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NORTH AMERICAN INDIGENOUS CURATORS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF
INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: APPLYING THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE
APPROACH TO DISCOURSE

By

IULIAN VAMANU

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

North American Indigenous Curators' Constructions of Indigenous Knowledge: Applying the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse

By IULIAN VAMANU

Dissertation Director: Professor Marija Dalbello

This dissertation aims to show how indigenous curators working in museums and universities across the United States and Canada construct indigenous knowledge as a discursive object and thus influence the production and circulation of indigenous knowledge in North American societies.

The study is framed through the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD), which accommodates meaning-making and material dimensions of discourses. Qualitative and interpretive research methods are employed including semi-structured in-depth interviews with indigenous curators, analysis of textual documents (scholarly work by indigenous curators and museum mission statements), and analysis of multimodal documents (an exhibition with indigenous content), in order to capture and describe actualizations of discourses of indigenous knowledge by indigenous curators.

Indigenous knowledge is constructed discursively as injured knowledge ("invisible" through "erasure" of spatial and temporal presence). Indigenous curators position themselves as the social actors authorized to articulate this status endogenously and to address it by making a case for the compelling (spatial and temporal) presence of indigenous knowledge. In this respect, they employ topographical and chronographic vocabularies to articulate threats to indigenous knowledge and to propose model practices

by means of which these threats may be addressed. There are roles associated with indigenous knowledge stewardship, which the curators fulfill, more or less innovatively, by interacting with other actors, by engaging in discursive and model practices, and by using affordances of the material practices of indigenous knowledge.

The dissertation contributes to the literature in Library and Information Science by looking at the constructed nature of cultural knowledge. It makes visible the creative work of indigenous curators as a group of information professionals who remain unstudied despite the important work they do in serving the information needs of both aboriginal communities and the larger society.

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DEDICATION

To my family

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INTRODUCTION

In the words of leading American Indian curator, visual historian, and artist Jolene Rickard, the founding of the National Museum of the American Indian in 1989 is,

[T]he first attempt at creating a hemispheric Indigenous imaginary. The non-Native visitors, Indigenous scholars, and individual community members all have a private imagery of how the “real” Indigenous experience looks, sounds, and feels. I believe that people have very stable private opinions about Native people that are not easily dislodged. Perhaps the most elaborate ideas of this sort are held by Native scholars, which makes the attempt by NMAI [National Museum of the American Indian] look unsatisfactory compared to their own imaginaries about Indigeneity. (Rickard, 2007, p. 86)

Further, Rickard states peremptorily: “One cannot deny the ongoing erasure of Indigenous presence in the Americas since contact” (p. 91).

In these quotes, Rickard hints at the importance of the museum as a privileged site in which discursive conflicts – inside and outside Indigenous communities – around the representation of Indigenous knowledge, a phenomenon under threat of erasure, become visible. These two quotes contain two crucial statements which, combined, constitute the most appropriate introduction to this dissertation, which aims to reveal precisely how Indigenous curators, an emergent group of museum professionals, counteract a kind of cultural erasure noted by Rickard by making Indigenous knowledge visible and intervening in the imaginaries held in the mainstream society about what constitutes Indigenous knowledge.

The background of the major event to which Rickard’s quotes refer is the 1989 enactment of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA), a key moment in the recent history of increased public awareness of and federal support for Indigenous

causes. This act authorized the building of a new museum within the Smithsonian Institution, whose aim was to preserve and curate the Indigenous artifacts of the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian (Kreps, 2011). Since one key explicit purpose of this new museum was to collect, organize, and exhibit Native objects (that is, practices involving curation), it gave additional spur and offered a concrete institutional frame to Indigenous curatorship as a profession. Also, since this museum has defined its mission statement in terms of “advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere — past, present, and future — through partnership with Native people and others” (please refer to Appendix A), it has defined Indigenous knowledge as a phenomenon of interest for research and practice.

It is in this context that I attempt to look at the multiple ways in which Indigenous knowledge has been constructed discursively as an information object by Indigenous curators – a group of information professionals with background and interests pertaining to Native cultures – in the context of their social and material practices within museums across North America. As such, the dissertation combines an interest in the key phenomenon of Indigenous knowledge and in the roles of Indigenous curators as agents in the representation and production of this type of cultural knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge is a form of cultural knowledge constructed as an object of research and practice within various areas of application: it is discussed as a political object, namely an object mobilized for strategic purposes by various actors involved in power struggles; it is also constructed as a legal object by laws protecting Indigenous rights of ownership and punishing illegal use; it is often treated and traded as a commodity (economic object) generating income for various types of (not always legal)

owners; it is viewed as an educational resource for Indigenous children and students who have the opportunity to learn about their cultures and truly become members of their communities; finally, Indigenous knowledge is an obvious object of interest within information studies and for the information profession. It is in this context that this dissertation proposes to articulate discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge through a reconstruction of phenomenal structure of this kind of knowledge as exhibited in the statements of Indigenous curators.

Cultural knowledge has always been a fundamental resource (of norms, values, symbols, cultural constructions, and world views) for individuals and communities to form and maintain a rich sense of their identity in the world. So that they can “survive, and reproduce themselves, and transmit their culture” (Bailey and Peoples, 2013, p. 26, 28): it connects them to their past, in light of which they are urged to understand themselves in the present, as well as to project themselves towards possible meaningful futures.¹

Understood as a form of cultural knowledge, Indigenous knowledge is part of the cultural heritage of Indigenous populations across the globe, from the Northern Territories to New Zealand.² In this dissertation, a specific form of knowledge production

¹ According to an anthropology handbook definition, cultural knowledge, broadly defined, “includes all the things individuals learn while growing up among a particular group: attitudes, standards of morality, rules of etiquette, perceptions of reality, language, notions about the proper way to live, beliefs about how females and males should interact, ideas about how the world works, and so forth” (Bailey and Peoples, 2013, pp. 21-2).

² The most prominent peoples labeled as “Indigenous” are “the Indians of the Americas, the Innuits and Samis of the Arctic north, the Maori of New Zealand, the Koori of Australia, the Karins and Katchins of Burma, the Kurds of Persia, the Bedouins of the African/Middle Eastern desert, many African tribal peoples, and even the Basques and Gaels of contemporary Europe” (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, p. 16).

by Indigenous curators is examined as a discourse around Indigenous knowledge – understood as cultural knowledge with associated tensions.

As German Ethnology scholar Christoph Antweiler points out, in the notion of Indigenous knowledge the “semantic stress” falls on the fact that this type of knowledge is being “defined in relation to western (scientific) knowledge ... [a] contrast [which] implies many dichotomies (e.g., us/them, west/rest, rationality/magic, universal/particular, tradition/modernity)” (Antweiler, 2004, p. 3). The problem to which this definition alludes is the following: if Indigenous knowledge is constructed as non-knowledge (at best as a set of superstitious beliefs), the members of the communities which rely on this type of knowledge, yet live in societies dominated by Western conceptions of knowledge, will form distorted identities (Cornell and Hartmann, 1996, p. 82; Nagel, 1996). The overarching question is about the status of such knowledge that does not fit the Western scientific epistemologies – the dominant ways of framing all types of knowledge.

The relationship between (Western) knowledge and Indigenous knowledge is complex. Hans-Georg Gadamer draws a useful epistemological distinction among three species of knowledge as understood in the Western societies:

- Scientific knowledge (or Science) is “the sum total of the ever progressing results of natural scientific research”³
- Practical knowledge is “the empirical knowledge of so-called practice that everyone accumulates in the midst of life – the doctor, and like him the

³ This type of knowledge is also known as “informational knowledge” or “knowledge about” (Schwab, 2012, p. 4).

clergyman, educator, judge, soldier, politician, tradesman, workman, employee, official”⁴

- Cultural knowledge is “that vast wealth of knowledge which flows toward each and every human being in the transmission of human culture – poetry, the arts as a whole, philosophy, historiography and the other historical sciences” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 529)⁵

In contrast, Indigenous knowledge is built on an opposition to Western knowledge with respect to all three species of knowledge listed by Gadamer (1977). The main term of opposition embedded in Indigenous knowledge is precisely the first one listed by Gadamer, that knowledge can be understood as a body of truths generated through “natural scientific research” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 529).

There is tension within the notion of Western knowledge itself. For instance, Gadamer (1977) already noted that practical knowledge and cultural knowledge are “largely unverifiable and unstable” (p. 529); nevertheless, the two types of knowledge form an immense part of the wealth of knowledge produced and circulated within communities.⁶ Gadamer implies that scientific knowledge is not the most frequent species of knowledge that humanity relies on, yet it is verifiable and stable. These two features,

⁴ This type of knowledge is known in the cognitive science literature as “embodied” knowledge, that is, knowledge acquired by individuals involved in particular activities and contexts, usually cultural and professional contexts (see, for instance, Suchman, 1987 and Collins, 1993).

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of cultural knowledge is more restricted than the anthropological notion discussed above. Insofar as the latter amounts to everything a member of a community learns in the course of her socialization into that group, there is a sense in which the anthropological notion of cultural knowledge is the synonym of Gadamer’s notion of knowledge tout court: it includes conceptions of reality (a functional equivalent of Gadamer’s “scientific knowledge”), standard patterns of behavior in various circumstances (Gadamer’s “practical knowledge”), as well as idea(l)s of good life, symbols, and interpretations of events (Gadamer’s “cultural knowledge”).

⁶ Wuthnow and Witten (1988) refer to cultural knowledge described by Gadamer as “expressive knowledge.” This type of knowledge consists of “cultural products as end-products, [that is] species of art, religion, and science that are regarded as intrinsically important (i.e., art for art’s sake)” (p. 52).

verifiability and stability, may account for its privileged and even dominant status in the Western societies and beyond.

Viewed from the perspective of the notion of scientific knowledge as verifiable and stable, both practical knowledge and (especially) cultural knowledge appear as weak forms of knowledge at the most (the dispute between supporters of quantitative research methods and supporters of qualitative/interpretive research methods in social sciences illustrates too well this tension). From this point of view, it comes as no surprise that Indigenous knowledge does not fare any better.

The tension between Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge – which, as one can see in Antweiler, is inherent to the very core of the notion of Indigenous knowledge – can be fruitfully and systematically explored, within a discourse research framework in terms of the tensions between two discourses of Indigenous knowledge. I will label these two discourses the “science (or scientist) discourse” and the “tradition (or Indigenist) discourse” and will assume the tension between them.⁷

⁷ The use of the term “Western (scientific) knowledge” and “indigenous knowledge” should be taken here as covering a wider range of phenomena: from specific items of knowledge, to conceptions of knowledge, as well as to epistemologies and ontologies supporting those conceptions. This proviso is important: the tension between Indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge may reside in specific instances of each type of knowledge, in specific conceptions of the two types of knowledge, as much as in their respective epistemologies. To clarify: Western scientific theories of the matter may be incompatible with Indigenous ideas about existence; yet, there is a sense in which the tension lies at a deeper (possibly metaphysical) level, namely what place people are ready to assign to scientific knowledge in a larger scheme of things, such as a world view (and this is precisely where I believe the use of a discursive framework becomes salient, if not inevitable). In this respect, Swedish philosopher Mikael Stenmark has noted a range of natural scientists (such as Peter Atkins, Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, Edward O. Wilson), as well as naturalistic-oriented philosophers of mind (such as Daniel D. Dennett and Patricia Churchland), for whom the “overwhelming intellectual and practical successes of science have led ... to think that there are no real limits to the competence of science, no limits to what can be achieved in the name of science” (Stenmark, 2008, p. 111). Stenmark labels this (arguably metaphysical) position “scientism” and defines it as “the view that science has no real boundaries – that it will eventually answer all empirical, theoretical, practical, moral, and existential questions and will in due time solve all genuine problems humankind encounters”

Starting with the 1960s, North America has experienced a rise of Native American political activism and cultural activity (in close connection to the political and cultural agenda of other groups, e.g., African Americans, women, etc.), which has changed the landscape of Native American ways of life (Churchill, 2008; Smith, 2012). Specifically, from a political point of view, such movements as the American Indian Movement (an advocacy group formed by young urban Natives from Minneapolis in the summer of 1968) have raised public awareness about the poor living conditions of Native Americans and have advanced their improvement. Also, culturally, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) has contributed, since its founding in 1962 and together with other Indigenous colleges and universities, to the emergence and empowerment of (especially young) Native artists and art educators (Gritton, 2000). This is the context in which Indigenous curators, a particular group of professionals, have started to play a key role in this process of institutional shaping of Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous curatorship has emerged as an information profession in the context of the increased realization that Native peoples have a right to control the representations of American Indian cultures in various media. The Indigenous background of these professionals (many of whom have in fact grown up in the Reservations and speak the languages of their ancestors) and the Western undergraduate and graduate education they have received are elements likely to position Indigenous curators in a key role in

(p. 113). As such, Stenmark argues, scientism comes paradoxically close to a form of secular religion, served by “science believers,” that is, people who “put their faith in science ... put their trust in science ... rely on science” (p. 113). A version of scientism, which Stenmark labels “epistemic scientism,” holds that “only science can confer genuine (in contrast to apparent) knowledge about reality. The only kind of knowledge people can have is scientific knowledge. Everything outside science is taken as a matter of mere belief and subjective opinions” (p. 113).

processes related to Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous curators often gather in professional collectives, such as the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, and convene within the framework of symposia and conferences. In fact, the very existence of such a collective was one of the reasons that pushed me to plan studying Indigenous curators as a group. My reasoning was the following: if people who identify along several identity axes (ethno-cultural, professional, etc.) manage to come together as a group around a shared set of meanings, ideals, as well as around a program of action, there is most likely a discourse at work within which they operate and which can be researched.

This dissertation articulates a range of actualizations of discourses of Indigenous knowledge by Indigenous curators – a group of key information professionals involved in institutional practices of production and circulation of Indigenous cultural knowledge representations. To study Indigenous curators' discourses of Indigenous knowledge, this dissertation employs a multi-method approach within the tradition of discourse research in the social sciences: the discourse is located through examination of museum mission statements, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Indigenous curators, exhibition analysis, and analysis of the scholarly work produced by the interviewees. This multi-method approach will enable me to elicit both the material and the meaning-making dimensions of Indigenous curators' discourses of Indigenous knowledge.

The discourse-analytic approach this project employs originates in the field of Sociology of Knowledge and in particular in a recent theoretical framework developed in Germany in the work of German sociologist Reiner Keller. It is called “The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse” (abbreviated as SKAD) and has been presented as “an interpretive approach to discourse and the politics of knowledge” (Keller, 2005, np).

This discourse-analytic approach brings together two complementary traditions of sociological thinking. On one hand, it builds on the micro-level sociological approach to knowledge developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) which focuses on processes of social production and circulation of knowledge through actions and interactions of self-reflective social agents: the institutionalization of knowledge is “objective” and internalization of knowledge is “subjective.” This discourse-analytic approach also builds on Michel Foucault’s (1969) macro-level discourse theory and focuses on discourses understood as practices of “power/knowledge” and meaning production.

This study has theoretical and methodological relevance, because it provides insights into Indigenous knowledge and curatorship and introduces a recent and innovative discursive approach to LIS. This dissertation also has a practical and applied relevance, insofar as it points to cultural information needs of under-researched and marginal(ized) communities and suggests ways in which serving these groups may first require such serious discursive work as the critique of problematic representations of their traditional knowledge, which circulate in the mainstream media. Finally, it is significant from an activist point of view, as it does justice to so far silenced Indigenous voices in the larger society.

Chapter 1 maps the field for the study. It identifies a few areas of application and explores critically a range of understandings of Indigenous knowledge elaborated within each of the areas of application (i.e., Indigenous knowledge in the informational, political, legal, economic, and educational realms). The chapter argues that two main perspectives – one exogenous or external to the Native points of view and another one

endogenous or internal to the Native points of view – are active within any of the identified domains. An exogenous perspective suggests a point of view on Indigenous knowledge that does not originate with the Native peoples and cultures and is perceived as the point of view of the outsiders speaking about Native peoples and cultures. In contrast, an endogenous perspective represents a point of view that originated with, or has become widely accepted by, Native peoples and their cultures.

The chapter shows that information science literature on Indigenous knowledge focuses on one of three themes (social actors, curatorial practices, and the practice-supporting dispositif) and establishes a gap in knowledge: it points to a need for further research of Indigenous curators as key social actors in the institutional production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge representations through curatorial practices. This research will be integrative by capturing and describing of a range of articulations of discourses around Indigenous knowledge in terms of their interrelated meaning-making and material aspects (museum-related material and social practices) and by employing a multi-method approach in order to provide a rigorous procedure for the articulation of the discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge.

Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework for the dissertation and identifies the main and subsidiary research objectives and methods. It outlines its goals as a discursive analytic study. The main and subsidiary research objectives are formulated to reflect the specificity of a discourse research type of study.

Chapter 3 is the first analysis chapter, which focuses on the meaning-making dimension of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge, which the dissertation reconstructs in terms of a “phenomenal structure” (Keller, 2005) of Indigenous

knowledge. This chapter proceeds with the first step of this reconstruction by eliciting definitional features of Indigenous knowledge from the statements of Indigenous curators.

Chapter 4 continues the exploration of the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge. It describes a topographic vocabulary that Indigenous curators employ in order to make sense of the various causalities, responsibilities, threats, and possible solutions and needs for action, which they associate with Indigenous knowledge.

Chapter 5 describes a chronographic vocabulary used by Indigenous curators to articulate and address what they perceive as prejudiced narratives about Indigenous knowledge.

Chapter 6 describes the matrix of materiality which supports the construction of Indigenous knowledge: subject positions, practices, and *dispositif*.⁸

Chapter 7 focuses on the roles of Indigenous curatorship as a possible privileged locus for exploring the entanglement of the material and meaning-making dimensions of the discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge: Indigenous curators as social actors occupy the subject position of Indigenous curatorship in various ways. Some involve more self-reflection and more daring interpretations of the roles incumbent upon the curatorship position and are, thus, potentially more creative than others.

⁸ I preferred to use the slightly rebarbative word “*dispositif*” from Michel Foucault’s Discourse Theory, instead of its imperfect, though clearly more euphonic English equivalents (e.g., assemblage, arrangement, mangle, etc.), as it better captures the idea of an arrangement of elements (military troops, rhetorical figures, architectural parts, etc.) in order to achieve a goal (victory, persuasion, stability, etc.), as well as the idea of disposable materiality (i.e., things which can be disposed of easily after they were marshalled in view of achieving that goal).

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation, points to its limitations, as well as to possible lines of further research.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

1.1 Introduction

A topic of interest in various disciplines and areas of application, Indigenous knowledge is a form of cultural knowledge. As Library and Information Science scholar Martin Nakata puts it, this type of knowledge “defies simple definition” (Nakata et al, 2005, p. 9). Education scholars Ladislaus Semali and Joe Kincheloe, the editors of a collection of studies on Indigenous knowledge, suggest, in their introductory chapter, that this knowledge is “an ambiguous topic” from two points of view: “Not only are scholars unsure what we’re talking about, but many analysts are uncertain who should be talking about it” (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, p. 3). The first ambiguity can be related to the existence of other descriptors for this type of knowledge, such as “traditional,” “local,” “ethnic,” “folk,” “autochthonous,” “community,” and so on – all of them covered by the descriptor “cultural,” yet not all of them perfectly synonymous. In this respect, German Ethnology scholar Christoph Antweiler provides a no less than three-page long table of competing descriptors of Indigenous knowledge, together with their associated “semantic stress,” that is, the meaning that any such descriptor tends to emphasize (Antweiler, 2004, pp. 3-5). The second ambiguity can be traced back to the fact that, according to Antweiler, in the phrase “Indigenous knowledge” the “semantic stress” falls on the fact that Indigenous knowledge is being “defined in relation to western (scientific) knowledge ... [a] contrast [which] implies many dichotomies (e.g., us/them, west/rest, rationality/magic, universal/particular, tradition/modernity)” (Antweiler, 2004, p. 3).

At a minimum, definitions of Indigenous knowledge involve references to a particular Indigenous community which is the unique and legitimate owner of this type of knowledge, as well as the context of the production, validation, and circulation of this type of knowledge in the communities. These features are captured, for instance, by the following definition: “the local knowledge held by Indigenous peoples or local knowledge unique to a given culture or society” (Berkes, 2008, p. 9).

In reality, since each discipline dealing with this kind of knowledge emphasizes a particular set of features of this phenomenon and embeds this set in a particular conceptual network (which defines that discipline), we encounter different emphases and possibly competing takes on Indigenous knowledge.

This chapter surveys some of the contributions of various bodies of literature on Indigenous knowledge in various areas of application. Based on this literature, the chapter will briefly describe two competing perspectives around the notion of Indigenous knowledge, which I have identified as exogenous and endogenous, respectively. An exogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge suggests a point of view on Indigenous knowledge that does not originate with the Native peoples and cultures and is perceived (and even rejected) as the point of view of the outsiders speaking about Native peoples and cultures. In contrast, an endogenous perspective represents a point of view that originated with, or has become widely accepted by, Native peoples and their cultures. This distinction is grounded in explicit statements of Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and activists that native peoples need to represent themselves – in both senses of the word: “to be entitled to speak or act on behalf of (a person, group, organization, etc.); (in later use esp.) to act or serve as the spokesperson or advocate of,” as much as “[t]o make

present, bring to view” (OED, 2014).⁹ The chapter will explore these two perspectives in five areas of application: memory institutions, politics, law, economics, and education. The chapter will pay particular attention to aspects of Indigenous knowledge that the information science literature has emphasized (the actors involved in institutional practices, social and material practices of curatorship, and the dispositif supporting these practices) and will pay special attention to the museum as an institution in and through which museum professionals produce and circulate Indigenous knowledge. Finally, the chapter will draw conclusions of the survey of the scholarly literature on Indigenous knowledge and will point to gaps in knowledge that are addressed in this dissertation.

1.2 Features and Discourses of Indigenous Knowledge

This section critically discusses representations of Indigenous knowledge in various areas of application (political, legal, economical, educational, and informational).

The scholarly literature which discusses the phenomenon under the explicit label of “Indigenous knowledge” shows understandings of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous community as its legitimate owner or the site for its production, validation, and circulation. First, Indigenous knowledge is regarded as communally owned knowledge (Janke, 2005, p. 99; Nakata et al, 2009, p. 11). Second, Indigenous knowledge is knowledge produced within the habitat of a specific Indigenous community, namely one that has developed through “observations of, experiences with, and explanations

⁹ The concern of Indigenous communities with self-representation and thus the tension between endogenous and exogenous perspectives is acknowledged by non-Native scholars of museum studies: “Groups attempting to establish and maintain a sense of community and to assert their social, political, and economic claims in the larger world challenge the right of established institutions to control the presentation of their cultures. They challenge exhibitions that overlap with their concerns, demand real power within existing institutions, and establish alternative institutions” (Lavine and Karp, 1991, pp. 1-2).

about the physical environment and living resources that characterize the territory in which [Indigenous peoples] live” (Brooke, 1993). Third, Indigenous knowledge is knowledge validated through a process of collective assessment and “consensus building” (Castellano, 2000, p. 26). Fourth, Indigenous knowledge is knowledge circulated within the community. According to Peruvian anthropologist Mahia Maurial, this type of knowledge is shared in the form of oral tradition (Maurial, 1999, p. 63). As curator Gwyneira Isaac – an important Anthropology scholar who studied knowledge systems in Zuni communities before being hired by the Smithsonian Institution – noted, this type of knowledge consists of “practices that are transmitted intentionally from elder to younger members of the community in order to define an individual’s specific social role and to affirm generational links” (Isaac, 2007, p. 113).

These characterizations are descriptive of the political status of Indigenous knowledge. This type of knowledge is often referred to as subjugated knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 230; Robinson, 2013, p. 28; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, p. 32). This knowledge is also distinct from the Western conceptualization of knowledge. Anthropology scholar Sonya Atalay notes that Native peoples have “a unique way of viewing the world, [which] has been severely affected by colonization, yet is ever changing and resilient.” She emphasizes the importance of initiatives aiming at “[b]ringing Native voices to the foreground to share these experiences and worldviews is a critical part of readjusting the power balance to ensure that Native people control their own heritage, representation, and histories” (Atalay, 2000, p. 285). The quote states clearly that bringing Native voices (i.e., endogenous perspectives) to the foreground is an imperative for political action, under the plausible assumption that communities ought to

be able to have control over their cultures and the representations of those cultures in the various media. This constitutes an endogenous point of view that I will use to present the literature on Indigenous knowledge in the areas of information, politics, law, economics, and education. In contrast, an exogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge suggests a point of view on Indigenous knowledge that does not originate with the Native peoples and cultures and is perceived (and even rejected) as the point of view of the outsiders speaking about Native peoples and cultures. Therefore, an endogenous perspective represents a point of view that originated with, or has become widely accepted by, Native peoples and their cultures, while the exogenous perspective is common to many domains shaping the idea of Indigenous knowledge in the mainstream and dominant spheres of knowledge production in society.

In light of the insight from Atalay (2000), this chapter explores the tensions between the exogenous and the endogenous perspectives around the notion of Indigenous knowledge in five areas of application: memory institutions, politics, law, economics, and education. They will be examined next.

1.2.1 Indigenous Knowledge in Information Science

This subsection is devoted to Indigenous knowledge as a topic of interest for the information disciplines. The literature on Indigenous knowledge in information studies focuses on three major themes: the actors involved in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge, the curatorial practices in which these actors are involved, or the institutions (museums, libraries, and archives) within which these practices occur. At

each level, my discussion will substantiate the tension between exogenous and endogenous perspectives on Indigenous knowledge.

1.2.1.1 Social Actors and their “Voices”

Stephen Lavine and Ivan Karp, the editors of an important collection of studies on museums (Karp and Lavine, 1991), point out, in the introduction chapter, to the fact that the human actors involved in the operation of museums are decisive in the shaping of museum exhibitions:

Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others. The assumptions underpinning these decisions vary according to exhibit. (Lavine and Karp, 1991, p. 1)

Museum curators and staff, collectors or purchasers of Indigenous knowledge artifacts, as well as historians and critics who analyze these artifacts are examples of such actors, according to Baxandall (1991) and Jonaitis (2002, p. 17). Yet, as Lavine and Karp (1991) suggest, other types of actors, such as individual or collective Indigenous audiences, have become increasingly active in the decision-making processes resulting in the mounting of exhibitions. In fact, as Performance Studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted, the role of museum professionals themselves has changed accordingly: for instance, she claims that the curator has become less responsible for caring for objects and collections, as for serving the specific (cultural, educational, recreational) needs of the various types of audiences of the museum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1997, p. 138). This is just one example in support of the claim Levine and Karp (1991) make that exhibitions result from “complex interactions of competing parties and interests” (p. 2).

As scholarly literature of deconstructive and discourse-theoretical inspiration has emphasized, social actors influence the design and shape of museum collections by means of their cultural-professional assumptions and interests (Bowker and Star, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Karp and Lavine, 1991). These assumptions and interests ground specific decisions: “to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others” (Lavine and Karp, 1991, p. 1). For instance, Anna Catalani analyzed ten museum displays of traditional religious Yoruba objects in the United Kingdom. She looked at “the morphology of the galleries, the arrangement of the objects, and the texts of the panels” (Catalani, 2007, p. 71) and suggested that the interpretive work curators had performed to facilitate the visitors’ understanding of the objects on display actually presupposed a highly educated type of audience. In addition, she deplored the “limited reference and emphasis on the importance of traditional Yoruba religion for the local contemporary Yoruba communities” (p. 74). Catalani’s conclusion was that Western stereotypes affect museum displays and, consequently, non-Western material culture is turned from religious cultures into “ethnographic specimens or art” (p. 76).

To address situations of cultural distortion, Indigenous peoples have increasingly become involved in the shape of museum collections and exhibitions not only as audiences, but also as museum professionals. As Brenda MacDougall and M. Teresa Carlson point out:

Increasingly, there are Aboriginal people on staff at mainstream museums to assist in redesigning existing displays as well as to create new, appropriate displays that include Aboriginal perspectives and voices. Typically, these employees work closely with local communities and elders to ensure that displays of objects, therefore the message of exhibits,

reflect cultural sensibilities and values. (MacDougall and Carlson, 2009, p. 167)

In conclusion, according to museum studies literature, social actors, with their cultural-professional backgrounds and interests, are always involved in the production of exhibitions and, thus, of representations of Indigenous knowledge. Some of these actors regard Indigenous collections and exhibits from an exogenous, and often (though not always) distorting, perspective (Catalani, 2007). Other actors, e.g., Indigenous peoples (especially Indigenous museum professionals), inhabit an endogenous perspective on Native collections and exhibitions and are thus the most appropriate actors to deal with representations of Indigeneity. Building on these insights, this dissertation will study the role of a particular type of social actors, namely the Indigenous curators, in the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge.

1.2.1.2 Museum Practices

Museum practices are a second theme of interest for information science studies of Indigenous knowledge. Research in this area focuses on tensions around the appropriate use, handling, and display of Indigenous artifacts. To contextualize these tensions: in 1990, the United States Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which legislated that Indigenous peoples had the right to decide upon the most appropriate ways of dealing with religious and cultural property (including graves and human remains) of their ancestors. Even though tribal communities had developed traditional curatorial practices prior to 1990, after this date, these practices have been gradually integrated into the curatorial practices of mainstream museums having Indigenous collections (see, for instance, discussions of this

process in Clavir, 2002; Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001; Gurian, 1999; and Rosoff, 1998).

Similarly in Canada, the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) and the Assembly of First Nations organized a Taskforce on First Peoples in 1990, in order to “develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions” (Assembly of First Nations and CMA, 1992).

The goal of this Taskforce was to provide guidelines for more respectful relationships between Canadian museums and First Peoples.

It is in this context that such museum studies scholars as Sherelyn Ogden or Miriam Clavir examine museum practices (e.g., conservation and preservation of Indigenous artifacts) through the lens of such ideals as the protection and promotion of the cultural knowledge, in relation to which those artifacts play a role. For instance, Clavir (2002) articulates a tension between an exogenous and an endogenous perspective on museum practices, when she claims that,

Conservators approach preserving the cultural significance of a heritage object by preserving its physical integrity (which they can “read” through scientific evidence) and its aesthetic, historic, and conceptual integrity (which is interpreted through scholarship in related disciplines as well as “read” through physical evidence). Many First Nations, on the other hand, view the preservation of the cultural significance of a heritage object as inseparable from the preservation of traditions, oral history, community, and identity as First Nations; preservation is about people, and objects have their role in cultural preservation. The “juncture of impasses” that prompted me to write this book concerned whether or not it is possible to balance the preservation of the physical integrity of First Nations collections in museums with the preservation of their conceptual integrity – an integrity that derives from the living culture from which the objects originate. (p. xvii)

In other words, while non-Native museum practices are directed at the preservation of Indigenous artifacts qua physical objects, Native practices are more

concerned with the preservation of the forms of life within which those artifacts play a specific role.

Drawing on statements by Indigenous museum professionals, Ogden (2007) summarizes the ideals which, according to her, ought to guide museum practices sensitive to an endogenous perspective, namely understanding, respect, and collaboration. First, museum practices should be informed by an “understanding [of] some of the reasons American Indian people believe objects should be preserved” (p. 279). For instance, Ogden cites Native curator Faith Bad Bear (Crow/Sioux), according to whom “[s]ome items are meant to deteriorate and should be left to deteriorate naturally. Some are not. Those that are not should be used to educate our children” (Faith Bad Bear, as cited in Ogden, 2004, p. 82). In light of this insight, it can be inferred that museum practices and the dispositif of the museum should enable the interaction of the visitors (especially of Native origin) with those artifacts.

Second, according to Ogden (2007), museum practices should embed an ideal of respect for the Indigenous artifacts. This is an ideal which reflects local norms for appropriate use of items. For instance, she cites a Native registrar, Joan Thomas (Kiowa), who advises that,

The museum and collector should always be aware when adding to their collections that the items they are handling are from a living and vibrant culture. No object exists within a cultural vacuum. There are people who care deeply about how you are handling, displaying, and storing the cultural material in your care. (Thomas, as cited in Ogden, 2007, p. 281)

This quote refers indirectly to an exogenous perspective on museum practices, according to which Indigenous artifacts are handled with no concern for the original

context in which those objects were produced and circulated or for the appropriate ways in which their legal owners consider those objects should be treated.

Third, Ogden also mentions collaboration as an ideal which should inform museum practices: “Respectful display of items probably cannot be accomplished by non-Indians without the guidance of members of the appropriate tribe” (Ogden, 2007, p. 283). The implication is that the display of items can be done without this kind of collaboration, case in which it reflects an exogenous perspective on museum practices.

Clavir (2002) and Ogden (2007) are part of a small group of studies focusing on museum practices. While the two works are built on and reveal the tension that exists between the exogenous and endogenous perspectives on preservation and conservation of Indigenous artifacts in museums, they are limited, insofar as they do not address other key types of practices, such as Indigenous curatorship. This is the focus of my dissertation.

1.2.1.3 Dispositif

A third focus of interest for the information science literature about Indigenous knowledge is museum, library, and archive viewed as a *dispositif*. Famously theorized by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, or Giorgio Agamben, as well as, more recently, by German sociologists Andrea Bührmann and Werner Schneider, a *dispositif* is a component of the matrix of materiality which supports museum practices and shapes Indigenous knowledge. It refers to museum spatial organization, rules and modes of operation, the information and communication technologies by means of which Indigenous knowledge is collected, organized, stored, and disseminated, and so on.

For some authors, this type of materiality consists of what American historian Antoinette Burton refers to as that concrete “presence which structures access, imposes its own meanings on the evidence contained therein, and watches over users both literally and figuratively.” Far from being neutral workplaces only, these institutions often constitute “a panopticon whose claim to total knowledge is matched by its capacity for total surveillance” (Burton, 2005, p. 9). The reference to museums, libraries, and archives as a “panopticon” has great purchase for research within a Foucauldian discursive theoretical framework. Specifically, this framework opens up the space for research aimed at the articulation of discourses, i.e., formations which make possible certain forms of knowledge and exclude others. Numerous studies focus on museums as the paramount sites where Indigenous knowledge is produced and circulated. For instance, Museum Studies scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill wrote a seminal historical work exploring the ways in which “[m]useums have been active in shaping knowledge over (at least) the last 600 years” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 191). Within a Foucauldian framework, museum anthropologist Henrietta Lidchi describes a “politics of exhibiting” which constructs museums as sites of power, where dominant discourses inform the way objects on display are selected and framed. She emphasizes that a Foucauldian approach allows the researcher of museums to trace the emergence of a “body of knowledge” through discursive formations which “construct a specific object/topic of analysis in a particular way, [while] limit[ing] the other ways in which that object/topic may be constituted” (Lidchi, 1997, p. 191). This insight emphasizes the fact that Indigenous knowledge itself as a topic of analysis is constructed differently by Indigenous curators who operate within different discursive formations.

The tension between exogenous and endogenous perspectives in this area is captured by Gwyneira Isaac, who notes that, while information technology has certainly enabled Indigenous people to keep a record of, and a wider access to, their traditional practices, it has also presented “a threat to oral traditions by capturing a performance and separating it from its performer.” Thus, the use of technologies for recording and disseminating Indigenous practices may “[defy] the expertise of teachers to determine the appropriate context for the transfer of specific knowledge and cheating students out of the highly valued interaction with their teachers” (Isaac, 2007, p. 119).

Also, information scientist Ramesh Srinivasan proposes to work within a “multiple ontologies” framework which emphasizes the existence of a plurality of ways of knowing and the importance of embodied and situated perspectives on the world. Based on this framework, he proposes to empower Indigenous peoples to “not only create their own media and information, but also to iteratively design the architecture by which these voices are represented and disseminated” (Srinivasan, 2006, p. 361). Srinivasan suggests that technology is an important component of the materiality of the museum and can function as an appropriate platform for the effective dissemination of Indigenous representations of Indigenous knowledge, following from the Science and Technology Studies tradition best represented by Donna Haraway. In consequence, this dissertation may gain from exploring the role of the *dispositif* (including technologies of display) in exhibitions around Indigenous peoples and cultures.

1.2.1.4 Conclusion

With respect to the information science treatment of as an object in the area of application of memory institutions, the discussion has revealed that a few aspects are frequently invoked: the social actors, the practices in which these actors are involved, and the dispositif (especially the institution itself with its material presence and the information and communication technologies designed and implemented to enable knowledge processes). In regard to each of these dimensions of analysis, the section pointed to the existence of various tensions between endogenous and exogenous perspectives. These tensions shed light on the various ways in which the materiality of memory institutions may have enabling or thwarting consequences on the ways in which Indigenous knowledge is represented in these institutions. The following sections will explore similar tensions in other areas of application in which Indigenous knowledge is an object of interest.

1.2.2 Indigenous Knowledge in Politics

Indigenous knowledge is often discussed as an object of politics. Politics is widely understood as the realm of power relations and the “good” governance involving various types of actors, individual, governmental, and non-governmental who are caught in power relations. Depending on what aspects are emphasized, the political perspective on Indigenous knowledge is either endogenous or exogenous. A range of concerns from both perspectives are presented below.

An endogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge in the politics-oriented literature is usually occupied by Indigenous scholars. For instance, De La Torre (2004)

considers the ways in which Indigenous knowledge is omitted as insignificant, ignored, or even altered “to fit into the theoretical paradigms of the [mainstream political science] discipline,” which include Western conceptions of sovereignty, democracy, and justice, to mention three most contentious political notions (p. 182). Indigenous scholars critique the lack of interest of both politicians and mainstream political scientists in those aspects of Indigenous knowledge that bear on Indigenous political life (e.g., political values, as well as the local models of governance and conflict resolution). Some authors suggest that, for instance, Indigenous knowledge can be a source of inspiration for mainstream politics, insofar as it can offer suggestions of “good governance” (De La Torre, 2004, pp. 189-90).

From the exogenous perspective manifest in the politics-oriented literature, Indigenous peoples are regarded as citizens and minority groups who have acquired more freedom and power of self-determination from the governments (of the United States and Canada) as a result of a long series of protests and negotiations in the last decades of the 20th century. In this process, Indigenous knowledge has played a double role: first as an instrument in the Native Americans’ fight for self-determination, and second, as a good to be protected and cultivated as the ground for cultural identity formation and protection. On the one hand, studies have explored tribal leaders’ manipulation of symbols (a key component of Indigenous knowledge) to mobilize support, especially starting with the 1960s (see, for instance, works by Fowler, 1978; Gayton, 1930; Richardson, 1940; Smith, 1969). Also, Whiteley (1998) discusses how Indigenous people appropriate representational technologies to produce representations of themselves in response to dominant representations. On the other hand, Indigenous knowledge (embedded in

traditional forms of life related to the use of land) has been invoked in the struggles of various Native communities with the state. An instance (Barger, 1980 and Feit, 1982, 1985) is the discussion of the Cree people protesting against the building of a hydro-electric project that would have threatened their traditional way of life based on hunting. The emphasis of the preservation of traditional forms of life based on hunting was central to the strategy designed by the Crees in their negotiations with the state, which resulted in an agreement in 1975.

1.2.3 Indigenous Knowledge in Law

Legally-oriented literature abounds in studies of the various legal aspects surrounding Indigenous knowledge, many of which involve law cases. Both this literature and the legal institutions themselves regard Indigenous knowledge as a community good. In this case too there is an obvious split between exogenous and endogenous perspectives on Indigenous knowledge, of which the former is the most widespread.

An endogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge as a legal object is implicit in critiques of the exogenous perspective. For instance, scholars criticize the mainstream treatment of Indigenous knowledge in terms of intellectual property rights. Thus, some authors point to the problematic construction of authorship of Indigenous knowledge in the intellectual property law (the issue being whether the author is an individual creator or a juridical part). The argument these scholars make is that this notion of authorship is a construction with which Indigenous people do not identify (see discussions in Boyle, 1992). Also, scholars criticize the overemphasis of the legally-oriented literature on Western notions of ownership, tenure, and access, as well as the implicit spur that the

intellectual property law gives to commercialization and distribution (in this case, there is a direct connection between the legal and the economic frameworks, which will be discussed in subsection 1.2.4). In the first case, most Indigenous peoples feel uncomfortable with the Western notion of possessing assets (e.g., Indigenous knowledge as an asset one could possess), whereas in the second case, they believe the commercialization and wide distribution of at least some Indigenous knowledge items is precisely what needs to be restrained, given protocols of access to knowledge in the Native communities. Finally, as anthropologist Darrell Addison Posey notes, Indigenous peoples perceive the best use of at least some of their traditional knowledge in spiritual, rather than market-economical terms (Posey, 2004). Even if scholars like Boyle or Posey are not Indigenous, their perspective is sensitive to the Native points of view on Indigenous knowledge and the law. In this case, an argument can be made that these authors speak from an endogenous perspective.

From an exogenous point of view, Indigenous knowledge represents a community good to which Indigenous peoples can have authorship-grounded claims of ownership. The literature focuses on the laws and regulations put in place by national and transnational organisms in response to previous breaches of the right of Indigenous communities to the possession and adequate representation of their knowledge (see, for instance, discussions in Bradford, 2000-3; Glauner, 2002; Tsosie, 2000). Often, legal scholars discuss the role of supranational organizations such as the United Nations (and its various organisms) in the definition and implementation of international laws concerning the rights of the Indigenous populations to decide on the adequate handling of traditional knowledge (see, for instance, Barsh, 1986). Also, from an exogenous perspective, there is

a prevalent framing of Indigenous knowledge in terms of intellectual property, the outcomes of which should generate at least some form of compensation, if not steady economic return, to their legitimate owners. Legally speaking, this means that Indigenous peoples are viewed as (usually individual) authors of Indigenous products and are guaranteed the right to benefit from the economic exchanges in which these products may enter (see, for instance, discussions in Brush and Stabinsky, 2006; Drahos, 1997; Posey, 1990; Posey and Dutfield, 1996; Yano, 1993).

1.2.4 Indigenous Knowledge in Economy

Studies focusing on Indigenous knowledge as a commodity, i.e., in terms of goods which can be sold and bought, or as a resource to be used in view of some form of profit (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, 2005) constitute a distinct body of literature. The studies collected in a 2001 book edited by History professor Carter Jones Meyer and English professor Diana Royer, titled, Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures explore how Indigenous cultures in general (and Indigenous knowledge, by extension) are appropriated by non-Natives in two senses of the word, as represented and consumed. Therefore, this is an economic framework in which one can identify endogenous and exogenous perspectives. An economic framework for Indigenous knowledge is not completely foreign to Native communities.

An endogenous perspective is manifest in discussions of the various degrees to which commodification of Indigenous knowledge is allowed by various groups of Native peoples. For instance, Goertzen (2010) suggests that Indigenous peoples in North America experience economic pressures and, consequently, a need to commodify

traditional knowledge to different degrees (p. 34). This type of commodification is the result of a “negotiation of authenticity,” in which the artists feel compelled to engage between tradition and their perception of the tastes of the potential buyers. For instance, referring to a pillowcase produced in highland Chiapas (Mexico), Goertzen (2001) argues that the result of this negotiation is the artifact itself, the pillowcase, “an untraditional object handwoven in traditional ways presenting a modern version of an ancient, sacred design, an object made with the tourist in mind” (p. 242). The insight that the Indigenous artifact emerges out of negotiations between tradition and perceived needs of potential buyers draws attention to the dangers of essentializing Nativeness (i.e., of claiming that artifacts advertised as “traditional” are illustrate something like authentic or unadulterated Nativeness) – a topic which this dissertation will address.

The literature espousing an exogenous perspective is interested in how Indigenous knowledge can be marshalled by techno-science in addressing such environmental problems as the melting of the polar ice cap or agricultural challenges (DeWalt, 1994). Other authors explore the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge by global biotechnological, pharmaceutical, and agribusiness corporations for profit-making purposes (see, for instance, discussions in Maddock, 1989; Roht-Arriza, 1996; Soleri et al., 1994; Yano, 1993). The main concern of this literature is with the best ways (economic and legal), in which Indigenous peoples can benefit from the market appropriation of their traditional knowledge. In this respect, the concerns of the economic science literature partly overlap with those of the legal studies literature. The authors collected in Meyer and Royer (2001) explore how Indigenous cultures in general (and Indigenous knowledge, by extension) are appropriated by non-Native peoples in two

senses of the word (i.e., represented and consumed). They suggest that museums and other similar cultural institutions may share with corporations a similar exogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge, insofar as they regard it as a commodity and attempt to attract as wide an audience as possible to their collections on exhibit.

1.2.5 Indigenous Knowledge in Education

Knowledge is intimately connected to the realm of education. Knowledge, widely conceived to include both propositional and practical knowledge, is what people acquire during their education and is often the product of an educated person who engages in endeavors of all sorts (scientific, artistic, social, political, and economic). With respect to Indigenous knowledge, there is again a distinction between exogenous and endogenous perspectives.

An endogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge is manifest in scholarly work which, according to Native education scholar Marie Battiste (M'ikmaw), emphasizes the systematical exclusion of Indigenous knowledge, i.e., the knowledge which comprises “Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences,” from “contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems” (Battiste, 2002, p. 4). The main causes for this situation seem to derive both from the already mentioned epistemological concerns and from political assumptions: specifically, according to Native education scholar Eber Hampton (Chickasaw), there is a concern among Indigenous scholars that, despite the support of multicultural and inclusive projects, the educational system in North America is still geared towards the assimilation, rather than the self-determination, of the Indigenous peoples (Hampton, 2001, p. 210).

A few Indigenous authors attempt to articulate the aspects of Indigenous knowledge which they believe should underlie the educational projects in Native communities, based on a normative understanding of education. For instance, Native Education scholar Gregory Cajete (Tewa) points to such factors as a sense of community, the “technical environmental knowledge” (i.e., ways of understanding and interacting with the place in which one intends to make a living), “the visionary and dream tradition based on an understanding that one learns through visions and dreams,” the vision of the world through “mythic traditions,” as well as the “spiritual ecology” (“the intimate relationship that people establish with place and with the environment and with all of the things that make them or give them life”) – all being integral to the programs of education that are endogenous in nature. In his opinion, these are foundational knowledge elements that need to ground an educational project, whose main goal has to be “to perpetuate a way of life through the generations and through time” (Cajete, 2000, p. 184). The five factors mentioned above point to an epistemology describing every possible human experience (including the oneiric and the spiritual ones) as a possible ground for knowledge formation. Similarly, in the Canadian context, Hampton (2001) defines First Nations education sui generis as one “based on the spirit and cultures of First Nations, designed and implemented by First Nations” (p. 209).

Curiously, the exogenous perspective is manifest not so much through explicit statements about Indigenous knowledge, as through an implicit indifference towards this particular type of knowledge in the educational context.

Knowledge is intimately connected to the realm of education, an arena for the formation of citizens. Being a good citizen usually presupposes a long-term systematic

training in (natural and social) sciences which are grounded in mainstream epistemology (i.e., the epistemology which favors an understanding of knowledge as justified true belief). For Indigenous peoples, education is often an arena of tension: on one hand they are citizens living in North American societies, which mainstream education provides with a platform through which they can communicate with members of other communities; on the other hand, Indigenous peoples claim their right to cultivate their ethno-cultural identity, which often presupposes education grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. Given the tension between mainstream and Indigenous epistemologies, it is not surprising that the mainstream philosophical literature of education barely pays attention to Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate topic within its domain. Grounded in the Western intellectual tradition, epistemology defines knowledge in such a way (i.e., as belief that is true and justified in some acceptable way), so as to exclude a significant part of Indigenous knowledge from the spectrum of candidates to knowledge stricto sensu. This explains why there is barely any philosophical study engaging with Indigenous study explicitly in education. Given the great purchase of the idea of epistemic justification in almost all sciences, the main consequence of the indifference with regard to Indigenous knowledge is that it cannot claim a place for itself in the scientific arena; it may be researched as an object, but it is almost never considered as a possible epistemology that can ground research (for a notable recent exception, see Wilson, 2008). Insights into the epistemological status of Indigenous knowledge can be gleaned by looking at more or less explicit critiques of Eurocentric epistemology models by Indigenous scholars (see, for instance, discussions in Battiste, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The tension between the exogenous and endogenous perspectives on Indigenous knowledge in the educational contexts is particularly relevant to my dissertation project: one can plausibly assume that the perception of the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge as a type of knowledge by the wider society, and often by the Native communities themselves, have serious consequences. For instance, this perception may motivate (or simply inhibit) collective efforts to keep Indigenous knowledge alive and safe (for instance in and through museums, libraries, and archives) and to promote it through educational projects aimed at Native children in particular; as a result, this perception of the "legitimacy" of Indigenous knowledge may shape the forms Indigenous identities take, assuming that education is the realm of ethno-cultural identity formation. Since Native peoples are probably the first to be concerned with their traditional knowledge, it is fundamental to make their perspective more salient in discussions of Indigenous knowledge as an educational object. Moreover, since museums are by definition institutions meant to serve and educate citizens, Native and non-Native (Ames, 1992; Gurian, 2002; Karp, Mullen-Kreamer, and Lavine, 1992; Simpson, 1996), the role of Indigenous curators in the institutional production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge should be explored more thoroughly and their voices brought forward as salient.

The areas of application within which Indigenous knowledge is constructed are not necessarily foreign to Indigenous communities. However, these communities do not agree with mainstream views of what information work, politics, law, economics, and education are and ought to be. Rather, they often propose alternative views of these areas

that are grounded in their traditions and are beneficial to them. Priming these endogenous perspectives is an imperative that must inform the research of Indigenous knowledge.

1.3 Summary and Programmatic Research Needs

This chapter has shown that Indigenous knowledge is an issue of interest in many areas of application (memory institutions, politics, law, economics, and education), within which it is constructed as an object in or for informational stewardship, political struggles, legal contestations, economic exchanges, and educational programs. The writings of Native scholars on Indigenous knowledge in these areas demonstrate a tension between endogenous and exogenous perspectives on this phenomenon.

The presence of an endogenous perspective, while being small, points to the need for further research. The need for research that makes room for the Indigenous voices is all the more urgent if we acknowledge that the constructions of Indigenous knowledge in various areas of application have concrete effects on the Indigenous communities, cultures, and ethno-cultural identities. For instance, if Indigenous knowledge is portrayed as a form of non-knowledge, the communities relying on this kind of knowledge to build their collective identities will form distorted identities.

Information science and the information profession constitute a particularly important area of application for Indigenous knowledge. The plausible assumption is that, before anything else, the problem of Indigenous knowledge is an informational one (i.e., Indigenous knowledge is produced, stored, and circulated through such specific information-related institutions as the museums, libraries, and archives, and by information professionals working in, for, or with these institutions). With respect to the

information science treatment of Indigenous knowledge, the discussion of relevant literature has revealed that a few aspects are frequently discussed: the social actors, the practices in which these actors are involved, and the dispositif (especially the institution itself with its material presence and the information and communication technologies designed and implemented to enable knowledge processes).

The social actor aspect appears to be less discussed in the information science literature devoted to Indigenous knowledge, even though it is of extreme importance: the cultural and professional assumptions of the museum professionals in general (and the museum curators in particular) influence the shape of the collections and, consequently, the way in which knowledge is produced and circulated through the museum and in the wider society. Since Indigenous people have a legitimate right to decide on matters of Indigenous knowledge (e.g., Nason, 2000; West, 2000), one can ask whether a subgroup of Indigenous peoples is not more qualified than others for the difficult task of mediating the Indigenous knowledge within and for the larger society. I believe that Indigenous curators (or Indigenous curatorship as a professional position) are obvious candidates for the following reasons: they are usually but not always tied to both local communities (through their tribal/national affiliation, life experience, cultural background) and the larger society (through their education and current life); perform activities (such as designing exhibitions) which involve both local communities and the wider society as relevant actors; and have an official mandate to represent Indigenous peoples and cultures to North American societies. Therefore, their constructions of Indigenous knowledge and their curatorial practices as validators of endogenous positions on Indigenous knowledge need to get more attention. This situation points to a need for research which allows the

researcher to capture the Native curators' constructions of Indigenous knowledge, the interactions (sometimes antagonistic) of these constructions with other actors' constructions, and the material aspects of Indigenous knowledge practices through which these constructions are manifest.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

2.1 Introduction

This study explores the phenomenon of Native American curatorship as an expression of Native American curators' discourse of Indigenous knowledge. Specifically, it seeks to describe some of the ways in which discourses of Indigenous knowledge are actualized (i.e., reproduced and transformed) through statements and exhibitions produced by Native American curators as a type of museum professionals. In order to achieve this goal, the theoretical framework is grounded in the social constructionist tradition of research of knowledge production and circulation represented by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Michel Foucault, and Reiner Keller). This approach reveals the social reality of Indigenous knowledge as being constructed discursively by Indigenous curators through and within the museum institution. Within this research tradition, discourses of Indigenous knowledge can be explored along a meaning-making (symbolic) and a material dimension. These two dimensions are distinguished for methodological-analytical reasons, even though in reality the two dimensions are tightly intertwined. On the one hand, the meaning-making (or symbolic) dimension of a discourse refers to its internal organization, which can be reconstructed in terms of a "phenomenal structure." On the other hand, the material dimension refers to the subject positions constituted within that discourse and the social actors who occupy them (e.g., museums curators, scholars in Academia, tribal communities, Indigenous artists, self-organizing collectives, art critics, audiences); the discursive practices and the

objects they involve (e.g., exhibitions, objects on exhibit, reports, albums, flyers, etc.); and the dispositif or the material infrastructure of a discourse (e.g., the museum as an institution, festivals, Academia, the legal-political matrix). The literature on Indigenous knowledge focuses on specific concrete aspects of Indigenous knowledge, such as the social actors involved in practices of Indigenous knowledge production and circulation (Catalani, 2007), the museum practices (Lidchi, 1997), and the institutional infrastructure of the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge (e.g., Brady, 2007; Christen, 2007; Lidchi, 1997). Instead, my approach proposes to consider Indigenous knowledge as a discursive phenomenon with two dimensions: meaning-making (or symbolic) and material. These dimensions will be discussed in detail in sections 2.2.1 (the symbolic) and 2.2.2 (the material). Social actors, practices, and the dispositif of the museum represent the materiality of Indigenous knowledge. Although the focus on material aspects of Indigenous knowledge is a valuable endeavor, it is not sufficient by itself: knowledge is material as much as it is symbolic. To attend to both the material and the symbolic dimensions the discourse of Indigenous knowledge within an explicit integrative theoretical framework is a highly desirable goal. Such work is also timely, as there is a dearth of theoretically informed studies on Indigenous knowledge, and even less so on museum professionals (particularly on Indigenous curators).

2.2 SKAD as a Theoretical Framework

There is a need for research and for a program that relies on a research framework to capture and describe the meaning-making and material dimensions of the constructions of Indigenous knowledge. The characteristics of a theoretical framework most

appropriate for exploring Indigenous knowledge are described by the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD), a quite recent approach to discourse which combines the sociology of knowledge developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann with insights from Michel Foucault's discourse theory – as two different yet complementary approaches to the social construction of knowledge.

The notion of discourse refers to (linguistic or non-linguistic) practices, i.e., “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings” and functioning as structuring contexts, within which bodies/individuals and activities are constituted and embedded” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11). In this sense, discourse is a useful theoretical device which helps the researcher account for the interrelations of the material (the activities together with their material mediators, e.g., subject positions, practices, and the *dispositif*) and the symbolic (phenomenal structure) aspects of a phenomenon in question.

SKAD is framed as “an interpretive approach to discourse and politics of knowledge” (Keller, 2005). It builds on the micro-level sociological approach to knowledge developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), by focusing on the processes of social production and circulation of knowledge in the actions and interactions of self-reflective social agents (e.g., the parallel institutionalization of knowledge as “objective” and the internalization of knowledge as “subjective”). It also builds on Foucault's (1969) macro-level discourse theory, in which discourses are understood as practices of “power/knowledge” and meaning production as opposed to the “collective stocks of knowledge” emphasized by the social constructionist school of thought of Berger and Luckmann (1966), which are independent of the intentions of human subjects, yet guide

their behavior. In other words, it prefers to emphasize enabling discourses (insofar as they are dynamic structures organizing activities and practices, as opposed to static worldviews) implied in the sociological notion of “collective stocks of knowledge.”

SKAD defines discourses as identifiable and empirically researchable “cognitive devices” (such as phenomenal structures, interpretive schemes/frames, classifications, narrative structures, metaphors, cultural models, and so on) which are “produced, actualized, performed and transformed in social practices (not necessary but often of language use) at different social, historical and geographical places.” Unlike Foucault’s discourse theory which emphasizes one discourse at a time, SKAD presents discourses as multiple and competing in the “struggle over symbolic order,” i.e., the struggle to constitute the “social realities of phenomena” (Keller, 2005, p. 11). This aspect is extremely useful to this project, because constructions of Indigenous knowledge are plural, i.e., irreducible, and competing (as pointed out in CHAPTER 1), and a SKAD framework can render them visible.

Keller (2005) emphasizes that, in the process of exploring a phenomenon, the researcher needs to start by assuming the existence of a discourse as a working hypothesis to be tested. Using discourse analytic procedures, he or she will be able to determine whether the empirical data collected using that discursive hypothesis actually account for a particular discourse and how that discourse is constituted:

[T]he concept of discourse works as a sensitising hypothesis for data collection, in order to find appropriate data sources (newspaper texts, books, speeches, media events, web presentations etc.). But only data analysis can show whether the original hypothesis for data collection was appropriate or ill suited. Answers to the questions of whether concrete phenomena of language do account for a particular discourse, and by what

elements or “rules” and strategies the discourse is constituted, cannot be found a priori, but only in the process of analysis. (p. 22)

SKAD views discourses as proposing “a symbolic-material structure of the world” (Keller, 2005, p. 11). In what follows, the two discursive dimensions of Indigenous knowledge are presented and the stage is set for the best way to research them in terms of material and symbolic dimensions of the discourses within which Indigenous curators operate.

2.2.1 The Meaning-Making (Symbolic) Dimension of Discourses

In addition to the material dimension, discourses can be analyzed for a meaning-making (or symbolic) dimension. In reality, the two components are closely intertwined, but for methodological reasons they need to be analyzed separately.

As far as their meaning-making (symbolic) aspect is concerned, discourses “provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (Hall, 2001, p. 4). They “impose frameworks which structure what can be experienced or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said, thought, and done” (Hunt and Wickham, 1994, p. 8). In this respect, SKAD draws our attention to the museum with Indigenous collections as an institutional site to which certain modes of talk, knowledge, and behavior are associated, as well as to the effects of this site on the Indigenous curator and the knowledge work he/she performs as a meaning-making practice.

SKAD suggests that eliciting the meaning-making (symbolic) dimension of a discourse amounts to reconstructing the “phenomenal structures” (Keller, 2005, 2011,

2013). The notion is borrowed from German sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim, who referred to Aspektstruktur (i.e., “perspective” in English translation) as “the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in his thinking” (Mannheim, 1936, p. 272). In Keller’s elaboration, phenomenal structure is a lens, through which alone a phenomenon or a topic (in this case, Indigenous knowledge) becomes intelligible as a theme or problem. Insofar as people (e.g., Indigenous curators) refer to Indigenous knowledge by talking about it and invoking it in various circumstances, as well as by producing and circulating it, they actually construct Indigenous knowledge as a phenomenal structure and therefore a discursive phenomenon.

Phenomenal structure is a theoretical concept by means of which one can capture the referential aspect of a discourse, that is, the manner in which that discourse refers to an object or topic by thematizing or problematizing it in specific ways. The “theme” or “referential relationship” is constituted through a process of selection of elements, as much as by their combination into a specific formation, hence the notion of “phenomenal structure” (Keller, 2013, p. 114). Keller (2011) makes further clarifications:

[C]onstructing a theme as a problem on the public agenda, requires that the protagonists deal with the issue in several dimensions, and refer to argumentative, dramatizing, and evaluative statements; the determination of the kind of problem or theme of a statement unit, the definition of characteristics, causal relations (cause-effect), and their link to responsibilities, problem dimensions, value implications, moral and aesthetic judgments, consequences, possible courses of action, and others. (p. 58)

Keller prefers to discuss phenomenal structures alongside other such “cognitive devices” as frames, classifications, narrative structures, and so on (he leaves this list open). Each of these devices corresponds to a specific analytic approach that may be

marshalled by SKAD as one possible level of discourse reconstruction. Since these devices have many structural features in common and since the notion of phenomenal structure seems to be able to accommodate all of them, I will focus on this particular notion and present in some details these features (indicating where I see the above-mentioned overlaps).

A phenomenal structure is an integrated structure of dimensions and strategies which represent a certain theme. In what follows, the two components of the phenomenal structure are discussed.

2.2.1.1 Dimensions of a phenomenal structure

On the one hand, a phenomenal structure includes such dimensions as: a central theme, causal relations, subject positions, and responsibilities associated with these positions in regard to the effects (or consequences) that (are perceived to) follow the causes, as well as “model practices” (types of action recommended to addressing the causes and effects of the problem).

First, in much the same way as a frame, a phenomenal structure involves a reference and privileges a particular definitional understanding of a central theme or problem (Keller, 2011, p. 58; Van Gorp, 2010, p. 91). In this dissertation, the phenomenon under consideration is Indigenous knowledge, and a phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge will suggest into which type of theme or problem the Indigenous curators turn it. According to Van Gorp (2007), whose considerations on framing can well apply to phenomenal structures, a central theme can take the form of an archetype (e.g., the victim), a mythical figure (e.g., David vs. Goliath), a value (e.g.,

freedom of speech), of a narrative line (e.g., devil's bargain), and so on (p. 64). This dissertation will attempt to elicit a possible central theme in a phenomenal structure through which Indigenous curators refer to and think about Indigenous knowledge.

A phenomenal structure also involves references to causal relations into which the phenomenon under consideration is perceived to be entwined by the social actors operating within that discourse, that is, to the perceived causes and effects (or consequences) of the phenomenon.

A phenomenal structure also implies a range of subject positions, i.e., types of phenomenon-related roles (or positions) that social actors are regarded as legitimate in fulfilling (or occupying).

Additionally, a phenomenal structure consists of types of responsibilities associated with the various subject positions in light of the perceived causal relations.

Finally, a phenomenal structure also involves model practices which “provide guidelines or templates for how one should act concerning issues ... that have been defined by the discourse” (Keller, 2013, pp. 57-8). Model practices consist of recommendations for lines of action deemed appropriate (e.g., treatment, remedy, etc.) in light of the various consequences of the prior identified causes.

2.2.1.2 Strategies within a phenomenal structure

The most important strategies that compose a phenomenal structure amount to a range of reasoning patterns that correspond to the above-mentioned dimensions: classification, explanatory, evaluative, and dramatizing patterns.

Categorization and classification patterns are reasoning strategies by means of which a phenomenon is made intelligible as a theme or problem. Definition is an example of such a reasoning pattern. Defining a phenomenon can involve a process of either making it as concrete as possible, close to everyday life, or of “attaching [it] to a larger value horizon” (Gerhards, 1995, p. 230). For instance, Indigenous knowledge may be defined, very concretely, as a useful resource for solving environmental problems. Or it may be defined as a common good of Indigenous populations across the Americas, on which their identities depend, and thus make a strong case for its preservation.

Explanatory patterns are reasoning strategies by means of which the phenomenon is integrated (often narratively) into a causal scheme. Often, the most efficient ways to describe causalities and make explanatory use of them is by enmeshing the phenomenon to be explained into a solid plot which points to events and actants (with their motivations) placed in a temporal sequence in a certain spatial setting (Gergen and Gergen, 1983, p. 162; Keller, 2005, p. 30; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 153). “Personalization” and “intentionalization” are examples of explanatory patterns which explain a phenomenon by linking it to a particular social actor perceived as a cause or, even more powerfully, to a particular causing intention of that actor (Gerhards, 1992, p. 231).

Legitimization patterns are reasoning devices through which social actors position themselves as legitimate stakeholders and position other social actors as non-legitimate stakeholders in regard to a particular phenomenon. “Moralization” is an example of a (rather de-)legitimization pattern of reasoning, through which a social actor is positioned outside the space of those who can legitimately claim to have a stake in the phenomenon or, even more, in the right to participate in a conversation around that phenomenon

(Gerhards, 1992, pp. 231-2). For instance, Indigenous communities often position urban Natives as illegitimate stewards of Indigenous knowledge.

Evaluative patterns are reasoning strategies by means of which the (perceived) consequences of the phenomenon are assessed by means of rhetorical appeals to (usually moral) principles, values, or narratives.

Finally, dramatizing patterns are reasoning strategies by means of which courses of action deemed appropriate (e.g., treatments or remedies) are recommended in light of the evaluation of those consequences (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Gamson and Lasch, 1983).

Identifying all these dimensional and strategic elements of a phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge in the accounts North American Indigenous curators give of their work and practices will allow us to reconstruct the meaning-making dimension of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge. The phenomenal structure is the means through which a phenomenon is constituted as a discursive object and made intelligible. My study will show how Indigenous curators draw on elements of phenomenal structures to make intelligible particular senses of Indigenous knowledge as a phenomenon, and thus, construct it as a social reality.

2.2.2 The Material Dimension of Discourses

The materiality of discourses refers to “the ways discourses exist in societies” (Keller, 2012, p. 61). It consists of discursively generated subject positions, practices in which the actors occupying those subject positions engage, and a dispositif, i.e., “an ensemble of heterogeneous elements, drawn together, arranged in order to manage a situation, to respond to a kind of ‘urgency’” (Keller, 2012, p. 65). The materiality of a

discourse constitutes the means through which a discourse impacts social fields in order to bring about “power-effects” (Keller, 2013, p. 71).

In this study, SKAD alerts us to the importance of materialities through which discourses of Indigenous knowledge operate in the world (see Bennett, 1995; Burton, 2005; Greenhill-Hooper, 1992; Lidchi, 1997). The subject positions linked to the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge, the practices of Indigenous knowledge, and the dispositif are the key material aspects of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge. All three are discussed in what follows.

2.2.2.1 Subject Positions in the Arena of Indigenous Knowledge and their Interactions

SKAD assumes that discourses make available “subject positions” which people (as social actors) can occupy in various ways, for instance by conforming to these positions or even transforming them in the process. Just like in Michel Foucault’s discourse theory, the subject positions and the possibilities of action available to them are pre-constituted by discourse. In other words, any discourse makes available subject positions for individuals to take up. For instance, a discourse of Indigenous knowledge pre-constitutes such positions as the scholars in Academia, tribal communities, Indigenous artists, self-organizing collectives, art critics, and various intended and actual audiences of exhibitions (all of them supporting or deterring the work of the Indigenous curators). SKAD differs from Foucault’s discourse theory because it also emphasizes that, as a matter of fact, social actors are “not puppets on the strings of discourse, but (inter) active and creative agents engaged in social power plays and struggles for

interpretation” (Keller, 2005, p. 7). In other words, actors do not conform to roles, but often exceed their boundaries, relativizing and even transforming them. From a SKAD perspective, Indigenous curators are socially constituted actors who play an active role in the social production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge in North America by designing exhibitions, producing scholarly work, as well as being active politically for the benefit of Indigenous communities.

2.2.2.2 Practices of Indigenous Curatorship and Exhibitions

Ethnographic or art exhibitions are the visible result (and possibly the main purpose) of practices of Indigenous curatorship. Both practices and the exhibitions emerging as their outcome constitute one key aspect of the materiality of curators’ discourses of Indigenous knowledge, through which knowledge, ideologies, but also identities are generated for the Indigenous curators and the audiences. An exhibition embeds and proposes a certain understanding of Indigenous knowledge. It shapes the various audiences’ perceptions of what Indigenous knowledge is. This shaping effect may be more dramatic in the case of mainstream museums which have collections of Indigenous material (component of the museal dispositif), since their audiences (“subject position” component) are more diverse than those of tribal museums. This is one of the reasons why this study will focus on mainstream museums. Among the practices of Indigenous curatorship in mainstream museums, gathering (purchasing) of objects, negotiating the theme and the content of the exhibition with managers and with engineers, as well as designing and overseeing the implementation of the exhibition are the most visible. These practices may differ from those enacted in tribal museums

(cultural centers), where the constraints on the collection, design, and exhibition of material may derive from community-based values and regulations (including protocols on the circulation of knowledge).

2.2.2.3 The Dispositif of Indigenous Knowledge

Drawing on the symbolic interactionist approach to the construction of “public problems” (developed by American sociologist Joseph Gusfield), SKAD views institutions as temporary “frozen” processes of ordering, which enable and constrain the activities of individual actors. In consequence, the present study needs to take into account the ways in which the museum as an institution shapes the actions and interactions of Indigenous curators, and, consequently, the form of ethnographic exhibitions and the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge. The spatiality of the museum, resources, the technologies of display, the administrative hierarchy (power relations between various stakeholders), as well as laws and regulations that apply to the museums as institutions are key elements of the dispositif this study will consider. Indigenous curators are positioned institutionally in such a way that their projects are incessantly constrained by the affordances of the museum: their works depend on the space, objects, and technologies they can afford, as well as on the decision-making processes involving institutional superiors and interpretations of law and regulations.

2.3 Research Objectives

Based on the conceptual framework sketched in the preceding section, this section identifies the primary and the secondary research objectives of this study, followed by

outlining the structure of the chapters. Figure 1 outlines the research objectives organized according to the two dimensions of discourse (material and symbolic) and briefly describes the methods the project will use to address them.

2.3.1 Primary Research Objective

The main research objective of this discourse-analytic study is to capture and describe a range of articulations of North American Indigenous curators' discourses of Indigenous knowledge in order to understand how these discourses are actualized (i.e., reproduced and transformed) through social and material practices of Indigenous museum curatorship and how Indigenous curators are involved in the institutional production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge in North America. Since any discourse has a meaning-making and a material dimension, aspects of the symbolic and the material dimension of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge will be explored within the framework of an integrative account that encompasses both.

2.3.2 Subsidiary Objectives

In accomplishing the overall objective, this study has the following subsidiary objectives:

Research Objective 1: Reconstruct the phenomenal structure (i.e., the symbolic dimension) of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge held by Indigenous curators (RO₁).

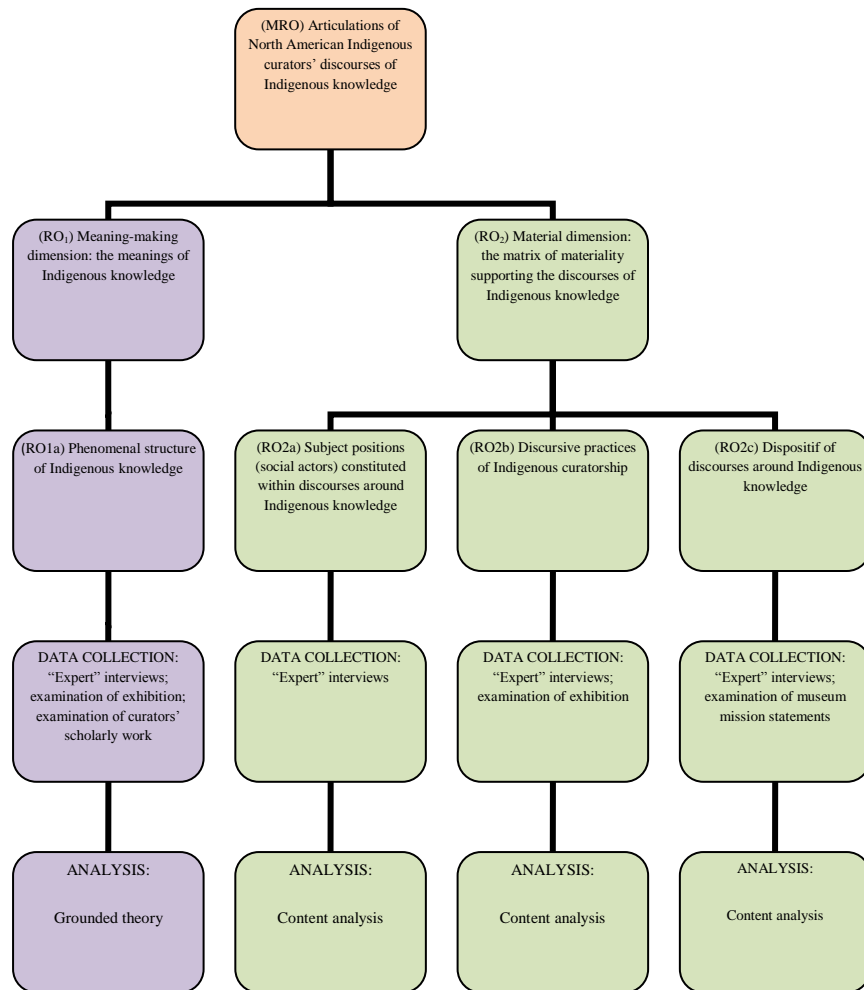
Research Objective 2: Identify some of the material aspects of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge in the work of Indigenous curators (RO₂).

Research Objective 2a: Identify some of the aspects of the Indigenous curator subject position and the relations with other subject positions (RO2a).

Research Objective 2b: Identify some of the practices of Indigenous curatorship as indicated by the North American Indigenous curators, their exhibitions, and/or their written documents (RO2b).

Research Objective 2c: Identify some of the aspects of the dispositif which supports Indigenous curatorship in major North American museums (RO2c).

Figure 1: Overall research plan



2.3.3 Definitions

The notion of discourse is understood in its sociological sense to refer to (linguistic or non-linguistic) practices, i.e., “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings” and functioning as structuring contexts, within which bodies/individuals and activities are constituted and embedded” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11). In this sense, discourses have a material dimension (practices/ activities together with their material mediators, e.g., subject positions and a dispositif) and a symbolic or meaning-making dimension (a phenomenal structure).

This study defines knowledge as one that emerges out of practices of knowledge production, involves reference to what a community takes to be reality for it and for others, and requires validation through some form of collective acceptability. These three features are captured by definitions such as those proposed by Sociology scholar E. Doyle McCarthy or philosopher of science Helen Longino. McCarthy discusses a concept of knowledge in terms of “any and every set of ideas and acts accepted by one or another social group or society of people, ideas and acts pertaining to what they accept as real for them and for others” [author’s italics]. The assumption is that “social reality itself is in process and is formed out of the prevailing knowledges of a society or group of people. What makes a group of people a society or social world in the first place is what and how they think and what they know” (McCarthy, 1996, p. 2). Also, Longino proposes a notion of knowledge whose content is that which is “accepted in some community C or the outcomes of [knowledge-productive practices] in community C” (Longino, 2002, p.

84). More precisely, “a given content, A, accepted by members of C counts as knowledge for C if A conforms to its intended object(s) (sufficiently to enable members of C to carry out their projects with respect to that/those object(s)) and A is epistemically acceptable in C” (p. 136).

Defined along these lines, the concept of knowledge covers both standard forms of knowledge, such as “(Western) scientific knowledge,” and non-standard forms of knowledge, such as “(Western) practical knowledge” and “(Western) cultural knowledge,” as well as indigenous knowledge.

The notion of Indigeneity, after its conceptualization by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), describes Indigenous populations as (1) being, historically, direct continuators of “pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories”; (2) seeing themselves as “distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those countries, or parts of them”; (3) constituting “non-dominant sectors of society”; and (4) being “determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identities, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural pattern, social institutions and legal systems” (WIPO, 2001, p. 23).

This study defines Indigenous knowledge as “the local knowledge held by Indigenous peoples or local knowledge unique to a given culture or society” (Berkes, 2008, p. 9). CHAPTER 3 is devoted to the elaboration of this notion.

The notion of Indigenous curators refers to the professionals of Indigenous (or mixed) heritage, who are affiliated with museums, galleries, libraries, or archives and responsible for the identification, acquisition, evaluation, organization, and dissemination

of Indigenous knowledge. Dissemination refers to any institution-based practice of making Indigenous knowledge available to audiences in any imaginable form and unrestricted to group membership (including the staging and maintaining of performances and exhibitions).

The meaning-making (symbolic) aspects of a discourse refer to the internal organization or symbolic structuring of that discourse, i.e., to the phenomenal structure by means of which a phenomenon of interest (e.g., Indigenous knowledge) is made intelligible.

The material aspects of a discourse refer to the actor positions (e.g., stakeholders involved in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge), the concrete practices (e.g., practices of Indigenous knowledge), and the dispositif (e.g., institutions, technologies, rules and regulations, etc.) through which a discourse operates in the world and produces concrete effects.

Phenomenal structure represents the symbolic dimension of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge. It comprises discursive dimensions and strategies which are integrated into a unitary whole it is the task of the researcher to articulate.

Subject positions are key material aspects of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge. An actor positioned in a discourse of Indigenous knowledge is entitled to speak about it, to produce statements about it, as well as to act with legitimacy in regard to Indigenous knowledge. Among the possible actor positions, the Indigenous curator will make the object of particular interest for this study. Since Indigenous curators are positioned in various discourses, they also act as dynamic agents, insofar as they often need to negotiate claims, interest, and interpretations generated from within those various

discursive perspectives. An exploration of this aspect will provide an answer to the issue, mentioned in the main research objective paragraph, of how Indigenous curators are involved in the institutional production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge in North America.

Practices of Indigenous knowledge are practices through which discourses around Indigenous knowledge are produced and reproduced. More precisely, according to Keller (2012), these are “conventionalized action patterns, which are made available in collective stocks of knowledge as a repertoire for action, that is, in other words, a more or less explicitly known, often incorporated recipe or knowledge script about the ‘proper’ way of acting” (p. 63; author’s quotation marks). Practices are of two types: first, the discursive practices are those practices through which a discourse is actualized, that is, “typical ways of acting out statement production whose implementation requires interpretative competence and active shaping by social actors” (Keller, 2012, p. 63). Exploring such practices as the design and implementation of an exhibition (which imply interactions with other actors and with objects), as well as writing and publishing scholarly works will provide an answer to the question of how these practices of Indigenous museum curatorship actualize discourses of Indigenous knowledge. Second, there are practices understood as effects of discourses, that is, “exemplary patterns (or templates) for actions, which are constituted in discourses, fixed to subject positions and addressed to the discourse’s public or to some ‘counterdiscourse’” (Keller, 2012, p. 63; authors’ quotation marks). A good example of practice in this second sense is the providing of curatorial expert evaluations: it behooves the Indigenous curator to provide expert advice on the proper treatment of Indigenous artifacts or works of art, just as it is

incumbent on army officers to provide expert advice on the appropriate defense of a city in case of war.

Dispositif refers to the assemblage of “heterogeneous elements” that social actors or groups put together “to solve a particular situation, ... to manage a situation, to respond to a kind of ‘urgency’” (Keller, 2012, p. 65). A dispositif is both “the institutional foundation, the total of all material, practical, personal, cognitive, and normative infrastructure of discourse production” and the infrastructure “emerging out of a discourse (or out of several discourses)” as a means of “deal(ing) with the real world phenomena addressed by the discourse in question” In other words, a dispositif comprises both the infrastructure enabling the production and reproduction of discourses and the materiality generated as an effect of discourse. For instance, a dispositif involved in the discourses around Indigenous knowledge will comprise, at the level of discourse (re)production, the discursive interventions of Indigenous curators who disseminate and legitimize a particular construction of Indigenous knowledge (e.g., as injured knowledge) through their statements, publicly available interviews, scholarly publications, position pieces in magazines, and, most importantly, through their exhibitions. Also, at the level of discourse implementation, a dispositif (understood as an effect of discourses of Indigenous knowledge) will comprise such items as: the museum as an institution devoted, by political and legal mandate, to the preservation and promotion of Indigenous cultures; the Academia, insofar as it permits the development of programs and departments devoted to Indigenous issues; specific technologies and objects; treatises, laws, and regulations; and so on.

2.3.4 Methodology

The methodological aspects related to the selection of the settings and participants for this study, the process of data collection, the process of analysis of the material and symbolic dimensions of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge in three sources of evidence are discussed next.

2.3.4.1 Data Collection Settings and Participants

Research Site

The research site chosen for this study was the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York, where I examined the exhibition titled, “A Song for the Horse Nation.” A museum represents a mid-level environment, which allows one to notice and explore the interrelations between macro-sociological phenomena (such as the discourses of Indigenous knowledge) and micro-sociological phenomena (such as the actors and their interactions). Specifically, a museum is a regulated environment, in which the dominance of some discourses (e.g., science discourse, political discourse, etc.) is more obvious (because funded by the state and having a mandate to advance knowledge and serve as educational tool) and the clash with other discourses seems inevitable. The social actors who, as professionals, fulfil specific roles in those environments may mobilize additional discursive resources, based on their other commitments.

The National Museum of the American Indian is, according to its website presentation, “an active and visible component of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex.” It takes care of “one of the world's most expansive collections

of Native artifacts, including objects, photographs, archives, and media covering the entire Western Hemisphere, from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego” (National Museum of the American Indian, 2014). Its exclusive dedication to the Indigenous peoples and cultures of the Americas makes it the most appropriate place for the exploration of Indigenous knowledge constructions. NMAI provided the researcher with a key point of observation, namely one exhibition (“A Song for the Horse Nation: Horses in Native American Cultures”). Hosted by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York City (November 14, 2009 – July 7, 2011), this exhibition was designed and put together by three American Indian curators: Emil Her Many Horses, George Horse Capture, and Herman Viola.

The research did not cover other possible sites of Indigenous knowledge production and/or circulation, such as tribal museums and cultural centers. These are situated in the Reservations and their impact on the larger society is significantly less powerful than the impact of the non-tribal museums this study proposes to investigate.

Participants

The participants in the study were Indigenous museum curators, most of whom work for museums in the United States and Canada. They are professionals of Indigenous (or mixed) origin who are affiliated with museums and art galleries and responsible for the identification, acquisition, evaluation, organization, and dissemination of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous curators form a category of professionals who have been scarcely considered in information science as populations in human-information behavior. Yet, they are key actors in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge: on the one hand, Indigenous curators are part of Indigenous communities and

intimately familiar with their cultures; on the other hand, these professionals are well-trained in museum practices and link Native communities to the larger North American societies.

The relevant museum professionals were identified according to the following criteria: as individuals who (1) self-identify as Indigenous persons (Native Americans in the United States and First Nations in Canada), (2) are active museum curators, (3) reside and work outside (the jurisdiction of) Reservations, and (4) have organized at least one exhibition focused on the culture of North American Indigenous peoples. These conditions ensured that the participants (1) had an allegiance to their Indigenous background, (2) were actively involved in the life of museums and the wider networks of museum actors, including other Indigenous curators, (3) produced work (meant to be) visible to the wider society, and (4) had (at least some) experience in designing exhibitions.

The recruitment of the research participants was accomplished through two means. First, I inspected the websites of significant American and Canadian museums and galleries and created a list of possible informants to be contacted. Second, I participated in the public events organized by these institutions (e.g., symposia, conferences, workshops, exhibition openings) and approached potential interviewees and assess them in terms of the criteria identified here. Snowball sampling was employed: once a museum professional accepts to be interviewed, I asked him or her to provide recommendations regarding other possible interviewees. Thus, I tried to tap into the social network of these professionals, a particularly useful strategy since many Indigenous museum curators form a tight community and convene regularly to share

ideas and cooperate on various projects. If contacted via phone, email, or regular mail, the curators were sent an initial request form. Once they agreed to be interviewed, they were sent a follow-up letter containing a consent form attached. Each interview took place once the respective museum professional signed and returned this form. If approached directly in a public event, the curators were asked directly whether they would like to participate in this research. If they agreed, a consent form was handed to them. Once they signed and returned the form, the details of the interview were settled and the interview was conducted at a mutually convenient time and place (Appendix B: Interviewee Request and Agreement Follow-Up). Eventually, I was able to interview ten curators. There are a few aspects which make this limited number of interviewees acceptable. First, Indigenous curators working for mainstream museums are themselves a small, yet currently expanding, group of professionals. Second, the discourse-research framework of this dissertation justifies a low number of participants, as it relies on other sources of data (in this case, online available interviews with, as well as scholarly work of twenty curators). Nevertheless, to compensate for the limited number of participants in direct interviews, I also looked at published and publicly available interviews with two of these curators and with nine other curators. I selected and used these additional interviews as part of the “theoretical sampling,” a procedure from Grounded Theory to which I will refer in Section 2.3.4.3.

2.3.4.2 Research Process. Data Collection Steps

This section presents in detail the research process outlined in Figure 1 which unfolded based on the overall research plan. This dissertation used a mix of qualitative

methods to collect data, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews with curators, and an examination of some of the exhibitions and of the scholarly work produced by the interviewed Indigenous museum professionals in institutions. The process unfolded as follows:

1) Examination of Institutional Mission Statements

Before proceeding to take interviews, looking at exhibitions, and examining curatorial scholarly work, I collected institutional mission statements from the official web pages of mainstream museums with partial or exclusive focus on Indigenous peoples and cultures (Appendix A: Mission Statements of Various Museums with Indigenous Collections). My purpose was to acquire knowledge of the dispositif within which curators undertake their activity (RO_{2c}). I was able to retrieve seven such documents, which allowed me to understand some of the roles that these institutions expect curators dealing with indigenous collections to fulfill.

2) Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews lasting up to one hour and a half were conducted with ten Indigenous curators associated with major museums in Canada and the United States, as well as with recognized Indigenous curators exhibiting in the online environment (please refer to Table 1). The ten curators I interviewed represent various tribes and Nations across the United States and Canada. Many of them are mixed-blood (i.e., of indigenous and European ancestry), yet still identify as indigenous persons. The curators are affiliated to a variety of museums, both public and private, in traditional and virtual environments.

In addition to these interviews, I also located and analyzed publicly available interviews with two of these curators and with nine other curators (please refer to Table 2). The reason for this choice was to include statements about my research questions by key Indigenous curators who were not available for interviews, yet I deemed very important in the community of indigenous curators. These additional interviews are listed in the Bibliography, under Primary Sources (“Interviews with Indigenous curators available in the public space”).

Table 1: Indigenous curators who participated in this study as interviewees

No	NAME	TRIBAL or NATION	EDUCATION	INSTITUTION	ROLE
1	B.	N/A	N/A	N/A	Curator
2	Grussani, Linda	Algonquin of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation (Canada)	PhD, Cultural Studies (Queen's Univ.)	National Gallery of Canada	Assistant curator
3	Hill Jr., Richard	Cree (Canada)	PhD, Art History (Middlesex Univ.)	Department of Visual Art & Art History, York Univ.	Assistant professor, curator, art critic, art historian
4	L'Hirondelle, Leanne	Métis (Canada)	MFA, Fine Arts (Univ. of Saskatchewan)	Gallery 101	Independent curator, artist
5	Mithlo, Nancy Marie	Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe, Oklahoma (United States)	PhD, Art History (Stanford Univ.)	Art History and American Indian Studies, Univ. of Wisconsin	Associate professor; curator
6	P.	N/A	N/A	N/A	Curator
7	Prince, Nicholette	Carrier/Dakelh (Canada)	PhD, Art History (Univ. of Alberta)	Canadian Museum of Civilization	Curator of Plateau Ethnology
8	Skawennati Tricia Fragnito	Mohawk (Canada)	Fine Arts (Concordia Univ.)	Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace	Artist, curator
9	Smith, Paul Chaat	Comanche (United States)	N/A	NMAI	Associate curator
10	Tayac, Gabrielle	Piscataway (United States)	PhD, Sociology (Harvard Univ.)	NMAI	Curator

Table 2: List of Indigenous curators with publicly available interviews

No	NAME	TRIBAL or NATION AFFILIATION	EDUCATION	INSTITUTION	ROLE
1	Ash-Milby, Kathleen	Navajo/ Diné (United States)	MA in Native American Art History (Univ. of New Mexico)	National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)	Curator of Native American Art
2	Dartt-Newton, D.	Chumash/ Californio/ Mayo/ Cochimi (United States)	BA, MA, PhD in Anthropology (Univ. of Oregon)	Portland (Oregon) Art Museum	Curator of Native American Art
3	Hopkins, Candice	Carcross/ Tagish First Nation (Canada)	MA in Curatorial Studies (Bard College, New York)	National Gallery of Canada	Curator
4	Houle, Robert	Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation (Canada)	MA in Art Education (McGill Univ.)	Canadian Museum of Civilization (1977-1981)	Curator, artist, and critic
5	Loft, Steve	Mohawk (Canada)	Art (McMaster Univ.)	National Gallery of Canada (2008-2010)	Curator, media artist, scholar, and writer
6	Rice, Ryan	Mohawk of Kahnawake (Canada)	MA in Curatorial Studies (Bard College, New York)	Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico	Curator and artist
7	Spang, Bently	Northern Cheyenne (United States)	MFA (Univ. of Wisconsin)	University of Wyoming Art Museum	Curator, artist, and writer
8	Warren, Daina	Montana Slavey Cree Nation (Canada)	BFA (Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver, BC)	National Gallery of Canada	Curator
9	Young Man, Alfred	Chippewa-Cree (United States)	PhD in Anthropology (Rutgers Univ.)	First Nations University of Canada, Regina, Saskatchewan	Curator, artist, educator, and writer

I respected the desire of two curators to be anonymous informants and I assigned them random initials instead of using their real names.

The interviews with the ten curators (Table 1) were held either at the interviewee's workplace (museum) or online via skype or phone (according to the

interviewee's preference). They were recorded with a digital recorder and stored in a safe place.

Interviews were conducted to elicit Indigenous curators' statements on both the meaning-making and the material dimensions of the discourses around Indigenous knowledge (please refer to Appendix C: Interview Guide, for the list of the questions that the participants were asked). Publicly available interviews were used to complement the data from the personal interview to the extent that the former addressed the foci of interest of the latter.

Specifically, the first focus of the interviews was the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge in North America (RO₁). The questions were designed in such a way so as to capture the key components of a typical phenomenal structure: central theme, causal relations, subject positions, and responsibilities associated with these positions in regard to the effects (or consequences) that (are perceived to) follow the causes, as well as "model practices" recommended to address the problems identified through those causal relations (Table 3).

Table 3: Questions about the phenomenal structure of discourses around Indigenous knowledge

Phenomenal Structure aspects	Questions and their rationale
Central theme (with definitional aspects),	Questions nos. 2 through 5 were geared toward eliciting from the participants explicit statements about Indigenous knowledge: definitions of Indigenous knowledge and the sources of those definitions (Q2); contents of Indigenous

<p>i.e., the manner in which an object or topic is problematized.</p>	<p>knowledge (Q3); decolonization as a context for thinking about Indigenous knowledge (Q4); and the extent to which Indigenous knowledge is present in their curatorial work (Q5). My hope was to elicit not only definitions, but also (discursive) meanings they attach to this phenomenon.</p>
<p>Causal relations (causes and effects) and explanation patterns</p>	<p>A phenomenon is thematized properly only if the network of causal relationships in which it is caught is made explicit. Questions no. 11, 12, 14, 15 aimed to elicit participants' perceived causalities into which Indigenous knowledge is integrated. I did so by inviting the participants to elaborate on their disagreements with other actors inside the museum institution (Q11); the enabling or constraining effects of potential materialities (Q12); and the effects of other (individual or collective) actors from outside the museum institution on the participants' curatorial work (Q14, Q15).</p>
<p>Subject positions and legitimization patterns; Responsibilities and evaluative patterns</p>	<p>Questions no. 1, 5 through 11, and 14 through 17 were designed to elicit participants' considerations about Indigenous curatorship, its roles and responsibilities in the context of museum as an institution (Q1, Q5 through Q10, and Q16); about other subject positions and social actors whom curators deem relevant within the museum framework (Q11) or from outside this framework (Q14, Q15), including anticipated and</p>

	actual audiences (Q17).
“Model practices” and dramatizing patterns	Questions no. 9, 10, and 11 were meant to elicit participants’ accounts of what they perceive as normative courses of action in their work, especially in light of possible disagreements with other types of actors.

The second focus of the questionnaire was the matrix of materiality through which discourses around Indigenous knowledge are (re)produced (RO₂): this matrix includes three types of entities: subject positions, practices, and a dispositif (Table 4).

Table 4: Questions about the Materiality dimension of discourses around Indigenous knowledge

Materiality aspect	Questions and their rationale
Subject positions and social actors (RO _{2a})	Questions nos. 1, 5 through 11, and 14 through 17 were designed to elicit participants’ considerations about subject positions and social actors who happen to inhabit them. These questions focused on aspects of the Indigenous curatorship subject position within the museum institution (Q1, Q5 through Q10, and Q16); on other types of subject positions and concrete social actors within the museum framework (Q11) or from outside this framework (Q14, Q15), including audiences (Q17).
	Questions nos. 4 through 9 aimed at obtaining participants’ understanding of, and accounts of their involvement in, discursive practices. The question about decolonization (Q4) is important, insofar as this is the horizon within which many native intellectuals

Practices (RO _{2b})	position themselves and their work (Smith, 1999; Wilson and Bird, 2005). Other questions aimed at eliciting participants' view of practices by means of a reflection on the sense in which their work as curators involves Indigenous knowledge (Q5), is linked to specific responsibilities (Q6), is grounded in specific goals and ideals (Q9), as well as results in such products as exhibitions (Q7) and scholarly work (Q8).
Dispositif (RO _{2c})	Questions nos. 10, and 12 through 15 focused on elements of the dispositif of the discourses around Indigenous knowledge: the mission of the museums, which functions as a normative framework for the work of the curators (Q10), the materialities which enable or constrain the curators' work (Q12), the relevance of new media technologies to curatorial work (Q13), as well as organizations which the participants feel have an important role in their work (Q14, Q15).

3) Examination of Exhibition

In addition to interviews with Indigenous curators, I also performed an examination of one significant exhibition – titled, “A Song for the Horse Nation: Horses In Native American Cultures” – hosted by the National Museum of the American Indian, in New York, between November 14, 2009 - July 7, 2011, in order to articulate the curators' Indigenous knowledge phenomenal structure within that artifact of curatorial work (RO₁). This exhibition was the only permanent exhibition with indigenous content

that was available at the time I was designing my project.¹⁰ Moreover, it was unique among exhibits in that it combines artefacts from both ethnology and art collections, from past and present – thus being relevant for exploring indigenous knowledge in relation to both ethnology and art indigenous curatorship. Finally, in comparison with other exhibits (e.g., “Infinity of Nations,” which is staged to reflect and illustrate the geographical distribution of indigenous peoples and cultures across the Americas), this exhibit is built around a strong narrative core and, therefore, lends itself to a SKAD type of discourse research. Since this dissertation explores discursive constructions of indigenous knowledge and does not claim to be able to identify all such possible constructions, it is interested in exploring the extent to which the same discursive constructions of indigenous knowledge are conveyed through multiple media (exhibition, academic publications, interview statements, etc.).

I took photographs of the exhibition (including the objects on exhibit and any text associated with them). I complemented my own observations of the exhibition itself with an analysis of exhibition-related documents (the exhibition album and website) and to direct commentary I was offered by the exhibition curator through a guided tour.

4) Examination of Scholarly Work

In addition to interviews and exhibition analysis, I also examined the scholarly work (39 documents) of 19 indigenous curators (including those curators I was not able to interview, but whose various interviews I was able to retrieve online). My purpose was to use them in complementarity with the interviews and the exhibit to reconstruct the

¹⁰ This is a permanent exhibition at NMAI in Washington, but was redeployed at NMAI in New York between November 14, 2009 and July 7, 2011.

discursive resources they mobilize to refer to Indigenous knowledge (RO₁). For this purpose, I searched for journal articles, book chapters, books, and online material they published (listed in the Bibliography, under “Secondary sources”).

2.3.4.3 Analysis of the Material and Meaning-Making Dimensions of the Discourse of Indigenous Knowledge in These Three Sources of Evidence

The material dimensions of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge were elicited through content analysis of institutional mission statements (Appendix A: Mission Statements of Various Museums with Indigenous Collections) and interviews. I identified Indigenous curators’ role in regard to Indigenous knowledge and in relation to other social actors with whom they interact in their curatorial work (RO_{2a}); Indigenous practices of curatorship (RO_{2b}); as well as affordances and constraints of the dispositif on which Indigenous museum professionals rely to perform their work (e.g., regulations, funding sources, resources, technologies) (RO_{2c})

The meaning-making dimension of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge (RO₁) were elicited through a classical grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) through transcribed interviews, the notes and photos taken during exhibition observation, and the scholarly work of the Indigenous curators. This procedure unfolded in three stages which aimed to reconstruct the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge. To analyze the data I used procedural proposals of grounded theory – a method developed by Strauss (1998) and Charmaz (2006) and summarized by Titscher, Wodak, Meyer, and Vetter (2000) – as it was adapted for discourse research purposes by Keller (2013).

First Step: Open Coding

According to Charmaz (2006), coding is “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.” It represents the “first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (p. 43).

I started with initial coding of data from two sources resulting in coding scheme reproduced in Appendix D: Coding Scheme:

- Scholarly work of Jolene Rickard, an Indigenous curator who is acknowledged by many of her peers as the most important living Indigenous curator (a key source of data)
- Transcripts of one interview with, and a book by, Paul Chaat Smith (two sources of rich data)

I examined interview transcripts and the exhibition-related photos and notes and looked for the following types of discursive indicators:

- Phenomenal structure dimensions, i.e., central theme (metaphors, exemplary stories, catchphrases, depictions, and recurring visual images); causal relations; subject positions; responsibilities; model practices
- Phenomenal structure strategies associated with the phenomenal structure dimensions listed above, i.e., categorization and classification patterns; explanatory patterns (e.g., attributing causal roots); legitimization patterns (e.g., moralizing); evaluative patterns (e.g., rhetorically appealing to principles); dramatizing patterns

A few examples of initial codes I devised while reading closely the above-mentioned interview transcripts are the following: “Indians lived in the past only,” “Indians have had no contribution to the present,” and “Indians are an obstacle in the way of progress.”

Second Step: Axial Coding

I clustered initial codes into fewer more elaborate codes illustrating dimensions and strategies of possible phenomenal structures of Indigenous knowledge. For instance, I clustered the three initial codes mentioned above into the code “Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (temporal) presence.” At this stage I relied on “theoretical sampling.” According to Charmaz (2002, 2006), theoretical sampling is sampling aimed at developing the researcher’s conceptual categories and their relationships. When I raised the most important focused codes to conceptual categories, gaps became apparent. Many of my categories were incomplete and lacked sufficient evidence. Therefore, I engaged in further data collection, – based on the strategies of “minimal” and “maximal contrast” – until they became saturated, i.e., until all their properties had been specified and no new information could be found (Charmaz, 2002, 2006). According to Keller (2005), the two strategies “suggest to start an analysis with some data or document and then to look for the next piece of data ... either by criteria of ‘similarity at first glance’ or ‘complete difference at first glance.’” The strategy of “minimal contrast helps “to develop precise reconstruction of core elements,” while the strategy of “maximal contrast” helps “to explore the range of heterogeneities in a discourse or discursive field.” (np)

Third Step: Selective Coding

Then, I identified the most significant and frequently recurring codes and moved on to focused or selective coding (Charmaz, 2002, 2006; Glaser, 1978). According to Charmaz (2002), “[f]ocused codes are more abstract, general, and, simultaneously, analytically incisive than many of the initial codes that they subsume” (p. 686). I used focused codes to organize larger amounts of data.

I searched for logical connections across broader categories identified during axial coding (i.e., definitions of Indigenous knowledge and classification patterns; causal relations and explanatory patterns; subject positions and legitimizing patterns; responsibilities and evaluation patterns; model practices and dramatizing patterns). My purpose was to identify a limited number of phenomenal structures that are mutually exclusive and in which each link is meaningful. I identified one such phenomenal structure, with a central theme which I labeled “Indigenous knowledge as injured knowledge” – a cultural motive meant to function as a core idea bringing unity to the dimensions and strategies within the phenomenal structure.

2.3.4.4 Interpretation

This study is interpretive in a particular sense of the word: it does not involve an attempt to reconstruct what the participants believe about Indigenous knowledge (or “deep/true meanings” they have); rather, it articulates the vocabularies, reasoning patterns, stories, and categorizations which they use in order to refer to Indigenous knowledge as a phenomenon. My assumption is that discursive constructions are public, rather than idiosyncratic. Thus, they are mobilized by more than one single curator.

2.3.5 Limitations

An important limitation of this study is the fact that it is only concerned with Indigenous curators' statements, that is, with discursive constructions of a phenomenon, rather than with objective facts or how these discourses are perceived by others.

Also, the research may have also benefited from an institutional ethnography of the processes involved in the design and building of an exhibition. This type of ethnography allows in principle for more nuanced observations of the interactions between Indigenous curators and other types of actors.

In addition, the study would have benefited from interviews with more than ten curators. Yet, this shortcoming is alleviated by the fact that the study has identified – and will rely on – interviews that these other curators gave in other contexts (yet addressing similar concerns such as those that guide this research), as well as by the fact that it uses insights from their written work as well.

Another limitation is that the study only includes present-day curators and treats them as a group, without drawing distinctions among their various tribal identities. Nevertheless, there is a plausible sense in which these curators have developed professional standards of practice despite individual styles.

The next chapters will be devoted to the analysis of the data. Specifically, CHAPTER 3 will focus on conceptualizations and definitions of Indigenous knowledge as the central theme of the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge discursive construction. CHAPTER 4 and 5 will deal with two vocabularies (a topography and a chronography of Indigenous knowledge) by means of which the dissertation will

document the Indigenous curators' perception of the threats that Indigenous knowledge faces and the solutions that these professionals propose in order to address those threats.

CHAPTER 6 will explore the materiality of the discourses around Indigenous knowledge in terms of three connected components: subject positions, practices, and the dispositif.

CHAPTER 7 will focus on Indigenous curatorship as a privileged subject position with associated discursive practices.

CHAPTER 3: INDIGENOUS CURATORS' DEFINITIONS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

3.1 Introduction

This is the first of five analysis chapters which aim to capture and describe actualizations of discourses of Indigenous knowledge by Indigenous curators in North American museums. The methodical reconstruction of discourses of Indigenous knowledge is achieved by means of a “phenomenal structure” (Keller, 2005, 2011, 2012, 2013). As already stated in Section 2.2.1 (“The Meaning-Making (or Symbolic) Dimension of Discourses”), phenomenal structure is a theoretical construct, referring to the definitional aspects of the phenomenon (i.e., Indigenous knowledge), the causes and effects of that phenomenon, the subject positions constituted around that phenomenon (together with the responsibilities associated with these positions), and model practices (types of actions recommended in regard to that phenomenon). A phenomenal structure also involves reasoning patterns corresponding to each of the previously mentioned dimensions: classification, explanatory, legitimization, evaluation, and dramatization patterns, respectively.

This chapter focuses on definitions and features of Indigenous knowledge by Indigenous curators who assume a subject position constituted with regard to Indigenous knowledge as a phenomenon.

This chapter is organized as follows. It presents briefly the contrast between Western world view and Indigenous world view, a distinction to which the curators refer often. I suggest that this contrast may be framed more usefully in terms of conflicts of

discourses around Indigenous knowledge (Section 3.2). Finally, it presents definitional aspects of the Indigenous knowledge phenomenon in the statements of Indigenous curators. There are converging statements which configure a conceptual core of Indigenous knowledge, as well as diverging statements, which describe a range of possible variations within the concept of Indigenous knowledge (Sections 3.3.1-3.3.9).

3.2 Conflicting World Views: Science vs. Tradition Discourse

The curators often refer to the distinction between a Western European world view and a traditional Indigenous world view. They refer to the former only indirectly, serving as a contrasting term for the latter. This distinction amounts to differences in basic ontologies, epistemologies, as well as intellectual products and practices of the two world views. Historian Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) – a key figure among Native intellectuals whom many of the participants in this study regard as an inspirational figure – claims that, “in the field of human knowledge,” there is a fundamental clash between the “beliefs and the practices” of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. He singles out three areas of tension: science, religion, and social-political organization and interaction (Deloria Jr., 1995, p. 15). Referring to his double cultural heritage (as a Native and as a Westerner), Canadian curator Richard Hill Jr. claims he felt it was important for him to “understand what kind of basic ontological and epistemological assumptions ... [he has] inherited by speaking English, by growing up in [the Western] society [since] there are certain ontological assumptions that are very basic to the Indigenous cultures’ worldview.” His purpose has been to understand the extent to which these assumptions and ideas “accord” with each other or “might be different.”

Key curator and scholar Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) claims that there is a clash between deeply entrenched, hard-to-dislodge “private imageries” that various social actors (Indigenous curators included) hold in regard to “how the ‘real’ Indigenous experience looks, sounds, and feels” (Rickard, 2007, p. 86).

That there are different world views (with their respective ontologies and epistemologies) or imaginaries grounded in Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge does not mean that these types of knowledge exist in a state of purity, as “authentic” Western knowledge or as “authentic” Indigenous knowledge. As noted in the words of curator Richard Hill Jr. (Cree): “to me [a mixed-blood person], that’s a kind of more complicated intellectual task than simply going back and finding the people who have the old knowledge and just getting it from them; I feel like it’s more of a negotiation” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). Referring to Indigenous knowledge, curator Gabriele Tayac (Piscataway) is also wary of searches for authentic forms of types of knowledge: “there’s been a great deal of change over the years after colonization and after Contact, so I’m not as necessarily interested in always teasing out anymore, ‘Oh, what’s the pure Indigenous?’” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). In other words, the historic experience of the colonization and its aftermath has contributed to the emergence of hybrid forms of knowledge (as well as of hybrid identities).

One important issue with respect to which the two world views differ, according to the curators, concerns the status of everyday-life things. For instance, Hill Jr. claims that strong “dichotomies of nature and culture” are at work in the Western world view: “Western culture makes a strong powerful distinction between human beings and things, and human beings and non-human animals ... things [are] being different from us in the

sense that they lack agency, they are inert, they're just stuff, they just kind of sit out there, waiting for us to use them – a pretty basic idea of Western thought.” In contrast, for Indigenous world views, “things have a kind of agency in the world; they act on us and we have social relations to them.” Hill Jr. acknowledges: “I find that very useful theoretically to imagine that things are kind of interacting with you in a much more active way, you know, that you're not kind of cut off from things. And art makes it very obvious” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). L'Hirondelle claims something similar: “Traditionally, a lot of things are not viewed in a Western sense as inanimate objects: there are things that have, I guess you could say, energy or life, so they are not viewed in the same way” (personal interview, February 22, 2012).

Because the ontologies of objects (including artefacts) are so different, they ground different attitudes towards objects, and thus, different material practices of curatorship. For instance, curator L'Hirondelle claims that certain objects

[A]re not supposed to be kept. They're not kept for a reason and it has to do with the way that cultures view them, like traditionally view things and it is different than western European world view. There are things that are supposed to disintegrate and go back into the environment, and we all do eventually. If you encase it in things like synthetic plastic, it doesn't. It just respects the integrity of what that object meant. (L'Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012)

Curator Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) contends that “spiritual things have been made with a purpose. We always advise museums not to bring certain things into exhibitions. Some of them are very powerful spiritually and must be respected, it's a reality — that's our understanding of the world” (Spang, interview by Julic, 2011).

Moreover, the different epistemologies have concrete effects on the adequate treatment of specific knowledge contents: “some knowledge, we can't record it on video,

we can't write it down, because it's a particular kind of knowledge, and it only can be passed through oral tradition, so that's another kind of thing that's different"

(L'Hirondelle, 2005, np).

Not only Indigenous curators, but also non-Indigenous scholars discuss the contrasts between the two types of world views, discourses, or "knowledge systems," as Canadian Ecology Studies scholar Fikret Berkes prefers to call them. Berkes (2008) points to the following differences between "Indigenous knowledge systems" and "Western scientific knowledge systems" (pp. 10-11), which I organized in a table below:

Table 5: Contrasts between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems, according to Bekres (2008)

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS	WESTERN SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS
"embeddedness of knowledge in the local cultural milieu"	"disembeddedness"
"boundedness of local knowledge in space and time"	"universalism"
"the importance of community"	"individualism"
"lack of separation between nature and culture"	"nature:culture dichotomy"
"lack of separation between subject and object"	"subject:object dichotomy"
"commitment or attachment to the local environment as a unique and irreplaceable place"	"mobility"
"a noninstrumental approach to nature"	"an instrumental attitude (nature as commodity) toward nature"

Reconstructing a phenomenal structure of a discourse around Indigenous knowledge brings forward not only definitional aspects (e.g., spatio-temporal boundedness) and classification patterns (e.g., things belong to the nature|culture continuum), but also causal relations (e.g., the local environment as a causal factor in the generation of

Indigenous knowledge, the local cultural milieu as factor enabling the production and circulation of knowledge) and explanatory patterns. Moreover, this reconstruction brings forward subject positions (e.g., the community) and legitimizing patterns (e.g., community as a likely context of production, validation, and circulation of knowledge), responsibilities (e.g., commitment or attachment to the local environment) and evaluation patterns, as well as model practices (e.g., non-instrumental approach to things in the world) and dramatizing patterns.

This and following chapters will be devoted to the articulation of the phenomenal structure of the “tradition discourse” around Indigenous knowledge as it emerges from the analysis of the statements of the Indigenous curators on this type of knowledge, often in critical reference to the “science discourse” of Indigenous knowledge.

3.3 Aspects of Indigenous Knowledge

When asked to talk about Indigenous knowledge, the Indigenous curators chosen for this project converge on a few themes. Features described in Sections 3.3.1 through 3.3.7 below constitute aspects of Indigenous knowledge, whereas features described in Sections 3.3.8 and 3.3.9 below represent attitudes of the curators in regard to the suitability of defining and employing notions of Indigenous knowledge in their work. This section focuses on the explicit views that Indigenous curators have of Indigenous knowledge.

3.3.1 Indigenous Knowledge – Grounded in Aboriginal Ways of Being in the World

The curators describe Indigenous knowledge as being grounded firmly and lastingly in Indigenous ways of being in the world. As one director of public programs at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) puts it explicitly, Indigenous knowledge is “the point of view, the world view, the perspective, the cultural experience, the kind of lifeway, the kind of family and all [those things] that make native people who they are in this world” (Haworth, personal interview, April 5, 2012). It appears as “a profound, ancestral brilliance” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012) that emerges out – and is a crystallization – of “Indigenous experience” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). This aspect of Indigenous knowledge is emphasized in the sociological literature as knowledge “rooted in personal experience and lay[ing] no claim to universality” (Castellano, 2000, p. 25). The task of Indigenous curatorship is to represent this knowledge in visual forms to which wide audiences can relate intellectually and emotionally.

3.3.2 Indigenous Knowledge – a Form of Relationality to Land, Family, and Memory

Indigenous curators describe Indigenous knowledge as relationality. For curator Tayac, the fact that “everything is connected ... is really a hallmark of Indigenous knowledge” (personal interview, February 24, 2012). Curator Hill Jr. emphasizes the idea “common to a lot of Indigenous cultures -- that human beings have a kind of social relationship to material objects” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). The threefold relationality to land, family, and memory is particularly important, because it is one

which defines Indigenous identities. In this respect, Halpin (1990) had pointed out that Native identities are “a matter of shared values: respect for the family, the old, and the land” (p. 6). Along similar lines, Native curator and scholar Nancy Marie Mithlo (Apache) had observed that “many Native American and other Indigenous artists continue to articulate a sovereign, bounded, and discrete identity based on land, family, and memory” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 18). In short, according to these curators, there is a sense in which at least some Indigenous peoples experience their identities in close connection to land, family, and memory. According to Native scholar Eva Marie Garrouette (Cherokee), there is also a sense of plausibility to “the assumption held by tribal philosophies throughout the Americas ... that relationships with [American Indian land, languages, history, and cultures] are rich sources of knowledge” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 150). It may be worth exploring in which sense Indigenous identities and knowledge are connected. The following three subsections explore this connection.

3.3.2.1 Land

As noted in the discussion of the first aspect of Indigenous knowledge emerging from the statements of the curators, land appears to be the concrete location in which Indigenous peoples are embedded and in which they engage in everyday life practices. According to the curators, the experience Indigenous peoples acquire through their engagement in everyday life practices with the land crystallizes in certain forms of knowledge.¹¹

¹¹ The importance of the land for indigenous peoples emerged from my interviews without me asking the curators explicitly about it.

The interviewees differ in the importance they attach to the connection of Indigenous knowledge to the land. With one important exception, they assume Indigenous culture to be “tied really close to the land base and where [they]’re from and that kind of thing” (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012).¹² In consequence, Indigenous knowledge, as part of Indigenous culture, comprises ideally, but not necessarily in practice,

- The knowledge of that land base (with the flora and fauna related to it);
- The know-how or knowledge of those everyday practices (e.g., cynegetic, culinary, medical, artistic, and spiritual/ceremonial) involving the (use of the) land and its resources (Prince, personal interview, August 18, 2010);
- The knowledge as codification of the previous two types of knowledge (e.g., cultural popular beliefs, traditions and customs, stories handed down over generations, together with the protocols put in place to protect knowledge and the well-being of the community) (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012).

This trichotomy of knowledge corresponds to Gadamer’s threefold distinction, mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, among scientific, practical, and cultural knowledge.

The one exception mentioned above is a view of the link to the land as a major problem, rather than as a desirable feature:

¹² In this respect, the curators have views similar to those of Native artists. For instance, poet and musician Joy Harjo, a leading figure of “Native American Renaissance” phenomenon in literature (Lincoln, 1985), writes: “What especially makes Indigenous cultures unique is the relationship to the land. Land is a being, an entity, a repository of meaning. There is an ongoing relationship between human beings and the land. It is the keeper of our bones, stories, and songs” (Harjo, 2011, p. 125).

[T]his connection to the land might be a problem... in a lot of different ways. ... I live in the city, my yard has no grass, I have a very small yard, I love nature, trees, I love all that stuff. But I have never had to hunt for my dinner, for example, and, you know, I've been excommunicated. I live in exile from my Reserve since I was three, pretty much. So, I don't know, in my Reserve there is a lot of fighting over land: actually, they have kicked people out, because they're so afraid that those people's non-Native children are gonna take their land. So, maybe land is the problem, you know? (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010)

That curator prefers to frame Indigenous knowledge against the background of the Indigenous ways of being in the world, values, and ideals that do not depend on the availability of the traditional land base: it is “something that we carry within ourselves that we know” (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010). In other words, according to this curator, even if Native forms of life developed out of specific practices enabled by the contact with a place, these forms of life may have taken on a life of their own, which is no longer dependent on land ownership.

3.3.2.2 Family

Family is the context of personal relations in which certain knowledge and epistemic practices are shared and acquired (through imitation and, then, through emulation). According to Native film and video artist Marjorie Beaucage, there is knowledge “gained by just being born, cared for [and] being in a group” (Beaucage, 2000, p. 140).

Family remains a normative context even for professional decisions of its members: “I'm always a person of my family first, always. (...) it is not job first, it's the family first. Thinking about [how] you want to carry yourself always informs everything

I write, every selection that I make, how I'm going to negotiate it" (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Family and, by extension, the entire community, is a normative context in yet another sense, namely as a context of validation for knowledge. As the same curator has it, "Indigenous knowledge in its classic sense, requires some level of collective agreement. So I think that's very different from the Western [knowledge, added IV]" (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

In addition, as noted by Critical Studies scholar Danny Butt, family is the structure within which knowledge is shared from person to person (an emphasis on testimony as a reliable source of knowledge) as a gift (rather than as a commodity) and in view of responsible use (this amounts to a focus on the practical aspects of knowledge circulation):

In Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge is commonly viewed as ... a gift from one's ancestors to the present. The ultimate social good is not the transfer of knowledge, as it is under modernist theories of information diffusion, nor is it the maximum extraction of capital value, as under capitalism. More important is who the knowledge is transferred to and whether their use of that knowledge will help maintain the entire knowledge system. (Butt, 2008, p. 4)

This notion that the "entire knowledge system" of the Indigenous community needs to be maintained implies a view of knowledge as an entity having the value of a common good that is to be preserved, developed, and shared generationally.

3.3.2.3 Memory

Memory is a context of relations to past events and the tradition itself, and to the present. Smith (2009) approvingly refers to renowned Native artist Jimmie Durham,

whom he admires both as an artist and as a person. This artist talked about the imperative of “remember(ing) everything, especially those things we never knew.” For Durham, remembering the past is to be performed “from an active standpoint” (p. 90). As such, it manages “to shift time and space, to reflect, to re-arrange the past in new ways, today” (Beaucage, 2005, p. 147).

This triple conditioning of Indigenous knowledge (on land, family and memory) echoes discussions in the anthropology literature on Indigenous knowledge viewed as “local knowledge” or “situated knowledge. Specifically, as community psychologist Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) puts it eloquently, Indigenous knowledge “is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us” (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). Clearly, the environment consists not only of the land base (the most obvious candidate), but also of the social relations (e.g., family), and relations to past events and exemplary narratives (e.g., memory).

3.3.3 Universal Relevance of Indigenous Knowledge

In their statements, the curators emphasize that Indigenous knowledge has universal relevance. For instance, Smith claims that nowadays one of the tasks of Indigenous curatorship is “to talk about the significance of Indian experience in national and global terms, [that is, in terms of] global impact” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). Smith implies that Indian experience (past and present ways of being in the world, of viewing the world) is relevant on a local scale, but, and more importantly, that it can be also relevant at a larger scale, for instance for non-Native peoples who cared to enter a dialogue with Native works of art and learn from them. In consequence, since this

universal relevance is always a possibility, Smith recommends that it be made concrete through practices of curatorship. Also, Hill Jr. believes that Indigenous knowledge is “not over there, away from us,” but rather “something that anybody could be thinking about.” In this respect, he refers to instances of Native knowledge which inform, for instance, “the way people have been writing about architecture and built environments.” Examples of this kind show that one can bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of thinking in the same arena and possibly “have a conversation with the whole world about that if [one] just can navigate all those different territories” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). Hill Jr. operates a move from the translatability of Indigenous knowledge to its universal relevance: precisely because non-Natives can make sense of this type of knowledge, there is a sense in which it does not have local relevance only.

Another aspect of the universal relevance of Indigenous knowledge pertains to the “veritistic” dimension of its claims, namely to the fact that, according to Cherokee scholar Eva Marie Garrouette, these claims are not simply “claims that some people *believe* to be true,” but rather “claims that, to one degree or another, *reflect* or *engage* the true” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 10; author’s italics). If claims of Indigenous knowledge “reflect or engage the true,” there is a sense in which they can be accepted as such by anybody.

The universal relevance aspect seems to speak against the local or situated aspect of Indigenous knowledge which defined the notion of knowledge as relationality (please refer to feature #2 above): specifically, if knowledge emerges as a result of, and reflects on, local conditions, in what sense can one talk about its universal relevance? Yet, possible answers to this contradiction would likely point to structural similarities between two or more local situations (e.g., the Indigenous peoples’ forms of life and historical

experience of oppression and survival in North America and Oceania) – an idea defended by curator Mithlo under the label of similarity or commonality of “historical experience” among the various members of tribes and Nations – or to the intricate connections between apparently unrelated phenomena (e.g., the relevance of Indigenous knowledge of the polar ice cap might help one better understand the more complex phenomenon of global warming and ecological disasters in various areas of the planet) – an idea defended most eloquently by curator Tayac. The point that this curator makes, at a deeper level, is that Native forms of life (including patterns of knowledge) may now be more adequate in addressing impending ecological disasters resulting from excessive consumerism and irresponsible treatment of the environment.

3.3.5 Indigenous Knowledge Under Erasure and Its Possible Recovery Through Concrete Action

The curators consider Indigenous knowledge to be no longer an obvious presence in the world, because of “attempts by people, by colonization, to wipe out culture completely from aboriginal people in Canada, and in the U.S. of course” (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012). It is no longer a presence in the Native communities (in the Reservations) or in the lives of the Indigenous curators (largely due to disruptions in the Indigenous ways of life in the last two centuries, which involved massive displacements). In these circumstances, it makes sense for curators like B. and Smith to claim that Indigenous identity by itself (in contrast to non-Indigenous identity) does not necessarily make a curator more of an expert in taking care of Indigenous collections and knowledge. For instance, curator Smith claims that “there’s nothing

inherently in terms of my identity that would mean that I could do that in a more effective or significant way than someone who doesn't have that ancestry. ... Identity by itself does not convey anything. Now, knowledge and experience, and talent, of course, do" (personal interview, May 7, 2012).

Yet this is not a pervasive view among curators. For instance, asked about the meaning of curating in an Indigenous fashion, curator Steve Loft (Mohawk/Jewish) claims that it means,

[H]aving an indigenous perspective to start with. For me, as a person who is indigenous and has a broader understanding of that perspective than a curator who comes from a very specific Euro-American art historical background, I have a very different notion of art, art making, cultural production, and cultural transfer. (Loft, interviewed by J. Henry, 2013)

Not only is Indigenous knowledge under erasure in the Native communities, but it is so in any of the available media. For instance, referring to the public visibility of Indigenous information and knowledge, prominent Native scholar Vine Deloria Jr. noted that "perhaps only 10 percent of the information that Indians possess is presently in print and available for discussion" (Deloria Jr., 1995, p. 11). Rather, Indigenous knowledge is something that "was either merely lost" or has just been "silenced" (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). This situation describes Indigenous knowledge in a state of erasure.

In this case, curators emphasize the importance of uncovering and bringing Indigenous knowledge to the fore through active research. This can take the form of a return to and re-integration into the tribal community and its traditions:

[My father] was taken away from his culture and did the traditional thing of coming back after he retired and really being warmly embraced and welcomed and I was part of that process with him. My generation, then, is

a generation ... trying to find out knowledge ... you can probably use the literature on Diaspora [*laughter*] to understand the process, even though it's all happening in the U.S. I was part of that process of taking dad back or him taking me back into our tribal community and really working assertively to understand that. (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012)

As indicated by Tayac, it can also take the form of active research of the scientific kind, when the curator goes back to the Indigenous communities (assuming that he or she was raised there) and engages in ethnographic interviewing with and participant observation of relevant members of those communities in their everyday lives. However, Indigenous knowledge seems to be such that the researchers-curators absorb it indirectly as it were, rather than derive it methodically and strictly as a result of social scientific research in the communities (interviews, ethnography, etc.): “a lot of what I got, to be honest, was not through my formal study, it was really through community-based activity” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

This drive towards recovering Indigenous knowledge – which I believe is one of the few instances in which the science discourse and the tradition discourse are aligned – aims at re-inscribing Indigeneity into reality, into the world, and into world relevance:

Anthropologists use terms like “reinscribing.” So it’s about reinscribing the Indigenous back into reality and into what is a civilization of humanity. I know that it is very lofty and it’s very idealistic, but that’s really what it is about. I think whether it is on the very micro level, maybe it’s about a very specific, small topic; maybe it’s about a much bigger one, but that we are rewriting ourselves back into the world, into world relevance. It is already there but we want people to see it, and not only to see it, but to respect it and it is not only relevant to Native people, but it is relevant to everyone. (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

In this quote, curator Tayac proposes a powerful argument, to the extent that efforts aimed at recovering Indigenous knowledge need to be regarded against the

background of universal relevance of this type of knowledge. This reasoning illustrates the definitional strategy, mentioned in Section 2.2.1.2, of “attaching [a phenomenon] to a larger value horizon” (Gerhards, 1995, p. 230).

3.3.4 Survival-Oriented Aspect of Indigenous Knowledge

Curator Tayac’s above-mentioned suggestion about the ecological value of Indigenous knowledge is not unrelated to the curators’ placing of Indigenous knowledge in the context of the efforts of Native peoples to survive and to teach (and, therefore, to pass on) this collective experience to future generations. In this respect, the dispersion of Native peoples across the American continent and the disappearance of traditional forms of communal life may constitute additional threats, as they thwart the sharing of knowledge by traditional means, such as oral narratives. As curator P. [this curator did not wish to be identified] puts it, “issue number one” for Natives is survival and “issue number two” is “teaching and passing on knowledge for our kids, our youth and our families, even the term aboriginal.” Survival seems to be the most pressing issue: “We’re all trying to survive. We [curators] look at similar things that affect us socially, politically, culturally, and how we are surviving and contributing, discussing, debating issues that affect us” (P., personal interview, March 30, 2012).

This survival-related aspect of knowledge is connected to the generational (family) grounding of knowledge and to its practical (use) value: by circulating from one generation to another (in the form of education), Indigenous knowledge is not only preserved and developed, but also provides Indigenous communities with tools for survival.

Yet, in regard to the survival dimension of Indigenous knowledge, there are also dissenting voices. At least one curator believes that survival is not a pervasive problem for Indigenous peoples anymore:

For a very long time we've been very concerned about basic survival. That was very important. I think we're okay. I think basic survival is covered. Yes, we still have lots of problems: highest incarceration rates in the country, illiteracy, I think still highest infant mortality rate, and other problems as well. But, we also now have aboriginal peoples who have lots of money and lots of education. And I think that we're gonna survive, that is pretty clear to me. And so, what are we gonna do now? What are we gonna do with our aboriginal heritage? How are we going to use it? (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010)

The more pressing issue, according to Skawennati, seems to be the choices the Natives are supposed to make, once the threat of physical extinction is no longer serious. Her concern is with other types of survival: since she is an artist, her concern is that Natives rely on their heritage to make a difference in the world.

3.3.6 Storytelling – Constitutive of (and Honoring) Indigenous Knowledge

Also, involved in this transmission of knowledge within the communities, but also from the communities to the outsiders (or such “insiders outside” as the Native researcher/curator) is some traditional form of verbal interaction, such as storytelling, as well as metaphoric or symbolic content. For instance, according to curator Hill Jr. who recounts his interactions with her Cree grandmother, moral knowledge is conveyed through stories: “I have bits and pieces of that kind of knowledge that came through to me directly; my grandmother used to tell me Wesakechak (Cree Trickster) stories; so I have Trickster stories; those are the kind of things that I do feel are connections back” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). In this quote, Hill Jr. points to the power

of traditional narratives to engage memory and to mould the identities of even those Indigenous peoples who live outside the communities, but are still concerned about their heritage.

The reason that Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically narrative pertains to the fact that, as Native film and video artist Marjorie Beaucage (Métis) notes, storytelling is the best mode of “honoring” and expressing “cultural knowing” which “comes from being in the world, from experiencing life rather than measuring and controlling it” (Beaucage, 2005, p. 140).

These insights are confirmed by observations of scholars in the context of ethnographic studies. For instance, anthropologist Eugene S. Hunn summarized the constitutive role of storytelling as follows:

Children learn the moral precepts that will guide them in their social and ecological relationships by listening to their elders tell these stories. Thus religion, art and ecology are one. Traditions are thus ecological in the sense that they represent a complex and integrated system of practices and beliefs. (Hunn, 1993, p. 14)

The narrativity aspect of Indigenous knowledge explains perhaps why exhibitions (multimodal documents with artistic intent and emotional impact) are adequate means for circulating this type of knowledge.

3.3.7 Control over Knowledge

Closely connected to the narrativity aspect of Indigenous knowledge is the emphasis Native communities place on the protocols that regulate the narrative situation of knowledge sharing (e.g., who is supposed to tell what and to whom):

The thing about traditional knowledge, a lot of it, you can tell stories only a certain time of year. You can tell certain stories to different people and

there are different knowledges that go to different people and there are protocols around how you gain that knowledge and how you respect the story after you receive the story; whether you can retell the story to somebody else or do you have that permission and that kind of thing. (L'Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012)

Knowledge protocols reflect the Indigenous peoples' concern that knowledge should reach the right persons only and be put to the right use. Protocols are all the more important, because the curator's engaging with Indigenous knowledge can take many forms, from learning to reinventing knowledge. Knowledge is learned in practices of interpersonal transmission, but it is also transformed in active personal use. Especially as far as the latter aspect is concerned, the activity of artists and curators (understood as artists) amounts, according to Native Anthropologist and curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault, to looking for new "ways to translate, transform, reinvent" knowledge. In consequence, there is a sense in which strict ways to "protect, and sometimes [to] obscure the knowledge that is integral to the representation of a culture" (Townsend-Gault, 1993, pp. 96-7) are needed as a creative process of knowledge production obeying the ecological and protocol-related imperative.

However restrictive the protocols for the access to knowledge may look in the practices of the Indigenous communities, their existence (and the associated impression they convey that knowledge flows are controlled) derives from the simple fact that access to knowledge is only offered as a gift, rather than claimed by potential beneficiaries and appropriated as a right. As Native Studies scholar Laurelyn Whitt noted, "Access to other ways of knowing is something that must be given, not taken. One cannot lay claim to it or demand it as a right. It can only be received because it is shared by other beings – human and nonhuman" (Whitt, 2009, p. 34).

3.3.8 References to Indigenous Knowledge

When employing the notion of Indigenous knowledge, the curators vary in how they assess its appropriateness. As a rule, they choose to take the path of either prudence, or liberality in defining it and each of these further ramifies into sub-paths to be specified below.

3.3.8.1 Prudence in Defining Indigenous Knowledge

Based on the analysis of the curators' statements, I noticed that the curators who hold, beside their practitioner positions, academic positions as well (e.g., Hill Jr., Mithlo, Smith), are aware of the various controversies in the scholarly literature around the notion of Indigenous knowledge. They participate in academic debates, and, thus, are sensitive to (or, at least, aware of the pervasiveness of) scientific construals of Indigenous knowledge. Such curators refrain from advancing a clear-cut definition of this type of knowledge.

One reason for their prudence is that the notion of Indigenous knowledge may be too "broad and wide" (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This statement builds on a covert criticism of the epistemological notion of knowledge which – the curators believe – is defined too restrictively in Western epistemology and, thus, does not allow Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate form of knowledge, yet practicing this knowledge construction without restraint leads to vague and unspecific characterization of Indigenous knowledge.

Further reason for refraining from providing a definition to the notion of Indigenous knowledge is that any possible definition may be suspected of emphasizing

some aspects to the detriment of other (possibly also relevant) aspects of this type of knowledge; when I asked him about his understanding of the notion of “Indigenous knowledge,” curator Hill Jr. acknowledged that he was reluctant to use the term “Indigenous knowledge” in his conversations with other people and in his work. He claims to be “a bit suspicious” about both terms, “knowledge” and “Indigenous,” because they “capture something and they leave something out, at the same time” (personal interview, March 20, 2012).

In exchange, some of these curators suggest that Indigenous knowledge is just a “place-holder for knowledge that has very deep and enduring roots,” but “has not yet really been adequately legitimized or codified in terms of the Western Academy” (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). Moreover, “[t]he wealth of Indigenous knowledge is vast and largely incomprehensible to those viewers and listeners trained to expect entertaining and easily comprehensible messages” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 21). Hence, such curators as Mithlo regard any attempt to provide a definition for it as premature.

The underlying concern behind this refusal to propose an explicit definition – when prompted by me to offer one – seems to be that, from the point of view of these curators, the existing stark distinction between scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and Indigenous knowledge, on the other hand, takes the form of a comparison which systematically demotes the latter.¹³ In fact, the curators are aware that Indigenous knowledge is rarely viewed by mainstream Academia as knowledge *stricto sensu* – which

¹³ As a matter of fact, at least some aspects of Indigenous knowledge are taken seriously, for instance pharmacological knowledge (by pharmaceutical industry) or meditation techniques (by psychotherapists).

is yet another situation of subalternity of Indigenous knowledge: as it is not viewed as the real knowledge, it is not taken seriously, but rather treated as curiosity.

One version of the above-mentioned refusal to provide a definition for Indigenous knowledge consists in rejecting a “generalizing approach” to this phenomenon, since – the argument goes – it inevitably results in clichés. Thus, even though one can refer to Indigenous knowledge for purposes of approximate identification of a body of the experiences that Indigenous communities have gone through, the view is that legitimate talk about it needs to be more elaborate, more specific, thus, inevitably circumscribed to a particular space and time, as well as to a particular Indigenous community:

[A]s soon as you try to generalize, and say “Here’s a working definition of another view of history by Indians generally (let’s say all Indians of pre-Contact) or something, before 1492,” it becomes ... so generalized, and so fraught with contradiction, that eventually you end up with sort of cliché. It makes no real sense. If you have a very serious scholarly approach that says, “Here’s – based on all we can discern – what a Mayan worldview produced by Mayans in the 13th century might have looked like,” that I can take seriously. (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012; interviewee’s emphasis)

Similarly, Townsend-Gault (1992) recommends “a stress on local knowledge to make specific what has been generalised, to make actual what has been essentialized” (p. 86).

However, the curators emphasize that this particularizing approach does not mean that, once articulated, a piece (or even a body) of Indigenous knowledge may not have universal relevance and may be incomprehensible to non-Indigenous persons too. It is in this context that Smith emphasizes the importance of “talk[ing] about the significance of Indian experience in national and global terms, [that is, in terms of] global impact” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012).

Yet another version of the Indigenous curators' refusal to advance a definition of Indigenous knowledge builds on the identification of various semantic issues around the words "Indigenous" and "knowledge" (that is, issues about the reference of these terms). More specifically, some curators (especially, curators Hill Jr. and P.) suggest that the term "Indigenous" (or "aboriginal") emerged in the context of Western colonialism. According to these curators, this term creates a "sometimes false sense of collective unity, when in fact there is diversity and we only started to think about ourselves ... as a unity in response to Western colonialism." Historically, Indigenous peoples have identified through their belongingness to tribes and Nations, thus "would see themselves through their difference to other Indigenous people, not through their similarity" (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). In the same vein, curator P. acknowledges the homogenizing effects of the classification practices of Western science: "to me the term aboriginal is a westernized thing, and when you look at the three groups in context, I don't necessarily feel that I'm aboriginal. I'm more of an Inuk, and a lot of people would say that as well" (P., personal interview, March 30, 2012).

As a result, the temptation is for Native peoples to view Indigenous knowledge as "exist[ing] over here, in a kind of isolation, or in contrast to, Western culture" (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). However, this temptation is not that strong in the case of self-declared mixed-blood Indigenous curators – like Linda Grussani (Algonquin Band, Italian origin), Richard Hill Jr. (Cree First Nation, German origin), or Nicholette Prince (Carrier First Nation, English origin). Because of their experience as individuals who are familiar with at least two different symbolic systems of beliefs and values, the very idea of keeping Western knowledge in a radical separation from Indigenous

knowledge does not make sense either from an existential, or from an epistemological point of view.

Thus, from an existential perspective, due to their diverse family lineages and cultural backgrounds, self-declared mixed-blood Indians may experience the pressure of integrating the multiple identity lines: “for me, as someone who’s grown up in English, grown up as a fairly mixed person (my mother is Cree, my father is German, but second-generation German, immigrant), those things aren’t solitudes, and so I have to kind of go back and think about it in some other way” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012).

Also, at least one curator (Hill Jr.) is explicit about the epistemological connection between Indigenous knowledge and the historical experience of colonization, in the context of raising a series of questions meant to identify possible understandings of Indigenous knowledge:

[I]s it the knowledge of the past, of the things that we believe before Europeans came along, and, if so, why? Is it this kind of romantic, potentially very romantic, idea of kind of Edward Curtis’ world, frozen in time? Is it knowledge that we have as a result of being colonized and the experience of colonization? (personal interview, March 20, 2012)

In the case of the second term, “knowledge,” these curators sometimes doubt that Indigenous knowledge is knowledge properly speaking (that is, instances falling under the category of knowledge privileged in the Western academia – a category with which they are familiar and on which they often rely as participants in the mainstream culture: “I have to figure out what’s going on there, how I can get to it without getting caught in the traps that seem laid for you, like ... the assumption even that, because it’s Indigenous and you’re Indigenous, you should necessarily believe it” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012).

3.3.8.2 Liberal Use of the Notion of Indigenous Knowledge

Other Indigenous curators are not (or at least not exceedingly) concerned about using any notion of Indigenous knowledge (in the scholarly literature and in general) and proceed with discussing possible understandings of it (at least, they do not seem to be concerned about inadvertently emphasizing some dimensions of it, while leaving others out of the picture – one of the concerns that has been raised by other curators, e.g., Hill Jr.).

Among the curators selected for this study, some have an affirmative stance towards employing notions of Indigenous knowledge. The stance is affirmative because, irrespective of its relations to mainstream knowledge, Indigenous knowledge is the indispensable material in the constitution of Indigenous identities:

[B]y and through Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and ways of knowing, we determine the image that manifests the reality of Indigenous culture. This is the construction of art, of art history, and aesthetics and cultures articulating the ageless voices of our elders, our ancestors, and the generations of artists who came before us.” (Loft, 2011, p. 137)

In this context, to be affirmative of Indigenous knowledge may involve “mak[ing] people open and aware” and “shift[ing] their minds [so that they] be able to see Native knowledge as powerful as it is, to acknowledge it, to never again ignore it, to understand it.” This means that even if people “disagree” and “think it’s not worth keeping,” they should at least understand the Natives’ motivation and entitlement to hold on to it (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Consonant with this stance is the curators’ attempt to make a positive case for Indigenous knowledge as a solution more adequate to local conditions and problems than

those offered by Western techno-science. For instance, curator Tayac notes that “there are certain principles in it [Indigenous knowledge] that are very valuable for contemporary society” and that one can “watch the transformation of how Native knowledge was viewed prior and now how it is being taken more seriously” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). She claims that science finds increasingly compelling evidence that things in the Universe are linked together: “this idea about how everything is connected, which is really a hallmark of Indigenous knowledge, is coming out more and more in scientific finding” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). In the same context, Tayac gives the example of the relevance of Indigenous knowledge for environmental issues related to the melting of the polar ice cap as a result of global warming:

[I]n Western science there is no kind of classification, which can capture [the] incredibly distinctive forms of sea ice. To be able to pair up climate scientists with a part of people that understand what the language is, it helps to grasp better about what is really happening, because who knows better about this environment than people who have been living there in that way for a while. (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

This affirmative stance has been made explicit in the form of a theoretical framework, which Native scholar Eva Marie Garrouette (Cherokee) calls “Radical Indigenism.” This framework revolves around the assumption that “American Indian (and other Indigenous) philosophies of knowledge are rational, articulable, coherent logics for ordering and knowing the world.” Moreover, it goes even further to argue that “Indigenous philosophies of knowledge, and the models of inquiry they imply, have a place in the academy. This position invites an understanding of these philosophies not merely as objects of curiosity ... but as tools for the discovery and generation of knowledge” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 113). In this quote, Garrouette advocates an

epistemological strategy of integrating Indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge into a more inclusive notion of knowledge.

This strategy is not unrelated to the strategy, recommended by other curators, of avoiding – if not even downright confronting – anti-intellectual stances, which they regard as pervading the attitudes of Indigenous peoples towards knowledge: “The work we have to do to contribute to any serious dialogue is partly about confronting the anti-intellectualism in our own communities” (Smith, 2008, p. 85). In this quote and with respect to multiple issues (epistemic, aesthetic, etc.), Smith advocates a stance of openness towards available non-Indigenous systems of value and the possibility of mutual gains.

Part of this move is to encourage young Natives to become familiar with ideas from the Western intellectual traditions, in order to be able to really understand the predicament of Native peoples, that is, often as a result of those ideas:

Western theories and scholarship ... have influenced Indigenous people, [and] they have to understand that. I think, probably when I was an undergrad, I was so like, “Oh, I don’t want to be anything like them ... and it’s all horrible.” And now I’m thinking, “Oh, I missed a lot,” because in order to understand colonization and its influences and how it interacts with people [you have to] know where that is coming from, [otherwise] you’re operating half-blind. And so I think ... that’s something my son, [who] is a senior in high school now, is getting. And I was just telling him ... “You want to read Aristotle, Plato, and Herodotus, and all of that, because you have to understand it, you have to understand it. And maybe it will help to illuminate some things too.” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

Another effect of engaging with Western traditions may be a deeper understanding of the ways in which Western ideas and traditions have become enmeshed

with pre-1492 Native traditions in the form of multiple hybridizations for more than half a millennium now:

I think that often the people who are most adamant about tradition and reviving tradition are the ones who have kind of lost what I see as some of those core values and it's because they're kind of trying to understand it in a vacuum. I think you need to kind of be able to look at, and know at, a broad cultural history or broad history of ideas and able to say "where's that coming from?" and recognize some of those ideas might date back to ancient Indigenous ideas and others maybe are Christian; and in order to be able to parcel those out, you need to be knowledgeable in some way about both. (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012)

Taking this path of avoiding anti-intellectualism means Indigenous peoples should become more confident in engaging with the wealth of knowledge that has been handed over to them across generations.

3.3.9 Generalizing approaches to Indigenous knowledge

Possibly under the assumption about Indigenous knowledge as personal, that is, "rooted in personal experience and lays no claim to universality" (Castellano, 2000, p. 25), some of the curators are skeptical of any generalizing approach to Indigenous knowledge (that is, any scientific approach which aims to make general claims across tribes and Nations, on one hand, and across historic periods, on the other hand): "as soon as you try to generalize, and say 'Here's a working definition of another view of history by Indians generally' – let's say all Indians of pre-contact [between Natives and Spanish conquistadors], or something, before 1492 – it becomes hopelessly stupid" (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which a generalizing approach is still viable if its concern is to grasp the structures underlying the various particular approaches to

Indigenous knowledge. In this respect, some curators prefer to see a similar “stance” behind the variety of Indigenous knowledges distributed across space and time (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012) or, even more elaborately yet – as described by a director of public programs at NMAI – a “point of view,” “worldview,” or “perspective ... that make Native people who they are in this world” (Haworth, personal interview, April 5, 2012). In other words, there is at least one sense in which one could usefully generalize a metaphysical claim across tribes and Nations, namely that to be an Indigenous person presupposes that one perceives, thinks, senses, and acts from within an identifiable common “stance” which builds on certain “ontological assumptions” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). From this point of view, the use of the phrase (and the study of) “Indigenous knowledge” as a place-holder for various types of knowledges developed within Native communities is legitimate, indeed.

3.4 Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, a concept of Indigenous knowledge emerged from the analysis of the statements of the Indigenous curators with the following features:

- it is grounded in aboriginal ways of being in the world
- it is a form of relationality, especially to land, family, and memory – key elements in the formation of Indigenous identities
- it has universal relevance
- it is oriented towards survival
- it is under erasure and requires recovery through (inter)active research
- it is structured narratively

- it presupposes protocol-based forms of control

In addition, the Indigenous curators display two main attitudes when employing, or just referring to, the notion of Indigenous knowledge. On one hand, they tend to be cautious out of concern about the general mistrust of this type of knowledge in the scientific and academic contexts (the notion of Indigenous knowledge might be too broad and, thus, hard to define adequately – that is, without falling into generalizations – or likely to leave aside key aspects). On the other hand, other curators tend to be very liberal in defining and employing any notion of Indigenous knowledge. Among those curators, some are downright affirmative of Indigenous knowledge on account of its importance in the formation of Native identities or in offering better solutions to local problems.

Articulating definitional features of Indigenous knowledge is only one aspect of the reconstruction of the phenomenal structure of this type of knowledge. Other aspects concern the various ways in which the phenomenon is thematized or problematized (especially from the point of view of perceived threats or risks and their consequences), the types of actors involved and their associated responsibilities, as well as the kinds of actions or modes of problem solving required and/or proposed by those actors. All these aspects will be discussed in CHAPTERS 4 and 5.

Beside the symbolic dimension of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge (which is reconstructed by means of articulating the phenomenal structure of this phenomenon), the material dimension comprises the main actors playing key roles in regard to that phenomenon (how they position themselves and how they position other actors) and the responsibilities attached to those roles; the practices of knowledge

production; and the dispositif on which the curators rely to do their work and achieve their goals. All these aspects will be discussed in CHAPTERS 6 and 7.

CHAPTER 4: VOCABULARIES OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE (I): A TOPOGRAPHY OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

4.1 Introduction

Indigenous curatorship emerged in the second part of the 20th century as a position of competence and authority in regard to the collection, organization, preservation, promotion, and dissemination of Native cultures. The official mandate of these museum professionals has entitled them to represent Indigenous peoples and cultures on a global scale and also allowed them to develop projects aimed at addressing issues surrounding Indigenous knowledge and its representations in the media. Having commitments to Western academic practices as well as allegiances to the Native communities within which they grew up, the curators have found themselves positioned at the intersection between two types of discourses. In the introduction to this dissertation and in Section 3.2 (“Conflicting World Views: Science vs. Tradition Discourse”) the labels of “science” and “tradition” are employed to distinguish Western from Native epistemologies and associated knowledge types.

To use a conceptualization proposed by Indigenous curator David Wade Chambers, one can state that these “discourses” around knowledge present two mutually exclusive “knowledge spaces” (Chambers, 2005, np). The two discourses compete in the sense that their respective constructions of Indigenous knowledge (some of the elements of which were described in CHAPTER 3) diverge fundamentally, with each claiming at the same time to be adequate descriptions of this type of knowledge. From the

perspective of science, Indigenous knowledge cannot count as knowledge properly speaking (i.e., scientific knowledge). In consequence, it has been “at best neglected, at worst denied, over long centuries of cultural oppression” (Chambers, 2006, np). From the point of view of tradition, scientific knowledge has not been a concern, until Indigenous scholars and activists have started assessing its effects on Indigenous ways of life. For one, science has been perceived as an endeavor with detrimental effects to those ways of life (Martin-Hill, 2008, pp. 65-6).

In this context, the activity of the Indigenous curators working in museums across North America opens up a veritable discursive arena – similar to what Wade Chambers calls “Third Knowledge Space” – within which science and tradition are able to interact, to test each other, and even to generate new discursive formations by what Gadamer (1960) calls “fusion of horizons” (Horizontverschmelzung). This idea is consonant with the statement, expressed by at least one participant in my study, about the importance of “creating a space in which people can kind of work through their different positions” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012).

The majority of the Indigenous curators chosen for this study are aware of the “subjugated” status of Indigenous knowledge (Section 3.3.5 and Appendix E). I refer to this type of knowledge as “injured knowledge” implying the need for a recovery or healing work. The Indigenous curators do not use this word themselves, but refer to features of Indigenous knowledge that are perfectly covered by it, especially since it can be understood in two ways: first, Indigenous knowledge is “injured” in the sense of being reviled, calumniated, i.e., the object of more or less aggressive forms of prejudice.

Second, this type of knowledge is “injured” in the sense of being persistently harmed, “damaged.” Curator Mithlo uses the phrase “damaged knowledge” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 16).

There are multiple ways in which the curators convey this notion through their statements. They refer to Native cultures (and Indigenous knowledge, more or less explicitly) as being in a state of lethargy (and, thus, in need of revival), lost or silenced, oppressed, subjugated, marginalized, victimized, concealed, disconnected from the individuals or communities, under erasure, or invisible (please refer to Appendix E for examples). As already mentioned in Section 2.2.2, according to German sociologist Jürgen Gerhards, defining a phenomenon can involve a process of either making it as concrete as possible, close to everyday life, or “attaching [it] to a larger value horizon” (Gerhards, 1995, p. 230). In this case, defining Indigenous knowledge (metaphorically) as injured knowledge (with all the synonyms provided by the curators to characterize the sense in which it is injured knowledge) follows both paths at the same time. First, Indigenous knowledge (as a theme or problem) is made concrete, as “something” being acted on, by association with states of “lethargy,” “oppressed,” “victimized,” “damaged” – even though it may sound paradoxical, or rather oxymoronic, that such a tenuous presence in the world as knowledge in the senses described in the previous chapter (Sections 3.3.5) can in fact be made that concrete. Second, the curators integrate Indigenous knowledge (as a theme or problem) into a “larger value horizon” by framing it as a collective good that is under a threat of imminent “erasure,” “loss.”

Two qualifiers, “under erasure” and “invisible,” are particularly interesting. From a discourse perspective, the injured status of Indigenous knowledge translated in terms of its erasure or invisibility politicizes the silence and invisibility it holds as an expression of

human experience (as “Indigenous knowledge”). To make this connection clearer: an accepted point in discourse theory has it that any discourse constitutes veritable spaces of visibility for some objects, while at the same time leaving other objects invisible. What is visible exists, what is invisible (or erased) is virtually inexistent.¹⁴

Based on this insight, the discursive struggle of Indigenous curators to address problems that Indigenous knowledge faces (as injured knowledge) can be understood as an attempt to make an as strong as possible a case for the notion of what I would call the “compelling presence” of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledge in the North American discursive arena of knowledge.

An observation of curator Rickard (2007) lends massive support to my reading. In the context of a discussion of her curatorial work for the “Our People” gallery at NMAI, and, more particularly, of a series of ceramic figurines – each standing for a particular community or culture – she notes that these “figures created a presence, a reminder of an ongoing unmarked past of Indigeneity in the Americas” and states clearly: “One cannot deny the ongoing erasure of Indigenous presence in the Americas since contact” (p. 91).

While compellingness refers to the use of multiple media and forms of expression through which the curators attempt to make a strong case for the presence of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledge, presence can be understood in two senses, one spatial and another temporal. As Mithlo (2008) puts it straightforwardly, “many Native American and other Indigenous artists continue to articulate a sovereign, bounded, and

¹⁴ Kendall and Wickham (1999) emphasize Foucault’s idea that “scientific discourse has already made the objects of science visible. This is not an alternative route to a pure pre-discursive realm of existence. These visibilities are not reflections of the pure forms of objects, but rather the result of temporary discursive luminosity; they allow a thing to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer” (p. 40).

discrete identity based on land, family and memory” (p. 18). Land is a spatial (better yet, a topological) phenomenon, whereas family and memory are temporal phenomena.

The presence of a phenomenon in the spatial sense is achieved to the extent to which that phenomenon occupies a place where it is “visible,” where it counts as being “here” (rather than “absent,” “invisible,” or even “nowhere”). Indigenous knowledge is present spatially insofar as the conditions of its possibility (e.g., a land base) obtain. The presence of a phenomenon in the temporal sense is realized if that phenomenon is (perceived as) occurring “in the present,” or “now” (rather than “in the past,” or “then,” relegated to the realm of the already-dead). Indigenous knowledge is present temporally when it is not constructed (and actively forgotten) as belonging to the past (as a relic).

This and the following chapter substantiate the claim that these two vocabularies for grasping the idea of the “compelling presence” (spatial and temporal) of Indigenous knowledge describe a veritable topography, on one hand, and a veritable chronography of Indigenous knowledge, on the other hand. These vocabularies usually go “unnoticed,” yet there is a sense in which they “still operate [as] structuring device[s] for the organization and the presentation of written knowledge, debate, forensic rhetoric, and numerous other forms of knowledge presentation” (St. Clair, 2000, p. 94). The way in which these vocabularies operate can be described well by using St. Clair’s (2000) considerations on metaphor, that is, in terms of “an invisible matrix that silently operates within the epistemological framework of the culture itself” (p. 94).

These vocabularies allow us to reconstruct a major part of the phenomenal structure of the Indigenous curators’ discourse around Indigenous knowledge: definitions and classification patterns; causal relations and explanatory patterns; subject positions

and legitimizing patterns; responsibilities and evaluation patterns; model practices and dramatizing patterns.

This chapter discusses the first (topographical) line of thinking, involving topological metaphors of presence.

4.2 A Topography of Indigenous Knowledge

The spatial sense in which one can conceive of the presence of something (Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledge) is: being right here, visible, palpable, or locatable. I suggest that the inclusion of certain spatial tropes, such as place and boundaries, around which the Indigenous curators' statements are organized, lends support to the reading of Indigenous knowledge as a presence in the spatial sense, that is, topographically.

4.2.1 Place(s)

Based on the coding structure, I argue that Indigenous curators use the trope of place extensively in discussing Indigenous identities and knowledge. They employ this trope with four senses, namely place as concrete; as virtual; as fluid; and as geo-symbolic (or discursive). This division allows us to understand the multiple levels at which Indigenous identities and, thus, Indigenous knowledge can be understood.

4.2.1.1 The Concrete Place

Place is viewed as a concrete geographical location which grounds forms of life of Indigenous communities. According to curator Nicholette Prince, there is a “deep rooted and ongoing link” between Indigenous peoples and the land they inhabit (Prince,

personal interview, August 18, 2010). This kind of place is what Bellah (2011), quoting German phenomenologist Alfred Schutz, calls “the standard place” (p. 2). With one exception, all Indigenous curators interviewed for this study view Indigenous culture as being “tied really close to the land base and where you’re from,” to use curator L’Hirondelle’s wording (personal interview, February 22, 2012). What is more, the curators emphasize the fact that Natives “identify with their lands and territories” (Venne, 2004, p. 127) or “continue to articulate a sovereign, bounded, and discrete identity based on land, family and memory” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 18). In other words, the land is one of the key elements in relation to which the individual and collective identities of the Native peoples are formed.¹⁵

Defined as “a body of knowledge associated with long-term occupancy of a certain place” (Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg, 2000, p. 7), Indigenous knowledge is linked to place in two senses. First, this type of knowledge expresses the experience of a person (by definition an embodied being) situated in a concrete place; thus, it encompasses both an intellectual and an emotional dimension.¹⁶ Native film and video artist Marjorie Beaucage makes sense of this complex topo-experience by pointing to those situations in which people are forced to move, often unwillingly, from one place to another. In such situations, changing “one’s physical place” is intimately linked to a change in “one’s psychic place.” What explains this connection is the fact that “[a] sense of place is an emotional investment. It is part of Belonging, being part of a community that determines

¹⁵ This idea has been theorized by Allen (1999), Biolsi (2005), and Casey (2009), as well as explored and defended in the context of specific groups of Natives by Kame’eleihiwa (1992), Memmott and Long (2002), Meyer (2003), Mihesuah (2003), or Nabokov (2006).

¹⁶ The issue of Indigenous knowledge as local/experiential is discussed in Antweiler, 2004, p. 10; Castellano, 2000, p. 27; and Maurial, 1999, p. 63.

self and identity” (Beaucage, 2005, p.140). In other words, inhabiting a place is more than just occupying a position in space in much the same way as an object is present in a container; rather, the act of inhabiting or dwelling engages the human being entirely. This relationship with the place is inflected cognitively, but also emotionally (assuming the two dimensions are separate).

Second, that Indigenous knowledge is linked to the place (land) also means that it is the knowledge of that particular place (land base) with all its features; of the everyday practices which involve the land, e.g., hunting, “living off the land” (Prince, personal interview, August 18, 2010), offering sacrifices to a Supreme Being, and so on; as well as of the protocols put in place to protect knowledge and the well-being of the community: “there’s protocols around certain things. Usually protocols for any culture are put in place because they act as safety belts or ways of protecting, but also not just ways of protecting, but ways of insuring the well-being of the people” (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012). A strong statement about land is offered, among others, by activist and writer Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe), according to whom,

The Cree also have assumed that there will always be food from the land, so long as the Eeu – the Cree – do not abuse their part of the relationship to the animals and the land ... To me this is the essence of culture and the essence of the meaning of life. From where I sit on James Bay, it seems almost trivial to talk about other things – so called religion, literature, spirituality, and economics ... if [due to the activities of hydro Quebec and Ontario Hydro] there are no longer six seasons of the year, the waters no longer flow in their order, and places where people have prayed, been buried, and harvested their food cease to exist as “land,” is that not the essence of cultural destruction? (LaDuke, 1991, p. 43)

In this quote, LaDuke makes a strong statement about the land as a concrete place which sustains traditional forms of life of Native communities, including forms of

spirituality. Doing damage to the land has concrete damaging effects to those forms of life (which include both natural and cultural aspects – whether or not we agree to the distinction between the two dimensions).

Where the issue of concrete place is still present (for instance, as an object of potential restitution or compensation), legal and political action (including even mobilization of larger numbers of Natives for protest) is viewed as a necessary path to take: “if the land question is not central to our struggle and the reason for our continued survival, then I don’t know what is” (Smith, 2009, p. 168).

Recently, some of the original places have been regained (especially in Canada) through revisiting treaties, only to become objects of other types of contention – this time within the communities themselves (for instance between older and newer generations): “in my Reserve there is a lot of fighting over land: actually, they have kicked people out, because they’re so afraid that those people’s non-Native children are gonna take their land. So, maybe land is the problem” (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010). Skawennati’s remarks point to the existence of struggles around land inside the Indigenous communities themselves.

Finally, at least one curator argues refers to the indigenization of colonial institutions as a strategy for making a claim in regard to space. Thus, talking about his exhibit titled “Ghost Dance: Activism, Resistance, Art,” curator, critic, and artist Steven Loft (Mohawk of the Six Nations with Jewish heritage) believes that,

Not just the gallery and the gallery system, but the university specifically is also a very colonial institution. It was one of the tools used to oppress Indigenous peoples for a long, long time, so to have this exhibition in here is problematic on one level. But also, colonialism is not a thing right, it’s not a club, it’s not a gun, it’s not a legal framework, it’s an ideology. So

when you want to change these institutions for us you have to indigenize them. When we have shows like this, we claim the space as Indigenous space; we proclaim who and what we are firmly (Loft, interviewed by J. Henry, 2013)

In this quote, curator Loft touches on the issue of claiming space no longer in the sense of aiming at ownership, but rather in the subtler sense of embedding the place within Indigenous knowledge structures (this is what he means by indigeneization as counter-ideological tool).

The fact of “being emplaced” often turns out to be a problem (either because of the unavailability of the original environment or because of the problematic nature of newer forms of concrete emplacement, e.g., in Reservations or urban areas). In consequence, curators point to the existence of alternative, psychologically more convenient forms of emplacement, especially when the connection to the concrete land is no longer perceived as indispensable for people’s physical survival, yet the claim to land remains important for the sake of gauging the effects of “centuries of colonialism” (Smith, 2009, p. 85).

4.2.1.2 The Virtual Place

In this context, at least one curator refers to a new type of place, understood as virtual, to which corresponds a new form of emplacement, namely virtual (as in the digital projects of Mohawk artist and curator Skawennati in the Aboriginal Territories in the Cyberspace network):

Basically, our goal [is] to see more aboriginal people participating in online cultures. ... We call it the cyberspace because we consider cyberspace to be virtual environments such as Second Life, online games like “Worlds of Warcraft,” console video games, the web, chat spaces, we call all of that “cyberspace” and we want to see aboriginal people’s

contribution to cyberspace. We see cyberspace as a new territory, as a new frontier. It's one of the first media that aboriginal peoples have a chance to be in on a ground floor. For example, (...) we were always in front of the camera, not so much behind it. And so, what aboriginal people looked like was very much influenced by that fact. The same with cameras. Now, here is a new medium that, you know, it seems that we'll be able to be behind the camera ... We can represent ourselves. What we would like to see is more representations of ourselves across cyberspace; we'd like to see more people at a deeper level. (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010)

In this case, the virtuality of place and emplacement becomes the support of prospective forms of knowledge, for instance of knowledge oriented not so much toward the past, but towards imaginable futures for Indigenous peoples. For instance, virtual place can become the context for imaginative, prospective inquiry into the nature of Indigenous knowledge (does it require emplacement in a land base?), its production and circulation patterns (is Indigenous knowledge communicable in virtual environments, can virtual worlds enable storytelling, the fundamental medium in which Indigenous knowledge is produced?), and so on.

Skawennati's work is part of a larger movement of Indigenous artists and curators (including Dana Claxton, Archer Pechawis, kc Adams, Stephen Foster, and Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew) who aim at literally occupying or populating the recently emerging virtual worlds with Indigenous characters and stories. They "use a range of technological and digital media to construct sites of media and perception" (Loft, 2005, p. 96). For instance, the abstract of a 1997 multimedia production by Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew and collaborators, titled, "Isi-pikiskwewin Ayapihkesisak (Speaking the Language of Spiders)" reads as follows:

A powerful and deeply thoughtful work, this collaborative production explores both idealized and demonized images of First Nations people by

examining the influence of First Nations history, spirituality, and language on marginalized, urban First Nations youth. Based on the nine domains in the Saulteaux cosmological cycle, this website explores a variety of digital technologies including computer graphics, animation, and manipulated photographs, weaving together a complex meta-text that locates spirituality and traditional knowledge within a landscape of prostitution, drugs, danger, and violence. (Maskegon-Iskew, 1997, np)

In the context of a discussion of the pioneering work of Cree filmmaker Loretta Todd (author of a land-marking text on “Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace”), curator Hopkins notes that Indigenous peoples have always been able to adapt to changing environments, and the emergence of information and communication technologies, as well as of the cyberspace, has constituted a new opportunity for Natives to make their stories and, thus, Indigenous knowledge more visible and thus, more present:

[C]hange has come due largely to time and the advent of new technologies, but ... what has remained consistent is the ability of Aboriginal artists to continually change these technologies to meet their needs. ... This is true when Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun challenged his programmers in creating the virtual reality piece “Inherent Rights, Vision Rights” and is true today in works by artists like Archer Pechawis, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Skawennati Tricia Fragnito and others. What are also exciting are initiatives like Isuma TV, which has made almost every production by Isuma and Arnavit available to whoever wants to tune in. I think with the shifts in technology there is greater accessibility and greater opportunity for networks, which means that works have more visibility than ever before.

More specifically, curator Hopkins argues that,

Cyberspace has been occupied, transformed, appropriated and reinvented by native people in ways similar to how we have always approached real space. Like video, digital technologies have become a medium for speaking and telling our stories. The Internet, for example, was recognized almost immediately for its ability to bring people together and communicate across large geographical divides. (Hopkins, 2006, p. 343)

In these two quotes, curator Hopkins emphasizes the importance of new media technologies in current Native projects of self-expression. Specifically, Native artists and

curators have employed successfully these new technologies – just like their ancestors had appropriated Western technologies for their purposes –, to generate virtual places where Indigenous voices have found venues for expressing themselves and creating knowledge.

I believe that, in spite of the impressive achievements of Indigenous digital artists and curators in the virtual world so far, there still remains the question whether the virtual place can re-place the traditional land base as the appropriate site for Indigenous knowledge production and function more than as a place for self-representation.

4.2.1.3 The Fluid Place

“Being emplaced” can turn out to be a problem in yet another sense: outsiders (Native and non-Native) may perceive the community (together with its culture and knowledge) as too parochial. This perception is addressed implicitly in the claim that Indigenous curators make about place as delocalized (or fluid): “A contemporary community is no longer a fixed, unified, or stable place; it exists in a state of flux” (McMaster, 1998, p. 20). Curator Hill Jr. claims that “everybody is in that double world now. Even if you grew up in the Reserve, even if you speak your language, everyone’s watching TV up there; no one is in a pure state. So everybody negotiates these worlds in different ways” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). In a similar vein, Mithlo prefers to view “Indigenous peoples as living in multiple places,” which one can interpret in fact as being a fluid place. She may be echoing sociologist John Urry’s relatively recent suggestion that, in our times, mobility better defines social phenomena than stability (Urry, 2000, 2007), when she contends that since nowadays there is “a great amount of

movement, ... it's impossible to talk about [the] categories of urban or reservation life [as distinct, since they] don't exist [as such]." This present-day movement is strikingly similar to and different from past mobility. On the one hand, many Indians choose to move away from the Reservations into which their ancestors were forced and live in the cities, in the hope of avoiding social stigmas and getting better education (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010). Other Indians choose to move back to the Reservations, for instance in order to reconnect to the traditions of their tribe or Nation: "[my father] was taken away from his culture and did the traditional thing of coming back after he retired and really being warmly embraced and welcomed and I was part of that process ... of taking dad back or him taking me back into our tribal community" (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012).

Also, Mithlo claims that the use of technologies of information and communication allows people to exchange information and to inhabit a fluid place, even when they are "not physically moving from one space to another" (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This entanglement of mobility and technologies and its subsequent collapsing effect on our perception of spatio-temporal stability (Dourish and Bell, 2011, p. 122) is an idea that can lend support to the notion that a fluid place is an alternative type of space Indigenous peoples can choose to inhabit.

An interesting detail related to the quote above is that curator Mithlo made this point, during the interview, in response to my drawing too sharp (she believed) a distinction between the Native people living in the cities and those living in the reservations. She implies that, given the affordances of present-day information and communication technologies, Native people are able to inhabit multiple places at the

same time, which is to say, a different, delocalized kind of place, namely one that is harder to pin down.

Hill Jr. complements Mithlo's point by suggesting why overemphasis of particularities of Indigenous experience may lead to "unfortunate" hierarchical distinctions around Indigenous identities:

Of course, people privilege their own situation in different ways, instead of allowing that there's a kind of multiplicity of ways of occupying that subject position, people want to start bracketing it off and creating territory for themselves, which is always unfortunate. But although I think it's important to draw distinctions, e.g., someone who grew up in the Reserve has a different experience, someone who speaks the language does have privilege of access to knowledge that maybe other people don't – it's good to talk about these things – but when you start creating these little hierarchies and fiefdoms (Who's more Indian?) it gets really silly and not very helpful. (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012)

In this quote, Hill Jr. notes that there are inevitable differences between Native peoples in terms of their personal situation (i.e., place of birth, growth, and living, linguistic experience, and so on), and that, in a problematic move, some Indigenous people, especially those living in the Reservations, take these differences to ground alleged hierarchies of Indian identity. In this context, Mithlo's option to do away with stark spatial distinctions (Reservation vs. urban) and to favor a concept of fluid place and, thus, fluid identity, can be read as an attempt to address the problematic constructions of identity that Hill Jr. describes. Gerald McMaster – a prominent Canadian aboriginal curator – captures the sense in which a notion of fluid place supports forms of subjectivity, and, implicitly, of resistance:

[B]etween the two (and more) communities — reserve and urban — there exists a socially ambiguous zone, a site of articulation for the contemporary (Native) artist that is frequently crossed, experienced, interrogated, and negotiated. This site is a perceptual space for various

practices, including “resistance” and the articulation of “self-identity” in the postmodern and postcolonial world. That is to say this is a zone of “inbetween-ness,” and as such it is a socially constructed and politically charged site where shifting allegiances criss-cross permeable grids or boundaries, and where identities are to be understood as “nomadic subjectivities.” (McMaster, 1995, p. 75)

In this quote, McMaster implies that fluid space is an intermediary site that is not given as such, but rather needs to be constructed in much the same way as artists build surreal worlds.

4.2.1.4 The Geo-Symbolic (or Discursive) Place

Fourth, when all previous types of places are unavailable, there is still the possibility of positioning oneself in a “place of one’s own.”¹⁷ In this case, place can be understood as geo-symbolic (or discursive). For instance, Smith (2009) considers that one of the options Indian curators have in their struggle around Indigenous knowledge is the finding, (re)claiming, and creating of a place of their own: “There is no place for Native people in the conventional discourses and will never be unless we begin to create [them] ourselves” (p. 90). Smith quotes Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham, saying: “I feel certain that I could address the entire world, if only I had a place to stand.” In these two quotes, “a place of one’s own” is a place for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity.

Moreover, as Townsend-Gault (1992) puts it, Native “artists are making a space for themselves; challenging the colonial discourse, they undermine the authority of the signs that constitute its knowledge, and reassert the authority of the signs of their own rightful knowledge” (p. 80).

¹⁷ This phrase echoes and plays on Virginia Woolf’s famous phrase “a room of one’s own” (from her 1929 essay by the same title).

All the above-mentioned positions echo theorist bell hooks' idea –which captures both the subjectivity and the knowledge dimensions – of creating a space “within [the] culture of domination” (hooks, 1990, p. 148), namely “a radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity,” but also “gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (hooks, 1990, p. 153).

The flipside of this endeavor may be that, by creating a “place of their own,” place may start looking more like a self-enclosed “corner,” as curator Hill Jr. puts it: “we have to be really careful that, as we’re asserting that [legitimate] authority [over knowledge], we’re not defining ourselves into a corner, that we’re not reducing our intellectual circumstances down to this little thing: ‘this is our bit of traditional knowledge’” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012).

A serious problem arises when Indigenous peoples are (rendered) invisible, a situation which can be understood in the sense that there is no place for them where they can represent and present themselves as they choose to. The curators identify this situation as one in which there is a “continued oppression of [the] invisibility” of Indians (Mithlo, 2008, p. ix). To use Smith’s (2009) words, Indians have been “rendered invisible, disappeared, vanished” (p. 169). This is a situation which can be described as one of ignorance (p. 6). Ignorance can be understood in both sense of the word: the Indian has been systematically ignored and, as a consequence, the majority are now ignorant of them. Invisibility can also be understood as a situation of misappropriation and distortion of Native identities, which leads to the degrading and diminishing of Native personhood (Mithlo, 2008, pp. ix, 2). Therefore, forms of subjectivity are decisive for knowing and being and becoming known.

In what follows, I look at the oppression of invisibility as an issue of unavailability for Indigenous peoples of a place of their own, within which they can (re)define their identities and from which they can make their voices heard. Based on this premise, I argue that exhibitions with Native content constitute genuine discursive places which Indigenous curators create and organize in order to address invisibility by making native identities visible.

One of the most interesting strategies Indigenous curators employ in order to build their exhibits as discursive places for Indigenous voices to be heard can be reconstructed by means of narratological devices. Specifically, this section argues that there is a narrative dimension to every exhibition and that the curators rely on a particular distribution of narrative roles described by narratological theory (character, focalizer, narrator, and author) in order to convey to the visitors a sense of the compelling presence of the Indigenous voices. A character is the agent playing a certain role in the story world. A focalizer is the character through whose point of view the reader acquires the narrative information making up the storyworld. A narrator is the textually encoded speech position from which the narrative originates. Finally, the author is the actual producer of the narrative. My focus on rhetorical-narrative devices is consonant with Isaac's (2006) statement that there is a clear sense in which NMAI "openly experiments with alternative ways of telling history and eschews Euro-American categories in favor of new rhetorical modes" (pp. 592).

Reconstructing the narrativity dimension of an exhibition presupposes, just like in the case of a text-based story, that the narrative-oriented researcher is able to identify the presence of certain structures (protagonists, in a certain spatio-temporal setting, in which

sequences of events involving these protagonists take place). The protagonists are usually actors or agents who make things happen (to themselves and/or to other actors or agents) and, thus, have concrete effects; one can regard these effects in terms of chains of events (the protagonists and their roles in the story may be described in terms of such binaries as hero vs. anti-hero; sender vs. receiver; human vs. non-human actant; operator vs. moderator, etc.). Furthermore, the researcher aims to reconstruct a basic script or story line that should unify the three types of narrative units, causally or otherwise. Viehöver (2010) suggests why the plotting activity is important in the analysis of narrative structures: it is supposed to act synthetically on these three individual units and actants, organizing “both the meanings of the lexical surface structures and the value structures.” For instance, various climate issues (including events and actors having a stake in them) can be discussed by analogy to the human body and its sicknesses, e.g., “Earth is ill.” This might constitute a plot which would allow for various ways of telling the story of Earth’s climate change and possibly draw attention and mobilize energies around ecological projects (pp. 246ff).

In order to demonstrate how narratological devices are used by Indigenous curators to reclaim a space of their own, I will refer to the analysis of the narrative structures in the exhibition titled “A Song for the Horse Nation: Horses in Native American Cultures.” Hosted by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York City (November 14, 2009 - July 7, 2011), this exhibition was designed and put together by three American Indian curators: Emil Her Many Horses, George Horse Capture and Herman Viola.

During five visits of the exhibition in Spring 2010, I captured digitally all the objects on exhibit and the texts accompanying them. I was also able to converse with the main curator of the exhibition (Emil Her Many Horses) during a guided tour which lasted about 120 minutes and elicited the curator's insights into the design and components of the exhibition.

The methodology grounded in this understanding on narrativity follows closely the categorizations presented above. The analysis of narrative structures comprises the identification of actors, relations between these actors, settings (time and space), and the way in which they are linked through the plot; and finally, the determination of the narratives typical of the discourse underlying the exhibition,

The overarching narrative in the exhibition concerns the encounter and relationship of the American Indian peoples with the horse, an animal brought over to the Americas by the European colonizers in the 15th century.

Since the exhibition focuses on the horse cultures among American Indians, the settings within which the various actors (Natives and colonists) are situated are those where the horse came from initially (La Isla Española, now the Dominican Republic, through Spaniards, and New Amsterdam, now New York, through Dutch colonists) and where it spread (especially to the Plains and Plateau communities of North America). The story covers the whole history of the American Indians since the Spanish conquistadors brought over the horse to North America, i.e., 1493 to present day.

The curators of the exhibition use the space of the exhibition to organize the horse-Native relationship on the basis of chronological and thematic criteria. These episodes are easily identifiable:

1. 1493: Columbus brings the first horses on the continent
2. A Terrifying First Vision: The Natives have a first and very terrifying encounter with the horse
3. Horses Spread Across the Land: A plate titled “The Pueblo Revolt Opens the Gate” gives information about a precise historical event (around 1680), when Native people of the Tewa tribe vanquished the colonial rulers in the area of present-day New Mexico (Fig. 18). This event marks the moment when around 1500 horses become property of Native tribes and spread on the American continent.
4. The Acquisition of Horses (the Native perspective)
5. Horse Trading Among Nations
6. Guns on Horseback: Trading for War
7. The Impact of the Horse (1680-1875):
8. Decline and Revival (1875-present)

The last two divisions are detailed thematically as follows:

The section dedicated to The Impact of the Horse (1680-1875) dwells on the impact of the horse on the everyday life of the Plain and Plateau Natives: “Horses revolutionized Native life and became an integral part of tribal cultures, honored in objects, stories, songs, and ceremonies. Horses changed methods of hunting and warfare, modes of travel, lifestyles, and standards of wealth and prestige.” All these activities are illustrated by means of displayed objects, photos, and textual commentary. They include hunting, warfare, travel (“with horses, tribes could move farther and faster”), and arts

(transforming the utilitarian horse-related equipment “into a unique level of art,” e.g., clothing, toys, and carvings).

In the section dedicated to the Decline and Revival (1875-present), the curators state that “[a]s the Indian Wars [came] to an end, American Indians struggled to settle and preserve the small territories that the U.S. government called reservations. Horses, which had become so central to our culture, were largely forbidden. The big herd were destroyed.” In this context, two important cultural phenomena developed, namely mounted parades (an “integral part of fairs, rodeos, and other events where Native people could proclaim their identity”) and Wild West Shows.

My analysis focused on the three main actors in the exhibition (the Horse, the Colonist, and the American Indian) and the narrative voices (character, focalizer, narrator, and author) which they inhabit.¹⁸

There are three types of characters: (1) the Horse; (2) the Colonist; and (3) the American Indian. These characters are followed in North-American settings across key temporal moments, and are discussed next.

The Horse as Character

From a narrative-analytic perspective, the horse itself appears to be a full-fledged collective protagonist (non-human, yet decidedly endowed with human features), namely one that is central to both this particular exhibition and the history of the American Indian in the Caribbean Islands and North America. The presence of the horse is manifest in textual, visual, and acoustic forms.

¹⁸ I relied, in my narratological analysis, on Bal (1997) and Viehöver (2010).

Textually, the horse is present as a collective character in the purely informative panels (digital and non-digital) which detail its “history” on the continent and organize the content of the exhibition into meaningful sections. It is also present in artistic objects. For instance, a prose poem by Black Elk (Oglala Lakota) entitled, “A Sky Full of Horses” (1932), portrays horses as animals descending from the heavens: “I looked around and saw millions of horses circling around me – a sky full of horses.” Also, a blue plate on a wall in the lobby displays four lines of a Teton Sioux song and a stylized galloping horse. The lyrics read as follows: “Out of the earth / I sing for them, / A Horse nation / I sing for them.”

The horse is made into a character through various visual means as well. For instance, the exhibition includes reproductions of older cave paintings (e.g., a 16th-century stylized Taíno depiction of horses in central Cuba). It also displays numerous color drawings, such as horses in a 1884 ledger book of artist O-ki-tci n’-ta’-wa (“His Fight”), or in the so-called “winter counts,” pictographs that Hunkpapa Lakota people used as mnemonic devices. The exhibition also relies on photos of horses in war, domestic activities, and Wild West Shows (from 19th century up to present day), as well as on contemporary videos (e.g., a short documentary on the Nez Perce (Nimiipuu) tribe’s Young Horseman’s project). The curators also make use of symbols (schematic representations of objects). A panel states it explicitly that “[s]ymbols help tell stories. In this exhibit, symbols help tell the stories of horses. Symbols can be drawn or they can be actual objects that stand for an idea. See if you can figure out what these symbols are and what they help tell us” (panel). Horses are also depicted in ledger books (notebooks including writing and drawings of war scenes involving horses), in the so-called “winter

counts,” or pictographs, i.e., “symbolic pictures drawn on hide or cloth,” referring to “specific historical event[s] from a given year,” on art objects, and utility objects related to the use of the horse.

The horse is present in the exhibition through sound, too. As the visitor steps into the lobby of the exhibition, that is, right from the start, she finds herself in a small, dimly lit room, enveloped by mingled sounds flowing softly and rhythmically from a loudspeaker. Listening carefully, she can slowly begin to make out clatter of hooves, neighing and snorting of horses, together with low, hypnotic male voices speaking and chanting in a Native tongue.

The Colonist as Character

The Spanish conquistador is one of the first types of characters that the exhibition visitor is able to see when she enters the exhibition space. As she faces the passageway from the main entrance, the visitor can see, on the wall on the left-hand side, a poster depicting typical Spanish conquistadors on horses and with weapons resting on their left shoulder, as well as a glass case containing the rusty iron helmet of a Spanish conquistador. He is often presented in contrast to the Native. Thus, a panel discussing the return of the horse to the American continent states that “[t]he Spanish used the horse as an instrument of warfare and control. But as soon as horses came into Indian hands, Native peoples began to weave a close relationship with the Horse Nation.” In the same vein, another panel explains what the first sight of a horse was like for many Native peoples: “A Spanish soldier on horseback seemed to be a single monstrous creature. The Spanish used this terror to advance their conquest, sometimes attaching bells to their armor to add more noise and confusion.” The way in which Natives and Spaniards relate

to horses says much about two opposite types of world views. In the Spanish world view conquest and control through force are much valued, and therefore, the horse is construed as an instrument for attaining militaristic goals; by contrast, in the Native world view, the nurturing and respect of non-human beings, as well as the cultivation of a meaningful relationship with them are much valued.

The American Indian as Character, Focalizer, Narrator, and Author

This exhibition is about the horse as much as about the various American Indian peoples. Most characters are viewed through the eyes of the authors-narrators (whose texts are presents in the informative panels and in the photographs spread throughout the exhibition). We, the visitors, see them as characters performing various daily tasks, because the curators intended us to see them in these capacities. Yet, just like in certain types of story, where the narrator is not identical to the author, we can expect to encounter characters that “focalize” the story (focalizers, i.e., the characters through whose eyes we spectators perceive the unfolding of the events). The distinction between these two types of narrative voices will emerge once the levels (textual, visual, and acoustic), at which their presence is manifest, are made explicit.

Textually, Indigenous persons (understood as characters in the exhibition narrative) are mainly present in the (digital and non-digital) informative panels positioned in various places of the exhibition with the aim to delineate its main topics. The texts on these panels tell the story of the American Indians in close relation to the story of the horse on the American continent.

Visual documents constitute the main medium in which American Indians appear as characters in the exhibition narrative. They are displayed in such a way, that they can

speak of the intentionality of their creators, yet they are intertwined with curators' textual explanations in the wall text inviting the visitors to interaction, possibly because the point of these documents might be missed by the visitor. The exhibition makes use of old photographs (end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century) from various collections (by Daniel Cadzow, L. M. H. Company, Edward H. Davis, Henry Fair, Sumner Matteson, Fred E. Miller, Horace Poolaw, Frank G. Speck, Rolf Tietgens). They usually portray Natives on horses, individually or in groups. More recent photographs are usually taken by the curators themselves (e.g., Emil Her Many Horses). For instance, the panel adjacent to the one displaying the introductory text shows a montage of color photographs of contemporary Native people in traditional dress and horses. On the same wall, there is an immense photograph of present-day Native horsemen riding toward the foreground in an Indian file.

The Natives appear not only as simple characters in the narrative running underlying the exhibition. They are also focalizers – the characters through the eyes and ears of which the visitors see and hear the stories, as well as narrators. One example is that of Dr. Joseph Medicine (Crow), a veteran from World War II living in the Apsáalooke (Crow) Reservation in southeastern Montana, who recounts his deeds involving the capturing of horses from German Nazis (please refer to Figure 2 below). Visitors can see and hear a recording of his storytelling performance on a screen in the exhibition.

Figure 2: Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, now in his 90s, tells a story of modern horse-raiding.

Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/raiding.html>



Finally, though most importantly, there are situations in which the Natives appear simultaneously as characters, narrators, focalizers, and authors. Surprising effects are achieved, in this respect, through mixes of old and recent photographs. The three curators of this exhibition chose to create a few panels by juxtaposing photographs of members of different generations of the same family. For instance, a particular montage (the left-hand side image) brings together the photo of an A'aninin warrior, named Waatyanath, (i.e., “Horse Capture” in English translation), who lived at the beginning of the 20th century (Figure 3), and that of his descendant, George P. Horse Capture, one of the three authors of the exhibition (Figure 4). The story behind this montage, as recounted to me by Emil Her Many Horses, is that George Horse Capture was doing research for this exhibition when he happened, much to his surprise and elation, upon the photo of Waatyanath (Horse Capture), his ancestor.

Figure 3: Horse Capture, ca. 1908. Photograph by Edward S. Curtis. Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois. Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/wealth.html>



Figure 4: George P. Horse Capture, 2001. Photograph by R. A. Whiteside, NMAI. Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/wealth.html>



This photographic composition is, thus, unique in the sense that it brings together two characters (specifically, members of the same family, who are separated by a century). The text which accompanies the montage tells a story about one character

through the eyes of the other character, namely George Horse Capture, who is, consequently, the focalizer. Moreover, this character-focalizer is also the narrator of the exhibition, that is, the voice guiding the visitors through the exhibition through the choice of material (including this montage) that he made. Finally, this character-focalizer-narrator is also one of the empirical authors of the exhibition as such.

I argue that this subtle organization of narrative voices in this exhibition illustrates an artistic strategy of Indigenous creation of a “place of one’s own” as a form of addressing the “continued oppression of [the] invisibility” of Indians (Mithlo, 2008, p. ix). Specifically, the empirical author George Horse Capture creates an artistic universe (the exhibition) in which he is also the narrative voice guiding the visitor, as well as one of the characters who tells the visitor a family story of seemingly unbroken continuity which involves two other characters: his ancestor and his son, George Horse Capture Jr. – the keeper of the Sacred Flat Pipe, a symbol of distinction and leadership in the A’aninin tribe.

4.2.1.5 Discussion

Section 4.2.1 has focused on the trope of place as a component of the topographic vocabulary of Indigenous knowledge which allows Indigenous curators to reconstruct dimensions of the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge, such as causalities, subject positions together with their associated responsibilities, as well as model practices. The findings are summarized below, using discursive language.

First, the curators use the trope of place to point to a particular type of causal relation: loss of land (cause) has led to loss of cultural identity and Indigenous knowledge

(consequences). In the section of the exhibition that is dedicated to the Decline and Revival (1875-present) of the horse culture, it is stated, on the wall text, that “[h]orses allowed Native nations to better defend themselves, as settlers and soldiers encroached on tribal lands,” moreover, that “[a]s the Indian Wars [came] to an end, American Indians struggled to settle and preserve the small territories that the U.S. government called reservations,” a more or less indirect reference to land loss. In addition, it is stated that “[h]orses, which had become so central to our culture, were largely forbidden. The big herd were destroyed.” This is in direct reference to the erasure of traditional forms of life of American Indians. Two patterns of explanation emerge from the exhibition and the statements of the interviewed curators: the explanation by “personalization” works by pointing to a particular social actor as a cause (and as responsible) for the perceived problem (Gerhards, 1992, p. 231): the Colonists (portrayed as one of the three major actors in this overarching narrative of colonization) have been responsible for Natives’ loss of their ancestors’ land, forced relocation, and consequently, for their loss of cultural identity and traditional knowledge (grounded as they are in the long-term occupancy of a place). The curators go even further with a pattern of explanation by “intentionalization,” which works by pointing to the causal power of a particular intention of the human actors (Gerhards, 1992, p. 231): greed and will to power of Colonists (and their descendants) are the intentional factors that have led to Natives’ loss of land, relocation, and loss of cultural identity and traditional knowledge.

Second, the trope of place allows curators to establish two types of subject positioning and responsibility: the Natives are portrayed as responsible users of the land base (including such animals as the horse), whereas the Colonists (and their descendants)

are regarded as irresponsible abusers of their part of the relationship to the land (and other forms of life). Playing on this not unproblematic dichotomy, the curators imply that Natives are in fact the legitimate users of the land because they are legitimate owners and responsible users of the land. As a panel discussing the return of the horse to the American continent puts it, “[t]he Spanish used the horse as an instrument of warfare and control. But as soon as horses came into Indian hands, Native peoples began to weave a close relationship with the Horse Nation.” Clearly, this is a problematic dichotomy, as Native tribes also used horses to fight other Natives – a form of conquest and control not unlike that displayed by the European colonists. Clearly, Natives also used horses to fight other Natives – a fact which this distinction makes less visible.

Third, the trope of place allows curators to articulate “model practices” to address the loss of Indigenous knowledge deriving from the massive loss of land. Some curators (Hopkins, Loft, and Skawennati) emphasize the virtual place as a new environment through which Natives can experiment with new forms of Indigenous subjectivities and knowledge. Other curators (such as Hill Jr., McMaster, and Mithlo) point to the importance of fluid place as an appropriate environment for the formation of delocalized forms of Indigenous subjectivity. Finally, other curators (such as Smith, Townsend-Gault, as well as Her Many Horses in the exhibition discussed above) devote their attention to what this dissertation has called “geo-symbolic (or discursive) place” – a place that does not exist but needs to be created, mainly by means of artistic and curatorial practices, so that Native presence and Indigenous knowledge can become visible. The curators view the designing and creating of exhibitions (model practice) as a means to create that discursive place for Natives (dramatizing pattern).

4.2.2 Boundaries

Beside place, boundary is another important topographic notion that organizes the statements of the Indigenous curators on knowledge.¹⁹ According to cognitive sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, the notion of boundary refers to the “mental fence” with which we “surround” an object to “separate it from everything else.” If we perceive things at all (social, but also material objects), it is because boundaries (social constructions) are already at work, “help[ing] us separate one entity from another” (Zerubavel, 1991, p. 12). We learn to perceive these distinctions as “natural” (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 426-7). Four of the most important distinctions (and their corresponding boundaries) that the Indigenous curators mention in their interviews and scholarly works are the following: nature vs. culture, Us vs. Them, “civilized” vs. “primitive,” as well as local (or parochial) vs. global. Boundary lines “play a critical role in the construction of social reality, since only with them do meaningful social entities (families, social classes, nations) emerge out of the flux of human existence” (Zerubavel, 1991, p. 12). Zerubavel (1996) also suggests that people make sense of their experience through processes of mental clustering in terms of similarities and differences. “Lumping” is the mental process of “grouping ‘similar’ things together in a single mental cluster.” In contrast, “splitting” refers to the mental process of “perceiving ‘different’ clusters as separate from one another” (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 421).

In what follows, the four distinctions (and their corresponding boundaries) mentioned above are discussed. They emerged as part of the coding process. They are

¹⁹The scholarly literature on symbolic boundaries and boundary work is growing. Lamont and Molnar (2002) and Pachucki, Pendergrass, & Lamont (2007) are recent useful overviews of the sociological debates around boundaries.

organized by the broader category “Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (spatial) presence.” In other words, the curators point to and critically discuss types of boundaries (and boundary-making processes) which contribute to keeping Indigenous peoples, culture, and knowledge in a state of spatial “invisibility.” The curators point to the effects of these boundaries being active in the society and suggest how they may be undermined in the process of recovery of injured knowledge. This broader category itself is organized under the even broader category “Threats to Indigenous knowledge and proposed solutions” which describes an important part of the phenomenal structure of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge.

4.2.2.1 Nature vs. Culture

A distinction which the science discourse encourages is that between nature and culture (see Section 3.2). This distinction has been problematized, among others, by French anthropologist Philippe Descola in his discussions of Amazonian “native ecology” (e.g., Descola, 1994), as well as by French sociologist Bruno Latour in his discussion of modernity (e.g., Latour, 1993). Curator Hill Jr. invokes Latour as a reference when he points to the powerful nature/culture dichotomy inherent in the very use of English language, a dichotomy which, according to Hill Jr., has negative consequences on the Indigenous peoples’ self-understanding:

It’s almost impossible to speak English without invoking those dichotomies of nature and culture. ... if we, Indigenous peoples, are trying to talk about our relation to the land, and we’re using English to do it, and that’s all I have to use, then we’re stuck constantly creating these dichotomies functioning, and we’re in that dichotomy: we’re the nature to European culture and the history of our representation. (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012)

More concretely, Hill Jr. points to the fact that maintaining this strong opposition and associating the Natives with nature has harmful effects on the representations and self-representations of Natives: “no one has created a model for talking about what it means to be an Indigenous person in an urban space. The romantic myths don’t give you the space to do that, because we’re supposed to be the children of nature, in touch with all that” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). In Zerubavel’s words, nature and culture are perceived as naming two split domains of things, separated from one another by allegedly real boundaries. Romantic myths that are active in the society portray American Indians as belonging to Nature’s domain of things, and, thus, split from Culture or from Science and Modernity.

It is in response to this kind of reductionism that we can interpret curator Mithlo’s preference to use of the notion of identity as “simultaneously mobile, contemporary, and tribal” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 27) to refer to identities of present-day American Indians. In Zerubavel’s words, Mithlo problematizes and dissolves the entrenched divide between Nature and Culture by positing, through a process of “lumping,” an Indigenous identity described as a conjunction of attributes from both domains (“mobile” and “contemporary” obviously describe the modern human being, whereas “tribal” is associated with Nature).

4.2.2.2 Us vs. Them: “Essence” and “Authenticity”

Historians (such as Harvard Professor Jill Lepore) point out how New England puritans (e.g., Reverends William Hubbard and Increase Mather) adopted the “language of cruelty and savagery” in their letters, diaries, and (war) chronicles to define their

“sense of themselves”(“what it meant to be ‘English’”) against the Indian Others, whom they described as “Brutish, Savage, Barbarous” (Lepore, 1998, p. xiii-xiv, xviii; see also Canup, 1990). Known under the label “Othering,” this is one the most frequent themes in philosophy and postcolonial literary theory (see, for instance, Said, 1979). It refers to the various types of boundaries drawn, through a process of “splitting” (Zerubavel, 1996), between a (group of) speaker(s) identified as “us” and a target group identified as “them” (or “others”). This dichotomy, in which the Indigenous peoples are regarded as occupying the position of the other(s), is produced and reinforced with particular strength within the science discourse circulated in Academia (especially in anthropology). For instance, anthropologist Johannes Fabian devotes an entire book to the specific ways in which anthropology as a discipline is built around a construction of “its own object [as] the savage, the primitive, the Other” (Fabian, 1983, p. 1). This kind of discourse centers on the scenario of a researcher bringing the theoretical and methodological apparatus of his/her scientific discipline to examine a phenomenon constituted as an object of science. This situation in which the scientist is constructing a voiceless “Other” is captured well by curator Young Man: “The only people that had anything to do with Indians were studying them, the anthropologists, and giving the world their general idea of who Indian people were. We never had a chance to talk, to tell them who we were” (Young Man, interview by Abbott, nd).

Linguistically, the process of Othering has involved the systematic use of a specific vocabulary meant to consolidate the view of the Native as “strange and primitive” (Smith, 2009, p. 17). Smith’s (2009) statement is part of a vaster discussion about the importance of language, “one of the crucial ways of distinguishing between

men and beasts” (Greenblatt, 1976, p. 23), and of the availability of media for inscribing narratives in the shaping of identity and of the “official past.”

Our times present us with other, yet not less demeaning forms of “Othering” Indigenous peoples; they are still perceived as “the Others” (better, “the Others inside”). This attitude takes two forms along the dimension of “All Indians are alike.”

4.2.2.2.1 “All Indians Are Alike” – the One-Dimensional Indian

First, as anthropologist and curator James D. Nason (Comanche) summarized in a brisk statement, one gets the sense, if one looks at media representations, that Indigenous peoples are a homogenous group: “All Indians are alike” (Nason, 2000, p. 39). Or, as artist and curator Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) claimed, “The number one misconception is that all Native people are Plains Indians and dress the same way and have the same value systems” (Spang, interviewed by Jurich, 2011). To use Zerubavel’s words, one can say that, through a process of “lumping” (together), Indians are viewed as similar. The process of homogenization is usually based on an overemphasis of an isolated dimension of group identity (such as race or ethnicity) or on a stereotyped view of their forms of life. The first problem is a straightforward case of racism (Mithlo, 2008, pp. ix, 16, 31). For instance, curator L’Hirondelle confesses, in this respect, that once she travels away from such Canadian metropolitan areas as Toronto or Ottawa, she is “made aware” that she has a Native background “from the sheer fact that the way that some people in a society react to [her].” She suggests that this treatment is similar to the situation in which one is “going into a store and not getting service, or just getting treated ... differently” (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012).

The other problem is that racism comes in more disguised forms as well, for instance, in those stereotyping approaches which, according to the curators, exoticize or romanticize native cultures and peoples (Mithlo, 2008, pp. 21, 67; Smith, 2009, pp. 17-18). When using the term “stereotype,” Mithlo (2008) refers to those “patterned,” “essentialized” images that express “projections” of a group unto another group; these are projections which come often, though not always, in the form of negative judgments (p. 20). According to Smith (2009), there is an insidious form of racism which,

[O]ffers rewards [to the Indians] for functioning within the romantic constructions, and severe penalties for operating outside them. Indians are okay, as long as they are “traditional” in a nonthreatening (peaceful) way, as long as they meet non-Indian expectations about Indian religious and political beliefs. ... Indians are okay as long as we don’t change too much. Yes, we can fly planes and listen to hip-hop, but we must do these things in moderation and always in a true Indian way. (p. 91)

In this quote, curator Smith points to a social mechanism by means of which American Indians are stereotyped positively (and, thus, encouraged to conform to these stereotypes). In this case, as in the case of straightforward racism, a homogenizing view is projected unto American Indians; in consequence, it is easy for the non-Indigenous majority to perceive them as “the Others.” Whether positive or negative, the stereotyping is a guarantee that the “Others” remain invisible.

4.2.2.2.2 “All Indians Are Alike” – The Essentialized Indian

Second, according to the Indigenous curators, not only are Indians misrepresented as one-dimensional, but they are also viewed as having an “essence.” That is, not only are they regarded through one single dimension, but often this dimension is taken to be fixed, unchangeable, thus defining something like an alleged “nature” of Indigeneity and

encouraging a discourse of “authenticity” (which asks the question “What is authentic Indian?”) In his contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition titled “Visions of Power: Contemporary Art by First Nations, Inuit and Japanese Canadians” (an exhibition presented by The Earth Spirit Festival at Harbourfront, Toronto between June 28 and July 29, 1991), anthropology scholar, artist, and curator Alfred Young Man (Cree) refers to this phenomenon as “neonativism.” Illustrated by both Native and non-Natives, he sees this phenomenon as “depend[ent] on nostalgia, ... very naive, and ... cater[ing] to the dominant concept of what Natives should be” (Young Man, 1991, np).

In another interview, Young Man asks rhetorically: “Were Indian people who lived at Columbus’ time more Indian than the Indians of the generation before me?” And answers that,

This idea that you’re more Indian than someone else just doesn’t make any sense to me at all. We’re all products of our own time. My children after me will be Indians in their own time in the way they find themselves. We’re undergoing change all the time. The idea that there’s an ethnographic-present Indian out there is a myth. There never has been and the people who are looking for one are looking for pie in the sky. I see Native people all the time and they never seem to fit those stereotypes at all, at least not from my point of view. I don’t believe in the idea that I should somehow be the same type of Indian as, say, Sitting Bull in order to be an Indian. That’s not the issue. Sitting Bull was a great man in his time and that time is gone now. The buffalo were there then but they’re not here anymore. We’re finding and recreating our world the way we want it to be. That’s what we’re here for and that’s what I’m here for. ... I’m not in that business of finding out who the authentic Indian is. It is no concern. ... We get hooked onto a romantic image of a culture that we identify with and then when we run across real people from that culture who are in a different space in a different time, doing differing things, then we feel insulted. We have to look for a reason. We’re not satisfied that things change. Time moves on. We need to get on with life. We can’t spend our whole life looking for imaginary Indians who aren’t there anymore. (Young Man, interview by Abbott, nd)

Artist and curator Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) refers to this form of stereotyping as a “misconception ... centered around the idea of authenticity” and contends that,

The need to define a group or a person or an object as authentic is really a problematic thing for us because we have never defined ourselves in those terms. Even our name, Cheyenne, is not our name but a name assigned to us. Cheyenne is really an adaptation of a Lakota phrase — when they described us to the white man, the white man turned it into “Cheyenne.” (Spang, interviewed by Jurich, 2011)

Many curators argue that there is an implicit and subtle form of racism running through the essentialist views of the Natives (Mithlo, 2008, p. 24; Smith, 2009, pp. 35-36, 70, 73). Essence is more often than not a fiction, an invention, yet it may also refer to some feature that happened to define a community at some point. For instance, Smith (2009) asks:

Are Indian people allowed to change? Are we allowed to invent completely new ways of being Indian that have no connection to previous ways we have lived? Authenticity for Indians is a brutal measuring device that says we are only Indian as long as we are authentic. Part of the measurement is about percentage of Indian blood. The more, the better. Fluency in one’s Indian language is always a high card. Spiritual practices, living in one’s ancestral homeland, attending pow-wows, are all necessary to ace the authenticity test. Yet many of us believe taking the authenticity tests is like drinking the colonizer’s Kool-Aid – a practice designed to strengthen our commitment to the our own internally warped minds. In this way, we become our own prison guards. (p. 91)

Faced with this threat of essentialism, curators often suggest, in guise of a possible response, the act of embracing change. This idea emerges indirectly from the quote above, where “invent[ing] completely new ways of being Indian” is connoted positively. The idea also emerges directly from another statement by the same curator, Paul Chaat Smith, which bears a flavor of Romantic revisionism: “All Indians alive today

are here because our ancestors used intelligence, skill, planning, strategy and sacrifice. They didn't fear change; they embraced it. They survived because they fought for change on our terms" (Smith, 2009, p. 110).

Yet essence can also be a pure invention. Applying this fictive identity to a target group amounts to committing a form of symbolic injustice, even when the alleged "essence" is connoted favorably:

[S]ome will prefer white inventions of Indians preferable to the real thing. There will always be a market for both nostalgia and fantasy. The cottage industry of Native Americana, formerly the province of hippies and enterprising opportunists, has become mainstream and professional. Today in the average chain bookstore in the United States, most of the Indian titles are in the New Age section. (...) The myth-making machinery that in earlier days made us to be primitive and simple now says we are spiritually advanced and environmentally perfect. Anything, it seems, but fully human. Over time these cartoon images have never worked to our advantage, and even though much in the new versions is flattering, I can't see that in the long run such perspectives will help us at all. (Smith, 2009, p. 23)

In this quote, curator Paul Chaat Smith captures the sense in which the dichotomy Us vs. Them grounds a process of reductionist representation, by means of which the Other is encountered not as the real Other ("the real thing"), but as an abstract Other: either in a negative (as the "primitive and simple" Native) or in a flatteringly positive (as "spiritually advanced and environmentally perfect" native) form. According to Smith (2009), this particular way in which Indians have been categorized "has encompassed and permitted a range of historical responses from destruction to idealization" of Indians (p. 18). Namely, destruction relied on the negative forms of Othering, whereas idealization has been based on the positive types of Othering.

A new aesthetic is anticipated as a possible solution to these problems: “It is my own thesis that an Indigenous aesthetic has yet to be articulated in a manner that may be mobilized to counter harmful negative stereotypes” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 5). This aesthetic may be grounded in a critical stance, “in a more proactive frame of reference” that would focus less on “what others think (getting in and being witnessed by others as in a ceremony) and more [on] what we [Indigenous peoples] think of ourselves in relationship with others” (Mithlo, 2006, p. 88).

This aesthetic strategy of reversing narrative roles is crucial. I argue that such new aesthetic is manifest in such an exhibition as “Songs for the Horse Nation.” This exhibition reverses a dichotomy of Us vs. Them by allowing Native voices to inhabit, through rhetoric-narrative devices, the active position of the “Us” subject position. This reversal occurred in many exhibitions designed by Indigenous curators and their paratextual²⁰ features mark it eloquently. For instance, three permanent exhibitions at NMAI are titled “Our Universes,” “Our Peoples,” and “Our Lives.” Also, a Canadian virtual exhibition is titled suggestively “Our Voices, Our Stories: First Nations, Métis and

²⁰ Genette (1997) proposes a distinction between text and paratext to shed light upon the complex mediations that exist between authors, publishers, and audiences of literary works. While the textual aspect of a literary work is “a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance” (e.g., the main body of a poem, consisting of all its lines in order), the paratext represents a “threshold” (*seuil*) which mediates the access of generations of readers to the text. It consists of such elements as format, cover, name of the author, title, internal titles, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, introductions, notes, as well as public and private epitext (i.e., public and private paratextual elements that circulate freely in the social space, potentially attachable to the text). Genette further suggests that the paratext constitutes a “zone of transaction” between texts (and their producers) on the one hand, and the readers on the other hand, i.e., “a privileged place of a pragmatics and strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)” (p. 2). In a short sentence at the end of his book, Genette hints at the possibility that the notion of paratext may be extendable to other areas of cultural production, including museum exhibitions. In these cases, audiences should be able to identify “the opportunities for authorial commentary” offered by exhibition catalogues (p. 407).

Inuit Stories.” To give more detailed examples: the paratext of the exhibition titled “A Song for the Horse Nation” reveals that the narrative voices speaking to the visitor through the display of museum artifacts belong to Native selves. In other words, the visitor is faced with Native selves whose presence is no longer mediated through ethnocentric representations produced by non-Native observers (i.e., the traditional curator who presents Native Americans and their ways of life as curiosities to be gazed upon and marveled at in museums). Rather, the Native selves informing this exhibition are actively relating as a “We” to the “Other” (i.e., non-Native visitors), and possibly to fellow Natives, in their own language. A few concrete details can prove this claim.

Paratextual elements displayed at the entrance make the visitor aware that the exhibition has been created by Native curators: the plate listing the exhibition and donor credits placed on the right-hand side wall of the small lobby preceding the exhibition (see image below), as well as the exhibition brochures made available for pick up, attest that the creators of the exhibition are three Native curators and scholars: Emil Her Many Horses (of the Oglala Lakota tribe), George Horse Capture (of the A’aninin tribe), and Herman Viola (of the Crow tribe). In addition, as one steps into the lobby, one finds oneself in a small dimly lit room, enveloped by mingled sounds flowing softly and rhythmically from a loudspeaker. Listening carefully, one slowly begins to make out the clatter of hooves, neighing and snorting of horses, and low, hypnotic male voices speaking and chanting in a Native tongue. The Native selves literally speak directly to the visitor and their voices reach her mingled with the sounds of horses, already suggesting what will be made clear by the text printed on the introductory panel: from Natives’ point of view, people and horses are fellow beings and lead closely intertwined lives. What is

more, this auditory form of presentation seems aimed at disrupting the ethnocentric gaze, which has traditionally looked at the Native “Other” in a scientifically detached and objectifying manner. The visitor is prompted to lend her ear to what the Native has to say, thereby shifting her customary mode of perception, in order that a process of understanding may ensue.

Proceeding to the panel beyond the glass door, one reads the introductory text and becomes increasingly aware of the fact that the exhibition to follow presents aspects of Native cultures on their own terms. The brief story of the relationship of Native peoples and horses is told from the point of view of Natives: it takes the viewer from the moment of the Natives’ encounter with the horse, through the 1800s, to the present age and reinforces what had only been hinted at earlier, in the lobby preceding the exhibition: for Indigenous peoples, the horse is a companion and plays a vital role in the cultural and spiritual lives of some of their communities. We are told that “Native peoples have traditionally regarded the animals in our lives as fellow creatures.” Interestingly, by referring to “our lives,” the curators seem to indicate that the voice telling this opening story, as well as serving as a guide through the exhibition as a whole, belongs to Native selves. Nevertheless, these selves are not cut off from the rest of humanity. For instance, the communion of Natives and horses is described as “one of the great sagas of human contact with the animal world.” Also, a closer reading of the above-mentioned sentence about “the animals in our lives” reveals a certain semantic ambiguity: while it points to the Native worldview, it also opens up the way for non-Native persons to identify with this perspective. Thus, the Native selves are constructed as distinctive and integrated with

the rest of humanity, at the same time. This understanding of Native selves creates a firm basis for a fruitful and non-oppressive conversation between Natives and non-Natives.

Having been exposed to the introductory paratext, the visitor has likely developed a sense that the voice speaking to her through the objects on display belongs to Native selves, who have claimed a space of their own. Interestingly, the majority of the artifacts, drawings, photographs, and texts in the exhibition has been produced by Natives or are commented upon from a Native perspective. Through this choice of visual material and the notes attached to it, the curators aim at driving home the powerful point that everything is seen through a Native lens. For instance, the white European conquistadors appear as characters in Native cave drawings and as terrifying, monstrous half-animal, half-human creatures in early oral narratives of the Taíno tribe. Also, an interactive device allowing visitors to press a few white buttons to hear the word “horse” in various Native languages raises awareness of the fact that the voices speaking and naming beings in the world are Native.

4.2.2.3 “Civilized” vs. “Primitive” (“Tribal”)

One of the strongest distinctions to which the curators allude in their interviews and works is the “Civilized vs. “Primitive” one. As curator Young Man eloquently puts it,

[T]here are tourists who flood out here by the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions every year from back east and from all over the world. One of the things they want to see is the savage Indian. That's one of their favorite stereotypes. They come to the reservations and crowd around with their cameras and their camcorders and generally make nuisances of themselves because they want to take back to where they're from pictures of savage Indians or primitive Indians that reflect their understanding of Native people. (Young Man, interview by L. Abbott, nd)

This is a distinction which, based on the science discourse, maps perfectly onto the above mentioned Us vs. Them distinction by contrasting groups of people based on how they are placed on a scale of historical progress ranging from a stage of alleged primitivism to a stage of civilization:

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim ... some of their theory was based in a misconception of Native people, because they classified people based on certain characteristics and that's the way they marked origins of society, they would use American Indians for this, right? So it was like always assuming that Indigenous, pre-Christian Europeans are going to be like American Indians and so let's just use American Indians as primitive men for everybody. (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

As this quote already suggests, the origin of the distinction primitive (or heathen) vs. civilized (or believer) – at least as it has been used to refer to Indians of North America – is found in the religious discourse. For instance, writing his account of what has become known as “King Philip’s War” of 1675, Reverend Hubbard deplores the “barbarous Cruelty” of the Indians, “these Heathen” (quoted by Lepore, 1998, p. 4).²¹

As in the case of the other dichotomies discussed above, language (understood widely as a system of signifying) plays a paramount role in supporting this distinction between “civilized” and “primitive” as well. Referring to Westerns, Smith (2009) contends that they “set up a language that extends the metaphor of the frontier into paired

²¹ This is certainly an overstatement, since, at least at that time, many Indians were Christians themselves. This distinction becomes part of the emerging science discourse at the end of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century, when natural historians and proto-anthropologists, such as William Bartram (1791), John Adair (1775), and Benjamin Hawkins (1848), extol the benefits of and the need for “civilizing” the Indians. For instance, Adair’s history book from 1775 contains even in its title the phrase “the benefits of colonizing Georgiana, and civilizing the Indians — and the way to make all the colonies more valuable to the mother country.” Also, Bartram’s (1791) travel book displays towards the Indigenous cultures and peoples the curiosity of an ethnographer and, while cautious not to reproduce stereotypes, he still frames his observations in terms of degrees of civilization; thus, referring to Muscogee people, he notices that they “appear evidently to have made greater advances towards the refinements of true civilization” (p. 490).

opposites of, for example the wilderness versus civilization, the individual versus community, savagery versus humanity” (Smith, 2009, p. 49).

Smith (2010) offers the example of this dichotomy from the field notes of Scudder Mekeel, an anthropologist who, in Pine Ridge in 1930, was drawing a distinction among:

[T]hree main classes of Indians: 1. Christian and trying to be acculturated. 2. Pagan and living as near as possible in old way, and perhaps succeeding spiritually to some extent. 3. The in-betweens—loafers, criminals, delinquents. The first two are fine individuals—the third (by far the majority) are all bums. (Scudder Mekeel, as quoted in Smith, 2010, np)

In an ironic twist aimed at rendering obsolete the distinction between Civilized vs. Primitive, curator Smith suggests that the most interesting category for him is Indians of the third type, whereas the first two types are doomed, because they submitted to a “boring and impossible” acculturation program:

The question is, why do most Indians choose to be class threes? I think because we understand that loafing is the most effective way to annoy the largest number of people ... class three is neither past nor future, Christian or pagan. It’s just a kind of Indigenous *Lumpenproletariat* that says little to the world, except, “What are you looking at?” ... Reluctance to get with the program, or any program for that matter. Yes, we’re talking about the artists of the Red Nation. (Smith, 2010, np; author’s italics)

Artist and curator Betsy Spang (Northern Cheyenne) too claims that the assumption of “primitivism” is still powerful in the public perception of Native Americans: “we’re still kind of a mystery to people. There’s an image of either anger or mysticism, and the notion that our people were and are primitive” (Spang, interviewed by Julich, 2011).

A version of the Civilized vs. Primitive dichotomy concerns the various uses of the notion “Indian” as a qualifier for art, writing, etc. For instance, Houle claims that, “as

a practicing and exhibiting artist” he is “enraged and saddened” by the fact that his artistic work is ethnicized, in the sense of being “curated simply as material culture,” instead of being treated “as a legitimate contemporary work of art” (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, np). In this quote, Houle implies that this dichotomy governs the decisions of non-indigenous curatorial practice in regard to what counts as a piece of genuine artistry today: art produced by indigenous peoples does not seem to count as art tout court (interesting exclusively for aesthetic reasons), but rather as a piece of material culture (interesting as anthropological evidence).

4.2.2.4 Local/Parochial vs. Global

The distinction between the local and the global, which is frequent in the postcolonial theory and globalization theory literature, acquires new meanings in the context of the Indigenous curators’ statements about Indigenous peoples and cultures. More specifically, they point to an interesting tension between the local and the global within which Indigenous peoples are caught. On one hand, it is the local that is the more problematic term, for instance when the curators perceive that tribalism may be detrimental: tribalism “is a perverted, embattled form of community” (Lippard, 1990, p. 153). The implication is that Indigenous peoples should avoid the parochialism of the attitude which emphasizes local ties and values.

The solution seems to be instead the advocacy of pan-Indianism as a version of strategic essentialism useful to Indians in the process of locating their selves, of communicating with one another and with non-Indians, and of engaging in political action:

I actively embrace the idea of the “every Indian” as a pantribal construct, as well as the reference “non-Indian.” As problematic as a generic Indian construct has been in reference to negative stereotyping, I suggest that the essentialism inherent in pantribal causes is also inevitable, given centuries of active colonial practices via various legislative acts (the General Allotment Act of 1887, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, 1948-1979). Since contact with Native North American groups, the US government has enacted specific policies that have resulted in common legacies ... Like other identity constructs, the category of pan-Indianism exists and is employed variously as a means of locating self, a communicative device, and a political tool. (Mithlo, 2008, p. 24)

On the other hand, it is precisely the opposite notion, i.e., the global, that is perceived as the more problematic. For instance, anthropologist Anne Terry Sawyier Straus and community activist Debra Valentine (Oneida/Menominee) contend that “Pan-Indianism, an artificial foil invented to facilitate federal policy, was seen gradually and insidiously to become accepted by Indian people as their own identity” (Straus and Valentino, 2001, pp. 85-6). In the late 1970s, “both Indians and progressive non-Indians protested the apparent loss of Native heritage inherent in a generalized Indian identity construct” (Mithlo, 2009, p. 66).

A possible solution out of this dichotomy is the strategy of cultivating a sensibility of American Indianness as “simultaneously mobile, contemporary, and tribal” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 27). This would certainly go along the interest – to which many curators refer – in participating in a “global dialogue” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012).

In conclusion, there is a sense that curators act critically at the boundaries of the established disciplines, by dissolving them (as curator Mithlo proposes, in the case of the Nature vs. Culture divide, with her notion of fluid identity); by reversing them (as in Mithlo’s proposed strategy of reallocation of narrative roles –a strategy that, we argued,

is illustrated by the exhibition “A Song for the Horse Nation”); by reappraising, in an ironic twist, the deprecated term (as in curator Smith’s inventive reinterpretation of “Primitive” within the “Civilized” vs. “Primitive” dichotomy); or by strategically operating crossing-overs (as in curator Mithlo’s proposal of cultivating a local-global identity).

4.2.2.5. Conclusion to Boundaries

The trope of boundary as part of the topographic vocabulary of Indigenous knowledge allows Indigenous curators to point to a particular type of causal relation: the circulation of several dichotomies unfavorable to Natives has led to erasure of Native presence. Thus, Native peoples are regarded by non-Natives as belonging to Nature (rather than Culture), as homogenous, as primitive, and as parochial. When it comes to the attribution of responsibilities, the curators point to several factors: the language of the Colonist (and its in-built categories), the science discourse (and its propensity to construct the Other as an object), public opinion (reinforced by the media), and prejudices (racism, exoticism). Since boundaries are constructed, the dichotomies they generate are also constructed. In consequence, the Indigenous curators propose model practices which problematize and reshape these boundaries: the articulation of Indigenous identities that dissolve the Nature/Culture and Local/Global divides by cultivation of a strategic Pan-Indian stance; the design and creation of exhibitions grounded in a new aesthetic, for instance one which reverses the traditional subject positions/narrative roles (Natives as characters vs. non-Natives as focalizers, narrators, and authors); and the ironic valorization of the deprecated term of the dominant dichotomies.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the idea that the reconstruction of a discourse around Indigenous knowledge involves the articulation of the phenomenal structure of this phenomenon. In writing this chapter, I relied on three sources of data – interviews with Indigenous curators, an exhibition with Indigenous content, and scholarly writings – as three ways of reconstructing the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge.

Beside features that define this type of knowledge, there are also vocabularies within which Indigenous curators make sense of the various causalities, responsibilities, threats, and possible solutions and needs for action in regard to Indigenous knowledge. Specifically, the chapter presented a topography of Indigenous knowledge and shows various understandings of two key tropes, namely place and boundary. Thus, places can be concrete, virtual, fluid, and geo-symbolic (or discursive). Also, boundaries define dichotomies that beset Native peoples, cultures, and knowledge, this chapter discusses, in more or less detail, the following: nature vs. culture; us vs. them (others); less vs. more; civilized vs. primitive (tribal); and local (parochial) vs. global. Each of these understandings is illustrated with examples from the statements or the curatorial works of the curators.

This chapter suggested that a central component of the efforts of Indigenous curators is the attempt to address the “injured” status of Indigenous knowledge. If one translates this status in terms of invisibility, one can make the claim that the efforts of Indigenous curators are oriented towards making a strong case for the “compelling presence” of Indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, presence can be understood as a

spatial or as a temporal notion. In consequence, a topography and a chronography of this type of knowledge constitute adequate vocabularies within which curators make sense of the threats and damages inflicted upon Indigenous knowledge, as well as of the possible solutions to these problems.

CHAPTER 5: VOCABULARIES OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE (II): A CHRONOGRAPHY OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

5.1 Introduction

“The compelling presence,” in addition to the spatial (topographic) sense analyzed in CHAPTER 4, can also assume a temporal (chronographic) sense, i.e., that something (a community, culture, knowledge, etc.) may be present in the sense of being “in the present,” in the “right now,” and not only in a place. To think about Indigenous knowledge as a presence in the temporal present amounts to thinking about this phenomenon in terms of possible combinations between various constructions of the three basic temporal axes (i.e., the past, the present, and the future). Michel de Certeau proposed a similar approach, when he emphasized the different ways in which time (i.e., the relationships between past, present, and future) is understood in historiography and psychoanalysis:

Psychoanalysis recognises the past in the present; historiography places them one beside the other. Psychoanalysis treats the relation as one of imbrication (one in the place of the other), of repetition (one reproduces the other in another form), of the equivocal and of the *quiproquo* (What “takes the place” of what? Everywhere, there are games of masking, reversal, and ambiguity). Historiography conceives the relation as one of succession (one after the other), correlation (greater or lesser proximities), cause and effect (one follows from the other), and disjunction (either one or the other), but not both at the same time. (de Certeau, 1986, p. 4; author’s italics)

Just like historiography in de Certeau’s text, the science discourse (which is the discourse underlying historiography) encourages a view of the flow of time (that is, of how people understand time in their everyday life) in terms of three discrete components: past, present, and future. These are assumed to be moments of time separated from one

another in such a way that the present cannot exist unless the past is left behind, and the future becomes reality by negating the present. This assumption about the distribution of the three temporal stages enables the production and circulation of stereotypes about Indian peoples, cultures, and knowledge as belonging to the past and, necessarily, inexistent in the present. As a result of the coding of the curators' statements three versions of this stereotype emerged as broader categories. They can be formulated as three related narratives: the Discontinuity, the Irrelevance, and the Marginality. Together, they range under the even broader category which I labeled "Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (temporal) presence." In other words, the curators point to and critically discuss types of narratives which contribute to keeping Indigenous peoples, culture, and knowledge in a state of temporal "invisibility." The curators point to the effects of these narratives being active in the society and suggest how they may be undermined. This broader category itself is ranged – together with the category labeled, "Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (temporal) presence," which we discussed in the previous chapter – under the even broader category labeled, "Threats to Indigenous knowledge and proposed solutions." That category describes an important part of the phenomenal structure of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge, namely the causal relations in which Indigenous curators perceive Indigenous knowledge to be embedded.

5.2 The Discontinuity Narrative

The first and most widespread stereotype about Indigenous peoples and cultures (knowledge included) is embedded in what I call "the Discontinuity narrative."

According to this story, as summarized by Comanche anthropologist and curator James D. Nason, “real” Indian peoples and cultures existed only in the past, with no trace left in the present whatsoever: “there are no more Indians [today] – they all died” (Nason, 2000, pp. 38-9). Indian culture itself is viewed as “a relic of the past” only, in such a way that “the reality of a continuing Indian presence” is negated consistently (Nason, 2000, p. 37).

As one curator puts it explicitly,

Some of the most prevalent messages are that Native people are gone – at least the “real” or “pure” ones. The historic materials reflect the uncontaminated Native culture that was “replaced” by the dominant, mainstream American one. Many venues portray this in a chronological trajectory where the Indians are only at the beginning of the story – literally placed at the entry of the exhibit spaces, but left behind in every way. (Dartt-Newton, interviewed by E. Janiak, 2012)

Hopkins et al. (2011) point out, in their introduction to the exhibition “Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years,” that both the “academic disciplines most associated with the study of Aboriginal arts and culture [i.e.,] art history and anthropology” and “[p]opular culture and media” have largely succeeded in freezing us in the past. Popular culture and media tend to reinforce this notion of Indigenous peoples as relics of the past (p. 13).

From a chronographical point of view, this narrative is built around the seemingly sound argument that, since the past is isolated from both the present and the future, and since Indians belong to the past, there is no way in which they may be living in the present, let alone claim a presence for themselves in the future. What belongs to the past stays in the past.

5.2.1 Critique of Fake Images of the Native Past

One form in which the Indigenous curators have chosen to respond to the discontinuity narrative has been to critically emphasize the fact that the specific image of the past often employed to describe the times when Indians were alive is pure invention, that is, “a utopian past that never was” (Smith, 2009, p. 101). In this respect, it follows that a community that accepts, more or less explicitly, this fake image of its past as true is a community living in a state of amnesia. In consequence, one strategy to address this state of amnesia is, as expected, to cultivate memory, for instance, to actively remember the past. This amounts to the act of emphasizing,

[T]he biggest story never told: the rise and fall and rise of the Americas, the ways America changed Europe, Africa and Asia, and how Europe changed America, a story featuring Indians as actors on the world stage and not merely victims. It is a story of changing worlds and how people managed that change in often, surprising, ingenious ways (...) the greatest mass human extinction in history, and the countless ways Indians survived and triumphed in the face of adversity. (Smith, 2005, np)

Also, as curator Young Man puts it,

I feel that we were and are victims of politics so we have to respond to it. We are essentially aboriginal people who have lived on the land for thousands of years. We were invaded, we didn't invade anybody, so our reaction is to address the invasion, and politics is part of this invasion. The imagery of the modern world we live in is part of this invasion. That imagery was never here before, so naturally we address it, and when we address it those people who live within that sphere look at us as being political artists. I suppose that's the only way they can identify what we're doing within their limited frame of reference ... If [my visual language] happens to contain political messages that's just the way it is, because virtually every piece of work ever done by an artist is political to some person or another. (Young Man, nd)

Both curators quoted above view this strategy as artistic, rather than as purely political, since it is performed “from an active standpoint as an artist who lives in the

present” (Smith, 2009, p. 90). An example of this strategy is offered by Luiseño artist James Luna who – in his installation, titled, “Artifact Piece,” 1985-87 – addresses the issue of “the objectification of Native American cultures in Western museum and cultural displays” by employing his own body. According to the presentation available on the artist’s personal website, Luna “donned a loincloth and lay motionless on a bed of sand in a glass museum exhibition case” for several days “among the Kumeyaay exhibits at the Museum of Man in San Diego. Labels surrounding the artist’s body identified his name and commented on the scars on his body, attributing them to ‘excessive drinking.’ Two other cases in the exhibition contained Luna’s personal documents and ceremonial items from the Luiseño reservation.” The performance had surprising effects:

Many museum visitors as they approached the “exhibit” were stunned to discover that the encased body was alive and even listening and watching the museum goers. In this way the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer was returned, redirecting the power relationship. Through the performance piece Luna also called attention to a tendency in Western museum displays to present Native American cultures as extinct cultural forms. Viewers who happened upon Luna’s exhibition expecting a museum presentation of Native American cultures as “dead,” were shocked by the living, breathing, “undead” presence of the Luiseño artist in the display. Luna in *Artifact Piece* places his body as the object of display in order to disrupt the modes of representation in museum exhibitions of native others and to claim subjectivity for the silenced voices eclipsed in these displays. (Luna, 1987, np; author’s italics)

Commenting on this strategy of critique of the fake images of the past, curator Smith contends that it is also truly revolutionary: “If amnesia is the state religion, then the act of remembering turns you into a heretic, a revolutionary, a troublemaker” (Smith, 2009, p. 90). We can link this insight, at this point, to the “loafers, criminals, delinquents, and bums” status that the same curator had praised – in the context of his critique of the “Civilized” vs. “Primitive” dichotomy – in “class three” Indians. This is the condition of

the artist who cannot accept being regimented in the cultural projects of the majority and enjoys living in the freedom state of “in-between-ness,” that is, between what he takes to be distorted forms of Indian identities (Smith, 2010, np).

In a similar vein, referring to Navajo artist Gloria Emerson’s choice of painting as her preferred medium for artistic expression, Mithlo (2008) suggests that it “indicates that art serves as a tool of empowerment against forgetting ‘the agony of our lives’” (p. 85). This strategy can be linked to the notion that Indigenous identities are constituted in relation to memory, beside land and family (as discussed in CHAPTER 3). If so, art forms inflected by knowledge of the past become instrument not only of empowerment, but also of identity configuration.

To illustrate this strategy: on one plate with autobiographic content in the exhibition “A Song for the Horse Nation” exhibition (Figure 5) Emil Her Many Horses (Oglala Lakota), one of the three curators of this exhibition, narrates how the name of his great-great-grandmother, Tasunka Ota Win (Many Horses Woman), was mistranslated by the census-takers during the first census or enrollment on the Oglala Lakota reservation in South Dakota as “Her Many Horses” and ended up being adopted as a family name by her descendants (the curator does not provide a date for the Census, yet we may expect this to have happened during the first half of the 19th century). It is interesting to note that the Census, a State-based form of surveillance, is distorting not only explicitly, through the imposition of reductive representation, but also, inadvertently, through mistakes in the practice of inscribing names. This anecdote is significant: given the importance of names

and naming in Native cultures,²² the act of misreading a name, even inadvertently, bespeaks the power of the State to represent Native peoples and cultures distortedly. In this context, the act of displaying a piece of private family history in the public amounts to making a strong statement that, in spite of historical “accidents” caused by the White peoples, the Natives have managed to go on with their lives and, more importantly, remained connected to the past. This resilience reflects one dimension of continuity, namely that of names and generations.

Figure 5: Emil Her Many Horses, 2004. Photograph by Cynthia Frankenburg, NMAI. Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/wealth.html>



Another aspect of continuity concerns spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples.

For instance, a particular montage in the “Song for the Horse Nation” exhibition (Figure 3 and 4 in section 4.2.1.4) brings together the photo of an A’aninin warrior, named Waatyanath (i.e., “Horse Capture” in English translation), who lived at the beginning of the 20th century, and that of his descendant, George P. Horse Capture, one of the three

²² There are a few very important statements about the importance of name and naming in Native cultures. Please refer, for instance, to a book by activist and writer Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe), titled *Recovering the sacred: The power of naming and claiming* (2005), or to a memoir by writer N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), titled *The Names: A Memoir* (1976).

curators of “A Song for the Horse Nation” exhibition. This photo composition is significant: it suggests the continuity of Native people and cultures over the span of a whole century – a historical time created for the Native peoples of the Americas through colonial subjugation. This time is recovered in the form of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) with one’s ancestors enacted through a ritual reconstruction of a genealogy (a memory device frequent in spiritual practices).

The visitor of the exhibition can also read a text which informs her that George Horse Capture Jr., the son of the curator, is the keeper of the Sacred Flat Pipe, a symbol of distinction and leadership in the A’aninin tribe. Besides the more “surface meaning” of this pipe (a smoking device), the pipe (as part of a spiritual practice of handing over a symbol of spiritual leadership to future generations) also can be interpreted as a symbol of the indestructibility and revival of Native forms of life.

A third aspect of continuity concerns ancestral domestic practices such as the breeding of horses. The curators of the “Song for the Horse Nation” exhibition chose to document this practice by displaying a video documentary about breeding program in a reservation of the Nimípuu (Nez Perce) tribe of Idaho (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Appaloosa mare and colt standing in pasture. Photograph by Alan and Sandy Carey.
Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/breeds.html>



As mentioned on the official website of the exhibition, “the Nimípuu are re-establishing their own Appaloosa herd with an ambitious breeding program that incorporates the Akhal-Teke horse of Turkmenistan. This magnificent horse with a golden coat may be the oldest of domesticated breeds.” (Smithsonian, 2014)

Finally, the curators who advocate the reconstruction of the past do so with the aim not only to reconstruct the past for the sake of the past (this corresponds to a strategy of telling the truth at all costs), but also to enable a more adequate positioning of the Native person into the often confusing present time. In this respect, McMaster acknowledges: “I am not interested in a romantic or nostalgic reading of history but in a reconstruction of the past to negotiate a chaotic and transitional present” (McMaster, 1992, p. 178). This strategy consorts well with the next strategy to be discussed below.

5.2.2 (Re)focusing Attention on the Present

At the same time as they are staging the past (as shown in the last example above), the curators advocate a renewed focus on the present, more specifically on “a different kind of today, where [Indians] are present in the world like everyone else,” since they have always been “trying to be part of the world” (Smith, 2009, p. 101).

The focus on the present presupposes a rethinking of the past as a dynamic realm:

Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson views Iroquois artists as crucial to the construction of an ‘Iroquois self, society, and tradition within this past that is both ours and not ours,’ and ‘most importantly, their work helps us to construct and live within a present that belongs entirely to us.’ Simpson recognizes that Indigenous artists resituate traditional subjects from a frozen past to a dynamic present. (Rickard, 2011, p. 472)

This redirection of attention on the importance of the present often involves a continuously renewed, though by no means easy, strategy of “living in the present” – a strategy which includes, among other things, the projection in the public sphere of endogenously generated images of Indians living in the present, especially through such multimodal media as the museum exhibitions. Curator Dartt-Newton (Chumash) recommends to Indigenous curators to focus on depicting Native peoples in all their appearances – whether or not they “look ‘Native,’” whether or not they are engaged in “‘traditional’ cultural practices” –, on addressing “the actual history of place in text panels,” and on “show[ing] maps of displacement of local people and discuss[ing] what this meant for identity and cultural knowledge for the people” (Dartt-Newton, interviewed by E. Janiak, Winter 2012). This strategy is well illustrated in the “Song for the Horse Nation” by visual media, both static and cinematic, and performance. For instance, a panel (Figure 7) displays a photo shot of present-day Crow Indians who take part in a 2009 fair.

Figure 7: Crow Fair Parade, August 15, 2009. Crow Agency, Montana. Photograph by Emil Her Many Horses, NMAI. Source: <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/horsenation/crowfair.html>



The panel allows the visitor to identify, in the foreground, Crow horsemwomen dressed in traditional clothing and riding horses on a road in Montana. In its simple display of activities located in present times, the panel manages to convey the sense that Native peoples and cultures are a matter of the present and thus to undermine the Discontinuity narrative which projects an image of Native peoples as a matter of the past.

5.2.3 Imagining the “Indian Future”

Another, yet more unusual form, in which the Indigenous curators selected for this study attempt to address the discontinuity stereotypical narrative, is to emphasize the importance of not so much the past or the present, but rather of the future. This strategy makes sense in the context in which many curators, among whom Candice Hopkins, are concerned with the fact that “Indigenous thoughts, images, and words have been omitted in discussions addressing the future” (Hopkins et al, 2011, p. 13).

This focus on the future as a privileged time dimension is the approach advocated by digital media artist and curator Skawennati, whose projects aim at addressing the concern that “there are very few images of aboriginal people in the future,” that there is a deficit of Native self-representations (“how we can represent ourselves in the future”), as well as of possible imaginable contributions of Indigenous peoples to the world of tomorrow (“what we will be bringing to society in the future,” “what we wanna do in the society”). Viewed against the background of the issue of presence understood chronographically, Skawennati’s futuristic concern can be interpreted as follows: to address the kind of erasure threatening the presence of Indigenous peoples and knowledges, it is not sufficient to articulate the sense in which these peoples and their cultural knowledge thrive in present times; it is possibly more important to imagine what shape they may take in the future. To exemplify how this prospective imagination may work, Skawennati focuses on the new kind of environment enabled by the technologies of information and communication:

I think the World Wide Web is an extraordinary delivery mechanism. What I am really interested in talking about, or in seeing and showing to other people, is Native people in the future. I would like to see us there, so that we can envision ourselves there in this far future, as not just survivors anymore, but as fully participating, empowered members of society, of contemporary, thoroughly modern, futuristic society. That is what I am thinking about, and the medium I have chosen for the most part is the newest medium. (Skawennati, interview by Indigenous Arts Network, nd)

It is not an accident that the same curator advocates both a focus on virtual places and on future times. The same concern is echoed in a Canadian exhibition with aboriginal curators that has the (imagining of possible) future(s) as its main theme (“Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years”). It starts out from the observation that “Indigenous

thoughts, images, and words have been omitted in discussions addressing the future, or if they have been included, it is often through pan-Indian prophecies and predictions, poorly understood, and appropriated by dominant culture” (Hopkins et al, 2011, p. 13). In this quote, Hopkins points to the same kinds of stereotypical dichotomizations which relegate Indigenous knowledge to the realm of sensationalism, at best (positive stereotyping) and of obscurantism, at worst (negative stereotyping).

In response, the exhibition “Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years” proposes to “offer speculative, critical, and aesthetic mediations on our [i.e., Native] collective future,” that is, to become a veritable “platform to speculate what the world might be like half a millennia from now” (Hopkins et al, 2011, p. 13). In other words, there is a sense in which Native imagination is not viewed by the Natives themselves as constrained by prophetic practice, but is able to use the newest technologies and speculate about the kinds of forms of life that these technologies might enable for Natives living in the future. This creative move is yet another example of Native appropriation of available technologies (please refer to discussion of virtual places in CHAPTER 4).

Another version of this future-oriented strategy is suggested by Smith (2009), who, commenting on the opportunity presented by the projected founding of the NMAI, suggests that,

[T]he new Indian museum must tell stories from throughout the hemisphere and throughout time. It is a task that is at once absurd, impossible, and urgent, and it must be done well (...) It must be a place of memory, memorial, hope, and grief; a place where questions are as important as answers and no facts are beyond dispute; and a place that honors the Indian past and Indian future. (p. 62)

In other words, the only way for curators to honor an “Indian future” is to approach the past with an open-mindedness which questions allegedly established facts about the past.

5.3 The Irrelevance Narrative

The irrelevance narrative represents a step farther in relation to the discontinuity story, insofar as it states that Indigenous knowledge can have no contribution or significance to the present: “there is no such thing as Indian history, and therefore no contribution by Indians to ‘progress’ or ‘significance’ in the lives of present-day people” (Nason, 2000, p. 39). This narrative is a component of the public narratives which suggest that “Indians are of only marginal importance to [country’s] past and irrelevant to its present” (Smith, 2009, p. 95). Obviously, “importance” and “relevance” refer to systems of evaluations that are foreign to the Natives themselves and do not recognize Native systems of relevance as legitimate components of an alternative epistemology. This is another sense in which Indigenous knowledge is injured.

Chronographically, the Irrelevance narrative amounts to making the following claim: even though there may be some sort of continuity between the three temporal moments of time, the existence of such connections does not imply that the previous moments have by necessity a bearing on later moments.

Since in traditional exhibitions the “Indians are virtually always presented as elements from the community’s past – elements that no longer have any importance or bearing on current life in the community” (Nason, 2000, p. 37) – one of the strategies devised by Indigenous curators to counteract this view is to emphasize precisely an

opposite narrative of relevance, under the assumption that what is relevant from the point of view of a group may differ from what is relevant from the point of view of another group. More precisely, the strategy involves an emphasis on the fact that Indians have a different notion of relevance, grounded in differences of worldviews. Section 3.4 (“A Concept of Knowledge Compatible with Indigenous Knowledge”) pointed to differences in ontological assumptions about the relationships between humans and non-humans (whether animals or things). In this respect, curator Hill Jr. suggested that Indigenous world views portray human beings as having “a social relationship to material objects, in a way that means that they’re not objects.” Specifically, “people recognize that things have agency in the world: they act on us and we have social relations to them.” In contrast, “Western culture makes a strong, powerful distinction between human beings and things, and human beings and non-human animals.” For the Western world view, “things [are] different from us in the sense that they lack agency, ... are inert, ... are just stuff, ... just sit out there, waiting for us to use them” (personal interview, March 20, 2012). This ontological difference likely grounds different systems of relevance and norms for relating to non-humans. Part of this strategy involves documenting and exploring in detail aspects of past and present Indigenous life in order to emphasize what has been valuable in Native experience and possibly has wider significance. For instance, the whole exhibition “Song for the Horse Nation” is an attempt to articulate the sense that the Natives exemplify fundamental values, such as respect and even praise for non-human forms of life: it conveys a sense that people and horses are fellow beings whose lives have always been closely intertwined.

5.4 The Marginality Narrative

Third, there is the marginality narrative, which makes an even bolder claim: not only has Indian culture been irrelevant to the present (and, implicitly, to the future), but it has also proved to be an obstacle in the march of American history of progress from the past to the present: “the ‘real’ Indians who once existed are interesting only as an extinguished footnote or as obstacles that had to be removed from the ‘real’ progress that characterizes the history of the community or the nation” (Nason, 2000, p. 37).

Chronographically, this narrative emphasizes the discontinuity of the three temporal moments (past, present, and future) by suggesting that the past may often be seen as an obstacle that needs to be cleared away in order for the temporal progress to the present to continue its march. Rhetoric Studies scholar D. P. Gaonkar offers an example of this narrative in his discussion of the meaning of modern consciousness in Western European context:

Prior to Baudelaire, and despite contextual variations, the term *modern* generally designates the consciousness of an age that imagines itself as having made the transition from the old to the new. This consciousness takes two different forms. In one version, the old representing venerable antiquity haunts and instructs the new. The old, as the custodian of the classical, sets the measures and models of human excellence that each new age must seek to emulate under altered conditions without ever hoping to surpass it. In the other version, which came into prominence with the Enlightenment, the modern is associated with the scientific superiority of the present over antiquity. With visions of the infinite progress of knowledge and continuous improvement in moral and material life, the “modern” at last frees itself from the spell of antiquity. (Gaonkar, 1999, p. 56; author’s italics)

In this quote, Gaonkar captures the tension that exists between the past (the old) and the present (the new, modern) and the sense that the past exerts a “spell” which the

modern consciousness (the consciousness of the present) needs to overcome in order to engage on the path of progress.

To address this view, Indigenous curators often point to ways in which Indigenous peoples and cultures have actually contributed to the progress of North American culture and civilization. For instance, Rickard (2011) dwells on the contribution of the Haudenosaunee people who “historically, played a critical role in the formation of concepts of democracy in the emergence of the United States and today are leaders in the forum on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (p. 466).

Finally, it should be noted that many of the hopes of the Indigenous curators are related to the perceived importance and agency of the memory institutions (like museums, galleries, archives) in bringing to the fore the contribution of Native peoples to progress in North America. Thus, talking about the opportunity presented by the projected founding of the NMAI, Smith (2009) argues that this museum,

[M]ust tell stories from throughout the hemisphere and throughout time. It is a task that is at once absurd, impossible, and urgent, and it must be done well (...) It must be a place of memory, memorial, hope, and grief; a place where questions are as important as answers and no facts are beyond dispute; and a place that honors the Indian past and Indian future.” (p. 62)²³

In this quote, curator Smith captures the uniqueness and importance of a mainstream museum such as NMAI, which may become a site for necessary debate around the past of, and for projections of possible future for, Native Americans peoples.

²³ Quote repeated in Section 5.2 as well.

This importance of the museum as an institution involved in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge will be discussed at length in next chapter, which will be devoted to the material dimension of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge.

5.5 Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Indigenous curators' interviews, scholarly work, and of one exhibition, I identified three types of narratives grounded on the Western European assumption that time is constituted by a concatenation of three distinct moments (past, present, and future). In what I called a "chronography of Indigenous knowledge" (that is, a map of the dominant understandings of the relationships between the three temporal moments), the past is construed as absent from the present (and, hence, from the future); as irrelevant to the present (and, hence, to the future); or even as hindering to the present (and, hence, to the future). Projected stereotypically onto Indigenous peoples and cultures, these narratives state that Indians do not exist in the present (Discontinuity), do not have any contribution to the present (Irrelevance), or even constitute a burden that needed to be discarded in order for progress to unfold (Marginality). These three types of narratives are part of the causal relations that the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge embeds: Indigenous curators identify them as causalities having detrimental or threatening consequences for the status of Indigenous identities and knowledge.

Against these narratives which can be construed as threats, Indigenous curators propose solutions (the model practices and dramatizing patterns which constitute yet another aspect of the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge). With respect to

the Discontinuity narrative, the curators propose to critique fake images of the Indian past, to refocus attention on the present (by means of material practices of curatorship), and to imagine possible versions of “Indian future” (by relying on the affordances of the new media technologies). With respect to the Irrelevance narrative, the curators emphasize the fact that the different ontologies constituting the Western and Indigenous world views ground different systems of relevance, such that what is relevant for one culture (e.g., conquest and exploitation) may be irrelevant for the other culture. Finally, with respect to the Marginality narrative, the curators propose to emphasize the contributions of Indigenous peoples to the North American societies. For this purpose, a mainstream museum constitutes possibly the most appropriate site for debate around the past and the possibilities that are open for the “Indian future.”

As shown in this chapter, there emerge for Indigenous curatorship a range of roles directly related to the possible responses to the stereotypical representations of Indigenous knowledge as circulated through the science discourse. These roles will be discussed in CHAPTER 7.

Also, CHAPTER 8 will develop the sense in which the solutions proposed by the curators presuppose the availability and the affordances of a matrix of materiality (subject positions, practices, and a dispositif).

CHAPTER 6: MATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

6.1 Introduction

The material dimension of any discourse comprises the set of subject positions, practices, and the *dispositif* through which a discourse is actualized (that is, reproduced and transformed) and has concrete effects in the world. The discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge presuppose specific sets of such materialities.

This chapter will focus on each of the three aspects of the material dimension of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge. First, Section 6.2 will describe the subject positions associated with the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge and the ways in which social actors occupy them. Second, Section 6.3 will focus on discursive practices of Indigenous curatorship. Finally, Section 6.4 will address the issue of the dispositif, itself a component of the matrix of materiality through which the curators' discourse of Indigenous knowledge is (re)produced.

A reflection by Rickard (2007) on the founding of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), with which the Introduction to this dissertation opened, is a welcome introduction to our discussion of the material dimension of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge; specifically, she claims that there is a sense in which this museum is,

[T]he first attempt at creating a hemispheric Indigenous imaginary. The non-Native visitors, Indigenous scholars, and individual community members all have a private imagery of how the “real” Indigenous experience looks, sounds, and feels. I believe that people have very stable private opinions about Native people that are not easily dislodged. Perhaps the most elaborate ideas of this sort are held by Native scholars, which

makes the attempt by NMAI look unsatisfactory compared to their own imaginaries about Indigeneity. (p. 86)²⁴

In this quote, Rickard captures the sense in which the materiality of a Museum like NMAI which includes subject positions such as “non-Native visitors, Indigenous scholars, and individual community members,” discursive and discourse-producing practices, such as curatorship (which generates exhibitions providing to the visitors a form of access to “how the ‘real’ Indigenous experience looks, sounds, and feels” – according to the interpretation, or “private imagery” of the curator), as well as the dispositif which is expected to generate discursive (in the sense of meaning-making) effects in the consciousness of the various audiences in North America and even beyond.

When curators like Rickard or Smith refer to the museum (or gallery) as a site of possible encounters between peoples and cultures, they mean a matrix of materiality comprising subject positions (actors), practices, and a dispositif. For instance, in the case of NMAI, beside the exhibits, which “make up only about 30% of the space inside the Museum,” there are other, less obvious, aspects of the museal dispositif, such as “books and CDs, the landscape, the ducks, the water and rocks,” as well as, “in the building itself, the café and gift shops.” All these material entities work together to enable a particular experience of the visitor. There is also a sense in which even types of actors, such as “floor staff and cultural interpreters,” are parts of the dispositif of the exhibits (Smith, 2005, np).

In what follows, the three material aspects of the discourses around Indigenous knowledge are presented, together with illustrative instances, as well as links that emerge

²⁴ Quote repeated in the Introduction to this dissertation

among them – based on the analysis of the mission statements of museums, and of statements of the Indigenous curators (elicited from personal interviews conducted with ten curators in 2010 and 2012, from publicly available interviews with two of these curators and with nine other curators, as well as from scholarly works of nineteen Indigenous curators). Whenever the analysis allows it, the ambiguous effects of each of these instances on the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge are made explicit.

6.2 Subject Positions

According to Keller (2012), who follows closely Foucault's discourse theory, subject positions are one of the three components of the matrix of materiality of a discourse, the other two being the discursive practices and the *dispositif*. In a research informed by the SKAD framework, the researcher encounters social actors performing certain roles (e.g., in the biomedical discourse, social actors occupy such positions as the patient, the doctor, the researcher, etc.). The discursive interest of these social actors resides in how they are related to the subject positions that discourses made available to them. Keller (2012) contends that,

[S]ocial actors are related to discourse in two ways: on the one hand, as the holders of the speaker position, or statement producers, who speak within a discourse; and on the other hand, as addressees of the statement practice. The sociological vocabulary of institutions, organizations, roles, and strategies of the individual or the collective – but always of social actors – can be used for a corresponding analysis of the structuration of speaker positions in discourses. (p. 62)

The statement producers are those types of actors whom the discourse has already entitled to make statements (e.g., doctors and biomedical researchers in the biomedical

situation). The addressees of the statement practice are the actors who are the legitimate receivers of the statements produced by the former type of actors (e.g., actual and potential patients, in the biomedical situation). In the discursive arena of Indigenous knowledge, the main statement producers (individual or collective) are, beside the Indigenous curators (to whom the entire next chapter will be devoted), the following: scholars in the Academia with expertise in Indigenous issues, tribal communities, self-organizing collectives, art critics, and Indigenous artists. These are social actors whose claim to produce statements about Indigenous knowledge is perceived as legitimate. Also, the main addressees of the statement practices are the types of actors to whom the statements are directed and who are viewed as enabling or as detrimental to Indigenous knowledge (e.g., the public). These two types of subject positions and their corresponding actors are discussed below.

6.2.1 Scholars in Academia

Indigenous curators perceive scholars in Academia as key producers of statements about Indigenous knowledge, with lasting effects on how this type of knowledge is (re)presented in the public sphere: “people are more knowledgeable now, and people respect [Indigenous knowledge; added by IV]. Not everyone, of course, there’s always that issue between Academia and the community, and how the information is portrayed and how it’s manipulated, if it is, and how that voice, that aboriginal voice, is brought forth” (P., personal interview, March 30, 2012). Curator P. claims that, as a rule, endogenous representations (voices) of Indigenous realities are missing from the public sphere (an issue which can be linked to our notion of invisibility of Indigenous peoples).

Yet, when those representations (voices) happened to be present, they are usually stereotypical (an issue which can be linked to the notion that Indigenous knowledge is injured).

To curator Tayac, one of the main problems is that “a lot of that critique [produced in the Academia; added by IV] is that Native knowledge [is] unscholarly” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). This is an issue which we discussed in terms of the contrast between the science discourse and the tradition discourse around Indigenous knowledge (in Section 3.2, “Conflicting World Views”).

Scholars in Academia are the main actors in the science discourse and the disciplinary epistemic practices in which they have been trained orient them toward a particular approach to Indigenous knowledge. For instance, curator Young Man describes this orientation in the context of a response to an interview question about the “elements of the Native perspective” in art. He emphasizes that “Indian sensibility [is not] something that you can quantify or isolate, in the sense that you can quantify the Western aesthetic under a formal classification. It's feeling, it's intuition, it's a lot of things that are probably not as scientifically-wrought as people in the academic world want it to be” (Young Man, interview by Abbott, nd).

Also, referring to anthropology, curator Tayac claims that it “went through a phase of trying to mirror a [natural] science, so that you want everybody in their own little category like if you use little pin things or little bugs like little beetles and taxonomies and stuff. It is almost as if one tribe is supposed to be pinned to a little box like, you know, a specimen” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Curator Tayac, who was trained as a doctoral student in Sociology, also recounts a telling episode pertaining to her formation as a scholar in the Western Academia:

I had a lot of resistance in graduate school from the approach that I wanted to take. It took me a while to finally get an advisor to support my work and most of the people did not. I'll give you an example, I had in my first year we had to do all of the standard papers about theory and whatever, so I decided, you know, we were reading Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and it occurred to me that some of their theory was based in a misconception of Native people, because they classified people based on certain characteristics and that's the way they marked origins of society, they would use American Indians for this. So it was like always assuming that Indigenous, pre-Christian Europeans are going to be like American Indians and so let's just use American Indians as primitive men for everybody. I thought that, well, I'm not so sure about that, but also how could they, these guys, decide they even know about Native societies, they've never been to them, they don't speak any of their languages, they didn't really study, they are making a lot of assumptions. (personal interview, February 24, 2012)

This narrative is evocative of the ways in which the science discourse has concrete effects, in this case by generating specific subjectivization patterns for social actors, so that they actualize that discourse as faithfully as possible, that is, produce acceptable statements about Indigenous knowledge.

6.2.2 Tribal Communities

Tribal communities play a key role as producers (and regulators of the production) of statements about Indigenous knowledge. The main reason is that, as stated in CHAPTER 3 ("Indigenous Knowledge: Definitions as Part of the Phenomenal Structure"), this type of knowledge is linked to a specific tribal community as its owner and context of production, validation, and circulation.

Part of the importance of tribal communities pertains to the control they exert – as the legitimate owners of Indigenous knowledge – over the production of discursive statements by Indigenous peoples (curators included). For instance, when I asked her whether she saw herself as “producing Indigenous knowledge,” curator Tayac answered that “Yes, I do see that. I definitely see my work as Indigenous work” but that this work “does not replace the community-based ownership or intellectual property because, if I write something as an individual, I’m not going through the protocols of talking to the chief and all of the Elders, and they’re like, oh, am I speaking on behalf of all of us?” (personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Another part of the importance of tribal communities lies in their capacity of legitimate validators of Indigenous knowledge, insofar as they are veritable custodians of the tradition and connection to the past. For instance, curator Ryan Rice (Mohawk) refers to the community as,

[K]ey to cultural continuity. By including or thinking of aspects of community in arts-related projects, whether they are curatorial or hands-on/participatory, the means of expression can become validated and integral to strengthen links between historical memory and tradition with contemporary constructions and understandings of the beaux-arts and its profound effect of maintaining and expanding knowledge systems (Rice, interview by E. Neal, 2012)

Normatively, the tribal communities may be entitled to this key role in relation to Indigenous knowledge. Yet, as a matter of fact, their role is minor. As leader Ian Campbell, one of the hereditary chiefs and, thus, representatives of the Squamish (Skwxwú7mesh) people, states: “We have been invisible on our own lands” (as cited in Townsend-Gault, 2011, p. 46). Townsend-Gault (2011) interprets this invisibility as a

“metaphor for powerlessness” (p. 46). I would interpret this assertion in the context of the discussion about the ongoing process of erasure of Indigenous presence.

6.2.3 Indigenous Artists

A special type of statement producers are the artists, whose discursive statements about Indigenous knowledge are expressed through the medium of art. Yet, their works and voice come to the fore mostly through the work of the curators who organize the artistic objects in the frame of exhibitions and, thus, create a necessary reception link between the artist and the wider public. As curator P. pointed out repeatedly in our conversation, the curator has a key role in “getting [the artists’] voice(s) out there” (personal interview, March 30, 2012). The assumption is, apparently, that artists’ works need the dispositif of the museum in order for the public to be able to encounter them.

The relationship between Indigenous art creation and curatorship is very close. Some of the curators by formation decided at some point in their career to become artists as well. For instance, in his interview with curator Clara Hargittay, curator Robert Houle (Saulteaux First Nation) invokes reasons of freedom of expression that led him to choose to operate as an artist:

It became clear that my hands were tied, and that no matter what I did nothing was going to make any difference or change the entrenched attitudes towards contemporary Native art at the museum. I became passionately involved with the issues surrounding contemporary Native expression, but, that day I realized that, for me, perhaps the best way to promote this cause was not as a curator, but as an artist. (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, np)

In another case, curator P. became a photography artist “trying to bring awareness – especially to urban Inuit: awareness of who they are, what to do, and where they live,

some of the issues, socio-political and cultural – to the fore. That's my focus now” (personal interview, March 30, 2012).

Finally, curator L'Hirondelle claims that she became a curator because of very concrete constraints of time: “I didn't have time to do art projects, for ideas; so I ended up curating like that” (personal interview, February 22, 2012).

Curatorship, especially of the variety operating within an aesthetics discourse of art, has not always been favorable to Indigenous artists. For instance, the case of the Diné artist Mike McCabe is famous. He reports the situation in which

[H]e approached a contemporary art gallery in person to inquire if they were taking new artists. McCabe was told, “We don't show Indian art.” However when he sent in slides anonymously, the gallery responded enthusiastically, a response that implied that racism was a factor in their decision-making process. (Mithlo, 2012, p. 119)

The situation illustrates the fact that the true reasons for refusing McCabe access to the exhibiting dispositif was not necessarily an elitist view of art (implied in the curator's statement that “We don't show Indian art,” but association with its Indianness).

Artist and curator Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) describes a similar situation:

I've been told by contemporary curators and galleries, “Your work is Indian so it belongs in an Indian museum. We don't show that here.” You don't see Native artists at the Whitney or MoMA very often. That's one of our challenges — that's what we're trying to confront and change. That's what I've been up against for the last 20 years. I think I should be able to exhibit in both spaces. Native artists have a lot of challenges and we're taking on one at a time. (Spang, interview by Julich, 2011)

In other words, art produced by Indigenous artists is categorized as folk or ethnic art – yet another illustration of the boundary work that relegates Indigenous knowledge to the realm of the local, natural, or primitive (as seen in Section 4.2.2).

Yet, Spang's statement is ambiguous between a claim of racism and one of elitist view of art. In any case, there is a sense in which Indigenous artists welcome criticisms, rather than indifference. According to Smith, who curated many exhibitions of Indigenous artists,

[O]ne of the challenges for the Native artist is that they feel like the work, even when it's very strong, doesn't get the attention of the reviews, because non-Indian critics and curators say, "well, I only understand this if I read about it and sometimes you think what he's saying is special. We always say "we don't wanna real critiques." But sometimes, you know, frankly, people don't want real critiques, they can't handle the criticism. And sometimes it might be misguided and questionable in terms of the politics or social outlook. But Native artists generally do want to be part of the art world. So I was very much about doing shows that could contribute to the discussion about where these artists and the questions that their art raises fit into a broader dialogue. (personal interview, May 7, 2012)

In this quote, curator Smith points to a sense in which the public success of the Native artist depends on the ability of the Indigenous curator to frame the works of that artists he or she will curate in such a way that the audiences are willing to engage with them as an interesting partner of discussion, namely one that speaks from a "place of his/her own."

6.2.4 Self-Organizing Collectives

Various types of self-organizing collectives are perceived by Indigenous curators as legitimate producers of statements about Indigenous knowledge, representing Native peoples and cultures as strategically unified groups. For instance, the American Indian Movement was involved in the 1970s in activities aimed at challenging "racist stereotypes while at the same time engaging a host of structural issues directly relevant to Indian people ... [it] pushed for better housing and education, treaty recognition, an end

to police brutality, the ouster of dictatorial colonial elites on reserves, and an end to exploitative lease arrangements” (Smith, 2009, p. 18). Discursively speaking, one can interpret the emergence of such a political movement as an effect of discourse: various individual agencies coalesce into a Pan-Indian movement precisely because the tradition discourse becomes more salient among Native peoples.

Other self-organized collectives have formed to address issues pertaining to Native art. For instance the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective is, according to curator Grussani, its secretary,

[D]edicated to informing the public about the role of Aboriginal Art Curators in protecting, fostering and extending Aboriginal arts and cultures in North America and around the world through acquisition, conservation, interpretation and exhibition. By sponsoring conferences, lectures and publication, the AAC increases public understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal artists and curators. The ACC serves as a forum for discussion and information sharing and as a means for promoting professional development. The ACC gratefully accepts gifts. (personal interview, August 13, 2010)

Another such collective, called “Nation To Nation,” is actively involved in enabling Native artistic projects. As curator Ryan Rice (Mohawk) noted, this collective creates spaces “for artists to respond, imagine, and consider themes, concerns etc., that [are] relevant to their communities, society and themselves.” In general, it is a fact that “[t]he formation of native art collectives continue to contribute widely to a native art history and are necessary because many art spaces have institutional limitations and prejudices” (Rice, interview by E. Neal, 2012).

6.2.5 Art Critics

Art critics are important discursive statement producers in the discursive arena of Indigenous knowledge. The effects of their critical pieces directed at specific exhibits or artists shape the public perception of Indigenous artistic and curatorial projects. For instance, curator Alfred Young Man points to the situation of Daphne Odjig, who “in those same early years of establishing Native art in Canada, faced complete rejection as a Native/ female artist” because of the detrimental activity of “noteworthy art critic Jay Scott of the *Globe and Mail* condemning her historically for ‘puréeing everything from Picasso to Walt Disney into a blandly decorative pictorial pulp.’” (Young Man, 1991, np; author’s italics)

In general, one reason for the negative stance of art critics toward Native art is that “many Native art critics prior to 1978 were of the ‘week-end gardener’ species, uninformed and unmotivated to do the research needed to write a meaningful critique.” Young Man (1991) traces back this situation partly to their “ethnocentrism, as they too swallowed the scientific and political mythologies of the day” (np). Discursively, we can interpret this statement as an indication of the fact that, for this curator, art critics operate within science discourse, which makes them at best indifferent towards Indigenous cultural productions. Mithlo suggests a similar problem in her discussion of the lack of reaction of art critics in regard to the Native participation at the Biennale festival in Venice:

This hope for an immediate recognition by established arts journals and critics was largely unfulfilled. The resounding silence from magazines, fine arts museums, and our professional peers (Native and non-Native) following *Ceremonial* was characterized by NA3 board member and artist

Harry Fonseca in terms of ripples. Instead of a growing, influential reaction – like a pebble tossed into a lake with concentric circles radiating outward – he observed that the public response was more akin to a rock dropped into a vat of frybread oil – no “blip” with expanding ripples, but a solid “bloop” to the bottom of the kettle (sound effects help with this particular telling). James Luna's comment that “my phone isn't exactly ringing off the hook” after the 2005 Biennale exhibit *Emendatio* reflects a similar realization. We have witnessed a decade of Native arts exhibitions at the Biennale, yet Native arts have yet to be treated seriously. By seriously, I mean more than a token mention of the exotic Native in mainstream contemporary arts curricula, publications, or exhibitions. The apparent indifference to Native arts suggests exhibition alone is insufficient. Meaningful appraisals that incorporate alternative artistic worlds – what Robert Storr, curator of the 2007 Venice Biennale, takes pains to reference as multiple “sites of art” – are needed. (Mithlo, 2006, p. 86; author's italics)

In this quote, Mithlo argues that Native art is not taken seriously – a most likely explanation for the lack of reaction of established art critics in regard to Native art project exhibited at the most prestigious art festival in the world.

6.2.6 Audiences

Audiences consist, by definition, of the social actors playing the role of addressees of the statement practice (the second role for social actors, beside that of discursive statement producers, also mentioned at the beginning). The Indigenous curators' discursive statements are addressed to audiences in two senses: as implicit and as actual audiences. First, as implicit audiences: the curators design the exhibits with these audiences in mind, often with the goal of changing their views on Native peoples and cultures: “as part of the whole museum project, [an exhibit] is meant to really reach a very large audience and really change the way people think” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). The curators see themselves as “talk-show host(s) ... bringing together ideas and objects and people, to say, ‘Ok, check this out, what kind of useful and

hopefully engaging discussion can we have from that” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). In this context, they even have an image of the ideal visitor of their exhibitions.

This would be,

[S]omebody that would come in, maybe with a little bit of knowledge, but not a lot, look at the exhibit, maybe you looked at the book, and say “I disagree with you, I don't think he was the most significant artist, and here's why.” To me that's great if you can engage people. So, it's not about, you know, using the museum voice to assert, you know, one truth, or to convince people of a whole set of debate points; it's about what makes for an interesting conversation. (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012)

Nevertheless, what constitutes the implicit audience of a curatorial project is often hard to determine, since even in those cases in which the curators have a particular audience in mind (for instance, a particular target group), their more or less explicit expectation is to be able to reach an as wide audience as possible. This leads to the second sense of the audience, namely actual audience (the audience that an exhibition will attract beyond the initial expectations of the curator). As curator Daina Warren (Montana Cree) acknowledges:

I consider my primary audience both the arts communities that I work within, and the outlying public that has some connection to those locales, e.g. grunt gallery's community in Vancouver, British Columbia; the NGC's art community and the Ottawa public, and now Urban Shaman's membership and Winnipeg, Manitoba. However, I do hope to engage a national and international audience in the works that I have produced over the years. (Warren, interview by S. Towne, 2012)

The role of the museum (e.g., NMAI) and of festivals (e.g., Venice Biennale) as dispositifs becomes, in this context, crucial, insofar as they provide a platform for reaching a very wide and possibly unexpected audience. Many curators point to the fact that the emergence of “NMAI created an opportunity for a new relationship between the

museum and Native communities and a much broader global audience” (Rickard, 2007, p. 85). Sometimes, being able to gain exposure to and enter a conversation with a wider public takes on imperative accents: referring to the Indigenous exhibit titled, “Ceremonial” – an exhibit sponsored by the Native American Arts Alliance (NA3) organization at the 1999 Venice Biennale –, curator Mithlo puts the issue eloquently: “Just as one cannot be properly named, married, or buried without the participation of a larger community, NA3 sought recognition as a participant within the structure of the international arts community” (Mithlo, 2006, p. 86).

Often, a strong distinction between Native and non-Native audiences does not make sense to curators: first, Native audiences are themselves widely different, ranging from people living in the Reservations to artists living and working in Metropolitan areas; second, there is also a fact that Native audiences may not necessarily be more knowledgeable than non-Native audiences in Native cultural issues:

The Indian audience is incredibly diverse, even if we are only talking about U.S. Indians visiting NMAI in Washington. Some people imagine that Indians automatically have deep knowledge about Indian history and culture. Well, that’s certainly not true, even if you are only talking about their own tribe. Most Indian visitors to NMAI in Washington have never even heard of several tribes who have their own exhibits, and this includes me, so the common presumption that Indian visitors would read those exhibits differently than non-Indians doesn’t make sense.” (Smith, interview by E. Gregory, 2012)

To come back to the distinction between the two types of audiences, we can say that the anticipated and actual reactions of the audiences are important issues for the curators. They tend to generate a favorable reaction by making their exhibits as engaging as possible: “Why is *The Simpsons* the best show in the history of television? Because they keep everyone watching, mixing slapstick physical humor with quips about Jonathan

Franzen, Adlai Stevenson, and Frank Gehry.” The worst possible enemy is boredom. In this case, the rule is to manage this risk by taking oneself as a test case: “the best way to make sure you aren’t boring your audience is to not bore yourself” (Smith, interview by E. Gregory, 2012).

6.3 Practices

A second component of the dispositif of any discourse is represented by practices. According to Keller (2012), these are “conventionalized action patterns, which are made available in collective stocks of knowledge as a repertoire for action, that is, in other words, a more or less explicitly known, often incorporated recipe or knowledge script about the “proper” way of acting” (p. 63). Practices are of two types: first, the discursive practices are those practices through which a discourse is actualized, that is, “typical ways of acting out statement production whose implementation requires interpretative competence and active shaping by social actors.” Some examples of usual discursive practices in which Indigenous curators engage relate to the main ways in which they produce discursive statements, that is: doing research for exhibits, producing exhibits, writing and publishing scholarly works, and lecturing in academic environments.

Second, there are practices as effects of this discourse: “model practices generated in discourses, that is, exemplary patterns (or templates) for actions, which are constituted in discourses, fixed to subject positions and addressed to the discourse’s public or to some ‘counterdiscourse’” (Keller, 2012, p. 63). A good example of practice in this second sense is the providing of curatorial expert evaluations.

6.3.1 Discursive Practices

Curatorial practices resulting in the production of exhibits are the most important discursive practices associated with Indigenous curatorship. They are forms in which Indigenous curators use affordances of traditional curatorship to make discursive statements pertaining to tradition discourse. Practices of this kind will be detailed in next chapter, which will be devoted to roles of Indigenous curators as social actors occupying the Indigenous curatorship subject position.

6.3.2 Model Practices

Curatorial practices resulting in the production of exhibits are the most important model practices associated with Indigenous curatorship. Curator Mithlo offers one of the most helpful discussions of model practices by focusing on a concept of “American Indian curatorial practice” – a strategy aimed at “the creation of new categories that reflect Indigenous values of cultural reclamation, sovereignty, and land-based philosophies” (Mithlo, 2012, p. 112). She circumscribes this notion normatively by focusing on four aspects which, this section argues, constitute responses to (what indigenous curators perceive to be) irresponsible curatorial practices, many of which define classic (non-indigenous) curatorship.

First, curatorial practice is a “long-term” engagement with and commitment to the community within which the curator does research (“you can’t jump in and out of the community”). The purpose of this choice is to avoid producing generalities and, thus, engaging in a self-defeating endeavor (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This first feature is a response to the traditional anthropological attitude of objectifying the

“subjects” of research and telling a story about them which is crafted exclusively in exogenous categories.

Second – and related to the first aspect, – curatorial practice is a “reciprocal” relation (“you’re not just taking but you’re giving”). Yet, in order to be able to give, the curator needs to be able “to know what’s meaningful to give,” which in turn requires that the curator spends enough time in that community (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This second feature is a response to the same traditional anthropological attitude of producing knowledge about a community that will not benefit, in turn, in any way from the results of the research.

Third, curatorial practice is “mutually meaningful” practice, in the sense that the collection of knowledge would “hopefully [have] a positive impact ... upon the communities ... [the curator is] working with” (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This third feature is a response to the lack of sensitivity to ethical issues pertaining to the research of a community. Not only is the community not getting anything in exchange of letting itself studied, but the results of the research are downright detrimental to them.

Fourth, curatorial practice “has mentorship,” in the sense that it needs to unfold on “an infrastructure that has longevity,” such that elements of practice are learned and improved from one generation of curators to another (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012). This fourth feature is a response to a perceived inefficacy of curating when the curators need to reinvent all over again fundamentals that might have been better transmitted if a tradition were in place.

Underlying these imperatives is a respect for Indigenous world view (that is, for Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies). As curator L'Hirondelle puts it,

[C]ertain objects that are not supposed to be kept. They're not kept for a reason and it has to do with the way that cultures view them, like traditionally view things and it is different than western European world view. There are things that are supposed to disintegrate and go back into the environment, and we all do eventually. If you encase it in things like synthetic plastic, it doesn't. It just respects the integrity of what that object meant, I guess. Traditionally a lot of things are not viewed as a Western sense of an inanimate object, there's things that have, I guess you could say, energy or life, so they're not viewed in the same way. (L'Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012)

There is a tension between curatorial practices applied to ethnographic collections and those applied to art. Often, curators draw the boundaries between material culture and art in ways that conflict with the interpretations that the artists themselves have of their own works. For instance, aboriginal curator and artist Robert Houle reports on his realization that his work, which he saw as fundamentally artistic, was oddly lumped together with artefacts pertaining to ethnological collections:

[S]lowly I began to see many odd things at the museum. I began to realize that the people who worked there, from the director down, did not see these works as standing on their own merit at all. They were seen as extensions of the ethnological collections, without any appreciation of their esthetic values. (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, np)

In this context and on a more personal note, Houle confesses that, "as a practicing and exhibiting artist," he is "enraged and saddened" whenever his "work at the museum will be curated simply as material culture and not as a legitimate contemporary work of art," since the public reaction to his work will thus inevitably apply the label "ethnic" rather than simply "artistic" (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, np). Houle points to a conflict between the non-indigenous curatorial practices and the aspirations of indigenous artists

to be treated as artists rather than as ethnic artists producing artefacts of ethnological interest only.

In addition, there are situations in which curators see curatorship as a job only (in other words, they perform their job as simple actors who follow the rules of the profession mechanically). For instance, curator B. reports the situation in which a person in charge of an ethnology collection would not allow him to do more sophisticated photographing of a particular item (as part of his research for an exhibition). That person would instruct him to climb the stairs and take a picture of the object on the shelf, but without touching or, worse yet, removing it from there. B. confessed that it took a whole day to convince her to let him see, touch, and take a picture of the object. His frustration was obvious: “I didn’t travel such a long distance to be allowed to take a picture from a distance.” B. acknowledged that he made it clear to that person that he knows how to handle these sorts of objects and that she should not teach him curatorship (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010).

6.4 The Dispositif of Indigenous Knowledge

Within a SKAD framework, a *dispositif* refers to the assemblage of “heterogeneous elements” that social actors or groups put together “to solve a particular situation ... to manage a situation, to respond to a kind of ‘urgency’” (Keller, 2012, p. 65). A *dispositif* is both “the institutional foundation, the total of all material, practical, personal, cognitive, and normative infrastructure of discourse production” and the infrastructure “emerging out of a discourse (or out of several discourses)” as a means of “deal(ing) with the real world phenomena addressed by the discourse in question.” In

other words, a dispositif comprises both the infrastructure enabling the production and reproduction of discourses and the materiality generated as an effect of discourse.

For instance, a dispositif involved in the discourses around Indigenous knowledge will comprise, at the level of discourse (re)production, the discursive interventions of Indigenous curators who disseminate and legitimize a particular construction of Indigenous knowledge (e.g., as injured knowledge) through their statements, publicly available interviews, scholarly publications, position pieces in magazines, and, most importantly, through their exhibitions. Also, at the level of discourse implementation, a dispositif (understood as an effect of discourses of Indigenous knowledge) will comprise such items as: the museum as an institution devoted, by political and legal mandate, to the preservation and promotion of Indigenous cultures; the Academy insofar as it permits the development of programs and departments devoted to Indigenous issues; specific technologies and objects; treatises, laws, and regulations; and so on.

The following sections (6.4.1-5) address the issue of the dispositif involved in the discursive arena around Indigenous knowledge as evidenced through statements of the Indigenous curators who participated in this study.

6.4.1 Museums

The analysis of the interviews and publications of the Indigenous curators selected for this study shows that the museum is a key institution involved in the circulation of Indigenous knowledge. Specifically, it constitutes a dispositif in both senses in which the term is used within a SKAD framework: it enables the (re)production

of discourses around Indigenous knowledge and is generated as an effect of those discourses. The two senses are illustrated below.

6.4.1.1 Museums and the (Re)Production of Discourses

The museum has fulfilled the role of a *dispositif* in the first sense, insofar as it has been used by Indigenous curators as a platform for their reconnection to Indigenous heritage and for their work of representing Indigenous knowledge. Thus, curator Mithlo claims that museums have enabled people with Indigenous background to reconnect to their heritage by means of objects that they would not have been able to find in any other place:

I think many people who enter this field [i.e., Museum Studies; added by IV] have tribal background and they're curious about their own heritage because they've been separated from it, so you kind of gravitate towards the older objects and what museums hold – this has sort of been a natural progression for myself. (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012)

Also, the curators state it clearly that museums (NMAI in particular) are instrumental in enabling the diffusion and transformation of Indigenous knowledge: “the museum is the most visible site of encounter available in North America in which non-Native people can engage with a contemporary Indigenous perspective” (Rickard, 2011, p. 467). The fact that a museum as NMAI is a site of encounter does not mean that the encounter and the conversation it is supposed to enable unfold easily. On the contrary, curators' expectation is that this conversation cannot be but difficult in the beginning, but needs to be sustained:

We are the very beginning of that conversation, and like any difficult conversation, it can be rough going, especially at first. Let's keep arguing, because at least it means we're talking. And of course by now you know I'm talking also about arguments among Indians, not just those boring

arguments between Indians and cowboys. But we'll get better at this, because we have to. I mean, it's not like anyone's going anywhere, right? (Smith, 2005, np)

The difficulty of the public conversation around Native past and issues may stem from the presence of conflicting discourses (the science discourse and the tradition discourse) in the discursive arena around Indigenous knowledge, but also of conflicting positions within the tradition discourse itself. When Smith alludes to “arguments among Indians,” he may refer to debates around the appropriateness of Pan-Indianism as an ideology, around issues of representativeness of tribes and Nations in exhibitions devoted to Native peoples and cultures, etc.

Part of the ability of museums to (re)produce the tradition discourse depends on the ability of the curators to rely on appropriate technology to accomplish their curatorial projects. For instance, when asked about the use of new media technologies, the curators responded that they were comfortable using media technology in their exhibits. For instance, referring to his project of a virtual exhibit involving video documents produced by urban Natives, curator B. argued that the use of media technology is inherent to such a project (from the collection of documents to the exhibition itself). In the same vein, yet also offering an explanation for why technologies are not intrinsically detrimental to Indigenous knowledge, Hopkins (2005) points to the fact that,

Storytellers in Indigenous communities are continually embracing new materials and technologies, including video and digital media. I would suggest that this shift does not threaten storytelling traditions in these communities but is merely a continuation of what aboriginal people have been doing from time immemorial: making things our own. (p. 130)

Curator Grussani argues along similar lines: “Aboriginal artists have always been adapting to new technologies and new methods of creating and I just think that film and

video and photography, it's just a new element for us to try and like to champion” (Grussani, personal interview, August 13, 2010). Moreover, for artist and curator Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne), the use of new media technologies for dissemination of Native representations is not only seen as an opportunity, but also as a responsibility: “We first have a responsibility as Native people to do our part, to ensure our voices get out there using new media, the internet” (Spang, interviewed by Julich, 2011). In other words, Natives treat new technologies as they did in the past with other types of technologies imported from the colonists (tools, weapons, etc.), namely adapting them creatively to their needs.

However, there are clear limitations to the use of technologies of display that pertain to their excessive costs. For instance, during our interview, when asked whether he is open to the use of media technology in exhibitions, curator B. contended that he would use new technologies of display as much as he could; yet, the costs of these technologies make them prohibitive. He told me that, during the process of designing exhibition, when the budget needs readjustment, what the administrators of the museum get rid of first is precisely this technology (personal interview, August 11, 2010).

While museums are clearly dispositifs in the (re)production of the tradition discourse (by programmatically enabling the encounter and conversation around Indigenous cultures and knowledges), they have usually been appropriated as dispositifs in the (re)production of other types of discourses, especially the political and the science discourses, which have often been in conflict with the tradition discourse. This is most likely the reason why the Indigenous curators refer to an ambiguity in the functioning of the museum as an institution: “The big museums, together with the government itself in

the United States and Canada, are key operators in the success or failure of Indian artists. They are playing a central role today in the development of contemporary Indian art” (Smith, 2009, p. 24). More precisely, museums like NMAI are perceived to play an enabling role, insofar as,

[T]here are several aspects of the physical space of the museum and curatorial interventions that challenge inherently Western or European classification systems and initiate the process of representational decolonization. I am not suggesting that the entire project has these aspirations (for example, the problem of focusing on the visual display is presented as secondary to the written text and demand for narrative history), but that very significant elements within the museum express this desire. (Rickard, 2007, p. 86)

Yet there is also a sense in which museums thwart the work of a curator, especially when the other types of actors involved in its functioning operate within the boundaries of other discourses (e.g., economic). One such type of actors is the administrator (or bureaucrat). Whether appointed by the State or by private companies, the administrators of the museum play a key role in the decision-making process resulting in the production of exhibitions and, hence, in the circulation of Indigenous knowledge:

Curating an exhibition presupposes extensive interactions with one’s superiors (the managers who control the allocation of Federal funds to projects). The proposal for an exhibition needs to be approved, in hierarchical order, by the director, the vice-president, and, finally, by the executive committee. (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010)

Importantly, these business professionals are part of the *dispositif*, rather than producers of statements (i.e., actors) within the tradition discourse; as curator B. puts it, museums are led by managers who “don’t know anything about culture and don’t care about culture. They just happen to be in the Museum. But they are business people” (personal interview, August 11, 2010). Thus, the activity of the administrators – though

important, because involving the management of resources indispensable for the existence of an exhibition – does not bear directly on the production of discursive statements about Indigenous knowledge. More precisely, nobody would address these professionals as sources of authoritative statements on Indigenous knowledge.

In the institutional context in which Indigenous curators work, complex activities such as the design of an exhibition involve, beside administrators, other types of professionals who engage in “messy” and “conflictual” decision-making processes. Nevertheless, as curator B. quipped, when the disagreements occur in relation to the managers and tend to carry on for long periods of time, “the solution is simple: the managers always win” (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010).

Beside administrators, there are other museum professionals involved in the matrix of materiality which enables the production of exhibitions. Often, there are other curators involved in the same project. Curator Smith acknowledges, in this respect: “Curatorially, I’ve never been just the sole person who gets to decide everything. I think often it’s messy and there is conflict.” The ideal outcome of such a process is normally the “building [of] consensus” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012).

Beside curators, an exhibition presupposes “a small village — of curators, carpenters, researchers and electricians” (Smith, 2005, np). Once a project is approved, the curator starts interacting with other types of actors in a long process which leads to the production of an exhibition: designers, lightning engineers, carpenters, painting specialists, etc. If one of these people doesn’t do her job properly (e.g., bad lighting, loose walls, etc.), then the whole project (or at least sections of it) will suffer (both in terms of coherence and attractiveness to the audience). There are challenges and

disagreements at this micro-level, most of them deriving from differences in disciplinary-based views. For instance, there are rules in curatorship for how intense light is allowed to fall on clothes (no more than 50 lux). The lighting engineer may face a challenge and try to negotiate. But usually, the curator has the final word at this level (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010).

6.4.1.2 Museums as Effects of Discourses

The museum fulfils the role of a *dispositif* in a second sense too (i.e., as an effect of a certain discourse), insofar as it has been designed (or reappropriated) for the explicit purpose of serving Indigenous projects of self-representation. The very founding of a mainstream museum like the National Museum of the American Indian makes it a *dispositif* in this second sense. As curator Smith noted:

Awarding Indians the last open space on the National Mall was a profound act that showed the American government and its people wanted Indians to be part of a national conversation, to finally talk, seriously, and at the highest levels, about things we had never really talked about before. Let's be clear: you don't get a new museum right next to the Capitol itself for making excellent jewelry, or for having stories and songs, or religious beliefs you wish to share with the world. You get the last open space on the National Mall because the country's decided, in the mysterious ways nations decide such matters, that it's time, at last, to speak about the hard things, the painful things, the unspeakable things. (Smith, 2005, np)

To use discursive terms, one can argue that the founding of this major museum was the result of an increased importance of the tradition discourse of Indigenous knowledge in the discursive arena around Indigeneity in the United States – an increase in importance which made issues such as the understanding of the Indian past a priority in the public sphere. Also, curator Rickard's observation can be interpreted along the same lines:

[T]here are several aspects of the physical space of the museum and curatorial interventions that challenge inherently Western or European classification systems and initiate the process of representational decolonization. I am not suggesting that the entire project has these aspirations (for example, the problem of focusing on the visual display is presented as secondary to the written text and demand for narrative history), but that very significant elements within the museum express this desire. (Rickard, 2007, p. 86)

Specifically, there is a sense in which the museum itself (including its topography) embodies a perspective which is generated from within the tradition discourse.

In the matrix of materiality associated with the museum, there are other entities which, according to the Indigenous curators, constitute the dispositif (understood as the effect of discourse) of Indigenous knowledge. For instance, there are working groups, such as the one led by Kevin Goldberg at the Smithsonian Institution (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). The founding of this group within the Smithsonian, whose goal has been to indigenize of methodology and theory, may be interpreted itself as an effect of discourse. There are also art collectives, such as Nation To Nation, “a ‘local/urban’ collective based in Montreal that functioned without and/or beyond boundaries, therefore determined to reach out to native and non-native communities (urban and reserve) to socialize/interact within a creative art-focused milieu” (Rice, interview by E. Neal, 2012), or the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, whose task revolves around “protecting, fostering and extending Aboriginal arts and cultures in North America and around the world through acquisition, conservation, interpretation and exhibition” (Grussani, personal interview, August 13, 2010).

6.4.2 Festivals

Festivals constitute a highly complex component of the dispositif of Indigenous knowledge. Just like museums, festivals can be regarded either as discourse (re)producers or as effects of discourse. Both senses are explored below.

6.4.2.1 Festivals and the (Re)Production of Discourses

Festivals such as the Venice Biennale, where Native peoples have been represented as a Nation since 1999, enable the exposure of projects of Indigenous artists and curators to wider audiences, as well as a “living, breathing, endlessly changing global conversation” (Mithlo, 2006, p. 85).²⁵ As forms of materiality appropriated for the purposes of self-representation, festivals serve as dispositifs for the production and reproduction of discourses around Indigenous knowledge (i.e., dispositifs in the first sense of the word).

Festivals enable the curators to perform multiple roles (which will be discussed in detail in CHAPTER 7). As curator Mithlo argues:

Despite a lack of mainstream institutional recognition, a multiplicity of artistic dialects and worldviews exist. In this frame of reference – one not dependent on art historical canons – cultural translations are necessary for a global arts conversation to ensue. A sovereign, culturally specific platform that is simultaneously engaged with larger art currents can emerge if space is made available outside of the standardized inclusion/legitimization agenda. ... I am calling for ... recognition of the cultural translations necessary for true parity in the global arts arena.

²⁵ “The 1999 Venice Biennale exhibition Ceremonial, sponsored by the Native American Arts Alliance (NA3), a Santa Fe, New Mexico-based organization that I helped found, was designed to commemorate the incorporation of Native American voices into the artistic dialogues of the Biennale. By invoking the concept of ceremony, this group of educators, artists, and activists referenced the concept of public witnessing for central life events. Just as one cannot be properly named, married, or buried without the participation of a larger community, NA3 sought recognition as a participant within the structure of the international arts community” (Mithlo, 2006, pp. 85-6).

Remarkably, the Venice Biennale accommodates these interventions without restrictive control. (Mithlo, 2006, pp. 88-9)

The Indigenous curators have the opportunity to perform not only an actantial role – as promoters of Indigenous cultures and artists in the world (see Section 7.2.3) –, but also the agential roles of creators of public conversations around Indigenous issues (see Section 7.3.1) and of translators of mainstream cultures into Indigenous cultural idioms (see Section 7.3.4).

6.4.2.2 Festivals as Effects of Discourse

Pow-wows merit special discussion, as their very existence touches on issues of authenticity and change.²⁶ They are dance festivals which, according to curator Tayac, were literally produced by Indigenous peoples and then re-enacted as traditional:

Pow-wow culture is something in and of itself that people add on in addition to their own and sometimes pow-wow stuff is used when people have lost everything, and they try to get energy just by identifying as Indians. In the region where I am, it is something that's a huge deal just to have identified as Indians at all, and say that you are an Indian at all was something, that was major victory. And now people are trying to sometimes patch that together, what is the specific culture and then you have places where people have really maintained that much more closely. I think the idea is, I'm becoming, I'm very concerned about preserving, protecting, promoting the specific, but also then seeing how does the growth change. (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

²⁶ Pow-wows celebrate Native traditions and are perceived as “traditional,” yet they are modern creations – “a purely imported, and somewhat invented, pan-Indian phenomenon ... [d]erived from Plains Indians traditions in Oklahoma” (Miller, 2013, p. 55). Their aim has been to educate newer generations about and reclaim (and maintain) traditions: “Indian youths learned both traditional tribal culture and Native traditions from other peoples” (p. 56).

As such, this particular type of festival is part of the *dispositif* of Indigenous knowledge in the second sense (i.e., being generated as an effect of the tradition discourse around Indigenous knowledge).

6.4.3 The Academy

6.4.3.1 Academia and the (Re)Production of Discourse

Academia is part of the *dispositif* which reproduces discourses around Indigenous knowledge, especially the “science” (i.e., Academic) discourse. According to the Indigenous curators, this particular type of discourse has had detrimental effects on Indigenous knowledge by making visible, and thus salient stereotypical representations of this type of knowledge. CHAPTERS 4 and 5 documented some of these detrimental effects, as perceived by Indigenous curators. As historian and curator Marcia Crosby (Tsimshian/Haida) puts it: “Increasingly, we as First Nations people assert our national and cultural differences against the homogenizing effects of academic discourse, mass culture and government legislation” (Crosby, p. 219).

6.4.3.2 Academia as Effect of Discourse

Yet, Academia has also become part of the *dispositif* emerging as an effect of the tradition discourse around Indigenous knowledge. For instance, academic institutes and programs have become places for the education of future Indigenous curators. For instance, curator Mithlo emphasizes the fact that specific education institutes, such as the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe (in New Mexico), have played a key role in the formation of Indigenous curators:

I give that organization credit for really developing the tribal culture center movement. If you look at the archives and you look at who actually

attended the school and went back home and started tribal cultural centers since like the 70's, 80's, those are all people that were trained in IAIA or were trained by other people at the Institute of American Indian Arts. I'm talking about the American, U.S. experience. So that was a big part of my training as well. (Mithlo, personal interview, March 30, 2012)

Also, many academic programs and departments focusing on Native issues (e.g., Native American Studies as part of Ethnic Studies programs) have been founded since the 1980s, even if under the pressure of a pervasive bias that “[m]inorities were believed to have little to contribute to human knowledge and the idea that they might have some history or culture worth knowing was regarded as the greatest insanity” (Deloria Jr., 1986, p.1).

The Academy has also been the space within which specific associations, such as the Native American Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), have emerged in an attempt to bridge a perceived gap between Western notions of knowledge and Indigenous knowledge. According to curator Tayac, NAISA brought together,

[A] critical mass of people who were bridging the academy with Indigenous based knowledge. That was really a trademark going across the board in so many of the papers and presentations. It wasn't just people who were native scholars or grad students, there were people from all over the world of all different ethnicities who were studying but with that though process in mind. (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

6.4.4 The Legal-Political Matrix

The legal-political matrix refers to the assemblage of policies, laws, regulations, and rules which are generated, implemented, and enforced by agencies linked to the political power in a society. Depending on the type of discourse which has appropriated it, this dispositif has had effects ranging from the most detrimental to the most propitious.

This dispositif had detrimental effects to Indigenous peoples and cultures in the past. As curator Smith noted: “The federal government has not always been a friend of Indian people. In fact, the U.S. for much of its history has targeted Indians for removal and physical destruction” (Smith, 2005, np). Smith alludes to policies aimed at the physical annihilation of American Indians. Other policies designed in the same vein were meant to regulate the space of culture and education.

First, cultural regulation meant, according to curator McMaster, that, “[b]eginning with an amendment to the Indian Act in 1884, the government forbade freedom of cultural expression and instead enacted a program of assimilation” (McMaster, 1989, p. 208).

Also, according to the same curator, the educational regulation has occurred either directly, by means of the explicit control of the contents and forms of education, or indirectly, by delegating educational tasks to such intermediaries, as the Church (an institution intrinsically built around the ideal of re-formation):

The government also gave churches the responsibility of educating Indian children. Most Indian children were removed from their families and sent to church-run boarding and industrial schools to become “civilized,” which deprived them of the chance to have a traditional education. (McMaster, 1989, np)

One certainly remembers the discussion (in Section 4.2.2.3) on the “Civilized” vs. “Primitive” dichotomy – a distinction abused in the statements of churchmen in the Americas. Used to describe the relationships between Western Europeans and the Native Americans, such a pervasive dichotomy was certainly able to support Church-based systems of education meant to “civilize” what was constructed as “primitive.”

The legal-political dispositif has also had propitious effects. For instance, it is partly responsible for the flourishing of museums with Indigenous exhibits, through the generation of specific legal acts. For instance, the founding of the National Museum of the American Indian as a result of a governmental decision has been hailed as a most unexpected opportunity for Native peoples to tell their stories:

Awarding Indians the last open space on the National Mall was a profound act that showed the American government and its people wanted Indians to be part of a national conversation, to finally talk, seriously, and at the highest levels, about things we had never really talked about before. Let's be clear: you don't get a new museum right next to the Capitol itself for making excellent jewelry, or for having stories and songs, or religious beliefs you wish to share with the world. You get the last open space on the National Mall because the country's decided, in the mysterious ways nations decide such matters, that it's time, at last, to speak about the hard things, the painful things, the unspeakable things. (Smith, 2005, np)

Policies also regulate the flow of financial resources. For instance, as curator B. noted, the State remains the most significant funding agent for museums: at least in Canada, federal funding is the main source of income for the Museum (B., personal interview, August 11, 2010). Curator Warren mentions federal grant programs as having a key impact on the number of works artists and curators create, as well as the freedom of expression these people experience in their work:

[I]n Canada, ... because we can access specialized government arts grants, artists and especially Indigenous artists are supported to create their artwork and tend to be quite innovative with their ideas and practices. For example the performance art practice is quite prevalent within Canadian arts programming. We have special programs and grants from Canada Council, which offers residencies to work with art institutions, programs like these offer first-hand experience in the curatorial practice and has launched many careers. And this especially so with Artist-run centre culture, many emerging artists begin their careers through the smaller arts institutions. (Warren, interviewed by S. Towne, 2012)

The shift in policies and legislation towards an explicit support of Indigenous peoples and cultures – a shift recorded by Indigenous curators in the quotes above – can be interpreted as the configuration of an incipient legal-political dispositif which is an effect of the emergent tradition discourse around Indigenous knowledge.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter presented the three types of components of the matrix of materiality underlying discourses around Indigenous knowledge. In the case of each of these types, instances mentioned by the curators have been described. The table below organizes these types and instances.

Table 6: The matrix of materiality (re)producing the discourses around Indigenous knowledge

SUBJECT POSITIONS/SOCIAL ACTORS	PRACTICES	DISPOSITIF
Scholars in Academia	Discursive practices	Museums
Tribal communities	Model practices	Festivals
Indigenous artists		The Academy
Self-organizing collectives		Legal-Political Matrix
Art critics		
Audiences		

First, under the heading of “subject positions,” the dissertation referred to the agency of scholars in the Academy, tribal communities, Indigenous artists, self-organizing collectives, art critics, and of various intended and actual audiences of exhibitions in supporting or deterring the work of the Indigenous curators. Second, under the heading of “practices,” the dissertation discussed some of the discursive and model practices associated with curatorship, that emerge from the curators’ statements. Finally,

under the rubric of “dispositif,” the dissertation briefly described some of the roles that museums, festivals, Academia, and the legal-political matrix play in enabling or thwarting the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge.

A few strong connections emerged from the discussion. First, the curators interact with other types of actors involved in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge. Among these actors, some tend to be aligned with the curators (the artists, NGOs, and other museum professionals), while others tend to diverge (especially managers and art critics). Moreover, other actors tend to be more ambivalent, e.g., the State (which was more divergent in the past, yet has been increasingly more aligned to the curators). Also, the audiences tend to be unstable, possibly because of their heterogeneity.

Second, the curators do their work against the background of a dispositif. Some of these tend to be aligned with the curators (the museum as an institution, festivals, legislation, and technologies of display), whereas others tend to raise serious symbolic and material barriers (especially the Academy and the funding sources for curatorial projects).

CHAPTER 7: THE ROLES OF INDIGENOUS CURATORSHIP IN THE DISCURSIVE ARENA OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Keller (2012) described social actors as “socially configured incarnations of agency” at the intersection “of multiple and heterogeneous, maybe even contradicting discourses.” They do not conform strictly to the rules deriving from the subject positions they occupy (as Foucauldian Discourse Theory assumes), but rather always interpret them as “offered rules” (pp. 61-2). Based on this insight, this chapter argues that the roles of Indigenous curatorship fall into three categories of increased self-reflexivity with regard to the rules of their position in the museum system and to how they engage discursively the roles they play. Specifically, the curators perform their roles (1) as actors within a discourse; (2) as agents mobilizing resources from within different discourses; and (3) as innovators playing at the boundaries of discourses, promoting discourses, and possibly contributing to the emergence of a new discourse of Indigenous knowledge.

The roles may be assigned to them and may require working around in order to creatively serve various audiences.

7.1 Introduction

The analysis of the phenomenal structure of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge in CHAPTERS 4 and 5 has revealed that Indigenous curators identify a series of threats which tribal communities’ cultural knowledge faces; in consequence they propose ways to address these threats in terms of model practices (an important component of the meaning-making dimension of the discourse around

Indigenous knowledge). CHAPTER 6 described the main components of the matrix of materiality through which the discourses around Indigenous knowledge have material effects: subject positions, practices, and a *dispositif* (notion borrowed from Michel Foucault's discourse theory and defined the assemblage of elements which enable the production of discursive statements about Indigenous knowledge).

Bringing together insights from these three previous chapters, this chapter focuses on Indigenous curatorship as a key subject position and describes its roles by drawing on how curators themselves understand their roles and position themselves in relation to Indigenous knowledge as injured knowledge.

This chapter shows that the various roles that Indigenous curators perform fall in one or more of the three following constructed categories, which are not mutually exclusive, but constitute a progression in how free the curators are in relation to the roles the institutional framework (as part of the *dispositif* of the museum) assigns to them. There are three ways of occupying the subject position of Indigenous curator in institutional contexts, namely as (1) actors conforming to roles assigned by the institutional framework and using "specific rules and resources to (re)produce and transform a discourse by means of their practices" within established, prescribed roles in actual work (Keller, 2013, p.72); as actors, the curators follow the rules associated with the curatorial position. In this respect, they mediate connections among communities, cultures, and institutions; support the activities of various tribal communities by providing them with resources and expertise; promote Indigenous culture in general, as well as Native artists; connect these artists to infrastructural resources; and educate and motivate various audiences; as (2) agents mobilizing creatively "social knowledge

supplies” from within the multiple discourses competing in the discursive arena of Indigenous knowledge (Keller, 2012, p. 62), the curators are able, through their positioning into multiple discourse, to create public conversations around exhibits and specific controversial topics; they are also capable of critiquing stereotypical representations of Nativeness, as well as of critiquing the Western canon and metanarratives in art and sciences; also, they are capable of acting as genuine translators, in both directions, of the cultures they are familiar with (Indigenous cultures and Western culture); finally, (3) the curators may assume a level of reflexivity which allows them to act as innovators. For instance, since Native cultures have been under an ongoing process of erasure, i.e., of invisibility, a curator may attempt to operate a true re-inscription of Nativeness into reality (to use the idea of one of the curators). This means, the curators (together with other artists) may attempt to re-invent Indigeneity in those situations in which it has become invisible, absent, silenced, and erased.

This tripartition of curatorial role does not mean that a curator operates strictly and exclusively within the boundaries of only one of these three roles. On the contrary, as will emerge from the analysis below, the same curator may, for instance, act innovatively (with respect to a role) and agentic (with respect to another role) within the same institution. It is important to maintain this distinction as it reflects the distinction between a Foucauldian discursive framework which assumes that discourses define subject positions very rigidly and actors occupy them without problematizing them and a SKAD framework which assumes that social actors are rather agents who keep juggling with resources pertaining to multiple discourses and combining them to achieve their goals.

Table 7: Roles of Indigenous curators with regard to instances in which roles are being modeled

TYPES OF ROLES	INSTANCES OF THOSE ROLES
ACTANTIAL (7.2)	Mediating connections among communities, cultures, and institutions
	Supporting community activities
	Promoting Indigenous culture, artists
	Linking/connecting Native artists to resources
	Educating/motivating audiences
AGENTIC (7.3)	Creating public conversations
	Critiquing stereotypes
	Challenging the Western canon/ metanarrative
	Translating cultures bi-directionally
INNOVATIVE (7.4)	Re-inscribing Indigeneity into reality

7.2 Actantial Roles of Indigenous Curatorship

Indigenous curators perform actantial roles of Indigenous curatorship by occupying the subject position of Indigenous curator prescribed by the discourses around Indigenous knowledge which inform the statutes governing the functioning of museums (please refer to Appendix A for examples of these mission statements) and the relationships between the majority and the Indigenous peoples. Actantial roles can be inferred from the mission statements of the museums which employ the curators, as well as from the legislation regulating the appropriate treatment of Native American remains and artifacts (this is precisely the legislation which presides over the mission statements

of those museums; see Section 1.2.1.2). The analysis of the seven mission statements of the museums with which many of the indigenous curators are affiliates reveals a few common values defining the framework which provides the curators with a specific understanding of their roles. Insofar as the curators are part of academic-scientific institutions through which such a discourse is (re)produced and transformed, it is expected, at a minimum, that they conform to these roles and the complex levels of responsibilities associated with them, i.e., “all these kinds of layers of responsibility” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012).

7.2.1 The Indigenous Curator as a Mediator among Communities, Cultures, and Institutions

The main role that Indigenous curators assume is mediation, of access of Indigenous artists and communities (two major actors in the tradition discourse of Indigenous knowledge) to resources of the museum needed for the production and display of artistic or ethnographic artifacts. In his 2012 interview with Elizabeth Neal, Mohawk curator Ryan Rice (Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts since 2009) is particularly clear about his role:

I consider myself a mediator fostering everything between supporting an artist’s production and up to the presentation. I am open to dialogue and willing to accommodate artists’ ideas, suggestions that will enhance and support the exhibition when in development and need to be able to negotiate and be strategic when making decisions in all aspects of the project.” (Rice, interview by E. Neal, 2012)

Often, the mediation role boils down to sheer administrative work requiring sharp negotiation skills from the curator in his/her dealings with administrative decision-makers. As the same curator claims, a curator has a “predominately administrative [role]

once the basis of the project/proposal is developed. Multi-tasking and organizing skills are crucial and fluctuate from exhibition to exhibition” (Rice, interview by E. Neal, 2012).

The mediation function does not require the curator to go beyond a role which is prescribed to him/her by the museum viewed as providing artists with a “venue” (according to the mission statement of the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, NM) for expression (please refer to Appendix A).

7.2.2 The Indigenous Curator as Provider of Support for Activities of Tribal Communities

Insofar as a seminal museum like the National Museum of the American Indian claims in its mission statement, “to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life” (please refer to Appendix A), supporting the activities of tribal communities aimed at their self-preservation or self-promotion is obviously part of the role that Indigenous curators must assume. In this respect, curator L’Hirondelle defines sharply this role as one of being “supportive of [tribal] communities” (personal interview, February 22, 2012).

According to curator B., the curatorial support that a museum like NMAI offers to artists or craftspeople takes the form of the curators’ engagement in specific practices in partnership with Native communities: for instance, the job of a curator is to provide, upon request, tribal communities with available material resources, but also with curatorial expertise in the organization of tribal festivals and commemorations (personal interview, August 11, 2010). For instance, this requirement is reflected in the statement of NMAI:

as a cultural institution, it is “committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others” (Appendix A).

Yet supporting communities does not mean adopting a paternalist attitude toward them: curator B. acknowledged that he would not preach to tribal communities what they ought to do, or about what values they ought to have, since, as a matter of fact, “they can take care of themselves” (personal interview, August 11, 2010).

Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which appropriately supporting tribal communities involves, for the curator, to have already reflected upon and to hold a conception of what is good for those communities. Thus, according to curator Tayac, there is “a level of curation that you have to think about what is good for our communities and what will make us better, stronger, more compassionate and more able to purge a lot of things out that people have been carrying in painful ways for many years that we have to deal with” (personal interview, February 24, 2012). In this quote, curator Tayac alludes to the healing function of Indigenous curatorship in the context of the injured status of Indigenous knowledge.

The support offered to the communities by the curatorial work may even have a self-sacrificial dimension to it, as it may trump curators’ possibly divergent private interests: “sometimes somebody is going to be unhappy, but the people who are not going to be unhappy, it is not going to be the community that is unhappy” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

7.2.3 The Indigenous Curator as Promoter (of Indigenous Culture and Artists)

A third type of actantial role of Indigenous curatorship involves the promotion and preservation of Indigenous cultures and knowledge. As curator L'Hirondelle makes it clear, "within the institution itself ...the prime focus is the promotion and preservation of First Nations and Metis cultures" (personal interview, February 22, 2012). Specifically, for the curators, promotion is itself a form of support, insofar as it presupposes "allowing Native artists to express themselves, to make their voices heard, to have their work presented in serious, professional contexts, and to encourage young creative talent." This activity is regarded as decisive to the survival of Native cultures (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, np).

Yet, successful promotion often involves the ability of the curator to really understand artists' needs:

[O]ne of the challenges for the Native artist is that they feel like the work, even when it's very strong, doesn't get the attention of the reviews, because non-Indian critics and curators say, "well, I only understand this if I read about it and sometimes you think what he's saying is special. We always say "we don't wanna real critiques." But sometimes, you know, frankly, people don't want real critiques, they can't handle the criticism. And sometimes it might be misguided and questionable in terms of the politics or social outlook. But Native artists generally do want to be part of the art world. So I was very much about doing shows that could contribute to the discussion about where these artists and the questions that their art raises fit into a broader dialogue. (personal interview, May 7, 2012)

In this quote, curator Smith regards as a challenge for the curator the design of exhibitions which are responsive the deepest needs of Indigenous artists, namely that people (and especially art critics) receive their artistic works with the genuine desire for engaging in a dialogue with the artists.

7.2.4 The Indigenous Curator as a Connector

A fourth role can be understood in terms of connection (“being a positive force and making a difference” for individuals). According to curator Ash-Milby (Apache), in an interview taken by Chela Perley, the curator is supposed to “connect artists to opportunities, whether [by] encouraging them to apply to specific artist residencies and funding opportunities, or [by] introducing them to other people in the field” (Ash-Milby, interviewed by C. Perley, 2012).

Even curatorial collectives such as the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC), of which Ash-Milby is a member, view their main task in terms of “support[ing], promot[ing] and advocate[ing] on behalf of Canadian and international Aboriginal curators, critics, artists and representatives of arts and cultural organizations” (ACC, 2014).

7.2.5 The Indigenous Curator as an Educator and Motivator

The fifth role of Indigenous curators as actors within the science discourse is consonant with a frequently invoked value in museum mission statement, namely that of “educat[ing audiences] for the enrichment of present and future generations” (Portland Art Museum, 2014). Education is framed in terms of “promoting a greater understanding” (e.g., “of Canadian identity, history, and culture”), of “fostering a sense of Canadian identity” (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2014), or of “stimulating” (Gallery 101, 2014) or providing “pleasure and understanding” to the various audiences (National Gallery of Canada, 2014).

Thus, curator Tayac considers that one task of Indigenous curatorship is “to make people open and aware, and to shift their minds to be able to see Native knowledge as powerful as it is, to acknowledge it, to never again ignore it, to understand it, to use it to motivate people” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). Being an educator or motivator can be interpreted as an actantial role: the curator is not required to go beyond the boundaries prescribed for his/her role by the museum (one of the most frequent tasks that museums assume is that of educating audiences).

7.2.6 Unresolved Tensions

Nevertheless, there are a few tensions that remain unresolved within the “neutral” actantial role. One such tension concerns the situation of the Indigenous curator being a mere actor in a discourse: he/she may end up and keep understanding curatorship only as a job, as curator B. points out. He offers the example of a person in charge of a collection who would not allow him to do in depth photography of an item. She would say: climb the stairs and take a picture of the object on the shelf, but don’t touch and don’t remove it. It took a whole day to convince her to let him see, touch, and take a picture of the object (“I didn’t travel such a long distance, to be allowed to take a picture from a distance”) (personal interview, August 11, 2010).

Another tension concerns the varying degrees of knowledge and commitment to curatorial work that Indigenous curators display. Curator B. refers to another curator who started as a preacher and then ended up being a museum curator. But “there are many things he doesn’t know,” precisely because “he is not a curator at core.” For instance, at some point, B. asked the museum where that curator was working to help him with

traditional Métis items from their collection. That curator brought him all items with floral motives. B. told him the floral motives do not constitute a mark of Métis culture, necessarily (personal interview, August 11, 2010).

7.3 Agentic Roles of Indigenous Curatorship

The agentic roles of Indigenous curatorship arise from the curators' increased awareness that there is more than one discourse competing in the discursive arena of Indigenous knowledge and that they may be able to mobilize resources pertaining to more than one such discourse. These roles may not necessarily be such that the curators are obliged to fulfill as part of their being museum employees bound by strict institutional rules. Yet fulfilling these roles may be a permitted activity.

7.3.1 Creators of Public Conversations

A key agentic role that curators assume explicitly is that of being public intellectuals “trying to create a public conversation” involving tribal and ethno-national groups towards which the curator feels responsible (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012) which may be through acting as “talk-show host[s]” generating opinions that people can “explore [within the frame of] an interesting conversation” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). In this sense, Indigenous curators see themselves as facilitators who “[bring] together ideas and objects and people” in order to determine the “kind of useful and hopefully engaging discussion [they may] have from that” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). The role of the curator is to “engage people, [rather than to use] the museum voice to assert one truth, or to convince people of a whole set of debate

points.” This experience of “ideational exchanges” is viewed as one way for the visitor to “internalize the engagement of different knowledge systems, which are continually at play in the world around us” (Isaac, 2008, p. 263).

This role for Indigenous curators is facilitated by the dispositif of a museum like NMAI, which, according to Rickard (2011), has been designed in such a way so as to function as “the most visible site of encounter available in North America in which non-Native people can engage with a contemporary Indigenous perspective” (p. 467). Also, referring to NMAI, Smith talks about the museum,

[A]s a site of a national conversation. We are the very beginning of that conversation, and like any difficult conversation, it can be rough going, especially at first. Let’s keep arguing, because at least it means we’re talking. And of course by now you know I’m talking also about arguments among Indians, not just those boring arguments between Indians and cowboys. But we’ll get better at this, because we have to. I mean, it’s not like anyone’s going anywhere, right? (Smith, 2005, np)

Some of the curators actually voice a clearly articulated position on the “ideal visitor” of an exhibition focusing on Native issues: this “would be somebody that would come in, maybe with a little bit of knowledge, but not a lot, look at the exhibit, maybe you looked at the book, and say ‘I disagree with you, I don’t think [artist X] was the most significant artist, and here’s why’” (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012). Referring to the curatorial vision of another prominent curator, Jolene Rickard, Smith (2005) says that she “believes that an exhibition (...) should generate controversy, questions, discussion, and yes, argument” (np).

It may seem that this role is actantial, since one value in the mission statement of many museums is to “educate for the enrichment of present and future generations” (Portland Art Museum, 2014). Yet, one can still argue that this particular role is rather

agentic, because there is a sense in which it plays against the traditional view of the museum as a depositary and dispenser of absolute “truths” and of the curator as an unquestionable authority. Assuming a dialogic stance (as described by Smith) may be regarded as an attempt to involve the visitors (and, implicitly, potentially new and diverging discourses) in the process of knowledge production and circulation.

7.3.2 The Indigenous Curator as a Critic of Stereotypes

This is one of the most important roles that the Indigenous curators see themselves as compelled to fulfill (curator Mithlo devotes a whole book to the topic of stereotype subversion; see Mithlo, 2008). This is a role which emerges as an obvious one from the discussion of the topo-chronography of Indigenous knowledge (see CHAPTERS 4 and 5) providing the basis for critique. One may be tempted to view it as an actantial role, insofar as the very act of exhibiting contributes to the neutralizing of stereotypes. Yet, one can also argue, more convincingly, that the curators need, first, to be aware of the various, and often very insidious, forms that stereotyping assumes (e.g., by working through mechanisms pertaining to the science discourse which pervades Academia and the media), and, second, mobilize the best resources to address these stereotypes. In terms of SKAD, critiquing stereotypes may mean to engage in such model practices as the use of narratives, symbols, and metaphors – made available through the tradition discourse – in order to undermine the power of the discursive statements about Indigenous knowledge generated from within the science discourse. After all, as discussed in Section 3.3.6, storytelling is constitutive of Indigenous knowledge: it emerges from

“experiencing life rather than [from] measuring and controlling it” (Beaucage, 2005, p. 140), what presumably science does.

7.3.3 The Indigenous Curator as a Challenger the Western Canon / Metanarrative / Cartography

A further agentic role of Indigenous curatorship, which is related to the previously discussed one, consists in engaging in concrete acts of challenging the canon or the metanarrative of mainstream culture, insofar as this culture construes Indigenous knowledge in distorted ways. This process of challenging the canon can take many forms. For instance, Tayac suggests that the point of Indigenous curatorship is to “expand [the canon by] incorporating Indigenous ways of thinking” (personal interview, February 24, 2012). This strategy reflects what Native scholar Eva Marie Garrouette (Cherokee) called “Radical Indigenism” (see Section 3.3.8.2 on curators’ liberal use of the notion of Indigenous knowledge), namely that scientific knowledge and Indigenous knowledge can fuse together into a new and more complex form of knowledge. This strategy amounts to a form of blending endogenous and exogenous perspectives on knowledge in the hope that a more nuanced perspective will emerge.

Referring to her exhibit, “Our People,” curator Rickard proposes the further strategy of “making an intervention on the framing of Native cultures within a metanarrative of the West” (Rickard, 2007, p. 88) as an act of resistance. In a similar vein, Crosby (1991) notes that “the West’s recent self-critique of its historical depiction of ‘the other’ [may still constitute] just another form of the West’s curious interest in its other; or more specifically, the ultimate colonization of ‘the Indian’ into the spaces of the

West's postmodern centre/margin cartography.” In this context, she advocates “an act of confrontation and resistance” that would consist in “[e]xposing the self-serving purposes, and the limitations that such cultural maps impose on all First Nations people” (p. 219). This strategy amounts to an affirmation of the endogenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge as a form of resistance to dominant exogenous perspectives.

7.3.4 The Indigenous Curator as (Bi-directional) Translator

Indigenous curators can often act as translators between cultures and, more importantly, between competing worldviews or systems of knowledge. This particular feature is often a function of their plural backgrounds (ethno-cultural, but also professional). For instance, curator Tayac talks about her position as a traveler between endogenous and exogenous perspectives: “I come from a multi-racial, multicultural background too, so personally I always sort of been an inside/outside person, constantly having to explain things to very, very different groups of people or to know how to be in one space, and to another space” (personal interview, February 24, 2012). Having and valuing one’s plurality of backgrounds usually positions the curator at the boundary of discourses. McMaster (1995) captures this situation when he refers to Native artists as “smugglers, coyotes, or tricksters.” In his work on border zones, he suggests that

[B]orders are cultural not physical. At the border there is a displacement of time and space. Borders hold up a “reflecting mirror” to the dominant society, which is to say, they can and will be subversive, particularly disrupting the one-way flow of the mass media that attempts to control images of itself. In Bakhtinian terms, the border zone is a zone for “heteroglossia” (a multiplicity of languages within a single language), a deterritorialized and political zone. (p. 82)

Translation is a process whereby knowledge can move from either direction. In general, it is viewed as a form of expressing a sense embedded in a medium of representation into another such medium:

[T]he act of expressing the sense of one language into another parlance or form of representation. When applied to visual languages, translation can transcend the boundaries of specific movements and discourses and does not bind artists by locating them in (or up against) a particular realm. (Mattes, as cited in Loft, 2009)

First, and most frequently, curators attempt to translate Indigenous knowledge contents into mainstream knowledge. For instance, according to Hill Jr., it is part of Indigenous ontologies that “things have a kind of agency in the world, they act on us, and we have social relations to them.” From the point of view of strictly religious thinking, this means that “there’s literally a spirit in the thunder that makes it animate.” However, there is also a sense in which certain things may be plausibly regarded as “having intention in relation to you,” as “interacting with you in a much more active way.” Hill Jr. acknowledges that this insight has changed his “view of the material world,” especially since he is interested in “art and architecture and just what material does.” Hill Jr. conveys the notion that art is a privileged medium for this kind of translation, insofar as it “makes it very obvious” that things and the material world in general have concrete effects on humans. He gives an example of how humans and things can establish relationships of reciprocity:

The example I always give to my students is [the following:] I have a little berry bush that grows outside the apartment I live in, that makes raspberries; and I have a relationship with the bush: every day I go there to see if there’s a fresh ...when there is a fresh berry, I take it as a kind of present from the bush, I don’t think about it, again, in a spiritual way, but I think, well, I’m having that relationship, I’m excited to see it, I’m disappointed if it’s doing badly, I care about it, and, of course, there

should be a kind of reciprocity (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012)

Smith also points out to his realization of the fact that the task of the curator as an actor within the museum institution is to translate the significance of Indigenous experience from a local context to even wider contexts, for instance “in national and global terms,” that is, to reveal its “global impact.” Smith came to hold this view as a result of his experience with attempting to get at “what we call Native voice, which is people talking in their own words, their own ideas.” His experience was that, in fact, “it was hard to pull off.” He rhetorically asked the question:

[I]f you just go to any community, if you go to people in Toronto, and say: “Tell me about Toronto, tell me about what your beliefs are, your religion, politics, and your history,” they can have profound experiences and insight into that, but would you actually be able to sketch out an exhibit, or even a book? I don’t think so. (Smith, personal interview, May 7, 2012)

The role of art as a privileged medium of cultural translation is emphasized by curator Townsend-Gault. In her essay on the exhibition “Land, Spirit, Power” (published in the collective volume dedicated to this exhibition), she contends that translation is “a complex and subtle operation” of “reaching across cultures on many different levels.” Translation is more than “a relatively simple matter of translation from language A to language B” (Townsend-Gault, 1992, p. 99). Rather, it is a transformative process in which knowledge is being shared “willingly.” Knowledge can be “shared,” can be “merely intimated,” as well as downright “withheld” (Townsend-Gault, 1992, p. 86). The last situation bespeaks the existence of limits to translation. Curator Mithlo contends, along similar lines, that

[E]xhibitions alone are insufficient. The “get in” is a hollow goal in the absence of a grounded cultural understanding. Visibility alone is really

only another form of voyeurism. Indian people have been subjected to the incessant gaze of the West since Contact. It is not enough to be looked upon, serving as the exotic other in an exchange that has profound negative implications for self-representation. Scholars Lutz and Collins refer to this imbalanced power dynamic as a “culturally tutored experience” that presents as natural that which is really ahistorical, patriarchal, and constructed. To see fully is to be able to translate aesthetic conventions cross-culturally. The mimicking of Western terminology is a form of colonialism, an assimilation to Western constructs and norms. (Mithlo, 2006, p. 87)

In this quote, curator Mithlo contrasts the act of translating aesthetic conventions across cultures to the act of mere mimicry of Western aesthetic ideals and vocabularies (which she construes as a form of assimilation). From this point of view, the curator fulfils an agentic role, since he or she has to be able to immerse him- or herself in at least two cultures, in order to be able to reconstruct the conventions of one in terms of conventions for the other.

Second, translation can also occur as a form of interpretation of non-Indigenous art (and knowledge) from an Indigenous perspective. As curator L’Hirondelle points out, “you can have the ability to interpret non-aboriginal art from an aboriginal world view in some regard.” In guise of example, she refers to her exhibit called “Animal Dreams,” which involved two non-Indigenous persons:

When I looked at the work, it reminded me of the Santa Fe Indian style school of painting, the works that they were doing. That’s the way that I looked at it. When I talked to the artists and I had written about that a bit in the text I had written for the exhibition, they told me they had never heard of that school of painting before. It’s just like interjecting those things, to show that stylistically, things don’t always come from where we... [interviewee stopped] It’s the influences. (L’Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012)

As mentioned above, the curators are aware that there are situations in which untranslatability rules: “a point is reached where translation stops. This point should mark

the beginning of a more broadly encompassing, necessarily humbling, appreciation of the knowledge of other cultures — of cultural difference” (Townsend-Gault, 1992, p. 99). For instance, she points to “the suave elegance of [the] carvings” of artist Dempsey Bob, which “conceals as much as it reveals — essentially un-knowable to a non-Tlingit audience” (p. 99). Specifically, “[n]arratives recalling how the spirits were originally revealed to the clan are essential to these works, but cannot travel into a collector's home with a carving.” Also, the concept of *at.óo'w*, which is “fundamental to Tlingit social structure, oral literature, and ceremonial life, ... cannot readily be translated into English, yet it remains the spiritual, social, and rhetorical anchor for oratory, carving, and much else.” If there is a limit at work in the possibilities for trans-cultural translation, this is set “[neither] for the sake of mystification, nor as a hostile withholding for the sake of individual or group power, but [in order] to protect a cultural power” (Townsend-Gault, 1992, pp. 99-100).

The fundamental “untranslatability of certain concepts and subtleties from one culture to another” reveals the existence and persistence of cultural differences:

In the end, cultural difference is expressed not by attempting to find common ground, common words, common symbols across cultures. It is finally dignified by protecting all sides from zealous over-simplification, by acknowledging a final untranslatability of certain concepts and subtleties from one culture to another. Despite the immense generosity, the ethical injunction to share, and the holistic, animist philosophies that are essential to aboriginal societies across North America, self-definitions rooted in cultural distinctiveness must retain their untranslatable difference. The works in this exhibition contribute to, but also significantly adjust, by expanding, the discourse. We can know many things, whoever “we” may be. But we can never know everything. (Townsend-Gault, 1992, p. 101)

It may seem that translation is an actantial role, insofar as one of the main tasks of the Indigenous curator is precisely to mediate connections between Native communities and cultures, on one hand, and mainstream societies and cultures, on the other hand. Yet, one can argue that translation is an interpretative act which requires the curator to be familiar with, and navigate between, various discourses, usually backed up by an enabling dispositif (such as international festivals). This, at least, is what curator Mithlo seems to suggest when contending that

Despite a lack of mainstream institutional recognition, a multiplicity of artistic dialects and worldviews exist. In this frame of reference – one not dependent on art historical canons – cultural translations are necessary for a global arts conversation to ensue. A sovereign, culturally specific platform that is simultaneously engaged with larger art currents can emerge if space is made available outside of the standardized inclusion / legitimization agenda. ... What I am calling for is not a separate playing field, not a replication of the ethnic arts segmentation that often results in stagnation, but rather recognition of the cultural translations necessary for true parity in the global arts arena. Remarkably, the Venice Biennale accommodates these interventions without restrictive control. (Mithlo, 2006, pp. 88-9)

In this quote, curator Mithlo suggests that cultural translation is a requirement for the genuine conversation on a global scale for which Indigenous artists and curators strive. The unstated assumption is that such a conversation can only unfold upon a background of shared understandings.

7.3.5 Unresolved Tensions

There are unresolved tensions with curatorship even when the curator displays a professional self-awareness which overflows the boundaries of her actantial role. The problems may derive not so much from the attitude of the curator him-/herself, but rather from how other actors understand the horizon of permissible movement of an actor and

how they constrain possible “deviations” of curators. More often than not challenges seem to originate outside the Indigenous communities, as Robert Houle pointed out in the interview done by C. Hargittay, yet without offering a concrete example:

It became clear that my hands were tied, and that no matter what I did nothing was going to make any difference or change the entrenched attitudes towards contemporary Native art at the museum. I became passionately involved with the issues surrounding contemporary Native expression, but, that day I realized that, for me, perhaps the best way to promote this cause was not as a curator, but as an artist. (Houle and Hargittay, 1988, p. 58)

However, there is also a sense in which the most challenging challenges come from within the Indigenous communities, especially when the indigenous curators are challenged by the Native communities on grounds of legitimacy of speaking in the name of Native peoples. In this respect, curator Tayac claims that “[a] lot of times the fiercest, most intense debates and conversations and conflicts, they happen internally” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Interestingly, by pointing to his shift from being a curator to becoming an artist, Houle alludes to an interesting dimension of curatorship that is captured by its innovative roles. This type of role for curators is discussed below.

7.4 Innovative Roles of Indigenous Curatorship

Finally, there is a third type of role that Indigenous curatorship exemplifies in the literature and the interviews which I analyzed. Beside actantial and agentic roles, there are other roles, which one can call “innovative” or “artistic.” Their point consists in more than the actantial (re)production of one particular discourse or in the agentic mobilization of resources from multiple discourses. It is rather a matter of going beyond the strict boundaries of actantial role and engaging in creative discursive practices out of which the

extant discourses may shift. The curator him/herself may paradoxically experience this new type of role as a non-role (in the sense of a role which is not bound by very strict rules). For instance, curator Smith claims that “curating is a dubious, mostly invented profession, with no firm requirements and elastic definitions” (Smith, interview with E. Gregory, 2012). Hill Jr. makes sense of this apparent shapelessness of curatorship by framing it as an artistic endeavor: “I see [curating] as much more a kind of creative undertaking ... similar to my training in art” (Hill Jr., personal interview, March 20, 2012). What artists, compared to scientists do, is create, invent worlds, especially there, where there is no longer anything to be discovered. This innovative attitude reminds us of curator Tayac’s claim that, in a drive not unlike that of artists, tribal communities often invent traditions (such festivals as the pow-wow is her example) in order to preserve a thinned sense of identity (personal interview, February 24, 2012)

Curator Jolene Rickard captures the creative, innovative, artistic dimension of Indigenous curatorship when, according to Smith (2005), she claims that “an exhibition should present something that has never been done before, and not repackage knowledge that already exists. It should use objects to provide an experience you cannot have any other way” (Smith, interview with E. Gregory, 2012).

The curators mention one such innovative role for curatorship, namely, that “very lofty and (...) very idealistic” operation of making Indigeneity visible and respectable again, by re-inscribing, by re-writing it back into reality, “into the world, into world relevance.” In fact, “the world would never be what it is now, (...) it would just be very different if native people weren’t around or didn’t impact the world after Columbus” (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012).

Creativity within the boundaries of the role of curatorship is the most effective form of resistance to the dominant discourses backed up by the State: “the resistance to the state's ‘coded power’ is exercised through artistic praxis” (McMaster, 1995, p.76). In this respect, McMaster echoes the views of emblematic Indigenous artists like Joy Harjo (Mvskoke/Creek Nation), for whom resistance can take the form of “writing, singing, making new art, reviving and continuing older classic traditions” (Harjo, 2011, pp 125-6). An older tradition is the use of storytelling to convey Indigenous knowledge, as discussed in Section 3.3.6, a practice which distinguishes the tradition from science discourse.

I believe that the innovative dimension of curatorship understood as an artistic practice revolves around the notion of work at the boundaries, insofar as borderlands are “sites of creative cultural production” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 208), zones in which “emergent social agents/subjects experience, interrogate, and negotiate their conditions of existence ... [and in which] new cultural practices [emerge] that involve improvisation and the recombination of disparate cultural elements, creating a diverse cultural repertoire” (McMaster, 1995, pp. 80-2). Section 4.2.2 in CHAPTER 4 discussed the notion of boundary and types of stereotyped distinctions that are active in the public representations of Indigenous peoples and knowledge. That section also suggested that the Indigenous curators are active in imagining new ways in which they can problematize, relativize, shift, and even dissolve these distinctions. McMaster (1995a) refers to this possibility when he argues that, nowadays, Native artists (curators included) are engaged in a process of “hybridiz[ing] new cultural practices through the improvisation and recombination of disparate cultural elements, creating a diverse cultural repertoire.” For instance, the works of prominent aboriginal artist Edward Poitras

combine influences from traditional Native and Chicano art and Western conceptual art (Marcel Duchamp) to rethink the relationship between life and death:

This is achieved by decorating animal skulls with the internal components of discarded electronic equipment, combining them in such a way as to make reference to his Indian heritage. The mix of environmental material sheds light on a new path, but also activates an alarm that questions the effect of technology on culture and our responsibility to the environment. (McMaster and Martin, 1992, p. 160)

Specifically, these artists “often live, create and appropriate between two and more spaces, responding, for example, to home “markets” for ceremonial productions (on the reserve) and competing within the larger commercial art market.” McMaster interprets this as “a tactical position, allowing artists to live and create new styles.” In addition, “this position allows them to challenge deeply rooted artistic practices that are value-laden,” for instance such dichotomies as “art/culture, elite/popular, traditional/modern, and political/aesthetic.” Given this, “the border zone becomes a creative arena, a heteroglossia of languages and styles as contemporary (Native) artists maneuver to control and determine meanings” (McMaster, 1995, p. 84). There is a sense in which McMaster’s discussion reliably describes the situation of the Native curators, an assumption which is made plausible by most of the curators themselves, who consider curatorship itself to be as a form of artistry.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the roles of Indigenous curatorship as a privileged site for enactment at the intersections between the meaning-making and the material dimensions of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge. It suggests that Indigenous curators may inhabit the subject position of Indigenous curatorship in three major ways with regard to

self-reflexivity as curators in institutional contexts. Firstly, they often behave as actors following strictly the rules associated with the curatorial position. In this respect, the curators mediate connections among communities, cultures, and institutions; support the activities of various tribal communities by providing them with resources and expertise; promote Indigenous culture in general, as well as Native artists; connect these artists to infrastructural resources; and educate and motivate various audiences. Secondly, the curators may behave as agents, that is, more than simple actors following strictly the rules of the job; specifically, agentic curators are able, through their positioning into multiple discourse, to create public conversations around exhibits and specific controversial topics; they are also capable of critiquing stereotypical representations of Nativeness, as well as of critiquing the Western canon and metanarratives in art and sciences; also, they are capable of acting as genuine translators, in both directions, of the cultures they are familiar with (Indigenous cultures and Western culture). Thirdly, the curators may assume a level of reflexivity which allows them to act as innovators. For instance, since Native cultures have been under an ongoing process of erasure, i.e., of invisibility, a curator may attempt to operate a true re-inscription of Nativeness into reality (to use the idea of one of the curators). This means, the curators (together with other artists) may attempt to re-invent Indigeneity in those situations in which it has become invisible, absent, silenced, and erased.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The main research objective of this discourse-analytic study has been to capture and describe a range of articulations of North American Indigenous curators' discourses of Indigenous knowledge in order to understand how these discourses are actualized (i.e., reproduced and transformed) through social and material practices of Indigenous museum curatorship and how Indigenous curators are involved in the institutional production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge in North America. Since any discourse has a material and a meaning-making dimension, aspects of the material and of the meaning-making dimension of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge were explored within the framework of an integrative account, called the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD). Through a synthesis of Foucault's discourse theory and the sociology of knowledge of Berger and Luckmann, this framework allowed me to understand how constructions of Indigenous knowledge emerge as a result of the agency of Indigenous curators in the discursive arena of Indigenous knowledge.

In accomplishing the overall objective, this study reconstructed a phenomenal structure (i.e., the symbolic dimension) of the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge (RO₁). Also, the study identified some of the material aspects of the discourse of Indigenous knowledge (RO₂); some of the aspects of the Indigenous curator subject position and the relations with other subject positions (RO_{2a}); some of the practices of Indigenous curatorship as indicated by the North American Indigenous curators in the interviews, their exhibitions, and/or their written documents (RO_{2b}); and some of the

aspects of the dispositif within which Indigenous curatorship is positioned in major North American museums (RO_{2c}).

To address these objectives, data were collected and analyzed, during 2010 and 2012, from three sources: interviews with Indigenous curators, scholarly works of these professionals, and an exhibition with Indigenous content.

8.2 Have the Research Objectives Been Addressed?

The organization of the chapters of this dissertation reflects the structure of the main and subsidiary research objectives. CHAPTERS 1 and 2 provided the background review of literature on Indigenous knowledge and the plan of the study aimed at addressing the gap in knowledge I identified in that literature. CHAPTERS 3 through 7 comprised the analysis.

8.2.1 First Research Objective

CHAPTERS 3, 4, and 5 focused on describing the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge as a way of reconstructing the meaning-making dimension of this type of knowledge (RO₁). A phenomenal structure consists of a configuration of corresponding dimensions and strategies: a central theme and categorization and classification patterns; causal relations and explanatory patterns; subject positions and legitimization patterns; responsibilities and evaluative patterns; model practices and dramatizing patterns.

Specifically, CHAPTER 3 looked at Indigenous knowledge as a discursive construction with specific definitional aspects as emerging from the statements of the

Indigenous curators. A finding was about an intrinsic tension built into the very notion of Indigenous knowledge (as defined and discussed by both Native and non-Native scholars); namely, there is a tension between a scientific world view and Indigenous world view. I framed this thesis in terms of a conflict between what I called the “science discourse” and the “tradition discourse.” The main finding in Chapter 3 was that Indigenous knowledge is constructed as “injured knowledge” – a theme which informs the reflections, strategies, and work of the curators. These professionals often refer to the cultural knowledge of their tribes or Nations of origin as something that was either “merely lost” or has just been “silenced” and, thus, needs to be recovered or “healed,” often through active research, as well as asserted through concrete use and through political action.

Moreover, when asked to provide explicit conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledge, the curators rely on a notion of Indigenous knowledge that has the following features: it is grounded in aboriginal ways of being in the world; takes the form of relationality (especially to land, family, and memory – key elements in the formation of Indigenous identities); has universal relevance; is oriented towards survival; requires acts of recovery through (inter)active research; is structured narratively; and presupposes protocol-based forms of control in the processes of circulation within the Native communities owning them.

The curators are split when it comes to employing the notion of Indigenous knowledge in their statements and work. Some of them are prudent in defining and using this term because they are aware of the notion of knowledge made available through the “science” discourse, namely a notion that Indigenous knowledge is by definition

constructed as non-knowledge within the framework of dominant post-Enlightenment scientific rationality. Given this dominant notion, some of the curators feel that Indigenous knowledge may not have yet an adequate codification and legitimation in the Academy, or a definition that is specific and inclusive enough to shirk generalizations that relegate it to the status of the non-scientific. Other curators take an opposite, more liberal, attitude: they inhabit an affirmative stance towards Indigenous knowledge, under the assumption that it is crucial to the formation of Indigenous identities and to the solving of problems created by its invisibility as a type of knowledge.

Additionally, the curators' notion of Indigenous knowledge is compatible with at least one version of the mainstream concept of knowledge, namely the one involving, as a requirement, a condition of connection to what a community takes to be "reality" and an additional condition of collective acceptability for a belief to qualify as a piece of knowledge.

After having elicited the central aspect of the phenomenal structure of Indigenous knowledge as "injured knowledge," the dissertation explored the other aspects of that phenomenal structure (namely, causal relations and explanatory patterns; subject positions and legitimization patterns; responsibilities and evaluative patterns; as well as model practices and dramatizing patterns). Specifically, CHAPTERS 4 and 5 described two vocabularies, a topography and a chronography of Indigenous knowledge, within which the Indigenous curators articulate several types of causalities and responsibilities for the injured status of Indigenous knowledge, as well as possible "model practices" to address these threats. One vocabulary, labeled "topography of Indigenous knowledge," builds around two major tropes, namely place and boundary, to refer to perceived threats

to Indigenous knowledge and anticipated solutions to these threats. Another vocabulary, labeled “chronography” of Indigenous knowledge, allows for the articulation of three major narratives built around three types of relationships among past, present, and future (the three dimensions of time): the Discontinuity, the Irrelevance, and the Marginality Narratives, which, grounded in the “science” discourse, downplay and even reject Indigenous knowledge as inexistent, irrelevant, or even downright detrimental. Against each of these narratives, the curators design, through their exhibits, powerful counter-narratives. CHAPTER 5 considers narrative structures embedded in one such exhibition and how they are supposed to address the damaging effects of the three narratives.

8.2.2 Second Research Objective

The second research objective concerned the identification of the matrix of materiality through which the discourses of Indigenous knowledge have concrete effects in the world. CHAPTERS 6 and 7 were devoted to this objective.

CHAPTER 6 explored the interrelations among subject positions, practices, and the *dispositif* – the three main components of the matrix of materiality (re)producing the discourse around Indigenous knowledge. First, under the heading of “subject positions,” the dissertation referred to the agency of scholars in the Academia, tribal communities, Indigenous artists, self-organizing collectives, art critics, and of various intended and actual audiences of exhibitions in supporting or deterring the work of the Indigenous curators. Second, under the heading of “practices,” the dissertation discussed some of the discursive and model practices associated with curatorship, that emerge from the curators’ statements. Finally, under the rubric of “*dispositif*,” a term borrowed from

Michel Foucault's discourse theory, the dissertation briefly described some of the roles that museums, festivals, the Academia, and the legal-political matrix play in enabling or thwarting the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge.

A few strong connections emerged from the analysis of these materialities. First, the Indigenous curators interact with other types of actors involved in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge. Among these actors, some tend to be aligned with the interests of the curators (e.g., the Native artists, whose visibility and success often depend on the indigenous curator's ability to promote them; the self-organizing collectives; and other museum professionals), while other actors tend to have interests that diverge from those of the curators (especially those of the administrators and art critics). Finally, some actors tend to have a more ambivalent position, e.g., the State (which used to have a different agenda in the past, yet has been increasingly more aligned with the interests of the curators). Also, the audiences tend to be unstable in their relations with the curators and their works: given the heterogeneity of the actual audiences and, thus, of their various types of expectations, the reactions of intended audiences may vary between such extremes as indifference and downright hostility.

Second, the curators do their work against the background of a specific *dispositif*. Some of the components of this *dispositif* tend to be more enabling of the work of the Indigenous curators (e.g., the museum as an institution which provides the curators with technologies for exhibition, the festivals, and the legal-political matrix), whereas others tend to raise serious symbolic and material barriers (especially the scholars in the Academia).

CHAPTER 7 looked at the roles of Indigenous curatorship as a privileged site for enactment at the intersections between the meaning-making and the material dimensions of the discourses of Indigenous knowledge. It suggests that Indigenous curators may inhabit the subject position of Indigenous curatorship in three major ways with regard to self-reflexivity as curators in institutional contexts. Thus, firstly, they often behave as actors following strictly the rules associated with the curatorial position. In this respect, the curators mediate connections among communities, cultures, and institutions; support the activities of various tribal communities by providing them with resources and expertise; promote Indigenous culture in general, as well as Native artists; connect these artists to infrastructural resources; and educate and motivate various audiences. Clearly, these are tasks that define general curatorship as well. Yet, insofar as they focus on the protection and promotion of indigenous knowledge, they describe features of Indigenous curatorship as a species of curatorship. Secondly, the curators may behave as agents, that is, more than simple actors following strictly the rules of the job; specifically, agentic curators are able, through their positioning into multiple discourse, to create public conversations around exhibits and specific controversial topics; they are also capable of critiquing stereotypical representations of Nativeness, as well as of critiquing the Western canon and metanarratives in art and sciences; finally, they are capable of acting as genuine translators, in both directions, of the cultures they are familiar with (Indigenous cultures and Western culture). Thirdly, the curators may assume a level of reflexivity which allows them to act as innovators. For instance, since Native cultures have been under an ongoing process of erasure, i.e., of invisibility, a curator may attempt to operate a true re-inscription of Nativeness into reality (to use the idea of one of the curators). This

means, the curators (together with other artists) may attempt to re-invent Indigeneity in those situations in which it has become invisible, absent, silenced, and erased.

8.3 Implications

The study of North American Indigenous curators' actualizations of discourses of Indigenous knowledge is significant in its contribution to scholarship and its implications for practice and Indigenous activism.

8.3.1 Implications for Theory and Method

First, one of the key contributions of this dissertation is the development – through the discourse analysis of the perspectives and practices of indigenous curators – of an empirically tested coding scheme (please refer to Appendix D) for identifying the scope and character of indigenous knowledge. This scheme can be developed further by including insights from other types of indigenous professionals working in memory institutions.

Second, the dissertation also contributes to the literature on comparative epistemologies through its focus on constructions of North American Indigenous knowledge: it substantiates the claim that knowledge includes within its boundaries more than standard forms (such as Western scientific knowledge): it also comprises non-standard forms of knowledge, such as Indigenous knowledge. In this context, by exploring discursive competitions and even conflicts, it uncovers the power differentials between the dominant notion of knowledge (Western scientific knowledge) and that of alternative – and, most importantly, injured – knowledges.

Finally, beside introducing a recent and innovative approach to discourse in the field of LIS – a procedure which is likely to open up new venues for research on information and knowledge, e.g., the politics of scientific knowledge – the dissertation also offers insights into the importance of materiality (widely construed to include types of subject positions) in the production and circulation of (discourses around) knowledge, as well as of the discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge that North American Indigenous curators rely on continuously in their work.

8.3.2 Implications for Practice (Practitioners)

The dissertation draws attention to cultural information needs of under-researched and marginal(ized) communities and suggests ways in which serving these groups may first require such serious discursive work as the critique of problematic representations of their traditional knowledge, which circulate in the mainstream media.

The dissertation does justice to the so far silenced voices of Indigenous curators in information work. The scholarly literature on, and giving voice to, this category of museum professionals is surprisingly scarce both within information science and other related disciplines (anthropology, museum studies, heritage studies). Yet they are key agents in the production and circulation of Indigenous knowledge in North America: they are well trained museums professionals, knowledgeable in the scholarship and practices of museums, while also displaying sensitivity to the particularities of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Moreover, through the work they perform (exhibitions and reports), these professionals represent Indigenous cultures in all their complexity. They represent these cultures in both senses of the word: on the one hand, they take Indigenous knowledge,

organize it in a way that makes sense to and serves their communities, and present it to Native and non-Native audiences as a valuable asset. Hence, these actors' understandings of Indigenous knowledge likely influence their decisions about appropriate representations of Indigenous cultures and, therefore, the ways in which various audiences come to perceive Native peoples and cultures. On the other hand, Indigenous curators often manage to be the advocates of their communities, speaking the truth about Indigenous history to non-Indigenous audiences.

8.3.3 Implications for Praxis (Activists)

The insight that Indigenous curators – key representatives of Native peoples and cultures in the arena of memory institutions – regard Indigenous knowledge as injured knowledge under an ongoing process of erasure and propose specific “model practices” to address the injured status of Indigenous knowledge may constitute a good starting point for activists as well. A focus on praxis is all the more appropriate, since many of the solutions proposed by the Indigenous curators have a political component and since many of the indigenous artists view themselves as media activists – a category of activists who can reach potentially wider audiences: they use the affordances of new media technology to critique stereotypes and raise awareness about poor living conditions of Native peoples of today.

8.4 Limitations

This dissertation relied on multiple sources of data and involved research of a closed-in professional group. Nevertheless, the research may have also benefited from an

institutional ethnography of the processes involved in the design and building of an exhibition. This type of ethnography allows in principle for more nuanced observations of the interactions between Indigenous curators and other types of actors.

Also, the study could have benefited from interviews with more curators. Yet, this shortcoming was partly addressed by identifying and relying on interviews that these other curators have given in other contexts (yet addressing similar concerns such as those that guided this research), as well as by using insights from their written work (the experience of the researcher has been that the curators tend to express similar views both in interviews and other media).

Another possible limitation is that the study only includes present-day curators and treats them as a group, without drawing distinctions among their various tribal identities. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which these curators have developed a group consciousness (reflected, for instance, in the fact that many of them joined self-organizing collectives, such as the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective). Also, as curator Mithlo pointed out, a strategy of pan-Indianism based on shared historic experience is important “as a means of locating self, a communicative device, and a political tool” (Mithlo, 2008, p. 24).

This pan-Indian approach is also reflected in the willingness of North American Native curators to establish links with Indigenous curators from other parts of the world, e.g., from South America and Oceania. They often travel and exhibit in each other’s locations. Finally, most of the curators are mixed-blood (Native and non-Native). And even those who do not have European ancestry do belong to multiple tribal identity lines.

Another possible limitation concerns the fact that the dissertation examined only one exhibition. In particular, since that exhibit was about a very specific relationship between Natives and their Others, the examination of an exhibition that did not include the “other” may have offered additional insights into the shaping of indigenous knowledge.

8.5 Future Research

Further research which goes beyond the boundaries of mainstream North American museums and Indigenous curatorship may yield further insights into discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge. Specifically, one direction of research may include tribal museums as well, in an attempt to determine whether the statements of the Indigenous curators working in those museums differ from the statements of the curators selected for this study.

Other lines of research may involve comparisons between practices of Native and of non-Native curators of Indigenous collections; between Indigenous curatorship in North America, on the one hand, and in South America and Oceania, on the other hand; as well as between Indigenous curators and other Indigenous museum professionals.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Mission Statements of Various Museums with Indigenous Collections

Canadian Museum of Civilization (2014). Mission. Available at:

<http://www.historymuseum.ca/about-us/corporation/about-the-corporation/mission>

“Through its activities, the Corporation practices museological excellence, thereby promoting a greater understanding of Canadian identity, history and culture. ... [it] disseminates its knowledge throughout Canada and the world through its website, travelling exhibitions, conference participation, publications, social media, engagement activities and other forms of outreach.... the Corporation protects and exhibits Canada’s heritage for current and future generations. It also plays a vital role in fostering a sense of Canadian identity, reaching a diverse – and growing – audience through its research and public programming activities.”

Gallery 101. (2014). Mission. Available at: <http://www.gallery101.org/>

“Gallery 101 is a non-profit artist-run centre in Ottawa, Ontario, dedicated to the professional presentation and circulation of visual and media art. Each year, we present a stimulating array of solo and curated group exhibitions of Canadian and international contemporary artists.”

Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA). (2014). Mission/Mandate/Vision.

Available at: <http://www.iaia.edu/museum/about/missionmandatevision/>

Vision: “To position the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts as the founding institution and the premiere destination to experience contemporary Native arts.”

Vision Statement: “The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts is the country’s leading museum for exhibiting, collecting and interpreting the most progressive work of contemporary Native artists for local, national and international audiences. MoCNA is a venue for exhibitions of artists who merit, local, national and international recognition. The Museum belongs at the forefront of contemporary Native art presentation and strives to be flexible, foresighted and risk-taking in its exhibitions and programs.”

Mission Statement: “MoCNA’s mission is to advance contemporary Native art through exhibitions, collections, public programs and scholarship.”

National Gallery of Canada (2014). Mission Statement. Available at:

<http://www.gallery.ca/en/about/mission-statement.php>

Mission: “The strength of the National Gallery of Canada lies in its collection of art, especially Canadian art, and its accessibility to the public across the country. The collection opens the way for appreciation of the finest in artistic expression: The works of art reveal the past, celebrate the present, and probe the future. The collection must be expanded, preserved, interpreted, and used extensively by the public for pleasure and understanding, for research and the advancement of knowledge.

Values

- Accessibility: Programs are developed with the public in mind – not only visitors to the Gallery, but all Canadians.

- Excellence and Scholarship: The Gallery builds upon the high standards it has attained over the years in all its endeavours, from research to acquisitions, exhibitions, publications and public programs.
- Corporate Citizenship: The Gallery meets its public policy and legal obligations.
- Leadership: The Gallery acts as a recognized leader in the national and international art museum communities.
- Collaboration: The Gallery collaborates with the network of art museums in all regions of Canada and abroad, and with its partners in the Government of Canada.
- The Gallery's Workforce: The Gallery values its workforce and creates a work environment in which people can maximize their potential and contribute fully to the success of the organization."

National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). (2005). Mission. Available at:

<http://americanindian.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=about>

"The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others. The museum works to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life."

Portland Art Museum. (2014). Mission Statement. Available at:

<http://www.portlandartmuseum.org/page.aspx?pid=411>

“The Mission of the Portland Art Museum is to engage the public with art and film of enduring quality, to facilitate dialogue with diverse audiences, and to collect, preserve, and educate for the enrichment of present and future generations.”

University of Wyoming Art Museum. (2014). Mission Statement. Available at:

http://www.uwyo.edu/artmuseum/about_us/mission.html

“As an academic museum and a leader in the arts, the University of Wyoming Art Museum collects, preserves, exhibits and interprets visual art from around the world to challenge, inspire and educate the people of Wyoming and beyond, and serves as a gathering place for interdisciplinary discourse, dialogue and community interaction.”

Appendix B: Interviewee Request and Agreement Follow-Up

Interviewee Requests

1.1 Initial Request

Dear [NAME OF INDIGENOUS CURATOR]:

My name is Iulian Vamanu and I am a graduate student at Rutgers University. As part of my research project I look at the Indigenous knowledge in North American museums. I found your name and address through []. I would like to interview you in order to learn more about your views on this topic and hear more about your work.

If you are interested, I can send you more information about myself and my research.

Please feel free to get in touch with me at any time. My phone number is 917-628-8349 and my email address is ivamanu@eden.rutgers.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Iulian

1.2 Agreement Follow-Up

Dear [] :

Thank you for agreeing to an interview. I am a Doctoral Student in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University School of Communication & Information. My research is about Indigenous curatorship and Indigenous knowledge in North American museums.

The interview will take place at a time and location of your choosing. The consent forms (one for the interview and another for audio recording) are attached to this email.

My research is approved by the Institutional Review Board of Rutgers University and conducted under the direction of my faculty advisor, Dr. Marija Dalbello, an Associate Professor at the Rutgers University School of Communication & Information.

If you have any questions regarding the interview specifically or my research in general, please feel free to contact me via email at ivamanu@rci.rutgers.edu or via phone 647-340-2163

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,

Iulian Vamanu

Appendix C: Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION

1. Can you briefly describe the institution with which you are affiliated, as well as the responsibilities you have as a curator there?

Cluster 1: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

2. Can you think of a situation where you had to define (for yourself or for others) what "Indigenous knowledge" is? What were the most important features of cultural knowledge you eventually identified? Is your definition of Indigenous knowledge a standard one?

3. Do you have concerns about the situation of Indigenous knowledge in the present? How could a curator address them?

Cluster 2: THE WORK OF THE CURATOR

4. Can you please tell me the story of how you became a curator?
5. What are two of the exhibitions you have created so far? Can you please tell me about one you really like and one you think did not turn out so well?
6. How do you see your role as a curator in the larger context of Indigenous museum work in North America? What do you hope to achieve as a curator eventually?

Cluster 3: THE INTERPERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF THE CURATOR'S WORK

7. How do you see the mission of your institution in regard to Indigenous knowledge?

8. What are the main types of actors (persons) with whom you interact in the context of your curatorial work and what types of interactions you have with them? Have you had disagreements with any of these actors while working on a particular exhibition? How are such disagreements usually solved?
9. Can you tell me how the material-technological infrastructure (e.g., space, technologies of display, financial resources, etc.) enables or constrains your curatorial work? Can you please give me two examples from your experience?
10. Have you adopted new media (or digital) technology in the design of your exhibitions? Can you tell me in what ways you believe this technology helps and/or hinders museum work?

Cluster 4: THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT OF THE CURATOR'S WORK

11. With what other actors (e.g., private individuals, organizations) outside your institution do you interact in your work? Whom do you consider to be very important to your work? Why? Can you please give me some examples?
12. Which of these actors have been beneficial/detrimental? Can you please give me some examples?
13. What audiences do you usually have in mind when you design your exhibition? Do you interact with them? In what ways?

CONCLUSION

14. Is there anything I have not touched upon that you consider important? If so, please tell me about it.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA:

Name: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Tribal Affiliation: _____

This protocol will be further refined and developed based on the analyses of field notes and documents.

Appendix D: Coding Scheme

1.0 Indigenous knowledge (*phenomenal structure: central theme*)

1.1 Characteristics of Indigenous knowledge

1.1.1 Grounded in Native ways of being in the world

1.1.2 A form of relationality

1.1.2.1 Land

1.1.2.1.1 Struggling for land

1.1.2.1.2 Connection to land defines Native identities

1.1.2.2 Memory

1.1.2.2.1 Historical experience grounds pan-Indianism

1.1.2.2.2 Connection to memory defines Native identities

1.1.2.3 Family

1.1.2.3.1 Collective accountability of the curator

1.1.2.3.2 Collective acceptability as epistemic condition

1.1.2.3.3 Connection to family defines Native identities

1.1.2.1 Native identities

1.1.2.1.1 Diverse

1.1.2.1.2 Hybrid

1.1.2.1.3 Diasporic

1.1.3 Universally relevant

1.1.3.1 Generalizing approaches

1.1.3.1.1 Risking generating clichés

- 1.1.3.1.2 A similar worldview behind various approaches
 - 1.1.3.2 Particularist approaches only are acceptable
 - 1.1.3.3 Compatible with a mainstream notion of knowledge
 - 1.1.3.3.1 Link to “real”
 - 1.1.3.3.2 Collective acceptability
 - 1.1.4 Oriented toward survival
 - 1.1.5 Recoverable through (inter)active research
 - 1.1.6 Narratively structured
 - 1.1.6.1 Orality is important
 - 1.1.7 Knowledge processes are controlled by protocols
 - 1.1.7.1 Function of protocols
 - 1.1.7.1.1 Protecting Indigenous knowledge
 - 1.1.7.1.2 Acquiring knowledge without claiming it
 - 1.1.7.1.3 Sharing knowledge as a gift
 - 1.1.7.1.4 Allowing for knowledge transformation
 - 1.1.7.2 Curators need to respect tribal protocols around knowledge
 - 1.1.8 Indigenous knowledge as injured knowledge
- 1.2 Referring to Indigenous knowledge
 - 1.2.1 Prudent approach
 - 1.2.1.1 Not yet legitimized or codified sufficiently in the Academia
 - 1.2.1.2 Definitions are inevitably partial
 - 1.2.1.3 False sense of unity
 - 1.2.2 Liberal approach

1.2.2.1 Affirmative stance

1.2.2.1.1 Indigenous knowledge is powerful knowledge

1.2.2.1.2 Indigenous knowledge is useful

1.2.2.2 Avoiding anti-intellectual stances

1.3. Content of Indigenous knowledge

2.0 Threats to Indigenous knowledge and proposed solutions (*phenomenal structure: causal relations*)

2.1 Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (spatial) presence

2.1.1 Place (*as a trope*)

2.1.1.1 Concrete

2.1.1.1.1 Displacement of Natives

2.1.1.1.2 Struggling for the land

2.1.1.2 Virtual

2.1.1.2.1 Populating cyberspace with Native presence

2.1.1.3 Fluid

2.1.1.3.1 Natives are not parochial

2.1.1.4 Geo-symbolic

2.1.1.4.1 Creating a space of one's own

2.1.2 Boundary (*as a trope*)

2.1.2.1 Nature vs. Culture

2.1.2.2 Us vs. Them

2.1.2.3 Less vs. More

2.1.2.4 “Civilized” vs. “Primitive”

2.1.2.5 Local vs. Global

2.2 Invisibility of Natives through erasure of (temporal) presence

2.2.1 Discontinuity (*narrative*) – fossilizing the past

2.2.1.1 Critiquing fake images of the past: recovering the past

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

2.2.1.2 Focusing on the present: living in the present

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

2.2.1.3 Imagining the future: making spaces for Native voices

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

2.2.2 Irrelevance (*narrative*)

2.2.2.1 Documenting relevance of Natives

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

2.2.2.2 Emphasizing alternative systems of relevance

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

2.2.3 Marginality (*narrative*)

2.2.3.1 Emphasizing Natives' contribution to progress

(*phenomenal structure: model practice*)

3.0 Material dimensions of the discursive constructions of Indigenous knowledge

3.1 Subject positions and social actors

(also *phenomenal structure: responsibilities*)

3.1.1 Scholars in the Academia

3.1.2 Tribal Communities

3.1.3 Indigenous Artists

3.1.4 Self-Organizing Collectives

3.1.5 Art critics

3.1.6 Audiences

3.2 Practices (*phenomenal structure: model practices*)

3.2.1 Curatorial

3.2.1.1 “American Indian curatorial practice” (*in-vivo code*)

3.2.1.2 Curating material culture vs. art

3.3 Dispositif

3.3.1 Museum

3.3.2 Festivals

3.3.3 Academia

3.3.4 Legal-Political Matrix

4.0 Roles of Indigenous curatorship (*phenomenal structure: responsibilities & model practice*)

4.1. Actantial (*phenomenal structure: model practices*)

4.1.1 Mediation

4.1.2 Supporting activities of tribal communities

4.1.3 Promoting Native cultures and artists

4.1.4 Connecting artists to resources

4.1.5 Educating and motivating audiences

4.2. Agentic (*phenomenal structure: model practices*)

4.2.1 Creating public conversations

4.2.2 Critiquing stereotypes

4.2.3 Challenging the Western canon

4.2.4 Translating cultures bidirectionally

4.3 Innovative (*phenomenal structure: model practices*)

4.3.1 Reinscribing Indigeneity into reality

4.3.2 Acting at the boundaries

Appendix E: The Category “Injured Knowledge”

CATEGORY	CODE	EXAMPLE
Injured knowledge	In lethargy	“the revival of Indigenous knowledge that’s happened basically since the 1970s” (Hill Jr.)
	Lost	“A lot of my work has to do with uncovering what was either merely lost...” (Tayac)
	Silenced	“...or what was silenced.” (Tayac)
	Disconnected from individuals & communities	“I have to work my way back to some of that knowledge. I have to figure out what’s going on there.” (Hill Jr.); “My generation ... is a generation ... trying to find out knowledge. ... you can probably use the literature on Diaspora to understand the process” (Mithlo)
	Subjugated	“subjugation of Indigenous peoples under colonialism results in innumerable forms of oppression, from which the arts are not immune.” (Mithlo, 2004, p. 230)
	Concealed for a long time	“long-concealed Indigenous knowledge” (Townsend-Gault, 2011, p. 546)
	Victimized	
	Under erasure	“One cannot deny the ongoing erasure of Indigenous presence in the Americas since contact” (Rickard, 2007, p. 91)
	Invisible	“perpetuating the same kind of invisibility, oppression, or marginality of previous histories and colonial regimes.” (Rickard, 2005, p. 62)
	Marginalized	idem
	Oppressed	idem

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