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 Webster¹

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 prescriptions 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 Tolem 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 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 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 gao 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 Todd¹⁹
 photographs the weapon is removed from the hand that wove the basket, wore the cloth or wielded the weapon.—Loretta Todd¹⁹

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 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 statuette. 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 Todd²⁸

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—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

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, paralyzing 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 "Chieftly 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 (NAGPRA), 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 Mowchat 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'waka 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 vation 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., *Chieftly 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