OUR LIVES

Collaboration, Native Voice, and the Making of the National Museum of the American Indian

o n e
Anticipation

THEO: And this is exciting for us!

JEN: Why is it exciting?

THEO: Because we can show the world how we live today.

TERRI: Yeah.

THEO: How much impact the world has on us today.

JEN: Has it been frustrating always having people ask you how things were before you were born?

THEO: Yeah, uh-huh.

TERRI: Yes.

…

TERRI: Some people ask us if we still live in igloos. So this is what we're doing now—it's going to tell the world that we don't live in igloos any more [*laughs*].

JEN: Well, if that's something that's really exciting for you…

THEO: It is exciting!

TERRI: It's very exciting.[1]

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In September 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) presented its inaugural exhibitions to the public on the National Mall in Washington, DC. As NMAI founding director Richard West Jr. (Southern Cheyenne) explained at the time, the NMAI represents "the culmination of nearly 15 years of planning and collaboration with tribal communities from across the hemisphere" (Smithsonian Institution 2004). Although the museum on the mall was not completed until 2004, it had existed for years in the imaginations, documents, hopes, and dreams of countless individuals who labored to make it a reality. NMAI staff, members of Congress, Native American community members, activists, and many more had great expectations for this site. In the years leading to its grand opening, staff often talked in the future tense about the museum; they also often talked as if the structure already existed, because in many ways it did—in their minds. They all were dedicated to the promise of, and felt anticipation for, this future museum. They also labored under the heavy responsibility of preparing a museum that was to represent all Native peoples in the western hemisphere, for all time, in one place.

The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures, published in 2000, can be seen as both a part of and a prescription for the "paradigm shift"—a phrase that museum staff widely used by 2004 to explain the nature of their work—that Rick West and other NMAI staff hoped to implement through their museum. In the introduction to that edited volume, West (2000:7, emphasis added) places Native voice at the center of this paradigm: "From the start, our new museum has been dedicated to a fresh and, some would say, radically different approach to museum exhibitions. To put it in the most basic way, we insist that *the authentic Native voice and perspective* guide all our policies, including, of course, our exhibition philosophy." Five years later, West (2005) stated in a speech at the World Archaeological Conference in Australia that the museum is "a cultural and spiritual emblem on the National Mall in Washington, DC…[that] exemplifies decolonisation in practice" (citing C. Smith 2005). This was the new language of the paradigm shift NMAI staff had been advocating from the start.

Nowhere are collaboration, the commitment to Native voice, and the NMAI exhibition philosophy more evident than in the "community-curated" exhibits in the museum. To show what this form of collaboration entailed, this book examines both the NMAI as a whole and the making of one specific exhibition: *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities* (OL). *Our Lives* is about Native lives today, and two other galleries in the museum depict Native cosmologies (*Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World* [OU]) and Native histories (*Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories* [OP]).

In June 2003, as a contract researcher for the *Our Lives* gallery and a staff field worker assigned to the Inuit community of Igloolik in Nunavut, Canada, I conducted a final exhibit script review with the Igloolik community curators. I asked the co-curators, considering that over four million people per year would read their introduction to the exhibit, what did they most want people to know about them? Their

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resounding response: "We don't live in igloos any more!" We all laughed because it seemed silly to have to put it in writing, but they insisted that this is what the world needed to know. They explained that it was the most common question they were asked by non-Inuit people. So the last line on the introductory panel in the Igloolik exhibit in the *Our Lives* gallery would declare precisely that.[2]

As this exchange shows, Native communities that worked on the *Our Lives* gallery hoped that they would be able to counter pervasive stereotypes in the Americas, and they were excited to be able to communicate with the public in their own words. This scene is emblematic of the subject matter of this book: it shows that the co-curators had both direction over the content of their exhibit and a particular understanding of who their audience would be; it highlights the ubiquitous practice of transforming recorded conversation into exhibit display text; it shows the desire of the co-curators to tell what their life is like *today*, in their own words; and it reflects the high level of excitement and anticipation about the NMAI that was present not just among community curators and NMAI staff but also throughout Indian country. It also shows that I was both a participant in and an observer of the curating process, and it acknowledges that my work on behalf of the museum contributed to my perspective in writing about it.

Reflection on my work with the Igloolik community in many ways motivated the questions and methodological approach of my research about community curating. My ethnographic engagement with the people with whom I did my fieldwork resembles the methods and ethical concerns espoused by the NMAI curatorial staff about community curating. This is not surprising, as this methodology and the commitment to presenting "Native voice" were responses to the critiques of representation in anthropology and in museums that I was concerned with when I entered the discipline, and the NMAI's approach was one of the reasons I applied to work there in 1999. There were many reasons I felt compelled to conduct research about the community-curating process, but mainly, like others who worked on the inaugural exhibitions, I believed that it was history in the making. The scale of the endeavor provided visibility to and increased scrutiny of the products of collaboration—but less so its process, which is why I elaborate upon that here. This book is also a direct response to the fact that the museum never asked Native community curators for feedback on the curating process or on the exhibits, nor did staff do the kind of post-mortem within the museum that was conducted about the *Listening to Our Ancestors* exhibit (see epilogue).

I argue that the inaugural exhibition process—community curating—was essential to the establishment of the NMAI as a "Native place" (Blue Spruce and NMAI 2004) presenting Native voice, regardless of what kinds of curatorial methods or exhibitions have followed. Collaboration through community curating laid the foundation of the NMAI's legitimacy and its acceptance by Native people. Through foregrounding Native voice, the museum has sought to address issues of museum authority and power often central to indigenous and scholarly critiques of

how indigenous people have been represented in museums and in public media, shorthanded as the "politics of representation" in anthropology. As I show, collaboration alone does not overcome the problems and politics of representation. But this particular form of collaboration was essential to building relations of trust and accountability that were foundational to creating exhibitions that Native people claimed as their own.

History and Background of the NMAI

The National Museum of the American Indian was created by the NMAI Act of 1989 (Public Law 101-185),[3] a law that is applicable to the Smithsonian Institution and includes some provisions similar to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 (Public Law 101-601). An outcome of the decades-long movement for Native American religious freedom and social justice by Native Americans and their allies, these laws empower federally recognized US tribes to request that museums return to the tribes specific categories of items in their collections, including Native ancestors (human remains), sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (Echo-Hawk 2002; Fine-Dare 2002; Mihesuah 2000; Nash and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010). Whereas these laws provide guidance and structure for consultations between museums and tribes regarding these particular items, the mission of the NMAI calls for consultation with tribes in all of its endeavors.

Today, the National Museum of the American Indian has three main sites: a display venue in New York City (the George Gustav Heye Center, or GGHC); a research and collection housing facility in Suitland, Maryland (the Cultural Resources Center, or CRC); and the main public exhibition space, or mall museum, on the National Mall in Washington, DC. It was estimated at the time of its opening in 2004 that the mall museum would have more than four million national and international visitors each year due to its location next to the National Air and Space Museum, which is the second most-visited museum in the world (Zafar 2012).[4]

In 1922, George Gustav Heye, known as an "obsessive" collector, opened his large private collection to the public of New York City in a space he called the Museum of the American Indian (Force 1999:3; for a critique of Force's account by a former trustee, see Carpenter 2005:167; for a more nuanced view of Heye, see McMullen 2009). In 1989, with the NMAI Act, the US Congress transformed the Museum of the American Indian into the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, and plans began for its occupation of the last spot on the National Mall.[5] In 1990, Rick West was appointed the founding director. The George Gustav Heye Center, a permanent exhibition space, opened in 1994 in the Customs House in lower Manhattan. In 1999, there was a groundbreaking ceremony in DC as construction on the National Mall got under way, and in 2001, a welcome center opened at the site. It was a small trailer with information panels containing details about the planning, design, and construction of the museum. Reflected in those information

panels, as well as in various other forms of publicity, the mission statement and guiding principles of the NMAI (see appendix C) stressed the contemporary presence of Native people and their participation in every aspect of the NMAI's development and exhibition-making practices.

The NMAI is one of the most recent additions to the Smithsonian Institution, which since the bequest of James Smithson in 1829 has strived for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The original interpretation of this mission was to record and display for posterity dying American Indian lifeways that were going to become extinct or be completely acculturated (Fitzhugh 1997:214). To the contrary, the NMAI's guiding principles answer back in the twenty-first century, "We are here now," or as the main message of the museum in 2004 declared, "We are still here."

Among the Smithsonian museums, the NMAI is distinct in that it explicitly recognizes in its literature and staff discourse two groups to which the museum is responsible: its "constituency," or Native people, and its "audience," or non-Native visitors. This division was delineated at least as early as 1991, when it was mentioned in the master facilities plan, *The Way of the People: National Museum of the American Indian*:

> [The] NMAI has as its primary *constituency* all Native American people. However, the largest *audience* to visit NMAI facilities, especially the Mall Museum, will be non-Native. The wider public will come with a different perspective than that of Native Americans, and will have different informational expectations and needs. While programs and exhibitions will address these informational needs, they will do so with Native American voices and perspectives and in multi-sensory environments to enhance them. It is believed that all people will respond to this approach and value its *authenticity*. (Scott Brown Venturi and Associates 1991:36, emphases added)

The issue of authenticity is raised often in NMAI discourse, but anthropologists recognize authenticity to be a value judgment rather than an inherent characteristic. Therefore, it is important to ask who is using the term, what the category includes, and what is at stake. For these reasons, I do not seek to determine whether the Native voice at the NMAI is "authentic," but rather how it is produced and valued and by whom.

Critical Museology

The NMAI is in line with the approach of critical museology, which is considered to be an outgrowth of the "new museology." This approach, rooted in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, introduced questions of power to the analysis of museums and is derived from cultural studies, critical social theory, and anthropological theory (Kreps 2003a; Shelton 2001b:146–147; Witcomb 2003:129; see also Vergo 1989). Christina Kreps (2003a) explains, "To new museologists the 'old museology' was too concerned with museum methods and techniques, and did not pay

enough attention to the purposes and interests museums serve in society. Conventional museums were seen as object-centered. The 'new museum' was to be people-centered, action-oriented, and devoted to social change and development." In short, the terms "critical museology" and "new museum theory" (Marstine 2006) point to changing forms of analysis and new expectations for museums in recent decades.

By changing the museum from a temple to a forum, critical museology advocates for the democratization of museums and greater accountability to visitors. This has been interpreted as a shift in emphasis from objects to stories (Macdonald and Silverstone 1992) and from collections to audiences. Shelton (1995:6) explains that, as a result of critical museology, "museums have the ability to empower rather than dominate, to forge dialogical rather than monological relations with their publics and to reveal and encourage the transformation of contemporary realities rather than masking them." The museum has increasingly been envisioned as an educational space and more recently as an institution for civic engagement (American Association of Museums 2002) and social change (Sandell and Nightingale 2012). Rather than a dusty place where knowledge is bestowed upon visitors and research is conducted behind closed doors, the museum is reconceived as a participatory space (Simon 2010).

In the introduction to *Reinventing the Museum* (2012:2–4), Gail Anderson provides a table that outlines the "trends in the paradigm shift" from the "traditional museum" to the "reinvented museum" advocated in new museum theory. Changes include "information provider [to] knowledge facilitator," "ethnocentric [to] multicultural," "assumed value [to] earned value," "good intentions [to] public accountability," "assumptions about audiences [to] knowledge about audiences," "individual work [to] collaboration," "one-way communication [to] two-way communication," "presenting [to] facilitating," and "protective [to] welcoming."

In the nineteenth century, the first profession established in the museum was that of the curator, who cared for and researched the collections (Kreps 2003a); typically, curators had Ph.D.s and were considered subject matter specialists. Since then, the responsibilities of curators have broadened, and collections managers, conservators, registrars, educators, and evaluators have been added as museums have become bureaucratized and as professionals have become more specialized. Museum anthropologist Michael Ames notes the changing nature of professionalism in museums as they have become more audience focused and consumer based. As the museum becomes a more public-oriented enterprise, he explains, "the work of the newer professions [those concerned with audience development and satisfaction, such as marketing, promotion, programming, and interpretation] necessarily encroaches upon traditional curatorial territories and traditions, altering the balance of power and status and upping the levels of internal tension and dispute" (Ames 1992:9). My research at the NMAI substantiates Ames's observation (see also Terrell 1991; Witcomb 2003).

As new professions—most recently, education (Roberts 1997) and visitor studies (Hooper-Greenhill 2006)—have been established in the museum, they have often justified their contributions through a critique of curators, characterizing curators as

isolated in an ivory tower and unable to communicate with the public. Traditionally, curators provided the intellectual content of exhibitions; more and more, that role is being filled by educators and exhibit developers. As Macdonald and Silverstone (1990:187) explain, there has been a "displacement of attention and concern away from the curatorial achievement—the authority and coherence of the collection—to the visitor's experience—the authority and coherence of the person.... The visitor is invited to become the curator." But they and Terrell (1991) caution against the pendulum swinging too far toward the visitor.

Curators argue that they have changed with the times: "The isolated scholar and manager becomes a facilitator and collaborator who shares, rather than represents, authority" (Nicks 2003:24). Christina Kreps (2003a) writes that there is a "new reality that curators and curating can no longer be defined solely on the basis of their relation to objects. Just as the museum has become more people- and socially-oriented, so too has curating." Consequently, Kreps suggests that we view "curating as social practice" to "become more aware of how curatorial work is relative to particular cultural contexts" (ibid.).

Ironically, critical museology has been embraced by curators at the same time it has enabled the conditions in which their contributions are devalued in the museum. Museums, particularly those that house ethnographic or anthropological materials, are being democratized in two distinct ways. First, there is the wider museum trend toward inclusion of the audience in planning exhibitions and in creating more interactive experiences on the exhibit floor and through programming. Second, there is the trend toward the inclusion and participation of indigenous people when conducting research or developing an exhibition that relates to them. This latter form of inclusion is one aspect of what is referred to as "decolonizing the museum" and is considered to be part of new museum theory (Marstine 2006:5). These two different commitments to inclusion were championed by different departments at the NMAI and consequently created tensions within the museum (see chapter 3).

Decolonizing the Museum

The term "decolonization" has become quite common in museum and anthropological practice and discourse, where it points to efforts in Native communities, museums, and social sciences more broadly to acknowledge the past and to engage in ethical research, representation, and writing practices in the present.[6] Decolonizing the museum can be seen as part of a larger movement to decolonize Native communities, Native minds, and non-Native research practices (see, for example, Atalay 2006; Bowechop and Erikson 2005; Kreps 1988; Phillips 2000; C. Smith 2005; C. Smith and Jackson 2006; L. T. Smith 1999; Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird 2012; Wilson and Yellow Bird 2005).

The perspective of decolonization began in the political sphere, referring to the process by which a colony transitions to independence. But it has since taken on far

greater meaning in relation to settler colonialism, internalized racism, and museums. The European museum was born from the colonization process and is an artifact of colonialism and dispossession (Simpson 1996). The United States, through settler colonialism, through force and government policy, subjected Native American communities to spiritual, cultural, and material dispossession in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Museums were complicit in this process; collectors and anthropologists assumed the demise of Native peoples and the loss of Native knowledges during the forced assimilation process, collecting indigenous material culture and depositing objects in museums around the world for future study. In addition, museums served ideologies of the nineteenth century that posited Native Americans to be lower in social evolution than Europeans; one result was that Native American material culture was collected and housed in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History rather than in the National Museum of American History.

Government assimilation policies, scientific racism (Thomas 2000), and salvage anthropology empowered museums to collect Native ancestors and cultural artifacts,[7] some of which are considered to be breathing, living beings in need of ritual feeding or other kinds of "traditional care" (Clavir 2002; Cobb 2005; Rosoff 1998). Consequently, Native communities are spiritually, culturally, and ideologically invested in, committed to, and connected to museum collections. Collaboration with Native communities has become a key aspect of the movement to decolonize the museum; it has also been described as a commitment to "restorative justice" in light of this history (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2007:111). Although not labeled as such at the start, the decolonizing practices the NMAI would endorse included returning ancestors' remains and sacred objects, hiring Native staff, incorporating Native voices and perspectives into exhibits, and collaborating with those whose objects are housed in the museum and whose cultural knowledge and images are placed on display.

Decolonizing the museum was at the heart of the NMAI's insistence on collaboration, which was seen as an ethical commitment to upsetting the historical power relations between tribes and museums, between those who are represented and those with the power to represent, between those who originally possessed cultural knowledge and artifacts and those who collected and stored them away from the communities in which these originated. Although this history and its injustices were legally acknowledged and addressed in the landmark legislation of the NMAI Act and NAGPRA, museum staffs and Native communities have struggled for years prior and since these acts to work productively together to restore justice (see, for example, Merrill et al. 1993).

There are many reasons that museums collaborate with originating communities, whether they are Navajos, Kalinagos, World War II veterans, people of the African diaspora, or Holocaust survivors. Collaboration can enhance participation in the museum, improve community–museum relations, help provide research resources, and ensure content accuracy. But there are other reasons as well. As a matter of politics, when working with Native peoples in particular, those interested

in decolonization want to enhance the originating community's rights and public visibility. Museum professionals also want to maintain a positive public image and avoid political protests, although some of the latter have driven positive changes in museum practice over time.[8] Ethically, we want to empower Native people to have control over how they are represented to the public, redress past injustices, and include originating communities that have been represented yet often silenced in the museum. We want the museum to serve the communities whose objects they house. Finally, epistemologically, we value other ways of knowing the world around us and do not want to continue to privilege only western ways of knowing the world and western views of Native objects and Native life experiences.[9]

Historically, the non-Native public has considered museums and anthropologists as competing and, often, more-valued sources of authority or recognized expertise about Native Americans than the Native people themselves. Therefore, it was significant that the NMAI referred to community curators as "experts" on their own experience and cultures and as "co-curators" of the exhibits. By using these terms, NMAI staff clearly aimed to refigure the authority of Native peoples in museum representation and practice, a key component to decolonizing the museum. This language is at the heart of NMAI museology, which has changed over the years but has maintained the centrality of Native knowledge as authoritative and Native voice as the main vehicle for this knowledge.

Although staff did not talk about it in such terms from the beginning, because their work commenced before it was a major discourse in museum practice, Rick West's embrace of Claire Smith's (2005) description of the NMAI as a decolonizing museum certainly reflected what staff felt that they were doing and how a number of scholars have interpreted the museum. In contrast, in *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, Amy Lonetree offers a thoughtful and forceful critique of the NMAI. She argues that, although the museum's collaborative methodologies are laudable, collaboration alone is not decolonization. Decolonization, in her view, includes "speaking the hard truths of colonialism" and providing a space for healing (Lonetree 2012:6). She argues that the NMAI has failed to address the genocide of the Americas directly enough, and she provides a counterexample of a tribal museum that has accomplished this. It is not my purpose here to determine whether the NMAI is a decolonized museum, but rather I seek to understand the "native point of view."[10] What matters is that by 2005 the staff defined their work in such terms.

Anthropology of Museums

According to the American Alliance of Museums (formerly the American Association of Museums), as of September 2012, there were 17,774 museums in America—more than the number of Starbucks and McDonald's combined. Studies show that museums are among the most trusted sources of information in the United States, more so than books and teachers and more so than commercial, government, or

private websites (American Alliance of Museums 2012; Griffins and King 2008).[11] In addition to their association with colonialism and the construction of indigenous peoples as Other, as contemporary institutions with such presence and authority in society, museums certainly merit anthropological study.

Museum anthropology is a diverse field that includes both practice-oriented and critical theoretical scholarship. The anthropology of museums uses the methods and theories of cultural anthropology to understand the role of museums in history and society, as well as the practices of culture producers within the museum. In the seminal book of this subfield, first published in 1986 and then revised under the title *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Michael Ames (1992:5) focuses on "how museums, especially those concerned with the works of humankind, cope with the two historical forces or developments of democratization and professionalization." These two forces are at the heart of the story of the NMAI: democratization in the sense of inclusion, whether of the museum's audience or its constituency, and professionalization in the sense of increasing staff specialization in a bureaucratic institution. In addition, Ames (ibid.:14) asks some key questions that are relevant to the NMAI story: "We are now entering an era [when] formerly dominated and underrepresented populations—at least those who survived—are asserting their rights to self-determination and to control of their own histories. Museums will be expected to respond creatively. Will they be able to? Will the museum professions show sufficient flexibility to enable them to respond effectively to the competing demands for popularity, integrity, responsiveness, and financial responsibility?"

Historically, the anthropology of museums mainly resembled an "anthropology of things" (Appadurai 1986), and it was more theoretical than ethnographic. For example, it focused on the context and history of collecting (O'Hanlon 1993; Shelton 2001a), the historical and changing methods of display and curatorial practice (Ames 1992; Kurin 1997; Peers and Brown 2003), and the circulation and valuation of art and museum objects (Errington 1994; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Price 1989). Nelson Graburn and Kathryn Mathers (2000:692) characterized the anthropology of museums as lacking a "thick" ethnographic engagement with the museum and its subjects and objects.[12] *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* by Richard Handler and Eric Gable (1997), however, is one early and influential "thick" museum ethnography. In an article summing up this genre of writing, Gable (2010[2009]:[9–10]) explains that although "anthropologists of museums read, respond to, and borrow from the multidisciplinary world of cultural studies, they also tend to be more concerned with process than with representation. Like Geertz, we are fascinated with the ways that texts are produced and read by their interlocutors; like Malinowski, we want to understand this process from the native's point of view. Like Nader, we assume that when we study museums, we are 'studying up.'"[13]

The more recent work of Gwyneira Isaac on mediation and Sharon Macdonald on knowledge production provides useful interpretive frameworks for understanding

the community-curating process at the NMAI. Isaac (2007) shows how a Zuni tribal museum, the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center, mediates between Zuni and Anglo American ideologies and approaches to knowledge. Mediation is a culturally defined practice, she explains, but in general "involves the negotiation and reconciliation of differences" and "places the museum as [an] agent" (Isaac 2007:17). The framework of mediation, then, provides an opportunity to name and analyze what these differences are. Although the NMAI certainly could be described as mediating between tribal and national interests, discourses, and expectations, in this book, I am more concerned with understanding what this process looked like in the everyday practices of individuals rather than in the museum writ large. NMAI staff did use the term "mediation" to describe their role in the community-curating process, and I use "mediation" as an analytical concept through which to view community curating a different way, to understand the role of the imagined audience in the choices made by individuals working on exhibitions (see chapter 5). Isaac's attention to different knowledge systems is akin to the approach I take in understanding the politics of expertise and how particular kinds of knowledge are valued differently.

Like Macdonald, I conducted research on an exhibition that was in the making, and we both examine the production of knowledge. Macdonald's *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum* (2002) focuses on the unintended consequences of particular actions and decisions during the exhibit-making process. Her account of changing curatorial practices and internal departmental dynamics is helpful to compare with the story I tell here. I did not read her ethnography until well into writing my own, and I was astounded by how similar our approaches and analyses were, which became a major insight about the nature of museum institutions more generally. Reading Macdonald's work suggested to me that the museum institution as a field site moves the ethnographer to see in certain ways, bringing particular kinds of relations to the foreground. In my copy of her book, the margins are filled with "yes!" and "yep!" as I recognized the issues, tensions, and experiences common to her descriptions of the science museum and to my fieldwork at the NMAI. I would argue, however, that the introduction of community curators—outside content producers with particular subject positions with respect to the museum professionals and exhibition content— added a distinct complexity to, and increased tensions in, the exhibition-making process at the NMAI. Through describing these tensions, I, too, hope to illustrate that "an anthropological-ethnographic perspective helps to recover not just a degree of agency for museum staff but also some of their critical and informed reflexivity" (Macdonald 2002:138).

Macdonald's (2002:114) illustration of how expertise was considered an obstacle to developing museum exhibits that were more accessible to the public helped me to understand the changes at the NMAI as emblematic of the wider museum landscape. Expertise was seen by museum professionals as a "barrier" to communicating with everyday people. Macdonald (ibid.:113) situates this development within the more general trend of the declining number of jobs requiring "traditional expertise"

in museums and the greater reliance on contractors. She chronicles one way that democratization and professionalization have been interpreted in museum practice, including the rise of more public-oriented professions and the decline of subject matter specialists. This trend is key to interpreting the shifting dynamics at the NMAI over time.

Ethnography of Collaboration

Whether the approach is called "critical museology" (Shelton 1995, 2001b), "analytical reflexivity" (Macdonald 2001:94), or "strong collaboration" (Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009), this book exemplifies the theoretical position that we should collaborate and also be reflexive about the process as we do so (see Shannon n.d.).[14] There is a growing movement toward this form of knowledge production in museums and anthropology.

What makes the NMAI a fortuitous site, and indeed the inspiration for my orientation to collaboration, is that the museum's modus operandi in all its endeavors— from early consultations about the nature of the museum to architectural design features and exhibition content—has been an iterative and specifically collaborative process with Native peoples. This is an outcome of both the museum's reason for being and the shifts happening in museum practice more generally. Collaboration with Native people in anthropology and museums was not a new practice when the NMAI was being planned and implemented, but there was certainly something different about the scale, visibility, and commitment of the NMAI to this methodology and its desired outcome, the expression of Native voice.[15]

During the development of the inaugural exhibitions, collaboration was not just a buzz word among museum people and a call from Indian country; it was also the method of exhibit development, described the exhibit form, and was an ethical stance—the "right way" to make exhibits about Native peoples. A common description of this process is of someone going to a community and saying, "This is what I heard you say. Did I get that right?" The idea is not just to listen as a symbolic behavior of respect or a ritual practice, but to develop content based on accurate representations of the intent and information produced in the encounters between museum staff and Native community members.

Over the course of my fieldwork (June 2004–June 2006), I documented the production of the *Our Lives* gallery as it unfolded from an imaginary entity to its materialization in September 2004 and its subsequent reception and interpretation by its collaborators. Taking seriously NMAI references to Native American community members as co-curators of the inaugural exhibitions, I conducted my research as a multisited ethnography of "experts," both museum and cultural. For comparative purposes, my fieldwork lasted six months or more in three of the nine communities involved in the making of the *Our Lives* exhibition: the museum professionals in Washington, DC; the Kalinago community in the Carib Territory on Dominica in the Caribbean; and the American Indian community in Chicago. This book thus

brings together the perspectives of people both near to and far from the center of power and cultural production.

I also attended academic and professional conferences in which museum staff presented their own interpretations and theoretical analyses of their work at the NMAI. I saw these events as moments in which NMAI staff members were both making sense of their own work to themselves and indicating how they wanted their work to be received by others in their field. Following the work of Boyer (2004) and Myers (2006), my work has illustrated that an exhibition is not just what is built on the museum floor, but also how its makers present it to others. Along with me, countless individuals were writing about the NMAI and participating in the same academic and professional arenas.[16] At academic conferences, NMAI staff presented—framed, interpreted, critiqued, and translated—their work at the museum. Just as Myers recognizes the interplay between museology and anthropology and Boyer insists that we recognize the politics of expertise, I show that anthropological methods, critiques, and theories infused NMAI curatorial practice and Native communities' expectations in their collaborations with the institution.

This account is also rooted in my experience in the NMAI's Curatorial Department from August 1999 to May 2002, first as a research assistant for the *Our Peoples* gallery and later as the lead researcher for the *Our Lives* gallery. I was also assigned as the main field worker and museum representative to the Igloolik community of Inuit in Nunavut, Canada, in 2001–2002 and continued as a consultant for the scriptwriting process and the NMAI media team's visit to that community in 2003.

A Neo-Boasian Approach

The NMAI's emphasis on collaboration manifested in the framing of Native communities as experts in their own experiences and cultures and as co-curators of the exhibits. Refiguring fieldwork as an anthropology with experts (a characterization that came *from* the field site rather than was applied *to* it), I basically went into the field asking experts on community curating and exhibition development about their collaborative process. Based on my training in anthropology, which included Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1988[1969]),[17] as well as my experience working at the NMAI, I was not comfortable with the notion of "studying people." By focusing on knowledge production, I placed the exhibition itself as a third aspect of the fieldwork relation. The exhibition process was something that the participants in my research could look at, reflect on, and study *with* me.

In many ways, the (re)orientation to the ethnographic subject, as something the ethnographer and her interlocutors puzzle over together, resonates with the neo-Boasian approach to anthropology that Matti Bunzl (2004) proposes. Writing against the notion that anthropological knowledge must be produced through a distance between the ethnographic self and the Native Other (or a studying *of* the Other), thus reifying and sustaining a hierarchy of difference, Bunzl combines Boasian ethnography with Foucauldian genealogy. He suggests that both insiders and outsiders

to a culture have a common "epistemic position" with respect to the "ethnographic subject," which he suggests is a "history of the present" (ibid.:440). This approach follows Boas in turning our attention to "the production of historical differences" and their "ethnographic reproduction"; in short, rather than simply "find" (and thus reify) cultural differences and boundaries, we should look to how they were produced, including through anthropological practice (ibid.). The neo-Boasian approach, then, makes the temporal dimension of difference, rather than the cultural dimension of difference, the focal point of analysis. In this book, it is the exhibition (that is, the history and analysis of the exhibition) that is the shared focal point of analysis.

Collaboration as Subject and Method

This shared epistemic position between the ethnographer and her interlocutors can be seen as a form of collaboration. Since the 1980s, collaboration has emerged as a solution to issues of representation in such fields as anthropology, media production, and museum studies when working with indigenous people; it has also been posited as "good practice" in business administration, state–citizen relations, and international development projects, among other endeavors. Unfortunately, "collaboration" is also an opaque, feel-good term that often passes for a description of practice when instead it can obscure the details of this particular form of knowledge production, which is tension filled, time-consuming, difficult, and rewarding.

In the museum world, collaboration is considered to be both research method and ethical practice by Native and non-Native people.[18] There are many different models for collaboration with indigenous communities; this book discusses how the process worked in just one case. Because it is seen as an ethical practice, collaboration is often assumed to be positive and productive—and consequently has been overlooked or at least underdescribed by theorists. Miriam Kahn, a curator and professor of anthropology at the University of Washington, believes that much is missing in our analysis. In her article "Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits," she explains that, following the critiques of representation in the 1980s,

> today, most self-respecting anthropology museums in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and many European countries rally around the same set of principles and practices of including native advisors, advisory boards, community councils, task forces, etc.… Several accounts have appeared describing these collaborative processes and the results. With few exceptions, these reports relate mainly problem-free processes, with little or no mention of miscommunications, tensions, or factionalism, and almost no discussion of how successful these collaborations are in solving problems of representation. (Kahn 2000:58)[19]

Taking up collaboration as both subject and method opens up certain analytical opportunities and challenges. This book does not address or seek to describe or illuminate the inner workings of "cultures," in the conventional sense of the term.

Instead, I use collaboration as a lens through which to view social relations, knowledge production, and the representational strategies of culture producers—to describe and analyze the inner workings and representational consequences of this process.

Ethnography with Experts

Two methodological challenges in this multisited study were continuity and distance. In my fieldwork, I followed the *Our Lives* exhibit through time and space, mainly in three locations. This, of course, proved a challenge to the continuity of my experience and my ethnographic record keeping: as the exhibition was developed and then when it opened in September 2004, for example, events and discourse associated with *Our Lives* were occurring simultaneously in all three communities. Much of past anthropological analysis relied in general on distance, both literal and figurative, between the "modern" and the "traditional," the "anthropologist" and her "informants," "us" and "them," "here" and "there." The challenges associated with an anthropology of experts are, I believe, the latest predicaments for contemporary anthropological theory and methods (Clifford 1988; cf. Boyer 2008).

Analytical distance was also a challenge, since the participants in my research were at the same time cultural experts, anthropologists, and bureaucrats; in other words, their knowledge practices were much like mine. This particular challenge has been noted by a number of scholars doing ethnography in institutions (see, for example, Boyer 2003; Holmes 2000; Holmes and Marcus 2005; Riles 2000; Zabusky 2002) and is often shorthanded as a "lack of distance." In common conceptions of anthropological practice, the act of going somewhere unfamiliar and distant from home provides a "space" for reflection and analysis. My fieldwork provided both opportunities—anthropology at home (Chicago and DC) and anthropology abroad (Dominica).

Since this was an experimental approach for me, there were some questions that propelled my research: What might an anthropology of experts look like? Is the framework of "expertise" or even "exhibit making" appropriate to considering the processes of this kind of knowledge production? Can it adequately address such disparate locations, knowledge practices, and cultural communities in an analytically useful way? What, then, becomes the role and interpretive activity of the anthropologist in such a framework?

Although there are many ways in which the National Museum of the American Indian—its staff and its content—can be rendered through tropes like local knowledge and cosmopolitan expertise, indigenous and bureaucrat, here, I am interested in what happens when we symmetrically consider the various participants as experts, when we examine the "cultures of expertise" (Holmes and Marcus 2005).[20] Therefore, this book is a "symmetrical ethnography" (Latour 1993) of *Our Lives*, in which the subjects are both we and they and the participants in the making of the exhibit are both human and nonhuman (keeping in mind that design diagrams, content worksheets, bureaucratic forms, and computer imaging programs also impact

social relations and exhibit content and design). This symmetry also means that the museum professionals, both Native and non-Native, and the Native co-curators with whom I worked are treated equally: they have all been engaged and invited to interpret the exhibition and its process and impact. Finally, it is important to recognize that I have been just as involved as the "subjects" within the frame and in the framing of the ethnography.

A number of anthropologists have discussed the challenges of doing anthropology with experts. Dominic Boyer's "The Dilemma of the Anthropology of Experts" (2004) resonates in many ways with what I found during my fieldwork: he noticed that culture was a category that experts would offer to explain particular social arrangements, already there in the "auto-analysis" (as I call it) of the interlocutors of his research. Community curators who worked with the NMAI, in this sense, are very much theorists in the ways they think, define, and speculate about their identities for the sake of exhibitions and other public presentations.

Boyer's interlocutors provided ready-made theories and analyses for his dissertation through their critical inquiries into their own social environments. Stacia Zabusky's (1995:21) interlocutors in the European Space Agency, when questioned, would theorize about "cooperation"—the focus of her research—but generally did not have such discussions during the workday. Similarly, NMAI staff and consultants were quite adept at explaining what was anthropologically interesting about the museum. In the first month of my fieldwork, a museum consultant told me that the type of tensions found at the NMAI were everywhere—they were not a product of just this particular museum, and, in that way, they were "anthropological." Some tensions were between Natives and non-Natives, and some were the historical and classic "design versus curatorial" tensions. But the consultant added, "Really, it's all about power."[21]

Like Boyer, I believe that this kind of analysis of analysis has always been present in some way in anthropological engagements with "informants," for, in translating their lived experience to outsiders, they are bound to theorize about why things are the way they are. But what is changing perhaps is that the (culture) concepts, attentions, and professional standings of expert and ethnographer are now more alike. I discussed my analysis with the people with whom I worked in all three communities, asking them about ideas I had about what was going on around us, not separating the data from the analysis or keeping my theorizing to myself. Like Zabusky's space mission members, the participants in my research were "expert theoreticians" on the concept of collaboration that I was studying. At times, I was interrogated by participants; at other times, we puzzled together about the notions of collaboration and community curating.

Circling Back

I began my fieldwork by returning to three communities where I had formerly been in a professional relationship, to live with them for an extended period of time. In

explaining the term "circling back," Annelise Riles (2006a:63) recounts how she was educated in human rights law and it is in that field she formed the problems and questions that motivated her to study anthropology: "I then came to anthropology as an anthropologist comes to the field—in search of solutions to those problems." Circling back, as Riles notes, "poses certain challenges" in the relationships with one's former colleagues, who are now participants in the research, and there are certain politics of ethnography and ethnographic writing to be considered, since the participants will read and be affected by any publications (see also Brettell 1993). Thus, there is an emphasis on ethics in the way in which one interacts with, writes, and imagines the readers of the ethnography (Riles 2006a:64).

This was certainly evident when I presented a paper at the 2007 American Anthropological Association meeting in Washington, DC. Over the years, NMAI staff had been friends, colleagues, and participants in my research, but on this day, they were my audience. I began with a provocative question from Michael Ames (2000): "Are changing representations of First Peoples in Canadian museums and galleries challenging the curatorial prerogative?" I was terribly nervous as I gave a presentation that included some of the content of this book. I quoted conversations with current and former NMAI curators, some of whom were sitting in the rows of chairs facing me. My hands were shaking. At one point, I dropped the paper from which I was reading, quickly dipped down to pick it up with a nervous laugh, squared once again to the podium, and continued speaking. I gave details and analysis from an anthropological perspective and described events and practices that these anthropologists themselves had theorized, deliberated over, and put into practice. After the talk, some people said that they appreciated my presentation and that it "sounded right." But speaking for others, selecting or summarizing their conversations and perspectives and organizing their experiences according to my own perspective and purposes, continues to be an anxious exercise.

I could tell many stories based on my fieldwork, but I have chosen to maintain a narrow focus on the community-curating process. This means that my experiences of the 2005 national election in Dominica, the NMAI staff picnics and seasonal blessings, the American Indian Center's annual powwow in Chicago, and countless other events and encounters are unwritten here. But they are not unacknowledged: they have informed and guided my understanding of the relationships between community members, NMAI staff, and the subject matter of the exhibition.

My first field site was the NMAI itself in 2004, as it was preparing to open. The co-curators with whom I would later be working were flown in to participate in the Native Nations Procession and the grand opening of the museum (see chapter 7). That was a brief encounter and very museum centered, but returning to the Carib Territory and to Chicago for fieldwork was quite a different experience. Unlike working as a lead researcher for the NMAI, I had no community liaison to aid me in meeting people, no one to explain who was the right person to talk to about particular subjects, no structured agenda, and no focused group meetings with tangible

goals to achieve (although I did host a co-curator meeting in each community to present what my research was about and to invite people to contribute). However, also unlike NMAI curatorial fieldwork, I had more than a week or two to spend with community members.

Comparative Methods

In each community, I confronted existing ideas of what an anthropologist does and what a volunteer can do—and, more specifically, what someone who had worked at the NMAI could do. At the NMAI field site, I was received as a former curatorial research assistant, an expert of sorts on the inaugural exhibitions, and was welcomed to assist in the plans for the opening; at one point, a new associate director questioned me at length about the history of the *Our Lives* exhibition. Among the Kalinagos, I was first greeted as an expert in computers and computer literacy training, but my administrative skills proved to be most valued by a number of different task forces. In Chicago, I was greeted as a museum specialist and assigned to keep a Native arts gallery running until a replacement could be found for the former arts director; they even surprised me with personalized business cards stamped with the American Indian Center's logo: "Jennifer Shannon, Program/Public Relations."

In each location, I engaged in the day-to-day activities of fieldwork in different ways, responding to the volunteer work I was asked to do, the different sensibilities of each community, the experiences that each community had with researchers in their midst, and the particularities of each field site, such as ease of access to community members and events or modes of transportation. For example, at the NMAI's Cultural Resources Center, recognizing that I had been an employee there and that I blended in almost too well, I sent an email to the staff about my research and carried my ethnographer's notebook much of the time—pencil in hand—to remind people that I was there as a researcher as much as a volunteer. In the other sites, I employed multiple devices suggested by Native community members to let people know that I was an anthropological researcher, including introducing myself in community newsletters and making presentations in community centers with co-curators.

My daily life in each community was quite different as well, according to the pace of life, access to transportation, nature of my volunteer work, frequency of contact with co-curators, and community gathering practices. The volunteer work I did in each community was participant observation, which provided me with ethnographic data, rewarding professional relationships, and rich learning experiences. It meant that many of the social interactions I shared with participants occurred in work environments.

Professional-to-Professional Relations

I agree with Darnell (2001:169), who states that "fieldwork may be the most theoretical of the things anthropologists do, because it forces us to reflect on the premises

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of our personal traditions, both culture-of-origin and professional." In addition, our approach to fieldwork, how we conceptualize and implement it, is based on particular theoretical commitments. With all of the locations (workplaces, professional conferences, Native communities, Native art and cultural centers, the museum, and the exhibition space itself) included in the "field site," research about an exhibition can provide an opportunity to reconceptualize not only what the field is, but also the nature of fieldwork relations. For example, I remember an interview with Cynthia Chavez (San Felipe Pueblo/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo), the lead curator of the *Our Lives* gallery, during which both she and I were taking notes on our conversation. (This happened often.) From my field notes:

> [Cynthia] asked me what we had talked about yesterday…so I looked back at my handwritten notes from the day before and told her. She said thanks and wrote some thoughts down. I asked if it was for the AAM [American Association of Museums conference] paper, and she said it's for herself in general and that this is really helping. She wants to make note of things so that she can start writing papers about her experiences. It's clear that talking with me is helping her process things and that she is taking notes as I am on our conversations. (July 29, 2004)

In general, NMAI staff welcomed my presence and were quite engaged in thinking with me about the museum, its exhibitions, and the process of community curating.

This mutual learning and creative thinking was one of the greatest benefits of working with people in this capacity. One of my conversations with Cynthia, focused on interdepartmental power struggles to control exhibit content and design,[22] resulted in two different publications: for me, it was "The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian" (Shannon 2009), which was published in a book about Native peoples and museums and contributed to chapters 4 and 5 here; for Cynthia, it was "Collaborative Exhibit Development at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian" (Chavez Lamar 2008) in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, in which she writes about what it means to be an NMAI curator and a Native woman seeking to establish trust relationships with Native communities.

But it was not only at the NMAI, among museum experts, that I maintained this approach to ethnographic practice. Because the communities with which I worked included both a small island society and a large bustling metropolis, rural farmers and bureaucratic professionals, I was given opportunities to challenge and rethink approaches to and the classification of anthropological "subjects." I suggest an alternative metaphor for fieldwork relations: work, or professional engagement—as opposed to informant, friendship (fictional or otherwise), teacher, and so on. This is based on what I found myself saying in the course of fieldwork—"I'm going to work"—on days I would head to my volunteer positions. And I often referred to participants in my research as "the people I work with" (this phrasing has become

increasingly common among cultural anthropologists more generally). Taking that language seriously, for lack of a better term, I call this approach a "professional-to-professional" relationship in ethnography.

Similar to the notion of "collegiality" in fieldwork that Rena Lederman and Annelise Riles have separately written and talked about, a professional-to-professional relationship means that there is a basic agreed-upon and stated purpose to our discussions and meetings—the exhibition—and a more structured context for our encounters. Of course, during my fieldwork, other kinds of interactions and subjects became part of our dialogue and practice, but my purpose was never to see what goes on behind closed doors at home or to create fictional friendships to access insider information.[23]

What surprised me was my overwhelming sense that people did not want me to leave. As my departure loomed closer in each place, community members often would ask, "Did you get what you need?" or "What else can we help you with?" We had forged a partnership of sorts. I do not write this to demonstrate how appreciated or "in" I was in a community—something I have heard some anthropologists and graduate students boast about. It was not my goal to be "in," if that includes being adopted into a local family, being asked to join regularly in private or religious activities, or getting a behind-the-scenes look at the underbelly of a community. And when I *was* privy to such experiences and relationships, I made it clear that, without explicit instructions and consent, the information would not be recorded or published but it did improve my understanding of the circumstances of my fieldwork.[24] Although all fieldwork encounters are inevitably imbalanced, this was my approach to creating an ethical response to these concerns and to the broader critiques of anthropological methods by indigenous people.

There were times during my fieldwork when I was placed in the position of an informant or was confronted with the stereotype of the anthropologist in a Native community, both at the museum and in other sites. In conversations, NMAI staff often asked me what I thought about the exhibitions or what other interviewees talked about. One new associate director at the NMAI extended our conversation for almost six hours, through lunch and on to dinner time, asking me questions about the history of the institution. She also requested that I let her know if, in the course of my research, I heard that her employees had issues she could address.

Despite my intentions, three instances cut to the quick, when staff members with whom I had worked in the past made a comment or explained my presence to an outsider. An NMAI associate director with a Ph.D. in anthropology said to a colleague, "I see you have your academic observer with you." My former colleague and peer responded, "Like germs under a microscope."[25] Another former colleague explained my presence to a newer hire, saying that I was studying them as if they were in a "fishbowl." We all laughed, and I took the lighthearted ribbing as an opportunity to describe my research project.[26] In another instance, a staff member commented while describing my project to another, "She has us all under a magnifying glass, and when

the sun comes out, we're going to burn to a crisp."[27] Although my methods were developed to allay these anticipated fears of exposure and feelings of being studied, this type of uneasiness and the imbalance of power with respect to authorship and publication are always factors in the social relations of anthropological practice.

The Anthropologist Slot

In "Anthropology and the Savage Slot" (1991), Michel-Rolph Trouillot outlines how anthropology filled a "savage slot" in the existing tropes of western discourse and how the Other in anthropological discourse was a reproduction of this larger trend. But Native critics and scholars, talking among themselves or in books and journals—most influentially Deloria (1988[1969]) in the chapter "Anthropologists and Other Friends"[28]—created an inverse trope through their counterdiscourse: an "anthropologist slot."[29] This is a figure that, especially among tribes in the United States, the researcher often meets in the field and must come to terms with through sincerity and a commitment to reciprocity (Bodinger de Uriarte 2007:27; see also Shannon n.d.).

One evening, I interviewed a member of the Chicago urban Indian community, Eli Suzukovich (Cree/Serbian), who was about to enroll in an anthropology Ph.D. program. He noted:

> Everybody [in the Chicago community] reads Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins*, and they stop at page 99 [the end of "Anthropologists and Other Friends"]. So they're, like [*speaks in a dopey voice*], "Oh, anthropologists are bad and blah blah blah"—[*returns to normal voice*] this sort of antiquated view. So what I always liked about [elders] Angie and Susan and Josephine is that they remember Boas and they have a higher opinion of [anthropologists]. So having them kind of quell that "So what? They're anthropologists, *big deal*. Then make sure you tell the right story." So I think it changed a lot of attitudes, that Indians have always had a say in their interviews and that you can *direct*—I mean the community co-curator thing.[30] I think it was *good* in that it kind of showed people that they are empowered.[31]

He was cautioning members of his community not to automatically place museum workers from the NMAI in the anthropologist slot when they came to work with the community. Instead, he saw NMAI staff as providing an empowering rather than an extractive experience. It is important to note that his exception to the kind of anthropologist that Deloria describes is Franz Boas.[32]

Another example of how anthropology is "slotted" in a community, is a certain expectation about a white, young woman like myself in some places that reflects a tension between anthropological researcher and local community. During my first week in Dominica, I was walking along the road when a young Afro-Dominican man said, "Go home to your own country! We're not apes in a fucking zoo!"[33] Needless to say, the proliferation of tourists and investigators in the area had left some

people displeased; one co-curator said that the community was tired of researchers coming and asking questions all the time. In general, Native Americans do not have a rosy view of "anthros." In Chicago, one elder, while glaring at a non-Native man who was sitting at a table after serving meals at an elders lunch, was outraged and said that she thought he was "studying" her and the other elders, because all he did was sit and watch them.[34]

These are legacies we encounter in the field. As the people with whom we work become more aware of the history of anthropology and what we do (or, more likely, what people *think* we do), we encounter this antagonism toward the anthropological expert as a category, even if we feel far from being an expert and more like a student in the situation. It is rewarding when we move past seeing each other through categories and instead create lasting working relations. Of course, we focus on the instances of critique because they are moments of anxiety in the research process and they cut to the quick in light of the professional-to-professional methodology I espouse. Therefore, this book is based on positive and productive professional relationships with NMAI staff and Native community members and also acknowledges the anxieties and concerns that inhere in anthropological work more generally.

Invisible Genealogies

What people think we do in Indian country has been greatly influenced by critiques of anthropologists such as Deloria's (see also L. T. Smith 1999); these critiques in turn have had an impact on the discipline of anthropology and on museum practice. But the critical assessment of anthropology had been going on in Native communities long before Deloria penned his witty and biting caricature of the "anthro." In fact, as Regna Darnell (2001:29, 170) mentions in her description of the Americanist tradition in anthropology, Native Americans were pivotal in shaping the nature of anthropological practice in America from Boas onward. This impact of Native Americans on the discipline of anthropology began, in part, at the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology and at Columbia University, where Boas institutionalized his vision for the discipline in America.

The contemporary narrative about the development of anthropology notes two major periods of "crisis" and experimentation in anthropology over the past thirty years that have converged on the notion of collaboration as anthropological method and ethical practice. During the 1980s, epitomized by *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1999[1986]), and *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford 1988), the notion of ethnography as a literary genre brought to light issues of representation and authority in ethnographic texts. It was a crisis of representation, and the collaborative strategies posited in response to these critiques included multivocal or dialogic text and co-authorship.

In the 1990s, epitomized by *Anthropological Locations* (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), *Ethnography through Thick and Thin* (Marcus 1998), and *Routes* (Clifford 1997), there was a sense that changing how one writes is not enough; the implicit assumptions

of what "the field" is and how anthropologists relate to it were deeply questioned—a result of changing theoretical orientations, especially toward issues of globalization, as well as what is perceived as the changing nature and growing complexity of "the field." From this examination, multisited research methods and collaborative strategies in fieldwork relations were posited in response, illustrated by the reformulation of "informants" as "alliances" (Clifford 1997) or "counterparts" (Holmes and Marcus 2005). These developments can be characterized as a shift from locating the problem of representation and authority within the text ("writing" ethnography) to locating it in the practice of fieldwork ("doing" ethnography).

Matti Bunzl (2005:188–189) asserts that the insights of the "writing culture" group were influential but not new and, "like many paradigm-shifting contributions, that work tended to obfuscate its own historicity." Bunzl situates this work in response to the "crisis in anthropology" that occurred in the 1960s–1970s, with Dell Hymes's *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972) as emblematic of the times. In that edited volume, Hymes begins with Boas and traces his influence to Herder and German Enlightenment tradition. However, the influence of Boas is absent in later renditions of the crisis in the discipline. Regna Darnell seeks to address this absence in *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology* (2001). Her preface states that the Boasians "laid the groundwork for a number of contemporary developments," including the "reflexive moment" of "writing culture" (Darnell 2001:xviii).

Earlier, I mentioned the neo-Boasian approach, following Matti Bunzl (2004). It was through Bunzl that I began to trace my own "invisible genealogies," implicit not only in how I developed my methodological practice but also in my concerns for the perspectives of the people with whom I worked. Seeking a greater understanding about the Boasian nature of this work, I turned to Darnell. All the "signs" indicating that one is an "Americanist" rang true to me. Like J. Peter Denny (1999:365), I backed into an understanding of my own—and the NMAI's, for that matter—debts to the Americanist tradition through Darnell's work.

My concerns over how to do anthropology, and over how the NMAI went about its curatorial practices, were shaped by the same constituencies as the Americanists': Native American peoples. In Darnell's terms, Americanist anthropology is not about where you do fieldwork—although its approach was created in the context of fieldwork in the United States with American Indian tribes—but rather it denotes particular concerns and methods for practicing anthropology.[35] She also writes against the notion that Boas, his followers, or Americanists in general are "anti-theory."[36] According to Darnell (2001:12), the "Americanist tradition" has seven "distinctive features" that "form an interrelated package, [but] this is not a finite system model." Briefly, these features are as follows:

> (1) Culture is a set of symbols in people's heads, not (or at least not merely) the behavior that arises from them; (2) Language, thought, and reality are mutually entailed in ways that are accessible to investigation; (3) Texts from Native

speakers of Native languages are the appropriate database for both ethnology and linguistics; (4) There is considerable urgency to record the knowledge encoded in oral traditions as part of the permanent record of human achievement; (5) "Traditional" culture is a moving target, always changing and adapting to new circumstances; (6) Native people are subjects and collaborators, not objects for study; and, (7) Fieldwork takes a long time. (Darnell 2001:12–20)

Some basic tenets of the Boasian tradition are foundational to this Americanist approach, to the NMAI, and to my own work, and I want to highlight these before moving on.[37] First, I want to reiterate that Native Americans, their critique of and proximity to anthropologists, and their demand for accountability are part of what has shaped the nature of the Americanist tradition as a diverse but recognizable body of theory. As Darnell (2001:29) notes of the reciprocal relationship between Native peoples and anthropologists, "for a long time Native Americans have been teaching anthropologists how to behave in a civilized fashion and respond to local communities' needs and concerns" (see also Cruikshank 1992; Jones 1993:212). Second, for Boas and those who followed him, working with Native Americans entailed particular kinds of ethics and commitments, including respect for the Native point of view and the belief that the explanations by informants in their own words were crucial information. When Boas collected objects or recorded ceremonies, he felt it important to record the community member's own perspective on why they were meaningful ("Native texts"). Boas brought together psychology (what people think) and history, and the neo-Boasian approach and the NMAI community-curating process reflect this.

In this book, I document how the NMAI sought to be a "museum different" and what this meant in everyday practice and from the various perspectives of those involved. As the collaborative exhibit at the heart of this book is about Native identity, I attend to the process of creating representations of indigenous peoples and how Native communities interpret and produce notions of identity explicitly for public consumption. I also illustrate how individual identities and choices contribute to collaborative products.

Structure of the Book

Native community co-curators were tasked by the NMAI with producing the content for their exhibits in the inaugural exhibitions, since they were the "experts about what it is to be Native." Each chapter in this book considers two concepts—content development and relations with community curators—from different perspectives, and each chapter presents artifacts of the museum, but they are not (or not only) the objects in the collection. They are instead artifacts of bureaucracy, collaboration, and media production. They are the things that were created along the way to making the exhibit, what informed or organized or became the exhibit, and the varied responses to it.

This book figures the museum as both a federal bureaucracy and an institution of media and cultural production, as both a workplace and a context for collaboration among experts. Chapter 2, *"Our Lives,"* considers the exhibition as a symbolic vehicle not only for the communities represented but also for the museum professionals who worked on it. I explain what community curating is, who is involved in the process, and how the life histories of individuals and the gallery influenced the changing content of the exhibition over time. Chapter 3, "Bureaucracy," presents the institutional context of community curating. I examine how the bureaucratic nature and departmental structure of the museum impact exhibition development and relations among different cultures of expertise. Chapter 4, "Expertise," provides more focused attention to the antagonism between departments, (re)presenting the departmental dynamics of the institution through cultures of expertise and illustrating how relationships to community curators complicated the normal tensions that exist between departments in museums. Chapter 5, "Authorship," views collaboration in terms of how Native voice is produced through community curating, focusing on the collaborative authorship of exhibition concepts and text. Chapter 6, "Exhibition," is a photographic tour of the *Our Lives* exhibit. Chapter 7, "Reception," is about the performance of cultural and professional expertise, and it documents the experiences of the co-curators at the museum opening and the evaluation of the exhibition by art critics, NMAI staff, and community curators. I also include some of the impacts on the communities as a result of working on the exhibition. Chapter 8, "Reflection," in part explains how community curating—its process and product—was seen as essential to fulfilling the museum's mission and at the same time was at the center of ideological differences in the museum.

Throughout, I argue for the politics of expertise as a different way to understand the representation and reception of Native peoples and their knowledge in museums. I can say in retrospect that the museum did indeed establish itself as a Native place. Although it may not be the "museum different" that many originally imagined, it surely has become the primary institution for representing Native peoples in the Americas.