

Sonderdruck aus:

Cordula Grewe (Hrsg.)

# Die Schau des Fremden

Ausstellungskonzepte zwischen  
Kunst, Kommerz und Wissenschaft

*(Transatlantische Historische Studien, Bd. 26)*



Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 2006

## RECONFIGURING MUSEUMS: AN AFTERWORD

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At this critical moment in the history of museums, as some museums are being dissolved, collections reorganized, and new museums created, this book explores the anxious space between art and artifact in relation to their respective disciplines, art history and anthropology, and shifting museological contexts. In reflecting on the book as a whole, I will explore the following themes:

- Alignments and synchronies
- Disciplinary formations
- Authenticity
- Disarticulations
- Rearticulations
- Museum theatre
- The expo model
- The paradigm of attraction
- From rehearsal to redress
- From an informing to a performing museology
- Museum as an art practice
- Agency of the museums

### ALIGNMENTS AND SYNCHRONIES

A fundamental issue for the history of museums is the alignment and later disarticulation of knowledge formations, collections, and institutional arrangements. Many of the museums discussed in this volume were established at a time when there was a close fit among these elements. Collections were established in relation to knowledge formations that were museum fields. As these fields migrated to the university and changed their relationship to collections, museums that once housed them became doubly and even triply museological. Museums fulfilled their primary museological function, namely, to preserve collections of natural, cultural, and artistic materials related to active fields of research. As the knowledge formations that had created these collections migrated into the university, museums came to preserve the outmoded fields that had materialized themselves in collections and museum arrangements. Some museums, particularly those without the will or resources to transform themselves, became museums of themselves and have been ei-

ther criticized or valued on that account. Taken as a whole, this book tracks the widening gap between historically integrated components of the museum system and the various ways that museums are rearticulating themselves.

### DISCIPLINARY FORMATIONS

Critical to the coherence of public museums during the nineteenth century was their role in creating “disciplinary objects.” How disciplines mobilized museums to produce disciplinary objects and how, once constituted, such objects served to consolidate and secure a discipline are questions that resonate throughout this book. Key to this process was the distinction between art and artifact. Defining objects as artifacts, specimens, and documents – and not as art – was a key strategy for securing the scientific status of anthropology as a field.<sup>1</sup> As Andrew Zimmerman argues, *Völkerkunde* (ethnography) was based on the convergence of a disciplinary subject, *Naturvölker* (“natural peoples”), and disciplinary object, the artifact. Objects became *disciplinary artifacts*. Since the denial of *Naturvölker*’s capacity for art was fundamental to both the constitution of *Völkerkunde*’s disciplinary subject and the distinction between so-called natural and cultural peoples (*Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*), “primitive art” was an oxymoron. Then, to secure its scientific authority, *Völkerkunde* had to establish the evidentiary status of its disciplinary objects. Zimmerman shows how, consistent with these principles, the Berlin Museum used material practices such as iron and glass cases to secure the conceptual category of artifact. Their goal was to prevent objects caught in the artifact category from relinquishing their evidentiary status and activating an aesthetic response.

The critical question is not only how the distinction between art and artifact gets made, but also what this distinction enables and what it constrains. Museums by their very nature tend to be conserving and conservative institutions. Given how central the art/artifact distinction was to the formation of modern museums and the disciplines associated with them, it is not surprising that this distinction should continue to preoccupy them. How could it be otherwise considering how fully this distinction has materialized itself in collections, the distribution of them across institutions – especially art museums and museums of natural history, ethnology, *Völkerkunde* (ethnography), and *Volkskunde* (folklore) – and their arrangement within each kind of museum? Nélia Dias provides rich evidence of how a museum’s history conditions the kind of future that can be imagined for it in her insightful account of ethnographic museums in Paris across four periods, from the *Louvre* period of the 1820s to the present project of the *Musée du Quai Branly*. Shifting her attention to the present, she observes the transformation of artifacts into art and

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Zimmerman’s contribution to this volume; while Zimmerman focuses on nineteenth-century Germany, the same was true for other countries.

asks, “Is the designation ethnographic museum obsolete” and the distinction between “art” and “ethnographic object” moot?

The dissolution, redistribution, transformation, and creation of new museums indicate four main strategies that address the question posed by Dias: first, the reclassification what were formerly ethnographic objects as art; second, the extension of ethnography to everyone; third, the heritage approach and, fourth, the engagement of museums with their own past.

If the problem is that the material culture of other people has been treated as ethnographic object, then the first strategy is to treat, or be prepared to treat, those objects now as art. This can be seen in the Paris case: reclassify what were formerly ethnographic objects as art and what was once called “primitive art” as “*les arts premiers*,” remove these objects from anthropology museums, and show them in art museums the same way, more or less, that other art is shown.

What then happens to the category of artifact? When art museums reclassify ethnographic artifacts as art, they do not collapse the two categories into one. Rather, they maintain the categories and reclassify the objects. Now the newly defined works of art must be accorded the same respect that art historians bestow on European art. This means that the creativity of individual artists must be recognized and that aesthetic response in local contexts be given its due. Without an indigenous art category comparable to art history’s disciplinary subject and without indigenous art genres comparable to painting and sculpture, art historians use *distinction* to effect the transformation of artifacts into art in two ways. “Artifact” is a byproduct of the distinction between what is and what is not art and as such helps to secure the integrity of the art category and the value of everything within it. This is why the category of artifact does not – indeed, cannot – disappear when artifacts are reclassified as art. Even the rejection of the distinction between art and artifact affirms the distinction because the rejection continues to carry the history of the difference. This is in keeping with what Roland Barthes calls constitutive negativity.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, as Zimmerman’s essay reveals, artifact is also more than art’s residual other. It provides an evidentiary basis for the scientific claims of anthropology. In this context, art becomes artifact’s “Other.”

Having been reclassified as art, what were previously artifacts are now subjected to hierarchies of quality. Those hierarchies are often based on an aesthetic sensibility rooted in modernist formalism and a commitment to the universality of art as a category and the importance of maintaining the purity and integrity of that category. However, as the history of contemporary art attests, formal properties may be of little if any consequence in what counts as art, as can be seen in conceptual, process, and some forms of performance art. In his work on African art, Robert Plant Armstrong makes a useful distinction

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills*, in: *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath, New York 1977, p. 64.

between an aesthetic of virtuosity and an aesthetic of invocation, which may or may not involve formal qualities; what defines an aesthetic of invocation is an affecting presence. That presence develops with the repeated appearance of an object in significant events. There are even cases where an aesthetic of virtuosity might be inimical to an aesthetic of invocation.<sup>3</sup>

If, however, the problem is that one has subjected everyone but oneself to ethnographic study, then a second strategy is to extend ethnography to everyone, including oneself. This is the idea behind the *musée de société*, a term that emerged during a colloquium in Mulhouse in 1991 and is invoked by Michel Colardelle in this book, the exhibition “Body Art,” a show discussed in Enid Schildkrout’s contribution, and the Museum of World Culture, which opened in Gothenburg, Sweden on December 29, 2004. Aptly, the new museum defines its mission as “adapting the collections of historical and ethnographic museums to the globalization process, as well as to accelerating intercontinental migration and multicultural societies.”<sup>4</sup> What these strategies share is the idea that a solution to the problem of the West and the rest is integration: everyone’s art in the art museum and all peoples in the museums of society and culture. The art/artifact distinction can still hold as long as it no longer distinguishes those who have artifacts from those who have art.

Interestingly, art museums do not feel a need to change their name, just the game, or at least some of the rules, by being more inclusive. In contrast, former museums of ethnology, *Völkerkunde*, and *Volkskunde* do feel a need to change what they are and what they are called because their name points to their discipline – to their historical commitment to exhibiting disciplinary knowledge – and increasingly to their problematic relationship to those whose objects are in their collections. Their objects are not just artifacts, they are objects of ethnography and as such they are disciplinary objects.<sup>5</sup> Such museums can sidestep the question of what to call themselves, as with the *Musée du Quai Branly*, or they can become museums of society and culture, as with the *Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée* in Marseilles, or they can become something else altogether.

There is a third strategy, which I will call a heritage approach, which respects or even insists upon the relationship of the museum to those who claim the objects as their patrimony. Prime examples include the new National Museum of the American Indian, which opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in September 2004. This museum is concerned first and fore-

<sup>3</sup> Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence: an Essay in Humanistic Anthropology*, Urbana 1971 and *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence*, Philadelphia 1981.

<sup>4</sup> “About the Museum,” Museum of World Culture (Gothenburg, Sweden) website, <http://www.varldskulturmuseet.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=869&a=3503>; last accessed August 10, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> I discuss this idea more fully in the chapter *Objects of Ethnography*, in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Berkeley, CA. 1998, pp. 17–78.

most with what the objects in the collection mean to Native Americans today, not with what anthropologists find interesting about them. New national museums in other postcolonial settler societies, such as New Zealand, Australia, or Canada, have adopted a similar approach, staffed their institutions with indigenous curators, developed ongoing relationships with native communities, and formulated protocols for the handling of objects in their collections that respect indigenous understandings and practices.

A fourth strategy, a variation on the heritage approach, can be seen in museums that engage with their own pasts, their own (museum) heritage, if you will. Just as objects are not born ethnographic but become ethnographic, so too, I argue, are objects and practices not born heritage but become heritage. I use the term heritage to signal a metacultural relationship to that which was something else before it was heritage. Heritage, as I am defining it here, is a mode of cultural production that has recourse to the past and produces something new. What is new is the nature of the relationship to the past, namely, a heritage relation, which by definition is metacultural. Heritage is made, not found. That which was not heritage becomes heritage through particular operations, as can be seen in the UNESCO's world heritage initiative and, most recently, the creation of a new category, the oral and intangible heritage of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than dissolve, reorganize, relocate, and rename themselves, museums whose histories are misaligned not only with the disciplines that once animated them, but also with contemporary social and political realities, can make their relationship to their past, both good and bad, an essential part of their core mission. Self-examination, internal critique, even self-indictment have the potential to reanimate the museum's role in civic life today by tempering its power to valorize with the necessity for critical examination on everyone's part. For example, the Maryland Historical Society invited Fred Wilson to create an exhibition based on its extraordinary collection of paintings, sculpture, and decorative art documenting the social history of the region. Given the nature of such collections, which often originated from the elites' desire to preserve their heirlooms, visitors of the 1992 installation might have expected to see a beautiful vision of the past. Yet, Wilson unsettled such assumptions by exhibiting the absence – and thereby unnoticed presence – of African Americans in the collection. He pursued this goal through a series of jarring juxtapositions that made rarely noticed museological operations – from the formation of collections and the classification of objects to designations

<sup>6</sup> I took these issues up in *From Ethnology to Heritage: The Role of the Museum*, Keynote Address, Conference of SIEF (*Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore*), Marseilles 2004 (forthcoming in the conference proceedings in 2007); and in *World Heritage and Cultural Economics*, in: Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz (eds.), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham 2006. On the history of the idea of *patrimoine*, see Françoise Choay, *Allégorie du Patrimoine*, Paris 1992.

and labels, pedestals, and the works' contextualization – the subject of the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> Wilson exhibited a whipping post together with beautiful furniture, a Klu Klux Klan hood in an antique baby carriage, slave shackles with fine silver in a case labeled “Metalwork 1793–1880,” and, within a row of pedestals topped with busts of white dignitaries, left one pedestal empty. Visitors who thought they could take comfort in Maryland's glorious past – and the historical society dedicated to that past – had to rethink how history gets made and the role museums can play in its remaking. This is what made Wilson's approach a performing rather than informing museology, a distinction I explore below.

It would be interesting, in this regard, to read Bärbel Küster's account of the presentation of the Belgian Congo at the 1897 Brussels-Tervuren world's fair against “The Memory of Congo: The Colonial Era,” a recent exhibition at the museum that evolved out of that world's fair. The exhibition, on display from February 4 through October 9, 2005, originated in the context of Belgium's celebration of its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary and its tradition of tolerance. Celebratory anniversaries are not conducive to critical self-examination, so the museum's willingness to take up this “turbulent chapter in history” and enter the “highly topical debate concerning the colonial history of Congo and Belgium” is commendable, if late in coming and not vigorous enough for some critics.<sup>8</sup> That debate was precipitated by Adam Hochschild's scathing account of Belgian atrocities in *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998).<sup>9</sup> The Congo is a delicate subject in Belgium – many visitors would have come to the exhibition having been taught in school that Belgium brought civilization to the Congo – and the museum takes a less confrontational approach than Wilson did in Maryland. To its credit, the exhibition does recognize “the museum as an instrument of colonization,” but, consistent with its overall tone, stresses the scientific value of the museum's endeavors.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, edited by Lisa G. Corrin, with contributions by Leslie King-Hammond and Ira Berlin, Baltimore and New York 1994; for the ways in which the exhibition intensified civic engagement and dialogue, see Profiles and Case Studies: Mining the Museum, in: *Animating Democracy: Strengthening the Role of the Arts in Civic Dialogue* website, [http://www.americansforthearts.org/animatingdemocracy/resource\\_center/profiles\\_content.asp?id=217](http://www.americansforthearts.org/animatingdemocracy/resource_center/profiles_content.asp?id=217), last accessed August 10, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Memory of Congo: The Colonial Era website, Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren, Belgium), <http://www.congo2005.be/geheugen/frameset.php?page=tentoonstelling.php&lang=en&menu=1>, last accessed August 10, 2005; see also Alan Riding, Museum Show Forces Belgium to Ask Hard Questions about Its Colonial Past, in: *New York Times*, February 9, 2005, B3.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Boston 1998.

## AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of “primitive art” is not only a matter of provenance, as with European art, but also of temporality, for art history, as well as anthropology, has tended to view “primitive” art as something *in* the present, but not *of* the present, consistent with the eternal present of “peoples without history.” The value placed on the purity of works, especially those created before contact, is linked to the temporality assigned to these works and the difficulty that museums have had in recognizing non-European modernities. By implication, is “their” modernity less authentic than our own? Or, can “they” be authentically themselves only outside modernity? As Alice von Plato has commented, how much authenticity does development allow? For “their” art to be authentic must it be protected from the market, a condition that we do not demand of European art? The signboard painting of urban Africa discussed by Till Förster, while not “primitive art,” is valued for its “naïveté,” that is, for having been created outside the international art world. What makes it authentic for many collectors is its innocence of “outside influences.” Given the historical and global circulation of “primitive art” and “naïve art,” we might speak of authentication or truth of claims rather than of authenticity, whether purity in the case of “primitive art” or local specificity in the case of signboard paintings.

## DISARTICULATIONS

Art is a place of eternal rest for objects too valuable to be left to museums that no longer value them for the reasons they were originally collected. As disciplinary paradigms shifted, the way to establish the seriousness of a field such as anthropology was to move it into the university, emphasize theory, and address topics that had little if any bearing on material culture per se. Material culture came to be seen as an albatross that kept *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* in the museum and held these fields back theoretically. As disciplinary paradigms shifted to new topics and theory received greater emphasis, museums like the *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires*, as Michel Colardelle would be the first to concede, became museums of outmoded knowledge formations sedimented in their collections and enshrined in their permanent exhibitions and museum’s institutional form. As he explains, scholars are no longer interested in working with the collections at this museum. They are not interested in material culture. The challenge he faces as he forms a new *Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée* in Marseille is to redefine and reinvigorate the role of material objects in the museum and to do so in terms other than those who made them ethnographic in the first place. No object is born ethnographic. It becomes ethnographic by virtue of the concepts and operations that ethnographers bring to it.

## REARTICULATIONS

Collections once kept apart are being brought together and “art” provides a framework for rethinking their relationship. While structured differently and with different effects, museums of art – and museums of modern and contemporary art, in particular – as well as museums of ethnology are rearticulating older spatializations and temporalities of cultural difference. The temporal issue is expressed in the distinction between the contemporary (of the present) and the contemporaneous (in the present) made by Johannes Fabian.<sup>10</sup>

The recategorization of ethnographic artifacts as art is a normalizing strategy, a way for art museums to say that “they” are as artistic as “us.” When the *Louvre* integrates what were formerly ethnographic objects into its art collections it elevates them and, by implication, the people identified with them. Note the statements made to the press and reported around the globe when *les art premiers* opened in the *Louvre’s Pavillon des Sessions* in April 2000. Jacques Chirac said that visitors would “discover art works comparable to the Louvre’s greatest treasures,” while the collector Jacques Kerchache told reporters that “I got the idea to put primitive art in the Louvre when I realized that three-quarters of humanity were being ignored.” Chirac added, “The museum will show that there’s no hierarchy among the arts, and no hierarchy among peoples.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, posters for sale at the entrance to the *arts premiers* exhibition featured medieval sculptures side by side with African figures.<sup>12</sup>

On the *Louvre* poster, the carved figure from the show proclaimed, “Je suis au Louvre,” in answer to the famous question, “Iront-ils au Louvre?” that Félix Fénéon had posed in his 1920 essay *Enquête sur les arts lointains*. Objects become proxies for persons and museums do for objects what society has difficulty doing for the people associated with those objects. The role of objects as proxies is one of several reasons that museums are political minefields.

While *Louvre*-style displays of ethnographic objects as art pursue normalizing strategies, anthropological exhibitions such as “Body Art” aim to unsettle the visitor. They seem to say that “we” are as strange as “them.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, “Body Art” unsettled assumptions about the familiar (us) and strange (them) by relativizing culture through the aesthetic framing of such cultural practices as tat-

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York 1983.

<sup>11</sup> *The Times of India*, April 14, 2000, printed an Associated Press account.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion as well as reproduction of these posters, see Nélia Dias’ contribution in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> For a documentation of the show, see <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/bodyart/index.html>; for further discussion of the exhibition, see Enid Schildkrout’s contribution in this volume.

tooting and scarification, foot binding and corsets. This exhibition was an “anthropological” experience not because it placed the “Other” on display, but because it unsettled visitors’ certainties about their own normalness.

The issue, then, is not representation per se, but how difference is structured, spatialized, and temporalized, inside, outside, and across disciplines, institutions, collections, exhibitions, and stakeholders. Like American anthropology, *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* have extended their cultural scope beyond “primitive” peoples and peasants. How new configurations and terms (cultural science, European ethnology, cultural anthropology) attempt to address the vexed history of *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* in the German context is taken up by Elisabeth Tietmeyer in her history of how Berlin museums dedicated to these fields have reorganized the cultural territory, changed their names over time, and later consolidated and redistributed collections. She shows how “Fascination Picture”, the inaugural exhibition of the *Museum Europäischer Kulturen* (MEK), spatialized new cultural understandings in ways that the institution as such could not do. Although MEK now combines German and European collections, it continues to be separate from the Berlin Ethnological Museum. Similarly, as Schildkrout explains, the anthropology department of the American Museum of Natural History does not collect “Western” material, but will borrow such material for an exhibition such as “Body Art”.

Given the impact of recent immigration and global population flows, the spatialization of collections (and to some degree exhibitions) along geographic lines is less and less in touch with the daily reality in which the museum is actually operating. How European is Europe? The world is already here.

## MUSEUM THEATRE

What is to be done with museums that are museological in the first, second, or third degree, as outlined above? No longer engines of research (this is more the case in North America, Australia, and New Zealand than in Europe), now custodians of the materialization (and display) of outmoded knowledge formations, what are the doubly and triply museological museums to do? We might look to new museums being planned in Paris as part of a more general trend.

One way to capture the epochal shift in the nature of museums is to think of them as a theatrical form – and, for that matter, to think of performance, for example, the *Völkerschauen* discussed by several authors in this volume and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival today, as a museum for practices that cannot be detached from the bodies that do them. One need only note the long history of national types, costumes, rituals, music, and dance in theatre and opera, and above all world’s fairs. How expos exploited the museological capacities of performance is taken up by Gabriele Dürbeck and Alice von Plato

in their analyses of the Samoan *Völkerschauen* and folkloristic displays of provincial France, respectively. These performances and installations placed living persons, and not only things, on display using theatrical conventions. Moreover, as von Plato notes, scholars such as Le Play, who had difficulty establishing their disciplines within the university, used the world's fair as their forum. They thereby aligned the temporary space of the world's fair with the role of the museum in showing (and advocating) for particular fields of knowledge not yet at home in the university. In this respect, both the museum and the world's fair could be seen as more progressive – during their early history – in nurturing new fields than the university, with its conservative legacy of a classical curriculum.

We might distinguish between theatre and museum as follows. In the theatre, spectators are stationed in their seats and the display moves. In the museum, objects are stationed in their cases and viewers move. Museums have always been a theatrical form in the sense of *mise-en-scène*, the placement of things in space, which is as essential to the taxonomic display of systematic collections as it is to the theatrical realization of a story. It is in this sense that the *Galleries d'Anatomie Comparée et de Paléontologie* is as much an example of museum theatre as such scenographic installations as the nearby *Grande Galerie de l'Evolution* at the *Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle* in Paris.

More than ever, exhibitions have become a theatrical medium in their own right and museums have become events as much as places. Increasingly, exhibitions are organized around a theme, concept, or narrative, and museums are drawing attention to themselves for their installations and not – or at least not only – for their collections. Indeed, the increasing number of museums without collections and exhibitions without objects put the very identity of the museum into question. Asked for a definition of the museum that would account for these relatively new developments, the late Jeshajahu Weinberg, curator of the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and formerly a theatre director, told me that “a museum is a story in three-dimensional space,” as is theatre. This approach is consistent with the approach of the Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongarewa* in Wellington. Stories come first. Objects follow. *Te Papa* proceeds from the premise that visitors want to find themselves in museums and to be emotionally engaged by what they encounter. The museum visit is designed to be affective before it is informative, an emphasis that arises as well from a questioning of ethnographic authority and rise of heritage as a way to restore the vital relationship of objects to those who identify with them as patrimony.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See James Clifford, On Ethnographic Authority, in: *Representations* 1(2), pp. 118–146, reprinted in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1988, pp. 21–54.

## THE EXPO MODEL

The theatrical approach to exhibition is but one of several practices that link museums to world's fairs and mark a shift from an exhibitionary to an expository approach. Museums have been – and continue to be – active organizers of exhibitions for international expositions, to cite only the Smithsonian Institution, which was represented at many world's fairs during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or the *Deutsche Hygiene-Museum* (Dresden), which was responsible for the thematic exhibition “Mensch” at Expo 2000 in Hanover. Some museums were actually created out of world's fairs, using them to develop their collections, a standard practice of the Smithsonian, or occupying former world's fair buildings. The examples are numerous: The Field Museum of Natural History, for example, was founded in 1893 to house the natural history and anthropological collections that had been brought together for the Chicago World's Fair. The Royal Museum for Central Africa evolved out of the *Palais des Colonies* created for the 1897 world's fair in Brussels-Tervuren, as discussed by Küster. The *Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie*, formerly the *Musée des Colonies*, occupies a building created for the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris. Though established only in 1972, the Queens Museum of Art is housed in the New York City Building featured at the 1939/40 and 1964/65 New York World's Fairs. As several essays in this volume attest, world's fairs produced exhibition prototypes that museums would later adapt to their own purposes. Some of those techniques can still be seen in museums today. They include pre-cinematic dioramas, still a star attraction at the American Museum of Natural History, and panoramas, a stunning example of which survives in the *Biologiska Museet* in Stockholm. Another famous example is the “Panorama of the City of New York.” Created for the 1964/65 New York World's Fair it is considered the world's largest architectural scale model, today preserved and periodically updated at the Queens Museum of Art.

Despite or perhaps even because of these linkages, museums have stood in an equivocal relationship to world's fairs. To establish their own seriousness, they have tried to distance themselves from the commercialism and sensationalism associated with world's fairs and their spectacular displays. Yet, in an effort to attract a larger audience, museums have also competed with world's fairs. Most recently, we can see museums using an expo model to refashion themselves within an increasingly commercial cultural marketplace. *Te Papa* is a prime example.

As long as world's fairs took a retrospective approach to measuring how far civilization had progressed, they were more compatible with museums, which also arranged their collections to tell a story of progress or evolution. The “civilizing mission” of the colonial project, and the role of the museum in it, was still enshrined, as of 2002, at the entrance to the Royal Museum for Central Africa, in a statue featuring a Belgian colonialist with two Africans kneeling,

and the words “Belgium brings civilization to the Congo.” By World War I, however, world’s fairs were shifting from a retrospective assessment of achievement to a prospective envisioning of the future. It is precisely this future orientation that so appealed to the planners of *Te Papa*, who were determined to turn their back on the museum’s problematic history and look forward.

### THE PARADIGM OF ATTRACTION

Today, as museums focus on attracting and serving a wide public, they find in world’s fairs a wealth of possibilities. Museums, like expos, have become a prime site for radical architectural experimentation and an economic engine for attracting tourists and revitalizing cities. Notable examples include the Guggenheim in Bilbao and New Zealand’s new national museum on the Wellington waterfront. Like expos, many museums in the English-speaking world have become unabashedly commercial ventures, with large gift shops, destination restaurants, and travel services. Like expos, museums are focusing on exhibitions more than on research. Instead of research giving rise to exhibitions, exhibitions are driving research and setting the museum’s intellectual agenda. This is consistent with the priority of visitors over collections and accounts for the emphasis on visitor services and amenities. More space is devoted to exhibition, both permanent and temporary, as well as to revenue-producing activities, while expanded public programs are transforming museums into performing arts and cinema venues.

Consistent with these developments, museums have learned from expos to elevate installation from a minor design practice to a serious artistic enterprise. This has been the mission of premier exhibition designer Ralph Appelbaum. Celebrities such as architect Frank Gehry, theatre director Robert Wilson, and filmmaker Peter Greenaway have been invited to design installations at the Guggenheim in New York and in various European museums. Lest we presume that such strategies are recent, it is worth noting the *art nouveau* setting for Congo objects at the 1897 world’s fair in Brussels-Tervuren, and how, during the early part of the twentieth century, Germany’s ethnographic museums began taking a more aesthetic approach to display in an effort to balance their scientific mission with popular appeal. To that end, they shifted from the older scientific approach embedded in the permanent installation of taxonomic displays to thematic exhibitions, temporary displays, and more spectacular installations. Appealing to a wide public was in keeping with the emerging role of museums in a new public sphere, as H. Glenn Penny discusses in his book *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, which offers a historiographic corrective to the argument that colonialism was the prime mover in the development of Germany’s ethnographic museums. Certainly, colo-

nialism was important, but, as Penny shows, it was not the whole story. The competition among German cities also played a crucial role, and Penny demonstrates how these cities used their museums to compete with one another and to increase their prestige on a world stage. Their motivations were civic as well as economic and they used cosmopolitan strategies and not only colonial ones.

### FROM REHEARSAL TO REDRESS

Even as they become customers for museum services, visitors have become citizens in ways that differ from nineteenth-century models. The museum's accountability to its publics has changed. In the past, according to Tony Bennett, the public museum attempted to create citizens through a program of pleasant instruction.<sup>15</sup> As several essays in this volume demonstrate, museum visitors were not the only target of such programs. Christian missionaries had already converted the Samoans who performed in the late nineteenth-century *Völkerschauen* discussed by Dürbeck. Like the performers at today's Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii, they were engaged in what Steven Mullaney has called a rehearsal of culture.<sup>16</sup> By rehearsal of culture, Mullaney means an exhibition or performance that forecloses what it shows. Such displays are designed to repudiate, if not eradicate, what they exhibit. In the case of the Polynesian Cultural Center, a Mormon operation on the American campus of Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, Polynesians who are Mormons perform their "native" culture, just like the missionized Samoans.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, the performers enact their conversion by performing what they no longer believe. If repudiation licenses the showing of questionable material in the first instance, extinction enables its aestheticization.

Turning this process on its head, performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña has created what he calls "reverse anthropology" and what I have named "the ethnographic burlesque."<sup>18</sup> In "The Couple in the Cage," one in a series of works that protested the celebration of 500 years since Columbus "discovered" America, Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco presented themselves as newly discovered natives from the remote – and fabricated – island of Guatinau. Dressed in grass skirt, sun glasses, sneakers, fright wig, collar and chain, they occupied a cage that was placed in a public square in Madrid, in an art gallery,

<sup>15</sup> Bennett's study focuses on the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London and New York 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Mullaney, *Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance*, in: *Representations* 3, Summer 1983, pp. 40–67.

<sup>17</sup> See the website for the Polynesian Cultural Center (Laie, Hawaii), <http://www.polynesia.com/framegeneral.htm>, last accessed August 10, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *The Ethnographic Burlesque*, in: *TDR The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 42, Summer 1998, pp. 175–180

and in the rotunda of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.<sup>19</sup> What they did, above all, was to place viewers in an untenable position; there was no “correct” position to occupy in relation to this unsettling performance – and that was the point.

In a postcolonial era and at the heart of the former empire, museums can no longer assume a relatively homogeneous audience. New audiences are bringing new expectations to what museums exhibit, indeed, to what they are. Museums are being asked to deal with their fraught colonial past, to address cultural claims, and to be responsive to the new immigration and social inequities associated with colonialism. Museums are increasingly being held accountable for their own histories as institutions and to those who once lived far away from the metropole but are now in their midst. Ethnology museums, historically dedicated to displaying ethnological knowledge, are being asked to address their own relationship to their collections at the same time that they address their relationship to those who identify with those collections, whether this means the repatriation of objects or a movement from ethnology to heritage.

#### FROM AN INFORMING TO A PERFORMING MUSEOLOGY

Central to this process is the shift from an informing to a performing museology, to adapt a distinction that Johannes Fabian has made with respect to ethnography.<sup>20</sup> With this shift, the museum puts its authority as an information medium into question. It reflects on itself as a medium by bringing to the fore devices that it once hid. A performing museology at the National Museum of the American Indian means, for example, that an object may have three labels. The author will sign the label and identify him or herself as art historian, anthropologist, or Native American curator, including tribal affiliation. Or, in the case of an exhibition entitled “All Roads Are Good”, the museum, which is largely staffed by Native Americans, invited twenty-three indigenous people from North, Central, and South America to roam the collection and make their own selection of what to show and in many cases also how to show what they selected. The entire process was carefully documented and that documentation was also in the exhibition.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A video documentary made by the artists records the responses of visitors to their provocation; see *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatini Odyssey*, directed by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia, videorecording, 31 minutes, Chicago: Authentic Documentary Productions and Video Databank, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Fabian, *From Informative to Performative Ethnography*, in: *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire*, Madison, WI, 1990, pp. 3–20.

<sup>21</sup> See *All Roads Are Good: Native Voices on Life and Culture*, Washington, D.C. 1994, as well as the website for the exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian, <http://www.si.edu/harcourt/nmai/exhibit/exroad.htm>, last accessed August 10, 2005.

## MUSEUMS AS AN ART PRACTICE

Treating artifacts as art and aestheticizing display have become critical strategies in negotiating the relationship of showmanship, science, art, and cultural citizenship. It could be said that all museums are art museums in the sense that museums, by their very nature, aestheticize what they show, even when the objects they display are not intended to be viewed as art. The poetics of the medium – whether natural history museum or history of technology museum or cultural history museum – have inspired artists to take the museum as their subject and/or medium, to cite only Mark Dion, David Wilson, Ilya Kabakov, and Christian Boltanski among others.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as already suggested, the politics of cultural representation have required a systematic conversion from ethnographic object to art in order to fulfill the museum's role in a program of cultural parity and equity.

Several essays in this book explore the history of this process by attending to the relationship not only of art historians, but also of artists to ethnography, ethnographic collections, and museums, particularly in relation to the avant-garde. As these authors maintain, and as James Clifford and others have also shown, the aesthetics of ethnography and the ethnographic interests of the avant-garde before World War II, as seen in *Documents*, brought scholars and artists together around a shared sensibility. A critical site for their interaction was the museum.<sup>23</sup>

As artists make *curation* their art practice and curators become exhibition *auteurs*, the museum itself continues to develop as an art practice in its own right and, increasingly, to become an intensely reflexive one. The current trend towards narrative – the story museum and the highly interpretive exhibition – scenographic installation, and “animation,” is being critically reassessed in relation to the idea of the museum as an autopoietic system. I have in mind here the work of Michael Fehr, former director of the *Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum* in Hagen,<sup>24</sup> and experiments in reflexive museology by such artists as Fred Wilson, Coco Fusco, and Guillermo Gomez-Peña.

## AGENCY OF MUSEUMS

Whether they like it or not, museums are key players in identity politics, a topic that requires us to rethink such basic terms as “the Other” and “cultural representation.” While these terms provide a useful point of departure, this

<sup>22</sup> Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, New York 1999.

<sup>23</sup> The repercussions of this kind of interaction are beautifully explored by Grossman in her essay in this volume on the role of photographic practices in establishing the modernism of African sculpture through images that were themselves, to quote Grossman, “at the crossroads between ‘document’ and ‘art.’”

<sup>24</sup> For articles by Michael Fehr, see <http://www.museum-theory.de/>; for the *Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum*, see <http://www.keom.de/>; last accessed August 10, 2005.

book encourages us to rethink them. What if museums were prohibited from “exhibiting the Other,”<sup>25</sup> but required to exhibit their collections? What would they do? This question bears on the agency of museums in the mobilization of citizens around rights claims. Museums are an arena for the performance and contestation of cultural citizenship, which has made them a lightning rod for controversy.

Representation refers not only to imaging, but also to inclusion. And, not only to inclusion, for it is the structuring of inclusions and not inclusion per se that is critical. It is therefore important to attend more closely to the implied narratives that exclusions produce, as, for example, when Europeans are excluded from ethnological collections or non-Europeans are excluded from art museums, a pattern that some newly configured museums are trying to address. Similarly, note how inclusions are structured at the *Cité de la Musique*, where non-European music and musical instruments appear only twice: first, as the pre-history of European classical music; and second, in the context of world’s fairs, where their role as inspiration for European composers is primary.

Inclusion within the collection or within the space of display is one thing. Inclusion within the very infrastructure of the institution is quite another. The former has been associated historically with subjection, the latter with authority and control. While these issues may be addressed more vocally in the United States, the United Kingdom, as well as in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among others, they are relevant to Germany and France as well.

<sup>25</sup> The quote refers to the conference “Exhibiting the Other: Museums of Mankind and the Politics of Cultural Representation,” co-organized by the German Historical Institute and the *Centre Allemand d’Histoire de l’Art*, in Paris, France, November 2–5, 2000.

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