The Writing on the Wall:
The Impact of Information Media in Museum Space

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Abstract

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This thesis is focused on the study of information media in museum space. Didactic panels, literally the writing on the wall, are standard practice in the planning and execution of exhibitions. The composition and use of these panels can be described as an institutional technology, instrumental in the construction of power. This project investigates how the production and placement of didactic panels in museums and galleries creates and maintains relationships of power between the viewer and the institution. To investigate this relationship, a participant observation study focused on visitor use and movement patterns was completed, as well as interviews with visitors to draw out their understanding of how didactics function within a museum space. These two methods combine to create a vivid picture of how the use of didactics fits into a network of the exertion of power over the visitor.

For my parents

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Introduction

It was a visit to the Power Plant Gallery in Toronto that sparked my interest in information media. Helena Reckitt, the senior curator of the gallery, was giving a tour of her latest exhibition, and during it she addressed the many hidden aspects of curating; in particular, she spoke of the amount of compromise that surrounded the creation of content for and placement of didactic panels. Didactic panels, also known as exhibit labels, information media or information labels, are the panels hung close to works of art with the intent, in their most basic form, to identify the name of the artist, title of the work and year the work was produced. The artist featured in the exhibition had taken offense to the style of didactic she had chosen to use, insisting that it was too large and interfered with visitor perception of his work. Before this I had never questioned the way that didactic panels differed between institutions and exhibitions, yet once I heard this, I found it hard to focus on anything but: why did some museums have large didactic panels, while others had none? Why did I always feel compelled to read the didactic panels upon entering an exhibition? Did the information contained in these panels change my perception of the works of art? Who researched and wrote these didactics? What kinds of didactics are there, and who makes the choices to use different types? Are certain types of didactic panels more effective than others? What makes a didactic panel effective?

While developing a methodological strategy for this study I completed a pilot project that involved visiting several arts institutions to compare didactic presentation and writing style. My intent was to explore the ways in which writing styles differed between institutions and how the content of the didactic may change visitor perception. Though many interesting points surrounding content emerged, my interest was instead drawn to a

particular experience that I had in every institution: upon entering each gallery, crowds gathered around a large didactic panel that explained the curatorial premise and thesis of the exhibition. Similar crowds gathered around works with large didactic explanations, or didactic panels that explained themes within each exhibit. A visit to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City was particularly illuminating, as free audio guides were provided with the purchase of admission. Movement through the space revealed pockets of visitors surrounding the works designated with a small headphone symbol. Other works of art were ignored, and seemed to be deemed through this audio guide experience to be of lesser importance than those with a short audio interlude.

These experiences inspired me to focus my attention on the ways that information media changes the ways that visitors experience space and move through it. The use of didactic panels and audio guides create what Gillian Rose, a professor in Visual Culture with the Open University, calls the "spatial routing" of a visitor. (Rose 2007, 191) The concept of "spatial routing", also referred to as an "intended path", is most often applied to idealized patterns of movement through museum space, but this concept of spatial routing can also apply to techniques used by museum professionals. Where visitors have an idealized intended path of movement through space, museum professionals, through the study of museums and evaluation techniques, have developed an intended path for the production, distribution and evaluation of exhibition media, including didactic panels. This intended path includes following a specific set of instructions in order to produce as close to an idealized form of media possible. My interest in this concept of spatial routing is to explore how both the intended path of the visitor in the institution, and the intended path, created through the study of production and distribution of information media, has an impact on upon the visitor experience. As my research questions pose: How do information media change the experience of and movement through space in a museum

or gallery setting? How are information media developed and researched in a museum setting? How do current techniques of visitor study and analysis affect the ways that these media are designed and implemented?

Didactic panels have been selected as the type of information media to be explored through this study. Though many different types of information media exist within museums, didactic panels or exhibit labels are the most commonly found format. The fact that these print media panels exist in the great majority of cultural institutions made it a readily accessible media for this research. Three cultural institutions were observed in this study, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery of Ontario. All three institutions used didactic labels in the explanation and display of their collections. As in most institutions, the approach to the format, placement and content of didactic material between and within these institutions varied greatly. An investigation into how these media are used and positioned results in a useful study of institutional practices and the various methods used to give the viewer a brief relationship with a work of art. The investigation into how this relationship with art is constructed also draws out a unique criticism of visitor and Museum Studies.

This project investigates how the production and placement of didactic panels in museums and galleries works to create and maintain relationships of power between the viewer and the institution. The composition and use of these panels can be described as an institutional technology, instrumental in the construction of power. To investigate this relationship, two methodologies were selected: an observation study focused on visitor use and movement patterns, as well as an interview study with visitors to draw out their understanding of how didactics function within a museum space. These two methods combine to create a vivid picture of how didactics are understood.

There are several goals in completing this study, all of them related to how didactic panels contribute to power relationships that exist within museum space. Within any institutional space a power relationship exists, and within a public institution, like the museum, this relationship is further complicated by the introduction of the subject position of the visitor into institutional space. A visitor's experience upon entering a museum space is expertly crafted, shaped to cater to both the whims of the institution and the perceived desires of the visitor. This experiential creation establishes and sustains the power relationship that I am most interested in investigating: the creation of the subjectivity of the visitor within the context of the museum and how this subjectivity is groomed and maintained through institutional technologies like the didactic panel. Tied to this is what Institutional Discourse Analysis scholar, and author of *The Birth of the Museum,* Tony Bennett calls the construction of "invisibles" within a museum or gallery space. (Bennett 1995, 166-167) By invisibles, Bennett refers to the levels of invisible classification within an art museum, and the ways that these principles create a way of seeing through the art to find a "invisible order of significance." (Bennett 1995, 166-167) This is a power relationship that exists between the museum and the viewer, and manifests differently with visitors who have different arts and educational backgrounds. How do the common techniques of museum practice and Visitor Studies contribute to this subjectivity of the visitor, and in particular, how does the development and creation of didactic panels fit into this larger relationship?

Theoretical Framework

Though this study could be suited for an Art History or Museum Studies program, it is fundamental that an analysis of the power structure in museums be undertaken by someone who is outside of these fields. The fields of Museum Studies and

Art History have provided the industry with a great deal of "best practices" surrounding the use of didactics in museum space, and these best practices only further implicate the museum as a site that creates and maintains relationships of power. The interdisciplinary nature of Media Studies makes it possible to combine approaches from Cultural Studies, Visitor Reception studies, Museum Studies and Communication Studies. The combination of these approaches will illuminate the ways that information media and best practices for use can illustrate power structures between the museum and visitor. In particular, Media Studies provides a foundation upon which the application of a theory surrounding the discourse of institutional power can be used to analyze the techniques behind producing information media in museums and evaluating their usefulness with visitors.

Three steps were undertaken in this study to investigate the relationship of power between the viewer and institution, the first of these being a review of relevant literature surrounding three genres of academic study: Visitor and Reception studies, Museum Studies and Institutional Discourse Analysis. These fields contribute to a critical overview of the construction of the visitor and didactic within museum space. The fields of Museum Studies and Visitor Studies surround an understanding of traditional museum practice in the development and use of didactic panels, as well as the ways that visitors are framed and understood in the context of the museum. Institutional Discourse Analysis is a theoretical framework that can be used to effectively evaluate power structures within museum space and understand their foundations. Within the realm of Museum Studies, museological guidebooks written by scholars and professionals are produced to assist museum professionals in the creation and evaluation of didactic panels. An analysis of these sources provide a guideline of industrial practices to evaluate and identify different types of information media used in museum space. Visitor Studies literature provides a

forum for scholars to publish their results surrounding the subject position of the viewer within the larger institution, as well as methodological structures for evaluating visitor experience within the museum. Many institutions choose to use surveys, interviews and other monitoring techniques to investigate how visitors act within institutional space. These studies are tied to exertions of power over the visitor, as the institution attempts to examine the visitor's experience in order to better "understand" the visitor and accommodate their desired experience. The most common Visitor Studies practices currently in use are all quantitatively based, where even traditionally qualitative methods (e.g. participant observation, interviews and surveys) are being used in a qualitative context, as questions are written with the purpose of eliciting answers that can then be numerated. These techniques must then also be evaluated in a critical discussion of institutional relationships of power that surround the visitor. The field of Institutional Discourse Analysis ties these two fields together, as it analyses the ways that these best practices and evaluation guidelines for the construction of the subjectivity of the visitor creates and maintains relationships of power within institutional space. Scholars using Institutional Discourse Analysis have taken inspiration from techniques developed and used in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,* and use this approach to evaluate institutional structures of power and the creation of certain types of human subjectivities within an institutional space. (Rose 2007, 173)

Methodology

Two methodological approaches were used to explore the role of didactics in shaping the subjectivity of the visitor. The first of these was a participant observation study, where three different Canadian institutions - The McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts - were

visited and observed. This method highlighted patterns of movement and use in three institutions. The second study completed was an interview study: museum visitors were approached and questioned about their impressions on the function of didactic panels, and how they interacted with these panels during their visit.

There are two reasons for using two different methodological approaches. These two methods are founded in two different scholarly fields: that of Visitor Studies, in the case of a participant observational analysis, and Media Studies (among other disciplines) in the case of a conversational style interview study. The use of both approaches encourages the collection and analysis of a diversity of data. Also, to fully understand the field, a method rooted in traditional visitors studies approaches should be contrasted with a method that lies outside of these traditional approaches. The standardization of museum practices through graduate studies programs in museum and curatorial studies has created a power relationship between "proper" practices and any others that are used in their stead. Handbooks produced by scholars and professionals introduce a standard to the practice that most institutions are expected to follow. Common Visitor Studies practices help to enforce and exert this power relationship; especially as they masquerade under a guise of "accommodating" the viewer and their needs. Because of this, a critical examination of the common methodological practices surrounding the construction of the visitor is a priority in this study. Participant observation tracking studies are used often in museum space and are commonly explored in Visitor Studies research. Though participant observation studies used in many other disciplines are of a qualitative nature, within the realm of Visitor Studies, practitioners are encouraged to remove qualitative data from the presentation of their findings. Instead, the data gathered in participant observation studies by Visitor Studies practitioners presents results in only a quantitative format, with personal observations often downplayed or completely removed from

findings. Beverly Serrell, a consultant who focuses on developing strategies for museums and galleries to write and display exhibition labels, cautions Visitor Studies practitioners in her book *Exhibit Labels*, and encourages the use of more qualitative data because "…too often, however, there is a tendency to jump to conclusions about all visitors based on one case study or even a single anecdote." (Serrell 1996, 136) Likewise, interview studies used within the museum industry are often designed to elicit answers that can then be numerated and quantified. To differ from this reality, interviews in this study purposefully differed from quantitative interview studies currently used by institutions, and instead choose to questions that would elicit long form, conversational style answers.

Setting the Stage

The museum is most often recognized as a space of education and enlightenment. This understanding can be traced through history from earlier manifestations to the present day. Beth Lord, professor of philosophy at the University of Dundee, traces the history of the museum through how they presented themselves as spaces of representation. (Lord 2006, 6) Early museums, often described as "cabinets of curiosities" were spaces where no textual information was provided. (Lord 2006, 6) These spaces were reflexive, and interpretation was drawn through comparison of placement of objects. This shifted in the nineteenth century, as displays became text heavy, evolutionarily based and authoritative. (Lord 2006, 6) Tony Bennett illustrates the societal impetus for this change in his work *The Birth of the Museum*: early museums were seen as spaces that encouraged and enforced standards of behaviour encouraged by the upper classes that should be then emulated by members of the lower classes. Museums were (and are) spaces where silence, reverence and education were encouraged, while drunkenness, idleness and violent behavior were discouraged. (Bennett 1995, 102) This opinion of the museum as an

educative space persists, with museums portrayed and understood as spaces that inform the public about art that has, through academic and professional vetting, been recognized as valuable. This function of education is incorporated into school curriculums, and a large portion of resources within museums are reserved for the development and deployment of educational programs aimed at students. Education departments are becoming larger and more prominent within museum infrastructure, and an increase in after school programs and summer camps held at museums are a further indication of this trend. Many museums and galleries in Canada are publicly funded and reliant on government programs and grants to fund their activities. Opposing funding models exist as well, and both private and artist run or collective funding models are used in Canadian art galleries and museums, but most larger institutions use the public funding model to achieve at least some of their funding. As institutions compete for increasingly depleted sources of funding, the development of programs aimed at students is directly tied to applications for funding, as a program with a foundation in education is often well received by funding committees.

The fact that the primary function of a museum has shifted to educating has made it so that museums identify closely with a goal of educating the greater public. Didactic panels are seen as one of the biggest cogs in the great machine of accommodating public education within museum space. The didactic has become increasingly relied upon to provide the educative function within museum space. As Lord states: "Museums need not contain artifacts and need not contain text; sometimes interpretation is implicit and hidden. But without interpretation, without representing a relation between things and conceptual structures, an institution is not a museum, but a storehouse." (Lord 2006, 5)

Chapter Layout

The investigation of the didactic within this study has been broken into three chapters. Each of these chapters addresses one of the three approaches undertaken to understand the role of the didactic in the shaping of visitor experience.

The first chapter presents a review of literature, with three genres of academic studies explored. The first of these is Institutional Discourse Analysis, a study of relationships of power created and sustained in institutional spaces. This discipline primarily builds upon the work of Michel Foucault and in particular, his work *Discipline and Punish,* a study of the history and development of prison systems. With regard to museums, several academics have used the approach Foucault developed through *Discipline and Punish* to explore power relationships within museum space, including Tony Bennett, Mieke Bal, Douglas Crimp and Gillian Rose. The second genre of academic scholarship reviewed is Visitor Studies. A smaller focus within the larger discipline of Museum Studies, Visitor Studies surrounds the subjectivity of the visitor and how to study it within museum space. Visitor Studies are used to understand and use common approaches applied in the understanding and evaluation of visitor experience. In particular, the "visitor typing" method, a method based on marketing techniques reveals a potentially damaging trend that reduces visitors to their characteristics. This method formulates strategies and approaches to cater to these perceived characteristics, encouraging a restrictive approach to the position of the visitor. The final academic genre addressed is Museum Studies. The genre of the didactic handbook, a relatively new literature type focused on best practices for producing and evaluating information media, reveals an understanding of what best practices for the industry are and the goals of the institution in producing and hanging didactic panels. A critical reading of one of the most

popular didactic handbooks, *Exhibition Labels*, written by museum professional Beverly Serrell, and an analysis of her approach to didactic production and evaluation will reveal and demonstrate how the didactic is framed and studied within the field.

The second chapter presents the participant observation research of this study. The development of methodologies is explained, as is the theoretical framework drawn upon when the methodological approach was developed. This development relied greatly on common techniques used in Visitor Studies. An overview of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Art Gallery of Ontario follows, locating the reader within these institutions and explaining the didactic approaches used in the six galleries observed. An explanation of what types of information media were observed is then addressed, as well as what commonalities were chosen and preserved between galleries. The results of the participant observation study are then divided into two categories: results surrounding engagement percentages with different types of information media, and results surrounding movement patterns. The final section surrounds reflections, including changes that I would make to the approach used if this study was to be repeated, my reflections on the process and future research possibilities.

The final chapter presents the interview study portion of this research, and breaks down the responses of the thirty-four visitors interviewed. Themes observed in these interviews surround the physical imposition of didactic panels, the perceived function of these didactics, as well as didactic content. In this chapter, methodological choices are also addressed, and how a combination of methods rooted in different scholarly practices proved to be quite illuminating. It is possible that more studies that approach visitors studies from a multitude of approaches will be beneficial to the fields of visitor and Museum Studies. The final portion address reflections on the process of interviewing

visitors and some possible adjustments for research studies that may wish to use this method in the future.

As my experience at the Power Plant shows, there is a great deal of negotiation surrounding the consumption and production of the didactic panel. This seemingly small piece of media is for many visitors, the only space where curators or artists are able to speak to visitors. Likewise, the text printed on a didactic panel may be the only information on a work that these visitors have access too. Through the exhibition label seems small, its impact is potentially very large, and it is because of this potential, that this media and it's affect the visitor will be investigated here.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Exhibition labels, also known as information labels or didactic panels, function in a multiplicity of ways. They exist in their most essential form as an informational and interpretive caption to the artwork presented, telling a brief history of a painting, sculpture or other artwork's creation. They also can be used to shape a narrative or highlight a concept about the exhibit in which they reside. Didactic panels act as a voice for the planner of the exhibition, whether this is a curator, gallery director or artist, and this writing on the wall may be the only space in which communication between the institution and the visitor takes place. To fully appreciate the role of the museum didactic in shaping the visitor's experience, didactics are approached here through three different theoretical perspectives: Institutional Discourse Analysis, Visitor Studies, and Museum Studies. The disciplines of Visitor Studies and Museum Studies are often used together and are closely related disciplines, as both are used to inform the study of museums and the techniques used within them. Institutional Discourse Analysis is drawn from Media and Cultural Studies, and is used to understand the relationships of power within institutions. Within this thesis, Institutional Discourse Analysis theory, techniques, and studies will be used to draw out an understanding of power relationships within museums and within the disciplines of Visitor and Museum Studies.

The first of these approaches is Institutional Discourse Analysis, a methodological approach founded upon Michel Foucault's study of institutional spaces. Institutional Discourse Analysis focuses on the "key themes, truth claims, complexity and absences" (Rose 2007, 179) of the institution, and how the study of these aspects can illustrate hidden structures and hierarchies. It is used to analyze institutional apparatus

and technologies and how they construct a specific experience for the visitor, including the subjectivity of the visitor itself.

Visitor Studies examines the various activities of museum visitors, their backgrounds and their motivations for visiting the museum. Visitor Studies evaluations are used to inform the design and placement of exhibit labels. The practice of Visitor Studies can be problematic, particularly as trends that segment visitors based on demographics and motivation grow. For this reason, the theory and practice surrounding Visitor Studies will be approached with a critical eye.

Museum Studies focus on the operation and maintenance of a museum space and the objects within. An analysis of this discipline reveals "best practices" for the crafting and hanging of didactics. A closer look at the techniques developed through this discipline will be useful in this study as they can provide a better understanding the practical theory behind the production of these media.

Institutional Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis reveals the structured layers of power within the institution, which is what institutional discourse focuses on. Michel Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* has greatly informed this methodology, in which he analyzed the societal and power relationships within prisons. (Foucault, 1977) Scholars have appropriated these techniques first practiced by Foucault and used them to form a base for the methodology of Institutional Discourse Analysis.

Before studying the ways that Foucault's work has been used to inform this theoretical approach, it is useful to explore how the museum has been addressed by Foucault directly. The museum is unfortunately only addressed in a fragmentary fashion

by Foucault, with the most notable example of this existing in a lecture given in 1967 titled *Of Other Spaces.*

Of Other Spaces was was published in English 1986 in the journal *Diacritics.* It's first appearance in the original French was in a journal titled *Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuité* in 1986. (Foucault, 1967) The work is obviously unfinished, the thoughts are fragmentary and several of the points contradict each other. (Hetherington 2011, 466) Despite this, the concept of the heterotopia can be used to study some of the unique circumstances that surround museum space.

Of Other Spaces presents the phenomenon of the heterotopia. A heterotopia is a physical space that exists between idealized spaces (what Foucault calls utopias) and real spaces. Foucault describes a Utopia as "...sites with no real place. ... They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces." (Foucault 1986, 24)

Heterotopia are sites that are connected with the practice of deviant behaviour. (Hetherington 2011, 465) Foucault here is referring to spaces like prisons, psychiatric hospitals and retirement homes, where deviant behaviour is constrained, cured and controlled. (Heatherington 2011, 465) In describing the heterotopia, Foucault outlines six principles that define and outline its existence. It is in the outlining of the fourth principle of the heterotopia that Foucault directly addresses the museum, and this principle relates to what Foucault calls the heterchronia. (Foucault 1986, 26) A heterochronia is a building that is related to time; in the case of the museum, it is defined as a heterochronia because it is focused on the "indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place." (Foucault 1986, 26) This indefinite accumulation of time marks the museum as a space that exists between, as it is firmly rooted to the present through physical presence, governing structures, and focus towards current visitors, but it also exists as a space that idealizes the

preservation and presentation of a specific space in time. Another principle of the heterotopia that relates directly to the museum is the fifth principle: that "In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place." The museum fits perfectly into this description, as it presents itself as a public space; preserving culture and heritage for the greater good of the public, yet access is restricted by admission prices, norms of conduct, and the presentation of an environment that is heavily surveilled and regulated.

The fact that the museum has only been addressed in a fragmentary fashion by Foucault has not stopped scholars from applying Foucault's discursive approach to the museum. The practice of Institutional Discourse Analysis is drawn greatly from techniques used in *Discipline and Punish*. In the development of this method, Foucault abstractly broke down the institution into the study of two separate structural aspects. The names he gave these structural aspects are institutional apparatuses and institutional technologies. Foucault was not very specific in his definition of either term, but visual studies scholar Gillian Rose has defined these terms more rigidly in her book *Visual Methodologies*. (Rose 2007, 174) According to Rose, an institutional apparatus is a larger structure, both metaphorically and physically, than an institutional technology. It is the structure that validates the power of the institution. (Rose 2007, 174) This can be a physical structure, like the architecture of the space, or a political structure, such as policies or bylaws that outline the collecting or funding expectations of the institution. Institutional technologies in contrast, are specific to each institution and apply directly to the practices of the day to day. Rose describes them as the "practical techniques used to practice power." (Rose 2007, 174) Institutional technologies often found in museums include hanging styles, the selection of works, placement of furniture, lighting, wall colour and media within gallery space, as well as didactic panels. These techniques combine to practice the institutional power that the museum receives through its larger apparatuses.

Techniques and practices that inform the production of didactics will be approached through these two categories. By framing the institution in these terms, this study will not only show how didactic panels are a form of institutional technology, but also how they are reliant on the larger institutional apparatuses that exist in a museum space, while acting as a fundamental validation for the power that these apparatuses supply. For example, the institutional technology of didactics relies on both the apparatus of architecture (which provides the walls to hang the didactics on) and apparatus of layout of the space (which partially dictates where the didactics and the paintings should hang) while the didactic panel and the art it accompanies solidifies the role of this architectural space as a museum or gallery. These technologies rely on each other for validation and power in an institutional setting.

Institutional Apparatuses

As stated previously, an institutional apparatus is the structure that validates the power of the institution, and architecture is one of these larger structures. The apparatus of architecture is both obvious and subtle in a museum space. Tony Bennett, in his book *The Birth of the Museum,* states that the external architecture of the museum separates it and marks it out as a buildings with a specific function. (Bennett 1995, 52) Museum architecture varies greatly, but a recent trend has been to expand museum buildings through large renovation projects designed by internationally renowned architects. The Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario, both in Toronto, have both recently hired internationally celebrated architects to design and build additions to their space.[1] Bennett focuses on the way that museum architecture often serves the function of

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[1] The Royal Ontario Museum hired architect Daniel Libeskind to design their expansion, whose notable museum projects include the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Denver Art Museum (USA), and the Imperial War Museum in Manchester (UK). The Art Gallery of Ontario hired Frank Gehry, whose notable museum projects include the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis (USA), MARTa Museum in Germany and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Spain).

presenting an impression of grandeur or enlightenment. (Bennett 1995, 52-53) Traditional museum architectural style incorporates external classical facades with Ionic or Corinthian columns. These architectural forms do not serve a physical function, but instead provide the building with features that create an environment of imposition in the name of "inspiration" and "enlightenment." (Bennett 1995, 52) Buildings with these types of columns were historically used in the design of places of worship: Greek and Roman temples and then later, early Christian churches who appropriated these spaces. (Bennett 1995, 53) It could be argued that the recent trend in museum architecture is simply a new approach to this outward appearance of religious worship, but instead of worshipping a god or goddess, these new architectural spaces are worshiping the figure of the internationally renowned architect. The most illustrative example of this is the Guggenheim Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry. This museum is widely known, but mostly for its outlandish and extravagant architectural design. Many critics have approached this space as an experience of architectural worship, while others maintain that the focus on the architecture of the museum draws away from the experience of the contents of the museum itself. (Lord 2006, 4) In either case, the Guggenheim Bilbao is a prime example of how the apparatus of museum architecture contributes to an emphasis on the experience of enlightenment through museum space. Whether this is through the appropriation of a style that designates a space as a religious building or through the worship of an architectural genius, the intent of museum architecture is to encourage visitors to distinguish the museum, and through its external appearance, inform the public that the contents have a special and acknowledged value. The architectural style places the museum firmly into the realm of the heterotopia, marking it visibly as a space that exists between the ideal of the utopia and the reality of common buildings.

The layout of museum space relates to the architecture, yet it exists as an institutional apparatus in itself. The way that space is constructed and how it influences movement can greatly change the way in which an institution is experienced. Cultural Studies scholar Mieke Bal in her book *Double Exposures,* uses the layout of the Asian People's Galleries at the American Museum of Natural History to expose the narrative within the organization of display. As she moves through the space, she finds that the Asian People's Galleries can be approached through two routes, the "spatial" or the "temporal" route. (Bal 1996, 28**)** The layout of the gallery encourages her to take the temporal option, as the spatial route "entails the likelihood of skipping the temporal one." (Bal 1996, 28) In this case the layout and floor plan of museum space changed the way that an exhibition was experienced. As Bal relates, layout is intricately tied to classification and narrative structure. The Asian Peoples Galleries could have been approached through what Bal identified as two narrative paths, and the fact that one narrative path was more navigable gave it preference over the other. In this case, the layout changed how the visitor moved through the gallery, illustrating how layout as an institutional apparatus exerts a form of power over the visitor.

Where Bal showed that layout can effect movement and approaches to the navigation of space, the layout of an exhibition space can also contribute to the grouping or classification of objects on display as well. Common categorizations of artistic works found in museums are: schools of artists, places of focus or works by one particular artist. These groupings are often used to show a narrative of development through time or schools, such as highlighting the peak of a period through exhibiting a "masterpiece" work. Curators organize other works of to build to this "masterpiece" as a climax, or culminate the exhibition with the work of the western modern day, signifying that this work is the climax of the pictorial narrative. (Bennett 1995, 52) The influence of layout is

also contributed to through signage and floor plans provided by the museum. Bennett calls this the "second-order invisible": where the arrangement of the layout contributes to an evolutionary narrative. He cites the example of the Musée des Monuments Français, which displayed works organized by period. The architecture and layout contributed to this "second-order invisible" by leading visitors through a chronological path that gradually introduced more natural light into the environment. This progressive lightening of the space hinted to the visitor that the final rooms filled with modern European art and artists, were the most evolved. (Bennett 1995, 166-167)

Bennett also focuses on the layout of museum space related to observation. The foundation of the public museum coincided with the change in prison architecture and structure as observed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Bennett compares the museum layout to the prison design of the panopticon, a building structure proposed by architect Jeremy Bentham in 1791. (Bennett 1995, 64) The design of this space made it so that the prisoners in their cell could be observed at all times from a central watch tower, creating a site of accountability through the "rendering of everything visible to the eye of power." (Bennett 1995, 64) Visitors to a gallery are observed much in the same way; at all times, either by close circuit cameras or a gallery guard. The layout of a gallery space dictates how the visitor will be observed. In addition to these technologies of observation, Bennett argues that the layout of space and behaviour expected in a gallery encourages visitors to observe and judge others who do not act within the prescribed correct ways of behaviour. (Bennett 1995, 64) This "correct" behaviour is encouraged through the layout, the observation of other visitors, architecture, the techniques of display and other institutional technologies that contribute to following the behavioural norm.

Institutional Technologies

Foucault described institutional technologies as "diffuse and disparate sets of bits and pieces." (Foucault 1977, 26) The practice of Institutional Discourse Analysis separates these institutional technologies from the apparatuses they support and studies how they both validate and distinguish the environments in which they exist. This study focuses on the didactic panel, defined as an institutional technology, and how these panels work within a framework of technologies of display to produce an overall effect. These institutional technologies are not standardized between institutions, but there are several different types of institutional technology that are found consistently throughout arts institutions. For the purposes of distinguishing these institutional technologies from other technologies associated with museum space, I will call institutional technologies, (as they are framed in Institutional Discourse Analysis), by the term "technologies of display." Technologies of display are pieces of media created and placed within a gallery that combine to create an intended experience for the visitor. These technologies of display exert power over the visitor to validate the architectural space of a gallery or museum environment. Some examples of commonly found technologies of display are didactic panels, sculpture wall mounts and stands, frames, furniture, lighting, wall colour and audio guides. Essentially, a technology of display is any piece of technology or media developed to confirm to the visitor that the space in which they are in is a museum or gallery. These technologies of display are carefully selected and installed to create an intended experience for the viewer. The way that the work is displayed, the colour of the walls, the placement of a didactic next to a work confirms to the visitor that what they are viewing is a work of art that is worth contemplation; it has been validated by the institution, and the technologies developed to support it confirm that. Also important is the combination of multiple elements, and how this combination makes technologies of display so

effective. A work of art becomes increasingly validated when multiple pieces of institutional technology are developed and used within an artistic institutional space to display it as a work of art.

Several theorists have approached their visits to cultural institutions by studying the technologies that shape their experience. In *Double Exposures*, Bal noticed a combination of institutional technologies and the intended experience they produced. In the analysis of the didactics surrounding a diorama presenting the Mbuti Pygmies, Bal first situated the display in its location, lighting and appearance. (Bal 1996, 200) Her analysis focuses on how the combination of these techniques of display creates a specific experience of the exhibit that is encouraged and facilitated by these technologies. Situating the panel within its technological space is required by Bal to position the reader in the space created by these technologies. Through her experience, she focused on how combined techniques of display emphasize the increased role of power that these they can achieve when they are built to work together towards a common goal.

Hanging style is a technology of display that can change the experience and activity of viewers. The common trend in hanging style is to present works in a linear, singular fashion. Paintings in particular, are hung at eye level with enough space on either side so that other works will not impinge on the view. As Rose points out, they are hung as "individual works" and their layout encourages visitors to "follow them round (the room), looking at each in turn." (Rose 2007, 185) This style is in conflict with the "salon style" of hanging that was practiced more commonly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The salon style consists of paintings hung close to each other and from floor to ceiling. Rose argues that the change in hanging style was due to changes in the classification and understanding of art and that this change in style both individualized the piece of art, and changed the way that art was viewed, as it allowed for the

contemplation of single pieces instead of the hanging of complementary works. (Rose 2007, 185)

Another important text in the study of institutional technologies is Pierre Bourdieu and Andre Darbel's sociological study, the *Love of Art*, which addresses visitor-use patterns in European museums. Bourdieu and Darbel gathered data surrounding museum use through a survey carried out in six countries. Though Bourdieu is not a discourse analyst, *The Love of Art* used the technique of widespread surveys to analyze the state of the visitor in the museum, and provides a base of information that has been widely used in the practice of Institutional Discourse Analysis of museums. Their study of the didactic panel and how it is used has contributed to the study of the didactic panel as an institutional technology, while the data gathered has provided a foundation for several scholars within the field of Institutional Discourse Analysis to build upon.

Bourdieu and Darbel studied the cultural make up of the visitor and how access to forms of knowledge valued by the institution changes experience. They also focused on the use patterns of didactic panels and how they differ between visitors with different levels of cultural and educational capital. One of the most interesting results from this survey was the observation that those in lower classes or with less extensive educational backgrounds were more likely to use the information panels provided. (Bourdieu and Darbel 1990, 49) Bourdieu and Darbel state that a reliance on informative material most likely stems from a lack of background in art and therefore a need or wish to fill the gaps in one's knowledge. (Bourdieu and Darbel 1990, 50) They relate a need for these media more to a recognition and acceptance of a lack of knowledge than a solution to this gap:

> "In fact arrows, notices, guidebooks, guides or receptionists would not really make up for a lack of education, but they would proclaim, simply by existing, the right to be uninformed, the right to be there and uninformed, and the right of the uninformed people to be there: they would help to minimize the apparent

inaccessibility of the works and of the visitors' feeling of unworthiness." (Bourdieu and Darbel 1990, 49)

Bourdieu's conclusion that a certain type of knowledge is required for the understanding and reception of art is echoed in Cultural Studies scholar, Stuart Halls' Encoding/Decoding model. Stuart Hall first developed the Encoding/Decoding model while examining the viewing of televisions news. The theory is referenced often in both Cultural Studies and Media Studies, providing a model to understand communication theory between broadcasters and audiences of all types. The Encoding/Decoding model states that the dominant cultural order encodes the model, and the audience, whether they belong to this dominant order or not, decodes the message. (Hall 1972, 97) Much like Bourdieu's statement, the dominant order of the museum and those who work there (and who have been educated within the dominant order of the art world) encode the information presented in the institutional space. This information is then decoded by the viewer, who use their own background and experience to internalize the information presented. Within this model, only those whose prior experience includes the information required to decode the encoded information are able to decode the message in the same way that it was encoded. (Hall 1973, 90)

Bennett uses the findings of Bourdieu and Darbel to formulate his theory of "the politics of the invisible." (Bennett 1995, 163) The findings of the survey state that the visitor to the art museum is more likely to be of a higher social class and educational level. Instead of focusing on the class of these visitors, Bennett highlights the knowledge that is required for the enjoyment and understanding of art on display. (Bennett 1995, 165) In this way, art theory is as important as class level or level of education in the appreciation of art and visitation of museum spaces. (Bennett 1995, 165) It is more likely that those within a certain class or with a certain level of education will have this familiarity with

theory that exposes the "invisible significancies" that are required for critical engagement with a work of art. (Bennett 1995, 165) Therefore it is a just as important for the visitor to have a background in art (as a result of either their class, education or interest) for them to understand the encoded significanies within gallery spaces.

Visitor Studies

Studies of museum visitors has inspired a whole field of study, aptly titled Visitor Studies. This methodology focuses intently on the experience and actions of the visitor. Visitor Studies has become very popular, as many museums incorporate the surveying and study of their visitors into their mandate. This field of study is not practiced only by scholars, as museum professionals and consultants also contribute. Museums are not the only site of inquiry for Visitor Studies scholars and practitioners, and visitor study techniques are used often in institutions like galleries, libraries, zoos, botanical gardens and archives. Within any space where the accommodation of visitors within institutional space is a consideration, the practice of Visitor Studies is applicable.

Techniques of Visitor Studies vary, but there are more widely recognized methods that reflect an ideal of best practices in the industry. These methods are: timing, tracking, interviewing and surveying. They can be used individually, but are often used in combination.

Visitor timing is a technique where the visitor is observed for the amount of time they spend engaging with a piece of institutional technology. (Stylianou-Lambert 2010, 130**)** The study can focus on the time spent in a space (how long do people spend in this exhibition?), the time spent viewing a work or reading a panel (which works are engaged with and for how long?), or the time spent in the museum as a whole (how long does it take to navigate the museum space?). Timing can be used to evaluate the success of an

exhibition or the popularity of a piece of work or panel. Problems surround this method, as it assumes that spending more time regarding a work or panel signifies agreement and enjoyment with that work. Evaluating the success of an exhibit purely through the amount of time spent within it ignores many factors surrounding reasons for spending time within that space. Indeed, it is possible that spending more time reading or viewing a work of art can just as easily signify a displeasure or disagreement with that media as it can signify an agreement or interest.

Tracking is often used with timing methods, as it is the observation of visitors and how they move through a space. The methodology of tracking often includes a museum employee discreetly following and noting the movement of a visitor during their time spent within a designated space. Tracking often includes notation of which works the visitor viewed and which media the visitor engaged with. In combination with timing, tracking practices can be used to evaluate how certain aspects of exhibitions are performing and how often visitors engage with media. It can also be used to inform planning of future exhibitions in the same space, if trends of movement are observed.

Surveys and interviews are a method used by museums to receive a more qualitative response from visitors. Visitors can be approached through a variety of methods, including short interviews as they exit exhibitions or the museum [2], or online surveys that are facilitated by the museum's website. Short interview formats are common practice, and often include questions of a quantitative nature with the intent of numerating these answers. (Did you enjoy this exhibit? How would you rate it on a scale of 1-10?) (Serrell 1996, 224)

It is important to remember that these methods are often used as evaluation tools to determine the success of exhibitions or displays. They can also be used in long term

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[2] Often called (again aptly) exit interviews

planning and to help secure funding. The current trend, however, is to use these in short term projects related to time specific exhibition schedules. (Serrell 1996, 226) This can be problematic, as short term studies do not reveal use patterns over time and place greater value on short term exhibitions and those who visit them. As John Falk relates in his work *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, short term evaluation methods focus on the visit itself and not the motivations for this visit, thereby restricting the field and greatly reducing its capacity for value. (Falk 2009, 34-35) Beverly Serrell, in her museum handbook *Exhibit Labels* echoes this sentiment in her cautioning of museum professionals: "...too often, however, there is a tendency to jump to conclusions about all visitors based on one case study or even a single anecdote." (Serrell 1996, 136)

John Falk is a prominent and well known visitor researcher. A strategy that he has employed often in his work is that of audience segmentation, or visitor typing. This strategy was first used as a marketing tool, to target segments of the population with specific advertisements. (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 128) Museums began using this method in the hopes of "improving visitor experiences and developing products and position in the leisure marketplace." (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 128) The practice of audience segmentation requires the visitor analyst to group visitors into categories based on demographics: for example, age, gender, race, class status, or education level. Falk calls these demographic groupings "big 'I' identities." (Falk 2009, 73) Falk tries to move away from this trend of grouping visitors based on their demographic status, and instead advocates for the grouping of visitors based on the construction of their identity and motivations for visiting a museum space. Falk advocates for a contrasting model based on the classification of visitors though "little 'i' identities," which are characterized by "behavioral and self reported characteristics." (Falk 2009, 73) (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 129) By focusing on "little 'i'" characteristics, Falk develops five categories of the museum

visitor. He names these categories after the visitors presumed motivations for visiting a museum space: the explorer, the facilitator, the experience seeker, the professional/hobbyist and the recharger. (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 129) Using his research, Falk proposes models to create exhibits that would appeal to these groupings of visitors and provides techniques about how to evaluate museum practices by using his model.

I personally find any model that groups and standardizes the actions and motivations of the visitor to be problematic. This technique is reductionist in practice and undermines the visitor's motivations and experience in favour of placing them in categories that are simplified and stereotyped. Instead of trying to understand how to make the museum an open and accessible space, visitor typing acts as another form of power exertion over the visitor. By recognizing a small number of groupings (whether based on demographic characteristics or other characteristics, as seen in Falk's model) the museum places a greater emphasis on the visitors who fit into these models, and excuse their lack of focus on those who do not fit into the models by insisting on using this system. Emily Dawson, PhD Candidate at Kings College London and Eric Jensen, a professor in Sociology at the University of Warwick, recently wrote an article for the journal Visitor Studies regarding the fact that that traditional Visitor Studies models only focus on visitor time spent within a museum. Their recommendation for museums and Visitor Studies professionals is to move away from typing models and instead investigate the visitor from outside the museum space. This theory rests on the assumption that museums hope to increase viewership: Dawson and Jensen argue that instead of focusing on the small portion of the population that are frequent museum visitors, museums should instead focus energy on the nontraditional market. Indeed, if increasing viewership is the museum's intent, this model and more importantly, the movement away from typing models will be invaluable to museums meeting these goals.

Museum Studies

The recent practice of requiring a graduate level education when hiring museum sector employees has led to the widespread adoption of master degree level programs in Museum and Curatorial Studies. These programs have been criticized for institutionalizing the practice of museum management and standardizing approaches to museum space. An investigation of this type of literature can be used to better understand the ways that these programs approach the function and style of information media, and what is considered best practice in the industry.

Museum Studies include: the study of the museum as an institution, the study of the visitor, and the study of possible ways that a museum can and should operate. It is this last form of literature within Museum Studies that will be explored here, as manuals and articles about best practices for the development and deploying of didactic panels provide a standard with which to evaluate the methods used by institutions.

As institutions reevaluate their position and increasingly move towards an educative role, the role of the didactic panel has moved away from attributing credit to an artist or identifying a work of art, and has instead moved towards acting as a mediator between the museum and the visitor. The didactic is increasingly seen as the provider of the fundamental information needed to educate, and enlighten the visitor.

The rise of the didactic panel as a hot topic within the discipline has also resulted in a boom in publishing of guides and manuals for the production of these panels. One of these manuals is *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach,* by Beverly Serrell, a museum exhibition consultant who provides services to institutions looking for assistance in crafting labels, planning exhibition concepts and evaluating exhibitions. (Serrell and Associates) *Exhibit Labels* provides a handbook for museum practitioners to produce

exhibit labels geared towards engaging the visitor and providing a positive experience. Serrell outlines the best practices in the industry as explored through her experience and, through her handbook, provides the interested museum professional with best practices surrounding content, hanging style, typography and evaluating past work. *Exhibit Labels* approaches didactic panels through an analysis of their function, style and evaluation in the museum field.

I will be performing a critical analysis of this manual and its intent to reveal some of the underlying assumptions surrounding the best practices in the production of didactic panels. Though this is only one of a large number of manuals produced surrounding didactics and information labels, it is arguably the most cited manual of this subject matter and it reflects the knowledge practiced by Serrell, who has been hired by museums and cultural institutions around the world to provide the advice found in this publication.

Analysis of *Exhibit Labels* reveals several major themes and areas of best practice that Serrell finds instrumental in the production of successful didactic labels. First of these is the provision of a thesis statement, or what Serrell calls a "big idea." This reflects common practice in the industry to organize and curate exhibitions around a comprehensive theme or thesis. Serrell feels that a "big idea" is important because without it, it is impossible to create an organized and comprehensive exhibit. (Serrell 1996, 1-2) This ties into the second theme that she emphasizes, that of the importance of the linear, intended path of the visitor. As Serrell states, "Visitor research studies have shown that visitors who understand the organization of the exhibition and use it in the intended sequence, (if there is one), spend more time and get more out of it." (Serrell 1996, 22) This "intended sequence" is a result of the provision of a thesis statement of the exhibition and organization of a sequence around the illustration of this thesis. This organization of space

and the placement of labels illustrates the role of the exhibition as a more educative than illustrative medium. It also highlights the fact that it is possible for a visitor to approach an exhibition through an "incorrect" path, which Serrell believes can be solved through labeling and didactics that can clearly show the visitor what the "right" way to approach the exhibition is. (Serrell 1996, 21)

Knowing the audience is another important factor in Serrell's work and because of this, Serrell emphasizes the importance knowing who is visiting your institution while performing Visitor Studies evaluation. She firmly believes that evaluation is necessary in the practice of planning and hosting exhibitions, and an evaluation of methods should be selected and carried out by museum professionals. This emphasis by Serrell points to the increasing importance of the Visitor Studies discipline and the focus of the museum on the experience of the visitor. Her definitions of "positive" and "appropriate" responses to exhibits also highlights what she believes characterizes a successful strategy. In discussing a successful exhibit evaluation, Serrell highlights the fact that visitors spent more time in the exhibition, read more of the labels and that; "visitors could remember general ideas from the exhibition and they reported learning specific new concepts, making new connections and finding personally relevant meanings in specific elements of the exhibit."(Serrell 1996, 223) Serrell's focus on these elements shows what the goal of the production of didactics is within this institution: the visitor should be seen to engage with these panels, spend time engaging with them and most importantly, learn something and remember what the media contain.

Serrell's other themes focus on the technical aspects of writing and hanging didactics. Technically, Serrell believes that the amount of text on the wall should not overwhelm or distract the visitor. (Serrell 1996, 22) She emphasizes that the practitioner must keep in mind the location of the didactic and that the visitors are "standing, time

limited readers." (Serrell 1996, 90) Size of font is also important to Serrell, as is type of font, though she emphasizes that there are many different kinds of fonts that she believes can be appropriate and successful in museum space. It is possible that Serrell's style guide will be the most referenced portion of her book, as museum professionals recognize that it doesn't matter what you print on a label if no one can read it. Serrell's style guide interestingly seems to be the most flexible part of her approach, as she emphasizes that many different fonts are usable in a museum space, and that good design of the content will always encourage visitors to read the media.

Serrell's themes and approach to didactics highlight the ways that the institutional technology is approached by the industry, and is quite illustrative of the trends that can be observed. The focus on the sequential movement of the visitor and correct ways to view exhibitions indicates movement towards the educational function of the museum and the role of the didactic in this formation. The standardization of approaches to didactics also highlights the increased regulation of the discipline, clearly marking an intended path for the creation and placement of exhibit labels within museum and gallery spaces. As the analysis of Serrell's text has shown, it is the goal of the institution to use the technology of the didactic in a primarily educative function. This must be remembered as the goal of an institution when providing didactics determines how they are written, displayed and used.

Chapter 2

Part 1 - An Introduction to Institutions Studied

This research was undertaken at three Canadian art institutions: the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA). To begin researching and understanding the impact that information media have on visitors, I adopted a commonly used Visitor Studies method as my first approach. This method is participant observation, where practitioners spend time in selected gallery spaces and observe how visitors engage with the space. The majority of this research was conducted in the McMichael Collection, with data gathered at the AGO and MMFA providing contextualizing and contrasting data. For the second portion of this research I chose to complete interviews with visitors at these institutions, which will be addressed in Chapter Three.

Methodology

Participant Observation techniques are widely used within cultural institutions, primarily to evaluate engagement levels with identified media and understand paths and circulation patterns. Goals in completing an observation study were to use a technique often used in museums, and investigate how visitors were engaging with didactics and how the placement of these didactics and didactic styles changed engagement rate.

Before beginning this study, common techniques used in tracking studies were investigated. The most useful guides were found in the evaluation chapter of Beverly Serrell's *Exhibit Labels* and an article in the journal *Visitor Studies* by Steven Yalowitch and Kerry Bronnenkant titled "Timing and Tracking: Unlocking Visitor Behaviour." (Yalowitch and Bronnenkant 2009, 47-64) According to Yalowitch and

Bronnenkant, tracking data can be used to "determine the relative success of the exhibition, inform placement of exhibits in the future, understand visitor paths and circulation patterns and restructure label systems based on data about visitors' reading behaviour." (Yalowitch and Bronnenkant 2009, 61) They also state that tracking methods are some of the most commonly used techniques for exhibition evaluation and visitor study, though the factors that each museum chooses to track varies widely. (Yalowitch and Bronnenkant 2009, 60) Using these sources, techniques that fit best the goals and needs of the study were formulated.

Yalowitch and Bronnenkant suggest identifying the factors that will be observed before beginning any study, as the factors observed determines which techniques will be used. The factors observed in this study include engagement rates with different types of didactics, as well as visitor paths of movement. At the time of this study, I was completing an internship at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. The head curator and CEO of the McMichael were interested in the demographics of the visitors in their collection, so I offered to include some demographic observations in my study if they would let me conduct the study during work hours. Observations about the percentage of visitors who were in groups of three or more as well as the percentage of visitors who were accompanied by children or were children themselves were also included.

Two techniques were used in this methodology. The first of these measured engagement percentages with didactic panels. The total number of visitors who entered the gallery during each observation session were recorded, as were the number of people who engaged with a certain type of media. To do this, I would stand in the gallery with a clipboard and a chart, and a notation would be added to a chart for each visitor entering the gallery and then a separate notation for each time they engaged with a certain type of didactic. Each visitors engagement with a didactic would only be recorded once (for

example, if a visitor was observed engaging with two tombstone panels, they would still only merit one notation within the tombstone label box). Choosing to measure the use of didactics in this way gave engagement percentages (what percentage of the total visitors engaged with each type of didactic) but could not measure how often each specific didactic was used, or how often a visitor used a certain type of didactic. Though those factors would have been interesting to study, they would have required a great deal more time and attention to complete accurately, and the engagement differences between the use of certain didactic types was the primary intent of this study. To determine if a didactic was being engaged with, a model proposed by Yalowitch and Bronnenkant called the "attending to", was used. This model states that a visitor is engaging with a portion of the exhibit when they stop for two-seconds, with body language that shows a level of engagement with the material. (Yalowitch and Bronnenkant 2009, 51) Serrell recommends defining engagement through the visitor having two feet planted along with spending two or more seconds stopped, but as Yalowitz identifies, visitors can engage with certain materials while continuing to move because of this, the "attending to" model was selected. (Yalowitch and Bronnenkant 2009, 51)

The second portion of this study was the analysis of use patterns and paths of movement between the spaces. To investigate this, a random visitor was selected and their movement was mapped on a layout of the gallery. The target was to complete five of these mapping studies per hour. Visitor movement through the space was tracked on a gallery layout, including which didactics or works they engaged with, and demographic data surrounding the size of the group the visitors were in, their gender, estimated age and a rough estimate of the overall amount of time that they spent within the exhibit. The selection of visitors was completely random, with the only factor restricting selection

resting on the requirement of a previous mapping study to be completed before another was started.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection was selected as the main site of inquiry because I participated in an internship there during the summer of 2011. The access that this internship afforded me to members of the staff and the access and resources the position provided made it an obvious site for the main body of research. The Art Gallery of Ontario was selected as a contrasting site to the McMichael because though it displayed a great deal of works by the same artists featured in the McMichael, it presented them in a completely different style of hanging and presentation. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was selected to provide a contrast to the two Ontario institutions, and investigate current didactic presentation styles, as the Canadian Galleries opened a week before research began.

All institutions studied were art museums - this decision to focus only on art museums stemmed from a familiarity with Art Museum spaces on the part of the author, the unique opportunity that the internship at the McMichael Canadian Art collection offered and the availability within all museums of the opportunity to study art of a similar period and style, with many pieces in the spaces studied created by the same group of artists. Though an approach of contrasting art museums to other types of museums (science museums, or botanical gardens as examples) was a possible approach, I felt that a more in depth study of one type of institution would draw out an analysis that could then be contrasted and complimented through other studies of the same nature.

Spatial Impressions

This section is intended to explore and detail the realities of the galleries observed during this study. Each gallery and institution is unique, and an understanding of the

realities of their location, layout and setting are required to fully understand where this research was completed and how results were formulated.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection:

The McMichael Canadian Art collection is located in Kleinburg Ontario, about 40 minutes north of downtown Toronto. The collection is unique in that it is located within a public forest containing a network of public hiking trails. The McMichael Collection began as a summer home of Signe and Robert McMichael, noted art collectors and friends of the members of the Group of Seven. The McMichaels donated their art collection and home to the Province of Ontario in 1965, with the request that the land and gallery be used to display Canadian works of art. Until very recently, the collection policy of the McMichael (dictated by the Ontario Provincial Government) only allowed the gallery to collect works of art by the Group of Seven, their contemporaries, and Canadian Inuit and Aboriginal artists. (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport) Because of this restricted policy, the McMichael is most well known for its collection of works by the Group of Seven and other prominent Canadian artists of the time. The location of the gallery is somewhat isolated: to reach the gallery from downtown Toronto, visitors must travel about forty-five minutes, driving across the highway 401, up the highway 400 and then on local highways to the McMichael. Most visitors arrive by car, as public transit options are few and infrequent.

The architecture of the McMichael reflects its beginnings, as it is constructed to correlate with the original McMichael cabin with rustic features. It was last renovated in the 1980s, brining the gallery to its current 80, 000 square feet (Canadian Encyclopedia: McMichael Canadian Art Collection). The layout is sprawling and sequential, as the

visitor travels through the fourteen galleries processionally, eventually completing a circuit.

The choice of the McMichael as the site for the main body for this research determined what other institutions would be observed and compared to the data gathered at the McMichael. In the name of consistency, any other institutions selected for observation would be art gallery spaces, instead of museums or historical institutions. The type of art hanging within the galleries should be also be consistent and feature painting instead of sculptural or installation works. Finally, one of the galleries selected for observation within the McMichael was hung in the salon style. Salon style is a hanging style that was first used in the seventeenth centuries in the Parisian salons. (Rose 2007, pg 185) It is characterized by hanging multiple paintings over a small wall space, within the entirety of the space, both vertically and horizontally. The choice of the Parisian salons to hang their work in this manner rested in the commercial need to display the most amount of work within the least amount of space. A current trend involves using the salon style, as many museums in renovations and redesigns have incorporated it into galleries showing a variety of works. Beth Lord traces the origins of this trend to a recognition of the limitations of the "didactic model" traditionally used in museum space. In using the salon style, institutions hope to "encourage visitors to consider how objects are related to concepts and categories" (Lord 2006, 7) The difference in hanging styles within the McMichael presented an interesting comparison, and because of this, one gallery in each institution was chosen for observation that utilized the salon style. These consistencies restricted which galleries could be investigated, but they provided a base with which to evaluate the galleries within other institutions, and reduced the amount of variation between the institutions, providing a more telling study of didactic use patterns.

<u>The Art Gallery of Ontario:</u>

The Art Gallery of Ontario is located in downtown Toronto, and is accessible by subway, streetcar, car, and by foot. Opened in 1910, the AGO is Ontario's largest art gallery and the collection features works by both Canadian and international artists. Their mandate states that the mantra "Art Matters" serves the foundation of their practice, and they wish to "become the imaginative centre of our city and province". (Art Gallery of Ontario) The AGO is much larger both in size and scope than the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, and a recent architectural renovation by architect Frank Gehry has firmly placed it as a major tourist attraction in Toronto.

Observation sessions were held in the Canadian Art Collection of the gallery. The AGO has two collections of Canadian Art: first of these being the Thompson collection, which features works donated by prominent art collector Ken Thompson as impetus for the renovation of the gallery in 2008. The Thompson collection resides in twenty galleries on the North side of the second floor. The other collection of Canadian art was acquired by the AGO before the renovation and is hosted in nineteen galleries located in the East wing of the second floor. The layout of the Canadian collection is almost labyrinth-like, with each room leading into two or three others and multiple galleries visible from within each. The second floor of the AGO hosts the Canadian Collection almost exclusively, with the temporary exhibition space as the only space that does not feature Canadian content. The Thompson collection, in particular, is featured in large rooms with soaring ceilings and skylights that fill the rooms with natural light.

The AGO was chosen as a site for investigation because of the type of contrast it could provide to the McMichael. Though they both feature large and prominent collections of Canadian Art and works by the Group of Seven in particular, the galleries differ widely. The modern and new architecture of the AGO contrasts with the more

rustic style of the McMichael, and the recent renovation by Frank Gehry has made the AGO a destination based purely on the architectural innovation featured. The collection policies of both institutions differ widely as well, as the AGO collects international works along with Canadian works from a great variety of periods and schools, and their collection policy has never been affected by the policies of the Ontario government. Finally, the location of the AGO, within the downtown core of Toronto, contrasts greatly with the isolated location of the McMichael.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts:

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is located in downtown Montreal and is accessible by metro, bus, car and foot. It is Montreal's largest museum, was founded in 1847, and is also Canada's oldest arts institution. (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, About the MMFA) The mandate of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is to provide access to works of art by Canadian and international artists. In particular, the MMFA has stated a commitment to collect works of art within the genres of "Ancient Cultures, European Art, Canadian Art, Inuit and Amerindian Art, Contemporary Art and Decorative Arts." (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, About the MMFA) The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts also has a free admission policy, which they have adopted to "make our cultural heritage accessible to the greatest number of people." (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, About the MMFA) The Canadian collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has recently reopened and is now hosted within a new pavilion, designed to double the amount of space for the exhibition of Canadian Art at the MMFA. The layout of this pavilion (named the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion after two prominent patrons of the museum) is vertical and spread over seven floors. Each floor is organized around a period of Canadian art history, except for the fifth floor, which displays the museum's Inuit art

collection. Movement between the galleries is facilitated by two elevators and a staircase. At the time of my research, the Canadian pavilion had just opened amid great attention and fanfare from the local media.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was chosen as a location for investigation because of two factors: the first of these was the fact that as a student in Montreal, I was interested in completing my research within a local institution. This location was chosen to also provide a contrast to the two Ontario-based galleries.

Figure 1: Example of Tombstone Label
Photograph taken by author at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC, February 2011

Didactic Styles

Three types of didactic were identified and selected for observation during this study. This decision rested on the amount of types showcased at each gallery and the fact that all three styles were found in every gallery observed. The definition and categorization of each type was identified through study of Museum Studies texts as well as the definition of types used in practice by the curators at the McMichael. The categories of didactic panel investigated were the tombstone label, the extended label and the overview label.

The tombstone label is the most commonly found didactic within art gallery spaces. Its function is to identify a work of art and attribute it to the correct artist. Though there isn't a standard regarding what information should be contained on these labels, most feature the name of the artist, years in which the artist was born and died (if applicable),

nationality of the artist, name of the work, date(s) in which it was completed, medium of the work, and finally the donation or purchase information. (See Figure 1)

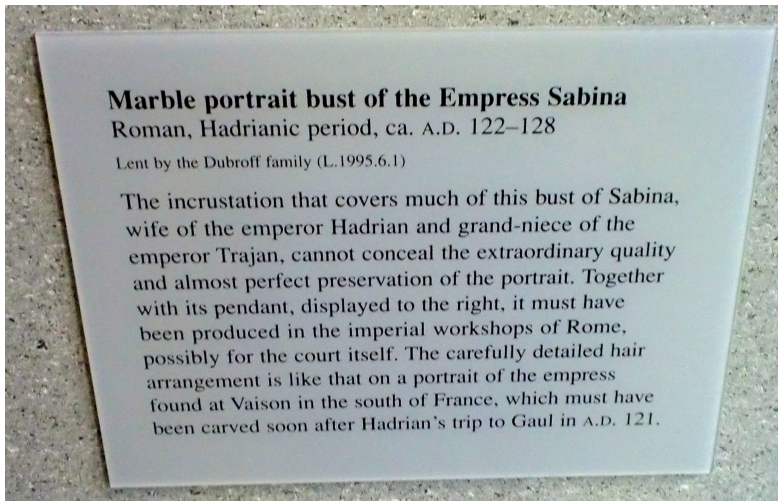The function of an extended label is to expand upon the information provided within a tombstone label. Because of the flexibility of this definition, this type of label features the greatest amount of variation. Most commonly however, extended labels are used to explain themes within an exhibition (which

Figure 2: Example of Extended Label
Photograph taken by Author at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, May 2011

could be period-based, artist-based, movement-based , etc.) or to expand on a particular work of art. At times, extended labels can be used to explain the history of a gallery or the donator of a collection. There is no restriction on the kind of content that can appear in these labels. (See Figure 2)

The final type of didactic that I observed is the overview panel. An overview panel is often found at the beginning of an exhibition, and serves to present a curatorial statement, providing the viewer with the thesis or intent of the exhibition. (See Figure 3) It should also be noted that didactic labels can be provided in book or brochure format, in addition to, or instead of a didactic hung on a wall.

Part 2 - Participant Observation Study

Methodology

Gallery Selection

The selection of galleries within the McMichael greatly influenced which galleries could be selected at the other institutions. In

Figure 3: Example of Overview Panel
Photograph take by author in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec, October 2011

particular, the decision to observe a gallery hung in the salon style revealed a pattern of use that led to a choice to include galleries using salon style in all institutions that were observed. The exhibitions selected for observation were titled *Ivan Eyre: Sculpture in Context* and *Modernity in Canada.* These exhibitions were held in Galleries Six and One, respectively. *Ivan Eyre: Sculpture in Context*, which was held in Gallery Six featured works of painting and drawing by Ivan Eyre who had recently donated a collection of sculptures to the McMichael for display in the new sculpture garden. The gallery itself is a large rectangular room with a temporary wall separating the room in the middle of the gallery. The ceiling height is about 10 feet tall and the far east wall is full of floor-to-ceiling windows, overlooking the local forest. (See Figure 4) Upon entering the gallery visitors were greeted by two large overview panels, in both English and French, featuring a small biography of Eyre on the left and a timeline of his career on the right. Each work was accompanied by a small tombstone panel hung to the side of the work. The exhibition also used extended labels to draw out themes found in Eyre's work. Gallery Six can be entered from two directions, either from Gallery Five, which held an exhibition showing the work of Canadian artists that that addressed the theme of "women", or Gallery Seven, which

was at the time hosting an exhibition of contemporary aboriginal photography on loan from the National Gallery of Canada.

Gallery One, the space that held *Modernity in Canada*, is one of two possible entry points into the McMichael Collection and features high vaulted ceilings with wooden beams. The gallery itself is a long ramp that leads the visitor from the entry atrium into the appropriated former McMichael home. *Modernity in Canada* featured on one wall, singular works by each member of the Group of Seven, and on the opposing wall hung in a salon style the works of Canadian artists who were active at the same time as the Group of Seven. The wall featuring the work of the Group of Seven used tombstone labels to attribute the work, while the works on the salon wall could be identified by consulting a brochure hung on the opposing wall in a clear plastic case. At the base of the ramp, two overview panels were hung presenting the curatorial thesis of the exhibition in English and French.

To keep data consistent between the AGO and McMichael, two galleries were selected that had similarities to those observed at the McMichael. The first of these was the Tom Thompson room, within the recently opened Thompson Collection of Canadian Art. When Ken Thompson donated his collection of Canadian Art to the Art Gallery of Ontario he specified that he did not want to use traditional didactic labels in the installation. Instead, he wanted the collection to feel like "home" for the viewer; a consideration that found its way into the architecture of the space as well. (Adamson et al. 2009, 12) "Ken wanted the works displayed in an atmosphere where the viewer could feel "at home." ... he liked the idea of a series of rooms that led one into the other so that people could walk through 'chapters' of his collection." (Adamson et al. 2009, 12) The Tom Thompson room is a small rectangular room within this series, open on two sides. When standing in the centre of the room, six other galleries within the collection are

Figure 4: Layout of Gallery Six of McMichael Canadian Art Collection, with notation showing didactic types used and placement.

visible, and there is fluidity between the spaces. The ceilings are high and filled with natural light from overhead skylights. In the centre of the room is a small bench and table. The didactics used in this room were sparse and minimal. There were no tombstone labels on the wall: instead identifying materials were printed in a small brochure and placed in a white box on the wall. The overview label was just a small panel, with the name of the gallery and a small statement about the artist. The final piece of didactic material within the gallery was a book about the collection, placed on the table next to the bench.

The second gallery observed at the AGO was Gallery 234, which featured an exhibition titled *Art and Influence*. This room was hung fully in the salon style with three walls completely covered in paintings from floor to ceiling. (See Figure 5) Unlike the Tom Thompson gallery, only two different galleries could be seen from the middle of the room.

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A metal guide line placed one foot away from the wall restricted the movement of visitors and the centre of the room featured a bench and two pedestals, which held the didactic

Figure 5: Installation photo of AGO Gallery 234. Photograph accessed from the Art Gallery of Ontario Website http://www.ago.net

information. This placement of furniture encouraged visitors to follow the perimeter of the room while walking. The overview panel was located on a pedestal with an angled surface. Tombstone labels were offered on a piece of laminated paper that identified where the works were within the salon hanging. Finally, a small brochure was provided for visitors and placed within a box on the side of the bench.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was the final institution visited, and it also displayed another gallery that used the salon style of hanging. This exhibition combined two walls in the salon style of hanging, with the remainder of the works hung in the singular style. (See Figure 6) The centre of the room was used to showcase a collection of sculptures, both in bronze and marble. This combination of hanging styles resulted in a large room with a variety of ways to look at the works on display. With regard to didactics, tombstones in both English and French were hung next to each painting or sculpture. A large percentage of works were also accompanied by an extended label detailing a historical fact or anecdote about the work. There was also another form of extended label employed throughout the gallery, which served to differentiate themes within the exhibit. The salon wall was accompanied by a one-page brochure that

identified the works. Finally, upon entering the gallery, there was an extensive overview panel which detailed historical facts about the period showcased in the exhibition.

The second gallery chosen for observation is the first floor exhibit titled *Towards Modernism.* Though it would have been ideal to observe the entirety of this exhibit, the layout cut off the sight lines that are necessary to complete an observation study of this nature. Only one room of the exhibition was observed because of this, titled *Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven.* The content of this room tied it closely to the exhibits

Figure 6: Installation photograph showing Salon Style Installation in Exhibition *Era of Annual Exhibitions,* Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec.
Photograph accessed from Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Website: http://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/collections/art-quebec-canada

observed in both the AGO and the McMichael. The didactic style is similar to the style found within the *Area of Annual Exhibitions* gallery, with tombstones next to each work and expanded labels detailing more about the paintings as well as highlighting themes or schools within the greater gallery. There was also an overview panel for this room, which described a brief history about the Group of Seven and Tom Thompson and their contribution to Canadian art. Next to each work was a tombstone in English and French, and several works featured an extended paragraph about their history. In the centre of the

room was a bench that helped facilitate traffic around the perimeter of the room. The room itself was open with half walls delineating the space as a separate room, and the other rooms within the gallery were visible. The rooms adjacent to the Group of Seven room featured the work of Marc Aurele Fortin as well as works about printmaking practices of the early 1900s.

Methodological Differences

The observation strategy at the McMichael differed from the strategies employed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the AGO. At the McMichael I was given a period of sixteen days to observe the two galleries selected. One hour of each work day for sixteen days was spent observing one of the galleries and each gallery was observed for a total of eight hours.

I was not able to conduct observation sessions in the same way at the AGO and MMFA because of time constraints and issues with permissions. I was provided with one day of observation at each institution, and this made necessary my observation of each space over a more condensed period. Where I was able to spend eight days observing each gallery at the McMichael, I was only able to spend one day observing each gallery at the MMFA and AGO. This is why the data gathered at the AGO and MMFA is considered to be contrasting and contextualizing data to the main body of data gathered at the McMichael.

Data Gathering Process

Participant observation and movement tracking was undertaken within the galleries that were being observed. For each session, I would bring a clip board with a chart to input visitor data on (see appendix) and copies of layouts of the gallery to map visitor

Engagement Percentages
Percentage of Visitors who engaged
with different didactic types

movement. I next chose a space within the gallery where I could be out of the way of visitor traffic and have a vantage point that would make the whole of the gallery visible to me. I was given a badge of identification at the McMichael Canadian Art collection and dressed professionally during all observation sessions. In each gallery I had to identify myself to security personnel within each gallery and describe to them why I was there

Figure 7: Table showing engagement percentage differences between instiutions

	Tombstone Labels	Extended Labels	Overview Labels
McMichael Canadian Art Collection	75.5%	31.0%	32.3%
	426 of 574	175 of 574	182 of 564
Art Gallery of Ontario	19.6%	4.3%	12.4%
	41 of 209	9 of 209	26 of 209
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts	76.3%	65.5%	25.2%
	212 of 278	182 of 278	70 of 278

although they had all been alerted of my presence in advance. Security personnel were often very interested in my project and would engage me in conversation about what I was doing. They often contributed to the project by pointing out patterns of movement that they saw during their shifts and how certain pieces of media were interacted with on a daily basis. This gave me a reference point of what to look for within each gallery and helped me to settle in the space quicker. Important to note is that the combination of how I was dressed, what I was carrying and how I interacted with security personnel clearly marked me as someone who was validated by the museum to conduct research in their space.

Permissions

One of the biggest steps taken during research in these institutions was receiving permission to complete it. At the McMichael, this process included talking to the Senior Curator and to the CEO of the gallery, and clearly identify to them what would be happening in the gallery and for how long. Both the Senior Curator and CEO were

Figure 8: Graph showing differences in engagement percentages between institutions

interested in this research, but they were also interested in how they could use this research in the future. After meeting with them several times, it was agreed that research could be conducted during work hours if I included two additional observations: the percentage of visitors who arrive in a group and the percentage of visitors who were children or accompanied by children. Another byproduct of having this permission was that staff members felt comfortable enough to contribute to this research and to speak about their experiences within the gallery spaces. Speaking with gallery guides and

security guards quickly became invaluable to my research, as their observations of use patterns and trends helped situate me in the space more quickly.

Results

Observation data revealed results that can be organized into several conclusions. Many of these surround engagement percentages between the institutions, and how these percentages varied between types of didactic presented. Several conclusions through the mapping data collected regarding the ways that layout and hanging style can influence how visitors move through museum space.

Engagement Percentages:

Engagement percentages differed between institutions. In particular, three observations revealed themselves as requiring further investigation:

> 1. The AGO has significantly lower engagement percentages than both other institutions. The McMichael and the MMFA, though similar in overview and tombstone engagement percentages, have a large difference in extended label percentages.
> 2. Overview panel engagement percentages remained fairly consistent between all three institutions.

An explanation for these observations can be made by taking a closer look at the institutions and their practice surrounding didactic panels.

As it can be seen in figures 7 and 8 the engagement percentages observed at the AGO were much lower in all three didactic types than those found at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the McMichael Collection. I believe that this is a result of a combination of the amount of didactics available at the Art Gallery of Ontario, how these didactics were presented, and the layout of the galleries observed.

The AGO offered the least amount of didactics in the institutions studied. In the Tom Thompson gallery there were no tombstone labels on the wall, a small overview label, the provision of a catalogue of the exhibition that served as an extended label, and the provision of tombstones were provided within a brochure that was hung on the wall in a white box. In the *Art and Influence* gallery, the tombstones were offered in a brochure and only the overview panel was visible
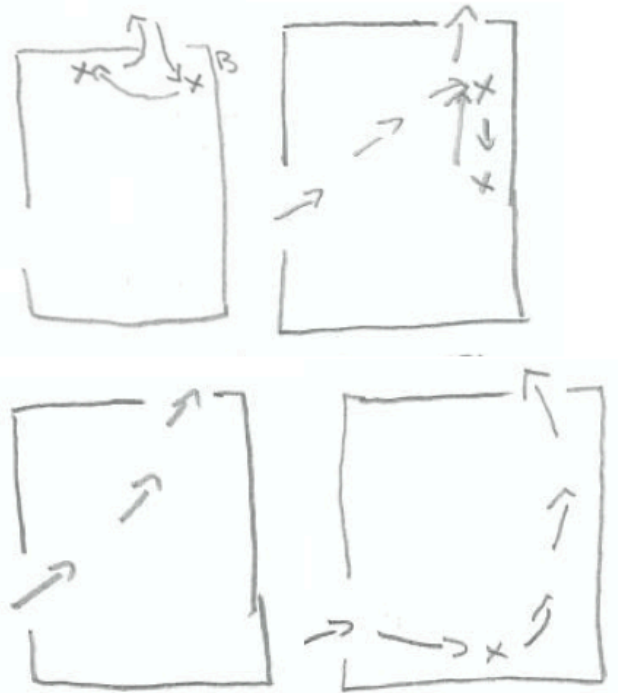

Figure 9: Examples of movement maps showing typical movement patterns in Tom Thompson Gallery of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario. Movement maps completed October, 2011

when entering the gallery space. To find the tombstone and extended labels the visitor had to look either on the bench or in pockets on the side of the bench. These were also offered in limited quantities, so if all copies were being used, visitors would have to wait until another visitor was finished with the media to engage with it.

The layout of the AGO also encouraged movement between gallery spaces, echoing the goal of Ken Thompson in creating an "at home" and "chapter" based experience within these galleries, and this is tied to the visuality and layout of the spaces. (Adamson et al. 2009, 12) As the visitor enters the gallery space, they see the multitude of open spaces beyond, and are drawn to keep moving and exploring the subsequent galleries. Stephanie Moser, a professor at the University of Southampton who specializes in the "construction of knowledge about the past through visual images, museum displays and exhibitions, wrote an article titled *"The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of*

Knowledge" that summarizes this effect and investigates it as a result of the visual nature of museum layout.

> *"Visitors often experience an exhibition in the context of viewing other galleries, and thus it is inevitable that they will make comparisons between them, either consciously or subconsciously. Additionally, elements of other galleries might be visible upon entering an exhibition, and the glimpses gained of other rooms and collections can affect what is being seen."* (Moser 2010, 28)

In my field notes I described this as a "labyrinth effect." The layout of small rooms and the high visibility of other galleries within the Canadian galleries created a space that encourages fluidity of movement. The movement maps completed within the space reinforces this assumption, especially when compared to those mapped in the McMichael collection. Visitors spent less time in gallery spaces and moved more between galleries, often backtracking and revisiting spaces that they already viewed. (for examples of this please see Figure 9). One could then draw the conclusion that visitor engagement with didactics and didactic panels is reliant on the accessible provision of these labels as well as the ease of finding and using them while in the space. Another conclusion could be made that a "labyrinth" like layout leads to a fluid movement between gallery spaces and therefore a smaller amount of time spent within each gallery space and a smaller chance of interaction with didactic material.

The second result surrounds the data shows in figures 6 and 7. This data shows a discrepancy between the extended label engagement percentages found at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the McMichael collection. The MMFA and McMichael have similar engagement percentages of overview and tombstone label usage, (Figure 7) yet when looking at the engagement percentage of extended labels there is a difference of 35% between the two institutions. This result is again tied to the provision of labels within the gallery and the fact that the MMFA used more extended labels than the McMichael. Along with theme or artist based panels shown independently in the gallery, which was

the technique employed by the McMichael, many of the tombstone labels were accompanied by an extended label paragraph providing a more detailed history of the work in question. I believe that this provision of the extended label with the tombstone label, in particular, was very effective and led to the much higher engagement percentage with extended labels as seen in the MMFA.

The third result surrounds the fact that though engagement percentage varies widely between the three institutions, and didactic styles differed, the engagement percentages of visitors interacting with overview labels is surprisingly consistent. This may be because all

Figure 10: Examples of movement maps showing typical movement patterns in Gallery One of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburgh, Ontario.
Movement maps completed August, 2011

three galleries used a very similar type of hanging style when using overview panels. Though each institution included a different amount of information in each panel, visitors chose to engage with the overview labels at a fairly consistent rate. Noteworthy is that

overview labels were the only kind of label that was consistently hung on the wall, and not provided in a brochure in any of the institutions. This result may also rest in choice of methodology, as the methodology used did not confirm if the whole of a panel was read, but only if it was engaged with for a significant amount of time. The length of the panel would not change the results of engagement percentages, unless the visitor decided not to engage in a significant way at all. These results also seem to confirm suspicions that the more difficult it is for a visitor to see and engage with didactics, the less likely they are to participate with them. The fact that all three institutions provided their overview panels in a format that placed them on the wall is the most likely explanation for why their adoption rate was so consistent.

Mapping Studies:

Mapping studies revealed general trends that can be tied to the layouts of the galleries observed, as well as the strategies for the hanging of didactic materials employed by these institutions. Conclusions surrounding this data rest in two avenues:

1. Movement patterns tied to gallery and institutional layout.
2. Movement patterns tied to placement of institutional technologies.

It may seem obvious to say that the layout of an institution or gallery changes the movement of a visitor but the data collected through research states this clearly. Through the collection of data two trends surrounding the layout of the spaces emerged. The McMichael Collection and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts with their processional layouts seemed to encourage a different type of use pattern than the Art Gallery of Ontario with its more fluid, "Labyrinth-like" layout. (For examples, see figure 10). More specifically, the processional layouts of the McMichael and MMFA encouraged visitors to spend more time in each gallery and move completely through the gallery before

continuing to the next. Visitors to these institutions were also less likely to reenter a gallery after exiting it. The AGO, in contrast, had a layout that encouraged movement between galleries. Visitors moved quickly between rooms, engaged with the works for short periods, and were more likely to exit and reenter galleries throughout their visit.

These phenomena are intricately tied to the layouts observed. As previously stated, the McMichael and MMFA have processional layouts that lead visitors from one room to the next. In the case of the McMichael, when entering a new gallery, a visitor can only see the gallery they just came from and the one immediately proceeding. The MMFA has an even more isolated layout, with visitors having to travel to another floor to explore the subsequent galleries. The only visual indication that there are more galleries to be visited lies in the opening to the staircase and the entrance to the elevators.

The AGO, in contrast, has a very open layout in its Canadian galleries, as visitors are able to see up to six other galleries spaces while they visit another. The galleries are also smaller, which has an impact on the amount of time spent in each gallery space. This combination of smaller galleries, and more open sight lines, has seemed to contribute to a use pattern that encourages less time spent in each space, as well as a trend to exit and reenter previously viewed galleries. This experience seems to echo Ken Thompson's goals in the planning of the new Canadian Galleries at the AGO.

Galleries also influence movement through placement of institutional technologies. The didactic, as an institutional technology, has been the focus of this study, but participant observation analysis revealed that the placement of other institutional technologies contributes to the way that visitors move around a gallery space. An example of this is the placement of benches or couches in gallery spaces. These pieces of institutional technology encourage visitors to focus their attention on certain works and changes possibilities for how they can move around a gallery space. Within the AGO

gallery *Art and Influence*, a bench was placed in the centre of the space and this placement encouraged visitors to move around the periphery of the room, as the option to walk through the centre of the room was removed through this placement. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts used their bench placement in a slightly different fashion, as they placed benches on front of central points of gallery design. In the *Area of Annual Exhibitions*, two benches were placed in the space, one in front of the salon installation wall, and the other in front of a large and prominent landscape painting of Quebec. The placement of these benches did not hinder movement in any way, but did signify that these works were worth contemplation in a restful pose. In the case of the salon wall, a brochure was provided on the bench, and visitors were most often seen sitting on the bench, consulting the brochure and identifying the unlabeled paintings on the wall.

Tied to this is the institutional technology of the hanging style and how it influences movement. Visitors entering Gallery One of the McMichael collection, which was hung in a salon style on one wall and in a traditional style on the opposing wall, were seen to engage with the works on the salon wall for longer. This is probably a result of the fact that the salon style involves more work than the traditional hanging style, and therefore more for the visitor to contemplate. It is also noteworthy there was a pattern observed in salon style galleries that used a hand-held brochure. In these galleries visitors were often seen moving towards and away from the salon style wall, as they used the brochure to identify pieces of interest to them and then point out these works to their companions. This pattern was completely unique to galleries that used a hand-held brochure with the salon style.

Analysis

The technique of participant observation is intricately tied to surveillance activities that take place inside the museum. All museum spaces open to the public are outfitted with some system of surveillance, and many spaces using a combination of security guards, motion sensors and video cameras to monitor the safety of artwork. Though museums require surveillance to protect vulnerable works of art, the practice of surveillance is also intricately tied to the exertion of power over the visitor. Bennett relates the practice of surveillance in the museum to the panopticon, the architectural structure designed to facilitate the execution of power through rendering everything visible to the eye of power. (Bennett 1994, 65-69) Though the museum is not architecturally styled as a panopticon, institutional technologies have been developed to carry out the function of constant surveillance. Guards are strategically placed to watch over visitors as they move through the space, and close circuit cameras are placed to allow observation from a central control room. All public spaces and those who are within such spaces are observed. Tied to this is self surveillance, the practice of governing yourself and those around you to a specific type of behaviour through self regulation. This is common in museum and gallery spaces, with ideals of behaviour well known and widely practiced within the institution. Bennett deems spaces with this type of self regulation to be "micro-worlds rendered constantly visible to themselves ... a constantly surveyed, self-watching, self regulating and ... consistently orderly public - a society watching over itself." (Bennett 1995, 69)

Where the panopticon can be seen as the utopia of surveillant architecture, the museum can then be seen as the space in-between, a heterotopia of surveillant action. The museum exists between the utopia form of the panopticon, where the institutional apparatuses of architecture and layout combine with institutional technologies to create a space where all action is visible to the eye of power and the reality of the "real place", spaces that do not exert the same high level of surveillant observation over their publics.

The practice of participant observation within Visitor Studies is tied to the practice of surveillance and the heterotopic space of the museum. This technique, employed by many arts institutions to study and understand their visitors, observes and disciplines the visitor, without thinking of their agency or opinion. The visitor is passively observed, with the practitioner judging and commenting on the ways the visitors act and interact within the space. In many cases the visitor is unaware that they are being observed.[1] The visitor is passive, and they have no way to control how they are observed, or how these observations are interpreted. The fact the one of the most commonly used techniques in Visitor Studies is one that is tied to surveillance is revealing about the mechanisms of power that the arts institution is comfortable with. In engaging in participant observation analysis, the practitioner becomes part of the mechanism of panopticism, controlling the visitor and commenting on their actions by surveilling their passive form. By placing myself in the position of participant observer, I became a mechanism, a cog in the larger machine of exerting power over the visitor.[2]

The practice of visitor typing or audience segmentation is also implicated in this environment of surveillance, as the information used to create demographic categories used in visitor typing is collected through participant observation analysis. The system of surveillance defines the subjectivity of those who are surveilled. As Foucault states, the system is built to "define, characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, heirarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate." (Foucault 1977, 223) By practicing surveillance over passive visitors, reading into their actions, and creating methods of classification through these

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[1] Some articles recommend discarding any participant observation results that involve visitors who may have become aware of the fact that their actions were being observed

[2] Also interesting is the fact that in a total of 30 hours of observation, only one visitor objected to my observation, and did so only in jest.

methods, museums are classifying and heirarchizing their visitors, creating a system that places those that conform to a prescribed type of action within categories that only serve to encourage more of that same action. The results of this study are within this system, encouraged by the intended path that museum professionals must follow when creating and evaluating exhibitions.

Reflections

The largest conclusion that can be drawn from an analysis of this data is that the provision of labels within a gallery (and on the wall in particular) leads to a larger engagement percentages and usage rates of didactic labels between visitors. Also, movement patterns are intricately tied to the layout of galleries as well as the placement of institutional technologies. Proper observation over a longer period of time, may have provided the possibility to draw even more information out of these sessions, and even perhaps create a map that would illustrate hot spots and show observed trends in use and movement over time. It would also be interesting to complete observation studies in the same gallery spaces with different exhibitions hung in these spaces. A study of this nature would contribute to understanding surrounding how much of an impact didactic panels make on movement, especially with layout and more permanent institutional technologies like benches and couches.

Though I feel that my observation of 1051 visitors was no small number, the nature of this study made it so that observation periods were short and limited in scope. Although this data has been used to make some observations and conclusions, a larger study is necessary for any decisive conclusions to be made. Finally, the power of the

institution in sanctioning this research turned out to be more instrumental to my study than I had initially thought. Authority granted to me by the institutions was instrumental in the collection of data as I was flagged by security personnel and given access to information that not all visitors would have. The power conferred on the study by the institution changed the results. The methodology chosen made it impossible for me to not be present in the spaces I was observing, and this power conferred on me by the institution was made apparent through the wearing of identification badges, as well as treatment by members of museum staff. In seeking validation from the institution, I created a subjectivity in which I was placed on a higher validation plane than the visitor. My actions in the same space had a greater power conferred on them by the apparatus of the museum. It would have been preferable to complete this study without institutional awareness or permission, so that data could be gathered without placing the visitor on a different subjective plane, but unfortunately this was not a possibility for this study.

Chapter 3

Overview and Methodology

Arts institutions use techniques firmly rooted in observation and surveillance to exert power over a visitor without consideration of their agency or opinions. These techniques are part of a larger structure that serves to create subjectivities within museum space. Techniques as are currently employed contribute to a norm of behaviour that excludes the visitor from the process of understanding their position within museum space. The exclusionary nature of Visitor Studies methods inspired the development of an interview methodology that purposefully moved away from traditional interview methods and instead focused on using an anonymous, conversational style of interview. This conversational style gives visitors agency in how they present themselves, how they represent their visit and creates a comfortable space to voice concerns with the museum's approach to didactic material.

This choice to supplement observation methods stemmed from the realization through studying and using traditional Visitor Studies methods that in many ways, these methods were flawed. In addition, since this project has been investigated outside of the disciplines of Visitor Studies and museum studied, I had an opportunity to research and develop an approach that addressed some of the issues with traditional Visitor Studies research methodologies.

Traditional Visitor Studies interview methods rely on short form interviews and questions with the intent of a quantitative result. Beverly Serrell, in her chapter on evaluation methods, discusses interviews only in the context of exit surveys or interviews with short form questions. These "traditional education models" of evaluation use

techniques such as "yes-no, right-wrong, fact-based, multiple-choice or closed-ended questions". (Serrell 1995, 223-224) These question types are quantitative in nature, as they are developed to elicit answers that can then been numerated. In the development of this methodology it was important to move away from asking these types of questions and instead focus on questions that would encourage longer, qualitative answers. To encourage a more conversational style of interviewing, an interview script was not used. Instead a list of questions was developed, and questions were selected from this list based on previous answers received.

In total, nineteen interviews were completed, with 1.8 hours of footage recorded. Each interview was recorded with audio equipment, and visitors were asked if they were comfortable being recorded before interviews began. No visitors interviewed had any issues with being recorded.[1] Interviews ranged in length from 3-8 minutes. A total of thirty-four visitors participated in the interviews and the majority of interviews were conducted with groups of two or more people. Interviews were completed over a period of three days, with one day spent at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and two days spent at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. I was unable to receive permission to conduct interviews at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

It was integral to this project that institutions were informed and that permission was received to conduct interviews with their visitors. Also necessary was the fact that museum staff had to be notified of my project and intentions. The McMichael gave me a security badge to wear that identified me as an employee. This, along with my recording device, clipboard and business casual attire marked me as institutionally sanctioned within the space. At the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts I also wore business casual attire and carried my clip board and recording device. Security was notified of my presence, and I

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[1] For more information on the ethical process used in conducing these interviews, please see the ethics protocol included in the appendix

introduced myself to security personnel during my visit, which often led to conversations, further identifying myself as a sanctioned researcher within the institutional space.

Choosing which visitors to interview was a fairly straightforward task, as I approached visitors or groups of visitors randomly. My approach in asking for an interview was to introduce myself and tell the visitors that I was a Masters Degree student at Concordia University, conducting some interviews for my thesis. I then asked them if they had a few minutes to talk to me. The great majority of the visitors that I approached were interested in talking to me, though several were unable to either because they didn't have any interest in being interviewed, or had time constraints to their visit.

After I had received permission from the person or group I was interviewing I then moved our conversation to seating just outside the gallery. Both the McMichael and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts had seating nearby available that made it possible to complete interviews just outside the galleries. This was very convenient, as talking to these visitors in a setting that was outside of the environment of the gallery (where the social norms of being quiet and nonintrusive are expected) provided a space where a more conversational style of interview could flourish.

At the beginning of an interview, visitors were given a short introduction of the project and why interviews were included in the study. This also offered an opportunity to explain what didactic panels are, as this is a very industry-specific term. I then asked their permission to record the interview and if the answer was yes, a consent speech was read that dealt with ethical rights and how to remove their responses from the study.[2] This was deemed to be a requirement of these interviews through an ethics review. Finally, each interviewee was given a business card that contained my contact information and a number assigned to their interview, so that if they wished to remove their responses, they

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[2] For a copy of the consent speech read to participants please see "Consent Speech" in appendix

could do so without providing their name or contact information. Only after all of these steps were taken were interviews conducted. As the goal was to complete a conversational style of interview, the same questions were not asked to each visitor, instead two questions were identified that would be asked to every participant as the first and last questions of each interview. All other questions were selected from a larger list based on how the previous questions were answered. To begin each interview the first question asked was always "What do you think is the function of a didactic panel?" This question quickly framed the intent of the interview, and encouraged the interviewee to think about how they view didactic panels in their visits. The final question asked was always "What information, if any, do you feel is necessary when viewing art?" Even though the answers to these questions often overlapped previous answers, this question encouraged visitors to list criteria that they thought were necessary on didactic panels. For each interview, approximately five questions were asked, but this number was dependent on the amount of time it took to answer each question, as well as the level of interest that interviewees showed during the interview.[3]

Before beginning an interview, a small amount of demographic information was collected about those who were interviewed, with the intentions of analyzing this data to identify any similarities between visitors. The analysis of this data shows several similarities between those interviewed.

In total, thirty-four visitors were interviewed. Eleven of these visitors were interviewed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, with the remaining twenty-three interviewed at the McMichael Canadian Art collection. This difference in the number of people interviewed is a result of permissions granted by each institution as I was given one full day to interview visitors at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and two full days

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[3] For complete interview question list, please see "Interview Script" in appendix

to interview visitors at the McMichael. The majority of visitors interviewed (65%) were female and between thirty-five and fifty years old (50%). A large majority (82%) had a post-secondary education, with 50% stating they held a bachelors degree, 12% stating that they had a graduate degree and 12% stating they held a college diploma. The majority of visitors interviewed (53%) also stated that they were frequent museum visitors.

There are several explanations for why the type of visitor interviewed followed such a pattern, the most likely of these surrounds the nature of demographics of museum visitors overall. The demographic results of those who I interviewed greatly reflect Bourdieu and Darbel's survey findings as related in *Love of Art*, where the average museum visitor was found to be middle class and with a post-secondary education. [4] (Bourdieu and Darbel 1998, 14) It is also possible that these types of interviewees were targeted, but as selection of visitors for interview was random, I feel that this is not the case. A possible explanation for this phenomenon rests in the time at which these interviews were completed, as they were all undertaken during work hours on weekdays. It is possible and likely that completing these interviews during the evening, weekends or holidays would have resulted in a more diverse group of interviewees, though if Bourdieu and Darbel's findings are any indication, the demographics may still be similar. Another explanation for the demographics of visitors may lie in the location of these interviews, as the majority were completed at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. As summarized in chapter two, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection is only accessible by car, as there are no viable public transit options. This restricts the type of visitor that is able to access the space, as does the high admission prices (at the time of interviews, it cost $5 per car for parking, and $15 for adult admission). The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in contrast, is located in downtown Montreal and is easily accessible by public transit. It also

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[4] Museum visiting increases very strongly with increasing level of education, and is almost exclusively the domain of the cultivated classes (Bourdieu and Darbel 1998, 14)

has a free admission policy, making the space much more available than the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. It is possible that if the majority of interviews had been completed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the interviewees may have been more diverse.

Interview Themes

<u>Didactic Function</u>

The purpose and function of the didactic label came up often in interviews, and overwhelmingly, interview participants stated that they saw the didactic as performing an educative, informative, enlightening function. Most commonly, visitors stated that the purpose of the didactic was to inform or educate them as visitors about what they were looking at, why it was of enough value to be shown, and how it is interesting in the greater context of other works presented. Interviewees expressed a wish to be educated about the life of the artist and how each painting fit into the oeuvre of their work. This was tied either to context, as the period in which the work was completed and at what stage of the artists life could contribute to their understanding Interest was another function, as several visitors identified a wish to know more about the artists who created the work and what conditions in the artist's life lead to the conception and execution of each work.

> *Heather: So if there were no didactics here, would you notice?*
> *Interviewee 2: Yes*
> *Heather: and why is that?*
> *Interviewee 2: I need an explanation of the piece. That's what I come to a museum for! (laughs) (Interview 4)*

This focus on the educative nature of the didactic label by visitors shows that the movement of museums and art galleries towards a more educative function has been recognized by the visitor, and they expect the didactic label to carry out this function. This

shift in paradigm within the museum from a space of display to a space for education can be seen in the visitor's approach to didactics and their function.

The reactions to galleries hung in a salon style shows again that visitors perceive the intent of the museum to be educative and expect didactic panels to carry out this function. I first decided to include a gallery with a salon style hanging in it because of multiple accounts from security and guide staff of either extremely negative or extremely positive reactions to the hanging style. This extremity in reaction resulted in a decision to ask visitors about their opinions regarding the salon hanging style. When interviewed about their thoughts regarding the salon walls, many visitors were disturbed or annoyed by the fact that didactics were not available on the wall and that they instead had to consult a brochure to identify the works of art. This annoyance stemmed from both the practicality of the brochure (many had trouble finding it, or there were not enough copies available) as well as the perceived inconvenience of not having the didactics located near the works on the wall. Several visitors pointed out that though the salon style wall was visually appealing, they felt that the lack of didactics on the wall did not meet their expectations of visiting the museum.

> *It looks more like decoration than really introducing the art itself.*
> *We need the background of the picture. We need much more information than that. (Interview 9)*

> *Generally I'm disappointed, because once I like a painting and I am drawn to it and I am looking at it, I want to know who painted it, the background, when, where I can get information so I can look at it somewhere else later, or the history behind it. When I don't see it then that's all there is to it, it doesn't have any more depth. (Interview 19)*

One visitor raised a particularly interesting explanation for why she believed the salon style was not to her taste.

> *I work with children and adults that are disabled and some of them have visual disabilities, and anyone that knows someone with a visual disability, this style is more overwhelming.*

In a styled setting like this, their eyes are going to move over them all and they're not going to be able to focus in on one thing, they going to be focusing on more. So looking at the educational point of view the single (style) is more appealing. (Interview 2)

These responses show a visitor for whom the lack of information on the wall compromised the ability of the museum to provide them with the educational resources that they expected from their experience. In contrast, a minority of visitors identified their experience with the salon style wall as a positive one. These visitors related their positive experience to the fact that they felt relieved there were no didactics on the wall and they were free to look at the art.

… in the first gallery on that one side there's no labels, and it was almost a relief, so you just look at the pictures. I spend too much time looking at the labels! And then I have to think, oh yea, I should be looking at the pictures. (Interview 11)

I liked it because it encourages you to just enjoy it. (Interview 16)

It is apparent that the great majority of visitors interviewed viewed the museum as primarily an educative institution, and view the didactic as an instrument in providing this education. In the past, the museum was not always seen as an educative space, and instead it was a space for display and confirmation of wealth and prestige. (Lord 2006, 6) The shift of the museum from space of privilege to a space that educates is tracked in Bennett's work. He ties this shift to the wish of the upper classes to educate the lower classes in proper decorum. The museum is a public space to educate lower class through example and enforcement what "proper" behaviour entailed. (Bennett 1995, 102)

As punishment was withdrawn from the public scene, it was increasingly the museum that was conceived as the primary instrument of civic education … thus when Henry Cole praises the museum for its educative potential, it is worth noting what he regards as its chief lesson: "it would teach the young child," he writes "to respect property and behave gently." (Bennett 1995, 102)

The museum is then seen as not only a space of education about verified works of art, but is also seen as a space of behavioural education.

If, as Bennett claims, the museum is a space of behavioral education, then why does the visitor see the museum as a space of education about art? This understanding of the museum as an educative and informative space about art and artifact is encouraged because it benefits the institution. It has been embraced as the function of the museum, the essential goal of the exhibition, and many exhibitions measure their success through the amount of information retained by the visitor. (Serrell 1996, 223) Bennett refers to this as placing the populace on to the side of power. (Bennett 1995, 95) By encouraging the visitor to see the museum as a beneficial and educative space, the visitor is more likely to identify with the institution and then act as agents in the propagation of the institution's power. This can be seen in the practice of visitors self policing; regulating the actions of other visitors through disapproval of improper behaviour and demonstration of accepted norms. By stating that the function of the didactic is to provide the necessary means for education, the visitor is also supporting the necessity for the education in norms of behaviour as well. What kind of behaviour does the didactic encourage that is not quiet, ordered contemplation? It is impossible to run through a gallery and read a didactic, and it is likewise impossible to speak loudly while reading a panel. The accepted behavioural norm associated with a didactic is to stand still and contemplate them quietly. Any visitor observing a school group that visits a museum or gallery will see that norms of behaviour are enforced and taught at an early age. Children not conforming to these standards may be ejected from the museum or reprimanded in front of other students. This educative function that visitors associate with the didactic is then intricately tied to the education of behavioural norms.

The disagreement and hostility shown to the didactic style used in a salon hanging showcases how greatly the visitor has been brought into the institutional network of power. They expect the technologies of display developed by the museum to help enforce

a certain type of experience that they have come to normalize and expect. This reliance on the didactic is tied to the visitor understanding of the function of the museum, and their reliance on this function to experience the space.

Physicality

Another topic that came up often in interviews was the practicality of the didactic as a media form. Visitors often spoke of how the placement and style of the didactics changed the way that they moved and acted while viewing art. Font size was by far the most cited example of this, as many visitors spoke of how font size is often too small to read or blends too closely in with the background of the gallery.

> *Interviewee 2: It's too small. The writing is way too small.*
> *Interviewee 1: ... I've been in museums like the National Gallery in Ottawa where it's grey on grey[5]. ... When it's grey on grey, you literally have to be on top of it and what if there are more than three people in the room? When they do that at a very popular exhibition it's very frustrating. (Interview 5)*

Tied to small font sizes is the necessity of visitors who have trouble reading these panels to move closely to the art to read what is on the panels. This can create an uncomfortable spatial awareness for these visitors, as they are required to move closely to the art to read the panel.

> *I felt that I had to go up close ... and I'm uncomfortable being close to works of art because you know, I was breathing on it. ... I would prefer to stand further back for the safety of the painting. (Interview 5)*

The placement of didactics also came up often, as several visitors stated their wish for didactics and paintings to be more closely linked. An example of this was in Gallery Two of the McMichael collection, which showcased many small sketches by members of the Group of Seven. The curator chose to hang paintings in groups of four and instead of hanging didactic panels next to each painting, hung the didactics in the same formation

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[5] By grey on grey, the interviewee is referring to grey didactic writing on grey walls

to the side of the works. Several interviewees found this to be disconcerting and that having to identify which didactic corresponded with which painting was confusing and distracted from the experience. (Interviews 7, 12, 16) While visiting the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, a security guard pulled me aside during observation to tell me about one didactic panel that was particularly dangerously placed. The panel was in a small room that held three works, and one of the didactics was located in the corner of the room. The combination of the placement of the didactic and the smallness of the font led many visitors to lean forward to read it, which also inadvertently led many to touch or bump the painting perpendicular to the didactic. This occurrence had become so common that the security guard often would warn visitors before they entered that room, especially those carrying purses.

Also tied to this is the imposition of the didactic panel. Though several visitors complained about font size and how it required them to bring a pair of reading glasses to the gallery, many of these visitors stated that the font size of the didactic panels should not be larger or more imposing, as if they were, they would create a visual distraction from the works of art.

> *When you're an old folk and you need reading glasses, you don't need the glasses to look at the pictures because you're far away, but you need the glasses to go up to the picture. But if you had it bigger it would really be invasive, no I wouldn't go any bigger.*
> *(Interview 6)*

Another practical consideration surrounding didactics is that of brochures. Several viewers interviewed had trouble using didactic brochures and a major problem was the fact that the brochures seemed to be hard to find. Several visitors expressed surprise at the fact that brochures were provided in salon galleries, as they were unable to find them.[6]

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[6] Data gathered in the participant observation study supports this observation, as brochures in Gallery One of the McMichael had a 23.8% use percentage, while 38.5% of visitors engaged with extended labels (placed on the wall) in Gallery Six of the same institution.

Others had difficulty using the brochures to identify which works were which on the wall, with one visitor citing the fact that the images presented in the brochure were all the same size, unlike the differently sized works on the wall, making it harder to properly identify each work. (Interview 9)

The practicality of the didactic and physical considerations while viewing a didactic can be tied to the institutional focus on the intended path. As Bal demonstrated through her work, and Serrell encouraged in her manual, the reading of an exhibit label is a physical experience as much as it is educational. It is the physical placement of the didactic that encourages an intended path through an exhibition. As Serrell states in her manual, if didactics are placed "correctly" the visitor will be lead through an exhibition, and will experience it in the "proper" order and sequence. (Serrell 1996, 21) Within this framework, the goal of this proper order and sequence is for the visitor to experience the "Big Idea" of the exhibition. For this path to be followed, Museum Studies texts stress that the content, placement and design of didactic contributes to the ideal spatial routing of the visitor through space.

The acknowledgment by some visitors that they could not properly interact with the didactic panels shows a failure in the following of the intended path, both in the sense of "proper" Visitor Studies techniques and "proper" engagement with the material. Evaluating visitor access and understanding of didactics reveals a hole in the intended path of exhibition evaluation. Traditional methods do not include a conversational style of interview questioning. Without this type of method, the fact that some visitors had issue with finding and engaging with didactic material would not be revealed. Additionally, methods like participant observation analysis would show a visitor engaging with a brochure and note this engagement as a positive interaction with the media, when instead as interviews showed, an interaction with the media did not necessarily mean that the

visitor understood that piece of media or used it correctly. As this technique only evaluates observational engagement with the media, if a visitor is unable to engage with this media meaningfully but still appears to be engaging with it, their engagement is evaluated as positive. This positive evaluation would not recognize the possibility that the visitor has not engaged positively with the media. This again highlights the difficulty and problematic nature of traditional surveillant Visitor Studies techniques and their reliance on exerting active power over a passive visitor. Museums are missing out on a key aspect of evaluation results by not including this step in the intended path of visitor evaluation.

Didactic Content

The final theme that was often discussed in interviews was that of content. Visitors consistently commented on the content of the panels, discussing both what content they felt would add to their enjoyment and use of the panels, and how the content on the panels should be changed or revised to better reflect their needs. Overwhelmingly comments on content discussed how visitors wished that more content, or content of a different nature would be used on the didactic panels. Often, visitors cited a wish for more information about the artist or painting that they were observing. A request for a "story" about the work or history of the artist was the most common request.

> *... to understand that perhaps at the time when the artist was painting this he was undergoing some health difficulties, his sight was failing, lets you understand, lets you get inside his head and see it through his or her eyes.* (Interview 10)

Visitors also often noted that some of the information on the panels was not of any use or interest, most particularly the donation information. Though several understood the need to include this information on the panels, they also felt that the donation information was of no interest or use to their visit. Also, when asked what

information was necessary when viewing art, none of the visitors interviewed identified the donation information as a necessary piece of information.

Another interesting comment that came out of discussions of content was whether the descriptive text in extended labels was correct or interesting. Several visitors identified the information presented in the labels as being incorrect or disagreeable. Despite this, an inclusion of controversial or "incorrect" information in the labels did not seem to discourage visitors from engaging with the media. In fact, a visitor to the McMichael gallery related how a disagreement that she had with the content of a didactic label led to her engaging with the painting more than she would have usually:

> *Sometimes they get it quite wrong, I think. This one thing, this great big long (didactic) on the nude and the little girl. Because they were saying things I didn't agree with, I looked more at the picture.* (Interview 8)

This comment again reveals that engagement with media does not necessarily reveal acceptance or agreement with the material, and that qualitative methods of evaluation should be used to address this.

Analysis

The responses and themes showcased here reveals a greater relationship between the viewer and the didactic as instrument of power. Disapproval of didactic techniques used in salon style hanging, the reliance on the didactic as provider of educational programming, and visitor expectations as to what content is necessary to the enjoyment of their visit, all point to Bennett's concept of the placement of the population on the side of power. Instead of questioning why the museum is intent on educating the visitor, why the behaviour expected in the space is restrictive, and why it is necessary that the museum act as a space of surveillance and control, the visitor instead identifies with the institution,

and becomes placed on the side of power. Visitors identify with power, and see it as "a power made manifest … by its ability to organize and coordinate an order of things and produce a place for the people in relation to that order." (Bennett 1995, 67) Instead of seeing the museum as a space in which a restrictive power is used, visitors identify with that power and tie their experience and enjoyment of the institution to the exertion of power over them. The form of power exerted by the museum is done in the name of accommodating a desirable educational experience. The visitor becomes the subject of power at the same time that they become the beneficiary of it. (Bennett 1995, 67) This was seen during the participant observation study, where over one thousand visitors were observed, and only one visitor vocally objected to it. Likewise, visitor participation in interviews highlighted aspects of their visit that contributed to this network of power. Visitors most common complaint was that they wanted more didactic material available and that they felt their experience would be enriched by more media. This dependence on the didactic feeds into the greater network of power and serves to show that most of the visitors interviewed identified with the power network within the museum.

Part 2 - Methodological Comparisons

One of the most interesting results to come out of this study is those surrounding methodological differences. In the development of this study two different methodological approaches were selected. This section surrounds the results from each method, how these results either worked with or against each other and why this decision to use two methodologies was a good one.

The completion of the participant observation portion of this research informed what questions were asked during interviews and what to focus on when speaking with visitors. In particular, two topics included in interview questions were raised through the

participant observation study. The most prominent example of this surrounded the salon wall style of hanging. As many interesting observations stemmed from comparing this type of hanging style with a single style, it was important to hear from visitors about what they thought about this style of display. Another observation gained through participant observations studies was how visitors often had to physically move in specific ways to accommodate reading didactic labels. Observation of this behaviour and subsequent interest in finding out why, led to questions about practical considerations surrounding didactic panels and if the ways that they were produced and hung changed the way they moved through museum space.

The participant observation study results focused on how the museum is physically negotiated and navigated and on visitor behavioural patterns. The most telling results surrounded how many people visited the spaces observed and what percentage of these people used the media placed there. A study of this nature can be used by institutions to evaluate how gallery spaces are used by the majority of visitors and how the technologies of display influenced movement and use patterns. Results also surrounded how changes to the ways that didactics were hung or displayed changed the ways that visitors moved through and worked with the space. The nature of this study also makes it easy to present the results, as they can be represented and understood in a graph or table format. The results of the mapping study are also easy to represent visually, as they provide examples to support the numerical data gathered through the observational study and represent common patterns that emerge through visitor use.

In contrast, the nature of the interview based study is much harder to represent visually and present definitively, and this may be why qualitatively based interview techniques are not often used in museum and Visitor Studies. Though some statistics regarding demographics of participants can be extracted, the bulk of the material exists in

quotes and summaries of what visitors stated. This can be problematic, as it is dangerous to assume too much from the opinion of one or even a few visitors. Additionally, as raised by the Dawson and Jensen article, focusing Visitor Studies on visitors who are already in museums also influences your results, as many studies have shown that a "typical" type of visitor tends to visit these spaces. (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 129) The demographic results from this study also reflect these findings.

By using both methodologies, their shortcomings quickly became apparent, yet through analysis of results, I came to the realization together these methodologies can accommodate some of these shortcomings and create a fuller picture of the visitors who participated in this study. A combination of methods also offers an alternative to traditional top down power methods of Visitor Studies.

The strongest result from the interview study is that conversational style interviews draw out personal reflections and observations that simply cannot be addressed through an observational based study. These kinds of answers are useful because they reveal conclusions that cannot be numerated. Conversational interviews actively seek out participation and input outside of answers to "yes-no, right-wrong, fact-based, multiple-choice or closed-ended questions." (Serrell 1995, 223-224) By focusing on answers that are not designed to be numerated, the visitor is given more freedom in how they represent themselves and their intentions when visiting museum space. There are some weaknesses to the method of conversational interviews, however, mainly because it is hard to justify why the opinion or thoughts of one or a few visitors should be a serious consideration of the institution. Numerical data that is gathered in a participant observation study can then be used to add weight to these personal reflections and make them more desirable when conclusions about changing techniques or adopting new methods of display are the goal of a study.

Another way that these two methods can work together is through looking at conclusions drawn through participant observation data. Use percentages are fairly simple to calculate, but other patterns of use and movement as observed in mapping studies can at times not be explained without the input of visitors who are taking these actions. An example of this is the brochures in Gallery One of the McMichael Collection. Use percentage data and mapping studies both showed that visitors were not engaging with brochures, but though assumptions could be made, neither method could explain why. The input of visitors through interviews helped explain possibilities for this use pattern, as many visitors discussed their issues with finding and using the brochure. The interview content provided the participant observation data with the required context to make it valuable to the study.

Qualitative interviews also address one of the major issues with traditional Visitor Studies methods: the belief that engagement with a piece of art or media symbolizes acceptance of it. Many tracking methods focus on engagement rates as symbolizing successful attempts of providing media to the museum visitor. Yet, as responses in this study show, visitors who engaged with media often had issues with using or understanding that media, putting this assumption made by museum professionals into question. The issues with brochure use is one example. Apart from many visitors having trouble locating brochures, some visitors who engaged with the brochures had difficulty using them or understanding their intent. In a participant observation study, the lack of this context would make it appear that these visitors supported this media through their engagement with it. This can further be observed in extended label use. Tracking methods can only record visitor use and engagement with these media, which traditionally signifies a level of success. Yet, an interviewee directly tied her engagement with an extended label to a disagreement with the content. Perhaps it is necessary to separate the idea of

successful engagement with didactic material from the acceptance or agreement with content. If agreement with content is to be evaluated through Visitor Studies methods, it should be accepted that some form of qualitative method must be used. Those who engage in museum and Visitor Studies projects should specify that engagement with a certain type of media does not necessarily imply agreement with that media, and practitioners should explicitly state what "success" or "positive engagement" means within their study. The use of traditional methods alone would not have shown that many visitors who use information media do not always agree with it or know how to use it. Evaluation of exhibits should then use a methodology that accounts for this reality and can accurately report upon it. Methodologies that rely solely on the interpretation of actions through surveillance should be avoided or used in conjunction with qualitative evaluation methods, as they remove agency from the visitor, making it difficult for visitors to explain how they interacted with the media. Museum comfort with surveillance methodology reveals a reliance on top down methods of power, and a reluctance to give the visitor agency in their own responses. There is no possible way to say "I had trouble understanding what this meant." or "I don't agree with this content because..." within the evaluation framework suggested by most Museum Studies texts and currently used in many museums.

Reflections

Though the conversational style of interview revealed a different layer of visitor interaction with didactic panels, there are also some issues with using this technique. As results showed, the timing of when these interviews were conducted possibly resulted in a demographic study that was very limited. If I was to complete this study again, I would

devote more time to interviews and complete them over multiple days at different times of day.

Another consideration for future conversational interview studies is the suggestion made by Dawson and Jensen that Visitor Studies be undertaken outside of the museum. By outside of the museum, I believe Dawson and Jensen are referring to public spaces that attract visitors. Examples may be theme parks, gardens, parks or concerts. By removing the museum itself from the equation, a different type of visitor or potential visitor could be reached. It seems that the conversational interview style could fit well into this type of visitor outreach. I would be curious to see if frequent visitors responded differently while outside of the mechanism of the museum, and what kinds of insights non-visitors or infrequent visitors would provide about didactics.

The most important finding from the use of this style of evaluation technique is the holes in traditional Visitor Studies methods that it brings to light. Qualitative interview methods should certainly be considered as part of an overall exhibition evaluation mandate, as these techniques in connection with traditional studies can reveal more aspects about visitor experience and provide the visitor with a voice in the construction of their experience. By including the visitor more closely in evaluation methods, this may lead to stronger, positive accessible exhibition viewing experiences.

Conclusion

The theme of the intended path has been pervasive throughout this project. By this, I mean the "intended path" as referred to by Gillian Rose when describing spatial routing created through the intervention of institutional technologies of display, and how the "intended path" can refer metaphorically to the approaches that should be used by museum professionals when designing and evaluating visitor experience. Through this project I have endeavored to understand how the intended path as constructed through technologies of display and institutional guidelines for production and evaluation have affected visitors understanding and experience of art as mediated through the didactic panel. How is the coercion of the institution changing experience, understanding, and use of space?

The importance of the "correct" or "proper" method of viewing an exhibition was a common thread found both in interaction with visitors and staff of these institutions. Serrell describes a decidedly "correct" way for visitors to move through exhibitions and how museum professionals can best facilitate this. An analysis of the spaces investigated during this project shows that of the six galleries observed, five of them use a combination of technologies of display and layout to create a progressive linear path through an exhibition. The intention of these paths seems to be to encourage the visitor to move through the entirety of the exhibition in a specific way before exiting. These paths also encourage sequential movement through the institution, so that the visitor moves processionally through the entirety of the space.

Only one exhibition space observed seemed to reject this encouragement of the linear processional path; the Tom Thompson gallery at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The

newly designed Ken Thompson Collection of Canadian Art has seemingly rejected this idea of the linear processional path, yet this rejection does not necessarily show a rejection to the concept of the intended path overall. As it can be seen in Ken Thompson's remarks about a goal of "chapter based movement" these galleries were constructed and designed with an intended type of movement in mind. In this case, both the technologies of display and the institutional apparatuses of layout and architecture combined to deliberately construct a path of movement through the space.

This concept of the "intended path" also finds its way into contemporary museum practices, with texts surrounding the production and evaluation of didactic panels clearly explaining a correct "path" in the processes to write, design, hang and evaluate didactic panels. My choice in using conversational style interviews deliberately moved away from this path, and instead forged a new path, where techniques combined to demonstrate a more comprehensive picture of visitor understanding of information media.

By undertaking this thesis I was able to explore the ways that didactics affect visitor experience and how institutions understand their visitors. I explored how didactics, as one piece within a network of institutional technologies, contributes to visitor experience, and performs an exertion of institutional power over the visitor and the interpretation of art and space. I used two differing methodologies to explore visitor experiences and these methodologies revealed contrasts between commonly used practices and others that are not often used within the field. A combination of two methodologies provided results that could not have been observed through one methodological study and addressed some of the most problematic aspects of current Visitor Studies practice. As my research questions posited: what is the impact of exhibition labels on visitor experience? How do they contribute to an exertion of power over the visitor and how do traditional models of Visitor Studies evaluation techniques contribute to this structure?

Through this research study these questions have been addressed and preliminary answers have been formed.

This study made several contributions to the fields of Media Studies, communication studies and Museum Studies. Though tightly focused, the data that gathered revealed several significant results regarding visitor patterns, and how visitors understand the function of a didactic panel. More importantly, the interdisciplinary nature of a Media Studies approach provided the opportunity to study and criticize the practices that study visitors and their behavior in their essence. This study revealed several dangerous patterns within the discipline that can and have become problematic in the construction and accommodation of the subjectivity of the visitor.

The question of why this study was undertaken in a Media Studies program will most probably be asked, and I hope the methodologies and theoretical frameworks used demonstrates why the support of a Media Studies program was necessary for the conclusions made to be formulated. The fact that Media Studies is outside of both realms of museum and Visitor Studies, but is also flexible enough to include aspects of both genres made it a perfect program to complete this study in. The objects examined in this study are closely tied to Media Studies, as didactic panels are communicative pieces of media, interpretive devices that exist to provide context for visitors. These media should be studied through a Media Studies lens, as it would have been difficult to be so critical of Visitor Studies methods and how Museum Studies contributes to a network of surveillance and power over the visitor, if this study was undertaken within those fields. In addition, the incorporation of Institutional Discourse Analysis is instrumental to the formulation of the major conclusions made and without it, the results would have been quite different. It is this inclusion and study of Institutional Discourse Analysis that

marks out this project as different from those completed within visitor and Museum Studies.

Main Findings

The first chapter of this thesis approached the study of didactics through a review of relevant literature in the genres of Museum Studies, Visitor Studies and Institutional Discourse Analysis. A combination of these genres showcased how the museum has evolved from a cabinet of curiosity, that confirmed class privilege and focused on the simple display of a large amount of valuable objects, to the current manifestation of the museum as an educative space that presents institutionally validated works of art. (Lord 2006, 6) A study of Visitor Studies techniques revealed commonly used techniques in exhibition evaluation and explored issues with "visitor typing", an increasingly common tactic in exhibition evaluation. Finally, a review of Beverly Serrell's handbook on didactic panels revealed commonly held institutional opinions on the proper ways to present and evaluate didactic use, as well as institutionally sanctioned techniques for the writing and hanging of didactic panels.

The second chapter revealed the results that the layout of a space and the way in which didactics are presented in that space influences patterns of movement and use. Through comparing results at the AGO, McMichael and MMFA, I was able to observe spaces that used both a processional and "labyrinth" like layouts, and saw that spaces with a processional layout encourages visitors to spend more time in each gallery, where spaces with a "labyrinth" like layout encourage visitors to move through spaces fluidly and quickly. Use patterns of didactic media types were also observed, and results from all three institutions showed that didactics hung on the wall were more successful than those provided in a brochure or book format. Also, use percentage rates rose when more

didactics were provided to visitors. I also used this chapter to explore the techniques currently used in Visitor Studies evaluation models, and how they contribute to a network of surveillance used to exert power over the visitor, and create the subjectivity of the visitor itself.

Interviews explored in the third chapter revealed common themes. The first of these was the exploration of the purpose of didactic labels. Most visitors felt that the purpose of didactics was to inform them about what they were looking at and why it was of enough value to be displayed in museum space. This understanding of function was approached through the shift in function of the museum, and the action of visitor self policing, which contributes to a norm of behaviour within museum space. Another common theme in visitor interviews was that of practical considerations surrounding didactics: namely that they can become difficult to read when the font is too small, that placement effects their movement through the space and ease of reading the panels, and that brochures could be difficult to locate and understand. This theme was tied to the idea of the intended path, and how current manifestations of the intended path in exhibition evaluation leaves a hole in analysis, often mistaking unsatisfactory engagement as positive engagement. Also tied to this was a theme of physicality, and the actual physical imposition of reading didactics on the eyes and body. The final theme discussed was that of content, and what content visitors thought was necessary to include while viewing art. These themes were then analyzed through Bennett's theory placing the population on the side of power. the themes raised in interviews seem to confirm that visitors identify with the power exerted over them in museum space, and believe that their experience is enriched through the practice of and yielding to that power.

A combination of these two techniques presented an interesting way to understand the role of the didactic in shaping visitor experience. The input of visitors

through interviews explained a use pattern observed in participant observation data, showing that qualitative data can add context and explanation to quantitative observations. Likewise, numerical data gathered in a quantitative study can be used to add weight to interview responses by showcasing data that supports statements made in interviews. Finally, a combination of these methods can provide industry members with space to prove that using media does not necessarily represent and agreement with or support of the content in that media.

Possible Areas for Future Research

As results have shown, many current practices in Visitor Studies essentialize the visitor to their demographics and use these techniques to reduce visitors to their most basic traits. This practice not only restricts the understanding of visitor motivations into a few select themes, but it also restricts future visitors and assumes that they will fit into these already narrow categories. New approaches that avoid this style of visitor typing should be adopted and encouraged, as a more inclusive approach can only serve to motivate more visitors to feel comfortable and valued in museum space.

Possible new approaches to Visitor Studies can, and should, include surveying and studying possible visitors outside of museum spaces. As recommended by Dawson and Jensen, an investigation into those who are outside of the visitor norm may reveal patterns of understanding that can explain why these potential visitors do not visit or do not visit often. (Dawson and Jensen 2011, 129) This approach will also underline the subjectivities of visitors created through popular visitor typing methods.

A further exploration into movement patterns through exhibitions should also be approached in future research. Galleries should be observed for a longer period of time through the installation of multiple exhibitions. If this is undertaken, hot spots of use will

gradually emerge. It is possible that after observing the same space installed with several different exhibitions, hot spots that result from the layout of the gallery can be isolated from hot spots that result from the installation of media individual to the exhibition. By revealing these larger patterns of movement that are tied to the institutional apparatus of layout, the full effect of institutional technologies and their placement can be more fully understood.

Original Contributions

At the end of any research project, the researcher should ask themselves what kind of contribution they have made to their field, and what original research they have completed. Though much of my research was derivative of many studies completed in the fields of visitor and Museum Studies, several aspects of this study make it an individual and useful piece of research.

The fact that this project was undertaken outside of the standardized disciplines of museum and Visitor Studies means that it has been able to investigate the structures of these disciplines and how they contribute to the larger power relationships practiced in the institutional space of the museum. Several observations were about traditional Visitor Studies methods and attempts to improve upon these methods were made. This innovation served to highlight some of the problems with traditional methods as well as address these problems with possible solutions.

Another unique aspect to this thesis research is the comparison of three separate institutions. Many Visitor Studies projects are carried out within a single institution, with the only comparison and contrast coming from within. By undertaking this study at three different institutions, I was able to use comparisons found through these institutions to

draw out larger conclusions about how institutional apparatus' and approaches to institutional technologies can affect visitor experience.

This project provides a base study for future scholars to build upon or emulate in other institutions. The development of a methodology and inclusion of the tools developed to carry out this study in the appendix provides a loose framework for scholars and institutions that are interested in investigating similar results in their own space.

Reflections - Part 1

As a note, I recently read this quote by author David Foster Wallace that caused me to pause and think about the didactic in a different light:

> *"But now realize that TV and popular film and most kinds of "low" art – which just means art whose primary aim is to make money – is lucrative precisely because it recognizes that audiences prefer 100 percent pleasure to the reality that tends to be 49 percent pleasure and 51 percent pain. Whereas "serious" art, which is not primarily about getting money out of you, is more apt to make you uncomfortable, or to force you to work hard to access its pleasure, the same way that in real life true pleasure is usually a by-product of hard work and discomfort. So it's hard for an art audience, especially a young one that's been raised to expect art to be 100 percent pleasurable and to make that pleasure effortless, to read and appreciate serious fiction. That's not good. The problem isn't that today's readership is "dumb," I don't think. Just that TV and the commercial-art culture's trained it to be sort of lazy and childish in its expectations. But it makes trying to engage today's readers both imaginatively and intellectually unprecedentedly hard."* (McCaffery, 1993)

Though Wallace is speaking about readers of contemporary fiction, let's extrapolate his argument from this quote and apply it to the modern day museum visitor. Museums, as public spaces of display and culture, compete with a plethora of other spaces for viewers time and money. The art gallery type of museum like those examined in this study compete against natural history and science museums, children's museums, theme parks and any other number of public cultural events for visitor attention. Keeping this in mind, can you blame museum spaces for using visitor evaluation techniques to accommodate the visitors they do have, and hopefully through their satisfaction, draw

more visitors to their spaces? Through this study I have endeavored to show that in many ways, traditional Visitor Studies techniques, especially those surrounding visitor typing and observation, exert a type of passive power over the visitor, implicating them in the creation of their "ideal" experience without providing them an opportunity to have any agency over how their actions are interpreted. Tied to this is the reliance of the visitor on the didactic, and if we look at the didactic in how Wallace has framed the consumption of culture in our contemporary world, the didactic can be seen as a way of increasing the pleasure percentage for the visitor, making what is presented easier to digest, and removing the need for the visitor to work hard. While it seems that I have been critical of the current approaches to didactic material in museums, this quote by Wallace gave me pause. The museum may be a heterotopia within Foucault's description, existing in between the utopian spaces of the ideal and the real world, but in reality, the museum exists within a complex network of culture consumption, and competes within these perameters. The museum is a space like any other, competing with spaces that provide easy access to pleasurable experience. If the didactic can accommodate the visitor, who, as it was shown in this study, do rely on and enjoy didactic panels, then it should be seen as an integral piece in the construction of visitor experience. Furthermore, though Visitor Studies are becoming necessary in the world where competition for consumption of culture is at an all time high, it is also important for those undertaking Visitor Studies investigations to keep the visitor in mind, and try to give them some agency over their interpretation, wishes and goals for experience.

Reflections - Part 2

The opportunity to conduct this type of study was a unique one, as was the opportunity to conduct it outside of the traditional academic genres of museum and

Visitor Studies. All three institutions visited and studied during this project deserve a great deal of praise, as they allowed direct interaction with their visitors in which many critical questions about how they present their spaces were asked. Many of the visitors approached to talk about this study were genuinely interested and more than willing to talk about their experiences and expectations surrounding didactic material. In fact, many of these visitors seemed flattered and surprised that I was interested in their opinion and this reaction may reflect the void that current Visitor Studies practice is not filling. Instead of trying to understand the visitor objectively, we should engage and work with them to explore some of their many opinions, thoughts and reflections.

Though this study is tightly focused and experimental in approach, the results gleaned from the data collected presents a firm argument that the didactic contributes to visitor experience and is instrumental in the construction of experience as shaped by the institution. It has also shown that current Visitor Studies methodologies run the risk of ignoring some essential aspects of the visitor experience, namely that they have many opinions and thoughts that cannot be expressed in short form numerated statistics, and that these opinions and thoughts can be useful to the institution in the planning and shaping of exhibitory practice.

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Appendix

Ethics Certificate: 2011 - 2012

UNIVERSITÉ
Concordia
UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Dr Rae Staseson

Department: Communication Studies

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: The Writing on the Wall: The Impact of
                        Information Media in Museum Space

Certification Number: UH2011-079
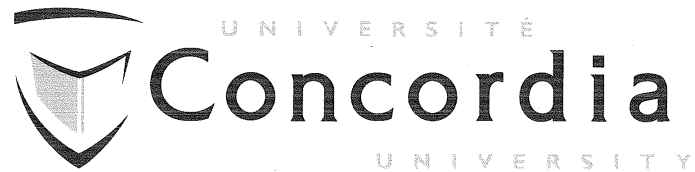
Valid From: August 17, 2011   to: August 16, 2012

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have
examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project,
and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant,
to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human
subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

01/29/2009

Concordia

UNIVERSITÉ

UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Dr Rae Staseson

Department: Communication Studies

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: The Writing on the Wall: The Impact of
                            Information Media in Museum Space

Certification Number: UH2011-079-2

Valid From: August 1, 2012   to: July 31, 2013

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have
examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project,
and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant,
to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human
subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

01/29/2009

Consent Speech

<u>Introductory Speech</u>

Hello, my name is Heather Ferguson and I am a Masters Degree student at Concordia University. As part of my thesis research, I am asking visitors to the (Institution Name) to comment on their experience when reading information panels. Do you have a few minutes to talk to me about your experience?

<u>Consent Speech</u>

This consent speech refers to interview number _____

Do you consent to participate in this interview with Heather Ferguson? If so, your answers will be recorded and may be reproduced in the final thesis. Your name will not appear in this thesis, and you will have the opportunity to remove your answers from the study at any time before the final thesis is published, by contacting Heather Ferguson and informing her of your request before April 1st, 2012.

Interview Script

Demographic Information (always asked)

Age:
☐ < 18
☐ 18 - 25
☐ 26 - 35
☐ 36 - 50
☐ 50 - 65
☐ > 65
☐ Prefer not to disclose

Highest level of education completed

☐ Some High School
☐ High School
☐ Some University/College
☐ College Diploma
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Some Graduate Education
☐ Graduate Degree

How often do you visit museums/galleries?

☐ Never/First visit
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often

Have you visited (Institution name) before?

☐ Yes
☐ No

First Question: (always asked) What do you think is the function of a didactic panel?
Last Question: (always asked) What information, if any, do you feel is necessary when viewing art?

Do you often read didactic panels when you visit a gallery or museum?

If there were no didactic panels in this gallery, would you notice?

If you could change the way that these didactic panels are presented (by changing aspects such as content, font size, location, amount of material presented etc.) what would you change? Would you change anything?

After seeing an exhibition, are you ever inspired to research/read more about the artist/
Group of Artists?
	If so, what draws you to do this? (e.g. the information in the didactics, a painting
	particularly moves you etc.)

(If they do not read didactic panels) Do you think it is important to have didactic labels,
even if you do not read them?

Do you feel that the placement of didactic panels change the way in which you move
through the gallery space? Why/Why not?

(In a salon style gallery) In the creation of this salon wall, the curators decided not to use
any didactic panels on the wall, instead using a handout to identify works. Do you enjoy
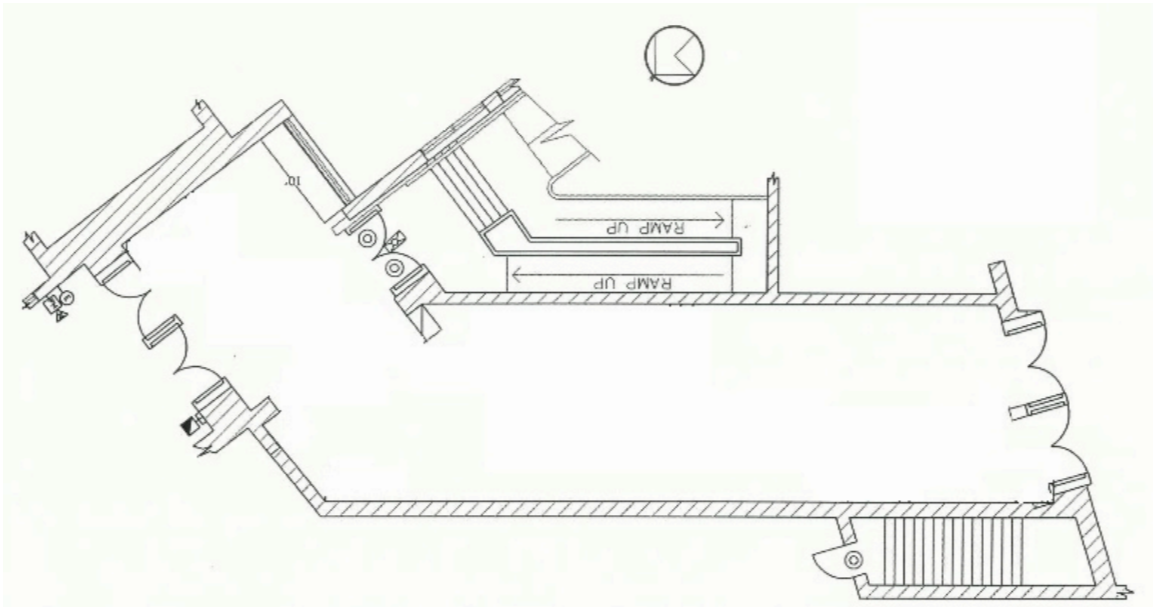this didactic style? Why, why not?

Participant Observation Data Gathering Form

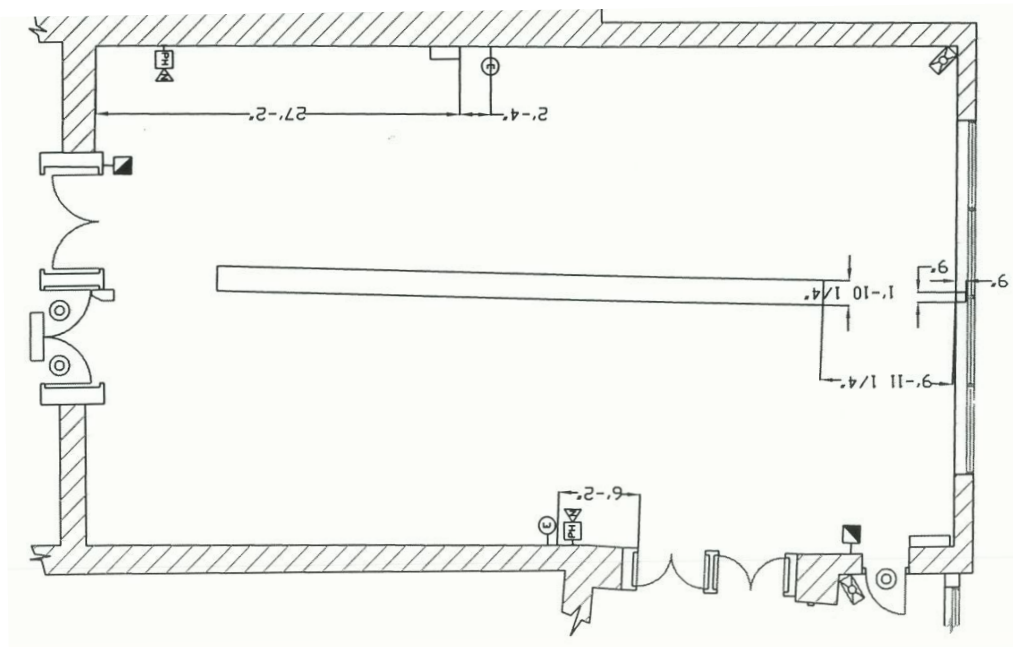| Participant Observation	
Date	Month, Day, Year Time
Location	Gallery Name - Exhibit Name
Total Visitors	
Of these visitors, total with children	
Of these visitors, total in a group of 3 or more	
Use of: Tombstone Labels	
Use of: Extended Labels	
Use of: Overview Panel	

Notes and Observations:

Gallery Layouts

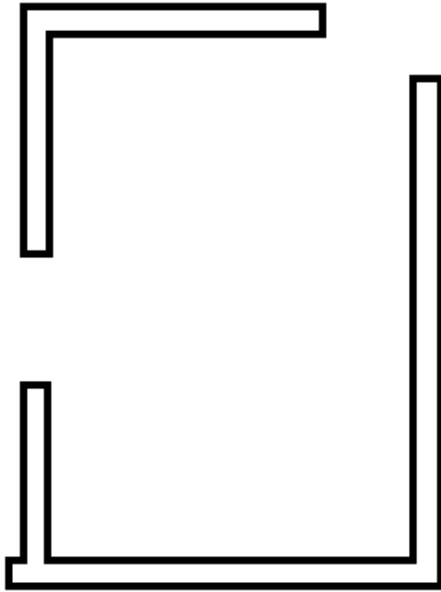<u>McMichael Canadian Art Collection</u>

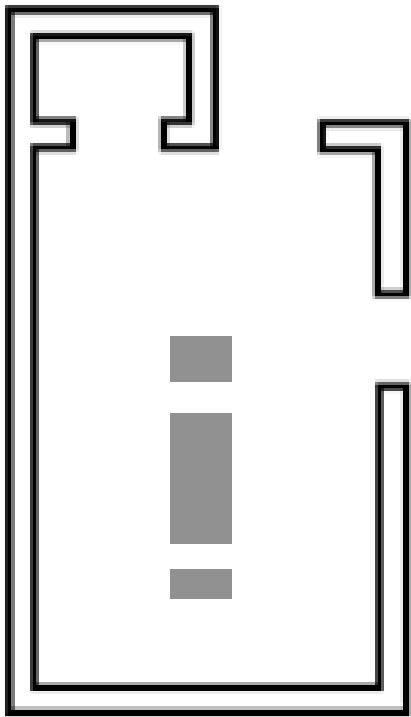Gallery One - Modernity in Canada

Gallery Six - *Ivan Eyre: Sculpture in Context*

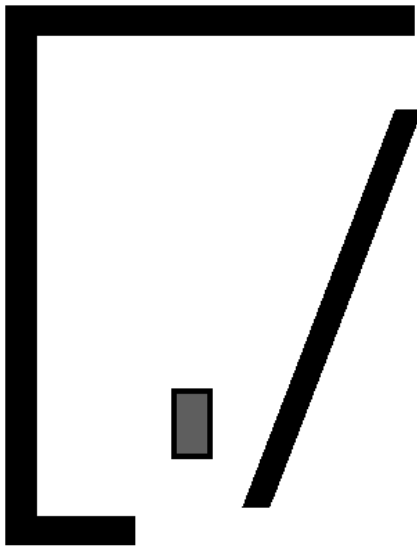<u>Art Gallery of Ontario</u>

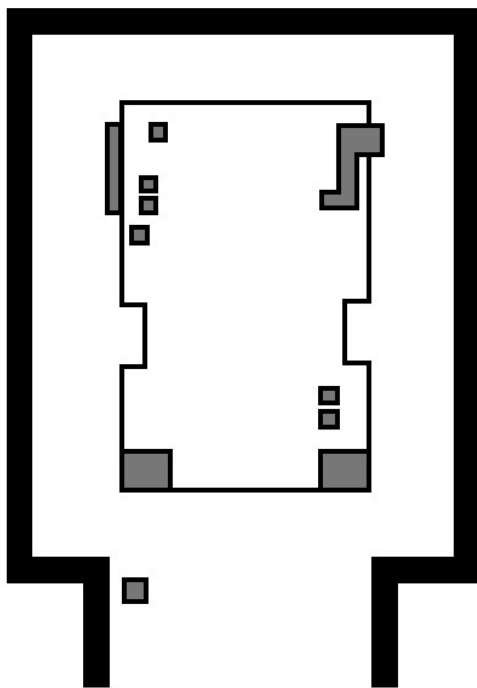Gallery 216 - *Tom Thompson Gallery*

Gallery 234 - *Art and Influence*

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

First Floor, Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion - *Towards Modernism*

Second Floor, Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavillion - *Era of Annual Exhibitions*

Participant Observation Data

<u>McMichael Canadian Art Collection</u>

McMichael Observation Data
Recorded between July 21st and August 18th, 2011

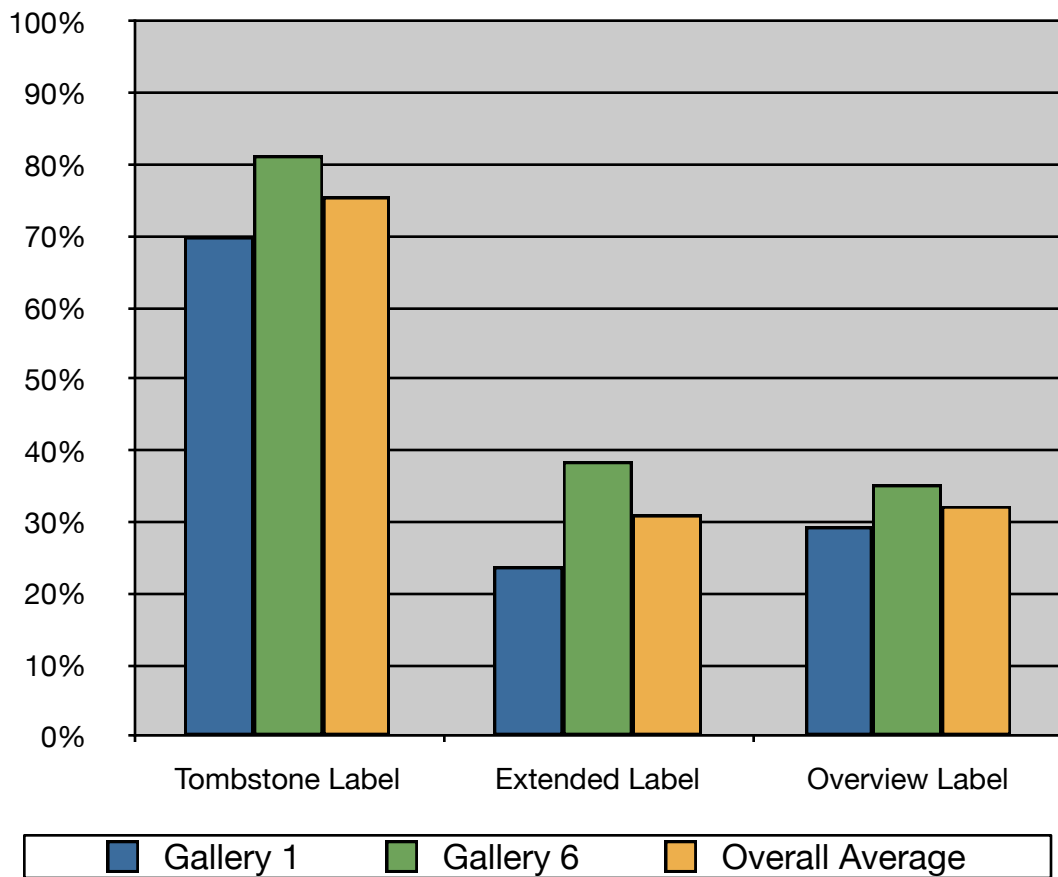| Date	Location	Total Visitors		Tombstone Label		Extended Labels		Overview Label	
2011-07-22	Gallery One	24	4.3%	18	75.0%	13	54.2%	1	4.2%
2011-07-26	Gallery One	39	6.9%	36	92.3%	3	7.7%	10	25.6%
2011-08-10	Gallery One	31	5.5%	20	64.5%	6	19.4%	3	9.7%
2011-08-11	Gallery One	21	3.7%	14	66.7%	4	19.0%	7	33.3%
2011-08-12	Gallery One	44	7.8%	31	70.5%	10	22.7%	27	61.4%
2011-08-15	Gallery One	26	4.6%	21	80.8%	11	42.3%	4	15.4%
2011-08-17	Gallery One	50	8.9%	26	52.0%	15	30.0%	18	36.0%
2011-08-18	Gallery One	51	9.0%	34	66.7%	6	11.8%	14	27.5%
2011-07-21	Gallery Six	30	5.3%	25	83.3%	13	43.3%	4	13.3%
2011-07-25	Gallery Six	29	5.1%	23	79.3%	13	44.8%	9	31.0%
2011-07-28	Gallery Six	36	6.4%	28	77.8%	15	41.7%	10	27.8%
2011-08-02	Gallery Six	15	2.7%	13	86.7%	5	33.3%	8	53.3%
2011-08-03	Gallery Six	38	6.7%	26	68.4%	13	34.2%	17	44.7%
2011-08-04	Gallery Six	60	10.64%	48	80.0%	20	33.3%	23	38.3%
2011-08-08	Gallery Six	34	6.03%	31	91.2%	15	44.1%	10	29.4%
2011-08-09	Gallery Six	36	6.38%	32	88.9%	13	36.1%	17	47.2%
Total Gallery One		286	50.7%	200	69.9%	68	23.8%	84	29.4%
Total Gallery Six		278	49.3%	226	81.3%	107	38.5%	98	35.3%
Total Overall		**564**		**426**	75.5%	**175**	31.0%	**182**	32.3%

Gallery One -
Modernity in Canada
Gallery Six -
Ivan Eyre, Sculpture in Context

Engagement Percentages

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

AGO Observation Data
Recorded August 16th, 2011

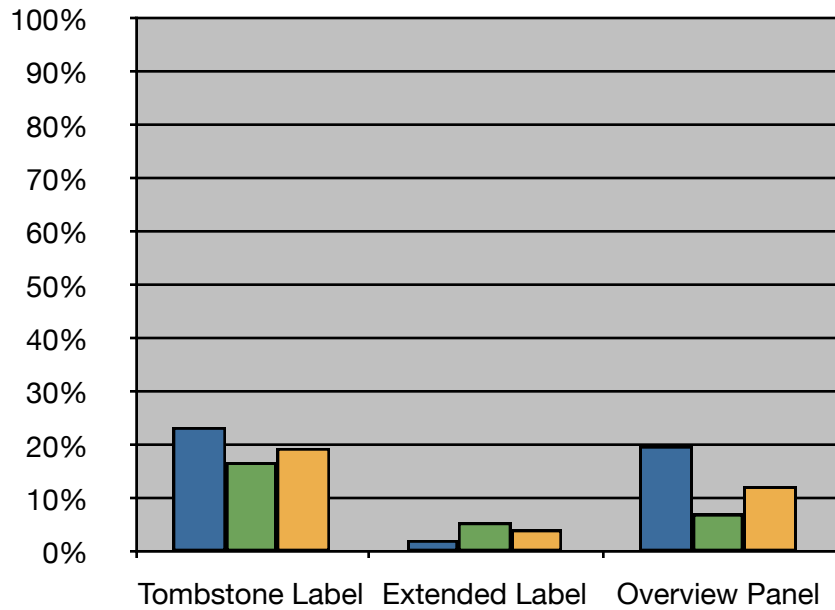| Date	Location	Total Visitors		Tombstone Label		Extended Label		Overview Label	
2011-08-16	Gallery 216	35	16.7%	18	51.4%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%
2011-08-16	Gallery 216	50	23.9%	2	4.0%	1	2.0%	14	28.0%
2011-08-16	Gallery 234	58	27.8%	5	8.6%	2	3.4%	4	6.9%
2011-08-16	Gallery 234	66	31.6%	16	24.2%	5	7.6%	5	7.6%
Total Gallery 216		85	40.7%	20	23.5%	2	2.4%	17	20.0%
Total Gallery 234		124	59.3%	21	16.9%	7	5.6%	9	7.3%
Total Overall		209		41	19.6%	9	4.3%	26	12.4%

Gallery 216 -
Thompson collection of Canadian Art, Tom Thompson
Room
Gallery 234 -
Canadian Salon, Art and Influence

Engagement Percentages
Art Gallery Of Ontario

MMFA Observation Data
Recorded October 20th, 2011

Date	Location	Total Visitors		Tombstone Label		Extended Label		Overview Label	
2011-10-20	Floor 2	85	30.6%	67	78.8%	58	68.2%	20	23.5%
2011-10-20	Floor 2	55	19.8%	40	72.7%	28	50.9%	13	23.6%
2011-10-20	Floor 1	61	21.9%	52	85.2%	46	75.4%	17	27.9%
2011-10-20	Floor 1	77	27.7%	53	68.8%	50	64.9%	20	26.0%
Total Floor 2		140	50.4%	107	76.4%	86	61.4%	33	23.6%
Total Floor 1		138	49.6%	105	76.1%	96	69.6%	37	26.8%
Total Overall		278		212	76.3%	182	65.5%	70	25.2%

Floor 1 -
Towards Modernism
Floor 2 -
Era of Annual Exhibitions

Engagement Percentages
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts