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TOWARDS THE COLLEGE AS MUSE --  
THE TEACHER AND THE MUSEUM AS PARTNERS IN STIMULATION

Although present attempts by college teachers to use regional resources like museums in teaching local studies, especially history, are limited and often frustrating, better cooperation between teachers and museums is possible on the pattern of Michael Spock's 'muse,' a new brokerage organization for relating students to regional learning resources.

Let me explain how. All sorts of beautiful word pictures have been or are being conjured up to describe the educational potential of both museums and the potential of regional colleges in B.C. and in Canada. Our college PR man delights in the slogan "discover at Douglas" and the C.B.C. ran a series on thawing "The Frozen Ark", about extending the reach of the collections of the National Museums. I am going to employ similar euphoric jargon to make a case for improved cooperation among B.C.'s communities' educational resources especially as regards history teachers and local museums -- using the regional college teachers and programmers as 'muses' or the brokers for this improved cooperation.

But why you may ask, do we need a 'muse' or any other new organization or institution?

The present situation:      B.C. college teachers and museum  
   education work

A 'muse' is needed because present attempts by college teachers to use regional resources for teaching history are as limited as they are frustrating. The backwoods mentality of some local historical or museum elites and the elites themselves, in particular the trustees of some museums, inhibit college-museum cooperation on historical education.

Museums and allied educational resource centres in this province are not usually institutions open for education of the public. They are often closed warehouses directed by elite groups for themselves. Why? How? The backwoods 'mentality of earlier generations holds firm in God's country. Museums are places of, by, and for the middle class lady WASP volunteers, or better yet for the old military men; i.e., the "dragon ladies" and the OMM's, in particular

where these two groups dominate boards of trustees. It is theirs to safeguard historic objects in old wooden buildings. Professional curating, community involvement, and educational programs -- beyond the odd school tour -- are anathema to the museum elites.

If a teacher sends a student to a museum to sketch an object or absorb the flavor of an era, the student is likely to be reprimanded, as many of mine have been, by the resident OMM. "Will you please tell your teacher that this museum is not an educational institution." Thus the backwoods elitist mentality perpetuates itself. The OMM's and "dragon ladies" need not fear that any of the students and other "dirty hippies" will interrupt ancestor worship at the local first-white-baby shrine. (And ancestor worship shrine is what the small museum becomes when used only by elite museum trustees.) Nor need the "dragon ladies" and OMM's fear that adequate funds for community extension work, or even for minimal professional staff will ever be made available by the public for such small, local museums. Nor have such controlling elites any fear that college teachers will try to collaborate with them in educational programs of broad appeal.

The museum people - trustee or curator - are not alone to blame for the educational weakness of local museums in B.C. The professional historian's ignorance of the disdain for museums as historical education centres in Canada does not promote the collaboration or cooperation of colleges and community or regional museums in B.C. The B.C. Museum Association meeting considers itself favored if three historians show up. Few historians other than professional museum historians attended the recent C.M.A. convention in Victoria.

On the other side of the mountains things are different, or so we here in the backwoods of B.C. are told. Historians there work with and for the National Museum and large metropolitan museums.

I was elected three years ago to go east of the mountains and indeed discover such activity and such palaces of learning, art and culture. The shiny wonder did not last. Museums east of the mountains turned out quite often to be not merely warehouses run by OMM's and "dragon ladies", or by boards of trustees made up of them, but worse enclaves yet. Eastern museums were like ordnance depots run by even more venerable OMM's or "dragon ladies" who were also first-white-baby descendants AND United Empire Loyalists. These institutions and their revered keepers champion Forts and Wars as the TRUE HISTORY of the True North Strong and Free.

As a young history student I was not intrigued by THE HISTORY, but

rather by the demographic aspect of the social history of all those forts, soldiers and trappers--the half breeds. Certainly, I thought, the university history departments were not letting the ordnance depot museum style perpetuate itself in Ontario. Certainly professional historians must be assuming some responsibility for museum educational developments--since the scientists were doing such work at the Ontario Science Centre.

So I went to hear a panel on "the future of the past in our schools" at the 1970 CHA meeting at the University of Manitoba. The professional historians there from universities, colleges and secondary schools stuck their heads in the sand like ostriches as far as museums or any other innovation in teaching was concerned. They moaned about having to teach the viewpoints of other disciplines like anthropology, the Americanization of the curricula, the vagaries of audio-visual equipment, and the poor teaching of history in Canadian schools. Yet they ignored the potential of museums and archives in their own communities to ameliorate their teaching situation.

This June, however, some members of the CHA had sessions on the use of film and the use of archival materials in teaching history. So perhaps the ostriches, the professional history teachers have started to lift their heads out of the sand.

Perhaps this head raising will be hastened by the current budget freeze on art, music, and all that baloney and popular dislike of the rarefied scholarly research, the results of which are known only to the scholar and seem to benefit only him. If the professional historians don't soon start to relate some of their learning to the masses, the masses will see as little justification for paying them grants as they do in paying the small local museums grants or visits.

#### The 'Muse' model and its applicability to the B.C. regional college scene.

While college history teachers are still negotiating with university historians nervous about academic quality and museum board members worried about the "hippie invasion" (over the possibility of classes working with museums), large metropolitan museums, museum professionals and Canadian cultural policies have been going through the "museum revolution." Marjorie Halpin, of the U.B.C. Anthropology Museum, explains this revolution as:

a reaction, to some extent, to what happened about a hundred years ago when great public museums were developed in London, Paris, New York, Washington and,

to some extent, in Canada. They tended to reflect the viewpoints and classification systems of an elite group of curators. These museums were open to the public but they didn't speak to the public in the ways that were relevant to their lives and experiences. In addition, many of them had an antiquarian approach that failed to relate exhibited objects to a system of cultural values.

The revolution has manifested itself in some extreme forms. In France, for instance, where much of the discussion was initiated, it has resulted in such extreme statements as "There can be no democratization of the arts until we burn the Louvre", and a couple of years ago the American Museum Association meetings in New York were picketed by a group that demanded that museums become relevant to the issues of racism, sexualism and war. Museum curators as a result of all this are getting very nervous.

So there is a reassessment going on ... about the democratization of museums. It centers around how museums can be scaled to human size in their architecture and how they can relate to the lives of the mass of the people. One of the concrete manifestations of the movement has been the establishment of neighborhood museums in the United States, museums that reflect the life of ethnic minorities, including museums on Indian reservations. (U.B.C. Reports, Oct. 27, 1971).

This revolution's chief Canadian manifestation seems to be the Secretary of State's democratization and decentralization program of associate museums, travelling exhibits museum mobiles, conservancy and training programs for museums -- all to extend the reach of the National Museums in Ottawa to every part of Canada.

Not all museum professionals would have Canada jump on the museum revolution bandwagon blindly. One museum professional, Michael Spock of the Boston Children's Museum, criticized the revolution at the Canadian Museums Association meeting in Victoria in May 1972 in his, the theme, address to the convention. He said that the museum revolution brought failure to and conflict within the large museum. He likened American museums in revolution to elephants dancing. Just as making elephants dance is not the best possible or most respectful use of those animals, neither is the big bureaucratic WASP museum's ethnic program the most appropriate or respectful thing for it to be doing.

He typified the traditional large American museum as a "thing place" with object-oriented staff, a backward looking point of view and a habit of being big and bureaucratic - not small, nimble, and responsive to contemporary society, its communities and their needs.

Spock would have museums, since they are unique in their potential for offering three-dimensional learning experiences, or learning by doing, begin communication with contemporary communities and their crises by or through the

formation of a new "client-centered" regional institution, a new kind of interface.

It could be broadly educational for all the community of a region by unlocking regional education resources for diverse modern communities in ways that reinforce both the museum and the community. This proposed brokerage institution or organization, which Spock has christened a 'muse', would help large metropolitan museums utilize resources such as galleries, government organizations and colleges, to make maximum impact on the community and on funding bodies.

Isn't this just the sort of tune our "student-centered," community-minded college administrations love to hear? They planned the colleges as "client-centered" brokerage institutions which could effectively apply their resources and those of the region to meet contemporary community needs, then hopefully make a large enough impact on the local taxpayer to be funded further -- just as regional districts, regional libraries, and regional hospitals are doing in B.C.

I think colleges, especially their history and geography teachers in relation to local studies, should be 'muses' for their regions' citizens. College teachers could implement the 'muse' model of Spock without costing the taxpayer or dean much more, and without upsetting the museum elites or academic historians.

How? Michael Spock's model 'muse' seems to me to be very applicable to the regional college scene in B.C. The 'muse' could work in the B.C. of regional governments and in the Canada of the Secretary of State's democratization and decentralization policy. Future attempts of college history teachers to work with both small local and large regional or national museums would be, through the 'muse' ideal museum communication: "student-centered", forward looking, nimble and responsive instead of the usual object-oriented, backward-looking, big, and bureaucratic 'communication'.

A diagram will help show how the colleges are already organized to have teachers and programmers work for the community's education, as Spock would have this model 'muse' work:

<u>'muse'</u>	<u>colleges</u>
a. is "client-centered"	a. are "student-centered"
b. has multidimensional learning experiences, not just objects on display but use of all regional resources.	b. have audiovisual departments, integration and cooperation with regional libraries, museums, archives arts centers.



'muse'

- c. is not strictly educational or aesthetic but willing and able to enter people's lives at different levels.
- d. can talk to city hall, the street and the school.
- e. has access to community and regional resources for all kinds of learning experiences.

colleges

- c. are melding academic, technical, and vocational learning institutions into learning centres that will also coordinate community adult education in many areas of the province.
- d. answer to local taxpayers for their actions and rest on them for a part of their funds; talk to city hall and to the street; have store front workshops for low income groups on the supermarket jungle; cooperate with local school boards on environmental education centers.
- e. cooperate with local, provincial, and federal libraries, museums, archives etc. for all kinds of learning experiences.

If the Spock model for this new kind of brokerage institution applied to B.C. college teachers acting as the 'muse', so do Spock's questions about his model 'muse':

1. Are there any existing muses?

Spock referred to the Anacostia neighbourhood museum in Washington D.C. as one. It is staffed, funded, and based out of both the community and the large metropolitan museum (The Smithsonian) and relates to all kinds of regional resources and all kinds of local problems. In B.C., the Delta Museum and the Richmond Art Centre might be used as examples of urban neighbourhood museums, and the Kootenay Doukhobor Historical Society's work could be counted as a rural one -- in conjunction with the work of Selkirk College archives, teachers and students.

2. How should muses be organized?

According to client, not curatorial categories; e.g., those who can come, those who can't come, and teachers and community groups who could use 'muse' facilities, says Spock. In B.C., colleges are beginning to be organized to serve the students who can't come and community groups as well as the students who can come. However, often the teacher and the potential students are frustrated in their planning for non-classroom experiences by administrators or by regulations requiring a certain number of classroom contact hours per week, per section, per instructor. Ideally I would see every college teacher as his own community education programmer in a 'muse' situation. There more learning would probably occur than in many "regular contact hours a week" classroom situation.

3. Where's the money for 'muses' going to come from?

Spock would fund his 'muse' on an educational voucher system with a 'freeing-up' of the vouchers to include any educational experience not just classroom learning. Some examples of alternatives to it would be travel, visiting museums, language training and handicraft lessons. The commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario or the Wright Commission seems to recommend something similar to the 'muse' and Spock's proposed funding for it in its draft report. This report recommends "universal accessibility", "additional forms of educational services and alternatives to post-secondary education" to be promoted by provincial government actions and increased support for "existing programs, such as CUSO and Opportunities for Youth." The Wright Commission recommends funding these alternatives "per individual, per year, as are formal types of education". The report also advocates more integration of formal classroom work with experience outside the institution, and "better geographical distribution of educational services," by satellite campuses, the opening of all post-secondary libraries to all citizens, and the establishment of an "open university" in Ontario. It would "create a close integration of its services with other cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums, theaters and art galleries." (University Affairs. March 1972, p. 12)

If College history teachers in B.C. were acting under existing conditions as Spock's brokerage institutions, they could receive public vouchers for services and then pay museums for services performed. Thus large and small museums would respond to the needs of the marketplace far more than they do now. They would find that their lives would become easier and more satisfying. The museum curator would be able to spend time on curatorial functions rather than being spread too thinly over audiovisual services, education, fund raising etc. The college history teacher would be freed to make education accessible and flexible for students. For example, he could provide more learning by doing experiences such as retracing fur trade routes instead of merely making students read about them. Student essays about such projects could serve a purpose -- as research papers on local historic sites for the local museum -- instead of being destroyed at the end of the term.

4. Would a 'muse' work or is one needed in smaller communities?

Spock says that often small museums in small communities are already small, nimble and responsive to local community need -- see mention of the Delta and Richmond centres above -- and that such communities don't need this kind of brokerage institution, the 'muse' in their immediate area.



5. Would 'muses' eliminate the education departments of large museums?

No, says Spock, depending on the site. Some resources can't be shipped. Also the educational function of museums could thus expand to include museum internships for future teachers. In relation to the B.C. college-museum situation it would seem that the college teachers working as 'muses' could provide the vehicle for democratization and decentralization of the 'frozen ark', the national museums. Perhaps they could prod the federal institutions into providing museum training or experience for all future teachers in use of varied modern resources for historical studies.

6. Will a 'muse' improve the museum curator's job? or the history teacher's job?

Yes, says Spock and yes say I, for the community will know how to make reasonable requests of the resource centre or professional scholar to do the kinds of things it or he knows how to do best. Moreover, the 'muse' will generate more jobs for historians in the museum education field. Good history interpreters have been lacking in all kinds of Canadian museums. Too often in the past we have had technicians or OMM's or telephones competent at reciting facts but not capable of involving visitors, engaging them in dialogue or learning at the museum. In my experience as a student guide at Fort Langley and Lower Fort Garry National Historic Parks I met few capable museum guides and even fewer teachers who knew how to make students' museum visits learning experiences rather than cultural penances.

7. Who will control the 'muse'?

According to Spock the community must control the 'muse' or it will fail. In B.C., communities through taxation and school boards already control colleges.

8. Won't 'muses' hurt museums by making them seem less important?

Spock says no, they will strengthen them by strengthening other existing institutions. By cutting down empire building of various historical resource centers and educating the public, college history 'muses' could be very supportive of museums. If they were operating as 'muses', college teachers could educate university historians, secondary or elementary school teachers and the public, about museums and about their educational opportunities.

9. And who will staff the 'muse'?

Teachers, teachers of teachers, curriculum developers and media specialists, according to Spock. And what college teacher is not by force of necessity filling

all these roles at some time.

#### How the college history teachers and programmers could operate in 'muse' fashion

College teachers and programmers acting as the 'muse' would be able to maximize community use of regional resources for local studies or for nearly any topic. Their work would thus respond positively to all of Spock's questions about the feasibility of the 'muse' and would reinforce the capability and potential of both college and museum for public service and for public funding. Both the college and the museum in B.C. seem to have to be continually implanted in the public's mind as worthwhile institutions. Shirley Cuthbertson, of the Vancouver Centennial Museum, summed it up very well when she said:

the most outstanding problem faced by any museum is that of keeping people interested . . . . However exciting the first visit, there comes a time when every person in the community with the slightest interest will say, "I've been to the Museum." And that is that.

Not only do displays have to change and develop, but there must be someone live in the place to . . . interpret . . . . .

It is possible to bring people to the museum again and again, without spending too much money, by having staff that plan, organize, and usually teach programs that supplement the school curriculum, and involve both school students and adults in active learning . . . . Education programs reach out into the community, and people whose lives have been enriched by the presence of a lively museum will be its faithful supporters in the future. (Shirley Cuthbertson in a letter to D. Norman, January 1972).

Some instances of B.C. college teachers and museums operating along these lines as partners in a 'muse' fashion on local studies in the college region are the local history courses, workshops, archive or museum projects and radio programs they have done in the past three years. My own college has offered university transfer courses in history at museums, run continuing education sessions on writing local history and workshops on local history and environmental change. Selkirk college this summer ran similar sessions and workshops. Selkirk, Capilano, and Cariboo have worked cooperatively with museums and archives. Cariboo College's relationship with the Kamloops Museum is described by its curator as a "symbiotic" one. Selkirk's radio program about its students' Opportunities for Youth work on collecting local archive material has been complemented by similar programs on videotape.

In each of the instances cited the college teachers seem to have success in their 'muse' work in proportion to their ability to "deal in terms of program not politics" as my college's dean of continuing education would say. The museum elites naturally have the advantage in the snakepit of local B.C. politics. So it is rather comforting to think that colleges wishing to be muses will not necessarily have to "tea party" over their future attempts to use regional resources in teaching local studies, but will be able to get things done. A word of warning: the "gapped generation" get things done by tea drinking, slowly.

However, with the background of past experience and in the light of the Secretary of State's new cultural policy, it seems to me that further possibilities for teachers and museums to act as partners in stimulation of historical education programmes could easily be developed from existing college and regional resources. These possibilities for development would generally be museum education programs involving all kinds of college community members in all kinds of learning experiences. The college teachers and programers acting as 'muses' might initiate, promote or advise: OFY and LIP grants, neighbourhood museum work, archival collecting, publicity for the new cultural policy or for the Canada Studies Foundation, historical digs, Heritage Victoria or similar historic building trusts, retracing old H.B.C. trails, distribution of films or speakers to local groups or citizens.

The possible result of further B.C. college history teachers' implementation of Spock's 'muse' model: democratization and decentralization of our national culture policies and programs.

If college teachers do attempt further use of regional resources in teaching local studies on the 'muse' pattern, their work might percolate up to and infuse the Secretary of State's new democratization and decentralization policy. Regional college muses could be the most flexible local vehicles for implementation of that policy. If the Secretary of State, Gerard Pelletier, would have us take his nickname "cultural czar" as a jest, not the truth, as he asked in his March 28, 1972 address, "Democratization and Decentralization: A New Policy for Museums", then he must arrange for varied and flexible vehicles for implementing his policy. Communications about this policy, plans for the associate museums, design for museum mobiles, plans for education of museum personnel and for a national popularization of museums' programs must come from the local folks as well as from the ministerial aide and those consultants he flies

in to Ottawa. Pelletier hinted at other ways besides planning in which B.C. colleges' teachers acting as 'muses' could help implement the new cultural policy. They could help carry out "the main aim of the associate museum . . . to even out existing disparities as regards museum collections, activities and standard, both geographic and economic." Their work is also already cooperative in nature, involved with the education of museum personnel and with the regional popularization of museums. Most important though it seems to me in the democratization and decentralization work, is the college 'muses' pragmatic philosophy about museum work. Hopefully it is imparting academic direction to the "dragon ladies" and a sense of what they are missing and neglecting to the professional or university historians.

Who knows, the college as 'muse' example of cooperation and collaboration might even bring the eventual melding of both our frozen arks, National Museums and National Historic Parks. They could then be put where they belong under one government department. The two philosophies and empires, the artsy one of the National Museum, and the ordnance depot one of the National Historic Park could be melded before the "museum revolution's" effect on both large national museum systems becomes any more embarrassing, expensive and token. The red tape and duplication which now prevent their democratization and decentralization could be cleared so that, as Michael Spock says, the elephants could stop dancing and turn to doing something respectful and appropriate for institutions of their capabilities.

#### Postscript:

As Mary Balf of the Kamloops Museum said to me October 6, this paper is provocative and its terminology may offend the staff of trustees of local museums. I hope this essay will not offend as much as it will provoke in a supportive way, interest in local museums' educational role on the part of professional educators as well as museum elites.

Also, this paper was written in June 1972 before the federal election campaign brought more cultural program announcements, and before the new B.C. government took office. I hope the latter group will plan, research and democratize the education and museum systems in B.C. Both the provincial government and the next federal government should now give local museum curators the professional status, salaries, and academic backing they have long deserved.