The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1

Our (Museum) World Turned Upside Down: Re-presenting Native American Arts

Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips

> Our aim is the complete *u'mista* or repatriation of everything we lost when our world was turned upside down.—Gloria Cranmer Webster[1]

The vast majority of Native American objects in private and public collections are the legacy of the high period of colonialism that lasted from about 1830 to 1930.[2] In the subfield of art history devoted to the arts of Native North America, the most urgent issues surrounding the collecting and display of these objects arise directly from the imperialist histories of their formation. Prodded by Native American activists and academic theorists, historians and curators of Native American art are today rethinking the most fundamental questions: Who has the right to control American Indian objects, many of which are thought by their makers not to be art objects but instruments of power? Who has access to knowledge (even simply the knowledge gained from gazing upon an object of power), only those who have been initiated, or all who pass through the doors of a cultural institution? Who has the right to say what the objects mean, and whether and how they are displayed? And how will Native Americans, as they assume increasingly authoritative roles in museum representation, remake the museum as an institution?

Native American arts are still radically underrepresented in arts institutions, both academic and museological,[3] perhaps because they are less easily aligned with Western fine-art media and genres than African, Oceanic, or Pre-Columbian objects. Even more than other "tribal" objects, Native American arts have largely fallen within the domain of anthropology. The manner in which we have framed the preceding statements, however, indicates key discursive conventions that need to be interrogated at the start of this discussion. The paradigms of art and artifact, spawned respectively by art history and anthropology, have structured most past discussions of collecting and display. They have been constructed as a binary pair of opposites comprising a closed system. Discussions of their problematics have tended to begin and end with the evaluation of their respective merits as representation.[4]

The tendency of poststructuralist and postcolonial critiques of the museum (a notable feature of which has been a focus on the representation of non-Western cultures) has been to flatten out the distinction between art and artifact. Recent critiques privilege the importance of the systemic and intertextual relationships between ethnography and art history, *both* of which were engaged by the imperialist project of inscribing relationships of power.[5] The "relic room" of the amateur collector of Native American archaeology, with its quiltlike arrangements of "frames" of arrowheads, the spacious, evenly lit installation of the art gallery, the exhibition hall of a world's fair, and anthropology halls of the early twentieth century are increasingly seen as intersecting spaces for the display of objects. All invoke formal, aesthetic, and intellectual templates that are equally arbitrary in relation to other cultural systems of priority and prerogative; all privilege the sense of sight over other modes of knowing; all make captured objects available to our surveillance.[6]

To a postcolonial sensibility, the difference between the jeweler's case and the specimen case seems, ultimately, of less significance than the wholesale historical appropriations of patrimonies and of voice that have led to the presence of these objects in Western collections. Both art-historical and anthropological practices of collecting and display have

1. G. C. Webster, "From Colonization to Repatriation," in G. McMaster and L. Martin, eds., *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*, exh. cat., Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Que., 1992, 37.

2. These dates not only encompass the most intensive period of collecting, but also correspond to two significant events in official U.S. policy toward Native Americans, underlining the connection between the official adoption of assimilationist policies and the process of collecting. The year 1830 marks the date of the American Indian Removals Act, whose intent was to remove all Native Americans from the eastern half of the continent. In 1933, John Collier was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and began to reverse many key elements of assimilationist policy, including proscriptions on the observance of Native religions which require the use of objects. W. Sturtevant ("Does Anthropology Need Museums?" *Proceedings of the Biological Society*, LXXXII, 1969, 619–50) has termed the period 1840–1940 "The Museum Age."

3. Native American art is included in only a small number of university art-history curricula, despite the fact that it is the indigenous cultural patrimony of our continent. It is also less often included, or included in much smaller numbers, in North American art museums than other "tribal" arts.

4. See R. B. Phillips, "Fielding Culture: Dialogues between Art History and Anthropology," *Museum Anthropology*, XVIII, no. 1, 1994, 39–46; and idem, "How Museums Marginalise: Naming Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion," *Cambridge Review*, CXIV, no. 2320, 1993, 6–10. The bibliographies of the two articles include many of the recent commentaries on these issues.

5. James Clifford models the systemic nature of object circulation in "On Collecting Art and Culture," *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, 1988, chap. 10. See also G. Stocking, ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, Madison, Wisc., 1985; Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Washington, D.C., 1992; and I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington, D.C., 1991.

6. See S. Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in Karp and Lavine, eds. (as in n. 5), 25–32.

7. See Sturtevant (as in n. 2).

8. I. Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Tenth Census (1880), Washington, D.C., 1884, 133.

9. J. Batkin, *Pottery of the Pueblos of New Mexico, 1700–1940*, exh. cat., Taylor Museum of the Colorado Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, 1987, 16.

10. A. Jonaitis, *From the Land of the Totem Poles: The Northwest Coast Indian Art Collection at the American Museum of Natural History*, exh. cat., New York/Seattle, 1988, 87, 97. See also D. Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*, Seattle, 1985.

11. D. Fane, I. Jacknis, and L. Breen, *Objects of Myth and Memory: American Indian Art at the Brooklyn Museum*, exh. cat., Seattle, 1991, 23.

proceeded from the same tragically misconceived set of assumptions about the nature of progress and the inevitability of assimilation. They have both been forms of mortuary practice, laying out the corp(u)ses of the Vanishing American for post-mortem dissection in the laboratory, for burial in the storage room, and for commemoration in the exhibition.

On Collecting

> Dollar bills cause the memory to vanish, and even fear can be cushioned by the application of government cash. I closed my eyes. . . . and I saw this: leaves covering the place where I buried Pillagers, mosses softening the boards of their grave houses, once so gently weeded and tended. . . . I saw the clan markers [Fleur] had oiled with the sweat of her hands, blown over by wind, curiosities now, a white child's toys.—Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*

During the century from about 1830 to 1930, an extraordinary quantity of objects became "toys of the white child," to be rearranged according to the taxonomies of science, or admired as objects of the aestheticizing gaze.[7] One explorer, reporting in 1880 to the Department of the Interior about a Yup'ik Eskimo graveyard in southwest Alaska, announced that he had found "a remarkable collection of grotesquely carved monuments and mortuary posts [which] would afford a rich harvest of specimens to any museum."[8]

A few figures, chosen almost at random, indicate the astonishing scale and rapidity of this "harvest," as it occurred inexorably across the continent. Between 1879 and 1885 the Smithsonian collected over 6,500 pottery vessels made by Pueblo women from Acoma and Zuni, villages of just a few hundred inhabitants.[9] Between 1888 and 1893 George Emmons sold over 4,000 pieces of Tlingit art to the American Museum of Natural History, including "hundreds of supernaturally potent artworks" belonging to Tlingit shamans.[10] The numbers grew more staggering and more wildly disproportionate in relation to the demography of Native American communities. By 1911 Stuart Culin returned from his collecting expeditions to the West with over 9,000 artifacts for the Brooklyn Museum, including Zuni kachina masks and War God figures from sacred shrines.[11]

The vacuum sweep of Native American objects into public and private collections was prosecuted with a systematic thoroughness that routinized what amounted to the rape of entire cultural patrimonies. In sheer volume, the greatest collector of all was George Heye, founder of the Museum of the American Indian, the largest single repository of aboriginal objects from the Americas, with holdings numbering over a million items.[12] A journalist, describing Heye's mode of collecting, reported (only slightly tongue in cheek) that "what George enjoyed most on his automobile trips was hunting up Indian reservations." He was so obsessive that "he felt that he couldn't conscientiously leave a reservation until its entire population was practically naked."[13]

Great violence has been done to Native American communities in the names of salvage anthropology and, since the early twentieth century, primitivist art collecting. During campaigns against Plains Indians in the second half of the nineteenth century, military officers had their Indian scouts strip the corpses of the men, women, and children they had just killed. Moccasins, drawings, and weapons became personal trophies, some of which were later sent to the Smithsonian Institution and other museums.[14] In an (in)famous incident in British Columbia in 1922, Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) participants in a banned potlatch were blackmailed with the threat of imprisonment into surrendering most of their ceremonial regalia to government officials.[15]

Although the history of Native American art collecting is marked by many such episodes of plunder and seizure, cash transactions were most common. They cloaked the process of appropriation in a normalizing fiction.[16] Acts of purchase not only ensured peaceful surrenders; they also reassured buyers of the progress Native Americans were making toward assimilation through their participation in the rituals of commodity exchange.

In the late twentieth century an official ethos of multiculturalism and pluralism has replaced assimilationism. It is cultural evolutionist ideology, not Native Americans, that has vanished. We are left, however, with vast hoards of objects acquired under what can be considered, at best, mistaken assumptions and, at worst, outright coercion. The consequences of the wholesale removal of objects have been particularly serious in North America. The totalizing con-

12. The Museum of the American Indian became part of the Smithsonian in 1989, and was renamed the National Museum of the American Indian. It is now directed by a Native American staff and is formulating policy on repatriation, and new approaches to research and display. For a brief statement of such policies, see W. R. West, Jr., "Research and Scholarship at the National Museum of the American Indian: The New Inclusiveness," *Museum Anthropology*, XVII, no. 1, 1993, 5–8; and idem, "Cultural Resources Center to House NMAI Collection," *Native Peoples*, VII, no. 3, Spring 1994, 66.

13. K. Wallace, "A Reporter at Large: Slim-Shin's Monument," *New Yorker*, Nov. 19, 1960, 106. The lines cited are voiced by an unnamed "eminent professor of anthropology, once associated with the Heye Foundation."

14. This traffic in personal items was not entirely one-way, however. To cite just one example of the multiple exchanges of objects between cultures: a small notebook kept by a member of the 7th Cavalry in the 1870s was captured by a Cheyenne warrior named High Bull who pulled it from its owner's dead body at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. High Bull turned it into a drawing book. A few months later, High Bull was killed in battle by U.S. soldiers, who reclaimed the notebook. It came to rest in George Heye's collection, which eventually became a national museum run by Native Americans. See P. Powell, "High Bull's Victory Roster," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, XXV, no. 1, 1975, 14–21.

15. Kwakwaka'wakw anthropologist Gloria Cranmer Webster ([as in n.1], 35) daughter of one of the chiefs involved, writes: "Those who were charged under the potlatch law did not have to serve their gaol sentences if their entire villages agreed to give up their ceremonial gear, including masks, rattles, whistles, and coppers. The federal government paid the owners a total of $1,450.50 for several hundred objects, which were crated and shipped to Ottawa. There, what came to be known as the Potlatch Collection, was divided between the Victoria Memorial Museum (later the National Museum of Man and now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) and the Royal Ontario Museum. Thirty-three artifacts were purchased by George Heye."

16. Native American artists were also engaged in the large-scale production of objects for sale to outsiders. These objects have often been regarded as "inauthentic" by both art and anthropology collectors. See R. B. Phillips, "Why Not Tourist Art?: Significant Silences in Native American Museum Collections," in G. Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Post-Colonial Displacements*, Princeton, N.J., 1994, 98–125. Market production of Native American art is a complex topic that raises different issues in relation to museum representation, ownership, and repatriation, a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

struct of "primitive art" obscures differences among colonized peoples that are worth remembering. The demographic and political imbalances affecting internally colonized minorities such as Native Americans allow the institutions of the dominant culture to exert even more effective hegemonic control than is the case in "third-world" countries of Africa and other regions. Extensive missionization, the residential schooling system, and the pervasive reach of the media of mass communication inscribed stereotypes of "Indianness" and led many aboriginal people to accept the myth that their very existence constituted an anachronism.

Many individual Native people were led by this process to collaborate in the process of collecting, believing that the museum was the only place in which a record of aboriginal cultures would eventually be preserved. Yet, as Edward Said has pointed out, in the imperial encounter, "there was *always* some form of active resistance, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out."[17] Although the collaborations of Native Americans facilitated anthropological collecting projects, they can also be considered a form of resistance to the nihilism that threatened. There were more overt acts of resistance as well. During Culin's 1902 trip to Zuni, for example, a village crier circulated through the town, warning people, upon pain of death, not to sell sacred objects to him.[18]

On Display

> The hand that collects the basket, displays the cloth and photographs the weapon is removed from the hand that wove the basket, wore the cloth or wielded the weapon.—Loretta Todd[19]

The interventions of art history and art criticism in the representation of Native American objects occurred several decades later than those of anthropology, and their impact has been more evident in practices of display than in those of collecting.[20] The paradigm of "primitive art," no less than that of the scientific specimen, trains the gaze on the object; the museum, as Svetlana Alpers has argued, is first and foremost a way of seeing.[21] Yet pluralism invokes emic (indigenous) perspectives on objects. For many aboriginal peoples the most important thing about an object may be the way in which it restricts the gaze. The vision-inspired paintings on Plains shields, among the most visually attractive and tautly designed examples of Plains graphic art, were sacred to their owners; though displayed on stands, they were normally hidden by a painted cover. Many Pueblo figural paintings and sculptures were sequestered in the semisubterranean kiva, a space often restricted to initiated males.

Part of the postcolonial Native American agenda has been the outright removal of certain classes of objects from the kind of democratic exposure enjoined by the art gallery or museum. The most well-known case is the repatriation of Zuni *Ahayu:da* (war-god images). These simple, abstract male figures have a visual eloquence that has appealed to many twentieth-century artists;[22] more important, they are among the most sacred of Zuni religious icons, and their place is in remote open-air hillside shrines where they are supposed to weather and return to the elements. (There, the Zuni say, their power works for all humankind.)[23] Since the historic moment in 1978 when the Zuni Tribal Council prevented Sotheby Parke Bernet from auctioning one of these sacred figures, more than fifty *Ahayu:da* have been repatriated to the Zuni people from collections as diverse as the Denver Art Museum, the Smithsonian, the University of Maine, some private collections, and the Brooklyn Museum.[24] The idea of the removal of significant art objects from museums, where they have resided for perhaps a century, strikes terror into the hearts of some curators and art historians. Yet, as Zuni councilman Barton Martza has observed, "white society must learn that some of our traditional culture is for Zunis only."[25] Although this is perhaps the hardest lesson for the dominant culture to accept, it is by no means an isolated example. The same message emerges from the interventions of a number

17. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, 1993, xii.

18. Fane, Jacknis, and Breen (as in n. 11), 60. The more recent and highly successful campaign of Zuni activists to reclaim the sacred objects that collectors like Culin succeeded in acquiring (discussed below), or the recent return of wampum belts from the National Museum of the American Indian to the Six Nations Iroquois, or reclamations of numerous medicine bundles by members of many Plains Indian communities can be regarded as examples of the eventual winning out of individual and collective memory. For a discussion of the wampum-belt incident, see W. Fenton, "Return of Eleven Wampum Belts to the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy on Grand River, Canada," *Ethnohistory*, XXXVI, 1989, 392–410.

19. L. Todd, "Three Moments after 'Savage Graces,' " *Harbour*, III, no. 1, 1993, 57–62.

20. See J. C. Berlo, "Introduction: The Formative Years of Native American Art History," in J. C. Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, Seattle, 1992, 1–21; and W. J. Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern: René d'Harnoncourt and 'Indian Art of the United States,' " in ibid., 191–236. Native American objects were "discovered" after those of Africa and Oceania, in part because works executed in the fine-art formats of painting and monumental sculpture are relatively less common in Native American traditions. See W. Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1985; and W. J. Rushing, *Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-Garde, 1910–1950*, Austin, Tex., 1995.

21. Alpers (as in n. 6).

22. See Rubin, ed. (as in n. 20), 29–32.

23. T. J. Ferguson and B. Martza, "The Repatriation of Zuni *Ahayu:da*," *Museum Anthropology*, XIV, no. 2, 1990, 7–15. See also W. L. Merrill, E. J. Ladd, and T. J. Ferguson, "The Return of the *Ahayu:da*: Lessons for Repatriation from Zuni Pueblo and the Smithsonian Institution," *Current Anthropology*, XXXIV, no. 5, 1993, 523–67.

24. It is noteworthy that the process of collaboration with Zuni tribal elders during the preparation for the 1991 Brooklyn show "Objects of Myth and Memory" laid the groundwork for the repatriation of Brooklyn's war-god statuary. Stuart Culin's own fieldnotes from 1902 and 1903 supported the Zunis' legal claim that these thirteen sacred figures (more than existed in any other institution) had been removed from religious shrines for purchase by Culin (Diana Fane, curator, Brooklyn Museum, personal communication, Nov. 1991).

25. Ferguson and Martza (as in n. 23), 11.

26. The primacy of the mask in tribal art has, undoubtedly, much to do both with the primitivist delight in African masks and the ease with which such carvings can be hung on the wall.

27. Iroquois have employed a number of strategies to control the display of False Face masks over the years. Initially, arrangements were made for proper ritual care of masks held in storage, but objections to the display of the masks steadily grew. During the Calgary showing of "The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples," an Iroquois group brought a lawsuit against the Glenbow Museum to force it to remove a False Face mask from the exhibition. Although the court rejected the request, the mask was voluntarily removed at the exhibition's second venue. The museum at the Woodlands Cultural Centre at the Six Nations reserve at Brantford, Ontario, displays a mask still attached to the tree trunk from which it was being carved—the reasoning being that, frozen in the process of carving, it has not yet become an autonomous power object.

28. Todd (as in n. 19), 57.

of Iroquois faith keepers and political leaders in relation to *Hadui* (False Face) masks worn by traditional Iroquois healers. These masks, regarded as the most important sculptural products of Iroquois carvers, have long been identified by scholars as canonical objects of Iroquois "art."[26] Many contemporary Iroquois object strenuously to their presence in public museum displays and have successfully called for their removal to restricted storage areas.[27]

On Addressing the Problematics

> But they can't fool me. In those basement rooms without windows or in spacious labs with bright lights, when no one is looking, they throw their heads back, eyes close and fingers touch; fragile threads, polished stone and massive masks. For a moment their hands—the collector, the cataloger, the curator, the anthropologist—have become the hands before, the hands that shaped and prayed.—Loretta Todd[28]

Michael Baxandall has described the museum exhibition as a field in which at least three agents are independently in play—makers of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited made objects. He observes that each of the three agents is playing a different game in the field.[29] Yet an observant ethnographer of Native American art history and museology today, trying to track the rules of representation as we move toward the end of the century, would certainly discover that there are, in fact, many more players than this, and the number of rule books has proliferated well beyond Baxandall's estimate. In Native American art-historical practice, the makers of objects and the exhibitors of objects increasingly will find themselves at odds if long-term and meaningful collaboration on every level of the curatorial process does not take place, and if they cannot redefine their legitimate common interest in objects. This has been occurring in many places with results that may disturb the comfortable routines of the museum but that will ultimately offer new and stimulating perspectives on objects that museums hold.[30]

The history of violence done to Native American communities by the collecting projects of our forebears, whether in the name of science, art, or sentimental commemoration, informs almost the entire corpus of Native American objects on which art-historical study has depended. Far-reaching new policies and legislative acts that regulate museum practice and allow Native Americans to reclaim or otherwise gain access to much that was removed from their communities are now in force in the United States and Canada.[31] At this moment it is urgent that we consider the benefits of empowerment and of collaboration as much as the difficulties, for this historical unfolding, unless scholars can address it honestly and constructively, has the potential to silence art-historical work. We have to accept, first of all, that scholars and aboriginal people will not always agree in their readings of objects, that different forms of authority will be recognized, and different facts privileged. Access to objects will also change, not always in conformity with late twentieth-century Western standards of equity.[32] But, as the return of collections and individual objects proceeds, a different kind of access will become available. When art-historical researchers revisit objects in Native American communities, they will find them differently presented, embedded in different texts from which much can be learned. The community perspective may well be more continuous with the historical and cultural truths that originally shaped the objects.[33]

Objects matter in cultural process, especially among peoples who have not relied on written texts for the recording of knowledge. Stripped bare of their traditional objects of use, beauty, and power, Native American communities have suffered interruptions of historical memory, paralysing failures in the generational transfer of political and sacred power, and the cessation of organic growth in many ancient stylistic and iconographic traditions.[34] Gloria Cranmer Webster's words, with which we opened this essay, link the past with the future:

29. M. Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects," in Karp and Lavine, eds. (as in n. 5), 33–41.

30. Recent major exhibitions which have involved collaboration between museum curators and Native scholars and artists include "Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch," curated by Aldona Jonaitis for the American Museum of Natural History, New York (1991), with the section on the modern potlatch curated by G. C. Webster; "Art of the American Indian Frontier," curated by David Penney for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1992), in consultation with George P. Horse Capture; "Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life," curated by Evan M. Maurer for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1992), in consultation with George P. Horse Capture; and "A Time of Gathering: Native Heritage in Washington State," curated by Robin Wright for the Burke Museum, University of Washington, Seattle (1989), in conjunction with co-curator Roberta Haines, as well as Vi Hilbert and a host of Native advisers; and "Reflections of the Weaver's World" curated by Ann Lane Hedlund for the Denver Art Museum (1992), in consultation with Navajo weavers.

31. In the U.S., the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGRA), passed by Congress in 1990 as Public Law 101–601, provides for the carrying out of inventories, the disclosure of holdings to the descendants of the makers of Native American objects, the return of all human skeletal remains, and the repatriation of objects of a sacred or mortuary nature. Debates on the ramifications of this law appear in *Museum Anthropology*, xv, 1991, passim.

In Canada, a policy rather than a law has been formulated, by the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, appointed by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations in 1989. Its report, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples*, Ottawa, 1992, was ratified by both organizations. It establishes a model of partnership between aboriginal people and museums, and makes recommendations in three major areas, repatriation, access and interpretation, and implementation. See T. Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons from the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture*, XII, no. 1, 1992, 87–94.

32. At the Makah-run museum built to house the important finds from Ozette, a Northwest Coast site destroyed by a mudslide in the 16th century, access to certain objects is barred to women, in accordance with Makah custom. Plains Indians visiting the Canadian Museum of Civilization have requested that menstruating women not come into contact with certain medicine objects, a requirement virtually impossible to meet under the contemporary guidelines of gender equity and protection of privacy.

33. See J. Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," in Karp and Lavine, eds. (as in n. 5), 212–54. For a recent, penetrating analysis of the complexities of the history of Native-made objects in museum collections and their relationships to contemporary Native peoples, see A. Jonaitis and R. Inglis, "Power, History, and Authenticity: The Mowachat Whalers' Washing Shrine," in M. Torgovnick, ed., *Eloquent Obsessions: Writing Cultural Criticism*, Winston-Salem, N.C., 1994, 157–84.

34. Nevertheless, the past thirty years have witnessed a stunning resurgence of artistic creativity, expressed both in the revival of nearly lost art forms and the employment of hybrid fine-art styles that are a sophisticated mix of Euro-American and indigenous American forms and genres. Discussion of this is beyond the scope of this brief essay. See McMaster and Martin, eds. (as in n. 1), and the works cited in their bibliography.

> We do not have a word for repatriation in the Kwak'wala language. The closest we come to it is the word *u'mista*, which describes the return of people taken captive in raids. It also means the return of something important. We are working towards the *u'mista* of much that was almost lost to us. The return of the potlatch collection is one *u'mista*. The renewed interest among younger people in learning about their cultural history is a kind of *u'mista*. The creation of new ceremonial gear to replace that held by museums is yet another *u'mista*. We are taking back, from many sources, information about our culture and our history, to help us rebuild our world which was almost shattered during the bad times. Our aim is the complete *u'mista* or repatriation of everything we lost when our world was turned upside down, as our old people say.[35]

The *u'mista* of confiscated Kwakwaka'wakw art remains one of the most important contemporary examples of the re-emplacement in a Native American community of objects displaced earlier in the century. In their new locations at the U'mista Centre at Alert Bay, British Columbia, and at the Cape Mudge Museum on nearby Vancouver Island, they are presented in ways that differ not only from standard, non-Native museums but also from the way they would have been seen in these communities in the 1920s.[36] (In other words, today aboriginal people often "museumize" their objects too.) At the Cape Mudge Museum, masks and other objects are periodically removed and refurbished so that they can be worn in potlatches. The incremental changing of the objects that occurs as a result of use—anathema to Western conservation practices—are acceptable because Kwakwaka'wakw beliefs locate ownership primarily in the mental concept behind the object and in rights of reproduction, and only secondarily in the object itself. Nevertheless, the repatriation of historical objects has been an essential step in permitting the rearticulation of such principles of indigenous knowledge, many of which are in danger of being forgotten. It has also set in motion a new cycle of artistic production and reproduction.[37] The insights gained from this process, both by Native and non-Native parties to it, have already resulted in the re-presentation of Kwakwaka'wakw objects in urban museums serving largely non-Native audiences that more accurately reflect the ways in which contemporary Native Americans understand their own heritage.[38] The dismantling of the imperialist legacy of collecting and display has only just begun, but it is already clear that the old illusion of ideal panoptical vision has been shattered. The partial views that replace it offer insights into the meanings of objects that more accurately reflect the multiple ways of knowing that are emerging in the late twentieth century.

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35. Webster (as in n. 1), 37.

36. For example, they are not in glass cases, and they are grouped according to the order in which they appear in a potlatch, rather than according to Western taxonomies.

37. J. Ostrowitz's dissertation in progress, "Privileging the Past: Art, History, and Historicism on the Northwest Coast," Columbia University, addresses this rich and subtle cycle of the use and reuse of objects and ideas in Kwakiutl culture. See also idem, "Trailblazers and Ancestral Heroes: Collaboration in the Representation of a Native Past," *Curator*, XXXVI, no. 1, 1993, 50–65.

38. See A. Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch*, exh. cat., American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York/Seattle, 1991, esp. chaps. 1, 5. Not only did Gloria Cranmer Webster curate the section of the potlatch show that was concerned with the 20th century (see n. 30), she was also adviser to the Canadian Museum of Civilization's Grand Hall, so that her vision of a Kwakiutl community house and its potlatch furnishings is presented there as well.

The Art Museum as Ritual

Carol Duncan

The literature about art museums tends to represent them either as collections of things or as distinctive works of architecture. Museum catalogues, for example, itemize the holdings of particular institutions; the museum is treated not as a place but as an accumulation of distinctive and unique objects. Meanwhile, architectural writing concentrates on the kind of artistic statement a museum building itself makes or the way it solves practical problems such as lighting or traffic flow. But art museums are neither neutral sheltering spaces for objects nor simple architectural products; rather, they are complex totalities that include everything from the building to the selection and ordering of collections and the details of their installation and lighting. In my view, this totality is best understood as a ritual setting, a ceremonial monument in its own right and not just a container for other monuments. By approaching art museums in this way, we can, I believe, more fully grasp not only the meanings that art museums impose on the objects they display but also those they project onto the social and political world outside the museum's walls.

Since their appearance in the late eighteenth century, art museums have regularly been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples. Indeed, through most of their history they were deliberately designed to resemble them. One might object that this borrowing from the architectural past is only metaphoric; after all, museums are secular institutions, and in the secular/religious terms of

our culture, "rituals" and "museums" are antithetical. Rituals are associated with religious practices—with the realm of belief, magic, and miraculous transformations. Such goings-on bear little resemblance to the contemplation and learning that art museums are supposed to foster. But in fact, rituals in traditional societies may be quite unspectacular, informal, and contemplative, while our supposedly secular culture is full of ritual situations and events, very few of which (as Mary Douglas has noted) take place in religious contexts.[1] Like other societies, ours, too, builds sites that publicly represent beliefs about the order of the world, its past and present, and the individual's place within it.[2] Museums of all kinds are excellent examples of such microcosms; art museums in particular—the most prestigious and costly of all museums—are especially rich in this kind of symbolism and even equip visitors with maps to guide them through the universes they construct. Once we question our Enlightenment assumptions about the sharp separation between religious and secular experience—that the one is rooted in belief while the other is based in objective rationality—we may begin to glimpse the hidden—perhaps the better word is disguised—ritual content of secular ceremonies.

We can also appreciate the ideological force of a cultural experience that claims for its truths the status of secular, that is, objective, knowledge. To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community's highest values and most authoritative truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual—those who are most able to respond to its various cues—are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, or ethnic) the museum ritual most fully confirms. It is for this reason that museums and museum practices can become objects of fierce struggle and impassioned debate. What we see and do not see in art museums—and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it—is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity. At the same time, however, art museums are not always or entirely reducible to sociological or political description. It is precisely their complexity—their existence as cultural objects as well as social, political, and ideological instruments—that makes the idea of the museum-as-ritual so attractive.

Museums resemble older ritual sites not because they borrow from past architecture but because they are structured to accommodate and prompt ritual activity (I make no argument here for historical continuity, only for the existence of comparable ritual functions). Like most ritual sites, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special kind of attention—in this case, contemplation and learning. "Liminality," a term associated with ritual, well describes the quality of attention art museums elicit. Used by the Belgian folklorist Arnold van Gennep,[3] the term was taken up and developed in the anthropological writings of Victor Turner to indicate a mode of consciousness "betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending."[4] As Turner himself realized, his category of liminal experience had strong affinities to modern Western notions of the aesthetic experience—that mode of receptivity thought to be most appropriate before works of art. Turner recognized aspects of liminality in such modern activities as attending the theater, seeing a film, or visiting an art exhibition. Like folk rituals that temporarily suspend the constraining rules of normal social behavior (in that sense, they "turn the world upside down"), so these cultural situations, Turner argued, could open a space in which individuals may step back from the practical concerns and social relations of everyday life and look at themselves and their world with different thoughts and feelings. Turner's idea of liminality, developed as it is out of anthropological categories and based on data gathered mostly in non-Western cultures, probably cannot be neatly superimposed onto Western concepts of art experience. Nevertheless, his work remains useful in that it offers a sophisticated general concept of ritual that enables us to think about art museums and what is supposed to happen in them from a fresh perspective.[5]

Ritual also involves an element of performance. A ritual site of any kind is a place programmed for the enactment of something. It has this structure whether or not every visitor can read its cues. In traditional rituals, participants often perform or witness a drama, but a ritual performance need not involve a formal spectacle. It may be something an individual enacts alone by following a prescribed route, by repeating a prayer, recalling a narrative, or engaging in some other programmed experience that relates to the history or meaning of the site (or to some object or objects on the site). Some individuals may use a ritual site more knowledgeably than others—they may be more educationally prepared to respond to its symbolic cues.[6] (The term "ritual" can also mean habitual or routinized behavior that

These comments are condensed from my forthcoming book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London/New York, 1995. The approach I describe originates in work begun many years ago. See C. Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual," *Marxist Perspectives*, no. 4, Winter 1978, 28–51; and idem, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History*, III, 1980, 447–69.

1. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London, 1966, 68. On the subject of ritual in modern life, see Abner Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society*, Berkeley, 1974; M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1973), New York, 1982; Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," in *Essays in Social Theory*, New York/London, 1977, 52–73; Sally F. Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual*, Assen/Amsterdam, 1977; and Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," in *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello, Milwaukee, 1977, 33–55.

2. This is not to imply the kind of culturally or ideologically unified society that, according to many anthropological accounts, gives rituals a socially integrative function. This integrative function is much disputed, especially in modern society; see, e.g., Cohen (as in n. 1), Lukes (as in n. 1), Moore and Myerhoff (as in n. 1), and Edmond Leach, "Ritual," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David Sills, 1968, XIII, 521–26.

3. A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee, Chicago, 1960.

4. Turner (as in n. 1), 33. See also V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca, N.Y./London, 1974, esp. 13–15, 231–32.

5. See Mary Jo Deegan, *American Ritual Dramas: Social Rules and Cultural Meanings*, New York, 1988, 7–12, for a thoughtful discussion of Turner's ideas and the limits of their applicability to modern art.

6. It should be evident that mine is not a sociological approach; I have no findings to report on how an "average" or representative sample of visitors reads or misreads art museums. The objects of my study are art museums understood as ritual settings and the visitor ideals they construct.

lacks meaningful subjective context. This sense of ritual as an "empty" routine or performance is not the sense in which I use the term.)

In art museums, it is the visitors who enact the ritual (presupposing at least a minimal preparation), whether or not they think of themselves as performers. The museum's sequenced spaces and arrangements of objects, its lighting and architectural details constitute a dramatic field—a combination stage set and script—that both structures and invites a performance. The situation resembles in some respects those medieval cathedrals in which pilgrims followed a narrative route, stopping at prescribed points for prayer or contemplation. Similarly, museums offer well-developed ritual scenarios, most often in the form of art-historical narratives that unfold through a sequence of spaces. The most significant moments in the narrative—those works of art said to embody culminating achievements or epochal turning points—are indicated by the museum script: they occupy central places on walls, are framed by doorways, located at the end of vistas, or are otherwise dramatically isolated. Even when visitors enter museums to see only selected objects, the museum's larger narrative structure stands as a frame and gives meaning to individual works.

Probably the most familiar art-museum ritual is the civic ritual that organizes national galleries and big-city art museums everywhere. In this setting, the visitor is cast as an enlightenment-seeking citizen who enters the museum to take in the city's or state's spiritual treasures gathered there for that purpose. Another kind of scenario (to mention just one more) is played out in mansion museums such as the Wallace or Frick collections or the J. Paul Getty Museum, where visitors call upon an idealized donor who, in the ritual of the museum visit, may achieve a kind of eternal (and eternally aristocratic) life. Of course, no real visitor exactly corresponds to the museum's ideal visitor—the hypothetical individual who is perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically, and culturally to enact the museum ritual. In reality, people continually "misread" or scramble or resist the museum's cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs according to all the historical and psychological accidents of who they are. But then, the same is true of any situation in which a cultural product is performed or interpreted. By the same token, not all art museums are equally coherent as dramatic fields; some are more effective than others, not only because they have bigger, better, and richer collections, but also because their organizers are more skilled at putting them together as convincing dramatic fields.

Most of today's art museums are designed to induce in viewers an intense absorption with artistic spirits of the past—or, in museums of contemporary art, the present. Indeed, the longing for contact with immortal spirits, especially those of an idealized past, is probably pervasive as a sustaining impetus not only of art museums but of many other kinds of rituals as well. The anthropologist Edmond Leach noticed that every culture mounts some symbolic effort to contradict the irreversibility of time and its end result of death. He argued that themes of rebirth, rejuvenation, and the spiritual recycling or perpetuation of the past deny the fact of death by substituting for it symbolic structures in which past time returns.[7] As ritual sites in which visitors seek to relive spiritually significant moments of the past, art museums make splendid examples of this kind of symbolic strategy.

At the same time, however, art museums belong fully to the modern era. What makes them interesting is not simply that they are ritual structures, but rather that, *as ritual structures*, they are objects rich in social and political history. As one quickly learns from the history of almost any national gallery, the question of how a museum should be organized is almost always a matter of serious concern in the highest circles of power. Indeed, museums are excellent fields in which to study the intersection of power and the history of cultural forms.

Art museums also have much to teach us about the international character of bourgeois culture. However much they have been shaped by particular historical conditions—the politics of their founders or the collecting habits of their patrons—it is safe to say that all the big national and municipal public art museums in the West were and are meant to be internationally visible. Certainly their planners always looked across national boundaries for both conceptual models and examples of museum management. Given the historical origins of art museums, this internationalism is not surprising. They appeared just at the moment when notions of the public and public space were first being defined throughout Western Europe (or rather redefined in terms of new, bourgeois forms of the state). If the various capitals of Europe and, later, America ended up with similarly conceived art museums, it was because, from the start, those nation-states and cities had similar ideological needs, and public art museums afforded them similar ideological benefits.[8] This internationalism is still a striking feature of the museum world. Today's museums continue to be valued—and supported—as potent engines of ideology, and the forms they adopt still have international currency.

To treat art museums as ritual sites and the objects in them as ritual artifacts is, of course, to appropriate outright terms that are more familiar in anthropological discourse. In these interdisciplinary times, such borrowing is hardly remarkable. Even so, the importing of these terms into art-historical work is not unproblematic. As a category, artifacts have been distinguished from works of art both conceptually and as objects of museum display. Indeed, the art/artifact distinction long marked the divide between the disciplines of anthropology on the one hand and art history and criticism on the other. The dichotomy also provided the rationale for putting Western and non-Western societies on a hierarchical scale, with the Western ones (plus a few Far Eastern courtly cultures) on top as producers of art and non-Western ones below as producers of artifacts. All of this rested on the assumption that only works of art are philosophically and

7. E. Leach, "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time," in *Rethinking Anthropology*, London/New York, 1961, 124–36.

8. As Benedict Anderson has argued (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983), nation-states have often adopted similar forms, similar institutional strategies, and similar cultural expressions.

spiritually rich enough to merit isolated aesthetic contemplation, while "artifacts," as products of presumably less evolved societies, are not. Consequently, art was thought to belong in the more contemplative space of art museums, while artifacts were consigned to anthropological, ethnographic, or natural-history collections where they could be studied as scientific specimens. The term "ritual" has similarly been positioned below art (or art performance), signifying the kind of cultural "Other" familiar in classical anthropological studies. In recent decades, this hierarchical thinking has been decisively challenged, most often by "elevating" the culture of Others to the status of art; hence, the introduction of "primitive-art" wings into art museums or the creation of separate museums specializing in such art. My own effort is related, but rather than choose between the terms of the dichotomy, I endeavor to collapse its central distinction. I treat art-museum art as a species of ritual artifact, not in order to oppose it to some higher (or, for that matter, lower) category, but to understand better the way in which art museums construct and communicate meaning within our own society.

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Museology and Museography

Donald Preziosi

> I identify myself in language, but only
> by losing myself in it like an object.—Jacques Lacan[1]

The title of this set of *Art Bulletin* statements, "The Problematics of Collecting and Display," might itself be seen as emblematic of what in fact has been *most* problematic in the museological literature, including much of the more recent and critically perceptive writing on the subject of the museum—namely, the belief that exhibition and display could, under certain specifiable circumstances or achievable conditions, be *un*problematical.

The modern practices of museology—no less than those of the museum's auxiliary discursive practice, museography (a.k.a. art history)—are firmly rooted in a modernist ideology of representational adequacy, wherein exhibition is imagined to be more or less faithfully or truthfully *representative* of some set of extramuseological affairs; some "real" history which, it is supposed, preexists its portrayal or *re*-presentation in exhibitionary or discursive space.

Museums are among the most complex, powerful, and successful of modern sociopolitical institutions. Since their invention in late eighteenth-century Europe as one of the premier epistemological technologies of the Enlightenment, and of the social, political, and ethical education of the populations of modernizing nation-states, museums most commonly have been constru(ct)ed as evidentiary and documentary artifacts; as instruments of historiographic practice.

They therefore constitute a particular mode of *fiction*—one of the most brilliant and remarkable genres of modern fiction, and one which has become an indispensable component of statehood and of national and ethnic identity in every corner of the world. In no small measure, modernity itself is the supreme museological fiction. What can it mean to be a "subject" in a world of "objects" where some are construed as representative of others because of their material siting in the world, their "framing?" A world, moreover, in which virtually anything can be staged or deployed *in* a museum, and in which virtually anything can be designated or serve *as* a museum?

Although there has appeared over the past decade a useful critical literature on museums,[2] it has at the same time become clearer than ever that significant progress in understanding the remarkable properties, mechanisms, and effects of museological practice demands nothing less than a substantive rethinking of not a few of our more comfortable historical and theoretical assumptions and modes of interpretation and explanation. The Enlightenment invention of the museum, after all, was an event as profound and as far-reaching in its implications as the articulation of central-point perspective several centuries earlier (and for not dissimilar reasons).[3]

What follows is an outline of several issues which need to be attended to in furthering the task of critical understanding so usefully begun in recent years; fuller discussion of these and related problems appears elsewhere.[4] I have organized the following as a dozen distinct and partially overlapping

1. J. Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, 1977, 86.

2. The literature on museums is immense (more has appeared in the past decade than in the previous century), and any list of recommendations will be largely idiosyncratic. The following represents a useful cross-section of recent work: E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London, 1992; S. M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections*, Washington, D.C., 1992; K. Walsh, *The Representation of the Past*, London, 1992; A. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, Cambridge, 1994; and J.-L. Déotte, *Le Musée: L'Origine de l'esthétique*, Paris, 1993. Anthologies include *Continuum*, III, no.1, 1990, special issue: "Space, Meaning and Politics"; and D. J. Sherman and I. Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture*, Minneapolis, 1994. On the beginnings of museological practices, see O. Impey and A. MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Oxford, 1985; and A. Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia: Il collezionismo enciclopedico nelle Wunderkammern d'Europa*, Milan, 1983.

3. On the subject of perspective, see the pathbreaking new study by H. Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, Cambridge, 1994. esp. chap. 8, "The Mirror Stage of Painting," 114–40.

4. See D. Preziosi, "The Question of Art History," *Critical Inquiry*, XVIII, Winter 1992, 363–86; idem, "Seeing through Art History," in E. Messer-Davidow, D. Shumway, and D. Sylvan, eds., *Knowledges: Critical and Historical Studies in Disciplinarity*, Richmond, Va., 1993, 215–31; idem, "Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity," in P. Duro, ed., *Rhetoric of the Frame*, Cambridge, in press; and idem, "Collecting/Museums," in R. Nelson and R. Shiff, eds., *Contemporary Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago, in press. These issues are taken up in greater detail in a forthcoming volume by the writer; an earlier discussion may be found in D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven, 1989.

propositions and hypotheses. Although much of this appears assertive and declarative, it is principally interrogative, aimed at opening up discussion and debate.

1. The art museum object functions in a manner similar to the *ego:* an object that cannot coincide with the subject, that is neither interior or exterior to the subject, but is rather a permanently unstable *site* where the distinction between inside and outside, between subjects and objects themselves, is continually and unendingly negotiated.[5] The museum is a stage for the adequation of an "I"/eye confronting the world as object, and an "I"/eye confronting itself as an object among objects in that world—an adequation, however, that is never quite complete.

2. Museums do not simply refer to the past; rather, they are places within the present that establish an ambivalent figuration of the past and the future. The function of this museological "past" is to signal *alterity*, to separate out from "the present" an Other which can be formated so as to be legible in some fashion as *generating* the present. The past becomes the sign of what is lacking in the present. Museums, in other words, perform the basic historiographic gesture of separating out of the present a past so as to compose the relics of that past into a geneaology *for* the present.

3. The elements of museography (art history) are highly coded rhetorical tropes that actively "read," compose, and allegorize the past (rather than simply reflect a preexisting past). Museological allegories constitute the verisimilitudes of museography. Art history as board game of causalities, perhaps; and a never-ending one. It is the game's hidden end point which has the most powerful explanatory power, as an ideal limit in which it may be imagined that all things will be revealed.

4. Exhibition (museology) and art-historical practice (museography) are each a genre of composition and narration and, as such, can only constitute the "realities" of history through the use of prefabricated materials and vocabularies—tropes, syntactic formulas, methodologies, principles of design, and the techniques of stagecraft and dramaturgy—that they share with other genres of ideological practice (religion, culture, entertainment, education). An art museum of "original" specimens can only ever be a fiction—historical realities are the *effects* of such fictions. Both museology and museography are discursive arts which coyly erase all traces of their labor.

5. The domain of museology and museography—*art*—is itself one of the most brilliant of European modernist inventions; a notion which has for the past two centuries retroactively rewritten the history of the world's peoples. It was (and remains) an organizing concept which has made certain notions of agency intelligible (its unity, uniqueness, self-sameness, nonreproducibility, spirit, etc.). At the same time, art came to be the paradigm of all production: its ideal horizon, and a standard against which to measure all production. And the artist became the paragon of all agency in modern society. As ethical artists of our own subjecthood and identity, we compose our lives as works of art, and live *exemplary* lives—lives which themselves may be legible as representative artifacts in their own right. Museology forms an intersection between religion and the ideologies of Enlightenment governance, where delegation and exemplarity constitute representation.

6. Art is thus both an *object* and an *instrument*. In this regard, it is the name of what is studied and the (often forgotten) name of the *language* of study. As with the term "history," denoting ambivalently a disciplinary practice of writing and the referential field of that scriptural practice, art is the metalanguage of the history (historiography) fabricated by the museum and its museographies. The instrumental facet of the term is largely submerged in modern discourse in favor of the "objecthood" of art. What would an art history or a museology consist of which was attentive to this ambivalence? But then art history or museology as we know them might cease to exist.

7. If art, as an organizing concept, as a *method* of organizing a whole field of activity with a new center (rather like a Lacanian upholstery button), makes palpable and legible certain notions of the subject, it also renarrativizes and centers history as well. Art has become the universal standard or measure against which all peoples of all times and places might be envisioned together on the same hierarchical table of aesthetic progress and ethical and cognitive advancement. To each people and place an art, and to each art a position on the ladder of evolution toward the modernity and presentness of Europe. Multiculturalism is more often than not the forgetting of the name of this climactic point, this ever-receding horizon. Art, in short, came to be fielded as central to the very machinery of historicism and essentialism: the very Esperanto of European hegemony. It may readily be seen how museology and museography have been indispensable to the Europeanization of the world: for every people and ethnic group, for every class and gender, for every individual no less than for every race, there may be a legitimate "art" with its own unique spirit and soul; its own history and prehistory; its own future and its own respectability; its own style of representational adequacy. The brilliance of this colonization is quite breathtaking: there is no "artistic tradition" anywhere in the world which today is not fabricated through the historicisms and essentialisms of European museology and museography, and (of course) in the very hands of the colonized.

8. The museum has become the very summa of modern optical instruments, of which the great proliferation of tools, toys, and optical games of the nineteenth century may be seen as fragments, partial machines, half-signs, anecdotal emblems. The museum places its users in *anamorphic* positions from which and only from which a certain historical dramaturgy unfolds with perfect naturalness; where a specific teleology may be read in geomantic fashion in the form and matter of specimens; and all kinds of genealogical filiations appear reasonable, inevitable, and demonstrable. Modernity itself is the most overarching form of identity politics.

9. As long as we remain fixed in place at the level of the individual museum specimen or artwork, we may find pleasure in believing in an individual "intentionality" at play in the production and appearance of things as a significant and determinant (and even final) causality. In this Euclidean

space of the museum, intentionality is a vanishing point or horizon of authorial origins: "let the work of art speak directly to you with a minimum of interference or distraction," as we are commonly exhorted.[6] (Of course, it does take two to tango—and it is the most extraordinary of "optical" illusions that museological space appears Euclidean in this anamorphic dramaturgy, this heterotopic landscape of sliding agency).

10. The modern museum of art may also be understood as an instrument of compulsory heterosexuality: one of the chief productions of the institution, after all, is the *engendered* subject. The topologies of gender positions are among the museum's effects: the position of the museum user ("viewer") is an unmarked analogue to that of the (unmarked) male heterosocial pose/position. So much has been clear; what may be less apparent is that *all* art is drag, and that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a continual and repeated imitation and reiteration of its own idealizations. Just as the viewer's position in exhibitionary space is always already prefabricated and bespoken, so also is all gender (a) drag.

11. Museums are sites for the *bodying forth* of imaginary histories. Our fascination with the institution—our being both bound to it and drawn to it—is akin to our fascination with that quintessentially modernist literary form, the mystery novel. Both museums and mysteries teach us how to solve things, how to think, how to put two and two together; and both teach us that things are not always as they seem at first glance. They show us that life, experience, and the world itself need to be pieced together (literally, re-membered) so as to become coherent. Both the museum and the mystery novel evoke and enact a desire for panoptic points from which, by hindsight, all things may appear in their true, fitting, natural, real, or proper order. Both labor at convincing us that each of us could "really" occupy privileged synoptic positions, despite all the evidence to the contrary in daily life, and in the face of domination and power. Both are equally heterotopic and compensatory disciplines of the self.

12. Finally, museums cause us to forget that we have forgotten how particular things worked in their own or other (or extramuseological) worlds. We are *disarmed* by museums, which dis-member the past so that we may re-member it anamorphically—in a manner whereby all that is visible may become legible as ethical hieroglyphs in a social history of the state or the people. Forgetting, of course, is not a losing but an action performed against the past, against memory: a repressing. Everything begins by referring back; yet once the cut between present and past is made, every trace becomes a window on to other traces, without end. The time of the museum is always the future anterior of what will have been for what its narrative episodes are in the process of leading up to. Notions of salvation are entailed in all of this as well (haven't we always believed that "art saves"?).

Museology and museography are complementary ways of distributing the space of memory; both operate together on the relationships between the past and the present; both operate hand in hand so as to transform the recognition of the past *in* the present into a spatial economy wherein the past and present are juxtaposed, where their relationship cannot *not* be construc(ct)ed as succession and progession, as cause and effect.

In this regard, the modern invention of art and its "history"—and of museology and museography—have not only been central to the fabrication and maintenance of modernity, but have also been ceaselessly enabling of all of modernity's various modernisms, including its periodically heralded aftermaths.

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5. An excellent discussion of the work of Jacques Lacan in relation to ego formation, and to the question of distinctions between ego and subject, is J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, New York, 1993, esp. chap. 2, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," 57–91.

6. See David Finn, *How to Visit a Museum*, New York, 1985, 1.

Museum Education Embracing Uncertainty

Danielle Rice

> In the world of visual images . . . the museum is *the* primary source for education. Merely by existing—by preserving and exhibiting works of art—it is educational in the broadest and best sense, though it never utters a sound or prints a word.—Sherman E. Lee[1]
>
> In the past the art museum has always been an extremely prestigious institution. One of the main reasons undoubtedly is that from the beginning these museums played an important role in legitimizing power. . . . And in a modern democratic society, political power, as embodied in the apparatus of state, can only be legitimized by claiming that this power operates for the benefit of all.—Jan Vaessen[2]

As a young intern just starting out in museum education in 1973, I had a clear sense of mission: museum educators built bridges between the objects in the museum and the visitors who came to see them. Building bridges meant convincing

1. Sherman E. Lee, "Art Museums and Education," in B. Y. Newsom and A. Z. Silver, eds., *The Art Museum as Educator*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1978, 21.

2. Jan Vaessen, "The Inflation of the New: Art museums on Their Way to the Twenty-first Century," in T. Gubbels and A. van Hemel, eds., *Art Museums and the Price of Success*, Amsterdam, 1993, 119.

visitors of the aesthetic status of the objects they observed. In keeping with the sentiments expressed by Sherman Lee in the words quoted above, museum educators were compelled to celebrate the silent eloquence of art objects by opening their visitors' eyes to the formal qualities of art: color, shape, line, texture. This formalist understanding of art went hand in hand with the belief that art spoke a universally understood, visual language. The role of the museum was to be a neutral but evocative backdrop for the best examples of human creativity that it could acquire and display. The quality of the art object was, at this time, firmly grounded in a system of connoisseurship that celebrated uniqueness, rarity, and participation in the developmental and exclusionary narrative of the progress of the arts that was considered to be the history of art.

In the ensuing decades, I have come to understand that the constraints which defined collecting, exhibiting, and museum-education practices in the 1970s were informed by a specific ideology or world view that has since been absorbed under the umbrella of "modernism." Like most isms, modernism has been defined in retrospect by scholars who claim that we have now evolved to a new way of understanding and modeling reality.[3] Postmodern scholarship eschews the notion of a singular, metanarrative history of art in favor of multiple narratives and perspectives. The individual art object, instead of being seen as a pleasing combination of formal elements, is treated as " as an element of discourse" within a variety of social, cultural, and political contexts.[4] In contemporary critical thinking, the museum can no longer claim to be a neutral backdrop for the display of art, because it is understood instead to be a highly complex institution which participates in the legitimation of power, as Jan Vaessen points out in the passage cited above. The universality of the formal language of art, implied in Sherman Lee's suggestion that museums have merely to display objects to be educational, is now seen as a particular ideology which upholds the structuring of authority.

Under the influence of modernist dogma, museum educators had the paradoxical task of teaching visitors to recognize and appreciate the silent language of art. It is thus not surprising that museum educators were among the first to welcome postmodernism into the museum.[5] But the debate about the boundaries and practices of art history has also resulted in uncertainty regarding the nature and the content of museum education. The issue of who is to be taught and to what ends remains a richly contested one. This essay examines the historical and structural tensions informing the traditional "educational" function of art museums in the context of today's climate of intellectual questioning of institutions and their practices.

In 1978, Barbara Y. Newsom and Adele Z. Silver published the first and only comprehensive study of the beliefs and practices of the museum-education profession. The book, *The Art Museum as Educator: A Collection of Studies as Guides to Practice and Policy*,[6] is a lengthy, painstakingly researched tome which celebrates the coming of age of the field of art-museum education at the very moment that art museums began acknowledging their public functions in a new way. The promotional blurb on the back cover states: "For the first time, the burgeoning field of education in the art museum has been defined and surveyed in this reference book." But in her foreword Newsom cautions: "In spite of the title of this book . . . it should be understood at the beginning that the art museum is above all about art. . . . Important as the educational process is, the museum is less a place to learn about art than a place in which to enjoy it." This cautious beginning, to what is otherwise a ground-breaking study, is not surprising in light of the fact that the Cleveland Museum of Art, then under the directorship of Sherman Lee, was instrumental in the conceptualization and execution of this book.

It is fairly simple to look back on the 1970s and the sentiments expressed by Newsom and to classify the disclaimer, that museums are really about pleasure derived from the unmediated encounter with art, as an idea grounded in the modernist conviction that art is devoid of content and politics. But it may, perhaps, be more challenging to consider whether postmodernism, which has affected so many branches of art history and theory, has had much of an impact on the art-museum business in general and museum education in particular. Have museums actually changed their strategies? Has the shift in thinking about art succeeded in decentering the structuring of authority within the institution? A consideration of the changing role of museum education in the past three decades may hold some answers.

The museum's educative function has always been a contested arena. From their very inception, museums were essentially teaching machines, whose subject was "not the individual work of art but relations between works of art, both what they have in common (styles, schools, periods) and what in the sharpest way clashes in their juxtaposition."[7] But this has not always been acknowledged or celebrated. In the United States, the history of art museums generally recognizes two different attitudes to education that date back to the early 1900s: the Boston Museum of Fine Arts model and the Newark Museum model. The Boston Museum's aesthetic philosophy of art museums was developed by Benjamin Ives Gilman, who wrote in 1918 that "a museum of art is primarily an institution of culture and only secondarily a seat of learning."[8] For Gilman art was an end in itself, while education was merely a means to an end. "The aesthetic purpose, the aim of art," he insisted, "is to engage the powers; the didactic

3. R. Williams, "When Was Modernism," in *The Politics of Modernism*, London, 1989, 31–36; and J. Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in H. Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Wash., 1983, 3–15.

4. K. Silver, "Past Imperfect: A Museum Looks at Itself," *Art in America*, LXXXI, no. 1, 1993, 43.

5. H. Shannon, "Museum Education as a Post-Modern Act," paper given at the second annual conference of the New York City Museum Educators' Roundtable, Apr. 10, 1992.

6. It was funded by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Edward John Noble Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Research was begun in the summer of 1973 under the administration of the Cleveland Museum, which also supervised the publication. The book is not an overall evaluation of the museum's educative function but a descriptive study of current programs (105 in 71 institutions), primarily programs initiated and undertaken by museum education departments.

7. P. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums*, New York/Oxford, 1991, 8.

purpose, the aim of education is to modify them."[9] Grounded in the idealist thinking of the Aesthetic movement, which from the 1870s to the early 1890s championed the beauty of art and its power to elevate the spirit and serve as an antidote to the ugliness of industrialized manufacture, Gilman's philosophy still has its advocates.

If the Boston Museum of Fine Arts model envisioned the museum as a temple, where learning was equated with the individual worship of beauty, the Newark Museum's model, on the other hand, saw the museum as a library. Developed by John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Museum and a librarian by profession, the Newark model embraced education as the institution's primary mission. Dana's pragmatic approach was directly critical of the templelike quality of museums. "A museum is good," he wrote, "only in so far as it is of use." Calling upon museums to "entertain" and "instruct," Dana urged an active policy of loaning objects to schools and civic groups, and of establishing storefront museums in communities and factories.[10] Furthermore, Dana rejected the notion of the rarity of art, calling upon museums to embrace and exhibit all aspects of material culture. If Gilman's philosophy is rooted in Aesthetic-movement thinking, Dana's is most akin to Enlightenment rationalism with its optimistic belief that all human beings have the capacity and the right to be educated.

The tension between aestheticism and rationalism was still alive and well in the 1970s. At that time, the debate regarding museums' public mission pitted Lee, the aesthetic-minded director of the Cleveland Museum, against Thomas Hoving, the media-minded director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Their differing approaches were characterized by Grace Glueck in her article "The Ivory Tower Versus the Discotheque," a title that vividly captures their differences.[11] Hoving is famous for his aggressive solicitation of corporate sponsorship, the Metropolitan's outreach programs into inner-city neighborhoods, and his unprecedented use of media for both promotional and didactic purposes.[12] But, in retrospect, the differences between the two men are far from clear-cut when one considers Lee's active involvement in the publication of the *Art Museum as Educator*, as well as Hoving's efforts to acquire, research, and exhibit exquisite and rare examples of art. The aesthetic position needed its advocates and museum educators were ideally suited to the task of convincing the public of art's enlightening characteristics. And the so-called populist, education-minded director still had his temple to mind.

Although museum education was much in the limelight at this time, the status of the profession was still very low. Despite the sheer physical evidence of active and innovative museum-education programs recorded in the *Art Museum as Educator*, museum educators in the 1970s had a much lower capacity to affect institutional decisions than their curatorial counterparts and for the most part received lower pay.[13] In aesthetically oriented institutions, educators had to tread lightly in the hallowed halls where art spoke for itself. Condemned for trying to trivialize the sacred encounter with art by explaining it away, museum educators often found themselves in conflict with the very institutional values they were hired to communicate. In the more aggressively public-minded art museums such as the Metropolitan, educators, despite their nominal support from the director, were nevertheless considered marginal by the curatorial staff. Outreach activities often took educators outside of the museum and into the community, and there was little evidence that their efforts had any significant effect on the collecting and exhibiting practices of the institution. When government support for innovative educational programs ended in the early 1980s, so did many of the programs.

A general sense that art museums were still failing in their educative functions inspired the Getty Center for Education in the Arts to sponsor a study ten years after the *Art Museum as Educator* was first initiated. Commissioned in 1984 from Elliot W. Eisner, professor of education and art at Stanford University, and Stephen M. Dobbs, who was then professor of creative arts at San Francisco State University, the study resulted in a report entitled *The Uncertain Profession: Observations on the State of Museum Education in Twenty American Art Museums*, published in 1986. Eisner and Dobbs interviewed thirty-eight directors and educators in twenty large and medium-sized art museums around the country in order "to understand the position, function, problems, and achievements of museum education."[14]

The study, primarily an informal summary of opinions and attitudes, not surprisingly reveals the continuing low status of the museum-education profession and the widespread failure of art museums to understand and respond to the needs of their publics. Neglecting to locate this failure in a broader context encompassing the function of art museums in the culture, Eisner and Dobbs criticized museums for what they perceived to be a lack of consensus regarding the basic aims and theoretical foundations of museum education. The authors, both academic art educators with little grounding in art history and no previous experience in museums, regarded museum education as a species of art education as it had been developed primarily in order to prepare primary- and secondary-school art teachers. With classroom teaching at the core of their understanding of education, Eisner and Dobbs failed to consider the recreational aspect of art-museum use. Their evaluation of art museums' potential to serve as an informal university for art education was thus misguided from the start.

The participants in this study were almost unanimous in

8. Quoted by T. Zeller, "The Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Art Museum Education in America," in S. Mayer and N. Berry, eds., *Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice*, Reston, Va., 1989, 29.

9. Ibid., 30.

10. Ibid., 34–35.

11. Grace Glueck, "The Ivory Tower versus the Discotheque," *Art in America*, LIX, May 1971, 80–83, 85.

12. Zeller (as in n. 8), 35.

13. *Education in the Art Museum: Proceedings of a Conference of Art Museum Educators, Held in Cleveland, Ohio, Nov. 4 and 5, 1971*, New York, 1971, 33. That museum educators were well aware of their lower status is evidenced in the creation in 1973 of the first standing professional committee of the AAM, the Museum Education Committee, as an attempt to redress some of the grievances of the profession. Also in 1973, the first journal devoted entirely to issues in museum education, *Roundtable Reports* (now the *Journal of Museum Education*), began publication.

14. E. W. Eisner and S. M. Dobbs, *The Uncertain Profession: Observations on the State of Museum Education in Twenty American Art Museums*, Los Angeles, 1986, 2–3.

their hostility to its findings,[15] which have yet to be repudiated in any systematic fashion. In the meantime, museum educators and directors succeeded in redirecting the Getty's interest in improving museum education away from studies such as that by Eisner and Dobbs and toward the relatively new field of visitor studies. Museum educators justified this redirection by arguing that very little was known about how visitors actually experience art in the museum setting and that any revision of museums' educative missions had to start with more information about the nature of that experience.

In 1987 eleven art museums agreed to participate in an experimental study co-sponsored by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and the J. Paul Getty Museum. This study, aimed at redressing the perceived failures of the Eisner/Dobbs report, used focus groups to gather new information about how people experience art in museums. It was hoped that this information, in turn, would inspire art museums to be more responsive to the needs of their visitors and more conscious of why certain people choose not to visit art museums.

Unlike earlier museum-audience surveys which emphasized demographics, the focus-group format gave museum staff an opportunity to listen to visitors and nonvisitors discussing their experiences and perceptions. At each of the eleven sites, two groups of ten people, one made up of visitors (people who had visited their local museum at least once in their life) and nonvisitors were assembled in a room with a two-way mirror. Museum staff watched as a facilitator led the two groups at separate times in a discussion of their experiences in the museum and, in the case of the nonvisitors, their expectations. All the participants were then asked to come to the museum during the ensuing week and to monitor their experiences while visiting several assigned galleries. The groups met again after everyone had had a chance to visit the museum.

The final report of this experiment, *Insights: Museums, Visitors, Attitudes, and Expectations*,[16] is composed of both a written summation and a forty-five-minute videotaped compilation of some of the actual interviews from four different sites. The reported "findings"—for example, that there is no single reason for nonvisitation, that first-time as well as repeat visitors find the museum experience meaningful and rewarding, that the layout and information of the museums are confusing, and that information and adequate signage for orientation are lacking—are neither surprising nor earth-shattering. But the focus-group experiment had an immediate and perceptible impact on the participating institutions. Curators and administrators who had had little opportunity to confront the museum public directly acknowledged being moved and inspired by the findings, and a number of projects to improve access were conceptualized in response.

In his essay placing the focus-group experiment in the context of the history of museum-sponsored audience research, historian Neil Harris argues that "the appearance of the Getty project marks a new stage in the long history of art museum management."[17] Harris identifies and names four phases of public-opinion polling in museums: authoritarian condescension, authoritarian experimentalism, populist deference, and existential scrutiny. The first phase, authoritarian condescension, dates from the end of the nineteenth century to the early 1920s and reflects the fact that, while museum administrators were willing to acknowledge the value of popularity, they were not willing to make it a priority in their thinking about the institution and its goals. This phase was followed in the 1920s and 1930s by authoritarian experimentalism, which used the systematic methods of study newly introduced in the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. After a period of retrenchment in the forties and fifties, the 1960s saw the dawn of an era of populist deference, fueled in part by the creation of new sources of government funding for the arts and also by the expansion of museum-sponsored money-making enterprises such as shops and restaurants. The focus-group experiment is characterized as one that differs considerably from the market-driven research of the sixties and seventies by its very open-endedness. Populist deference driven by marketing needs gives way in the late 1980s to existential scrutiny.

Harris sees a connection between the focus-group experiment and the current deprivileging of institutions, "as throughout our entire culture the canons of taste and the assumptions of scholarship have been challenged . . . from within."[18] By promoting interpretations that speak to the worlds and experiences of the visitors, the focus-group experiment and other like-minded visitor studies have brought the debate about canon into the museum context. For the first time, the visitors' ways of knowing are presented as valid alternatives to experiencing art.

The new weight given to visitors' experiences and ways of knowing in the art museum has resulted in a revision of its educative function and subsequently of the role of the museum educator. As we have seen, museum educators have spearheaded efforts to learn more about the nature of visitors' experience with art in the museum setting and this newfound knowledge, the result of planned experiments, surveys, and focus groups, has resulted in a new attitude of respect for and interest in the perspectives of art-world outsiders. Participating in the postmodernist deprivileging of any one discourse, museum educators have come to view themselves less as missionaries and more as ethnographers, working to interpret two cultures—that of the visitors and that of the experts or museum professionals—to one another. In this new model, interpretation is reciprocal. Thus, museum educators play a more active role in informing museum authorities about the values of people outside of the

15. To acknowledge this dissent from the museum profession, the Getty Center for the Arts convened a conference at the Toledo Museum of Art in Nov. 1985. A summary of the discussions at this conference was printed and packaged with *The Uncertain Profession* when it was released the following spring.

16. L. L. Duke and J. Walsh, eds., *Insights: Museums, Visitors, Attitudes, and Expectations*, Los Angeles, 1991.

17. N. Harris, "Conceiving the Art Museum: Some Historical Observations for the Getty Colloquium," in Duke and Walsh, eds. (as in n. 16), 133.

18. Ibid., 149.

19. D. Rice, "The Cross-Cultural Mediator," *Museum News*, LXXII, no. 1, 1993, 38–41.

20. S. Cahan, "Theory and Practice of Museum Education," unpublished paper communicated by the author, 5.

21. D. Rice, "On the Ethics of Museum Education," *Museum News*, LXV, no. 5, 1987, 17.

art world, and they are also more involved in constructing institutional decisions regarding collections, exhibitions, and the disposition of objects and information in the permanent collection. This new function has begun to play a role in the decentering of the traditional structure of authority within the institution.[19]

However, this repositioning of the role of museum education has not greatly improved the status of the profession, or made the public function of museums more certain. If the aesthetic position of modernism implied that the educational enterprise was unnecessary because art appreciation was the result of taste or intuition, or of the object's speaking for itself, postmodernism suggests that education is completely irrelevant because all views are equally valid. The uncertainty which affects so many intellectual disciplines today makes the educational enterprise entirely suspect. As one museum educator has argued:

> The first step in rethinking museum education is to recognize the "teacher" and the "learner" as historically grounded subjects. When this is acknowledged, meaning is no longer thought to be an objective entity contained within the art work, extractable only with special interpretive tools. Meaning is constituted in an active relationship between the object and the viewer. When this is recognized the museum becomes a site of knowledge production, rather than transmission. . . . When knowledge is considered a product of discourse, no class of people . . . may claim a right to superior perceptions of the world.[20]

One can only conclude that if, in fact, visitors' ways of deriving meaning from art are equal to those of museum professionals, then there is no particular necessity to introduce visitors to the values or ideas of the experts.

In sum, the historical tensions affecting the museum's educative function, that is, the traditional conflict between an aesthetic position—that art speaks for itself—and a rationalist one—that museums are places for the transmission of knowledge—have to some degree been replaced by the postmodern decentering of knowledge. If all knowledge is interpretation and no one interpretation is superior to any other, then museum education is part of an outmoded paradigm that needs perhaps to be completely dismantled.

A number of structural tensions—that is, tensions built into the very framework of art museums as institutions—also contribute to the uncertain status of museum education. First, art objects are highly prized commodities which make up the expensive inventory of art museums. The power elite that governs museums in this country is still primarily made up of collectors of art. The fundamental imbalance in the institution between the status of curators and that of educators results from the fact that curators are guardians of the treasure that the institution is structured to preserve. In their dual missions, to preserve and to educate, art museums are locked into a value system that, despite claims to the contrary, continues to place preservation (and acquisition) firmly above education.[21]

A second tension results from the fact that museum curators are scholars, intellectuals who have inevitably absorbed the values of their peers. Intellectuals in this culture, like artists, have a mandate to be provocative and innovative, in other words, to be leaders in their respective fields.[22] For museum curators, the exhibition is the primary vehicle of scholarship, often leading to a lengthy publication or catalogue. Although exhibitions are also developed in order to attract and inform the museum public, the scholarly bias informing exhibit planning often results in shows that are somewhat esoteric and difficult for the visiting public to understand. An excellent example of the mismatch between public interest and scholarly focus is the "West as America" exhibition held at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., in 1991, which presented a radical deconstruction of one of the central myths of American identity, but did so in a traditional, linear, exhibition format that allowed little room for dissent (although there was plenty).[23] In addition to scholarly exhibitions developed by museum curators, the recent proliferation of exhibitions and artists' work critical of museums as institutions confirms the fact that the latest scholarly thinking is alive and well within the museum.[24] Ironically, the postmodern scholar/curator who sets out to challenge traditional ways of thinking about art often gets caught in a three-way bind between the conservative expectations of the public, the authoritative structure of the museum as an institution, and the innovative necessities of scholarship.

The final structural tension affecting the museum's educative function stems from the fact that the art museum participates actively in the consensus limiting art's ability to respond favorably to popular tastes. Thus, it is a questionable honor for museums to become too popular, and attempts at popularization are tempered by reversions in the other direction. The basic modernist assumption that art is good for people is rooted in art's freedom of operation, which fosters freedom of vision and thus engenders innovation. Paradoxically, art affirms its freedom by asserting its esoteric nature. Art museums celebrate this freedom by designating as museum-quality art only those forms validated by the art world. Museums can hardly escape the inherent contradiction governing their actions—namely, that while they are supposed to make art accessible to all, they must neither be too popular nor show art that is too readily pleasing to large numbers of people.[25]

Although most postmodern art remains adamantly antipopular—oriented as it is to the tastes of a small, core group of art-world insiders[26]—certain artists have become aware of the necessity to engage broader publics and include non-

22. For a discussion of the history of intellectuals in America, see A. Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, New York/London, 1989.

23. L. Roberts, "From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1992, 197.

24. Silver (as in n. 4), 43–47.

25. Vaessen (as in n. 2), 116.

26. The concept of an art world, encompassing the collectively developed activities of artists and others who work in the specialized domains of the arts, was formulated by H. S. Becker in *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, 1982. Thomas Crow has recently characterized the contemporary art world as a village culture with its own language; see T. Crow, "Versions of Pastoral in Some Recent American Art," in *The Binational: American Art of the Late Eighties . . .*, exh. cat., Boston, 1988, 20–41.

artists in the art-making enterprise. Artists have made billboards using community input and installed exhibitions of artifacts gathered from people of many different classes and backgrounds. Comment cards inviting visitors to leave their opinions behind are fairly common in museums and contemporary art galleries. But, as one museum educator has discovered:

> the proliferation of participatory strategies seem[s] less engaged with the transformative goals of cultural redefinition than with salvaging an art world facing a crisis of competing agendas—the historical legacy of its own insularity, and the imperatives of serving an increasingly diverse audience, in a climate of intense financial pressure. . . . The bottom line is that participatory strategies, at present, . . . put the "public" in the service of the artworld, rather than vice versa.[27]

Artists, museum professionals, and other scholars are often much more aware of—and self-conscious about—the contradictions and questions raised by the public art museum in late twentieth-century democracies than average museum goers. If we choose to present these questions to the public, we are still doing so from an authoritative stance that implies these are the things that people should be thinking about. One museum professional's directive to other museum professionals to "Be episodic, be controversial,"[28] is counter to the expectations of museum visitors that the museum environment is a place of recreation and repose. Instead of being more conservative than their audiences, museums, at least insofar as they are identified with the scholars and artists in their midst, are often more liberal, but they are not necessarily more inclusive.

Art museums are still inaccessible to most people despite their claim that they serve everyone. In 1966, French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbell published their influential study of the class-based foundations of taste. They argued that: "Even in their smallest details . . . museums reveal their real function, which is to reinforce among some people the feeling of belonging and among others the feeling of exclusion."[29] The people lacking the right codes for understanding the museum environment and those who have them tend to break down along class lines. The democratic museum is therefore an illusion, since it maintains the special inheritance of some people only. Bourdieu then went on to publish a lengthy and highly detailed study of taste preferences, in which he argues that the aesthetic world view, which informs the patron class of museums, serves as an instrument of domination by emphasizing individuality, rivalry, rarity, and "distinction" and by devaluing the well-being of society as a whole.[30] Recent statistical demographic studies reveal that art-museum participation is still the prerogative of a small percentage of people (roughly 20 percent of the population), who are, on the whole, more highly educated and have a higher occupational status and a higher income than the rest of the population.[31] Furthermore, some studies reveal that only a small percentage of visitors account for the majority of all museum visits. Thus, a limited group of frequent users far outnumbers the casual visitors to museums.[32]

I have outlined a number of tensions, both historical and structural, that inform the practice of art-museum education today and affect how museums envision and serve their publics. Ironically, education is devalued both by modernist ideology, in its celebration of the silent eloquence of art, and by postmodernist thinking, with its understanding that knowledge is fundamentally interpretive and its deprivileging of any one narrative. Further contradictions complicate the task of education, especially the tension between the interests of a general viewing public and those of a highly professional art world with its own esoteric language and system of values. Since museum professionals most often value the opinions of art-world insiders, such as critics, artists, collectors, and other museum professionals, over those of the general public, the latter's needs and interests are often ignored. This predicament explains the traditional uncertainty or crisis in museum education. Because museum educators are the ones most often charged with responsibility for acknowledging and catering to the needs of the general public, the crisis in museum education is in actuality a crisis in the museum's public function. As financial pressures increase so does the need to be more readily marketable to a larger viewing (and paying) public, making the tensions described above all the more acute.

However, in contrast to theory, practice allows for a large number of ideologies, even contradictory ones, to function at the same time. Thus, the various ways of thinking about art and about the role of the museum as an educator that have been described here are all still alive and well in museums throughout the country, and perhaps the world. If contemporary critical theory has convinced me of the absurdity of trying to resolve contradictions into one, neat, and conclusive prescription for action, I am at least confident that a clearer understanding of the various tensions that come into play at certain moments can lead to a more imaginative way of posing the questions for the next generation of art historians, critics, and museum professionals.

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27. S. Cahan, "Cultural Politics and Public Participation in Art in the 1980s," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, Seattle, Wash., Feb. 1993, 10.

28. These sentiments were expressed by Robert D. Sullivan, associate director for Public Programs at the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C., at a seminar entitled "Many Pasts, Many Visions: Interpreting Cultural Diversity," sponsored by the American Association of Museums in Philadelphia on June 16, 1994.

29. P. Bourdieu and A. Darbell, *The Love of Art* (1966), trans. C. Beattie and N. Merriman, Stanford, 1990, 112.

30. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1968), trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.

31. J. M. D. Schuster, "The Public Interest in the Art Museum's Public," in Gubbels and van Hemel, eds. (as in n. 2), 39–75.

32. Marilyn Hood showed that 14 percent of the visitors at the Toledo Museum of Art accounted for 40–50 percent of the visits; M. Hood, "Staying Away: Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums," *Museum News*, LXI, no. 4, 1983, 50–57.

Reevaluating the Object of Collecting and Display

Anne Rorimer

The work of art as a physical object singularly rooted in time and place and bearing the weight of its commercial status was redefined in the latter half of the 1960s. Two decades have come and gone and yet museums with collections of contemporary art have not met the challenge presented by the ground-breaking practice of many of the leading artists of our time. Because it has built ideas involving the problematics of collecting and display into its very content, the art of Dan Graham, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher deserves particular consideration here.

These artists have anticipated the recent revision of attitudes toward the place of the art object within the context of the traditional contemporary art exhibition by thematically examining how and where a work literally and figuratively stands in relation to its institutional setting. They have, moreover, participated in laying the groundwork for the current debate surrounding museum collecting and display as this has been taken up by a younger generation of artists as well as by historians and curators.

Outside of temporary installations in the United States and abroad, the works of these and other artists, as well as the thinking behind them, have not been adequately represented by museums, which are generally resistant to radical artistic change.[1] Because of this resistance, museums run the risk of not educating their public about alternatives to conventional notions of collecting and display at the very time they still can acquire works that most successfully broaden aesthetic horizons.

Specific works by Graham, Broodthaers, Buren, and Asher exemplify how each, along with others of their generation, have called the commodity status and collectibility of the traditional work of art into question. In different ways, their work has taken stock of the socioeconomic factors underlying the conditions of the contextual placement of art in order to make manifest hidden realities informing institutional modes of display.

Already in the mid-1960s, Dan Graham (American, born 1942) had precociously and incisively noted that works of art depend as much on economics for their support as they do on physical walls. His magazine pieces, which he abandoned in 1969, are crucial to any appraisal of recent artistic innovation. Having run his own gallery from 1964 to 1965, Graham experienced the economic realities behind the idealized "white cube."[2] He reflected: "I saw contradictions in both the work and in the gallery structure I was part of. After the gallery closed, I began to make art which I felt could resolve some of these contradictions through bypassing the gallery structure altogether."[3]

Graham placed his first works of art in magazines, coming to the idea of using publications as a context. *Figurative* (1965), one of a number of Graham's magazine works,[4] appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in March 1968. A section of an actual cash-register receipt, with the amounts paid for numerous inexpensive items aligned in standard columnar fashion (placed arbitrarily by *Harper's Bazaar*) is bracketed on page 90 between two advertisements, one for Tampax and the other for a Warner's bra. Representational material and presentational method are thereby fused in that the work is to be seen simultaneously *on* the page and *inside* the magazine that contains it. The shopping receipt, signifying the result of a commercial exchange, contrasts with the two surrounding ads signifying the potential for such an exchange. *Figurative*, thus, not only brings the commodity status of art into view but also makes it part of its thematic content. Additionally, it hitches the cash receipt, otherwise a free-floating and unanchored "found object," to the timeliness of a magazine—itself in circulation—instead of to the purported timelessness of a gallery space.

Marcel Broodthaers (Belgian, 1924–1976), in his few but poetic and alluring installations, similarly sought to resist the creation of a single object that, passing through the commercial system, would seek its final resting place in the museum without serving a self-critical and social function. His renowned *Der Adler vom Oligözan bis heute* (The eagle from the Oligocene to the present), a temporary exhibition at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1972, critically reflected not only on art as such but also on art, as Benjamin Buchloh has phrased it, "in its place of official acculturation, the museum."[5] The installation belongs to the artist's larger enterprise during the years 1968–72, which he titled "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles" (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles) and subtitled "Section des Figures" (Figure section).[6] Hoping, as he stated in the catalogue, "to provoke critical thought about how art is represented in public,"[7] Broodthaers reversed the traditional practice of participating in a museum exhibition by organizing one himself. Rather than display his "own" work, as is customary, he followed the curatorial procedure of

1. Resistance permeates all levels, from acquisition committees to staff members. For example, in 1982, the Art Institute of Chicago purchased a work by Daniel Buren that requires gluing removable striped paper to the risers of the museum's Grand Staircase. In this way, the staircase is revealed as a sculpture of architectural proportions, visually and metaphorically defining itself as the institution's pedestal and core. Following upon the work's acquisition, confusion reigned when staff members worried over where to affix the museum's acquisition number in the absence of a singular object.

2. See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, San Francisco, 1986 (based on an essay published in 1976).

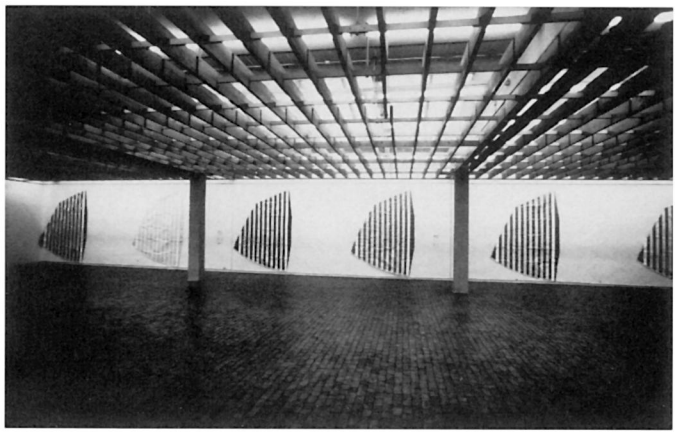
3. D. Graham, unpublished notes. See D. Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages," in *Dan Graham*, exh. cat., Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 1985, 8–13.

4. See Los Angeles, Otis Art Institute, *For Publication: Dan Graham*, exh. cat., 1975. For a recent discussion, see also Alexander Alberro, "Reductivism in Reverse," in *Tracing Cultures: Art History, Criticism, Critical Fiction*, ISP Documents, no. 5, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994, 9–29.

5. B. H. D. Buchloh, "Formalism and Historicity: Changing Concepts in American and European Art since 1945," in Art Institute of Chicago, *Europe in the Seventies: Aspects of Recent Art*, exh. cat., Chicago, 1977, 98.

6. See, e.g., Douglas Crimp, "This Is Not a Museum of Art," in Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *Marcel Broodthaers*, exh. cat., New York, 1989, 70–91.

7. M. Broodthaers, "Section des Figures," in *Der Adler vom Oligözan bis heute*, exh. cat., Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 1972, II, 18. Translated from the German for the author by Angela Greiner.



1, 2 Daniel Buren, *Voile/Toile, Toile/Voike, 1975–76.* Photo/souvenir: a work in situ, showing exterior and interior phases of an exhibition organized by the Berliner Künstlerprogramm and the Folker Skulima. Gallery, Berlin. Geneva, Selman Selvi Collection (photos: Daniel Buren)

borrowing objects from elsewhere and grouping them together to illustrate a particular theme or subject.

The subject of Broodthaers's exhibition was the eagle. For the purposes of presenting what appeared to be an exhaustive survey—as if it were the ultimate "eagle throughout the ages" exhibition—the artist secured the loan of 266 objects from a wide variety of museums and collections throughout Europe and America.[8] The exhibited works, from ancient to present times, belonged to all categories of media and included paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, and decorative arts. Only the image of the eagle served to tie together the vast array of material hung on the walls of the museum or placed in glass vitrines.

Being, as it was, a work that was an exhibition, not simply a work *in* an exhibition, *Der Adler vom Oligözan bis heute* exemplified the way in which museums of art are able to subsume their contents into a seemingly unified ensemble. By amassing an encyclopedic cross-section of objects unrelated to each other except through the image of the eagle, Broodthaers succeeded in relocating and reclassifying works already relocated and reclassified within the respective museums or collections that owned them. He thus subordinated a great diversity of objects to a further process of decontextualization and reassembly so as to re-view the process itself. The myriad examples of eagles did not, of course, add up to a single, cohesive statement about this bird but offered only specific manifestations of it in a multiplicity of instances. On a grand scale, Broodthaers's work commented upon, through reenacting, the process of collecting and display as an activity primarily motivated by the amassing of objects for its own sake.

Daniel Buren (French, born 1938) questions ingrained aspects of museum display with the similar intent of guarding his art from total subordination to the commercial system. In 1965, he decided to reduce the pictorial content of his painting to the repetition of alternating white and colored vertical bands measuring 8.7 centimeters (3½ in.) in width. Furthermore, since the end of 1967, he has chosen to work in situ, that is, in direct relationship with particular locations—often other than traditional exhibition spaces. In every case, Buren's vertical bands of color, which may be commercially reproduced in or on many types of materials, serve as neutral and generic signs for painting. By removing all illusionistic reference and subjective content from his work, Buren explores the work's presentational framework.

In one of his early texts, "Function of the Museum," Buren maintained: "The Museum is an asylum. The work set in it is sheltered from the weather and all sorts of dangers, and most of all protected from any kind of questioning," further stating that a work which "does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism."[9] By inquiring into and demonstrating the role of the museum in the interpretation of art, Buren has shown how the support of a work of art is a nexus of visible architectural factors and invisible economic ones—a place, that is, where all manner of physically autonomous objects are shown under the umbrella of art.

A two-part work from 1975–76, *Voile/Toile, Toile/Voile* (Sail/canvas, canvas/sail; Figs. 1, 2), synthesizes a number of Buren's concerns regarding the museum, in which works of contemporary art, he suggests, are at risk of being deposited like so many marketable items. Now in a private collection, the work was initially shown in Berlin and may be reshown at any time. The first part of the work consists of a regatta of nine boats rigged with striped sails, each of a different color. Launched on a body of water—in the first instance, the Wannsee—the sailboats take part in a race on an appointed day. Canvas sails as paintings and paintings in the form of sails, as the title suggests, merge in a single, inseparable function when "paintings set sail" on a lake.[10]

The full implications of the work are realized during its second phase, when the sails are detached and mounted on the walls of a museum, as they were in the Berlin Akademie der Künste, in the order in which they arrived at the finish line. As exhibited in the museum, the sails assume the look of art objects, moored to the walls, isolated and disconnected—no longer in use. By disclosing the dichotomy between how something is viewed inside and outside of a museum, the work bridges the gap between art and non-art and exposes how the museum sanctions the materials exhibited within its confines.

The work of Michael Asher (American, born 1943) also

addresses institutional support structures in order to demonstrate that objects are beholden to their physical and social context, not simply "free"-standing in space. To this end, Asher brings otherwise unobserved conditions into focus. In 1991, in four galleries of the Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, he exhibited a work that, treating the subject of collage,[11] was not collectible in the usual sense but could be acquired by the museum for which it was conceived. Like traditional collage, Asher's work was made from bits and pieces of found material and printed matter that were culled from the non-art world. In a departure from traditional collage, however, the scraps of paper bore direct witness to the *places* where the artist found them: inserted between the pages of the books in the psychoanalysis section of the Centre Pompidou library (Bibliothèque Publique d'Information). In three of the four large galleries, Asher mounted sixty-seven small, miscellaneous, loose fragments of paper on the museum walls, spacing them equally around each of the rooms in a single row, rather than gluing them together in the usual manner of collage.

The pieces of Asher's "collage" were obtained from the fifty-seven different books in the psychoanalysis section of the library that contained one or more of these slips of paper. Asher decided to focus on the psychoanalysis section since the least number of slips of any section were visible in the approximately one thousand shelved volumes pertaining to this field of study. Each paper fragment, furthermore, was accompanied by the bibliographical information, or standard library entry, of the book in which it had been inserted. Set in computer typeface, this information was enlarged on the wall in its original format. Placed above and to the right of the respective paper fragment(s), much like a label beside a work, the entry provided all the relevant information for each book, including its library code.

In a fourth gallery, a bound booklet of black-and-white photographs recorded each of the paper fragments as they had lain on the opened pages of their respective books prior to their removal for exhibition. Visitors could thus read the text originally surrounding the paper fragments shown on the walls, insofar as it was not blocked by them. In addition, gray bookmarks with green lettering (directly referring to the gray carpet and green furniture of the library), designed by Asher as handouts, listed, in conjunction with the book's library code, all of the pages on which the paper fragments had been discovered.

Although many of the page markers were blank, others attested to the information that circulates in tandem with, but outside of, the official domain of systematized, published knowledge. An advertisement and telephone number for self-help therapy and a guarantee of cure, for example, had been left in more than one book. A ticket stub from another library appeared twice (both whole and torn), as did various handwritten notes similarly left behind in books.

The slips of paper were not treated like autonomous found objects or aestheticized ephemera, but rather were integrally linked with the pages they had marked. In this capacity, they brought the given textual material into visual relief. By supplying anonymous traces of conscious interaction with the materials, the slips of paper permitted Asher to register or, in effect, "mark" the convergence between reader and text—or between a person and a body of knowledge—as a concrete event. The Paris work, in short, succeeded in thematically highlighting the interface between the perceiving subject and the perceived object of knowledge, while it acted as a conduit between two educational institutions that dispense different kinds of knowledge—the library and the museum.

By encompassing their institutional contexts, works by Asher, like those of Buren, escape requisite physical or ideological positioning and generally cannot be cut loose from their institutional framework. Commissioned directly from the artists and conceived in each case for particular situations, their works serve to direct the attention of spectators toward their surroundings. At the same time they reassess the concept of art as a collectible—that is, transferable and resalable—object.

To the degree that it outwitted its own potential marketability, a work such as Graham's *Figurative* is also bound to and in its place of display—the magazine. Possessing no commercial value in and of itself, it begs the question of its worth and thereby asks for a profound reconsideration of the components of artistic meaning beyond those of the unique object. The once easily obtainable issue of the magazine has, paradoxically, become scarce by the very nature of its disposability. Broodthaers's Düsseldorf installation, in its case, cannot be bought or sold—only re-collected. However, other works of his that may be acquired, including artists' books, prints, slide projections, and films, give evidence of his influential artistic enterprise devoted to the questioning of art as merchandise.

In the last quarter century, the art object has broken from the bonds of conventional museological categorization according to medium, and from confinement to traditional methods of display. Now that a number of internationally acclaimed artists have, in the interest of artistic renewal, opened the door to fresh ways of thinking, the museum, in turn, must insure itself against airless narrow-mindedness and rigid inflexibility in the face of new visual ideas. Most urgently, the museum must recognize the potential for its own suffocation by the systems and values at work in a commodity-driven society.

Works by artists such as Graham, Broodthaers, Buren, and Asher, who have succeeded in endowing art with thematic and physical parameters beyond those of the traditional, contained object, are in danger of being lost to view. Lest they be irremediably remiss as they ride the waves of fashion,

8. For a further detailed discussion of this work, see Rainer Borgemeister, "*Section des Figures*: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present," *October*, no. 42, Fall 1987, 135–44.

9. D. Buren, "Function of the Museum," *Artforum*, XII, Sept. 1973, 68. Buren notes that his text was written in Oct. 1970.

10. D. Buren, "Sail Art," in *Daniel Buren: Voile/Toile, Toile/Voile*, exh. cat., Berlin, 1975, n.p.

11. For a thorough study of this work, see Birgit Pelzer, "The Insistent Detail," *October*, no. 66, Fall 1993, 93–112.

museums, which define themselves as repositories for (r)evolution and ongoing changes in visual history, must remain current and preserve works that propose alternative ways of looking at the institution's own area of authority and responsibility—the collecting and display of art. Otherwise, it will be too late for them to fulfill *their* critical social role in conjunction with the art they house.

Anne Rorimer is an independent scholar and curator specializing in postwar art. She has published extensively on the work of Asher, Broodthaers, Buren, Graham, and others, and is currently co-organizing an exhibition for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, titled "1965–1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art" [415 West Fullerton Parkway, Chicago, Ill. 60614].

Letter

Picasso, Sara, and the Subject in/of Reading

It has come to my attention that there is a sentence in my recent contribution to the forum on "The Subject in/of Art History" (*Art Bulletin*, LXXVI, 4, 578–80) which admits of a possible reading that is both inaccurate and contrary to what I meant when I wrote it. This sentence begins a paragraph in which I express my doubts as to the success of all contextualist explanation—ranging from social and political frameworks to biographical circumstances—to account for Picasso's assumption of neoclassicism at the end of the teens. To illustrate what I see as this inadequacy, I wrote: "Picasso's turn to neoclassicism was not a result of his admiration for Sara Murphy, having begun long before he met her in 1921, nor was it terminated with the passing of their 'serious flirtation.' This peculiar and momentously reactionary alternative to Cubism is a deep conundrum for historians of modernism." Since the example of Picasso's connection to Sara Murphy came from an essay by William Rubin, one I had just cited in the preceding paragraph, a reader might make the assumption, which I never intended and which Rubin himself never implied, that Rubin would have held such a belief or that he had argued it in his essay ("The Pipes of Pan: Picasso's Aborted Love Song to Sara Murphy," *Artnews*, XCIII, May 1994). This is manifestly untrue and I now write to set the record straight.

When I wrote my own essay, I made it clear that I was focusing more on what I saw as the symptomatic character of the report of Rubin's findings, as relayed in the *New York Times*, than on Rubin's own essay, which had not yet been published. I would now like to focus, if ever so briefly, on the importance of Rubin's art-historical contribution, in which several hundred drawings are now seen as preparatory studies for a large, ambitious work, one that Picasso sketched onto canvas and then painted over to produce the extant *Pipes of Pan*. It was in the course of pursuing the logic of that abandoned composition that Rubin set out the analysis of a brief sub-period within Picasso's neoclassicism during which he created a more Leonardesque, atmospheric variant on the style, for which his use of sand and highly granular pastel during that moment in the late summer of 1923 contributed a material base.

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