

Hilty, Reason and Shelton

HOLD

Acquisition, Representation, Perception

Work by Shirley Chubb



MUSEUMS: HOLDS OF MEANINGS, CARGOES OF RE-COLLECTIONS

Anthony Shelton

HOLD: "The use of a simple word was chosen to convey firstly a complex set of emotions, responses and developments within my own work. Secondly, to convey the subtle notion of a museum's collection. And thirdly, to reflect how these two realities, the personal and the institutional, become reliant and accentuated by the other, held together." Shirley Chubb, 1995.

"Since all museums are subjective, why don't we acknowledge the subjectivity?" Peter Greenaway (1).

HOLD, 'a place of refuge or shelter; a lurking place' (2).

Enlightened humanism is combined with Gothic fantasy, the harsh light of classical Greece with the suffused twilight of Victorian Britain; a contradiction that takes form and shape in the preferred architectural styles for museum buildings - the disorienting interiors and fanciful façades of Neo-Gothic or Neo-Romanesque edifices (the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Exeter's Royal Albert Museum, The University Museum at Oxford, or the Manchester Museum, part of the Victoria University of Manchester). Royal appellations of the epoch in which they were founded abound, closely associating the Neo-Gothic or Neo-Romanesque museum with the age of imperialism and colonial expansion. The style forewarns us of what we shall encounter within walls evocative of neither the department store nor mausoleum (3). Museums become the 'lurking places' for taciturn parents, distracted school children, erstwhile scholars, curious tourists, and the lonely or aged, who, from the fragmentary and shabby testimonials of the past, reassure themselves that they lived the lives they now can only imagine.

Museums become the resting place of social memories, re-constituted and re-presented through objectivising discourse and display technology. The Gothic museum submerges its visitors in its vaults hewn of interstitial melancholia - interstitial precisely because the Gothic museum holds its artifacts between the borderlines of different cultures or social classes, at the boundaries and between the margins of different periods which are blurred and displaced in the conjured romanticism that the architecture effects.

The classical style museum building provides the alternative image of Western civilization - glacial, functional with a strong and simple linearity, and uncompromising monumentality. A measured imperial style, but unlike its Gothic counterparts, its interiors slice up space, create well defined areas, classify artifacts into established categories in accordance with accepted aesthetic principles. Both Gothic and classical museums provide refuges for 'objects out of place', but while the Gothic model subordinates such objects to romantic fantasy (4), its classical cousin asserts the triumph of Western categories that incorporate objects into intellectual and aesthetic orders. Few displays, and usually only those responding to crises, approach the heterogeneity in the unsanctioned refuges about which idealists dream. *A chacun sa croix* (1991) where the Musée D'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel exhibited objects from their collection chosen at random to parody the arbitrary decision of their

municipal patrons to cut the museum's budget, provided a rare example of a display where the museum's hold was temporarily released. More recently Peter Pick's installation of African objects wrapped in cling film, *Objekte schlagen zuruck* (1994), piled high on pallets, scattered on the floor or stuck to blackened walls at Köln's Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum questioned the priorities of financial planners to provide adequate exhibition spaces and protection of the city's cultural patrimony (5). Museums justly claim to hold objects in trust on behalf of the region, the nation, even humanity itself, but such refuges are perhaps inevitably more usually determined by ideological didacticism. Furthermore, the metaphor of the museum as a 'hold' may assume less significance as new forms of creativity and means of producing representations develop. In two exhibitions in Barcelona and Geneva, Peter Greenaway has developed the idea of a 'museum without walls' by combining cinematographic and exhibition techniques to create viewing platforms which frame particular sights and situations while placing an audience within the field of real and unique action (6). In another intervention in 1991, Shimon Attie projected old slides of scenes from Berlin's pre-war Jewish ghetto, the *Scheunenviertel*, on to the present buildings in the area, to evoke memories of its tragic past (7). The ghostly juxtaposition of light, images and crumbling mortar that sets up an ambiguous opposition between the past and present, produces a far more powerful impression than most conventional historical exhibitions that rely on material objects. Unlike museum displays, light spectacles like this can continue to haunt the viewer far longer than the time required to forget a museum visit.

HOLD, 'a fort or fortress: a stronghold'.

The museum refuge is a 'building out of place', which its architecture sets aside from the cityscape. By its very style the building is easily perceived as elitist and closed, a quality it incessantly disputes by internal programmes, exhibitions and conveniences. The museum is first the victim of its own architecture (8). The value, whether scientific, artistic or monetary, of its holdings necessarily makes the museum into a stronghold. Part of its purpose is to 'withstand'. It needs therefore, to deploy a defensive and, at times, offensive position against its contending agents. The museum stands as a fortress against time. In its classical guise its architecture asserts historical continuity with the fledgling origins of Western civilization itself. There are few more impressionable images than the great classical facade of Berlin's Pergamon Museum, on first sight an elegant yet defiant and impregnable fortress against the forgetfulness and calamities of time, but then, on drawing nearer, blackened columns and walls which are still riddled by bullet holes, punctuate its timeless illusion. In the Gothic or Romanesque museum, time is annulled into a romanticised a-historical world of co-existent forms, textures, styles, materials and colours, held in a sort of magical stasis to provide an inventory of examples and possibilities. Recall the sculpture court at the Victoria and Albert Museum or the specimens of marble brought from all over the world to make the supporting pillars around the central gallery of the University Museum, Oxford. The battle against time becomes a fight against decay as whole departments of conservators are deployed to freeze the condition of the objects entrusted to them and to maintain the incorruptibility of the buildings which hold them.

The museum must also withstand sudden or imposed changes in its classification of objects, organization of galleries, or the basis of its educational work - it can multiply and diversify the stories told, but seldom questions

the basis of its own didacticism. Consistent with the primary function of transmitting representations, museum knowledge, work and style aim, with few exceptions, to represent contemporary scholarship, fulfill cultural and social needs and present current or good design. Malcolm McLeod's initiative, *Spores*, (1994) at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, promoted contemporary creativity by making the museum into a forum through which artists, scientists and curators interacted, fostering dialogue and the process of creativity. The British Museum, if at times hesitant, has been forceful in promoting an open dialogue between contemporary artists and its collections. Curators have played the role of facilitators, enabling artists to engage in sometimes dissonant, but always suggestive, relationships with collections. The first of these exhibitions, Eduardo Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl*, (Museum of Mankind, 1985), facilitated by Malcolm McLeod, was followed by *Time Machine: Ancient Egyptian Art and Contemporary Art* (9), organised by James Putnam, to be followed by an exhibition of installation art by Sokari Douglas Camp (10), presently being organised by John Mack in the Ethnography Department of the British Museum. Malcolm McLeod notes, more generally of this trend, that: 'Only in this way will (museums) get unexpected results, have awkward or unanswerable questions asked, be part of new ways of looking at their collections, new ways of perceiving the world' (11).

Museums strive to withstand the commoditization of the artifacts they hold. The monetary value of items in the collections are seldom made public: curators, some of whom may be knowledgeable about the art market, are prohibited from giving valuations of objects brought to their scrutiny. The museum environment acts as if it forms part of a terrain that is independent of the capitalist market. It tries to deny capital forms as a unitary and general standard of exchange or that objective ratios and proportions can be calculated between it and 'art' objects. Museum discourse on value alludes to non-specific intangible qualities supposedly inherent in such objects as the source of their value: the material condition of the artifact (weathering, tactility, patina), formal aesthetic qualities (style, proportion, volume), intangible qualities (aura, feeling, presence) or uniqueness, to make the museum object 'invaluable', protected, safe in its fortress-like stronghold.

HOLD, 'confinement, custody, imprisonment'.

Museums exercise a custodial role not only over objects, but also over representations of peoples, cultures and histories, which are neither necessarily pernicious nor munificent. Museums hold and fix images of human beings which, once stripped of their personal identities, can become objectified racial typologies. These frozen image stereotypes have often been contentious. A stuffed 'Kalahari Bushman' (San) displayed in the Natural History Museum in Banyoles, Spain, threatened to provoke a boycott by African countries of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games (12). The political and cultural implications of racial typologies that were once part of South Africa's ethnographic displays, in a post-apartheid society, have now had to be radically revised (13). The Marischal Museum, Aberdeen, is unique in having made explicit the implicit racial assumptions underlying such representations by attaching a protest sign to mannequins of a 'Hottentot' (Khoikhoi) couple pointedly asking whether they should be regarded as humans or curiosities (14).

Contrary to popular opinion, most ethnographic collections, in the United Kingdom at least, far from



Angola, 1995 (detail)
Etched and plain glass, screenprint, acrylic and cellulose paint on board, one of twenty-two cases, each 32 x 33.5 x 14.5 cm

comprising invaluable sculptures, extraordinary and forgotten art or royal treasures and sovereign regalia, actually in the main consist of items of technology (used for hunting, trapping, fishing, agriculture, weaving), domestic wares (baskets, pots, containers, utensils), pastimes (pipes, games, musical instruments), clothing and personal adornments, weapons and objects made specifically for foreigners. What appears to have most fascinated British travellers, explorers, administrators and missionaries were not the rare trophies, but everyday material culture (15). Consequently the acquisition of exotic objects, while often obtained through exploitative exchange relationships, were less commonly looted or taken under threat of duress. It would be misleading therefore, to see the majority of museum collections as 'imprisoned', confiscated, held either against the interests of their producers or in contravention of their legal title. The objects from Brighton Museum's Non-Western Art Collection that Shirley Chubb has chosen to work with - an Angolan basket, part of a 'Mandinga' narrow strip loom, a drum made from a powdered milk tin, Asante gold weights made from brass and a Ghanaian pot - give a more accurate profile of the collections than the permanent displays in the Non-Western Art and Anthropology galleries, with their bias towards figurative pieces, which constitutes perhaps only five percent of holdings.

Objects such as the above have tended to be ignored because of their familiarity and meagre value, while rare museum objects have received disproportionate attention because of their presumed exoticism, typological importance or transcendental value. These latter kinds of objects may more properly be seen as held in confinement. The museum has effectively taken them from common circulation and holds them in order to define social and cultural standards (scientific, aesthetic, economic) by which similar examples can be classified and valued. The very inclusion of objects in museum collections provides an institutional pedigree that consecrates their symbolic value and legitimates their supposed importance. Alternatively, certain objects may be transcendental symbols of national or regional significance. Museum objects act as cultural capital, inferring status and prestige on their holders (nations, municipalities, private collectors), supporting standards of economic worth (by which the art market can ascribe value to similar objects), and provide the guarantee and measures of absolute values (scientific, cultural or aesthetic).

HOLD, 'a grasp which is not physical'.

The Brazilian-Dutch artist, Claudio Goulart has noted: 'We may know the facts but the way they are visually presented may deeply affect the way we understand them' (16). The way museums intellectually grasp their objects has been at the forefront of recent debates on ideology and representations. It can be of no surprise therefore, that museums hold strong intellectual views on the significance, value or importance of the objects they hold in custody. Broadly speaking non-Western artifacts have been situated in either a modernist discourse or they have naïvely been re-contextualized by anthropological realism. The former focusses on the similarities to be found between the formal, sculptural or pictorial qualities of non-Western and Western art, subsuming them under classical or Kantian categories of aesthetics (17). The arbitrary ideological play between these two positions has been exposed both by Fred Wilson, who in the early 1990s looked at the effect of installing works in different display settings and by The Centre for African Art's *Art / Artifact* exhibition (New York, 1988), where the crucial

influence of design and technology in determining the perception of African objects as either art or material culture was demonstrated.

The focus on the aestheticization of non-Western art can be contrasted with the displays of more explicitly didactic institutions, such as missionary museums, with their concern to demonstrate progress in their proselytizing campaigns; colonial museums, which attempt to provide windows on overseas territories; military museums, which retain 'trophies' and souvenirs of warfare; and trading societies, which encourage overseas investment interests (18).

In recent years it has been institutions most closely linked with European colonialism, that have been at the forefront of decolonizing the terms of their own displays. The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam has re-oriented itself away from the spectacular and the unique to exhibitions which focus on the popular and national cultures of Third-World countries (19). The ethnography museums of Frankfurt and the port cities of Rotterdam and Hamburg have pioneered exhibitions of contemporary African sculptures and paintings, challenging long-held notions of the unchanging nature of African art. Liverpool has gone even further in adjusting tired stereotyped images of Africa by establishing a permanent gallery devoted to the history of slavery (20). Such museums while not relaxing their hold on older collection areas, are repositioning their intellectual grasp in line with contemporary geo-political and cultural realities. The most challenging museum, the *bête noire*, of ethnographic museums, the Musée D'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel has demonstrated in a series of inspired exhibitions the fragility and tenaciousness of the hold museums exercise over meaning and the potentially subversive nature of their heterogeneous collections (21).

Categorization and labelling hold objects and meanings together. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnographic categories such as 'fetish', exoticized and charged objects with an arcane and mysterious significance that connoted ideas of racial inferiority. 'Fetishes' and charms are still closely identified, in the popular imagination, with witchcraft, magic and other beliefs associated with a pre-rational and superstitious mind. Before the more recent explosion of guides and catalogues to museum collections, objects, without their labels, became easily bereft of meaning. The systems of difference between categories of objects marked by labels are never set and immutable. In many museums up until the 1950s the information for labels was often obtained directly from the personal experiences and presuppositions of the donors. Only after being lost or the object becoming displayed, was the original label substituted for more 'objective' attempts at description and classification. At Brighton Museum and Art Gallery there are two systems of labels. One relates to objects in store that still have the original labels provided by early donors or curators. The second system has been created for the objects now on display. These labels, printed on perspex, are depersonalized, objectivized and limited by set geographical, ethnic, chronological and historical criteria. By untying labels from objects and incorporating them naked into her own work, Shirley Chubb makes ethnographic objects connote new, challenging and often disturbing situations and conditions that are frequently filled with irony and pathos. The museum's hold over meaning was tenuous even before the recent advent of post-modernist criticism which *Hold: Recent Work by Shirley Chubb* forcefully demonstrates can equally be communicated by a visual language as well as by text.

HOLD, 'The action or an act of holding, keeping in hand, or grasping; grasp. Also, an opportunity of holding'.

The museum space is a political space. Access to reserve holdings is restricted, popular curatorship over exhibitions has only recently begun to be pioneered by museums in Canada and England, opportunities for intervention in their ideological hold over objects are limited, though becoming increasingly fashionable. Curators are in a central position to open up and democratize exhibition spaces and facilitate a plurality of voices to communicate through visual and textual media within and between communities. Possessive custodianship (though not standards of conservation and display) must be relaxed in favour of empowering wider publics to influence curatorship and democratize the museum environment. Those who want a voice must, where possible, be given the opportunity of holding and re-presenting the objects previously held by collectors, auction houses, artists and craftspeople. The physicality of objects, submerged by the emphasis on visual qualities in museum displays, must be re-gained, flesh reunited with the gritty, smooth, sharp, cold, cutting, jagged, rough, warm materiality of the object world that, until now, the eye communicates only to the mind and heart.

Ethnographic museums can count a long and intimate association with subversives and revolutionaries who have zealously sacked their collections to challenge the dominant political and cultural fictions of their times; Picasso, Epstein, Moore, Pollock and many of the French surrealists were involved in recategorizing or subverting museum classificatory systems. Until recently, however, this relationship has been academic: Picasso, Epstein or Moore were primarily interested in formal properties, rather than in the politics of representation, and materiality was restored through the secondary objects that they created rather than through the primary media which provided their inspiration. The Surrealists' passion was for confirmation of the poetic value of the irrational lying dormant in the Western unconscious rather than the discovery of a conscious and articulate indigenous exegesis of parallel worlds of experience which non-Western art expressed.

There have been relatively few artists' interventions in museum displays; these are usually reflexive, relatively few and only a recent phenomena. The surrealist anti-colonial exhibition, *The Truth about the Colonies* (Paris, 1931), demonstrated well the potentially subversive nature of critical curatorship. Using similar categories to those employed by the official colonial exhibition of the same year, the Surrealists countered Western assumptions of inherent superiority by displaying Catholic reliquaries and saints as 'fetishes' and common everyday Western objects as 'magical'. At the same time, non-Western artifacts were exhibited alongside surrealist *objets trouvés* and other categories of surrealist objects as part of the critical aim of undermining bourgeois taste and values. The Western frame of reference was to be punctured, and accepted relationships disconnected to defamiliarize the familiar. As Dawn Ades explains: 'The point of juxtaposition from an extensive field, too, like the point of the Surrealist image (verbal or visual collage) was not to seek affinities but to disorientate and shock through difference' (22). It is the confrontational quality of non-Western art, that challenges dominant Western imagery through style, construction and perceived meaning, that has given it a central catalytic role in modernist experimentation. Non-Western artifacts have generally been juxtaposed with other art forms to question classifications of art. This has not only been a surrealist strategy, but has also been employed by more recent installations, created by artists and anthropologists alike. Subversive interventions into the museum space have used three basic strategies: juxtaposition, inflation of classificatory logic and incorporation.

In the United Kingdom, the most publicised artistic intervention in an ethnography collection was made in 1985 by Eduardo Paolozzi in *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* (Museum of Mankind, London). Sharing many of the romantic notions of the Surrealists and similar political sympathies, Paolozzi 'quarried' the Museum of Mankind's reserve collection for objects that he displayed alongside his own sculptures, raw materials, sketchbooks, photographs and casts to construct object assemblages. The creation of the marvellous from the everyday, moral provocation and the engineered cynicism against established definitions of art and aesthetic taste, echo the aspirations of the Surrealists. Both his assemblages - which involved the juxtaposition of diverse objects of very different material value, age, significance and usage and in different states of completion - and his organisation of the gallery space, provoked new questions that fundamentally challenged 'orthodox' curatorial practice. Each object assemblage referred only to its own constituent elements and not to the others around it, forcing visitors to question how the exhibition, without a beginning or end, was to be read. Linear and cumulative description, on which the construction of rationalized relationships depend, was subverted in favour of the simultaneity and disconnectedness of each assemblage. Reading codes modelled on written narratives, notably the genre of natural realism, were problematized. Accepted distinctions between different forms of visual culture were questioned. The juxtaposition of non-Western objects and Paolozzi's own sculptures, with no label to distinguish between them, blurred the distinction between non-Western and Western art forms, forcing the audience to think hard about previously accepted hierarchies, values and art forms. The boundaries between 'art', musical instruments and toys were also merged, forcing audiences and reviewers to admit outrage at a sacrilege which played so effectively against established truths and classifications. Disregard for the accepted dogmas of the art institutions also threatened to collapse clear distinctions between authentic and fake objects, models and mechanical reproductions, all of which were given equal status and value within the gallery.

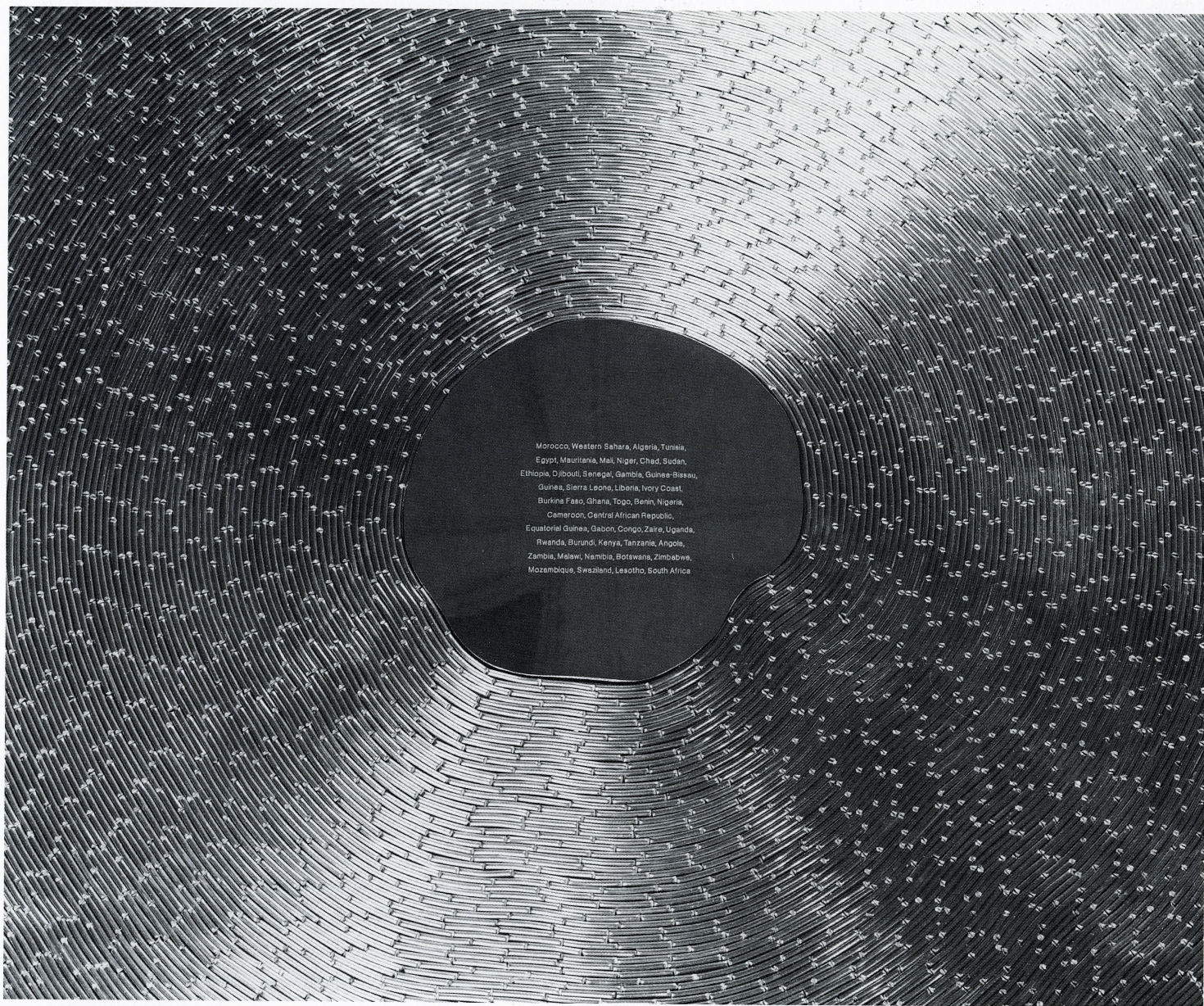
Paolozzi's experiment was taken further by Clementine Deliss in the exhibition *Lotte or The Transformation of the Object* (Grazer Kunstverein, 1991). *Lotte* brought together the work of contemporary African, European and American artists to question the validity of the accepted academic divisions between ethnic, traditional and contemporary art. Works by Jeff Koons, Mike Kelley, Lubaina Himid, Haim Steinbach and Rosemarie Trockel were shown next to manufactured plastic dolls, kettles, jugs and shoes, metal toys, barbers' boards and printed textiles from all over West Africa, fashion devils from Sierra Leone and proverb trees from Ghana. Similarities between materials, compositions and forms confused the basis for any strict division between so-called non-Western and contemporary art and raised questions about the validity of the 'art establishment's' (museums, galleries, critics, dealers, etc) preferred divisions and exclusions according to geographical or historical criteria.

Juxtaposition, as a technique for subversion, has also been used by Mary Bouquet in *Melanesian Artefacts: postmodernist reflections* (Museu de Etnologia, Lisboa, 1988). The exhibition played on the rich creative potential in the idea of an artifact defined as 'something artificial that is produced or occurs (e.g. an experiment) as a result of extraneous influences'. The collection, held by the University of Oporto, had been obtained through exchange with the Museum für Volkerkunde in Berlin and was registered, that is to say ordered and incorporated, according to different systems of classification each with their own particular logic. Two orders of objects coexisted simultaneously, each brought in to existence by the numerical or alphabetical markings inscribed on or

attached to the original object. The object itself connoted an earlier identity and logical affiliation to the non-European complex of ideas and usages, subsumed under its later classifications. The juxtaposition of label / written marking with original object re-created the object in the museum, making problematical its meaning and significance, but acknowledging an itinerary or what Appadurai calls a 'biography' to question both the intellectual and physical hold the West exercises over exotic objects (23). This subversive scepticism underlay the work of artists such as Claudio Goulart and Carlos Capelán shown at *In Fusion: New European Art* (a National Touring Exhibition from the South Bank Centre in collaboration with the Ikon Gallery, shown at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, 1993). Goulart's work, *Vale Quanto Pesa*, juxtaposed neat rows of gold suitcases laid flat on the floor with reproductions of De Bry's prints which were mounted on the cases, showing the Spaniards' barbarity to native Americans, contrasting a militaristic and a touristic invasion of America.

A second strategy of visual criticism may be termed 'subversion by order'. The Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, the American artist Fred Wilson and the British film-maker Peter Greenaway have, in different ways, brilliantly pioneered this strategy by accepting the principles and rules of Western classifications but then applying them to invent new classifications which either create bizarre associations or which, once translated from textbooks or written compendiums to the assemblage of objects themselves, establish dramatic and startling parodies. In his use of parody, Broodthaers questions the very existence of institutional museums. In one intervention (1968-9), he concocts a *Department of Modern Art* housed in his studio home at 30, Rue de la Pépinière in Brussels. Similar installations were made in Antwerp and Dusseldorf until in 1972, the installation *Musée* was closed at *Dokumenta 5* in Kassel. The first installation to inaugurate the nineteenth-century Department consisted of packing crates used to transport paintings, 40 postcards of works by David, Ingres, Courbet and Meissonnier, and the projection of slides of prints by Grandville. The *Musée* was identified by the sign stencilled on windows, by the numbering of rooms mimicking the numeration given to galleries, by a letterhead, invitation cards, an inaugural address, a buffet and all the ephemera of stationery without the monolithic organization, rules, conventions, procedures, and assumed aesthetic, economic and cultural fictions characteristic of conventional museums. Broodthaers here was proposing a radical critique of the institutional framing of art works, the pretentiousness of the private view, and the commoditization of art which he challenged with postcard reproductions and the conflation of places for the storage and production of art with the place of its reception. His most sustained attack on classification came with the *Section de Figures* exhibition, *Der Adler vom Oligozan bis Heute* (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present, Stadtliche Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf 1971) of more than 300 representations of eagles from paintings, comic strips, fossils, typewriters, ethnographic objects and product logos. As Crimp remarked: '*The Section des Figures* demonstrates the oddness of the museum's order of knowledge by presenting us with another, "impossible" order' (24).

Fred Wilson in the United States follows a similar strategy in generating an often humorous critique which has devastatingly subversive effects. In one display, twentieth-century masterpieces, usually isolated in painting galleries, were re-arranged with furniture from decorative art collections to produce cosy domestic interiors whose ambiguity was further exacerbated by its homely credibility (*The Museum: Mixed Metaphors*, Seattle Art Museum, 1992). Elsewhere he has displayed ethnographic objects on plinths in the manner of Western sculptures, while tightly cramping paintings together in cases alluding to earlier displays of ethnographic objects.



Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia,
Egypt, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan,
Ethiopia, Djibouti, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau,
Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast,
Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria,
Cameroon, Central African Republic,
Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo, Zaire, Uganda,
Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Angola,
Zambia, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe,
Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa

Tanzania , 1995 (detail)
Engraved brass plaque, cut brass wire

Classifications already compromised by aesthetic considerations were 'mined' with startling results. Iron slave shackles were added to a case displaying metalwork, selectively represented by silver bowls and table ware, or the names of paintings were changed to re-direct the visitor's gaze on to the normally unseen black slave children (*Mining the Museum*, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992).

Greenaway has translated his fascination with extra-narrative order and classification, from a film to a museum context. Two of his exhibitions, *100 Objects to Represent the World* (Academy of Fine Arts, Hofburg Palace and Semper Depot, Wien, 1992) and *Some Organising Principles* (Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and Museum, Swansea, 1993) began by using artifacts with specifically local associations to create visual statements about universal principles of order and propriety. Strict typologies and a highly structured serialization of objects, dramatically enhanced by the choreographed play of light and sound, made visible the effects of the normally abstract rules used to organise and classify objects and phenomena.

Within this very briefly sketched history of critical artistic interventions in museum institutions, the work of Shirley Chubb has particular importance. Unlike other works discussed here, Chubb's critical insights are expressed neither through strategies of juxtaposition nor re-classification. Her work both physically and conceptually 'holds' the objects. She incorporates and re-shapes non-Western pieces to make explicit meanings noted neither by the museum nor the indigenous manufacturer. The objects form an integral part of each installation constructed around them. The ethnographic objects are in each case the starting point for a larger work which draws out and develops the elliptical meanings generated and existing in an intercultural space between societies and historical periods. Objects have no stable or necessary meaning. Almost a century separates most of these artifacts from their manufacturers, during which time they have assumed new meanings determined by their consequent histories. For Shirley Chubb it is not a classification by function (a fascination, for example, with drums, charms or looms) or cultural geographical area (coastal West Africa or central Africa), nor even with the process of collecting, that has motivated her interests. It is what she sees as the resonances within these very simple objects that are all the stronger for the ambiguity and dissonance they set up between radically different cultural realities. There is no pretence here at objectivity. It is the subjective hold of the artist-curator who mediates the Western associations of objects; baskets are associated with nurturance and plenitude, and the mythically charged meeting of David Livingstone with Henry Stanley at Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika, commemorated on a brass plaque mounted on a section of the mango tree under which the event supposedly took place, is reinterpreted and redisplayed.

As part of this installation a basket is cased in a simple glass-fronted box. Twenty-two identical boxes, each with an etching of the basket on the glass front, are arranged in linear order to represent each year since Angola became independent from Portugal in 1975. Suspended between the back of the box and the front piece of glass is a word or short phrase from *The Times* newspaper describing the political situation and social conditions in the country. The words connote poverty, famine, civil strife, death, seen through the etching of the basket and its subjective associations of plenitude and nurturance. The worth of the basket as an ethnographic testimonial is questioned - the basket's incorporation into a larger work creates a communicative and emotive power that re-humanizes and revindicates a meaning that transcends both cultural boundaries. The last box represents the current year, 1995. Waiting to assume and communicate a history not yet made, the etched basket, lacking any

further signifier, demands we consider the future of such a country. The object as testimonial is made problematic, but the dissonance it effects at the interfaces of Western perceptions and conceptions of other societies, is deeply moving and full of pathos and irony, which questions our personal and existential relationship to other cultures.

In another work, a drum made from a discarded tin of powdered milk is encased in a box. Eight surrounding boxes, in combination with the ninth box holding the actual object, represent the nine months of female gestation and are covered with powdered milk and striations painstakingly built-up with layers of paint representing the estimated number of babies that die every hour for reasons relating to the consumption of powdered milk.

The work of artists like Paolozzi, Broodthaers, Wilson, Greenaway, or Chubb, and of anthropological curators like Hainard (25), Bouquet and Deliss may be considered either experimental, which they incontestably are, or subversive. Their work is unnerving in that it substitutes the illusion of a stable and neat world in which everything has a harmonious and necessary place, by a temporary, always conditional reality, whose terms are in flux, contested, contradicted; which is forever menaced by the constant threat of disorder, pollution and dissonance, issuing each time from a new source or direction. Within the terms of our worldly existence, we are all geographical immigrants, we are all caught in unending passages of knowledge, marginalised from creativity, lost in labyrinths of half-truths, irreconciled and cut off from our neighbours. The distinguished French critic, Jean Baudrillard, imagines a singularly depressing world in which, having lost our humanity, we have all become mutants. It is no longer appropriate to see ourselves as playwrights or actors, but as 'terminals of multiple networks' with our living room becoming our receiving and operating area (26). The Chicano artist, Enrique Chagoya, himself betwixt and between the ancient cultural history of his native Mexico and the technologically advanced society north of its border, writes: 'Real immigration takes place internally. People come here, but it may be years before they land here. It has nothing to do with paper. Instead of change of place, it is a journey of spirit' (27). If artists such as Shirley Chubb and those discussed in this paper, as well as anthropological curators, have their way, museums may become less conservative institutions dedicated to holding objects for successive generations and more like laboratories where the essential experiments and distillations of creativity occur and are channelled to fortify our historical being and provide signs through the moral and existential anxieties and uncertainties that face us at the century's close.

1 Quoted in Arnold 1994: 28.

2 The definitions of hold in this essay have been taken from *The New Collins Concise English Dictionary*.

3 Harbison 1977.

4 This is not to imply that the Gothic museum does not order or classify the objects on display or in store, only that the visual language of the architecture always threatens to overpower the work of curatorship.

5 Völger 1994.

6 Exhibition *The Stairs, Geneva, The Location Geneva*, April 1994.

7 Attie 1991.

8 Instead of denying its unique resonances, styles, taboos, conventions etc., Charles Hunt has suggested they may be made its principal and seductive virtues: "is it not also a unique quality of museums that they are different, set apart and full of anomalous curiosities?". See Hunt 1978.

9 Hall 1994: 6-7.

10 Personal communication.

11 Mcleod 1994.

12 Harrison 1992.

- 13 Davison 1993.
- 14 Shelton 1992.
- 15 Colonial personnel were one of the principal groups of benefactors of museums, thereby influencing the profiles of museum collections. Missionaries and military personnel were known to have destroyed figurative sculptures and masks in the colonies because of their believed complicity in strengthening resistance to foreign political and religious domination. The world's museum holdings of African art probably only represent a fraction of the much bigger total that was wantonly destroyed.
- 16 The South Bank Centre 1993: 22.
- 17 This criteria has been used in a number of exhibitions including: *40,000 Years of Modern Art* (Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1948); *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984); and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1989).
- 18 Avé 1980.
- 19 Leyton 1993.
- 20 *Transatlantic Slavery - Against Human Dignity*, 1994.
- 21 These exhibitions include: *Objets pretextes, objets manipules*, 1984; *Temps perdu, temps retrouvé*, 1985; *Le Mal et la Douleur*, 1986; *Le Trou*, 1990; *A chacun sa croix*, 1991; *Les Femmes*, 1992; *Si*, 1993; *Marx 2000*, 1994. See Bentham 1994, for a review of *Marx 2000*.
- 22 Ades 1985: 65.
- 23 Appadurai 1986.
- 24 Crimp 1989: 79.
- 25 Hainard is a curator at the Musée D'Ethnographie at Neuchâtel.
- 26 Baudrillard 1988: 16-17.
- 27 Nash 1994.