

**From Civilization to Participation:  
The Convergence of Policy, Practice and  
Difference in the Art Museum**

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## Declaration

I certify that this thesis that I have presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London is solely my own work. References to the work of others have been cited and indicated throughout.

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Kimberly F. Keith

## **Abstract**

This research examines how practitioners in the art museum engage with difference, particularly with the black subject, and the influence that policy, which is intended to promote access and inclusion, has on the process. How difference is imagined and addressed is explored through an investigation of the lived experience of museum professionals in both the United States and the United Kingdom. The research is an ethnographic study that utilizes a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing from sociology, cultural studies, social and cultural history, art history, and museum studies, and its methodological approach includes in-depth interviews in Seattle, New York and London, and long-term participant observation in London. An examination of race, diversity and representation, an overview of historical accounts substantiating the development of support for the arts and culture, and an indication of arts policy in the US and UK provide a context from which to view the empirical data. The data makes visible how specific communities are imagined, how projects are developed for ‘targeted’ audiences, and it reveals how conventions in practice continue to perpetuate an air of exclusivity in institutions purportedly open to all. Contrasting and comparing the stated motivations and intentions of practitioners with observed practice illuminates the challenges inherent in transforming words into action. These challenges expose the mechanisms of essentialism, instrumentalism and exclusion that can be exerted in practice; analysis of the process illustrates the complexity of shifting the narrative and culture of the museum, a shift which denotes the evolution in learning and audience development from a civilizing, transmission approach towards a participatory, individual meaning-making approach. This research intends to enhance the understanding of the agency of museum practitioners, particularly during their engagement with difference and external policy mandates, whilst they are concurrently situated in the evolving material and discursive space of the art museum.

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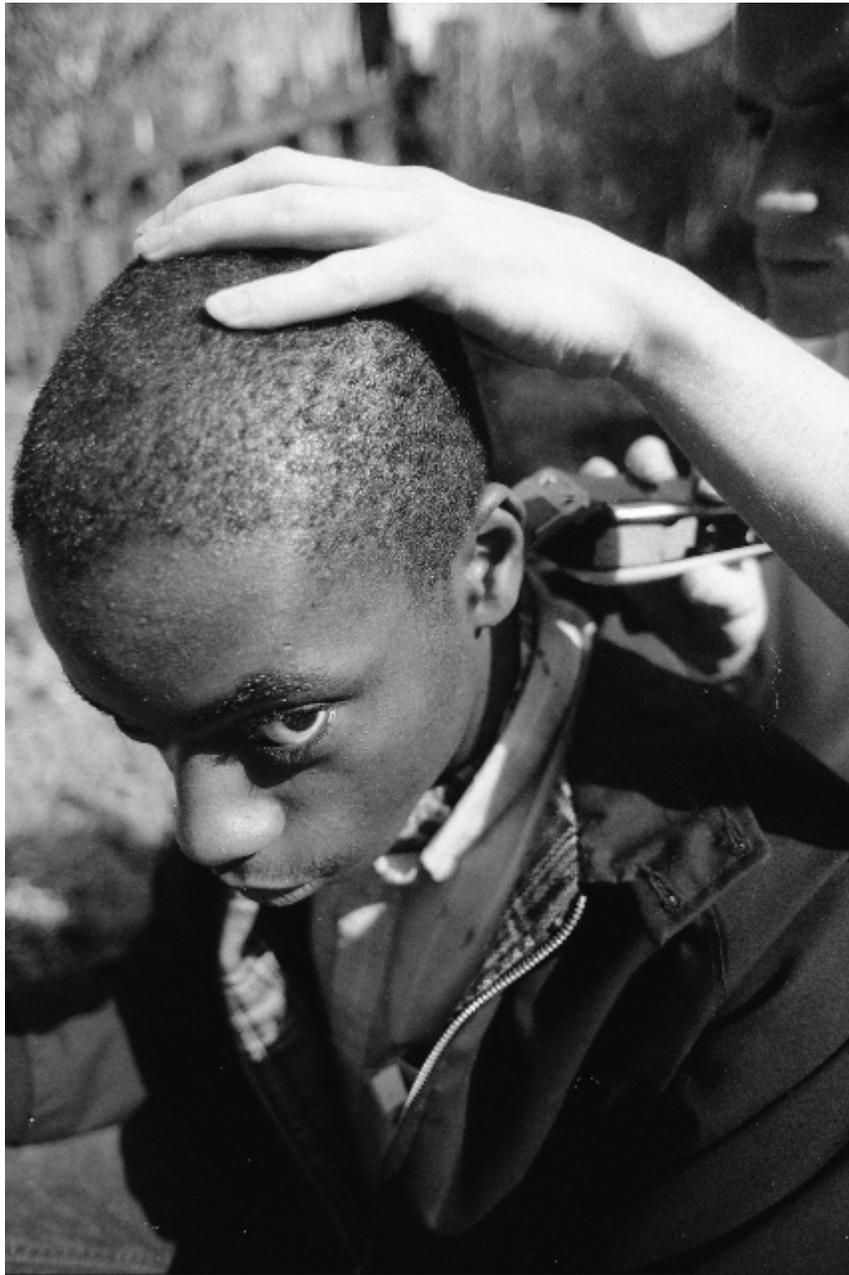
## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAM	American Association of Museums
ABP	Autograph- the Association of Black Photographers
ACE	Arts Council England
ALM	Archives, Museums and Libraries London
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCA	Black Cultural Archives
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CWA	Civil Works Administration
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport
DSU	Diversity Strategy Unit
GLA	Greater London Authority
GLC	Greater London Council
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IMLS	Institute of Museum and Library Services
MAD	Museum of Art and Design, New York
MCAAH	Mayors Commission on African and Asian Heritage
Met	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MLA	Museums and Libraries Association
MoG	Museum of Glass, Tacoma
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
MP	Member of Parliament
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Bodies
NYSCA	New York State Council on the Arts
OWAAD	Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent
PAT	Policy Action Team

PSA	Public Service Agreement
PWAP	Public Works of Art Projects
RCMG	Research Centre for Museums and Galleries
SAC	Seattle Arts Commission
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
TAC	Tacoma Arts Commission
TCM	The Children's Museum, Seattle
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum, London
WMA	Western Museums Association
WPA	Works Progress Association
WSAC	Washington State Arts Commission
4Culture	King County Arts Commission

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*Barry*, by Gavin Watson, early 1980s

## Introduction:

### From 'Gangsters' to the Academy: How an Adolescent Fascination Led to a Dissertation

"Bernie Rhodes knows don't argue!"

Why must you record my phone calls?  
Are you planning a bootleg LP?  
You said you've been threatened by gangsters  
Now it's you that's threatening me

Can't fight corruption with con tricks  
They use the law to commit crime  
I dread – dread! – to think what the future will bring  
When we're living in gangster times

"Don't call me Scarface!"

Don't interrupt while I'm talking  
Or they'll confiscate all your guitars  
A catch 22 says if I sing the truth  
They won't make me an overnight star

Don't offer us legal protection  
They use the law to commit crime  
I dread to think what the future will bring  
When we're living in real gangster times

"Bernie Rhodes knows don't argue!"

'Gangsters', The Specials, 1979

I vividly remember seeing the video for 'Gangsters' when I was thirteen years old, in the spring of 1981. Although I did not know it at the time, that video would influence the course of my life. It was filmed in black and white, perhaps as an homage to 1920s Al Capone era gangsters, yet it utilized many hallmarks of early 1980s music videos –hand held cameras zooming in on individual band members, split screen graphics, fast edits. The first image was a black and white checkerboard and it provided the backdrop for the

sound of screeching tires, which was promptly followed by the shout “Bernie Rhodes knows don’t argue!” Then the drums, bass, and what sounded like a vibraphone, began the backbeat of the song, which was swiftly joined by reggae-style guitar scratching. The vocalists, Terry Hall, in his black and white striped button-down shirt and Sta-Prest trousers, and Neville Staple, in his trilby hat, sunglasses and skinny tie, looked into the camera with a mix of apprehension and bravado. Jerry Dammers hopped around behind his keyboard in a natty suit, and John Bradbury wore a white Fred Perry shirt with black braces while he played the drums; the rest of the band jumped and swaggered to the beat.

The Specials were made up of black guys and white guys who all had closely cropped hair, dressed like a cross between old school bluesmen and skinheads, and they played ska, a music that sounded like a combination of reggae and rock with a bit of calypso and jazz thrown in. They were inter-and cross-cultural at a time when I did not know what that meant; but what I did know was that, as a mixed race, part black, part white American girl, those British guys were speaking to me. I bought their first album and was captivated by their songs about politics, race, class and poverty, and by their portrayal of both the tensions and harmony in black/white relations. Through their music I realized that the thoughts and feelings that I had had about my own mixed heritage and identity were both unique to me and part of a larger discourse, namely the 2-Tone music and cultural movement. 2-Tone records, which was started by Jerry Dammers of The Specials, guided the melodious fusion of 1960s Jamaican music with contemporary British punk, which in turn fostered a movement that melded aspects of British and Caribbean retro fashion and dance with a political agenda that promoted racial and social equality. According to Simon Frith “music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective and the collective” (Frith 1996: 110); The Specials contributed to my burgeoning sense of self and I felt I was a part of their collective (a “rude girl”, as female fans of 2-Tone/ska were known), and perhaps this was because “in responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into emotional alliances with the performers and with the performers’ other fans” (Frith 1996: 121).

The Specials helped to expand my awareness of the world beyond my hometown of Tacoma, Washington, and somewhere between the video and the album I decided that I

was going to move to London to participate in 2-Tone firsthand. By the time I was sixteen, in 1984, I had earned enough money to pay for a six-month visit and I had made arrangements to study art and English in the sixth form at Southgate Secondary School in north London. While I was there I became immersed in the culture and politics of the times; I learned firsthand about Thatcherism (and gained new insight into the Reagan administration back home), which led to my (first) participation in a protest march which was organized by CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) in support of the miners strikes. I learned about the GLC (Greater London Council) through rallies with music and commentary provided by Neil Kinnock, Billy Bragg and The Smiths. I engaged in this newfound political activism with my friends from school, one of whom was Stephen Twigg who, in 1997, became the first openly gay MP. Between my friends and my interests in the arts I was able to avail myself of a broad cross section of activity in London, and my horizons expanded accordingly. Had I known then that The Specials were from Coventry, I may have ended up in the Midlands. But my geographic ineptitude had a silver lining, as living in London provided me with an opportunity to immerse myself in both the production and consumption of visual and performing arts. Those early experiences with music, culture and politics laid the foundation for my professional involvement in museums and to my interest in developing programs and projects for non-traditional audiences.

My adolescent encounters shaped my taste, my thinking and my identity, which were further enhanced during my years as a museum educator (which is an example of odd museum nomenclature: I did not educate museums, I developed educational programs for museum visitors). Those formative youthful and professional experiences influenced the participant observation conducted for this research, and being critical of my personal and professional position, taking apart my habitus or habitual behaviours, was central to my questioning and understanding of the processes that I observed. My professional experience led to my interest in examining the complexities of American and British arts policy, particularly its effects on museum practitioners, and inspired me to conduct my research in London. My previous experience in London, and my taste and knowledge of specific musical and cultural practices, informed my contributions during participation in *Staying Power: The Story of Black British Identity 1950-1990s*, a partnership project between

the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), which comprises a significant portion of this study. The core of the *Staying Power* project concerned the acquisition of photographs for the V&A's permanent collection of photography, which is the national photography collection for Britain. Relating an incident where my personal and professional influences were apparent during participation will help to illustrate the central interest of this research, namely the convergence of policy, practice and difference: how policies and individual practitioners influence how difference and ethnic diversity are imagined and engaged in the museum, and the quandaries and tensions that arise, and must be negotiated, when working in partnership.

The image that precedes this introduction was considered for acquisition as a part of *Staying Power*. 'Barry' by Gavin Watson, depicts a black teenager in High Wycombe getting a skinhead haircut in the early 1980s. He sits in the sun in the back garden of a housing estate as a pair of white hands holds his head still and clips his hair. He is wearing a button-up shirt and a Harrington jacket with its tartan lining slightly visible. His face is tilted downward and is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  view; Barry looks directly into the camera while his barber, in the shadows behind his head, peers on in concentration. My first glimpse of that image brought back memories and feelings about The Specials, my earliest encounters with British culture, 2-Tone, and my own youthful exuberance. My interpretation of the signs and signifiers in the image stemmed from my personal, nostalgic ideas; when placed in conjunction with my thoughts on race, identity and multiculturalism, and my professional knowledge of museum operations, acquisition and display, this instance demonstrates the lived-experience of negotiating policy and practice in a project concerning race and identity.

The remit of *Staying Power* stipulated that acquiring the work of black British photographers was of primary concern, and that "acquiring objects that directly reflect the history and heritage of the UK's African and African Caribbean communities" (V&A, 2007 b) was the central purpose of the project. Watson is a white photographer, which directly opposes the primary purpose of the remit, and 'Barry' is an image that requires a lot of unpacking in order to get to the "history and heritage" in the subject matter

depicted. I comprehended the content immediately and knew that the image portrayed a particular subculture which was an interesting part of the black British experience. Had I not been both a participant in the project and personally affected by 2-Tone and skinheads, the subject matter may not have been considered relevant for consideration within *Staying Power* (as skinheads, in general, are often seen as a subculture related to racism in extremis, English fascists and the British National Party). This raises interesting points in regard to the individual position of practitioners on a project that combines professional expertise with personal taste and a consideration of difference. I interpret material through the lens of my African-American heritage, my personal interest and history, and my professional practice. This is ostensibly the same for other practitioners on the project, although their cultural heritage and professional expertise are quite different from my own (which could include white, British, male, art history/object-focused), which begs the question, how do these differences in position effect an engagement with difference?

I understood how Watson's work could fit within the scope of the project, yet I was conflicted; how was I to weigh my personal values against my professional skills in order to form an opinion about acquiring a specific object? In terms of representation, was the subject matter of the image or the collecting of work by black photographers (who are seriously underrepresented in national collections) more important? Was the material quality of a specific object or the social and cultural content of its subject matter more significant? These questions led to broader concerns in the project: how was the policy remit influencing the outputs and outcomes of project? How would *Staying Power* inform the engagement of diverse audiences in the museum? What effect did my position have on the project? How did the other individuals in the partnership affect the process? Questions specific to *Staying Power* will be considered in Chapters 6 through 8; the remainder will be addressed throughout this dissertation. What is significant to note is that the convergence of policy, practice and difference occurred during the process of developing and conducting the project, evidencing micro-level detail of the phenomena. *Staying Power*, and contemporary museum practice, resides within a specific context which is comprised of historic precedents and policy models; an exploration of these topics will be conducted in Chapters 3 through 5, providing a macro-level view into the subject.

## Questions

An examination of historic and contemporary practice, as well as my own professional experience, informed the questions which sparked this dissertation, such as: in the move from civilization to participation, what processes have museums utilized to engage audiences, particularly ethnic minority audiences? How do practitioners imagine difference, and how does that imagination effect the selection and engagement of particular constituent groups? What influence does policy, and its related funding, have on an engagement with diverse audiences? How do museum practitioners negotiate both the internal organizational cultures of their institutions and the external policy directives of government, and culture sector bodies, in order to develop programs for diverse audiences? What is the practical lived-experience of developing a partnership project, with a focus on ethnicity and difference, between two organizations of disparate size and scope? What are the challenges inherent in this type of practice? Answering these questions, through an interrogation of the practical ramifications of the convergence of policy and practice in the museum, will provide insight into the rationale and the process of how the museum has moved from civilization to participation.

The original contribution of this research lies in conveying insight into the lived-experience of the practitioner and in analysis of the project development process, in order to reveal the tensions and dilemmas negotiated during an engagement with difference, whilst navigating internal organizational cultures, and in the face of external policy mandates. Heretofore this process has been hidden behind vague, undefined liberal-left political agendas (which encourage the museum to contribute to the “public good” through support for projects aimed at targeted audiences that address overarching aims such as “community cohesion” and “regeneration”) and has been overlooked in literature which has focused on the outputs of project development rather than on the process (such as technical examples of “how to” create exhibitions and programs or evaluations of “best practice” scenarios). This research aims to illustrate a critical gap in the existing knowledge through unveiling and analysing specific, detailed components of the development process.

## Structure

This research is an ethnographic study with a sprinkling of autobiography and a liberal dose of history, and it was informed by a wide range of disciplines, subjects and sources. Metaphorically the structure of the dissertation is that of a pyramid: the initial chapter lays the foundation for exploring the topics of interest that inform the research. The second chapter builds a methodological footing for the personal and professional approach to ethnography that was undertaken. Chapters 3 and 4 provide layers of historic material that demonstrate the evolution of support for the arts and culture in the US and UK, and the corresponding policy that that support engendered. Chapter 5 is the centre of the pyramid, marking the transition from secondary to primary sources, providing an exploration of the material and discursive spaces of the museum, where the practitioner resides. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are strata where the practitioners engage in a partnership process where policy, practice and difference converge. Chapter 9 is the peak of the pyramid, where the key arguments of the research are distilled and examined, with reflections on lessons learned.

Through an interrogation of the general and the specific, and the discursive and the material, a framework was developed to support a rounded analysis of the data. Topics explored included: conceptions of race, the black subject and difference; policy that was informed by race (such as access and inclusion and under-served audiences); museums as specific sites and types of organizations that are directly influenced by policy, which may be indirectly and/or directly informed by race, and that fully encompass the practitioners that work within them; and the practitioner, or individual agent, whose work comprises the practical implementation of the confluence of race, policy and museums. In order to consider the array of topics that inform this research it was necessary to draw from the literature and theories of various disciplines, such as Museum Studies, history, politics and cultural studies, while utilizing a sociological frame to make sense of the social aspects of the micro-level (individual agency of practitioners) and the macro-level (structures and systems in museums) data of the subject matter at hand.

While the topics consistently inform one another, it is important to note that there is no hierarchy to the causal or determining factors inherent in the subjects themselves. For example, race in and of itself does not determine which arts policies are created, what type of museums are constructed or whether or not one becomes a practitioner or visitor in a museum. However, race, and attitudes surrounding race and racism, does inform certain types of policy (such as access and inclusion), it can influence the representation of peoples and cultures in many types of museums (art, history, ethnographic, etc.) and it may contribute to whether one chooses to work in or patronise a museum. Therefore it was important to interrogate the real and imagined links between subjects, as an examination of how practitioners conduct their work must include an investigation into the subjects which surround and influence their work. In looking at specific aspects of practice, such as creating a partnership and/or developing programs and projects for ethnic minority communities, it was necessary to draw from the literature of subjects relating to the said practice. In order to examine program development, the individuals and organizations involved in the process were analysed, the internal and external influences on the decision to create programs were interrogated, and the broader social and cultural causes that were driving the internal and external influences were considered. Connections were made across topics, but there was no intention of prioritising one subject over another or to present the inference that there were consistent causal links between the topics.

## **Chapters**

This research is an investigation into how museum practitioners engage in the process of developing programs and projects for ethnic minority audiences in the face of policy agendas set out by government. In that brief description there are (at least) eight potential topics for study suggested: museums, organizational practice, program development, race/ethnicity, policy, arts funding, cultural politics and history. It was necessary to delve into each of those topics, with the result being an eclectic theoretical framework through which to view the empirical data. Chapter 1 will present the key literature and topics explored during this research, yet the theoretical framework will

continue to unfold throughout the subsequent chapters. Chapter 1 will examine the connection between the disciplines of Museum Studies and sociology, as I chose to conduct the research from a sociological standpoint (from the community/outside the museum towards the institution/practitioner), rather than from a Museum Studies or policy management angle (from inside the museum towards the audience/community). The chapter will also interrogate issues of representation, diversity and difference, and touch upon the idea of museums as businesses, which directly relates to the influence of policy on museum practice.

Chapter 2 relates my personal and professional experience to the subject matter and describes my approach to conducting ethnographic research, setting a context for my engagement with the material. My familiarity with the practical aspects of museum work and first-hand knowledge of the implications of policy on programs led me towards the development of a cross-cultural analysis of practice in the United States and the United Kingdom. The selection of particular museums and heritage sector organizations as sites for interviews and participant observation are explained. This chapter presents a description of the rationale and of the different methodological approaches and methods employed to conduct the research, including: ethnography; participant observation and in-depth interviews; and a review of secondary source material (literature, brochures, web sites, objects and documents from specific museums and arts organizations). This chapter elaborates on my epistemological position, how I have synthesized my 15 years of experience working in the museum field with my current research, the implications of my status as an insider/outsider, how that status has shaped my interactions with my research subjects, and how that status impacted my research.

An overview of how the museum was physically and socially constructed, from Victorian through contemporary times, is the subject of Chapter 3. As museums moved from being privately organised “cabinets of curiosity” to public institutions that collect and display what society deemed “most valuable,” the support and oversight of museums concurrently moved from an individual to a public concern. As the necessity for support and funding increased so did the rise of patrons for the arts who had specific visions for particular institutions (such as the Rockefellers and the Museum of Modern Art in New

York); the development of public funding policy to support national and public institutions kept pace with those changes. This evolution of philanthropy and public policy occurred differently in the United States and the United Kingdom, particularly after the Second World War. This chapter provides an indication of how this process developed in both the US and the UK, and highlights the differences in approaches taken, in the post war period, that have continued to shape support for the arts in contemporary times.

Museums did not decide to change their approach to audiences and programming overnight or of their own accord, it is a slowly evolving process that has as much to do with responding to external changes in society as it has to do with garnering continued financial support from government and private sources. Chapter 4 examines how this financial support is directly linked to policy, particularly access and inclusion policy set out from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) through funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Arts Council England (ACE) in the United Kingdom, or to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) or The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the United States, or more frequently through language set out by membership organizations, such as the Association of American Museums (AAM) or the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which are non-funding bodies. It should be noted that this research was conducted during the New Labour era in the UK, a particular period in terms of the policy framework established by central government; this era has now passed with the advent of the Liberal Democrat-Conservative Coalition of David Cameron and Nick Clegg. Despite any change in national leadership in the US or UK, whether internally or externally motivated, museums and their audiences have changed. This chapter examines the social and cultural contexts which have influenced changes in the museum and the policy which it relates to, which in turn informs how museum practitioners engage with diverse audiences.

Building upon the historic, social and cultural context of museum development outlined in previous chapters, Chapter 5 situates practice within the material and discursive space of the museum. Taking real and imagined barriers to engaging with difference as a point of departure, this chapter examines obstacles encountered in three spaces of the museum:

1) the material, architectural structure as a physical manifestation of the ideology of the museum paradigm; 2) the internal organizational culture of the museum and how it impacts audience engagement; and 3) the specific conventions in practice that comprise elements of the organizational culture. This chapter offers insight into how practitioners negotiate these barriers during the course of their work, providing insight into the context that the *Staying Power* project resides within, which will be related in the following three chapters.

The initial development of the partnership between the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) and the Victoria & Albert museum (V&A) during *Staying Power*, which is where policy meets practice, is examined in Chapter 6. The history and position of the organizations are introduced, compared and contrasted, followed by an overview of the many strands of policy that influence the project. The effects of policy and the conditions under which the partnership was conducted are examined, through an exploration of the written intentions behind the project and the lived-experience that actualised the project. The effects of the process on the organizations and individuals involved are considered, along with the ramifications of the practical endeavours on the theoretical context the work is conducted in, and vice versa.

Chapter 7 begins with defining value and values as an essential element of the *Staying Power* project. It then offers a consideration of the black subject as a context from which to view the central conundrum of the project. Through an examination of language, classificatory systems, racialised thinking and the trope of the stereotype, a picture of the imaginings of the black subject and the consideration of difference will emerge. These imaginings will be interrogated through an examination of the role of the Advisory Panel during *Staying Power*, which will provide evidence of the practical engagement with identity and the black subject. Diversity within the black subject and issues of provenance, or who and what determines what is black (whose gaze and perspective determines definition or inclusion), are analysed along with the interpretation of information and language. All of which inform the process of acquisition.

Chapter 8 looks into the acquisition process in *Staying Power*, examining which images were collected and how they were selected. Fine art photography is explored in relation to the material object and the subject matter depicted. A detailed account of the acquisition process is presented, along with a description of the personal and professional elements that influenced the process. Issues of instrumentalisation and links to the essentialisation of the black subject from the previous chapter are offered. This chapter is where “the rubber hits the road” in terms of dramatically portraying the convergence of policy, practice and difference.

Chapter 9 provides insight into to outcomes and outputs of the *Staying Power* project and relates them to conditions practitioners work within. The complexities in the relationship between individuals and their commensurate organizations are examined, as well as the changes in the social, cultural and political landscape beyond the museum. The implications of the findings of this research, and the future of museum practice, will be explored.

The practical information and insight into the motivating factors behind an engagement with minority audiences, the influence policy has on the process, and the detailed account of the *Staying Power* project have the potential to be of use to practitioners and students alike, making this research a unique contribution to both sociological and Museum Studies literature.



*Steel Pulse*, by Dennis Morris, 1978

## Chapter 1:

### Location and Consideration: Concepts that Inform an Engagement with Policy, Practice and Difference in the Art Museum

“The especially crude and reductive notions of culture that form the substance of racial politics today are clearly associated with an older discourse of racial and ethnic difference which is everywhere entangled in the history of the idea of culture in the modern West. This history has itself become hotly contested since debates about multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and the responses to them that are sometimes dismissively called “political correctness” arrived to query the ease and speed with which European particularisms are still being translated into absolute, universal standards for human achievement, norms, and aspirations.”  
(Gilroy 1993: 7-8, original emphasis)

I chose to begin with this quote from Paul Gilroy because an investigation into policy, practice and difference in the art museum requires an interrogation of the racial and cultural politics that inform the museum’s constitution, particularly the contemporary racial and cultural politics and policies that effect how practitioners operate. I preceded this chapter with an image of the band Steel Pulse, which was taken by Dennis Morris and was acquired by the V&A as part of the *Staying Power* project, as, with my museum educator’s hat on, I view the image as a catalyst for sparking discussion about racial politics. The overt bigotry and race hatred implied by the Klan hoods, the co-option of the hoods by a Birmingham reggae band (which is linked to their first single *Ku Klux Klan* on Island Records in 1978), and the mediation of the un-hooded band members’ gaze through the use of dark sunglasses, are all signs and signifiers which beg for dialogue. I imagine sitting with a group of young people, maybe from where I live in Southeast London, playing the music of Steel Pulse in the background, having the image propped up on an easel on a table (so it would be more accessible than if it were hung on a wall), and asking the young people what they see. After listening to their impressions I could introduce some background information about Dennis Morris and Steel Pulse, and share some thoughts about migration and belonging (Morris and some of the band members

are from Jamaica), and then ask how or if any of this information or imagery relates to their young lives. In an ideal situation an engaging, reciprocal dialog would ensue and we would learn much from each other; through an encounter with an object in an art museum this type of exchange could be made possible.

What Gilroy suggests is that contemporary debates about racial politics cannot be conducted without the recognition that those debates are informed by a conception of culture which was based on an older discourse of racial and ethnic difference. In many respects the museum is a material and discursive manifestation of an “older discourse” which offered “reductive notions of culture,” which lends it to being an ideal location for the contestation of debates on racial and cultural politics. Those reductive notions have been perpetuated through the museum’s narration and display of the tangible evidence of Empire and colonialism, and have informed its approach to an engagement with difference; precedents and processes by which this has been accomplished are interrogated in Chapters 3 through 5 of this research. Prior to engaging with those debates, this current chapter will offer a consideration of the art museum as a specific site of study, and will draw upon connections between sociology and Museum Studies as disciplines that inform an understanding of the museum. It will then interrogate the role of diversity, difference and representation within the museum narrative.

### **Locating the Research: Museum Typology, Educational Practice and Old Notions in Contemporary Practice**

#### ***Selecting the Art Museum and Educational Practice as Locations for this Research***

The museum in its various types, such as ethnographic, historic, scientific, and art, has contributed to a dominant symbolic perception of the customs and cultures of particular peoples, and it has produced relative notions of civilization through its narration and portrayal of subjects in its exhibition and program content (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Crooke 2007; Bennett 1995; Sandell 2002). Additionally, the museum has attempted to

shape the civilization of its visitors, as civilizing principles were imposed upon them when they observed and interacted with the museum's content within its material and discursive space (see Chapters 3 and 5). Art museums, the specific type of museum under scrutiny in this current research, are the purveyors of two distinct aspects of culture: 'high' culture, defined as the appreciation and understanding of literature, arts and music; and culture as it pertains to the customs and civilizations of particular peoples and groups. The art museum, from its position as an authority on culture, has influenced how Western society has developed its appreciation and understanding of culture and cultures (Duncan and Wallach 1974; Bennett 1995; Pollock and Zemans 2007). This influence has been conducted through various means, which will be explored in detail in Chapters 3 and 5 and will be expanded upon throughout the empirical chapters in this research.

In this study racial and cultural politics, ethnicity and difference, cultural arts policy, museums as cultural institutions, and history (of art, the US and the UK) are all topics that contribute to conceptions of the material content and organizational structure of art museums. Other topics could have been explored in relation to different types of museums, such as cultural anthropology or post-colonial theory in history or science museums, multiple intelligences or teaching methods at children's museums, or collection practices, semiotics or semantics within ethnographic museums. However, the initial motivation for this research stemmed primarily from concerns about how practitioners negotiate policy during an engagement with difference (in terms of both subject matter and audiences), the relative efficacy of policy initiatives, and the process of implementing change in contemporary museum practice. This was based in large part on challenges that I had faced in my museum practice, which fostered a strong curiosity in me to find out how other practitioners negotiated this difficult terrain, which will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 2, 4 and 5.

The display of art objects and their use in exhibitions and programs was of secondary interest to this research, which called for a consideration of representation in the art museum, analysis of the provenance of particular objects, and a questioning of the narrative account of objects; all of which required an examination of curatorial and conservation practices alongside educational and audience development practices.

Empirical data was derived from both educators and curators, with emphasis placed on the practice of educators, as they engage directly with audiences and organizational partners as well as provide the conduit between the curator and the public, and as such they carry a major portion of an engagement with difference in the art museum (I have firsthand experience of these aspects of practice, and the ubiquity of the experience was evidenced time and again during this current research).

### ***Old Notions and Contemporary Thoughts on Museums***

As museums are arguably the keepers of what are inscribed as the most valued and cherished objects in society (Duncan and Wallach 1978; Pollock and Zemans 2007), the status of their responsibility feeds the connotation of their being elitist institutions. At ethnographic and anthropological museums, initial collections and displays were comprised of what ‘they’ (read: white, male, Western, upper-class, wealthy, patrons and curators – the generators of ‘high culture’) deemed valuable, with many labels and texts utilizing pejorative and demeaning language about the cultures and subjects on display (‘exotic’, ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, etc.) (Jordan and Weedon, 1995; Lidchi 1997). This is interesting in relation to the idea that racist ideas and imagery “take two main forms... those that define difference in purely negative terms and those that, in fixing the nature of Others, celebrate their difference from a white Western norm” (Weedon 1999: 153). In the art museum the term ‘primitivism’ can be considered to be part of the latter celebratory debate inasmuch as it valorises the “authentic,” “closer to nature” assumptions held about the ‘other’ (ibid: 153), yet the implication that the ‘other’ are less-than their white counterparts is concurrently in effect. These conceptions and presumptions contribute to notions about cultures and peoples, artists and objects, and they also influence the museum’s narrative and inform who and what it acquires.

At art museums there has always been fierce debate about what constitutes fine art and which artists should be placed into the art-historical canon. All types of museums collect objects on the basis of perceived value (work that has a high monetary value according to galleries and dealers and/or high aesthetic value according to academics, critics and

collectors), and museums are essential to the valuing of those objects. As “curators seem merely to assess evidence, but in practice are deeply involved in setting the values that they police” and they “are not mere inspectors and scholars, since they are just as intimately involved in setting market values as in assessing artistic ones” (Phillips 1997: 6-7), it stands to reason that once an object or work by a particular artist has been acquired by a museum the value of the work, and the esteem of the artist, generally increases. Evidence of this condition in practice will be offered in Chapters 6 through 9; what is important to note at this point is that this practice relates to the narrative developed in the art museum and to the contestation of debates on racial and cultural politics.

In her essay *Cultural Theory and Museum Studies*, Rhianon Mason explored how ideas in cultural theory are being employed in museums. Of particular interest to this current research was Mason’s use of Stuart Hall’s “cultural maps” (Hall 1997: 18) whereby groups are distinguished by signifying practices. Mason offered that, according to Hall, culture is comprised of signifying practices which are bound to value judgements. Cultural maps are created based on a shared understanding of our environment, which is complex and layered. The process of creating cultural maps involves the judgement of cultural practices which can indicate their value, meaning and legitimacy, which can confer or deny the value or legitimacy of specific objects or subjects. If the museum offers a particular position on the value of an object or culture it stands to reason that its visitors may incorporate the same valuing into their own “cultural map,” as the museum is in a position of power and authority over the narrative of the object or culture and the visitor may or may not engage critically with the museum’s narrative but rather passively accept it as truth.

Museums place objects from different cultures in context with each other and are central sites for the negotiation of aspects of cultural politics (Jordon and Weedon, 1995; Phillips 1997; Hall, 1997, 2001) – those objects can be signs or signifiers of culture, where a shared meaning is developed through a shared understanding of the signifier, which is a socially constructed phenomena. This relates to the polysemic quality of museum objects – they can have different meanings for different people, based on their individual cultural norms and understandings. According to David Phillips “often the mere categorisation

of objects masks original context” and in the Western museum “the object is generally displayed just for its formal qualities, or worse still presented as important only as an example of the kind of primitive art by which some early twentieth-century Western artists were ‘inspired’” (ibid: 168, original emphasis). In recent years, particularly in accordance with trends portrayed in Museum Studies literature, museums have begun to rethink the narration of items held in their collections and to change their collection policies to reflect a broader reading of the content of their objects. This may indicate a shift in the values that are informing the valuing of objects, which could be a reflection of changes in social relations and culture beyond the museum’s walls. Subsequent chapters provide examples of the process by which this occurs; one reason for developing a broader narrative can be gleaned through a suggestion by James Wood:

“The collections of our great museums provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate that curiosity about others is the greatest form of knowledge. The fact that art history is hardly a science and that the concept of progress is particularly ill-suited to understanding and appreciating the museum’s collections only emphasizes the need for its experts to define many different kinds of truth with regard to chronology, attribution, iconography, context, and condition without succumbing to a relativism that reduces the collection to an arbitrary accumulation of material culture. To be authoritative in a democracy the museum must maintain a creative tension between demonstrating its expertise and questioning its assumptions.” (Wood 2004: 110)

Questioning assumptions in regard to the context, provenance and representational value of objects in the museum is an aspect of Gilroy’s contestation of racial and cultural politics inasmuch as the process of questioning practices (collecting, exhibiting and narrating objects, as well as targeting specific groups or communities to engage in programs or partnerships) may reveal the assumptions and positions inherent in the museum’s existing narrative and provide a point of departure for changing that narrative. Allowing “many different kinds of truth” to sit side by side in the museum may impinge upon the museum’s position of authority, which may account for the (glacial) pace of change in its operational practices and organizational culture. The impetus to create

change is also a contributing factor to its pace, as often those inside the museum do not see the necessity for change or have the tools to make it happen (which will be addressed in the *Staying Power* case study). However, if the museum is going to seize its “unique opportunity to demonstrate that curiosity about others is the greatest form of knowledge” it must actively engage in a reflexive process to shift its narrative and practices; sometimes this requires input from outside of the museum, in the form of policy mandates and community input, which will be examined in Chapters 4 and 6 through 8.

### **Disciplines Informing the Research: Sociology and Museum Studies**

“The flow of social science to the museum reflects new forms of power/knowledge; it is indicative of an institution that must constantly adjust to change and that is required continuously to reflect on the outcomes of its actions. The museum has internalized social research.” (Fyfe 2006: 43)

Conducting this research from a sociological standpoint was a considered decision, and in light of the above passage by Gordon Fyfe my choice was in keeping with current thinking about museums. My personal and professional interest in the programmatic interventions offered by museums (see Chapter 2) fuelled my curiosity with the social aspects of practice, institutions and policy, with my central concern being how practitioners develop programs for and with ethnically diverse audiences. What influence might they have on their organizations? What are their decision-making processes and what background experience do they have? How do they work within the constraints of their museums and how do they challenge museums from the inside, particularly while entrenched in their internal organizational cultures and in the face of external political and social pressures? As a museum practitioner, I felt that it was important to view the museum from outside of my personally and professionally constructed paradigm, and I imagined that sociology would offer a conduit for analysis that would allow me to do that.

Just as I had imagined sociology to offer a particular approach, I also imagined that situating the research from a Museum Studies perspective would be less productive– I felt as if I would have been viewing the inside of the subject *from* the inside, having been enmeshed in the museum world for many years. However, as the research progressed, I found that my status as an insider/outsider figured significantly into my research and that I would ultimately write myself into the story. Outlining the connection between sociology and Museum Studies will substantiate my understanding and use of the disciplinary frameworks that allowed me to make sense of what I had seen and experienced in the field and during reflexive analysis of my personal and professional position.

### ***Reciprocal Relationship between Disciplines***

Whilst I did not know it at the time, my imagining of the disciplines of sociology and Museum Studies were related to a larger sociological imagination, one that C. Wright Mills described as a faculty which “enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals,” (Mills 1959: 11). This research draws from the disciplines of sociology and Museum Studies (as well as history, politics, Culture Studies and a range of art disciplines [history, theory, practice and criticism]). Drawing from this range of disciplines and topics was necessary in order to convey the historic, social and cultural significance of the museum (as an institution and as the context in which the practitioner is situated) and the complex processes and tensions that the practitioner must navigate, a process which is in accordance with Mills’ sociological imagination. Utilizing, merging and contextualizing information from various disciplines with primary data will convey my understanding of how the subjects are linked and create a theoretical framework that provides a transparent account of my methodological approach.

Sociology and Museum Studies were the two disciplines that I primarily drew upon and the connection between them is straightforward – Museum Studies is an interdisciplinary subject partially comprised of sociology, and sociology is a discipline involving empirical

investigation coupled with critical analysis which could potentially be applied to an investigation of the museum. The fields have a reciprocal relationship, consistently informing one another. Through my professional experience I was familiar with the vocabulary of the museum, the operational mechanics of the institution, and the Museum Studies literature that would frame my arguments about the museum's location and organizational practices. However, the broader arguments of the dissertation lay beyond Museum Studies. I needed to gain a deeper understanding of race and difference in order to understand the material and discursive space of the museum, and while the literature of Museum Studies provided information about organizational structures and specialist practices, it did not go far enough to explain and explore many of the factors that contributed to the constitution of the museum – such as the history of empire, post-colonialism, representation, and racism, to name a few.

Sociology would allow me to develop a theoretical framework to consider those various factors and enable me to examine the current issues and dilemmas facing museum professionals, namely the imagination, negotiation and operationalisation of race, power relations and cultural politics within museum practice. When I began this research I was unfamiliar with sociological theory and terminology, I had never read any sort of philosophy or thought about cultural politics beyond what I had encountered personally or professionally. But I had a strong sense that if I could learn to wield the tools of sociology (the theories and methods that contribute to the critical analysis of an empirical intervention) to form and refine my ideas about the social aspects of the practitioner's position in the art museum, I would be able to investigate the questions that arose from circumstances that I had encountered during my own practice. Sociological theory, such as Bourdieu's 'habitus' or Hall's thoughts on representation and ethnicity, in conjunction with concepts from Museum Studies, would provide the explanatory power to analyse the variety of topics that I encountered in this research and it was imperative that I draw from both disciplines in order to fully develop my arguments. I chose to situate the research in sociology as it provided me with the tools to make meaning of the context and construct of the museum as a dynamic location for the contestation of racial and cultural politics, and to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions that contribute to the constitution and position of the practitioner. However, museums and their

practitioners are subjects clearly related to Museum Studies, and as such this research is contextualised by and is situated within the literature of that discipline.

### ***Defining Museum Studies and Contextualizing the Current research***

As this research concerns contemporary practice in museums it was necessary to explore the literature and position of Museum Studies, which has developed into a distinct discipline over the past forty years. The expansion of this field has led to new ways of conceptualizing the content and use value of the museum, and describing the discipline shall reveal the conception of museums that is in use within this current research.

Museum Studies emerged from Museology, which was concerned with the methods and mechanics of collection, display and interpretation, into a subject concerned with the social aspects of the museum – how objects are interpreted by the museum and by its audience, how visitors make meaning from the objects on display, how museums engage with social concerns beyond their walls, and what role the museum may play in those broader concerns.

In 2006 Sharon MacDonald edited *A Companion to Museum Studies* which brought together essays that drew from a wide variety of disciplines to comment on the contemporary state of Museum Studies, and I would refer readers to this source for a thorough overview of the discipline. I suspect that *A Companion to Museum Studies* was compiled in response to previous volumes on the subject, as MacDonald wrote a review of Museum Studies readers in the November 2006 issue of the *Museum and Society* journal. In her review she critiqued the format and content of volumes offered by Gail Anderson, Bettina Messias Carbonell, and Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, and expressed “the hope that other compilers [of readers] will follow the best practice” she outlined in her own volume (MacDonald 2006b). In her introductory chapter, MacDonald stated that museum studies had moved from a minority subject area into the mainstream, and that it is truly a multi-and inter-disciplinary subject due to its adoption and incorporation of techniques from a broad range of disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, and Culture Studies. Her volume was meant to provide “a guide through this multi-disciplinary landscape; and

to contribute to and develop cross-disciplinary dialogue about museums” (MacDonald, 2006a: 1). This current research attempts to contribute to this dialogue and as such it sits at the crossroads between sociology and Museum Studies.

### ***New Museology***

The late 1980s saw the burgeoning of Museum Studies, then thought of as the *New Museology*, which is the title of a book edited by Peter Vergo (1989) and an approach taken up by many preeminent scholars in the field. This approach, whereby museums were thought of in counterpoint to their old methods-based approach to collection and presentation of objects (art, ethnographic or historic), moved towards a new methodology which promoted the contextualization of objects and placed the audience experience, in relation to the objects on display, at the forefront of museum endeavours (which could be interpreted as the operationalisation of the shift in notions of culture that Gilroy suggested at the outset). MacDonald proposed that this shift allowed for the museum to be seen as moving from a fixed and bounded entity to one that is contextual and contingent. The literature exploring the contextual and contingent nature of museums draws heavily on sociological and philosophical theory, often the writing of Michel Foucault. Although Foucault examined the institutional nature of prisons and hospitals, his theories translate well to the structure of the museum, in particular “power/knowledge” and “governmentality”, which are both concerned with systems of control and inform thinking around the civilizing process of the museum (which is both contextual and contingent) (Foucault 1980; Rabinow and Rose 2003).

Fyfe proposes the museum, as a space, is comprised of specific characteristics in that “ a) it was, *pace* Foucault, a *heterotopic* space in that it was a place, outside of all other places, and within which other places and times were “represented, contested and reversed” (Foucault 1994: 178); [and] b) it was also a characteristically Western, universalizing, heterotopia in that it aspired to contain all times, ages, forms and tastes in one space (Duncan and Wallach 1980; Foucault 1994:182)” (Fyfe 2006: 35, original emphasis). Fyfe notes the Western connotation of the museum as developing a metonymic reading of

other cultures as inferior, which led to the labelling of cultures and peoples as primitive, which was ratified by the museum (ibid: 36). Both points raise sociological concerns in the space of the museum; taken together they indicate an aspect of the civilizing principle in the museum, which is that the museum's authority over cultures and cultural authority determines what is civilized. Its visitors in turn are encouraged to change their behaviour accordingly ("think and act like we do and you too will be considered a part of the civilized continuum of Western society"); this sentiment is possibly more evident today than in the past. In the move from transmission and civilization (whereby the museum delivered the 'truth' about objects fixed and intact to the visitor from its position of authority, and visitors passively received the 'wisdom') to participation and civilization (contextualising the narrative with input from cultural heritage representatives, and facilitating active meaning-making on the part of the visitor) the museum has attempted to refine its civilizing objectives – it is becoming specialized, it is developing particular civilizing efforts for specific groups and it is trying to exact explicit changes.

Of those who have contributed greatly to latter day Museum Studies curricula, Tony Bennett, a sociologist who focuses on culture, governance and the history of the museum, and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Richard Sandell and Susan Pearce of the University of Leicester School of Museum Studies, the world's foremost department of its kind, all can be said to take a Foucauldian approach to viewing the museum. Their writing covers topics such as visitor engagement in the museum, professional practice within the museum and the museum as it relates to the broader field of arts and culture – subjects which are sociological in nature and are underscored as such through the authors' use of Foucauldian frameworks. Sociology informs Museum Studies, which in turn furthers the sociology of the museum, creating a reciprocal relationship between the two subjects as they draw from the same philosophical, social and cultural theories. However, I would argue that previous volumes may not provide definitive evidence as to the efficacy of the Foucauldian frame to explain practice in the museum, as they did not examine practice as a dynamic, lived-experience. This lacuna in the literature prompted a question central to the shaping of this thesis – how does the lived-experience of power/knowledge manifest during an engagement with difference within the systems of control in the museum, and how does this affect practitioners and audiences?

It is well and good to write Museum Studies volumes about the outcomes of best practices, but these often focus on the outputs (exhibitions, programs, catalogues) and document the results of an engagement with museum content (visitor studies, community impact statements, toolkits to replicate best practices). It is also useful to provide material that critiques the state of the museum (deconstruction of exhibition messages and outputs, assessment of the marketization of culture or the 'blockbuster' show, demonstration of inequalities in access and representation). However, while this material cannot be recorded without input from the practitioners who develop and conduct the various exhibitions and programs, the processes that practitioners engage in and the positions that they occupy are rarely commented upon or chronicled. The lived-experience is where "the proof is in the pudding": gathering examples of implementing projects and approaches to interaction with audiences in the US, and documenting the journey of a project from conception to implementation in the UK, will demonstrate how practitioners negotiate the landscape of policy and organizational cultures, and will provide evidence of the efficacy and validity of the stated intentions and purposes of museum interventions. Presenting insight into processes and conveying the views of practitioners will provide answers to some of the "how" and "why" questions about practice, which will complement the existing literature concerning the "what" of practice.

It is through individual practitioners that decisions are made about whose work the museum will collect and who will be represented on its walls, about which community groups will receive outreach efforts and be encouraged to participate in the museum, and during the decision making process some peoples are ignored and/or marginalized; that some peoples were excluded from the outset contributes to the elitist ethos of the museum. The initial endeavour to open museums to a broad audience exacerbated class differences and perpetuated the elitist paradigm (see Chapter 3). Over time attempts were made to break down internal organizational barriers, as is indicated by the implementation of the New Museology, which attempts to deconstruct aspects of museum practice which are exclusionary, to expand the canon to include a greater diversity of artists and objects, and to develop programming for broader audiences. This shift in practice stemmed in part from a post-colonial and feminist critique of content

that was incorporated into the New Museology. External influences also contributed to reducing those barriers, such as public policy and funding aimed at promoting access and inclusion in the museum; however, those policies and funding streams presented new types of barriers for practitioners to negotiate (see Chapters 4, and 6 through 9). This research aims to analyze and critique the process of negotiating these barriers in order to provide insight into the lived-experience of the convergence of policy, practice and difference.

### ***An Example of Theory Informing Practice***

This current research examines the influence of cultural arts policy on program development for and with ethnic minorities in art museums in the United States and the United Kingdom. Art museums offer exhibitions and programs for a variety of audiences, and those exhibitions and programs are developed by practitioners with specific skills and knowledge. Exploring how practitioners conceive, develop and facilitate those programs provides insight into the role that policy plays at individual institutions and in specific programs. In researching practitioners this study aims to discover the motivations, behaviours and beliefs which inform program development, and as such it is sociological in nature – it will wrestle with the complexity of organizational structures and professional relationships (organizational culture), and interrogate the tacit knowledge of the researcher and research subjects, whilst utilizing established theories to examine multiple dimensions of the problem in relation to issues of ethnicity and difference.

Contextualization in the museum can be thought of as presenting the multiple voices and meanings of objects, and thinking differently (in opposition to the older, mechanistic Museology approach) about who, how and what is represented and to whom. This contextual and contingent aspect of museums previously suggested by MacDonald is especially pronounced in the areas of educational programming, community engagement and audience development. As museums diversify their audiences and develop programs for specific, targeted audiences, whether in response to external pressure to contribute to

broader social and political agendas (Smith 1998; Mirza 2006) or as a result of the museum (re)considering its relationship to its public (Cuno 2004), it is critical to probe how museums are imagining audiences, how programs are tailored to meet the needs of particular audiences and how audiences are engaged (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, 1997; Sandell 2002, 2007; Knell, MacLeod and Watson 2004).

An engagement with difference occurs when both imagining the constitution of audiences and during relationship building, whether with organizational and community partners or with audiences. The processes and motivations behind the engagement can be observed and described through a sociological lens while furthering the cross-disciplinary dialogue MacDonald referred to. For example, in an interview conducted for this current research Nicole Caruth, from the Brooklyn Museum, commented:

“When I first got here I [thought] it was really important to *create relationships* with *people outside the Museum*. To call the *school for the deaf across the street* and *ask* what kind of programs can we offer that you would want to bring your students to, to *talk to teachers* and figure out what they are teaching this year, what's their curriculum, and look at the exhibition calendar and say is there some way *we can make a connection* to science or math or what's happening in history right now, and what kind of things can we offer in terms of programs, in terms of offering teacher resources on the Web. So I think kind of reaching out... *why should we expect them to come to us? We have to go to where they are.*”

The italicised portions of the quote indicate topics that could be analyzed in a number of ways; a sociological approach might begin with what is the meaning of “create relationships?” What is the difference and meaning of “people outside the museum” as opposed to those on the inside? Exploring these questions calls for an investigation into the components of perceived difference between individuals, such as their class, gender, ethnicity and status, whilst concurrently negotiating the material and discursive construct of the museum (Puwar 2004; Skeggs 2003; Weedon 1999). This research was not so much concerned with the minutia of the technical process of relationship building, but rather two of its central concerns were how relationships are imagined (as in with specific

audiences) and how they are operationalised (as in through organizational partnerships). This called for an engagement with literature pertaining to cultural identity, race, ethnicity, and representation (Hall 1996a, 1997; Gilroy 1993; Appiah and Gutmann 1996; Back 1996; Back and Solomos 2000) which offered insight into how difference was imagined and negotiated, both prior to and during actual engagement.

Additional questions that may arise from reading Caruth's quote might be: Why target that particular group? How does the museum imagine the needs of this group in comparison to mainstream groups (is "making a connection" to math, science and history curriculum de rigueur, and how does the museum's version of history compare to that of the school's curriculum)? Will working with the deaf students/school contribute to community cohesion, and if so in what way will this be demonstrated? What other groups are "across the street?" How can this relationship be built and sustained? This small interview excerpt prompts a variety of questions concerning the practical and theoretical implications of working with specific audiences, and it further demonstrates that this current research relates to the cross-disciplinary nature of Museum Studies as defined by MacDonald.

As a researcher and a practitioner I am positioned between the academy and the museum and the previous paragraphs provide an indication of this, as I was utilizing my practitioners lens to tease somewhat-academically-informed questions from a comment that I 'get' intrinsically, because what Nicole said is similar to thoughts that I have had myself. Simply put, "reaching out is important, because what the museum has to offer can be enjoyed by everyone and some people might not participate if we don't invite them in." When one works in an educational role in a museum a great deal of time is spent determining how to best serve individual visitors and groups of various types whilst working within the constraints of the organizational culture, the collection, the permanent and temporary exhibitions and the available resources. Determining which audiences are approached is a process comprised of many factors: does the motivation stem from the group (perceived or stated desire) or the museum (mission or funding driven)? Who does the museum currently serve and who is not being served? Who are the potential audiences in the local community? Is there a community/social need that the museum

could address through engagement with a specific group? What resources are available to dedicate to serving a specific group? Are there any potential partners that could support serving this group? What can the museum offer the group that is specific to their needs/interests? In the process of conducting the everyday business of museum practice some of these questions are thoughtfully considered, while others are taken for granted, by which I mean that experienced practitioners are able to ‘answer’ the questions automatically/instinctively through their accumulated organizational/professional knowledge or habitual behaviour – they respond through their habitus, which is, according to Bourdieu, “a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16; original emphasis).

The Brooklyn Museum example is useful in that it demonstrates a point where Bourdieu’s theories of “field,” “habitus” and “capital” converge and contribute to an understanding of the position and constitution of the practitioner. The “historical relations” in habitus are in part comprised by an individual practitioner’s social, cultural, and symbolic capital, which are non-financial assets that are exchanged in relationships, can influence one’s social mobility through their relative value of power and status, and are determined by both social origin and through experience (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). A location where habitus and capital may operate is a “field” which “consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16, original emphasis); in this research the field is the art museum. Habitus is comprised of “a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions” to help one “cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (ibid: 18). Through these definitions it can be deduced that habitus and capital operating in the field effect how practitioners ‘answer’ questions and how they engage with difference.

Questioning my own habitus and interrogating its component parts contributed to how I formed a critical assessment of the subjects that I observed and reflected upon during this research, which indicates an engagement in a reflexive practice where theory informed, and could not be separated from, methodological approach (ibid: 26-30). Interjecting

information from my situated knowledge and critically examining my habitus was essential to conveying my position as an insider/outsider in this research. I could not disconnect my professional experience in the museum from my analysis of what was observed or gathered in the field. My professional knowledge informed my interpretation of the data, yet my research skills allowed me to create a critical distance from the material (well, at least most of the time this was the case). Much of the research has been shaped through an exploration and critique of my own habitual behaviours, which allowed me to gain a new appreciation for the positions and behaviours of others.

This critique was not limited to my professional knowledge, but was also brought to bear on my personal heritage and history. As a mixed-race woman the binaries and dualities in this research were personal as well as professional – black and white, insider and outsider, student and practitioner, ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, community heritage and mainstream cultural organizations, US and UK. Recognizing, negotiating and expressing my personal/professional position during the process and through the written work has been instrumental to my understanding the data and to the articulation of my arguments. I was living the issues that I was observing and participating in, and I had not imagined that that would be the case at the outset of the research, and I certainly had no idea as to the high degree of intensity that living the research would involve. At times, when distance was not so much lengthy and critical as it was fleeting and passionate, I would feel disappointment, frustration, anger and sadness at the inadequate concepts and lack of appreciation for difference demonstrated by the practitioners under observation. I believe that people’s perception of themselves (opportunity to build self-esteem in relation to representation, access and engagement in museum programs), their ease in accessing art and culture (feeling welcome in the museum), their opportunity to engage in informal learning (hands-on experiences, examining primary objects and material) and build critical thinking skills (taking in and questioning the museum’s narrative) are all at stake in how difference is conceived and negotiated in the museum. My holding these beliefs in the face of a disregard or incomprehension of them by my research subjects was incredibly difficult at times; reflections on my position in this regard are given throughout Chapters 6 through 9.

## **Race, Representation and Diversifying Audiences: Imaginings Influencing Policy and Practice**

“In part, we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.” (Hall 1997: 3, original emphasis)

“Exhibition or display in a museum or gallery can also be thought of as ‘like a language,’ since it uses objects on display to produce certain meanings about the subject-matter of the exhibition.” (Hall 1997: 5, original emphasis)

Meaning is imparted to objects through descriptive language that provides information about the material nature of an object, and this language can be found in the museum on text panels, labels, exhibition catalogues and in the spoken word of curators and museum staff. Depending upon the provenance of a specific object, there may also be notions of race and culture conferred upon an object. This interpretive enterprise is what constitutes the museum’s narrative and it includes the conceptual representation of objects. As was mentioned previously, the Western museum’s narrative account incorporated certain pejorative values that were established during colonial and empirical engagement with peoples from different cultures. The museum’s authority was established through that narrative and it has been, and continues to be, challenged through the application and practice of New Museology. The museum’s narrative affects how an object is viewed and how audiences’ make meaning from the material on display; understanding the construction of the narrative and interrogating its component parts is the imperative that I glean from Hall’s suggestions. This is significant because “differences between individuals and groups – between sexes, classes, races, ethnic groups, religions, and nations – become important political issues when they involve relations of power” (Weedon 1999: 5), and the museum wields power through its position as an authority on culture, and its practitioners operate through the circulation of power and authority imbued in their individual positions. The following section will begin to address these points through an examination of the role of diversity, difference and representation in the narrative of the museum.

## *Diversity and Difference*

Diversity refers to a variety of attributes that can be distinguished between people, places and things. There are liberal-left political ideologies that promote the idea of cultural and ethnic diversity as desirable, particularly where issues of equality are of concern, as evidenced through the establishment of the Commission for Racial Equality (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) in the UK and the Commission on Civil Rights in the US, which support the legal rights to employment, education and access to public services for people of all races and creeds within those multicultural societies. It is not possible to give an expansive overview of the history of diversity in this study; however it is important to note that its history and prominence on the political and social landscape in the US and the UK occurred prior to the establishment of, and informed, the policy under scrutiny in this research. Debates about diversity and multiculturalism have held a prominent position in popular and academic imaginations since the 1950s (with less prominent engagement going back for centuries). Portions of that history and debate, as it pertains to the museum and museum practitioners, will be included in various chapters. At present what is called for is an introduction to thoughts on diversity that have shaped this research.

Diversity is both an ends and a means within the cultural sector. Museums can aim to diversify their audience by reaching out into their communities and endeavouring to draw in visitors from ethnic minority and other groups, thus diversity is an ends for transforming the demographic of their visitorship. Museums can also offer a variety of programs that will allow various groups and individuals to come together in order to promote community cohesion or neighbourhood renewal, thus utilizing diversity as a means to promote overarching governmental and societal agendas. Engaging with diversity can be seen as a continuation of one of the museums' founding principles, which was to 'civilize the masses' (Bennett 1995; Duncan 1995); yet in contemporary times this mode of engagement has shifted from civilization, through the transmission approach to education, to participation, through an active involvement with audiences. Multifarious tactics to promote participation may include diversifying what is represented in the objects on display, modifying the material architectural space of the museum, offering

a layered provision of interpretive material (labels, texts, catalogues, etc) and developing community partnerships to meet the needs of potential audiences (Black 2005: 64-65), all of which contribute to the visitor making his or her own meaning in the museum – allowing for a participative, engaging learning experience, rather than the ‘truth’ (the museum’s interpretation of material based on its position as authority) being given to the visitor wholesale. This shift in the language, from civilization to participation, may indicate a shift in the ethos of the museum, from elite institution to a more egalitarian establishment, at least in terms of how it relates to its broader audience. Arguably, this shift has been in response to external policy mandates and their commensurate funding streams, and also to changes in pedagogy both inside and outside of the museum (see Chapters 4 through 6). An exploration of contemporary pedagogy is beyond the remit of this research; at this point it is necessary to interrogate the ideas and imaginings that inform diversity and difference.

In considering the conception of difference, Chris Weedon offers that “differences can be categorized in various ways, for example as social, political, cultural or natural. How differences are defined has implications for whether they are seen as desirable, changeable or fixed” (Weedon 1999: 5). In accounting for the feminist and postcolonial critique of the “multicultural language of ‘cultural diversity’”, Sara Ahmed suggests that “cultural diversity reifies difference as something that exists ‘in’ the bodies or culture of others” and it can be co-opted by the nation-state as property that it “can have” (Ahmed, 2007a: 235, original emphasis). If difference is embodied and can be achieved by including individuals (in the state, in the community, in the museum) based upon biologically grounded signifiers (gender, skin colour, phenotype, etc) that are steeped in hegemonic white societies’ “implicit and explicit definitions of whiteness and racial otherness” which are “structural, inhering in the discourses and institutional practices of the societies concerned” (Weedon 1999: 152), then it is no wonder that the defining of difference holds implications for its use value and that museums are ill-suited, based on their colonial and empirical history and constitution, to engage with difference.

The language of difference, particularly as it is expressed in both policy and theory, is the cause of much conceptual confusion: diversity, multicultural, cross-cultural, inter-cultural,

cultural pluralism, trans-cultural – what do these words mean in terms of how practitioners approach audiences? When I was conducting programs in public housing projects and in prisons from the mid 1990s through the mid 2000s the buzz words were ‘at-risk youth’, ‘marginalized groups’ and ‘diverse populations,’ now there is so much terminology and semantics around ethnic and cultural diversity that they can be a challenge to negotiate, not least of which because many individuals use these terms interchangeably without recognizing the differences they entail, other than to note that the subject in question may mean ‘different’ from themselves. Gone are the days of the binary; in contemporary thought race and ethnicity is understood to be layered, stratified and nuanced, fluid and not fixed (Gilroy, 1993; Hall and Du Gay, 1996; Back and Solomos, 2000).

Despite political sound bites decrying an end to multiculturalism (from Trevor Phillips at the Commission for Racial Equality in 2004 to Prime Minister David Cameron in 2011) and academic thought questioning the actuality of the end of multiculturalism (Back 2007; Modood et al 2006; Hellyer 2009), it is clear that multiculturalism is still alive and kicking. Multiculturalism is a concept stemming from cultural pluralism, which refers to both cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographics of a particular social space, and is inclusive of diverse cultures and religious backgrounds (many cultures, side by side, operating separately within a shared space). To paraphrase Parekh (1995) multiculturalism causes conceptual confusion because culture is but one component of a pluralistic subject. He posits that multiculturalism in contemporary society is: 1) rooted in identity, which is complex and multidimensional, composed of diverse elements such as gender, ethnicity and religion; 2) that multiculturalism denotes that cultures are distinct and contained units, mutely existing side by side, capable of being neatly individuated and separated, which is not the case; 3) that to stress multiculturalism makes it appear unique to our times, which is also not the case as cultures have mixed in many countries throughout the world for millennia; and 4) multiculturalism obscures important differences, as diversity can be an important part of cultural identity.

Diversity connotes the differences in backgrounds or lifestyles, including race, age, religion, gender, class, ability, sexual preference, intelligence, behavior, etc., and the

contemporary liberal imagining of diversity is that it is valuable and desirable to aiding communication between people of different backgrounds and lifestyles, leading to greater knowledge, understanding, and peaceful coexistence (which relates back to Wood's earlier assertion that "curiosity about others is the greatest form of knowledge" and that the museum is in a unique position to facilitate the development of that knowledge). Interculturalism is the philosophy of exchanges between cultural groups within a society, requiring an openness to be exposed to the culture of the 'other' in order to seek commonalities (towards integration and assimilation, yet rooted in an appreciation of difference). (These terms are considered to be highly contested and, though I provide somewhat standard Oxford English Dictionary definitions for them in the interest of brevity, it is not my intention to diminish the importance of debates around the terms.)

As anti-racism has not been fully considered as an approach to engaging with difference in the museum (except in specific institutions, such as the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles or the Museum of Human Rights in Osaka Japan, and at museums within the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience), this research suggests that interculturalism (assimilation and integration) and multiculturalism (separation and co-existence) are the choices in approach museums are faced with, in terms of engaging with visitors (see Chapter 3). This choice was eloquently set forth by Victoria Walsh (2008), Deputy Head of Learning at Tate Britain, who commented that "... debates about how best to raise the representation of minority populations in public life is also one of the most contentious and elusive debates that British society is currently engaging with across generations, classes, and political divides: what approach should be assumed to ensure social cohesion in a multicultural society – integration (interculturalism) or self-selecting cultural separation (multiculturalism)?" She proceeded to comment that "Tate, by its own definition has 'pioneered the 'Social Model' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century museum that locates and identifies it as a significant contributor to the social and cultural fabric of the national life. Indeed, it recently noted to government how "Tate is greatly encouraged by the [government] emphasis on the central role of museums and galleries in the cultural, social and educational life of the nation" (Walsh 2008: 13, original emphasis). Yet in the same paper she noted that "there had been no demonstrable change in the demographic

representation of audiences at Tate Britain, which continues to attract only 3% from ethnic minorities” (ibid: 1).

If the population of London consists of 27% black or minority ethnic people (according to the 2001 Census), and Tate Britain is situated in central London, yet only has 3% ethnic minority attendance, how can it substantiate claims of being a model of good practice? How does the Tate record and calculate minority participation (does it rely on visible difference, or old notions of skin colour and phenotype, to generate figures and account for its audience demographics [through scanning the audience and guess-timating its numbers], since free participation is not tabulated through ticket sales with concurrent data collection, as is the case in US museums through postcode capture at the point of sale/admissions desk)? What benchmarks does it use, and what benchmarks should museums generally use to indicate success? I do consider the appointment of a Cross-Cultural curator and the three-year research project Tate Encounters to be significant contributions to a “Social Model of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century museum,” yet if an organization with such considerable resources is challenged by engaging in diversity work what does that imply for much smaller organizations, with limited staff time and skill as well as financial means? Perhaps it is the allocation, rather than a lack, of resources which is more to the point, as it is arguable that increasing inclusion could be considered *essential* to rather than *additional* to gallery education objectives.

Exploring the positional nature of difference and multiculturalism requires a depth of understanding for both the varied nature of audiences and for the material content of programs and exhibitions. The museum’s content knowledge is expansive, but its understanding of difference on the part of its audience tends to be limited, and this may be a symptom of what Stanley Fish refers to as ‘boutique multiculturalism.’ Fish describes this as “the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants [and] weekend festivals ... [which] is characterized by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection... [and can] admire or appreciate or enjoy or sympathize with (or at the very least) “recognize the legitimacy of” the traditions of cultures other than their own” (Fish 1996: 378, original emphasis). This type of multiculturalism can be conducted without actually engaging with difference at any deep level, stopping short of genuine acceptance

when the central values of another culture offends or goes against the practitioner's own cultural norms. In order to avoid this trap it is necessary to thoroughly examine the purpose, meaning and intention behind practice, including personal feelings and perceptions (see Chapters 6 through 8). This may seem straightforward, yet it is the central challenge to implementing audience and program development work in a meaningful way.

### ***Representation***

Hall (1996a) described/defined a shift in black cultural politics as:

“Politically, this is the moment when the term ‘black’ was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities... Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible ‘other’ of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses.” (Hall 1996a: 441, original emphasis)

Additionally, having stated that blacks had been pushed to the margins of British culture in “the representational and discursive spaces of English society” he stated:

“In these spaces blacks have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects, of the practices of representation. The struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject.” (ibid: 442)

Hall was speaking about blacks in society in general in the above quotes, yet it is my view that he could also have been describing how various peoples have been portrayed in

museums since their inception over 200 years ago. Museums are the material manifestation of a “predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourse.” In museums, black people have been the objects of anthropological/ethnographic exhibitions which have portrayed aspects of their traditional manner of dress, body adornment, religious and social practices as ‘primitive’ and ‘exotic’ (Jordan and Weedon, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 2000), yet only in the last 40 to 50 years has there been any question as to ‘in comparison to what or whom?’ Reflexive practice in museums has slowly begun to question how the dominant culture has literally portrayed blacks as the ‘other’ through subjective label copy, text panels and educational programming.

Taking the two previous quotes from Hall as an example, the word black was defined in political terms. Museum educators in Britain may share the same understanding of the term with Hall, but do they reflect on what it means when developing programs? Do they think about the history and the politics that have shaped the ‘black community’ (which is a problematic term, as community and black are both subjective and contentious words to define), particularly during the past sixty years? When Hall states that “blacks have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects, of the practices of representation,” I believe he is expressing a sentiment that is particularly relevant to museum practice and audience development. I interpret his statement to mean that black people are looked upon as being distinctly different from museum staff and traditional visitors, and that the way in which blacks have been depicted in the material displayed in museums has reinforced this difference because blacks traditionally have had limited say in their own representation. These questions will be explored throughout the *Staying Power* case-study in chapters 6 through 8.

The term ‘representation,’ described by Hall (1997: 2-3) as the assimilation of three components of understanding an object or thing – the physical object itself, the concept of the object, and the language created to describe the object – is applied in practice on two levels in the museum. On one level representation is evidenced in how objects and subjects are depicted and narrated. On another level representation is evidenced in the cultural, ethnic, gender, age, etc. backgrounds of the visitors to the museum, as they are interpreted by the museum staff – not necessarily as they, the visitors, would describe or

interpret themselves – in order to tick boxes (which correlates with diversity being utilized as both an ends and a means in the museum). On both levels blacks (or any ‘other’ outside of the dominant group) have very little input into how they are represented, and this has been the prevailing paradigm in museums since their inception, and continues to be evident in the current state of operations in many museums observed during this current research. This is problematic in consideration of these further suggestions by Hall:

“The viewer should be able to read a particular narrative in the context of other narratives and understand that its identity is always positional.” (Hall 2001: 22)

And:

“... [B]ecause museums, in spite of what we would like to think, are deeply enmeshed in systems of power and privilege. They are locked into the narrowest circulation of art in its diminishing terms and are consequently locked into mindsets which have been institutionalised in those circuits.” (Hall 2001: 23)

In order to serve a broad audience, and to meet the standards and benchmarks set forth in access and inclusion guidelines, museums must endeavour to look at issues of representation through the lens of what they are and what they are not, and through the lens of their entrenched, institutionalized organizational practices and structures. If the museum is imagined as a boring, sterile environment that houses material irrelevant to, and sometimes blatantly disparaging of, the life experience of some of its potential visitors, it is necessary to engage in practices which deconstruct those concepts in order to change the mental and visceral image of what museums can be to those potential visitors, to meet external benchmarks and to provide an engaging visitor experience. Not only should the viewer be able to “read a particular narrative in the context of other narratives and understand that its identity is always positional,” but it is necessary for the museum to think about representation, in terms of the objects it displays, as being positional. This is contrary to the foundational tenant of the curator, and thus the museum, being the expert and authority, conveying the ‘truth’ of the object through its narrative. Creating operational and organizational change is difficult under ideal

circumstances; doing so in response to social and political forces is even more so, which will be explored in subsequent chapters.

## **Conclusion**

This research incorporates theories and data from a variety of sources; as such it was necessary to introduce specific concepts that frame my approach to interrogating the material. The art museum is comprised of particular attributes and politics; an introduction to those qualities substantiated its selection as specific location for research and revealed some of the complexities that practitioners must navigate within that site. Interrogating the disciplines that informed this research offered insight into how the current research is contextualised within New Museology and introduced an innovation in this current research, that of moving beyond the theory of Foucault into the lived-experience of the museum practitioners who enact his theories. The convergence of theory and practice was illustrated in the Brooklyn Museum example, demonstrating my approach to analysing data and offering an explanation of the position of the practitioner through the lens of Bourdieu's capital, habitus, and field. Introducing diversity and representation provided an indication of how those concepts were utilised during the research. Altogether this chapter presented an initial theoretical framework from which to consider the subsequent material in this research. The following chapter will incorporate aspects of autobiography into an overview of my methodological approach to ethnographic research, and will address my insider/outsider status that was alluded to earlier.



*Me and My Dad, Berkeley Francis Keith, June 1982*



*Me and My Mom, Susan Marie Keith, October 2008*



*Me and My Other Parents, Sharon and Roger Wilson, June 1990*

## Chapter 2:

### **Reflecting and Remarking on My Self: Acknowledging the Influence of Personal and Professional Experience in the Research**

“... [G]iven the contribution of the ethnographer’s sociocultural context to the research, these contexts too must be considered. They become a part of the research, a turning back in the form of cultural critique that has moral and political implications as well.” (Davies 2008: 5)

“[One approach to the craft of sociology] is to link individual biographies with larger social and historical forces and the public questions that are raised in their social, economic and political organization. It is about the search for remarkable things that are otherwise not remarked upon.” (Back 2008: 19)

Reflexivity in social research is “a turning back on oneself, a process of self reference” (Davies: 4) whereby the research product is affected by the researcher and the process in which the researcher engages. According to Charlotte Aull Davies ethnography is a research process that is based on conducting fieldwork in which subjects are studied over an extended period of time, that employs a variety of qualitative techniques or methods, and which usually provides a descriptive account of the data. Ethnographers “help to construct the observations that become their data” (ibid: 5) and, according to Judith Okely, “the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use” (Okely 1996: 28). Okely’s point is reminiscent of Les Back’s linking individual biographies to larger forces (2008: 19) in the craft of sociology, which is apropos of this research inasmuch as it is an ethnography that pertains to art museums and their practitioner’s engagement with ethnically diverse audiences, and it stemmed from both my professional involvement with museums and my ethnic minority status. Stating my connection to the subject under investigation is necessary and relevant; “the personal is political” and as such this research is in accord with second-wave feminism in its challenge to the public/private divide and in its avail to public and political scrutiny (Weedon 1999: 19). My position and the

formation of my situated knowledge shaped how I approached the material and was central to the reflexive process that I employed throughout this research.

My personal and professional position was embedded in the research from the outset and there were times when I was unsure where the boundaries lay between my 'life' and my 'work,' or if there were boundaries at all. Whether analysing thoughts expressed by interviewees with whom I shared a knowledge of museum practice or when reflecting upon observed instances of power exerted in the museum setting, the reflexive nature of my practice (and of my self) led me to interpret each instance through the many hats I was wearing – museum practitioner, researcher, mixed race individual, woman, foreigner – I viewed the research through a quintuple consciousness, not warring per se as in the Du Boisian sense, but occasionally sparring whilst running parallel. That particular consciousness, of being a practitioner working within the structure of the museum (under the influence of internal and external policy, endeavouring to create sustainable relationships with specific community groups and stakeholders), led me to question the pressures and constraints that I had been working within. As a researcher I became curious to know how other practitioners contended with comparable pressures and constraints, whether there were similarities or differences between how practitioners in two different cultural and policy settings negotiated them, and if through interrogating my findings I could present a pragmatic account of museum practice – not a worst or best case scenario, such as can be found in previous texts on the subject, but rather an account of the tensions and challenges faced during the lived-experience of the practitioner.

Creating a pragmatic account of practice, to evaluate the subject through an examination of the practical consequences and how they bear on the human interests involved in the process, began with an investigation into the binaries inherent in both the subject and in myself. The binaries in this research – insider/outsider, professional practitioner/researcher, black/white, practical/theoretical, written policy/interpretation of policy, 'high' art/'low' art – comprised aspects of the multiple consciousness referred to above, and they lay at the heart of both my research interests and my reflexive practice. According to Seale (2004) a reflexive practice: entails making a researcher's "subjective values and assumptions explicit;" encompasses "the capacity of researchers to reflect

upon their actions and values during research, whether in producing data or writing accounts;” and, when it pertains to reflexive ethnography, it “should involve a keen awareness of the interpenetration of reality and representation” (Seale 2004: 297, 509, 228). This chapter interrogates my reflexive practice, whilst recognizing the fluid nature of the binaries I associated with the research, and foregrounds how I am positioned in relation to the subject, providing insight into what I consider to be the practical and pragmatic aspects of museum practice.

In this chapter I will convey the complexities of expressing the intertwined thoughts and feelings of my ‘knowing’ through this multiple consciousness, and how it was applied in my methodological framework. I will begin with an autobiographical section on my educational and professional background, proceed to an accounting of the locations and sites drawn upon during this research, and conclude with a description of the methods I utilized in the ethnography.

### ***Educational and Professional Background***

I started going to museums when I was about six years old. My mother’s office was next door to the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington State, and when I would go to visit her at work I would always stop in to the museum and see what was going on in the children’s gallery. When I was eight years old my teacher submitted an artwork that I had made to an all-city young artists competition at the museum. My piece was one of a group selected to hang in the children’s gallery for the summer. The submission was an abstract work on paper; I had cut out shapes from a piece of heavy card stock, which I then placed on a large sheet of white paper and proceeded to colour quickly over the edges of each shape with felt tipped markers of purple, magenta, yellow and green. The effect produced negative spaces of the cut pattern shapes on the white ground, with gestural marks protruding from the edges of each shape, which were my interpretation of starbursts and starlight in the night sky. The artwork was hung on the wall along with a label which read “*Universe,*” by Kimberly Keith, age 8, Bryant Elementary School. Seeing my drawing on the wall of the museum made me feel as if I had ‘arrived.’ As I grew older

I ventured further afield into the main galleries and contemplated the ‘real’ art. I engaged in this exploration on my own. I remember being there with the artwork, in a quiet, reverential space, and rather than feeling lonely or alone I felt at ease and comfortable. Not welcomed per se, but I had a visceral sense of belonging, despite my being both ‘low income’ in US parlance, or ‘working class’ in UK vernacular, and African-American, or black as we were known in the 1970s, which are two conditions which continue to have a bearing on access to the museum.

I continued to have an interest in art and museums throughout my childhood and teenage years. As an undergraduate I studied art history and studio arts at a non-traditional college that placed emphasis on undertaking independent educational projects; the independent project I devised was to spend nine months in London and eight weeks in Spain, France and Italy, visiting museums and compiling essays on art historical subjects through an engagement with primary source material (which was much more constructive, valuable and effective than utilizing reproductions in books). After university I began working for the King County Parks Department in Washington State as a Project Administrator, developing and managing arts and sports programs for children living in unincorporated King County (read: afterschool art programs for kids who lived in rural areas, who had very limited access to activities of any sort). Through that position I contracted The Children’s Museum of Seattle’s (TCM) outreach program to visit the various King County sites that I coordinated. I was intrigued by the educational activities that TCM offered. I began to learn more about the museum, and eventually the position of Outreach Coordinator became available; I applied for and got the job, and I was with TCM for almost nine years. In addition to facilitating the outreach program, I developed two site-based arts and humanities programs for children who resided in public housing (council estates in UK parlance), working mainly with East African and Southeast Asian immigrants. Years later, based on the programmatic accomplishments I had achieved at TCM, I was approached and offered the position of Associate Director of Programs at the Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art (MoG) in Tacoma Washington. At the time the museum was one year away from its opening, and I was charged with developing many of the initial twelve educational programs that the museum would offer, including the Remann Hall Women’s

Project, which was an arts and humanities program for incarcerated female offenders age 11 to 18, residing in a maximum security detention centre. I was at MoG for just over three years, and during my last year there I completed a Master of Non-Profit Leadership at Seattle University. I then went on to do consultative work with the Wing Luke Asian Museum prior to beginning my doctoral program in London.

While working on my master's degree and throughout this current research I engaged with the literature that was being produced through the University of Leicester School of Museum Studies. Its faculty produced some of the leading monographs and edited volumes in the discipline, particularly in the areas of education and audience development (Hooper-Greenhill 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000; Sandell 2002, 2007; Knell et al 2007). The department's Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) conducted a variety of research and evaluation projects that have had an impact on the sector and on my own thinking about museums (RCMG 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004). Reviewing the RCMG's literature piqued my curiosity as to the differences in practice between the UK and the US, specifically volumes pertaining to meaning-making in museums and evaluations of the outcomes of government-funded visitor and learning initiatives in UK museums. This literature tended to concentrate on the results of the visitor's engagement with the museum rather than on the conceptual framework and process of developing and designing the engagement. This current research aims to fill that lacunae, providing a unique contribution to the literature by exploring the practitioner in situ and conveying the challenges and accomplishments encompassed in the lived-experience of program development.

This brief sketch of my educational and professional background is significant in that my experience and life-long interest in museums has shaped how I view the museum and its purpose; that personal knowledge informed how I approached and analysed the data for this research, and describing how that knowledge was constituted offers insight into how I interpret and understand my data. For example, the programs that I developed for King County, TCM and MoG were all funded either in total or in part by grants from government agencies which intended to promote access to the arts for targeted groups who had been traditionally under-served. Based on my youthful experience in the

museum it seemed natural for me to embark on a career path that would allow me to work towards providing artistic and cultural opportunities for others, particularly at organizations that promoted access for people like myself who were minorities and who may not have had occasion to experience the arts. It was only whilst conducting my master's degree that I began to read literature about the contemporary state of museum education (after working in museums for over a dozen years), and it was then that I learned that the beliefs I held were somewhat contentious. There was considerable debate as to whether the museum should be expanding access in relation to broader social agendas, such as community cohesion and regeneration efforts, with the arts being seen as a mechanism for carrying out the aims and objectives of those schemes ostensibly through implementation of the museum's civilizing mission coupled with broadening participation for those who were deemed socially excluded. Many practitioners and academics supported this expanding view of the museum and in turn promoted the notion of museums acting as agents for social change (Sandell 2002, 2007; Crooke 2007; Pollock and Ziemans 2007; Cuno 2004; Weil 2002), which was in accordance with my, somewhat organically developed, view.

As a practitioner I was getting on with the process of broadening audiences, expanding access and promoting the development of pro-social behaviour skills in 'at-risk' populations. I was an agent for social change within the museum, and I had never questioned the necessity or the politics of my position. While I was actively engaged in the daily operations of conducting programs there was not much time to engage with the literature of museums, and there was little encouragement to do so from the leadership or management of the organizations that I worked in. I availed myself of professional development opportunities, such as attending conferences, taking up membership in local and national museum associations, and participating in a fellowship with the Smithsonian Institution on minority management in museums, yet those platforms were primarily focused on improving upon practice-based activity or operations, rather than on an engagement with the theoretical and conceptual position of the museum, or the general, rather than the specific, state of practice. During this current research I have learned that there are others who share my view and approach, and still others who are sceptical about the efficacy of such approaches.

I would describe the approach I am referring to as taking a position whereby the visitor experience is at the centre of the museum's purpose rather than the collection of objects and artefacts and their subsequent exhibition. I have always viewed the *interaction* between audience and content as the most significant feature of museums; that museums have visitors to perceive their collections is what elevates them from warehouses to cultural institutions. Placing the audience at the centre of the museum's purpose emphasizes the experience of meaning-making. I was at the centre of the museum experience when I was a child; it was about how I felt and what I imagined when I was looking at (and sometimes making) the artwork, not about the specific artwork per se – subject matter, materiality, and provenance were not important to me as a child, there could have been anything on the walls and I would have had a similarly engaging experience. My childhood encounters with the museum spawned my belief that the visitor should be at the centre of the museum experience, which directly led to my creating arts and humanities programs for 'at-risk' youth in an attempt to provide a similar experience for the next generation. Because my motivation was inculcated at such an early age I had never questioned my socio-cultural position, I took it for granted. Throughout this research I have not only examined the practitioner's position within the museum, but I have interrogated my own knowledge and how it was constituted. This process has allowed me to recognize my multiple consciousness and understand that I am moving from working with specific groups and individuals through my own artistic and cultural lens as a practitioner, towards engaging with the larger idea of audiences through the lens of sociological, political and cultural inquiry as a researcher. It is my hope that the research will demystify aspects of practice that impact audience development and provide an opportunity to consider how museum practitioners serve diverse visitors in the face of internal and external pressures.

The point of offering this information is to note that in researching this topic I have realized that as a practitioner I operated from a specific political position that I did not articulate or question at the time. As a researcher it has been necessary for me to appreciate that my position informs the research, and that during analysis I must strike a balance between my informed opinion and the 'facts' at hand – facts which are

problematic, in that data collected is never objective as it is filtered through situated knowledge, and need to be interrogated in order to provide a nuanced account of the subject.

## **Analytical Framework: Research Questions, Defining the Museum, Locations and Sites**

### ***Research Questions***

In order to explore the linkage between cultural arts policy, operational practice in the art museum, negotiating difference and serving ethnic minority audiences, I developed a series of questions encompassing the confluence of topics which underpin the research:

How has the trajectory of support for the arts informed contemporary policy and how has it contributed to situating the museum in the broader socio-cultural landscape? What influence does policy, and its related funding, have on an engagement with difference? How do museum practitioners negotiate both the internal organizational cultures of their institutions and the external policy directives of government and culture sector bodies in order to develop programs for diverse audiences?

What processes have museums utilized in the move from civilization to participation as a mode of engagement for audiences, particularly ethnic minority audiences? What is involved in the process of creating a partnership between two organizations, particularly a project with a central focus on representing ethnicity and difference? How do practitioners imagine difference, and how does that imagination effect the selection and engagement of particular constituent groups? What are the tensions and challenges inherent in this type of practice? What implications does this research raise for the museum field?

Through answering questions about the historical and contemporary state of support for the arts and its commensurate policy in Chapters 3 and 4, a context is created for the current research to reside in. In chapter 5 the practitioner is examined in relation to how he or she is situated in the material and discursive space of the museum, which allows insight into the production and function of the museum, and offers an indication of how practitioners negotiate within its bounds. The *Staying Power* partnership case study in Chapters 6 through 8 reveals the processes and challenges inherent in the lived-experience of practitioners, while also providing information as to how civilizing principles are employed through participative engagement in the museum. Chapter 9 provides an interrogation of the challenges of engaging with difference, in both the specific partnership and in the museum in general, and offers implications for this type of work.

### ***Defining the Museum***

An introduction to the historic and social precedents that informed the development of the museum is provided in Chapter 3. Having been enmeshed in museum practice for fifteen years I came to understand it, and its complexity, from a specific position, which I shall attempt to describe: art museums provide access to historic and contemporary objects which may both represent and challenge ideas about culture (social, political, aesthetic, economic, etc.). Through varying means of self-expression artists provide objects that may be interpreted in myriad ways by the viewer, and in turn the viewer may make meaning from the artwork in accordance with their own personal experience and knowledge which they bring to the interpretive process. Engagement in this process may potentially lead to increased self-awareness and/or promote identity building vis a vis the process of interrogating the artwork. Many museums provide interpretive material to aid in this process, and this interpretive material is developed by a curator or an educator depending on the particular museum. The process in an art museum is somewhat different to those taken in science, anthropological, ethnographic or history museums, in as much as those types of museums generally present material and objects as fixed or intact, offering the museum's interpretation of the specific use value of the artefacts

derived from evidence gleaned from hard or soft scientific findings. The interpretation of art objects may be informed by history and biography, yet interpretation remains fluid and subjective, and is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. Many ethnographic and science museums have done a great deal to increase accessibility and add a modicum of fluidity to the information that they present (through interactive exhibitions, reinterpretations of collections based on community consultation, incorporating performance into educational programs, etc.) and they have begun to shrug off their elitist image. Art museums continue to be viewed by many as elitist, and this is primarily due to the material content that they present – interpreting artwork has been an activity for the elites, and access to it has been slow in coming. Combating this elitist paradigm was one of my motivations for entering the museum field, and my professional experience informed the selection of art museums (as a specific typology) as a location for this research.

### ***Locations and Sites***

When I initially imagined the methods I would utilize during this research I had thought that gathering in-depth interview data from practitioners at similar types of museums in the United States and the United Kingdom would provide the majority of information I would need to conduct a comparative analysis. As I went into the field that was the approach I employed, but while in the field an opportunity arose to develop a case study based upon long-term, participant observation of a developing partnership. The case study turned out to be the substantive focus for the empirical chapters of this thesis; there was no way that I could have known from the outset that I would have the good fortune to observe and participate in a project that encompassed many of the elements I was interested in examining – i.e. the initial development of a partnership between two organizations of disparate size and resource, which was funded and influenced by public arts policy, and that focused on representing and serving ethnic minorities in an art museum. I made a choice to adjust my initial design in order to accommodate this fortuitous circumstance. This change in approach presented some issues in regard to how I would synthesize data gathered from different types of sources, yet it allowed for a

more exhaustive interrogation of the research questions than interview data alone could have provided.

As this research concerned a cross-cultural analysis of US and UK museums, it was necessary to choose geographic locations that would 'stand in' for their commensurate nations. As my own professional practice was conducted in the Puget Sound region of Washington State I chose museums in Tacoma and Seattle as my initial site of investigation, as I had access to practitioners and a personal interest in the goings-on of the museum community in that area. I conducted interviews in New York City in order to gather both east and west coast perspectives, and in an attempt to allow for a balanced consideration of the US museum. In the UK, the museums and organizations that I investigated were in London. Both London and New York offered the highest concentration of mainstream museums and cultural institutions in their respective countries (mainstream meaning established, recognized, traditional, well-known), allowing for an analysis of museums with similarities in size, scale, scope, and material content, thus comprising what I considered to be an equitable sampling. Both cities have populations of over 7 million people, with approximately 300 languages spoken, and a cosmopolitan nature unique to their respective countries. Those conditions contributed to the provision of an abundance of arts and cultural institutions. It is arguable that New York and London are not representative of the US and the UK precisely because of those reasons, and I recognize that contention. Allowing big cities to represent their respective nations neglects the contributions of small town, rural and specialty museums, which would no doubt provide another perspective on the influence of policy and an engagement with ethnic minority audiences. However, it was not the intention of this research to solely focus on perspectives outside of the mainstream, part of the intention was to examine the civilizing principles employed in practice as influenced by policy, and London and New York represent the pinnacles of the civilizing process as evidenced through their sophisticated, multi-ethnic, urban conurbations.

Established, mainstream art museums share similar attributes: they provide exhibitions of artwork and artefacts, particularly of material that is deemed significant to the Western art historical canon; they provide programming complimentary to their exhibitions, often

tailored for specific audiences; they employ professional staff to develop and implement most aspects of museum operations; they generate revenue (operational) and restricted (program-related) funds to support operations, often through monetary awards granted from public funding bodies; they operate within internally and externally imposed policy mandates. Selecting museums that shared mainstream traits ensured that a certain amount of compatibility would be evident when it came to comparing data gathered, such as: all of the museums had a public program component, most had at least one community program, and many had outreach programs. I knew from my professional experience that museums conducting those types of programs would also be engaging in audience development activities and working with specific stakeholder groups, most probably ethnic minority constituencies. I initially thought to group US and UK museums by collection or period type, with the understanding that there would not necessarily be a direct correlation across countries – for example, Tate Britain relates to the Whitney Museum of American Art in that they both hold national collections comprised of art produced by British and American nationals respectively and their collections cover a time period of several hundred years, yet the programming and the staff positions dedicated to conducting programs varied a great deal between the two museums. The point being, there were no apples-to-apples comparisons across museums, but I did endeavour to select institutions that had relatively comparable attributes.

When I began my research I was interested to learn how different organizations were serving black audiences and how they went about developing programs, and that interest strayed beyond the museum into other types of cultural and heritage organizations. I was introduced to the BCA through a university colleague and began to do some volunteering for them, mostly assisting with events and educational programs. As I continued to volunteer I became more involved with the organization, eventually becoming a Trustee on its board and assisting with its capital campaign to build the Black Heritage Centre, the first national centre of its kind in the United Kingdom. I often questioned how the BCA would figure into my research, as it was such a different type of organization to a museum and it did not particularly synch up with my research questions. Then an opportunity arose for the BCA to establish a partnership with the V&A around an

acquisitions project that focused on black British identity, and it was funded through a public body under specific policy remits – thus providing a case study that was museum-based and which encompassed all of the subjects I was investigating.

### **Conducting an Ethnography**

Ethnography is both a product, in that it is a socio-cultural analysis of a particular unit of study, and it is also a qualitative research method used to examine a ‘cultural group’ bound together by shared understandings, beliefs and/or behaviours (Seale 2004; Davies 2008); in this research I have interpreted ‘cultural group’ to be museum practitioners. In ethnographic research, the cultural group is investigated in its ‘natural setting’ (in this case the museum) in order to explore the research questions from the practitioner’s point of view; to observe what happens, to listen to what is said, to ask questions, and to collect data. The epistemological underpinnings of considering this current research as ethnographic include accepting ‘museum practitioners’ as a cultural group, and the museum as a ‘natural setting.’ In addition to collecting primary data in the field ethnography also calls for the broader socio-cultural context the unit of study resides within to be taken into account, and in this research that included an engagement with the literature pertaining to museums, history, cultural politics, cultural arts policy and race. This brief introduction to ethnography denotes my methodological approach; in-depth interviews and participant observation were the primary methods and techniques that I employed, which I will describe below.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews allow the researcher to access attitudes, values and beliefs of individuals that may not be as accessible through other means, such as surveys or focus groups. A thoughtfully developed interview, with open-ended questions, can “...provide better access to interviewees’ views, interpretations of events, understandings and experiences and opinions,” and are conducted from an “ontological position which values people’s

knowledge, values and experiences as meaningful and worthy of exploration” (Seale 2004: 182). As this research was concerned with interrogating the beliefs and behaviours of museum practitioners, interviews and participant observation were deemed the best methods to employ for gathering primary data. The majority of my research was conducted in London, for multiple reasons: to investigate the UK policy framework that was previously mentioned, to gain first-hand insight into differences in practice between the US and the UK, and to have a lived-experience that was analogous to the cross-cultural analysis that I was undertaking. Being based in the UK allowed me to conduct an extended participant observation which provided an opportunity to view museum practice from a fresh perspective and to examine the influence of policy in a cultural setting other than my own; however, employing that same method in the US would not have been practical (time, expense, logistics, etc.). Also, as I had lived-experience and extensive knowledge about US museums through my professional practice in three separate museums there was no need to conduct participant observation in the US. I decided that the best approach to collect data in the US would be to conduct in-depth interviews, as this allowed an opportunity to gather a sampling of practitioner’s views that I could utilize in conjunction with the UK data.

The selection of specific sites for research, and therefore particular practitioners, was decided upon through the rationale discussed in the previous sections. At this point I would like to focus on the choice of the interview as a method and how I employed it in the field. Interviews are “well suited for studies in which researchers have a relatively clear sense of their interests and the kinds of questions they wish to pursue” (Taylor, Bogdan 1998: 91), which was certainly the case for this research. From the outset it was my intention to investigate how practitioners imagined and worked with ethnic minority audiences and what, if any, was the influence of policy on an individual’s practice in the art museum. One of the most efficient means to obtain that information was to ask practitioners about those specific topics, using open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses. As I was based in London, I arranged to visit Seattle and New York at specific times to conduct interviews (December 2007, May 2008 and May 2009, for two weeks duration per visit) and as “interviewing makes the most efficient use of the researcher’s limited time” and as a researcher I was “interested in understanding a broad

range of settings or people” (ibid: 91) the interview was the most useful method to use given my restraints/requirements.

I initially contacted individual museum practitioners via email. I explained a bit about my research and previous experience working in museums, and asked if they would agree to be interviewed. All individuals consented, save one who had changed jobs since the initial contact and who had subsequently relocated to Chicago. In the final tally, I interviewed 27 individuals at 19 different museums and cultural heritage sites in the US and UK. The interviews ranged in length from 27 minutes to two hours, with the longer interviews being the few occasions where I interviewed more than one person at the same time; the average length of an interview was one hour and ten minutes. I developed a list of questions that I followed consistently for the first few interviews. As I became more comfortable with the somewhat unnatural process of conducting an interview, I was able to rearrange the sequence of questions in the hopes of eliciting more detailed responses from my interviewees. Since I was a practitioner I was able to employ the language, jargon and referents of my interviewees, which was useful in teasing out additional information during follow-up questions.

One of the most interesting things that I noticed about the interview process was that when I would begin individuals would initially appear to be a bit on guard and provide succinct answers to my questions, particularly those whom I did not know personally or professionally. As we eased into the discussion, perhaps 15 or 20 minutes into the interview, I would say something to remind them that I was a practitioner myself, not just a researcher with no ties to the field. Once they were reminded of my insider status they were more expansive, forthright and candid about the information that they shared with me; the reminder seemed to enhance the level of complexity and intimacy of the information shared. The feeling in the room would become more relaxed and the exchange would become more conversational, less guarded or adversarial, and occasionally resulted in my being given information “off the record” about certain internal politics and policies (interesting to know, impossible to cite).

Not all interviews engendered feelings of camaraderie – during one interview my interviewee made numerous references to my apparent youth, in a way that I took to imply that she felt as if she were schooling a novice. When I reminded her of my 15 years in the sector she just gave me a blank stare and continued on with her lecture (in a 75 minute interview I only asked her three questions, she spoke the entire time and illustrated her points with photographs and diagrams from her marketing department). On another occasion I interviewed a museum director who was a former curator and she did not appear to relate at all to the questions I was posing, as her organization was designed to exhibit the artwork of and to serve a specific ethnic minority audience. She made it clear through her body language, comments and time allocated for the interview (27 minutes) that she did not consider me a colleague but a researcher (or an outsider, or an inconvenience). All this is to say that being an insider-outsider was not straightforward and my status had implications for both the research and for me personally, in the field and during analysis.

Employing my multiple consciousness, or being the insider-outsider in the field, influenced how the data was gathered, what data was gathered and how it was subsequently utilized. For example, when I heard a comment about ethnic minorities being invited to visit an exhibition by an artist that shared their ethnic background, and then heard that the same group was not invited to subsequent exhibitions by white or ‘other’ artists, I had a layered reaction to the information: as a practitioner I could understand the challenges involved in devising marketing materials to attract multiple groups to an exhibition; as a black person I felt consternation at the way groups were invited only when exhibition content was assumed to be representative of their culture (tokenism); as a feminist I questioned the inequitable approach to audience development (not inviting each group to each exhibition); as a researcher I was interested in the comment as a response that described a process and position that was taken by a practitioner, and therefore a museum, and how it related to both the traditional museum paradigm and the contemporary practice I was investigating. In the moment, I was a researcher first and foremost and asked probative follow-up questions in order to tease out the reasons why such choices were made. Yet, at the same time, I had to contend with my multifaceted thoughts and feelings about the subject. This brief description

gives insight into how I interpret my multiple consciousness and how I juggled and processed it in the field during interviews and participant observation.

### ***Participant Observation***

Participant observation is a method where a researcher participates in the life of a group and observes its member's behaviours, and is characteristic of ethnographic research (Seale 2004: 226, 508), and it is “conducted so that specific issues and problems of practice can be identified and explained” (Merriam 1998: 34). While acting as a participant-observer during the case study, I was not “simply the collector of data about others, not even data that are primarily the self's response to others, but [I became] the other as well as the self of the researcher” (Davies 2008:220). Being the other as well as the self gets back to the idea of multiple consciousness and the blurred line between my self and my work/research – as a museum practitioner I went ‘native’ to conduct research on my own ‘tribe,’ which is an anachronistic trope of the anthropologist involved in ethnographic research. I do not mean this analogy in the negative sense of over-identifying, I mean to infer that I was a part of the cultural group that I was investigating and as such I had to consciously reflect on my position in the moment, when compiling field notes and during analysis.

According to Michael Quinn Patton (1990) the advantages of participant observation include: 1) direct contact which provides understanding essential to a holistic perspective; 2) an inductive approach; 3) “the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape conscious awareness among participants and staff;” 4) allowing for additional learning that may otherwise be missed in the formal interview setting; 5) an opportunity for the researcher to move beyond “the selective perceptions of others... By making their own perceptions part of the data available in a program, evaluators [researchers] are able to present a more comprehensive view of the program being studied;” and 6) allowing “the evaluator [researcher] to access personal knowledge and direct experience as resources to aid in understanding and interpreting the program being evaluated. Reflection and introspection are important parts of field research. The impressions and feelings of the

observer become part of the data to be used in attempting to understand a program and its effects. The observer takes in information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes” (Patton, 1990: 203-205).

In relation to Patton’s advantage number 6, accessing personal knowledge and experience, my professional practice spanned management, administration, curriculum development, staff training and supervision, teaching, coordinating volunteers, fund development and evaluation, and I worked predominantly with marginalized and ‘at-risk’ populations on community-based projects. This experience made me a part of the inner circle of the museum world, which has a correlation to the inner circle of an art world. Howard Becker states that:

“Knowledge of professional culture, then, defines a group of practicing professionals who use certain conventions to go about their artistic business. Most of what they know they learn in the course of their daily practice, and, as a general rule, none of the art world’s other participants need to know such things to play their parts. These understandings facilitate getting the work done, but one need not know them to understand the [art] works themselves. The group defined by knowledge of these working conventions can reasonably be thought of as the inner circle of the art world.” (Becker, 1982: 63)

As I was reading Becker (1982) I thought that his descriptions of the processes and conventions in art worlds were rather obvious; as I had been entrenched in the art world practices he was describing, they seemed like second nature to me. Becker described the relationships between the agents involved in artistic pursuits, and I had been in many of those positions at various times – artist, curator, writer, editor, museum administrator, collector, audience member – and in each situation it was necessary for me to contribute specific material, knowledge and expertise, while concurrently exercising an understanding of my role within the larger group, or art world. Each of those positions held a specific perspective on and relationship to the other actors within the group; in order to be successful in a certain role it was necessary to understand how they all worked together. The state of being ingrained in art world practices coupled with my role as

researcher, led me to recognize my multiple consciousness out in the field, and led me to ponder the line between participant/observer in my research and methods. When I wore my researcher's hat I was outside of the art world, but through my knowledge and experience I was in the middle of it at the same time. I strove to take in situations as they occurred without judgment, and leave the analysis, and potential action, for a later time. However, this was easier said (or written) than done.

The lens I view museum programs through is my personal knowledge of museum culture and professional experience. This has an impact on how I observe situations, how I interact with practitioners and program participants, and the type of data that I collect. The impact and effect of the interaction between my experience and my data collection and interpretation is what I am attempting to map out, flag up or articulate in this methodology chapter; in doing so I recognize that my lens is situated. I do not view this as something that detracted from my ability to conduct research or as something that pitted each interaction in binary terms of black or white, good or bad, yet it was something I had to be consciously aware of out in the field. An example derived from my field notes may help to illustrate my points:

There were instances where I became an active participant, even the facilitator of a process, and the output and outcome of the overall project was greatly affected by this. In particular, participating in the development of the BCA and V&A partnership, where I was able to contribute to the design of the working partnership, shape how the partnership considered the value of both ethnic minority artists and audiences, and participate in the selection of objects that would become part of the permanent photography collection of the V&A. Those activities went beyond what may be considered the 'normal' bounds of participation in that they influenced the outcome of activity in the partnership. Perhaps I have hit the nail on the head there – what is 'normal' when it comes to the social sciences in the field? Did I cross a boundary of good science? Did I cross a boundary of good ethics? Is there a 'good' or 'bad' answer in the context of a practice which is fluid by its very nature? Patton states:

“In participant observation the researcher shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study. The purpose of such participation is to develop an insider’s view of what is happening. This means that the evaluator [researcher] not only sees what is happening but feels what it is like to be a part of the setting or program.” (Patton 1990: 207)

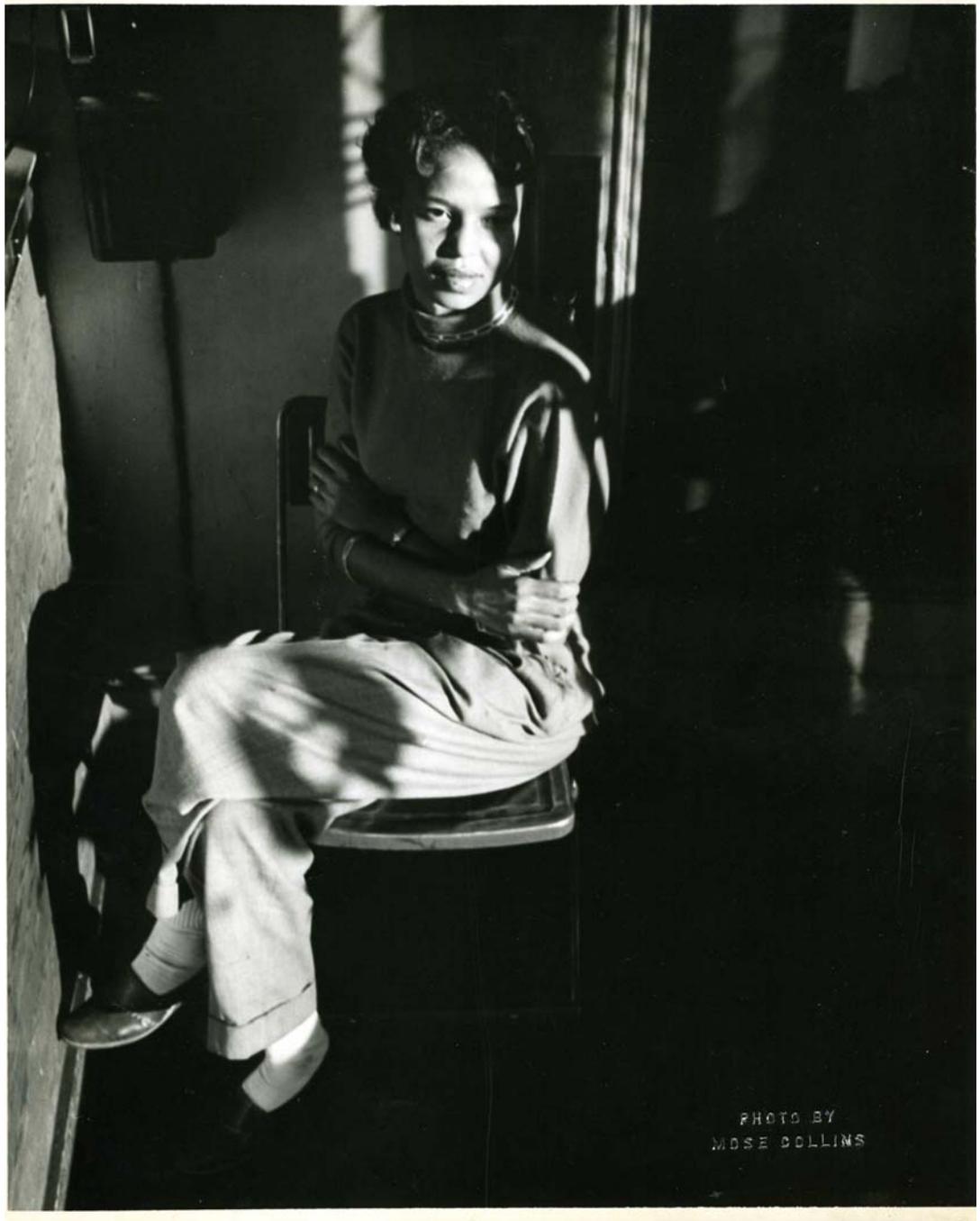
And:

“Experiencing the program as an insider is what necessitates the participant part of participant observation. At the same time, however, there is clearly an observer side to this process. The challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the program as an insider while describing the program for outsiders.” (ibid: 207)

The rub is keeping a critical distance and maintaining a reflexive practice. My own code of ethics, as pertaining to museum programs, requires that I put the needs of the public, especially children, first, and ensure, to the best of my ability, the success of the program, which has a direct bearing on the success of the museum (in particular, its community relations). As a researcher I had to ask myself some questions –should I be the first to contribute or should I let the organizational staff take the lead in establishing the parameters of the partnership? Do I utilize my personal and professional opinion in the process? Shall I volunteer to complete tasks that would be beneficial to the project or should I wait to be directed by project staff? Do I take responsibility for the process and ensure that the goals and objectives of the project are met? Participant observation always entailed an ongoing internal dialog (which was exhausting at times). In the end, instinct and training prevailed over any positivist notions of research practices, meaning that I contributed my expertise as a museum professional and reflected on my contribution as a researcher. My challenge was to continue that internal dialog through to my final analysis, thus demonstrating reflexivity and a constructive use of situated knowledge in the field.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an account of my methodological approach, which was designed as an ethnography that employed in-depth interviews and participant observation as the primary methods for data collection. Placing myself in the research was necessary, as my political position vis a vis the museum is that it is primarily a place for interaction between the audience and the object, which challenges the paradigmatic museum position of conservation and display of the object as its *raison d'être*. This position was established at a young age and was cultivated through my educational and professional experience, and I have come to recognize that it is a position shared by contemporary writers in the museum studies discipline. My position informed my choice of art museums and their practitioners as the subjects of my research, the selection of specific sites and locations to investigate, and the choice of policy and race as topics to investigate in relation to those subjects and sites. Research does not begin as a blank canvas, researchers come from a position of situated knowledge, opinion and expertise, which provide a standpoint or rationale for their study – researchers *choose* to embark upon specific projects, and those projects hold a personal and/or professional interest. Is it possible to leave opinions, personalities and concerns at the door when conducting research? Should there be an endeavour to do so? Throughout this chapter I have answered those questions with a resounding ‘no.’ However, it was not enough for me to merely recognize that my situated knowledge played a role in my research, it was necessary to unpack the role that it played through a detailed analysis of my reflexive practice. In doing so I have provided an account of the methods I utilized and have offered insight into how I interpret my position in relation to the data that I have gathered. According to Mitchell Duneier, a fruitful ethnographic encounter is connected “to a recognition of the historical relations between the kinds of people being studied and the kind of person doing the study” (Duneier and Back, 2006: 549). This chapter introduced the kind of person doing this study; the following chapter will provide an account of the historical relations and formations that established support for the arts and culture in the US and the UK.



*My Grandmother, Myrtle Lee Combs, 1956*

## Chapter 3:

### **Contextualising History: An Exploration of Social and Governmental Support for the Arts in the United States and the United Kingdom**

“The political intellectual is concerned with the attitudes, the manners, the moral and emotional life which the individual consummates within that social framework. It seems to me that the beginning of a common socialist humanism is the realisation that these are not two distinct areas of interest, but the complementary parts of complex, common experience.” (Hall, 1958: 87)

In placing transformations in cultural policy and museum practice in context with political change it is useful to consider what Hall is suggesting here, that culture and politics are inextricably linked at a fundamental level in the human experience. Support for the arts is influenced and affected by the social and political framework it is situated within, which is the subject of this chapter. By analysing the antecedents of national governance and cultural policy for the arts and culture it is possible to demonstrate its influence on current funding and program initiatives, specifically those which focus on audience diversification, access and inclusion, which is the subject of the following chapter. Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 will establish a context from which to view practice in the material and discursive space of the museum, which will be set forth in Chapters 5 through 8. This chapter begins with an introduction to the founding precedents of the art museum, with a particular focus on how the museum engages with its public; it then explores the history of support for the arts in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

The art museum dates back over two centuries, and its support, both public and private, has an equally long history. In order to examine how contemporary policy has come about it is first necessary to examine the history of the evolution of support for the arts the US and the UK. Government and philanthropic support, and its commensurate policy, has progressed in relation to both the development of the art museum and the evolution of the concept of “the public good;” noting the trajectory of this process will

illuminate how the museum has come to be considered an integral component of urban regeneration efforts, promoters of social inclusion and contributors to social change. An examination of the similarities and differences in support in the US and UK will illustrate the ideology behind current policy and its relationship to contemporary practice, which has the potential to influence how diverse audiences are developed and served; this relationship between policy and practice is the principal concern of this research.

### **The Development of the Museum**

In *The Birth of the Museum* (1995) Tony Bennett provides an overview of the history, theory, policy and politics of the museum, specifically the public museum. Today it is almost taken for granted that virtually all museums are public, that they serve varying ‘publics’ and that their doors are open to whomever should choose to enter. Who constitutes the public is at the centre of the discourse in access and inclusion policies, audience development practices, the implementation of educational strategies and questions regarding the purpose of museums – are they repositories for objects and artefacts or are they laboratories for social engagement? According to Bennett:

“The public museum, as is well known, acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The process of its formation was as complex as it was protracted, involving, most obviously and immediately, a transformation of the practices of earlier collecting institutions and the creative adaptation of aspects of other new institutions – the international exhibition and the department store for example – which developed alongside the museum. However, the museum’s formation – whether understood as a developmental process or as achieved form – cannot be adequately understood unless viewed in the light of a more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power.” (Bennett, 1995: 19)

In its early days, culture and its institutions were seen as a vehicle for controlling the behaviour (beliefs and actions) of the masses, the general public. The upper classes already enjoyed access to culture through visiting private collections of fine artwork, attending the opera and the theatre, through patronizing artists and by being collectors, either of fine art or of ethnographic artefacts. Lower classes had limited if any exposure to fine art or ethnographic material. When museums initially proposed to open their collections to a wider audience there was outrage and apprehension amongst those who controlled access to those hallowed halls – if the lower classes were allowed in, what was to prevent them from brawling and carrying on like they do down at the pub? Would the objects be damaged, would the atmosphere be degraded? These issues were addressed through the internal and external architectural design of museums and by a strict mode of operation that was adopted at individual institutions. All of this was undertaken because government and those in power understood that culture could be used as an instrument to “civilize the population” (Bennett 1995; Mulgan 1996; O’Neill 2002).

According to Bennett, it was James Silk Buckingham in early Victorian England who suggested, in 1834 after the Select Committee on Drunkenness, that there should be provisions made for the establishment of civic activities and organizations (such as libraries, museums, theatres and halls) that would give the public an alternative to carousing in pubs and participating in what we now describe as ‘antisocial behaviour.’ This was a turning point in the emergence of liberal government, whereby culture was beginning to be considered as a viable means of controlling forms of behaviour and promoting ‘the public good,’ which was based upon an ethical belief that this process would lead to a civil society. This approach would allow the government to operate “‘at a distance’, achieving its objectives by inscribing these [formal regulatory powers of the state] within the self-activating and self-regulating capacities of individuals” (Bennett 1995: 20, original emphasis).

These self-motivated behaviours would be conducted in an environment that was designed to foster the said development. Museums were initially private spaces which had restricted access and were socially exclusive. In order to make them inclusive spaces, where the behaviour of the upper classes could be emulated and adopted, thus ‘civilizing’

the lower classes, a museum's exterior was required to be imposing and architecturally grand in order to invoke awe, and its interior design was mandated to provide clear lines of sight, allowing visitors to become objects of display along with exhibited materials. As for the display of the collection itself, vitrines encased items of art and antiquity (providing a physical barrier between the visitor and the objects), aisles were utilized as a means of conducting orderly passage through the space and, initially, wardens were employed to guide and watch over the visitors as they passed through the museum, regulating the time spent and the number of people congregating in specific areas. This regimented mode of visiting did not necessarily allow the viewer to spend sufficient time with the objects and artefacts or in observation of others, thus undermining the development of changed behaviours (ibid: 52-54). Over time it became clear that visitors did not need such close scrutiny by wardens; visitors watched each other and their behaviours did indeed become self-regulatory. The use of wardens or guards is still in effect today, yet their role is to protect the artwork and objects, and to provide general information about the building, more so than to shepherd individuals through the gallery.

“...Governmental power, however, typically works through detailed calculations and strategies which, embodied in the programmes of specific technologies of government, aim at manipulating behaviour in specific desired directions. The ‘instruments of government,’ as Foucault puts it, ‘instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiform tactics’ (Foucault 1978: 95) – and especially of tactics which, in aiming at changed conduct as their outcome, depend on a close relationship between the government of the state and the government of the self. The critical developments affecting the sphere of culture in these regards concerned the shift – which, of course, was a relative rather than a total one – from a conception in which culture served power by embodying, staging or representing it, making it spectacularly visible. In place of this, culture was increasingly thought of as a resource to be used in programmes which aimed at bringing about changes in acceptable norms and forms of behaviour and consolidating those norms as self-acting imperatives by inscribing them within broadly disseminated regimes of self-management.” (Bennett 1995: 23)

Here Bennett utilizes a Foucauldian framework to illustrate the power inherent in the regulatory mechanisms of the museum. Foucault espoused that power/knowledge is exerted with the intention to influence the behaviour of others, to make people do or believe things which they might not have done or believed if left to their own devices. Power/knowledge works through people to create belief systems which constitute common knowledge or 'common sense' (in the Gramscian notion of hegemony) which leads to the defining of figures or organizations as symbols of authority, such as museums. These beliefs form regimes of truth and come to define particular views, which in turn become normalized patterns of thought and behaviour. Power/knowledge does not have to be 'true' in order for an idea to be disseminated through the economy of discourse in a particular historic and/or practical framework; the idea just has to become accepted as the norm for it to become 'true' (Foucault 1980; Gutting 2005). In the case of museums, for example: upon entering a museum people generally become quieter and slow their pace. Movement is orderly and generally follows a prescribed route through the space. Museum staff and representatives are seen as authority figures. The curator and director are the highest authorities in this field (those in *power* have specialist *knowledge*). Visitors are encouraged to make meaning from the text (or audio guide) provided alongside the art or artefacts (power in the application of specialist knowledge). The specialist knowledge of museum personnel provides power and control over the public/museum visitor in the discourse, and in the tangible environment, of the museum.

These modes of behaviour have been in effect in museums for over 200 years, they have become 'common sense.' Ask just about anyone (in Euro-American, Western society) what they think is the 'proper' way to conduct oneself in a museum and they will probably mention being quiet, moving slowly, progressing in a certain direction, reading text and label copy, not touching anything, etc. In light of the shift in educational practice in museums over the past thirty plus years, wherein the focus has been to create a more inclusive environment with an emphasis on the visitor experience, it is important to examine how the museum's initial emphasis on changing behaviours has become ingrained both bodily and intellectually. Museums have moved from civilization to participation as a means of engaging the visitor. As a result, contemporary efforts to create inclusive, accessible programs for diverse audiences can be at odds with those

ingrained behaviours. Participatory activities in the museum encourage visitors to have conversations, make artwork and move throughout the galleries in ways that run counter to the civilizing paradigm, yet the ultimate goal is arguably the same – to improve the behaviour of the visitor, whether that be in the moment while participating in a specific activity or later after the visitor has left the museum and reflects upon his or her experience, which indicates that the move from civilization to participation could be considered an ends as well as a means. It is this potential to shape ongoing behaviours and beliefs that leads to claims of culture being a useful tool in combating social ills, as integral to regeneration and community cohesion efforts, and as an important contributor to ‘the public good.’ This line of thought continues throughout Chapters 5 through 8 of this research, but first it is necessary to examine how museums have come to be positioned in such a way as to potentially have an impact on the wider society; this examination begins with an exploration of the evolution of arts funding and support.

## **Origins of Support for the Arts and Culture: Philanthropy and Government**

### ***Initial Support for the Arts in the United States***

The United States did not have a federal funding body or policy to support the arts until the National Council of the Arts was approved by congress in 1964 and the National Arts and Humanities Act was passed in September of 1965, which then allowed for the Council to administrate the National Endowment for the Arts established by the Act. Prior to this time the United States had a limited and sporadic approach to supporting the arts at the federal level. The country was founded in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century on Puritan traditions and beliefs that discouraged following what it considered to be the extravagant European example of expenditure on arts and culture by the royal courts and the church. The early US limited its support for the arts to architectural commissions that had a practical use value which superseded the artistic merit inherent in the form. Subsequently support for the creation of sculpture and murals was provided in order to enhance the federal buildings with statues and paintings. Not much forward progress was

demonstrated in the breadth of federal support for the arts in 19<sup>th</sup> century America; however, there was progress during that time in the museum sector at the state and local level. In 1829 James Smithson, an English scientist, bequeathed his estate to the American people in order to establish an institution “for the increase and the diffusion of knowledge,” and in 1846 the Smithsonian Institution was founded in Washington D.C. Over time the Smithsonian would develop into the world’s largest museum complex, which would include “16 museums, four research centres, the National Zoo, the Smithsonian Institution Libraries (a research library system), the Smithsonian magazine, the Smithsonian Institution Press, a Travelling Exhibition Service, an Office of Education, and a number of other offices and activities” (Smithsonian Institution 2008).

In 1870 The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) was founded in New York through an act from the New York state legislature, and in 1871 the city of New York allowed the Met to establish its permanent home on land located on the east side of Central Park, which enabled the city to retain ownership of the building and enter into a public/private partnership with the Met’s board of trustees, which has endured for over a century (Cummings 1991; Metropolitan Museum website). Other US cities, such as Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Cleveland, soon followed suit in establishing major art museums, as this was a symbolic means of conveying their prosperity and importance. This process was distinctly American in that individuals and city representatives were responsible for the conception and development of the early museums, which were notionally developed on the European museum model and yet were created without federal subsidy. With the proliferation of museums in major US cities in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, federal support for the arts began to increase in reflection of the private and public interest in provision for the arts. President Theodore Roosevelt created, by executive order, an advisory group entitled the Council on the Fine Arts in 1909, which would “advise the president and congress on the aesthetics for public buildings, monuments and parks in Washington D.C., and on other arts issues” (Binkiewicz 2004: 14). Later, President Taft abolished then reconfigured the Council into the Commission of the Fine Arts, which he sought congressional approval for, and won, in 1910. This Commission was established with a small budget and was focused solely on developing the arts in the nation’s capitol, yet it reflected a changing attitude, at least in the

presidency if not on the part of the congress, away from federal opposition to support for the arts and towards an ethos of supporting the arts for the greater public good.

A few years later two items that would have long-term implications for the funding and support of the arts in America were established: the Federal Income Tax Law of 1916 and the Federal Inheritance Tax of 1918. Additionally, 1917 saw the implementation of a tax deduction for charitable contributions to health, education and cultural organizations which would have long-term implications for arts organizations and donors alike, as increasing tax rates provided powerful incentives for charitable giving (Netzer 1978; Cummings 1991). Tax deduction allows contributors to non-profit/tax-exempt organizations to deduct the value of their donations from the amount of their income that is subject to federal income tax. In a sense this actually makes the federal government a de facto supporter of those organizations designated by the contributor, as a portion of the donated funds will be forgone by the federal government. In addition to individual giving, charitable foundation support was also developing during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and would prove to be a significant source of revenue for the cultural sector in the United States. Charitable foundations also relied on the federal government for specific tax relief and exemptions, so once again the federal government was made a de facto supporter of the organizations that charitable foundations supported.

### ***Philanthropy in the United States***

Philanthropists and their private foundations developed into a major form of support for the arts in addition to supporting other fields concerning 'public welfare' or 'the public good,' such as education, health and the environment. Combined with charitable tax deductions, philanthropic giving would provide an enduring and substantial proportion of support for the non-profit sector in the United States, and provide a model for giving for individuals in all economic brackets. For example, John D. Rockefeller was the founder of Standard Oil and became one of the first billionaires in America. As his wealth increased he gave support to charitable organizations and eventually created many philanthropic organizations of his own. In 1897 his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., joined

him in the family business and philanthropic endeavours, helping to expand the scope and scale of the family's giving. The Rockefellers established many charitable endeavours including the Rockefeller Foundation, in 1913, to "promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world" with a broad remit to provide support in the areas of "public health, medical education, increasing food production, scientific advancement, social research, the arts, and other fields" (Rockefeller Archive Center 1997a; 1997b). John D. Rockefeller Jr. felt that his fortune should be used for the public good, and this was one of the values his father demonstrated and instilled in him; he in turn had six children that he modelled and instilled this value in. His children would grow to be involved with the family business of philanthropy and civic engagement, and they would eventually have an influence on everything from state politics to environmental concerns to cancer research to the arts and culture.

The example and influence that the Rockefellers provided over the generations is evidenced in other foundations, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the Bill and Melinda Gates and Paul Allen foundations today. The significance of this model of philanthropic giving is in its emphasis on the public good, whereby the wealthiest few give support to organizations and charities that aim to improve the lives of the many. By supporting specific organizations philanthropists provide an imprimatur for the subject matter and the work that the organization is concerned with, which not only impacts the organizations and the clients they serve, but provides an example of charitable giving for others to follow. With the tax laws established in the US it is possible for individuals at any socio-economic level to donate to the charity of their choice and receive a benefit. The Rockefeller's example demonstrates the value and belief that charitable giving is the 'correct' thing to do in order to promote the public good, and from the inception of the charitable giving tax deduction individuals have followed the example of philanthropists. This process has developed into an ethos that the non-profit sector has built its funding structure around in the United States.

### *Philanthropy in the United Kingdom*

Britain also has a longstanding tradition of philanthropy whereby benevolent citizens have shouldered the responsibility for taking care of the less fortunate and for improving their communities. Early patrons were “fashioning an ethic of social responsibility which was to be the hall-mark of the liberal society” (Jordan 1959: 143), establishing a tradition that would endure for centuries and become an integral component of the 20<sup>th</sup> century market economy. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the First World War the English enhanced the Tudor-Stuart tradition of social responsibility by founding and funding many institutions and voluntary organizations that dealt with various problems in society and that focused on the betterment of communities, such as charity schools, hospitals and almshouses. Protestant and Calvinist social ethics, a growing sense of national identity and national obligation, and a desire to emulate the elite may all have been contributing factors to the development of this philanthropic ethos throughout the merchant and working classes. Wealthy individuals established trusts and left fortunes to benefit the public good, and some pooled their money in charitable trusts in order to support larger projects that benefitted more individuals in the community. Most philanthropists came from finance, industry and commerce although their backgrounds and motivations for giving were diverse. The aristocracy participated in philanthropy as well, although they tended to give to local charities and to provide large one-off gifts for special purposes.

Working class individuals also participated in poor-to-poor philanthropy and were not always the helpless victims supported by the elite. This self-help charity in the local neighbourhoods took the form of orphanages, boot drives, washhouses, and individual support to people who lost their jobs or were the victims of crime. Philanthropy was an indicator of respectability which individuals from all classes aspired to attain a measure of. With the growth of the population and the increase of both industry and poverty in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, perspectives began to shift away from individual philanthropic support in order to make way for the State to provide essential support in areas that had previously been occupied by the voluntary sector, as the need for social support was growing beyond the resources of private philanthropy. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise

of state welfare services, which were influenced by many programs and projects set up by the voluntary sector, and after World War II there would be a concerted expansion of welfare services in Britain (Owen 1964; Jordan 1959; Prochaska 1988).

The relationship between philanthropy, the voluntary sector and government tends to be cyclical and tempestuous. Government policy changes as the economy shifts and as political parties and their agendas come and go. Emphasis shifts to specific areas or concerns, such as from public health to education to the crisis in the inner cities to the erosion of the family. Philanthropy stems from a personal relationship to the cause or individual that needs support, and the State takes cues from the community and the philanthropists that are meeting those needs. The religious motivations for 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century charitable giving may have receded, in public discourse if not in actual support, yet the underlying motivation to be “my brother’s keeper” still holds sway in the imaginations of donors today despite an increase in State provision. There is and will continue to be a need for the State to work in concert with the voluntary sector and philanthropy in a democratic society where the gap between wealthy and poor continues to widen in proportion to the cracks that the less fortunate may fall into.

### ***Philanthropy as a Hegemonic Practice***

Developing an ethos of philanthropy is a hegemonic process, with the state and individuals taking cues from philanthropists in supporting the public good. Robert Hewison summarized Antonio Gramsci’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century writing on hegemony thusly, in *Culture and Consensus* (1995): “Gramsci developed a theory... which argued that the dominant group in society exercised its power by leadership and consent, rather than command and coercion. To secure consent, it was necessary for the dominant group to make concessions to other groups or classes in society, though always stopping short of giving up their fundamental economic power” (Hewison 1995: 11). This implies that the dominant group leads by example and encourages other groups to follow suit or adopt similar patterns of behaviour, thus creating a “common sense” or shared understanding. The other groups and lower classes are allowed to participate up until the point where

their participation impacts the economic power and rule of the dominant class. Britain, having perpetuated a tradition of class distinction for centuries, illustrates the operation of hegemony throughout its political and social history, particularly in the cultural arts. The importance of flagging up this theory is to note that consensus plays a significant role in the evolution of arts funding and support, of which philanthropy is but one part, and that “common sense” plays a role in how individuals engage with the arts – thus placing hegemony (and its inherent class issues) at the centre of any discussion of the arts in Britain.

Hewison writes that common sense is generated through a society’s culture, ideas, images and values. In examining the role of culture in hegemony Hewison cites Stuart Hall:

“The dominant culture represents itself as *the* culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. *Its* views of the world, unless challenged, will stand as the most natural, all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order: they will enter into a struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign – its *hegemony*.” (Hall, 1976: 12, cited in Hewison, 1995: 16, original emphasis)

Hall’s definition describes many aspects of British culture – in terms of race the natural-born white majority dominates the foreign-born former colonials, in terms of politics the conservative Tory framework dominates the outlook of the majority (from 1900 to 2010 the Labour party held power for just 33 of 110 years), and in terms of the arts there is the high/low art debate and the changes in policy and support for the visual and performing arts in Britain over the past 60 plus years. American culture is not immune to this hegemonic state of affairs – the foreign-born white settlers who came to be the majority population in North America went on to dominate the Native American and African/African-American peoples, the conservative Republican agenda has held sway over the liberal democratic schema during a considerable portion of the country’s history, and in the area of support for the arts there has been a struggle between high/low arts which was evidenced in the initial lack of support for anything that did not have an

inherent use value through to the censorship debates around the content of art as evidenced in the NEA funding furore during the culture wars of the 1980s (which will be examined later in this chapter). These similarities are not so unusual when one considers that the United States were founded in large part by British settlers, who ostensibly brought their cultural beliefs and sensibilities to bear in the development of the new country's culture. Yet there was a determination to do things differently in the US, as will be demonstrated in an examination of the development of government funding for the arts.

## **Expansion of Government Support for the Arts**

### ***Pre-Federalized Support for the Arts in the United States***

The US federal government took note of what was going on in the philanthropic and private sector in regard to support of the arts and culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it would take some time before direct support was demonstrated at that level of government. During the Great Depression of the 1930s President Franklin Delano Roosevelt oversaw the development of the New Deal Works Progress Administration (WPA). In May of 1933 the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created, in November of 1933 the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Public Works of Art Projects (PWAP) were created as part of the WPA, which were intended to stimulate employment and economic activity and provide work for many needy artists; at its peak between 1935 and 1938 this was the largest public arts program in history and more than 40,000 artists were employed under its various programs (Cummings 1991; Binkiewicz 2004; Netzer 1978). The PWAP produced artworks for government buildings; it was eliminated after one year amidst revived congressional concerns about support for the arts, which were still considered a luxury by many in government. Yet artists continued to be employed under the WPA work program, which was reorganized in 1935 to be more work-orientated and less relief-orientated. This approach to stimulating the economy, and by extension the arts and culture, through investment with an emphasis on

public works can be traced to the economic theory espoused by John Maynard Keynes, a leading British economist during the period. Keynesian economics or Keynesian social democracy was an approach that promoted a mixed economy comprised of free market processes with economic intervention from the government, with an emphasis on social rights and citizenship (Marquand, 1996). This approach is evidenced in the WPA in that it focused on building infrastructure, was closely monitored by the government and was concerned with the welfare of the US citizenry, yet the extent of this approach was not as marked or enduring as would later be demonstrated in its UK counterpart.

The goals for art projects under the reconfigured WPA “were twofold: first, to provide work for the unemployed [artists] and, second, to depict “the American Scene.” Its projects were divided into four major sections: music, drama, literature, and visual art. Historians agree that the WPA succeeded in achieving its first goal. [...] The second goal of the WPA – to depict the American scene – proved a memorable triumph, but it also provoked concerns about how politicians and artists linked aesthetics and ideology [...]” (Binkiewicz, 2004: 16-17), which led to questions as to whether a federal funding body should have control over the creative content produced by an artist. It could be argued that the WPA promoted realist artwork at the expense of more provocative and politically challenging pieces, which was essentially controlling content without specifically dictating the subject matter to an artist. This relates back to Bennett’s idea of the arts being used as a means to control behaviour, but in this case it was the content of the artwork influencing the taste of the people in addition to the space and place of display. The issue of control continues to have an effect on how the arts are funded in the United States to the present day, as current policy was partially based on the WPA model.

When the US entered into the Second World War the WPA art program was subsumed into the Graphic Section of the War Services Program. With the war economy on the rise, ushering in the advent of late capitalism, there was seemingly no longer a need for the relief programs established during the depression, and the arts gained little attention from the federal government for a time. The cold war period saw the backlash to realism usher in the era of Abstract Expressionism, which would turn out to be one of the most significant American art movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Abstract Expressionists

explored the material elements of painting, depicting life during the cold war through the gestural application of pigment to canvas rather than through a realistic interpretation of the state of the world. This process was creative and political, “demonstrating freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude” (ibid: 20); Abstract Expressionism could be described as a form of bourgeois decadent art, which would be considered the diametric opposite of Soviet Realism, which endeavoured to depict a truthful and realistic expression of the proletariat struggle while conveying the ideological goals of communism. In exhibiting Abstract Expressionist work abroad, through programs sponsored by the State Department, the American government endeavoured to promote the excellence of its culture while denouncing the culture of the Soviet Union, which was an overt example of the arts being utilized to civilize the viewer.

A major proponent of exhibiting this American artwork abroad was Nelson Rockefeller, who was instrumental in establishing exchanges between the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and Latin America. MoMA was founded in part by his mother Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs John D. Rockefeller Jr.) and he was a MoMA trustee, where he served as treasurer from 1935 to 1939 and as president from 1939 to 1941 and again from 1956 to 1958. Nelson Rockefeller went on to become the governor of New York in 1958 and held that office for four consecutive terms, during which time he established the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) which, along with the WPA, would provide the template for the future National Endowment for the Arts (Rockefeller Archive 2008; DiMaggio 1991). Arguably, Nelson Rockefeller offers an example of the merging of the philanthropic with the governmental, as his family background informed his approach to arts support and policy development while he was an appointed and elected official. However, he had limited control over how funding was appropriated at the national level and federal subsidy for the arts during the cold war continued to be limited due to congressional fears of McCarthyite attacks. At this time support for arts policy could have been viewed as support for artists who may have been socialist and communist leaning intellectuals, which potentially could have led to investigations by the House Un-American Committee. It would take another decade before federal funding for the arts would gain bi-partisan support and become a recipient for appropriated spending.

### *Establishing National Funding Bodies in the United Kingdom*

The development of arts policy and support in the United Kingdom must be placed in context with concurrent social and political developments. The greatest catalyst for systemic societal change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the UK was the Second World War. In May of 1940 there was a coalition government in the United Kingdom which saw Labour and Liberal politicians united under a Conservative administration led by Churchill, and this coalition was planning to create significant change for Britain's future. Concurrently, in January of 1941 Mass Observation public-opinion monitors gathered data that showed a post-war Britain expected to see 'less class distinctions,' 'more state control,' and 'educational reforms' (Hewison 1995: 26). Public-opinion was in accordance with political will; both were determined not to return to pre-war levels of mass unemployment, poverty and deprivation. This consensus marked the beginning of the welfare state, which was based on a comprehensive system of social welfare reform proposed in the Beveridge Report of December 1942 and was later influenced by Keynesian social democracy. Additional key pieces of legislation contributing to the framework of a new system included the Employment and National Health Service White Papers of 1944, the Butler Education Act of 1944, and the Family Allowances Act of 1945.

During this period, in 1945, the Labour government took financial responsibility for the Arts Council of Great Britain (which had grown out of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), established to support the arts during wartime). The Arts Council of Great Britain was given a Royal Charter in 1946 and its purpose was to develop "a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm, and to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts and to advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with those objects" (ibid: 43). Prior to becoming the Arts Council, CEMA supported a mixture of amateur and professional arts practices. This support of a wide spectrum of ability, in addition to a breadth of visual and performing media, led to many conflicts and discussions within the

organization. What is amateur, what is professional, what is entertainment? Those questions led to the creation of factions: those who took a missionary approach to the production and presentation of the arts and felt that the arts should be created for their own sake and presented to audiences for free, and those who took the professional approach and thought that the arts should be self-supporting and not mere entertainment. This is a version of the high/low art debate, and it was played out through the leadership of the CEMA/Arts Council and through its policy decisions. Hewison offers that “in practice, cultural activity is a matter of taste, and taste is an expression of personality” (ibid: 37); at the helm of the Arts Council there have been a succession of strong personalities who have dictated the taste of a nation, beginning with John Maynard Keynes in 1941 through to Dame Liz Forgan today.

In addition to funding the Arts Council, central government supported numerous other arts organizations and Non-Departmental Public Bodies at ‘arms length,’ meaning that they were to be primarily funded by and accountable to government, yet operationally and artistically autonomous to government. The Crafts Council, the British Film Institute, the British Library, English Heritage, as well as the large national museums (The National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Tate, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, etc.), regional arts boards, and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council are all organizations funded by the government. Currently this funding is distributed from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), although there are additional funding streams from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Defence (for the Imperial War Museum and the National Maritime Museum, for instance) that support art and heritage related organizations.

In 1963-4 the Arts Council budget was to be planned on a triennial basis with proposed increases of ten percent per year allocated. In 1964 the Library and Museums Act was established to outline the duties and comprehensive services of said institutions. In 1965 the first government White Paper for culture was published, *A Policy for the Arts*, which had a threefold purpose: 1) to acknowledge the increase in public funding for the arts; 2) to recognize that the Arts Council could provide capital funds for building projects as a result of the Housing the Arts Fund; and 3) to acknowledge a shift in the definition of

culture by recognizing and challenging the gap between 'high' and 'low' art. This paper also heralded the development of Regional Arts Associations as a balance to metropolitan culture (ibid: 121-122). The high/low debate reached a new level with the advent of Pop Art in the 1960s. Images and objects from mass and popular culture were the subjects in Pop Art, and the acceptance of this work as high art created a shift in what was defined as culture. Hewison quoted John Russell as saying:

“Pop was a resistance movement: a classless commando which was directed against the Establishment in general and the Art Establishment in particular. It was against the old-style museum-man, the old-style critic, the old-style dealer and the old-style collector... Pop in England was, as I have indicated, a facet of the class struggle, real or imagined... It was for the present, and even more of the future: it was not for the past, and saw nothing to regret in the changes which had come about in England since 1945.” (ibid: 133)

This shift in the definition of culture was one aspect of the change in support for the arts, and it was part of a wider shift in the evolution of liberal Britain. Other important pieces of legislation of the era, some of which had an influence on culture, included the Obscene Publication's Act of 1959 (revised in 1960), the abolition of the death penalty in 1965, legalisation of gambling in 1960, homosexual law reform and easier abortion in 1967, the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of the theatre in 1968, and the Divorce Act of 1969 (Glennister 2000; Hewison 1995). In 1967 the Arts Council of Great Britain's charter was renewed and revised, and separate councils for Scotland and Wales were established (they were sub-committees of the Arts Council of Great Britain until further constitutional change came about in 1994) (Hewison, 1995:140). All of this legislation points towards a more benevolent way of thinking, about the arts and about other societal concerns, which indicates a move away from elitism and towards liberalism on the part of the government and, arguably, by extension, the population that supported it.

### *Establishing Federal Funding Bodies in the United States*

As the cold war progressed the fear of communism led to the arts and culture being used as a means of diplomacy – American art and culture went head-to-head with Soviet social realism to compete for the hearts and minds of viewers throughout the world. This use of the arts for promoting democratic superiority was a key to developing the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, which would become the enduring federal arts policy and funding body in the United States. In January of 1961 President Kennedy was sworn into office and in his inauguration speech he alluded to both the necessity of American military strength in the face of the communist threat and to the need to promote excellence in the arts in order to demonstrate democratic superiority. Kennedy invited many well known and influential artists to his inauguration, and that was taken as an indication of his support of the arts and as a precursor to the advancement of federal arts policy. Kennedy became known as a proponent of culture and would eventually come to see the arts as an important means of diplomacy. Research was commissioned by the Kennedy administration and reports were generated about the cultural needs of Americans, how their lives could be enriched through the arts, and how they might spend their increasing leisure time. This data informed the president’s decision to create, in June of 1963, by executive order, the President’s Advisory Council on the Arts, “giving the United States for the first time a formal government body to survey the arts across the nation and to recommend to the president ways to encourage them” (Binkiewicz 2004: 59). In late 1963 a bill to establish a national arts foundation was put forward, yet it failed in the wake of the Kennedy assassination and would not be considered again until 1964 under the Johnson administration.

President Johnson was a consensus politician and his motivation for advocating for arts policy stemmed from an interest in creating “the Great Society” where the quality of life would be advanced for all Americans, and in which the arts would play an important role in human welfare. Johnson linked the arts and humanities to improvements in education, which moved congressional interest towards scholarship and away from opposition to funding used solely for culture. In 1964 the National Council on the Arts bill was passed, and in 1965 the National Arts and Humanities Act was passed, thus establishing a

National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, which was composed of three institutions: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities. The purpose of the NEA was “to make the arts more widely available to millions of Americans; to preserve our cultural heritage for present and future generations; to strengthen cultural organizations; and to encourage the creative development of talented individuals”, (Netzer 1978: 62). To achieve its purpose the NEA would provide grants to individuals, block grants or basic state grants to state arts commissions, and grants to organizations. In regard to the support of cultural organizations, the NEA would provide matching grants to fund programs, projects and activities (it would not provide capital gifts, deficit cover, general operating support or support for non-program related expenses).

Initially the NEA gave few grants to museums, due to the fact that “many art museums are long established, relatively well endowed, and governed by conservative boards that were initially suspicious of public subsidy” (ibid: 67), until the economy turned in the early 1970s and museums needed to make increasing claims for public subsidy. By 1974 museums amounted to 12 percent of the NEA’s allocated funds and were an important part of the endowment’s Expansion Arts Program that sought to increase community involvement in the arts. During the Nixon years the Arts Endowment grew nearly tenfold, from \$8.3 million in 1970 to \$80 million in 1975, and under President Carter it grew from \$100 million in 1977 to \$149 million in 1979. President Reagan initially wanted to cut the budget of the Endowment by fifty percent, but vocal political opposition held the cut to ten percent in 1981 (Cummings 1991: 55-58).

### ***The End of Consensus***

If the consensus politics of President Johnson led to the creation of the NEA as part of “the Great Society” in the United States, it would be fair to say that a decade later the neo-liberal policy agenda of the Thatcher government would see the end of consensus in the United Kingdom. With Thatcher’s emphasis on limited government and the

expansion of the free market it would only be a matter of time before provision for the arts and culture would come under scrutiny in her government. Prior to becoming Prime Minister in 1979, in 1970 Margaret Thatcher was appointed Secretary for Education during the Conservative Heath government. During this time she proposed that entry charges be collected at all national museums in an attempt to curb the museums' dependence on state support. The museums were opposed to charging, but "Mrs. Thatcher fiercely defended the government's proposals in June 1971, but the time taken to introduce the necessary legislation meant that the turnstiles were only in operation between January and March 1974. This was long enough to discover that the charges were not meeting the cost of their collection. Attendances fell from sixteen million in 1973 to 14.8 million in 1974, and rose to 17.6 million in 1976" (Hewison 1995: 171) (attendance fell when admission was charged and rose when it was repealed). During this time debate arose around the content of art which affronted the religious beliefs and taste of those funding the arts. It was suggested that the Arts Council should take this debate into account – which was in effect calling for censorship. This content issue would have an impact on arts funding through the late eighties, including the central government insisting that local authorities become more involved with the funding and support of the arts. (This debate around content and censorship has parallels with the culture wars and the NEA funding row in the late eighties in the United States, which will be addressed shortly).

By 1976 the UK faced an economic downturn which resulted in cutting government spending across all sectors of government. This low ebb in the economy provided the background for the advent of the punk movement, which provided a real, tangible product reflecting the crisis. As Pop Art reflected the elevation of mass production and consumerism to the level of high art through the work of Richard Hamilton and Allan Jones, punk reflected the decline of the economy through the music of the Sex Pistols and the Clash, the films of Derek Jarmon and the fashion of Vivienne Westwood (all of whom would later become part of the establishment, based on the success of their anti-establishment roots). In 1979 the poor economy was exacerbated by a series of strikes by public-sector trade unions, which led to the "winter of discontent," which coupled severe winter weather with huge garbage piles, transport strikes and limited hospital service.

This was the state of society which ushered in the conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher, and ushered out consensus. In February of 1979 Thatcher told the Observer: “I am not a consensus politician, or a pragmatic politician, I’m a conviction politician,” (ibid: 208).

Thatcher marshalled in a reduction in state expenditure and promoted increased private initiative. Tax cuts for those in the highest income brackets were supposed to allow wealth to “trickle down” to the lower classes and improve the overall health of the economy, yet that result was not achieved and a larger gap developed between the highest and lowest classes. Under Thatcher the ethos of community and collectivism (consensus) that had pervaded society and government, developed from the 1940s through the 1970s under the influence of Keynesian social democracy, was replaced by aspirations of economic individualism. Concurrently there was a shift in the marketplace from manufacturing and production to a focus on service and ideas. This shift enabled culture to become an item for consumption, giving rise to the cultural industries as an integral component of the new marketplace; this marketization of the arts further dissolved the boundaries between high and popular culture. The implication, for large arts institutions, of this move away from consensus was that government spending was reduced, appointments were made as to bring institutions under the government’s will, power was moved away from the local authorities and the number of quangos was reduced. Arts funding was maintained, but not increased, which effectively ended the debate about professional versus amateur support – since resources were limited, only the professional would be supported. Another result of the levelling-off of arts funding in the mid-1980s was that museums resorted to charging entrance fees. Managerial entrepreneurs with partisan agendas were given leadership roles in the arts in order to reflect the economic values of the Thatcher administration. This shift was indicative of the current of anti-intellectualism which flourished under Thatcher. The social welfare state was still in operation, but it was diminished and not as effective as it once was. (I would add that the situations, tactics and language employed under Thatcher are being repeated in 2011 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of David Cameron and Nick Clegg).

### *The Changing Role of the Arts*

Two items that underscore changes in the marketplace that would have direct impact on the arts were the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme and the National Audit Act. In 1984 the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme was created, instituting a matching fund scheme between business and government in support of the arts. Seeking business sponsorship would become an established norm for arts organizations, and with closer links to the corporate sector the terminology in the arts began to shift – visitors became customers, exhibitions and performances became products, investments became subsidies (all of which are indicators of marketization). In 1983 the National Audit Act was created, which gave rise to the rigid evaluation practices that many arts institutions adhere to till this day. Performance indicators, quantitative data, projections and targets all became a part of the cultural industries lexicon, further changing the terminology and business model in accordance with a more corporate ethos. This change in ethos and approach arguably led to a shift, in the late 1980s, away from art for art's sake towards an emphasis on urban renewal and community development. The Arts Council, in the 1986 document *Partnership: Making Arts Money Work Harder*, espoused that the arts would “bring new life to inner cities/expand and develop the cultural industries and, consequently, the number of jobs/improve the quality and quantity of arts provision outside central London/help develop the skills and talents of ethnic minorities and other specific communities/enhance the cultural and economic potential of rural areas,” (Hewison 1995: 258). The connection between the arts and regeneration has endured.

Concurrently in the United States, in 1986 the NEA created the Arts in Education program in order to promote art instruction for all school age children from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. This was a significant development “for it was the first time the Endowment had sought to play a major role in promoting curriculum change throughout the nation's schools” (Cummings 1991: 60). This occurred at a time when there was increasing public concern about cultural equity and provision, as public funding for the arts tended to go towards mainstream high arts/fine arts that traditionally served white, upper and middle income America in big cities rather than urban and rural communities made up of minority and lower income individuals. In the public and

popular imagination the arts were beginning to be connected to regeneration efforts, community development programs and various projects related to social change initiatives, which were projects targeted at populations not traditionally served by the NEA or other arts organizations. The connection between the arts and education that President Johnson had initially sought to capitalize on during the early days of the NEA were being reinforced twenty years later through this enhanced programming. However, continued concerns about the content of the arts funded by the NEA would recall an earlier Puritanical view of the arts and its provision in America, and would have an impact on the NEA's survival and funding.

### ***Arts Support and the Culture Wars in the United States***

In 1989 controversy stormed around the NEA stemming from support it had given to two arts organizations that had in turn worked with artists whose work was thought to be obscene and pornographic by members of the viewing public and by government officials. The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina received funds from the NEA, and, as part of its grants to individual artists program, an award of \$15,000 was made to Andres Serrano. Serrano's work *Piss Christ*, which was a photograph of a plastic crucifix submerged in urine depicting the artist's ambivalent feelings about Christianity and religion, was deemed offensive by some and particularly enraged Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York and Senator Jessie Helms of North Carolina. During the same period of time in Washington D.C. the Corcoran Gallery of Art was set to launch an exhibition entitled "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment." Mapplethorpe's work included some homoerotic photographs, and although the Corcoran had not received NEA funds for the exhibition, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, which had organized the exhibition, had been awarded \$30,000 of NEA funds. The Corcoran decided to cancel the Mapplethorpe show; one year later, Mapplethorpe's work was displayed at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati (which, at the time, did not receive government funding of any type) and the exhibition led to the local indictment of the director and the gallery on charges that they were pandering obscenity by showing the photographs

(Cummings 1991; Bolton 1992; Jeffri 1991; Binkiewicz 2004). The ‘inappropriate’ use of public funds and the relationship between government and the arts were the central issues of this controversy. Once again aesthetics were being linked to ideology; rather than a communist threat, the threat was perceived to be an assault on the moral sensibilities of Middle America. What is obscene? Who should be the judge? Should the government engage in censorship? Should the tax dollars of individuals go to support art and artists that those same individuals may find offensive?

These ‘offences’ sparked outcry in the House of Representatives to eliminate all funding for the NEA, which, after much debate, did not occur. However, the NEA budget was reduced by \$45,000, symbolically, which was “the amount of Endowment funds that were linked to the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions. [... which was] to serve as a reminder that the agency would be held accountable for its grant-making decisions” (Cummings 1991: 64). The NEA was becoming a bone of contention between Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate, with implied threats to the effect that opposition to the budget cuts for the NEA could result in members being targeted during general election time as supporters of “sexually explicit and anti-religious works of art that are offensive to millions of Americans” (ibid: 65). In July of 1989 Senator Jessie Helms proposed a last-minute amendment to the Department of Interior’s budget, under which the NEA falls. The Senator brought this amendment forward for a voice vote towards the end of the debate, with few senators in attendance, and it was passed. This amendment “forbade the use of federal funds” for “promoting, disseminating, or producing” the following:

1. Obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts; or
  2. material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion; or
  3. material which denigrates, debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin.
- (ibid: 65)

After passing through the Senate the amendment still needed to pass through the House of Representatives and a House-Senate conference committee, during which time there were counter amendments and much political positioning, posturing and wrangling before any decision was to be made. Senator Helms was portrayed as an advocate for ‘traditional American values’ and those who opposed him were painted with an anti-American brush; anti-intellectualism was pitted against American liberalism in a fight for the souls of the nation. Eventually a compromise was reached whereby the House-Senate conference committee barred the funding of art that was considered “obscene,” as defined by the Supreme Court in 1973’s *Miller v. California*. There were to be three determining factors to define obscenity in the arts: “works that were lacking in serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value; works appealing to prurient interests; or works containing patently offensive portrayals of specific sexual conduct” (ibid: 70); this language would later be referred to as the Endowments “anti-obscenity pledge” or “decency clause” which was included in the terms and conditions of each grant made by the NEA; this clause would later be eliminated in October of 1990 (Bolton 1992: 362).

This controversy around the NEA was an element of the “culture wars,” a term that is associated with conflict and disputes between cultural values, which were waging in the United States at the time, and continue in various forms today. Culture wars stem from “groups and individuals with fundamentally different views of the world,” such as those holding “orthodox” or “progressivist” positions (Nolan 1996: xii), who then engage in conflict over certain subjects or objects, or both. In terms of the conflict over NEA funding, the Christian right, championed by Senator Helms, was waging a battle for government censorship of art that it deemed as pornographic and obscene, unfit for consumption by decent, taxpaying Americans. The supporters of the NEA were taking a stand that freedom of expression should be encouraged and supported without censorship. The entire conflict was/is actually about morality and who can dictate morality and to whom, which is emphasized in a comment from Beth Eck:

“It has been suggested by artists and others that art is merely an expression of life, a reflection and perception of the reality in which we live. If this is the case, it is

not that homoerotic photographs are bad, rather it is the acknowledgement that the homoerotic activity actually taking place is. The depiction of homoeroticism in federally funded art portrays the homosexual lifestyle as acceptable.” (Eck, 1996: 110)

In this example, the objects (the Mapplethorpe photographs) were the source of consternation for Helms et al, yet it was the subject matter (homosexuality and its expression) that was really the source of contention. The battle that raged around the NEA was a symbolic substitute for the (ongoing) battle for moral authority and superiority in the lives of the American people. This entire debate was an iteration of the division between high/low and fine/folk art, with aspects of morality mixed in. Since the government was now funding portions of the exhibition and production of high/fine art Senators such as Helms decried, on behalf of the American people, that the art of Mapplethorpe and Serrano was not fine art and thereby should not be supported. But the outcry was not based on art historical reference or a comparative analysis of the technique, materiality or compositional elements of the work; it was based solely on the subject matter and visual content of the work. No consensus could spring from this debate because each side founded its argument on different criteria; one side was grounded in the primacy of material content representing the entire cannon of artistic expression and the other side was steeped in conservative Christian dogma. It is an object versus subject debate and the arguments never actually line up, they continue to run parallel infinitum, hence the calls for censorship have never fully abated in some circles. Interestingly, the budget for the NEA steadily increased over much of the next decade.

The NEA continued apace until 1996 saw a decrease in its budget of 39%, from \$162.5 million to \$99.5 million, as a result of congressional concerns to balance the country's budget. Also at this time, congress contemplated phasing out all support for the agency over the next two years, it prohibited the NEA from making grants to individuals other than for Literature Fellowships and it prohibited the agency from providing grants to organizations for anything other than project support (thus eliminating seasonal and operating support grants). In 1998 the NEA was not eliminated, but it received a reduced

budget of \$98 million. At the same time the NEA published *The 1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* which noted that Americans were “enjoying the arts in record numbers: 50 % of America’s citizens, or 97 million people, attended an arts activity during the previous year” (NEA 2000: 58), inferring that although the government was not making the arts a high priority, many American citizens were. The NEA’s budget hovered at the same level until 2001 when it was increased to \$104.7 million; it then saw a generous increase to \$115.2 million in 2002, a jump to \$124.5 million in 2007 and another boost to \$144.7 million in 2008 (NEA b, website). The population of the United States, in July 2008, was estimated at 305.8 million people (US Census Bureau, 2009), which works out to an allocation of 47¢ per capita for the arts (which roughly equates to 25 pence Sterling per person). Compare this to the Arts Council England which, in 2006/7, had a budget of £315 million in support of its Regularly Funded Organizations (ACE e, 2007), with the population of England estimated at 49.1 million (ONS, 2001), which equates to £6.41 per capita. These figures demonstrate that England spends 25 times more per capita on the arts at the national level than the US does. If the de facto support of tax forbearance was estimated this discrepancy would be less acute, yet the difference would still be significant. However, additional federal-level funding bodies were created to support the operating and programmatic costs of museums, which further reduces the discrepancy.

### ***Federal Funding Bodies Specific to Museums in the United States***

At approximately the same time the NEA and NEH were established there was also a move towards creating a fund specifically for libraries and museums, which emphasised supporting organizations rather than individual artists and practitioners. The Library Services and Technology Act of 1956 provided major federal funding for libraries through the Library Programs Office of the Department of Education; the Institute of Museum Services was established in 1976 as a result of the Museum Services Act of the same year. In 1996 the two were combined to form The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The IMLS consists of the Office of Museum Services and the Office of Library Services and was established through the Museum and Library Services

Act of 1996. Subtitle C of the Act outlines Museum Services and gives a detailed account of the purpose, definitions and activities covered under the Act. Construction and installation of displays and exhibitions, professional development for staff, administrative costs, collection preservation and conservation, and developing collaborative partnerships and programs between museums and libraries, were all considered valid and valuable activities supported and funded by the newly established IMLS. Of particular relevance to this research is Section 273(6) which points towards expanding audience demographics through “developing and carrying out specialized programs for specific segments of the public, such as programs for urban neighbourhoods, rural areas, Indian reservations, and penal and other State institutions” (IMLS 2002: 15).

The IMLS was funded through the federal appropriations process and recent legislation has expanded its remit to support ethnically specific museums. The African American History and Culture Act of 2003 called for the creation of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (scheduled to open in 2015, located on the Mall in Washington DC, and a component of the Smithsonian Institution) and for the IMLS to offer support to museums with a primary focus on African-American history and culture. From 2006 the IMLS began to offer Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, and the 2009 appropriation request for this fund was \$1.35 million. The description of the program in the 2009 appropriations request to the US congress states:

“Museum Grants for African American History and Culture are intended to build professional capacity in the African American museum community. The program provides opportunities for the staff of African American museums to gain knowledge and abilities in the areas of management, operations, programming, collections care, and other museums skills identified as high priority to the applicants. It provides an opportunity for African American museums to design projects that will enhance institutional capacity and sustainability by utilizing professional training, technical assistance, internships, outside expertise, and other tools.” (IMLS 2008: 14)

While the Native American/Native Hawaiian Museums Services Grants were described in the 2009 appropriation request as:

“Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Grants enable Native American tribes, Alaskan Native villages or corporations, and organizations that primarily serve native Hawaiians to benefit their communities and audiences through strengthened museum services. Grants are awarded competitively to support programming, professional development, and enhancement of museum services.” (IMLS 2008: 13)

The difference in the focus of these two grant programs for specific ethnic minority groups is remarkable. The African American grants are intended to develop the capacity of individuals within the niche of African American museums and has very little focus on programming. The Native American/Native Hawaiian grants are to fund programs for specific audiences with a limited focus on professional development. Is this because the African American Museum of History and Culture is the primary recipient of this grant fund and as the organization is in its infancy (it began formation in 2004/2005 and is scheduled to open in 2015) it stands to reason that its staff may need intensive capacity building, capacity that may already be inherent in the staff of established Native American/Native Hawaiian museums? What about all of the other African American museums in the US (many of which are struggling due to limited capacity in their staff and severe underfunding at the national and local levels)? Perhaps this policy has more to do with the ongoing nature of the culture wars in America. In the twenty years since the furore over NEA funding, decision makers have become more attuned to both issues of diversity and equality in terms of providing services for the widest possible audience and to the necessity of articulating precisely how their funds are to be utilized, hence the appropriations for ethnic minority museums and for specific legislation. Specific legislation allows for funding bodies, in this case the IMLS, to identify exactly what it is that they want to support, thus providing a certain amount of control over the outcome of how their funds are utilized. Coupled with the increased ‘audit culture’ nature of assessment tied to support (quantitative and qualitative data gathering, evaluative reports) this specific legislation aids to circumvent the problems that arose at the NEA.

### ***State and Local Funding Bodies in the United States***

An introduction to the various state and local funding bodies in Washington will demonstrate the layers of support, and commensurate policy, that practitioners must negotiate while developing programs for diverse audiences. The Washington State Arts Commission (WSAC) was established in 1961 with a mandate to oversee an increase in the accessibility of the arts and to promote the support and advocacy of the arts across the state. WSAC initially had a very limited budget which made implementing projects difficult, then in 1967 it began to receive a substantial State Agency Grant from the NEA. Today WSAC awards grants in six categories: Grants to Organizations, Art in Public Places, Arts in Education, Folk Arts, Community Arts Development and Other Projects. According to Lisa Jaret, Program Manager for Arts in Education, when asked about current funding levels at WSAC she responded, “Our [WSAC] 2008-09 annual budget is \$5,531,150, which includes \$1,777,469 that is awarded to organizations, schools, and community coalitions as project and operating support grants. Another \$2,144,750 of the annual budget is for public artwork acquisition, collection conservation, and public art administration. Our primary funding sources include the state of Washington and the National Endowment for the Arts. Also, it is important to note that there are no grants in Art in Public Places, as the funding becomes available based on construction projects. As for the other program areas, the final numbers for the last completed fiscal year, which is FY08, are: Arts in Education: \$616,753, Grants to Organizations: \$1,153,712, Community Arts Development: \$19,606 and Folk Arts: \$50,000” (Jaret 2009).

Four of Washington’s 39 counties have arts commissions, two of which are King County and Pierce County, where a portion of this current research was conducted. The King County Arts Commission (KCAC) was established in 1965, and in 1969 the KCAC was made a program of the County Executive, which established it as the first publicly funded county arts agency in the United States. 1973 saw another first for the KCAC, when it developed the first program in the United States to set aside one percent of capital improvement project funding for the creation or purchase of public art (KCARM 2003). In 2003 the KCAC was merged with the Public Arts Commission, the heritage programs of the Landmarks Commission, and the newly established Preservation Program, to form

4Culture, the county's cultural services agency. According to the 4Culture website "4Culture is a new model for public support of cultural programs. It combines the resources of the public sector with the flexibility of a non-profit. Through the integration of four program areas, 4Culture stimulates cultural activity and enhances the assets that distinguish our communities as vibrant, unique, and authentic," and it currently funds 187 arts organizations with more than \$1.1 million of support (4Culture 2008). Further south along the Puget Sound, the Pierce County Arts Commission was established in 1985 as a volunteer advisory group to the Pierce County Arts & Cultural Services Division of the Pierce County government. Community Arts and Education grants, artist in residence programs, and a one percent for the arts capital improvement program are the major funded initiatives in the arts in Pierce County. The total budget for the Arts and Cultural Service Fund in Pierce County was \$690,000 for fiscal year 2008; the specific distribution of the funds is unclear from the available documentation (Pierce County website 2008).

The Seattle Arts Commission (SAC) was established by city ordinance in 1971. Like its King County counterpart the SAC adopted a one percent for the arts ordinance, becoming one of the first American cities to do so. In 1976 the SAC became an independent executive city agency, and in 2002 that independent agency was transformed into the Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (MOACA); the SAC was retained as a voluntary advisory board to this newly formed Office. The mission of MOACA is to promote "the value of arts and culture in and of communities throughout Seattle" and by "fostering and investing in the creative contributions of our artist citizens to every facet of the community, we engage the creativity in every resident and build a healthy and vibrant Seattle" (City of Seattle website, 2008). The MOACA mission is achieved through grants to artists and arts organizations, by overseeing the percent for art public arts program, and through supporting arts education; in 2007 MOACA provided \$1.7 million to support 243 artists and arts organizations. Similar to the SAC, the Tacoma Arts Commission (TAC), which was established in 1965, is a voluntary advisory board of artists and arts advocates that are appointed to the commission by the Tacoma City Council. The TAC has the responsibility to "create policies to support the ongoing development of arts programs and projects in Tacoma. Its primary programs include the funding of artists and arts organizations to provide services for the citizens of Tacoma,

and oversight of the Municipal Art Program” and during the 2007-2008 biennium it allocated \$405,000 (or \$202,500 per year) for grants to artists and arts and culture organizations (Tacoma Culture, 2008).

Government funding for the arts and art museums in the United States is layered. A single art museum in Seattle, Washington may be funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities at a national level, the Washington State Arts Commission at a state level, and by 4Culture and MOACA at the local level. Each layer of government support has specific policy stipulations in regard to working with community groups and diverse audiences, and according to *Mapping State Cultural Policy: The State of Washington* (Shuster, 2003), there are an additional 17 state agencies, six non-profit entities and 29 Native American Tribes which provide support and have cultural policies that often have state wide impact. Although not all museums are funded at all levels of government, many practitioners in the US must negotiate this complex maze of funding and its commensurate policy in order to develop and provide programs and services for diverse audiences. This negotiation impacts how museum audiences are served, inasmuch as the broad spectrum of support from a mixture of charitable foundations, corporate funders and government grants leave museums and practitioners beholden to multiple and specific agendas and policy mandates. There is a commensurate layering of funding support and policy mandates in the UK, which will be detailed in Chapter 6.

## **Conclusion**

The museum evolved into a space where the masses were to be civilized through an exposure to arts and culture. This was due in part to the power inherent in the regulatory mechanisms of the museum, a process illustrated through the lens of Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge. Over time the agenda for museums widened to include both expanded access for diverse audiences and direct engagement in community regeneration efforts. This agenda developed concurrently in both the UK and the US in accordance

with a similar tradition of philanthropic support for the arts, and in spite of differences in governmental support. UK support at a national level stemmed from the post-war social democratic ethos whereby large government provided subsidy for social services, and the arts were seen as a necessary component of social life. The US post-war period saw the rise of late capitalism, with an emphasis placed on production and participation in the market economy, with limited government intervention in the private sector and narrow support for social services. However, the US did introduce regulatory programs and welfare programs (particularly in the areas of health care, education and environmental protection) and the UK did engage in the market economy. In a sense the two countries had similar post-war trajectories, yet the emphasis on the provision of social services was weighted differently, with dramatically different provision for the arts and culture. The UK provided national support for the arts with the advent of the Arts Council in 1945; it would take another twenty years for the NEA to be created in the US. As these two national funding bodies progressed over time their commensurate levels of support demonstrated the different weighting of the arts, as a social service central to the government agenda in the UK and as a tangential area of federal concern in the US. What are the differences in contemporary policy in both nations, in relation their national agendas? What implications do the differences have for the provision of service in both countries (variety, scope)? The current context for support, whereby the museum is situated as a contributor to community building efforts and as a platform for inclusion, provides a lens from which to explore these questions; an examination of contemporary policy in both the US and the UK is the subject of the following chapter.



*Demonstration Marking the Murder of George Jackson, by Dennis Morris, circa 1971*

## Chapter 4:

### **Contextualising Policy: Contemporary Strategies for Engaging with Difference in the United States and the United Kingdom**

“No government can or should attempt to create culture, or dictate what its components are, but governments can help creative impulses to flourish, and can ensure that as many people as possible have the chance to enjoy and absorb.

There is a perpetual danger that ‘culture’ will be seen as something alien to the vast majority of people, something just for an élite and for special people in privileged places. We must fight as sturdily as we can against such notions.”

(Smith 1998: 37, original emphasis)

The legacy of public and private support for the arts and culture in the United States and the United Kingdom were explored in the previous chapter, laying a foundation for an investigation into contemporary arts and culture policy. As Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1997-2001), was instrumental in creating much of the rhetoric and substantive change in how the arts and culture were viewed and engaged with in the UK under New Labour, it is fitting to begin this chapter with some of his words. I take Smith’s claim that government can “ensure” that broad audiences “have a chance to enjoy and absorb” as an oblique reference to the policy and funding government provides to the culture and heritage sectors in order to support access and inclusion efforts. I interpret museums to be a part of the “we” that he indicates should fight against elitism, I view broadening access as one of the museum’s most important means for engaging in that fight, and I see policy as a motivating factor in this process.

This current research is specifically concerned with policy as it relates to serving ethnically diverse and marginalized audiences, such as access and inclusion in the UK or ‘underserved’ populations in the US, which is an area of policy that has risen in prominence since the late 1990s. These types of policies have affected the cultural sector in addition to other community areas, such as health, education, welfare and housing, and they have

often been linked with broader policy aims and objectives, such as community cohesion and regeneration. This chapter will explore the connections between specific policies and those broader aims and objectives, and how the layering of these agendas may influence how audiences are served in museums and related culture and heritage sector organizations. The first section will examine the contemporary policy context in the United Kingdom; the second section will investigate United States policy.

## **Contemporary Policy in the United Kingdom**

### *Creating a Context*

In the previous chapter there was mention of the dismal climate for the arts that Thatcher created in the 1980s, which was then continued under Major, with the exception of the establishment of the lottery fund in 1994, which would prove to be an enduring source of support for the arts and culture, albeit competitive and limited in scope. (Whether the times were in fact 'dismal' due Thatcher's marketized approach to the arts could be argued; some artists managed to survive and thrive during the 1980s, notably the artists involved in the advent and explosion of the Black Arts Movement (Baily et al, 2005), which recalls the establishment of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the US, which occurred in counterpoint to the lack of governmental support for non-representational art). Then in 1997 the Labour party came into power in the United Kingdom, ushering in the era of Blair and New Labour, which implied a shift towards a modern, centrist position for the party and a distancing from its traditional Old Labour roots. New Labour's agenda included aims and objectives to regenerate inner city neighbourhoods and foster community cohesion, and it was believed that this could be achieved in part through promoting access to and engagement with the arts and culture. To this end a framework was established to encourage the inclusion of various publics in the cultural institutions that would contribute to combating society's ills. The framework encompassed the development of policies, standards and guidelines which were set forth by DCMS, as the main governmental arts and heritage funding body, which were in turn

reiterated by NDPBs (Non-Departmental Public Bodies) such as the Arts Council England (ACE), Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Big Lottery and the Museums, Library and Archives Council (MLA). The framework, and the influence of the public bodies which created it, was established in part to promote the actualization of expanded access to the arts, which Smith envisioned at the outset of this chapter.

The concerns of the museum and the government come together through policy and funding that is attached to the visitor, whether that is in the form of operational support (such that the national museums receive in the UK, see Chapter 3) or programmatic support. Policies calling for increased access to the arts and culture are often attached to programmatic support. This is the point of *convergence* where the influence of *policy* (public funding and support) on *practice* in the face of negotiating with *difference* (specific, targeted audiences) occurs, as indicated by the subtitle of this thesis. Regardless of the overarching goal (regeneration, improved agency, increased participation in the community, a desire to educate visitors, or to shift the narrative and perception of the museum), policy was developed in order to facilitate meeting the perceived needs of both the museum and the government.

### ***Policy, Regeneration and Community Cohesion***

Prior to describing the connection between arts and culture policy and regeneration and community cohesion, it is necessary to provide definitions for the latter two. According to the UK Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG):

“Community Cohesion what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

“Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on **three foundations**: People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities; People knowing their rights and responsibilities; People trusting one another and

trusting local institutions to act fairly. And **three key ways of living together:** A shared future vision and sense of belonging; A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity; Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.” (CLG, 2008: 11, original emphasis)

The CLG define regeneration as:

“A set of activities that reverse the economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without support from government.

“Successful regeneration strengthens communities by creating new economic opportunities. It is a time-limited investment that transforms places and economies so they do not need long term subsidy. It is not an end in itself, and it is not mainstream funding or a substitute for it. Regeneration is central to our ambition to create **sustainable places where people want to live, work and raise a family.**” (CLG 2009:2, original emphasis)

From these definitions it is possible to draw links between the arts, culture and museums and the aims of community cohesion and regeneration: providing life opportunities for a diverse range of people, building trust in local institutions, creating a sense of belonging, highlighting the similarities and differences amongst peoples, fostering cross-cultural relationships, and contributing to sustainable communities are all activities that museums in specific, and the arts and culture in general, can participate in. Through the establishment of a framework, policies and guidelines, the government seeks to ensure the participation of museums and other cultural institutions in these community-building endeavours.

In 1999 DCMS, under the leadership of Chris Smith, published *Policy Action Team 10: Report on Social Exclusion* (PAT 10), which was to herald a step change in the development of social inclusion policy. This report outlined many best practices in culture and sport which have engaged with people in poor neighbourhoods, who may have been at risk of

exclusion, and it also presented the means to maximise government expenditure and policy in poor neighbourhoods. The goal was to create an action plan that would demonstrate that the implementation of best practices and policy could contribute to neighbourhood regeneration, community cohesion and increased local participation. Social exclusion – in general, in society and in the community – was the issue at hand, and in this instance it was tied to broader concerns of regeneration and cohesion. Creating inclusion policy within the arts, sport and leisure appears to have been a by-product of this process, and I would argue that this is where exclusion became intertwined with inclusion in the arts and culture, which I will return to shortly. The principles in the PAT 10 report have been taken up in the policies of many NDPBs and have been honed and refined over time. As the foundation of the framework that was to move the New Labour’s agenda forward, it appears that the purpose of combating social exclusion became conflated with the desire to regenerate poor neighbourhoods. The arts and culture were brought forward as one of the means to achieve a portion of this two-fold agenda.

Regeneration was a keen area of interest for New Labour. In the 1998 report *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) brought together findings from several government departments in order to “develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools etc” (SEU 1998, introduction page). This strategy set out to tackle these various issues, first by defining the problems, then second by addressing each one through interventions outlined by Policy Action Teams. Some of the interventions relied on laws, such as the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, to work in conjunction with the coordinated efforts of various agencies to combat issues such as anti-social behaviour; others relied on new funding schemes, such as The New Deal for Communities, to address issues of unemployment, crime and enhancing neighbourhood services, or Sure Start, which aimed to support young children in order to improve their later performance in school and reduce their risk of becoming truant, unemployed, drug addicted and/or criminal offenders. The scope of the neighbourhood renewal strategy touched upon most aspects

of community life, including the arts, and the PAT 10 report was a direct result of the SEU strategy.

Regeneration was (is?) not limited to the social sphere alone; environmental and economic regeneration were also on the agenda. All three spheres of regeneration were to be tackled concurrently if there was to be any hope of breaking the cycle of poverty for the poorest inhabitants of the UK's decaying neighbourhoods. Arts and Business, a non-profit creative network which brought together arts and business professionals to create reciprocal, beneficial business opportunities, published *Re-Creating Communities: Business, the Arts and Regeneration* in July of 1999. Taking a cue from the PAT 10 report, this report highlighted best practices in regeneration in all three spheres, all of which included the arts as a basis for collaborative community projects. In addressing the role that museums could play in regeneration, Richard Sandell suggests:

“... we might consider museums' contributions to regeneration and renewal initiatives in, for example, deprived inner city or rural neighbourhoods. Specific outcomes include enhanced community self-determination, and increased participation in decision-making processes and democratic structures. Though empirical data is limited, it appears that cultural organizations, in comparison with other agencies, might be uniquely positioned to act as catalysts for community involvement and as agents for capacity building. An international conference on the role of culture in regeneration initiatives concluded that: 'Cultural initiatives are inclusive, and have an unsurpassed capacity to open dialog between people and engage their enthusiasm and commitment to a shared redevelopment process.' Furthermore, 'culture and the development of creativity has a major part to play in helping to develop the capacity of local communities to address their own needs.' (Sandell 2002: 7, citing Matarasso and Landry, 1996: v)

Sandell went on to point out that the museum's role in combating social exclusion is generally accomplished through its educational and outreach programs rather than by its exhibitions. He also stated that “this may also account, in part, for reticence and resistance on the part of some museums' staff who feel that they are ill-equipped to

embark on projects of this kind, lacking the skills and resources to work directly with communities” (ibid: 8). Museums can play a role in the regeneration process, yet it should be a role that is closely in tune with their purpose and mission and not an attempt to fill the role of social service agent, health care worker or any other role that is performed by certified professionals from other fields. In partnerships there may be an overlap of interests and skills, and museums, or more specifically individual museum practitioners, may have skills and abilities suited to performing tasks in social, health or development roles; but the primary task of a museum is to execute its mission and vision, and to operate in tandem with partners from other fields, not to replace or provide the function of those partners.

An important point to consider in regard to the skills and roles of museum practitioners in the regeneration process is that the terms ‘social exclusion’ and ‘audience inclusion’ have often been conflated; they are in fact two separate phenomena, which should arguably be addressed by separate and distinct means. Social exclusion is a process or cycle whereby an individual becomes excluded from society due to multiple factors, such as limited educational attainment, unemployment, poor health, discrimination, low social status, or disability. Audience inclusion is a process of creating programs and projects designed specifically to appeal to targeted audiences, or the transformation of existing programs and projects to appeal to broader audiences, and the commensurate practices to directly engage those audiences. Museums address audience inclusion through educational programs, but museums do very little to mitigate the factors of social exclusion (although it could be argued that the arts in general do generate jobs, so a case could be made for the arts addressing the employment strand of social exclusion). It could be argued that audience inclusion could be viewed as a means to combat social exclusion, inasmuch as alienation could potentially be addressed through participation, and as such by engaging in this work museums are moving the agenda of community cohesion and regeneration forward.

## ***Policy and Cultural Diversity***

Regeneration is one aspect within policy concerning “community areas” in the UK, with the main policy strands being social exclusion, neighbourhood renewal, cultural diversity, health and community cohesion. Of particular interest to this research is the policy strand of cultural diversity and its links to access and inclusion in museums. Increased diversity and the desire to achieve equality and social justice for all UK citizens informs specific policies and all NDPBs have developed definitions of diversity in relation to potential audiences served by museums. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) publication *New Directions in Social Policy: Cultural Diversity for Museums* (MLA, 2004) provides an overview of diversity policy and definitions from a variety of organizations, such as UNESCO, the Arts Council England, the BBC and MLA’s central and regional agencies. Many of the policies utilize similar language and not all will be referenced here, rather examples shall be provided to give an impression of the overall language and content of this category of policy.

Examples cited in *New Directions* included: the “working definition” of diversity, offered by Archives, Libraries and Museums London (ALM), found in *Handle with Care: Towards a Diversity Strategy for London’s Archives Libraries and Museums* (2005), is “the complex composition of society, made up of individuals and groups who may have multiple identities. These may relate to ethnicity, faith, gender, sexual orientation and intellectual and physical ability, but equally include health status and educational and social background,” and the Arts Council England’s (ACE) understanding of diversity is “a broad and inclusive interpretation, as meaning the full range and diversity of the culture of this country. In some cases the focus will be in race and ethnic background and in others on disability” from *Focus on Cultural Diversity- The Changing Face of Arts Attendance and Participation in England* (2003). In its strategic plan for 2008-2013, *Valuing Our Heritage, Investing in Our Future* (2008), The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) states that its focus “is on conserving, sustaining and sharing heritage. Through our grant making we aim to: conserve the UK’s diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy; help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about their heritage; [and] help people to learn about their own and other

people's heritage" (greater detail of HLF's policy will be provided in Chapter 6). These definitions inform the diversity policies of these organizations, and it can be inferred that understanding and incorporating diversity in the programs and projects that they fund, and sometimes initiate, is of primary concern.

In addition to the policy set out by central government departments and NDPBs there are a number of organizations that produce handbooks, reports, toolkits and manifestos which deliver research findings and essays meant to inform how diversity and difference are engaged in the heritage and culture sectors. This body of white papers, technical reports, grey literature and sector resources also contributes to how museums think about and engage with diverse audiences. The Greater London Authority (GLA) convened the Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage (MCAAH) which produced both the *Delivering Shared Heritage* (2005) and *Embedding Shared Heritage* (2009) reports, which addressed issues of representation and diversifying collections, workforce diversity, inclusive educational practices, empowerment of community-based heritage initiatives and creating equitable and sustainable partnerships across and beyond mainstream cultural institutions. The London Museum's Agency published  *Holding Up the Mirror: Addressing Cultural Diversity in London's Museums* (2003), about re-visioning museums in the face of diversity, and Policy Exchange, an independent think tank, produced *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* (Mirza, 2006), a critique of the social impact of the arts that was edited by Munira Mirza, who was later appointed, in 2009, as the Director of Arts, Culture and the Creative Industries for the Mayor of London. These are but a handful of publications that support, expand or assess the position of policy in the UK as it relates to museums, inclusion, cultural diversity and difference. I mention these specific documents as they were consistently referred to by practitioners encountered throughout this research, and they exemplify the variety of materials that inform and support how practitioners imagine and utilize cultural diversity policy.

### ***Policy Framework: Purpose and Utility***

As has been previously mentioned, the constitution of the museum emerged from empirical and colonial customs that promoted exclusive and elitist practices. After two centuries of existence traces of those customs and practices remain in effect. This anachronistic position is not productive for the long-term viability of the museum and in order to effect change it has been necessary for external forces, such as social and cultural politics that operate through government and community agents, to apply pressure and incentives for the museum to re-examine its practices. Within that re-examination it is essential for those working in museums to respond to these external influences in order to create operational and organizational change. Engaging in this process is vitally important for three reasons: firstly, because the policy objectives to increase access and inclusion, which may contribute to achieving the broader aims of community cohesion and regeneration, are important to the wellbeing of a civil society. By demonstrating social responsibility through inclusive practices the museum can be regarded as instrumental in achieving social aims, albeit within a policy framework (as it remains to be seen whether this would occur without external influence). Secondly, the museum wants to retain its position of authority and relevance in society; to do so it must be seen to respond to social and cultural concerns beyond its walls in order to engender popular support and maintain its significance in the social order. Thirdly, because the museum needs to keep its doors open; this can be done, in part, through the funding attached to projects concerning difference and engagement with diverse audiences. The policy framework allows the museum to achieve all three of these aims.

The policy framework is tied to funding, and in order to access the funding museums ostensibly must take the policy into account in program design and during outreach and audience development activities. I use the word ostensibly to indicate that the language and intent of policy can be discounted and (mis)interpreted in practice, which can lead towards an essentialisation of audiences and an instrumentalisation of funds and policy. This process of translation and application will be investigated in Chapters 6 through 9. What is important to note at this point is that, in the UK, policy (and its commensurate funding) is established and dispersed through central government and goes more or less

directly to the museum for implementation (e.g. from DCMS, to HLF, to the museum), which is in contrast with the diffuse nature of US funding that will be described in the following section.

## **Contemporary Policy in the United States**

### ***Creating a Context***

In the US there is no policy specifically to address the cultural arts in relation to other social concerns set forth from central government; therefore there is no direct parallel to be drawn with the contemporary policy framework in the UK. This is partially due to the nature of arts funding at the national level, which was outlined in the previous chapter, and partially due to how social concerns, especially those pertaining to race, are addressed nationally in the US. In 1961 Affirmative Action was brought into the lexicon of US politics and it began to address issues of inequality at the national level, particularly as it pertained to African-Americans. In 1964 there was the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which ensured voting rights for black people, placed a ban on discriminatory hiring practices, and encouraged integration of public schools, and 1972 saw the development of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (Kennedy-Dubourdieu 2006; Farley 1996). These are but a few examples of national legislation established to promote equality and diversity in the US, and there have been many additions and amendments to national laws in regards to race, gender and disability during the following years and it is not possible to detail them all in this current research. What is important to note is that since the mid 1970s national legislation as it pertains to race and ethnicity has moved to the background while issues of equality and individual rights relating ongoing tensions in the culture wars, such as homosexuality and gay rights, religious freedom, capital punishment, gun control, and abortion, have moved to the foreground.

This does not mean that issues of systematic and widespread racism, sexism and inequality were ameliorated with the passage of a few pieces of legislation, quite the contrary; issues of class and race continue to divide the US (and the UK for that matter). Ongoing racism and discrimination has been evidenced in events that have been in the national spotlight (such as the controversy and civil unrest sparked by the beating of Rodney King in 1991 and the shooting of Amadou Diallo in 1999, the disproportionately high number of black males in the prison system since the 1980s, the continuing underachievement of black students in public education post *Brown vs. The Board of Education* ruling in 1954), and in the underreported lived-experience of many Americans who are unable to meet their own basic needs for food, clothing and shelter due to unequal access to resources stemming from a lack of capital of various types (financial, social, intellectual [inherited and actual], political). There has been a renewed interest in the exploration of race, difference and equality in America in recent years. Events that have sparked interest and debate include the election of Barak Obama as the first black President of the United States in 2008, the arrest of public intellectual and scholar Henry Louis Gates in 2009, the response and ongoing attention (or lack thereof) to the people of New Orleans in aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the post-2008 economic downturn, which has seen record numbers of black and ethnic minority people lose their homes, jobs and livelihoods.

Issues of immigration, Islam-a-phobia, and protectionism have become topics of local and national debate, and the rise of the Tea Party Movement (in 2009 and ongoing) has seen a vocal minority of Americans espouse controversial conservative beliefs such as that the government should not be charged with overseeing the achievement of affirmative action and civil rights (while they agree that providing opportunities for success as desirable, compliance and oversight should be left to those directly involved in individual cases), and that Obama favours blacks over whites, as they view the passage of healthcare reform and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to disproportionately benefit blacks and minority ethnic Americans. Throughout the media and popular culture, in the academy and the political arena, these topics are engaging Americans in a dialog about race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but as yet there has been no new

national legislation in their regard, which is the point being underscored by these examples.

This current research is concerned with providing a cross-cultural analysis of contemporary policy as it pertains to the arts and culture in the US and the UK, and it is not possible to provide a detailed overview of the plethora of political and social antecedents which have led to the current landscape of cultural policy in both countries. However, it is essential to mention that issues of racism, segregation and inequality have not gone away in the US over the past four decades, if anything the issues may have become exacerbated from the lack of priority status accorded to them in national and state legislation. Unlike the UK, which has addressed issues of racial equality in national legislation as recently as 2006, with the establishment of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (which was partially a reformation of the Commission for Racial Equality which had been established in 1976), US national policy as it pertains to issues of race and diversity have not been at the forefront of national policy in contemporary times. What is significant to note is that while both countries address issues of race, diversity and equality through policy, there is no direct correlation between examples of national/federal or state/local policy. The point of exploring the similarities and differences in the policy is to demonstrate that the policy framework that practitioners operate within can influence on how they engage with difference; establishing what that influence is and how it is operationalised will be addressed in relation to the material and discursive space of the museum in Chapter 5 and within the case study in Chapters 6 through 8.

### ***Policy and Under-served Populations***

As previously noted, funding for a specific museum in the United States is layered and comes from many levels of government, all of which have their own remits and may or may not take their cues from federal mandates. State arts agencies, such as the Washington State Arts Commission, are funded through the NEA and provide support in the spirit of the NEA's mission and vision yet have their own policies and criteria for

funding. The NEA provides funding and support with an overarching aim to bring the arts to all Americans, provide leadership in education, and support excellence in the arts (NEA website). Although the language of regeneration is not specifically utilized by NEA, the implication that community improvement will result as a by-product of an individual's engagement with the arts and culture is inherent in the organization's granting practices and in its national educational initiatives. For example, after the 2004 NEA survey *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* found that literary reading in America was in rapid decline, the NEA launched the "The Big Read" initiative in 2007, which aims to revitalize the role of literature in American popular culture and bring "the transformative power of literature into the lives of its citizens" through a community-wide 'book group' where individuals can discuss aspects of selected literature that they have all read (NEA Big Read website). In 2003 the NEA launched "Shakespeare in American Communities" to bring professional theatre productions of Shakespeare to small and mid-sized communities throughout the US. From 2003 to 2008 this program was provided in 2,000 communities across all 50 states, provided 4,000 performances to over one million audience members, and provided 55,000 toolkits for teachers for use in primary and secondary schools (NEA website).

Arguably, increased literacy and exposure to Shakespearian theatre aims to result in an improved citizenry that will in turn improve America's communities, potentially resulting in regeneration of sort (and, I might point out, these examples provide a contemporary twist on cultural engagement in that they combine both civilizing – watching professional theatre – *and* participatory – discussing literature – modes of engagement for the audience). These are just two examples of initiatives provided directly by the NEA, which are offered in addition to the many funding initiatives for individual artists and arts and culture organizations that were mentioned in the previous chapter. These brief examples demonstrate that top level government support for the arts in the US is diffuse in comparison with the more direct process in the UK. Diffuse in the sense that individual artists and arts and cultural organizations may apply for individual support, which is spread more or less equally across the states to the applicants, and only those who successfully apply receive the funds (read: a limited group of organizations and individuals directly fall under the umbrella of NEA policy). There is no blanket policy or

funding going out to all artists or cultural institutions in the United States (or even to the majority of artists and organizations), which implies that the NEA model for programming and its requirements for funding are not necessarily ascribed to or followed by most museums, which is in sharp contrast to the UK model.

Museums in the United States are engaging with issues of access and inclusion, although that is not necessarily the language they use in regard to providing programs and content for diverse audiences. In the US the term “under-served populations” is a catch all phrase commonly employed to denote specific ethnic minority groups, individuals with disabilities, people from the gay and lesbian community, or any group that may lie outside of the majority demographic. In developing programs for under-served groups and when generating accessible support material (text panels, labels, guides, etc) museums look towards the American Association of Museums (AAM) for policy guidance. In the document *Accreditation Program Standards: Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum* the AAM provides a guideline for standards and best practices, including such items as “the museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions about how it serves them”, “the museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation”, and “the museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation” (AAM 2005). In 1992 AAM produced the report *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, which outlines the association’s policy on education and public service which helps to define the museum’s role in education and in the community. This report continues to be in widespread use with practitioners throughout the country. These documents point towards the necessity for museums to be inclusive and accessible to a wide audience, and they suggest standards for all US museums to strive for regardless of accreditation status or membership in AAM. As an accrediting body since 1971, the AAM has the authority to bestow a seal of approval that denotes a museum’s attainment of the highest standards of practice and professionalism; it does not, however, provide any funding support to museums.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary federal funding source for museums and libraries, with a potential applicant pool of 123,000 libraries and

17,500 museums. The IMLS has 19 grant programs that fund a range of projects, from professional development for individual staff members to supporting collection and preservation efforts. There are five grants developed for serving ethnic-specific museums, libraries and cultural organizations – Museum Grants for African-American History and Culture, Native American Library Services: Basic Grants, Native American Library Services: Enhancement Grants, Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Program, and Native Hawaiian Library Services – which indicates that the IMLS places a priority on preserving the history and culture of these specific groups and promoting their offerings to a broader public. As with the NEA, the IMLS intends to improve the citizenry and strengthen communities through a diffuse funding approach (it will support those that apply and are successful, rather than setting out guidelines for all museums and libraries to follow, particularly in relation to regeneration and community building efforts).

### **Interpretation: Intention vs. Application of Policy in the US and UK**

As previously mentioned, Arts Council England is a major funder of the arts in the United Kingdom. It provides annual funding for organizations and has a grants program for artists, organizations and individuals who use the arts as a part of their work (perhaps in partnership with individuals or organizations outside of the arts sector on interdisciplinary projects). The Arts Council states that the arts “have a key role to play in the vision and design of our communities. Imaginative and pioneering artists have often worked in collaboration with education, regeneration, health and social exclusion to powerful effect. We want to encourage more of those partnerships to help build a sense of identity and pride in communities across the country” (Arts Council b 2006: 10). To qualify for funding a grantee must complete an application in which the Arts Council seeks to gain demographic and programmatic information about its grantee’s organization and their potential audiences in order to determine whether the application may support the Art Council’s aims and objectives set out in its list of key characteristics. Yet by leaving the interpretation of program content broad and by not quantifying specific

characteristics of staff or audiences to be served there is no direct linkage between the grantee's proposal and the grantor's support in terms of meeting the overall objectives for the "public good" that the Arts Council aims to achieve – community development, urban regeneration and the various social cohesion efforts to build a sense of identity and pride. The Arts Council has published numerous documents which outline its position on the key role of the arts in the community, much of which is comprised of qualitative and quantitative research it has commissioned from a broad spectrum of academics, organizations and specialist consultants. Yet the content of the publications is not directly linked to the grant application process; in effect it is possible for grantees to obtain funding without engaging with the literature of the Arts Council, thereby bypassing all of the overarching objectives of the grantor in an attempt to fund a specific project, which may or may not be in alignment with the Arts Council's aims.

The Washington State Arts Commission's *General Guidelines for Grants to Organizations* includes language in its grant applications such as "The Commission encourages projects designed to reach special populations who are not regularly served by arts events" and "The Commission encourages projects by ethnic communities who have been under-served by traditional funding sources. The Commission is particularly supportive of projects that promote ethnic cultures through their traditional art forms and those that promote cross-cultural exposure within the community" (WSAC 2008). WSAC is "encouraging" applicants to serve diverse audiences and under-served populations with their programs yet, like the Arts Council, the Commission talks around the issue of demographics as a means to achieve their overarching goals. This is the same approach taken by the county and city arts commissions in Seattle and Tacoma, Washington and it appears to be the norm for public funders in the US. What this demonstrates is that there is a clear desire in both the US and the UK for arts and culture to serve a broad audience, which presumably contributes to the public good and helps to address aspects of wider social concerns. Yet if there are no criteria for specific objectives or outputs in relation to this endeavour then how can there be an assessment of whether any of the overarching goals are being met? How is this policy interpreted and put into practice in museums? These questions are explored through an analysis of the interview data

collected from practitioners in the US and through an extensive participant observation conducted in the UK, in Chapters 5 through 9.

## **Conclusion**

It may be arguable as to how much influence government has over the creative impulses of practicing artists, but where museums are concerned I would argue that government has helped them to think creatively about who they serve and how they serve them. Whether national policy is direct, such as in the UK model, whereby aims, objectives and language tie financial support for museums to the national agenda, or if policy is diffuse, where support for museums is informed by a general ethos established by multiple national and local agencies and associations which promote increased engagement with the arts and culture, such as in the US, there are underlying assumptions inherent in both approaches. The language used in this policy, such as diversity, access, inclusion, and under-served, and its relationship to museum practice should be teased out in order to contextualize the influence of policy on practice. The standards and policies outlined by the American Association of Museums and the National Endowment for the Arts, by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts Council England, combine to create a context for contemporary practice to reside within (and although much of this policy was developed in the late 1990s, its language and usage continues to be in effect today). How that practice is developed at specific museums in both the US and the UK will be explored in the following chapters.



*Maman* by Louise Bourgeois (1999, cast bronze), installed adjacent to the Guggenheim Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry and opened in 1997; by Kimberly Keith, taken November 2010

## Chapter 5:

### **Situating Practice in the Material and Discursive Space of the Museum**

“... For in the end, this is what our visitors most want from us: to have access to works of art in order to change them, to alter their experience of the world, to sharpen and heighten their sensitivities to it, to make it come anew for them, so they can walk away at a different angle to the world.” (Cuno, 2004: 73)

Cuno’s words point towards the aspiration of some museum practitioners – that their work and institutions may somehow stimulate change in the individual visitor and potentially affect how those visitors engage with the world. As mentioned in Chapter 2, my decision to become a museum practitioner was based upon my childhood experience of the museum, which, over time, developed into an ingrained belief in the process Cuno describes. In order to realize the aspiration that Cuno and I share it is first necessary to address issues of access, as without it there would be no opportunity to engage with visitors, particularly those outside of the ‘mainstream,’ who are disadvantaged and ‘underserved.’ Examining how practitioners function within the space of the museum will reveal how accessible and inclusive practices are operationalised, demonstrating the means for creating the conditions to facilitate change in the visitor and indicating ways in which the museum is moving from civilization to participation.

The material and discursive spaces of the museum include the physical architectural space, the traditional ideological constitution of the museum as an institution, and the internal organizational culture comprised of conventions in practice; all three spaces must be continuously navigated and negotiated by museum practitioners, as each has the potential to affect audiences in conjunction with the objects on display. How museum staff traverse these spaces, and the opportunities and barriers to audience engagement that each presents, is the focus of this chapter. The first section explores material space and the role that architecture plays in maintaining an elitist aura around cultural institutions, and current alternatives to that paradigm. The second section focuses on the

development and constitution of internal organizational cultures, specifically in relation to engagement with the public through educational programs, and offers examples from individual museums which have implications for the field. The third section explores the conventions and practices that comprise the organizational culture of the museum, which further deconstructs components of the process presented in the second section.

The narrative accounts in this chapter are mainly derived from interview data collected in the United States; this data will offer an examination of how the practitioner is situated within the museum, providing a lens to view the detailed account of institutional practices in Chapters 6 through 8. My experience as a practitioner of museum education, and my professional association with some of my interview subjects, contribute to the framing of concepts and content of this chapter. Interviewees were selected because they offered varied approaches to community engagement and through their examples notions of community, audience and difference are evidenced through an exploration of how they operate within their respective museums.

In the essay *Un-Framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility* (Pollock and Zemans, 2007) Pollock refers to Oberhardt's notion, in *Frames within Frames: The Museum as Cultural Artifact* (2001), that the museum acts as an invisible frame for whatever content it is housing or presenting. This framework produces meaning in that it actively shapes the visitor's interpretation of objects by the fact that the museum is part of a larger cultural framework in society, one which critically engages with history, popular culture and representation. These frames, or spaces where practice is situated, include the traditional art-historical model whereby art and objects are separated from 'ordinary life' and elevated to positions of authority, and the New Museology frame (as espoused by Peter Vergo (1989), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1994; 2000), Tony Bennett (1995)) whereby the museum is situated in a critique of its colonial and imperial past, coupled with a discourse on race, ethnicity and gender (Pollock and Zemans 2007: 2). Oberhardt states that "the art museum per se does nothing but exist, and it is the human discourses that surround and move through the art museum which invest the lifeless walls with a "voice" of authority. The art museum cannot speak, but we speak *about* the art museum" (Oberhardt 2001: 9, original emphasis). In examining the external and internal spaces of

the museum this chapter considers how this “voice of authority” is constructed through how practitioners “speak *about* the art museum,” which in turn creates a space for engagement that influences audience participation.

## **Material Space: Architecture as Ideology**

### ***Classical Buildings as Ceremonial Monuments***

Visiting a museum may be a planned activity or one of happenstance, but an individual’s initial encounter most often begins with an approach to the building itself. This section examines how museum architecture influences how practitioners conduct audience development and negotiate audience perceptions of the material construct of the museum. As mentioned previously, there is a traditional framework that connotes museums as being separated from ‘ordinary life,’ and, in regard to how architecture resides within this framework, Pollock offers a quote from Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach (1978):

“Museums, as modern ceremonial monuments, belong to the same architectural class as temples, churches, shrines and certain kinds of palaces. Although all architecture has an ideological perspective, only ceremonial monuments are dedicated exclusively to ideology. Their social importance is underscored by the enormous resources lavished upon their construction and decoration. Absorbing more manual and imaginative labour than any other type of architecture, these buildings affirm the power and social authority of the patron class. But ceremonial monuments convey more than class domination. They impress upon those who see or use them a society’s most revered values and beliefs.” (Pollock and Zemans 2007: 7)

Pollock goes on to point out that this was written prior to the 1990s ‘boom’ in museum construction, when creating signature buildings by the worlds’ leading architects became

all the rage, such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao and Experience Music Project in Seattle, Zaha Hadid's Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati, and IM Pei's Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Museums built in contemporary times may not directly resemble churches, but the grandeur by which they are built is nothing less than reverential; regardless of when Duncan and Wallach made their claim, the custom of designing museums to ensure that they convey the impression of housing "society's most revered values and beliefs" and that they are the manifestations of an ideology that conveys the "social authority of the patron class" is still a standard practice. This ideology is apparent in the structure of the buildings themselves, denoted in their size, scale and use of materials (metallic veneers, asymmetrical contours, water features, and expansive grounds surrounding the buildings). This sacred aura that museums project can either be an attractive or repellent attribute, depending on the perception of the visitor. It is not possible to delve into the multiple subjectivities that individuals can bring to this area of inquiry, yet, simply put, perception and thinking are shaped by condition and experience, which includes gender, race, class, culture and education, and each individual applies information from all of these aspects of their knowledge in order to interpret their world (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Skeggs 2003; Weedon, 2004). Museum architecture could be considered a deterrent to engagement for many unfamiliar with visiting museums, particularly for those who interpret museums as alien or other. In interviews conducted for this research aspects of museum architecture were mentioned in relation to audience perception and access.

"I know people who are intimidated about walking up those stairs and in coming here – people who just say "I can't leave my neighbourhood, I owe my neighbourhood" – you don't owe your neighbourhood anything. You know, so there's that framework." *Amy Silva, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

"So my concentration was people in the community who did not feel welcome, which is actually a misconception. It was that people felt that the stairs were too big, or that the museum was too big, so that I can do nothing about. But if it's a misconception, then work with people until they understand what you are about;

and so we have this committee, they help us strategize how to get the word out that the museum wants them here.” *Donna Williams, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and its façade is that of the quintessential museum paradigm – an expanse of stairs topped with large Grecian columns fronting an imposing two-million-square-foot building (in London the classical architecture of the V&A, the British Museum and the National Gallery are all variations on this theme). The Met is a temple and shrine to the encyclopaedic collection of art and artefacts it has collected since 1870. In commenting that people are intimidated by the stairs and that people are conditioned to think within a certain “framework,” Amy Silva is noting that the Met is not a part of “the neighbourhood” in a literal sense (it is in Central Park) or in a figurative sense, so it is viewed as alien or other to some potential visitors, and therefore not for them. Peoples’ sense of belonging and relationship to their own neighbourhood is tied to ingrained notions of identity and culture which are in opposition to those that they perceive are espoused by the museum. The perception of the museum as alien or other is both the framework Silva refers to and the misconception that Donna Williams suggests. This (mis)conception of the museum space points towards issues of representation and belonging (Hall 1997, 2001; Hall and Du Gay 1996), and Williams’ desire to let people know what the Met “is about” aims to present the museum as an inclusive space. She endeavours to achieve this by letting potential visitors know that the Met houses objects and artefacts from many of the world’s cultures and that there is the potential for any visitor to identify culturally, if not personally, with pieces in the Met’s collection. Williams accepts that there is nothing she can do to change the architecture or the scale of the Met, but she contends that the imposing sense of otherness that the building conveys can be countered by engaging directly with potential visitors through outreach and programmatic efforts.

By demystifying the museum’s content through facilitated outreach, conducted by members of a diverse advisory committee, Williams hopes to move beyond the ideology inferred by the building in order to expand the Met’s audience. Challenges to this approach include that it does nothing to alleviate any negative connotations visitors may have about the building, it requires extensive resources – to develop the advisory

committee, the outreach strategy, to select the target community, to tailor programs to the needs of the chosen groups – and, most significantly, it is based on an underlying premise that people are primarily interested in objects that have a cultural or social significance related to their personal history and that they would prefer museum representatives that reflect their cultural and social background. This premise is contentious for many reasons: it raises issues of representation in relation to objects and subjects (Hall 1997; Bhabba 1999; Mercer 1999); it potentially runs counter to the current trend towards promoting cross-cultural means of engagement (Crooke 2007; Walsh 2008); it essentialises the visitor; and it instrumentalises the visitor experience. However, issues of representation can never be ignored when engaging ethnic minorities as there is a measure of truth to the notion that people feel connected to artwork and artists with whom they share an ethnic/social/cultural background. These issues will be addressed in subsequent chapters; what is important to note currently is that Williams and Silva wrestle with the ideological implications of the space and place of the Met as a routine component of their work and it is a fact that must be negotiated whenever they engage with potential new audiences.

### **New Buildings Exemplifying the Classical Paradigm**

This necessity to consider the physical space of the museum alongside approaches to audience engagement is not unique to older historic buildings; it is an issue for newly built museums as well.

“I still think that museums have a reputation for being, kind of, aloof for many of our community members. I still think that museums- it’s hard for certain elements of our community to walk into a museum and feel comfortable. I think that’s still a challenge that we have to overcome. We [the Museum of Glass] have, percentage wise, more first-time museum goers than most institutions, and I think that’s because of our hot shop. It’s industrial, it’s crafty, and you know, you can walk in there, and it’s like, all this fire, and you can acquaint to it if you are

from a trade, or from across the spectrum and so we have that advantage. And then our job is to lure those people into the gallery, to other experiences in the museum. I still think we have a long way to go really, as an industry.” *Susan Warner, Museum of Glass*

“We feel we have an obligation to outreach to the surrounding community and bring people who wouldn't ordinarily walk through the Museum doors. When I say to people, I'm in the Bowery [it] has a history of liberation. And so it's a huge Chinese population, obviously there's Chinatown. It's been a huge immigration bed for the Jewish immigrants, for Spanish, Italian... so maybe that 80-year-old, 70-year-old Chinese grandma might not so readily walk through the Museum doors without being prompted, without you know what, “we're here... we're just here in this beautiful building. But we're here accessible and these are some of the things that you can expect to find when you come to the Museum.” So we're doing that by accessing certain community groups and establishing a relationship with them, and we go into the community centre. And then we follow up that here at the Museum. We do the initial introduction there on their home turf, and then they come into the Museum of for two tours.” *Cathleen Lewis, The New Museum*

Both the Museum of Glass (MoG) and The New Museum are housed in new buildings designed by renowned architects (Arthur Anderson, and Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa/SANAA respectively). Both have distinctive features that, arguably, continue the tradition of physically manifesting the museum as an ideological arbiter of “society's most revered values and beliefs” – MoG has a 90 foot aluminium-clad ‘cone’ (which houses its glassblowing studio) and The New Museum appears to be a stack of metallic boxes with each level slightly pushed to either side (not a tower, but more like an unkempt pile of books), and it has a large rainbow-striped sign reading “Hell, Yes!” on its second story façade. Despite having more first time visitors than other museums, Susan Warner is challenged by visitors' reluctance to enter the gallery, even if they have made it into the museum to see the more industrial and crafty glassblowing demonstrations in the hot shop. Audiences may relate to what they see in the hot shop, but the content of the

galleries still carries the essence of otherness. The juxtaposition of the hot shop and the gallery provides a physical manifestation of the high art/fine art versus low art/folk art debate (Elkins 2003; Johnston 2006); the craftsmanship of the glassblowers is made accessible through live demonstrations in the hot shop, while the object's meaning is filtered through the art historical canon (via the museum's narrative, comprised of labels and text panels) in the gallery, disassociating the object from its production.

Cathleen Lewis finds that, despite The New Museum being located in a (semi-residential) neighbourhood (The Bowery), many local residents and potential visitors who routinely walk past the museum will not enter of their own accord, they have to be brought to the museum through targeted outreach efforts. The entrance to The New Museum is a wall of glass that allows passerby to see into the museum shop and reception area, it is positioned at street level and not set back from the sidewalk, and it is situated in and amongst other businesses on the street, blending in with its neighbourhood; it was designed to be inviting to a broad audience. Yet the transparency coupled with the shape and scale of the building continues the traditional museum paradigm, denoting a sacred space that should only be accessed by the initiated.

Whether a museum is in an old or new purpose-built building, a visitor's 'otherness' is apparent from the moment they are positioned in proximity to the museum architecture. If one was not used to confronting the imposing façade, let alone felt comfortable with understanding the content held within, what would be the motivation to enter? How can the museum hope to encourage the engagement of the non-traditional visitor if the visitor does not even make it over the threshold? These are interesting questions to ponder in context with the previous examples and in light of a few planned and completed architectural additions to the London arts scene: the Tate Modern expansion, whereby an already imposing building (in terms of scale if not exterior ornamentation) is poised to expand with a wing designed by Herzog and de Meuron added onto its south side, and two recent David Adjaye-designed buildings for black arts organizations, Rivington Place and the Bernie Grant Arts Centre, which both opened in 2007. In opposition to the museum paradigm which the Tate Modern expansion is following, both of Adjaye's buildings were constructed as if they were pieces of conceptual art, yet they are both

presented on a human size and scale. Both Rivington Place and the Bernie Grant Centre allow their building's contents to be seen by passers-by through large windows. Tate Modern is situated in a Thames-side pedestrian zone and is somewhat of a 'destination' location (one doesn't happen upon it, one goes there on purpose), catering to tourists and art aficionados more than to its surrounding community. In contrast, accessibility was built into the design of Rivington Place and the Bernie Grant Centre, the nature of the user groups appear to have been a consideration (windows invite visitors in and are on street level, buildings fit within the landscape of the neighbourhood and are not set apart so as to loom over the environment), and perhaps it was not a coincidence that the architect and the primary audience for those two organizations were ethnic minorities. Yet despite Adjaye's seeming sensitivity to audience and content, and the myriad ways to design and build a museum, it appears from the accounts provided in this research that architecture continues to keep museums separated from 'ordinary life' and elevated to positions of authority.

### ***An Example of a New Way Forward***

An example of a project with the potential to challenge this separation is currently being addressed by the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) in its project to restore and inhabit Raleigh Hall in the London Borough of Lambeth. The BCA is an organization that has been a site of study for this research and it is evolving from a grassroots organization into a professional cultural heritage institution after 30 years in existence. The mission of the BCA is to preserve and share the history of black people of African and Caribbean descent in the United Kingdom. This is achieved through telling the stories of individuals, by preserving ephemera and through conducting educational programs for those in both the immediate Lambeth community and across the United Kingdom. During much of its history the BCA occupied a storefront location on Coldharbour Lane in central Brixton. It is currently partnering with Lambeth Council, with funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the London Development Authority, to refurbish the derelict Raleigh Hall building on the east side of Brixton's Windrush Square. Raleigh Hall was originally built in 1824 as two Georgian residential houses, then later it was a

school, and finally it was the Brixton Liberal Club before it fell into disuse. The building was a domestic space that evolved into a community space and its location is close to the commercial area but very rooted in the surrounding residential neighbourhood. The building is listed as historically significant and has been considered 'at risk' since 1992 (BCA Capital Project Plan, 2007). The renovated building, and the new building constructed to its west side, will be renamed the Black Heritage Centre; the BCA intends to bring its mission of community-driven preservation of black heritage to the preservation of this building in the hope that it will promote community cohesion and contribute to regeneration in the area.

Raleigh Hall was originally a residential building and its scale is not imposing; that, coupled with its location in the neighbourhood, should encourage visitors to approach and enter the building. Restoring the exterior has the potential to rejuvenate the area, as the current visage is an eyesore (windows boarded up, graffiti on the walls, dilapidated iron fence around the building, overgrown hedges and lawn), and the project aims to encourage pedestrians to venture down from the main road into Windrush Square and into the heritage centre. Transport for London has recently renovated the square and enhanced its amenities and usability (redesigned traffic flow, created new pedestrian pathways, added public art, new plants and trees, lighting and seating). Improvements to the square and the development of the Black Heritage Centre comprise a considerable amount of regeneration in central Brixton. Arguably this regeneration is focused on community needs rather than commercial expansion, as creating a heritage centre on a human scale appears to be more in sync with the local council's aims rather than going with the trend towards creating monumental signature buildings for culture in the hopes of expanding commerce (such as the Guggenheim Bilbao and the forthcoming Riverside Museum in Glasgow, which utilize museum architecture as a driving force for tourism). The BCA could have easily selected a renowned architect to design a new building; however, the intention was to create an inclusive rather than exclusive space to contemplate the history of black Britons.

Although the BCA is not a museum per se (it is an archive), the Black Heritage Centre will encompass an exhibition space, a research room/library/archive-viewing space, and

The Front Room, which will be a cafe with interactive educational components (both participatory/hands-on and performance-based), and as such I considered the scope and scale of the BCA's capital project to fall within the continuum and discourse of museum architecture. In this discourse it could be understood that the BCA is proposing an alternative approach to the existing ideology inherent in museum (and heritage) architecture, one that is in accordance with the size and scale of its institution. This type of approach may not be possible for other organizations, yet it is an example of what may be achievable when an organization acknowledges the barriers to participation inherent to its physical site.

In summary, this section endeavoured to demonstrate how the physical space of the museum presents material and imagined barriers that practitioners have to negotiate in their efforts engage diverse audiences. Examples of how historical and contemporary buildings can exude a sacred aura and promote an elitist ideology, particularly in the imagination of the uninitiated visitor, have been presented in conjunction with an example of an alternative approach to museum architecture. Individual accounts of practitioners have highlighted some of the specifics involved in negotiating this space and in developing programmatic efforts to counter negative connotations and encourage participation. This section presented views on the material space that practitioners operate within whilst they concurrently negotiate the discursive and intangible spaces of the museum, which will be explored in the following sections.

### **Discursive Space I: Organizational Culture**

This section is concerned with the constitution of the discursive and ideological space that comprises the organizational culture of the museum, which must be negotiated concurrently with and within the physical, material space of the museum. Both Gramsci's (Jones, 2006) "war of positions" within hegemonic structures, whereby "meanings and values become the object of struggle" in order to "shape parts of the superstructure before action can be taken" (ibid: 31), and Foucault's (1980) "power/knowledge,"

whereby in practice “power is neither given or exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action” (ibid: 89), provide a theoretical frame to view the museum’s organizational culture. Museum practitioners struggle with their relative positions within the hierarchy of the museum (curator, educator), the struggle involves the circulation of power within their organization (the application of various strands of specialist knowledge that are in contention during decision-making processes), and the process is replicated during program development (object vs. subject, collection vs. education). This research endeavours to recognize the historic or traditional precedents that comprise museum ideology in order to explore the evolution of the contemporary practice that critiques it (according to Oberhardt at the outset of this chapter). This section will examine the origins of contemporary practice as it pertains to engaging with various audiences and how approaches to engagement may influence the internal organizational culture of the museum.

### ***MoMA and the Establishment of a New Paradigm for Museums***

The critique of the traditional ideological frame in the museum may have had its start with the innovative approaches of Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) (circa 1929). His approach was to make the MoMA a multi-departmental (i.e. photography, painting, design, etc.) collector and historian of all things Modern. Barr placed an emphasis on public programming and education, which involved a concerted effort to reach out to the public in order to share the significance of Modern art; this outreach included catalogues and travelling exhibitions (Pollock and Zemans 2007: 6). Barr’s model was innovative in that it was a break from the traditional approach to exhibiting work either chronologically or by geographic region, or both, and that it drew from media other than the traditional fine arts of painting and sculpture.

“Yet Barr clearly planned MoMA as an active player in the culture which it was created to curate: in the absence of existing frames of knowledge and narratives for the understanding of what appeared to be a chaotic and indecipherable rejection of the very concepts of culture that the newly founded grand survey

museums of the nineteenth century existed to enshrine, Barr's concept for MoMA was innovative and trend-setting. One of its most significant interventions was to place education – or shall we say the creation of constituencies and communities for art – onto the primary agenda, there being no widespread acceptance of, or means of finding intelligible, “the outrageous art we all loved”, in the words of MoMA's three women founders. Yet this museum became the paradigm for most modern art museums, and its exhibitionary and discursive framing of modern art became the doctrinaire model for the teaching of the subject throughout most art history institutions. MoMA created the terms of intelligibility and dissemination of the new, while having to consolidate art as always already known within its fixing definitions, preferred narratives, and ultimately selective canon. The museum installed a racist, sexist, and Eurocentric conception of the modern against which we are now obliged to agitate from the disqualified margins of race, class, gender, and sexuality, i.e. what was placed categorically outside what the museum defines alone as art worthy of being part of the canon.” (Pollock and Zeman, 2007: 10-11, original emphasis)

Barr's approach was imbued with some of the broader ideals of Modernism: breaking with tradition, experimentation, confronting social and political norms, embracing industrialization and popular culture. His approach was a reflection of that particular point in history, whereby a negotiation with modern production led to new modes of social behaviours and expanded the boundaries of what was considered the 'norm.' A full exploration of Modernism and its implications for Barr and the MoMA is not possible here; for an expanded account please see Schoenholz Bee and Elligott 2004 and Kantor 2002. Although the time was ripe for Barr to offer an innovative approach to educating the general populace about Modern art, he was still working within the entrenched traditions of museum practice. Those fixed definitions and preferred narratives included exhibiting art made by white European males, and since MoMA went on to become the prime exemplar of exhibitionary practice the Eurocentric paradigm continued; it was woven into the fabric of the MoMA's organizational culture, was appropriated at other institutions, and contributed to the constitution of specific positions (such as curators) – it became convention.

In his book *Art Worlds* (1982) Howard Becker described various aspects of conventions in practice, from musicians learning specific pieces of music in order to become viable members of an ensemble to the stylistic approaches photographers utilize to distinguish their artistic work from their commercial work. Those accepted, often implicit, modes of behaviour are evident in any type of organized activity, as was noted in Chapter 2. But how do people learn these skills and conventions? Becker states that they often teach themselves, through on the job training and observation. They adopt the skills and behaviours from being in the environment or proximity of the art world they want to be a part of (ibid: 78-79). The process of sharing knowledge, of establishing conventions, is applicable to museums, especially in light of the MoMA example. If it is conventional practice to prefer the artwork of white European men then museums develop into Eurocentric institutions, and as such art that is created by non-Europeans is considered inferior by comparison (if it is considered at all). In addition to Becker's conventions it should be noted that an individual's habitus and situated knowledge contribute to their capacity to engage and/or influence conventions, and the learning of bourgeois taste contributes to the Euro-centricity of the museum and its practitioners (Bourdieu 1984), which will be addressed in Chapters 6 through 8.

It is possible to extrapolate this conventional mode of practice and behaviour onto the process of audience development; if the standard of display is Eurocentric, it stands to reason that practice would be geared towards attracting and catering to a Eurocentric audience. To serve a diverse audience it is necessary to adjust both the standards of display, to include representation of other cultures, and the strategies employed to engage a more diverse audience, through outreach and programmatic efforts. I will return to issues of display and representation in subsequent sections and chapters, and will now focus on educational and programmatic means of engagement.

MoMA emphasized education as an important means to convey the significance of Modern art, and this approach has had an impact on MoMA's organizational culture through the conventions in practice that were established.

“I think what anybody would tell you is that this [MoMA] was founded as an educational institution. So the mission of the museum is one to educate and to collect and exhibit... I think that since its founding in 1929, education has been on line, there’s been an education department here since Victor D’Amico was the first Director [of Education] sometime in the 30s, so it’s a long, long history. And he was very much interested in the idea of art being for everyone, whether they’re kids or whether they’re adults. He also started a war veteran’s art center right after World War II, which was really one of the first art therapy programs anywhere, where people coming back from the war were welcomed here. And so I think there is a long history of this, I guess I would say that it’s something we have [always] done in various ways.”

*Francesca Rosenberg, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)*

Francesca Rosenberg, the Director of Access and Community Programs at MoMA, remarks upon how the legacy of Victor D’Amico continues to inform practice at MoMA today. The ethos that “art is for everyone” and that education is one of the primary functions of the museum has a direct bearing on MoMA’s decision to have a dedicated access officer (which is more uncommon in the US than it is in the UK) and to reach out to diverse audiences. There is a link from conducting programs for World War II veterans to serving ethnic minority groups today – both are marginalized audiences not traditionally served by museums, both require programming tailored to their specific interests and needs – and the ethos instilled in the organizational culture at MoMA has been to serve these groups as a core component of its mission. The commitment to do this has been passed down in the organization through a written mission statement, but notably it has also been cultivated through a combination of hiring staff that have the experience and predilection to do this type of work, and through a process of observation and adoption of behaviours and attitudes that are promoted through working in the environment. Marrying the conventional practices of the education department with those of the overall museum, where the Eurocentric focus of the collection may be at odds with the audiences MoMA would like to serve, presents certain challenges. However, education aims to make content accessible for everyone while Modern art clings to an air of exclusivity; this tension is enduring because access and exclusion are

eternally in opposition to elitism, and the reconciliation of this tension presents an ongoing concern. Although MoMA is a single institution, there are potentially multiple cultures within the organization that need to be reconciled – between education and curation, education and fund development, curation and marketing, and between the overarching organization and its subsidiary departments – and the tensions between these subcultures contribute to forming the overall organizational culture.

### ***Shifting the Paradigm***

MoMA offers an example of an established institution that has developed an organizational culture that has evolved over time and that has become an exemplar and template for other organizations to follow. MoMA firmly established its practices in a critique of the traditional museum paradigm and, over time, MoMA itself came to be regarded as a paradigm. Another method to establish a museum may be to begin with an emphasis on community and heritage initiatives which, in combination with a critique of the traditional paradigm, may offer alternative approaches to developing conventions in practice and organizational cultures. Crooke suggests that museums may spring from community initiatives and that “over time, a community initiative may well become more closely involved with the established heritage sector, maybe by adopting professional standards or linking with policy initiatives emerging from the sector. Or the established heritage sector may well support a community initiative, and be prepared to keep its distance, so allowing the initiative to emerge independently” (Crooke 2007: 9). The implication of this is that a museum could evolve without an aura of exclusivity, which is traditionally linked to its collection or architecture, based on the fact that it stems from a grassroots or community initiative that is by its very nature inclusive (at least in terms of its primary constituency).

The Wing Luke Asian Museum provides an example of the process Crooke describes, demonstrating how a museum and its conventions can be established whilst concurrently operating outside of the Eurocentric norm. As America’s first Pan-Asian Pacific American museum, the Wing Luke lies on the cusp between the art museum and the

history museum, incorporating both art and social history to tell the story of its community. Its non-traditional approach to building internal and external practices offers a contrast to those taken in the traditional museum. Founded in 1966 in Seattle, Washington and named after Seattle city councilman Wing Luke, the Northwest's first Asian-American elected official, the museum was established to engage the Asian-American community and the general public in an exploration of issues related to the culture, art and history of Asian Pacific Americans. The conventions and organizational culture established in the museum are grounded in learning by doing, gathering community and staff input throughout the exhibition and program development process, and encouraging collaborative participation, rather than in the traditional hierarchical, object-based art-historical museum model.

The behaviours and environment that promoted this ethos were instilled by Ron Chew, who was hired as the museum's first executive director in 1991. Chew, a local journalist and political activist, who had no previous experience directing a cultural arts organization, went on to lead the Wing Luke for over 16 years and became one of the museum field's most respected practitioners. He received the 1997 Governor's Heritage Award, was appointed to the National Council on the Humanities by President Clinton in 2001, in 2004 he received both the Leadership for a Changing World and the Western Museums Association Director's Chair awards, and December 12, 2007 was proclaimed "Ron Chew Day" by Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels. Chew's background and achievements are significant when juxtaposed with the traditional museum director who, typically, would have a graduate or postgraduate degree in either a subject specialty related to a museum's content or in business or management, coupled with previous experience leading a cultural institution. Chew had 'grassroots' experience and never completed his college degree, yet he oversaw a successful \$23 million capital campaign for the expansion of the Wing Luke, which was completed in 2008, and he is currently a lecturer in the Museum Studies program at the University of Washington. I had an opportunity to work as a researcher and evaluator with Chew and his staff in 2005 during the development of the *Wing Luke Asian Museum Community-Based Exhibition Model*, which was funded by the IMLS, and I interviewed him for this current research. An extended interview excerpt

outlying the development of his first exhibition demonstrates how his engagement with collaborative community activism shaped the culture and ethos of the Wing Luke:

RC: ...If anything it was sort of the movement [grassroots political action] in general that instills different ways of doing things, and then you fumble around on your own for a while and you figure out what suits your values and what works for you.

KK: And then as the Wing Luke museum grew as a professional organization over the years, how did you train your staff in this kind of grassroots approach to community building that then professionalized over a number of years? The culmination of which, I think you can look in the blue book [*Wing Luke Asian Museum Community-Based Exhibition Model*] or you can look at the online component of that and [see that] there is a clearly articulated approach to working with community there.

RC: Yeah

KK: so how did you teach that?

RC: well that's a good question, I wish I knew!

KK: (laughs)

RC: I mean one thing I should say just as a maybe a contributing factor, ah, I remember doing the Executive Order 966 exhibit [about Japanese internment camps in the United States], with the Japanese American community, and when I proposed that as an exhibit project people were very sceptical, and even members of the Japanese American community said "you're crazy Ron, how are we going to do this? I mean, you know, how do we create an exhibit inside a museum?" and some of the people are still around from that project and they recall my sort of flippant answer to a lot of things which was "ok, so actually break it down, what is an exhibit? So you put some pictures on the wall, you put some text on the wall and that's an exhibit."

KK: um hmm

RC: "So what's the big deal about creating an exhibit? Why can't you guys do it? I mean we've got a lot of people working on it, it's not just one or two of you, you guys are all kind of a group," and people said "what if we can't work together, what if it is awful," and so forth, and so there was a lot of doubt. And so I played sort of a little bit of a cheerleader, again because of my values that were instilled from the movement, it was partly self determination, people doing stuff that they are capable of doing, empowering

them to do that, to use their own voice, to find their own voice. I also had the added advantage since I didn't know the museum lexicon; I mean, what's a curator? I don't know. What's a docent? I don't know. So it's, "look, I'm the boss ok, so we do this however we want to!"

KK: (laughs) uh huh

RC: "You guys want to put up those pictures? Put them up. So, does anyone know how to blow up this image? Um, so we have to stick this object on the wall, does anybody know how to create something to hang this thing on?" And then inevitably there were people who knew how to do it, and then it's about believing then that you can do it. And then by the time you are pretty far into the project, everybody has migrated to their areas of expertise, you've got some artists who are really talented and they feel like "wow, I'm not just an isolated artist off on the side, I get to work with people in the community that I have observed

KK: um hmm

RC: and I get to learn some history and share some of that and have a vision," so then you've got some things automatically happening. In terms of teaching that model to other folks I think once we started going down this track I think people started to believe that this was something pretty incredible. And then the stakes were such that the museum was actually on the verge of folding, financial problems anyway, so the stakes were, I mean if it didn't work in my mind it wasn't like this million dollar operation that went tumbling, we were a \$130,000 operation then, one and a half staff and a deficit of about \$50,000, so it was actually less than a \$130,000 operation, so the stakes in my mind were not high enough that you couldn't go out there and just try something. Plus, then people thought I was a kook anyway, and my peers and colleagues in the profession were probably snickering a little bit, and I didn't really care. Because you see, I didn't consider myself a museum person; I ultimately thought I was going to go back to writing.

*Ron Chew, Wing Luke Asian Museum*

In terms of shaping the organizational culture, which comprises a portion of the discursive space of the museum, Chew developed a museum that was firmly "situated in a critique of its colonial and imperial past" as was mentioned at the outset of this chapter. The Wing Luke's content focused on culture and history that was outside of the

mainstream museum purview – the Executive Order 966 exhibition had specific social and cultural significance for the primary constituency of the Wing Luke and it is highly unlikely that any other museum would have considered mounting a show on that topic, particularly because the subject matter critiqued an aspect of American culture that is uncomfortable for many to consider. The internal culture was not mired in entrenched views and established conventions – the components of exhibition development were simplified and made accessible for community members to understand and accomplish; people were empowered by Chew’s approach and support; inclusivity was a part of the process which led to a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the organization (some of the original community advisors and volunteers continue to be connected to the organization today). This approach to exhibition development provides a contrast to the traditional model where curatorial tasks are conducted separately and out of sight by specialists, furthering notions of exclusivity. The Wing Luke example demonstrates that the traditional museum paradigm may be circumvented in a ‘community-led museum model,’ which has been outlined by Crooke (2007) as an organization that is, amongst other things, personality led, best used and known in its own community, has little or no training in museum standards and practice, and may be limited and exclusive in its catering to a specific audience.

Over time, organizations that emerge from community concerns have the potential to become components of the mainstream cultural heritage sector, which is the case with the Wing Luke. After years of program development Chew and his staff began presenting their outputs (exhibitions, program models, advisory group structures) at museum conferences. The findings resonated with many local and national practitioners and the Wing Luke was urged to document its process; in 2007 the *Wing Luke Asian Museum Community-Based Exhibition Model* was published through a grant from the IMLS. The grant also funded a residential training program for practitioners from small museums across the United States and an on-line component of the exhibition model. The Wing Luke went from being an insular community museum to a mainstream cultural institution, and from having no standards of practice to promoting a new set of standards that could be replicated and applied in other museums.

### *Injecting a Community-led Approach into the Paradigm*

One museum that incorporated aspects of the community-led model is the Museum of Glass (MoG) in Tacoma, Washington, which is situated geographically in the same region as the Wing Luke. The two organizations operate in the same regional cultural heritage sector and are affiliated with the Museum Educators of Puget Sound, the Washington Museums Association and the Western Museums Association. Through participation in these professional organizations, ideas and approaches to audience participation and program development are shared, and although specific models were not replicated across these two museums, an ethos and approach to engagement has been fostered and promoted amongst the staff of the organizations through participation in conferences and symposia. I witnessed and participated in this process first-hand as the Associate Director of Programs in the education department of MoG from 2001 to 2004. Having had this professional experience I felt it relevant to interview individuals from both the Wing Luke and the MoG for this research.

Susan Warner, Director of Public Programs at MoG, has been working in museums for over 25 years and has focused on community engagement and working with under-served audiences since the mid 1990s. Her approach has been to survey the community to assess the areas of greatest need, establish partnerships with organizations serving those areas and audiences, and to develop programs to serve those populations, with the dual aims of expanding the audience of the museum and promoting positive change in the community. Warner is a proponent of museums as agents of social change (Sandell 2002, 2007; Silverman 2010), which is yet another critique of the traditional museum paradigm, which is grounded in political action not so far removed from the model Chew espoused. In developing the organizational culture and championing work with under-served audiences at MoG Warner commented:

“Yes, I think it’s an educational thing. I have a lot of opportunity to dialog with our Board of Trustees, and present ideas, share wonderful stories and successes from the program, and we are fortunate that they have always shown enormous support for these ideas. They are a diverse group of people themselves, and they

believe in this kind of outreach, if they didn't it would be a lot more difficult, but this institution has come easily down these pathways, from changing directors to our board of trustees. So we are fortunate in that regard. It might be much more difficult if you had a traditional museum that wasn't aware or hadn't taken initiative, and then had, perhaps, a member of the education staff come forward and say "I want to develop a program here," then there might be more resistance than there has been here. Which is [to say that], we are just not a traditional [museum], we are a young organization, we don't have an established culture, we're establishing the culture now, which says we are working with under-served people!" *Susan Warner, Museum of Glass*

Briefly examining Warner's professional background may assist in clarifying the points she makes in the observation above. Warner was a decorative arts curator at the Dayton Arts Institute and her acknowledgement of the resistance of traditional museums to engage with hard-to-reach audiences is based on first-hand experience. While working in a traditional art museum her interest in decorative objects shifted from a focus on the history and provenance of the object to the untold stories behind the objects, which she felt would be more engaging for the museum visitor. This shift from object to audience as a focus for her work led her to move from the curatorial realm into education, and her interest in audiences increasingly focused on those who were not coming into the museum and on how she could engage them. An exploration of potential audiences led her to engage groups that were not only excluded from museums but were marginalized in other areas of society, such as incarcerated persons, terminally and seriously ill children, and people with learning and physical disabilities. Her personal interest in working with these populations shaped how she has participated in the organizations that she has worked for; when she commented that she has "an opportunity to dialog with the board" and that they have "shown enormous support for these ideas [engaging under-served populations]" this is partially due to how she presented the material to the board, subtly influencing the Trustee's response to it, and in part due to the short history of the organization (it opened in mid 2002). As the Director of Public Programs she has had an effect on how 'public' has been interpreted by the organization and she has been able to infuse her own definition throughout the culture of the organization. In remarking that

“we don’t have an established culture, we’re establishing the culture now, which says we are working with under-served people!” she demonstrates this influence, which critiques the traditional paradigm and promotes new conventions in practice.

Both Chew and Warner brought their personal values and vision to their roles within their respective museums. Chew brought a grassroots political action approach to exhibition development and Warner brought her interest in connecting under-served audiences with the museum’s content; these are examples of values-based approaches which can inform the organizational culture of museums, reminiscent of the legacies of Victor D’Amico and Alfred Barr at MoMA. This section examined examples of approaches in the evolution of contemporary practice – from the initial critique of traditional practice employed at MoMA, to MoMA constituting the next paradigm in practice to be critiqued, through to contemporary practice that is values-based and driven by individuals– and how this contemporary practice influences the organizational culture within specific organisations. This section examined how overarching ideals (Modernism, grassroots political action, foregrounding marginalised populations), as a method of approach set forth by individuals, can shape the internal space of the museum; this section offers a framework for examining conventions in practice, which are the specific actions and points of engagement where the organizational culture impacts audience development, that will be explored in the next section.

## **Discursive Space II: Conventions in Practice**

The organizational culture of the museum is comprised in part by conventions in practice that are the learned behaviours and routines practitioners engage in, which are informed by an ethos that guides an approach to executing specific tasks. This ethos is a blend of the situated knowledge of the practitioner, the espoused mission and vision of the museum (and the mechanisms employed to achieve them) and the traditional ideological constitution of the museum. It is arguable that museums have been altering conventions in practice for the past forty years or so, particularly in the areas of education, programs

and audience development, as is indicated by the advent of the New Museology and as conveyed through Museum Studies literature (Hooper-Greenhill 1994, 2000; Sandell 2002, 2007; see Chapter 1) and as was demonstrated in the previous section. Much has been written about the expanded role of education in museums and its function to enhance ‘the visitor experience,’ meet the needs of ‘diverse audiences’ and increase access and inclusion for marginalized populations, which denotes a shift from an exclusive to an inclusive ideology. But are such needs actually being met, or are boxes just being ticked? Has there been any fundamental change, or has the rhetoric just become more sophisticated, with quantitative data to support its claims?

There have, of course, been incredible strides forward in the provision of educational means to attract a broader audience; the traditional approach to civilizing, through the transmission of fixed and intact meaning conferred on the visitor, has given way to more contemporary modes of engagement, which are participatory and allow for individual meaning-making. But have the underlying frameworks changed, or have museums just kept pace with changes in general education and popular entertainment, allowing for a facsimile of change while adhering to old conventions? Just as with Barr in the creation of MoMA, the evolving programmatic offerings of the past forty years have appeared to be entirely new, but are they? This section will examine the conventions, the traditional modes of thinking and operation, which influence contemporary practice and how difference is engaged.

### ***Defining Conventions and Contemplating Change***

Conventions occur in all organizations and in many facets of individual life – people learn to do things a certain way, adopt particular behaviours and beliefs, establish a comfortable routine and rarely question their approach until they are confronted with something outside of their frame of reference. When outside factors interrupt the normal flow they are often perceived as a threat, which can either be ignored or dealt with depending on their nature or severity. For example, Eurocentric practices in programming, exhibition and audience development have been questioned as a result of

contemporary public and social agendas around multiculturalism, access and inclusion, prompting the shift from civilization to participation in the museum. This shift could imply a threat to the museum's financial stability inasmuch as access and inclusion are linked to public and private funding mandates; yet it also presents an opportunity to increase the museum's relevance in contemporary society through the diversification of its audience. Left to their own devices, many museums may not perceive a need to expand their audience base; after all, they have been around for over 200 years and have had consistent practices, and attendance, for much of that time (Bennett 1995; Weil 2002). There has been no cataclysmic event to encourage reflexivity and change in the museum, as may be the case for other fields of practice. However, the perpetuation of the museum's aura of power and social authority is central to its very existence; public perception plays a role in maintaining their credibility and reputations – their funding and support may dry up and go away if museums are not seen as contributing to social concerns (community cohesion, regeneration) and participating in civil society, with programming relevant to diverse audiences which substantiates public/private support. Change may be in the long-term best interest of the museum in order to maintain its power, although the change may be spurious, as this research will suggest in subsequent chapters.

Before any change in practice can be considered we must first investigate how conventions are developed. In adopting conventions Becker states:

“Artists learn other conventions – professional culture – in the course of training and as they participate in the day-to-day activities of the art world. Only people who participate regularly in those activities, practicing professionals (however the particular world circumscribes that group), know that culture. Conventions represent the continuing adjustment of the cooperating parties to the changing conditions in which they practice; as conditions change, they change.” (Becker 1982: 59)

Diversifying audiences and meeting external policy mandates are “adjustments” to “the changing conditions” of practice. Adjustments pertain to how the practitioner considers

and engages the visitor in light of external forces driving engagement. Gone are the days when museum wardens ushered visitors through the galleries in an attempt to regulate their visit and patrol their behaviour, so too are notions that the working-classes will be educated and uplifted, or civilized, by being in proximity to and in imitation of the upper-class patrons they were allowed to mix with at the museum. Today visitors can explore the galleries at their leisure, with or without the aid of an audio tour device, and are encouraged, but not required, to engage with the text and labels provided. The outward, operational practices have changed or adjusted over time, yet the underlying premise remains: that the visitor will somehow be transformed (civilized) through their encounter with the museum.

In current practice this transformation is facilitated through programs designed for specific audiences. Developing an understanding of the unique attributes of specific constituencies is, I believe, a crucial factor in serving minority audiences; gaining this understanding is easier said than done, as will be demonstrated in relation to the black subject in Chapter 7. However, the concern at present is that beliefs and actions inculcated in the traditional museum ethos are passed down in day-to-day practice to new members of staff through active participation in the museum environment, and that these traditional beliefs are often at odds with the skills needed to engage new audiences (hence the necessity for Museum Studies and its literature, and this research). Conventions in practice, nurtured through interaction between peers and superiors, continues to be Eurocentric and male (despite the examples I have shown, and an increase in the number of females participating in all levels of operation, and an increase in training and placement opportunities for minorities interested in entering the field [i.e. Inspire Fellows, Clore Leadership Program]). This phenomenon is related to another point that Becker makes about conventions:

“Every convention implies an aesthetic which makes what is conventional the standard of artistic beauty and effectiveness. A play which violates the classical unities represents a fixed criterion of dramatic worth, it is distasteful, barbaric, and ugly. An attack on a convention attacks the aesthetic related to it. Since people experience their aesthetic beliefs as natural, proper, and moral, an attack

on a convention and its aesthetic also attacks a morality. The regularity with which audiences greet major changes in dramatic, musical, and visual conventions with vituperative hostility indicates the close relation between aesthetic and moral beliefs.

“An attack on aesthetic beliefs as embodied in particular conventions is, finally, an attack on an existing system of stratification. [...] Sects – religious, political, or artistic – are at war with the mores. An attack on the mores (for which, in this case, read conventions) is thus an attack on social structure (for which read the organization of an art world), and sects or innovators in art worlds are at war with the systems of rank current in the worlds whose conventions they attack and attempt to replace.” (ibid: 305-306, original emphasis)

Herein lies the crux of the issue: the traditional foundations of the museum are based upon a belief system which incorporates an hierarchical view of ethnicity (European at the top and all others below in an arguably descending order) and ability (educational and physical, from high to low levels) which is taken to be “natural, proper, and moral” in its context and in accordance with the modes of operation that museums have perpetuated. This foundational belief system is now under attack from external forces – funding and governmental bodies, an increasingly diverse society and a general shift towards a more ‘politically correct’ approach to the language, manner and concern demonstrated towards difference. Changes in conventions in practice are an attack on the social structure of museums and can be difficult to contemplate, let alone implement.

### ***Barriers to Implementing Change in Conventions***

An example of conventions presenting barriers to engagement can be seen in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s approach to developing audiences for exhibitions. The Whitney’s approach is similar to that of many art museums in both the US and the UK. In an extended interview extract, Margie Weinstein, Senior Coordinator of Public

Programs at the Whitney, highlights the challenges inherent in the struggle between working in a traditional vein and meeting the needs of diverse constituent groups:

MW: ...I would say that what we have done is kind of develop audiences on a program by program basis, so we'll do outreach to a lot of colleges and universities depending on the subject matter. So with the Kara Walker exhibition we did outreach to African-American faculty members, art history faculty members, American history. With the biennials [we outreach] specifically for people who are filmmakers, we did it to cinema studies departments, media departments, film production. For the painters we go to the school of visual arts painting departments and that way we try to cultivate an audience based on the program, but it's very labour-intensive and it also tends to be the kind of one-shot deal, so we try to get away from that little bit.

KK: I was going to ask if when you're out trying to cultivate these audiences if there is carryover from program to program, so when you do the Kara Walker and you did outreach to those African-American students, did you reach out to them for your next program and your next program?

MW: So beyond Kara Walker, no. I didn't target those schools for say, biennial programs. And for the biennial programs mostly we targeted studio art students. One of the things, that in conversations with one of the faculty members who actually did bring her students to two of the programs, she had said that frequently it's hard for them to come up here so this was a program that really spoke to their interests. And in that way we're trying to be cognizant of what would speak to someone's interest, although something beyond what could obviously speak to their interests may also draw them in. I have not specifically targeted those classes for biennial programs. I would say that probably the core group that I keep going back to again and again are the art schools because if there's, in a broad sense, any core audience I would actually say that the Whitney gets a lot of art students. [...]

KK: Okay, in thinking about audience, because that's where my interest really lies in that relationship or connection that comes from the meaning-making experience of viewing the art work [...] I'm interested in how we develop audiences for our shows, and so what I'm hearing, and tell me if I'm interpreting this wrong, is at the Whitney you look at your content and think of a content match rather than an audience match.

MW: You know I would say that the audience match is the content match. That when we did target those specific schools or classes for Kara Walker, it was quite successful. So the content match became the audience match. Maybe if you want to explain your distinction a little bit more to me, then I might be able to clarify it.

KK: And this is tied to the kind of policy debate and policy initiatives that I'm looking at as well, for example in the UK central government funds the arts, and then it [the money] goes through funding bodies and then it goes down to the museums, but there are goals and standards set by central government which say "access and inclusion need to be a priority because we want to build social cohesion" and a lot of agendas like that, and so it's basically about targeting or serving economically disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, those types of populations. And then here in the US, we kind of have, with language that is set out by IMLS, and AAM and also the NEA and NEH-

MW: Reaching 'under-served' populations.

KK: Yes, it's [language] about reaching 'under-served' populations. Yes, under-served is kind of our catch-all in the states because we don't really talk in terms of class, and then when we talk in terms of race a lot of times it's very couched in these other terms.

MW: Under-served, right, right.

KK: And so that's what I think of as a targeted type of audience, that's what I'm thinking about rather than a subject specific audience. And so I'm just wondering if you do?

MW: Yeah, what's hard is I think for us, for me, is that oftentimes, I'm sure that you understand that education departments are often given the task of doing that kind of outreach when the exhibition might not speak in any way to those needs. So you find yourself being charged with trying to bring in various constituent demographics for a show, like say it's a show for Paul McCarthy and to bring in the African-American audience, and Paul McCarthy, well, this is New York City, that's probably not going to happen. They [African-Americans] do come for Kara Walker because they see themselves...

We then discussed the difficulty of generating widespread interest in the work of white male artists (i.e. McCarthy, Olafur Eliason), the problem of the policy clash with museum constraints (limited resources), that class is an issue that is addressed through offering a monthly free admission evening, and that public schools [free, state-operated] have

limited time and resources. Weinstein offered that a flaw within many US museums is that the education department and its practitioners are given the task to bring in diverse audiences:

MW: So I think that, I actually think that is a fundamental problem, in fact, in the Museum programming. But for me where that push really has to come is in the exhibitions schedule.

KK: um hmm

MW: And I don't know if that sounds like the public programmer shifting responsibility but I do think it's very hard to bring in certain audiences for certain shows. Without really lifting a finger we had tremendous response to the Romare Bearden show, same for Isamu Noguchi. I think that some shows just are inherently more interesting because they reflect a certain history that is sorely lacking in these other shows. So it becomes a great way of showing "we're visible, we're present, and we're being recognized."

*Margie Weinstein, Whitney Museum of American Art*

Citing the Kara Walker exhibition as an example of an opportunity to reach a specific ethnic minority audience, Weinstein stated that African-American students were targeted because there was a link between the ethnicity of the artist on display and those particular students, which reinforced the idea that African-Americans were "visible, present, and recognized" at the Whitney. However, that group was only targeted for that specific show not for subsequent exhibitions. This group was comprised of *art students* who also happened to be African-American, which counters her claim that "the audience match is the content match." If it was solely a content match then the ethnicity of the students would be irrelevant, as all of the student groups approached studied art in some capacity and, arguably, all could benefit from viewing any and all upcoming exhibitions. Kara Walker's artwork explores race, gender and identity through large-scale paper-cuts, which is a modern twist on a traditional Chinese art form. It is also a specialism that does not fit neatly into a university art departments, so the means of engagement that Weinstein described for developing audiences for other exhibitions (through a content match with media, painting and other specialist art departments) would not have been possible with the Walker exhibition. The Whitney then relied on demographics, relating the artist's

background and subject matter to their target audience, presuming that the Walker show would “obviously speak to their interests.” But were students from other departments, and other ethnic groups, contacted in regard to the Walker show? Were the African-American students the only audiences targeted for that exhibition? I do not know the answer to these questions, but I assume that due to Walker’s broad appeal that other groups were indeed encouraged to attend.

The relevant point is that African-American and ethnic minority audiences are often approached when it is assumed that they will have an interest in an exhibition because they either share an ethnic background with the artist or their ethnic background is represented in some way in the exhibition, not because they have an interest in the material content per se. This approach may set up a tokenistic, unsustainable relationship with ethnic minority audiences if they are only invited when the museum presumes that they may have an interest in a particular show. In raising the point that “without lifting a finger we had a tremendous response to the Romare Bearden show, same for Isamu Noguchi” Weinstein indicates that the Whitney provides material content that may appeal to ethnically diverse audiences, yet the means for engagement with those audiences is not firmly established in organizational practice. This indicates two conventions that are based in the traditional mode of museum operations: firstly, audiences are compartmentalised according to their place in the (ethnic or class) hierarchy and are approached when the museum imagines it is suitable, rather than being invited to participate on an ongoing basis (which recalls the enduring tension between access and exclusivity that was mentioned in the earlier MoMa example); and, secondly, that the ethnicity of a particular artist is enough to generate attendance by diverse audiences. These practices are steeped in traditional beliefs and behaviours, particularly the stereotype (Bhabba 1999; which will be addressed in detail in Chapter 7), wherein the Eurocentric majority audience is preferred and the ethnic minority audience is marginalised.

Weinstein offers that education departments are often given the task of serving ethnic minority audiences, and “I actually think that is a fundamental problem, in fact, in the Museum programming. But for me where that push really has to come is in the

exhibitions schedule,” meaning that exhibitions need to include more minority artists, and/or representations of ethnic minorities, in order to bring in diverse audiences. She implies that the driving force of audience development lies with the standards of display or curation (the exhibitions and how they engage difference) rather than with programs, and then she goes on to state “that [it] sounds like the public programmer shifting responsibility.” More explicitly these statements imply that she believes education is charged with audience development and is hindered in this pursuit by the exhibition schedule, which provides a credible rationale for why audiences are not participating, yet shifts the onus of audience development off of the program practitioner. The point being that it is difficult to create sustainable relationships with any constituency group and it is challenging to develop diverse audiences, as existing conventions in practice substantiate the continuation of providing programs mainly for mainstream/Eurocentric audiences.

Assuming that the McCarthy show may not hold an interest for ethnically diverse audiences may be missing an opportunity to develop both an interest in McCarthy’s artwork and an interest in the museum. Yet she makes an important point when she indicates that issues of representation are of primary concern when engaging in audience development, particularly as educational programs are developed in conjunction with exhibitions and objects. When educators have material representative of or relevant to specific minority audiences then they are able to develop projects for those specific groups, which may make the means of engagement more obvious or direct (as evidenced by the audience turn out for the Bearden and Naguchi exhibitions). There may be issues of tokenism and essentialism involved in this approach, which could be as problematic as trying to create a relationship to an artist or exhibition that is completely unrelated to an ethnic minority audience. These points will be explored in subsequent sections and in Chapters 7 and 8.

Offering a free night may indicate an attempt to address some of the class related issues of serving diverse audiences, inasmuch as many ethnic minority groups have a high percentage of lower-class and working-class members who may not be able to attend the museum during daytime opening hours. But does offering free programming at a specific

time further marginalise these audiences? Many museums in London have late night offerings on a weekly basis, which are coordinated so that major institutions are open on different nights each week – visitors could potentially go to a different museum each night. As entry to museums is free in London, these evening offerings are targeted at middle-class to affluent city workers, but they also serve to encourage participation by a wider, diverse audience, in terms of both class and ethnicity. The Whitney free night is particularly for visitors who cannot afford the \$15 admission price, predominantly students and low-income people, which presumably may encompass ethnic minority visitors. By offering this evening program on a regular basis the Whitney, and other similarly positioned museums, avoid having to change conventions in any substantive way, as they can point towards an existing, recurring provision for under-served audiences. The same could be said for occasionally exhibiting ethnically diverse artists, such as Romare Bearden (who was African-American) and Isamu Noguchi (who was Japanese-American); as their work is considered to contain or represent Black and Asian cultural content, it also serves to bring in a diverse audience, and apparently it does so with very little effort on the part of the museum, thus avoiding change in its conventional practice.

### ***Challenging Conventions: Curators (verses?) Educators***

Exhibiting the work of minority artists can positively impact upon the participation of diverse audiences, and it indicates a shift in conventions as it denotes an expansion of the traditional Eurocentric art-historical canon and its corresponding narrative. The selection of the material content on display lies in the curatorial rather than educational realm of the museum, and, although the canon may have expanded in recent years, the process of determining exhibitions continues to be mired in traditional modes of operation. Power and authority to control the content of the canon, the collection and the display in the museum resides with the curator; one approach to create a shift in conventions in this area could be:

“Instead of inviting the educators in only after the art-historical paradigm-bearing curators have made their textual decisions, the educators should be part of the overall strategizing of the museum as a public resource. This department is the open passage that mediates between the conservatory and disciplinary operations of specialist curators and budget-minded museum managers and the concrete, non-unified publics, the incredibly varied (which is not the same as stratified or classified) constituencies of the museum that its works and its workers have to serve rather than service.” (Pollock and Zemans 2007: 25)

This approach would allow for the educational role of the exhibition to become central to the context of the display rather than subsidiary to the objects. This passage gets at one of the underlying conventions that stand in the way of moving this approach forward – that educators are lower in the museum hierarchy than curators, therefore their voices are not heard in the initial phases of exhibition design. This hierarchical paradigm appears to be ubiquitous, based on observation during my professional experience and throughout this research; curators tend to assess their own collections or survey available loans according to their individual areas of expertise, rather than by beginning with an idea or inquiry derived from the educational department, in order to determine the objects and content that they will display. Yet it is the responsibility of the educator to make the exhibition content accessible to the widest audience possible, as they are the conduit between the curators and the public. In some institutions educators provide input into the text and label copy that accompanies the objects on display, but at still more institutions the art-historical curatorial voice is often the only one speaking for the objects. This can present a challenge for many visitors. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has developed a process by which interdepartmental staff teams contribute to the development of exhibitions, but within a proscribed framework. Amy Silva, Community Programs Manager for the Met, commented on this process as follows:

AS: Another thing that we've done which has been a way of education becoming more integral throughout the museum, there's two things: about 10 years ago educators were assigned to exhibitions, so you have [input into] an exhibition that comes onto the schedule. It has a designer, it has a communications person, of course it has a curator,

and up until about 10 years ago had an educator. So I'm the exhibition rep for the feather works show. It means that I know the show, I learn the show, I teach about the show, but it also means that I'm communicating everything about the show to my colleagues [in the education and programs department] so that someone that's doing films is putting in films for that show; so that somebody who is doing family programs is putting in family programs for that show; so that someone who is doing teaching programs is doing something for that show. Balancing all of that and communicating all of that to the curator [and asking] "what kind of programs do you want for your show?" and playing this kind of... I'm the middle man between the entire department, not just adult programs but everybody and the exhibitions. In addition to that, two years ago, three years ago, our boss Kent Mydecker, who's the social director for the museum, decided that we needed to build on that relationship even further, so each curatorial area now has an Education Liaison. So I am – surprise, surprise – the Liaison for the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, which I'm so happy about because my background is in pre-Columbian art. So, I get to teach those collections, and I get to develop a very, very tight relationship with those curators. They have an annual meeting of the visiting committee and I'm there. And, supporting them and making sure that their programs form part of our general programming. Having those curators teach for us, and that kind of relationship is replicated with all 18 [subject] areas. We don't have enough educators for all departments, and all departments aren't the same size, so now you have some educators who have two departments, some who should be split, one educator that has the department of 19th century modern and contemporary art - that is *huge*.

KK: And so did those educators get to contribute to the content of the exhibition?

AS: Not in this museum.

KK: So curators...

AS: We take the path of (inaudible) of the public. We're not writing labels, some of the educators are not contributing to the catalogue. We are in some instances, it depends; we do contributions to the website and to the timeline of Art History, but for the most part we are overseeing the programs and communicating with the public.

KK: Well, that must present some challenges for you.

AS: Ah yeah, well yes and no. The challenge is deviating from what the curator wants us to say. (laughs) I mean-

KK: Yeah, because the label copy isn't [written] for everybody [to understand].

AS: Right.

KK: And so, it serves interpretation a lot of times.

AS: That's what we have to do - take that information and make it accessible

*Amy Silva, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

This collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to program and exhibition development indicates a change in conventional practice, yet, in examining what Silva states, this process at the Met appears to be only partially inclusive and just slightly different from conventional practice. Silva implies that educators occupy a subordinate role to the curators on the exhibition team, as evidenced by the comments “what kind of programs do you want for your show?”, inferring that the show belongs to the curator and not to the entire staff team, and in reference to attending the annual meeting, “[I am] supporting them and making sure that their programs [exhibitions] form part of our general programming,” once again inferring ownership of the content on the curator with support from the educator. At the Met the educators are not allowed to suggest material content, write labels or contribute to exhibition catalogues, and considering that they are the link between the curator and the audience, and that they are charged with making the content accessible to a broad audience, this failure to contribute content may be a barrier to access. The educators are expected to attend the annual meeting with the visiting committee and demonstrate a show of support for the exhibitions, but this appears to be a perfunctory duty rather than substantive inclusion in the process. This is but one example of how conventional curatorial practice can be at odds with audience development. If the educators of the Met are not fully welcomed to the table, then it would seem unlikely that representatives of the audiences it serves would be allowed to contribute to exhibition development. Yet that is exactly what was done so successfully at the Wing Luke, whereby the educational, curatorial and community needs were expressed and addressed in concert through an inclusive process to create relevant programming.

## *Changes in Conventions*

Howard Becker comments on the process of change in art worlds by stating:

“In short, changes in art occur through changes in worlds. Innovations last when participants make them the basis of a new mode of cooperation, or incorporate a change into their ongoing cooperative activities. Changes can occur piecemeal and peacefully, almost unnoticed, or occasion substantial conflict between those who stand to profit and gain in public esteem by the change and those who will lose. Innovations begin as, and continue to incorporate, changes in artistic vision or idea. But their success depends on the degree to which their proponents can mobilize the support of others. Ideas and visions are important, but their success and permanence rest on organization, not their intrinsic worth.” (Becker, 1982: 309-310)

A change “in artistic vision or idea” that could be considered in regard to Weinstein’s earlier assertion, about the necessity for exhibition content to reflect audience demographics in order to promote participation, is realized in the approach to collecting, display and audience engagement at the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in New York City. Brian Mac Farland, MAD’s Director of Education, explains his organisation’s approach to utilizing material content and conducting educational programs:

BM: So it is the fine craft medium that this museum has focused on for the last half century, it has been clay, as an example; clay, wood, fibre, glass and metal, and those typically are just more accessible [materials to utilize] than when you are faced with taking a pen in hand and drawing or taking a brush in hand and painting. So it's more that extra barrier disappears because everybody has played with some clay or maybe they've played with some mud, so they're not concerned about it, so it feels very accessible. So we have focused here at this museum on the art making. So what you do in the studio processes, and the creative process involved when the artist picks his materials and turns it into a work of art, that's what we do. That's the education department's philosophy, that's how we distinguish ourselves from the other museums. So when the students come here they

spend 40 minutes in the gallery with a very highlighted targeted tour, the same art educator that tours them brings them down here which is our lab area where we make art [...] They will have spent as much time making art and working with materials as they did standing in front of the art and that's really a goal of ours. When I was at the Whitney and we used to say "yes we have hands-on activities," well, we gave out a golf pencil and a pad.

KK: Um hmm

BM: And you could go into the gallery and you could sketch. That was a hands-on art related experience at the Whitney Museum of America. So it's been very easy for us to distinguish ourselves because we are so material-based from a curatorial position and are getting kids engaged in the art making process. And we do the same for adults. We do a lot of workshops, a lot of demonstrations and a lot of ways in which we try to get people to actually make art. And that's a distinction from other people [museums] as sometimes they do it sort of parenthetically or they do it sort of (shrugs), but it really is at the top of the list of what we do.

KK: Yeah, it's a core function of your education

BM: Precisely, and one of the best things is you don't have to know 3,000 years of western art to feel comfortable talking and doing what we share.[...] So helping to demystify some of that and understand that it is a process that people learn kind of cuts across all levels and I think we have a real advantage because you can come to us without having really known all the dynasties of Egyptian history and you may not know a Manet from a Monet, but if you don't it doesn't matter because that's not really how we talk about it here. There isn't that intimidation factor. The Met approaches it very historically, the MoMA doesn't do that at all, you know they don't want to talk about it, their approach is "you never talk about the context, you never talk about the artist, you just talk about what you see in front, and there are no wrong answers."

KK: That's VTS [Visual Thinking Strategies].

BM: Yeah, so we are interested in connecting [...] we have a disproportionate percentage of our permanent collection that is art made by artists who are non-traditional in the way that art has been made for the last few hundred years. There are disproportionate- a huge percentage are women, we have a lot of African-Americans represented, Hispanic-Americans represented, and international, so as a contemporary art museum we have

been reflecting very much what has happened in the last 20 years. So it gets better at other museums now than it used to be, of course, but we were able early, I mean we have been showing the work of women and non-white, non-middle-class, non-dead white guys for most of this museum's history. They didn't call it that, I mean they were just showing the art that was done, you know. But they did, so that's another entry level. We have a lot of ways that we can talk about [art] when you come here and you hear through a lecture or through a film or if you are online or you are learning from an art educator about, we can very often talk about an artist who looks like you as the museum visitor, with some of those audiences. And that resonates, that means a lot, people like hearing that and we have that, what we consider a sort of natural advantage to talk to those communities.

KK: That builds inclusion and ownership, and a connection to the museum etcetera. You were saying, you have your education program that is connected with the schools but then you have your summer programs that you work with the social service agencies and different folks out there.

BM: Precisely.

KK: Now when you say, “we do that” was that Brian Mac Farland's idea to do that or was that the museum’s idea, or what was the “why” and the rationale behind going out and actively engaging with those groups?

BM: That was Brian. And it’s [Gail, the program manager] [...] Because it's the right thing to do [...]

*Brian Mac Farland, Director of Education, Museum of Art and Design*

MAD highlights material and craftsmanship/process concurrently with the significance of the object itself, which is reminiscent of the hot shop demonstrations and gallery displays at MoG. Mac Farland and Warner both contend that emphasizing the material and giving visitors the opportunity to either view the production of art or have a hands-on experience with a material demystifies the creative process and empowers the visitor. This approach seems to work well with craft but may not be as effective with applied fine arts such as painting or drawing, as their techniques may be understandable but the sophistication and ability to execute them may be beyond the ken of many visitors. Mac Farland states “we can very often talk about an artist who looks like you as the museum

visitor” as MAD routinely collects art from ethnically diverse artists; this notion, coupled with the fact that visitors “... will have spent as much time making art and working with materials as they did standing in front of the art,” concretizes Weinstein’s earlier assertion that there is a need for museums to present art that inspires visitors and that “reflect[s] a certain history.” This approach signals a change in conventional museum practice in that MAD relies on the provenance of the artwork in its collection to make a connection with its audience rather than depend on time-limited exhibitions or events to make that connection.

When Mac Farland speaks about the approach that MoMA takes where “you never talk about the context, you never talk about the artist, you just talk about what you see in front, and there are no wrong answers,” he is specifically referencing VTS, or Visual Thinking Strategies. VTS is an approach to engaging with visual art that was developed by Phillip Yenawine, former Education Director at MoMA. Simply put, VTS asks viewers to answer three questions in regard to what they are looking at in the museum: What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? This approach is itself a change in convention, as VTS typically eschews information about content, context, history or provenance of the object, which runs counter to the traditional museum approach. Where VTS is employed education staffs are trained in its facilitation, and it is a method that has been utilized at many museums across the world; its effectiveness and relevance has also been the subject of much debate in educational and museological circles (it raises questions such as: what are viewers supposed to be learning, other than to articulate what they see? What do viewers learn about the object, or about art? How and why is a no-context approach preferable to providing accessible contextual material?). At MAD, educational programs include a hands-on experience where the context of the artwork is presented along with the object; making something, learning about the material’s history and viewing the artwork all combine to allow the visitor to make-meaning in the museum, through kinaesthetic, aural and visual learning strategies, which offers an alternative to both VTS and traditional museum approaches.

The provenance of the object can play a valuable role in educational programs, and the decision to include contextual information is embedded in the conventional practices of MAD. The curators collect objects from a variety of artists reflecting the multicultural nature of contemporary society, which encourages audience participation, thus supporting Mac Farland's assertion that MAD's approach resonates and gives "a sort of natural advantage to talk to those communities." This model is an example of the "innovative practice" Becker was referring to and the innovative strategizing Pollock calls for, yet it runs counter to the examples of the Met and the Whitney and the practices at many art museums in both the US and the UK. However, for all of the innovation in curatorial practice and change in conventions demonstrated at MAD the impetus to actively engage with diverse audiences came from Mac Farland himself "because it's the right thing to do." Like Warner and Chew in the previous section, Mac Farland works from within to change the organizational culture of his museum by promoting the necessity of programs for diverse audiences, which is based on his own values.

This section offered examples of conventions in practice that have implications for the engagement of diverse audiences. Becker suggested how conventions in practice are established and examples from the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Art and Design demonstrated how conventions are deployed when working with diverse audiences. Whether selecting which groups to engage for specific exhibitions, or participating in how information will be contributed and conveyed in exhibitions, or utilizing a museum's collection in educational programming, the practitioner's negotiation of these activities demonstrate the type of conventions that are in operation in art museums.

## **Conclusion**

The material and discursive spaces of the museum present challenges for practitioners and barriers for potential audiences. *Architecture and Ideology* suggested that museum architecture exudes an ideology that presents physical and psychological barriers to

audience engagement, and demonstrated how practitioners negotiated these imagined and material obstacles. *Organizational Culture* presented the museum as a site for the critique of traditional modes of operation in relation to wider societal issues and concerns.

*Conventions in Practice* explored how the underlying frameworks, in thought and practice, influence audience engagement, program development and organizational culture. The interview data throughout the chapter offered examples of how these ideological concerns were operationalised at specific museums, situating the practitioner within the material and discursive spaces of the museum. The interview extracts from Chew and Warner offered examples of strategies which could be employed to mobilize support, promote ownership and create new approaches to developing exhibitions and programs at their organizations. Silva and Weinstein presented cases wherein the relationship between curatorial and educational practices had the potential to impact audience engagement in relation to the material content on display. Mac Farland's account related how the fusion of educational and curatorial practices could shape audience engagement.

The interview material in this chapter offered accounts of the challenging nature of engaging with diverse audiences whilst situated within the organizational culture of the museum. This examination of how practitioners perform in the complex spaces of the museum provides a context from which to explore the convergence of policy, practice and difference in *Staying Power: The Story of Black British Identity 1950-1990s*, a case study that will unfold over the next three chapters.



*Historical Documents*, marketing image, Black Cultural Archives, 2010

## Chapter 6:

### Where Policy Meets Practice: Establishing the *Staying Power* Project, a Case Study in Partnership

“...[T]he ethical context for museums is never fixed, but is continually evolving, both as a result of the intense analysis to which museum practitioners subject their own values, and in response to the shifting values of the society which they serve and to which they are accountable.” (Besterman 2006: 432)

In Chapter 5 the shifting context of the museum was explored through examples of how individual practitioners negotiate the material and discursive barriers to an engagement with difference, which included examining the ideological underpinnings of the constitution of the architectural and organizational elements of the museum, and the relationships between the educational practitioner and the curator, the program and the object. Policy is also linked to the changing ethical context the museum resides in, particularly policies established to promote access and inclusion (see Chapter 4), which endeavour to widen participation in concert with attempts to extend the civilizing mission of the museum, which in turn aim to increase community cohesion. This policy is indicative of the shifting values that museum practitioners are accountable to, as Besterman suggests above. Yet the process of fulfilling policy objectives and funder’s directives is less straightforward in practice than it is on paper.

The previous chapter addressed broad issues confronting practitioners in art museums in order to situate the practitioner in the space(s) of the museum; this current chapter, and the following two chapters, will delve into particular issues that practitioners face within a case study located at a specific museum. While this case study pertains to a partnership, it is not the intention of this research to imply that partnerships or collaborative efforts are the only means to engage with difference or to achieve audience development goals. However, the examination of a partnership established under the influence of policy will reveal the contrast between stated intentions and observed practices in a project encompassing the topics of difference and the black subject, cultural policy and politics,

art objects and artistic production, and individual and organizational practice. Partnerships by their very nature are transgressions in practice, as they require organizations to engage in an ongoing cycle of confrontation and consensus which affects their established operating procedures. Examining a partnership in detail will provide insight into patterns of behaviour that shape interactions between individual practitioners engaged with difference, which in turn can shape the content and context of programs offered to the public. This chapter explores how the initial development of a partnership may have long-term effects on both the organizations and the audiences the partners propose to serve.

*Staying Power: The Story of Black British Identity 1950-1990s* is a five-year (2008-2013) project concerning object acquisition (collection) and program provision for diverse audiences, specifically black audiences. The project is being developed through a partnership between the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), and is funded in large part by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Five strands of policy converge in the *Staying Power* project, and those policy strands are derived from contemporary liberal-left politics which aim to influence how ethnic minority audiences are represented within and gain access to the arts and culture. This case raises issues of sustainability and equity which have implications for organizations and audiences. The V&A/BCA partnership provides an example of the connection between funding, collecting and programming in concurrence with an initiative to serve a specific ethnic minority audience – bringing policy, practice and difference together, exemplifying the shift from civilization to participation, thus addressing the overarching themes and questions in this research.

This chapter will describe the strands of policy and funding which converged to bring *Staying Power* to fruition, revealing the influence of policy on practice. An introduction to the partner organizations and their geographic locations will be followed by a review of the policy and previous projects which informed the development of *Staying Power*, the resource issues arising during the project, and a description of the process of establishing the partnership. The practical consequences, including issues which challenge the partnership and have implications for audience development, as well as an account of the

influence of policy on organizational and operational concerns, shall evolve throughout the chapter. Describing the initial stages of partnership development will provide a framework and context for the following two chapters, which will focus on theoretical and practical issues in *Staying Power*.

When organizations of differing size and resource address issues of difference, culture and identity, both within their collections and across their audiences, what does their partnership 'look like?' While partners negotiate within the confines of public policy and funding mandates, how are the partnership and the proposed program affected? Tensions arise between organizations in partnership, especially when funding is involved, but the implications and effects of those tensions are rarely openly examined. This case study lays these tensions on the table for scrutiny, offering insight into the lived-experience of program development.

## **The Partners**

### ***The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)***

The Victoria and Albert Museum, or V&A, was founded in 1857 as the South Kensington Museum, in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, in West London. Initially the V&A was part of a complex of institutions that were established, in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851, in order to provide object-based learning, in the fields of manufacturing, engineering, science and the arts. Much of this practical higher education was located outside of the university, although the University of London was a part of the initial complex and the Royal College of Music and Imperial College (of science and engineering) are still located within the original site of the complex. The V&A, under the initial direction of Henry Cole, was developed primarily as an educational institution, with the acquisition and collection of objects being a supporting function of its educational provision (Robertson, 2004: 3). Over time the V&A grew into the modern conception of a museum (see chapters 4 and 5) as successive directors shifted its emphasis from

education to acquisition, collection and display; however, the initial educational emphasis continues to be a primary concern for the museum. Today the V&A is considered to be the world's leading museum of art and design, with a collection of over 4.5 million objects, a staff of roughly 800 people and an operations budget of £87 million (personal communication with V&A staff; V&A, 2008: 2).

South Kensington, the area where the V&A is located, was comprised largely of agricultural estates prior to the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Commissioners for the Great Exhibition of 1851, led by Prince Albert, bought land in the area with surplus funds from the Exhibition, which were supplemented by Parliament, for the subsequent development of institutions to further the aims of the Exhibition (Shepard, 1975: 43). In the mid-nineteenth century South Kensington was a considerable distance from the centre of London; with the development of the institutions in the complex and the arrival of the Underground in 1868, the area not only began to grow but became a desirable residential and commercial area. The main road in the area continues to be named Exhibition Road, and the neighbourhood surrounding the V&A continues to be one of the more desirable areas of London containing some of the most expensive real estate in the world. The French Institute, the French Consulate and the Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle are all near the V&A and attest to the French presence in the area. Hyde Park, the central green space in London, and Harrods, the most exclusive department store in the UK, are also within walking distance from the V&A, giving an indication of the upper-class roots and middle-class aspirations of South Kensington.

### ***The Black Cultural Archives (BCA)***

Brixton is a neighbourhood in the South London Borough of Lambeth (and this brief historical account was derived from information gathered from the Lambeth Archives, the Brixton Society and Urban 75, which are non-profit organizations promoting the historic and contemporary significance of the area). Brixton was a mainly agricultural area until the industrial revolution, the construction of the Vauxhall Bridge and the development of the railways linked Brixton with central London. In 1880 Brixton's

Electric Avenue became the first commercial street to be lit by electricity (Eddy Grant's song of the same name came along about a century later to celebrate the ongoing vibrancy of the area), and many grand houses were built for the burgeoning middle classes along the main routes to Brixton. Over the next two generations there was a shift from middle class to working class majority in the area, with many of the houses being converted into flats and rooming houses. By the 1920s Brixton was a thriving area full of markets, pubs and cinemas, with Morley's department store (established in the 1880s and still in operation today) contributing to the area's reputation as being one of the best shopping areas in London. The area was severely bombed in the Second World War, which resulted in a housing shortage and the subsequent decline of the remaining housing stock.

In the 1940s and 1950s many West Indians immigrated to the UK as a result of the convergence of the British Nationality Act of 1948 (granting British citizenship to people from the colonized countries of the commonwealth) and a labour shortage. Many settled in the Brixton area as the limited housing that was available was affordable (ostensibly because it was deemed 'not suitable or acceptable' for white habitation). Although housing was difficult to obtain, as landlords were in the practice of having a policy of 'no dogs, no Irish, no coloureds,' many West Indian immigrants moved into the Brixton area and over time it grew to be considered the capital of the black or British African-Caribbean community, much as Harlem, New York holds that place for the African-American community of the United States.

In 1981, Brixton was the site of race riots that were the result of the convergence of poor social and economic circumstances for black people (high unemployment, poor/limited housing conditions, high crime rates) combined with an overuse of the Sus Law (which permitted police officers to stop and search people based on *suspicion* of involvement in crime, and was used disproportionately on blacks). During the riots many police and members of the public were injured, buildings and cars were burned and a number of people were arrested. Following the riots the Scarman Report (1982) was commissioned and it found that the police had abused their authority (the later Macpherson Report of 1999 found that recommendations of the Scarman report had not been implemented and

that the Metropolitan Police of London was an institutionally racist organization). As a positive response to the riots and their aftermath, the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) was founded in 1981 as a grassroots community-based and volunteer-driven organization with an aim to foster and promote education about the cultural identity and history of the African and African-Caribbean people in Britain.

The BCA's aims were achieved through providing access to a community library (that was comprised of volumes donated by local individuals, which could be read on site) and through offering exhibitions and talks about issues relevant to the black community. Since 2000 the BCA has been steadily evolving into a professional organization, with paid staff and a Board of Trustees, and it aspires to become the leading national institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of black people in the UK. Its collection includes rare documents (such as slave indentures and original manuscripts), memorabilia, written and recorded oral histories, photographs, and grey literature (independently published material). The BCA aims to "lead the heritage and cultural sectors and the general public towards a greater understanding and enjoyment of Black heritage" (BCA mission statement), and it views dialog and development of joint programming as essential to achieving its mission.

The BCA operated in a storefront location on Coldharbour Lane in Brixton, South London for its first twenty years and is currently conducting a capital campaign to develop its own building, The Black Heritage Centre (see Chapter 5), which is projected to open in 2012. The BCA has six staff, an operating budget of £45,000 (which will increase to £500,000 post opening of the new centre) plus an additional £85,000 in restricted funds for specific projects, and has a collection of 10,000 objects (350 artefacts, 8,400 archival items, 1,250 library volumes), with acquisition ongoing as part of its expansion and capital project.

### *Compare and Contrast*

The vast differences between the V&A and the BCA can be demonstrated when one compares and contrasts the quantifiable assets of the two partner organizations: 800 staff

to 6 staff; an £87 million budget as opposed to an (eventual) half million pound budget; 4.5 million objects compared to 10,000 objects (and counting). The V&A was established and expanded through imperial connections; the BCA was established and organized as a grassroots response to civil unrest linked to racism. The V&A is located in a middle- to upper-class neighbourhood, the BCA in a working- to middle-class area. These differences in size, scope and constitution indicate factors that contribute to an imbalance of power between the organizations, arguably pointing towards an unequal partnership – the interrogation of which I will explore throughout the balance of this research.

### **Policy's Influence on Organizational Aspects of the Partnership**

In the United Kingdom black and minority ethnic communities live the particular historical legacy of Empire and slavery. Since the late 1940s there has been ongoing struggle and debate around racial equality for all UK citizens, placing the current case within the context of deep and historically rooted imbalances in access to resources, power and influence. In recognizing this cultural framework and in noting that there was a low percentage of black audiences attending the museum, the V&A responded by developing exhibitions and programs which aimed to appeal directly to black audiences, such as *Black British Style*, *Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave Trading on Art and Design*, and the Black Heritage Programme which takes place during Black History Month and offers regular programming throughout the year. Additionally, the V&A began a collegial relationship with the BCA, intending to develop collaborative efforts which would potentially enrich the program content offered, and assist in the expansion of audiences served, at both institutions.

### ***Application of Specific Policy in the Staying Power Case Study***

According to the V&A's strategic plan for 2005-2010 the organization has a priority "to provide access to collections and services for diverse audiences, now and in the future" (V&A, 2004: 8). This may stem in part from the V&A's original mission to serve a broad

public through educational endeavours, and it is in accordance with the rethinking and restructuring of museums that has been taking place sector wide, as was noted in Chapters 1, 3 and 5. Yet it is mainly in response to receiving funding and direction from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), particularly in accordance with DCMS's PSA 3 (Public Service Agreement in support of the DCMS Strategic Objective on Communities) agenda which endeavours to promote "the increase [in] the take-up of cultural and sporting opportunities by people aged 16 and above from priority groups" (DCMS, 2006), with blacks and ethnic minorities being recognized as priority groups. These two agendas, mentioned in the V&A's Report on Cultural Diversity 2007 (V&A, 2007 a: 1), were addressed in part through creation of the Diversity Strategy Unit (DSU), in 2003, within the Learning and Interpretation Department (Education) at the V&A. The DSU is a cross-departmental initiative which promotes embedding diversity, from the outset, as a principal component of all projects and programs developed throughout the museum. Cultural diversity, as one component of the unit's wider remit (which also encompasses gender, ability, religious and socio-economic diversity), is an area of focus that the V&A has spent considerable resource and effort to address over the past few years, and its engagement with black audiences is of relevance in this case.

As previously mentioned, the V&A has a collection of 4.5 million objects, which is divided into fifteen subject areas, designated by material type, discipline or time period. Of interest for this current case is the photography collection; the V&A was the first museum to collect photographs as a fine art form and its collection contains over 500,000 images/objects. Within this half million images there are but a handful created by photographers of African and African-Caribbean descent (Ingrid Pollard, Maud Saulter, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Faisal Abdu'allah, and Joy Gregory), in addition to a small number of prints which depict content relating to African subjects which were taken by white photographers (such as Henri Cartier-Bresson). This seeming gap in the collection contributed to the expansion of the V&A's relationship with the BCA, which was subsequently formalized into a partnership through the development of *Staying Power: The Story of Black British Identity 1950-1990s*, which was funded in large part by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which is a non-departmental public body developed by Parliament which distributes grants to local, regional and national heritage projects.

The V&A submitted the *Staying Power* application to the HLF in October of 2007 and was granted an award in May of 2008 under the HLF's *Collecting Cultures* grant giving program. Through *Collecting Cultures* the HLF intended to “fund programmes of strategic acquisition that will develop existing museum and gallery collections for public use, and enhance the professional knowledge and skills of people working in museums and galleries” (HLF, 2009). Over half of the requested HLF funding, £100,000, would go towards “acquiring objects that directly reflect the history and heritage of the UK’s African and African Caribbean communities” (V&A, 2007 b). This amount is ten times the annual acquisitions budget for the entire Word and Image Department (of which Photography is a part) and the intention was to purchase 25 to 35 objects (estimated by calculating the average cost of a professional quality original print by an established artist, then dividing the total acquisition fund by that average), potentially expanding the V&A’s collection of black photography seven fold. In the broad scope of the V&A’s collecting and partnership projects *Staying Power* is quite significant in terms of the resources allocated to expanding and diversifying its holdings, and in terms of the amount of programming to be offered throughout the project, which will support meeting the aims of its strategic plan to diversify its audience.

Prior to developing *Staying Power* the scarcity of both black visitors and objects of African and African-Caribbean origin were noted and addressed by the DSU during the *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project*, which was a three year project (2005-2008), also funded by the HLF, whose aims and objectives included: “to uncover and explore the hidden histories of the V&A’s collection in relation to the African Diaspora and contemporary cultures and faiths; develop new collections which reflect London’s diverse communities; encourage new, culturally diverse audiences to access the V&A; and to contribute to social cohesion” (V&A, 2010: 3). The partnership with the BCA was mentioned in the V&A Report on Cultural Diversity 2007 as contributing “to the development of the *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership* programme, a central aim of which is to empower and strengthen capacity of both the black and Asian cultural sector and the V&A, through employment, training and mentoring programmes and the development of mutually beneficial partnerships” (V&A, 2007 a: 6); the submission of the

*Staying Power* grant application and the formalization of the partnership with the BCA were direct outputs of this earlier project. However, “empower,” “strengthen capacity” and “mutually beneficial” are subjective terms, especially in relation to a developing partnership between two organizations of differing size, resource and mission. To move beyond rhetoric and into the fruition of the stated intentions it is necessary for practitioners to toil through the actual work of partnership building, which is a tall order that is not easily filled.

### ***Policy and its Effect on Individual Practitioners***

The *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project* was the precursor to *Staying Power* and as such it provided the foundation for the current partnership and informed how the V&A engages with difference. The emphasis on capacity building has continued into *Staying Power*, as is indicated in the aims of the original proposal to “enhance the professional knowledge and skills of people working in museums and galleries.” The V&A’s cultural diversity report indicated that through its *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project* the capacities of the organizations it partnered with were to be developed, yet how was this demonstrated and how sustainable was this for the V&A? The *Capacity Building* project allowed the V&A to employ three Black British staff who were charged with developing relationships with black organizations (such as the BCA), community groups and audiences during the three year period of the grant, but the positions were supported through time-bound funding. At the close of the grant period the V&A was unable to sustain the staff positions through its general operating budget. Of the three black British staff one person was retained on a part-time basis in the Learning and Interpretation department and another was contracted to occasionally support aspects of the *Staying Power* project, but due to the current economic climate, more so than lack of desire to retain the individuals and the positions they filled, the other positions were eliminated.

It is significant that any staff were retained, particularly since there was no stipulation in the original grant from the HLF to incorporate any of the positions into the organizational structure of the V&A, and the V&A had not independently set out to

retain any project staff from the outset. It could be argued that the capacity of the organization was increased overall (through the addition of the permanent part-time position), and conversely it could be claimed that capacity was significantly diminished with the loss of key staff whose time was dedicated to enhancing the diversity and audience development work of the V&A. A re-evaluation of the organizational structure, based on existing resources in the operational budget, was necessary to ensure fiscal responsibility, yet the human resources that the staff brought to the organization, in terms of relationships built and maintained, culturally specific knowledge, technical skill and expertise, also had value for the museum. Weighing the financial and human resource costs of doing diversity work is a conundrum for many organizations, which is often compounded by time-limited grants – when positions and staff are lost then programs for and relationships with ethnic minority audiences are often reduced, which can be considered to have a negative impact on audiences served, which runs counter to the initial aims and objectives set out in policy by funders. Short-term gains are often achieved and offered up as evidence of success (increased attendance, number of programs delivered – gains are almost always described in quantitative, positivist terms), which allows funders to maintain that their objectives were met and allows museums to return to their pre-program state of operations.

In my professional experience two-year funding cycles were the norm for federal, state or local bodies in the US, and during my research this appeared to be the case for national and local funders in the UK as well, with both the US and the UK seemingly interested in supporting start-ups or new projects as opposed to providing continued operating or revenue funding for existing programs and projects. Time-limited funding sets up a process whereby museums take two steps forward, and one step back – going forward they conduct programs, expand audiences and increase the knowledge and capacity of their organization, then when the project ends they go back to their previous level of staffing. Whilst measures may be taken to incorporate lessons learned into the ongoing practice of the remaining staff, a reduction in service results which may affect relationships established during the program. This is the nature of time-limited projects, and it advances the impression that museums employ tokenistic efforts to serve diverse audiences (as in the Whitney example in the previous chapter)—which can lead to

questioning why the project was conducted in the first place, was it for the museum or for the audience? Is engaging with difference about creating change in the museum, operationally and/or organizationally, or is it about serving audiences? Can it be about both, and if so how are those different objectives balanced? These questions and their various answers have an effect on participation in different ways; however, the point is that when serving diverse audiences is reduced to an add-on, and is not fully incorporated into the ongoing program of the museum, issues of organizational change remain unaddressed. This is not unusual, as it takes investing in long-term strategic planning to ensure that an organization has the resources to continuously engage in diversity work in a meaningful way. The vision and impetus to do so must come from the top of the organization (as was the case for both Chew and Warner in Chapter 5) rather than from the middle, which is where most diversity initiatives, including this current case, arise.

The V&A, despite its vast resources, is not immune to these challenges and it could claim that the Diversity Strategy Unit (DSU) does provide a long-term, meaningful intervention for engaging with diversity and diverse audiences. However, from the audience perspective it may seem that the V&A made an effort at increased engagement for a while, then it stopped, as the audience only sees the outputs (programs, exhibitions, etc.) of diversity work and the work of the DSU is applied to ongoing interdepartmental projects, such as *Staying Power*, that do not necessarily have a consistent public profile. As for increasing the capacity of its partner organizations during the *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project* there remains to be seen any quantitative evidence to support this, although it could be inferred that developing the *Staying Power* project with the BCA amounts to qualitative evidence to support the V&A's claims of building capacity in at least one of its partners.

Changes in individual staff and overall staffing levels point towards issues of sustainability with community partners and audiences. The V&A's relationship with the BCA was cultivated by an individual in a time sensitive post; when that person left the point of contact was lost, along with first-hand knowledge of the conception of the partnership. Concurrently, the BCA staff responsible for developing the partnership with the V&A resigned, presenting a similar loss of first-hand knowledge at the BCA. Records were

kept to inform subsequent staff at both institutions about the pending application for *Staying Power*, new points of contact were established and communication remained open between the organizations. The partnership continued with different individuals representing both organizations; staffing changes did not diminish the organizations' commitment to the partnership or to their commensurate responsibilities for *Staying Power*, thus sustainability was ensured. However, there was an impact on resource allocation at both organizations, which calls the capacity building of the partners into question.

At the time of staff transition the V&A had a staff of roughly 800, approximately 550 of which were full time and the remainder either part time or contracted, and the BCA had a staff of six – three full time permanent staff and three contracted full time staff. These numbers indicate the vast difference in the size and scale of the organizations in the partnership. The V&A have a large infrastructure and vast resources in terms of objects, intellectual property and budget; and while its budget may seem large, at over £87 million in the income for continuing operations budget for 2007-2008 (V&A, 2008:2), there is little 'fat' in the budget. The BCA has a very small infrastructure and an extremely limited budget (its executive director is seconded from Lambeth Council, two staff positions are supported through contributed income from Lambeth Council, and three staff positions are supported through time-limited grants from the HLF).

For *Staying Power* the V&A allocates four staff to the project: the Director of the Collections Office, who assists the Director of Collections, was given the task of managing the *Staying Power* project (an allocation of 5% of her time), as it comes under the auspices of Collections, being a project of the Word and Image department. The head of the Diversity Strategy Unit, a Curator of Photography and the African and Caribbean Audience Development Officer are the other V&A staff on the project; the project was added to their existing workloads, and while a specific percentage of their time was not disclosed/allocated it has not been voiced as a hardship for them to participate in the project. To provide the program components of the project the V&A will develop two work placements and/or interns who will work between the V&A and BCA on the oral history project and the exhibition. They will be on the V&A payroll and be contracted by

the V&A, yet a portion of their activity will be directed and supervised by the BCA staff, and they will conduct a portion of their duties from the BCA and use a portion of BCA resources during their placement.

This will place a strain on BCA resources, but it is expected as an in-kind contribution towards the partnership. At the BCA, the Program Manager was the initial point of contact with the V&A, contributed to developing the HLF proposal and was intended to staff the project. However, when the post holder resigned the position was not refilled due to limited resources, which led to a change in the organizational structure at the BCA; the Operations Manager added the *Staying Power* project to her existing workload, which proved to be burdensome in some regards, as she was unable to drop any existing duties. This necessitated adding a volunteer Trustee board member (me) to the Project Team to share the responsibility for developing the partnership.

### ***The Consequences of “Working on a Budget of Love”***

Noting that staffs of both organizations have added this project to their workloads brings up an interesting point related to an ethos which operates within many non-profit and cultural organizations, which is “working on a budget of love” (which is a colloquialism that I do not know the origin of). This ethos revolves around the fact that many if not most employees at non-profits work beyond their job description in terms of tasks and time, for little or no remuneration, and that is the accepted norm. The opportunity to displace or redistribute existing work is not always (ever?) possible, due to limited human resources, which is often a reflection of limited financial resources. Even when there are unpaid staff in the form of interns and volunteers it is difficult to get all of the tasks completed, especially within a traditional 35 or 40 hour work week (not to mention the time and resources involved with training and managing unpaid staff). Working on “a budget of love” appears to be, based on my professional experience and as observed throughout this current research, a tacit condition within non-profits of all sizes, and thoughts on the problems inherent in operating in this manner were offered during an interview with Kelly Foster, the Operations Manager of the BCA, who commented:

“I get incredibly frustrated at heritage funders’ reluctance or lack of acknowledgement of the fact that a lot of small heritage organizations run on a budget of love, and they want to see these small heritage organizations flourish, and they want to see them really contribute to the sector, but you know, things that run on a budget of love, they burn out. And these people who are doing great work can’t be doing great works forever because they need to pay the rent and buy food. But there is still a reluctance to really invest in the people, to invest in revenue funding, to actually invest in the organizations rather than invest in the projects. And that’s just at all small community voluntary heritage organizations across the board, not just black BME [Black Minority Ethnic]. I don’t ever see that being addressed in any of the policy documents that I see, really. You can’t have financial sustainability unless the funders are able to acknowledge the role that revenue [unrestricted funds], or the lack of revenue funding plays in the stability of a lot of community organizations.”

Smaller organizations such as the BCA feel the strain more than larger ones like the V&A, if only because almost every resource they have is stretched (office space, technical equipment, storage space, consumable materials, etc.), not only staff time. Funders such as the HLF do not acknowledge, or perhaps understand, the reality of doing business in a small heritage organization – so they continue to fund programs and projects, rather than offer a commensurate amount of funding for unrestricted operating costs (perhaps because it’s a lot sexier to have their logo on an exhibition panel or a program flyer than it is to be on the heating or electric bill, lest we forget about the marketing aspects of supporting the ‘public good’). In this current project capacity is stretched at both organizations in terms of human resources, whilst intellectual capacity has increased due to the partnership. Increasing the capacity of partner organizations was one of the intentions of the HLF in both the *Capacity Building* and *Staying Power* projects, yet the term is problematic in that it is never fully defined, particularly in terms of perceived or actual quantified or qualified outcomes. Sharing knowledge and understating promotes the intellectual capacity of each organization, but stretching staff up to or beyond their limits has diminished the operational capacity at both – which arguably diminishes their “ability

to fulfil their missions in an effective manner” (DeVita and Fleming, 2001: 6), which is the definition of capacity building.

The V&A will be able to quantifiably demonstrate expanded capacity through the number of tangible objects purchased and public programs offered, which will include workshops and courses for various publics. But how will the qualitative pieces of capacity building, which are inherent to working in partnership, be accounted for? How will the growth and change of the practitioners involved in the project be measured, and the impact of the individuals on their organizations? How will success be measured and demonstrated, beyond an accounting of meetings scheduled and attended, and tangible evidence of tasks completed through programs delivered and objects in hand? Answers to these questions will develop over time, or not, as the partnership evolves.

### ***Questioning the Authenticity of the Partnership: Resource Disparity between the Partners***

In examining the human resource issues during the partnership certain questions in regard to the terms “strengthening capacity” and “mutually beneficial” arise. Can there be a true partnership when operational and financial resources between organizations are unequal? In the instance of *Staying Power* all of the financial resources were allocated to one partner, which was the larger organization in the partnership, as the V&A submitted the proposal to the HLF in the “sole applicant” category. Yet in order to qualify to receive the HLF funds the V&A had to demonstrate that the objectives of creating a collection and program about black British identity would be met through an engagement with experts from the black community. It was strongly suggested (by the HLF) that the V&A partner with an organization with expertise in black British identity in order to achieve those aims, hence the partnership with the BCA, which was arguably a contributing factor to successfully securing the grant. This can be seen as beneficial to both organizations, as Kelly Foster offers:

“The V&A wouldn’t have gotten the funding to do the project without our partnership, and also in a certain way the partnership with the V&A validates

what the BCA is doing, or is trying to do, but then, also, there is the issue [that] it's an important recognition as to what the BCA is trying to do and what the BCA's ambition is and what the BCA's USP [Unique Selling Point] is. [It's] Recognition from the V&A but also [recognition] from the funding body, the policy makers that required the partnership.”

It could be argued that the V&A has the subject expertise to identify artists and objects that are worthy of inclusion in its collection based solely on its knowledge of the fine arts canon. Therefore the V&A could fulfil the object acquisition remit of the project without the support of another organization. Yet through the *Collecting Cultures* grant program the HLF endeavours to fund “strategic acquisitions” “for public use, and [to] enhance the professional knowledge and skills of people working in museums and galleries” – which implies both that diversifying collections will diversify audiences, and that knowledge and skills in the staff of both partner organizations will be enhanced along with the expansion of the collection.

These implications are problematic on two scores: firstly, there is an inbuilt assumption that exhibiting material that reflects specific audiences will expand attendance by those audiences, as was touched upon in the previous chapter, and which was demonstrated anecdotally if not scientifically by the attendance figures for *Black British Style* and *Uncomfortable Truths* which noted a marked increase in the number of ethnic minority visitors to the V&A. Yet serving black audiences primarily through content presumed to be representational of their culture or experience smacks of tokenism. By expanding their collection of black British objects the V&A is relieved of having to contextualize the balance of its collection for a broader audience. Audience engagement then becomes contingent upon specific content rather than upon building a relationship to the organization's general collection and program, which could undermine sustainable audience development if efforts were solely based upon the objects collected, particularly when those objects are not on permanent display. This is reminiscent of the difficulties described at the Whitney in Chapter 5.

Secondly, that through an engagement with experts in the cultural background of the photographers and the subjects depicted, knowledge and skills will be enhanced for the staff of both organizations. It is possible that knowledge could flow in both directions throughout the partnership – the BCA intends to share cultural expertise and the V&A intends to share collecting and archival preservation techniques, thus expanding the capacity and competencies at both organizations. However, it could also be argued that the BCA is supporting the V&A to achieve its goals of enhancing its collection and building its audience, and that capacity building is heavily weighted on the side of the V&A, thus undermining the “mutually beneficial” intentions of the partnership, especially in light of the fact that BCA staff are professionally trained archivists with experience in collections and acquisitions.

The relative sizes of the operational and financial resources of the two organizations present further problems. The V&A is large enough to subsume the tasks inherent in the *Staying Power* project by stretching existing resources without diminishing its overall capacity. The resources of the BCA were so limited from the outset that participation in *Staying Power* diminished its ability to meet some of its other organizational responsibilities. Many factors contributed to this: the BCA did not receive funds to fully or partially support a staff position to manage its portion of the partnership; the BCA was clear about its subject expertise but had not been forthright about the limitations of its organizational capacity, which limited both organization’s abilities to create realistic expectations; the BCA could be viewed as trying to ‘punch above its weight’ through participation in *Staying Power*, arguably in order to demonstrate its strength to the HLF in hopes that the partnership with the V&A may have a positive influence on its own funding and monitoring projects with the HLF (on its capital project). By contributing time, training and expertise to the V&A the BCA can bolster its reputation and profile in the heritage sector; in demonstrating its ability to be a good partner the BCA may prove it is worthy of continued HLF support, and support from the HLF is critical for its ongoing operation. Staffs at both organizations are willing and focused on creating a sustainable partnership based on equity and shared values, but differing levels of resources present barriers to certain types of capacity building. If a partnership is unequal from the start (as the size, scale and scope of the organizations were not the same from the outset, and the

resources apportioned throughout the project were disparate) can it ever truly be equitable (with each partner fairly valued in the process)?

### **Policy's Influence on Organizational Aspects of the Partnership**

In the case of the *Staying Power* project, five strands of policy merged during its development— the internal organizational policies of the V&A's strategic plan for 2005-2010 and the BCA's mission, and the external policies of the DCMS's PSA 3, the HLF *Collecting Cultures* grant giving program and the HLF funded *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project* at the V&A— in addition to institutional policy at the V&A which led to the initial creation of the Diversity Strategy Unit. Each of these strands of policy stress the necessity to serve diverse audiences and each led to the development of the V&A/BCA partnership. Beyond a general statement of policy to serve diverse audiences there must be practicable action to do so. The funds offered by the HLF allowed for the project to take place and if they were not available it is possible, even likely, that the project would not exist and the commensurate audiences might not be served. The funding makes the project possible and the policy informs the development of the program. Delving into the initial set-up of the partnership and examining the practicalities of establishing a working relationship between the two organizations may shed light on the influence of policy on practice.

### ***Establishing the Structure and Ethos of the Partnership***

The first full partnership meeting was held on May 8, 2009 and was presented in the form of a workshop to facilitate an in-depth discussion about how the partnership would operate and how it would ideally progress. Items discussed were roles of the individuals in the partnership (what their current positions were and what they were responsible for at their organization), roles and responsibilities (of the organizations), values, challenges, effective communication and equity. Each item will be expanded upon below (with each item italicized prior to its description/analysis), indicating the intentions of the ethos to

be developed within the partnership and touching upon the challenges involved in actualizing the stated objectives. The partner organization staffs involved with the development and facilitation of the project will henceforth be referred to as the Project Team; specialists contributing guidance and support for the project will be referred to as the Advisory Panel (the role of which will be examined in Chapter 7).

*Roles of the individuals on the Project Team* - Gender, ethnicity and professional roles are important factors to note during this case, as they inform the situated knowledge of each individual on the Project Team and contribute to the group dynamic. The V&A has four staff on the Project Team: Teresa Kirk, Director of the Collections Office, is the manager/administrator of the project and is in charge of scheduling, facilitating and minuting the meetings, reporting back to the Director of Collections, liaising with the Advisory Panel and minuting their meetings. She expressed at the outset that she has limited time and resources to dedicate to the project, but that she was very interested in the subject matter. She is white British, northern, from Yorkshire. Marta Weiss, Curator of Photography (one of four photography curators in the Word and Image Department), is responsible for the subject expertise (type, size, style and age of prints, type of paper, quality of the print, etc.) during the collecting process. She has limited experience with black British history or artists but is keen to learn more and contribute to the project. She is white American, from New York, and she will take maternity leave and be away from the project for approximately one year commencing in October of 2009; Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photography, will step in during her absence. He is a white Briton. Eithne Nightingale, Head of the Diversity Strategy Unit, is responsible for integrating aspects of the project into the program and operations of the V&A. She has many years of experience working with ethnic minority populations while with the Hackney Council and she has been at the V&A for twelve years. She is white Irish, second generation raised in Britain. Janet Browne, Audience Development Officer (African Caribbean Community), is situated in the Learning and Interpretation Department and is responsible for developing the photography workshops and educational components of the project. She is black British of Antiguan descent.

The BCA has two representatives on the Project Team: Kelly Foster, Operations Manager, is responsible for delivering the oral history program and disseminating information about the project to the BCA staff. She is black British of Jamaican decent. I am the other BCA representative; I am a Trustee on the BCA board and am responsible for contributing to the development of the project, feeding information back to the BCA board and participating in the Advisory Panel (whilst concurrently gathering information for this research). As was mentioned in chapter 2, I am American of mixed heritage, African-American and white. It is of interest to note that all of the Project Team is female; this may be a contributing factor to the atypical approach to establishing the ethos of this working partnership.

The individuals listed above took part in the initial partnership workshop, and after four months Martin Barnes stepped onto the Project Team to replace Marta during her maternity cover. This provided a shift in the dynamic of the group, as Martin is male, is the Senior Curator of Photographs in the Word and Image department (meaning: he has a position of authority in the V&A hierarchy, at least as compared to the other team members), and he did not have the opportunity to take part in the initial partnership workshop – three factors which contributed to a change in the team. As he did not participate in the initial workshop he was unable to contribute to laying the foundation for the partnership; he may have been verbally informed of how the framework developed and/or taken the opportunity to read the minutes from the meeting, but I believe he missed out on opportunities to absorb what the project was about, which was unfortunate given his professional background as a curator and the difficulties this can present in terms of organizational change (see Chapter 5). Martin brought the traditional museum paradigm to the process through his position as Senior Curator – as arguably anyone in his position could have done, given the situated knowledge and years of conventions in practice that contributed to the constitution of his position. His participation in *Staying Power* had a significant impact on how the project progressed; specific instances of how this affected the team shall be offered in subsequent sections and will be expanded upon in Chapter 8.

*Roles and responsibilities* for both organizations were outlined – it was established that the V&A would lead on acquisitions and collecting, with consultation from the BCA and the Advisory Panel, and have primary responsibility for management of the budget and production of HLF progress reports; the BCA would lead on the oral history programme to be developed in conjunction with the objects collected. The project is funded for five years, with the collecting to take place during the first two years, the oral history and photography programming to commence after object acquisition, and an exhibition to be mounted at the BCA, in the new Black Heritage Centre, towards the end of the grant period in 2013. It was agreed that the BCA would act as a critical friend to the V&A on the ‘definition’ of black British identity and advise on the best approach for the project to take in terms of engaging various stakeholders. It was established that ideas and proposals for program activities would be submitted to the Project Team for discussion and approval, and that decisions must be ‘signed off’ by both the BCA and V&A.

After the framework was established there was much discussion about the process of collection – how would pieces be acquired (direct purchase from artists, through galleries, through donations)? Should the group be consulted about each piece, should they consider series or individual works, which artists should be pursued? It was decided that the Project Team would establish themes that reflect black British identity, in consultation the Advisory Panel, and that an initial list of artists, to be researched by Marta with input from the Project Team, would be drafted and disseminated to the group. It may go without saying that this description indicates that a process that is typically done by an individual curator becomes decidedly more cumbersome when it is conducted by a group. There is much gathering of input, consensus building and ‘voting’ on what objects should be collected and what type of programs should be offered, and it takes much longer than the usual procedure, hence the five year time scale for the project.

This approach to acquiring photography is potentially a significant departure from the typical collections practice in the Word and Image department of the V&A. Generally, when a curator wants to propose an item for purchase they need to identify the object, write a justification as to why it should be assessed into the collection, present the justification along with a funding proposal to the Curators of Photography and to the

Director of the Word and Image Department, and wait for the approval of the purchase. A photography curator may have an ongoing ‘wish list’ of items to choose from, derived from specialist knowledge of photographers, from attending portfolio reviews and exhibitions, knowing what is available in the marketplace or based on gaps in the current collection. The Word and Image Department has an annual acquisitions budget of £10,000, with access to a central fund of £150,000 for supplemental purchases (but that is a competitive fund divided amongst the 30 departments in the museum). It was made clear to the group that the standard process for purchasing would be in place for the project (object identification, justification, presentation to Photography Department, approval/disproval) and that the items proposed for purchase would be put forward from the curator on the Project Team – the Project Team could suggest items for purchase but it would have no definitive decision-making power over the selection and purchase. For the curator on the *Staying Power* project, incorporating the group’s input could potentially present a challenge to her professional opinion and expertise. A curator by definition is an expert in their specialism; to collaborate on a core function of her job could potentially be an aggravating and humbling experience. Marta, the curator on this project, has been forthright about her limited knowledge of the cultural aspects of the program and has voiced a willingness to learn and contribute fully to the process, as did Martin when he joined the team. Moving from espoused intent to actual practice was not so straightforward, however, as will be addressed in the following chapters.

The BCA has conducted oral history projects with community partners in the past, and the BCA would take the lead in the oral history collection for the project. During the *Ghana Jubilee Season* in 2007 the BCA conducted group and individual remembrance sessions with Ghanaian elders as part of an oral history project offered in partnership with the Royal Geographic Society and the Ghana High Commission. In 2009 it conducted *The Heart of the Race: Oral Histories of the Black Women’s Movement*, which was inspired by the book *The Heart of the Race* by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe (1985), which set out to collect testimony from women involved with the OWAAD (Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent) civil rights group. This project was conducted in conjunction with members of the Remembering Olive Collective and it received the Volunteering of the Year Project Award from the National

Council on Archives in 2010. Oral histories are valuable social and cultural records, and the BCA is committed to collecting and preserving the testimony of black Britons as a part of its archive.

*Values* were discussed, as it was stated that in order to move beyond consultation into a “good partnership model” it would be vital that the group determine shared values at the outset to facilitate developing said model. It was noted that a partnership presents challenges to the way both organizations typically work, and that current structures at the V&A (such as the purchasing process mentioned previously) may present barriers to the project. To mitigate the barriers shared values were proposed for adoption and application throughout the project. To this end a list of values were drafted and discussed, which included: equality (all voices will be heard), empathy (understanding how each organization operates and how individuals work), expertise (valuing knowledge and skills of individuals), transparency, flexibility, energetic/creative/ effective communication, and the promotion of a supportive and open environment; all were considered keys to a successful partnership. Creating a shared understanding of the values underlining the process could ameliorate potential problems in the future; having a record of the values provides a reference point for future discussions. Most importantly, the discussion presented an opportunity to cultivate the ownership and buy-in of individuals on the Project Team – everyone had the opportunity to contribute, to add what they felt was important, and all agreed to abide by and hold the values set forth (but once again, some things are easier said than done in practice).

Establishing values for the Project Team was an atypical approach to building a partnership, at least as an introductory activity and in such a detailed manner, based on my professional experience. Often agreements are drafted and individuals work within the confines and spirit of the written agreement, and the agreements may or may not have been drafted by the individuals charged with executing the related activity. Having a workshop to collaboratively create the foundational principles of the organization’s and individual’s working relationship was forward thinking and feeds into the desire to create a “good partnership model” and is very much in accordance with the literature on leadership and organizational best practice (Scholtes, 1998; Senge, 1994). However,

partnerships “need regular maintenance and support on a continuing basis, if they are to survive and flourish” (Mayo, 1997: 4); it is not enough to outline principles, they must be referred to and adhered to throughout the process. The inconsistent promotion and application of the principles set forth in *Staying Power* presented problems which will be addressed in subsequent sections and chapters.

*Challenges* may arise in many forms, but the discussion centred on the different operating styles and structures of the organizations and how to negotiate them. For example, the V&A is a very large organization with 30 departments and multiple cross-departmental program groups. Information must flow to those departments and groups in a certain manner as individuals outside of the Project Team (such as the Director of Collections, the marketing team, the preparators, etc.) must be kept abreast of what is happening with the *Staying Power* project as they may have responsibilities that could be effected by the project (building the overall exhibition calendar, printing the V&A newsletter, updating the web site, etc). Keeping everyone informed takes time and effort. The BCA has a very small organizational structure and its challenge is to fit all of the tasks and responsibilities for the project into the schedule of an already overburdened staff, with the assistance and support of a BCA Trustee (me).

*Effective communication* relates to implementing the values established by the Project Team throughout the process of the project. The schedule of activity was established in conjunction with the timeline set out in the original grant proposal that outlined activities, outcomes and benchmarks for *Staying Power*. There were to be monthly Project Team meetings, with meeting agendas set in accordance with elements on the timeline, and the location of each meeting would alternate between the BCA and the V&A; additionally, there would be quarterly meetings of the Advisory Panel. Dates, times and agendas were to be agreed upon in advance in accordance with the timeline and current program activities. Critical decision-making times are clearly identified on the agenda, and decision making and brainstorming were meant to be conducted in person; email was primarily to be used for information sharing purposes only (sending documents, changing meeting dates, etc.). The Project Team would create a central file sharing point, using Google

groups or some similar tool, to be used for sharing reports, important files and budget information.

The process as stated appears straightforward: for example, alternating the meeting locations promotes equity in that it evenly distributes the onus of travel between the partners and it equally distributes the facilitation of the meetings; however, implementing the meetings presents capacity issues in regard to the scale of the partner organizations. At the V&A there are quiet rooms in which to conduct meetings with external visitors in a professional setting. At the BCA, the organization is housed in temporary accommodation in Kennington; the bulk of the BCA space is taken up with shelving for the archive, as such it is mainly an active work place with no separate meeting rooms. There are two areas with large tables set up, which are used for researching archive material and alternatively for meetings when necessary. The BCA staff sits at desks around the perimeter of the room; meetings held at the BCA are not private and there is a certain amount of noise and activity at all times. This could present problems if there were sensitive issues under discussion, such as engaging a particular artist or program contractor that may be known to the staff within earshot, or time and space could be taken away from an archive activity if the Project Team were utilizing the BCA workspace. At the V&A there is a budget for hospitality and the catering department provides tea, coffee and biscuits, much like any typical business meeting in the corporate or cultural sector. At the BCA there is no budget for hospitality, but there is a desire to be reciprocal hosts, so the staff (or I) provide and set up a hospitality service of tea, coffee and biscuits for the Project Team meetings. This is problematic in terms of cost, as it involves an out of pocket expense with no opportunity for reimbursement, and it also gives the impression that the BCA can incur the costs and support hospitality when it in fact cannot, which is putting a false face on the capacity of the organization. It may seem a small thing, but it is symptomatic of the organization, putting a veneer over its true capacity in an attempt to continually punch above its weight, whilst operating on “a budget of love.”

*Equity* was determined to mean creating equality, and the appearance thereof, throughout the partnership. Outwardly this would be demonstrated through the co-branding of

written materials with both brand identities (logos) of equal size and prominence on printed material. Internally equity would be demonstrated and fostered through: making information available to all members of the Project Team, with dissemination to others in the partner organizations as necessary; agreement of all appointments by both organizations; establishing clear reporting lines that include all members of the Project Team, contractors and volunteers. Defining equality and what it comprises in practice is one thing, but it is quite another to operate within the spirit of equality between two organizations of such differing size. Information sharing and clear lines of report establish parity of knowledge, but the overall resource allocation for the project looms over the entire project and it is here that the most obvious signs of inequality are embedded in the project. The program and related administrative costs for *Staying Power* are £123,087, the acquisitions allocation is £100,000, which result in a total project cost of £223,087; the Heritage Lottery Fund contributed £167,315 and the V&A match is £55,772 (75%: 25% match ratio). Nowhere in the budget is there any provision of funds for the BCA. In fact the V&A submitted the grant application to the HLF as a “sole applicant” rather than as “a lead organization for a joint project.” When questioned about this at the first Project Team meeting there was not a clear answer as to why this was done but a reference was made to an unidentified protocol in the application process which necessitated the V&A to apply as a sole applicant.

At a subsequent meeting the BCA were asked whether digital recording equipment purchased for a previous oral history project could be included as a portion of the V&A match funding total. I questioned this request and pointed out that, as the BCA were not receiving direct funding from the HLF, it seemed inappropriate that the BCA should contribute to or be responsible for any portion of the match funding requirement. This was countered by Martin with the response that the budget line items related to the exhibition would directly benefit the BCA as the exhibition would be displayed at the BCA. I countered with the fact that all of the exhibition line items were for hardware that would eventually be retained by the V&A and would only be used temporarily at the BCA during the exhibition, that the funds allocated to marketing the exhibition (£6,000) was more than the BCA generally allocates but was in accordance with the materials generated by the V&A (which is the cost for its in-house design and printing, and

distribution of flyers), and that ostensibly all of the items in the exhibition portion of the budget were allocated to the V&A. My remarks were not directly addressed, instead it was expressed that all staff costs at the V&A were “contributed in kind” to the project, meaning that there was not a percentage of time and salary for individuals on the Project Team charged against the project budget. This was stated with the expectation that the BCA would do the same, and it was clear that the V&A staffs thought this had been made clear from the outset. It was not, and it was not written in the grant proposal or covered at the initial Project Team meeting.

By shifting the conversation away from specific hard costs allocated in the budget to a wider conversation about contributions to the match funds, the conversation was steered towards discussion of commensurate in-kind contributions to the project by the partners, in an attempt to return to the initial emphasis of equity in the partnership and away from the disparate and unequal nature of budget allocation in the project. Expecting staff costs to be covered and contributed to a partnership by the partner organizations is not unusual per se; the BCA and the V&A have both experienced this in practice previously. The point is that there was an expectation from the V&A that a contribution to the match funding would be made by BCA; this was questioned in light of cash flow to the BCA from the grant and was countered with the V&A’s perceived contribution to the BCA from the budget (the V&A considered the exhibition line items as flowing towards the BCA, however the cash flow is virtually zero, as the exhibition and related material and marketing costs will retained by the V&A) and an inference that the BCA should contribute soft and hard costs to the project in commensurate areas if not at commensurate levels to the V&A. This could be viewed as an indication of the larger partner organization, which controls the allocation of capital for the project, exerting control and influence over the smaller organization.

This is an example of an instance when discussion of the budget touched upon sensitive aspects of the partnership, and is of particular interest in regards to Martin’s participation and in thinking about aspects of the concept of value. It has already been pointed out that the regular members of the Project Team are all female; the Senior Curator of Photography is male, and when he assumes a place on the Project Team when the regular

(female) team member cannot attend it disrupts the relationships within the team in a few significant ways. His embodiment of museum conventions and traditions through his professional position, coupled with his gender and situated knowledge, allow him to assume a position of authority over the Project Team, which the team tolerates as the team is also working within established conventions and traditions. He enacts the position of 'leader' on a team that has no designated leader per se, which at times proved to be problematic, as, although the project strives for equality and equity, leadership still needs to occur to move the process forward.

Martin, who stepped into the leadership vacuum based on the traits outlined above, could be described as the quintessential museum curator – he has been in post for fifteen years and has therefore been socialised into the structure and operations of the V&A's organizational culture which could be said to reflect many aspects of the traditional museum paradigm (see Chapter 5); he is an art historian inculcated in the Western art canon and an expert proponent of fine art photography, which could potentially conflict with the material quality and subject matter of images depicting black British identity that may be considered for acquisition as part of *Staying Power* – which could arguably position him at odds with the stated functioning and purpose of *Staying Power*. The aspiration of the project is to operate beyond the paradigm, much like the examples Chew and Mac Farland provided in the previous chapter; having Martin on the team, albeit temporarily (but for twelve months), creates an ongoing push and pull between traditional museum practice and the innovative rethinking of program development which *Staying Power* aims for.

All this is to say that the entire budget is controlled and consumed by the V&A and it is difficult to plainly discuss the budget without individuals becoming defensive, which relates to an axiom that money, politics and religion (and race) are subjects that ought not be discussed in polite company, yet all of these topics must be scrutinized and discussed throughout the course of the *Staying Power* project. This circumstance, I believe, was an unstated factor that necessitated the initial establishment of the partnership parameters and procedural aims and objectives – there were going to be difficult conversations to be had, so establishing an ethos within which to conduct the partnership was a pre-emptive

measure to ensure a productive process in the face of challenging issues in content and material. The practice of operating within the established (written and theoretical) framework becomes problematic when the partners discuss the practical needs to provide the 25% match funding for the HLF, as those costs are of an operational nature (they extend beyond the Project Team into organizational fundraising and budget allocation and have an impact beyond *Staying Power*), rather than the hard costs for purchasing objects or contracting support staff that are directly associated with the soft funds provided in the *Collecting Cultures* grant from the HLF.

In the bigger picture of the *Staying Power* project the issue of no funds being allocated to the BCA in the program budget is a sensitive subject. I believe this has to do with the fact that, as the V&A applied for the grant as a sole applicant and the entire budget is allocated to the V&A, a strong case could be made that there is indeed no partnership. It could be argued that the BCA, through contributing consultation, is in fact supporting the V&A in a project, but that there is no genuine partnership, despite the strides that have been undertaken to create and establish an equitable working framework. It may be that partnerships are never equal, particularly between organizations of disparate size and resource, and perhaps the spirit of partnership – the written and discursive process of building a shared ethos, promoting equitable relationships, dividing and allocating responsibilities – will constitute a partnership in this case. But considering the position of the BCA, which is operating on a shoestring budget and is stretched beyond its capacity in human and financial resources, it is a challenge to take the long view. But as there is much at stake, in terms of the BCA's position in the heritage sector, in its relationship with the HLF and in its ability to be seen as the 'expert' in the area of black British identity, it will continue to work on "a budget of love" and reap the benefits and hardships during its participation in *Staying Power*.

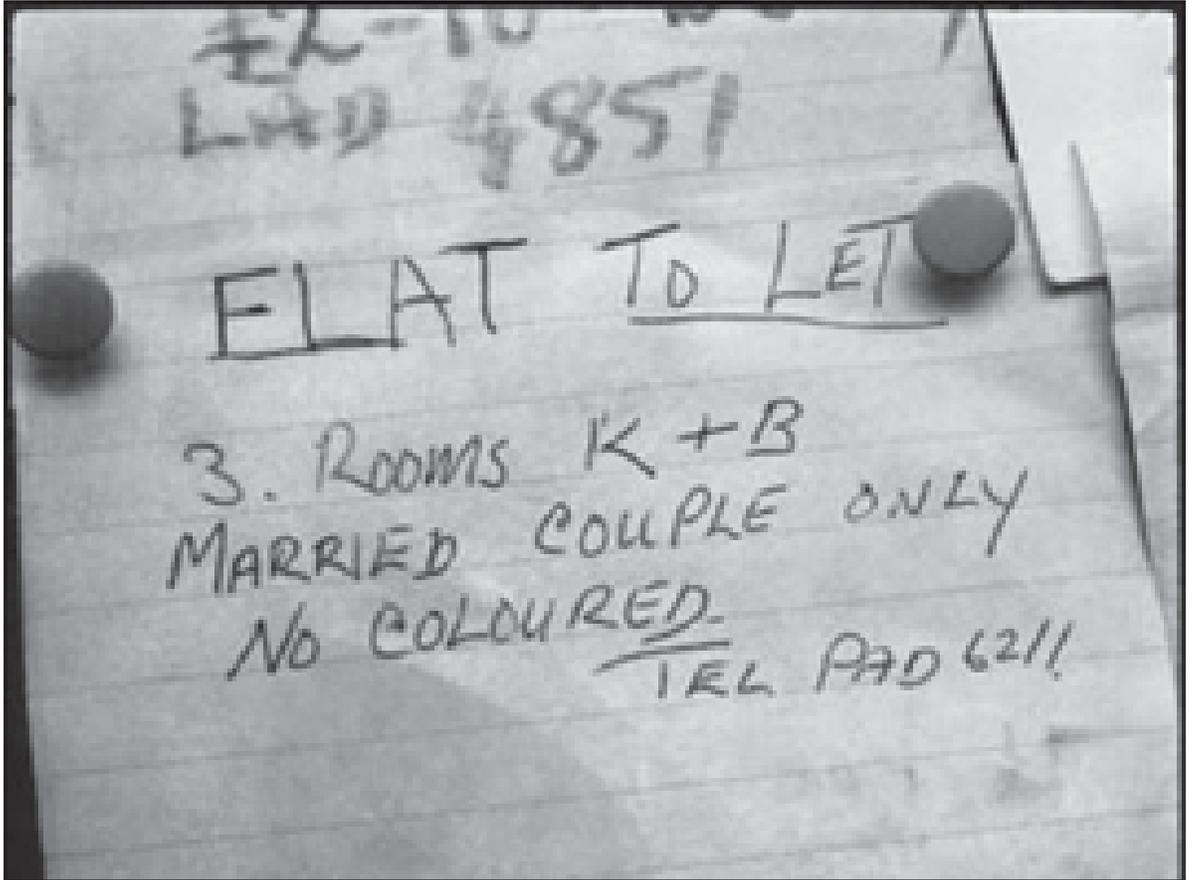
One significant problem with the partnership, in my view, is that there was no discussion about the definition and purpose of a partnership. There was plenty of discussion about the practical operation of the V&A/BCA partnership and the outputs that would ideally emerge from working together. However, Mayo (citing Mackintosh, 1992) suggests that there are three types of partnerships: the *synergy model* that is driven by shared knowledge,

approaches and resources; the *budget enlargement model* that is based on obtaining funds not available to individual organizations; and the *transformational model* which “assumes that there are benefits to be gained by exposing the different partners to the assumptions and working methods of other partners” (Mayo, 1997: 4-5). I believe that *Staying Power* was imagined as a budget enlargement initiative with aspirations to be a synergy model whilst espousing the intentions of a transformational model. In doing so it was attempting to be all things, which I would offer is not only impossible but undermines its ability to do one thing successfully.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the initial stages of development of the *Staying Power* project and the challenges inherent in collaboration under the aegis of specific policy remits. What is written is often an idealized version of what occurs in practice, whether it is a policy mandate or a proposed approach to mitigating organizational practices and constraints, and this chapter began to evidence those differences between what is stated and what is carried out, offering examples of the lived-experience. The following chapters will build upon this evidence by going into greater detail about specific aspects of the partnership, furthering an account of the differences between espoused objectives and enacted practice. The descriptions of the process of engagement between the V&A and BCA staffs endeavoured to answer the questions posed at the outset of this chapter – what does partnership “look like” and how does policy affect it? Considering the project as an example of practice that is conducted in other museums to varying degrees, answering these questions through a descriptive analysis is important inasmuch as it begins to illuminate the complexity of the position of the art museum in contemporary society, particularly museums in urban centres. As cities in the West have become increasingly multicultural and diverse the institutions that serve them have been faced with the choice to adapt or perish; they can either accommodate a varied public or they can become an anachronism. In order to retain relevance there has been a concerted effort over the past forty years to reshape how the museum conducts its business (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5).

Part of the shift in operational procedure is related to how museums are funded, which in recent years has seen an increase in the dependence upon public funds, coupled with an obligation to meet the policy criteria attached to said funds (see Chapter 4). *Staying Power* is a part of the evolving museum model, established in order to access short-term funding yet aspiring to be a transformative partnership, whilst residing in the context of deep and historically rooted imbalances in access to resources, power and influence. This case offers insight into the challenges organizations negotiate, and addresses some of the practical concerns of operating a partnership in relation to the tensions that arise in working with public policies concerning difference, which ultimately influence audience development and participation. The following chapter will provide insight into a consideration of the black subject and the contribution of the Advisory Panel.



*Flat to Let*, by Charlie Phillips, n.d. (circa 1957)

## Chapter 7:

### Considering the Black Subject and the Subject of 'Black': Theory in Practice in *Staying Power*

“Museums have to understand their collections and their practices as what I can only call ‘temporary stabilisations.’ What they are – and they must be specific things or they have no interest – is as much defined by what they are not. Their identities are determined by their constitutive outside; they are defined by what they lack and by their other.” (Hall 2001b: 22)

I interpret Hall’s suggestion to mean that museums present a ‘stabilized’ or fixed reading of the objects and material in their collections that is based upon Western, Eurocentric precepts, yet the museum’s perspective and position could be considered as temporary, rather than fixed, as its narrative account has the potential to shift and change, particularly through a consideration of its “constitutive outside.” Museums have presented material through a European lens (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5; Bennett 1995) which failed to include an account of the social and cultural significance of its objects from a non-Western standpoint; this failure led to Hall’s claim of museums being “defined by what they lack and by their other.” In recent years, museums have begun to shift their practice in response to changes in society, through an engagement with multiculturalism, difference, globalization and changing notions of the ‘public good’ (Knell et al 2007; Sandell 2002, 2007; MacDonald 2006; Cuno 2004), in an attempt to keep pace with the outside world. However, change comes slowly to the museum as organizational cultures and conventions in practice, described in Chapter 4, situate the practitioner within an entrenched position (“temporarily stabilized” until conventions and organizational cultures change).

Throughout this research I have recognized a tension between the anachronistic, (post)colonial condition of the institution and the policy developed to promote inclusive practice, a tension that is exacerbated when the museum is confronted by elements of its “constitutive outside” which question the stability of its authority and its status as the

conveyor of what is sacred and true (see Chapters 3 and 5). In this chapter, I question the ways in which the museum is defined by what it lacks, and whether it is attempting to remedy this condition by expanding its narrative account and diversifying its audience (albeit through the directive of policy, rather than of its own initiative) or whether its practices remain unchanged, yet couched within a new rubric which satisfies policy bodies and sections of the public without actually creating operational change. Examining *Staying Power* in conjunction with existing debates on culture and race will provide insight into how the museum's identity may be comprised by both its constitutive inside and outside.

From the previous chapter, it is evident that the V&A has taken steps to engage black audiences and expand its collection to include the work of black artists, which is an attempt to shift its identity, or change how it is perceived, by including what it lacked. This shift indicates a repositioning of the approach of the museum, from civilizing to participatory, as the transmission method of offering the museum's preferred narrative en masse moves towards incorporating additional perspectives into its narrative. This move towards expanding the canon of fine art photography aims to broaden the definition of what is considered to be fine art, who is considered to be a collectable artist, and what subject matter or content is considered to be of importance to the V&A's national collection of photography. This expansion is being conducted under the auspices of policy derived from the HLF's *Collecting Cultures* funding stream, which was intended to increase the diversity of an organization's collection as well as its audience. But has fundamental change occurred as a result of *Staying Power*? Has engaging in consultation and partnership contributed to shifting the position of the museum? Has investigation into the topic of identity, particularly in relation to the black subject, led to substantive change in the museum or its practitioners? *Staying Power* has the potential to play an important part in shifting the V&A's position, or perhaps at least its perception, through the inclusion of black photographers and photographs depicting the black British experience in its collection. This chapter offers a consideration of the theoretical debates around race and identity through an introduction to the black subject and through an examination of the contribution of the Advisory Panel, providing an observation of how individuals negotiated the subject matter and practical concerns of the project whilst

engaging in operational activity which had the potential to create elemental change in the museum.

## **Value(s): What is of Importance in *Staying Power***

### ***Defining Value***

According to the Oxford English dictionary ‘value’ is a word with multiple meanings, including: a connotation of worth, desirability and/or utility, and the estimation thereof; the purchasing or exchange power between commodities; an indication of the purpose of a thing to cause effect (such as ‘shock value’); a signal of one’s principles or standards, as in what one views as important in life; a sign of rank in classification. These aspects of value surface throughout the case of *Staying Power*, and indeed throughout this entire research project. From the outset, the title of the research, *From Civilization to Participation*, suggests movement from uncivilized (primitive, savage, disorderly) towards participatory (enlightened, engaged, orderly) conduct; reflecting on the meaning of the two terms may lead one to consider the value judgments behind them – there is an implied desirability for civilized and participatory engagement (in the museum), which was derived from standards and principles consistent with a colonial, Eurocentric worldview . The subtitle, *The Convergence of Policy, Practice and Difference in the Art Museum*, indicates that this research is concerned with the process museum practitioners engage in, including the various factors which influence their work, such as policy mandates, organizational cultures, and the material and discursive barriers to audience engagement, all of which utilize value in various ways which should be analyzed in order to uncover their effect on the museum.

### ***Value in this Case***

Value was mentioned in the previous chapter as both an aspirational attribute for the Project Team (through the development of shared principles and ideals, as in values) and as a point of tension when discussing the budget (sensitivity as to the monetary value

attributed to time and resources). How objects are valued, what objects are valued, valuing the contribution of individuals and organizations, the tangible and intangible measurements and types of value – this entire case study, and the research it lies within, involves perceptions and ascriptions of value (civilizing principles, the ‘public good,’ etc.) and the overt and subliminal negotiation of creating consensus, or not, around value and values. Whether that is through outlining the values and structure of how the partnership would be conducted, placing a monetary and/or aesthetic value on the material nature and/or content of the photographs to be acquired, or how difference and ethnicity are valued within the hierarchy of organizations and audiences, there is a constant negotiation as to how value is established and constituted. The what, how and who that are valued in *Staying Power* relate to individual beliefs and aesthetics; in Chapter 5 Becker suggested that people experience their aesthetic beliefs as natural and moral and that an attack on conventions [practices, beliefs] is an attack on one’s morality (Becker 1982: 305-306). In a project where race and identity inform the task of acquiring images for the national collection of photography, it is important to remember the connection between aesthetics, morality and conventions in practice, as the personal and the professional fuse to inform the process and what is determined to be of value.

### **Creating Context for the Case: The Black Subject and the Subject of ‘Black’**

An introduction to the black subject and how it is imagined is in order, as this informs the subsequent analysis of *Staying Power*. Examining the black subject in relation to identity politics and post-race debates provides a context for how the content and subject matter of the images can be understood, which in turn can be examined through how the Project Team engaged with the input given by the Advisory Panel and how the Project Team developed as a group. Establishing this context will illuminate the selection process, which will be the subject of the following chapter.

### ***Definitions and Language***

A basic definition of racism, according to Jordan and Weedon (1995: 256), is that it is the categorization of people into groups based on certain inherited characteristics or traits,

supposedly indicated by physical attributes, such as skin colour, hair texture, head shape or other assumed/inferred features, which emphasize the differences between peoples. These categories of difference are socially constructed, that is they are not based in biological or genetic facts per se, they are rooted in social and political causes, such as colonization, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and presumed pre-historical ancestral relationships, which support and perpetuate the hierarchical ranking of peoples. Particular hierarchies of groups may be influenced by specific geographic or temporal locations.

This research is primarily concerned with how black audiences are imagined and served by practitioners in art museums, and the literature drawn upon concerns the black subject in relation to contemporary cultural politics and issues of representation, allowing for insight into how black people are imagined, particularly by museum practitioners. Black audiences in this research pertain to African-Americans and black Britons, with the acknowledgement that there are other black audiences that could have been investigated. Contemplation of the black subject informs the analysis of specific incidences of how race was engaged in practice by and between agents from specific cultural organizations, which will be illustrated in subsequent sections.

The term 'black' is problematic in that it has multiple meanings; in the United States, the word typically denotes people of African descent (mainly an ethnic designation), in the United Kingdom, it can mean people of African and Asian descent whose ancestors were colonial subjects (taking on political, social and cultural significance) or it can mean people of African and Caribbean descent (an ethnic designation). Expanding on the earlier point, that race is socially constructed and not biologically determined, Stuart Hall stated:

“If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically – and the concept which refers to this is ‘ethnicity.’ The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all

discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual.” (Hall 1996a: 446, original emphasis)

And:

“Western Europe did not have, until recently, any ethnicity at all. Or didn’t recognize it had any. America has always had a series of ethnicities, and consequently, the construction of ethnic hierarchies has always defined its cultural politics.” (Hall 1996b: 466)

Hall’s points are that the black subject had previously been essentialised based upon biologically and/or culturally presumed characteristics, that the black subject should be constructed through its situation in the complex social structure it is enmeshed within, and that once constructed the black subject remains fluid rather than fixed, as imaginings of the black subject are contextual. Hall notes that whites in Western Europe did not recognize the complex nature of their own ethnicity until recent times, whereas ethnicity has been negotiated in America for some time. Historically, it is possible that white Europeans did not *need* to recognize or consider their own ethnicity; as the dominant group that ostensibly created racial hierarchies and instituted racist practices of categorization (which were an attempt to legitimize difference, based on class as well as racial distinctions), it may be that it was only during the recent past that it became necessary for whites to consider their own ethnic position relative to the advent of new ethnicities, which is a symptom of the Eurocentric world view. Apropos to these points Blum asserts that:

“Americans in general, and whites in particular, are often strikingly unattuned to their own history, and to that history’s impact on the present. They fail to appreciate the significance of slavery, segregation, racial restrictions on citizenship and immigration, and the like. Related to this ignorance or indifference, though partly independent of it, many whites also do not appreciate the current structural and systemic dimensions of the situations of different racial groups.” (Blum 2002:50)

If whites are unattuned to their own history it stands to reason that they would not be attuned to the histories of other racial groups, or to the underlying circumstances and precedents that comprise those histories. This is problematic in that the museum's status as authority and truth-teller is undermined by the notion that its practitioners, though experts in the areas of art history and material objects, may not be experts in the socio-cultural meaning and relevance of the material they preside over.

### ***Museums, Classificatory Systems and Racialised Thinking***

Museums were formed within a Eurocentric world view, and what is necessary to acknowledge about museums and race is that the initial classificatory systems for objects and artefacts on display in ethnographic museums did “not simply reflect *natural* distinctions but serve[d] to create *cultural* ones” through classifying and constituting difference “systematically and coherently, in accordance with a particular view of the world that emerge[d] in a specific place, at a distinct historical moment and within a specific body of knowledge” (Lidchi 1997:161-162, original emphasis). Museums were integral to the construction of the Western narrative of colonization; the objects taken from the colonies and returned to the metropole served as material evidence of the power and strength of the colonizers when contextualized through the classificatory system described. Use of language such as ‘primitive,’ ‘savage’ and ‘exotic’ helped to create cultural distinctions based upon European interpretations of material indigenous to Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, South America and the Pacific, and was in common practice in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic museums. The pejorative nature of this language to describe peoples, objects and practices highlights the opposition between “a modern, enlightened, progressive West and less-developed societies which are seen as quintessentially tradition-bound”, the implication being that these traditions in question were “unenlightened, often irrational, untouched by modern technology and industrialization” (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 293), and thus inferior to their Western counterparts. From its inception the ethnographic museum's derogatory interpretation of material from non-Western indigenous peoples shaped how museum visitors constructed knowledge about different cultures, material objects and traditions.

As was mentioned in Chapter 5, museums are regarded as the collectors and purveyors of material that is inscribed as the most valued and sacred in society; the narrative which contextualized its sacred and valuable material is problematic (as previously outlined) inasmuch as it is taken to be ‘the truth,’ as the museum is viewed as an institution of power and authority, and in turn its narrative is reproduced in the imaginings of the museum visitor. This process is what Bennett and Foucault asserted (in Chapter 3), whereby the museum exerts power over its visitor by imposing its version of the truth, which then becomes the normalized pattern of thought and behaviour on the part of the visitor in regard to the objects and subjects on display. For these reasons it can be understood that the legacy of colonialism is tightly intertwined with that of the museum – cultural distinctions conceived during the colonial period were manifest materially through objects and descriptively through text panels and label copy that were crafted through the museum’s position of authority.

Unfortunately, the narrative within the museum has not quite kept pace with post-colonial discourse (which is not surprising, considering the time, effort and inclination that it takes to implement institutional change). The art museum utilized pejorative language of the sort used in the ethnographic museum, which alluded to cultural distinctions derived from ethnographic interpretations, which was then presented alongside art historical knowledge, which in turn perpetuated racialised ideas in the art museum. This indicates that the museum could be understood to be institutionally racist, meaning that its practices in and of themselves may be free of racial bias (for example, selecting, purchasing and collecting objects are not inherently racially biased activities) yet the conception and construction of the narrative around the objects and the museum’s cumulative organizational practices when engaging with culturally sensitive material tend towards producing a negative effect on subordinate racial groups, as “racially unjust outcomes can be a product of the “normal” workings of institutions and policies” (Blum 2002: 22, 186; original emphasis) whether or not that is its intention.

The perpetuation of racialised ideas in the museum is still in effect to varying degrees, such as when a museum focuses race or ethnicity as the central theme for an exhibition or program, which can be an indication that what is on display is considered to be outside of

the mainstream. Projects such as *Staying Power* may act to counter these ideas through promoting change in both material content and organizational practices. An example of racialised ideas in practice could be inferred through the separation of the Africa gallery from the Egyptian galleries at the British Museum, where Egypt is not presented as a part of Africa, rather it is considered along the continuum of antiquity in the Greek and Roman traditions, which are white and European. As a counter to that, recent exhibitions and programs in its Africa gallery have included contemporary 'African Art' alongside objects from its permanent collection, which has begun a discourse within the museum and beyond its walls as to how all things African could be considered and interpreted at the British Museum. The term 'African Art' is itself problematic in that it implies that art which is derived from Africa is homogenous; the term fails to recognize that art is created by individual artists, who may be from Africa or from the Diaspora, that draw from a multitude of particular traditions that are informed by their specific social, cultural and geographic backgrounds.

Another example is that there are Europe and Asia galleries at the V&A, but there is no gallery dedicated to Africa (which is racialised on two scores in that galleries separating/highlighting ethnically derived material exist in the first instance, and that Africa is not an area of emphasis). Visitors may take a tour which highlights African related objects which are distributed throughout the museum (such as Mameluke tiles in the Islamic Middle East section of the Asia galleries, or the black servants depicted in two William Hogarth prints [*A Taste of the High Life*, 1746 and plate two of the series *A Harlot's Progress*, 1732]). The tour was developed during the *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership Project* when extensive research was conducted into the provenance of some of the objects in the V&A's collection. The research established that the V&A held over 4,300 objects and images which related to the black presence in Britain (V&A 2010: 9), yet those objects were disparate and spread across the museum's collections rather than comprising a coherent African collection. This could be considered a positive sign, as the African material was integrated throughout the museum and considered an integral part of the story of decorative arts and crafts, which is the V&A's main focus. However, the material was not acknowledged to be of African origin, so the cultural and social contribution of the material in relation to its provenance remained unacknowledged.

Up until 2005, the V&A did not consider itself a collector of African art, it had no formal policy to do so and it had not noted the relationship of certain objects to their African roots (it is a museum of decorative art and much of its interpretive data is focused on the material and craft of the object). Subsequent to the aforementioned research, a proposal was set forth and the V&A has established a plan to collect African objects, and to that end *Staying Power* “seeks to enhance the collection by researching and acquiring objects that directly reflect the history and heritage of the UK’s African and African Caribbean communities” (V&A, 2007b). Although efforts are being made to combat racialised practices in the museum, issues of stereotyping, entrenched practices (see Chapter 4) and resistance to change continue to make the process difficult.

### ***The Stereotype***

This particular case study queries the connection between the stereotype and the practice of photography. In colonial discourse, Homi K. Bhabba writes that the stereotype is the major discursive strategy of fixity, which is a “sign of cultural/historical/racial difference” and “is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition,” and “is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated – as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved” (Bhabba, 1999:370). Kobena Mercer provides a point of departure to examine the connection between the stereotype and the photograph:

“In as much as the image-making technology of the camera is based on the mechanical reproduction of unilinear perspective, photographs primarily represent a ‘look.’ I therefore want to talk about Mapplethorpe’s *Black Males* not as the product of the personal intentions of the individual behind the lens, but as a cultural artefact that says something about certain ways in which white people ‘look’ at black people and how, in this way of looking, black male sexuality is perceived as something different, excessive, Other.” (Mercer, 1999: 435, original emphasis)

*Black Males* is a collection of nude photographs, which Mercer contends “facilitates the imaginary projection of certain racial and sexual fantasies about the black male body” (ibid: 436). Throughout the essay Mercer describes how Mapplethorpe’s mastery of the technical elements of photography and the discrete employment of ‘camera codes’ (sculptural, portraiture, cropping and lighting), when combined with a gaze that allowed for a “reinscription of the fundamental *ambivalence* of colonial fantasy, oscillating between sexual idealization of the racial other an [sic] anxiety in defence of the identity of the white male ego” (ibid: 438, original emphasis), led to the production of work which “aestheticizes the stereotype into a work of art” (ibid: 439). Mercer contends that nude images of the black male body, as cultural artefacts, allow for the gaze, particularly of the white, male viewer, to conflate the stereotype with an artwork. The stereotype signifies a difference that cannot be proved, yet through repetition of tropes from colonial fantasy (duplicity, bestial sexual license) it becomes a form of knowledge that is utilized, perhaps unquestioningly or unknowingly, to perpetuate that difference. This relates to broader issues of representation in mainstream cultural sites such as the museum, and in society in general.

Both Hall and Bhabba maintain that notions of race are socially constructed and fluid, not fixed; Mercer contends that the white photographer “aestheticizes the stereotype” through his depiction of the black subject; Lidchi, Jordan and Weedon propose that museums are in the business of classifying difference through a Eurocentric worldview. This is the context *Staying Power* resides in; observing and analyzing the practitioners and the processes within this context provides a framework from which to discern whether change in the operational or organizational paradigm may arise through *Staying Power*, which in turn has the potential to shift perceptions of the museum. It is through the Advisory Panel that an examination of the convergence of the lived-experience of the black subject and practice in the museum takes place, where the project negotiates the broader socio-cultural concerns that drove its inception. The next section will provide an introduction to the Advisory Panel and give examples of the consultation it provides.

## **Consultation: A Practical Engagement with Identity and the Black Subject**

### ***Advisory Panel: Purpose and Participants***

The purpose of the Advisory Panel is to advise the Project Team on potential acquisitions and interpretive approaches throughout the project. It is comprised of individuals with a specialist knowledge of African and black British photography and/or a broad knowledge of African and black British production (artistic, cultural, social, and/or identity), but practicing or retired artists were not included, particularly photographers, as a conflict of interest could potentially arise. The Advisory Panel was selected in April 2009 and comprised: Mark Sealy, director of Autograph ABP (Association of Black Photographers); Professor Paul Gilroy, of the Sociology Department at London School of Economics; Colin Prescod, Chair of the Institute of Race Relations; Dr David Dibosa, Senior Lecturer in Fine Art Theory at Wimbledon College of Art; Jacqueline Springer, journalist/consultant/media personality specializing in black music and culture; Carol Tulloch, independent curator and researcher at University of the Arts London at Chelsea; and Paul Reid, Director of the BCA.

The initial meeting of the Advisory Panel was held on June 22, 2009 and the second meeting was held on October 21, 2009. The data and analysis in this section is drawn primarily from the content of the initial meeting. I will remind the reader that this data is drawn from participant observation and that the analysis is filtered through the lens of my situated knowledge; it is my own ethnographic interpretation of events and I will endeavour to provide explanations for my understanding of the evidence throughout.

Marta stated during the introduction of the meeting, whilst going over the terms of reference documents which had been distributed to the Advisory Panel prior to the meeting, that:

“What we are hoping the Advisory Panel will do: we will be asking you to help us, being the Project Team, to define, for the purposes of this collecting project, black British identity, don’t worry it’s not that big a question [laughs, a bit

nervously]. To help identify specific themes to be reflected in the collection, which is what we will be discussing later. Again, the topic of our later conversation is to suggest potential artists and or even specific artworks for consideration, and it's important too that we do. We've asked you here because we want to get your opinions on the work that we hope to acquire... So while we will be asking you for opinion, you won't be signing off on acquisitions, we will be drawing on your expertise for feedback on the work that we are potentially going to be acquiring. Later on in the project as we move towards other later stages of it we'll be asking for advice on the learning and public participation activities that are going to be associated with it. And also with the interpretation of the objects. And then finally more generally we will be asking that you take into consideration what we started to see now [items on display in the Print Room which were viewed prior to the start of the meeting], what's already in the V&A, what the V&A's criteria are and make sure that the things that are acquired enhance our collection.”

This statement, combined with the documents outlining the collections policy and process and the remit of the grant, clearly defined what the aims and objectives of the Advisory Panel were, with the acknowledgement that the subject matter at hand lent itself to lengthy debate and interpretation, much like the standards of aesthetic, technical, historical and documentary merit which were outlined in the documents distributed prior to the meeting. Much ground was covered during the two hours of the meeting; I will present examples from the discussion which offer insight into the input of the Advisory Panel, which underscores the sensitive nature of the material under consideration and the tensions and challenges inherent in the process.

### ***Identity***

The group discussed the parameters of their input (they would not decide what would be purchased, rather they would contribute ideas) and that essentially they were to assist the Project Team to ensure they “are going in the right direction.” The following comments arose in sequence:

Paul Gilroy: “I mean, all I would say is that the less I hear the word identity the happier I am” [all laugh].

Paul Reid: “Yeah, we automatically jump to definitions; we want it in a box, don’t we? And I think it’s really important to kind of start with a position which is, it’s likely to be incomplete, this process. And to some extent inadequate given everything that we are trying to do, to have any understanding at all about black presence and notions of identity, I mean how many things are you, how many things am I? And how do we then prioritize that into what is important? It’s nebulous; it can go all over the place. But there are some important clues here, I think, in how we got here. The title, I think, is important, *Staying Power*, somebody was thinking about something, which is important. Black British identity obviously, Paul’s already wanting to strike it out- “enough!” And then we’ve got 25-35 images and the 1950s to the 1990s as something that defines this discussion, which is about photographers, important subjects and themes, and periods. There’s a lot going on, we have to organize our thinking.”

I think it is interesting that Paul Gilroy, who, in the 1980s and 1990s, wrote extensively about identity and ethnicity in a British and global context, would like to distance the project from this topic, and I think it was even more interesting that everyone in the room laughed when he said this; I will address both the comment and the response. Identity of any type is a difficult and weighty topic to grapple with when the stakes are low, but to discuss black identity in an interracial group with one of the foremost writers on the subject, with the V&A’s collection and reputation hanging in the balance, is potentially particularly tense. My reading on the subjects of post-race and identity (Gilroy 1998, 2000; St Louis 2002; Blum 2002; Appiah 1996) informs my interpretation of Gilroy’s comment. The literature suggests that identity politics rely on absolutism, that essentialising the black subject based on presumed biological or cultural signifiers should be avoided (as was stated earlier in this chapter) and that racialised thinking is outmoded. St Louis offers (citing Gilroy as an influence) that race “as a definitive marker of social description, is an inescapably divisive category that needs to be assiduously interrogated” and “the idea and reality of race cannot fully escape the (historical) taint of its absolutist

and essentialized premises” (St Louis, 2002: 653). I inferred that Gilroy recognized that the Advisory Panel meeting was not the time or place to conduct a rigorous deconstruction of current debates on identity politics and race, which would have had to include a nuanced discussion as to the role of the museum in the reification of race, which was probably a bridge too far during a discussion about photography and collecting within a group perhaps unfamiliar with post-race and identity politics debates. As a result he made a remark that diffused the tension in the room while pointing towards the difficulties inherent in the project; yet it also caused debate on the topic of identity to be shut down.

Laughter is a way of breaking the tension, such as when the group laughed at Gilroy’s comment on identity and when Marta made light of defining black British identity for the purposes of this project. The Project Team and the Advisory Panel have to discuss race and identity with a modicum of critical distance, as the subject is sensitive and positions on the matter move beyond the professional into the personal; laughter is a means of achieving that distance. During the meeting I felt that once the distance was created the tension amongst the group receded but remained in the room. This is interesting, as when an environment is charged people are potentially defensive (they may feel morally attacked as per Becker’s argument), which can make listening a challenge and can present barriers to communication and comprehension, which can impact outcomes.

The group coalesced indirectly through acknowledging the difficulties at hand (by laughing) but due to the challenging nature of the topic, the limited time for discussion and the clearly defined purpose of the Advisory Panel (to promote discussion, not to select objects), there was no direct recommendation offered as to how to best utilize identity in *Staying Power*. Gilroy’s comment on identity went unchallenged, as he occupied a position of authority on two levels: 1) as a leading thinker on the topic, and, 2) as an ‘expert advisor’ brought in to help steer the process of developing the project. Although I believe the individuals around the table all held opinions and views on the topic, no one appeared to be powerful enough to challenge his authority or take the conversation in another, perhaps more definitive or productive, direction that could have promoted greater understanding or consensus about identity. Leaving identity open for individual

interpretation provided no opportunity for change in the paradigmatic practices of the V&A, as there were no “answers” or articulated positions against which to question the previously/currently held assumptions and beliefs of the practitioners (which remain personal and undisclosed to the group). Practice will ostensibly continue as per usual, as assumptions and beliefs about identity remain unqualified due to a lack of interrogation at this specific meeting and throughout the process. This situation allowed for no expanded interpretation or understanding of the black subject, which left fixed notions of identity, or the stereotype, as the norm for considering the content of the photographs and the provenance of the photographers.

All this is troubling to consider within a project intended to promote diversity through an engagement with identity – the boxes will get ticked because the selection process was informed by the experts of the Advisory Panel and therefore the ‘right’ images will be acquired. Yet the potential for the project to inform and change the thinking and approach of the V&A was undermined, as the inclusion of black voices (photographers) and black narratives (the photographs) in its collection would not be conducted in a new, innovative manner through an expanded understanding of content and subject matter.

### ***Diversity within Black***

Paul Reid brought up many salient points in his follow up comments, particularly in his candour at recognizing that this was likely to be an incomplete and inadequate process to engage with such a weighty topic, which was a reminder to be realistic in the expectations for the outputs and outcome of *Staying Power*. I interpreted his remarks as acknowledging the tension in the room and taking steps to diffuse it. Stating that “we want it in a box,” in regards to identity, furthers the notion that the topic cannot be neatly defined and categorized, making it impossible to bypass discussion (and discomfort) in order to create criteria for the selection process, as those boxes are labelled through language that employs signs and signifiers which refer back to biological and historical notions of race which are problematic, and as such there needs to be a common language and shared understanding developed within the group. Then he said “to have any understanding at all about black presence and notions of identity, I mean how many things are you, how

many things am I?”, which indicates that people are mixed and complex, that identity is not fixed (echoing Hall), and that reliance on signs, signifiers and tick boxes cannot begin to unravel the subject; yet the entire project is attempting to create a simulacrum of black British identity – a daunting if not impossible task.

Further along in the meeting Gilroy stated:

“I don’t disagree with what’s been said at all, and my sense is that there’s an issue that you’ve raised and that I hear as a tension between the needs of the museum and the needs of the exhibition, and I think that it’s probably on some level important to think about the different issues that arise from making a group exhibition and contributing in a serious way, so that to the archive [that already exists in the V&A’s collection and in the BCA collection] which is something which is important for people who are going to be writing the history [in future] and I think those things don’t always pull in the same direction. I think what you said about the, for one of the reasons I don’t like identity as a sort of fixed thing is because it has been, although it changes over time, and I think one of the things that is happening now, which has a very important impact on how we think about this history, is this shift from a Caribbean, broadly speaking, minority, to an African [majority black minority]. A Caribbean majority black population to an African majority, and that does change what counts as history. So I think that that’s important too, I mean, you know, if you’re trying to make this exhibition into something that will offer people a version of their history that their own experience doesn’t yield them spontaneously, then you need to identify some priorities with that.”

Gilroy recognized a push and pull relationship between both the needs of the museum and the exhibition which will be developed with the objects acquired, and between engaging in a group process that requires consensus and incorporates multiple perspectives whilst contributing to the discourse on race and identity in a serious way. *Staying Power* endeavours to meet all of these competing objectives and to that end it was necessary to develop priorities for collecting. Establishing themes was one way to

prioritize acquisitions; the Advisory Panel suggested topics such as citizenship (migration, immigration, participation in the military), music and creativity (beyond the notion of celebrity, community/folk styles, images of audiences, modes of dress), images beyond London (Northern Ireland, Liverpool, Bristol), and key events at specific moments in time (Windrush, Brixton riots) as important themes to consider.

Gilroy's point about the shift in the demographic centre of the black minority community from Caribbean to African is an important one, as black British identity draws from a number of cultures with diverse histories and trajectories marked by specific significant events, places and people. The original grant application did not cite this shift in the majority minority composition of black Britons, perhaps this was due to its being informed by the history depicted in the book *Staying Power* by Peter Fryer (1984) rather than being informed by more recent forms of immigration, which would indicate that Gilroy is better informed than the museum in terms of the constitution of the black population of Britain. This also indicates the lag between the socio-cultural shifts in society and changes in practice within the museum – entrenched practices and thinking take time to shift, and often can only be achieved through outside intervention (such as consultation with the Advisory Panel) and then only if the information is absorbed and utilized with the intention to create change. Including multiple aspects of the black British story is part of the project's remit, but encompassing the diversity of black Britain into a linear narrative would be difficult. Identity is not fixed and drawing from a wide variety of cultures, styles and subjects will underscore this fact. Getting the balance right, to ensure that the stories are considered equitably, is a tricky endeavour.

***Provenance: Black Photographers or Photographs of Black Subjects by Others***

In addition to recognizing the multiple origins of black Britons, Mark Sealy added another complicating issue for consideration:

“Do you identify the experience through the author who is taking the picture or do you identify the experience through what the image is actually communicating?”

It's always a kind of chicken and egg then, as we know this is a very sensitive subject about *who* is actually in this space [the V&A] and what makes up the collection and why they are in there. So if we're saying that the history of photography taken by black British people in the V&A is numero uno on the agenda, then that's a body of work that I think is obviously needed and we know that, but in terms of the way that images circulate and the power that they have, [] and there will be quite clearly some important [poles] within that kind of historical work because of the time and the place and social conditions of which people were actually working. If we are looking at archival images then we have to look, well, we don't have to look too far up the road to someone like Armet Francis' environment to see that you will struggle to probably find something that is worthy of spending a great deal of money on, or will be in generally terrible condition, so there is quite a lot of work to do in practical terms."

Sealy is questioning whether the acquisitions process is about the photographer or about the subject/content of the image; in other words, he is asking if the photograph has to be taken by a black British photographer or could the image be captured by a person of any ethnicity as long as the image depicts something of relevance to black British identity. He raises two important points: that there is an "obvious need" for collecting the work of black photographers, which would expand the art historical canon in general and the V&A's collection in specific, and that he recognizes that there are circumstances which may prevent the team from finding suitable images and objects. The original proposal stated that "the acquisitions would primarily concentrate on work by photographers of African and African Caribbean origin working in the UK from the 1950s to the 1990s" and "while our aim is primarily to collect the work of photographers not currently represented in our collection, some acquisitions would also build upon our existing holdings of work by black British photographers" (V&A, 2007b). I interpret this to mean that the ethnicity of the photographer is of primary importance, as the intention of the project is to present black British identity from a black British perspective. I mentioned this at the meeting, as did Eithne, and Marta suggested that the group should discuss this (issue of provenance/authorship) but it was suggested, by Gilroy, that provenance was not a matter for decision by the Advisory Panel as it was not in the brief that they were

given, and that it seemed more appropriate for discussion between the Project Team and the museum. Much like the discussion of identity, the discussion about provenance and authorship was moved beyond the Advisory Panel towards the realm of personal interpretation, with the potential to take up the discussion at a later time. These points illuminate ambiguities inherent in the initial project proposal – which leave the language, rationale and process open to interpretation and contestation as a result, which in turn has an impact on the acquisition process, which will be explored extensively in the next chapter.

Sealy's comment about struggling to "find something that is worthy" underscores some of the concerns raised by Marta in that some professional photography, as apparently offered by Armet Francis, does not meet the archival quality necessary for inclusion in a museum collection (which is a separate, but equally relevant, issue from that of the aesthetic qualities and standards for inclusion, which were touched upon in Chapter 6). Armet Francis is of Caribbean descent and is a moderately well-known London-based photographer who has been documenting black Britain through street photography and portraiture since the 1950s, and his work is held in the collection of the Museum of London. The questions of authorship, subject matter and quality are inextricably linked and have to be negotiated during this project – Francis offers an interesting case in point as he meets two criteria (he is black and captured the British experience through his imagery) and is questionable on the third (the archival quality of some of his material is poor); deciding as to whether his work, or that of another similarly placed artist, should be included will comprise the practical work that Sealy referred to. The *who* that is collected by the V&A has value for both the museum and the photographer – to be in the V&A collection will increase the esteem and the monetary value of the artist's work, and to include the work of black photographers in the V&A's collection will address what the museum has previously lacked, as Hall implied at the outset of this chapter, and engaging in the process may help to promote a shift in practice.

It is not possible to dissect all of the input that the Advisory Panel provided, but it is important to give an impression of the type of information discussed. Considerations about the fluidity of identity and what that means for the project, developing thematic

content to create narrative strands, issues of authorship and provenance, and other topics were touched upon during the meeting. Information provided by the Advisory Panel is meant to inform the approach the Project Team will take in the collecting and programming phases of the *Staying Power* project; it acts as a reference point and useful guide, but is just one of many factors involved in the acquisition process – meaning it is possible to discount this advice when it comes to the “real work” of selection, which will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

### ***Interpreting Information and Language***

Each individual participates in any process through their specific social and professional position, which includes all of their constituent component parts: education, class, gender, culture, ability, organizational affiliation, social status. It is possible for a group of people to be engaged in conversation and for there to be multiple interpretations of the same information; this is why it is important to clarify and define terminology and content when individuals work collaboratively. As has been previously stated, discussion around identity and provenance during the Advisory Panel meeting did not lead to collective definitions of either topic; one year on from that initial meeting neither topic has arisen for further discussion within the Project Team or Advisory Panel. I interpret this to be problematic, as memory and interpretation can be selective and have consequences for the outcome of the *Staying Power* project.

An example of interpretation altering the course of the project can be seen in the minutes from the Advisory Panel meeting, which reflected that Gilroy “was not keen on the word ‘identity’ since identities change constantly over time. PG preferred the term ‘experience.’” I transcribed my digital recording of the Advisory Panel meeting and I do not have reference to Gilroy saying that. Teresa, who took notes during the meeting and distributed the minutes, attributed the change from identity to experience to Gilroy. As a consequence the language used by the V&A staff changed from identity to experience, which negated any need for further discussion into the topic of identity. This shift in language moved the focus from *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, as in the

book by Fryer (1984), which links the history of people of African descent in the UK to the socio-cultural identity of contemporary black Britons, to a focus on experience, which is a rather vague term that I believe plays into the regressive notion of race as a biological condition marked by visual signifiers. Any picture of a black Briton engaged in any activity could be interpreted as ‘the black experience,’ and the photograph could be taken by anyone of any ethnicity. Once again there is a missed opportunity to engage with the meaning and intention behind the remit of the HLF policy and the objectives outlined in the application for the project.

Use, interpretation and understanding of the language employed to describe content or subject matter is worth considering. Identity is problematic for the reasons presented earlier in this chapter – it can be essentialist, regressive and is ever-changing in response to shifts in the socio-cultural landscape. Charles Taylor suggests that identity “is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (Taylor, 1994: 25; original emphasis). Representation of the black subject in the museum, and the lack thereof, has contributed to the distortion Taylor refers to, as was touched upon in previous sections. I infer, through Gilroy and Sealy’s comments, that the Advisory Panel recognized the problematic nature of evidencing black British identity through photographs, yet the discussion and advice (or lack thereof) on the topic did little to enhance the understanding of the black subject for the Project Team. In relation to Taylor’s suggestion, I interpret the problematic nature of negotiating identity to be linked to the project’s outputs and outcomes (images and the commensurate imaginings of their viewers) – the project is attempting to mirror the black subject to the black subject, which could exacerbate the traditional trope of the black subject in the museum (the stereotype of Bhabba and Mercer, the primitive of Jordan and Weedon, etc.) inasmuch as the project is not considering the black subject within the context of a post-race discourse. I view the Advisory Panel’s comments as an attempt to forgo this conclusion.

As problematic and complex as identity is, at least it is specific; there are means to derive its definition within specific contexts, and once determined the definition may remain open for re-evaluation and change. Experience, on the other hand, is an ambiguous term that is more open to contestation and interpretation than identity is. In writing about experience as a means of accounting for identity in documented history Joan Scott suggests that there is a problem with its foundational premise, inasmuch as:

“When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which the explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.” (Scott, 1992: 25)

According to Scott, an engagement with both the constitution of the black subject and post-race debates are eschewed when experience stands in for identity, which is problematic because it denies the need for the recognition of how difference constitutes the individual. Difference is what the remit of the *Staying Power* project and the policy propelling it is primarily concerned with – both intend to enhance the collection and programme of the V&A by including what it lacks, which inherently implies that the project and the policy recognizes a difference between black and Eurocentric or mainstream objects and activity. Yet I would offer that while the policy and the project remit recognize that difference is relevant, neither elaborates on how difference is constituted, and I would contend that their recognition is based on older, biological imaginings of race and its (presumed) visual signifiers. Similarly I would suggest that experience, as it is employed in this case, denotes recognizable difference as attributed by visual signifiers, yet the term remains as undefined as identity, and as such any understanding of the constitution of the black subject goes unacknowledged. Without establishing a definition and developing a commensurate understanding of experience

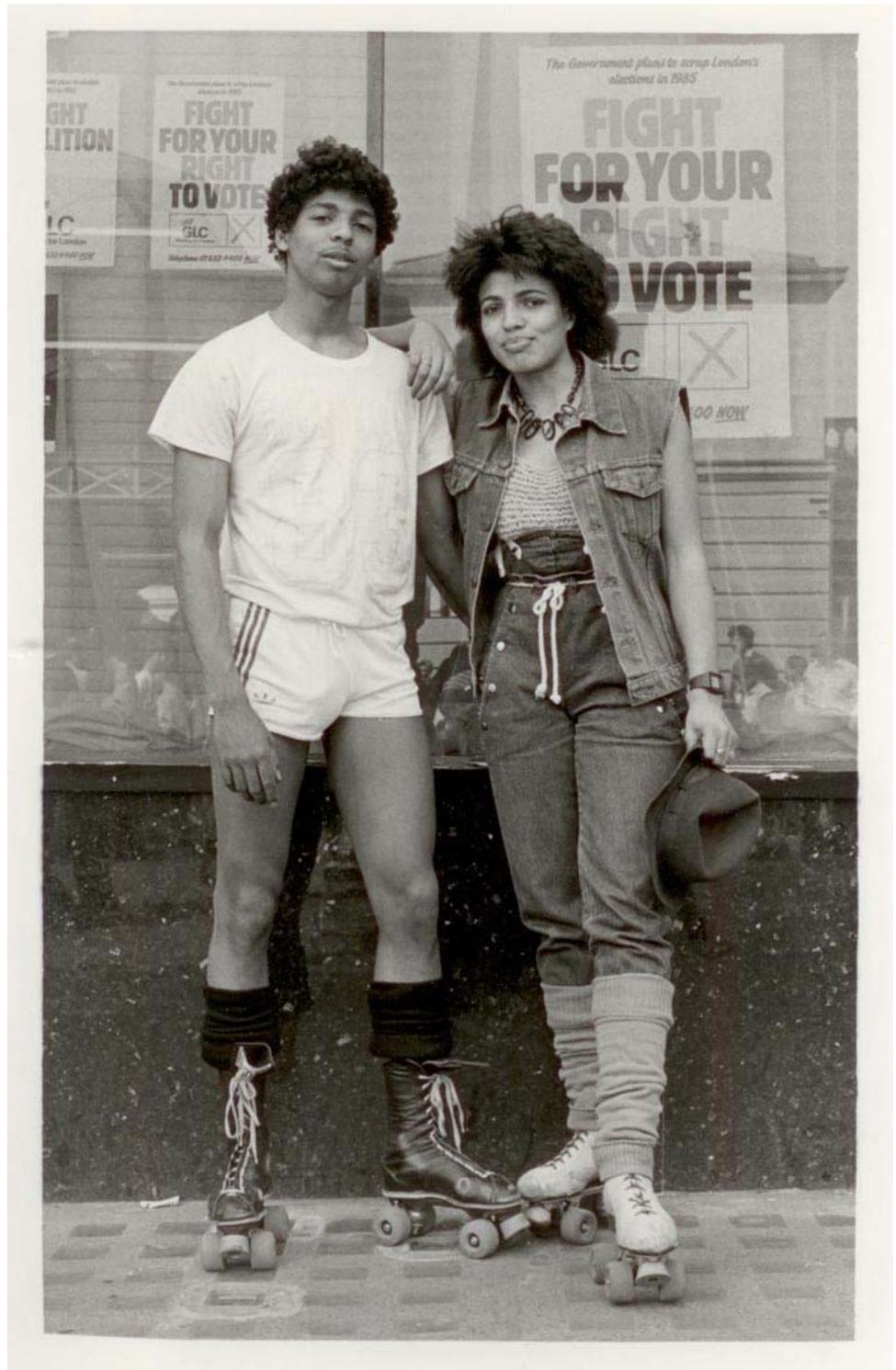
there can be no mechanism to promote change in the institutional practices of the museum, and practice will continue as per usual.

Changing the language from identity to experience could continue to contribute to the misrecognition of the black subject that Taylor suggests, as not taking a position on black British identity does not allow the project to escape from offering a potentially confining account of it, it only replaces one undefined term with another. Moving away from the specificity of identity to the ambiguity of experience may be more comfortable for individuals to countenance, as the term is potentially less weighted and freighted with social and cultural baggage. If the Project Team continues unchallenged, informed by their undisclosed individual interpretations of the subject matter, there may be little impact on the practical aspects of selection and acquisition (choosing photographers and images), as individuals will continue to operate from their existing positions through their situated knowledge. Yet there could be substantial effect on the intellectual process (considering the black subject) if they were to engage in the rigorous process of defining what it is that they are endeavouring to reflect through *Staying Power*. Herein lies the crux between 'business as usual' and creating a paradigm shift in organizational practice; it remains to be seen whether *Staying Power* will propel the V&A from the former towards the latter.

## **Conclusion**

There were questions set out at the beginning of this chapter that I would like to address in conclusion. Has change occurred as a result of *Staying Power*? Yes, but probably not as much as was possible, as there were many missed opportunities for gaining knowledge and understanding of the black subject and for defining the aspects of provenance that were of importance to the acquisitions process. Has engaging in consultation and partnership development contributed to shifting the position of the museum? The outputs of *Staying Power*, the images collected and the programs delivered, have the potential to shift the perception of the museum, as they will tick all of the boxes for

serving black audiences and depicting the black British 'experience.' However, the internal organizational culture and general operating practices have not changed much as a result of the project thus far (but there are still three more years to go), as consultation has barely scratched the surface of entrenched practices. Has investigation into the topic of identity, particularly in relation to the black subject, led to substantive change in the museum or its practitioners? I do not think that the museum's practitioners had enough time or opportunity to engage deeply with the topic, and as a result no substantive change could be made. An examination of the black subject and engagement with identity politics and post-race debates often reside outside the professional reckoning of many museum practitioners; those topics are often left to the academics and subject specialists. That is why the contribution of the Advisory Panel is of importance to a project like *Staying Power*, as it invites stakeholders to contribute to the outcome of a project, it offers a modicum of inclusion, and it brings those debates within the consideration of the museum and its practitioners. The effectiveness of the consultation will only become evident during the selection process, which is the subject of the following chapter.



*Couple in Roller Skates by Voting Posters, Al Vandenberg, 1985*

## Chapter 8:

### **A Simulacrum of Black British Identity: The Convergence of Policy and Practice in *Staying Power***

“Does the category “black art” include whatever a black artist produces, or is there something historically or aesthetically specific about it? Are paintings like Shanti Thomas’s *The Roti Maker* (1985) and Errol Lloyd’s *The Domino Players* (1986-88) black because the artists are black? Or because they are about a black experience? Or because they deploy a black aesthetic language? And, if so, of what does this black aesthetic consist?” (Hall 2005: 11, original emphasis)

Hall questions how one considers the work of black artists and the creative process that they engage in – is the work “black” because of how the artist is situated or because of the aesthetic content of the artwork? *Staying Power*’s primary written objective is to acquire the work of black British photographers, which infers that the ethnicity of the artist is an important factor in considering their work to be “black art,” which furthers the essentialising of the black artist and the black subject, which was addressed in the previous chapter. Is the link between an artist’s ethnicity and their work inherent to their creative practice, or is it something that forms in the imaginations of those who perceive their work? In aiming to acquire images that portray the black British “experience,” is the experience determined by the background of the photographer or by the subject matter depicted in the image? Which experience (creating the image or viewing the image) and/or whose experience (the photographer, the Project Team or the viewer) determines whether a photograph is evidentiary of comprising both black and British elements?

Through *Staying Power*, a visual simulacrum of black British identity is developed through amassing a collection of images that would stand in for/create a likeness of/approximate fifty years of black British experience. While a simulacrum is intended to be a likeness there is an element of distortion that renders it different (Baudrillard 1994; Deleuze 2004). I would argue that there are elements of distortion in both the material collected for *Staying Power* and the process to select the images (perhaps the implementation of the

project could be considered a simulacrum of the proposed project outlined in the original grant application?) In the endeavour to depict the black British experience through collecting the work of black photographers, the primary initiative of the project could be considered to be in contradiction to the post-race theories outlined in Chapter 7, as identifying photographers as representatives of their race is culturally essentialising the artist and by extension their work. I see this as a flaw in the project design, which I consider it to be in accordance with how the directives of policy can influence how ethnic minority audiences are engaged in the museum through funding programs aimed at increasing inclusion. The policy itself is essentialising and instrumentalist in that it is linked to quantitative results that are determined by box ticking exercises, which are based on older biologically essentialised notions of race rather than on contemporary theories and post-race debates that rely on social and cultural interpretations of race, which was the argument offered by Munira Mirza in *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* (2006). This research attempts to reveal the distortions in the simulacrum while describing the lessons learned throughout the process.

Chapter 6 offered insight into the initial establishment of the partnership between the BCA and the V&A through an examination of the challenges inherent in creating a collaborative project between two organizations of differing size and resource, whilst negotiating the stated objectives of the remit and the lived-experience of the practitioners. In Chapter 7 a consideration of the black subject and an assessment of input from the Advisory Panel demonstrated how the Project Team engaged the topic of black British identity within *Staying Power* – which is to say that identity was left undefined for the purposes of the project, yet it continued to inform the process through the individual imaginings and assumptions of the Project Team. Another unresolved topic from Chapter 7 was the issue of provenance; the question of whether the ethnicity of the photographer would take precedence over the content of the image, or more specifically whether the photographer ought to be black British, or at least black African or black ‘other,’ or whether an image taken by a non-black photographer, which depicts an aspect of the black British ‘experience’ would be appropriate for acquisition – all of which relate back to Hall’s questions and the essentialising of the black subject. These unresolved issues, coupled with the roles and processes written and enacted by the partnership,

influenced collaborative efforts and presented conundrums in practice which will be explored in this chapter.

### **Context for the Selection Process in *Staying Power***

Many images will be acquired throughout the *Staying Power* project, and the quantity of acquisitions indicates that there can be no true dichotomy in the selection process, no either-or scenario, as images are to be drawn from a variety of sources which could be interpreted in various ways in order to fit the remit, depending upon which aspect of provenance informs their selection. The intentions set out in the proposal and the expectations of the funder point towards gathering a collection that depicts black British identity through photography, yet there is no indication or definition given for what constitutes 'black,' 'British' or 'identity' in the project. To reiterate from Chapter 7, the original proposal stated that "the acquisitions would primarily concentrate on work by photographers of African and African Caribbean origin working in the UK from the 1950s to the 1990s" and "while our aim is primarily to collect the work of photographers not currently represented in our collection, some acquisitions would also build upon our existing holdings of work by black British photographers" (V&A, 2007b). The V&A's permanent collection contains the national photography collection of Britain. As the national collection there is the expectation that the photographs therein epitomize what is most valued in Britain in terms of the technical (the quality of the print, the paper, etc.) and artistic (composition, aesthetic, etc.) merit of the objects themselves, as well as their subject matter and provenance (date, location, photographer), which continues the trope of the museum and its content being held as sacred, as was set forth by Duncan and Wallach in Chapter 4.

The process of selecting images for acquisition during *Staying Power* differed from the usual process at the V&A, as was noted in Chapters 6 and 7. However, previous mentions of the traditional and adjusted processes of acquisition did not delve into the ways in which individuals influenced the selection process and the partnership; addressing

this aspect of the process is the primary concern of this current chapter. The particular position a practitioner holds, and how they are situated in the museum (see Chapter 5), contribute to power differentials within the group and have an impact on the outcome of the group's activity. The fixed definitions and preferred narratives that initially constituted Eurocentric museum practice were passed down through conventions in practice and institutionalized (see Chapter 5), and a part of that practice included the creation of hierarchical structures for the museum's various functions, imbuing certain positions with power and authority, such as curators outranking educators within the organizational structure, which is an extension of the premise that the object is of primary importance to the museum (those in charge of collecting, conserving and creating the narrative account for the objects are in a position of authority, employing Foucault's theory of power/knowledge, see Chapter 3) and subsequent programming is secondary (those working with visitors support the curator's agenda rather than leading on the development of exhibitions and material content, see Chapter 5). Subsequent sections of this chapter will offer evidence as to how individuals, including myself, enacted specific positions during the process, demonstrating the invocation of power/knowledge and authority (or not, as the case may be) vis a vis their situation, and the influence this had on the outcome of the process.

This chapter will examine how the initial acquisitions were selected, and probe how practice diverged from the stated intentions of the project remit. This chapter offers insight into the challenges and negotiations involved in selecting images and photographers whilst working without consensus on key topics meant to inform the process, and how the intention of policy can become instrumentalised and complicated during practice. What operational and organizational practices have been challenged and changed, or not, during the process? Has selection and acquisition during *Staying Power* contributed to the shifting position of the museum? Through examining the constitution of the fine art photograph, relating the position of individuals within the process, and recounting the steps involved with selecting and acquiring photographs, I hope to demonstrate why this process was complex and not straightforward. Why this exercise is of importance is that evidencing aspects of the process illuminates how difference is negotiated, which informs how representation is utilized in the museum, which affects

both how visitors engage with material and how the museum develops programs for diverse audiences.

### **Fine Art Photographs: Professional Interpretations of Black British Identity**

A fine art photograph has a monetary value assigned by the art market, which is determined as much by its material nature (whether it is a vintage print [printed from the negative near the time of exposure, using period-specific materials, which is considered a more accurate reflection of the photographer's vision] or it is a contemporary print [a print made from an original negative many years after the image was captured, using contemporary printing techniques and materials]) as by the relative celebrity of the photographer or the notoriety of the subject matter. Fine art photographs are created professionally and it is assumed that the paper, developing techniques and storage of the print will have been of archival quality to ensure that the object will stand the test of time.

Selecting photographers and choosing specific images for acquisition is a lengthy process for any organization that is in a position to do so, let alone one that is responsible for a national collection. In general, ongoing research is conducted in order to gather information about material, genres, time periods, artists, and what is available on the market (through galleries, dealers, artists, etc). For *Staying Power* there is a specific remit, to acquire photographs depicting black British identity from 1950-1990s, and a list of approximately 45 photographers working in this area was compiled by the Project Team during the first four months of the project. From the outset it was clear that the Project Team was looking for the work of British photographers of African and Caribbean descent, but would consider the work of photographers who were not of those specific ethnic backgrounds if they produced work that was illustrative of a black British theme/content (the grant allows for up to 10% of acquisitions to be 'outside' of the remit, either in terms of the photographer or the content). All Project Team members contributed names to the list; research into the artists on the list was conducted by Marta, and she was assisted by Natalie, an intern working on the project for six months. Marta

and Natalie developed a document which included names, background information and general descriptions of photographers, as well as thumbnail images of examples of their work. Compilation of the list would be an ongoing activity throughout the selection and acquisition process; the first draft of the list was circulated to the Project Team on August 27, 2009.

### ***The Selection Process***

At the following Project Team meeting on September 24, 2009, Martin, who replaced Marta during her maternity cover, tasked the six team members with choosing their top five photographers from the list. They were then asked to submit their five preferences to Teresa one week prior to the following team meeting, in order to create a short list. The list would have 30 names, or less if there were duplications/crossover, and it was to serve two purposes: firstly, to provide a basis for discussion at the following meeting, where a rationale and defence for each selection would be offered by each team member, in an attempt to further winnow the list for presentation to the Advisory Panel at its following meeting, and secondly, to give the team a glimpse into the decision-making process and preferences of its members.

I asked Martin and the team what criterion we should use for our selections, and I referred to the themes discussed at the previous Advisory Panel meeting and to the remit of the grant. I asked this because I wondered whether our selections were to be based on principles other than personal taste and value judgments. Martin answered that what would make the future discussion interesting would be the conversation around the defence of our individual preferences and that he did not take a position on referring to the remit for guidance. Assuming that all of the photographers in question produced work of suitable archival quality for museum collection (technical proficiency would not need to be taken into account), the only remaining considerations would pertain to content/subject matter and the specific style or artistry of the photographer. This would suggest that the selection could boil down to the personal likes and dislikes of the Project Team members, which would be based on individual values and beliefs (the defence of

which could possibly disrupt the team due to individuals feeling personally attacked, as per Becker, Chapter 4), and had the potential to shift the team and the process away from the remit of *Staying Power* and into the realm of personal taste.

Personal taste or preferences are shaped through the breadth of one's experience, aesthetic and education, in combination with specific ethnic, gender, social and cultural conditions and the commensurate capital attached to one's position and/or attributes – all of which combine to establish one's acquired sensibilities and situated knowledge. Also, each Project Team member holds a specific position in their organization, and those positions incorporate modes of behaviour which stem from participating in specific organizational cultures that are comprised of conventions in practice (see Chapter 5) which are applied, consciously or not, throughout the process. Martin and Marta have specialist knowledge in photography, and as curators they occupy positions of power in the hierarchical structure of the museum's organizational culture (a conventional practice). According to Foucault "individuals are vehicles of power, not its points of application" (1980: 98) as power circulates and functions through the linkages between people; power/knowledge is operationalised during *Staying Power* through wars of position or power dynamics between individuals, and I consider the ammunition used in the wars to be derived from aspects of each individual's habitus. Analyzing the selection process should demonstrate the political utility of the organizational culture of the museum and offer examples of how power functions in a Foucauldian sense during *Staying Power*. This exemplifies the discourse of power moving through and shaping the subjects and practices in the museum, enacting the civilizing principles of the museum through discursive practice, thus institutionalizing power and authority.

I will analyze my own selections in an attempt to tease out the principles that I employed during the process. I would concede that my taste was my primary guide, although I did not get to choose *any* photographer or image based solely on my personal taste, I had to choose from the established list of photographers who had (more or less) met the criteria outlined in the remit for the project. However, having contributed names to the initial list of 45 photographers, it could be inferred that my preferences and values had already influenced the selection process.

### ***Personal and Professional Relationships as an Influencing Factor***

The names that I put forward were those of black British photographers that I was familiar with, either through knowledge of their work or through meeting them through professional or personal contacts – I valued their contribution and put them on the list. Knowing photographers personally or professionally informed my estimation of their work, and played a role in how I advocated for or against their inclusion on the list. If I liked or disliked someone on an interpersonal level it had a bearing on whether they made it into my top five. For example, I had spoken with one photographer about this project and he had disparaging things to say about members of the Advisory Panel; he did not respond to repeated attempts by V&A staff to contact him in regard to facilitating a photography workshop as a program component of *Staying Power*; he had not maintained his website domain name so it was not possible to add information or thumbnails of his work to the list of photographers; and he was a bit antagonistic when I questioned him about these points. This photographer spent 20 years compiling a photography project about the city of London and his work has many valuable comments to make about black British identity, yet without access to written information or examples of his work I was unable to advocate for his inclusion (should the team have just taken my word for it?) and because of his interactions with me I was disinclined to advocate for him on principle (he was rude, so why should I have promoted him?) In this instance not having tangible material to substantiate the quality of his work and my personal dislike of the photographer's interpersonal and professional behaviour influenced my selection, and my taste to a certain degree, as I did not choose to separate the personality from the photographs. The personality of the photographer, as much as their work, may inform the selection process, as was true in my case; I subsequently learned that this was true for Kelly and Eithne as well.

This provides an example of how my position, comprised of situated knowledge informed by my specific habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), influenced my participation in the selection process. My reflexivity and effort to create a critical distance from my personal feelings, which inform my opinion and taste, led me to conclude that it is not possible to create an objective opinion about photographers, there can only be subjective opinions as

the situated position of an individual informs his or her selection. This process indicates an attempt to grasp both the generic and specific interests of myself and others in the project in order to understand the “form and content of the self-positionings” through which the interests are expressed (ibid: 12), which, incidentally, also reveals the workings of power within the project. When a Project Team member knows a photographer personally and/or professionally a power dynamic comes into play, as team members have the power to include or exclude photographers from the process, and value judgments about photographer’s personal attributes contribute to the power dynamic. To conflate the attitude and behaviour of a photographer with their work, and make an assessment based upon that, indicates the application of individual beliefs and principles in order to exert power and influence over the process (at least this is true in terms of my own choices if not in terms of the other team members). We speak our positions, history, interests and taste (which reflect our habitus) through the information we choose to share or not share with the team, which may or may not relate to the content or provenance of a specific object, and what we say may influence the other team member’s selections.

### ***My Personal Selections***

I found it difficult to limit my selection to five photographers, as I found much of the work appealing on some level. If I am to be completely candid about my choices, and if I had solely used my personal taste and preferences as a guide, I would have put Gavin Watson first on my list, due to his depiction of inter-racial skins and punks in the 1980s. As was mentioned in the introduction, I was a huge fan of the British ska revival in the late 1970s and early 1980s, so much so that as a teenager I moved to London for six months in 1984. Viewing Watson’s images is like a wave of nostalgia washing over me, taking me back to a time when music and its corresponding fashion and attitude had a strong influence over how I was developing as a young adult. Dr. Martin’s boots, 2 Tone band badges (Madness, the Specials, Bad Manners), black and white chequered anything (t-shirts, skirts, scarves, socks...) and of course the tunes themselves, “Gangsters,” “Baggy Trousers,” “Lip Up Fatty,” “Three Minute Hero” –these are all signifiers which

inform the signified concepts of adolescence and multiculturalism, as well as skins and punks, of which Watson's images are the signs. At least that is how I read/interpret his work, which elicits a visceral response from me more so than any of the other photographers on the list. However, as much as I truly enjoy Watson's work, I felt that for this specific project it was important to select artists of black British, African or Caribbean descent; Watson is a white photographer, so I did not put him in my top five (although I will mention that he eventually made it on to the shortlist and his work was considered for acquisition). There are so few black photographers held in any museum collections, let alone a collection of national significance; I felt that the provenance of the artist was as important as the image itself, perhaps even more so, and I place both of those criteria higher than my personal taste within the context of *Staying Power*. This indicates that not only are there multiple criteria in use during the selection process, but they can be oppositional or warring. (I admit to having a war of criteria within my own head, torn between my personal and professional positions, my personal history and US and UK national histories, my black subjectivity and my white subjectivity, which is all ensconced in objectifying objectivity).

Preferring to select the work of black photographers could be considered an act of affirmative action or positive discrimination, or even an example of my essentialising the black subject. I recognize the flaw in the remit, as mentioned earlier, and I know that the foundational principles and framework established in the remit, while arguably well-intentioned, serve to further stratify black artists within the mainstream art establishment. This is done through creating special circumstances for collecting their work, which carries the stigma of inferiority in that they require additional support and consideration to achieve inclusion in the canon, which indicates that they reside outside of the mainstream. This sets up a catch-22 scenario: without projects such as *Staying Power* it is possible that black artists may not make it into national collections or into the art historical canon owing to institutionally racist practices in the museum, yet by participating in this type of project the black photographer continues the stratifying process and the trope of the black artist as needing special consideration in order to obtain mainstream status. That said, and all things being equal in terms of the quality and content of an artist's work, I would still prefer to select a black artist in order to further

diversify the canon, and to fulfil the spirit (which is about expanded representation and changing organizational and operational practices), if not the letter (which is about quantitative outcomes in terms of acquisitions and audiences served), of the project remit.

There were many factors that I considered when making my selections. I wanted to make sure that not all of the photographers and images were London-based, as the project is about black British identity and not black London identity. Often the capital city stands in for the nation as a whole (as it does in this research, as was addressed in chapter 2) yet in some respects London is not indicative of the nation, particularly in terms of ethnic minority life and demographic distribution, as there are far greater numbers of ethnic minorities in London than anywhere else in the UK, with long-established neighbourhoods and community groups, and the experience of minorities outside of London is sure to be qualitatively different. My selections were as follows:

- *Ajamu X* is originally from Huddersfield and has lived in London since 1987; he produces provocative and challenging black and white images of gay black males, sometimes in fetish gear or drag; in addition to being a photographer he is also an archivist and the co-founder of ruckus! Federation Ltd which is dedicated to exhibiting and showing the work of black lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender artists nationally and internationally.
- *Jennie Baptiste* is a Londoner of Caribbean descent and her work, inspired by youth culture and music, was included in the exhibition *Black British Style* at the V&A in 2005. She has photographed many musicians in London and New York, mainly rappers, hip-hop and R&B performers, as well documenting the dancehall scene and the maroon community in Jamaica.
- *Clement Cooper* is a self-taught artist who lives in the North West of England and he explores social documentary in his portraiture. When I began this current research a friend of mine showed me a copy of his book *Deep* which, according to his website, “explores the contentious issue surrounding British mixed-race identity through image and oral testimony.” I am mixed-race, as is the friend who

introduced me to Cooper's photography, and my ethnic background provided a personal link to his imagery.

- *Vanley Burke* is a photographer originally from Jamaica who has lived and worked in Birmingham since 1965, and, according to the Tate website, "He describes his own work as 'capturing the personal, social and economic life of black people as they arrived, settled and became established in British society.' Burke's memorable images provide one of the first intimate, insider's portraits – as opposed to a sociological study – of a settled Black British community and its way of life in photography" (Tate 2009).
- *Charlie Phillips* was one of three photographers showcased in the *Roots to Reckoning* exhibition at the Museum of London in autumn of 2005, which was one of the first exhibitions that I viewed when I began this current research. Phillips is from Jamaica and he came to London in the late fifties; he took up photography after being given a camera by an American GI. Phillips captured images of life in Notting Hill in the 1950s and 1960s, then went on to do freelance and paparazzi photography in Italy, Sweden, France and Switzerland before returning to London in the late seventies.

Cooper and Burke both conduct their work outside of London and bring distinctive takes on the theme of black British identity. Although the work of Phillips and Burke could be considered similarly as documentary/journalistic in style, they were working in different cities, London and Birmingham, and in different time periods (Phillips in the 50s and 60s, Burke in the 70s and 80s). The time period for the project spans five decades and I endeavoured to select photographers across different time periods. Cooper's work broadens the connotation of blackness to include mixed-race, and Adjamu X's work diversifies identity further by adding an aspect of sexuality to ethnicity. Baptiste brings a feminist element into the mix, as well as a focus on youth and popular culture. The situated knowledge or habitus of these photographers informs their work, and in returning to one of the questions posed at the outset of this chapter, I do consider there to be a link between the ethnicity of the artist and their work, although I would add that this is not unique to this group of artists nor is it something that is exclusive to black

artists. As has been previously noted, individuals are positioned distinctly and their situated knowledge informs how they act and react in the world. The connection between their positions and their images lead me back to Hall's questions about what constitutes the black aesthetic – to which there is no definitive answer. I interpret their work to encompass a black aesthetic inasmuch as they document subjects that are significant to the social and cultural practices of black Britons; and as such I consider 'experience' to be determined by the background of the photographer and by the subject matter that they depict, to address yet another question from the outset of this chapter.

In making my selections I purposefully thought broadly about black British identity. Drawing from a range of photographers with divergent positions contributes to recreating and representing the black British experience, which supports creating a simulacrum that constitutes a likeness of its object, insofar as a single collection or exhibition can attempt to do so. Baudrillard said of the simulacrum that "it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1994: 6, original emphasis). In that sense *Staying Power* is something unique that exists beyond the reality of its material content and the surrounding post-race debates of the black subject; in its attempt to reflect the black British experience it has become an object and a process that has pushed the boundaries of museum practice, but its effect remains to be seen. *Staying Power* offers an opportunity to move beyond collecting 'the usual suspects' (black photographers already held in national collections with a modicum of credibility and name recognition); however, even the 'usual suspects' are not very well known in many mainstream museums and arguably any addition of black photographers to the national collection would be of significance.

### ***Project Team Selection Process***

The Project Team met on October 21, 2009 (which was also the date of the second Advisory Panel meeting) and discussed the content of the long list of photographers. Prior to the meeting I had written up an extended rationale for the five photographers I

had selected and I circulated this to the Project Team. Martin asked me to summarize what I had written for the Advisory Panel and to lead a discussion about it at their meeting, which I did. David Dibosa remarked that he was impressed that the V&A was taking this project seriously through interrogating the selections through the lens of value and what is valued and how it is valued. I thought that comment was interesting, as I chose to write up my selections through a values-based framework and I was not prompted to do so by the Project Team or by the V&A; yet as a Project Team member my approach was considered to be that of the group. This is problematic inasmuch as it is not an accurate accounting of the process engaged in by the team; it gives the impression to the Advisory Panel that the process was more complex and considered than it perhaps was. The list of photographers was discussed and the panel agreed that it was a good start and that they would suggest additional photographers in the coming months.

The Project Team met directly after the Advisory Panel. I had created the detailed document referred to above, which the others had read prior to the meeting. Everyone had sent their selections to Teresa and a short list was comprised, however there was no printed short list for use at the meeting. Instead, the team brought their selections in note form and then engaged in a far-ranging discussion: why each individual chose specific photographers, what were the aesthetic reasons behind the selections, what would be possible within the budget of the project, and the need to begin purchasing before the end of the financial year in order to stay on target with the timing of the HLF funding allocation. It would not be possible to convey all of the details involved in the discussion but I will convey some of the highlights. The four photographers that received the most votes were: Charlie Phillips, Vanley Burke, Jennie Baptiste, and Yinka Sonebare. Kelly and Eithne both know Charlie and that influenced their selection of him, and mine as well; during the discussion insight into his somewhat outrageous and cantankerous character was shared with the group, descriptions of his previous participation in programs with both organizations were covered (lecturing, advising, teaching workshops), and there was excitement as to the potential to create an oral history with him to accompany the photographs and enhance the educational portion of *Staying Power*, all aspects were instrumental in his selection.

Through having personal and professional knowledge of Charlie it was possible to think expansively about how he and his photographs could be utilized throughout the programming of *Staying Power*. Charlie's work led to discussion about the potential use value of the material objects beyond acquisition, which pointed towards fulfilling the remit of the grant through providing participatory activities which could expand audiences. The educators on the team were used to thinking in this way, but I had the distinct impression that this was somewhat new territory for Martin to be covering. He agreed that Charlie should be included, and he seemed to catch some of the excitement about the auxiliary functions of the photographs and the photographer, but I had a sense that he was maintaining his focus on the collection and the acquisition process, and that the other project activities were not a major concern for him. This is understandable in that his position is that of Senior Curator of Photography and his primary concern is for the historical and aesthetic value of the photographs as objects to be collected and conserved.

During the discussion the team decided that James Barnor, who was in Kelly's top five (and a sentimental favourite of mine), should be contacted. His work with *Drum* magazine in the 1960s and his photographs of London from that period were important and, as he was aged in his early 80s, if there was to be any opportunity to collect an oral history account from him for program use, the team would need to communicate with him sooner rather than later. Martin and Natalie had both selected Virginia Nimarokh, an artist who photographs landscapes, and it was decided to pursue her inasmuch as her work provides social and cultural commentary through an established genre, yet it was qualitatively different and could provide an interesting counterpoint to the work of Ingrid Pollard (who also works with landscape and whose work is already held in the V&A collection). The team talked about the practicalities of contacting artists, what would be the best approach to take and who would be responsible for contacting which photographer. Informed by the discussion, Teresa compiled an adjusted short list of photographers for distribution prior to the following meeting.

## **“A Discovery!”: Instrumentalising the Process**

Hours after the meeting on October 21, 2009, Martin distributed an email, the subject line of which read “A discovery!” and the body of which stated “Hot on the heels of today’s productive meeting, please see the images attached – I think this is the kind of thing we all hoped might appear: almost totally unknown work, vintage prints, fantastic images. Please can we add him to the list?” in regard to the work of Al Vandenberg. The images were taken in the late 1970s and early 1980s mainly in the Notting Hill and Brixton areas of London, and the content consisted of portraits of black people (and a few interracial groups) taken on the street (the subjects were ‘posed’ and were aware that their images were being captured, as opposed to street photography where the subjects are captured unawares or documentary style). The images depicted the popular culture and fashion of the times (a couple in roller skates and leg warmers in front of a poster that read “Fight for Your Right to Vote” [see front’s piece to this chapter]; a black girl and a white girl dressed in Bay City Rollers tartan and denim; a woman with a large afro hairdo wearing a leather jacket with an extravagant fur collar; a group of break dancers with a boom box posing in front of the neon at Piccadilly Circus). These images were in line with what the team was looking for. Emails circulated amongst the group and it was decided that Vandenberg would be added to the list.

At the following meeting on December 10, 2009 examples of the Vandenberg photos were viewed by the Project Team. As there was a need to make purchases before the end of the year (as per the timeline in the HLF grant), and the photographs were available for purchase, the team began to consider specific images to acquire. There was discussion about content; the Project Team felt there should be a mix of males and females, groups and individual subjects, young and old, and the layout format (landscape or portrait) was also a factor as there was the potential to hang or use the photographs together and the look and presentation of the images as a group was a concern. There was discussion around how the images could be utilized during the programmatic elements of *Staying Power*, such as drawing attention to the social or political elements in the images in order to promote debate about the differences between the concerns of the 1970s and 80s as compared to contemporary socio-political issues.

There was a lot of excitement about the potential use of the images. After the conversation had been going for a while I asked Martin about the provenance of the photographer, and the entire group was surprised to learn that Vandenberg was a white, American. There was discussion around the fact that this deviated from the primary intension of the remit, which was of particular concern to me and Kelly. We raised the point about expanding the canon to include black photographers as a key purpose of the project; for Vandenberg, the subject matter did not reflect his cultural or social position but rather manifested his conception of the black experience, which is problematic in that the images could be read as the reification of difference through the structural discourse of white hegemonic practice (as discussed in Chapter 1). Martin countered with the fact that the images themselves fit the remit (in terms of what he, and arguably the Project Team, considered to represent the black British experience) and that there was the potential for 10% of the acquisitions to fall outside of the remit (either in terms of provenance, time period or location of the subject matter). This argument was plausible in light of the content and quality of the images, but I felt that there was a precedent to be set with the first purchase, and to select a photographer who was not black or British was not in the spirit of *Staying Power*. Much conversation and email ensued and it was decided that the team would proceed with the acquisition of Vandenberg's work.

In the months between the December 10, 2009 meeting and the April 21, 2010 meeting there were many changes to the *Staying Power* team: Teresa went on a one year sabbatical and was replaced by Rachel Francis; Martin had commitments that kept him away from meetings, as a result Susanna Browne attended instead; Janet went on leave for health reasons. The purchasing of Vandenberg's photographs was handled by Martin and the photography curators, and at the April 21, 2010 meeting the acquired prints were ready to be viewed by the Project Team. Martin and Susanna were both unable to attend the meeting; Ashley, another curator in the photography department, attended and brought the photos to the meeting. The team members present were Kelly, Eithne, Rachel, Ashley and me (three long-term members, one new member and one substitute). As the photos were viewed I commented on the clarity of the images and Ashley stated that they were clear and crisp because they were contemporary prints made from the original negatives. This was a surprise to both Kelly and me, as the initial email from Martin

stated that there were vintage prints available and that was what the Project Team had agreed to purchase. As was previously mentioned contemporary prints are not as valuable as vintage prints, as they are considered not an entirely accurate depiction of the image. Further in the conversation about the prints, Ashley mentioned that “they were an excellent addition to the four Vandenberg pieces already held in the V&A’s collection.” This was an even bigger surprise to Kelly and me, and these revelations by Ashley have big implications for the BCA/V&A partnership and for *Staying Power*.

By implying that the Vandenberg photographs were “A Discovery!” in his original email Martin made it appear as though Vandenberg was an unknown quantity to the V&A. Learning that Vandenberg was already in the V&A’s collection *after* the purchase of his work during *Staying Power*, and learning this information from Ashley, who was a veritable outsider on the project with nothing to lose by sharing the information, made me question the acquisition. An initial sceptical reading of the situation led me to think that it appeared as if Martin instrumentalised *Staying Power* – that he used its funds to further his curatorial agenda through withholding key information that would have influenced the discussion, if not the decision, of the Project Team. I interpret this to be an example of traditional paradigmatic curatorial practice, whereby the curator determined what would be included in the collection and canon based on the aesthetic and material value of the objects that he assigned them. It could be inferred that the Vandenberg purchase was an example of policy and its commensurate funding being used to further the existing operational procedures or to maintain the status quo rather than to engage in a new type of practice that would incorporate the broader concerns of *Staying Power* into V&A practice. By adding Vandenberg to the list after its compilation, and fast-tracking a decision for purchase, the entire process of establishing the Project Team’s criteria for selection was circumvented. On the surface, the boxes appear to be ticked (in the eyes of an HLF monitor overseeing the purchase) yet it could also be interpreted as an example of tokenism, with the museum not much closer to including what it lacked than it was before.

## *Acquiring Objects*

In Chapter 6, there was mention that the original remit stated that the V&A was to collect 25 to 35 objects during *Staying Power*. Those numbers indicated the total acquisition budget of £100,000 divided by the average cost of a print by an emerging or established artist, which was estimated to be in the range of £2,500 to £3,000. The project team decided to use that as a ballpark figure when meeting with photographers to negotiate purchases – in other words, how many prints could be acquired for approximately £3,000. In the case of Al Vandenberg it was 15 images or objects, for Dennis Morris it was 10 images and for Jennie Baptiste it was 4 images, although both the Morris and Baptiste acquisitions came closer to £5,000. Once the purchasing of objects began the Project Team had a better idea of how much objects would cost and based their acquisitions accordingly. It would be possible to buy one object for £20,000 if that was warranted, as long as the total purchases fell within the objectives formed in the remit. Which leads to questions about how the original proposal should be interpreted – is the total number of objects acquired or the total number of artists represented the quantifiable sum to be reckoned? If 10% of the sum could supposedly fall outside of the primary remit, how was this to be considered – could 10% of the artists be non-black, could 10% of the total number of objects not depict black British identity, could 10% of the total acquisitions budget be used for non-representational/abstract work? If the original number of 35 images by 35 different black photographers is considered, then the V&A could increase the number of black photographers represented in its national collection of photography seven-fold (it had five black British artists in its collection at the start of the project, in a collection of 500,000 objects); but if the photographers were white that number could be zero. This is an important point that is unresolved in the project, and I think that it contributes to confusion when it comes to negotiating the black subject, considering specific artwork, and quantifying and qualifying the outputs of the project to the HLF, all of which can be interrogated through an examination of the Vandenberg acquisition.

As was mentioned previously, the Vandenberg images were not a part of the initial valuing and short-listing exercise conducted by the Project Team. The work was

presented by Martin as “A Discovery!” after the short-listing process was concluded. The images were examined, the Project Team queried the provenance of the artist, and although there were mixed feelings about collecting the work of a white American photographer, particularly as the first precedent-setting acquisition, all agreed to move forward with the acquisition. Two conditions were in effect during this process: firstly, the Project Team equated the inclusion of black bodies in the images with black British identity/experience, which raises issues in relation to Ahmed’s point about difference residing in the body of the ‘other,’ Bhabba’s idea of the stereotype fixing signs of racial difference, and Mercer’s contention of the white gaze constituting the difference of the ‘other;’ and secondly, the instrumentalisation of the process and resources of *Staying Power* in order to meet broader curatorial agendas. The first condition relates to understanding the black subject, or not as the case may be, and selecting work on established, agreed criteria. Those criteria, discussed during the valuing exercise, were eschewed in light of Martin’s suggestion, which points towards issues of power and authority in play in the process, which pertains to the second condition.

I do not believe that the manipulation of the acquisitions budget was a conscious, Machiavellian manoeuvre on Martin’s part; I think it was the result of the confluence of habitus, position, organizational structure and the limited annual purchasing budget of the Word and Image department (which is £10,000). The *Staying Power* acquisitions budget of £100,000 is ten times that of Martin’s annual acquisitions budget. The V&A already had four images by Vandenberg and Martin saw an opportunity to expand its holdings of a photographer who already occupied a place in the museum’s narrative of photography. Martin was in effect killing two birds with one stone, which was made possible through his position of authority within the V&A hierarchy – ultimately he would be in a decision-making position over which objects would be put forward for purchase under *Staying Power*, which is an authority that no one else on the Project Team or Advisory Panel had (see description of selection and purchasing process at the V&A in Chapter 6). In other words, Martin performed the position of senior curator through his situated knowledge which was constituted in part by the hierarchical, paradigmatic condition of the art museum.

“In mainstream discourses of race, whiteness functions as an unmarked neutral category, a norm which is equivalent to being human” and as such this invisibility of whiteness “in the Western world often makes it difficult for those white people who benefit from racism to realize their part in maintaining the status quo” (Weedon 1999: 154-55). I think Weedon’s points can partially account for Martin’s being oblivious to the political and ethical importance of the provenance of the objects collected for *Staying Power*, particularly the first precedent-setting purchase. The remit specifically stated that the primary purpose of the project was to acquire the work of black British photographers and the selection of a white American photographer’s work goes against the stated desire to expand the canon to include the work of black photographers. The provenance of the image is significant inasmuch as it relates to Ahmed’s contention that difference can be reified and thought to exist in black bodies that can be “had” as property in order to prove that diversity has been “done” (Ahmed 2007a: 253). In considering that ideas of whiteness were formed in part by the objects in museum collections (paintings, sculpture, religious icons) in relation to conceptions and judgments about the ‘other’ and difference (Weedon 1999: 158) it is not surprising that Martin stuck to what felt normal and understandable from his position as a white, upper-middle class curator and art historian.

This process incorporated old museum tropes – the use of the stereotype and assumptions based on old notions of skin colour and phenotype to designate difference, which move the museum farther away from rather than closer to promoting equality and social responsibility (as implied in access and inclusion policy and as considered in humanist discourse). The result is that tokenism is in effect, wrapped in the guise of an inclusive, participatory project. Little substantive forward movement was made on the part of the museum in regard to working with the underlying principles of access and inclusion efforts, which are to engage with difference beyond the surface level of recognizing that difference exists. Ideally the project aims to encourage people to learn about different cultures and to allow black audiences to be represented and welcome in the museum through the images acquired and displayed. The purpose as stated in the initial proposal could arguably be considered accomplished through the tangible evidence (objects acquired and programs delivered), yet the tensions in the process remain unresolved.

A less sceptical view of the situation could be that, as was demonstrated in Chapter 5, practitioners are situated within organizational cultures and enact certain conventions in practice that are ingrained and often unquestioned, and Martin was acting according to his position and values in his traditional role as a senior photography curator. He joined the Project Team four months into the process, which was after the initial framework for the partnership had been established and after the first Advisory Panel meeting had been conducted, and as such he did not have the benefit of participating in those crucial portions of the development of the partnership and the project. It is possible that he read the minutes from the early meetings and was informed by Marta as per the parameters of the project, but I feel that his lack of participation in the initial process may have affected his developing a deeper understanding of the principles behind the project. Martin voiced an interest in hearing the Project Team's input, stated a desire to fully engage in the process, demonstrated a keen interest in the subject matter (black British identity/experience), and acknowledged that the team has more knowledge on the subject than he does (at least in terms of familiarity with black photographers and black British identity, if not in terms of the technical photographic process or the canon of photography). I observed him to be a very willing participant in the process and I enjoyed working with and learning from him; yet I continue to question his engagement with the deeper issues of *Staying Power*.

Since Vandenberg was already in the V&A's collection prior to *Staying Power* I assume that Martin had a professional, if not personal, tie to him, and as such the connection may have influenced his decision to promote his inclusion in the project. This raises two points: firstly, the remit has an aim to "build upon our existing holdings of work by black British photographers," and, although Vandenberg is white, acquiring more of his photographs enhances his position within the V&A's collection; and, secondly, that, much like the case of Charlie Phillips, who was known to three members of the Project Team, a personal or professional link to a photographer can influence whether they are considered for the *Staying Power* project. Martin knew of the quality of Vandenberg's work, yet the content and subject matter of the images under consideration for *Staying Power* were unknown to him, hence the proclamation of "A Discovery!" Martin knew the type of content that would be suitable for the project and he offered up something that

would correspond to both the remit and his professional interests, which could appear to address the salient issues in *Staying Power* if one were to look upon the surface. But digging deeper, I would offer that by not focusing on the primary aims of the remit, and in relation to Mercer's view on aestheticizing the stereotype and Sealy's position that there is an "obvious need" to include black photographers in the canon and in the V&A's collection, the decision to include Vandenberg may in fact run counter to the project's objectives. This was a single instance, and it may not indicate the modus operandi of the entire project. However, it does indicate that organizational and operational procedure can remain unchanged while working within policy set out to promote change in how difference is represented and how ethnic minority audiences are served within the museum.

## **Conclusion**

Selecting, acquiring and collecting images for the *Staying Power* project is not as straightforward as an individual curator conducting a similar process under the general operating procedures of the museum. Investigating the challenges inherent in the process provides evidence as to how policy remits can be variously interpreted and instrumentalised to meet the needs of the museum while staying within the scope, if not the spirit, of a project.

According to the initial remit of the project and the stated purpose of the *Collecting Cultures* funding stream, the HLF is interested in the quantitative results of *Staying Power* – the number of photographs purchased, programs offered, and visitors served – as the numbers indicate tangible outputs and point towards the impact of the project on widening participation. The funders are also arguably interested in the outcomes of the project, the qualitative results (such as the learning of individual participants, and whether the learning may influence other areas of an individual's life, which may in turn have an impact on broader social concerns, i.e. evidence that may affect regeneration and community cohesion efforts). However, at present there are no long-term evaluation or

assessment tools in place to capture evidence of the effect of the project on the visitor or on the partner organizations.

The V&A is interested in the same quantitative results as the HLF, as the number and provenance of the photographs purchased will have an impact on the status of its collection. The qualitative outcomes could have an influence on future museum visitorship and support and as such are also of interest to the V&A; yet, similarly, there is no evaluative mechanism in place to track their results. I raise these points because thus far the partnership has focused on acquisitions and the process of developing and delivering the project; yet the ultimate purpose of all this activity is to develop an audience that will engage with the material, and thus far potential audiences have not been mentioned during program development. Perhaps that is because museums are in the business of presenting objects for consumption and it is a tacit understanding that the knowledge of how to interpret the objects and translate them into engaging public programs is 'in the room,' embodied in the educational staff of both the V&A and the BCA. If it turned out that there was no audience for this work there would be limited reason to conduct the project at all, which could further the notion that it was instrumentalist from the outset.

Attempting to create change in the operational and organizational practice of any museum is a difficult proposition, and *Staying Power* has proved to be particularly demanding, as an examination into the process has demonstrated. Selecting photographers and images requires navigating power dynamics amongst team members as selections are linked to personal and professional values, and the subjective nature of individual positions can create tensions amongst the group. Hierarchical differences between individuals in distinct positions, and the operation of power amongst them, affect the acquisition process, as in the Vandenberg example.

Vandenberg was the first of many acquisitions for *Staying Power*, and only when all of the selections are made will there be an indication of the impact of the contribution of the Project Team and Advisory Panel on the project, and of the project on the organizational culture and operations of the V&A.



*Outside the 'Piss House' Pub, Portobello Road, London, by Charlie Phillips, 1968*

## Chapter 9:

### **In the Move from Civilization to Participation, has Policy on Difference Made a Difference in the Art Museum?**

“The decision to collect is made within an organizational context. We must always be aware of, and guard against, the ever-present risk that the culture of the organization, the attitudes and values that define it (rather than those of its audiences), will come to determine what is collected. In this sense, the diversification of collections is as much about diversifying institutions, as it is about what they collect...The power of collections to reveal communities’ interlinking histories has immense potential to support a re-examination of the structure of contemporary society, develop cultural awareness and understanding and, through this, to strengthen empathy, tolerance, cohesion and a shared sense of place...The museum is increasingly coming to be seen as a place which listens and reflects the multitude of voices and cultures which make up modern cities, rather than presenting a single authoritative, celebratory or pejorative view on world events.” (MCAAH, 2009: 17)

These assertions, made by Nick Poole, Chief Executive of the Collections Trust, in the publication *Embedding Shared Heritage: The Heritage Diversity Task Force Report* (MCAAH, 2009), raise interesting points in relation to this current research. When he states that “diversification of collections is as much about diversifying institutions,” in context with stating that an awareness and a vigilance must be taken against the tendency for an organization’s values and attitude to influence what is collected, that directly relates to the valuing of objects and peoples addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 during the *Staying Power* project and to the approach Chew took in establishing the ethos of the Wing Luke Asian Museum (described in Chapter 5). In speaking of developing “cultural awareness and understanding” in order to “strengthen empathy, tolerance, cohesion and a shared sense of place” Poole reiterates what Wood suggested in Chapter 1, that the museum can “provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate that curiosity about others is the greatest form of knowledge” (Wood, 2004: 110), which was an endeavour woven into the practice

of Chew, Warner, Silva and Mac Farland substantiated in Chapter 5. As for whether the museum is becoming a place where listening to and reflecting a “multitude of voices and cultures” is the *modus operandi*, the key word is “becoming,” as the evidence in this thesis has shown that the process of incorporating multiple voices and perspectives into the museum’s narrative is fraught with tensions and is not as straightforward as Poole’s words may indicate. This thesis documents this “becoming” by conveying the lived experience of the practitioner through a sociological frame, in context with the history of support for the arts and culture and within the framework of contemporary policy. This research moves beyond the rhetoric of aspiration into an exploration of processes in order to tease out the tensions and to provide insight into the practical elements of engaging with difference in the art museum, with the aspiration of providing insights for considering a way forward.

Actualizing Poole’s vision is a challenge inasmuch as the museum’s position as truth-teller, authority and keeper of what is inscribed as sacred in society, which was established at its inception and is linked to its colonial and empirical past (Duncan and Wallach 1973; Bennett 1995), is a position that is difficult to shift. Once established, the museum’s position became entrenched and ingrained in the public’s imagination; its narrative came to be accepted as the ‘mainstream’ account of arts and culture, and went largely unchallenged until the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sandell 2002, 2007; Pollack and Ziemans 2007; Crooke 2007). In recent years the narrative of the museum has been challenged both from inside the institution and from external sources. Internal influences include the response to external policy by individual practitioners and the implementation of organizational change management in accordance with social, cultural and financial trends which occur beyond the museum’s walls. External influences include government agendas to promote the access and inclusion of diversity in both the composition of the museum’s audience and in its exhibition content (see Chapter 4), and academic discourse arising from cultural politics and feminist critiques that recognize that the interpretation of objects and artefacts held in museums must be considered from multiple perspectives, particularly from the perspectives of the cultures, religions and societies from which the objects were derived (Hall 2001; Lidchi 1997; Jordan and Weedon 1995). Additional external influence can come from community heritage partner organizations and non-

museum subject specialist expertise, such as that which was provided by the BCA and the Advisory Panel during the *Staying Power* project. These influences are filtered and mitigated by the habitus and position of individual practitioners, which then contribute to the varying degree of change in the museum's narrative, which is why an investigation of the practitioner and the process plays a significant role in understanding how the museum engages difference, and why a sociological approach was an appropriate choice for this research.

### **Organizational Culture and Project Development in Practice**

Being aware of organizational cultures, values and attitudes is difficult to achieve from inside the organizational culture in question, for both the organization and the individual, which was illustrated in the case study. Organizationally, in *Staying Power*, there were challenges in that at the V&A the educational and curatorial functions operated as separate silos of activity led by specialists who did not regularly work collectively, which is not a situation specific to the V&A but is rather a condition of work in most museums. However, this presents problems inasmuch as when departments, and the individuals that comprise them, remain narrowly focused on their specialism they may lose sight of the bigger picture, or fail to consider how their specialism connects and effects other departments in the institution. This can lead to territorialism or protectionism, which contributes to the hierarchical nature of the museum where the curator is positioned higher than the educator in relation to the central mission of the organization. This was demonstrated at the Metropolitan and Whitney museums where exhibition subject matter influenced the development of program content for specific audiences (see Chapter 5), and whereby the object superseded the visitor in importance to the organization. This hierarchy fosters notions of authority; curators are the truth-tellers for the objects and educators are in service to curators in order to convey their information to the public. Silva and Weinstein both attested to this in Chapter 5 in their comments about being unable to contribute to text and label copy in the museum and having no influence on the exhibition calendar, as those topics were under the purview of curators who did not seek,

or accept, unsolicited input from educators. These conditions are perpetuated when the curatorial and educational departments operate separately, and they can become exacerbated during cross-departmental projects.

### ***The Project Proposal***

Here too, the case study provides a powerful illustration of challenges inherent in transforming words into action/process. The conception of the *Staying Power* project stemmed from a previous diversity initiative at the V&A and it appeared fairly straightforward on paper (see Chapter 6). Yet the proposal was written and submitted for funding prior to any deep engagement with the photography curators. I say ‘deep engagement’ as there was surface engagement, as in letting the photography curators know that the proposal was in the works, and allowing them to review an initial draft that indicated the project would be about African photography (which was an area of interest for the curators). As the proposal developed the focus shifted to black British photography (as that subject was more in tune with the HLF’s understanding of heritage in a British context), the BCA was brought in as a “partner” (although the proposal was submitted by the V&A in the “sole applicant category”) and it became *Staying Power: The Story of Black British Identity 1950-1990s*, which was based on the Peter Fryer book *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, and as such alludes to specific tropes of arrival and belonging that he describes in his book. The revised application to the HLF was submitted and the successful bid was presented to the photography curators as a fait accompli, and they had no say in the matter of participation – of what role they would play, on whether the acquisitions from the project fit the requirements for inclusion in the V&A’s photography collection, and particularly what role the subject matter and the status of the photographer (professional or vernacular) would play in the selection process.

This raises many concerns: the photography curators did not have an opportunity to contribute to the initial proposal, which led to resistance and resentment on their part during the project as ownership of the project and the process was undermined by a lack

of inclusion in the initial proposal; assumptions were made by the proposal writers that were not necessarily held or supported by the individuals who delivered the project (see Chapter 6); and the aesthetic and material aspects of the work to be acquired were not clearly articulated in the proposal because of a lack of curatorial input (and as a result a great deal of time was spent championing or defending the content of objects during the acquisition process, see Chapters 7 and 8). Ultimately some of the acquisitions did not meet all of the curatorial standards of the V&A, as in some cases the subject matter superseded the aesthetic quality of particular objects (the Project Team deemed the social and cultural content depicted more important than the compositional elements). This last point is a significant, as once an object is acquired it cannot be easily de-accessioned (in fact it is nearly impossible), that is why it is critical to make the 'right' decision about what to acquire from the outset and why the vague language and parameters of the proposal were so problematic. As highly skilled authorities in photography, with personal and professional stakes in the stewardship of the V&A's national collection, this circumstance was understandably distressing for the photography curators. This raises further concerns about collaborative projects: individuals' lack of understanding for the personal and professional positions of other individuals in partnership can create problems in the conception and execution of projects, and when communication is impeded by conditions of work (departmental silos), institutional positions (hierarchical departments) and/or personal styles (speaking up, or not, in relation to personal/professional views about subject matter/aesthetic quality) those problems can be perpetuated and exacerbated.

The proposal came from the Diversity Strategy Unit (DSU), which is part of the Learning and Interpretation department, and not the Word and Image department, of which Photography is a component. DSU noted vulnerability in the collection, a lack of photographic material depicting a portion of society that ostensibly belonged in the national collection of photography, and surmised that lacunae could be addressed through successfully obtaining and fulfilling the *Collecting Cultures* grant from the HLF. Questions about specific subject matter and aesthetic considerations were not addressed in the proposal, other than to indicate that any images acquired would be of suitable quality for inclusion in the national collection. The desire to expand the museum's

narrative through collecting the work of black British photographers and conducting related educational programs underpinned the decision to submit a proposal for funding, yet the process of developing the proposal lacked sufficient input from all organizational stakeholders, which relates to the impediments to communication mentioned above.

Writing, conceptualizing and submitting a proposal from a particular location within an organization relates to Ahmed's writing on the politics of documentation (2007b), which describes the process of developing diversity policies at universities in the UK. Ahmed contends that when diversity policies are developed, either by an individual or a group, claims are made that would indicate that an organization is diverse and promotes race equality, yet the documents are not necessarily tied to actions or evidence, as "an organization can authorize the document (can sign it) and refuse responsibility for the document at the same time" (Ahmed 2007b: 593, original emphasis). This indicates the bureaucratization of documenting and implementing diversity policy and procedures. The document gets done rather than "doing the doing" or taking action to substantiate claims of a commitment to diversity, and often those documents comprise evidence of a commitment to, or are the sum total of, an engagement with diversity in an organization. Often these documents are drafted by the equality officer who has a remit for promoting diversity, and although they may act in accordance with and promote the stated policy, they are frequently under-resourced or unsupported in actualizing the intention of the document. I think that the process of creating and submitting the proposal for *Staying Power* fits with this scenario inasmuch as an opportunity was seized to apply for funding and the proposal was informed by the V&A's written commitment to diversity, yet the V&A's active engagement with diversity was not considered. The photography curators did not appear to actively express the commitment and understanding of diversity that is espoused in the V&A's mission, and I would suggest that the work of embedding diversity as part of the ethos of the V&A staff remains a written (aspirational?) rather than lived-experience.

This description of the proposal process offers specific information about what occurred in one project, but it illustrates problems that can arise from working across departments and demonstrates the operationalisation of professional formations in the museum. Silva

and Weinstein also commented on the gulf between curatorial and educational practice and the challenges the gulf created; Chew avoided much of these problems by empowering staff and volunteers to work collaboratively on all aspects of exhibition and program development; and Mac Farland spoke of deliberately going against the museum paradigm by working with curators who actively sought input from educators about exhibitions (see Chapter 5). Regardless of how the museum's hierarchical relationships are negotiated, what is interesting to note is that the fragmented nature of operating in silos is a condition of practice at many, perhaps all, museums. This structural condition has an influence on how audiences are served, how projects are developed and how difference is imagined; accounts of how this process is operationalised are rarely chronicled.

### ***Funders, Policy and Support***

An important point to consider about the process and circumstances described above is that it began in response to a funding scheme based on specific policy initiatives – *Staying Power* would not have been developed without the impetus provided by the external support offered by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) via Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The promotion of access and inclusion through policy initiatives that are often tied to funding and operational support are promoted by the DCMS and the quangos which it funds, such as the HLF and Arts Council England (ACE), in the United Kingdom, and by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and non-funding advisory bodies such as the American Association for Museums, as was outlined in Chapter 4. This policy is specifically designed to address unequal access to the arts and culture, particularly in museums, and it often incorporates broader societal aims which encourage community cohesion and cross-cultural awareness and understanding. All of the practitioners in the US museums included in this research relied on Federal, State, County, and City funding initiatives to support the programs that they developed for diverse audiences, and as such they were beholden to the policy attached to those funds (see Chapter 4). At the V&A there may have been the desire to create programs for black audiences, such as *Black British Style* and

*Uncomfortable Truths* which were mentioned in Chapter 6, yet developing a cross-departmental initiative that included acquisitions as well as programmatic elements would not have been possible within the scope of the general operating budget of the museum or within the acquisitions budget of the Word and Image department. DSU oversees initiatives pertaining to audience development and organizational efforts to incorporate culturally relevant material throughout the V&A's operations (such as marketing, education, development, etc.), both of which relate to *Staying Power*. Yet *Staying Power* was not a project conceived and waiting on a shelf for implementation, designed to meet a core objective of the museum or of the DSU; it was conceived in response to the HLF's *Collecting Cultures* funding stream. As such it can be inferred that the policy informing the HLF funding drove and heavily influenced the process of engaging with difference in the case of *Staying Power*, which may also be the case at other museums where initiatives are conceived and developed under the same aegis. (Although the focus in this research is on the external influence of funders and public policy, it should be noted that there were other external social and cultural drivers calling for change in the museum, such as grassroots political constituencies, and feminist and post-colonial academic discourse, which were concerned with ensuring equal access to public institutions).

Funders providing policy mandates do not have a full grasp on all that is entailed in delivering projects that they support; they rarely address the details of enabling access to specific audiences (such as taking objects or exhibitions into specific communities, providing transportation for targeted communities to come to the museum, translation and interpretation, or increased/supplanted workloads) or the dynamics of the issues inherent in working with communities. A reason for this is that many funders do not have any deep understanding of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities or the black subject (see Chapter 7), yet they continue to set the parameters for the museum's engagement with them. An understanding of minority communities is developed through an exploration of the positional nature of difference and multiculturalism, and ideally this would be combined with a consideration of the varied nature of both audiences and material objects when funders are working with the museum. Operating without this knowledge is a symptom of Fish's "boutique multiculturalism" (see Chapter 1), whereby multiculturalism is engaged on the surface

during instrumentalist practices and is conducted without actually engaging with the social and cultural aspects difference.

When funders stick to the superficial safety-zone of “boutique multiculturalism” it is particularly problematic, as museums, and their community-heritage partners, feel pressure to tailor programs to fit a funder’s criteria, rather than to develop projects based initially upon input from, or at the request of, communities, and then subsequently seek support to fund the community-based initiative. If a program for a specific community stems from a tenuous understanding of and a lack of consultation with said community (on the part of the museum and the funder), the resulting program may be irrelevant to the community yet fulfil the objectives of the initial policy and funding remit, which would render the program a box-ticking exercise. Appiah suggested that “African-Americans do not have a single culture, in the sense of a shared language, values, practices, and meanings. But many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture by definition; jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African-American, whether she likes it or knows anything about it... more fully or naturally than it does to a white jazzman” (Appiah and Gutmann, 1996: 90). This relates to how I believe the HLF conceives difference in a funding stream such as *Collecting Cultures*; they do not fully recognize the diversity within black Britain when they are supporting a project such as *Staying Power*. I would argue that the staff at the V&A has a similar conception of black Britons, in that they imagine a homogenous group, which is conceived through notions of racial ascription based on outdated, biologically informed differences.

This consideration of funders highlights the professional formations, operational practices and conditions of work that practitioners contend with in many museums. The museum will continue to seek funding to work with community-heritage groups and diverse audiences, and for the most part this funding will be for supplementary projects that lay outside of its general operating budget, which supports the notion that projects about difference are not of primary concern for the museum (as they are literally on the margins of the museum’s operations). This issue of centrality will recur until projects

addressing difference are brought into the core of operations, enabling the development of sustainable relationships with community partners and diverse audiences.

### ***Sustainability and Challenges to Affecting the Narrative***

One reason museums continue to seek time-bound/project-based funding is because programmatic support helps to pay for (a portion of) practitioner's salaries, and it can offset the cost of existing programs, provide support for the development and implementation of new programs, cover the costs of consumable materials, and enable the development of partnership initiatives. Without public support this activity may not exist, as it is often viewed as supplementary to rather than central to the function of the museum, although it may be considered central to the mission of a museum. For example, a key strategic objective in the V&A's mission is "to provide optimum access to collections and services for diverse audiences, now and in the future" (V&A website), at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York one of its goals in relation to service for the public is to "reach out to the widest possible audience in a spirit of inclusiveness" (Met website), and at the Whitney Museum of American Art they state "we exist to serve a wide variety of audiences and to celebrate the complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity of American art and culture"(Whitney website). On the basis of this research, I would suggest these mission statements indicate the museum doing the document rather than "doing the doing" of diversity as Ahmed suggested previously, and that engaging with diversity remains aspirational rather than actual when there is no provision in the operating budget to conduct ongoing, sustainable diversity work.

Resources attached to temporary exhibitions and time-bound programs are unsustainable by their very nature; consequently, ongoing relationships with audiences and organizational partners are difficult to maintain beyond the scope of the project. This was discussed in Chapter 5 in the Whitney example, where targeted groups were invited to the museum during specific exhibitions but were not invited to participate in a rolling program of activity (due in part to resources [not enough time and money to engage groups not seen as a 'target' for the full calendar of exhibitions], and in part to issues of

representation, which ultimately also relates to resources [if there were more/sustainable resources then the museum could offer more representative exhibitions and programs]), and has implications for the *Staying Power* project. When projects are tied to time-bound funding their effect on the museum's narrative and practice is likely to be equally short-lived. As the museum moves on to its next project its focus will shift to another group or topic, its resources will be spent working with the next group, and it will most likely be unable to bring the previous group along for its subsequent project. This can leave audiences and organizations feeling used, as they were once considered necessary and important but were forgotten when their usefulness to the museum ran its course. This is a problem because a project or exhibition may be of central significance to the community group, but it may be one of many projects, and possibly a small one, for the museum. If the community group puts a significant amount of resources into a collaborative project the level of expectation and importance of both the project and the partnership are elevated. If the temporary nature of the project is not conveyed through an explicit account of the finite boundaries of the relationship, feelings of resentment may arise within the community group, which underscores the sentiment of collaborations as being tokenistic and instrumentalist.

The limited nature of projects that rely on time-bound funding can characterize them as box-ticking exercises as: the temporary employment of minorities for project-specific activities is both tokenistic and unsustainable, as was evidenced in Chapter 6 with the discontinuation of most of the minority staffing from the *Capacity and Cultural Ownership* project at the V&A; changes in material content and narrative are often temporary rather than long-term solutions; and museums may return to their 'normal' operating procedures after the completion of a project. The appointment of minority staff for time-bound, project-based initiatives is problematic due to the temporary nature of their involvement. This leads to unsustainable relationships with both visitors and community-heritage organizations, and creates a band-aid affect on staffing within the museum. Museums can fulfil directives tied to funding and policy by hiring minorities, but if minority staff is not permanently placed to affect the social dimensions of accessibility to museum collections then there can be no systemic change in the museum's narrative or position. Minorities merge personal interests and characteristics, which can be based on ethnic,

religious, cultural, sexual and gender attributes, with professional interests, and their permanent placement within a museum could begin to inform change in the museum's organizational and operational practices. Without the sentiment and interest which stems from both a personal and professional investment in the state of museum practice organizational change may be much slower to occur, if at all.

These thoughts about funders, sustainability and the location of diversity projects within the museum are particularly relevant in light of the recent economic downturn and the decrease in (financial if not ideological) support for the arts and culture in both the US and the UK. As museums have difficulty maintaining current levels of operation, the development and implementation of supplementary programs and projects may go the way of the Dodo. Tate Britain has recently eliminated its cross-cultural program. If the head of the DSU left the V&A it is unlikely that the position would be refilled due to overall budget reductions (which would not be the case if a senior curator were to leave, as a curatorial post is considered essential to the core function of the museum, as opposed to a diversity officer, which is regarded as supplementary). The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council of the UK has been abolished (with some of its remit transferred to the Arts Council England). And, yet again, there have been calls from the Senate to abolish the National Endowment of the Arts in the US (see Chapter 4), but at least at present there has been no action taken to do so and its budget for FY2012 has (only) been reduced by 13% (NEA website), which is fairly remarkable considering the current economic climate and the vociferous opposition to the arts from the Republican right in the US.

These conditions may render this dissertation moot. If there are no funds to support access and inclusion then the museum may revert to being primarily a repository for artefacts, with emphasis placed on the object rather than the audience, thus retreating back to its original position of authority that was rooted in colonial and imperial notions of culture. Resisting this scenario is central to the aims of this research. By revealing aspects of the lived experience of practitioners I hope instead that the evidence will help to demonstrate the tensions in the hierarchy and organizational culture of the museum, pointing the way towards addressing the inherent tensions and creating change in the

institution. This could in turn influence the location of diversity work and help to bring it from the margins to the core of the museum's mission and operations.

### **Changing the Museum's Narrative**

Specific examples from *Staying Power* demonstrate the convergence of policy, practice and difference during a particular project, and although they illustrate distinct experiences it can be inferred that aspects of the context, process and outcomes of the project can be taken as an account of the state of the relationship between policy, practice and difference in the art museum. For example, the BCA recognized an opportunity to have input into the contextualizing of objects in the V&A's collection and it seized an opportunity to contribute to the expansion of the museum's narrative through its participation in *Staying Power*. An expanded narrative could promote the inclusion of a wider public through what the BCA considered to be relevant cultural interpretation. This interpretation would ideally include current readings of historical precedents, events and evidence in relation to specific objects, coupled with contemporary thought on the black subject, which would provide the basis for a narrative that could be tailored to a variety of audiences (different ages, physical and cognitive abilities, etc.).

Changing the museum's narrative stems from a desire to modify the curatorial voice and practice that authors and proffers the museum's position vis a vis objects. This voice can be highly specialized and difficult to engage by non-specialists (it does not connect with a wide variety of audiences) and it has historically been comprised of pejorative and disparaging language in regard to objects and material from black or 'other' artists and cultures. A longing for change in the narrative may be evident to an outsider but is perhaps hard to distinguish or address for an insider, as examining one's habitus and consistently applying a reflexive practice may not be possible, due to a lack of time or desire to do so, particularly while enmeshed in the organizational culture of the museum. This indicates that it may take an outsider's perception with an insider's access to begin to create change in the narrative.

Chew was an outsider when he took the position of director at the Wing Luke Asian Museum. He told his community volunteers and staff that they should feel empowered to create the content and narrative for the exhibitions at the museum, and this was because he had no preconceived notions of what that content should look like or convey because he came from a journalistic and activist perspective rather than from within the existing museum paradigm. His approach became the normal operating procedure at his museum, and later became a nationally recognized model for working with diverse communities (see Chapter 5). Warner was trained as a decorative arts curator; after spending years focused on objects she questioned the purpose of display in the face of an engagement with visitors and questioned the (lack of) diversity in the visitors that she came into contact with. As a result, she moved from the curatorial to the educational side of the museum and began to develop projects for under-served populations. In terms of the hierarchy in the museum she moved from curator/insider to educator/outsider within the organizational construct. In both examples it took an outsider's perspective to create innovation in the museum's narrative, and the projects that they produced were arguably on the leading edge of what constitutes best practice in working with difference in the museum.

Having worked with both Chew and Warner I have an appreciation for their approach and the qualitative outputs of their projects. Through conducting this research I have a deeper understanding of their formation as museum practitioners and for the constitution and operation of the museum as an institution. This understanding has been gained through an engagement with sociology and through the development of a sociological framework to analyze and interpret the data gathered from all of my research participants. Reading Bourdieu and Foucault allowed me to consider aspects of situated knowledge and how it contributes to the circulation of power and authority in the museum. Prior to this research, I was not familiar with habitus and had never considered its component parts, the different types of capital that I exchange in my daily life, and how that exchange is enacted within my professional relationships. I had worked within the systems of control that Foucault described, but I had no description for the circulation of power/knowledge conducted between me and my colleagues; once I became cognizant of the structures I was able to examine the practice of individuals during this research in a

new light. Engaging with the thought of Hall (1996a, 1997, 1996 with Du Gay), Gilroy (1993, 2000), Back (1996, 2000 with Solomos) and Blum (2002), to name a few, caused me to think about the black subject in ways that went beyond the personal into the structural and institutional, as I was able to link my individual relationship to race and racism to historic and cultural movements and feel a sense of belonging and critical distance (naming/describing conditions brought comfort and clarity). Reading Jordan and Weedon (1995), Ahmed (2007a, 2007b), Puwar (2004) and Skeggs (2003) helped me to conceive of the political implications of culture and the museum, and to form a feminist approach to interrogating those implications. Learning that the personal is political, that my thoughts, interests and ideas could form the basis of a thesis that would have relevance to others, was truly empowering. Developing a sociological framework helped me to gain insights into the museum that would not have been possible through Museum Studies alone. Sociology offered a framework for me to view policy, practice and difference from a perspective that was different from and complimentary to my existing personal and professional knowledge, which was necessary in order to develop a critical account of the data and to develop a sustained argument.

### **Collaborative Projects as an Approach to Engaging with Difference**

Many programs developed for targeted audiences stem from liberal-left policies linked to access which in turn and can be linked to debates about multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, as those programs are part of an attempt to query old particularisms that define culture and determine who it is for, as was mentioned in Chapter 1. Often museums conduct outreach to minority communities when they have a project that they feel reflects that particular community, such as an exhibition derived from material from a specific part of the world, which may seem, to the museum and its practitioners, an obvious action to take. However, identity is complex, and when groups or individuals are approached as part of a 'target audience,' based upon connotations and presumptions about an aspect of their being, there may be antipathy encountered in the exchange. This circumstance presents one very strong reason to develop awareness and understanding

for many types of difference, as it is important not to assume that because someone is, or is presumed to be, a member of a specific community that they will be interested in learning (only or particularly) about their own culture, especially from a museum that is situated outside of their community. The onus is on the museum and its practitioners to gain the relevant knowledge in order to create a meaningful, sustainable relationship with diverse audiences and stakeholders, and one approach to gaining this knowledge is through establishing partnerships.

Collaborative projects, that include specialists from community-based heritage organizations, can address the objectives of expanding access and inclusion whilst concurrently interrogating the museum's position of authority and its commensurate practices. This process has the potential to aid in the development of culturally appropriate methods to engage and portray difference; an in-depth analysis of this process was presented in Chapters 6 through 8. However, as the museum and the community-based heritage organization are distinctly and differently situated in the social and cultural landscape, the similarities and differences in their missions and approach – to preserving objects and traditions, to serving diverse audiences, and to working in partnership – can create tensions during the collaborative process, as was evidenced during *Staying Power* through tangible examples of the imagination and negotiation of difference mitigated through policy.

When organizations come together in partnership there can be power imbalances, due in part to the size, scale and scope of the organizations, and due to the positioning and situated knowledge of the individuals that comprise the collaborative working group or team. Organizations engage in partnership for many reasons – to fill gaps in skills or resources in a single organization, because of a shared interest in a particular topic, to gain experience and knowledge of a particular subject, to increase visibility and awareness of their organization, to obtain funding and support – and in each collaborative effort there is a constant negotiation of symbolic power and authority between institutions via their representative practitioners. Symbolic power, according to Bourdieu, “is defined in and by a determinate relationship between those who exercise power and those who undergo it, i.e. in the very structure of the field within which belief is produced. The power of

words and commands, the power of words to give orders and bring order, lies in belief in the legitimacy of the words and of the person who utters them, a belief which words themselves cannot produce” (Bourdieu, 1979: 82-83, paraphrasing Bourdieu 1975). In collaborative projects the exercising and undergoing of power switches back and forth between partners depending on the topic at hand. During *Staying Power* the back and forth negotiation between the subject matter of an image (where the BCA would exercise power) and the aesthetic and material quality of an object (where the V&A would exercise power), were negotiated in the ‘field’ of the museum. Belief in the legitimacy of the words of Project Team members came under scrutiny in relation to the remit of the project, the standards of quality for inclusion in the national photography collection, and the habitus of the individuals on the team, and that belief (or disbelief) created an imbalance of power, which made for a tumultuous relationship between the organizations at times. Power imbalances have to be negotiated throughout a partnership, as they can never be ameliorated because there are rarely, if ever, equal partnerships.

### ***Continuity and Exchange of Individuals in Collaboration***

During collaboration it is the individual practitioners who establish organizational relationships, negotiate power imbalances and carry initiatives forward. Continuity and transience influence the sustainability of collaborative projects and affect individuals and organizations, such as when Martin replaced Marta during her maternity leave or when Rachel replaced Teresa in managing the *Staying Power* project; even when measures are taken to track the task-based activity embarked upon in partnership development (through written documentation and rigorous verbal and written fact sharing) there is still the potential for information loss, misinterpretation and/or a relationship breakdown when individuals are replaced within a partnership. This is because collaborations are developed, in large part, through the personal, social, cultural and professional characteristics of the individual practitioner, the specific position they hold within their organization and the relative position they hold within a partnership (which are aspects of the exchange of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, Bourdieu 1984; 1985).

The unique position and approach of each individual, and their application of capital in the process, has an influence on information gathering and sharing, both within a partnership and within their own organization, and it is impossible for an organization to capture and absorb the nuanced details involved in the interpersonal encounters which build relationships in a partnership. When an individual leaves a partnership a portion of the relationship is lost, and since this is linked to the social capital of the individual rather than the professional aspect of a practitioner the significance and import of the loss is sometimes missed. Changes in personnel do occur and partnerships continue; in order to mitigate the impact it is necessary to recognize the significance of the role of the individual in the process, to be aware of the challenges inherent to sharing information across departments and between organizations, and to take measures to ensure that communication is consistently reviewed and assessed.

When the museum's relationship (to the community at large or to its community heritage partner) resides with the individual practitioner, and the museum has not taken measures to enfold the relationship into its organizational and operational culture, the museum's capacity to continue the relationship is compromised when the practitioner is removed, and this can lead to the development of tokenistic and instrumentalist practices and projects. This is because the 'why' and the 'how' of partnership is often carried out by an individual (and is established through the practice/process of collaboration); remove the individual and the museum would be primarily concerned with the 'what.' This could reduce a collaborative effort to an objectified quantitative output, as the museum's narrative of the 'what' would most likely be drawn from its traditional position of authority.

### ***Benefits and Obstacles to Effective Partnerships***

There are benefits to be gained through collaboration between the museum and community-heritage organizations, or any other type of partner, despite the challenges that must be negotiated throughout the process. The benefits of *Staying Power* could be considered to be access to collections and the availability of complementary resources,

such as technical knowledge in terms of conservation and display practices or expertise in the historical, social and cultural dimensions of the black subject. Access prevents isolation, and collaboration can be useful in that it can redress certain issues that may have otherwise been overlooked, such as inclusion of images of the black British experience in the V&A's photography collection. Yet access and contributing diverse perspectives is a concern if the information flows one way (from the outside/margin/community heritage representatives to the inside/mainstream/museum); at that point a collaborative effort can become a consultation, which can affect aspects of social justice (equality, equity and parity), in a partnership.

The relative positions of the partner organizations, either actual or perceptual and either spoken or unspoken, have an influence on how individuals interact during the collaborative process, from how they speak to one another to which organization shall retain the tangible outputs of the collaboration. Not addressing and discussing the relative positions of the organizations and the implications therein can undermine the entire collaborative project. When organizations of disparate size join together there can be concerns about equity and equality, particularly when it comes to resources, or more specifically the (unequal) distribution of resources. In the *Staying Power* example, the V&A was awarded the funds to acquire objects for its collection, which it could have done without the input of the BCA in terms of the technical aspects of acquisition (determining the type and quality of print, the provenance of the artist, the object's significance in relation to its existing collection, etc), yet it was required (as a stipulation of the funder) to partner with the BCA in order to ensure that the social and cultural significance of the subject matter contained in the images reflected black British identity as determined by specialists in that subject. As the BCA did not receive remuneration for its input and will not retain any of the photographs for its archive collection, this could support the notion of *Staying Power* being consultative in nature. However, this was only one portion of a five-year project; subsequent exhibition and program activities may allow for the development of a more reciprocal process within the *Staying Power* partnership.

Organizations contribute significant amounts of professional subject expertise to museums for no remuneration or material benefit, and this is a problem comprised of

two circumstances. First, many practitioners from community-heritage organizations (and arguably from most charitable/non-profit organizations) work on “a budget of love,” meaning that they contribute time and resources beyond the stated parameters of their job descriptions and hours of employ in order to fulfil tasks and meet objectives that they feel passionate about, and they do so without additional compensation (see Chapter 6). Second, some museums expect community collaboration to be free. These conditions create (unrealistic) expectations which in turn create a vicious cycle: museums expect community expertise for free; free expertise is given because community experts feel strongly about correcting the museum’s narrative. Museums expect to pay for the expertise of academics and scholars who contribute to their catalogue and exhibition content, yet the same expectation is not true for community-heritage experts. Heritage experts are accustomed to being on the margins and to giving away their knowledge for free. In *Staying Power* the characterization and narration of the photographs in the catalogue of the V&A is of importance to the BCA because it will have an effect on how people view the objects and on how visitors will interact with the objects. It is important to the BCA that the story will be told in a way that is representative of black people and the black experience, and this provides a significant motivating factor for the BCA to partner with the V&A. But the BCA’s engagement is also partially instrumentalist in that, while it may work on a “budget of love,” it is also working on a project with the V&A, the world’s premier museum of design, and there is a certain amount of cache and kudos to be derived from heritage sector peers and funders based on that partnership.

What is important to note is that benefits and obstacles are often unconsidered prior to the development of a partnership, particularly if funding, support or policy provide the motivation to establish a collaborative project. Through highlighting the pitfalls and advantages that occur in the process this research hopes to demonstrate what may be encountered on the journey from written policy on difference to the lived-experience of museum practice.

## Reflections

As I was completing this dissertation I kept reflecting upon my early days as a practitioner, at The Children's Museum of Seattle (TCM), having lots of "if I knew then what I know now" moments. Back in the early 1990s I had approached my work with the enthusiasm and naïveté of a twenty something in her first professional position, guided my artistic interests, values and ethics, and relatively unaware of organizational politics or the constitution of the museum. I was able to excel in developing programs for at-risk, under-served, minority youth because I shared a background with them, and I knew, from my own youthful experience in the museum, the long-term pleasure and knowledge that could be gained through an engagement with the arts and culture. Subsequent professional experience, insight gained through this research and a modicum of maturity, now enable me to see things differently. I understand that enthusiasm and 'a good heart' are a great place to start, but they are not enough to provide and sustain an engagement with the social, cultural and historical elements of difference.

The exhibitions at TCM were immersive environments for children to play in, such as a mountain with caves to explore and a "main street" with shops where kids could pretend to be grocers or firemen/women. One exhibition, *Global Village*, offered themed areas based on rural Ghana and the urban centres of Kobe, Japan and Manila, Philippines. This exhibition gave rudimentary information about the social and cultural aspects of the locations and material presented, while aiming to promote a liberal-left connotation of the positive benefits of multiculturalism, ostensibly through encouraging the appreciation and acceptance of multiple cultures. Herein lays the rub: the exhibitions environments were based on objects or material which were not contextualized through a deep engagement with the social, cultural and political histories of the cultures that they were derived from, and exposure alone does not promote (the assumed) positive benefits of multiculturalism. An engagement with anti-racist objectives to reduce discrimination and promote an egalitarian society may result in those positive benefits, yet the museum (in general, and TCM in specific) has yet to consider anti-racism as an approach to developing its narrative and programs. It is not enough to say "here is something from Japan" and hope that an appreciation of the object will ensue and result in a greater

understanding of the culture; objects (or exhibition environments) need to be fully contextualized in order for a visitor to make meaning from them. If museums are going to help “develop cultural awareness and understanding” in order to “strengthen empathy, tolerance, cohesion and a shared sense of place,” as Poole suggested at the outset of this chapter, then they cannot be instrumentalist in their approach to engaging difference.

I feel frustrated and disenchanted when I recollect the *Global Village* exhibition, its content and the impression it might have engendered in the children who interacted with it. Ghana was represented by a drum maker’s compound in a rural setting (trees, rustic house made of tree branches and daub, a jitney parked outside), a hairdresser and a tailors shop. There was no text to indicate that there are big cities in Ghana, or that people there drive cars, or that people work in industries beyond service or traditional crafts. As a result young visitors could develop a false conception of Africa, one that plays into antiquated, colonial and pejorative connotations of the ‘other’ (living in ‘huts,’ working in trades [‘uneducated’], predominantly physical/kinaesthetic rather than intellectual/linguistic intelligence, etc), particularly juxtaposed with the material portrayal of Kobe, Japan that sits ten feet away. Kobe was depicted as a bustling metropolis with vending machines, sushi restaurants and motorcycles, with a recreation of a middle-class apartment, kitted out with rice paper shoji screens, Tatami mats on the floor and a rice cooker in the kitchen. This was a material manifestation of Eurocentric views of racial hierarchies, which parallels the conceptions of ‘high’ culture and ‘fine’ art demonstrated in the tensions involved in depicting black British identity at the V&A. As with *Global Village*, the *Staying Power* images call for contextualization by the museum in order to convey the social and cultural significance of the subject matter depicted, which requires an understanding of the black subject. If contextualization does not occur then the museum’s narrative stays the same as it has always been (Eurocentric, elitist, inaccessible, superficial), which does not promote the ideals that Poole espoused.

The portion of *Global Village* that continues to rile me up most is the Ghanaian hairdresser’s area. The curators designed the space with posters and photographs of traditional/afro-centric hairstyles (braids, cornrows, dreadlocks) and colourful Gele head wraps (which are actually a Yoruba tradition from Nigeria), and in the centre they placed

two phenotypically white mannequin heads that were tinted light brown and topped with long, dark curly hair; children were encouraged to either style the hair or wrap it in batik cloth. The use of white mannequins raises questions and concerns that cannot be fully resolved without making an equally essentialist counter argument about the merits of using mannequins that portray phenotypically black features via signs and signifiers based on old notions of visible biological characteristics. They are damned if they do and damned if they don't on that score, but that is not the only aspect that bothered me about that display. What grates is the fact that the hair on the mannequins was rarely replaced; it looked matted and battered (as if they were having a perpetual ultra-nappy bad-hair-day), and that is what children encountered in the exhibition – a white-tinted-brown head with scruffy hair on top, which they were then prompted to 'play' with as part of an effort to promote the virtues of multiculturalism. I took it personally, as a reflection of myself, as a representation of "my people," and I felt insulted. But I did not have the language or skill to discuss my feelings with my colleagues in a constructive way; I could not bring myself to exclaim "the emperor has no clothes!" and contend with the backlash that would ripple through the organizational culture of TCM. I knew that the display felt wrong, that it had to do with how the curators conceived and executed the exhibition, that it was related to their personal experience with Africa (as Peace Corps members in Sierra Leone) and that they were more focused on offering a hands-on interactive learning experience for five year olds than in unpacking the socio-cultural elements of the topic and subject that the exhibition was derived from.

Today when I think about this display I contemplate hegemonically defined standards of beauty which reify Eurocentric standards and divisions between black and white women; the exoticisation of the 'other' that is compounded through touch (which recalls Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, who was a black South African woman who was displayed, groped and ogled in a European freak show during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and whose plaster-cast skeleton and genitals were on ethnographic display in the Musée de l'Homme until 1976 (Quereshi, 2004: 245-246)); and shadism (skin tone bias) as it is portrayed in the song "Good and Bad Hair" in Spike Lee's film *School Daze*. I can now think about it through a sociological and pop-cultural lens with a certain amount of detachment and critical distance, but at the time I was working at TCM I had no other lens than my

personal experience. My sensibilities were offended by the display and I was resentful towards my colleagues who created it. I was unable to analytically assess how individuals were operating in the museum. I did not understand that the position, situated knowledge and habitus of individual practitioners contributed to their ability (or lack thereof) to navigate the complexities of difference in the material and discursive space of the museum – differences in class, ethnic background, education and life experience that contributed to the positioning and approach of their work and my own. I had no conception of the sociological aspects of practice, no vocabulary to name the conditions, circumstances and characteristics that constituted the environment that I worked in or the colleagues that I worked with.

Knowing what I know now, I have more compassion and understanding for my peers, even as I continue to disagree with their approach and results– which is saying something, because as at the time I did not know how to relate to my “politically correct and woefully misguided” co-workers (which is my gracious way of describing people who would say things to me like “you don’t look black,” “I’m not a racist, I have black friends,” “your people can’t actually blush, can they?” and, my all-time favourite, “I saw a black guy performing at the Opera House last night – I didn’t know they could play the piano!” [“um, never heard of Scott Joplin?” was the retort on the tip of my tongue...]). At the time I remember rolling my eyes and silently counting to ten when I would encounter these conversations or peruse the displays and curriculum packs developed by my peers. Now I realize that they did the best that they could with the skills, knowledge and material that they had, and that if they did not move beyond “boutique multiculturalism” in their engagement with difference it was not because they were “bad people.” They were entrenched in their positions, operated through situated knowledge unique to their habitus, were located in specialist departments and worked in a museum (which was, despite being a children’s museum, constituted by the historic, material and discursive precedents outlined in Chapters 3 and 5). They were seemingly unable to move beyond those positions, perhaps because there was no impetus (from public policy or other external motivating factors) to do so.

At the time I lacked the courage, ability and will to attempt to reshape the thinking of others through deconstructing the tensions involved in an engagement with difference. Leading by example was my only recourse back then. Now I have the tools to address the various structural barriers to an engagement with collaborative partners and diverse audiences, I have gained a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in the interpersonal aspects of practice, and I have the language to describe the factors and characteristics that comprise the lived-experience of practice. The research process taught me that it takes time to tease out the complexities involved in practice, and time is a commodity in short supply when one is enmeshed in practice. I came to understand that reflexivity is a learned behaviour which is difficult to master when one is in the throes of conducting programs, yet it is an integral component of a socially responsible and critically aware practice. I learned that conducting the somewhat solitary pursuit of research was more challenging for me than managing a staff of six and a volunteer corps of 85 individuals – being contemplative and introspective rather than being focused on developing technical skills in others or successfully completing task-based outputs was daunting at times. My perseverance will pay off as I move into future projects, whether they are research focused or programmatic, as my awareness of the influence of broader concerns and structures will inform how I engage with the objects and subjects of my practice. Most importantly, I am motivated and inspired to share what I have learned, through this written work and during my future endeavours, in the hopes that others may come to appreciate the complexity of the convergence of policy, practice and difference in the art museum, and that perhaps they may think differently when they encounter an object on display in the museum.

## **Conclusion**

Creating change in the museum's narrative, negotiating organizational and individual positions, challenging the language and tropes used to describe difference, generating social justice in partnerships, and operating in the face of policy agendas were themes found throughout this research, and this chapter provided some final thoughts on those themes. Change can only occur when both the museum and its partners are aware of the

challenges embedded in the process, and make a concerted effort to address them. If equality and equity are to be achieved through collaboration, the delicate balance of power in the precarious relationship between partners must be addressed and negotiated by individual practitioners and be implemented throughout their respective organizations. This may appear to be straightforward, but it is actually fraught with tension and difficult to actualize. In raising these issues it has been my intention to offer readers insight into the lived-experience of museum practice and partnership development. This research offers an intervention beyond what has been captured in the existing literature, and it is my hope that it may help practitioners and students to facilitate change, either in their existing institution or their future organization, and to question their own practice and approach to difference.

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