
Museum Review / Muséologie

*Listening for the Conversation: The First People's Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization*¹

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On January 31, 2003 the First Peoples Hall (FPH) opened at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec after over 11 years of planning and development. It offers a welcome relief to the limited, if dramatic, message of the houses, poles and monumental contemporary sculptures of the Native peoples, past and present of the Pacific Coast which greets all visitors to the Museum's Grand Hall. As magnificent as these original exhibits are, they privilege so singularly the Native populations of only one region of the country—and not even the ones who claim ownership of the land on which the museum stands—that they have to have served as an embarrassment to museum staff since the Museum opened in 1989. Although probably not intended, the content of the Grand Hall is reminiscent of Hollywood discourses or those of the tourism industry, fostering simplistic representations of “Indians,” such that one “Indian” is read to stand for all. Museum staff has worked hard in recent years to identify that the Grand Hall includes materials from only the Native people of the North West Coast of Canada, but I am doubtful that this distinction was and is fully grasped by many visitors. Until the FPH opened, with the exception of a few temporary exhibitions, there had been little to suggest the diversity of Aboriginal populations in Canada in the Museum's exhibitions. Now once visitors find their way to the FPH's entrance after traversing the magnificent space of the Grand Hall, there is much that they can learn about the indigenous peoples of this country, the variety and richness of their cultures and their contributions to the Canadian nation.

Background to the FPH

In the late 1980s the large empty gallery behind the Grand Hall on the Museum's ground floor was designated as the FPH. This 40 000 square foot space was to house one of two permanent galleries at the Museum. The first, which was installed on the third floor and largely complete at the time of

the Museum's opening, was Canada Hall. This theme park-like gallery tells the history at least in part, of European settlement in Canada.² In the late 1980s, preliminary plans began for the installation of the FPH. These early plans, however, were promptly shelved when they were deemed too traditional and too old-fashioned, in the midst of public debates about how Canada's Native people should be represented in the country's museums, generated by controversies surrounding 1988 *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.³ Thus the beginning of the planning of the current iteration of the FPH is designated as having begun in 1992, following the release of the Canadian Museums Association/Assembly of First Nations Task Force report, *Turning the Page* (Nicks and Hill, 1992) which laid out the principles and guidelines about how, among other museological matters, exhibitions about Aboriginal people in Canada should be done.⁴ They were to be collaborative undertakings between museum staff and Aboriginal people.

Such collaboration is no small task for a museum whose constituency spans the entire nation. There are over one million Aboriginal people in Canada dispersed in every region and city across the country. Who could actually represent this diverse and complex population? In the end, an Aboriginal Consultation Committee for the FPH was formed, comprised of about 30 individuals. Many of the Committee's members had pre-existing connections with CMC either as employees of cultural centres within their own communities, as artists and craftworkers, or as professional archaeologists. Others were individuals knowledgeable about their cultural traditions who were willing to come to Ottawa for regular meetings. A central concern for the Museum was that there was adequate regional representation among the group. The exact number on the Committee varied as not all members could make every meeting. Such fluidity was to characterize the personnel from both sides who were to work on the exhibit and its development over its gestation period. The Consultation Committee met nine times over two years. It had been charged with providing “guidance in generating the basic principles and processes for development of the exhibits,” however

the Committee's mandate was [eventually] expanded to include subjects other than the basic principles which would guide [the FPH] development: primary floorplans, allotment of spaces for various modes of exhibition; and the essential thematic structure of exhibits.⁵

The Committee, a group of people of diverse backgrounds, both Native and non-Native, developed the following set of principles to guide the development of the FPH. They were:

- All First Peoples of Canada will be represented in the Hall, including those following traditional and contemporary paths and those living in both rural and urban environments.
- Recognizing the value of multiple forms of discourse, we affirm that the knowledge and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples are vital to an understanding of issues in Native history and will be a primary element in initiating and planning the form and content of exhibitions and programmes and the messages they present.
- The diversity of Aboriginal languages, cultures, ways of life and views of the world will be affirmed and celebrated.
- We recognize that the diversity of traditional and contemporary First Peoples is based on a profound capacity to adapt to natural, social and political environments and to develop innovative ways to respond to changes in these environments.
- We recognize that the interpretation of First Peoples' history is growing and dynamic, and the design of the Hall and its exhibit space should provide for flexibility of interpretation through the decades to come.
- The importance of Aboriginal languages as the primary vehicle for transmitting and perpetuating First Peoples' cultural traditions is recognized. Therefore, Aboriginal languages will be used throughout the Hall in the interpretation and presentation of First Peoples' cultures.
- The Hall will present the history, culture and current realities of Aboriginal peoples in the voice(s) of Aboriginal peoples.
- The Hall will present to the public an opportunity to hear and understand the voice of the First Peoples, proclaiming: "We are still here, still contributing, and still playing our own distinctive part in the modern world, as we always have." In exhibits, care will be taken to explore the relationship between the present and the past.
- The Hall will address both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences. It will dispel stereotypes and underline the value of Aboriginal cultures and traditions.
- Artistic creativity in both traditional and contemporary expressions is recognized as an important means of interpreting and communicating First Peoples' cultures. Forms of artistic expression from all periods will be used as a means of presenting First Peoples' cultures throughout the Hall.
- The common experiences of Native peoples, including their

singular relationship to federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada, and to all Canadians, will be an important theme.

- Portions of the Hall will be devoted to exhibits dealing with: contemporary life and traditions; recent history (the past 500 years), including the interactions of First Peoples with Europeans and with each other; the decimation of First Peoples' populations; Aboriginal languages; ancient (pre-European) history; and origin and creation narratives. The First Peoples Hall will have a mix of temporary exhibit space and space allotted to more enduring exhibits.
- In developing the exhibits, we are working with ideas. While we recognize and treasure the skill, knowledge and aesthetic quality represented in the objects in the collections, in exhibits the role of objects will be to illustrate ideas. The shape of the collection will not determine, or limit, the character of exhibits. (CMCC Principles for Development of the First Peoples Hall, created 1998; edited 2002).⁶

The Committee agreed to determine themes for the core exhibits. A smaller group of about seven individuals continued to consult with CMC staff and outside consultants to develop the storyline for the exhibition based on these principles and themes. This process took four years, beginning in 1994, with the final storyline and design concept approved in 1998. In the end four key themes actually shaped the exhibit: "We are still here," "We are diverse," "We contribute," and "We have an ancient relationship with the land."⁷ Consultation and cooperation continued throughout the development of the exhibition with these seven individuals, but also with a network of individuals who were consulted for specific points of information and clarification. One senior Museum official stated that members of the Aboriginal Consultation Committee were some of the most consistent voices throughout the project's development.⁸ The stability of personnel typical within the CMC curatorial departments was regrettably not a feature of the FPH working group. One key individual, central to the early development of the exhibit left the Museum and other staff dropped on and off the project throughout its gestation, with only a very limited number having an ongoing involvement. Some archaeologists who were front and centre in the early stages had little to do with the final outcome. Members of the Ethnology Department staff had little to do with the project in its early development, but in the end, played a central role in bringing it to fruition. Exhibit developers were central to moving the project along, but many left for opportunities elsewhere in the civil service before the exhibit's completion. Various Aboriginal interns (part of a training program started by the Museum in response to the Task Force report) worked on the project, with some of them eventually joining the Museum as staff. These changes are expected when a project extends over such a lengthy period, but what is relevant to my discussion is that each shift in staff required a certain re-adjustment of focus in the exhibit plan, costing time and undoubtedly money. These shifts could account for

some of the “emptiness” spaces in the FPH, such as that between the last two galleries. Having been privy to various visions for the Hall as it developed through the late 1990s, it was clear to me that the final product was a much streamlined version of earlier conceptualizations, in the end only filling half of the original square footage allotted for the gallery.

Content of the First Peoples Hall

The FPH is divided into four “zones” each of which is intended to re-enforce the four central themes. The zones are *Greeting and Orientation*, *Diversity and Origins*, *Survival and Cooperation in Ancient History* and *Arrival of Europeans and Modern Existence*.

Zones I and II: Greeting and Orientation/ Diversity and Origins

A series of large sepia toned images of Aboriginal people dating apparently (as they were unlabelled) from the late 19th or early 20th centuries greet visitors at the entrance to the gallery. These historic images are a curious preface to an exhibition in which the vibrancy of contemporary Aboriginal life is to be emphasized. Once in the first gallery visitors are welcomed with a message from the Algonquin Council of Elders of *Kitigan Zibi* on whose traditional lands the Museum stands. Next a large video screen introduces you to a number of Aboriginal people of a range in ages, from all across the country. Briefly, they each tell their personal story. They live a range of lifestyles and work at everything from policemen, school principals, consultants, artists, entrepreneurs and trappers. One of the most successful sections of the FPH follows under the rubric “An Aboriginal Presence.” In a real break from traditional museum representation, Aboriginal people are identified as individuals, in this case persons generally well known both inside and outside the native community (see Photo 1). Notable examples are Buffy Ste. Marie, Louis Riel, Tom Jackson, George Clutesi, Pauline Johnson and historian Olive Dickason. Other individuals are less well-known, but clearly share significant “fame” in their own communities. Each person is introduced through an object that has direct connection to them, a brief biography, and a photograph. The theme “We are Diverse” is presented in the remainder of the introductory gallery in a dizzying and eclectic array of artifacts: canoes, hats, headdresses, gauntlets, harpoons, mittens, baskets, spoons, parkas, hunting equipment, nets and baskets. These objects from the impressive and expansive CMC Ethnology collections, combined with a diverse collection of photographs and images are intended to prompt notions of diversity, creativity, survival, continuity, an ancient history, memories of elders and the presence of a contemporary Aboriginal population in Canada. Many of the objects and photographs are loosely dated, with contemporary and historic items and images exhibited side by side. Such juxtapositioning speaks to the theme, “We are still here” as “our traditions continue.”

The decision to juxtapose objects from different peoples in different parts of the country is not without its problems. The emphasis on diversity of Native cultures in Canada possibly warrants this, but if the average visitor does not know how many kilometers separate the Gw'ichin, the Tsuu T'sina and Mi'kmaq and that each represents a very distinct cultural tradition, in far-flung corners of Canada, the impact of such diversity is lost. Nowhere in the gallery can the visitor find detailed information on any one group. The use of interactive computer terminals is one possible way that the interested visitor might be able learn more of the diversity and complexity of the Canadian Native populations.



Photo 1: Harry Foster, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Land is vital to Canadian Aboriginal identity. It is freedom, life, the future, the past and the present—all ideas articulated in the video that introduces the next gallery, entitled “Markers on the Land.” A large topographic map dominates the space. The complexity of “place names” is suggested through representations of such realities as the mouth of the Nimpkish River on Vancouver Island having one name in English, but 110 in Kwak'wala, with each name specifying a particular geographic feature or the site of some long remembered event. Banners highlighting the marking of land through *inukshuks*, trails, constellations, boulder configurations, petroglyphs and now stop signs in Aboriginal languages, engage the visitor with the notion of how Aboriginal people mark the land. Symbols of these different ways of “knowing” the land lead one into a space called “Ways of Knowing,” fitted with furniture, drawers of artifacts and an array of books, all circling a large un-named Inuit sculpture. This space presents the visitor with four broad epistemological structures that ground what is “known” about Aboriginal peoples. These include archaeology, oral tradition, historical documentation ethnography and contemporary “revival” initiatives such as film making and basket-weaving. Intended to set the context for the following gallery entitled “Our Origins,” the visitors that I observed in this space seemed confused as to its purpose.

Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike have, contentiously debated the subject of origins, or more specifically,

the role of the Bering Strait in the original settlement of North America. Text adjacent to a tiny Dorset mask acknowledges an ancient presence of Aboriginal people in North America, along with the idea that Native inhabitants have “been here before the land took its present form.” An elaborate simulation of the Blue Fish Caves in the Yukon allows the visitor to walk over an archaeologist’s “grid” of a cave floor littered with mammoth, horse and other miscellaneous bones. Adjacent exhibits of burins, micro-blades and butchering techniques for large animals, are all accompanied by extensive label copy and maps. The Debart, Grant Lake and Kettle Lake sites are discussed to support the scientific argument for a path of early North American settlement originating with the glaciation of the Bering Strait.

The visitor’s next encounter is Haudenosaunee artist Shelly Niro’s dramatic and engaging installation of *Sky Woman* who brought humans to the world, a work commissioned for the FPH (see Photo 2). Adjacent works by contemporary artists Roy Vickers, Vincent Bomberry and Frances Kagige speak of Coast Tsmishian, Cayuga and Ojibwa creation stories, respectively. At the centre of this “creation story” gallery a 22-minute video, dramatizing a Miq’kmaq version, is presented in a small theatre. An introductory text states that these “stories” are told in homes, schools and cultural centres. They are narratives interpreted by artists, writers and actors for Aboriginal communities, just as the bits of chipped rock and fragments of bone found in the previous galleries are interpreted (largely) for non-Aboriginal communities by archaeologists.⁹ No parallel, however, is made between both forms of interpretations and the role they each play in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world as narratives, which underpin very different epistemologies and world views.

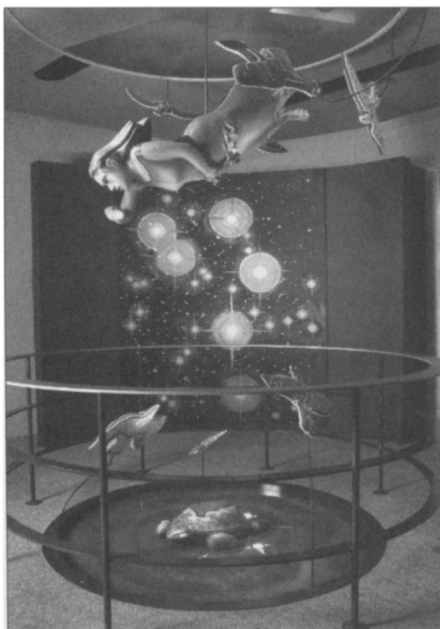


Photo 2: *Sky Woman*. Installation by artist Shelly Niro. Photo: Harry Foster, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Storytelling continues as a central theme in the next gallery. An audio booth with recorded stories from the Blackfoot, Dene, Metis, Ojibwa and West Coast peoples is juxtaposed impressive art works by Norval Morriseau, Roy Thomas, Larry Hill and Robert Davidson. These artworks and stories highlight both the relations between humans and animals that have sustained human life and the role these stories play in communicating life’s “truths” within the Aboriginal world. A salient quote from Anishnabe writer and artist Blake Debassige, notes that stories told by elders promote wisdom and reflection on what constitutes one’s lived reality.

Zone III: Survival and Co-operation in Ancient History

The next large gallery highlights the role of whaling, fishing, communal hunting, farming and trading in Aboriginal societies of North America. Dioramas of artifacts, with panels of waist-high, back-lit text (and thus often hard to read—see Photo 3) present various subsistence strategies with pertinent examples from across the country. For example, in the section on communal hunting both the Plains bison hunt and the Dene caribou hunt are included. With heavy emphasis on technology and gender roles, the gallery echoes introductory anthropology textbooks, which often privilege a cultural ecology view of the human experience. Each diorama is punctuated by a short video, which the visitor—by now somewhat weary—stands to watch. In three of these videos the tragedy of the mass slaughter by non-Aboriginals of the bison herds, the potential impact on caribou herds of Northern pipeline development and the recent conflicts over fishing rights at Burnt Church are discussed. The role of women in the 1990 Oka crisis as an extension of their important place in Iroquoian society, and the contemporary powwow trail as an extension of earlier trade and communal gatherings are the subjects of the two final videos. I wondered why such important topics were not given greater presence in the overall narrative of the gallery. Most visitors, I observed, simply walked by the silent videos, not stopping to don the cumbersome headphones to hear what they had to say. What happened at Burnt Church and Oka, as well as the complexities of northern pipeline development, are important events in the contemporary Canadian political reality. Why is the emphasis in the gallery so singularly on “ancient history?” Why are pre-contact lifestyles of hunting, arctic whaling, maritime subsistence, the longhouse and trade fairs presented as if they were removed from the larger sociopolitical context of the last 200 years? Why not balance these stories with the contemporary political and social challenges to retaining elements of a hunting, gathering, fishing, whaling subsistence in the 21st century? Would not such discussions speak directly to the theme of “We are still here?”



Photo 3: Steven Darby, Canadian Museum of Civilization

Zone IV: Arrival of Europeans and Modern Existence

Jarringly one emerges from the dark, even somewhat mysterious gallery on traditional subsistence patterns into a white, starkly-lit gallery which tells the story of the arrival of strangers, or as a press release said, the “shock wave” of the arrival of Europeans. Introductory copy for this final gallery recounts a Mi’kmaq story of a young girl who dreamt of the arrival of strangers, and Samuel Hearne’s recording of the rather uncomplimentary description by the Dene he encountered in 1777, who said his skin resembled “meat sodden in water till all blood drained from it.” These accounts establish how this European arrival was seen as one of foreboding, or at the very least, as a very curious event. A somewhat disconnected list of thematic headings—“Early Relations,” “Metis,” “Beliefs,” “Intergovernmental Relations,” “Economy,” “Social Gatherings,” “Art” and “Affirmation”—structures this gallery, with a multiplicity of sub-themes within each section.

Narratives of the inland and coastal fur trade begin the gallery. The demise of the Beothuk at the hands of newly arrived settlers, the emergence of the Metis, the devastation of Aboriginal populations by disease, the signing of treaties and the move to reserves, and later residential schools, the introduction of farming to native communities and the impact of missionization are some, but not all of the themes are covered in this section. The gallery is dense with artifacts, which one can, with some study, link to the thematic text panels—a task most easily done, I found, if one has some prior knowledge of the subject. The thematic text is essentially a running narrative describing key historical events, rarely making specific reference to how the artifacts on display connect to these events. An example from contemporary Metis artist Bob Boyer’s series of painted blankets is hung in the proximity to text that describes the devastating impact of disease on Native populations. The piece is tersely labelled “A Government Issue Blanket, 1983.” One has to know that in this series of works, Boyer spoke directly to claims that

small pox infested blankets were distributed to Native people, fostering a rapid and devastating spread of the disease to understand why it was hung here. More details are offered about yet more objects in thick, daunting binders positioned throughout the gallery. These contain archival photographs, images of artifacts (captioned only with catalogue label copy) and a few paragraphs of text highlighting things relevant to the gallery. These are a little overwhelming as museum fatigue and a certain frustration at having to work hard to piece the gallery’s story together had set in by this point. (Surprisingly there are no places for visitors to sit in this final gallery, even though the visitor will have walked a minimum of half a kilometer by the time they leave the Hall.¹⁰)

Potent themes such as the impact of residential schools are neutralized by noting that not all of those who attended them found them a demoralizing and deeply troubling experience. Although this is true, the suggestion that the positive and negative impacts on Native populations were equivalent is misleading. Resistance is a theme that slips in frequently, but is never boldly stated. Examples noted include the tough negotiations by those who traded early with the Europeans; those who stealthily slipped away from residential schools to undergo traditional initiation rituals; and the emergence of syncretic religious practice in many communities.

In the section on residential schools there is a photograph of a young man, wearing a traditional loin cloth and headdress, participating in a Sun Dance ritual. The image is labelled, “Indian Sun Dance, Making a Brave”—wording which was standard in the discourse of an earlier era, but is hardly so in the 21st century. Juxtaposed with this image is one of a group of young boys taken following their admission to a residential school, wearing suits with their heads shaved. Such western attire suggests that a “civilized” order has been imposed on their young bodies, an order that would widely be read to stand in stark contrast to that of the Sun Dance rituals. The contrast of these two images is unsettling—a discomfort to which visitors need not be protected, if they are engaged to reflect on the ideologies and power dimensions that underlay this change.

Native spirituality, beyond a discussion of its interaction with Christian traditions, is not discussed in the exhibition, making the Sun Dance images even more confusing. This omission was a conscious decision of the early Consultation Committee and one for which the logic seems reasonable, as these are complex theologies, and not necessarily beliefs to be shared openly. Discussion of this omission in the exhibition could prompt the visitor’s reflection on why such a decision was taken, and the imperative of Native people to keep their traditional spiritual practices private. The absence of label copy which draws the reader in more directly fails to prompt any questioning of the information offered.

In this final gallery the political history and gains of Aboriginal peoples in the latter 20th century are highlighted, along with contemporary lifestyles and continuing traditions. An example of the latter is a display on lacrosse. However, as

I gleaned from comments made by one mystified visitor, the labels were not adequate for a someone who had no prior knowledge of what a lacrosse stick looks like, or even that it is a game.

Aboriginal war veterans, the struggle of Aboriginal women over Bill C31 and several key political and constitutional struggles are discussed here.¹¹ Affirmation through art, contemporary political gains and full engagement on their own terms with mainstream Canadian society are the central messages of the final exhibits and video. A display of contemporary Aboriginal art ushers the visitor out of the FPH. While the examples of contemporary Aboriginal artistic expression are magnificent, the inclusion of this work here plays to a stereotype that "culture" is something best evidenced in "creative/artistic" projects. A few examples of Indian humour are pinned to a small bulletin board near the exit—the small number of items on the board is notable—considering the richness of the material available. Regardless, this modest inclusion is an important, yet very understated element of the story being told in the FPH.¹² The humanity of Aboriginal people so strong in the opening galleries is only fleetingly revisited here—a point I return to below.

Listening for the Conversation

It is early in the history of the FPH to get any real sense of its success with the general public. On the four separate visits that I made to the gallery, I observed that people seemed to stop longest in the first sections of the *Diversity and Origins* gallery—an exhibition which visually attracts one's attention and highlights the lives of individual people. The overall design of the Hall is a serpentine path, a form that propels people along rather than encouraging them to stop and read the text and examine the objects. Too often, the artifacts seem to serve as decorative objects, rather than the complex symbolic and metaphorical referents that they are. Individual labels are all too often formulaic listings of the object name (e.g., cradleboard, copper—terms themselves which only make sense to those with some inside information); the name of the people who made it; sometimes where they are located (BC, Alberta); a vague date (e.g., before 1925); what it is made of (e.g., cedar, glass beads); and the CMC catalogue number. These sparse details are rarely enough information to allow a connection with the narrative thematic text. More interpretive labels for at least some of the objects could potentially draw the visitor in to actually "read" the objects in relation to the themes presented.

It is noted in the first gallery of the FPH that 59% of Canada's Aboriginal population lives in urban centers. However, this population gets little attention in the FPH. Discussion of this reality is no simple task, even for the Aboriginal community itself. Such residence patterns for some have the political potential to work against claims for rights over traditional lands and resources. At the same time, these statistics speak to the successful engagement of Aboriginals with

mainstream society. Why not engage the visitor with the complexity that this reality presents for indigenous peoples of this country, whose Aboriginal title is recognized in the Constitution, something which should not be seen to hinge on where individuals choose to live.

Overall, I found myself craving a much more conversational discussion by the time I reached the last gallery. At a modest level, such a dialogue would prompt a more interactive visitor experience—something which is unfortunately lacking throughout the FPH as whole—but it would also foster some understanding of the complexity of the history and future of Canada's indigenous population. These realities are politically, if not morally charged, highlighting that straightforward resolutions are not always readily achievable. An *Ottawa Citizen* reviewer found this glossing desirable suggesting that the FPH "walks a fine line between offering its content for consideration and pushing it as an argument."¹³ "Content for consideration" unfortunately is read as stating the "truth," and "argument" according to this journalist is the pushing of a polemic. Such journalistic commentary hints at what CMC faced in mounting the FPH.

Museum officials informed me that it was intended that there be multiple voices present in the FPH, yet there little in the exhibition that prompts the visitor to engage in a dialogue with its subjects and themes. The videos in the exhibition are welcome infusions of Native voices, but in three of the four galleries an institutional voice seems to drown them out. "We" predominates in the early galleries, but is much more muted as one moves through the exhibition. The Native "we" that is found in the FPH frequently speaks as a collective voice of Native people in Canada. In counterpoint there are voices and faces of individuals, in quotations, on video screens and named artists whose works frame the exit to the final gallery. Historical figures such as Shenadit, Thaneldelthur, Louis Riel are included. Beyond these, sadly the genius and unique character of the individual hands that made the objects that fill the galleries are forever silent. These identities were rarely recorded, a point worth making to the public. It was the exoticism of the objects which fascinated the early collectors. In the end these items represented something generically "Indian," a designation which muted the cultural diversity of the indigenous peoples of this country. Details of their makers, their intended purpose or cultural significance mattered much less to those who collected these materials. Thus largely, and understandably, the individual Aboriginal voices heard in the gallery are contemporary ones. They are bold, engaging, thoughtful and insightful, even provocative. Despite these inclusions, however, an anonymous institutional/hegemonic voice is ubiquitous in the label copy, particularly in the last two galleries. This generic voice stands in contrast to the energy and spontaneity apparent in the quotations, stories and voices on some of the videos—all of which are Aboriginal.

In the end, the voices heard in the exhibit seem rather to speak sequentially, than in conversation. Aboriginal people,

archaeologists, ethnologists and artists all had a chance to speak, but they did not seem to necessarily be talking to one another. The visitor, meanwhile, is completely shut out from joining in the discussion. The declarative syntax of the label copy, particularly in later galleries, suggests an authoritative positioning of the institutional voice. The homogeneity of the design strategy (uniform font size, styles and typeface) suggests that all themes expressed by this voice are of equal concern—but is the continuance of lacrosse of equal importance to treaties, residential schools and racism—the latter being examples of themes buried in the consistency of the design strategy?

The burden of being a national institution, working in the context of a lumbering and underfunded bureaucracy coupled with conflicting visions of what the First Peoples exhibit could and should have been, all played out during the FPH's lengthy development, and weighed heavily on those who ultimately had the monumental task of pulling it all together. Some greater suggestion of the discursive nature of relations between Canadian First Peoples and the state would have been desirable to see in the FPH—an engagement fraught with ambiguity, politics, contradiction and every so often, good will. Collaborative relations between Aboriginal people and museums and ultimately their publics, as laid out in the *Turning the Page* document need to be those of conversation, where not every sentence is finished and ideas are continually in formulation. While achieving a great deal, and definitely a welcome change from the pre-1990s exhibitions in Canada's national museums, this conversation at in the FPH is often only whispered, and at times falls silent.

Notes

- 1 I am thankful for the assistance given to me by Michel Cheff, Director of Special Initiatives and Yasmine Mingay from the Media office at CMC.
- 2 It would appear that the Grand Hall was also a fairly permanent exhibit as many of the houses had been specifically commissioned for the space, but it is apparently not designated as a "gallery" in the same way as Canada Hall and the FPH.
- 3 See Ames 1988, Ames and Trigger 1988, Elton and Doolittle et al., 1987, Harrison 1993, Harrison et al., 1987a, 1987b, Trigger, 1988.
- 4 A grassroots consultation process directed by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations brought museums and local Native communities together to discuss their relationship. Recommendations from these discussions were integrated into the final Task Force report, called *Turning the Page*.
- 5 March 21/95 Internal CMC document entitled "First Peoples Hall Principles, Themes and Storyline."

- 6 This information was in an internal document provided to me by Michel Cheff, Director of Special Initiatives, CMC.
- 7 CMC Communiqué, Jan. 30, 2003.
- 8 Michel Cheff, personal communication.
- 9 It should be noted that archaeological evidence has been used frequently by Aboriginal peoples in establishing their claim to certain lands in various legal battles.
- 10 CMC website: <http://www.civilization.ca/media/docs/fsfph02e.html>. Last checked August 6, 2003.
- 11 Bill C31, passed in 1985, re-instated Indian status to women who had married non-Native men. The re-instatement also applied to any offspring from these marriages. Symbolically and materially this was a very important change for many women and children. It did, however, some claim, put a strain on the limited resources available on Aboriginal reserves.
- 12 One example from the board is: "What do you call an Indian vegetarian? A poor hunter!"
- 13 Anonymous, Hall Honours First Nations, *The Ottawa Citizen*, Feb., 2, 2003: C4.

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