was doing pre-medical studies at a prominent American university, Sean completed a "minor" in art history. He began collecting art while still at university and completed his medical training in Montreal, where he settled and pursued an ambitious career in both the teaching and practice of ophthalmology.

Throughout his life, Sean has maintained an active interest in art: he has visited many museums throughout Canada, the United States, England and Europe; he has been active on museum committees at both the local and national levels. About fifteen years ago, he took a two-week drawing course from a local Quebec artist and since then he has pursued the study of drawing and painting through courses and workshops. "Once I've retired, at least as a doctor" he says, "I expect to put a lot of time, at least half time, into this creative aspect of life".

Louise is from the Montreal area; she studied "social aid" at the C.G.E.P. level and has taken night courses in management at a local university. She is now 32 years old and for several years, she has worked in the administration and management aspect of the travel industry, organizing tours to Florida and Europe.

Louise visited many art museums while conducting coach tours through Europe: "otherwise", she says, "I don't know if I would have gone to as many museums". These visits to European museums rekindled Louise's interest in art. Although she did not study art in school, as a child, she would "sketch all the time". As she grew older, she lost interest in making art, but for the last two years she has been taking drawing courses at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. She has exhibited some of her work and intends to do a fine art degree on a part time basis while she continues her career in the travel industry.

Laurence is 48 years old and lives in Montreal where he is working

towards his Ph.D. while teaching courses in religion at both the college and university levels. His interest in art and museum-going started off as a "professional" interest, "a desire to introduce students to a religion via the artworks as well as the other sources". Laurence's interest in art "arises" he says, partly "from the fact that I'm married to an art critic".

Although he does not remember studying art in school, he does recall taking an art class outside of school when he was "10 or 12" years old.

Laurence was born and grew up in Ottawa, where he studied English literature at a local university, a pursuit which did not fully capture his interest, so at the age of 19, he left university and worked on road construction to earn money to travel to Europe where he spent "about a year"; his travels included visits to some of the major European art museums.

He returned to Ottawa in the sixties and worked at different jobs, including running a coffee house, editing a small newspaper and being an "extra" in part time acting. Later, Laurence went back to university and completed a B.A. in theology and a Master's degree in religion.

I have less information about Lisa and Elkana because I did not conduct interviews with them: instead, I asked them to add to their written descriptions some pertinent details of their lives, education and experience with art and museums. Lisa is a 20 year old student who is working towards a Bachelor of Education degree at a Montreal university. Although her major subject of study is elementary level education, she has also taken studio art courses at the university level.

Elkana is originally from Kenya, and he is presently completing a Master's degree in education at a university in Montreal. During his 45 years, he has completed a degree in fine art, including both studio and art history courses and he has pursued a career as a teacher and as an exhibiting sculptor.

Andy is a 23 year old musician who was born in California and has lived in Texas, Montreal and Vancouver. He attended a private high school in Montreal and then studied social sciences at the C.G.E.P. level. He studied anthropology and English literature at a Vancouver university for two years. During this time, Andy also taught "arts and crafts, music and gym" to children at a local community centre and "did a lot of creative writing". Later, he worked for the shipping division of a major British Columbia drugstore chain to earn money to travel to India to pursue his interest in the philosophy and practice of meditation.

He says that he has,

always appreciated art, right from the beginning... and I've never really pursued ... painting and drawing ... I've gotten into music and writing poetry...

At home, Andy was encouraged to develop his interest in a variety of art forms by his mother who is an amateur painter. Andy says that,

in high school, if the option was art, I'd always take it ... it would be the easiest class to relax in and have a good time, and usually the nicest teachers were in those classes.

Since I have made extensive use of Lorna's descriptions of her museum experiences, I felt it would be appropriate to provide a somewhat

more extensive picture of her life's story as a context in which to see her descriptions.

Lorna began visiting museums about 20 years ago when she accompanied her husband on business trips to New York:

I was a fool you know, just to spend all that time shopping - what a bore! ... I just found where the art galleries were and went... And so I really got myself all enthusiastic about art and I've bought books and read; every time I can, I follow a little course in art, or try to sneak into an atelier when nobody's looking. I'm usually the worst in the class, you know - my technique is horrible, but my enthusiasm!

Lorna's enthusiasm for art is very sincere: she enjoys visiting museums; she has taken drawing and painting classes at private studios in Germany and she has participated in art-making workshops at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Lorna remembers doing art as a child and attending museums on outings from primary school; she remembers being scolded by her piano teacher for making "fantastic" drawings all over her piano music. Her mother designed and made her own clothes and also did some painting on china and glass dishes. Lorna's father, who ran a small electrical company, liked to collect and invent novel, decorative and sometimes practical things for their home. Lorna grew up in Toronto and boasts of coming from a family that is six generations Canadian.

She did not study art at the private high school that she attended in Toronto; rather her interest at that time was in languages, mathematics, sciences, and performing some of Shakespeare's plays.

After high school, Lorna took a secretarial course at a business college in Toronto. After a brief stint as a secretary for a business in Hamilton, Lorna took a job as a meteorological teletypist for the federal govern-

ment; this was a "war-time" job and she worked in weather observation offices at several locations in Ontario for ten years. Later, she became the secretary for the "officer in charge" of Malton airport in Toronto. It was there that she met her husband who, at that time, was a meteorologist with the British Royal Navy.

Lorna and her husband lived in Dorval, then Toronto and later in Montreal; they have two daughters. After a few years of full-time home making and parenting Lorna deciding to go to teacher's college where she completed a teaching diploma, and then taught at a private boy's school in Montreal for several years.

Lorna is now 64 years old and lives in Germany with her husband who is vice-president of an international company. She spends the summers in Montreal and at their country home in the Laurentians.

Analyzing the Collected Descriptions for Common Themes

The purpose of analyzing descriptions, according to Barritt et al. (1983, p. 90) "is to find common themes" of experience. Analysis is a process of making sense of experience as it is lived. In a phenomenological approach to research, it is a process which requires openness and respect for the experience and words of others, to permit the informants to speak through their descriptions until, among the din of several voices, some chord of shared meaning is struck, a recurring note is heard, resonating with the ring of familiarity - or, perhaps intersubjective agreement is never heard; that is always a possibility, although an unlikely one. Analyzing experiential descriptions is an attempt to understand something of the essential characteristics of a phenomenon.

The analysis of the descriptions of actual experiences in art museums selected from eight informants was a process of gradually finding order among hundreds of pages of transcripts and written descriptions. I began by looking at the transcripts from Lorna's interviews, which as a series stands out for several reasons: Lorna's descriptions are rich in meaning and variety; her manner of speaking is consistently lively and, above all, candid: her words seem always to be a clear reflection of the nature and quality of her experience. Lorna's interviews also offer access to quantity as well as quality of descriptive material: Lorna participated in four interview sessions, with a total of four and a half hours.

Barritt et al. (1983, pp.90-101) outline a rigorous procedure for analyzing descriptions of lived experience, which I found very useful. This procedure, which was worked out through the experience of doing phenomenological research is given as a "starting point" for analysis; Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 90,95) write that, "this procedure is offered because we've found it helpful. It is not a fixed formula and we bend it to fit the information whenever that seems best..... it isn't a flawless procedure but it is systematic."

The first step in this process of analysis is to read the descriptions - in this case, the transcripts from Lorna's interviews - with "fresh eyes" and to, "select from it those moments which seem to be at the centre of the event for the person ... which 'fly up like sparks' from the description" (Barritt et al. pp. 57,92).

Lorna and the other informants would generally take several moments or even minutes to describe a "moment" of their experience of being in a museum. The following, for example, is an important "moment" of experience from Lorna's second interview, conducted in the Montreal Muse-

um of Fine Arts in which she describes her experience of looking at "Mount Temple" by Lawren Harris:

Lorna: I turn around and I have another look at this Harris one. Because that is, you know, that's like the Rock of Gibraltar, isn't it? You know, Prudential life had the Rock of Gibraltar as their trademark; yeah, "build on the rock"; it's a very - before your time - it's a very old slogan: buy their life insurance and it's as firm as a rock, you see.

So this reminds me of Gibraltar in its firmness and stability. And it's good to see it again; you know, you come along, and my God, you have personal tragedies - everybody does - and you have, you know, maybe you have a bad day and you come and you look at that. It's very pleasing.

Rose: So this is a painting that you're familiar with, that you've looked at before and you've come back to?

Lorna: Yes. And I've gone out of my way. When the Canadian collection used to be at the front, I'd go out of my way to go over and have a look at this one. Oh yes, I like this very much.

Rose: I found that interesting when you said that it's something that you do come back to intentionally and that you find it very pleasing - could you talk about what that is?

Lorna: Well, I do it too with that one Pissarro ["The Harbour at Rouen"]. When I first started coming here, coming to the art gallery - because we hadn't been here that long. It's nothing like what I was used to in Toronto and I didn't see too much stuff I liked, and there wasn't too much selection, so I had to latch on to something. So I latched onto this one; I latched onto that other one and I latched onto "Autumn" ["October" by Tissot] as I call her and a few paintings. And it's made me feel closer to Montreal because, now I have some old friends in the art gallery here. It's difficult moving around. I've done the same things in Hamburg actually; there are a couple of paintings that I go and see every time. I might go and see a special exhibition, but I'll go and see their general, their usual stuff. These two, especially this one - is a magnificent - I think it's a Renoir... [she goes on to describe this painting in Hamburg] It's a beauty; I like to go and see

that one.

But this - coming back to Harris; this is a peaceful rock - rock of Gibraltar. And you can come in here and think: well, you know, these things may go on in life, but some things never change. It's that trite - the feeling. And this, this one too ["Cathedral Mountain" by L[ismer], but to a lesser degree because this has more angles and is busier and it's not as peaceful. But this one has that lovely - this Harris has this great vertical development and even though he has some diagonal lines, he has this nice sort of flowing part at the bottom. Those kinds of things are very restful, very peaceful.

Rose: Yeah, that's right. In fact, I think what you're saying about it, even though sometimes it's hard to find the words, or the words might sound trite or cliché, it's actually quite a profound sort of experience, I think.

Lorna: Oh, very! Oh, yes. To talk about it is trite, but to feel it is not trite because it's worth while, you know, coming in just to see it, really.

After a careful reading of all the transcripts of Lorna's interviews, the above passage as well as five others stood out as being especially significant "moments" for Lorna. For each of these five "moments" I followed the suggestion of Barritt et al. (1983, p. 92) by listing key words and phrases that seemed to express the character of each experience.

Inherent in this process is the way in which experience, especially meaningful experience eludes linguistic expression; the informants' descriptions refer to their experiences and although these personal narratives are as close as possible to the lived experience, they should not be seen as identical with the experience itself: therefore the meanings are often heard "between the lines", between the words, and through the description as a whole, augmented by my memory of the informants' gestures, facial expression and tone of voice.

As an example of how I made a list of the key words and phrases from each important "moment" the following is the list of 18 points taken

from Lorna's description of her experience of the Harris painting, quoted above.

1. and I have another look at this Harris one.
2. that's like the Rock of Gibraltar, isn't it?
3. Prudential life... trademark' ... a very old slogan: buy their life insurance and it's as firm as a rock, you see.
4. this reminds me of Gibraltar in its firmness and stability.
5. it's good to see it again
6. my God, you have personal tragedies - everybody does ... maybe you have a bad day and you come and you look at that.
7. It's very pleasing.
8. I've gone out of my way... I'd go out of my way to go over here and have a look at this one.
9. oh, yes. I like this very much.
10. I didn't see too much stuff I liked, and there wasn't too much selection, so I had to latch on to something. So I latched on to this one... and a few paintings.
11. it's made me feel closer to Montreal because now I have some old friends in the art gallery here.
12. I've done the same thing in Hamburg actually; there are a couple of paintings that I go and see every time.
13. these two, especially this one - is a magnificent... a Renoir... It's a beauty; I like to go and see that one.
14. this is a peaceful rock - Rock of Gibraltar.
15. you can come in here and think: well, you know, these things may go on in life, but some

things never change.

16. this one has that lovely... this great vertical development and even though he has some diagonal lines, he has this nice sort of flowing part at the bottom.
17. those kind of things are very restful, very peaceful.
18. to talk about it is trite, but to feel it is not trite, because it's worthwhile, you know, coming in just to see it, really.

After making lists from each of the six outstanding "moments" from Lorna's interviews, I began to find "common themes" of experience appearing among Lorna's descriptions; for example Lorna was often attracted to works of art that recalled something familiar or recognizable and on several occasions she spoke of her experience in museums as peaceful or relaxing. Curious about whether or not these and other themes would show up in descriptions from other people, I turned to the descriptions from Lindsey, Louise, Sean, Laurence, Elkana, Lisa and Andy and repeated the process of listing the key words and phrases from the "moments" of experience that stood out as especially meaningful or important from each informant. This process yielded 9 more lists (2 lists from both Lindsey and Andy, one from each of the others), making a total of 15 lists of key words and phrases.

The next step in the procedure outlined by Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 94,96) is to compare all the lists of key words and phrases taken from informants' descriptions; wherever shared meanings, perceptions, patterns or qualities or experience appear, these are grouped together and summarized by a phrase which is faithful to the informants' words: these resulting phrases are called "common themes".

As well as themes, Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 95,96) point out that amongst several descriptions of an experience, one is also likely to find "variations" or "unique themes" which "frequently highlight the meaning of the common forms"; sometimes these appear as subtle modifications of a theme and at other times the variations are more dramatic, appearing as paradoxes or opposites which illuminate the meaning of the common theme. Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 96 - 98) suggest compiling a three part list for each common theme, stating the summarizing theme phrase; the "statements" or key words and phrases taken from the informants' descriptions and the variations on the common theme. For example, Table I illustrates a portion of one of the three part thematic lists that I constructed from the informants' words, which shows how certain aspects of Lorna's experience of looking at the Harris painting are shared with the experiences of others.

The systematic rigour involved in the procedure for analysis outlined by Barritt et al. (1983, pp. 90-101) makes this a satisfying process of real discovery; the thoroughness of this procedure allowed me to feel that I was uncovering something unexpected, unforeseen in the informants' descriptions. In a phenomenological approach to research, it is the subjective lived experience of the informants which provides the basis for intersubjective agreement about the shared aspects of their experiences; in the same way, the subjectivity of the researcher is not to be undervalued and certainly not overlooked or denied. Barritt et al. (1983) write:

...decisions about the meaning of experience do reflect the researcher's "reading" of the data. Other researchers might reflect a different emphasis. We are confident nevertheless that our different readings would be like two accounts of the same event rather than two different occurrences. (p.104)

Table 1
Excerpts from a Three Part Thematic List Showing the Relationship
between Informants' Descriptions

Common theme	Key Phrases from Informants' Descriptions (theme statements)	Variations
<p>- being attracted to works of art that are "reminiscent" of something "recognizable" or "familiar" and pleasant, something with which the visitor can identify.</p>	<p>Lorna: List #3 (Harris) 2. that's like the rock of Gibraltar, isn't it? 3. Prudential Life... trademark... a very old slogan: buy their life insurance and it's as firm as a rock, you see.</p> <p>Lindsey : List #8 (Roerich) 9. Especially the paintings of places that I knew: when I recognized them, it was just amazing to see them.</p> <p>Laurence; List #15 4. Tom Thomson... makes me think of times when I used to go out into the country alone... and go for walks in the country... in my teenage years.</p>	<p>- being attracted to the unknown, the mysterious or surprising:</p> <p>Andy: List#6 (Michael Snow)</p> <p>8. It's an experience that stuck out because there was always that element of something that just wasn't what you'd expect.. you just had no way of understanding it, but you knew you liked it, because you were entering into this realm of thinking that you'd never thought of before.</p> <p>Sean: List #12 11. It came as a surprise. It came as a distinct surprise... I didn't know also about the cartoon [drawing] so that came as a terrific surprise... it was great!</p>

Chapter 4

A Discussion of 12 Common Themes of Museum Experience

Through a careful "reading" of the descriptions from these eight informants, I found 12 common themes of experience which recur frequently throughout the descriptions. These are the shared aspects of the experience of visiting an art museum which "flew up like sparks" as I examined the descriptions. As a group, these common themes reflect the "best" or "especially meaningful" experiences of eight visitors to art museums, at particular times and in particular places. These themes may or may not be true for other visitors in different places and times. Barritt et al. (1983, p. 189) remind us that, "Phenomenological research focuses on the specific situation and the individual experiences of those in it. There is no methodological guarantee that the results will apply to another group." However, I am confident that because these 12 themes do reflect aspects of experience which are so central to the phenomenon of visiting an art museum, that any one who was ever had a meaningful visit to an art museum is likely to find a quality or pattern of experience among those themes which resonates with their own best museum experiences. "As in any study", Barritt et al. (1983, p.104) write "the only way to be sure is for the readers to investigate the phenomenon for themselves".

While these themes are an expression of some of the taken-for-granted aspects of "what it is like" to visit an art museum, the themes are also an expression of the informants' and my own values, perceptions, understanding, life experience and ways of constructing meaning.

The 12 common themes of museum experience which I found

through analyzing the selected descriptions from eight informants can be divided into three groups: the first six themes deal specifically with the ways in which museum visitors are attracted to and attend to works of art, and how visitors find meaning and value in the experience of looking; the next three themes are about how seeing works of art is related to making art and how visitors notice, admire and are sometimes critical of how works of art are made; the last three themes deal with visitors' physical presence in the museum building.

The themes are intended to serve as focal points of experience, rather than discreet categories and therefore their meanings tend to overlap and flow into one another. Each theme is like an extracted essence or distillation of a particular pattern or quality of experience that is found in several, but not all of the descriptions. Likewise, several common themes may be present in a single phrase or description of an experience; consequently, there are a few descriptive passages which appear several times throughout the discussion of the themes. The fact that the same descriptions can serve as expressions of different themes is evidence both of the fluidity of the themes and the density of meaning in many of the informants descriptions.

I have arranged the first six themes in an order that attempts to reflect the experience of museum visitors, starting with how visitors are drawn to certain works of art, followed by how attention and concentration take place, the feeling of unity with what is seen and the desire to prolong the experience of looking, culminating in the "feeling of well-being" which characterizes a meaningful museum experience.

Theme 1: Attraction to the Familiar.

The first theme, being attracted to works of art that are "reminiscent" of something "recognizable" or "familiar" and pleasant, something with which the visitor can identify, can be seen in the way in which visitors are attracted to paintings of recognizable landscapes. When Lorna looked at Tom Thomson's painting, "In the Northland", she recognized familiar qualities of the Canadian landscape: "all the colours are there and the blue of the lake", qualities which she saw as typical of a particular time of year, "that's really the way it is in the autumn" (See Figure 1).

Laurence also looked at this painting and recalled certain aspects of the Canadian autumn, a time of year that he likes very much:

I like the cool days... lack of mosquitoes, ... beauty of the trees, the dryness... certain smells in the air... a time of reflection, or bringing everything altogether... a time to make sense of things.

Looking at Thomson's landscape triggered the recollection of special memories for Laurence:

... makes me think of times when I used to go out into the country alone... and go for walks in the country... in my teenage years.

"In the Northland" also brought to mind paintings that Laurence had seen as a child:

...it's reminiscent of paintings that hung on the walls of school rooms when I was a child in elementary school.

Lindsey, like Lorna and Laurence, recognized the typically Canadian qualities of the Thomson painting; she "noticed" "In the Northland",

...particularly because it was so very Canadian... rich blue of the water ...all the leaves on the trees, and the fact that they're all thin and spindly which you only get in Canada 'cause they ripped all the trees down.

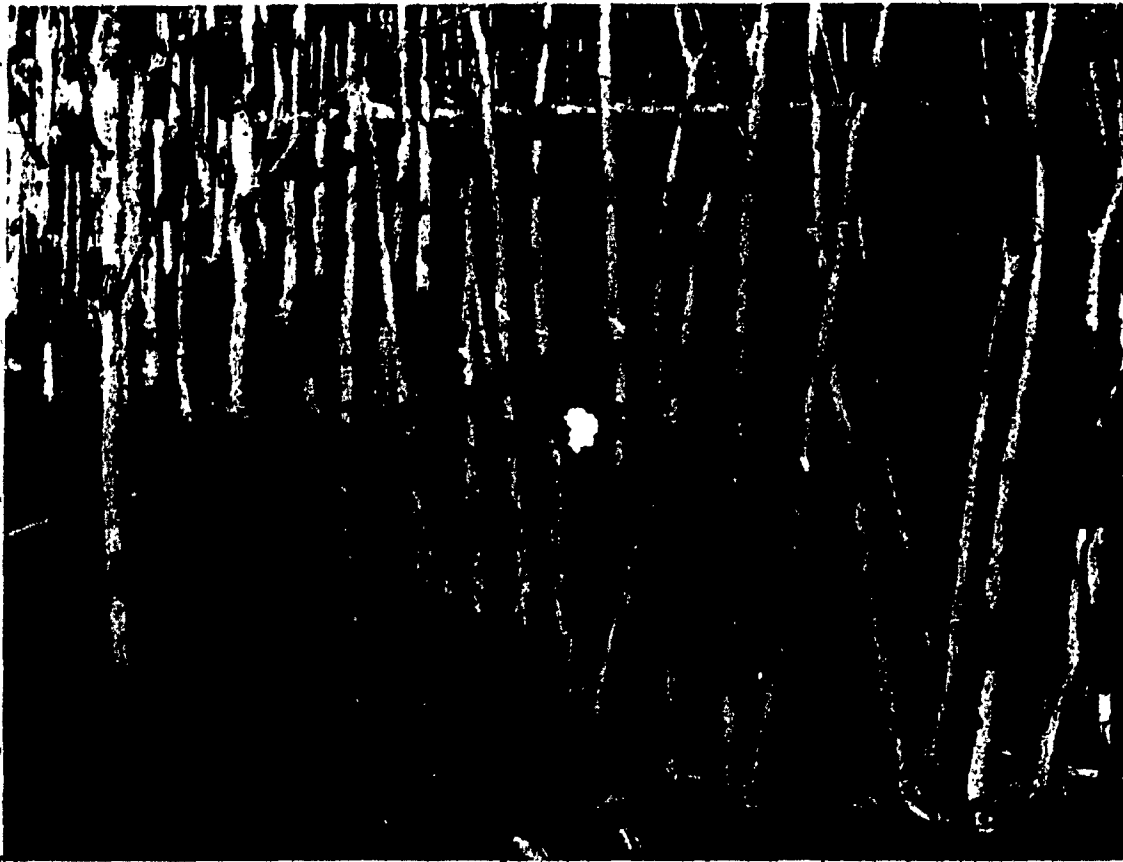


Figure 1. Tom Thomson "In the Northland" (detail)
oil on canvas
1915
In the collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
(reproduced from a post-card printed by the Montreal Museum of
Fine Arts)

For both Lindsey and Lorna, the thrill of recognition appears to be closely associated with their attention to the details of the painting. Laurence's comments however, suggest that the Thomson landscape served as a means to ignite his interest and attention, which quickly focused on his own memories and reflections. Elkana speaks about the view from the windows of the McMichael Canadian Collection and a painting by Varley in a similar tone:

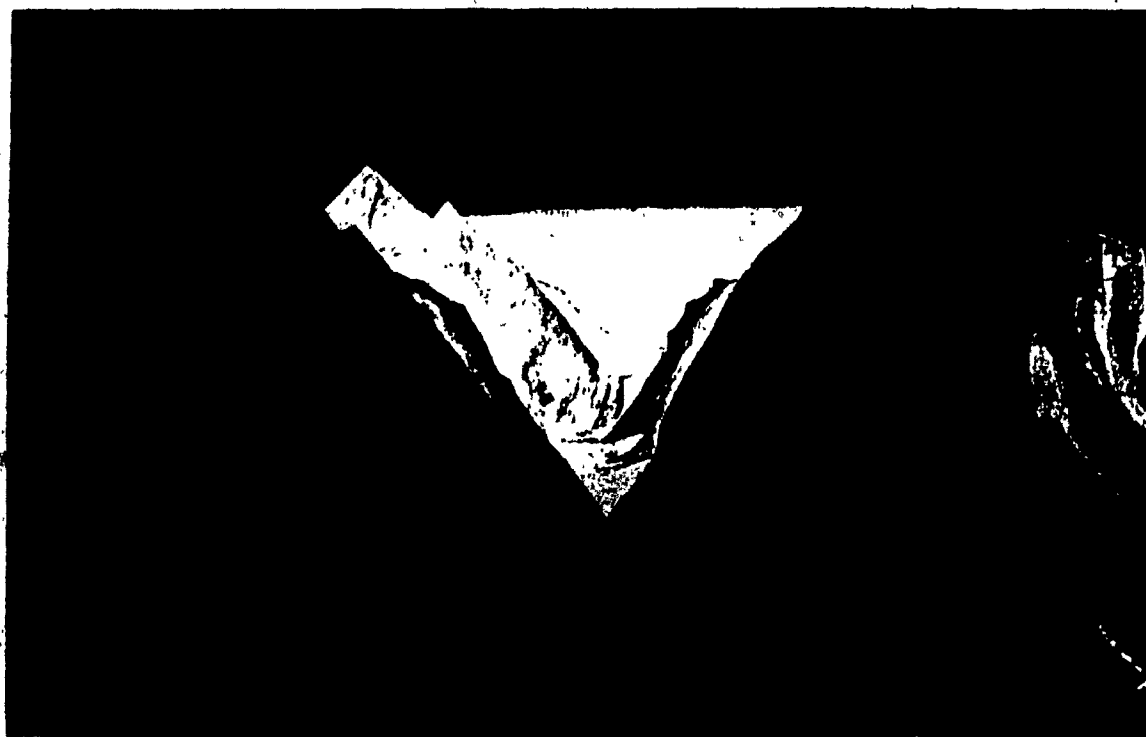
Kleinburg's hilly environment permeated the walls of the gallery. I saw not the Kleinburg hills... instead I saw the Kabarnet Hills and cliffs that I was familiar with... Varley has created a beautiful piece reminiscent of the morning views of the Kabarnet Hills.

The phrase, "instead I saw the Kabarnet Hills" reveals Elkana's attraction to the familiarity of the view, and the way in which the image in his memory is given much greater significance than the scene before his eyes, or perhaps, more precisely, the view that he sees at Kleinburg is attractive and significant to him because of the significance of the image of the Kabarnet Hills in his memory.

Lindsey in her description of visiting the Roerich Museum in New York, offers another view into the way in which a cherished memory of a particular landscape plays an important role in enjoying works of art:

Especially paintings of places that I knew: when I recognized them, it was just amazing to see them... I love seeing paintings of mountains... being in the mountains is one of the experiences that I cherish most... so when I see a really good painting that captures mountains, it takes me to that experience of being in the mountains. (see Figure 2)

When she says "it takes me" Lindsey seems to suggest that in looking at Roerich's paintings she is transported, instantly, through memory and imagination, to an experience which is already meaningful and, like



**Figure 2. Nicholas Roerich
"Himalaya"
in the collection of the Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York
(reproduced from a post-card printed by the
Nicholas Roerich Museum)**

Elkana, it is her own remembered experience which gives significance to the landscape in the museum:

And the sky - he will paint quite extraordinary shades, and yet, when you're there, you can see why he painted like that... it's really very, very vivid, and the colours are very vivid in the mountains... somewhat technically exaggerated... but in doing so, this captures the feeling.

Lindsey alludes to the way in which her own experience of being in this kind of landscape allows her to appreciate Roerich's paintings:

... in addition, he's captured the amazing difference in perception, because in the mountains things actually look different; they look staggeringly beautiful... it's more than just... my experience of being in mountains, ... something more than that... he was painting something very, very fabulous and fine and exhalted.

While looking at a painting by Pissarro in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Lindsey recognizes the place depicted in the painting:

This has been accurately painted but it's a dull scene [she looks at the label], "Afternoon, Duquesne Dock at Dieppe". Oh, I've been at Dieppe: it looks like that... a cloudy day. You're just kind of waiting for something to happen.

Recognition of a familiar era and way of life can also spark visitors' interest in a work of art. Lorna speaks about how she is attracted to a Canadian painting from the 1930's:

... Prudence Hewerd, - don't know who she was. But probably part of ... the sort of "in" people with money... the people who lived around here. This would be about this time, see - [she looks at the label], she was born in 1896... And so, I thought: oh, this looks like "old money" here, having dinner.

Another Canadian painting from the 1930's, "Hyman's Tobacco Store" by Hébert had a look of familiarity for Laurence:

I can imagine that world. I can actually be there because I lived at a time when horses were used to pull bread wagons or milk wagons.

Laurence's response to this painting shows how the recognition of a familiar era is not necessarily a pleasant or comfortable experience:

It's a mixed feeling... I don't feel entirely positive... my own personal feelings about my ... childhood... enter into my reaction to a painting like that... the 40s or the 30s ... a social realm in which ... I didn't feel that I belonged... I recall in a vague way those feelings of restraint and of repression... oppression, ... a world of fixed routines and very limited possibilities.

For Lorna however, the association of an old advertising image with a Lawren Harris painting, "Mount Temple" is a more positive experience:

... that's like the rock of Gibraltar, isn't it? ... Prudential Life ... trademark... a very old slogan - buy their life insurance and it's as firm as a rock, you see... this reminds me of Gibraltar in its firmness and stability.

The attraction to paintings that are reminiscent of familiar works of art is evident in the comments of Lorna, Elkana and Lisa. Referring to a Flemish painting by Jan Van Kessel, the Elder, "A Garland of Flowers with the Virgin and Child in Grisaille", Lorna says:

That, to me, looks like old Pennsylvania Dutch stenciling on furniture... his colours and absolute definition, - it reminds me of that in this painting.

Elkana remembers seeing paintings by the same artists in another museum:

I had seen... works by the Group of Seven at the Art Gallery of Ontario... it struck me as something special, but seen at the McMichael Collection... they acquired new life.

Lisa is reminded of a work in another art form - music - while visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art:

In the room with historic musical instruments, I had Bach's Canon playing softly in my mind.

The following comments by Lindsey show how a museum visitor can be attracted to and identify with a quality of familiarity, a feeling of being "at

home" that is perceived in a painting, in this case "The Green Jug" by Pellan:

I felt this was kind of homely... when you've got your clutter around you and you know it all... all the objects have been painted in a way of feeling familiar... that could feel like my kind of clutter.

Referring to a painting by Suzor Côté, entitled "Landscape" Lindsey says:

I like this - very homely, beautiful landscape shot... it's a kind of living room painting... the sort that... makes you feel at home and that all is well with God and nature around you, you know.

In contrast to being attracted to the familiar and the comfortable, Andy and Sean speak about their attraction to the "unknown", the "surprising", or even "mysterious" in works of art; their remarks reveal something of the special intensity of a new experience. Andy describes his experience of viewing an exhibition of works by Michael Snow at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts:

It's an experience that stuck out because there was always that element of something that just wasn't what you'd expect... you just had no way of understanding it, but you knew you liked it, because you were entering into this realm of thinking that you'd never thought of before... I'd always go for that; I'd dive into situations where I don't understand something, yet it feels comfortable, - I go.

Sean speaks about his discovery of a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, the "Cartoon for the Virgin and Child with SS. Anne and John the Baptist" in the National Gallery, London:

It came as a surprise. It came as a distinct surprise... I didn't know about the cartoon so that came as a terrific surprise... it was great!... the mystery of it. It's a very mysterious subject. You can't help but wonder exactly why they're there sitting in this strange landscape, all somewhat subdued, a little on the dark side. (see Figure 3).

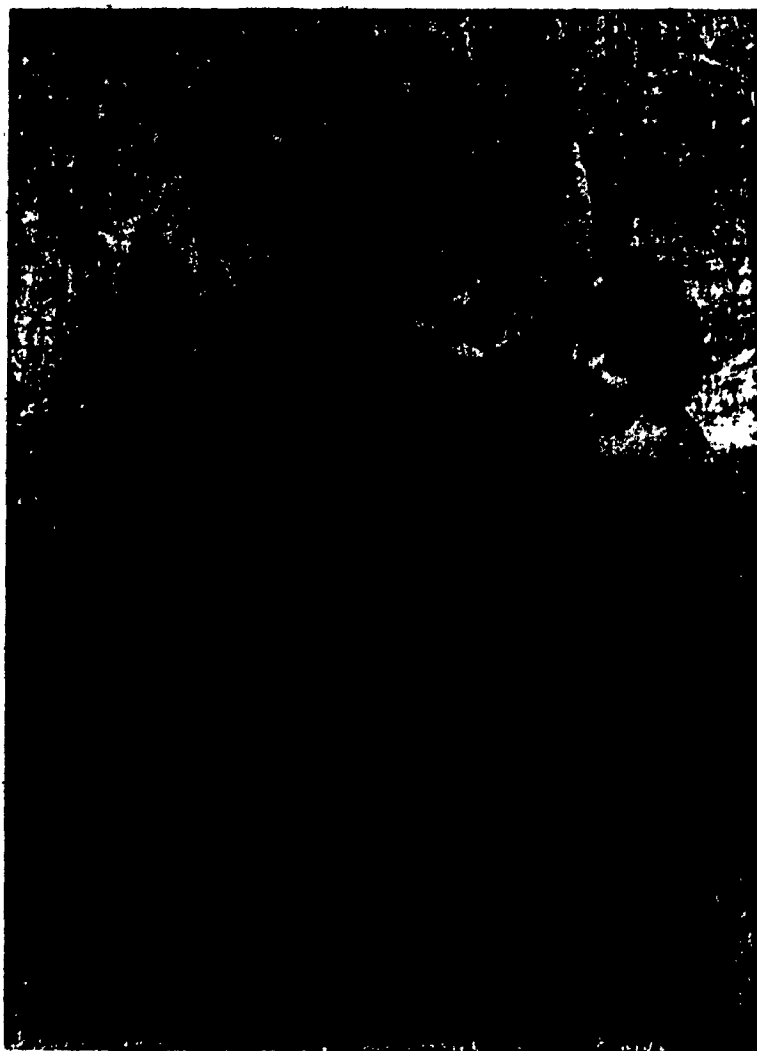


Figure 3. Leonardo da Vinci
"Cartoon: The Virgin and Child with SS. Anne and
John the Baptist"
141.5cms x 104.6 cms
black chalk heightened with white on paper
in the collection of the National Gallery, London
(reproduced from a post-card printed by the National Gallery,
London)

The above descriptions, with their emphasis on wonder, surprise and the appeal of the unexpected are variations on the theme of attraction to the familiar, and as such, provide a deeper understanding of this theme. Sean's and Andy's descriptions suggest that in discovering the unexpected they were challenged to be open and completely attentive to what was before their eyes in the present. However, in describing experiences of reminiscence and recognition of the familiar, whether it is the familiarity of a landscape, an era or a style of painting, museum visitors allude to a particular quality of experience which is one of recognition, rather than discovery; of that which is already known, rather than the unexpected, novel or unknown; being lulled into dreamy reminiscence of familiar experiences and images of other places and times, a reflectiveness, which may or may not be fused with attention to the work of art itself, a quality of experience that stands in contrast to being challenged to wonder and be fully attentive to the experience that is unfolding in the present.

Theme 2: Returning to Old Friends

Lorna, Lisa, Lindsey and Sean speak about returning to or discovering works of art that are like "old friends", which "never change" and offer a sense of "stability" and "comfort"; the capacity of such works to attract these visitors' attention, again and again, is "inexhaustible". Lorna describes how she took up the habit of returning to favourite paintings;

I didn't see too much stuff I liked... so I had to latch on to something. So I latched on to this one... and a few paintings... it's made me feel closer to Montreal because now I have some old friends in the art gallery here... I've done the same thing in Hamburg... a couple of paintings that I go and see every time.

The sense of return to old friends is captured in several phrases from Lorna's interviews, for example:

That painting always attracts me, the still life ["A Garland of Flowers..." by Jan Van Kessel, the Elder] ... I've always looked at it.. it's been here a long time.

I have another look at this Harris one ["Mount Temple"]... it's good to see it again.. I'd go out of my way to go over here and have a look at this one.

Sean speaks in much the same manner about returning to the Leonardo "Cartoon" in London:

it's an inexhaustible thing: the more you look at it, the more you can see in it... I've gone back; anytime I'm in London, I always go there.

Sean describes, as well, returning to favourite paintings as an aspect of the way in which he likes to visit museums;

The second and third time in the same institution... I go back into the room and look at the ones I like.

Returning to favourite objects at home can be seen as a variation on the theme of returning to old friends in a museum; in Andy's words:

... a lot of people create their own homes to be sort of like museums for themselves to come home each day, - which is sort of what I do. I like to look at nice things, not too many ... create an artistic feeling in my own home so that it's nice to come home and it's different from what it was like out on the road.

The above description helps to point out how the sense of return implies a personal and meaningful relationship between the work of art and the viewer. The value of this relationship seems to increase through time and repeated visits to see the artwork. Lorna describes how a painting by Pissarro, "The Harbour at Rouen" and "Mount Temple" by Harris act as anchors of stability and comfort amidst the changing events of her life:

Pissarro - it's beside a river and boats tied up and people on the dock, - that's kind of nice... it's not so extraordinary: it's just

that for some reason it stuck in my head... I don't go back for any fancy artistic reason... I go back because I know it and I feel comfortable; as I say, an old friend... I think it gives you a sense of security.

My God, you have personal tragedies - everybody does... maybe you have a bad day and you come and you look at that... you can come in here and think, well, you know, these things may go on in life, but some things never change... To talk about it is trite, but to feel it is not trite, because it's worthwhile, ... coming in just to see it.

A similar sense of "comfort" and "stability" is apparent in Lindsey's descriptions of her response to "The Green Jug" by Pellán and Suzor Côté's "Landscape", quoted earlier. Although she is seeing these paintings for the first time, they evoke a feeling of the "homely" and "familiar". The sense of return here is subtle: it is a return to a feeling of ease and comfort, rather than a return to specific art objects.

A somewhat different sense of return to an old friend is presented in Lorna's description of visiting the Frick Collection in New York; here it is the museum's environment as a whole that attracts her to return:

I adore looking at, say, paintings in the Frick Collection ... it's in the proper setting, in a lovely house, with lovely furniture around and all the doo-dads... maybe it's not such a hot painting, even; maybe you've seen it 18 times before, like the Constable they have there; you know Constable did about eight views of Salisbury Cathedral ... And so there's the same darn old cathedral, but it's just the setting.

Lisa describes her "farewell" to a painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "In the Meadow" by Renoir, which became an "old friend" during one afternoon's visit:

When I had to finally leave my meadows behind, I felt a great sense of loss while saying good-bye. It was farewell to an old friend. I kept my eyes on it as I slowly strolled out the door, and left hesitatingly, looking back over my shoulders to catch one last glimpse.

Lindsey echoes the emotive tone of Lisa's "farewell" in her descrip-

tion of "meeting good friends" in the Roerich Museum:

I was very excitable... I got so sort of, high, looking at these paintings... Especially the paintings of places that I knew: when I recognized them, it was just amazing to see them... it's not unlike meeting good friends that I haven't seen for years and years.

The key phrase in this theme is "an old friend" which implies a cherished relationship between the viewer and the work of art; what is cherished is a feeling; a feeling of "comfort" and "stability", "something that never changes". Friendship implies as well, a mutual exchange: the work of art gives of its unchanging presence, its image and in return, receives the visitor's attention; the visitor offers his or her own time, capacity to attend to the details of the image and, most importantly the capacity to make sense of the image in terms of the viewer's own life experience, and in return, is made to feel at ease. The friendship cannot be said to belong to either the viewer or the work, rather it occurs in their meeting. Works of art, like "old friends", can be greeted, parted with and visited, again and again; each visit reinforces the sense of friendship and the return can be a return to a feeling, to a specific work or to a museum; a return to a friendship which is so full that it can never be exhausted.

Theme 3: Attending to Works of Art with Concentrated Attention

The third theme is found, with varying degrees of intensity, in descriptions from six informants. This theme can be summed up by the phrase: attending to works of art with such complete "concentration" that "nothing else matters"; the viewer is "enraptured", unaware of time and oblivious to the surroundings.

Two museum visitors speak of being "concentrated" while looking at works of art. Andy explains:

Sometimes I'll look at a picture or an exhibit and I'll stare at it for a long, long time and I'll notice that my own thought patterns are very, very concentrated in that particular piece of art... I'm starting to imagine whatever it is that's happening.

And Elkana describes how:

I began to realize that all along the women guards had been there as we went through the gallery, except I never noticed their presence due to my deep concentration in the exhibits.

Other visitors tell us how their attention is captured and held by works of art. Both Lorna and Lisa speak of being "intrigued" by paintings. For Lisa, the Impressionist paintings at the Metropolitan Museum,

...seemed to demand my attention, calling me to stare into them endlessly. They had an uncontrollable hold on me... I could not take my eyes off it... unable to leave its presence, ... I tried to break the spell, and wandered back over to the other pieces... I could not get to distant without being drawn back to my intriguing Renoir... my heart was tied to the bows in the children's hair... Many came and went, ... I stood, unmoving. I could not tear away.

Lindsey, referring to a sculpture at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts by Laliberté, entitled "The Young Artist" says: "Now this is what really caught my attention". On another occasion, while describing her visit to the Roerich Museum, Lindsey alludes to being "enraptured" while looking at works of art, a feeling which, for her, is directly related to her understanding of the artist.

I like, when I look at a painting, to live... something of what the artist is living; particularly if it's a high and fine state, I'm all the more enraptured.

Implicit in concentration and attentiveness is an investment of the museum visitor's time. Lorna says; "I stood there for quite a while", look-

ing at a painting by Prudence Heward; Andy talks about staring at a picture "for a long, long time". Elkana describes his experience of looking at an Emily Carr painting for a long time;

... it was as though the totem poles in the picture were indeed sent to invite me into Kitwancool... long afterwards... I was still at the "village".

Sean tells us that he spent an hour and a half looking at Leonardo's "Cartoon" which was exhibited, in the National Gallery in London, in a way that allowed visitors to look at this drawing for a long time:

.. you can sit there undisturbed by anything else... no other paintings around; the room has just this one art object in it... you can sit there for as long as you want and really appreciate it, study it and thoroughly enjoy a real masterpiece.

It appears that the time spent looking at works of art is more complex, more subtle than a simple matter spending a few minutes or even hours to understand and enjoy a work of art. Lisa describing her experience at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, alludes to a sense of timelessness in which her attention is fully absorbed in the present, to the point where she is unaware of the passage of time:

... these timeless creations stopped my mind from running... It was only that moment, those paintings... Hours passed with me unaware, gazing at each painting repeatedly, each time as though it was the first time I was seeing it.

Both Lisa and Andy describe as well, how their interest and attention was so completely absorbed in looking that "suddenly" everything else was insignificant and they became oblivious to their surroundings. Lisa says,

When I stepped... into the world of the Room of Impressionism, the rest of the world ceased to exist... stunned by the pure beauty... All else was forgotten, nothing else seemed to have any importance.

Andy tells us that, while looking at a Michael Snow exhibition,

I wasn't noticing the walls any more and I certainly wasn't noticing that I was going in circles... you were able to forget that you were in a room; that you were doing circles.

He explains his absorption by comparing this to another experience of looking:

it had the same effect as if you were lying down on the beach and you were looking at the sky and watching a bird fly. Suddenly, nothing else matters. You're just watching that bird fly.

The state of attentiveness includes being "concentrated", "intrigued", "spell-bound" and "enraptured" while looking at works of art. The complete absorption in looking, suggested in several descriptions, has a rapturous, dreamy quality: Lisa writes that after leaving the museum, "A part of me was left in the Metropolitan, gazing dreamily" and Elkana says that, "When it came to leaving the gallery, it was like a return from a long journey into dreamland". This last phrase suggests, rather poetically, how visitors can travel into another kind of world in which they feel unbound by the usual sense of time and place. Through being wholly attentive in the present - "only that moment, those paintings" - it appears that museum visitors enter into a timeless realm, in which, although they may "stare" at a work for a "long, long time" they are "unaware" of the passage of time and of their surroundings.

Theme 4: Feeling Right There in the Painting

Looking at works of art with great concentration, can sometimes absorb visitors so completely, that they imagine or feel as though they are "right there", "part of" the scene depicted in the painting.

In the following passages, Lorna describes her experience of feeling

"part of" the water-lily paintings by Monet; she explains her experience in terms of the opportunity to view these paintings in comfortable, solitary surroundings in the Marmottan Museum in Paris:

... you can just sit there and let yourself go and get into that painting ... if there's nobody there... you're right there... And to me, it's just as if I were in that lily-pond, part of the lilies... it was, I was sure, just like being a frog in the pond at Giverny... I haven't felt that too often. (see Figure 4)

Later, Lorna explains her sensation of feeling "part of" Monet's lily-ponds by comparing this to another enjoyable experience - swimming in the Laurentians:

...it's much like... when you're looking underwater, or when you're standing there [on a rock in the middle of the lake] and you're part of the scene there... you feel like a beaver must feel, you know; you feel like you're part of the landscape.

Lindsey and Lisa both describe their experiences of looking at certain paintings in terms of sensations of touch, smell, sound and temperature.

Lindsey, referring to "Interior of a Synagogue" by Kaufman, says:

You can feel the grain of the old wood... you can almost feel the old parched leather in the books... you can almost smell the wood and the parchment and you could imagine it would be slightly musty... probably smell of wax, wax and candles...

Lisa tells us how she,

...was struck by the perfumed scent of van Gogh's "Flowering Garden"... felt the chill of the early morning fog hanging over Monet's "Morning at the Seine at Giverny".

For Laurence, it is the recognition of a familiar era which allows him to "actually be there"; he can easily "imagine that world", while looking at a street scene from the 1930s in a painting by Hébert.

Andy describes an experience of "being there" while looking at a series of paintings by Michael-Snow. For Andy, this kind of experience is the

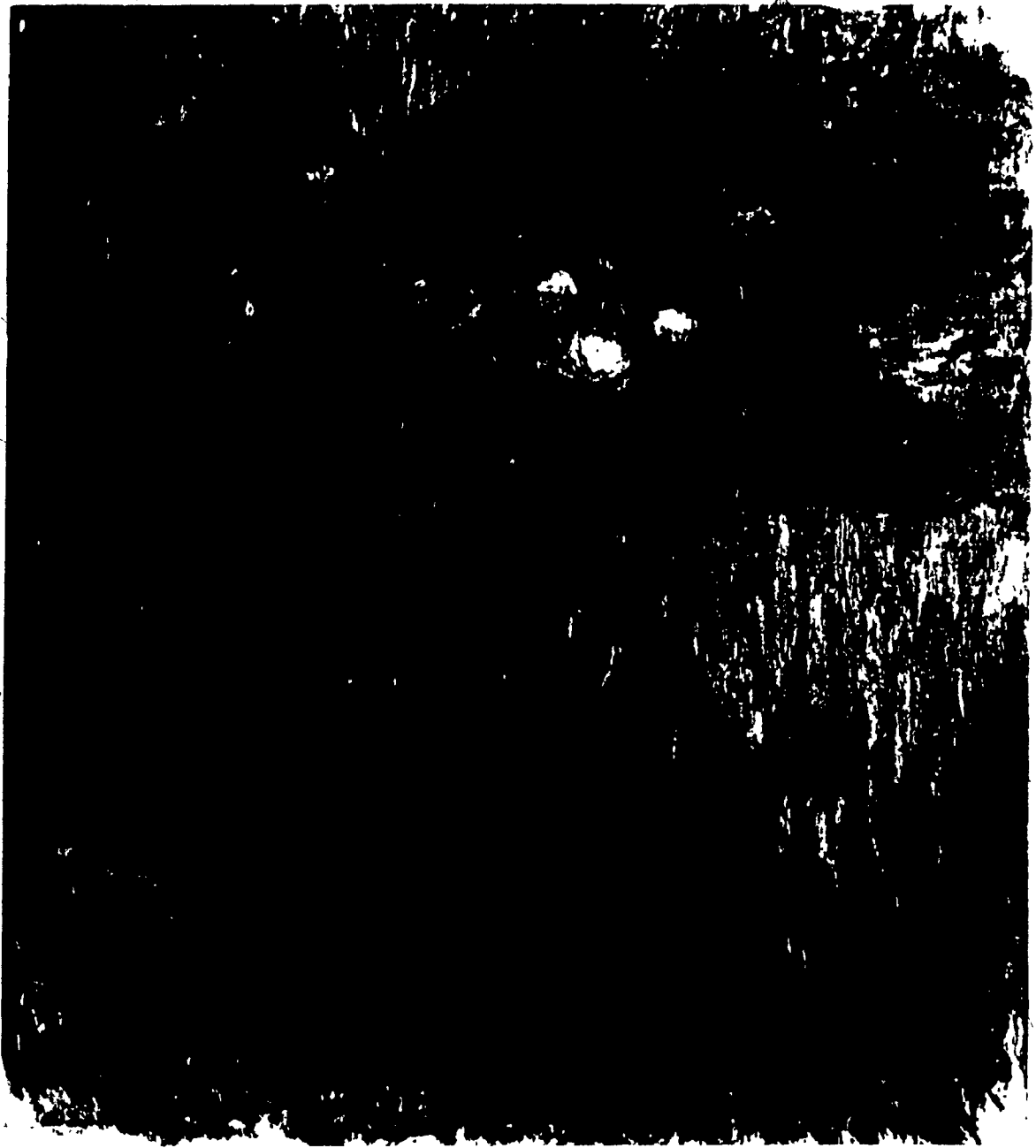


Figure 4. Claude Monet
"Water Lilies"
200cm x 200 cm.
oil on canvas
about 1915-1917
in the collection of the Marmottan Museum, Paris
(Reproduced from in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978,
illustration no. 69)

result of a combination of the artist's intention and his own participation in

looking, and in this case, hearing as well:

It seemed like he... left that element for you to be there... it was like the art was actually living with you because it was your input of life that created it. You needed the ears, you needed the eyes... it was like I was there; I was at that landscape and I was also there watching that landscape change...

Elkana tells us how, while looking at the "Corner of Kitwancool Village' by Emily Carr, "it was as though the totempoles in the picture were indeed sent to invite me into Kitwancool". Lorna is critical of the composition of Tom Thomson's "In the Northland' and suggests that by,

eliminating the foreground, your eye gets fight into the other side of the lake and your eye starts going through those white birches over there; you're falling over a stump and you're scratching your legs on the twigs and so on, but you're in.

Lindsey, also dissatisfied with Tom Thomson's composition, explains how the row of trees in the foreground are "the same right the way across, like a grid, and it doesn't draw [the viewer in] particularly. Lindsey describes as well, how she finds "something very unpleasing". about "Landscape at St. Rose" by Fortin, "because", she says, "it doesn't draw me in anywhere", implying that it is "pleasing" to be drawn in, to feel as if one is "in" the painting.

Lisa describes how she wanted to take the "beauty" of Renoir's "In the Meadow" to be "part of" herself; this can be seen as a variation on the theme of feeling "part of" a painting. Lisa tells us how, after leaving the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she,

now glowed warmly with the-light from those floral meadows that I took in to be a part of me, to stay with me forever, everywhere I went.

Not only did Lisa feel that she had taken something of the painting in the Metropolitan to be "part of" herself, she also tells us that, "A part of me was left in the Metropolitan... gazing dreamily" and Lindsey says that, as she left the Roerich Museum,

I felt I'd taken the feeling of the gallery with me. It was around me for several days afterwards... left in a kind of bubble, a mountain bubble.

It appears, in terms of the descriptions quoted above by these six informants, that there are three distinguishable means by which viewers can feel "part of" a work of art. All three ways involve, not only concentrated looking, but the capacity for imaginative looking, that is, the capacity to make the imaginative leap as it were, from the literal or actual situation of physically standing in front of a painting to being "right-there", "part of the landscape" or, also in Lorna's words, to "let go and get into that painting". The use of imagination in looking at a work of art is apparent in phrases such as:

...you can almost smell...
 ... you could imagine... (Lindsey)
 ... I can imagine... (Laurence)
 ... as if I were...
 ... just like being...
 ... it's much like...
 ... you feel like... (Lorna)
 ... it was like... (Andy)
 ... it was as though... (Elkana)

Lisa however, describes her feeling in more literal terms: she tells us that she "felt the chill of the early morning fog..." in a painting by Monet. Laurence, Andy and Lorna also speak of their experiences in literal terms:

I can actually be there (Laurence)
 I was at that landscape... (Andy)
 ... and get into that painting...
 ... you're right there...
 ... you're falling over a stump and you're
 scratching your legs on the twigs... (Lorna)

It seems that the more literal form of expression is indicative of an especially intense imaginative experience, rather than an unimaginative one. All of the above phrases allude to temporarily accepting and participating in the reality of the image in the painting, knowing full well that physically, it is certainly impossible to step into the landscape depicted in a painting. But imaginatively, anything is possible: in one's imagination, thought or feeling one can, quite literally, be "part of the landscape"; hence, the literal form of expression used by Lisa, Laurence, Andy and Lorna.

One way in which a landscape painting can "invite" or "draw in" the viewer is through a composition which allows the visitor to "enter" the scene. Recognition of a familiar era is another means by which a viewer can feel "part of" the scene depicted in a painting. A third way to feel "right there" is imagining the non-visual sensations, experienced through the body and senses, of what it would be like to be in the scene, such as imagining the sounds or smells.

The result of these three means is the feeling of being "there", "in" the painting, a sense of being at one with the scene in the painting.

Theme 5: Wanting to Prolong the Experience of Looking

For several informants, looking at works of art in a museum and especially, feeling "part of" a painting was so enjoyable, that they wanted to prolong the experience.

Louise describes how she felt about her time spent looking at a Renoir exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts:

I must have been there about an hour, but I could have been there much longer; we had to leave ... somebody was picking

us up... I wish I could have spent more time there... I regretted that we didn't have more time; I really wish that I could have spent more time there.

Also in reference to a painting by Renoir, Lisa tells us that,

I stood, unmoving. I could not tear away, so I stood there until the final moment - until closing time.

Lindsey alludes to a similar phenomenon in her description of visiting the Roerich Museum:

I spent a lot of time in the gallery... I felt I wanted to stay there forever and I didn't want to go... that's a feeling which I don't usually feel... I like being in art galleries but usually my feet get tired.

Andy describes how, after seeing a Michael Snow exhibition, he wanted to see more work by the same artist:

...at that time... I got really turned on to him as an artist... for weeks I would be waiting to hear when he'd come back [to the museum].

Post-cards, calendars or photographs can serve as means by which visitors extend their museum experience, by taking an image, a visual record, home with them. Louise says,

When I was there, I bought the 1986 calendar and I have it... I just love it because the scenes are really nice on the calendar.

Elkana gives us a vivid narrative of how he wanted to have a "recorded memory" of his experience at the McMichael Canadian Collection, another expression of the desire to prolong an enjoyable experience:

It was so beautiful outside I felt like taking a picture. I tried to push the blinds to get the proper position for my camera and a lady in uniform bellowed at me, "Gentleman, don't push the blinds". She appeared uneasy, I was more uneasy; especially to leave that corner without a recorded memory of the countryside beyond the windows of the gallery!

Lindsey, in her description of buying post-cards after a museum vis-

it, suggests that she wanted to somehow continue or recreate the joy she felt in looking at Roerich's paintings:

Even the little post-card size reprints, I just love looking at them.. afterwards... I would have bought all of them, if I'd had the money.. as it was, we bought about 20 post-cards, and maybe four blow-ups of the ones we really loved most.

Not only did Lindsey "take" something of her experience of the gallery away with her in the tangible form of post-cards, she also succeeded in taking the less tangible but equally real "feeling" of the gallery with her which was "around me for several days", a remark which suggests the temporariness of the "feeling".

Time is an important aspect of this theme: visitors talk about wanting to spend more time in the museum; wanting to extend an enjoyable experience over time; or taking post-cards, calenders or photographs as reminders of their museum experience, souvenirs that allow for the possibility of the experience happening again.

Theme 6: A Sense of Well-Being

The last theme has to do with the sense of value that visitors attribute to museum going. This can be paraphrased as a "feeling of well-being" which may include "happiness", "amusement", "excitement", "serenity", feeling "satisfied", "inspired", "high" or even "exhaulted".

There are many phrases in the interviews and written descriptions in which the informants speak of their museum experiences in very positive terms, as though these experiences are of great personal value. The sense of worth appears to be the value of an experience that is pursued and enjoyed for its own sake: the reward is simply an abstract sense of feeling

good about oneself. The abstractness of this theme makes it difficult to pinpoint one particular word, phrase or even feeling that expresses it; perhaps the most succinct expression is found in Louise's phrase, "a real feeling of well-being"; it is a quality of joyousness, as well as ease, that shines through the informants words; a quality which embraces a whole range of "good" feelings from "peace" and "relaxation" to feeling "excitable" and "high".

The feelings that comprise a sense of well-being can be divided into four groups: first, feeling "happy", "excited", "high", "delighted" or even "amused"; second, feeling "peaceful" and "relaxed"; third feeling "inspired" and finally, feeling "satisfied" or fulfilled.

Louise's description of how she felt while looking at an exhibition of paintings by Renoir at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts reveals a bright, effervescent happiness; an extraordinary happiness that happens only rarely:

It's only happened a few times that I can remember feeling that way. It's ... like a light in the back of my head that I feel... it gives me a real feeling of well-being when I see these things. Of course, it's temporary; but at the time it makes me feel very, very happy, you know that kind of happiness you get when you see a great painting? But this was like one great painting after another... it's like a high, but unlike I feel in other aspects of my life. [My sister] really enjoyed it as well... we were both pretty excited by it; we both thought it was fantastic.

The way in which Lindsey speaks about looking at Roerich's paintings conveys a similar quality of happiness:

I was very excitable... I got so, sort of, high looking at these paintings that I didn't know quite what to do with myself.

Lindsey also describes her amusement in looking at some sculptures at the Miro exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts:

I was amused particularly when I looked at the sculpture: I'd look back at the title and I would invariably be amused because ... the amusement is catching on to what he's saying.

In describing her experience of looking at Monet's water-lily paintings at the Marmottan Museum, Lorna says that it was "delightful... this water-lily feeling". Sean tells us that, for him, looking at Leonardo's "Cartoon for the Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant St. John" was "about as exciting a museum experience as I've had", a phrase that suggests the rarity of truly "exciting" experiences. He speaks as well, of enjoyment and appreciation:

... you can sit there for as long as you want and really appreciate it, study and thoroughly enjoy a real masterpiece.

Andy speaks rather philosophically about the "happiness", "freedom" and "joy" that he felt while looking at landscapes by Michael Snow:

... only paint... an illusion in canvas... how could something that was not supposedly real appear so real, but at the same time, how could something so unreal make me so happy?... What I was noticing in all those paintings was some sense of freedom and joy that I got from it. Yet you don't paint the word "freedom" and you don't paint the word "joy". Somehow it comes ... The experience that I was looking for ... in art or... life was just that sense of being free and of being happy and of feeling joyful.

Although Andy questions the reality of the paintings, he speaks of the "sense of freedom and joy" that he felt while looking at these works as being very real and valuable; identical with the quality of being that he holds as the goal of experience.

In contrast to a feeling of excited happiness, joy, delight or amusement, peacefulness and relaxation are calmer, quieter feelings; yet both are good feelings; feelings of "well-being". Lorna speaks of museums as places of refuge from daily life, and museum-visiting as a "relaxing" activity:

I remove myself entirely from the grubbiness, or the disen-

chantment, or even excitement, sometimes, of the everyday world...

... a very relaxing thing to do...

... Nothing is demanded of you; all you have to do is walk around and behave yourself, - you know, - don't touch ... to enjoy the solitude, the serenity, absolute peace, - marvellous.

She speaks as well, of the feelings evoked by looking at "Mount Temple" by Lawren Harris: "...those kind of things are very restful, very peaceful." In a similar tone, Elkana writes that, "...looking at "Summer Hillside" ... made me feel relaxed and completely at home" (see Figure 5) and Lindsey talks about feeling "at home and that all is well with God and nature around you" while looking at Suzor Côté's "Landscape". Lindsey's words suggest that to feel "relaxed", "peaceful" or "at home" is to have a sense of an inherent goodness and order of all things. Being "relaxed" and "peaceful" can be associated, as well, with an absence of hurry - the hurry of the city outside the museum and the "hurriedness" of a restless mind. Lindsey describes how she had,

... come off this New York street ... [into the Roerich Museum] a massive painting in pale blue and white ... Immediately .. all the feeling of being in a big city had left me in just one look.

Lisa writes about the Impressionist paintings at the Metropolitan Museum:

These timeless creations stopped my mind from running and shut out the desperate hurriedness of the city beyond those walls.

Inspiration appears as another aspect of the sense of "well-being" felt by museum visitors; an experience that inspires, that expands the visitor's sense of what is possible, either in art or in life itself, is an experience worth having. Lorna tells us how she feels inspired and encouraged through looking at modern art:

The new stuff is... inspirational; it's encouraging to know that



Figure 5. A. J. Casson
"Summer Hillside, Kamaniskeg"
50.7 x 61.1 cm
1945
in the McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario
(reproduced from Pattison, 1978, p. 44)

people have the inspiration to do this kind of thing; so in turn, it inspires you to read more and look more... it's marvellous... and you benefit from it.

Lindsey speaks of Roerich's paintings as,

...connecting me to something really... exhaulted, I think is the word... it connects me to something very, very vast and eternal. It's very expansive.. just looking at the paintings you... somehow become ... something - greater than you would be if you were walking along a New York street. Something an awful lot less mundane... it expands the idea of what you could creatively do with your life, just looking at a painting like that. (see Figure 6)

In explaining what she finds "pleasing" about Laliberté's sculpted head of a "Young Artist", Lindsey elaborates on what it means to "expand" the "idea of what you could creatively do with your life":

I like to look at that. I find it very, very pleasing... It brings out a higher quality within myself. I guess that's what is pleasing. I look at this and what pleases me is that I reach for a higher ideal, rather than being content with the mundanity of life; it tunes me into aspiring... an aspiring face, very fine.

These comments of Lorna and Lindsey suggest that works of art, when contemplated, can inspire, or "breathe into" the viewer an expanded vision of possibility and give courage to aspire, to "reach for a higher ideal" or knowledge.

For Andy, the inspiration to "think" or "wonder a little more" is associated with a satisfying museum visit; to leave a museum with a sense of fulfilment is to leave, not only with a "feeling of well-being", but with the possibility of wanting to return:

The most important thing at museums for me was if I could go in and be free to roam and come out feeling a little different as if something fascinating happened, or... something now in my head or mind that made me just think a little more or made me wonder a little more or... feeling that I'd want to go back. If I wouldn't leave with those feelings, it's just something that I'd basically forget about.

Here, Andy suggests that a memorable museum experience is

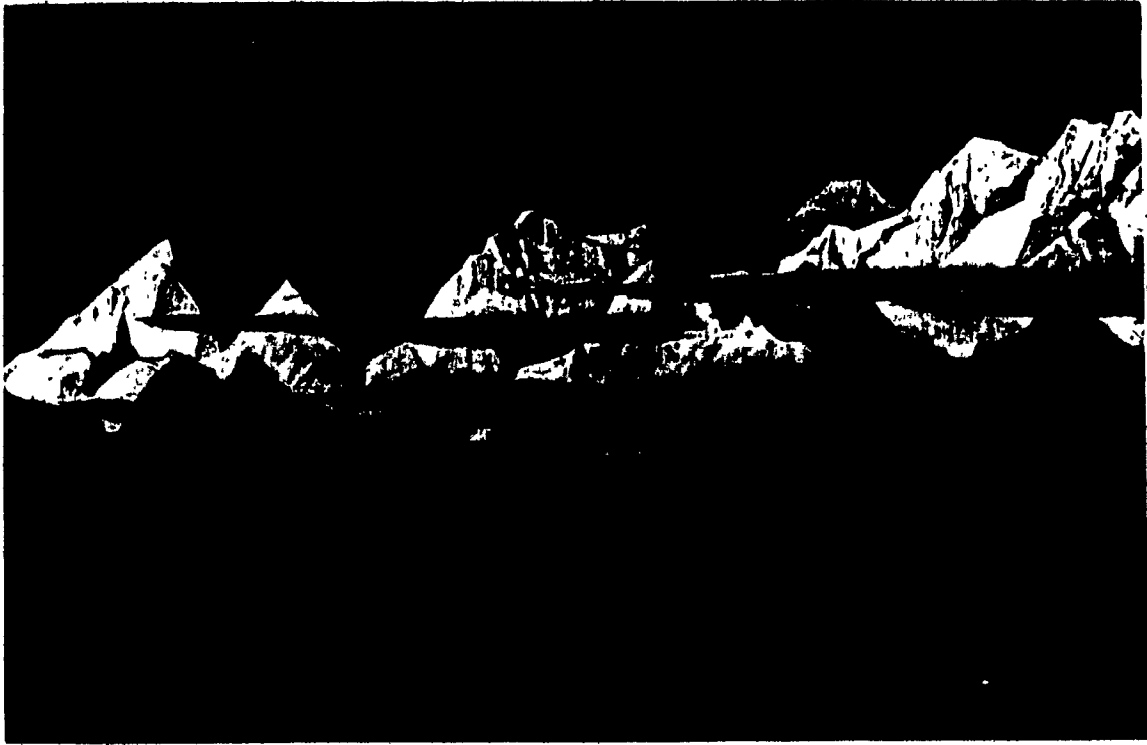


Figure 6. Nicholas Roerich
"Pink Mountains"
in the collection of the Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York
(reproduced from a post-card printed by the Nicholas Roerich
Museum, New York)

one that leaves the visitor "feeling a little different". Louise, who felt "very, very happy" and "excited" looking at Renoir paintings in Boston, speaks of this exhibition as "...really memorable for me... fantastic, the best I've ever seen... just about my best experience so far". She also tells us that the Renoir exhibition "was even more than I expected". Lisa alludes to a sense of satisfaction when she writes that after leaving the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she "glowed warmly with the light" from Renoir's meadows and Lorna speaks of her immersion in Monet's water-lily paintings at the Marmottan Museum as "a very physical thing... It's very satisfying".

There are three important variations on the theme of well-being. The first of these variations is found in Louise's description of visiting the Renoir exhibition, in which, as well as describing her own experience of happiness that she felt within herself, Louise speaks with a sense of wonder about how happiness can be communicated through a painting:

There was one of this couple dancing ["The Dance at Bougival"]... they really looked as if they were having a good time dancing; they're peasants, I guess, at some picnic. I just remember how happy they looked; what a good time they were having; amazing how you can portray that in a painting, eh? - It's really something! (see Figure 7)

The second variation on the theme of well-being is a sense of the unpleasant and uncomfortable which is found in Laurence's and Lindsey's descriptions of how they experience certain paintings. Laurence tells us that he had a "mixed feeling", not "entirely positive" about looking at "Hyman's Tobacco Shop" by Hébert, because this painting brought to mind the "time of constriction and restraint" in which he grew up. Lindsey describes her experience of another Canadian painting from the same era:



Figure 7. Auguste Renoir
"The Dance at Bougival" (detail)
180 x 90 cm
oil on canvas
1883
in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts
(reproduced from Gauthier, 1976, p. 47)

There's one here [she looks at the label]... "Landscape at St. Rose" by Marc Aurel Fortin, which I found the epitome of confusion... there's something very displeasing about it because it doesn't draw me in anywhere and the colours I don't really like. ...The way the branches twist perhaps, the way that everything is patchy on the ground. There's an obstacle course getting from the boat to the house... It doesn't make me feel clear and bright and happy about my life. It makes me feel that life is a struggle.

Here, Lindsey makes a direct connection between the formal qualities of the painting, such as composition, shape and colour and the quality of feeling that the painting creates in her. Unlike Louise, in her description of Renoir's "The Dance at Bougival", Lindsey is able to articulate precisely how a particular feeling is communicated through a painting.

What a difference there is between the passage quoted above and Lindsey's description of looking at paintings in the Roerich Museum. The third variation is found in the way in which Lindsey describes her own experience of being in the mountains in order to convey something of the "exhaultation" she felt while looking at Roerich's mountain landscapes:

If I walk up a mountain, absolutely one hundred percent I arrive in a higher state of consciousness - I feel totally at one with the whole of life, without any feeling of questioning or wondering why I'm there or what I'm doing.. a very exhausted state and everything is clear... as if my whole being has become clear and radiant.

Laurence also describes the sense of well-being that he has experienced through being in a natural environment. The way in which he speaks of his experience however, differs from Lindsey's description: Lindsey describes her experience of mountains to express the "exhaultation" she experienced while looking at Roerich's landscape paintings, whereas Laurence simply recalls the clarity of mind he felt through being alone in the country, rather than actually reliving that feeling while looking at Tom Thomson's "In

the Northland".

The sense of "well-being", as it is described by these museum visitors appears to be a rare and particularly memorable experience of works of art. The way in which the informants talk about their feelings of "happiness", "peace", "inspiration" or "satisfaction" suggests that while the circumstances of the visit, including the visitor's state of mind, certainly contribute to a "real feeling of well-being", this is a quality of experience which cannot be deliberately willed; rather it comes unexpected, as Andy says, "you don't paint the word 'freedom' and you don't paint the word 'joy'". Somehow it comes". Lorna talks about how the environment of the Marmottan Museum allowed her to "let go and get into that painting"; her subsequent experience of Monet's water-lily paintings was "delightful" and "satisfying". It seems that the "feeling of well-being" is most likely to be felt at times when museum visitors "let go" of some of their expectations and pre-conceived ideas, allowing themselves to look at works of art with real openness and sensitivity, with "fresh eyes" as Barritt et al. would say (1983, p.57).

Theme 7: Noticing Details and Formal Qualities

The seventh common theme is the first in a series of three themes which deal specifically with the ways in which museum visitors attend to works of art as objects which have been made, objects which are the embodiments of qualities, often intentionally selected, and combined with some degree of technical skill. Seven informants described how they noticed, admired or were fascinated by the technique, details and formal qualities of works of art, such as colour, composition and style.

Museum visitors sometimes speak of works of art in a manner that

reveals their awareness of the style which characterizes the works of a particular artist, group or period. Lorna, referring to Lawren Harris says "you know the way he paints, chunky and predictable". and in speaking about "In the Northland" by Tom Thomson, Lorna remarks, "this is so group of seven-ish". Lindsey, although not at all familiar with the history of art in Canada, immediately perceived in Thomson's landscape, the Canadianness which was the aim of the Group's painting style. Elkana, who, like Lindsey is not originally from Canada, noticed "elements of similarity" and "obvious differences" among the paintings by the Group of Seven during his visit to the McMichael Canadian Collection. He noticed as well, "the feeling of monumentality as I looked at Carr's massive trees, mountains, and turbulent skies", a comment which reveals his sensitivity to qualities typical of Emily Carr's style of painting.

Louise recognized Renoir's work as typical of Impressionist paintings: she sums up her perception of Renoir's style in succinct and uncomplicated terms which reveal that she has grasped the characteristics of Impressionism through her own experience of looking:

we [Louise and her sister] were impressed with his style... you know, the Impressionist style - kind of hazy, but so clear anyway.

Both Lorna and Lindsey noticed how lines and shapes are structured or composed in paintings. Lorna, speaking of "Mount Temple" by Harris says:

This one has that lovely... this great vertical development, and even though he has some diagonal lines, he has this nice, sort of flowing part at the bottom... not too many lines going too many ways.

Lorna is critical of the way in which the foreground of Thomson's "In the Northland" has been composed, and she prefers to look at the back-

ground:

I still think that's a beautiful picture, if you can just look at it half way up - just gorgeous.

Lindsey, referring to the same painting, points out how the trees in the foreground are all "the same right the way across, like a grid, and it doesn't draw [the viewer in] particularly". She is also critical of the foreground of a painting by Monet,

The composition also, I would put something [in the foreground] at least, even if it was a grass or two.

Implicit in Lorna's and Lindsey's criticisms are the positive suggestions for improvement; these and other constructive criticisms of paintings will form the basis for the ninth common theme.

Colour is another aspect of painting which Lorna, Lindsey and Elkana noticed. For Lorna, it was through the colours of "In the Northland" that she perceived "the ways it is, in the autumn". Both Lorna and Lindsey commented in the especially brilliant blue of the lake in this same painting. Elkana writes about how the autumn colours outside the windows of the McMichael Canadian Collection echo the colours of paintings by the Group of Seven:

Through the windows... the trees outside.. were still ablaze with the Fall hues. Impressions of this warmth of colours were captured in A.Y. Jackson's "Red Maple"... Tom Thomson's "Tamcracks" or the "October, a Thousand Shades of Orange and Yellow" by Casson.

Later in his description, Elkana expresses his perception of "Summer Hillside" by Casson in terms of colour: "the warm browns in contrast with expansive cool greens of the background, simple treatment of forms as areas of colour".

Lorna alludes to the way in which the mood of "Mount Temple" is

communicated through colour when she says:

it's grey-white and then it's blue and then it's blue-white and it's peaceful, because, you know, he doesn't slap in a big hunk of red or something.

Lindsey describes how Roerich's "somewhat technically exaggerated" way of painting has "captured the feeling" of the particularly "vivid" colours of the Himalayan landscape:

It's astonishing when you look at the paintings, because they stand out at you... Then you go and really peer at the oil... right at the edge [of a mountain] he's... painted a line in dark blue or mauve or black even... something really quite dark... and often it's next to snow and then rays of sun coming in bright orange.

On another occasion, Lindsey describes her unexpected enjoyment of bright colours in "The Green Jug" by Pellán, referring to this painting as,

This brightly coloured one which I like even though it has all the colours that I don't usually like, but there's something bright and creative about it.

It appears that these museum visitors not only notice but study and contemplate the details of works which they find attractive. While looking at Renoir's "In the Meadow", Lisa noticed the "depths of the rolling hills, the flow of colour among the spring flowers, and the mysterious backs of two small girls". Later, she found herself,

being drawn back to my intriguing Renoir ... my heart was tied to the bows in the children's hair. I decided to give in, and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to understand the attractiveness of this painting.

Lisa seems to suggest here, that her perception and appreciation of this painting is enhanced by examining its details. By studying the details of colour and shape in "The Young Artist", Lindsey was able to appreciate special qualities of Laliberté's sculpture; she says:

His whole face is so perfectly shaped, and in fact a... shape of someone who is driven to achieve; he has a vision he is reach-

ing to ... a person with his life ahead... I find it very, very pleasing... even the colour that he painted it, I find pleasing ... it tunes me into aspiring... an aspiring face, very fine.

As well as details, museum visitors observe technique or the way in which a work of art is made. Lindsey's comments about "Afternoon, Duquesne Dock at Dieppe" by Pissarro show how it is more than mere technical ability which attracts the attention of a museum visitor: "This has been accurately painted" she says, "but it's a dull scene". Louise, however, is completely unrestrained in her praise of Renoir's painting technique:

And his work - unbelievable! It's unbelievable that somebody can perform that way.. I was really quite overcome; I just could not believe it - that someone could paint that way!

It appears that the appreciation of technique often goes hand in hand with the close observation of the details in a work of art. It is not only the skill with which de Heem has painted "A Garland of Flowers..." that captures Lorna's admiration, but it is the "patience", "precision" and thoroughness with which he has depicted every detail:

It's the beauty and the patience that the artist has used to get those flowers just right - isn't that fantastic? ... he hasn't fudged the petals; he's put in every petal... And the leaves; every last leaf and the ... little blue flowers; they're all in there... he's put everything in... even the bee here; the butterflies and moths; the beetle; all done in great precision; little grass-hopper - isn't it fascinating?

The way in which Lindsey speaks about Kaufman's "Interior of a Synagogue" reveals a similar observation of details and admiration of precision and technical skill:

I really like this... Very meticulous. You can feel the grain of the old wood ... every little grain, see - every knot in the wood, you can see it, every little line; you can see how the furniture was made. He really looked at that before he painted it.

• Sean describes Leonardo da Vinci's "Cartoon for the Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant St. John" as "really an exquisite

work of art". His wonder and admiration are the result of the observation of both the details of the subject-matter and of Leonardo's drawing technique:

a large drawing of a seated figure with another figure on her lap... It's a very mysterious subject. You can't help but wonder exactly why they're there, sitting in this strange landscape, all somewhat subdued, a little on the dark side. ... the magnificent draftsmanship... the incredible use of chiaroscuro, all the shading - the way it brings out the forms of figures, and the incredibly delicate subtle shading.

In contrast to admiring the way in which a work of art has been made these museum visitors are occasionally critical of the technique, details and formal qualities of paintings. Lorna, speaking about "At the Theatre" by Prudence Heward, says:

It's not terribly well done, you know, those shoulders and that dress - it looks a bit amateurish... this chair here: I didn't think that was too well done.

Lindsey tells us how she finds the colours and the composition "unpleasing" in "Landscape at St. Rose" by Fortin:

The colours are: red, kind of grey-green and slightly muddy, dark, grey-black with a little more turquoise colour and... lemon-yellow. ...there's something that's very unpleasing about it because it doesn't draw me in anywhere and the colours I don't really like... There's an obstacle course getting from the boat to the house.

As a variation on the theme of noticing and admiring the way in which a work of art is made, Lorna's and Lindsey's critical perceptions reveal how a visitor's careful attention to the technique, details and qualities which constitute a work of art, can contribute either to the visitor's liking or to their disliking of a work.

The perception and appreciation of the technical and formal aspects of art is a common theme of experience which is about a conscious analytical process; a process of distinguishing and then evaluating various formal

elements and qualities, as a way to become in-formed about the quality of the work as a whole. Visitors' experience and knowledge of art contributes to their capacity to appreciate technique and to perceive meaning in such aspects of a work as colour, composition or style, which, in turn, contributes to their capacity to explain their perceptions. Clearly, museum visitors who have developed some degree of "visual literacy" are able to bring more to the experience of looking at works of art which can enhance their enjoyment, or if not enjoyment, at least a reasoned criticism.

Theme 8: Looking at Art Recalls and Inspires the Practice of Art

While looking at works of art in museums, Lorna and Elkana remember some of their own experience of art-making and, along with Lindsey, they speak of being inspired by a museum visit to continue or return to art-making.

Lorna's criticism of the "amateurish" way in which Prudence Heward painted "At the Theatre" is based on her own experience as an amateur painter; she says:

this chair here; I didn't think that was too well done. I'm being very catty here. Because there's - I think it's a Renoir... any way he did this chair and the material so you could just reach out and touch and feel the plush... well this doesn't look like a plush chair; this looks like a chair I would have painted, because I tried to paint that painting [by Renoir] and my chair turned out like this actually. So, that's why I'm saying that.

Lorna recalls another painting experience as she describes her perception of Thomson's "In the Northland"; she is particularly critical of the bright colours in the foreground rocks because they remind her of one of her own paintings that did not satisfy her:

I tried another painting once of rocks and water... I remember ... the teacher at the time... ranted and raved about it, you know: terrible-looking rocks! ... Maybe I'm critical of rocks... I had made this crumby red colour rocks and all the other colours and it was a disaster, the painting! And - I had probably done the same mistake, frankly... it was too bad, because the rest of his [Thomson's] painting is very, very good; mine wasn't; mine was just a total disaster! But, his, I feel, is just worth saving! [she bursts into laughter]

Elkana writes that, while he was looking at landscape paintings at the McMichael Canadian Collection,

I blushed before some of them, looking back at what I used to do in painting years ago at University.

Like Lorna, he sees similarities between one of these paintings and a painting that he once did:

"Summer Hillside"... by A.J. Casson is more or less the kind of thing I used to do in painting, except that "Summer Hillside" is just too good to be compared to my amateurish "Kigezi".

Although Elkana is very humble in the way in which he writes about his own painting, the effect of looking at "Summer Hillside" was certainly not a sense of intimidation; rather, Elkana tells us about the "challenge" he received from seeing this work, and the renewed inspiration to return to painting that he felt as a result of visiting the McMichael Canadian Collection:

There were days in the 70s when I used to paint. I stopped painting and never had the urge to return to it except when I was at the Art Gallery of Ontario in February. I left Toronto and forgot about that. But since I returned from the McMichael Collection, this time, I have bought painting tools and materials and I have started. The experience at the gallery was more than just an inspiration. I was discussing in my mind several things. Ideas came quickly and lingered on only to be temporarily pushed aside by more and more revelations.

Although Lorna does not have as much confidence in her painting ability, looking at Tom Thomson's landscape did awaken her desire to do

more landscape painting; she says, "I wish I could paint up in the country something that would come off as well as that." On another occasion, Lorna talks about how she finds contemporary art "inspirational":

The new stuff is inspirational; it's encouraging to know that people have the inspiration to do this kind of thing; so, in turn, it inspires you to read more and look more.

Lindsey also speaks about the connection between looking at art and feeling inspired to make art, a phenomenon which for Lindsey is indicative of the quality of the work of art:

I notice that whenever I see some truly inspired art work... I immediately feel like painting myself... I think that's the way that I know that it's truly inspired, because I feel the inspiration myself.

As an example of feeling the inspiration that she perceives in works of art, Lindsey says of her visit to the Miro exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine arts, where she saw Miro's sculptures made from "found objects":

I noticed a couple of times it crossed my mind... yeah, I should go and find a bit of garbage sometime and see what I can do with it. And I only think that when I'm feeling kind of inspired... somewhere I also want to be part of this whole happening of finding something and creating something from it.

Louise also speaks about the relationship between seeing and making art, but in a slightly different way, emphasizing the "feeling of well-being" which is the result both of seeing works of art that she likes and of making a work that pleases her; in her own words:

... it gives me a real feeling of well-being when I see these things.. it makes me feel very, very happy... it's the same feeling I get if I do [make] something that I like, which isn't very often, something that I would paint.

The above comments from Lorna's, Lindsey's, Elkana's and Louise's descriptions show how, for people who have had some experience of mak-

ing art, particularly in their adult lives, a museum visit can rekindle their sense of identity as an artist; these visitors recall past experiences of art-making and when they see paintings or sculptures that resemble something which they might have aspired to make, they are filled with a renewed inspiration for art-making.

Theme 9: Considering how a Work of Art could be Changed or Improved

Another aspect of the connection between seeing art and making art is found in Lorna's and Lindsey's descriptions; their response to certain paintings is one of not accepting these works as they are and considering how these paintings could be changed or improved. As she looked at "The Cliffs at Pourville" by Monet, Lindsey imagines herself as the creator of this painting and says,

This is very pretty, probably, it's the sort of thing that I would have at my home, except that it's so lacking in contrast... If I ever painted that myself I'd be dissatisfied with it and I'd feel it was unfinished. I'd take this orangy-brown out of the sky... make it clearer and accentuate.. the shadows and the water in between the rocks ... somehow, bring it forward a little more... The composition also, I would put something [in the foreground] at least, even if it was a grass or two... if one can say this about a great master.

Lindsey also made suggestions for the improvement of Tom Thomson's "In the Northland": if it were painted without the trees in the foreground, she says, there would be a "centre", a place for the viewer's eye to be drawn into the landscape. Lorna, although she usually accepts "most anything" she sees in a museum, was also dissatisfied with the foreground of "In the Northland" and recommends that by "eliminating this area of the painting "your eye gets right into the other side of the lake". While looking

at this painting, Lorna held her hand in front of her eye to block out the foreground, and said, "it makes quite a different painting actually, if you block out the foreground... it gets your eye into it better". For Lorna, it is the bright colours of the rocks in the foreground which distract her attention from the rest of the painting:

I don't know about the rocks. I think he's going a little far there for the rocks. ... I think ... that's just a little too too, those rocks. Of course, he's not trying to be realistic. But in a way he is. So, why - to me, he's got all this lovely colour... the different blue of the sky and then the deeper blue of the lake and all the foliage and the white birch trees. To me, your eye would have got into - into all that - easier, if he didn't have all this colour splotched on the foreground.

Lorna and Lindsey suggest improvements for these paintings by Thomson and Monet with the understanding that works of art in a museum cannot actually be changed or improved. Andy describes his experience of a work of art which was exhibited on a university campus, with the understanding that viewers actually could and would change or improve it:

Someone took a stand and instead of making a sculpture, they put a cube of clay there... it was incredible because everybody who walked up to it or near it, modified it, and did something to it, so the art was alive... it wasn't saying come up and do something to me... people would naturally play with the clay... I could go up and wreck it and change it myself.

The above description can be seen as a variation on the theme of considering how a museum work could be changed or improved, a variation which helps to show that although visitors are prohibited from "modifying", "wrecking" or, in anyway physically changing the works of art they see in the museum, they are always free to alter what they see in their imaginations; museum works are very much "alive" - in the imaginations of museum visitors.

Theme 10: The Presence of Others in the Museum

Throughout the informants' descriptions there are comments which suggest that the presence of others in the museum affects the visitor's experience, in ways which can either distract or enhance the quality of the visit as a whole.

To begin the discussion on the presence of others in the museum, I would like to present some excerpts from Lorna's description of being alone at the Marmottan Museum and Lisa's description of feeling alone in the Metropolitan Museum; the solitariness of these experiences is in fact a variation on this theme; the effect of the presence of others in the museum can perhaps be more easily understood by first examining the sense of being alone in a museum. Lorna tells us about how she felt in the room where Monet's water-lily paintings are exhibited:

- ... it's beautiful and there's hardly anybody there
- ... you're alone and you're so influenced by it [Monet's paintings]
- ... nobody else around; no guard's even: they don't bother
- ... nobody else around; you can just sit there and let yourself go
- ... if there's nobody there, ... you're right there ["in" the painting]
- I like the solitariness of those smaller places

On another occasion, Lorna says that she likes to visit museums "to enjoy the solitude, the serenity, absolute peace - a thing I think, better done on your own". Lisa writes about visiting the Metropolitan Museum on her own:

I decided to spend my final day of that memorable vacation alone in the Metropolitan Museum of Art... Floating from one exhibit to another, alone in my private world, I was grateful for the time to think freely, without having my thoughts being interrupted, - no-one around to discuss the "hidden meanings", no-one else's pace to keep up with.

Although there were certainly many other people in the museum,

Lisa felt alone. For both Lorna and Lisa, the sense of being alone in a museum allowed them to be "influenced" by the art work, to "think freely" without interruption and to move at their own pace.

In contrast to these solitary experiences, Lorna, Louise and Laurence describe what it is like to be in a crowded museum and how they are affected by the presence of other visitors. Lorna tells us that she is "very much influenced by people... I don't like full galleries... it interferes." She believes that a museum,

should be like a library... you shouldn't be allowed to talk, because you're intruding on someone else usually... I've felt intruded upon when other people have been gabbing away... I don't like to hear other people discussing... because I tend to listen to what they're saying... instead of just looking.

These are the things that Lorna does not like about being in a crowded museum:

garlic breath ... all around you
 ... people sneezing and generally being too human
 ... somebody obnoxious coughing behind you
 ... you can't see over anybody
 ... extraneous noise going on
 ... smells and movements in the background

The "solitude", "serenity" and sense of letting herself go that Lorna felt while she was alone at the Marmottan museum is a "feeling" which, she says, she "can't work up" "in the middle of a crowd".

Louise describes the crowdedness of the Renoir exhibition in Boston:

we had to wait... because there was a starting time... it was so crowded... that was un-real! ... you had to wait about five minutes before moving on to the next painting: I'd never seen that anywhere else before; a little bit of pushing and shoving, in a museum of all places! ... it did affect my enjoyment of certain paintings because they would be clustered around one ... painting ... and I couldn't see very well. I wasn't able to enjoy every painting as much as I would have liked to ... I would just move on to the one where there was less people.

Laurence tells us that he notices,

people... they are a competing object of attention, but they're not a distraction ... they're just also something else of interest.

As well as noticing the presence of other visitors who are strangers, Lorna, Louise and Elkana describe how they are affected by the friends and relatives who visit museums with them. Lorna says that she doesn't like,

going with a friend because it's too distracting... I'm more conscious of the personality of the friend; they always talk too much... I don't like to talk; I don't like to discuss until afterwards.

Going to a museum with her husband however, is a very different situation; in Lorna's words, "but I like going with my husband very much ... we're usually ready to go at the same time". Louise speaks in a positive manner about visiting the Renoir exhibition with her sister; unlike Lorna, Louise enjoys discussing works of art while she looks at them:

I was with my sister and we like to discuss it as we see things... to share it right away... [my sister] really enjoyed it as well... I think that maybe I notice things a little bit more because she likes to have me point things out: "oh, did you notice this?"

Elkana writes about the sensitivity of his friend's presence as they visited the McMichael Canadian Collection together:

I think Jim was very careful; he knew a lot about the artists exhibited here; he left me alone to enjoy it in my own way with occasional remarks here and there to add flavour to the truth.

Security guards are among the noticeable others in a museum.

Elkana writes about how he was oblivious to the security guards at the McMichael Collection:

I began to realize that all along the women guards had been there as we went through the gallery, except I never noticed their presence due to my deep concentration on the exhibits.

Lorna tells us that she is:

aware of guards. I try to say hello to them... they're sitting here all day and it must be very lonesome; so I try to smile or say hello to them in any language... if they're officious, or make you feel guilty... if you get a little too close to the painting... I can't blame them.

According to Lorna and Elkana, security guards have a presence which is accepted as being part of the museum.

For Lisa and Elkana, other visitors - like security guards - are an accepted aspect of museum-going; their presence is not a distraction or a hindrance as it was for Lorna, Louise and Laurence. Elkana tells us that,

the many people who walked around the same hall as we did never seemed to be there at all... We had to squeeze our way through a big crowd of teenage children ... in there ... [everyone] got absorbed and forgot about each other's presence... our speeds could never be the same.

Lisa alludes to a similar experience of the presence of other visitors in the "Room of Impressionism" at the Metropolitan Museum when she says, "I was alone in this over-crowded room"; however, she was not completely oblivious to the other visitors and writes about how she observed them with interest:

I was quite aware of others around me, and found it most interesting to watch those around me view a work of art. The comments, criticisms, facial expressions and explanations to children were fascinating, and everyone was sure to have an opinion. From the lay person to the art historian, everybody was an expert that Sunday.

Andy describes how he felt the unseen presence of the artist in an exhibition of works by Michael Snow:

It was designed in such a way that it always felt as if maybe I was being filmed watching the art, because I can't understand how he would know the full experience of his art unless watching somebody experience it.

The experience of being alone or feeling alone in a museum according to the descriptions of Lisa and Lorna, is an experience of feeling at ease, in which the visitor is concentrated, undistracted, able to give full attention to the works of art and free to move at his or her own pace.

These positive qualities of solitary museum experiences are also found in Lisa's and Elkana's descriptions of being with others in a museum. It would appear that "being alone" has a more subtle meaning than merely being by oneself in a room; "being alone" in a museum can be understood as a quality of experience; an attitude which is closely related to the origins of the word "alone", in mid-twelfth to mid-fifteenth century English as "all-one" (the shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973).

To be "all-one", as a museum-visitor then, is to maintain an attitude which includes all others - visitors and security guards - within one's own experience; the presence of others is accepted and even enjoyed as being part of the whole experience of museum-visiting. Museum visitors who are "all-one" cannot be distracted or annoyed by the presence of others; they are absorbed in a quality of being which is undisturbable, because it is all-inclusive.

However, this is not to deny that the extremely crowded and uncomfortable museum conditions described by Lorna and Louise do present a very real hindrance to the enjoyment of being in a museum.

Although each one of the informants who spoke about the presence of others in the museum has their own preferences for how and with whom they visit museums, each of these visitors expressed the value of being in a situation in which they are able to move at their own pace, "let go" and enjoy looking at works of art in the most concentrated way, whether by themselves or with others.

Theme 11: The Importance of Museum Architecture, Exhibition Design, a Comfortable Environment and Lighting

All of the eight informants whose descriptions I selected for analysis mention how carefully designed museum architecture and exhibitions, a comfortable environment and good lighting enhance the experience of looking at art. It appears that museum visitors notice and are very much affected by the physical as well as the human environment of the museum.

According to Sean, museum architecture should not be,

.... so outstanding that it kills the works of art ... on the other hand, it should have a certain presence, a certain dignity of its own so that it does enhance your appreciation of the works and ... enhances your museum experience ... Sometimes you go back to a museum simply because it is so exciting architecturally, in the sense that it helps in showing the works of art.

Lorna also notices museum architecture; she was particularly impressed by the Guggenheim Museum: "to me" she says, "before you've seen anything, you see the Guggenheim's design... fantastic design; I don't care what they're showing."

Several informants talk about the advantages of both large, awe-inspiring museums and smaller, less formal museum buildings. Sean tells us that,

my favourite art museums are the large ones because it's there that you have these tremendous treasure houses and varieties of experiences and styles and artists; it's quite wonderful to see all this under one roof.

Louise however, found the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which is one of the "large ones", "a little bit grand". Lisa was very much impressed by the grandeur of the façade of the Metropolitan Museum in New York; her description reveals her own love of dramatic effect:

I stopped dead in my tracks. Fifty feet in front of me stood a

massive, awesome structure, with streams of people flowing inside and out... Silk banners of bright colours hung down from the rooftops, blowing wildly in the December wind, announcing the exhibitions... huge oak doors opening and closing, swallowing hoards of visitors, and I found myself moving swiftly, yearning to reach the stairs, the doors, the grandeur of what was waiting for me within... then held back, deciding instead to mount slowly, yet anxiously, savouring the anticipation of the moments before unwrapping a neatly packaged gift.

Lorna echoes Lisa's appreciation of the architectural features of a museum which accentuate the sense of anticipating a great event, when she says:

I love walking up flights of stairs to get anywhere. I love that. That's sort of like anticipation. ... I love ... looking through a doorway and you see... a... succession, like beads in a string ... a succession of rooms ... and then at the end, if you can see a painting... and you're saving until last, like icing on a cake, that painting at the end. Oh - I think that's great!

As well as the grandeur of large museums, Lorna enjoys the "solitariness" of smaller museums such as the Marmottan Museum which she describes as an "old house" or the Frick Collection in New York. Lindsey tells us that the Roerich Museum, also in New York, is "much more comfortable than most places, because it was in a home, as opposed to a large, square building."

Museum visitors do notice the way in which works of art are exhibited. The paintings at the Roerich Museum, Lindsey says, "were... higglety-pigglety, really ... just sort of put up and an awful lot of paintings in a very small area ... I think I prefer them higglety-pigglety in a house." Lorna describes the way in which Monet's water-lily paintings were exhibited at the Marmottan Museum:

... nothing else in the room, but these beautiful big paintings of... water-lilies and... scenes of the garden at Giverny. ...not too many paintings, and they're all big... I sat down .. surrounded by these paintings.

Sean remembers another situation which, like the Marmottan museum, created a sense of reverence for a work of art and allowed for contemplation, even reverie:

one [experience] that stands out in my mind, which was very simple, was in the National Gallery in London... a small room which is kept fairly dark... a cartoon by Leonardo da Vinci... you can sit there undisturbed by anything else... no other paintings around; the room has just this one art object in it... you can sit there for as long as want and really appreciate it, study it, and thoroughly enjoy a real masterpiece.

Elkana writes about how he experienced the McMichael Canadian Collection as a "serene, out-of-this world environment"; he tells us that the

country rocks and wooden beams ... at the entrance never left my mind as I went deep into the gallery. ... Kleinburg's hilly environment permeated the walls of the gallery... through the windows into the wilderness ... the trees outside ... were still ablaze with fall hues. Impressions of this warmth in colours were captured in [paintings by] A.Y. Jackson... Tom Thomson... and Casson.

In contrast to the quiet, contemplative atmospheres of the Marmottan Museum, the McMichael Canadian Collection and the room that houses Leonardo's "Cartoon" in London, Lorna describes how she delighted in the glamorous, "show biz" aspect of a "block-buster" exhibition, in this case, the Miro exhibition in Montreal:

The museum next door [the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts] ... they know how to put on a show! I think they're very good, the way they hang their exhibitions... Miro's great hanging... Miro's girl - girl with the red legs. ...And it's perfectly framed in that door way... you come up the stairs, you turn around and you look; and my God ... you say: "oh - how marvellous!" You don't have to see another thing ... you've got your price of admission right there! That's what I think is important in a gallery ... it's show biz, I guess.

For Lorna, the way in which works of art are exhibited, and the museum environment as a whole are of great importance:

To me, a painting has to have, not only a frame, but a framed milieu... I adore looking at paintings at ... the Frick Collection ... it's in the proper setting, in a lovely house, with lovely furniture ... and all the doo-dads, and there on the wall is a frame ... and then in the frame is something ... maybe you've seen it 18 times before, like the Constable they have there; you know, Constable did about eight views of Salisbury Cathedral ... And so there's the same darn old Cathedral, but it's just the setting.

... in some other galleries ... there has been a fantastic collection, but it's just all hung up cheek-by-jowl with one another, and no classic background, just on a sort of blank wall.

As an example of a museum in which the works of art are lacking a "classic background", Lorna describes the interior of a museum in San Paulo, Brazil, where there are some "gorgeous old paintings"; however, they are "hung just on glass panels ... it was all stuck around like in a huge supermarket ... it had no background ... there was no class." Andy also discusses the effect of the museum environment and exhibition design:

if ... there's a display of something really nice, that would not always be good enough... some really amazing paintings and they weren't lit up properly or you felt like you were in some government office just looking at these things on the wall ... your attention never really would be held.

Andy is careful to point out, however, that while the museum environment is important to him, it is not always as important as the works of art themselves:

This is going to completely contradict everything I just said: but sometimes I feel like if the art is powerful enough... the art is going to take me over anyways, no matter where it's hanging. For instance, if you showed me an oil painting of Van Gogh's, I wouldn't care where it was: if it was in a garage or in a museum. I would be into the painting, and if I needed to I'd use a flash light to see it.

Louise eludes to a sense of feeling frustrated and limited by an exhibition design which prevented her from moving freely in the museum and enjoying the paintings as fully as she might have in another setting;

here, she describes the way in which the Renoir exhibition was set up:

The whole thing was cordoned off so you really weren't free to move around... there was a path... you were able to see the paintings closely ... but you weren't able to move that far back.

To what extent do visitors actually notice the details of exhibition design - the details in which museum personnel have invested hours of careful planning and labour? Louise tells us that at the Renoir exhibition in Boston, she noticed a "beautiful blue wall - I remember that, and I can't remember the other colours ... but most of the museum was done in off-white, very modern". Lorna however, says that she is, "never aware of walls" and,

I'm no longer aware of frames. I used to be aware of frames... I don't even know if they are in a frame, except, I saw something [a frame] downstairs... it was done just beautifully ... But that's the only frame I remember; that was ... unusual. I don't think I've noticed a frame in years.

Several informants talk about how they have enjoyed looking at works of art in a museum environment which is comfortable and how physical discomfort, tired feet and line-ups have detracted from their enjoyment of a museum visit. Lorna states her belief in the importance of feeling comfortable, suggesting that psychological ease can be the outcome of bodily ease and is a prerequisite to the full appreciation of works of art: "I think you have to have physical comfort to enjoy, to let your mind be comforted."

According to Andy, a museum should be "a comfortable place"; "no matter what type of person you are" he says,

Whatever your status in life, then you're going to feel comfortable in there ... I think it can be done ... in some of the art museums I've been into, they've been successful because that's how I've felt.

Lorna tells us that she does not relish "uncomfortable, hot circum-

stances" in museums; she describes her visit to the Jeu de Paume in Paris as an example of an uncomfortable situation:

you usually have to line up, and I get sore feet and fidgety and crabby... when I have to line up... Gee, if your feet are hurting and it's hot... you've stood in line for two hours...

Lindsey gives a vivid description of how museums can be uncomfortable and uninspiring: "Some of the museums I've gone to" she says, "they feel tired, you know"; she continues, describing how,

you feel tired just looking at the endless corridors... it doesn't help if the actual museum is dull... the building - it does make a difference. ...Well, your feet hurt; the floors are kind of thick and hard and cold and yet somehow you have an idea that ... you have to try and see the next painting, at least. ... you can almost feel the tired feet [of all the previous visitors] when you're walking.

Perhaps comfortable seating in museums is a possible solution to "tired feet" and "endless corridors". Laurence tells us that,

How long I look at a particular work would depend upon comfortable seating in front of it. ... Part of my own relationship to things... is taking notes, so I find it very inconvenient ... to take notes or write down reflections, standing.

He goes on to suggest how museum visitors could, more easily contemplate and "enter into" a work of art in a comfortable situation:

if there was... a work... chosen from the permanent collection ... and comfortable chairs to sit and look at it and ... handouts [that] helped you enter more into the work ... I think that would be great.

The comfortable setting that Laurence hopes for is perhaps found in Sean's description of looking at the Leonardo "cartoon" in a room with "two rows of sofas", and in Lorna's description of "letting go" and "getting into" the water-lilies at the Marmottan Museum:

a lovely cold blast of fresh air is around you ... you can sit on a lovely round sofa in the middle and just, sort of, sink back ...

surrounded by these paintings ... all you had to do was ... stretch your neck a little and you could see the whole thing.

Sitting down, however, is perhaps, not Lorna's usual or even preferred way to look at works of art because on another occasion she claimed,

I never sit down - I can never sit down, no matter how tired; I can't stand to sit down and gaze at a picture. I don't know why that is but I never sit down. I can be very tired and I never sit down - absolutely not!

Perhaps it is the unusualness of Lorna's experience at the Marmottan Museum that makes it so memorable.

Lighting is another aspect of Lorna's visit to the Marmottan Museum which contributed to the value of her experience there; she mentions, "indirect lights in the ceiling ... beautiful lighting for the ... Girverny scenes". Although most of the informants did not mention lighting, this is an aspect of exhibition design which Lorna does notice, and she finds that in "many" of the museums that she has visited,

The lighting is not as good as it could be... maybe they'd finished the painting to such a high gloss that the lighting ... blinds you, or certainly gives you blind spots in the painting.

Andy also notices the way in which works of art are illuminated and tells us that, "lighting is of huge, huge importance in a museum... I know that it creates environmental differences for people in how they feel."

In light of these visitors comments about museum architecture, exhibition design, a comfortable environment and lighting, there are certain physical conditions which can enhance the experience of looking at works of art. These are a cool, spacious, uncrowded environment, with plenty of comfortable seating; architecture and exhibition design which draw the visitors' attention to the works of art: if exhibition design is "show biz" then it would best fulfill its purpose by showing off the artwork with appropriate lighting and pleasant surroundings that provide a suitable context for the

works of art.

Through the informants' descriptions of the museum's physical environment, we can get a glimpse at the nature of museum-visiting and visitors' images of art museums. Museum visiting is viewed simultaneously as a glamorous, public event and as personal reverie; in this view, the theatre and the temple become metaphors for the museum.

Lorna and Lisa allude to a sense of child-like delight in museum visiting in phrases such as, "the anticipation of the moments before unwrapping a neatly packaged gift" or "saving until last, like icing on the cake, that painting at the end"; these comments seem to suggest that a visit to a museum is like a rare treat, an event that is full of wonder and the unexpected. These same qualities are apparent in Sean's description of looking at the Leonardo "cartoon" and Lorna's description of looking at Monet's water-lilies, suggesting that a museum visit can be experienced as a special event, set apart from daily life, whether the environment is grand, spectacular and exciting or quiet and contemplative.

Theme 12: Habits of Museum Visiting

The informants' descriptions suggest that through repeated visits to art museums, visitors form habits and preferences: pacing and the amount of time spent with each work and in the museum as a whole; selecting works of art to look at and attending to labels. While the previous two themes dealt with the visitors' experience of the museum as a human environment and as a physical environment, this theme is about visitors' movement through the time and space of the museum building; evidence of this theme is found in descriptions from each of the eight informants.

Time is an important aspect of museum-visiting; time spent with a work of art; time spent in the museum and each visitor's rate of movement. Lorna tells us that she "can't absorb much more than three-quarters of an hour" in a museum; she goes on to say,

I just speed-look.. I really do; my eyes get sore; I look very hard and very fast... all over the place. I can't take it for too long.

However, when Lorna sees a work of art that captures her attention, she will stop and look at it; for example she says that "At the Theatre" by Prudence Heward, "intrigued me. I stood here for quite a while". Similarly, Andy says, "sometimes I'll look at a picture or an exhibit and I'll stare at it for a long, long time"; he continues, explaining that he will,

just continue looking until I get the most out of it; until I've filled that up inside by brain to the extent that I know that I've experienced it to what it can do for me.

Sean, in his description of looking at Leonardo's "Cartoon", alludes to a similar pattern of looking at a work of art until he is "filled", satisfied, and then returns again as though empty, with a fresh appetite for looking:

I was there for about an hour and a half ... and I've gone back; anytime I'm in London, I always go there.

The length of time that Sean spent in front of this work was partly due to the fact that he could sit down to look at it; Laurence makes a direct connection between available seating and the length of time spent looking at a work of art when he says, "how long I look at a particular work would depend upon comfortable seating in front of it".

Both Lisa and Sean talk about a sense of "dilemma" they feel about the relationship between the time available for a visit and the number of works to be seen in a large museum. Lisa describes how she felt when she arrived at the Metropolitan Museum in New York:

So much to see - so little time. I had one afternoon to cover as much territory as possible, and soon came to the realization that in these few hours, I could never cover all of the museum. ...It seemed as though I was a contestant in a game show, given a couple of minutes to cram all the gifts that I could into a shopping cart. Here I was, open to all the museum had to offer, trying to drink it all up before the day came to a close.

Sean addresses the same issue in the form of a question:

It's always a dilemma when you go to a museum and you have a limited amount of time: what do you do? ... try and rush through the whole museum and get an impression of everything, ... or do you concentrate on just a few paintings?

There is a sense of freedom in Lisa's description of the time she spent at the Metropolitan Museum: unconstrained by co-visitors, the time was her own and she could choose how to use her time. She describes herself,

floating from one exhibit to another, alone in my private world, I was grateful for the time to think freely ... I breezed by pieces I didn't care for and stopped to gaze at others for longer than I was aware.

Lisa tells us that, as she first approached the Metropolitan, she climbed the stairs "swiftly" and then, realizing that this was a rare event, a special treat for her, Lisa "held back, deciding instead to mount slowly, yet anxiously, savouring the anticipation".

Lisa alludes to the way in which psychological time eludes the passage of chronological time when she writes, "hours passed with me unaware, gazing at each painting repeatedly, each time as though it was the first time I was seeing it". Fully absorbed in looking, time seemed to stand still for Lisa: "it was only that moment, those paintings". Yet that "moment", apparently only a single point in time, had duration: "what hung on the walls seemed to demand my attention, calling me to stare into them endlessly". In giving her attention completely to the present, the past and future momentarily disappeared for Lisa, allowing her to dwell in one

moment, endlessly. "These timeless creations", she writes, "stopped my mind from running"; as her mind stood still, so did her body: "I stood. Unmoving." She goes on to say that she "stood there until the final moment, until closing time".

Lindsey and Elkana convey a similar experience of long timeless moments during museum visits that were especially memorable: Elkana tells us that leaving the McMichael Canadian Collection "was like a return from a long journey into dreamland" and Lindsey says of the Roerich museum, "I spent a lot of time in the gallery ... I felt I wanted to stay there forever and I didn't want to go... that's a feeling which I don't usually feel".

Sean and Lindsey describe similar patterns of moving through a museum and attending to works of art. Sean tells us that,

what I like to do is to go through as much of the museum as I can, get an overall impression and then come back to the works I like. The second and third time in the same institution... I go back into the room and look at the ones I like.

This is Sean's solution to the dilemma of visiting a large museum for a short time. Lindsey talks about how her "style" of museum-visiting has changed over the years, from a dutiful thoroughness to spontaneity:

there was a time when I was gallery-going that I actually would go and see the whole gallery... I'd keep going from painting to painting and see it all. Whereas my style these days - now a lot of the English galleries have a room for each one; there's a Turner room and a Constable room, for example, in the Tate. Well, I'd take a swift look inside and get the space of the pictures and see if it's something that I would feel joyful looking at, or in some way interesting ... something that's alive or expressing something.

Lindsey's current style of looking at works of art however, does not preclude thoroughness; when she visited the Roerich Museum, she looked at, "the paintings up the stairs - I'd look at each one, one by one... each

painting, I really stopped and looked at, and wondered at". At the same time, she says that she "couldn't help but be drawn here and there".

After visiting the Miro exhibition, Lindsey explains how she is "drawn" or "attracted" to certain works of art:

I'm very much like a child wandering around... I went here and there... I'd look at a painting or a piece of sculpture and when I'd finished, I'd move on... there wasn't a thought: now I'm finished; now I have to move on. It's just that I found myself moving. ...I was attracted here and there very naturally without much kind of thought about it. Some things definitely attracted my attention more than others. I didn't have to think about that.

Lisa also mentions "wandering" in a museum and being "drawn" to particular works of art; while looking at Renoir's "In the Meadow" she was,

unable to leave its presence... I tried to break the spell and wandered back over to the other pieces... No matter how far I wandered, however, I could not get too distant without being drawn back to my intriguing Renoir.

The above excerpts from Sean's, Lindsey's and Lisa's descriptions show how museum-visiting is characterized by freedom of movement; these museum visitors speak about how they are free to wander here and there, being drawn by the power of attraction that certain works of art hold for them. While in an art museum there is very little that visitors are obliged to do, in Lorna's words: "nothing is demanded of you; all you have to do is walk around and behave yourself, you know: don't touch. All you have to do is look".

Lindsey, Louise and Lorna describe similar patterns of attending to labels: looking at a work of art, then checking the label in order to better understand the work and finally, looking at the work again. Lindsey tells about how she looked at labels at the Roerich Museum:

each one was labeled... I'd look at a painting... then it would occur to me to wonder what he called it... then I look and see what he called it... then I would go back and see what he was meaning by it.

Lindsey followed this same pattern of looking at labels when, during her visit to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, she looked at the painting of Dieppe by Pissarro first and then looked at the label; when she discovered that the painting depicted Dieppe she turned again to the painting, which now had more meaning for her. Similarly, Louise tells us that,

Usually I look at the label after I look at the painting and then I'll look at the painting again, I guess - [I look at labels] - in the middle, but not prior.

In her description of looking at Heward's "At the Theatre", Lorna looks at the label to affirm her own perception and to deepen her understanding of this painting; she says, looking at the label:

Prudence Heward - don't know who she was. But probably part of ... the sort of "in" people with money.. this would be about this time. See - [she looks at the label] she was born in 1896. ...Oh! it's a theatre though, is it? I just thought they were at a dinner table, but I see... it's a theatre.

Lindsey, in describing how she looked at labels in the Miro exhibition, reveals how knowing the title of a work adds to its enjoyment; she says,

I was amused particularly when I looked at the sculpture: I'd look back at the title and I would invariably be amused because ... the amusement is catching on to what he's saying. ...I think the titles are important to his work because you get an extra buzz when you see what he portrayed.

The other information that is usually given on museum labels, such as dates or media, was not particularly meaningful for Lindsey during her visit to the Miro exhibition; she says that,

sometimes I just happened to [notice the date on the label] '69, '72 ... they all seemed to be roughly the same time... I wasn't

really interested because I didn't know anything about the history of the artist... A lot of them said something like "lithography" but didn't mean anything to me.

Louise, however, expresses an interest in the dates given on museum labels:

What mainly interests me is when it was painted; what part of the artist's life; how old he was; what he did at the beginning of his career and at the end.

In this last theme, intersubjective agreement is found not so much in the particular habits and preferences of these eight museum visitors, but rather in the fact that they all speak of having developed preferred ways of visiting museums. As they describe their experiences in museums in terms of time, selection of works of art and attention to labels, the informants also reveal some of the taken-for-granted characteristics of museum-visiting: although it takes time to visit a museum and to attend to works of art, visitors can feel a sense of timelessness through attentive looking; visitors are free to move through the museum and look at the works that are attractive to them, selecting as many or as few works as they like and finally, attending to labels can add meaning and enjoyment or occasional bewilderment to looking at works of art.

As a group, these 12 common themes work together to reflect the museum experience as a whole: thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, the effect of the physical and human environment of the museum are all experienced simultaneously. The themes are fluid, their meanings flow into one another, merging into the completeness of experience. Each theme, like a window into the same experience, represents one aspect of museum visiting, the meaning of which can be fully grasped only in rela-

tion to the other themes. For example, the sense of well-being that a visitor might feel may be related to the recognition and remembrance of something familiar, observation of technical details, good lighting and comfortable seating and the quality of the presence of other visitors in the room. Experience as it is lived is whole, indivisible, but not always comprehensible. It is for the sake of understanding that experience, in this case museum experience, is analysed and described. In doing so, it is my sincere hope that some of the taken-for-granted characteristics of the museum-visiting have been disclosed, revealing something of the qualitative nature and meaning of museum experiences that these eight visitors have deemed to be amongst their best.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The purpose of my inquiry into the lived experiences of adult museum visitors has been to arrive at a deeper understanding of what it is like and what it means to visit an art museum. The 12 common themes that I found among the informants' descriptions can be seen as an expression of my understanding of some of the taken-for-granted characteristics of museum going for these visitors. Yet the question remains: what do these characteristics reveal which might be of some consequence to those who are interested and involved in museum visiting?

There are many issues and questions which could be teased out of the discussion of the 12 common themes of museum experience. Just as the particular significance of a museum visit will differ for each visitor and for each visit, so too, the significance, import or consequence of these common themes will naturally differ for each reader. As I read through the discussion of the common themes, indeed as I "lived" through the entire process of inquiry, there have been some questions and issues which have repeatedly captured my interest and attention; these are a cluster of ideas focused around what one of the informants (Louise) has called "a real feeling of well-being" which, according to the descriptions of these eight museum visitors, appears to be a significant outcome of meaningful museum experience. I would like to call attention to three related aspects of these visitors' "best" experiences in art museums which represent a synthesis of ideas expressed throughout the thematic analysis of informants' descriptions. These are: 1) circumstances and attitudes which, for these visitors, are conducive to a museum experience that allows for the possibility of a

sense of well-being; 2) the pervasiveness and meaningfulness of familiarity, comfort and ease throughout the informants' descriptions and throughout the 12 common themes; 3) the apparent association, for these visitors, of a sense of well-being with experiences of being completely absorbed in looking at works of art.

In an attempt to disclose the significance of the informants' best experiences in museums, I will discuss each of these three aspects of museum experience and then, through a brief interpretive reflection on the meanings of experiences of museums, musing, reverie, reverence and aesthetic, I will show how the meanings in the above-mentioned three aspects of museum experience merge and culminate in a particular quality of experience that Csikszentmihalyi (1982, p.35) has termed "flow", which characterizes what these eight museum visitors consider their "best" experiences.

It is appropriate at this point, before launching into a discussion of these conclusions to emphasize that a phenomenological approach to research aims to achieve a depth of understanding, "a reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its particular significance" (Van Manen, 1984, pp. 40-41). A grasping of something of the essence of a particular experience is not to be confused with generalizability: I can state with certainty that I have understood something of the nature and meaning of the museum experiences described by these eight people, but I do not, for a moment, claim that these understandings can be applied to other museum visitors. Rather, it is my hope that my understanding of the significance of this research will serve as a catalyst for further discussion, inquiry and self-reflection on the nature and lived meaning of museum experience. I would also like to remind the reader that the common

themes and the conclusions reflect the experiences of adults who are casual, yet enthusiastic and regular museum visitors; they have described visits to museums which were made alone or with one other person and perhaps, most importantly, they have spoken of their "best" or "especially meaningful" museum experiences. It is worth noting the kinds of museum visits that the informants did not describe: difficult, unpleasant or discouraging visits; experiences of participating in guided tours or museum education programs. Also, with the exception of Elkana, who is a professional sculptor, the informants are not art or museum professionals and as a group they represent visitors with a varying degrees of studio art experience and knowledge about art.

According to the descriptions of the eight informants, a meaningful museum experience seems to be quite unexpected; a somewhat elusive quality of experience which cannot be planned or willed. However, the informants did indicate that such an experience may be more likely to occur in certain circumstances. These are some of the conditions which could allow for the possible unfoldment of a meaningful experience and a sense of well-being: an openness to taking advantage of the freedom of movement and freedom of choice available in an art museum; a willingness to spend time, and sensitivity to a quiet, contemplative atmosphere.

The way in which all of the informants spoke about their experiences in museums suggests that a museum visit, whether alone or with others, is a personal and individual experience, characterized by freedom of movement and freedom of choice which is implied in phrases such as: "nothing is demanded of you"; "if I could go in and be free to roam and

come out feeling a little different"; "floating from one exhibit to another, alone in my private world, I was grateful for the time to think freely". It appears that these visitors' awareness of their freedom in the museum contributed to the meaningfulness of their experiences and to their sense of well-being: freedom to take their own time and to find their own pace; freedom to select works that they would like to look at and freedom to interpret what they see as they would, suggesting that there need not be any hesitation for museum visitors to be "drawn here and there", to works which attract or "capture" their attention. There is no reason, it seems, for museum visitors to feel that they ought to go around a museum in an arbitrary fashion. It appears that there are as many possibilities for meaningful ways of visiting a museum as there are visitors and visits; there is no single right way to visit a museum, it seems, apart from taking the liberty to suit one's own preferences.

A willingness to spend time and feeling unhurried seem to be conducive to concentrated attention as well as to dreamy reminiscence and imaginative looking. Lorna, Lindsey, Sean, Lisa, Elkana and Andy speak of heightened experiences in which they looked at works of art for a considerable length of time; for example, Lisa says of her visit to the Metropolitan Museum:

What hung on the walls seemed to demand my attention, calling me to stare into them endlessly... hours passed with me unaware, gazing at each painting repeatedly, each time as though it was the first time I was seeing it... as many came and went, I stood. Unmoving. I could not tear away, so I stood there until the final moment - until closing time.

This comment suggests that to allow plenty of time for a museum visit is to allow time for feeling time-less and time to be drawn into the image of a work of art.

Lorna, Sean, Louise, Laurence and Elkana expressed a preference for a quiet, contemplative atmosphere in a museum, suggesting the importance of an attitude of respect for other visitors' silent enjoyment of art; for example, Lorna said that a museum "should be like a library ... you shouldn't be allowed to talk, because you're intruding on someone else usually... I don't like to hear other people discussing... because I tend to listen to what they're saying... instead of just looking". For Lorna, a museum is a place to "enjoy the solitude, the serenity, absolute peace". The informants' descriptions suggest that the quality of a museum visit can be enhanced through sensitivity to the experience of co-visitors - the friends or relatives with whom one might visit a museum: sensitivity to their pace, their choice of what to look at and the appropriateness of discussion or silence.

A sense of well-being, according to the informants' descriptions, is a fulfilling and meaningful outcome of museum visiting. Rather than expecting to feel an extraordinary sense of well-being, visitors can create for themselves the conditions and attitudes that allow for the possibility of a sense of well-being. The informants' descriptions suggest that it is an attitude of openness, ease and "letting go" which invites experiences of unexpected meaningfulness, delight or inspiration.

According to the informants' descriptions, familiarity, ease and comfort appear as significant aspects of meaningful museum experience in several different ways.

First, there is the sense of comfort and reassurance that comes from finding familiar images or qualities in works of art, exemplified by Lindsey's description of looking at a landscape painting by Suzor Côté: "it's

a kind of living room painting... the sort that ... makes you feel at home and that all is well with God and nature around you, you know".

Secondly, there is the sense of familiarity that is felt in returning to a specific work of art or to a particular museum, in which the recognition of a familiar image or place puts the visitor at ease. This is especially evident in Lorna's descriptions of returning to Lawren Harris' "Mount Temple" and to "the Harbour at Rouen" by Pissarro at the museum in Montreal or in her description of returning to the Frick Collection, as well as in Sean's description of going to see the Leonardo "Cartoon" whenever he is in London.

It appears that the meaningfulness of these visitors' "best" experiences in museums lies partly in the way in which museum visiting functions as a way to recognize and reaffirm ideas or images which are already meaningful.

Repetition is a third aspect of familiarity: as the informants describe their preferred ways of visiting art museums, they seem to be describing the way in which repeated visits have generated habitual ways of being in a museum as well as a sense of familiarity with works of art and with the museum itself. As these eight visitors speak of habit and repetition, they do not seem to be alluding to meaningless repetition or dulled sensibility; rather, they describe their repeated visits in a tone that suggests something of a pilgrimage; repetition, for these visitors appears to have a greater affinity with experiences of the "reverential" than with experiences of "anaesthesia" (I will address the meanings of "reverential" and "anaesthetic" experiences in the context of museum visiting later in this chapter). Through repetition, these visitors have cultivated a sense of feeling at home and at ease in museums. For example, Lorna says that when she first began to visit art museums: "I missed an awful lot at first; I never knew

what I should look at: should I look at the titles? Should I look at, you know, the artist's name? And then you get stuck in some gallery, especially in Germany where there are a lot of old icons and stuff like that, and that didn't really turn me on. You know, I got fed up... when you first start looking, that old art looks pretty stony, eh?" After repeated visits to museums over a period of 20 years, Lorna describes her current museum visiting in a different tone, as an opportunity to get away from "the everyday world... a very relaxing thing to do." Her sense of confusion has, it seems, through repetition, given way to feeling at ease in the museum environment which, although familiar, is set apart from daily routines and from the unpredictability of life and therefore serves as a place of refuge, to which she can return to be comforted by a sense of the unchanging. The significance of comfortable and easy familiarity in meaningful museum experiences is particularly evident in Lorna's description, but it is also alluded to in Lindsey's description of visiting the Roerich museum and in Sean's description of returning to the Leonardo "Cartoon". Furthermore, Lorna associates the psychological comfort she has felt in museums with physical comfort. Andy, Lindsey and Laurence also describe how comfortable environments have contributed to their sense of well-being in museums.

The informants' descriptions suggest that being completely absorbed in looking at a work of art can be a heightened and memorable experience, the outcome of which is a feeling of personal well-being, which the informants express in terms of feeling exceptionally happy and excited or amused, or, in terms of feeling calm and at peace, inspired or fulfilled.

Among the informants' descriptions there are several examples of

being absorbed in looking at works of art: Lorna talks about letting go and getting into Monet's water-lily paintings; Lindsey describes her joy in looking at Roerich's mountain landscapes; Elkana talks about gazing at an Emily Carr painting for a long time; Sean speaks of how he was absorbed in looking at the Leonardo cartoon and Andy describes how he was "at" the landscape in Michael Snow's paintings. An especially good example of being absorbed in looking is found in Lisa's description of her visit to the Metropolitan Museum:

When I stepped over the threshold into the world of the Room of Impressionism, the rest of the world ceased to exist.

I was alone in this over-crowded room, stunned by the pure beauty of the masterpieces that danced on the walls. All else was forgotten, nothing else seemed to have any importance. It was only that moment, those paintings, ... These timeless creations stopped my mind from running and shut out the desperate hurriedness of the city beyond those walls. They had an uncontrollable hold on me, forcing me to go back over each one time and time again. Hours passed with me unaware, gazing at each painting repeatedly, each time as though it was the first time I was seeing it.

Nothing has captured my heart with such intensity since the moment I spotted the most captivating work of all, and fell in love with Renoir's "In the Meadow" ... [which] seized my attention, and won all my praise. I could not take my eyes off it, ...

I was mesmerized by this masterwork, and found myself paralysed in front of it, unable to leave its presence...

There was no point resisting this pull, my heart was tied to the bows in the children's hair. I decided to give in, and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to understand the attractiveness of this painting... When I had to finally leave my meadows behind, I felt a great sense of loss while saying goodbye...

Inside me, however, I now glowed warmly with the light from those floral meadows that I took in to be a part of me, to stay within me forever, everywhere I went...

The above description reveals how absorption is characterized by complete and concentrated involvement in looking to the point where the viewer's attention, so fully absorbed in the present, temporarily loses the

usual awareness of time and place. This appears to be an experience which is engaged in for its own sake; the rewards are intrinsic and intangible, contained within the process of looking: attentiveness, calmness, and a sense of being completely at one with what is seen, participating fully in the artist's vision.

The sense of well-being that is the outcome of these visitors' experiences of being absorbed in looking at works of art is closely related to the quality of experience that Graburn (1977, p.13) has called "reverential", a quality of experience which, it seems, for these visitors, surpasses other museum experiences in terms of intensity and value. I would like to explore, briefly, the connectedness and implications of the meanings of experiences of museums, musing, inspiration, reverie, reverence, the aesthetic, a phenomenological approach and experiences of what Csikzentmihayli (1982) has called "flow" (p.35). These are the experiences to which I would like to call attention. Such experiences have perhaps, been overlooked - or if not overlooked - sadly under-rated for their potential value in museum art education (Bersson, 1982).

The word "museum" is derived from a Greek word meaning the "seat of the muses". The muses in Greek mythology are the nine goddesses who "inspire learning in the arts" and "all intellectual pursuits", including poetry, literature, music, dance, astronomy and philosophy. The muses are seen as "personifications of the highest intellectual and artistic aspirations": thus, they give inspiration while representing aspiration. (The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 1970; The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973).

The word "muse" has another meaning as well, which is, "to be absorbed in thought, to ponder, to reflect upon, to contemplate and to wonder (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973).

To be in a "reverie" is to be in a state of "abstract musing" (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973). Reverie is also associated with dreaming: in the context of the literature related to museum experience, to be in a "dream space" is to be immersed in a "flow of images and meanings" abstracted from their original context (Annis, 1980, p.5). Graburn (1977, p.13) names this same quality of experience "reverential"; it includes reverence, reverie and dreaming; it is both a "fantasy space" and a "sacred space". It is an experience of something "higher", something to which one aspires, or through which one is inspired, a "direct connection to something purer, more eternal" (Graburn, 1977, p.13). An experience of the reverential can be understood as an experience of musing; in Graburn's words, it can be "contemplative" and in a museum, "one can be alone with one's thoughts and make of the objects and exhibits what one will" (Graburn, 1977, p.13).

Art museums are often associated with the concept of the "aesthetic": aesthetics; aesthetic quality; aesthetic value; and that much abused term - aesthetic experience. The original meaning of "aesthetic" Bersson (1982) reminds us, is "pertaining to sensuous perception; received by the senses" (p.35). The antithesis of the aesthetic, Ross (1984, p. 145) points out, "is not, as commonly thought, the ugly, but rather the habitual, the repetitious, the imposing, all that dulls, enervates, puts us back to sleep, drains off or curbs vital spirit." The aesthetic, understood as the opposite of "anaesthetic" is, "esthesia", or feeling (Flannery, 1980, p.27), and is all that is sensitive, awakened, alert, fully alive and full of wonder; as such, the aesthetic em-

braces the notion from Merleau-Ponty and Tsugawa, of "the aesthetic experience of sensuous immediacy" which Bersson (1982) explains as:

the consciousness of sensuous experience - of the myriad sounds, smells, sights, movements, texture, and tastes possible to human perception. Sensuous aesthetic immediacy also involves the consciousness of emotional states...: in the experience of sensuous immediacy, the 'here and now' is all. There is no future goal or desired end point. ... a preconceptual phenomena (pp. 35-37).

To live in the "anaesthetic" is to live in what phenomenologists call the "natural attitude" in a "world of habit, a world of repetition, of monotony - a prejudged world" (Flannery, 1980, p.28). The "aesthetic" however, is associated with feeling and with a phenomenological approach to understanding which is characterized by "openness to direct experience... uninfluenced by predetermined notions, concepts or theories of reality" (Bersson, 1982, p.35; Flannery, 1980).

Ross (1984, pp.142-145) tells us that "aesthetic experience" is "life-enhancing" and is an experience of "order" and "coherence"; the aesthetic, as an experience of wholeness is linguistically connected, according to Ross, to the words "health" and "holy", reinforcing the connection between the aesthetic and the reverential.

Csikszentmihalyi (1982) has developed "a theoretical model for enjoyment" based on interviews with composers, dancers, rock climbers, surgeons and chess players: men and women engaged in "autotelic activities" which Csikszentmihalyi (1982) defines as experiences which are:

Poised between boredom and worry, the autotelic experience is one of complete involvement of the actor with his activity. The activity presents constant challenges. There is no time to get bored or to worry about what may happen or may not happen. A person in such a situation can make full use of whatever skills are required and receives clear feedback to his actions ... we shall refer to this particular dynamic state - the holistic

sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement - as flow. In the flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention from the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment into the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response or between past, present and future... Ideally, flow is the result of pure involvement without any consideration about results. (pp:35-42)

Experiences of "flow" are characterized by "undivided attention", "self-forgetfulness", 'loss of self-consciousness', and even 'transcendence of individuality' and 'fusion with the world'" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982, p. 42). "Flow" is most likely to happen in experiences of "play" and "creative" activities as well as in "work" activities and "the practice of Zen, Yoga and ... meditation" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982, p.37).

I would like to add museum-visiting to Csikszentmihalyi's list of activities which are conducive to the experience of "flow". The people who described their "best" museum going experiences to me spoke of feeling: "enraptured"; "concentrated"; unaware of time," it was only that moment, those paintings... hours passed with me unaware"; absorbed in looking, "suddenly nothing else matters. You're just watching... you're part of the landscape"; exceptionally positive and extraordinary experiences,

... a long, journey into dreamland;

... a real feeling of well-being;

... a special kind of happiness;

... absolute peace;

... inspired;

... connecting me to something really... exalted ... very, very vast and eternal... very expansive; ... tuned into aspiring.

In such phrases, these museum visitors were, I would like to suggest, indicating experiences of "flow". They were also speaking of

"reverential experience", "dream space", a phenomenological approach to looking and aesthetic experience. These are the various names for a particular quality of experience which is the nature of museum-visiting at its best, - at least for the eight visitors who described their own best museum experiences to me - and, I suspect, for many others as well.

Bersson (1982, p.38) quotes Flannery's statement that "aesthetic consciousness" "brings us into contact with our 'aliveness' and makes our lives not only worth enduring but exquisite"; perhaps this is what Louise means by the "real feeling of well-being" which she experienced while visiting the Renoir exhibition, suggesting that a heightened awareness of "our aliveness" is central to meaningful experiences with art.

Have we, as art educators, emphasized ideas and information about art at the expense of meaningful experiences with art?

If museums are truly the abode of the muses, then their primary function is to inspire, to house representations of "the highest intellectual and artistic aspirations", to provide an environment and an atmosphere suitable for musing and experiences of reverie, reverence, and the aesthetic.

References

Annis, S. (1980). The Museum as Staging Ground for Symbolic Action. Unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago, Chicago.

Barritt, L. Beekman, T., Bleeker, H. and Mulderij, K. (1983). A Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan.

Beittel, K. (1978). Qualitative description of the qualitative. In Victoria, J. & Sacca, E. (Eds.). Presentations on Art Education research. Number 2. Phenomenological description: Potential for Research in Art Education. (pp.91-113). Montreal : Concordia University.

Berrson, R. (1982). Against Feeling: Aesthetic Experience in Technocratic Society. Art Education, 35 (4), 34-39.

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (1982). Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc.

Borhegyi, S. de & Hanson, I. (1968). Bibliography. In Borhegyi, S. de & Hanson, I. (Eds.). The Museum Visitor: Selected Essays and Surveys of Visitor Reaction to Exhibits in the Milwaukee Public Museum. (pp.175-187). Milwaukee: Publications in Museology, Milwaukee Public Museum.

Cameron, D. (1967). How do we know what our visitors think? Museum News, 45 (7), 31-33.

Cameron, D. & Abbey, D. (1960). The Museum Visitor II: Survey Results. Toronto: Reports from Information Services, Royal Ontario Museum.

Cameron, D. & Abbey, D. (1961). Museum audience research. Museum News, 40 (2), 34-38.

Chapman, L. (1978). Perceiving and responding to visual forms. In Chapman, L. Approaches to Art in Education. (pp. 64-91). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Coles, R. (1975). The art museum and the pressures of society. In Lee, S. (Ed.). On Understanding Art Museums. (pp. 185-203). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1982). Beyond Boredom and Anxiety. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Draper, L. (1977). Annotated bibliography. In Draper, L. (Ed.). The Visitor and the Museum. (pp. 79-107). Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California.

Elliot, P. & Loomis, R. (1975). Studies of Visitor Behavior in Museums and Exhibitions : An Annotated Bibliography of Sources Primarily in the English Language. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, office of Museum Programs.

Feldman, E. (1970). Mastering the techniques of art criticism. In Feldman, E. Becoming Human Through Art (pp.348-383). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Flannery, M. (1980). Research methods in phenomenological aesthetics. Review of Research in Visual Arts Education, (12), 26-36.

Folds, T. (1968). The role of the museum in the life of adults and school children. In The International Council of Museums, Meeting on the role of Museums in education and cultural action. (pp. 44-54). Paris: International Council of Museums.

Foss, S. & Radich, A. (1984). Metaphors in "Treasures of Tutankhamen": Implications for aesthetic educations. Art Education, 37 (1), 6-11.

Gauthier, M. (1976). Renoir. Paris: Flammarion.

Gluek, G. (1971). The ivory tower versus the discoteque. Art in America, 59(4), 80-85.

Graburn, N. (1977). The museum and the visitor experience. In Draper, L. (Ed.). The Visitor and the Museum. (pp.5-25). Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California.

Hamblen, K. (1984). Artistic perception as a function of learned expectations. Art Education, 37 (30), 20-25.

Hood, M. (1983). Staying away: Why people choose not to visit museums. Museum News, 62 (April), 50-57.

Hudson, K. (1975). A Social History of Museums: What the Visitors Thought. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Isaacs, C. (1977). The visitor and the museum. In Draper, L. (Ed.). The Visitor and the Museum. (pp.39-41). Berkely: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California.

Kurylo, L. (1976). On the need for a theory of museum learning Gazette, the Quarterly of the Canadian Museums Association, 19 (3), 20-24.

Hankford, L. (1984). A phenomenological methodology for art criticism. Studies in Art Education, 25(3), 151-158.

Lee, S. (1978). Art museums and education. In Newsom, B.Y. & Silver, A.Z. (Eds.). The Art Museum as Educator. (pp. 21-26). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Loomis, R.J. (1973). Please, not another visitor survey. Museum News, 52(2), 21-26.

Low, T.L. (1948). The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Art Museums in the United States. New York: Columbia University, Bureau of Publications.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. (1978). Monet's Years at Giverny: Beyond Impressionism. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers.

Morris, R. (1968). Leisure time and the museum. In Borhegyi, S. de & Hanson, I. (Eds.). The Museum Visitor: Selected Essays and Surveys of Visitor Reaction to Exhibits in the Milwaukee Public Museum. (pp.54-58). Milwaukee: Publications in Museology, Milwaukee Public Museum.

National Museums of Canada, Planning Secretariat, (1977). Patterns of Museum Participation. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada.

Newsom, B.Y. (1975). On understanding art museums Studies in Art Education. 16(2).46-53.

O'Hare, M. (1974). The audience of the Museum of Fine Arts. Curator. 17 (2), 126-158.

O'Toole & Leavitt, T. (1985). Two views on museum education. Museum News. 64 (2), 26-31.

Pattison, J.L. (1978). The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson. Kleinburg: The McMichael Canadian Collection.

Rawlins, K. (1978). Educational metamorphosis of the American museum. Studies in Art Education. 20 (1), 4-17.

Ross, M. (1984). The Aesthetic Impulse. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Screven, C. (1969). The museum as a responsive learning environment. Museum News, 47(10), 7-10.

Screven, C. (1979). A bibliography on visitor education research. Museum News, 57(4), 56-88.

Silver, A.Z. (1978). Exhibitions and the individual visitor. In Newsom, B.Y. & Silver, A.Z. (Eds.). The Art Museum as Educator. (pp.76-81). Berkeley: University of California Press.

van Manen, M. (1984). Practicing phenomenological writing. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 2(1), 36-69.

Williams, P. (1984). Object contemplation: Theory into practice. Museum Education Roundtable: Roundtable Reports, 2(1), 10-12.

Wolf, R. & Tymitz, B. (1980). When Will the Fourth Floor be Open?: A Study of Visitor Perceptions of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Washington, D.C.: Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution.

Appendix 1

Consent Form to Participate in Research

I,..... agree to participate in a tape recorded interview (or interviews) for an art education research project with Rose Montgomery-Whicher. I realize that this interview (or interviews) will be used only for educational purposes. I realize that my participation in this research project is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without any negative consequences.

SIGNATURE.....

WITNESS SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

Appendix 2

Request for Written Descriptions

A Personal Narrative of a Museum Experience

PLEASE WRITE A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A VISIT TO AN ART MUSEUM WHICH WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL FOR YOU.

Before starting to write, it might be helpful to reflect on your experiences in art museums throughout your life.

Then, focus on one particular experience which stands out in your memory as an experience that was significant, valuable, or meaningful for you; in short, your "best" experience in an art museum. This might be an experience of one art museum visit as a whole, an experience of one room or exhibition, or, an experience of one work of art.

As you write, describe this experience as you lived it, giving details that will let the reader understand what this experience was really like for you. Try to write in a manner that reveals your "stream of consciousness" - your inner thoughts, feelings, impressions, imaginative associations, sensations; as well as descriptive details of the museum environment, the presence of other visitors, security guards, and, of course, your own perceptions of the works of art. Please describe also, the circumstances surrounding this visit - which art museum was it? when? what prompted you to visit that museum on that day? - were you alone, or with friends, family or other students? As much as possible, use simple descriptive language, as though you are writing a letter to a close friend who has not studied art or art history, and try to avoid causal explanations, interpretations, or generalizations of your experience.