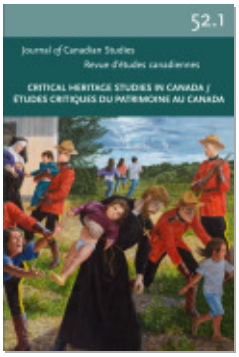
The Practice of Critical Heritage: Curatorial Dreaming as Methodology



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The Practice of Critical Heritage: Curatorial Dreaming as Methodology

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Abstract: In this article, I introduce the methodology of curatorial dreaming as a tool for exploring possibilities and limitations of critical heritage in Canada. Curatorial dreams are imagined exhibitions or interventions in museums, galleries, and heritage and vernacular sites. For our volume, *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, my co-editor Erica Lehrer and I tasked scholars to propose exhibitions in response to their own critiques of museums and broader social landscapes. This article focuses on curatorial dreaming workshops that I have facilitated with curators, educators, activists, students, and scholars. I argue for the value of responding creatively, concretely, and constructively to problematic exhibitions and heritage products. My examples include an advertising campaign for Yum Yum Potato Chips in Quebec, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights' representation of queer history and struggle, and the *Women Are Persons* monument that faces the Senate on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. In describing and analyzing curatorial dreaming in relation to these display sites, I compare realistic and impossible curatorial dreams and conclude by challenging mainstream, establishment museums and heritage sites to honour and acknowledge refusals and difficulties.

Keywords: critical museology, curatorial dreaming, public scholarship, pedagogy, reflexivity, multivocality, participatory culture

Résumé : Dans cet article, je présente la méthodologie « *curatorial dreaming* » en tant qu'outil pour explorer les possibilités et les limites de la critique du patrimoine au Canada. Les « *curatorial dreams* » sont des expositions ou des interventions imaginées dans des musées, des galeries et des sites patrimoniaux ou vernaculaires. Pour notre livre *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, ma codirectrice Erica Lehrer et moi avons demandé à des chercheurs de proposer des expositions en réponse à leurs propres critiques de musées et de paysages sociaux plus larges. Cet article met l'accent sur des ateliers de « *curatorial dreaming* » que j'ai organisés pour conservateurs, éducateurs, activistes, étudiants et chercheurs. Je soutiens qu'il est important de répondre de manière créative, concrète et constructive aux expositions problématiques et aux produits patrimoniaux. Mes exemples comprennent une campagne de publicité québécoise pour les croustilles Yum Yum; la représentation du Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne de l'histoire et de la lutte des queers; et le monument Les femmes sont des personnes devant le Sénat sur la colline Parlementaire à Ottawa. En décrivant et analysant le « *curatorial dreaming* »

en lien avec ces sites d'exposition, je compare des « *curatorial dreams* » réalistes et impossibles, et je conclus en défiant les musées et les sites patrimoniaux grand public et établis à honorer et reconnaître les refus et les difficultés.

Mots-clés : muséologie critique, curatorial dreaming, bourses publiques, pédagogie, réflexivité, multivocalité, culture participative

Introduction: Yum Yum

Can heritage be a bag of potato chips? In 2013, Yum Yum Potato Chips in Warwick Quebec issued a "vintage edition" of their chips, featuring a Hollywood-style caricature of a wide-eyed smiling "Indian" child with long hair, a headband, and feather (see fig. 1). Major grocery chains like Provigo set up life-sized cardboard displays of the figure, dressed in a loin cloth, with its face cut out so customers could insert their own for a "fun" portrait, presumably as a nod to participatory heritage. The

Fig. 1. Yum Yum Potato Chips.

ad campaign generated controversy, including defensive responses by the company that alluded to faithful customers' nostalgic memories of the mascot and to their founder's "Indian origin." Yum Yum's website says nothing of these vague origins; rather, it boasts that it is a "100% home grown, third generation family business from Quebec" that is "part of the Quebec landscape" and synonymous with pride, ambition, and authenticity (Yum Yum Chips 2017).

It is tempting to launch into a critical analysis of this ad campaign—there is so much to unpack and contextualize—but that is not the goal of this article. Rather, my focus here is to argue for the value of responding creatively and constructively to problematic representations of heritage. Specifically, I will make use of a methodology called curatorial dreaming to examine possibilities and limitations of critical heritage in Canada. Curatorial dreams are imagined exhibitions or interventions in museums, galleries, heritage, and vernacular sites. For our volume, *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, my co-editor Erica Lehrer and I experimented with this methodology with scholars whom we tasked with proposing exhibitions that responded to their own critiques of museums and broader social landscapes (Butler and Lehrer 2016a). This is an unusual approach, as scholars are highly trained in analysis and critique but are generally unpracticed at offering constructive solutions to the problems they identify, let alone in the form of a public exhibition. While the editorial process of coaching scholars to consider a range of factors—including materiality, space, emotion, the senses, and sociality—was intensive, the results have been well-received in academic and national media, and some of the exhibition blueprints have materialized (Antoncic 2016; Colbert 2016; Fulford 2016; Ruiz 2016). Each of the contributions can be read as invitations to future collaboration with specific museums, galleries, and communities. They are highly specific—with titles, venues, collaborators, images, objects, sounds—as well as being descriptions of curatorial strategies and processes of exhibition development. To be clear, curatorial dreaming builds upon critical analysis, translating critiques into exhibitonary moments or interventions. Contributors also reflect on practical and political challenges. For instance, in "abNormal: Bodies in Medicine and Culture," Manon Parry (2016) addresses the question, Who decides what normal is and what factors inform this decision? Her imagined exhibition explores social inequality in relation to scientific representations of gendered and racialized bodies, the medicalization of homosexuality, and the construction of disability. Departing from display conventions of medical museums, audiences are given the opportunity to respond to content, explore views of other visitors, comment on current trends, and use art and mass media materials to deconstruct and reconstitute popular and scientific images of bodies.

Parry discusses political, legal, and ethical obstacles and objections that could be elicited by her curatorial dream, adding that "speculative discussions of the problems of mounting such an exhibition may also allow for a more honest conversation about the political forces that frame museum work than accounts of real projects ever can" (Parry 2016, 4).

In this article, I will focus on curatorial dreaming workshops that I have conducted with curators, educators, artists, activists, students, and scholars.[1] I will discuss my pedagogical work with students at McGill, as well as a workshop, Museum Queeries and Curatorial Dreaming, held in Winnipeg in June 2017, which was designed to respond to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights' engagement with, and representation of, queer history and culture in Canada. At McGill, my undergraduate students adapt quite easily to curatorial dreaming; they are digital natives who are accustomed to participatory culture (Giaccardi 2012), predominantly liberal or left-oriented in their politics, civic-minded, and confident in their ability to engage with official, public culture. Their aspirations resonate with ideals of participatory museology, especially the goal of merging curating with dialogic, constructivist forms of education (Welsh 2005; Wilson 2010). In curatorial dreaming workshops with participants who come from diverse disciplinary, personal, and professional backgrounds, such as in Museum Queeries discussed below, the stakes and dynamics are different. Participants have more varied artistic, technical, conceptual, research, and political skills, and, perhaps most importantly, different relationships with institutions, such as universities, artist-run centres, and national museums. Their experiences of marginalization from establishment cultural sites are both difficult and emboldening, and they yield richly varied approaches to curatorial dreams. This creates an opportunity to reflect on possibilities, but also limitations, of curatorial dreams and critical museology and heritage.

Curatorial Dreaming: Write an Exhibition Label

For a take-home exam in an undergraduate seminar called Museums and Material Culture in Canada, at McGill University, I included a "creative response" question, in which I asked students to produce an introductory label for an imagined exhibit about the Yum Yum Potato Chips controversy. I provided links to journalistic reports as well as guidelines that the label should state the main idea of the exhibition, that the headline should be five to six words and the body text no longer than 150 words, broken into short paragraphs. I also requested that they locate their exhibit and outline its main curatorial goals. To say that I was impressed with the results is an understatement. I knew the students had the tools to critically analyze the advertisement

in relation to settler colonialism and museological traditions. Most remarkable was their ability to conceptualize constructive responses to real problems, and the range of curatorial strategies and sites that they deployed. Their proposed sites included the online Canadian Museum of Advertising, the McCord Museum in Montreal, the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University, the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill, the old Eaton Centre, a design centre at the University of Quebec; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; and the lower field of McGill campus. These choices demonstrated how different spaces could frame the controversy and engage different constituencies, including accidental ones, like a casual shopper. The students contextualized the controversy in multiple ways, referring to the Oka crisis (when Yum Yum cancelled its mascot), the Idle No More movement, decolonizing museums and universities, consumer activism, corporate responsibility, museum mandates, violence and racism, and North American popular culture. One intervention acknowledged the affective power of nostalgia, while linking the Yum Yum campaign to "retro racism".[2]

Oh, That Nostalgic Feeling!

How Do We Talk about "Retro Racism"?

Decades ago, a Yum Yum Potato Chip bag would not cause a stir. The smiling "Indian" boy is a familiar image. Today, there is much controversy over the company's decision to bring back the logo as a "collector's item." And people have started to ask: what are we collecting?

Debates over the representation of First Nations peoples in brands are not confined to Quebec. In the US, the Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians face similar challenges: how do you preserve a brand without contributing to structural racism?

Do we exempt commercialism from racism?

The importance of logos is clear. The importance of actively challenging popular history is not. What is the responsibility of corporations toward representation? Are people collecting racism when they collect a Yum Yum bag? Do we consider the impact of "retro racism" on the people who live with the consequences of commercial misrepresentation?

Question Nostalgia.

This is a strong example of an interrogative curatorial strategy. A core principle of the "interrogative museum," as outlined by Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, is to "exhibit the problem, not the solution" (2015, 281). This means

> moving away from exhibitions that seem to deliver a lecture—which ... might be seen as declarative, indicative, or even imperative in mood—to a more dialogue-based sense of asking questions. It means taking museum exhibits as essentially contested, debatable, and respecting the agency and knowledgeability of audiences. (Karp and Kratz 2015, 281)

In the Yum Yum Chips intervention above, the audience is directly engaged with specific questions. As the student explains in her curatorial note:

> The exhibit asks many questions in an effort to elicit a response from the viewing public. People don't often consider the impact of commercial items on social identity, so it is important to not prescribe a view but to force people to think about their own engagement with brands. It is not easy to draw the line of what is appropriate and what is not when the object in question has sentimental or nostalgic value; however this is precisely the reason that this exhibit is necessary. ... In a world where people recognize more brands than birds, it is necessary to put branding practices in question.

Also evident here is a curatorial desire to deal with difficult material ("It is not easy to draw the line ...") that may destabilize a viewer's sense of self or community.[3] Pedagogically, the intervention stakes out a delicate balance between being authoritative ("Question Nostalgia") and avoiding an authoritarian or overly didactic tone. Instead, the audience is asked to reflect on an aspect of heritage that is treated uncritically in consumer culture. The chosen sites for this intervention—the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University, and the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill—amplify its impact. At the time of the Yum Yum controversy, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal hosted *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop, and Aboriginal Culture*, which featured contemporary North American Indigenous artists whose work engages cultural and political activism and complex, hybrid, urban identities (Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal 2017). This bold, vibrant exhibition was an excellent counterpoint to the static, stereotypical, empty Yum Yum logo. As well, the nearby Montreal Museum of Fine Art faced a similar appropriation/misappropriation controversy over the stocking of a non-Indigenous owned, "Canadiana inspired" luxury fashion and housewares company named Inukt in its gift shop.[4] The chosen venue of business schools, not exactly hotbeds of activism, is another matter. This is a strategic curatorial choice,

based on a goal to communicate with future decision-makers in the corporate world. Finally, the use of "we" in addressing the audience may be a way of communicating fellowship (fellow students), as well as a strategy to connect with a potentially defensive audience. It also reveals the student's own implication in the problem, as a North American consumer. That said, if this project were conducted in a workshop setting, the group would explore implicit assumptions about intended audience that this "we" conveys, and possibly consider alternative narrative forms (Strong 1997).

In another curatorial dream, a francophone student situated her project, titled "Ce ne sont pas que des chips" (They are not only chips), at a design centre at the University of Quebec in Montreal. The immersive, multisensory dimension of this imagined intervention is striking: students walk down a narrow corridor lined with Yum Yum advertisements on one side, and Indigenous testimony and local historical facts about colonialism on the other. They end their visit in front of a bowl of chips, with a sign that reads: "Entendez-vous le crunch?" (Do you hear the crunch?) This intervention valorizes the "embodied and the lived" (Chakrabarty 2002, 9), creating an experiential alternative to textual didacticism. The sound of crunch is associated with the pleasure of eating chips, but also the act of bringing advertisements and testimony into contact with each other. Finally, a third activist intervention takes place in Eaton Centre:

We Will Not Back Down

If you are reading this *here*, you are a consumer. Your dollars are powerful. How do you spend them?

We Will Not Back Down is an interactive exhibit in the heart of Montreal's shopping district that explores the social repercussions of using stereotypical Native imagery as marketing material. If companies such as Yum Yum Potato Chips will not back down from leveraging harmful icons to sell their products, then we shall not back down in exposing their prejudice.

Take a look into the last three decades of Quebec's consuming capital. From t-shirts to tobacco Montreal retailers have sold products that promote hurtful images of Native peoples.

Put your money where your mouth is and sign the jumbo screen live-cast petition to take Yum Yum off the shelves, listen to first-hand testimonies, and learn about the cultural impact of your dollars.

We Will Not Back Down—Consume Respectfully.

In this instance, the vernacular site of a shopping centre ("If you are reading this *here* ...") is a crucial component of the exhibit, chosen to catch an audience in situ, to intervene in everyday life in consumer culture. A seemingly innocent activity, like buying chips and feeling nostalgic, is reframed as being linked to capitalist and colonial culture. The inclusion of Indigenous testimony reverses colonial silencing and displaces curatorial authority; the potential for collaboration with stakeholders is clear. And technology is mobilized as a tool for engagement and cultural exchange, as a live screen petition places the process in consumers' hands and makes their contributions visible and meaningful: "The more visitors can see how their voices add to a larger, growing conversation, the more likely they are to take questions—and their answers—seriously" (N. Simon 2010, 150).

These imagined exhibitions are personal, yet social; each strives to contribute to public scholarship and can be experienced alone or with others (Setten 2005). They seek to right past wrongs, to link the past to contemporary inequities, and to learn from differently positioned subjects. In another example, a student proposed placing a recreation of a Montreal kitchen, circa 1960 (complete with Yum Yum Potato Chips) on McGill's lower field, and linking it to the site's historical significance as an Iroquois settlement, the presence of the Redpath Museum (a quintessential nineteenth-century natural history museum that was gifted by a sugar baron), as well as the space's contemporary reappropriation during annual powwows. This ambitious cross-referencing of institutions, popular culture, domesticity, and cultural practices reflects the student's effort to create "startling juxtapositions" in order to complicate nostalgia and explore "layered and divergent meanings" that establishment museums rarely encourage. These goals resonate with critical pedagogy far more than with traditional museum practice of conservation, preservation, and collection management. Critical heritage, I would argue, similarly turns toward questions of power, pedagogy, and positionality. While any exhibition entails bringing together "unlikely assemblages of people, things, ideas, texts, spaces, and different media" (Basu and Macdonald 2007 , 9), a critical approach does this with an eye to disrupting and changing normative narratives. Curatorial dreaming, in this instance, involves translating critical analysis into imagined disruptive displays, which are designed to mobilize audiences and collaborators in addressing a contemporary, real-world challenge. While curatorial dreams are imagined, the process of translation is an act of public scholarship that may inspire further action and new ways of reading the world.

Disrupting National Heritage: What Is Possible?

What is critical heritage in Canada? One way to explore this question is to take stock of the status quo. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), like other Canadian national museums, is mandated to play a role in

- preserving and promoting our heritage at home and abroad,
- contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians, and
- inspiring research, learning, and entertainment that belong to all Canadians. (CMHR 2018a)

Striking in this mission statement taken from the museum's website is the assumption of a shared, collective memory, namely, "our heritage." Here, the CMHR mobilizes heritage for nation building, to create an elusive "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) among 36.5 million people who are spread unevenly over nearly 10 million square miles and six time zones. Such goals are normative in Canadian national museums.

Since its founding in 2008 and its opening in 2014, the CMHR has garnered critical attention, and, while the museum is not monolithic, analysts point to its emphasis on cultivating hope and optimism, to honour progress in the march for human rights (Failler 2015; Lehrer 2015). The *Canadian Journeys* gallery, for instance, is introduced in this way:

> There have been steps and missteps on the road to greater rights for everyone in Canada. This panorama of experience reflects continuing efforts to achieve human rights for all. This gallery, the largest of the Museum, explores dozens of Canadian stories, from democratic rights to language rights, from freedom of conscience to freedom from discrimination. (CMHR 2018b)

"Steps and missteps" is an understated and depoliticized way to describe many past and unresolved inequities (Failler 2017). While the museum does not deny that struggles for human rights are ongoing, progress and celebration shape its overriding narrative. This is materialized in its architecture (the Tower of Hope), inscribed in promotional materials ("Be inspired!"), and reproduced in pedagogical activities, such as a fast-paced digital simulation game in which participants build a GSA (gay-straight alliance) by seeking support from teachers, administrators, community leaders, parents, and peers. In this instance, a rather simplistic path of activism via official channels is valorized, while its potential limits and difficulties are ignored. Critical heritage in this case would need to disrupt the museum's dominant triumphant frame, whether visually, textually, aurally, or experientially.

In June 2017, I had the opportunity to explore such possibilities as a facilitator of a two-day workshop called Museum Queeries and Curatorial Dreaming, held

in Winnipeg. Organized by Heather Milne and Angela Failler at the University of Winnipeg, the workshop was introduced this way:

> Museum Queeries is a new interdisciplinary, collaborative research project based at the University of Winnipeg that involves academics, activists, curators, artists, community stakeholders, and students locally and internationally. As institutional spaces, museums are often closely linked to national identities and histories and also, tacitly, to heteronormative and cisnormative representations of the polity and public culture. Museum Queeries prioritizes Indigenous two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer (2S+LGBTTQ) contributions and interventions into museums and museum studies as a means of addressing structural exclusions and opening new modes of productive inquiry and activism. The idea of "queerying" the museum in this case is not only about addressing the museum's representation of gender and sexuality; it is also about challenging normative formations including white privilege, racism and settler colonialism, among other systems of oppression, as they operate alongside homophobia and transphobia.[5]

The workshop included a guided visit of the CMHR on "exploring rights of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities" (the museum offered this tour during Winnipeg's Pride Festival), as well as several curatorial dreaming sessions in which participants collaborated in small groups to explore and design interventions for the museum. The reflections that follow are mine alone, and focus on the process of shifting from critical analysis into curatorial dreaming. As the above workshop description suggests, Museum Queeries and Curatorial Dreaming participants were primed to be engaged, critical visitors to the CMHR. As described by Margaret Lindauer, the critical museum visitor

> notes what objects are presented, in what ways for what purposes. She or he also explores what is left unspoken or kept off display. And she or he asks, who has the most to gain or the most to lose from having this information, collection, or interpretation publicly presented. (2005, 204)

At the CMHR, workshop participants used the following questions to guide their observations:

1. How do you feel entering the museum? Why?
2. Describe the atmosphere of the tour. Is it welcoming? Inclusive? Challenging? Provocative? Celebratory? Didactic? Condescending? Predictable? Explain.

3. Does the tour guide reinforce the exhibitions, or add something new? Do visitors add elements to the narrative and experience?
4. Is there a space, text, image or object that grabs your attention? (It could be a source of inspiration, frustration, curiosity etc.). If so, please document it (photograph it if possible) and your reactions to it.
5. Is there anyone you would like to bring to this museum? If so, who? Why?
6. If you could ask this museum one question, what would it be?
7. (How) does the museum acknowledge the location/land/territory it sits on?[6]

I designed the fieldwork questions to generate detailed observations and responses to the displays and museum so that the curatorial dreaming process would be as concrete as possible, working with specific communities, spaces, texts, objects, and images.

A focal point for many in the group was a "story niche" in the Canadian Journeys gallery called "Taking the Cake: The Right to Same-Sex Marriage." It features a sculpture of a larger than life wedding cake constructed with eight "layers" of wedding portraits, in cream-coloured frames, of same-sex couples. (These were crowdsourced by the CMHR.) At a glance, the sculpture and portraits that constitute it are conventional—only its location in the CMHR signals that this is a story rooted in activism by a historically othered population. The story of an interracial gay marriage is highlighted in a nod to diversity. Such attempts to address difference, while emphasizing unity, have become standard practice in Canadian heritage, including Heritage Minutes, Olympic ceremonies, and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation documentaries like *Canada: A People's History* (O'Bonsawin 2010; West 2002). Haunting this curatorial and editorial strategy is the question of whether inclusion becomes a force for appropriation and assimilation. This is both a conceptual and real concern, with uneven consequences for queer communities. In response to "Taking the Cake," Angela Failler suggested a cheeky alternative title for it: "A Homonationalist Story of Pride." Renaming the exhibition was subversive, as well as creative: an embryonic imagined counter-exhibition was taking shape. In contrast with the ironic tone above, Heather Milne adopts an interrogative and research-driven methodology, alluding to an imagined counter-exhibit that could mobilize social history and testimony to complicate the idea of Canada as a beacon of human rights:

> How ... might an exhibit outlining Canada's human rights abuses against queers, including the systemic purging of lesbians and gay men from the civil service and the RCMP in the mid twentieth century, the denial of adoption rights to same sex couples until 1999 and later (depending

> on the province), or systemic police corruption and brutality against the LGBTQ community in the form of bar raids and bath house raids challenge museum-goers … ? (2015, 120)

During our visit to the CMHR, workshop participants paid attention not only to displays, but also to the built environment and infrastructure, including the museum gift shop. A few participants collected photos of a Pride Week display in the gift shop. Pride T-shirts used standard bathroom signage icons to depict hetero- and homosexual couples side–by-side, implying equality (see fig. 2). The T-shirts hung beside celebratory Canada 150 merchandise, perfectly illustrating the workshop's premise that "museums are often closely linked to national identities and histories and also, tacitly, to heteronormative and cisnormative representations of the polity and public culture." This narrow perspective on the needs and desires of queer communities has also been reproduced in mainstream advocacy movements like Egale (Howlett 2013). Generating critiques of the CMHR was not particularly difficult for the workshop participants. Our guide and tour were appreciated, but there was a broad consensus that the museum feels neither inclusive, nor engaged and hard-hitting, nor contemplative.

Fig. 2. Gift shop, Canadian Museum for Human Rights (photo credit Naomi Hamer).

Difficult heritage, contentious issues, and contemporary inequities and challenges linked to settler colonialism and to queer communities are buried in digital databases, or muted by euphemisms. The absence of any discussion or representation of sex was also noted.

In a curatorial dreaming session, one group of participants attempted to disrupt this absence and the display's implicit suggestion that queer resistance is resolved. The group decided to do this in a way that would be realistic for the CMHR, taking into consideration its broad audience, including families and school groups. Their proposed intervention mapped out life stories in terms of families of origin and families of creation, revealing issues, choices, risks, medical technologies, and barriers that informed the group's collective experiences. They included why people might reject the institution of marriage. The group envisioned the visual metaphor of a river that flowed according to pleasure and desire, but was not without ruptures and unresolved issues. Conceptually, they avoided making "unconsciously exclusionary choices" (Robert 2014, 27), and they acknowledged a need to further address decolonization with Indigenous communities. In short, they introduced a measure of complexity that could not be neatly historicized as a human right won. Alongside this immanently doable addition to the "Taking the Cake" display, fleeting impressionistic images of other curatorial possibilities emerged: hacking the wedding portraits to insert less conventional images of couplehood; a figure who comes out of the cake (as at a classic stag party) based on Métis artist Dayna Danger's photo portrait "Adrienne," which graces the Summer 2017 kinship issue of *Canadian Art* (see fig. 3). With digital technologies, such ideas are highly realizable from a technical point of view. In fact, the digital magic may embolden what we imagine as possible.

The curatorial dreaming exercises exposed what is possible, and what is likely impossible, in this national museum. To address the museum's missing "hard truths" (Lonetree 2012), artist and curator Ryan Rice proposed an exhibit title: "Haters' Hate: Lifting the Veil of Human Rights Offenders." The fact that this seems like an undoable proposition is linked to how the CMRH positions itself. As reported in the *Globe and Mail*, "the CMHR realized the best way—the Canadian way—to be a human rights museum was not to dwell inordinately on human wrongs" (Adams 2014).[7] Yet the Holocaust gallery in the CMHR shows images of perpetrators and establishes the facts of the machinery of destruction, including the targeting of people with disabilities, Roma, and homosexuals. Considering this, the idea of paying attention to perpetrators, such as Anglican and Catholic Church leaders and teachers implicated in residential schools, should be manageable. Here we hit a difficult question: What if curatorial dreaming in relation to the CMHR leads to disappointment, anger, or dead ends?

Fig. 3. Cover of *Canadian Art*, Summer 2017, kinship issue, featuring Adrienne, by Dayna Danger and Cree syllabics.

One way to address this concern is to conduct curatorial dreaming workshops in collaboration with establishment museums that critical heritage seeks to disrupt.[8] Many curators and educators in these institutions want to translate critical and reflexive museology into their complex spaces. As Carrie Hertz (2011) comments:

> Grappling with volatile and abiding issues like representation, power relations, identity politics, systems of knowledge, value production, post-colonialism, Eurocentricism, nationalism, and the like, museums in the twenty-first century have a lot on their proverbial plates. In this milieu, then, the constant reflexive desire of museum professionals and scholars

to appraise the past, present, and future of museology is both unsurprising and heartening.

Despite shared interests, scholar practitioner collaboration can be complicated. Museum critics often lack sensitivity regarding the constraints and complexities that establishment museums face, including competition for scarce resources, cultural diplomacy and prestige, market-driven decision-making, and a need to be popular. Yes, these constraints can be set aside in order to experiment, play, and dream in a workshop, but they cannot truly disappear. By articulating and exploring such constraints and tensions, curatorial dreaming seeks to identify and even mediate this gap between theory and practice (Butler and Lehrer 2016b, 7). While bridge building is a valid strategy, I argue that it is equally important to acknowledge and respect impasses.

Honouring Refusal and Difficulties

I arrived at the Museum Queeries workshop obsessed with the idea of turning the museum's alabaster ramps into a runway, to stage a joyful, proud show, like the Pride Parades that take place in Canadian cities.[9] Upon learning that people rent the museum's Garden of Contemplation for weddings, I also imagined a communal, alternative non-wedding taking place in this space. I soon learned from workshop participants that my utopian ideas of occupying the museum sat oddly against the emotional pain that the institution caused.[10] For some, imagined collaboration with the museum was not in the cards; they wanted neither to have their cake nor eat it. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to the CMHR as part of a network of museums, galleries, community groups, digital media, visitors, and onlookers, some of whom ignore or protest its curatorial choices (Blumer 2015; Lehrer 2015). As demonstrated in our workshop, there is a world of independent arts activism and expression that defies categories, let alone assimilating into an official national human rights museum (O'Sullivan 2017; Rice 2017). This offers an important lesson for establishment museums aspiring toward critical heritage practice. For museums that are not too risk averse, it would be hugely productive if they were to make visible their processes of knowledge production, including constraints, contradictions, and difficulties encountered (Butler 2014). For example, at the CMHR, steps toward greater transparency could be achieved if contributing curators introduced their exhibitions in personal and professional terms. This would render the museum less monolithic and reveal how some of the exhibitions are linked to community-based research, education, activism, and artistic projects. But, more dramatically, the CMHR could make visible difficult issues that have surrounded it since before its

inception, including its evolving (and improving) relationship with the Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, who created a community-based, Museum of Canadian Human Rights Violations to highlight the injustice and hypocrisy of enduring a boil-water order for 17 years even though its lake provides fresh water to Winnipeg, including the pools in the CMHR's Garden of Contemplation (Museum of Canadian Human Rights Violations 2018).

At the Museum Queeries workshop, one participant proposed a live feed of human rights violations and prejudice. I voiced concern about re-presenting hateful language and suggested a complementary strategy that identifies the hatred without reproducing it. For instance, newspaper websites (a virtual display space) could note the number of unprintable responses received when they run stories on Indigenous communities and violence against women. This is a practice of transparency. The point here is not to find a right answer for this representational dilemma (as if there could be one). Rather, I want to emphasize the productiveness of exploring multiple curatorial responses, to discover what each one demands of the museum and its publics.

At the CMHR, visitors can contribute and view video testimonies of personal experiences with human rights. In one, a young Indigenous woman says that she wishes the museum would pay more attention to issues faced by the LGBTQ Indigenous community. This is an example of multivocality in the museum. The inclusion of multiple, and even critical or contradictory voices, in exhibitions has emerged as an effective, easily achieved curatorial strategy that contributes to democratizing curatorial authority (Phillips 2003). But with these strategies we see the same dynamic of appropriation and assimilation described above. In this example, the museum gets bonus points for including a critical voice, but the video is not highlighted, tagged, or "curated"—it sits among a hodgepodge of others, so to discover it is a random feat. Thus, the inclusion of multiple voices is no guaranteed solution to legacies of marginalization and paternalism (Lynch and Alberti 2010). Nevertheless, this representational strategy can diffuse some of the museum's authority and demonstrate situated knowledge. For example, at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, multivocality is achieved by having three differently positioned public figures respond to the iconic painting *The Death of General Wolfe*, by Benjamin West in 1771 (see fig. 4). Iroquois curator and artist Jeff Thomas riffs pointedly on the "imaginary Indian" in the tableau.[11] Political columnist Chantal Hébert discusses how, despite the defeat of the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, French society remains vital in Quebec City. And ROM curator Arlene Gehmacher emphasizes the contrived and propagandistic nature of the painting that produced a hero for the new colony and cemented an artist's reputation. Each commentary has a gentle sense of irony that diffuses the

Fig. 4. *Death of General Wolfe*, by Benjamin West, 1770.

painting's power. Perhaps this multivocal curatorial strategy is realistic in the context of an establishment museum such as the ROM, but it barely disrupts a normative sense of Canada as a peaceable, unified nation. As I ask my students, How much further could this intervention go? What if visitors could add comments in response to these three interpretations of the painting? This begs the question, How far can one push meddling in museums, and what are its political limits? As Paul Basu and Sharon Macdonald write in their edited volume *Exhibition Experiments*, as reflexivity becomes a commonly used curatorial strategy, it is necessary to examine the "purpose to which it is deployed and how unsettling it is allowed to be" (2007, 20). Curatorial dreaming exercises can help different constituencies—including publics, museum professionals, and researchers—discover these limits, and even develop strategies to push them further.

Highlighting social and political contradictions and ironies by juxtaposing images, objects, and texts is a related time-honoured artistic strategy of critique that has been deployed most effectively in museums by artists such as Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser (Butler 2015). It is also productive in activist, non-profit, and community-based organizations. For instance, a recent full-page national ad for Habitat for Humanity shows a photo of a woman with three children, all of whom stand behind

a newspaper with the headline "Canada ranked top country to live in" and a picture of the Canadian flag. The serious expressions on each person's face, the dim lighting, and the plain domestic surround, create a sense of unease and confrontation. The cutline reads, "Even in the best country in the world, there's still work to be done." While not addressing heritage explicitly, the advertisement compels its audience to consider Canada's uneven development, in the past and present, in relation to its glowing global reputation.

A similar effort to bring different historical and political realities into conversation with each other is evident in Roger Simon's contribution to *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*. In his imagined exhibition, "The Terrible Gift: Difficult Memories for Twenty-First Century," Simon brings together archival materials and artistic productions pertaining to the Chernobyl nuclear explosions of 1986, the forced relocation of Inuit to the High Arctic in the 1950s, and political repression during the Argentine dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. His comparative method explores how these dispersed difficult histories might confront each other. His methodology avoids didacticism and moralistic history lessons. Rather, he envisions visitors navigating their way between materials, finding cross references and resonance, in an expansive, rather than reductionist fashion (Simon 2016). Thus, *The Terrible Gift* demonstrates a "public world ... that relates and separates people at the same time" (Simon and Ashley 2010, 2). This civic and pedagogical project seeks to complicate engagements with the past. It is worth noting that this curatorial dream was a planned exhibition at the Museum of Civilisation in Quebec City—it was accepted by the institution, and a wide network of community partnerships were in place, but it was never realized, due to a lack of funding (Simon 2016, 176). This highlights the way in which critical heritage possibilities are as closely linked to institutional politics and funding issues as they are to curatorial techniques. Anthony Shelton, director of the university-based Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, concurs, stating that ethnographic museums

> are no longer motivated primarily by either established or experimental academic programming, but by the delivery of external institutional objectives broadly related to social engineering policies and subordinated to supposed market forces. (2006, 76)

Conclusion: Translating Critique into Practice

In 2000, a monument titled *Women Are Persons* was officially inaugurated, facing the Senate on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The monument includes five larger-than-life statues of the Famous Five, the Alberta women who in 1929 won the Persons

Case, where Canadian women were accorded equal status under the British North America Act and became eligible for appointment to the Senate. These women—Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, and Henrietta Muir Edwards—are popularly celebrated as pioneers of the feminist movement. In the monument, they stand and sit facing each other in a wide circle, which includes an empty chair, and a small table set for tea. The women are toasting their court victory with tea, invoking the "pink teas" that, in the words of a foundation promoting the commemoration of the Famous Five, were

> developed as a subversive way for women to gather and discuss various issues of importance, including suffrage. Only women were invited, and frilly decorations and many pink doilies and ribbons festooned the tea tables. If opposition appeared, the organizer would simply change the subject. (Famous Five Foundation 2017)

As the first monument on Parliament Hill to commemorate women (with the exception of Queens Victoria and Elizabeth and allegorical female figures), the Famous Five are celebrated as Mothers of Confederation, who paved the way for women's rights. The monument has popular appeal, as visitors photograph themselves sitting in the empty chair, and interacting with the historic figures. Mary-Jo Nadeau (2013) interrupts the aura of innocence surrounding this monument with a compelling critical analysis of its politics of production and erasures. As Nadeau notes, the monument was contested in mainstream media, in a debate that questioned whether the Famous Five were "feminist racists" or "imperfect heroines," whose engagement with racism and eugenics was simply a product of its time (178). The latter position won out, thanks to concerted lobbying efforts by the Famous Five Foundation, which was launched with five private donations of $200,000. Nadeau uses historical analysis to argue that the monument and subsequent commemorations of the Famous Five (notably, the $50 note unveiled in 2004) contribute to neutralizing and erasing racism, and to bolstering white feminism and Canada as a benevolent nation (178).

What interests me most in Nadeau's essay is a point at which she shifts toward curatorial dreaming, imagining the monument's empty chair, not as a playful interactive, but as representing the Famous Five Foundation's unwitting reproduction of a "White hegemonic colonial present" (194). Picking up on Nadeau's new interpretation of the empty chair, I want to push this imagining further. Could this statue be changed or recontextualized to evoke interrelated histories of exclusion and racism? How might this be done? With digital technology, sitting in the chair or touching the teacup could trigger oral testimonies to complicate the picture. In this way,

hierarchies of exclusion that were enacted when the franchise was "not extended to people of Japanese ancestry until 1948, to Quebec women until 1940, to the Inuit until 1950, or to First Nations people living on reserves until 1960" (Crow 1999, 26) would be "performed." Visitors would affectively witness who could, and could not, sit around the table (as a metaphor for voting) at different time periods. Performative pedagogies, such as alternative walking tours and staged encounters with performance artists, are other ways to unsettle the monument's authority and implicit assumptions about belonging and nation.[12] For instance, I can imagine the disruptive and ironic effect of the presence of a black Miss Canadiana homecoming queen at the monument (see fig. 5). As performance artist and educator Camille Turner writes with regard to her Miss Canadiana persona, "my image ... points to the contradiction of the Canadian mythology. My body, as a representative of Canadian heritage, is surprising only because Blackness is perceived as foreign in Canada" (Turner 2017).

Alternatively, a multivocal approach would curate the debates, including critiques of the monument made by the political left, as well as those by conservative women's groups. However, I doubt that this curatorial strategy serves the interests of critical heritage with the same force as a performative intervention focused on power relations. Performative and activist interventions could include a critical re-enactment

Fig. 5. *Hometown Queen*, by Camille Turner.

of the pink tea to evoke British colonial traditions and settler culture. In a different vein, alternative ways of gathering and sharing could take place at the site, such as potlucks, which link to Indigenous cultural practices and evoke meeting grounds. There is no simple curatorial answer here, but the politics of cross-cultural food consumption is a rich subject for academic scholarship and exhibitions (e.g., Hollenbach 2016; hooks 1992; Voon 2017).

A curatorial dreaming workshop in response to the Famous Five monument could begin by identifying its assumed or "ideal visitor" (Lindauer 2005). Who feels comfortable or valorized—politically, socially, emotionally—in relation to the monument? Following this, participants would be invited to think like a conceptual artist or community activist about how to assemble "people and things with the intention of producing differences to make a difference" (Basu and Macdonald 2007, 17). While this task is challenging for scholars trained in dealing with text, it is also unique for museum professionals whose passion is often dampened or rendered invisible in establishment museums. As Kathleen McLean comments:

> When dreaming up exhibition and program ideas, framing the questions for research, and articulating future visions for our museums, we explore with colleagues our passionate interests and burning questions. Only rarely, though, does this passion and energy make it into the public arena. (2011, 70)

Scholars and museum professionals deserve opportunities to enact their passions, which are often shaped by unique combinations of formal education, social justice concerns, and embodied awareness of connections between the past and present. Finally, while I have championed curatorial dreaming as a tool for constructive experimentation, it is equally important to learn from those who choose not to invest energy in imagining interventions for establishment and authoritative heritage sites and museums. Paying attention to such refusals can highlight difficult issues that might otherwise remain hidden, as well as present opportunities for deeper degrees of institutional self-critique and public engagement.

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NOTES

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colleagues, workshop participants, and students who have inspired specific aspects of this article are mentioned in the notes below.

1. For an overview of the range of curatorial dreaming workshops that I conduct, see Butler (n.d.).
2. I thank my students for permission to include their work here. "Question Nostalgia" is by Jelena Stankovic. "Ce ne sont pas que des chips" is by Édith Vachon-Raymond. "We Will Not Back Down" is by Emily Sheiner.
3. On curating and learning from "difficult knowledge," see Failler (2015), Failler and Simon (2015), and Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson (2011).
4. Métis writer Chelsea Vowel (2013) offers an excellent, detailed analysis of the Inukt appropriation/misappropriation controversy, including the Montreal Museum of Fine Art's apology and withdrawal of the line from their shop.
5. For more information on this SSHRCC funded workshop see its web page ("Museum Queeries and Curatorial Dreams" 2017).
6. Questions 5 and 6 are inspired by Zahava Doering and Andrew J. Pekarik's (1996) work on Holocaust Museum education. I thank Heather Milne, Angela Failler, and Lauren Bosc for their feedback on the questions.
7. A recent official comment from the CMHR suggests a shift toward embracing "uncomfortable conversations" (Taylor 2016).
8. My colleagues Angela Failler, Erica Lehrer, Heather Igloliorte, and Monica Patterson and I are experimenting with this strategy on the SSHRCC funded research Partnership Development Grant "Difficult Knowledge in Public: Thinking through the Museum," in which I am a collaborator (http://thinkingthroughthemuseum.org/).
9. I thank Bryce Lease for this inspiration.
10. I thank Jason Baerg, D.J. Fraser, Hannah g, and Jeneen Frei Njootli for articulating this so clearly.
11. Jeff Thomas (2017) has an extended body of artistic work on this subject.
12. For an Ottawa-based example of a pedagogically oriented alternative walking tour, see Patterson (2016).

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