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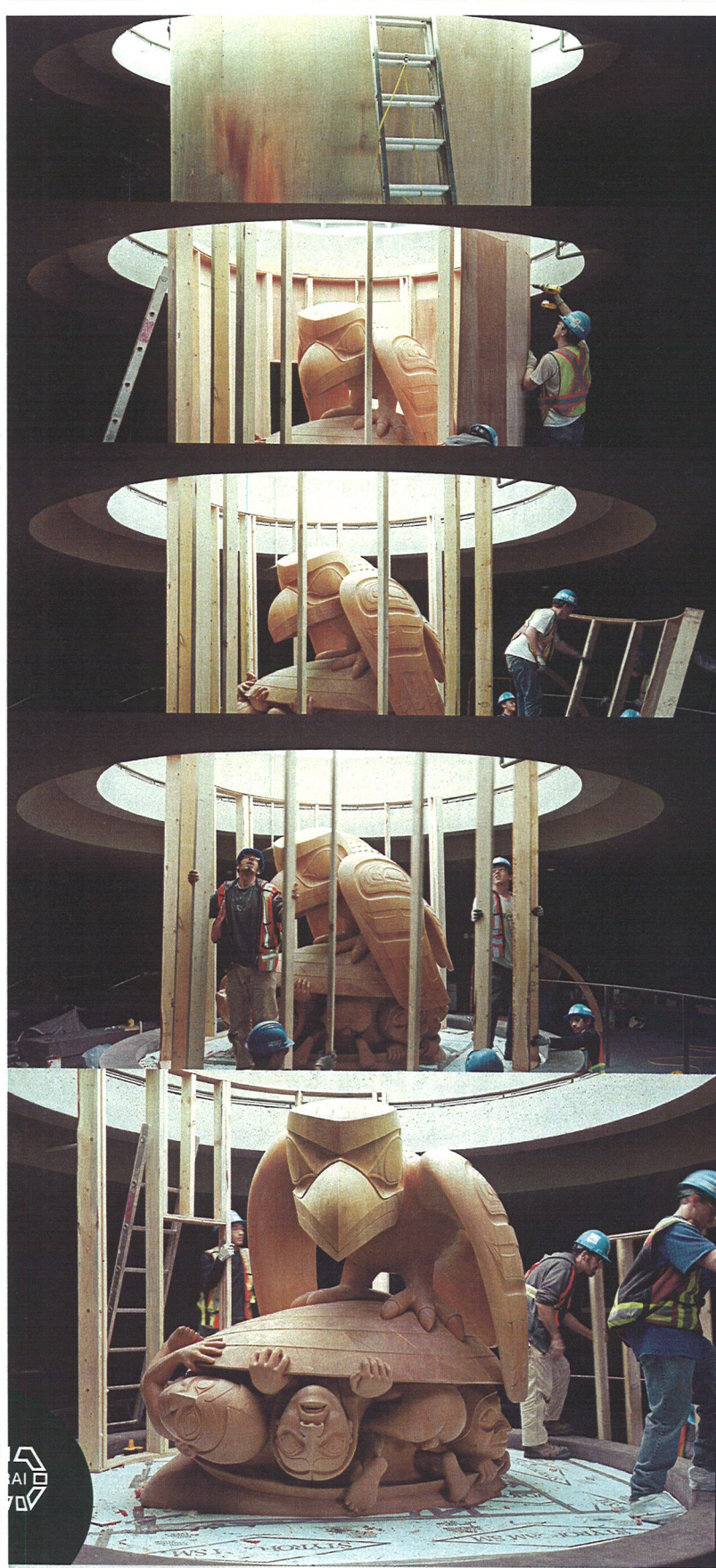
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Negotiating new visions

An interview with Anthony Shelton by Gustaaf Houtman

Anthony Shelton and Gustaaf Houtman

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Fig. 1. Exterior view of the Museum of Anthropology, showing the new Haida House complex.

BILL MCLENNAN

Gustaaf Houtman: How did you get involved in museums?

Anthony Shelton: I came to museums after completing my doctoral fieldwork in Mexico. On returning to Oxford in 1983 during the second Thatcher government, I along with other members of my generation found there were fewer academic appointments available, so we had to look further afield. A colleague referred to us as the 'lost generation'. I applied for a job at the Museum of Mankind (part of the British Museum) as research assistant in the Americas division. I had never thought of working in museums, but to my astonishment Malcolm McLeod offered me the job. There began my ambivalent affair with museums. Ambivalent because I soon discovered a world of sharply drawn and often hostile fiefdoms. Each department was hierarchically organized: many were fissured with all sorts of personal hostilities, and in the majority of cases curators were suspicious of theoretical or critique-based interpretation, which they dismissed in favour of uncritical empirical scholarship.

There were exceptions. Michael O'Hanlon, now the director of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, became a close friend and Malcolm McLeod, John Mack and Brian Durrans reflected critically on their own museum practice – a tendency made clear in exhibitions such as McLeod and Paolozzi's *Lost magic kingdoms* (1986), Mack's *Madagascar: Island of the ancestors* (1987) and his *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo* (1990-91), and the 1986 conference Durrans organized on the politics of representation. Then there were the Americanist seminars jointly organized at the museum with Essex University and London University's Institute of Archaeology. These really were fabulous forums guided by Gordon Brotherstone, Dawn Ades and Warwick Bray, bringing together researchers on

Latin American art, archaeology and anthropology from across the UK, and they were tremendously stimulating and fun. For me, they opened the world of painters like Torres García, Botero and O'Gorman, writers including Marquez, Fuentes and Cortázar, and fostered and reinforced my resolute commitment to inter-disciplinarity.

In fact, on looking back, those years when the Department of Ethnography was situated in Piccadilly and known as the Museum of Mankind were extraordinarily rich and full of experimentation in exhibition design and interpretation. It's a pity no research has been done on the period.

GH: How would you characterize your work within the international world of museums?

AS: Museums have tremendous potential to intervene ethically, intellectually and creatively to enrich people's lives. I have tried to challenge the conservative bias of museums and galleries by destabilizing some of the essential dogmas that museology enshrines as self-evident foundation narratives transmitted from generation to generation of curators, with paralyzing effects. Such dogmas include the idea that collecting is a fundamental faculty of the human psyche, and that museums are only the latest and most finely attuned institution in a long line of earlier manifestations that include cabinets of curiosities, classical and Biblical collections and even the caches left by Palaeolithic humanoids.

I have tried to forge an archaeology that devotes attention to the activity and context of collecting in distinct historical and cultural milieus. Following Stephan Bann and others, I view museums as constituting material supports of individuals' and society's fashioning of distinctive identities. I apply Appadurai and Kopytoff's attention to context in interpreting material culture, against the idea

Fig. 2. Anthony Shelton.



EDDIE JANG



Fig. 3. Fish-eye view of the Great Hall, MOA.

that this is about objective knowledge somehow deducible through the observation of its natural relations with other objects and forces. Such a perspective on museums is common enough in anthropology, but was widely ignored or denied until comparatively recently in the museum world. The relationship between signified and signifiers cannot be presumed either historically or across different cultures, and we must be sensitive to distinctive ocular regimes. Museums that distinguish between Western and non-Western cultures tend to obscure the essential relation between different geographies and socialities, that in constructing 'others' we construct ourselves.

Applying Bourdieu's work on the field, I would argue that museological practice, research and exhibition planning cannot be pursued without first understanding one's own position relative to others within the museological field as a whole. Museums cannot be understood without relating them to monuments, galleries, commercial and public sites of representations and adjacent notions of patrimony, and the articulations between national and regional concepts of these with global institutions like UNESCO and other supranational organizations. Taken together, these perspectives form the basis of what I call critical museology, a form of museology distinct from operational museology which it seeks to unmask and deconstruct.

Committing oneself to these principles encourages new exhibition genres and opens up fresh and experimental forms of exhibition-making. I have tried to advance this through cross-fertilizing curatorial practice and teaching: at the British Museum I taught at different times at the University of East Anglia and Loughborough College of Art; while at the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museum in Brighton I originated the first MA in Critical Museology at the University of Sussex; while at the Horniman Museum, I taught at University College London and before coming to UBC I taught museology at the University of Coimbra

in Portugal. Above all I want to contribute to a reorganization and critical appreciation of museums and material and visual cultures in our lives as a necessary pre-condition for engendering new forms and subjects of and for public representation.

GH: *How does your intellectual position relate to the tradition of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) as an existing museum with its own established curatorial tradition?*

AS: What excites me about MOA are four things. First, MOA is not remote from many of the people that it represents. The museum, and the sprawling UBC campus, are situated on the traditional land of the Musqueam, a Salish self-governing band, located about five kilometres away. Furthermore, over the past 60 years the Museum has striven to create a series of overarching and collaborative relationships with individuals and communities throughout British Columbia. The new museology that James Clifford thought he detected emerging in the region, reported in his now famous essay 'Four Northwest Coast museums', was no accident, and has more to do with the practical and ethical necessity arising when museums and First Nations cohabit the same territory and are implicated in the contested histories of land and culture.

For my own particular brand of critical museology, this cohabitation is immensely exciting and crucial in maintaining a critical edge. Cultural dialogue is an effective way of maintaining one's incredulity and scepticism, helping to transform our narrative practices by adopting other viewpoints and epistemologies and even ocular regimes. MOA is fortunate not only because of its location in a contested landscape, but because of the multicultural composition of Vancouver itself, which acts as a bulwark against complacency. In some of the independent galleries like the Grunt Gallery and Centre A, the creativity that emerges from the cultural and political frictions generated

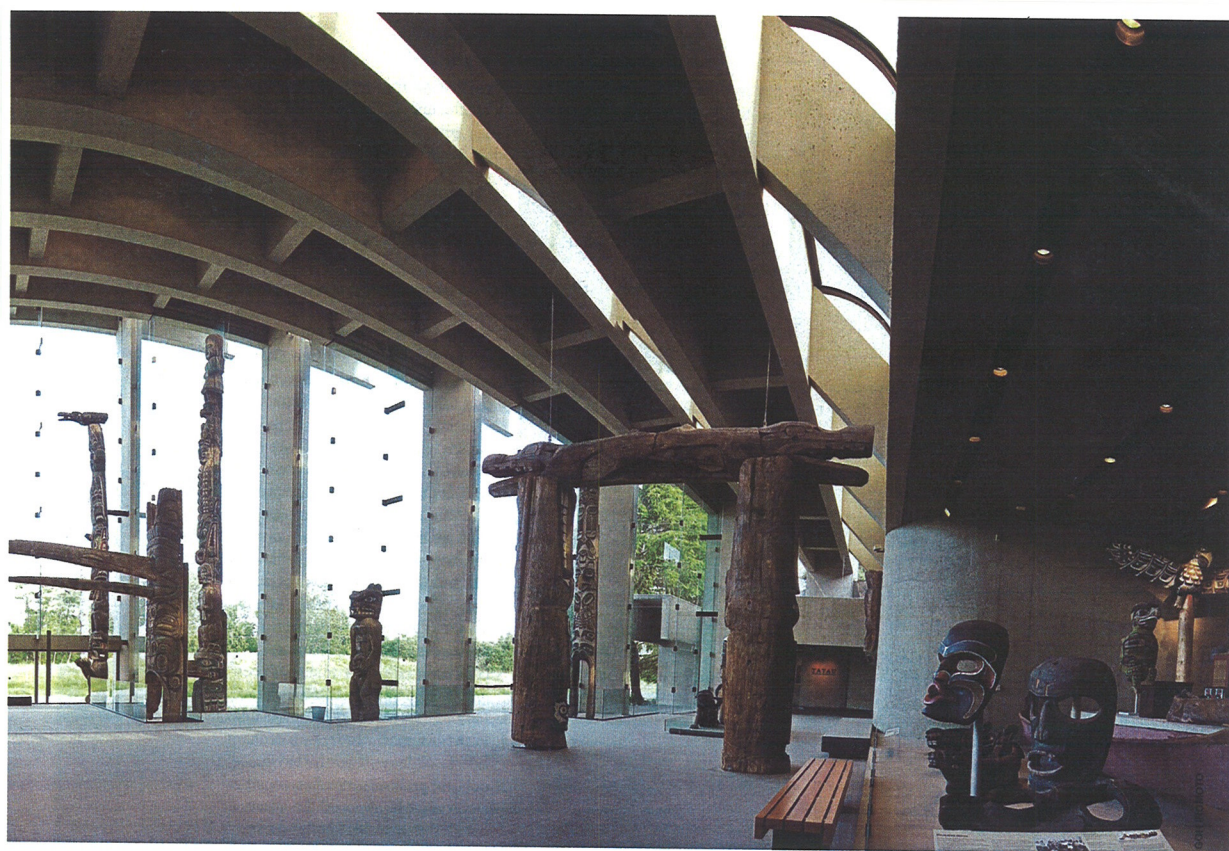


Fig. 4. Great Hall with canoe by Bill Reid (Haida).

between different ethnic groups and communities leads to a startling and fecund art scene, but so far the mainstream museums and galleries have not utilized their positions in contact with this creative maelstrom to its fullest potential. Even MOA could be more adventurous in how it interfaces with this complex culturescape.

Second, there is a tradition of critical scholarship that all three of the museum's previous directors have shared. Harry Hawthorn and his wife Audrey, the museum's first director (1947-74) and curator (1947-77) respectively, supported an applied anthropology that committed the museum politically to champion the cause of indigenous peoples, especially the aboriginal populations of the

Northwest Coast, as did Harry's successor, his student Michael Ames (1974-97). Ames and his successor, Ruth Phillips (1997-2001) both encouraged critical and experimental as well as collaborative exhibitions.

At the same time, MOA itself has been a focus of progressive political activism, with the peaceful occupation by First Nations rights protestors in 1981, and the not so peaceful demonstration against the 1997 APEC conference which it hosted. MOA has huge symbolic as well as intellectual capital in both the popular and academic communities, and is one of the towering institutions of Canadian liberal thought and progressive practices.

Third, and this is often overlooked, MOA has also provided a home for different critical scholarly approaches. The curatorial and programming interests of both Rosa Ho and Jill Baird, for example, were influenced by their interest in subaltern studies and critical theory. Miriam Clavir began a deconstruction of the profession of conservation and initiated the debate on its relation to First Nation knowledge communities. MOA has also provided a home for eminent cultural anthropologists including Marjorie Halpin, Julie Cruikshank, Alexia Bloch and Jennifer Kramer.

Fourth, we are a university museum. This gives us huge intellectual resources and the capacity to harness research across the spectrum to feed into innovative exhibitions. I think, given the museum's position at the intersection of all these different value systems, cultural and intellectual traditions and political battles, and its internal diversity of subject positions, there is more than enough room to accommodate my own approach.

GH: *What is the relation between the museum and the discipline of anthropology?*

AS: We are an independent unit within the Faculty of Arts and were actually established before the Department of Anthropology came into existence at UBC. Having said



GOH IROMOTO



Fig. 5. Tibetan monks from the Gaden Jangtse Monastery, India, in residence, 2009.

that, we share a number of staff and all the museum's directors have held full professorial positions in the department. Furthermore, some of the museum's curators and our head of conservation teach courses in anthropology: indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of anthropology at UBC is that undergraduates can focus on museum anthropology and material and visual studies in three out of their four years.

Our relationship with the Department of Anthropology is however different from our relationship with the discipline of anthropology. When the museum moved into its current building in 1976, anthropology still had a monopoly on the study of culture. Since then, the importance of culture that anthropology was so successful in demonstrating has led to a cultural turn in many other disciplines, including history, sociology, the new art history, cultural geography and cultural studies. It has stimulated a diverse range of critical approaches from post-colonial and subaltern studies to queer theory and the history of science. Anthropology no longer has a monopoly over the study of culture.

Furthermore, the crises which assaulted anthropology in the 1960s and 70s – the discipline's historical relationship to the state and colonial powers, its epistemological doubts and ethical concerns over its methodology and the uses to which the knowledge it generated could be put, as well as what was perceived as the disappearance of its traditional subject matter – were not all fully answered, and to some extent have been the impetus for a whole spate of critical works in some of the new disciplines which critique anthropology.

Anthropology has given rise to an anthropological imagination that has a far wider purview than the discipline from which it emerged. My point is that the museum

has always focused and will continue to focus on culture. But the museum must guide its practices through the interdisciplinary world that anthropology has itself helped create. We need to be less concerned about disciplines and outmoded academic allegiances and more committed to understanding the complex world in which we live and the multitude of expressions, including creative arts, that it continues to give rise to.

GH: What are your views on the relationship between anthropology as cultural critique and critical contemporary art practices?

AS: When I began my career in museums there was a radical tradition in anthropology that could be used to critique and transform traditional institutions. For me, this tradition was best represented by Clyde Kluckhohn, and has since been explored in the work of Marshall Sahlins. By studying other cultures we hold up a mirror to the practices of our own culture which might otherwise escape scrutiny as just one set of expressions, values and interdictions among many. Anthropology is about as great an antidote as one can find to cynicism, fanaticism, essentialism and any political ideology that draws its inspiration from a naturalization of our own social world. The anthropological imagination helps safeguard tolerance and liberal values. The subject has been so successful in articulating and applying the perspective of cultural relativity, which is its hallmark, that it has not been able to escape from the implications of the same methodological presuppositions for the categories of its own discourses. Mary Douglas, Franz Steiner, Rodney Needham, Edmund Leach and Edwin Ardener used the existence of distinct and specific cultural practices to refute social and cultural universalism and therefore opposed the attempt by Western intellectual discourses to reduce cultural expressions to our own terms. In turn, these anthropologists looked at concepts of kinship, social structure, belief, ritual, the problem of causality, and proposed their radical deconstruction.

There are interesting parallels between this type of anthropology and contemporary artists, particularly those grouped together under the banner of 'institutional critique' who are concerned with similar problems and their ideological expressions. I am thinking here of a long line of artists, including Marcel Broodthaers, Lothar Baumgarten, Joseph Kosuth, Fred Wilson, James Luna, Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser. What anthropologists have expressed in text, contemporary artists have given presence to through their varied practices. I am not suggesting any similarity in method of course, nor of cognitive process, but their distinct works have reached similar conclusions and expressed attendant consequences.

GH: What are your favourite museums and their most successful exhibitions? What do you see as ideal ways of developing new exhibitions?

AS: Well, my favourite museums might not necessarily be those that I feel most intellectual sympathy with. Where heart and mind did meet, however, was at the exhibition *Flying over water* (1997), curated by Peter Greenaway at the Fundació Joan Miró, in Barcelona. This was close to sublime on both visual and textual levels. Greenaway examined Europe's fascination with flight. The exhibition included historical books on the subject piled high in glass cases, a series of pistons which periodically splashed at different velocities into tanks containing water, making different sounds to help the audience imagine the noise made by Icarus as he fell and hit the sea, and a dissection room, in which the body of Icarus was taken apart to reveal the anatomy of wings. Since seeing that exhibition I have often wondered how exhibitions might tackle complex historical and conceptual subjects by going back to their often more powerful archetypal sources to engage the imagination rather than process alone.

Figs 6 and 7. House posts by Susan Point (Musqueam), forming the entrance portal to the Haida House complex and MOA grounds.



When I taught in London or Brighton I ensured students visited the Sir John Soane Museum and the Royal College of Surgeons because of their visual cacophony, the historical strangeness of their classificatory logics, and the challenges they posed to our modern sensibilities. The Toulouse Museum of Natural History and the Gustave Moreau Museum in Paris are also among my favourites, as is the French National Museum of Natural History, with its stuffed animal specimens paired in an inexorable march across the ground floor in a pageant of triumphant evolutionism. Museums such as these are – or at least appear to be – arranged by alternative conceptions of the world or sheer caprice, and while visually seductive nevertheless demand sometimes great efforts to understand them.

My favourite medium-sized museum, for quite different reasons, is the Menil Collection in Houston – near, I might add, to one of the most soothing and transcendent human spaces I have found anywhere in the world, the interdenominational chapel decorated by Mark Rothko. *Encountering other cultures*, on the other hand, curated by Kenji Yoshida at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, was notable for the transparency with which it demonstrated how different national and continent-wide traditions had mutually interacted and represented each other from different perspectives in the 19th and 20th centuries. Of exceptional interest today is the show at Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde *The tropics*, precisely because it looks at mutually different influences that have in turn affected non-Western and Western peoples' perception of themselves and the world around them.

I have enjoyed the artist-curated shows on different aspects of medicine put on by Ken Arnold at the Wellcome Museum for the History of Medicine. Without any doubt, as far as ethnographic museums and exhibitions are concerned, the Neuchâtel Museum of Ethnography, under the maverick directorship of Jacques Hainard, is the only institution to combine critical theory with anthropology to curate 30 years of original, challenging and humorous shows that made us think of cultural differences in a new way. If I could choose but one museum I enjoy above any other today, I think it would have to be the recently renovated and expanded Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, though the Menil Collection, the Musée du quai Branly, San Francisco's de Young Museum and the Seattle Art Museum would come close seconds.

GH: How do you accommodate First Nation peoples' claim on museum resources and exhibition objects?

AS: Museums hold in trust objects that are of inestimable value according to one criterion or another, and so we need to be receptive to and respectful of the rights, wishes and aspirations of those individuals and communities whose heritage we hold. This may have seemed a relatively simple matter in a world divided up into nation-states with apparent culturally homogenous populations, or with a ruling class strong enough to impose their own cultural values on the mass of the population, but such simple legitimizations and narrow visions of responsibility do not hold today. Rather than legitimizing national cultural values, museums have become sites at which values are most profoundly contested. Museums need to reflect this in a more dialogical form of exhibition. Exhibitions are part of wider processes: instead of ends in themselves they need to be seen, rather like the structure of the French *nouveau roman*, as more open-ended, embracing contradiction, and as they transform their audiences, they become transformed themselves. They need to be made living institutions, relevant to the now and the becoming, or the different possibilities inherent in the potential to become.

After a prolonged period of relationship-building with communities, MOA has been able to work more closely

to provide the facilities and services our patrons require of us. Some First Nation people use us as a repository for their personal ceremonial goods, and have chosen, for the time being, to allow us, under their advice, to continue to provide a home for their ancestral remains. We respect the spiritual power attributed to cultural objects by their source communities. One of our Northwest curators, Bill McLennan, provides technical advice to First Nations planning and building their own cultural centres and, along with his colleagues, has contributed enormously to making First Nations art and culture more publically visible. Pam Brown has worked with Tahltan (2003) and her own Heiltsuk (2002) communities to facilitate them curating community exhibitions at the Museum, and Karen Duffek and Jennifer Kramer are co-curating exhibitions with First Nation and other artists.

The Museum tries to meet requests from families and communities for the loan of objects from its collection to be displayed at potlatches and other ceremonies, and hosts community visits involving elders and artists to study items in its collections. First Nations are represented on the Museum's Advisory Board, we have a fair trade initiative to represent First Nation artists in the Museum shop, and we are currently completing the construction of a First Nation research suite as part of our 'Partnership of the Peoples' project.

I have seen positive outcomes with foreign museums engaged in repatriation issues. The return of the G'psgolox pole to Kitamaat by Sweden's National Museum of Ethnology resulted in a copy of the pole being made and given to the Swedish museum, and the establishment of new relationships between the museum and schools in Stockholm and Kitamaat. Similarly the recent repatriation of T'xwelatse by the Burke Museum to Sto:lo Nation forged new links between the community and the museum. These are all examples in which museums can exercise a transformative effect on peoples' lives. Such exchanges have made museums stronger, more relevant and more contemporary. The reason they first assembled such collections was to preserve the memory and evidence of what were mistakenly thought of as disappearing cultures. In having objects commissioned from and refashioned by the peoples whose ancestors originally made items in our collections, we are affirming our relationships with these communities and making manifest cultural revivals throughout the world.

GH: Could you say something about the current MOA renovation project? How does your vision ensure that it meets the needs of the 21st century?

AS: The Partnership of Peoples project will wholly transform MOA. Phase one has been completed, with the construction of a new wing that increased the size of the museum from 72,000 to 123,000 sq. ft. We are well ahead on phase two, which involves the extensive remodelling and refurbishment of more than 80% of the older building. Phase one has provided us with a new research infrastructure that will enable us to better meet the requirements of First Nation and other cultural community stakeholders. It includes a unique First Nation research suite complete with research rooms, culturally sensitive object storage facility, language lab and recording studio, for work on endangered languages both by First Nations themselves and in association with Faculty linguists, as well as an elders' lounge where visitors can relax, meet and chat. The idea has been to design the suite to make it as friendly and comfortable as we can, to make elders and other community members feel more at home.

In addition, the new wing contains a new library and archive unit, audio-visual lab, research rooms, a suite of open-plan offices and extensive object storage facilities. These will be complemented in phase two by a suite of six

Fig. 8. *Comfort Ero, African storyteller, at the African Awareness event, 2006.*



NICKY LEVELL



GOH IROMOTO

Fig. 9. 'Bone Box', one of three site-specific artworks created by Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas in 2007, as part of the exhibition 'Meddling in the Museum', inspired by the museum's renewal project.

specialized archaeology laboratories, one of the three most comprehensive in North America, a state-of-the-art conservation laboratory, exhibition workshops, four research rooms and a lecture theatre. The research philosophy of the museum will be presented to the public through a new series of galleries, covering more than 14,000 sq. ft., which will be at the very heart of the new MOA. These multiversity galleries, as we call them, are a further development of the well-known visible storage area which MOA pioneered.

During early consultation elders, artists and community members expressed their dissatisfaction with the style of the old visible storage area. They thought – and they were right – that the presentation did not respect the importance of the materials displayed. For example, Kwakwaka'wakw masks should only be shown with their beaks fastened, and whistles – on account of the sacred nature of their sound – are better not shown at all. Moreover, the old display cases were cluttered and it was difficult for the artists in particular to get a view of objects that interested them. Just as important, consultants asked that the new galleries should look warmer, be more inviting and provide better interpretation. The two consultations I attended shortly after arriving at the museum brought around 60–70 people together, and we have had many since. Curators have also actively gone out across British Columbia to continue ongoing consultations on the history and significance of specific community-based collections, bringing back information on the vernacular names of objects, their history and significance and importantly, the way communities want to see their material exhibited. This collaborative practice distinguishes us from other museums.

The concept behind the 'multiversity', a term recently developed by two post-colonial theorists, Paulo Wangoola and Claude Alvares, simply acknowledges that different cultural communities possess their own epistemologies, values and classifications, which during the colonial period were repressed, ignored and subverted by the imposition of positivist scientific models of knowledge. Applying these ideas to museums, multiversity galleries seek to acknowledge these differences and wherever possible, give the presentation and voice of interpretation back to originating communities to foster their own use of the spaces and stimulate new dialogues between cultures.

In the multiversity galleries, you will not see things presented according to accepted museological categories, but more often than not by the criteria and presentational tenets of contemporary members of originating communities. This is an ambitious aspiration. Thanks to various government grants we have been able to carry out this work with many of the different First Nation communities in British Columbia, and Carol Mayer has extended this to some communities in the Pacific and Africa. The multiversity galleries are intended to be a live link between the museum, its visitors and the representative communities, and will continue to be added to, edited and transformed to reflect ongoing dialogues between community members and MOA staff.

The multiversity galleries will give physical expression to the notion of the museum as being not solely a place for representing a 'product', but also being led by a dialectical process, active, engaged and relevant, that will stimulate the public, students and teachers, inspire new research partnerships and be a useful resource and a source of pride for the communities working with us.

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of the Partnership of Peoples project is the development of the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), an interactive research platform that will bring museum collections across Canada, the US and those belonging to Cambridge and Oxford Universities together with originating communities and researchers worldwide. This initiative, coordinated by Susan Rowley, is being spearheaded by four co-developers, namely Musqueam Indian Band, Sto:lo, the U'mista Cultural Society at Alert Bay and MOA. It has ten partner museums, and when completed will provide access to resources undreamt of. Since something like 80% of all historical Northwest Coast collections are held by institutions far removed from the area, the RRN will allow First Nation elders, artists and families to access and see material that many will not previously have seen. This will be an invaluable resource for contemporary artists, communities striving to reclaim their history and cultural heritage, and for families keen to link themselves with their ancestors.

Such 'virtual repatriation', as one First Nations' person called it, points the way to new models for the management of cultural heritage material. If successful, this would open up the possibility of joint management of collections between museums and originating communities. This, in turn, would make possible an alternative to outright repatriation, and also encourages museums to gain a better understanding of the objects in their collections. It permits academic researchers and First Nation specialists to gain access to collections and museum data, which will advance research immeasurably. This demonstrates a new model of intercultural co-operation, helping to negotiate equity in the sharing of cultural property and knowledge across cultural borders.

GH: You published an article in ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY on the recontextualization of culture in UK museums [Shelton 1992]. How have your opinions of UK museums changed since? Are museums in Canada or Portugal different in any way?

AS: At the time, I expressed reservations about the long delay in museums applying academic paradigms to the permanent exhibition of their ethnographic collections. So long was this lapse that in some cases the paradigm had already lost its academic authority before museums adopted it. Ten years on, I meant to propose a second survey but did not get round to it. Museums had meanwhile become less dependent on intellectual interpretations and more governed by the insidious rise of what Marilyn Strathern has called an 'audit culture', coinciding with a move away from general-purpose sup-

Clifford, James 1991.

Four Northwest Coast museums: Travel reflections. In: *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*, pp. 212–254. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

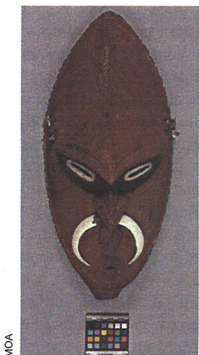
Shelton, Anthony A. 1992. The recontextualization of culture in UK museums. *Anthropology Today* 8(5): 11–16.



MOA



MOA



MOA

Figs 10-12. MOA's new Multiversity Galleries will showcase more than 16,000 objects from the world, many displayed according to the wishes of the originating communities. Examples of MOA's global collections include (top to bottom): Buddha statue, Argentinian Chané mask, New Guinea mask.

port grants to funding targeted at specific areas and efforts to ensure that museum development was closely tied to wider government objectives. It is no longer intellectual concerns but political objectives that create the order of the day, with academic paradigms left to be picked over for whatever meat they can provide to achieve instrumental objectives.

In Portugal and Canada the situation is different. Portuguese museums have been in a long crisis and decline, with government funding focused more on science museums and on opening contemporary art and photography centres in response to global art movements and Portugal's position within them, rather than on national concerns, as represented for example by the magnificent Museu Nacional de Arte Antigua, which has received so little support to modernize itself.

Canada is different again. Heir to a much more progressive museum movement than is found in many other places, but with resources stretched by the distribution of a small population over a vast country, Canada has invested in small scattered community museums and virtual online exhibitions (the Virtual Museum of Canada). Policies are progressive and sensitive to the politics of multiculturalism, and increasingly interculturalism is tempered with critical and experimental approaches. There is however a huge imbalance between the museum provision in eastern Canada compared to the west of the country, a balance which is tipped overwhelmingly in favour of Ottawa, home to the country's national museums that consume most of the federal museum budget.

GH: *In your five years as director of MOA you have faced some crises: a \$55-million capital project deferred, disputes about the differential status and conditions of faculty and non-faculty curators, decline of the museum as a teaching institute, a major theft, and conflicts over your proposed name change for the museum. Overall, how do you think you have fared during that time?*

AS: My time here has been challenging but also stimulating, exciting, sometimes perplexing but always a lot of fun and a source of profound pleasure. I am not the best person to evaluate the progress MOA has made during this period, but would say that the destinies of museums are forged by the commitment, imagination and engagement of their staff, ranging from the administrators and fundraisers who ensure the operation of the museum to

programmers, conservationists and curators who help determine and carry forward its vision. Museum directors are like producers who rely on collective energy and networks of actors to help ensure its flow and forge a collective vision out of the magma.

After a period of deferral and with a change of personnel, the capital project was embraced and supported by the University's President, Provost, Assistant Provost and the Dean of Arts, Nancy Gallini, who has been our long-term champion; the faculty has accepted museum criteria under which joint staff can be evaluated in line with their purely academic colleagues; in teaching, not only have we worked closely with the Department of Anthropology to restructure the undergraduate degree so that students can specialize in museology, but we are working with the Faculty of Education to launch a new MA in museum education, and with Art History and the Belkin Art Gallery to play a fuller role in the MA in Critical Curatorial Studies. The theft of the Bill Reid pieces was a blow, but through quick action we managed a safe return.

I pressed for a change of name in response to misgivings on the part of Asian and First Nations over the history and associations they attributed to 'anthropology', as well as to represent better what we have always done: exhibitions about art, artists and culture, and our insistence that First Nation makers have the right to have their works dignified as art and put on the same pedestal as the cultural and aesthetic achievements of other great world civilizations. This sentiment proved not to be as widely held as I had earlier thought, and when I failed to get the unanimous support of my advisory board, which included First Nation and Asian members, I believe it was right that I backed down, and I have no regrets about doing so.

MOA is emerging out of this project better equipped, more confident and with stronger community, academic and international ties. It has come of age, and the moral fortitude of a few generations of staff combined with the idealism of a great university has firmly committed its practices to the support of fairness, equality and human rights, to creativity and the goals of sustainability, and to the elimination of intolerance and prejudice in an ever more closely knit world community. This is the achievement of all of MOA's staff and of UBC, of the communities who trusted us, and the private and government funders who backed the vision that has given the world a remarkable institution. ●



Fig. 13. Kwakwaka'wakw delegation, First Nation/Maori Artist Cultural Exchange, MOA, 2006.

NICKY LEVELL