Editorial

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Editorial

Museums—Crossing boundaries

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We consider the things people make—artifacts—according to various disciplinary conventions, including those of anthropology, archaeology, art history, history, philosophy, and sociology. What are the relationships among these disciplines in respect of museums, the scholarly institutions that research and present artifacts? The various types of museums—of art, anthropology, history, natural history, and science—have largely operated in separate spheres. Increasingly, the rationale for their institutional boundaries is coming under conceptual pressure. In particular, changing ideas about class, race, ethnicity, and culture, in part generated within museums themselves, challenge the boundary between art and anthropology museums. How might art and anthropology museums, while sustaining their disciplinary commitments, find ways of sharing not only ideas but even their collections?

The articles that follow derive from presentations at a conference in April 2006 at Harvard University, hosted by the Harvard University Art Museums (HUAM) and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology to explore these and related questions.[1] The directors of the two museums, William Fash and Thomas Lentz, gave introductory papers, and were followed by Ruth B. Phillips of Carleton University, a historian of African and American Indian art, and formerly director of the Museum of Anthropology of the University of British Columbia. Subsequent presentations were grouped under the four headings given below. The articles we publish can only be a selection of those presented at the conference. They reflect a wide variety of responses to the statements and questions that follow here. The authors' responses form part of a heterophonous debate that continues to unfold as existing paradigms are questioned, and as artifacts once again assume a central, inevasible place in academic inquiry.

Art or anthropology: Must we choose?

Western scholarship, epitomized in museums since the eighteenth century, has not only divided the natural from the artificial, but also artifacts that are the products of literate societies from those of peoples reputedly close to a state of nature. Further, it has distinguished between objects valued for their unique qualities—artworks—and others valued as representative of their kind—specimens. The former predominantly invite aesthetic, the latter anthropological attention. Yet, if mental and manual ingenuity underlie all artifacts to some degree, is any given artifact amenable only to one form of attention? When considering the material products of human ingenuity, must we choose a single viewpoint, or can an artifact from any era or location be pondered in various ways on different occasions, whether as an artwork or as anthropological material? If so, might not art museums and anthropology museums fruitfully attend as much to what have traditionally been one another's collections as to their own? Further, how did these fundamental distinctions arise, and what attempts have been made to date to question them, especially in museum scholarship and practice?

Whose art? Whose anthropology?

The scholarship of Western museums has long ascribed art status to objects that were not necessarily created as artworks, whether in the Western world or elsewhere. Why are some things admitted as art while others are excluded? Who is entitled to decide what constitutes art and what should be treated as

1. The conference, "Crossing Boundaries: Art and Anthropology Museums in Search of Common Ground," was conceived by the World Visuality Committee of the Harvard University Art Museums (HUAM) and organized by HUAM and the Peabody Museum. The committee members are Suzanne Preston Blier, Thomas Cummins, Mary Schneider Enriquez, Barbara Fash, William Fash, Ivan Gaskell, Edward Keenan, and Thomas Lentz (chair). The conference was made possible by a grant from the Office of the President of Harvard University, and was part of a long-term project to promote scholarly collaboration among the collecting entities of the university to address world cultures. The editors would like to thank all who participated in the conference from which papers published here derive, including those who are not represented in this collection: Homi K. Bhabha, Christopher Brown, Marla Burns, Anne D'Alleva, Diana Fane, Christian Feest, Steven D. Lavine, Mary Malloy, Kay Shelemay, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Laurel Ulrich, and Irene Winter.

anthropological material? Do things look different from other cultural viewpoints, and, if so, how might those viewpoints be represented in both art and anthropology museums? Must one belong to a culture to define that culture and the place of artifacts within it? Is appropriation unavoidable when artifacts change hands between cultures? Can one distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate appropriation—misappropriation? How can one properly address the effects of asymmetrical power relations between advantaged and disadvantaged social groups and cultures? Should art and anthropology museums take greater pains than at present to collaborate with representatives of cultures other than their own in their care and interpretation of artworks and artifacts, whether aesthetically, philosophically, historically, or anthropologically?

Within museums—beyond museums: New paradigms for addressing artworks and other artifacts

New paradigms may be in development for the care and interpretation of objects in both art and anthropology museums—such as collaborations with community representatives—but are museums developing modes of scholarship in respect of art and artifacts that would transcend dependence on collections within their walls? Can collaborative stewardship reconcile differences of use of artworks and other artifacts produced by various constituencies by sharing them, both within and outside museums? Can museums develop forms of attention to artworks and other artifacts whose material and immaterial characteristics preclude their incorporation within museum buildings—elements of landscape, sites of ritual, even instances of performance—in collaboration with non-museum cultural custodians? If museum scholars now seek to draw on museum collections from any era or culture regardless of their customary designation as art or anthropological material, might they not also properly attend to phenomena physically uncontainable by those institutions, in part in the interest of promoting their various legitimate uses by diverse constituencies? What, if any, might the role of new media be in such processes?

"In scholarship is our strength": Shaping the future of art and anthropology museums at Harvard and beyond

HUAM and the Peabody Museum seek not simply to respond to continuing changes in scholarship and museum practice, but also to shape important aspects of those changes. They propose to view their respective collections as a scholarly resource to be shared intellectually. They seek to increase opportunities for inter-museum collaborations as each prepares to address a far wider range of artworks and artifacts than ever before. Equally important, each wishes to participate in scholarly collaborations widely within the university of which they are integral parts. In this light, how might HUAM and the Peabody best develop modes of scholarship that both make use of and contribute to research and teaching in other parts of the university? What might these museums learn from the experiences and critiques of other museums, whether within or outside university contexts? Might such a development provide a model for other research universities, as well as inspiration for other museums, whether of art, anthropology, or both?

Although the final set of questions preceding brings the discussion back to Harvard University and its museums, it clearly has implications for the development of museums as sites of scholarship more generally. No museum can fulfill its many functions and serve its various constituencies without being an independent site of scholarship. Although many boards of trustees and even museum directors now behave as though this were not the case, intellectual inquiry within museums underlies and sustains all else of worth that these institutions do or might ever do. Not to recognize this within research universities with constituent museums, and to assign a merely supplementary or recreational role to such museums, is to acquiesce in the intellectual impoverishment of the institution by diminishing what ought to be among its most significant engines of research, instruction, and inspiration. We, the editors of this collection of articles in an issue of *RES* devoted to museums and the scholarship they produce and inspire, do *not* acquiesce. Rather, we present our colleagues' work as an example of museum scholarship: a collaboration between museums—HUAM and the Peabody—and among scholars from these museums, from other museums, and from other sites of scholarship, whether within our own university or beyond.

Even those who acknowledge that museums contribute to scholarship often hold that museums—whether of art, of anthropology, or other fields—are at most places of empirical inquiry that cannot generate theoretical reflection. We disagree. This collection of articles demonstrates that museums not only should, but do produce theory. After all, as the British cultural

historian Peter Burke recently stated, "All theory needs to be a theory of something, so information is essential to it."[2] In their collections and documentation museums hold such information; in their scholars resides theoretical capacity. At least some of those scholars' productions—exhibitions and publications—exemplify what Burke describes as a cocktail of fact and theory. Pressures and proclivities can tend to favor the establishment of facts over the elaboration of theory in the practice of many museum scholars, but this need not necessarily be the case. By publishing these articles we hope to encourage museum scholars to increase the proportion of theory to fact in their own cocktails; and to encourage others to appreciate that scholarship, including theoretical reflection, is integral to museums, whether of art, of anthropology, or indeed of anything else.

In this instance, the subject of the cocktail of theoretical reflection richly mixed with empirical research is human beings' making and use of artifacts, including artworks, whenever and wherever that may have occurred, including within museums. In view of the misunderstandings and conflicts that inevitably arise when peoples of diverse cultural groups—whether indigenous or colonizers, art historians or anthropologists—assert their right to use and interpret artifacts, we might all seek to emulate the Brazilian historian Gilberto Freyre who "learned . . . to discriminate between the effects of purely genetic relationships and those resulting from social influences, the cultural heritage and the milieu."[3] In doing so, above all, those of us who are Westerners should always be conscious of the huge power advantage our hegemony gives us even as we listen to others. As several of the articles that follow demonstrate, our Western ways of understanding artifacts, their uses, and the relationships mediated by those artifacts—whether in art or in anthropology museums—are neither the only ways, nor necessarily the best.[4]

2. Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *The New History: Confessions and Conversations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 144.

3. Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization (Casa-Grande & Senzala)*, trans. Samuel Putnam, 2nd ed. (New York: A. Knopf, 1956), p. xxvii.

4. See further, Ivan Gaskell, "Some Ethical Judgments in Museums," in *Art and Ethical Criticism*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).