



Curatopia: Museums and the Future of Curatorship.

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University of Manchester Press, 2019**

The times of the curator

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My title tropes the title of a conference where this chapter began its life: 'The Task of the Curator'.¹ In what follows I evoke two senses of temporality: first 'The Times': as in the historical moment or context, 'the life and times of x', and second 'Times' plural: a sense of the curator's task as enmeshed in multiple, overlapping, sometimes conflicting times.

My primary concern is the discrepant temporalities (sometimes I want to say 'histories', or even 'futures') that are integral to the task of the curator today. I liked the conference title because of its invocation of Walter Benjamin and the problematic of translation, which in his famous essay 'The Task of the Translator' is fundamentally a temporal and open-ended process. For Benjamin, of course, the discordant times of the past would be activated and 'made new' by a critical-materialist form of historicising that could challenge and open up closed narratives, the inevitable realisms of the victors.²

I believe that what is going on currently in museums has the potential to make this kind of critical intervention. For the museum is an inventive, globally and locally *translated* form, no longer anchored to its modern origins in Europe. Contemporary curatorial work, in the excessive times of decolonisation and globalisation, by *engaging with* discrepant temporalities – not resisting, or homogenising, their inescapable friction – has the potential to open up commonsense, 'given' histories. It does so under serious constraints – a push and pull of material forces and ideological legacies it cannot evade.

Museum curating in nineteenth-century Europe was inseparable from the gathering, valuing and preservation of heritage – art and culture – in the context of bourgeois, national projects. Museums, as they became established, were purveyors of normative models of citizenship, taste, education and progress, as is detailed in the well-known work of scholars like Carol Duncan, Tony Bennett and others.³ In the nineteenth century, the times of the curator were normatively lined up in a singular, developmental History. But it is important to recognise that this history was less and less anchored by the teleologies of either Christian salvation or Enlightenment reason. What might be called Darwinian time – developmental, materially adaptive

and without any guaranteed destination – interjected a new, and troubling, ontological ‘ground’, or lack of ground. This unmanageable seriality may account for the anxiety, as well as the desire, associated with the collecting and preserving in museums around 1900. And it may have something to do with the remarkable productivity and dissemination of the museum form in the present moment of historical uncertainty.

Since the eighteenth century, Western curating has been associated with the creation and management of *colonial* collections. These collections were built on conquest (the Napoleonic expeditions, the Benin Bronzes ...) and on assumptions of ‘salvage’, the necessity and the right (guaranteed by a linear, progressive History) to collect vanishing or endangered artefacts, as well as written and oral records.⁴ Colonial collecting, which reached something like a fever pitch in the late nineteenth century, conceived of museums and archives as ultimate resting places, repositories for a precious legacy, kept in trust for science, for the nation, for Civilisation or for Humanity. Museums were treasure houses, and curators were their knowledgeable and loving guardians. The times of the curator were aligned in evolutionary sequences that (unlike Darwin’s time) assumed a vantage point at the end or cutting edge of development, and a place at the centre of a world system, a stable hierarchy of places and times.⁵

I do not need to dwell on this map or history, this ‘worlding’. The fact that we see it clearly now, as if from a distance, suggests that a shift has occurred, or, better, is occurring. Call it a ‘decentring of the West’, perhaps the principal achievement of the last half of the twentieth century. Two driving forces of this shift can be named, in shorthand: decolonisation and globalisation. Proceeding at economic, social, political and cultural levels, these processes are uneven and sometimes contradictory. Decolonisation and globalisation are linked, but distinct, historical dynamics.

This is, naturally, a crude generalisation, painting with a broom. But it will have to suffice, for now, to characterise the changing times of the curator in a new millennium. Times of confusion, of intersecting, crossing historical vectors, of alternative pasts and futures. I hasten to add that displacing the West (a dominant but always permeable and negotiated cultural location and economic power) does not mean leaving behind, getting free of, the legacies of colonisation or the capitalist world system. Far from it. It does mean that other big, or big enough, historical stories now need to be taken seriously alongside the former ‘realistic’ narratives of Westernisation, Modernisation, Progress, Development and the like.

There are many examples of this decentring. There is the opening of what seems to be a new Crystal Palace Exhibition, not in London, but the Shanghai World Expo in China. It has been a while since London was the centre of the world. Another example can be found in Bolivia, where Evo Morales has hosted an alternative global climate change convention, in counterpoint to the failed Copenhagen summit. Or there is Emmanuel Wallerstein, who has been writing about what he sees as the end of the five-hundred-year Modern World System that he himself put on the historical

map. That system is over, Wallerstein now believes: we are in a period of ‘transition’ and radical indeterminacy about what will come next.⁶

These are just a few signs of the decentring of the West, the branching and crossing of its historical teleologies in emergent, translational practices. My own awareness of these shifts has been deepened, over the past several decades, by the emergence of ‘Indigenous’ politics, social movements and cultural renewals in new public, performative contexts (peoples once thought to be destined for extinction reappearing rather suddenly, as Marx might have put it, ‘on the world stage’).⁷

I write here largely from the perspective of this Indigenous emergence, the focus of my recent research. Of course, curatorial practices, as conceived in this book, embrace a very wide variety of social contexts, historical constraints and sites of intervention. I am certainly not privileging the experiences of ‘Indigenous curating’ I will be evoking. But I do think they shed important, cross-cutting light on some persistent assumptions about time and history that have organised the Western institution of the museum, a cultural form that (as I have already suggested) is being translated throughout the world, in novel and unexpected ways.

My wake-up call was the Mashpee tribal recognition trial of 1977, which I attended in Boston as a graduate student and wrote about later in *The Predicament of Culture*.⁸ A living Indian tribe on Cape Cod simply was not on my map of historical reality. All of my categories of cultural form and social and temporal continuity were shaken up. And in a way, I have been grappling with the questions posed by the Mashpee ever since. They led me to an interest in the ways tribal people were remembering, telling, performing their histories – deep pasts inseparable from specific places, and violent colonial histories of rupture, loss and inventive survival. Tribal museums and cultural centres would become a research focus for me, places where I could see in action the gathering and transmission – the curating – of heritage, processes of preservation and valuing, but not in a classic ‘museumological’ sense. Instead I had to recognise old and ongoing social processes of articulation, performance and translation, across generations, and across fraught borders of culture and place.

It was a time when we were coming to see the borders of identity as dynamic, continually transgressed and remade, in specific historical relations of power, often unequal, but never static or unidirectional. Mary Pratt’s concept of the ‘contact zone’, drawn from colonial situations of dominance and transculturation, gave me a way of reconceiving the hierarchical, authoritative spaces of the Western museum. Readers may recall that the essay ‘Museums as Contact Zones’, which appeared in my book *Routes*, begins with Tlingit elders in the basement of an art museum in Portland, telling (singing) unexpected stories inspired by objects of their heritage, reopening (re-remembering) histories and powers associated with museum artefacts no longer collected ‘once and for all’.⁹

For me, the contact zone idea was a way to think about constitutive translations, opening up closed spaces (like museum basements, more

crowded places now ...). At that time, I saw the work of the curator – whether aesthetic, ethnographic or historical – as essentially conservative. In French, it is unambiguous: *conservateur*. Museums were collections of valuable things, and the job of the curator was to keep them safe, carefully displayed for public edification, or preserved in storage for research purposes.

I always felt uncomfortable in museum basements: all those undisplayed objects, silenced drums, powerful presences wrapped in plastic. The sheer, historical injustice of massive collections held in Western capitals while few old examples of African, Torres Straits or Alaskan art and culture could be seen in their places of origin. This made me want to open everything up, disperse the collections and bring outsiders into the museums to make new meanings, like Fred Wilson with his artist interventions.¹⁰

There were movements in the air that pointed in this direction. A leading influence for me, and many others, was the University of British Columbia (UBC) Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Canada, moving decisively towards collaboration under the directorship of Michael Ames, and under the *pressure* of North-West Coast Indian artists and tribes.¹¹ And we might recall the subversive work of Mary Nooter Roberts and Susan Vogel at the Museum for African Art in New York City, USA, shaking up what a museum could be.¹² They sponsored, for example, William Farris Thompson's pioneering exhibit of 'living' altars from African-descended religions in the Americas – altars that needed to be fed, that attracted offerings, dancing, drumming in spaces like the Berkeley University Art Museum, USA, where I saw it during its travelling phase. It was at this time, too, that the Oakland Museum began to open up its galleries to amazing and moving constructions by community-based *altaristas* during the autumn weeks of *Día de los Muertos*. It seemed the work of the curator was getting more interesting.

If you consult 'curator' and 'curate' in a dictionary you find that they come from *curare*, which means to care for something. In the recent work of Donna Haraway on inter-species relations, the idea of *caring* ceases to be a practice of protecting by enclosing and becomes a profoundly relational activity of crossing and translating.¹³ The 'care' of curating, in this perspective, is about preservation (in the sense of thriving) through active relations of reciprocity and dialogue – not administration or tutelage.

In the activities of Indigenous museums and cultural centres, curatorial practices were being translated and remade. 'Salvage' collecting and preservation would take on new meanings, no longer about gathering up what is doomed but rather supporting continuity and renovation. The Tlingit elders in the Portland museum basement *cared* deeply for the material objects there, but did not need them back. Material possession was not their first priority. They wanted the *stories* embodied in old masks and carved headpieces to be *renewed*, and they also wanted to forge relations of alliance and responsibility with the museum, in the midst of ongoing struggles to thrive as a people in a complex, dangerous postmodernity. Indigenous

curating has made me think again about the difficult, essential work of cultural politics: the relational, power-charged, processes of sustaining *difference through relationships*: keeping while sharing.

Around the world we see examples of current experiments and signs of the changing times I have been describing. First, the 'Multiversity Gallery' at the Museum of Anthropology UBC, Canada, which was designed in collaboration with First Nations, and its digital Reciprocal Research Network linking British Columbia tribal museums with collections in Ottawa, Washington, Oxford, Cambridge and more. Second, the Arctic Studies Center in Anchorage Alaska, USA, purpose-built for circulating collections from the Smithsonian, and for facilitating Native, hands-on access to their heritage. Third, the growth of digital archives which are collaborative in design and sensitive to Native protocols, such as Ruth Phillips's project in the Great Lakes area, and an experimental alliance between the Zuni tribe and the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, UK. Fourth are tribal museums, for example the Native-run Alutiiq Museum on Kodiak Island, Alaska, USA, and the Chateau Musée, in provincial France, working closely together to return on-loan iconic masks from Alutiiq heritage, not seen since the 1870s. These two 'marginal' museums are bypassing the national cultural institutions (Smithsonian, Quai Branly) to create their own reciprocal network, an alter-globalisation from below.¹⁴

And lest we think that the insides and outsides of identity are clear, that everyone agrees on just who they are, or that collaborative curating is somehow simply a matter of respect and reciprocity, we will always have Paul Chaat-Smith, Comanche curator and writer at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, USA, to keep us honest, reminding us (with humorous and mordant irony, never cynicism) of the pitfalls, the mistakes and misunderstandings, the ways that cultural authority is shored up and contested in the non-innocent contact zones of inter-tribal life today.¹⁵

'Curating', as cultural performance and heritage management, emerges as a newly complicated and relational task. What do we value and hold on to, what do we let go? What stories can be told? To whom? When? Which relations do we nourish? Curating involves complex negotiations, performances and translations in given *fields of force*: historical, economic, political.

I will not try to provide anything like a map or overview of these terrains of struggle and synergy. Things are too volatile and diverse for that. Rather I would like to offer a few specific examples of 'Indigenous curating' which bring the temporalities of curating back into view – now that the nineteenth-century museum chronotope of finality and centrality is up for grabs.

Let me offer three examples of what I have come to think of as 'Indigenous curating', working with things and relations in transforming times. I hope it will be clear that the temporal predicaments and strategies I am highlighting are not limited to tribal or Native heritage work, or to

museums with collections. Even in the so-called new museums or in local cultural centres, the task of the curator always involves deciding what to save and what to lose, what to remember and what to tell, what gets performed and what stays off-stage, what is translated (made new) and what is consigned to oblivion. Moreover, to speak of 'deciding' these questions is misleading. Time does not wait for us to make up our minds.

My first example is provided by the anthropologist Nelson Graburn in an article for a special section on 'Indigenous curating' in the journal *Museum Anthropology* in 1998.¹⁶ Graburn is well known for his long ethnographic experience with the Inuit of North-East Canada. The region has been named and renamed, reflecting altered relations of power: from the Hudson's Bay Area to Nouveau Quebec to Nunavut. There are also, of course, a great many local names. The protagonist of Graburn's article, Tamusi Qumak Nuvalinga, who died in 1993, was raised in igloos and tents. Monolingual in Inuttitut, he devoted many years to constructing a dictionary, which he hoped would preserve the language and support its use in schools. He also created a 'museum', which he called *Saputik* or 'Weir'. It opened in 1978. As an aside, it is fascinating to consider the various names of non-Western museums or cultural centres: 'Box of Treasures', 'Fortunate Return', 'Common Bowl', 'Winter storage', 'Attic', to list a few in English translation.

A weir is not exactly a 'dam', which *blocks* a stream, it is rather more like a strainer; a weir as Tamusi knew it, was a barrier of stones and wood, used to catch fish without stopping the river's flow. This means of *selective* capture provided an image of collecting and remembering. The contents of Tamusi's 'weir' (a two-storey wooden faux 'igloo') included: clothes and possessions of loved ones; dog sleds (but not snowmobiles); soapstone carvings (a relatively new art form that has become a source of Inuit pride); 1950s and 1960s photographs of Inuit people; upstairs, a re-created igloo interior, with old and newly commissioned furnishings. A 'traditional' world is gathered here in a retrospective project that is not, however, a re-creation of the 'pre-contact' past. Rather it gathers up things that need to be saved from the immediate, familiar, mixed and usable past.

According to Graburn, The Weir reflected a new historical awareness: 'Tamusi envisaged time as a river carrying everything irrevocably out to sea to be lost forever.'¹⁷ Things swept down Tamusi's river cannot be expected to come around again. And this feeling of non-return evokes something like Western historical time. *Something like*: for the transition experienced by Inuit in the later twentieth century is also a translation. What emerges with The Weir is surely different from other Inuit senses of time, whether these are conceived of as prior to or coexisting with Tamusi's river metaphor. But is the difference necessarily one of replacement or epochal succession?

Inuit, like other circumpolar Indigenous people, have conceived the material present as cycles of animistic or spiritual renewal: natural patterns of death and rebirth, the life cycles of humans and animals, the killing and return of hunted animals. They have organised the succession of social time in a recirculation of 'name-souls': the same person renewed in new

circumstances from generation to generation. This ontology of cycles and renewals was certainly more prominent in the past. But it is still active in a temporal reality experienced as process rather than sequence.

Tamusi's sense of temporal *linearity* confronts apparently irretrievable loss, a one-way river of time, and the need for 'Weirs' – for technologies of collecting and heritage. No doubt, as Graburn asserts, this is a new historical vision. But how is newness articulated in practice? Is it adequate to say that *this* sense of time is emergent, the *others* residual? I do not think we can be sure. There may indeed be some sort of overall development, but with many overlays, loops and intersecting temporal paths.

Tamusi's 'Weir' project is not simply elegiac, or museological in the usual senses, but linked, as Graburn details, to local co-operative movements, ongoing land and language reclamation projects, art and tourist markets, national- and international-scale 'sovereignty' politics – the bundle of 'Indigenous' actions that have made space in global discourses for names like 'Inuit' (no longer 'Eskimo'). In North-East Canada, these politics have led to the creation of the large, semi-autonomous region, Nunavut, along with a proliferation of neo-traditional institutions, discourses, arts and social movements. This is no longer the 'middle ground' world of the early and mid-twentieth century – igloos, tents, dogsleds, hunting rifles, a thriving fur trade and Inuttitut monolingualism that Tamusi's generation grew up in. But it is not an undifferentiated 'modernity' either – all of us 'flowing' the same way, down the same river.

The specificity of Inuit social survival, political struggle and cultural change is a crucial context for Tamusi's 'museum'. It is not a figure of ending, or even of loss. The Weir, which unlike the dam does not try to hold back the river, is a *pragmatic selection* of cultural resources and models, a technology of transformation. In any event, we cannot assume that Tamusi's river is the 'arrow of time' familiar to Western meta-historians, at least not inasmuch as an arrow points somewhere. The ocean into which this river of time empties may not be any specific future, but simply a figure for non-recurrence in the flow of existence. In the book from which this example is excerpted, I argue that we should not see this one-way flow, this 'linearity', as something immediately and fully recognisable – as history in its Western, modernising form.¹⁸

Recent ethnographic research on the historical knowledge and mnemonic practices of the peoples once assumed to be 'without history' has opened up a complex zone of translations, such as the work of Renato Rosaldo, Marshall Sahlins and particularly David Delgado Shorter, whose thesis on Yoeme (formerly Yaqui) historicising has been published as a compelling book.¹⁹ It has become evident that non-repeating time (and the 'historical' ontology it guarantees) can find expression in a variety of shapes, scales, uses and idioms. Recognising this diversity can help us be alive to historical practices and discourses in the contact histories of the past as well as in the current encounters of globalisation, neocolonialism, postmodernity (or whatever periodising term for the present we adopt).

I offer two more short case studies. The Hawaiian historian Lilikala Kame'eleihiwā, in her book *Native Land and Foreign Desires*, writes that

It is interesting to note that in Hawaiian, the past is referred to as Ka wa mamua, or 'the time in front or before.' Whereas the future, when thought of at all, is Ka wa mahope, or 'the time which comes after or behind.' It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to the Hawaiian an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge.²⁰

This image of going backwards into the future may remind many of Benjamin's famous 'Angel of History', from his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. Benjamin's angel is blown into the future, while facing the past. But the differences are telling. Kame'eleihiwā's Hawaiian does not, like Benjamin's angel, confront the past as a ruin, a heap of broken scraps. Rather, she engages a generative, socio-mythic *tradition*, 'rich in glory and knowledge'. Most significantly, perhaps, there is no relentless 'wind' of 'Progress' blowing the Indigenous Hawaiian backwards into the future. Time has no single, violent direction, but tacks resourcefully between present dilemmas and remembered answers: a pragmatic, not a teleological or a messianic orientation.

Let us hesitate, again, before we view this temporality as the opposite of a linear, progressive Western historical vision. For Kame'eleihiwā is not invoking repetition or cycles of recurrence. It might be better, instead, to think of looping lines of recollection, and specific paths spiralling forward. There is no either/or, tradition or modernity, here. And Kame'eleihiwā's tradition is about generativity, not recurrence.

In this she is engaged in an activity comparable to – but not the same as – Benjamin's materialist historian, for whom the junk heap of the past contains possible other histories, prefigurations of outcomes different from the apparently inevitable reality of 'what actually happened.' Both look to the past to find a way, a new path, in time: one historical process is pragmatic and genealogical, the other critical and messianic. Neither is about lining up past, present and future in a linear series. The future is open.

Hawaiian tradition is not, of course, a wholesale revival of past ways, but a practical selection and critical reweaving of roots. Gender roles show this clearly (where women's status has irreversibly changed), as do engagements with Christianity, with national politics, with transnational Indigenous coalitions. These and many other strategies are connected through appeals to genealogy and grounded by attachments to a common homeland. In today's Indigenous movements, as in any living tradition, some past elements are actively remembered, others are forgotten and some are appropriated and translated from histories originating elsewhere. Kame'eleihiwā concludes: the Hawaiian way of looking back to the future is an 'eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and

knowledge'. And we might add, with a nod to Benjamin, that the past is also rich in ambiguity and power.²¹

Finally, another example of an Indigenous vision of 'historical' survival and transformation. I have been thinking for some time now about the following quotation, from an exhibition catalogue on the Native people of Alaska and Eastern Siberia. Barbara Shagin – an Alutiiq elder – is speaking some time in the 1970s, on the Alaska Peninsula, near Kodiak Island:

Our people have made it through lots of storms and disasters for thousands of years. All the troubles since the Russians are like one long stretch of bad weather. Like everything else, this storm will pass over some day.²²

One can, without too much difficulty, read this as narrating a recognisable history, of non-repeatable events in time: she refers to quite specific 'troubles': the colonisation of Alaska and its consequences. Shagin is not saying that Alutiiq people will eventually go back to what they were before the Modern World System arrived with the violent, extractive Russian fur trade in the late eighteenth century. At least as I interpret her, she knows that the bad weather brings irreversible changes – some, like the Russian Orthodoxy that has taken root as a genuine Native religion, of real value. I conclude that the weather cycles she evokes are not unhistorical, mythic returns, but *structuring patterns* for transformation, for an ongoing history. Temporally deep stories, an Indigenous *longue durée* reaching before and after colonisation, are fundamental to contemporary Native ways of narrating history. So, I can listen to Barbara Shagin's words as something more than wishful thinking, and rather as a distinct 'historical idiom', making realist claims about the linking of past and future.

Perhaps it would be better to think of this historical idiom as a kind of 'temporal ecology', composed of 'material/semiotic practices' (as Haraway might say).²³ The changing weather – discursive *and* embodied, human *and* non-human – here translates a developing, shared experience of transformation. For 'weather' is always different and the same, always returning. The visionary Tongan writer Epeli Hau'ofa has proposed the 'spiral' as a genealogical figure for Indigenous persistence – transformations and returns in developing time.²⁴ No longer the 'arrow of time' but a swirl of contemporary times, histories, going somewhere, separately and together, in ways that cannot be mapped. This, in 2016, seems a realist observation. Curating in these times, then, is a work of caring and connecting, protecting and letting go, speaking and remaining silent, building weirs and then, in another season, letting them wash away.

Postscript

Curatopia's editors have suggested that I provide an update – for a chapter that is already an unfinished collage. So, I offer a few pages that reflect my recent research – visits and conversations – in Western European museums,

sites that can be called, with appropriate hesitation, 'post-ethnological'. Of course, comparable institutions in places like Canada, the USA, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, or Alaska are more closely engaged with source communities and Indigenous curating. But, somewhat to my surprise, I found many European museums, while differently positioned and constrained, responding to similar pressures and possibilities.

Post-ethnological museums today find themselves challenged to do something new with the vast collections that complex and sometimes violent histories have deposited in their storage areas. While sustaining an essential work of conservation and stewardship, how can they address the postcolonial realisation that the cultural traditions and travel stories gathered in these collections are unfinished? How will they think about practices of heritage preservation and public communication that engage multiple, often discrepant audiences?

'Ethnological' denotes a cluster of institutions sometimes called 'anthropological' or 'ethnographic' – museums of *Völkerkunde*, of Man, of the Colonies – what Benoît de l'Estoile simply names '*musées des autres*'.²⁵ I settled on the term 'ethnological' for its fusion of *ethnos* and *logos*. The name evokes a crucial vocation: the work of serious cross-cultural research and interpretation, inextricably ethnographic and historical. Like Nicholas Thomas, in his important new book *The Return of Curiosity*,²⁶ I think that ethnology museums, or their successor institutions, have a critical role to play in the present moment – a contradictory time of unprecedented mobility and openness but also of renewed ethnocentrism and aggressive ignorance.

'Post-ethnological museum' is a phrase one hears more frequently. I am ready to adopt the prefix, as long as 'post' does not mean, simply, 'after'. 'Post' evokes something new that we cannot name yet. 'Post' suggests following-from, with a difference – still very much entangled in what is being displaced. So, we are not talking about an epochal shift, a whole new kind of museum ... 'Post' thus denotes a predicament: working in a time of transition, without a trustworthy sense of direction, a time of possibility and constraint, invention and contradiction.

Several years ago, I gave an address to a conference at the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford, UK, the culmination of a three-year European research project on 'The Future of Ethnographic Museums'. I was worried about what seemed to me a pervasive move towards 'art', away from 'culture'. For many (post-)ethnological museums were rebranding themselves as, for example, 'Museums of World Arts and Cultures'. After further research – most recently at the *Volkenkunde* Museum in Leiden – I now think the trend is more complex and less one-sided.

In a changing 'art-culture system',²⁷ 'art' is certainly the more fundable (and commodifiable) partner. But ethnology museums, while adopting aesthetic strategies and making space for contemporary art and artists, are not just turning themselves into art galleries of the non-West. They are experimenting with strategies that are more hybrid, contradictory and

potentially more significant. These transformed institutions are, perhaps, uniquely well placed to offer non-reductive visions of human possibility. Drawing critically on ethnological traditions, they no longer promise an authoritative tour of the world's cultures – ways of life circumscribed in time and space, or arranged in evolutionary sequences. Post-ethnological museums explore plural histories that connect, converse with and interrupt each other.

This is my optimistic vision, on days when the glass seems half-full. But it is far from guaranteed. Post-ethnological museums face serious obstacles. They struggle to resist powerful pressures for purification, for uncomplicated messages, for a return to simpler times. Post-ethnological museums, in Europe and North America, aspire, in their different national contexts, to transcend colonial pasts. But they have limited room to manoeuvre, constrained as they are by funding cuts, neo-liberal governments and marketing, all structural features of contemporary capitalism. There is also a growing ideological climate of hostility to multiculturalism (so-called 'political correctness'). As renewed forms of nationalism, ethnocentrism and racism gain ground – not only on the extreme Right – cultural diversity of any kind comes under suspicion. Yet what can ethnology museums be about, if not cultural diversity?

Ethnology's post-Boasian brief for cultural relativity – while it has sometimes been expressed in Eurocentric ways – is a legacy that urgently needs to be preserved and reinvented. Yet the authority and public reputation of ethnology – some might say its marketability – is much diminished these days. The deeper reasons for this state of affairs are beyond my present scope. But a tendency to abandon anthropology, ethnology or *Völkerkunde* as museums rename themselves is worth noting. The UBC Museum of Anthropology is now called 'MOA: A place for world arts and cultures'. An important factor in its rebranding exercise was the reluctance of wealthy Asian populations in Vancouver to fund a new extension devoted to Asian art. The great civilisations of Asia did not belong, they thought, in an anthropology museum! Now the word anthropology is largely suppressed, hidden underneath the acronym MOA: 'World Arts and Cultures'.

I do not want to exaggerate the significance of the rebranding exercise. The Vancouver museum continues its pioneering work with North-West Coast societies, collaborations that have made it famous, even as it opens out to Asian, Latin American and Afro-Caribbean projects.²⁸ But name changes are not superficial. Not when understood as part of a pervasive shift. Musée de l'Homme becomes Musée du Quai Branly; Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum is absorbed by the Humboldt Forum; in Vienna the Museum of Ethnology turns into a World Museum (Weltmuseum); Bern's Museum für *Völkerkunde* is renamed Museum der Kulturen; in Frankfurt, 'Ethnology' changes to 'World Cultures'; in Cologne's rebuilt Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, anthropology is now 'Cultures of the World'; and a troika of museums in the Netherlands (*Volkenkunde*, Tropen and Afrika) is rebaptised a 'Museum of World Cultures'.

The word 'world', in many of these new names, resonates with 'globalisation'. (In French, 'monde', 'mondialisation'.) And it is not hard to recognise the neo-liberal force fields within, and against, which museums now operate. Brand recognition and marketing are increasingly the name of the game, as Julien Stallebrass has persuasively shown for contemporary art museums.²⁹ Survival depends on projecting an intelligible and attractive profile to maintain and increase the number of visitors. Museum managers, government bureaucrats and donors are paying attention. Names, logos, slogans, iconic objects and blockbuster exhibitions risk becoming more important than scholarly integrity and curatorial risk-taking. The threat of defunding, downsizing and consolidation is ever present.

The landscape, or 'museumscape' as Sharon Macdonald calls it,³⁰ is not unified. We need to consider a wide range of different local situations, political contexts and funding sources. In the United States, not surprisingly, the withdrawal of public funding and the pressure to find private sources is extreme. Sink or swim. In France and elsewhere in Europe, the participation of the state seems more assured, at least for now. In the United States, as the sadly outdated 'culture galleries' of the American Museum of Natural History attest, locating ethnology collections in natural history museums has not turned out well.³¹ 'Culture' tends to disappear between the better-funded institutions of 'science' and 'art'.

Pressures from the market, from funding sources, from diverse regimes of accountability and recognition, are not, however the whole story. Many of the changes currently under way, small and large initiatives, reconnect historical pasts with future possibilities in ways that potentially exceed the current neo-liberal hegemony. Hegemony, as I understand it, in the Gramscian tradition, is never permanent, always contested. Moreover, if post-ethnological museums are now forced to justify their existence, this is a challenge worth engaging. The old anthropology museums – rooted in 'salvage' collecting, devoted to conservation in the name of a universal human patrimony – had to change. The naturalised oppositions that guaranteed their existence are everywhere in question: art v. artefact, authenticity v. commodity, preservation v. invention, evolutionism v. creolisation.

Curators in virtually every post-ethnological museum I have visited in Europe are struggling to reinvent their institution in new, often post-Western, ways. Of many possible examples, I will mention just one: an update on the partnership I have already cited that links the Chateau Musée in Boulogne sur Mer with the Native-administered Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak, Alaska. The relationship reconceives the precious Pinart Collection of nineteenth-century Kodiak materials as an unfinished, 'shared heritage'.³² In the process both partners are transcending absolute concepts of ownership and repatriation. They have discovered how collections made under 'salvage' assumptions can inspire new arts and rituals, finding a second life in living culture. In the exhibition, at the Chateau

Musée, *Alaska passé/présent* (2016–2017), contemporary art from Native Alaska is on display. New creations, both traditional and experimental in style, are juxtaposed with nineteenth-century masks from the museum's collection.³³

The project, curated by the Kodiak Sugpiaq carver Perry Eaton and museum director Céline Ramio, has been co-operative at every level. And perhaps most significantly the Chateau Musée is actively developing an acquisitions programme for contemporary Alaskan art. Indeed, an increasing number of curators now think of their task not simply as conserving and interpreting artefacts from the past but also as stimulating cultural renewal. At Minpaku, the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan, this is established policy. Elsewhere it requires a struggle against established ideas of conservation to open up ethnology's deep commitment to collecting pasts, rather than pasts-becoming-futures.³⁴

Little by little, against resistance, a lot is changing. Do I need to add that consensus is not always smooth in the emerging contact zones? Suspicion and unequal power subvert reciprocity. Of course, demands for physical repatriation, whether made by tribes or nation-states, can be intransigent, non-negotiable. We are not in an age of postcolonial innocence. But through the development of specific relationships, historical legacies of mistrust (both within and outside museums) can be overcome. Post-ethnological museums are becoming places for the co-creation of new knowledge, sites of – if the phrase be permitted – 'collaborative conservation'. The times of the curator, contested and uncontrolled, have become more interesting.

Notes

- 1 The opening sections of this chapter were originally presented as the keynote address at 'The Task of the Curator' Conference, UC Santa Cruz, 14 May 2010, and published in *Collections*, 7:4 (2011), 399–405. The sections on Indigenous curating were added later and appear in my 2013 book *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). The 'Postscript' was written for the present occasion.
- 2 W. Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in M. Bullock and M. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 1 1913–26* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 253–62.
- 3 T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995). C. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 4 A.A. Shelton, 'The Collector's Zeal: Towards an Anthropology of Intentionality, Instrumentality and Desire', in P. Ter Keurs (ed.), *Colonial Collections Revisited* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2007). See also J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- 5 C. Gosden and C. Knowles. *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (London and New York: Berg, 2001).

- 6 E. Wallerstein, 'Structural Crises', *New Left Review*, 62 (2010), 133–42. See also E. Wallerstein, 'Reading Fanon in the 21st Century', *New Left Review*, 57 (2009), 117–25.
- 7 Clifford, *Returns*. J. Clifford, 'Indigenous Articulations', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13:2 (2001), 468–90.
- 8 J. Clifford. *The Predicament of Culture*.
- 9 J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 10 I. Karp and F. Wilson, 'Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums', in B. Ferguson, S. Nairne and R. Greenburg (eds), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 11 M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 2nd edition (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992).
- 12 S. Vogel, 'Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion', in I. Karp and S.D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
- 13 D. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- 14 Clifford, *Returns*, 261–314. See Museum of Anthropology (MOA), <http://moa.ubc.ca/>, Arctic Studies Center, <https://naturalhistory.si.edu/Arctic/html/alaska.htm>, Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC), https://grasac.org/gks/gks_about.php, Alutiiq Museum, <https://alutiiqmuseum.org/>, Chateau Musée, www.musee.ville-boulogne-sur-mer.fr/.
- 15 P. Chaat-Smith, *Everything You Know About Indians Is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
- 16 N. Graburn, 'Weirs in the River of Time: The Development of Historical Consciousness among Canadian Inuit', *Museum Anthropology*, 22:1 (1998), 18–32.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 18 Clifford, *Returns*, 35.
- 19 D. Shorter, *We Will Dance Our Truth: Yaqui History in Yoeme Performance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
- 20 L. Kame'eiehiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea La E Pono Ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony?* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1992), pp. 22–3.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 22 B. Shangin. 'Epigraph'; G. Pullar and R. Knecht, 'Alutiiq', in V. Chaussonnet (ed.), *Crossroads Alaska: Native Cultures in Alaska and Siberia* (Washington, DC: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 14–15.
- 23 D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, *passim*.
- 24 E. Hauofa, *We Are the Ocean* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), p. 69.
- 25 B. De L'Estoile, *Le Goût des autres: de l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007).
- 26 N. Thomas, *The Return of Curiosity: What Museums Are Good For in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).
- 27 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 224.
- 28 See Shelton, Chapter 8 below.
- 29 J. Stallabrass, 'The Branding of the Museum', *Art History*, 37:1 (2014), 148–65.
- 30 S. Macdonald, 'New Constellations of Difference in Europe's Twenty-First Century', *Museum Anthropology*, 39:1 (2016), 4–19.

- 31 S. Harding and E. Martin. 'Anthropology Now and Then in the American Museum of Natural History', *Anthropology Now*, 8:3 (2016), 1–13.
- 32 In the case of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin this claim of 'shared heritage' is heavily contested within Germany and beyond. See Sandahl's critique (Chapter 5 above), and Förster and von Bose (Chapter 3 above) on 'strategic reflexivity'.
- 33 Musée Boulogne sur Mer, *Alaska: Passé/Présent*, Exhibition Catalogue, 2016.
- 34 See McCarthy, Hakiwai and Schorch, Chapter 13 below.