

MUSE

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COLLABORATING FOR THE FUTURE

Highlights from Conference '89

COLLABORATION POUR LE FUTUR

Points saillants du congrès 1989



Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature

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Cover: "Hairsalon", by Jeannot Blackburn of Montreal. This coffee set, made of earthenware with lowfire glazes and lusters, forms part of the exhibition, *The Collection from Maxwell House*, organized by the Ontario Crafts Council and now on national tour.

Couverture : « Hairsalon » (Salon de coiffure) par Jeannot Blackburn de Montréal. Ce service à café, en porcelaine lustré à cuisson réduite, fait partie de l'exposition itinérante, *The Collection from Maxwell House*, (La collection de Maxwell House), organisée par l'Ontario Crafts Council.

Collaboration with the Wider Community

16

DR. ELAINE BERNARD

I am often asked to give talks on the and technology for fans. The Canadian

understand and, most importantly, participate and mold changes in our society.

I believe that museums are full of bias. Like every other product of human endeavor, like science and technology, museums are somebody's interpretation, at some point in history of what is important, significant, or worthy. The pretence of objectivity is a problem in all institutions. As philosopher Jean Paul Sartre said, "objectivity is the subjectivity of those who are ashamed of their subjectivity." So let's be open and honest about our biases. Most of our museums are about white Anglo-Saxon male culture. Let's think about that, and consider how we could change that if we wanted to.

There is also a tendency to show linear progress without

England approached a scientist, Humphry Davy, to assist them in reducing methane gas explosions in mines. Davy developed the miner's safety lamp, which enclosed an open flame in fine wire mesh and glass. The company heralded the invention of the Davy safety lamp as a fine example of technological progress, and even today it is often used as an example of science and industry working together to improve life for all of us.

But from a miner's point of view, the Davy safety lamp was a disaster. The lamp led to an increase in fatalities in the mines. It made it possible for company bosses to force workers into more gas-intensive environments that would have been totally inaccessible before the invention of the "safety lamp". But most important, it allowed the mining companies to forestall the real improvement in mine safety, proper ventilation. Technological progress

of the things we cherish most in our society aren't portrayed in our museums: democracy, democratic institutions, co-ops, the movements of our society and the beliefs that have pulled us together or pushed us apart. What about protest groups and advocacy groups, people in motion, changing, questioning, conflicting, arguing and, of course, the labor movement. In my province 42 per cent of the work force is in organized labor. There are few labor museums, per se in British Columbia. The history of the province has been one of continual industrial warfare, yet we do not have a museum about "the working people", their organizations and their aspirations, dreams and culture.

Today's museums must become centres of empowerment and they need to collaborate with the wider community. Collaboration as we know it, means mutual learning and mutual support. But the real secret

She would have said "There is a problem here with the constant shifting from letters to numbers." And if she had been able to convince him, he would have then gone to his office for a couple of hours and he would have thought "well I will make it all letters." This would have resulted in the potential for lots of obscene words, but these could be ruled ineligible. All letters would have given us, according to my calculations, about 5 billion possibilities. You could then assume a billion dirty words, which is optimistic. Put them on a database and eliminate them — you'd still have billions of possible codes. Not only that, but if you want revenue... heck in a country where the people are willing to pay big

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bucks to have Roger on their licence plate, think what they would be willing to pay for a personalized postal code.

What I am getting at, is that there are two types of knowledge, there is the knowledge of the expert who is the designer. But, there is also the user or consumer who may not have the skill and insight that the "expert" has but they hold up half of the sky too. They have a very different skill and insight and the *real* skill of the expert is opening their ears and learning how to listen to other people's knowledge. It is hard, but, boy, it is exciting!

I would like to end by stating that museums ultimately, like culture, like technology, are about people. So why are we removing all the people from our museums? Going back to the Deutschen Museum — it is full of craftspeople who are working at their craft. Those are the largest exhibitions, and the exhibitions that generate the most excitement. You can say to a mechanic, "Why are you doing it that way? Couldn't you try it this way?"

The museum thus becomes a centre for activity, learning, evaluation and rethink-

ing the state of our society. The good thing about a technological revolution is that it shakes up every institution. Museums are going through major changes because of this technological revolution. We can try new things... we can look very critically at our institutions and start to reconsider, not what they are but what they could be. The best way to predict the future is to create it, and we need to start reintegrating all of the aspects of our world. In the real world there isn't science here and technology there, and arts here and nature out there. They're all together, and the more we come to understand it the more we understand the integration and that integration is exciting.

I would like to end with a Chinese proverb, which is my favorite when dealing with the issue of integration: "when the finger points to the moon, the idiot looks at the finger".

Note: This article is excerpted from a keynote presentation by Dr. Bernard delivered at the 1989 CMA/SMQ annual conference in Hull, Quebec.

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