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All Under One Roof: An Ethnographic Commons in the Missoula Public Library

By

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Professional Paper

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Abstract

Ervin, Caitlin, B.F.A., December, 2023

AUOR: Exploring Cultural Reflection and Intersecting Spaces at All Under One Roof

Chairpersons: G.G. Weix, Kelly Dixon

In 2021 the Missoula Public Library opened in a new state-of-the-art building to include a science museum, a research facility, a family resource center, and a media resource center in addition to the library facilities, all providing free and low-cost programs to the public. This establishment, internally dubbed All Under One Roof (AUOR), offers a window into the culture of Missoula and provides the community myriad resources in one, co-located model that has never been seen in the United States. Using ethnographic methods, this study provides insight into AUOR and the significance of its culture house model as the future of educational, collaborative community spaces by demonstrating the effectiveness of diverse partnerships, centralized resources, and community-centered design. This work has found that AUOR mirrors Missoula's culture and produces an effective way to collectively address social issues by providing opportunities for interdisciplinary and intergenerational learning.

Introduction

In May of 2021, a new building opened in Missoula, Montana that contained a library, a science museum, a research facility, a family resource center, and a media resource center, all providing free and low-cost programs to the public. This large complex, internally dubbed All Under One Roof (AUOR), offers the small city an abundance of resources in one, co-located space that is the first of its kind in the United States, and a window into the people of Missoula. Since the 2016 presidential election, this heightened era of book censorship, ideological polarization, and anti-intellectualism, underscores the need to understand how information, resources, and gathering spaces can empower a community to embrace cooperation and education. Interdisciplinary, accessible spaces offer communities essential resources, collaborative gathering hubs, and opportunities for growth (Butler and Diaz 2016). Since opening, the AUOR collective has had an enthusiastic embrace from the local community, recognition from other professionals and organizations around the world, and in 2022 was awarded “#1 Library in the World” by the International Federation of Library Associations, the “global voice of libraries” (IFLA 2023). This study aims to demonstrate why AUOR is a model for the future of educational, collaborative community spaces and its cultural significance in Missoula.

This work will adapt cultural anthropological methods to analyze the social field within AUOR and its effects on the community. In the past few years, cultural shifts in Montana and across the United States have created a greater need for spaces like AUOR. Since the 2016 presidential election there has been an extraordinary spike in ideological polarization and extremism (Schwalbe, et al. 2020). Accentuated by isolated online communities, cultural

exchange has decreased while misinformation has increasingly infiltrated national discourse (Bavel 2020). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these symptoms, particularly worsening isolation (Silva and Benevenuto 2021). The pandemic also greatly stressed education systems around the world, leading America's previously under-performing public education into worse conditions (West and Lake 2021). As a collaborative, interdisciplinary, informal education institution, this study will analyze how AUOR is innovative in its educational approach and effective in providing space for cultural exchange.

There are five original partners of AUOR, with a new organization joining after the grand opening: The Missoula Public Library, which opened its doors originally as a Carnegie library in 1894; the University of Montana spectrUM Discovery Area, Missoula's hands-on science museum, which has been operating since 2007; Families First Learning Lab, a family resource center, which started in 1994 as a children's museum; Missoula Community Access Television (MCAT), now in the process of rebranding to Missoula's Community Media Resource, which opened in 1990; and the UM Living Lab, a new child development research lab and educational space. The newest partner, Missoula Community Radio, started in 2007 and moved into the building in 2022. All partners are free and open to the public, and some offer additional programs with a fee.

While there are studies examining the various organizational sectors represented in AUOR, and nonprofit partnerships, none explore the kind of profound collaboration within the building. Studies focused on access television and media resources have quieted since the surge of the internet, although at its height in the 1990's many publications had examined their power as a democratic media outlet (Fuller 2007). More recent studies have cited the historical force of access television in context with newer forms of communication technology (Howley 2013). In

regard to facilities like Families First Learning Lab, holistic research on family resource centers and their impact is limited, while focus on particular services, locations, or social issues are more common. A more comprehensive study was published in the journal of the American Psychological Association in 1997 by Romualdi and Sandoval. Both authors state the essential and significant influence these centers can have on empowering families in need. Living labs have emerged more recently in the 21st century as psychology research hubs using public spaces to drive participation, and collaboration in both the public and private sectors. While living labs can be found as independent institutions, they adapt well to co-located partnerships, especially with libraries, museums, and universities (Perez, et al. 2020). The mixed amount of research for these three sectors underscores the need for more attention on their function and influence.

One of the most ambitious publications studying the chronicling libraries is The Library: An Illustrated History, written by Stuart A.P. Murray. The author examined the tradition of libraries, starting with archeologists excavating sites as ancient as the invention of writing over 5,000 years ago, to the contemporary libraries found today. As empowering learning hubs, libraries have had enormous impact on both their localities and the larger human endeavor (pp. 1-30). Murray writes that libraries are collaborative in nature, especially in regard to working with art, history, and natural history museums (pp. 145-184). As one of the longest-standing public services in the United States, libraries have learned to be adaptable and welcoming to partnerships, demonstrating originality and creativeness when working with other organizations (Carlton, et al. 2016; Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003; Lesneski and Bray 2023). This work will complement Murray's publication by demonstrating a kind of radical change in the field found in AUOR collaborative spaces, new connections with the field of science museums, and how partnerships transform the function and culture of the institution.

Science museums are thought to provide influential educational opportunities outside of formal schooling and are trusted in their communities to connect academics in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields to the public (Association of Science and Technology Centers 2021; Walhimer 2015). While there has been research into pedagogy (Peacock, et al. 2015) and impact (Flexer and Borun 1984), one of the more groundbreaking studies of science museums was Silvio Bedini's 1965 historical analysis. Bedini was a historian at the Smithsonian Institution and through his 1965 paper, The Evolution of Science Museums, pioneered examining the significance of evolutionary change in science museum engagement through comparing collections very early in the history of the field. Koster's 1999 chronology of science museums advanced Bedini's effort by including newer institutions, broader geographical representation, and those that used participatory approaches that the public has come to expect from the field. Bedini and Koster both aimed to document the history of science museums but stopped short of examining community impact and collaboration. Alexander and Alexander's work in 2008 builds on both Bedini and Koster's history and includes a broad, albeit Eurocentric record of the field of science museums, in addition to facilities that focus on history, anthropology, natural history, art, zoos, children's museums, and botanical gardens. Understanding the evolution of science museums and their history of cooperation provides insight into how partnerships are used today and their innovations and cultural influence on communities.

While many publications contemplate the place and people of Montana (Maclean 1976; Rowland 2016; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018), there is lack of ethnographic work focused on Missoula. One ethnography published in 2000 explored the culture of Missoula through a triangular theoretical approach that examined the relationship of three significant

cultural units: the people, social amenities, and landscape. The twenty interviews conducted in the study found that, “Most people who are transplants and even some who are not talk about the myth of Montana. It is a myth that belongs to an even larger category: the Myth of the American West” (DeBerry 2000). The myth of the west is a stereotyped creation story for the United States: Cowboys versus Indians, the frontier, individualism, self-reliance, manifest destiny, empty land full of riches, and great wilderness to be conquered, found across media (Secchiaroli 2001; Murdoch 2001). The author goes on to write that Missoula offers a blend of values more established in the northeastern United States, namely urban conveniences and the arts, while holding true to its roots in Western cowboy culture. The people of Missoula value the wildness of the beautiful, expansive nature around them, and enjoy the arts and academics introduced through the University of Montana (UM).

To understand the complexity and numerous stakeholders of AUOR and its reflection of Missoula culture, this research used ethnographic methods to document and analyze the microcosm within the building and its influences. Participant observation is an ethnographic method of understanding culture and behavior within groups wherein the researcher strategically participates and observes in the community (Sanjek 2014). The use of participant observation provided valuable insight into the internal mechanisms of AUOR, such as communication, systems, values, and community engagement, and aided in understanding the progression of changes in interdisciplinary complexes, and methods of collaboration. This process, as explored in chapter two, will support analysis through identifying where traditional museum-library curation intersects, and areas of innovation found in the collaboration throughout all partners of AUOR.

Organizational leaders were interviewed to understand institutional history, context within their corresponding fields, and their observations about cultural evolution found within their organization. Five staff were selected to represent their organization and provide insight into the history and culture before and after joining the collective. Interviewees are leaders or long-time employees among their organizations: the director Missoula Public Library, Slaven Lee, the general manager of MCAT, Joel Baird, the director of the UM Living Lab, Rachel Severson, the former director of the University of Montana spectrUM Discovery Area, Jessie Herbert-Meny, and a long-time circulation employee of the library, Paulette Parpart. Most individuals were chosen because their leadership roles provide a comprehensive perspective of the services of their institutions and the responsibility to speak on behalf of its work, while offering a comparable view of each institution. Finally, Paulette Parpart has been a library employee since 1975, and the longevity of her institutional knowledge, coupled with her experience of the Missoula Public Library in its previous space and its home as a Carnegie building, provided important historical context. These parameters demonstrate the internal shifts occurring within the organizations, and observations of changes in patron experiences.

This work provides a foundation for understanding the impact and nature of the AUOR model, unique to the United States, and the implications of the partnerships and novel advancements. In the International Federation of Library Associations “Public Library of the Year Award” publication, the jury chair, Jakob Guillois Lærkes, shared what makes the Missoula Public Library a novel venture:

This year’s field of nominated libraries is particularly strong, and reveals the breadth of scope within new library buildings. From large and impressive prestige buildings to innovative and sustainable solutions and smaller local meeting venues. But Missoula Public Library has it all. The building stands out for its beautiful architecture that pays homage to the surrounding landscape while functioning as a library with a wealth of offers and possibilities that also serves as

a meeting place for the local community. The library therefore scores highly against all the award's criteria. It's a library that you would relish having in your own local area. It's a library built for the future. (Systematic 2022)

The results of this study may stimulate dialogue regarding collaboration and cultural influence and may spark institutions to reflect on what impact they are making through their partnerships and engagement techniques. This study may be used to provide framework for future collaborations among other organizations, and impact regarding social issues such as anti-intellectualism, isolation, and ideological polarization found locally and nationally. Future research can be leveraged by this work as a foundation for larger-scale studies about collaboration, co-located resources, informal learning engagement strategies, and spaces built for cultural exchange over time and across borders. By tracing the evolution of learning and gathering spaces in Missoula, this ethnography will provide historical perspective through oral histories, found in italics in the 3rd chapter, on collaborative techniques and its impact on the city, and the larger pursuit of ethnography.

The Ethnographic Pursuit

The ethnographic pursuit means to carry on the human tradition of cultural exchange through an academic lens. Our innate curiosity has historically inspired voyaging into the unknown to learn from one another and better understand humanity in its larger human endeavor. As contemporary anthropologists are expanding the genre by exploring a wider range of culture and technological innovation, the theories and methods embodied in ethnography have evolved as the craft improves and as the ethics of the discipline acclimate to societal standards. Ethnography as a pursuit of understanding people and the human story prescribes methods of careful observation, listening, and participation, with the purpose of archiving a holistic sample of culture within a specific margin of time. This contribution to the anthropological anthology is another step towards better realizing how the AUOR model is an innovation in collective educational community places and another chapter in the ethnographic pursuit.

Within the Missoula Public Library lies a constellation of different organizations and patrons, all with unique and intricate patterns of behavior and radically different purposes and pathways to the building that broadly represent facets of Missoula culture. To understand the ways in which these stakeholders foster connection, collaboration, and education, analysis was made through ethnography. Several methods were used in this research to analyze the microcosm within the building. “The ethnographic triangle of ethnography, comparison, and contextualization is, in essence, the way in which sociocultural anthropology works as a discipline to explain and interpret human cultures and social life.” (Sanjek 2014). James Clifford adds to Sanjek’s theory, stating that ethnography is orchestrated by inscription, transcription, and description (Sanjek 2019). Both Sanjek and Clifford’s methods are derivative of Bronislaw

Malinowski, one of the so-called “forefathers of ethnography”. Malinowski outlined “three methodological tenets of research: statistical documentation, attention to the imponderabilia of actual life and observed behavior, and the recording of spoken statements indicating the mentality of native thought.” (Nader 2011). For the purposes of this research, “native thought” is interpreted as people of the Missoula Public Library complex. Using ethnographic methods will capture the complexity of the place and its inhabitants and will provide a window into viewing what it means to be a Missoulian.

Participant observation is an ethnographic method of understanding culture and behavior within groups (Sanjek 2014) and was popularized by the likes of Malinowski and other innovators of early anthropology (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, Taylor, 2012). As a participant-observer, the ethnographer becomes a part of the daily life of the studied group to understand the culture more deeply. The use of participant observation provided valuable insight into the internal social landscape of AUOR, such as communication, systems, values, and community engagement, and aided in understanding the progression of changes in interdisciplinary complexes and methods of collaboration. Participant observation began upon my hire at spectrUM in December of 2017, when it was at its previous location on the north side of Missoula, one year into the extensive planning for AUOR.

Interviews were conducted with organizational leaders, and included inquiry about institutional history, context within their corresponding fields, and their observations about cultural evolution found within their organization. Five staff were interviewed to represent their organization and provide insight into the history and culture before and after joining the collective. The director of the Missoula Public Library, Slaven Lee, stepped into the director role in the spring of 2022 and provided a newer perspective on the collaborative and town of

Missoula as a new resident. The general manager of MCAT, Joel Baird, has lived in Missoula for over thirty years and has been involved with his organization since its inception in 1988, and offered historical context for Missoula, his institution, and the AUOR collaborative. The director of the UM Living Lab, Rachel Severson, is the founding director for the UM Living Lab UM psychology professor, shared about the university connection and an academic view of AUOR. The former director of the University of Montana spectrUM Discovery Area, Jessie Herbert-Meny, having left the organization just one month before the study was completed, was the longest-term employee at spectrUM, starting one year after the organization began, and was very involved in the design of AUOR. A long-time circulation employee of the library, Paulette Parpart, is the longest serving employee of the Missoula Public Library and provided rich historical information about Missoula and the library's evolution. Hannah Zuraff became the director of Families First Learning Lab not long before the AUOR organizations moved in together and showed interest in participating, but was unable to be scheduled for an interview. While all of these interviewees have varied experience at their institutions and Missoula, they share a comparable perspective in that they are senior employees and provide broad insight into their organizations and impact. Questions were adjusted as appropriate to fit the context of their role and their organization, and sought to understand their personal perspective in their institution's contributions to the collaborative its intersection with Missoula.¹

¹ Identity: 1) What is your position now? 2) What was your position when you first started? 3) How long have you been working or volunteering with your organization? History: 4) What was your organization's culture and patron experience like when you first started? 5) What was Missoula like when you first started in your position? 6) What changes have you seen in your organization since you have been in your position? 7) What changes have you seen in Missoula since you have been in your position? Current: 8) Can you describe what visitors may find when they come to your organization? 9) How does that compare to when you first started in your position? 10) What types of people visit your organization? 11) How does that compare to when

This work uses quantitative data as supporting evidence for anecdotal claims, such as program participation and the community's response to AUOR. Some AUOR partners, namely the Missoula Public Library and the spectrUM Discovery Area, record qualitative and attendance data, which are used to demonstrate participation before and after the move into the new building. These parameters demonstrate attendance and patron observations. Additionally, photos and inscription are included to illustrate the architecture and the everyday lives of the visitors.

AUOR represents niche and diverse facets of Missoula, Montana, unlike any other seen in the United States. In an effort to understand this group and the significance of the novel, co-located model, in context, multiple ethnographic methods were used to document this unique building. These methods, namely participant observation, interviews, statistical data, photographs, and analysis have been used to understand cultures around the world and are designed by anthropologists to engage in the ethnographic pursuit of understanding the human story. These methods exhibit what makes AUOR an important venture, how it came to be, and how it represents the Missoula public.

As cultural anthropologists use interdisciplinary methods in their work, they are also adaptive when choosing when and how to engage the public about their research, whether via informal or formal education, in person or virtually, or among different audiences (Fassin 2017).

Public ethnography is the means through which anthropologists educate those outside the

you first started in your position? AUOR: 12) How do you think your organization supports learning? 13) What are some ways that your organization makes learning relevant for people with different backgrounds? 14) How do you think partnerships in this building support learning? 15) What challenges arise when working with other organizations? 16) How do you think our collective work might affect people in Missoula? Other: 17) Is there anything else you'd like to share? 18) Do you collect evaluative data?

academy about their cultural research and can play a significant role in the field. This method of applied anthropology has been a pathway to inform the public about culture, advocate for social change, and inspire future ethnographers. While there is debate about the extent to which anthropologists should communicate publicly about their research, ethnographers can bring essential cultural education to the public that may spark curiosity and inspire longevity in the afterlife of their work. As a new kind of public space, AUOR is a study of how ethnography engages the public and is uniquely situated for both producing and delivering the broader impacts of this research.²

Ethnography is both solitary and public in its pursuit. While the singular ethnographer typically works alone to gather and analyze information about a culture, they engage their participants socially as the chief research method. In this way, ethnography is perpetually public, and with very rare exceptions does any social science remain private. However, the term *public ethnography* does not refer to the social nature of the field, but rather describes education about ethnographic research that is accessible for the public as defined as an audience outside of the academy of anthropologists. This subfield represents communication through many channels, such as in museums, open lectures, social studies, workshops, schools, news media, and through public policy advocacy. Roger Sanjek described the value of public communication in 2014:

At its best, traditional ethnography has embodied the humanistic goal of “broadening human understanding” by “persuading audiences that ‘other [non-Western or nonmainstream] cultures’ make sense in the light of ‘other’ premises.” In fulfilling this mission, ethnographers as “interpreters of cultural differences” seek to demonstrate “the relation of present action to a body of values initiated in the past.”

² This ethnography will be communicated through this publication, conferences such as the Association of Science and Technology Centers and the American Library Association, and collaborative outreach across the state of Montana at schools and educational events. Outreach will be documented and shared in future publications.

Historically, public ethnography was given more attention during the pioneering days of anthropology, but remains an important element of the discipline and its civic engagement.

While the field of ethnography has only existed since the 19th century, the art of documenting and storytelling about other cultures has been around for much longer. Conceptual elements of public ethnography can be traced to the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe through cabinets of curiosity, the practice of housing exotic material culture to showcase to others (Alexander and Alexander 2008). Articles in cabinets of curiosity were purchased by European elites from colonizers to exhibit privately, but this practice contributed to the inception of publicly available institutions showcasing natural history and ethnographic material (Hudson 1987). These institutions became formalized as colleges and universities, many of which continue to keep ethnographic material as a teaching collection, or in a public museum. This would be the start of formalized anthropology in higher education, and public ethnography in museums (Alexander and Alexander 2008). AUOR signifies an evolution in broader impacts communication and opportunity for educating the public about research as a building with a library, a museum, and integral ties to a university.

Public ethnography began making strides in the United States in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair, a monumental event celebrating novel scientific and technological discoveries. At the fair, the public were invited to consider a world beyond their own, with exhibitions by Franz Boas and representatives of the Smithsonian institution. Boas' exhibition at the fair culminated in the establishment of the Field Museum in Chicago, a large natural history museum with one of the biggest active anthropology departments seen in American museums today (Alexander and Alexander 2008). As time passed and more research was made available publicly, Boas and Margaret Mead would become household names by bringing their research to the forefront of

national discourse (Fassin 2017). Since the decline of anthropology and anthropological museums in the 20th century, the academy has not maintained such public figures and presence. Anthropologist Michael Taussig questions the newer limitations of the field, wondering, “if anthropology has sold itself short in conforming to the idea that its main vehicle of expression is an academic book or a journal article” (Starn 2015). Perhaps ethnography can offer more than just field documentation for the archives, but in addition strive to increase cultural competencies for all.

Alongside the establishment of public ethnography in museums, radio, television, and print have also been popular methods to share cultural research. Ethnographers often turn to print as a comfortable method of sharing their work, by publishing books or articles with their findings, however often targeting other academics as their audience. More newsworthy responses to social issues have been shared in radio and television, as seen in Mead’s work during the second World War. Many anthropologists addressed prejudice against Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 through public lectures, and many more ethnographers support their research participants by bringing awareness to social issues and challenging harmful policies (Hedican 2016). Orin Starn coined a term for anthropologists adopting methods of critical advocacy in 2015, “...exposé ethnography. Here the anthropologist scrutinizes troubling American institutions—supermax prisons, car culture, big pharmaceutical companies, military bases.” These wildly varying methods of ethnographic education exemplify the need for anthropologists to be agile in their response to public discourse and the considerations of their subjects, and their capacity for addressing social issues.

AUOR’s ability to provide public educational space both directly and indirectly addresses social issues found locally and nationally, namely ideological polarization, isolation, and anti-

intellectualism. The public, in the context of AUOR, implies both a common space for the people of Missoula, resources funded in part by the taxpayers of Missoula, and a nondiscriminatory service available to everyone. AUOR is a study of public communication in its evolutionary arc. By embracing the ancient to the novel, it holds space for oral storytelling, written literature, audiovisuals, and hands-on experiences. This research embraces public anthropology through studying AUOR as an innovative informal education and public communication hub, and by sharing its ethnography.

The Ethnographic Commons

In 1968 Garrett Hardin wrote a parable to explain the concept of his essay, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, illustrating a public field which shepherds shared to graze their sheep. In Hardin's essay, he describes how seemingly infinite public resources can lead to misuse due to their virtual abundance, so much so that the resource is damaged. Too many shepherds were grazing their sheep and not considering the consequences of how they deplete the resource, ultimately rendering the field unusable. *The Tragedy of the Commons* is often used as a lesson in economics and ecology, however the concept provides an interesting perspective when applied to other public resources such as those found in AUOR.

In this light, the idea of public ethnography has culminated in the ethnographic commons, educational resources shared for the good of the public, but it introduces complex social equations for ethnographers, their research participants, and the audience. The benefit of the ethnographic commons can be immense. The tragedy, however, is not in their virtual abundance, it is in the implications of the information, where it comes from, and how it is used. In the post-internet information era, this has become a new fold in the tragedy of the commons.

While public ethnography is an important method of communication, its application has been debated in the field. Anthropologists have moral responsibilities towards the people they work with, and often find themselves in the midst of affairs that directly affect their participants. One of the most hotly debated issues within the academy is about anthropological advocacy, and whether it's an ethnographer's responsibility to become politically involved, or if it's inappropriate to choose a side in a social issue. Debate also arises when ethnographers become involved as public agents for the government. Such involvement may compromise an

ethnographer's relationship with a community, put their participants at risk, and may put into question the objectivity of the researcher's work. Danilyn Rutherford writes, "If anthropology is going to remain a going concern, we have to learn to inhabit the ethical quandaries built into our kinky empiricism more creatively by building alliances across some of the barriers we have built around cultural anthropology. I have in mind those that divide us from policy work and the more quantitative social sciences." (Starn 2015). According to Rutherford, the future of anthropology lies in our ability to adapt to culture and expectation, navigate ethical ambiguity, and borrow from other disciplines.

Some argue whether this kind of public work should even be a part of cultural anthropology, and if so, what does that mean for theory and method regarding ethnography? Is it the ethnographer's duty to advocate, and does it do more harm than good to expose so much detail about what are often marginalized communities? Some clarity can be found in the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Statement on Ethics, "The complex issues that anthropologists confront rarely admit to the simple wrongs and rights of moral dicta, and one of the prime ethical obligations of anthropologists is to carefully and deliberately weigh the consequences and ethical dimensions of the choices they make — by action or inaction." (AAA, 2023). As diplomatically put by the AAA, it is the ethnographer's choice to share their research publicly, and to become involved in social issues according to their circumstances. The vastness of the field prohibits our ability to find a blanket conclusion to the advocacy dilemma.

Another point of concern with the ethnographic commons is the contribution of controversial public ethnography. Nancy Scheper-Hughes' field work in Ireland is often used as an example of contentious ethnographic publication because of her questionable methods and offensive conclusions (Scheper-Hughes 2000). Some have argued that her work was deeply

unethical due to her presentation of the causes and impacts of mental illness in Ireland, which her informants state was misrepresentative. “What is therefore at stake in the project of a public ethnography is the sort of truth that is produced, established, and, in the end, told.” (Fassin 2017). Such mishandled field work gives ethnography a bad reputation, dampens existing relationships between ethnographers and their participants, and may generate mistrust for future subjects.

As a record, ethnography may stand the test of time, but culture is continually evolving; even the best ethnographer’s work expires upon its publication. Though the ethnographic commons is an altruistic venture, there is risk that consumers of this media will not understand it in accurate context. Many aspects of culture are fleeting, but the written record is traditionally designed to exist in perpetuity. Ethnography’s afterlife can be seen by the ripple of influence it has on the public, and the archived knowledge of a culture after its evolution. It has a cascading effect, as the audience may come to understand the other with curiosity and continue to share the resource. The afterlife of public ethnography lives in the ethnographer’s ability to employ meaning in their work and communicate effectively.

While the issues of public ethnography have no clear answers, there is work to be done to educate the public in matters of culture, and anthropologists are qualified to address those topics, while AUOR provides opportunity to share those efforts. Engaging the public in ethnography brings to light research and the immeasurable opportunities to contribute to modern issues. Elements of public ethnography have been a human tradition longer than the academic discipline of anthropology has existed, and this innate interest in people, in addition to contemporary research, is what makes the field relevant. While ethnographers must be thoughtful about how,

when, and what they share, it's imperative that they do so to contribute knowledge, challenge ignorance, and inspire the next generation of ethnographers.

Museums and Libraries: Cultural Evolution, Collaboration, and Montana

From cabinets of curiosity to ubiquitous learning centers, museums remain a primary space for public ethnography, and are in the midst of cultural evolution in response to the digital revolution. Douglas David coined the term “post-object” to describe how museums have moved beyond simply housing objects, but rather serve as deliverers of informational entertainment alongside their collections (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003). Museums have evolved to become theaters of information and tangible learning places, competing for audience with the virtual world (Alexander and Alexander 2008). Likewise, libraries have kept their traditional book service and adapted to the post-object era by adding resources in response to community demand (Leneski and Bray 2023). In 1996 the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was inaugurated, combining two separate government agencies for the support of museums and libraries in the United States (IMLS 2015). This connection further embodies the concept that both institutions are overlapping in values and missions and are natural collaborators as post-internet informational commons.

The 2016 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) welcomed thousands of professionals from around the world to their 82nd conference. Using the theme, “Connections, Collaboration, and Community”, the conference was ambitious in its plans to convene and innovate through partnerships outside of the institution. In the session, “What Comes After the ‘Third Place’? Visionary Libraries - Space and Users” discussion centered on what the future looks like in libraries serving as community resources and gathering places. Marie Ostergaard, head of community engagement at Dokk1, a Danish library, led the session and later won the IFLA’s Public Library of the Year award, five years before the Missoula Public

Library had the honor. Ostergaard said of Dokk1 that it was the “living room of the city”, addressing the needs of the community beyond the usual scope of libraries. In addition to books, Dokk1 contains exhibits, artwork, performances, children’s programming, and more (Carlton et al. 2016).

“The community itself - whether in the academic or public realm - not only plays a vital role in the production and dissemination of knowledge but also comes away with a better understanding of the role of the library, now transformed into a library-museum hybrid sharing space both symbolically and physically, dedicated to the formation of knowledge through the juxtaposition of text and object...”
(Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003)

In the post-object era, museums and libraries are supporting each other through cross-pollinating programs and finding new ways to address community needs. Dokk1 and other Scandinavian culture houses, or *Kulturhus* in Danish, would prove to be inspiration for the Missoula Public Library complex (Leneski and Bray 2023).

While AUOR provides a new model of informational resources to the United States, there are other examples of co-located museums and libraries around the world, such as The Pompidou Centre in Paris, France, which is a large facility housing both the National Museum of Modern Art and Industrial Design Center and the Bibliothèque Publique d’Information library. A hub for public access to various education programs, whether through books or exhibitions, and in spite of an admission fee, The Pompidou Centre also has shops, a restaurant, an early-learning play area, and a cinema. All 7 floors provide distinct experiences in which the public may better understand themselves, Paris, and the world through a multi-sensory, immersive learning environment (Centre Pompidou 2023).

There are few examples of shared library-museum spaces in the United States beyond AUOR. The public library in Woburn, Massachusetts offers a different perspective of museum and library partnerships by housing both books and natural history collections since its inception

in 1879. “The intent of both the design of the building and the mission of the library itself was to produce a public cultural institution with a broad educational scope” (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003). The Woburn Public Library is one of the oldest examples of public library-museum hybrids in the United States (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003).

The Newark Public Library saw the need for creative education in their community, and, in an interest for the building to “reflect the tastes and interests of the community itself”, established an art museum in their facility (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003). Their mission is to blend the lines between museum and library, mixing art and cultural exhibition, and literature. “We suggest that the essentialness of libraries depends not only on their role as a physical presence in the community but also on the relationship between its collection and its patrons” (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2003). The library goes beyond their duty in their devotion to providing information relevant to the people of Newark by including exhibits echoing their community and culture.

The new-age, post-object library-museum aim to find bold ways of reflecting their community, innovative responses to needs, and deep partnerships with organizations to create novel experiences. Former Missoula Public Library director, Honore Bray, states:

Missoula Public Library’s co-located partnership is unique in the United States and a genius answer to the ever-increasing demands of the ever-evolving library. As libraries are asked to do more – and be more – for their communities than ever before, establishing partnerships can extend the breadth and depth of the services required to help community members thrive in the twenty-first century” (Lesneski and Bray 2023).

The Missoula Public Library has taken these ideas presented by fellow museum-library collaborations one step further by incorporating multiple organizations in one facility, all with unique expertise, to provide education and resources to Montanans.

The expertise of libraries, museums, and other resource centers lends itself to supporting education and uplifting the community. Paul Born wrote in his 2006 essay, *Community*

Collaboration: A New Conversation, “The system of support for vulnerable people has become specialized, and as a result, has created fractured solutions... When a community begins to work comprehensively, it naturally attempts to harness all of its assets.” Siloed resources further burden those in need, who may struggle to navigate both their scarcities and find support. Montana is one of the most rural states in the country, with most towns housing fewer than 2,500 people throughout the state (Montana Legislature 2020). The 2017 Missoula County Health Assessment found that since previous assessments, while residents are in love with Montana, the poverty rates were high, Missoulians suffer from barriers to services, child abuse has more than doubled, childcare is insufficient and unaffordable, and the number of kids in foster care has more than doubled in recent years (Missoula Public Health Department 2017). According to the Montana Office of Public Instruction, 46.1 percent of students are reading at or above grade level, and just 36.5 percent are proficient in math (Office of Public Instruction 2022). There is great need for affordable, centralized resources and supplemental education in Missoula. In response, more is asked of staff that may be outside of their wheelhouse, and institutional cooperation is in demand. Working collaboratively, leveraging one another’s expertise, and solving issues together can be more impactful than addressing community needs in isolation. Using the “culture house” model wherein multiple free resources are located in one space for diverse groups, AUOR found an effective, ambitious, and innovative way to address community needs that is unseen in the United States by combining multiple, interdisciplinary resources in one building.

Museums and libraries are finding new avenues to provide resources and education to address community need through partnership. In response to the post-object movement, and recognizing that museums, libraries, and resource centers address Missoula’s needs better

together, AUOR has revolutionized the museum-library fields in the United States through interdisciplinary, co-located space. Examining the post-object evolution in museums and libraries provides insight into why AUOR is an innovative model that carries traits of traditional forms of public anthropology and venue for the ethnographic commons.

AUOR

English³

We recognize that the Missoula Public Library sits on the ancestral homeland of the Salish and Kalispel peoples. The name Missoula derived from the Salish placename Nmesulétkw, which means “the place of freezing water”. This name has been used since the existence of Glacial Lake Missoula, and dates to the last ice age. The first settlers to arrive here borrowed and modified this name to become Missoula. Later, Salish people began using an additional term for Missoula: Nlʔáyčstm, which means “place of the small bull trout.” These place names indicate historical and current Salish relationship with the land, and it is critical to learn to understand the history of Missoula.

The Bitterroot Salish were forced to sign the Hellgate Treaty of 1855. Following this treaty, land dispossession and attempts of ethnocide against the Salish and other Indigenous tribes were made in efforts to acquire land. Regardless of centuries of colonial theft and oppression, many Salish and other Indigenous peoples continue to thrive in this “place of the small bull trout.”

Recognizing the colonial past of Montana and upholding Indigenous voices helps us to move forward into the future collectively. The Missoula Public Library begins this journey by properly acknowledging this land as known by the first peoples of Missoula, Nlʔáyčstm. We will actively work to increase Indigenous engagement and access by providing a space on their homelands that they can come to. We are committed to showcasing Salish language signage, books with Indigenous authors, Indigenous art, and programming by Native facilitators. ⁴

(Missoula Public Library, 2023)

³Salish

Es mistéʔes qe es lʔci lu ǀ Táʔáyaqn u Qlispélix^w sqlix^wúʔulex^ws t Nlʔáyčstm Snčlqeymintn. Táʔáyaqn sk^wstulex^w lu Nmesulétkw lu ne puti ep sx^wuymaq̄s. Es šʔit Suyapi lu cx^wix^wúʔuy čtemmis lu Sqélix^w sk^wstulex^w Nmesulétkw. Tma še xamstetk^w u Táʔáyaqn epǀ i sic sk^wstulex^w Nlʔáyčstm. Nk^wtnáqsm lu Táʔáyaqn sk^wstulex^w x^wǀ mipulex^w u sqlqelix^w u t sqsip sck^wúʔulms lu ǀ Nlʔáyčstm.

ǂu t opnčstqn eǀ hénmłnk^woʔqín eǀ clčǀʔupn eǀ cil, ǀpmintm lu Suyapi čox^wš qeymin t Táʔáyaqn ilmixonm. Suyapi píčm lu Táʔáyaqn x^wǀ ǀimšm č i sic sqlix^wulex^w. U plpulsntm ǀu Séliš u es ǀix^wlm sqlqelix^w x^wǀ qeʔečst lu sqlqélix^w t Suyapi x^wǀ es ntéʔe t stúʔulix^ws. T Sqsip u scq^wom ǀu sqlqelix^w stntem u i še čscuuts lu ǀ sqlqelix^w nx^wlx^wǀiltis t Suyapi. Pn puti ǀʔe u i x̄sxéʔes t Táʔáyaqn lu ǀ ye mlk^wsqlix^wúʔulex^ws.

ǂu ne qe mipnunm lu Suyapi čsk^wúʔulms lu ǀ Ssqlqélix^w u stúʔulix^ws, u ǀu nk^wtnelsm lu sqlqélix^w, tma tʔé pistem qe ep x̄spupúʔus. Nlʔáyčstm Snčlqeymintn súʔux^wis lu Ssqlqelix^w u sk^wstulex^w x^wǀ ye stulix^w, Nlʔáyčstm. Qe es nté t ǀ ciʔ x̄stmtem x^wǀ Ssqlqelix^w u qe stúlix^w x^wǀ išé eš cx^wix^wúʔuy. Qe es ax̄lmistm lu x^wǀ epǀ Nsélišcn, u Ssqlqélix^w snʔawʔawtn u x̄xséʔečstm, u sx^wmiméyem lu ǀ ye snčlqeymintn.

⁴ There is ongoing discussion among anthropologists and American Indian and Native Alaskan Nations about the use of land acknowledgements. At the time of this paper, the AAA and an AIAN task force is conducting a study to determine the effects of these statements.

The Missoula Public Library stands near the Clark Fork River at the base of the Missoula Valley, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains of Montana. The top floor of the library is encompassed by windows where one could look anywhere and be astonished by the beauty of Missoula: Mount Jumbo, the small downtown city center, the river, Mount Sentinel, or Blue Mountain across the valley. The natural valley acts as a canvas where one can imagine its long history, while seeing the current American West and the conglomeration of values of Missoula: amenities, people, and the landscape.

Considering Montana's historic tradition of learning and collaborating provides physical, cultural, and historical context for AUOR and the history of how this behavior has been an ongoing endeavor for the Indigenous people of this land. Gathering, learning, and resource connection is not a new phenomenon in the anthropological timescale and has taken place in Missoula since time immemorial (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018). In this perspective, the concept of AUOR as an interdisciplinary learning space is not newfangled to Missoula or the country, but rather is a natural reflex of the human condition wrapped in an industrial building of the 21st century. Examining this history will provide new framework for previous work that has been conducted regarding collaborative metamorphosis (Born 2006, Carlton et al. 2016, Truitt 2017, Kania and Kramer 2011) and will support new research in institutional impact and curation. As more studies investigate these collaborative efforts, people can think more critically about community resources and informal education, and its bearings on communities.

Prior to colonial settlement and subsequent desecration, the Salish, Nez Perce and Pend d'Orielle primarily inhabited the area where AUOR currently stands and continue to do so

beyond new borders. Oral histories describe the pre-colonial Missoula and Bitterroot Valleys as beautiful, abundant prairie, wide open groves, and venerated by the people.

For Millennia, Salish-speaking peoples traveled this enormous area by foot and canoe, visiting and trading with each other, following a seasonal cycle of life and expertly gathering what we needed of the earth's bounty: bitterroots, camas, buffalo, elk, deer, a wide range of fish, a great variety of berries, and dozens of other foods and medicines. (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018)

Before smallpox epidemics and violence, tens of thousands of people lived around Montana in small groups, migrating along traditional trails according to the cycle of seasons, and were generally prosperous. Today, Missoula is different. It's beautiful in spite of the paved gray grids and slant streets; it's manicured and institutional.

In Missoula, once the place of place of freezing water (Nmesulétkw), then of small bull trout (Nłʔáyčstm, sometimes referred to as Nłʔay), was land where the Salish (Séliš or sqélix^w) thrived. Nłʔáyčstm today refers to the expanse of Missoula, but traditionally this word referred to the place where Rattlesnake Creek joins the Clark Fork River. Missoula was a pathway to and from sacred sites, a good place to harvest bitterroot (spéłm), and a common migratory route to hunting grounds towards the east and traditional homelands south in the Bitterroot Valley. The Salish gathered in Missoula in a camp near Hellgate Canyon at the base of Mount Jumbo (Nńq^wé) to harvest the sweet bitterroot plant every spring as part of the seasonal migration. It appears since people have lived in Montana, they have gathered where the library stands today, or crossed its path on a trail rounding behind Mount Jumbo to avoid potential raiders hiding in Hellgate Canyon (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018).

South of the library is the Lewis and Clark trail, named for two individuals who incidentally moved along popular Salish sites through Missoula and into the Bitterroot Valley. While the meeting of Lewis and Clark with the Salish and Pend d-Orielle in the Bitterroot is a

drop of water in the vast history of Indigenous people in the western United States, today it is one of the better-known historical moments of learning and gathering in Montana. What was, at the time, a largely insignificant and confusing interaction for the Native peoples, would become a catalyst for violence (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018).

For the Indigenous peoples of this land, the tradition of learning and creating together did not seem to have so many barriers that have come with exponential growth, contemporary economics, and European cultural traditions (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2018). In many cases, humans have simulated neighborhoods centered around work, school, religion, or common interests, either in person or online. Places like AUOR provide coveted “third spaces”, free areas that are not work or school, for people to meet and gather to recreate a lost sense of small community in an otherwise overwhelming, globalized world.⁵ Using oral histories of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes, gathering, learning, and resource connection has taken place in Missoula for generations, which provides context for the location and practice of AUOR as a building that continues to provide public educational services.

⁵ “Third places’ is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and refers to places where people spend time between home (‘first’ place) and work (‘second’ place). They are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships.” (Butler and Diaz 2016)

The New Library

In 2014, the Missoula Public Library invited spectrUM to move into a new building they had begun planning, and soon after the remaining four backbone organizations joined the effort: Families First Learning Lab, which at the time was a children's museum before redirecting efforts to provide family resources; MCAT, Missoula's Community Media Resource; and Rachel Severson's research lab, which would later develop into the UM Living Lab. Many things have changed since the original scope started in 2014, the most impactful of which have been partners rebranding, and disruptions from shifting leadership. At this early stage of planning no one imagined that the idea of moving into a new building together would blossom into AUOR, an award-winning library.

When I joined spectrUM in 2017, the AUOR partners were secured, and planning had evolved into fundraising and spending many hours in meetings looking over blueprints. Every detail, both large and small, was thoroughly examined by everyone, and every detail had changed many times, which invited miscommunication. Hours were spent flipping through titles of what to call a private rest area on the second floor, from "Breastfeeding Room" to "Spiritual Space" to "it doesn't need a title", and, finally, the "Comfort Room." Many more hours were debated about where to put partner spaces, and what it would look like to put a water room in a library filled with books. As a means of piloting the collaboration of the new building, spectrUM began installing small science exhibits in the library. Excitement continued to build from staff and the community. The library worked hard to pass a bond initiative to help fund the new building, and spectrUM and Families First were busy with their own capital campaign to build an educational water room.



Figure 1: AUOR staff touring the construction of the library circa 2019.

When the partners toured the construction site in 2019 there was a palpable sense of wonder as we all faced the reality and possibility of the idea that started many years ago. At first glance, the site was overwhelmingly gray and dusty; fabric and tools were scattered across the floor and untrained eyes were guessing at blueprints, trying to figure out what was going where. It was hard to imagine what the space would feel like when the construction was over. The staff pictured are at once unidentifiable and representative of all AUOR staff. While many things have changed since the original planning, the spirit of the building remains the same. It's hopeful, and new, and ambitious.

Rocky Valley Floor

Perhaps we should acknowledge the astonishing resilience of the Ginkgo. ...Ginkgos are often used as metaphors for adaptability and tenacity, and it is true that I want to be adaptable and tenacious. But I don't think that's what sends me again and again to the Ginkgo's shade... I think I come back here for the same reason Gertrude Stein said, "there are so few masterpieces." It is easy enough to describe something, or even to comprehend something as it is, but what really thrills the human soul is to be in the presence of something wondrous. Something that makes us feel in both time and space, very small. There is so much I won't ever know... but I know the thrill I feel beneath the Ginkgo tree. How looking up at it makes me feel an awe that contains both wonder and fear at its edges. In the presence of this tree, I am before something, as my neighbor put it, "vastly older than sin." Older, even, than hope as I know it (John Green 2021).

From the street, AUOR does not seem like a building that welcomes the public as a neighborhood hub. Its architecture appears more confrontational and institutional, with horizontal stripes of steel and windows up the angular, irregularly stacked floors. The name AUOR, or All Under One Roof, came to fruition not by choice, but because the decision-makers of the time concluded that there was no perfect, succinct title for the building. The English language didn't seem to have a concise, descriptive word for the kind of complicated ambition that exists within its walls. For most visitors, AUOR is simply "the library".



Figure 2: Exterior photo of the Missoula Public Library from its south side.

There aren't any other buildings in Missoula that resemble the unique architecture, designed by MSR Design and A&E Design, which is juxtaposed by the surrounding stately brick buildings and row houses. On the north side, the front entrance is against a busy, one-way, Main Street, and a small sign stands at the corner of the building with a title that reads, "Gathering at the Place of Little Bull Trout."

Since Missoula's establishment in the 1860s and the dispossession of tribal people, the physical landscape and dominant way of life have changed dramatically. Bull trout are now endangered. Pavement covers much of the prairielands that made the valley the tribes' greatest resource of bitterroot, a sacred food and medicine. Yet members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes retain a deep connection to this place and are a vital part of every aspect of Missoula life today. Throughout this time of transformation, the valley has been a gathering place - a crossroads of trails, roads, railroads, and bike trails. Today, Missoulians of diverse backgrounds are coming together to learn from our history, and to forge a future of mutual respect.

Recognizing the past puts the present in context and guides the future of this place and what it means to gather, work together, and learn from each other, the ancient human traditions that AUOR makes space for "to be in the presence of something wondrous."

North across Main Street, mostly shrunken behind the library, except its glaring white roof, stands the Missoula Children's Theater. At the building's west is the former Missoula Public Library, which, with its dated, brick architecture, sits in stark contrast. Unseen in the photograph, south of the library's parking lot, is Kiwanis Park and the Clark Fork River, and at its east beyond the urban buildings stands Mount Sentinel and Mount Jumbo. The designers planted young *Ginkgo Biloba* trees, a 200-million-year-old species, on the south side of the library in the green space surrounding the parking lot. Ginkgo trees offer shade, habitat, and represent the persistence, growth, and longevity in which AUOR aspires.

The Ground Floor

Underneath the library sits a small parking garage for cars, with dedicated spaces for motorcycle parking and bikes. In one corner is a staff door that opens into a hallway overflowing with donated books to be organized by volunteers, and a workshop used by spectrUM and the library for maintaining exhibits and the building, respectively. In the middle of the garage is a glass-encompassed stairwell and elevators leading upwards. Walking up the stairs, visitors come across geometric glass artwork that reflects a pixelated likeness of their portrait, mixed with bright light cast down from the ground floor.

The ground floor, or first floor, is tall, black, and gray, and draws attention to the light and color coming in from the expansive windows, and from the people. For some, the first floor is a way to get what they need quickly and leave, such as printing paperwork, or picking up their books on hold, or an item they designed in the Makerspace. For others, it's a spot to meet someone for a cup of coffee, to work on projects, or their only place of refuge. Most of the year, the first floor remains a familiar, efficient, busy space, but occasionally it is transformed.

One of the biggest transformations takes place every New Year's Eve, when all partners in the building come together to participate in a "Missoula on Main" event. Officially organized by Arts Missoula, an organization dedicated to connecting art and culture, Missoula on Main is part of a national "First Night" initiative to offer alcohol-free alternatives to celebrate the new year. While the library is one of the largest venues for Missoula on Main, other activities take place throughout downtown Main Street, like ballet performances, art installations, floating lanterns, and ice carving, among others (Arts Missoula 2023).

For AUOR's part, celebrations and activities happen on all floors of the building, while the first floor sees the largest transformation from quiet efficiency, to roaring liveliness. This past Missoula on Main included a dance party by the UM Living Lab; MCAT hosted a photo booth featuring different new year's celebrations from around the world and palm reading; spectrUM showcased flashy science demonstrations; Families First Learning Lab facilitated art activities, a gratitude workshop, and installed extra exhibits; the Makerspace led an ornament making activity; the Demo Kitchen had apple pressing; the event space on the fourth floor was taken over by a jazz concert, and more. When walking in the door, the change in scenery is so dramatic that the building is no longer recognizable as a library, but rather feels more like a festival. One of four large events produced by all partners in the building, Missoula on Main kicks off the year, followed by Earth Day, an end of summer celebration, and Halloween. Hosting events together is an opportunity for creative collaboration beyond the day-to-day grind, while for the public it's a fun experience and a celebration of Missoula.

Throughout the year, all partners work to maintain AUOR, while much of the logistical effort is left on the library and their capacity to maintain efficient systems with limited resources, which can cause stress on employees and the collective. In addition to their public services, the library oversees the care of the building and its basic functions, which get billed proportionally to each partner. The library has roughly fifty staff, including a circulation department, children's department, IT department, reference department, and a range of people dedicated to helping with events, collaborations, the Makerspace, genealogy, notaries, safety, facilities, PR, development, and more. Overseeing the library is their board and the county of Missoula.

From the top of the stairs, visitors can look across the first floor and see everything at once. There are short shelves filled with books on hold, two rows of computer stations, and

further away are CD's, audio books, and public printers. To the right of the books on hold is a self-checkout station, and behind is a desk perched in the center of the floor where library staff are available to field questions. To the left of the books on hold is MCAT, Missoula's Community Media Resource. Within MCAT are recording rooms, a studio space, Missoula Community Radio Station, two television stations, and many items available for checkout from their inventory. MCAT, with the mission, "Providing Missoula residents and organizations with the equipment, training, and distribution to produce media based on their interests and concerns." is supported by the federal Cable Act law (MCAT 2023). MCAT provides many resources and programs, such as filming services, summer camps, dance parties, and the opportunity for community members to be featured on their TV channels.

Party on the Death Star

“Hang on, I have to get something sweet.” Joel Baird said, and directed me to wait for him in front of their studio before taking off across the atrium. Baird is the General Manager of MCAT, and I found him on the first floor in front of the grand staircase. I walked past a short bookshelf and a long row of computers to wait for him outside of their studio space.

Joel came back a few minutes later, “Trapper Peak is closed!” He said in mock devastation, referring to the cafe that is located on the opposite corner of the first floor. I followed him into MCAT and down a short hallway. We passed the Missoula Community Radio station that operates out of one of MCAT’s studios, and I saw through the small window a series of glowing, complicated technical lights. Inside their office lives enormous plants, floor-to-ceiling windows, a couch, desks, and a half dozen screens glaring above me showing what they are cablecasting from their TV channels.

I asked Joel what their old space was like before they moved into the Missoula Public Library. “What visitors found in the old place was totally homey. Hand-me-down couches, a stained old carpet... To me, now, it’s such a change because this building is so official. We used to have a big room with the old couches [and] a coffee maker. The popcorn was always being burned in the microwave, or somebody was pouring coffee all over the place. It was kind of like the hang out living room for the disenfranchised.”

“Do you miss that living room atmosphere?” I asked.

“No. I like it better here because... See, what the old space meant was I was the jack of all trades. If the alarm went off, I had to go down there. If it flooded, I had to go down there. If the snow is 4 feet, and management didn’t get around to it, I had to go down there. For anything, I had to go down there. Anyone acting up? There was no security. I was the security. If there was any kind of issue, like rudeness, smelliness, defecation, you name it, it fell on my plate. So, I am totally happy to have this weight lifted off my shoulders. The people aren’t hanging out [inside the studio], too bad. But they can hang out in the library.” Joel gestured towards the seating area on the other side of MCAT’s counter. “So no, I don’t miss it.”

“It’s interesting you say that, because between the vision of the architects and all the other work that went into the design, the point was to make this building a gathering space, almost like Missoula’s living room. But you’re right, if it’s a gathering space, it’s very manicured. What you describe before would be much more like a living room for a lot of people.”

“Yeah, the vaulted ceilings, the blackness of level one. It really does change on level two, where there’s much more warmth. And when people come in, it’s huge, and it’s institutional. It’s cold, and the cement floor? The walls are black. I mean, it kind of looks like a party on the Death Star.”

“What kind of people came into MCAT before you moved here?”

“There were 5 regulars that came to the old space. And mind you, that this transition [referring to when MCAT moved into the library] happened with an extra discontinuity because of the pandemic. So, I shut MCAT down in March of 2020 at the order of the governor of the state of Montana. It never opened in the same space; it opened here 14 months later.” Joel points to someone we can see through the window. They are outside walking towards the library.

After a pause, he continued, “There’s a lot of homeless folk. [Name redacted] does not live indoors, you know. He lives in a tent somewhere. He comes in 5 days a week, 3 hours a day from like 12 to 3, almost on the dot. He’s a little early, it’s 5 to noon... He’s been working on something, we have no idea what it is, for the last 12 years. 15 hours a week, for 12 years.”

“Wow, what’s he been working on?”

“We don’t know. He’s survived [during the closure caused by the pandemic], but the others didn’t...” We both quietly watch as the man disappears through the doors and into the library.

“What do you think this place does for people?” I asked Joel.

“Being collected together makes more of an impact on the city’s consciousness. Just by being together, we’re supporting learning because we support each other, and each one of us has something to impart.”

Baird is a quintessential AUOR character and with effortless wit captures both the humor and gravity of working in this building; at one moment there’s dancing and laughing and learning, while at another moment a homeless man is trespassed from the building for dangerous behavior. There is a constant, delicate choreography to provide programs while often working with people who need more help than AUOR can provide. In their old space, that choreography was framed in a “homey” climate and informalities, but with that atmosphere was more distraction from the mission MCAT worked towards. The timing of the pandemic was also an interruption to the regulars that visited and relied on MCAT to be their neighborhood corner, while also having enormous disruption to the construction of AUOR, the movement of the partners, and the livelihoods of everyone involved. MCAT’s move from its old location to AUOR created some predictable changes that come with being in a new building, and unforeseen changes, like the shift in atmosphere and effect on visitors.

MCAT is a party on the Death Star. In the corner of what is otherwise a large, black, open space that has all the aesthetic of the Death Star in Star Wars, lives a colorful crew of people working at MCAT who remember what it was like when people were burning popcorn and spilling coffee in their old building. Their party on the Death Star also represents what was almost the end of MCAT if not for AUOR. The shift from television to internet and streaming services rendered them nearly defunct if not for Baird’s efforts to be in AUOR and adapt their model to the changing media. They were themselves a dying star. The dramatic shift from being

an isolated entity in a basement in Missoula, to an enormous new enterprise in AUOR hasn't seemed to change the nature of the staff, nor the core of their operation.

All partners of AUOR were separate entities struggling to keep up, and in one way or another were reborn in the new building. Baird and other leaders of AUOR were creative in their problem solving, especially during a difficult time such as the Covid-19 pandemic. spectrUM, like many other science museums in 2020, were struggling before a well-timed grant award and the deal with the library. The party on the death star, rather than a paradoxical end, is a celebration of what each person and organization overcame to be in the new building.

Across the thoroughfare is the Makerspace, co-operated by spectrUM and the Missoula Public Library. Inside are tools, such as laser cutters, 3D printers and scanners, modeling software, and sewing machines. The Makerspace often hosts visiting artists who use their time to create their work and connect with the public. Throughout the week, consultation and resources are provided for visitors to support their projects, in addition to regularly organized special events and workshops for adults and youth, such as a Fix-It Clinic for toys, Girls Who Code club, and a Hacking class.

To the left of the Makerspace is the UM Living Lab, and to its right is The Store. In The Store, each partner has goods for sale to support their work in the building. The UM Living Lab, like most other AUOR partners, has separate hours from the library, and is run by Rachel Severson and her student research assistants. The UM Living Lab is a place where people can meet scientists at work, participate in developmental psychology studies, and try hands-on learning. They host educational events a few times a year, including an Air, Wildfire, and Smoke event, and spectrUM provides science activities regularly to supplement their efforts. The UM

Living Lab often participates in collaborative field trips during the academic year, along with spectrUM, MCAT, the library, and Families First Learning Lab.

Conflict

“I still remember the week before we were opening. It was hustle and bustle because the library was open [already], but we had a little bit [of a] delayed opening. And so, people were here, and they were like, “what’s happening?” And I remember this one kid, I think she must have been 9, maybe 10... We literally just opened the door and she said, “what are you doing here?” And I was telling her that this was a place [where] she can meet scientists, and her jaw just dropped.” Rachel shared. The UM Living Lab, funded by the National Institute of Health, is a small room on the 1st floor of the library encompassed by glass walls, and it errs more on the side of cozy rather than research laboratory.

“I think a lot of kids picture Einstein or chemistry labs when they think about science. They don’t usually see themselves, or regular people, as scientists.” I said after I sat down. I anxiously checked that my phone was recording a few times as I organized papers for our interview. Our bimonthly AUOR programming meeting had just ended in MCAT’s studio, and Rachel and I scheduled this interview right after. I was still out of breath after running up and down the stairs to my office to get my supplies.

“What is the mission of the UM Living Lab?”

“Part of the broader mission is, I think, complementary to what spectrUM is doing. It’s to really engage kids in primarily health and behavioral sciences, which for me is part of STEM. And it’s having that exposure to those fields to inspire the next generation, creating these onramps to higher education.”

“What do you think are some of the challenges that arise when working as a collective in this building?”

“Each organization had their culture coming into this building together, and because the mission collectively has been to do things together, one of the challenges has been how we create a new culture. And working with each other. So, thinking about our All Under One Roof programming meetings, they had really kind of gone south [last year]. They did not feel constructive, it felt like a gripe fest. So, I think that those are the types of challenges that you know are going to come, but you just don’t know where exactly they’re going to show up. Or figuring out spaces, and who gets dibs, who gets priority. And how do we do this? I think that that always has to be an ongoing conversation. You’re always negotiating.”

Rachel continued, “I think what has to be created is a culture where you just know that’s part of it. It’s like having a relationship. You know that there always are going to be chafe points. In relationships most of the time conflicts are around intractable problems, things that you can’t fix or that are not going to change. That’s where most people spend their time in conflict. So, you know that like that’s a human thing. There’s going to be some version of that, so how can you create a way of being able to talk about those things, and give space, and grace with each other to know that, ok, sometimes we’re going to need to say this isn’t working. Let’s think about different ways that we might do this.”

Prior to the opening of the building, the UM Living Lab didn’t exist. Severson had been conducting research with the public primarily out of a lab on the university’s campus, in addition to coming to spectrUM’s previous location every Saturday. As the newest entity, Severson offers

a fresh perspective of the space, and as a psychologist, an informed eye for the behavior in the building. Joining AUOR was a way to expand her reach, while also developing hands-on learning opportunities and a strong connection from UM's psychology department to the public.

Youth benefit from exposure to role models who are representative of them and their life experiences, which empowers them to see themselves as capable of achieving success in academia and the science fields (Kimbrell, Phillipe, and Longshore 2022). The UM Living Lab hires university students to facilitate research and, like spectrUM, provide broader representation of who can do science. By including space on the first floor to host a science laboratory, the entire community of Missoula has greater exposure to the sciences, and direct, free access to the University of Montana. The UM Living Lab supports efforts to make Missoula more scientifically literate, more comfortable with practicing science, and more open-minded about who scientists are and what they do. Having greater access to the university off-campus and being involved in a community hub also makes AUOR a more intellectually-minded space, benefiting not just students, but all Missoulians. Especially in a post-Covid world that generated greater mistrust in science, having greater scientific literacy, health-sciences education, and more accessible academic spaces may better prepare Missoula for thinking critically about healthcare and STEM.

Severson's perspective on the internal conflict between partners centered on misaligned approaches to operations and variation in work culture. Learning how to work with and around each other and negotiating the new building was a recipe for disagreements that were largely logistical in nature. However, having similar missions often invites employees with similar ideology, which makes compromising easier as most staff have common values and priorities.

Interpersonal disagreements with the public are more complicated as the visitors represent broad facets of ideology and the breadth of possible behavioral problems. As public institutions, conflicts with visitors are not a new issue for libraries, but with multiple partners in AUOR and an increase in attendance, they have become more complex in the building. To prepare for this, the library created a new safety department whose staff are trained to handle a spectrum of problems, such as medical needs, mental health incidents, and large evacuations. After national attention turned to violent police conflict during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, the library was interested in carefully training and hiring Safety Specialists who are more akin to social workers rather than security officers. As a public space, all are welcome in the building, and only in very extreme circumstances is someone trespassed from the property.

One corner of the first floor is dedicated to the Trapper Peak café, which is always busy with staff and patrons alike ordering food and coffee to go, hanging out, having meetings, working at a computer, or focused on a book. Next to the café is the Safety Specialist's desk, where they are at once monitoring security cameras and chatting with the regular crew of homeless people. The Safety Specialists work closely with the homeless population that spend time in the library, while also providing resources and support for all patrons and partners in AUOR. Across the way is the book robot, an innovative solution to presorting returned books. Through the glass wall that divides the public space of the first floor and the library's Circulation Department, visitors are able to watch the book robot and staff circulate over 600,000 books per year, a testament to how much the 80,000 residents love to read and the state's interlibrary loan program.

On the southern end of the first floor are mixed-use tables, a gaming station for both analog and videogames, and in a secluded corner is the teen space. The teen bookshelves are tall and quiet, with a seating area at the far end. spectrUM's classroom shares that corner, and many times during the year it interrupts the quiet with the excitement of field trip students, club members, and summer campers.

To get to the second floor from the classroom means to walk back through the open area of the first floor. Guiding the way is a string of seating resembling river rocks, and an old bench that used to reside outside of the old library. The rocks and bench are another nod to what makes this valley Missoula: the landscape and people. The rocks are often used by the rest of the homeless community that aren't chatting with the Safety Specialists or finding a quiet corner to rest. From time to time, Missoula's Homeless Outreach Team, often called the HOT Team, are working with them to ease conflict and provide resources.

The first floor is a mixed-use space with a variety of assets and guided programs for all ages. From camps, radio, television, studios, books, games, a cafe, maker space, science, and shopping, the first floor offers a taste of every kind of opportunity in the building and an abundance of mixing and gathering for anyone who might walk in the door. Or, to use the Missoula Public Library's mission statement, "Spark curiosity. Make connections. Thrive together." (Missoula Public Library 2023). There is something for everyone on the first floor, and there is space for people who want nothing but a place to be.

The Second Floor

“I’ll take half of them to the museum if you take the other half to the classroom, then I’ll meet you down there.” I say to the person who is helping me. Most of spectrUM’s staff are undergraduate college students working part-time while they’re in school, which is often just as much a learning opportunity for them as the families that visit us. It’s a warm spring day, and I’m waiting outside the front doors of the library on Main Street. Two busses have pulled up with forty students who are here for a spectrUM field trip. We watch as the students slowly walk off the bus and the teacher lines them up against the exterior wall of the library to wait for instructions. All the students are squirming around in anticipation.

“We are so happy that you’re here. Has anyone ever been to spectrUM or the library before?” I ask them. Half of them raise their hands. “Does anyone know what we’re going to be doing here today?” I ask. A few of the kids raise their hands and I call on one of them.

“Science!” They shout.

“That’s right! Today, we’re going to do science experiments together in our classroom on the first floor. We’ll also go to the second floor, which has our science museum, and books, and a water room. Are you ready?” I ask.

“Yes!”

After quickly going over a few expectations, namely no running or shouting, we split the field trip in two and I lead my group into the library. The twenty kids behind me are talking excitedly, and as I walk them inside I notice a couple of people are working on the front doors, and smile. Despite all the times the company has come to service them, the front doors, in addition to some other doors in the building, haven’t been properly fixed since the building was constructed, and are one of the imperfect quirks that make the building feel a little more like home.

I take the kids up the huge stairwell and I point out the skylight to them that’s shining down all the way down from the fourth floor. The interior wall of the stairwell is made of geometric, three-dimensional wood paneling inspired by the topography of the Missoula Valley. Walking twenty children up the stairs is a sight to behold, and some think it’s cute while others find it bothersome as the students sing to themselves and distractedly block the hurried, adult foot traffic.

We walk past bookshelves, a couple small science exhibits, and circular pods that feature books under different, rotating themes. The color scheme of the second floor is white and dark pink, inspired by the Bitterroot flower. The shelves are white, and there is a long, narrow, pink space dividing the floor from north to south like a stripe. The books on the second floor are organized from youngest to oldest, with the youngest being on the southeast side of the floor, and the oldest on the opposite end outside of spectrUM’s museum. This is where I stop the kids and ask them to sit down in front of the pink stripe.

“Do you all like science?” I ask.

“Yes!” Most of them say back to me, while the others are distracted by the new sights and sounds around them.

“Me too! Inside our museum we have all kinds of science. You can build things, and learn about outer space, and track eagles, and go in a Hellgate Canyon wind simulator...” I pause for a minute as the kids excitedly whisper to each other about what’s inside. “I need everyone’s help with something. Do you think you can help me?” I ask.

“Yeah!”

“I need all of you to be really curious and ask lots of questions, do you think you can do that?”

“Yeah!” They shout. I let the teachers know that I’ll be back in 45 minutes to bring their group down to the first floor before running down there myself to help with the other group.

An hour and a half later, both groups are done with their formal field trip and are lingering a little longer on the second floor before their busses come. Some of the kids are in Tiny Town, which is an area with modular, wooden exhibits overseen by the library and Families First Learning Lab. They swap out materials from time to time in the exhibits, today they have a vet clinic in one and a kitchen in another. Tiny Town is designed for early childhood education and learning through play, and is adjacent to the Baby Scape, which is an area for even younger kids. Next to Tiny Town is the Imaginarium, which is a library program room where they read stories, start their student tours, and have special guests visit to lead activities. On the other side of Tiny Town is the Comfort Room, a small, private space often used for breastfeeding and a calming area for upset kids. I walk through bookshelves, past the Art Box, where more library, spectrUM, and Families First Learning Lab programs are held, and through the pink stripe to check on a few more kids in the Water Room.

The Watershed Experience, also called the Water Room, is a play area with two large exhibits operated by spectrUM and Families First Learning Lab. On one wall is a huge mural designed by a local artist, Josh Quick, featuring a fantastical illustration of the people and places in Missoula. On the other side is a door to a balcony with seating for kids and adults, which is another area where the library and Families First Learning Lab occasionally lead programs, such as planting flowers. The students in the Water Room can’t contain their delight so much that they’re screaming.

“Inside voices please!” I announce, but none of them heard me. The noise on the second floor, I’ve been told many times, permeates to the third floor, and bothers the adults up there.

I start to make my way to check on more students and walk past a large pink playground structure. It’s part of the DNA Playground, a grant-funded project overseen by the City, the County, and the Holly Truitt Consulting Company, that has been delayed for a few years for various reasons. Most of the playground, except the pink structure, is boarded up by plywood. Despite the project being delayed for some time, staff still get asked about it, but most of us don’t have much of an answer.

Past the pink structure is a black and white animal mural and the Reading Hive, which is a honey-comb wall where kids can climb, sit, and read. Kids often have too much fun climbing on it to do much reading. I greet more students there and make my way to the museum, which is buzzing with excited kids. Our portion of the pink stripe currently has two exhibits, Pixel Pegs, which resembles a giant Lite Brite on one side and magnet wall on the other, and our Gravity Well, where kids can drop pennies and see a model of astrophysics at work. The rest of our museum past the pink stripe will be occupied for the next few months by our Sun, Earth, Universe exhibition, which offers an abundance of hands-on, educational, astronomy experiences. We also have a Golden Eagle exhibit, designed in part by a local scientist, where visitors can track and learn about eagle migration, a Cell Wall, a giant Cicada wall, and our Hurricane Simulator. The Hurricane Simulator is the only exhibit that requires money, with proceeds supporting spectrUM’s Science for All scholarship fund.

spectrUM’s museum offers free admission for all, is open to the public 40 hours per week, and is guided by an advisory board with members from UM and community leaders. Our

museum has a large Discovery Bench, where we facilitate guided science activities every afternoon featuring a wide array of learning experiences. Since moving into the Missoula Public Library, spectrUM's attendance has tripled, from 50,000 guests per year to over 150,000, in large part because of the free admission, the downtown location, and being part of the library complex. In addition to spectrUM's museum, we also offer field trips, camps, clubs, and extend enormous effort towards bringing hands-on science across the state to rural and tribal communities. spectrUM's outreach efforts are guided by two advisory groups. The Bitterroot STEAM Advisory Group supports effort for spectrUM to bring science south to the Bitterroot Valley, and the SciNation Advisory Group supports the work we do north on the Flathead Reservation.

I ask our museum staff if they need anything, but they're so busy with the students that they hardly have a moment to say they don't before I check back in with the teacher. The bus is almost here, she says, as she's getting ready to round up the students. I thank her for coming and make my way through the maze of kids back to the office. I pass by three, bright green study rooms, another nod to the Bitterroot flower. In one of them is a tutor and child doing schoolwork together, and I see the kid has plastered his face against the glass window in protest. I decide to use a shortcut, and walk past some nice furniture into Families First Learning Lab.

Families First Learning Lab, with a small but hard-working team, provides resources, classes, hands-on educational experiences, and consultation for families in Montana. Their mission is, "Strengthening families through education, connection, play & partnership." (Families First Learning Lab 2023). They are facilitating their Art with a Purpose program in their classroom as I walk by, and I see a bunch of kids and their adults spread out with craft supplies. I smile and nod at the person seated behind their front desk and walk past cozy consultation rooms and their office space before scanning my key card at their back door. Past the back door is more office space shared by all three partners on the second floor, Families First Learning Lab, spectrUM, and the library's Children's Department.

In one corner there are books, a new "touch table" exhibit purchased for spectrUM's Making Across Montana and Resilience MT exhibitions, and messy desks. On the other side are a couple of couches enclosed by piles of bins and boxes as spectrUM staff prepare for summer outreach programs. Another recently upgraded "virtual watershed" exhibit is sitting quietly next to the couch, waiting to be moved or played with.

Across from the couches are meticulously packed fossils, 2 printers, and more books. A quilt hangs on the wall made by a librarian that artfully graphed the hot and cold temperatures from Missoula over the span of the year. A shared work counter is cluttered with office supplies, mugs, plants, and more half-finished projects. A guitar sits next to a desk belonging to one of the children's librarians who does musical programs. Meanwhile, the surrounding private offices are either quiet with studious computer work, or loud with big meetings and zoom calls.

Around the perimeter of the open office are piles of books, bins, donations, science exhibits, and projects ranging from complete to barely started. The snack vending machine is empty, and the vacuum is clogged with Styrofoam. No other offices in the building seem quite as chaotic as the children's floor, but no other offices are quite as energized, either. The phones are constantly ringing, and staff are always chatting and coordinating with each other. Depending on the time of year, the office can feel calm or panicked. This is the place where everyone celebrates the best of news or grieves the worst of it together.

One great intersection of AUOR is the field trip and tour program operated by all partners in the building. Every partner contributes towards the common denominator of learning and extends great effort towards students in Missoula as well as the rural and tribal schools that visit. spectrUM and the library, in particular, fill their calendars to maximum capacity to welcome as many students as possible into the building to learn together, while often including Families First Learning Lab, MCAT, and the UM Living Lab. Students who participate in these collaborative visits experience a taste of all that AUOR has to offer, and staff have seen a sustained impact as they grow up and continue to spend time in the building and find ownership in the place.



Figure 3: Child playing in the water room.

Experiencing the children's floor through a student's perspective is a matter of understanding what things there are to do. They are here to play, to touch, to explore, to shout, to splash, to act, to read, to listen, to learn, to climb, to experiment. Through the theatrics of the children's floor, from the thematic Tiny Town, the pop-up books, the colorful mural, and splashy exhibits in the water room, all the way to the science exhibits, curiosity is sparked. Behind the

scenes, the offices are always at work designing and building things to do and stories to tell. It's active inside and out, which is how people find joy in learning.

Figure 2 demonstrates the hands-on learning components of the second floor best, with a child playing with a science exhibit in the water room. The child is placing a ball on a mechanism, which they use by turning a wheel to raise the track above them. The track will guide the ball to fall into a whirlpool reservoir that is not pictured behind the child. The exhibit is a metaphor for the water cycle, where the ball “evaporates” into the sky before “raining” back down into the reservoir. The child is also reaching up before a whimsical mural designed by a local artist, Josh Quick, that represents Missoula both real and imagined. As families explore the exhibits, they are recreating and learning about Missoula’s watershed, while seeing themselves and their neighbors in the artwork. The mural manifests the triangular values of Missoula as defined by DeBerry’s ethnography, the landscape, the amenities, and the people.

Because of the diversity of programs and partners on the second floor, the collaborative programming had a steep learning curve and requires diligent communication and attention from staff. While most confrontations occur about policies and procedures, cooperation was tested the most when, on a warm spring day of 2022, the building was evacuated due to a mentally ill man threatening himself and others with a knife on the third floor. While library staff have a long history of working with mentally ill people, there were added complications in the new space due to its size, unspecified policies, and less-experienced partners. Staff quietly informed patrons across the building of the situation until evacuation was officially ordered. Though most people were there in small groups, Families First Learning Lab had to evacuate dozens of kindergartners who were visiting on a field trip. While luckily no one was hurt, it was a test of cooperation that exposed greater need for collective emergency procedures, while the event represents a darker

shift of U.S. culture that includes rampant mass violence. There are emerging risks to being in a large and busy public building that obfuscate the social web of AUOR and that, at times, darken what is otherwise a joyful space.

On a normal day, the second floor is vibrant with a contagious sense of delight and curiosity emanating from the kids and their caregivers. It's playful and noisy, and the partners work together to create a sense of wonder for everyone who visits, while internally weighing the responsibility of the safety and care of young people. It's a place for learning across generations as kids visit with parents, grandparents, and their neighbors.

The Third Floor

The third floor of the AUOR is the adult floor and one of the more conventional library spaces in the building. At the top of the stairs, one is met with a librarian stationed at their perch and a self-checkout station, as the peaking excitement is overflowing from the second floor. Throughout the level, different styles of seating are occupied with thoughtful looking adults focused on computers or books at tables, desks, couches, squishy chairs, and counters. There are plants, globes, and signs atop the featured bookshelves indicating a smattering of different themes. The color scheme of the third floor is natural brown tones and white workspaces, which accentuates the bright green plants.

Despite the ambient noise below, it feels quiet, still, and calm in contrast to the bustle of the first floor and the energy of the second. The third floor is divided in two, with one half hosting fiction books, and the other the nonfiction books and resources. In the southeast corner is the Demonstration Kitchen, where partners can host cooking classes. Families First Learning Lab and the library's children's department often facilitate "Cooking With Chop Chop" a cooking and literacy classes for kids. Meanwhile, spectrUM leads science of cooking activities for camps and clubs, and the library has hosted assistive technology classes, in addition to a number of other events in the space.

In the northeast corner live the periodicals and an elk spotting scope. Elk winter on Mount Jumbo, and the spotting scope provides more opportunity for people to connect with the landscape through AUOR as they can see the elk and other plants and animals throughout the year. The northwest corner is the Montana Room, which holds cultural and historical records, maps, and a secure collection of rare and out-of-print books. Additionally, the third floor contains

a meeting room, study rooms, maps, a computer station, a laptop checkout station, artwork, a seed library, and notary and passport services.

Everything Moves

“The last January we were over there, we didn’t have heat in the lower floor for the last six weeks while we had to order a part for the furnace. It was freezing. The top floor was ok, but the bottom floor... So, if you worked on the bottom floor, you just wore a winter coat, fingerless gloves, and threw a little blanket over your lap. We were really waiting for this building.” Paulette Parpart shared about the previous library space. Parpart has worked at the Missoula Public Library for over 40 years. She has seen everything, and I wished I had the whole day to talk to her.

We were seated in a study room on the third floor of the Missoula Public Library. The room was almost uncomfortably small and had a faint musky scent, but it commanded our focus with just two, plain white seats and a white bistro table between us. We were surrounded by tall, overbearing walls on three sides, and through the window to my right we could peek at the people wandering past through the bookshelves.

“What was your first day like?” I asked her.

“I started January 11. Or, I’m sorry, January 8, 1975. It was a blizzard. I came in and the secretary met me at the door with a broom to brush all the snow off. Because I didn’t have a car, I walked to work. So, I was just a white blob. She said, “Oh you’re not bringing that in here.” It was a lot slower, a lot quieter. Who knew it would be my life?”

“What was your job back then?”

“When I first started, I was... I was actually assisting the cataloguing. Um, typing cards, you know that sort of stuff. Kind of what I do now, except it’s not on cardstock anymore. And then, um, helping out circulation, slipping books, which is the cards you put in and pull out. We did that for twenty years, and then gradually I tried children’s. It was ok. I tried interlibrary loan, circulation... always circulation. Didn’t like it. Then I got into genealogy when we created our local society. So, we decided to do projects. I got involved with those because I work at the library, and I could train people. I could check their work to make sure that it was accurate.”

“What was Missoula like then?”

“Slower, quieter, smoggy, dirty river. What else? Just an easier life. And the university was completely separate from the city. Two totally different populations. The only shopping was downtown and East Gate. You went out to Holiday Village, that was the extent. That’s as far as you got to go, the rest didn’t exist. Everything moves. Everything.”

“What do you think about the new library?”

“Well, you can make stuff here. There’s places where people can actually sit down and talk... And they were [the AUOR planners] thinking a lot about mixing and gathering, more than just a community center as opposed to [gestures to small space]. I think that’s the difference between the two, in the old building we couldn’t [have] community space because we didn’t literally have the space.”

“The old building was so much smaller.”

“We have a lot of people complain that this [the new library] is too big. Too many people, it’s hard to find stuff, because there’s so much stuff. I mean, I heard those comments, and I’m going, “yes, it’s exactly the way we wanted.” And they look at me like, “are you crazy?”, but it is, but you’re exactly right. That’s the difference between that building and this building and what we can offer, and it’s exactly what we wanted. That’s how you make your facility relevant to your community. You have to find a way to let them in.”

“We’re almost out of time. Is there anything else you’d like to share?”

“I’ve always wanted the library to be very inspiring. There’s so much knowledge here, it’s all here for anyone to use, and I don’t think people think about that. I mean, if you want to learn something and you can’t afford to go to school, you can at least get started here, and if you’re really interested, then you can go on. And people don’t think of this in that way, but as a place full of books, and we’re so much more than that. It’s just so much more now than it used to be.”

As an employee of the Missoula Public Library for nearly fifty years, and as a visitor to Missoula’s first library, an old Carnegie building, Paulette Parpart has seen the evolution of the library since its inception.⁶ The first Missoula Public Library is just a couple of blocks away on North Pattee Street and is now home to the Missoula Art Museum. Remnants of its Carnegie architecture are most obvious on the outside, while the inside has been completely renovated into a contemporary art museum. In 1974 the Missoula Public Library moved to 301 East Main Street, across the road from its current location. The 301 East Main building embodies the plain and practical government buildings of the era, with brick exterior and a dark, cramped interior. It is a fraction of the size of the new building, but despite the difference it circulated almost as many books. The old building, now occupied by Missoula’s Parks and Recreation department, a church, and a homeschool group, felt constricted, with old carpeting, small rooms, and sterile lighting, but it also had a familiarity to it that is lost in the ambition of the new building. The staff remember the old building and the pains it took them to create the new space, the cold winters they lived through for the brighter days. It was simply a library, while AUOR is big, cross-sector, and full of possibilities. The new building was designed in almost every way to be contrary to the old one, with wide open spaces and plenty of opportunity to learn and create as a community.

The speed at which library technology has advanced, from cardstock cataloguing to a book robot, is a testament to how the post-object AUOR is adapting and embracing the new

⁶ Andrew Carnegie’s philanthropy in the 19th and 20th centuries led to the construction of over 1,600 libraries across the United States, including Missoula’s first public library (Murray 2012).

information era. It's also a tribute to how quickly Missoula has evolved from a slow, quiet, dirty river locality to a busier, louder, and cleaner town; it's a reflection of the library's progression from 301 East Main Street to 455 East Main Street. While "everything moves", some patrons are disturbed by the movement, they don't expect such dynamics in a library, and, in a sense, they long for the days of the slow, quiet, dirty river. It is a sign of the changing times, as Missoula grows the public spaces reflect the cultural evolution taking shape because they are created by the people. The public wants more from Missoula, and so the library, "finds a way to let them in" and offers more.

The third floor is a space for adults to study, cook, connect, access resources, and learn. Despite the peaceful focus, there are at times punctuated distractions caused by noisy people, traffic to and from the different floors, and disturbances from upset adults. Like all the other floors, it's surrounded by windows to overlook beautiful Montana, shifting the focus to and from the amenities, the people, and the landscape.

The Fourth Floor

Today we're preparing for a farewell party to celebrate spectrUM's, now former director, Jessie Herbert-Meny. Herbert-Meny started as a student worker fifteen years ago, and has turned spectrUM into an award-winning museum, moved us into our forever home at AUOR, made it possible for us to offer free admission, in addition to steering us through the hard times and the good times. We're stretching black tablecloths over bistro tables, which is a stark contrast next to the white aesthetic of the fourth floor. The interior is minimal to give way to the beauty of the Missoula Valley that is showcased through every window. There's a reception area on one side, where we've set up a bar and charcuterie boards for guests. On the other side of the floor is adjustable event and meeting space, and a library staff person stationed to answer questions at a desk, strategically available but away from any events that might take place. As visitors look down the stairwell from the fourth floor, they can see all the way to the bottom, glimpsing the color, smells, and sounds at once, like a symphony of the building. It reminds me of where we've come from, and where we're headed.

The fourth floor is the most adaptable to different events and programs. On a normal day, a few people sit quietly at the reception area to work while various programs take place in the meeting spaces. Unlike many of the other floors, all the meeting rooms on the fourth floor are available for the public to reserve for their own use, while the third floor is limited to study rooms and one meeting room, only study rooms on the second floor, and a couple of podcast rooms on the first floor. The fourth-floor spaces are in high demand and are often booked out months at a time. Atop this floor are solar panels, capping the thoughtful design that went into the building so it can sustainably work for its community. They really did think of everything, if only the doors could work.

I walk down the hall, parallel to the private offices, to make sure the balcony doors are unlocked for the donors and to get a bit of fresh air. On the south side of the fourth floor is a deck that extends the length of the building, with beautiful flower arrangements, chairs, tables, umbrellas to provide shade, and a view of the Gingko trees blowing in the wind below. On the right is a sign in dedication to Honore Bray, the previous director and mastermind behind the building and AUOR partnership.

"What other libraries have you worked at?" I asked Slaven. Slaven Lee is the new director of the Missoula Public Library, and is the successor of Honore Bray, who, after seventeen years, retired not long after AUOR opened. In a few weeks Slaven will be heading to Chicago to accept an award on behalf of the Missoula Public Library for Best Library Design by the American Institute of Architect (Farhat 2023).

"Well, I've mostly worked in large urban systems. So, the public library in Cincinnati, Ohio, because I'm an Ohioan. Then the King County library system in Seattle, Washington, which started as a rural library system. It's a big, rural network, so our branches feel familiar to me in that way, having a bunch of branches outside of the county and then a big hub town."⁷ The Missoula Public Library has six branch locations around the area to reach those that don't live close to the city center. The library, along with most other partners in AUOR, extends an

⁷ The library branches are small, mostly autonomous libraries often within other public spaces, namely schools, that provide resources for more rural areas of Missoula County when AUOR is out of reach. The library branches are one example of outreach, while all partners of AUOR have many other programs across the state. These efforts will be explored further as part of a larger future study of AUOR.

enormous amount of effort to reach rural and tribal communities to provide resources and education beyond the walls of the building.

“Have the other libraries that you worked at been collaborative spaces as well, or were they traditional libraries?”

“Oh, I’ve never experienced a collaborative space like this before, it’s very unusual. Well, I’m very used to partnering with organizations, but not having them be co-located in the space. That’s totally different. I feel like more rural states, for lack of a better way to describe Montana or whatever, there’s a lot of innovation there, because you have to be innovative. You have limited resources and limited access to things, and I think that can really breed innovation in a deep way. Can I tell you the other library systems I’ve worked at?”

“Yeah!”

“Queens Public Library in New York City, and then Austin Public Library in Texas.”

“So you’ve been all over. With that national perspective how do you think this space compares?”

“It’s like in another league. I’ve worked in gorgeous buildings, brand new buildings, big projects like this. So, some of the issues we experience with this building too, that’s very standard. That feels... Not unusual to me at all. But I just think this place is such a testament to how involved the community was, how involved the partners were, and Honore’s vision for what this hub could be. I’ve never experienced anything like it. I just think this space is so well used and has such incredible public support. Like, just seeing how many people come out to any program that we have... an author reading can attract sixty people on a Monday night. That’s wild.”

“Can you describe what visitors may find when they come to the library?”

“I think they find pretty much everyone in the community represented. The diversity of folks that use this building is so much greater than what Missoula is usually made up of. I think that’s really cool because I think it demonstrates that people feel comfortable and welcome here than maybe some other places in town... people will encounter a broad range of other kinds of people, and a really diverse range of spaces.”

“How do you think the library supports learning?”

“Well, I think because of all the different partners and the different spaces, we support the different kinds of learning for people who need hands-on learning, or more visual learning, or a more contemplative sort of practice around learning... We have all of those options here, so you can experience them all in a day if you wanted to. I know we haven’t hit our stride with intergenerational learning programs yet, but there is a lot of different generation sharing spaces here. And I think that’s also something that you don’t see a lot out in the world. One of my favorite programs recently was the MonTech assistive technology classes in the demo kitchen. Making that relevant for people who maybe need to explore using assistive devices in their homes, and seeing what’s possible and in a safe way where you don’t feel like you have to, you know, seek it out. It’s just there. You can look at it and think about how it would impact your life. And even for people who don’t need assistive devices, seeing what other people experience, and having that taught by an Iraqi refugee who owns a business now...”

“How do partnerships in this building support learning?”

“Just seeing that relief and expertise in the building is so huge because it... Like when you’re a library worker and you’re trying to learn STEAM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math] to teach it to other people, that learning curve can be really high, and take a long time. So, I think the service can be impacted in that way.”

“How do you think our collective work might affect people in Missoula?”

“I just think there’s a lot of discovery that can happen in this building. People discovering resources that they didn’t know existed, or that they needed. Someone who maybe doesn’t know that Dads and Dialogues exists could be going to spectrUM with his kids, and join that group, and have his life totally changed... all the unexpected discovery that can happen here can really connect people who, I would say, in this post-Covid world, are feeling really disconnected. And this is a place that can decrease isolation, which for people’s wellbeing, is so huge.”

The change of AUOR staff and leadership has become a byproduct of all the organizations getting settled. For some staff, it was their final project before a natural departure, or a farewell gift before retirement, and for others the new environment was too different. For the library’s new director, it was an opportunity for growth and a welcome and exciting change. Former director Bray was a visionary and a force to be reckoned with, which put a lot of pressure and attention on new leadership, but being in a novel space brings new demands which have benefited from a new perspective. Lee has taken AUOR in stride, and, learning from her vast experience in libraries across the country, put particular focus on equity and diversity.

Because of the fourth floor’s adaptability, it makes it the most variable and vibrant floor. Movie nights, trainings, Red Cross blood donation events, watercolor classes, dementia workshops, grief counseling, weddings, fundraisers, meetings, clubs, interviews, lectures, and much more, all take place there. Isolation, anti-intellectualism, and polarization are best resolved in a place like AUOR, because every aspect of the building and programs are designed for collective learning. The loudness of the culture wars happening across the country, including Montana, can at times feel quieter in the building because AUOR, by design, surrounds patrons with opportunities to connect, create, and learn, which requires visitors to reckon with the humanity of their neighbors.

The fourth floor had never been so busy as on the day of AUOR’s grand opening, July 14th, 2021. The public anxiously waited through a ribbon cutting ceremony with AUOR’s

leaders, the late Mayor John Engen, the president of UM, Seth Bodnar, and many representatives from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes, including Tony Incashola, the late director of Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee. Once inside, there was a burst of activity, from face painting and art activities to laser shows, aerial dancing, explosive chemistry demonstrations, live music, and more. After the building was delayed for more than a year due to complications from Covid-19, the grand opening was a long-awaited celebration of the new space and of the community, and marked the end to a grim era. After hours of celebration from everyone in Missoula, the event was capped with watching the sunset from the fourth-floor balcony. While no other events could top the grand opening, next to the other spaces in the building the fourth floor is still most often the place for big celebrations.

As anyone in the community can reserve spaces on the fourth floor for free, it is the best representation of the ethos of Missoula. The fourth floor, as the top floor, represents AUOR's goals as an entity stewarding and serving its community. It's high reaching, adaptable, welcoming, representative, and was designed in response to the natural beauty of the people and places that make Missoula.

Conclusion

Today, as we dedicate this building, it's a continuation of a learning process for our children [and] our grandchildren. We all understand that we don't know everything... but we have a responsibility to teach what we know... and what we don't know, somebody else will fill those gaps and make us a whole person; make our knowledge whole to understand different things... And our responsibility as humans is to learn and pass on what we know to the next generation. That's how we survive as a people. That's how we become one as a nation. To teach, to learn, to share, to understand. And I've been trying to do that all my life, to pass on what was learned, what was given to me. And our future generations, the children that are going to be here, that are going to learn from the books, from the hands-on experience... can you image what the next generation's going to be because what they learn here, and what they learn in the future? (Tony Incashola, late director of Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee, at the Missoula Public Library Grand Opening.)

In the spring of 2021, after years of planning, construction, delays, and the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Missoula Public Library reopened at their new home with their AUOR partners, Families First Learning Lab, MCAT, the UM Living Lab, and the University of Montana spectrUM Discovery Area, to bring together resources and education for the community. A crowd gathered outside the building on a hot July day with anticipation as AUOR and community leaders took turns to honor the new building, followed by an Indigenous drumming ceremony, and, finally, a ribbon cutting. Excitement, nerves, and anxiety from the Covid-19 pandemic were amassed in the air for staff and visitors alike. Incashola's speech holds just as true two years after the grand opening. AUOR, as a new endeavor to the United States, is also a timeless enterprise of knowledge exchange.

Inspired by Scandinavian culture houses, and the first of its kind in the United States, AUOR has learned how to work together to address community needs and welcome people of all walks of life. During a time of amplified anti-intellectualism and division, the collective has helped to mitigate social issues by bringing the community together around resources and education, "to teach, to learn, to share, to understand". While neighborhoods are often simulated

around work or school, AUOR provides a coveted, free, “third space”, for people to gather and learn.

People in Missoula suffer from siloed and scarce resources, and most students are reading below grade level, which, prior to opening the building, had put undue pressure on library staff to provide beyond their means (Missoula County Health Department 2017; Office of Public Instruction 2022; Lesneski and Bray 2023). In response, AUOR came together to work collaboratively, leveraging one another’s expertise, to serve greater support for the community, which indicates that the new AUOR model is an impactful way to provide integrated resources and community.

Guided by public ethnography, oral history, and anthropology, this study provides insight into AUOR and the significance of its model as the future of educational, collaborative community spaces. This work has found that AUOR reflects the culture of Missoula as defined in DeBerry’s ethnography because it intentionally highlights the landscape, the people, and is itself an amenity, in addition to being an accessible public space with programs facilitated by diverse groups and individual Missoulians. AUOR models an effective way to collectively address social issues and provide resources because it is co-located by six partners, including Missoula Community Radio, with diverse expertise offering free services in the center of a busy metropolitan area. AUOR provides interdisciplinary and intergenerational learning as a building with dedicated children’s, teen, and adult spaces, as well as gathering spaces for all ages that house diverse programs.

As a venture new to English-speaking nations, there were no other analyses found regarding culture houses or similar free, interdisciplinary learning spaces. This research called upon other publications regarding collaboration, Indigenous history, and records and theory

surrounding science museums, libraries, living labs, family resource centers, public access television stations, and ethnography of Missoula as contextual work. Using interviews, participant observation, photos, and institutional data, this study represents an angle of ethnography focusing on microculture and its macro-affect.

Through six years of participant observation, four of which were during the planning of AUOR, and two after opening the new space, it is evident that the impact on participating families is great. Evaluation of spectrUM demonstrates that the majority of children think themselves more capable of doing STEAM after participating in a program, and their teachers and parents consider the programs beneficial to their students and families. spectrUM's museum attendance increased threefold after opening at AUOR due to free admission and its new centralized location. For other partners in AUOR, including spectrUM, attendance and diversity of programs and participation has spiked since opening. The new space has generated more support for AUOR partners, and therefore more resources and opportunity for the community.

As an experimental, co-located community hub, AUOR has been received positively in the community and provides diverse programs and learning opportunities for its patrons. The partners of AUOR create unique programs, both collaboratively and independently, that are complimentary to each other to generate individual, yet seamless, experiences for visitors. Each partner, with their own microculture, work together to bridge differences in an effort to cooperate, solve problems, and support each other. Innovation from co-located spaces around the world, such as Dokk1, The Pompidou Centre, the Woburn Public Library, and the Newark Public Library, have provided context for this research and have helped to demonstrate the significance of the culture house model and the collaborative nature of museums and libraries. The partnership and engagement strategies in AUOR are a natural evolution to post-object museums

and libraries and post-internet community access television stations and provide central space for family resource centers and living labs.

A larger study comparing quantitative and qualitative data across culture houses may illuminate a more comprehensive analysis of the effect of these institutions. In this work, ethnography may have been skewed due to bias from my own employment at one of the AUOR organizations. Language barriers and AUOR's connection to Scandinavian culture houses tailored research towards the United States and Europe, while similar models in Asia, South America, Africa, and Oceania may be either less common or underreported in English academic databases. Studies including more global representation would share a greater international perspective on multidisciplinary, co-located spaces. Though this work strictly studied AUOR, research dedicated to each represented institution could elucidate information about the relationship between the fields and AUOR's effect on each organization's outlook. Four out of the five backbone partners, namely spectrUM, the library, Families First Learning Lab, and MCAT, facilitate a significant number of programs outside of the walls of AUOR, which would benefit from a study to show a more holistic perspective of the collective work. More information could be gathered by comparing ethnographic analysis of AUOR over a longer duration, and from broad public evaluation.

Understanding spaces like AUOR will help expand the scope of possibilities in institutional collaboration and their influence and provides insight into the community. This study may be used to provide framework for partnerships among organizations, and influence regarding social issues, education, and resource insufficiency found locally and nationally. By tracing the pathway of gathering spaces in Missoula, this work will provide historical, Indigenous context for AUOR's work and location. Future research can be leveraged by this

ethnography as a foundation for larger-scale studies about collaboration, co-located resources, informal learning engagement strategies, and spaces built for cultural exchange over time and across barriers.

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