

**ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGY
AND THE MUSEUM**

New Directions in Anthropology

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**ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGY
AND THE MUSEUM**



Back to the Future

Edited by
Mary Bouquet



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This book started life in cyberspace, which is in many ways an apt location for taking stock of (some of) the relations that are developing between university anthropology and museums today. Rieke Leenders first suggested to me that I might edit a special issue of the Dutch journal *Focaal, Tijdschrift voor Antropologie* on this topic. Having just set up a course on Cultural Anthropology and Museology at the Department of Cultural Anthropology of Utrecht University in 1998, the idea held considerable appeal. The need for an accessible sample of the wide range of exciting work on museums being undertaken by anthropologists, in a variety of capacities, was a very actual one. The contributors, who include some of the leading figures in this field today, rose to the occasion and I am indebted to them all for their inspiring input to this volume.

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Mary Bouquet

1
INTRODUCTION:
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Mary Bouquet



...the moderns suffer from the illness of historicism. They want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with their past. The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums (Bruno Latour 1993a: 69).

The museum boom, with its accompanying objectification and politicisation of culture, finds its counterpart in expanding social scientific interest in the musealisation of culture. There is ample evidence that anthropologists are among those whose imaginations have been fired by the museum, over the past fifteen to twenty years.¹ However, this current of anthropological interest in museums is fairly recent (*see* Ames 1992), and it is certainly not evenly distributed around the academic world. Away from the mainlands of museum anthropology, there are still remote islands that appear to be untouched by these developments (*cf.* Gerholm and Hannerz 1983). The (re-) invention of museum anthropology, by which I mean a renewal of interest – along different lines – after a period of neglect,² presents a series of challenges for academic teaching and research, as well as for the work of cultural production in contemporary museums. Even if interdisciplinarity characterises much current academic interest in museums (*see* Svašek 1997), the specificity of contemporary anthropology's stake deserves exploration.

This book is concerned with the relations between a particular discipline, anthropology, and museums. That relationship is often couched in historical terms: anthropology started out in the museum in the nineteenth century, but academic anthropology sloughed off its material residue to become a fully-fledged social or cultural discipline in the universities after the fieldwork revolution of the early twentieth century (Stocking 1990: 722). Fieldwork became the trademark of modern, university-based anthropology (Van Keuren 1989: 26), with museum anthropology slipping ever further into the background and reaching an all-time low around mid-century (Ames 1992), or the mid-1960s in France. The result was that the social and the material parted company so radically (in some places) as to produce a kind of knowledge gap between historical collections and the intellectuals who might have been expected to work on them.

This conventional reading of history is of course difficult to rhyme with the kindling of critical interest in museums, exhibitions and material culture more generally that has taken place over the past fifteen years or so. This makes it important to examine both what museum anthropology is now, and how it differs from what it was, say, thirty or fifty years ago. The connection between anthropology and the ethnographic museum often seems to be almost taken for granted and therefore not a subject for explicit comment. How do present concerns – theoretical, pedagogical and praxiological – upset both the automatic association between a discipline and ‘its’ museum, and the ‘pastness’ that all too easily hangs about museums when they are assumed to belong to the history of anthropology? Time, as Latour (1993a: 75) has observed, gets thoroughly mixed up in museums, and the pastness or nearly pastness (Stanley 1998) of their contents has already become an issue for many of anthropology’s traditional subjects. Moreover, if the production and consumption of culture is characteristic of all sorts of museums, that must affect the discipline of anthropology and the practices of anthropologists. If the neat chronological categories of past, present and future, together with the disciplinary boundaries assigning sorts of museums per academic discipline, now seem thoroughly confused by contemporary museum frames, what does that mean for anthropology’s return to the museum? How should museum anthropology be taught, and what do students need to know?

A puzzle

This volume started life as a puzzle about the changing nature of the relationship between academic anthropology and the museum in the particular context of the Netherlands.³ That point of departure is retained here since it has the advantage of de-centring an exclusive preoccupation with the Anglo-American tradition, which is sometimes identified with anthropology as a whole. Setting up a course on cultural anthropology and museology at Utrecht University in 1998 meant thinking about how to interest students in a subject for which they were reputed to have

none.⁴ The ethnographic collection belonging to the Institute of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht, founded in 1913, was dispersed at the end of the 1960s when, according to Schoonheym (1986: 68), ‘The cultures of former colonies together with the study of material culture receded into the background, and it became taboo in student circles still to be interested in material culture. The ethnographic collection was scarcely used any more. Since no one was interested in the collection, it was more or less abandoned as an object of curation’.

This example illustrates how an image of museology as one of those fusty subjects concerned with the past tense, rather than anthropology today, was still alive in some universities in Europe at the end of the twentieth century (*see also* Bouquet 1996). The stuffy image inherited from the past sits uneasily with the explosion of museums – throughout the world (*see* Macdonald 1996) – and with the growing interest for museums in some areas of academia. It is in fact astonishing that anthropologists could fail to be interested in an institution that they may encounter anywhere from Highland New Guinea to north-eastern Angola; from the Kunsthall in Rotterdam to the north-west coast of Canada.

Students in Utrecht express surprise at the scope of contemporary museum anthropology and the sense of a world that they did not know about opening up for them. This sense of having the scales taken off one’s eyes or, as Nélia Dias puts it, gaining an apprenticeship in seeing, can very well lead (as Ames 1992 suggested) to undertaking anthropology in the backyard (Bouquet 2001b). The Netherlands, which has the third highest density of museums per head in Europe, after Denmark and Switzerland (De Haan 1997), is a case in point. It is strange that these local cultural circumstances and their implications seem, with few exceptions, to have escaped anthropologists. While material culture, art and collecting have all been topics of recent special issues of Dutch anthropological journals, the explicit relations between museums and academic anthropology have not.⁵ This underdeveloped interest in museums stems perhaps from their perceived separation from everyday life, as repositories of the past, outside the boundaries of proper anthropology. That perception has had serious consequences for the status of museum anthropology and its place in the academic curriculum in several different contexts, as a number of contributions to this volume show.

One aim of this book is to sample current anthropological work on and in museums, and to use these different accounts to reflect upon the relationship between academic anthropology and the museum. The original invitation to contribute was sent to some twenty-five scholars, and the five sections into which this volume is divided give an idea of the breadth of anthropological work now being undertaken in museums. There is, of course, much to be said about the post-colonial ethnographic museum, including the new connections between former centres and peripheries (Simpson 1996, ICOM 1997). While the severing of ties between the discipline and its collections opens up the museum world for much broader exploration, exactly that sundering may also lead to the rediscovery and reinterpretation of historical collections by contemporary anthropologists. How-

ever, anthropologists need no longer limit themselves to ethnographic museums in the former narrow sense of the word. Museums of all kinds – art, ethnographic and science – are increasingly part of the culture industry, in increasingly multi-cultural societies. The commodification of culture and the politicisation of identity are broadly recognised as major issues, making museums much more dynamic places than they seemed to be fifty years ago. Among the essays presented here, two (González et al., and Macdonald, this volume) seek to extend the range of anthropological analysis to include science as well as art museums.

If anthropologists' former role in ethnographic museums was rather narrowly defined, the crisis of curatorship (*see* Kavanagh et al. 1994) that accompanied many fundamental institutional changes (such as privatisation) has also altered the working relations, authority, and the relative importance of the collections vis-à-vis (their presentation to) the public. Anthropologists are now going into museums of all kinds, both to observe the changes going on behind the scenes and the much broader public who are now being targeted, but also to develop exhibitions and to work in the educational service. Few sever their ties with academia, and quite a number seem to operate somewhere in between museum and university. This breaching of the boundary between academic and applied anthropologies is another significant trend in the relations between universities and museums.

This new situation raises questions about how academic anthropology is responding to the challenge with which museums present it; and how it can re-engage with museums in a way appropriate to the twenty-first century? If the conventional role of curator is being deleted, and new roles (such as commissaire d'exposition, and interpreter) are being created, what constitutes appropriate anthropological scholarship concerning museums for the present and future generations of students? What skills can academic anthropologists bring to museums (not just ethnographic ones), and what skills do they need to learn in order to work in museums?

Contributors to this volume were invited in an open-ended way to draw upon their experience to comment on the dynamic interconnections that are developing between academic anthropology and the museum. Although by no means exhaustive, this collection of essays provides a kind of cross-section of the diverse involvements of anthropologists in museums: some are very close, others more distanced. All, however, reflect the intense nature of engagement in and with museums, which should banish any lingering doubts about the fustiness of museums and bring home their immediacy to contemporary anthropology.

Overview

The contributions divide readily into five main topics, although, of course, there are many interconnections between articles that fall under different rubrics. Part I begins with anthropological encounters with the post-colonial museum; Part II considers ethnographic museums and ethnographic museology 'at home'; Part III

explores the ethnographic challenge of science museums; Part IV attends to anthropologists as cultural producers; and Part V is an exercise in looking ahead.

Ethnographic encounters with the post-colonial museum

Anthropological encounters with the post-colonial museum are one of the ways in which the ethnographic museum has reappeared on the anthropological agenda, making it increasingly difficult for students of general anthropology to ignore. Part I begins with this renewal of anthropological interest in museums from the field. Museums, on what was conventionally seen as the periphery of the museum world, were the focus of Kaplan's (1995) volume. The three cases presented here connect centre and periphery (cf. Newton 1995), and properly complicate them by taking into account the role of scientific knowledge (including academic anthropology) in constructing cultures (Barbara Saunders discusses the Boas-Hunt legacy); in print colonialism (Nuno Porto examines the significance of printed materials including photographs in the Diamang Company's internal and external relations); and in reconsidering the effects of Baldwin Spencer's collecting earlier this century, as the Tiwi now attempt to re-appropriate historical objects for their own museums (Eric Venbrux, this volume).

Anthropologists are increasingly confronted by local museums or cultural centres in the field – sometimes in a form that seems remarkable: 'the Onga Cultural Centre seemed to have very much the atmosphere that traditional Western museums are conventionally supposed to possess: slightly musty, a place apart from normal social life' (O'Hanlon 1993: 74). Saunders' (1997a) analysis of the differences between the Northwest Coast U'Mistà Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum, leads her to contest James Clifford's (1991: 225) distinction between majority museums and tribal museums. She makes a theoretical exploration of the connections between two apparently quite unrelated post-colonial museums (the U'Mistà Centre, British Columbia, and Tervuren Museum in Belgium). Porto, by contrast, started his research at home in the museum archive at Coimbra, made one brief visit to the post-colonial Dundo Museum in north-eastern Angola, to which he is prevented from returning by war. His fieldwork is therefore carried out within a network that stretches (by cybernetic means) from the Dundo Museum and Angola, to former Diamang Company employees now living in Portugal. The refashioning of fieldwork to include the museum, is also present in Venbrux' work, which evolved from his original research among the Tiwi of the Bathurst and Melville Islands in northern Australia into the European museums where Tiwi collections are held.

Thus the reconfiguration of anthropological research, taking into account the museum as a key institution in the globalisation of national society (Prösler 1996), is one of the principal themes in Part I. Whether dealing with the fate of potlatch regalia, the photographic archive of the Diamang Company Museum, or scattered

Tiwi collections, museums at both ends of the former centre-periphery divide clearly represent key contemporary field sites. They are indeed 'contact zones', in Clifford's (1997) sense. Saunders' article concludes with a strong plea for 'careful and inspired empirical research in dialectical engagement with theory'. Both Porto's and Venbrux' articles provide significant responses to the challenge of engaging in such theoretically informed empirical work in the post-colonial museum.

Porto's focus on photographs as museum artefacts, on the multiple uses of the same photo, and on the agency behind the Dundo Museum archive, shows that 'photographs are much less an intentional, authored subjective visual statement, than the product of a network of interests'. Drawing upon Latour's actor-network theory, he shows that they 'may be seen as the material result of negotiations between personal skills and exogenous conceptions, pursued under the specific constraints of the bureaucratic structure of an enterprise to which the museum belonged, despite its internal autonomy'. Ultimately, 'the relevance or indifference of photographs to the museum was a function of how it cultivated an image for the outside world'. Porto's study of a particular photological apparatus underlines the importance of specific empirical studies, to illuminate the distinctions within Portuguese colonialism as well as differences with other colonial regimes. Photography, as Porto argues, was crucial to the attempt at cleaning up the image of the Third Empire. The analysis of the work of the Museum photographer provides subtle insight on the human/technical dimension of this instance of colonial photography.

The history of ethnographic collections is a central area of anthropological interest in museums (*see*, for example, Pomian 1990; Elsner and Cardinal 1994; Legêne 1998; O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000). Venbrux' essay on the pre-museum history of an ethnographic collection focuses on collecting as a process of cultural exchange. Venbrux analyses Spencer's collecting activities as an integral part of both his fieldwork and his work as a colonial administrator. The circumstances of collection, and particularly indigenous agency in the business are, he argues, of critical interest to our understanding of this key figure (with Frank Gillen) in twentieth-century anthropology. Although social anthropologists are more familiar with his studies of Aboriginal social organisation, re-reading Spencer in terms of museum anthropology connects with contemporary developments among the Tiwi and other Australian groups, and brings to light exciting material in terms of the history of anthropology. Venbrux tracks the complex ontogeny of Spencer's collection through a close reading of his publications. Access to the artefacts in question was (at the time of writing) impossible due to complete refurbishing of the Melbourne Museum in which the collection is held. How the Tiwi artefacts will be presented in 2001 – both in terms of their significance at the time of collection, and as a major component of an Australian museum in the throes of re-vamping its public exhibitions – remains to be seen. Elucidating the invisible networks of relations behind Aboriginal collections is surely one of the ways in which anthropological scholarship will impact upon the process of refashioning the Australian past (*see* Bennett 1995: 162) as it is presented in museums. Aboriginal groups such as the Tiwi not only

have their own museums, but consider collections – all around the world – of artefacts made by their ancestors of great relevance for their history and identity.

Analysing the complexities of the post-colonial museum involves rethinking conventional notions of the field (which is both here and there, ours and theirs) and the fieldworker. The historical examples of Boas and Spencer show that the physical removal of material objects out of their original contexts proved to open a fresh chapter rather than closing the ethnography. Furthermore, the museum effect as ‘a kind of attentive looking at crafted objects’ (Alpers 1991) persists, as Stanley (1998) has shown, in ethnographic theme parks world wide, where it conditions relations between local populations and tourists in significant ways – in heritage sites, eco-museums and local cultural centres, as well as conventional museums. Elucidating the complex interrelations between members of different populations during and after (and sometimes before) the colonial period, as they are congealed in museum objects, ought to be a vital part of the general study of anthropology.

Ethnographic museums and ethnographic museology ‘at home’

Ethnographic museums are currently being reinvented in a number of western European countries: from the Horniman Museum in London to the Museum voor Volkenkunde in Rotterdam (*see* Reedijk 1998), from the Museu de Etnologia in Lisbon to the University Museums of Cultural Heritage in Oslo. This upheaval produces challenges of various kinds for anthropologists, especially where ethnographic museology has disappeared or been marginalised in the academic curriculum.

The divergence between museum and academic anthropologies was not uniform in different national traditions of anthropology. Particular institutional histories underwrite the dynamic and politicised character of contemporary museums explored in Part I. If these latter represent one of the cutting edges of contemporary anthropology, and a major empirical challenge, precise national institutional histories and experiences are equally important. Accustomed as we tend to be to taking Anglo-American history as the standard, it is instructive to consider other national university/museum traditions. Part II comprises two studies which focus on the connection between anthropological research and teaching, and museum collections and displays, in France and Portugal. Martine Segalen’s history of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (hereafter MNATP); and Dias’ account of teaching ethnographic museology in two Portuguese university departments. The late nineteenth century French museum model was influential in the formation of the anthropological museum at Coimbra University in Portugal. The Portuguese Estado Novo was relatively indifferent to having a national museum for exotic anthropological collections; however, local museums of peasant culture started to thrive (like the French eco museums) with the demise of the cultural groups concerned.

Segalen considers the critical relationship between research and museum presentations in France through a fine-grained history of the MNATP, which was the seat of anthropology at home for thirty years – exactly when museum anthropology elsewhere was in serious decline (Ames 1992, Shelton 1992). She discusses why the centralised French state was relatively late in founding national museums of anthropology, when it was so early in founding public art museums (*cf.* Duncan 1995). She shows how the ‘exotic’ and the ‘peasant’ were initially thought of together: the Musée du Trocadéro, founded in 1878, included a Salle de France complete with scènes de genre. Anthropological research and museum work (collecting and preparing exhibitions) were closely connected in the two national museums of anthropology established on the site of the former Trocadéro, after the 1937 Paris Exhibition. The exotic collections were installed at the Musée de l’Homme, whereas the French ones were housed temporarily at the Musée des Monuments Français, during and after the war. Although her focus is on the latter, Segalen shows how partially connected institutional arrangements were to have profound implications for anthropology at home in France. This area of research was firmly tied to the MNATP from 1937, when G.H. Rivière became the Director, producing an almost seamless fit between research, collecting and exhibiting. The situation underwent dramatic change in the late 1960s, just as the MNATP moved to its new building and opened to an enthusiastic public.

The 1970s crisis within this unified research/museum model occurred after Claude Lévi-Strauss founded the laboratoire d’anthropologie sociale, changing the definition of anthropology at home in the process. From then on, anthropologists at home were expected to study the same kinds of problems as colleagues abroad: kinship, religion, witchcraft, beliefs, and identities displaced material culture. Since museology was not on the university curriculum, the divide between curators and social anthropologists increased.

There was something of a turnabout during the 1980s, with the combination of the heritage (patrimoine) movement and the rise of eco-musées. The reorganisation of the French museum landscape during the 1990s prompts Segalen to argue (like Saunders) that anthropological research should be a critical input to contemporary museum displays.

Both Segalen and Dias refer to the new ethnographic museum landscapes in France and Portugal. In taking up Sturtevant’s (1969) question about whether anthropology needs museums, Dias, like Segalen, suggests that museums may very well need anthropology. She does this through a reflexive account of teaching ethnographic museology at two Portuguese universities: ISCTE in Lisbon, and the Department and Museum of Anthropology in Coimbra. If ethnographic museums are going to require trained anthropologists to reinvigorate them, the question is what constitutes relevant training and how can it be taught at university level? Dias’ account of teaching ethnographic museology at Lisbon and Coimbra universities, illuminates several didactic quandaries.

If in one respect (an optional course on) ethnographic museology seems practical and provides a complementary perspective on social anthropology for undergraduates at ISCTE, its popularity decreases at Masters' level due to poor articulation with other courses and what seems an over-critical approach. The contrast with Coimbra, where the class could literally go into the depots to locate concrete museological examples, is striking. The Coimbra Anthropology Department was founded in 1992, with the innovative aim of connecting teaching with research on the Museu e Laboratório Antropológico collections. Even if this aim has been transmuted and to some extent failed in recent years, the experiment seems in other respects to provide exactly the material link that Dias identifies as missing for the ethnographic museology course in Lisbon. However, many university departments (such as Utrecht) have severed their links with their collections. This means that those teaching museum anthropology are forced to consider new ways of accessing museum collections with students – which may include visits to museums, exhibitions and depots that belong neither to the university nor to the discipline of anthropology (see Bouquet 2001b).

The persistent marginalisation of museology in Portuguese universities within a curriculum that is otherwise dominated by social anthropology (see Dias, this volume), is reminiscent of the post-1970s situation in France (see Segalen, this volume). The appointment of curators who are expected to carry out research on collections at the new Musée du quai Branly in Paris attempts to redress the situation. It will be interesting to see what initiatives are taken for training such curator-researchers, given the institutional terrain analysed by Segalen, and the relative absence of museological reflection in France noted by Dias. Despite her – frank – review of the difficulties with teaching ethnographic museology, Dias nonetheless affirms the benefits for students of an apprenticeship in seeing, and the appreciation of the difference between textual and visual representation that the course cultivates. These are topics to which the chapters in Part IV return.

The challenges that new kinds of museum represent for anthropologists is matched by the need to be able to look at old museums and collections in innovative ways. University courses that respond to this conjuncture are as vital to the future of museums as they are for anthropology itself.

Science museums as an ethnographic challenge

If anthropologists' professional attention was once almost exclusively vested in ethnographic museums housing collections of non-western (or peasant) artefacts, recent developments in museology have encouraged some of them to enter other kinds of museums – in various capacities (see, for example, Handler and Gable 1997). The reclassification of masterpieces from existing ethnographic collections (see Segalen, this volume), and the recognition of indigenous art (see Venbrux, this volume) as art (*cf.* Morphy 1994), has significant implications for the diagnostic

disciplinary fault-lines inherited from the nineteenth century (*cf.* Bennett 1995). These changes are not limited to art. The category of exotic rarities and curiosities, later transformed into specimens and used systematically to represent other peoples was, as Svasek (1997) argues, a precondition for the development of European High Art. The timeless Other was also a good foil against which to display industrial progress and civilisation, as the great exhibitions did from 1851 onwards (*see* Bennett 1995, Grevers and Waaldijk 1998), and festivals of folklore continued to do at the end of the twentieth century (Price and Price 1994).

The category 'art' is being redefined (*see* Morphy 1994), becoming more inclusive as the art market penetrates new areas of production (*see* Kingston 1999a and 1999b). What of science? Just as display in public art museums and galleries confers the status of art, involving networks and contestation in the process, so too do science museums constitute as much as they represent public understanding of science. This can turn them into highly controversial places, perhaps partly due to the uncertain status of scientific knowledge after Kuhn (1962, *see also* note 7).

Part III comprises two essays on the ethnography of science museums. Roberto González, Laura Nader and C. Jay Ou review the historical transformations in the relationships of anthropologists with museums, seen mainly from the perspective of American anthropology. The authors argue that there has been a shift of focus from the almost automatic assumption that anthropologists are mainly interested in anthropological museums (meaning non-western peoples' material culture), to a new concern with science museums. They argue, furthermore, that a new kind of anthropology at home, conducted in science museums, recasts the lay public as Other. González et al. examine the politicisation of public culture in ethnographic and science museums, by comparing Lubicon Cree Indian contestation of the Glenbow exhibit, *The spirit sings*, and Shell's double involvement (sponsoring the exhibit and a vested interest in Lubicon Cree land), with the way interested lay people (including guest curators) may try to present science in a new light for the general public. They focus on the case of the *Science in American life* exhibit, organised under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and held at the National Museum of American History.

González et al. end their chapter with a plea for ethnographic studies of science museums, analogous to that of Saunders. Sharon Macdonald's chapter gives an account of conducting just such ethnographic fieldwork at the Science Museum in London. Like Porto, Macdonald argues in favour of going behind the scenes at the museum, instead of assuming that the most adequate approach consists in reading off dominant class, race and gender interests from already completed exhibits. Macdonald's aim is to chart the complexity of what goes (and what does not go) on display; failures, she observes, can be as culturally revealing as successes. The Gallery plan was an ambitious attempt in the late 1980s to rewrite the Science Museum. The chapter makes a case for studying museums of science and technology as much for what is assumed to be their objective and neutral symbolic significance, as for their practical one. Going backstage at the Science

Museum enabled Macdonald to chart the way science becomes culturally and physically constituted in the public space of museums, and how this involves debates and struggles about the nature of science, objects, professional identity and visitors. That the end result may, for complex reasons, only partially reflect the plans, does not cancel out the creative agency of those who work behind the scenes (*cf.* Porto, this volume).

Macdonald's analysis of the Science Museum illustrates one of the complex permutations of Saunders' opening assertion about a museum being the performative naturalisation of objective relations between a state and its culture or master narrative of descent. One of the problems facing the Gallery Planning Group, for example, was the declining position of Britain as an industrial nation. The purchase of globally significant acquisitions had become financially prohibitive, and limitation to national products threatened to reflect the decline of Britain rather than industrial progress. The planned thematic reconfiguration of the galleries drove a wedge between the curators and their collections, with the interests of visitors invoked as part of what Macdonald and Silverstone (1991) refer to as the 'cultural revolution' at the Science Museum in the late-1980s and early-1990s.⁶

These chapters, then, elucidate aspects of both the theoretical interest and the practical conduct of anthropological research in science museums, beyond the more familiar fieldwork sites of ethnographic and art museums. The arguments would apply equally well to science centres, heritage sites, eco-museums and cultural centres. However, such a broadening of ethnographic horizons will entail training anthropologists to study the museum *world*, rather than limiting themselves to ethnographic museums, as they might have done thirty to fifty years ago.

Anthropologists as cultural producers

An anthropological-ethnographic perspective facilitates recovery, as Macdonald shows, of both a degree of agency for museum staff, and some of their critical and informed reflexivity. When museum staff are also trained anthropologists, their critical reflexivity holds special interest for an understanding of the relationships between academic anthropology and the museum. Their double involvement in making knowledge puts them in a complicated position where theory and practice converge.

If Macdonald's essay made visible the workings behind the scenes at the Science Museum using ethnographic techniques, Anthony Shelton contextualises his own involvement in cooperation between the Brighton Museum and Sussex University between 1991–1995 in the landscape of critical museology. He does this by first reviewing the development of critical museology in Britain, where it was detached from academic anthropology and yet shared many of the concerns of critical or new anthropology in the 1970s. Shelton argues that by de-privileging the disciplinary method (fieldwork as access to unmediated social facts), critical

anthropology came to focus precisely on western mediation of otherness. In so far as each ethnographic encounter generates meanings that are never more than contingent and specific, anthropology has come to share the uncertain status of art.⁷ If the crisis of representation (the muddle over subject and object) has left anthropology with this uncertain status of art, art faced its own epistemological crisis, with some avant-garde artists engaging in what they called fieldwork and producing discourse on their own work (cf. Sayre 1989). Praxiological museology, going back to the surrealist movement and pursued by artist curators such as Peter Greenaway, deliberately tries 'to deconstruct ... the working of dominant forms of cultural, economic or political expression and, in the process to reconfigure the specific meaning ascribed to things in the natural theory of value, to produce new contingent meanings generated through the process of assemblage and reassemblage' (Shelton, this volume).

The unsettlement created in museums, partly resulting from the past clashing with the present (Macdonald, this volume), is one that is readily accommodated in the kind of critical museology both advocated and practised by Shelton. There are some remarkable similarities between the planned third floor 'Knowing' section of the London Science Museum, and the Brighton arrangement: the Cultures Gallery (juxtaposing the familiar and the exotic), the Green Gallery (insights on collecting), and the temporary exhibits gallery (an experimental area used to explore issues and make them explicit – and concrete). The involvement of artists, on the one hand, and students and faculty members from Sussex university on the other, turned the museum into a place of creative exploration: a new-style cultural laboratory. Culture, for Shelton, is no less than interpretation itself, so that anthropology, 'art and critical museology are as much a part of the world's enchantment as they are sceptical of it'.

Just as anthropologists who go behind the scenes do not always study major revamps of museums, so can the work of anthropologists as guest curators be on a more temporary basis. Indeed, the new managerial regimes in many contemporary museums depend upon contracting in personnel for projects, including guest curators, designers, project managers and others. The new museology is clearly not immune to these changing organisational arrangements. Jeanne Cannizzo uses her work as co-curator of the exhibition *David Livingstone and the Victorian encounter with Africa*, to consider ways in which academic skills both complement and clash with the exhibitionary process. If there is little sense of disagreement in Brighton, Cannizzo's account of working as part of an exhibition team, and in broadcasting, demonstrates why the ability to cooperate with others is one of the transferable skills imparted to students taking her 'Objects and Others' course at Edinburgh University.

Guest curators have little opportunity to change the microcosm in which they work, which makes a candid assessment of the parameters essential. Cannizzo discusses the negotiable and the non-negotiable aspects of the Livingstone exhibition: the fact that the show was held in the National Portrait Gallery in