



Hi everyone. I'm Christine Wunrow, a Master's student in Anthropology at the University of Memphis. My presentation today draws on my master's research to share knowledge about collaboration, changing museums, and being an applied anthropologist.

OVERVIEW



Introduce the organization



Describe the project



Lay out theory and research questions



Explain methods



Discuss museum anthropologist



Give conclusions and recommendations

This is an overview of what I will cover in my presentation today.

The Pink Palace from the Website

THE PINK PALACE MUSEUM

Mission: to inspire discovery through collecting, preserving, and interpreting the cultural histories and natural sciences that shape our region

- Opened in mansion 1930
- Named Pink Palace Museum in 1967
- Major acquisitions and exhibit development until 1977
- Staff concerned about lack of diversity in representation

The Pink Palace Museum building was the mansion of Clarence Saunders the founder of Piggly Wiggly but when he lost his fortune, he lost the building, which was donated to the City of Memphis as a museum.

The museum opened in 1930 as the Memphis Museum of Natural History and Industrial Arts. It changed name in 1967 to Pink Palace Museum and continued major acquisitions and exhibit development until 1977.

During my research at the Pink Palace, staff shared their concern that the exhibits suffered from a lack of diversity in representation. For example, there was almost no representation of women or AA in the healthcare history exhibits.

The current mission statement is to inspire discovery through collecting, preserving, and interpreting the cultural histories and natural sciences that shape our region.



2019 was Memphis' Bicentennial, and the city told The Pink Palace that they expected the museum to do something big. After some thought, the museum decided to make a dedicated exhibit and make it completely in-house with their exhibit designers, graphic designers, curators, and educators.

They realized it was an unprecedented opportunity to implement new ideas, one of which was to build the exhibit through collaborative work with people outside the museum.

In my focus group with the curator team who developed the exhibit, one of them told me: "We also knew that we wanted, [...] community engagement from the front end, and so [...] there was a lot of hoops and hurdles and [...] opportunities and challenges, as far as doing that, because we hadn't done anything like that, going outside."

(Christine Wunrow, "Practicum Research Data" (Memphis, TN, 2019), P3: PPM FG 1, Para 24)



The final Bicentennial exhibit was a combination of work by the Pink Palace staff and collaborative work with people outside the museum.

Museum staff created five colored pods that covered Memphis history topically and a series of black pillars that gave events on a timeline. There were also cases with artifacts.

Two kinds of collaborative work were also put in the exhibit. The first type (outlined in green) was works based on submissions from individuals around Memphis at one of the museum's engagements tables. A Faces of Memphis mural created from photographs was mounted on the wall, a Voices of Memphis iPad stood near the end with recorded answers to a few questions about Memphis. Outside the entrance was a giant 3-D Word Cloud based on words describing Memphis. All of these works were created through the combined submissions of individuals who met museum staff at tables around Memphis.

The exhibit also contained three works by creative partners from outside the museum (outlined in red). The ReMix Memphis Kiosk (in yellow) allowed visitors to listen to sounds recorded around Memphis and submit a card listing a sound that

meant Memphis to them. At the GEMS Cart (in brown), visitors could participate in determining the future direction of Memphis as they filled out forms used to aid the development of the new city plan. Finally, the Search for a New Downtown exhibit on the wall showed visitors the speculative development that made Memphis.



Especially since the exhibit was new in so many ways, PPM wanted a thorough evaluation of it, but hadn't done anything like that before. At this point, I contacted the museum about the possibility of doing my master's research there, and we arranged a meeting.

I was already thinking about evaluation type work since I had some experience in that and it would enable me to examine representation issues, which was a main area of interest. So we quickly came to an agreement that working together would be beneficial for both of us, and over the next few months worked out the focus and plan of my work. As I conducted research, I considered people and questions that would inform both my own questions and the question of the Pink Palace.

THEORY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions

- What were the goals and expectations of each party?
- How was power negotiated in the relationships between the museum and its community?
- How were interests negotiated in the harmonization of these goals for the exhibit?

Pink Palace Questions

- How well did it meet expectations of all parties?
- How do visitors engage with the exhibit?
- What techniques worked, what should be improved?
- How can thorough evaluation of an exhibit be done?

Theory

- New Museology: Bennett, McCall and Gray
- Collaboration: Simon, Govier

Photo by PPM staff

My theoretical perspective centered around New Museology and collaboration.

New Museology is a loose combination of initiatives diagnosing what is wrong with museums and seeking to correct the ways the museum is seen to have failed its mission and audiences. Tony Bennett explained how the old museum worked with a combination of exclusivity and power, and led me to look critically at who controls the story and subtle ways that it is biased. Vikki McCall and Clive Gray provided a phenomenal summary of New Museology at the beginning of their paper and helped me comprehend the movement, what changes are being called for, and what issues I would focus on.

Collaboration is a common tool for museums, but its nature is contested. Nina Simon was foundational to my understanding of how collaboration was viewed and implemented inside museums. For my research, just as in the literature, she proved to be the norm against which other ideas were presented. I also drew heavily on the analysis of Louise Govier, who overturned the belief I had gathered, that collaboration's goal was the handover of power, and it should be evaluated by how much power was ceded by the museum. She argued instead that collaboration is about coming together to create something new, and all parties have valuable

contributions that should be utilized. It was based on this view that I analyzed and assessed the success of PPM's collaborations.

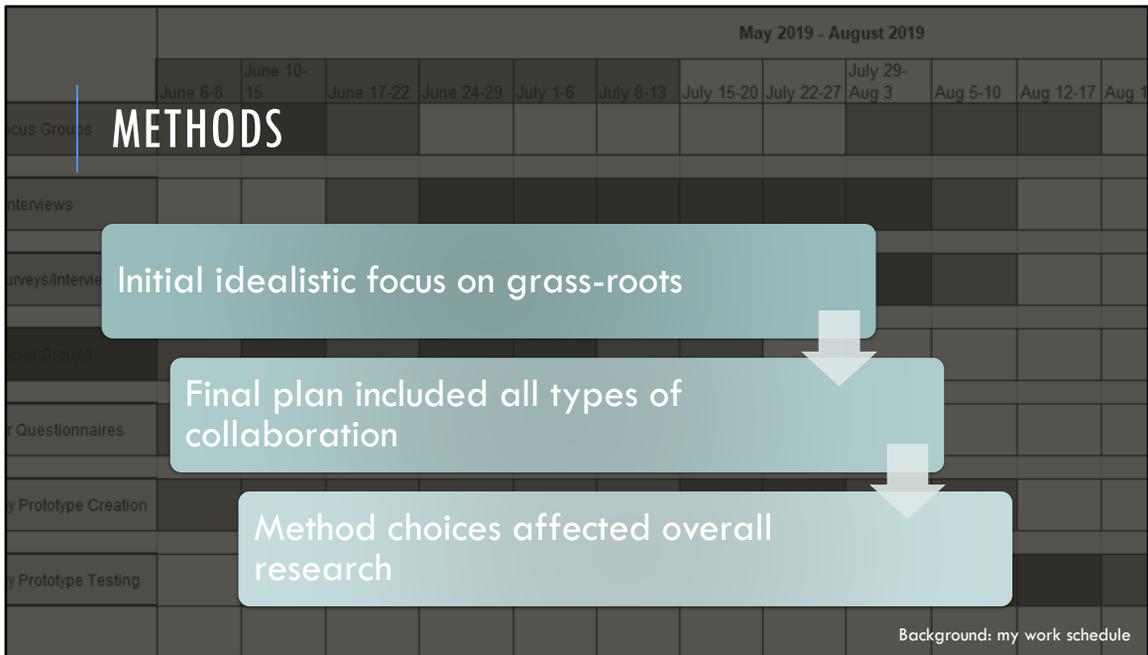
My research questions were designed to focus my work on understanding the application of New Museological principles through collaboration, especially how different voices were integrated into the final exhibit. The Pink Palace's questions focused on understanding where their work was successful, and how it could be improved for the future.

Louise Govier, "Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non-Museum Organisations," 2008.

Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>.

Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Vikki McCall and Clive Gray, "Museums and the 'New Museology': Theory, Practice and Organisational Change," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.869852>.



I came into the research with what turned out to be a very idealistic plan. My research was focused on the most grassroots collaborative element. This was individuals around Memphis who met PPM staff at one of their engagement tables and contributed a word describing Memphis, a photo of themselves, or a recording of them answering a question about Memphis. These were then used to make pieces in the exhibit.

I planned to have them as my main participants and give them a large say in the evaluation, but I soon found out that they were hard to contact, often didn't remember the contribution well, and weren't interested in spending much time or effort with the project. There were many unreturned emails and phone calls. So I readjusted and determined to examine as many involved individuals as I could, seeking for breadth in covering the many types of collaboration utilized by the museum.

So I:

- Conducted two focus groups with the Pink Palace curator team and education staff who planned the exhibit
- Interviewed four organization leaders who let PPM set up engagement tables in

their space

- Interviewed the three creative partners who worked with PPM to have a piece they had created put into the exhibit
- Got survey responses from 13 individuals who had contributed a word, picture, or recording

The more heavily a participant was involved in the exhibit making, the more time they were willing to spend contributing to my research and evaluation efforts of it. Creative partners did one hour interviews, while individuals filled out five-minute surveys. The mixed style I ended up using seemed to work well for my diverse participants. I was able to involve more people in the analysis because I could customize the research to how much they were willing to engage.

This opened my eyes to the practical realities that needed to shape my perspective on theory, and it drew me to data that helped analyze the effectiveness and value of different forms of collaboration.

CONCLUSIONS - ANTHROPOLOGIST IN THE MUSEUM

Shift focus toward people and relationships

- Balance
- New Museology
- Evaluation

Refocus theory through practice, and practice through theory

- Theory – challenged by practical constraints
- Practice – pushed beyond face value

Anthropologists can and should be more involved than just writing critical analyses. Their perspective is very well suited to be part of the work to change museums. During my research, I saw this in two main areas.

First, the anthropologists' perspective tips the focus toward people and relationships rather than objects, which helps balance the museum tendency. It is also essential for New Museology, which turns the museum outward, focusing on their obligations to people rather than the collection. An anthropological perspective is valuable for evaluation, especially for collaborative work, because it takes into account the evaluation of partners outside the museum.

In this case, my anthropological research was merely carrying on the work already done by the PPM curator team, many of whom are anthropologists. I would argue that their work, integrating outside voices from the beginning to the end of the exhibit, adds to mine to show what anthropologists can do for the museum. They can build exhibits that move the museum forward to connect with its current and potential audiences.

Second, I saw the value of anthropological work in and for museums in how my

research refocused theory through practice, and practice through theory. According to Marietta Baba in her piece “Theories of Practice in Anthropology: A Critical Appraisal” (2002), this is an essential part of the discipline. During my research, practical constraints such as the unwillingness of individuals to deeply engage, continued to challenge my theoretical position. This led me to reevaluate my understanding of collaboration theory to better fit the realities of people and museum work, eventually determining that collaboration should be evaluated not by the amount of power ceding, but by the fulfillment of all parties’ goals.

My theory also pushed me to go beyond face value when analyzing data. Guided by issues I’d been sensitized to from anthropological readings about representation and power in museum exhibits, I looked beyond the fact that collaborative pieces were prominent in the exhibit to consider their relative location. When I did, I realized that they were generally relegated to the edges of the exhibit, giving a marginalizing effect to their voice in the exhibit.

CONCLUSIONS — COLLABORATION AND NEW MUSEOLOGY

Collaboration makes more transformative changes

All forms of collaboration are valuable

Evaluation of collaborative work is complex

Keep on and do more!

My research also gave insight into collaboration in museums. Collaboration is not necessary for New Museology changes, but it seems to make change deeper and more transformative.

This was especially dramatic in my research when I compared the New Museology initiatives addressed through collaboration with the initiatives implemented by the staff. For example, Pink Palace staff provided hands-on activities to engage children and so widen access to the exhibit, but it was not as engaging as they had hoped. In contrast, seeking more diverse representation, the staff gathered contributions from individuals around Memphis, which enabled perspectives and people represented to be much broader than could have been possible just from museum staff.

Another conclusion of my work was that all forms of collaboration are valuable, as argued by Simon and Govier. In fact, different types allow more diverse involvement. As a micro-level example, PPM staff explained how simple ways to contribute at the engagement tables helped welcome diverse participation:

[...] we're trying to make sure we're getting a variety, [...] of people, but now [w]e want to make sure we're engaging that group of people as much as possible and realizing that some people are not going to want to sit down and

record, [...] or take a photo. [...] so we came up with three different ways. An anonymous word about Memphis. [in addition to the photo or recording]. (Wunrow, P3: PPM FG 1, Para 124)

Even if the type of collaboration isn't what the museum wanted, the form of collaboration can evolve. This can be seen especially in one of the museum's creative partners. They were approached by Pink Palace staff first, then worked as co-creative partners to make their work into an exhibit, and finally, they said:

[...] since I'm also, a writer, for [a local paper] [...] That, *really fed* into the, sense of collaboration, [...] after, the way we would present [my piece] was worked out and all the meetings, with me as an *artist*, I felt, really, close to [the museum curation team] because I went in and, interviewed them about the [...] exhibit as a whole. [...] I just, dove in in a completely other way and, came to appreciate what they had done, more holistically, by virtue of, getting the whole backstory [...]. (Wunrow, CPC2: Interview, Para 26)

Evaluating collaboration or collaborative work is complex. There are two things to keep in tension. First, collaboration is a success if fulfills goals of partners. Secondly, the museum desires collaboration to change the museum as called for by New Museology. In many ways, I think this reflects the balance between theory and practical action in the real world. From my work, I would advocate viewing evaluation of collaborative work on two levels. First, practical and project-specific: did it communicate what the makers wanted, did it draw people like they hoped, and so on. Second, theoretical and longer-term: did it fulfill New Museum goals.

Finally, so we don't get swamped in our own critiques, I want to end with something many of the partners said: it's good work, just keep on and do more! One of the creative partners said it this way:

[...] I think it's easy to, spin scenarios... [...] of, *how* to engage the public. [...] And then it's another matter when you're actually, dealing with people, [...] [T]o improve, I would say do *what* they did but more *of* it. [...] even more examples, of, community involvement. And I recognize it was a *challenge* and, sometimes it's like pulling teeth just getting people to participate [...] what they did was great but, more of that sort of thing... [and] more diverse approaches to eliciting, responses and, creative, engagement, with the process [...] (Wunrow, CPC2: Interview, Para 46)

THANKS TO ALL

My participants who took more of their time to talk to me about the project.

The Pink Palace Museum staff for welcoming me into the life of the museum, participating in my focus groups, and mentoring me.

My committee, Dr. Michael Pérez, Dr. Micah Trapp, Dr. Lindsey Feldman, and Dr. Leslie Luebbers for their encouragement and guidance.

My family for their endurance and uncomplaining support.

And to God, without whom none of this would have been possible.

And thank you for reading!