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Did the Spirit Sing?

An Historical Perspective on Canadian Exhibitions of The Other

by

Lis Smidt Stainforth

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University
OTTAWA, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the knowledge of Canadian museum history by analysing a landmark exhibition, "The Spirit Sings," in the context of past exhibitions or museum-installations — presented as detailed historical analyses. "The Spirit Sings" was the main cultural event of the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. It became a controversial exhibition when the Lubicon Band in Alberta called for a boycott of it. The controversy forced the museum community to address issues which today seem to be inherent in exhibitions of native culture and art. This thesis hypothesizes that "The Spirit Sings" and the surrounding controversy constitute a watershed in the history of Canadian museum exhibitions. I argue that The Spirit Sings 'crisis', made manifest to the museum community through the intense focus on it, is an indication that the scientific paradigm of museum representation is breaking down. "The Spirit Sings" was in itself a tacit recognition of the crisis, but it was not an example of a new model.

attention on problems inherent in the relation between native people and museums in the late twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION.

"The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples," organized by the Glenbow Museum, was the artistic centrepiece for the cultural program of the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. The exhibition displayed more than 650 historical native Canadian artifacts, most of them from collections outside Canada.¹ From one point of view this exhibition was the kind of scholarly enterprise "waiting to be done," as Duncan Cameron, Director of the Glenbow Museum said.² From another point of view the exhibition sparked a controversy "the like of which has never before been seen in the Canadian museum community" (Harrison 1988b:353). The initial cause of the controversy was a call for a boycott of the exhibition issued by the Lubicon Lake Cree Band in Alberta, which was involved in an unsettled land claim with the Federal and Provincial Governments.³ To attract attention to their cause the Lubicon Band targetted "The Spirit Sings," an event of international interest. Museums which were potential lenders to the exhibit were asked during the Spring of 1986 to refuse loans — and thereby effectively boycott the exhibition. The Lubicons and their supporters argued that it was hypocritical for an official Canadian exhibition to 'celebrate' historical native cultures when contemporary disputes were not being justly dealt with. From

¹ "The Spirit Sings" was shown in Calgary from 14 January to 1 May 1988, and from 1 July to 6 November 1988 in Ottawa under the auspices of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (in the Lorne Building which had recently been vacated by the National Gallery of Canada).

² At seminar at Carleton University, 9 November, 1988.

³ For a detailed account of the Lubicon land claim, see Goddard 1988.

this initial focus on a boycott intended to exert political pressure on the government, the exhibition itself soon came under scrutiny. The sponsorship of the exhibition by Shell Oil, for example, was contested. It was seen as particularly hypocritical that an oil company "actively engaged in destroying the economy and way of life of the Lubicon Band" should be sponsoring an exhibition about traditional values of native life (Trigger 1988:5). The controversy caused by the call for a boycott of "The Spirit Sings" thus went beyond this particular exhibition by focusing attention on issues which are inherent in representations of native culture and art.

I have chosen to follow current anthropological practice when I refer to the category of exhibitions to which "The Spirit Sings" belongs as representations of The Other (Fabian 1983; Price 1989). In this thesis I will examine "The Spirit Sings" controversy in relation to the current crisis in representations of The Other.⁴ I situate this crisis in the context of recent cultural theories, such as those of James Clifford. In *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) Clifford provides, in my view, the necessary tools for an understanding of events such as the controversy over "The Spirit Sings," and contributes to an understanding of 'where we are' now, and where we might be going.

To explain the background for the current events relating to "The Spirit Sings," I have found an historical perspective invaluable.

⁴ See, for example Ames 1986 and MacDonald 1989. That the crisis concerning representations of The Other is also felt in the museum field in general is for example reflected in a new British anthology *The New Museology* (ed. Peter Vergo 1989).

in connection with my analysis of "Indian Art of the United States," 1941, which was a direct result of the success of the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition. These two exhibitions are generally credited with changing the American public's attitude towards North American Indian art (Jonaitis 1981:4). Although the 1927 Canadian exhibition cannot be said to have had the same continent-wide importance as the American exhibitions, it is nevertheless important to examine it in detail, both as a parallel Canadian example and as an early manifestation in this country of the gradual reclassification of native American art from ethnographical specimens to works of art starting in the 1920s.

In Chapter Three I analyze three recent (1967 or later) Canadian exhibitions of North American Indian art. "Arts of the Raven: Masterworks of the Northwest Coast Indian," shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967, and the installation of Northwest Coast objects in the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, which opened in 1976, both favoured an attitude to native artifacts as *art*. The "First Peoples" gallery at the Royal British Columbia Museum is analyzed as an example of a more recent ethnographic design approach — the contextualizing, 'story-line' exhibit. This installation, it should be noted, devoted a large amount of space to *art* within the ethnographic framework. I argue that it is no accident that the monumental and sculptural Northwest Coast art was most readily accepted and promoted as *art*, in a modern Western sense of the word

The idea of progress based on technological advancement, made possible by modern, empirical sciences has its origins in the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe. The museum exhibitions analysed in this thesis all belong to what in Grant's terminology is the modern era.⁶

In Chapter One I review the development of early ethnographic exhibitions in North America. Anthropology museums provided the context for the first modern exhibits of North American native material and remain one of the main 'depositories' of native artifacts. It is important to trace the origin and early developments of this museum form and its exhibitions in order to understand the ideological heritage it represents. Examples are chosen to be representative of the early phases in the development of ethnographic displays. The first example, the ethnology installations of the 1880s and 1890s in the United States National Museum in Washington (the Smithsonian), represent the earliest known example of North American native objects arranged to illustrate the evolutionary theories which dominated nineteenth century anthropological theory. During the last decades of last century, such theories were challenged by the young, German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas in a couple of articles. From 1895, as an employee of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Boas was in charge of the installation of the Northwest Coast material for the North Pacific Hall. This

⁶ Most museum historians devote much attention to what is in fact a change from pre-modern to modern museums (from the Curiosity Cabinet to the Public Museum) thereby affirming their own position within the modern paradigm.

installation is my second example. The establishment of a Department of Anthropology at the Geological Survey Museum in Ottawa in 1910, was directly tied to these events, for the head of this department was Dr. Edward Sapir, a distinguished scholar and a student of Franz Boas. Canadian anthropology in the museum which was to become the National Museum of Canada modelled itself on Boasian anthropology and in this way belongs to the history of mainstream North American anthropology. The anthropology exhibits of that museum between 1910-1940 are the subject of the third analysis.

In Chapter Two I introduce the concept of Primitive Art which gained acceptance during the first decades of this century when Picasso and other artists in his circle 'discovered' and promoted it. The exhibition at the National Gallery in 1927, "Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern" is the first example I analyse in this chapter. Eric Brown, Director of the National Gallery, cooperated with Marius Barbeau, ethnologist at the National Museum, to produce this exhibition. "Canadian West Coast Art" is best known by historians of Canadian art as an important catalyst in the career of Emily Carr (Reid 1973:156). The aspect which will be examined here, however, is the role this exhibition played as a manifestation of the gradual revaluation of native art which was taking place. The Indian display at the International Exposition in San Francisco in 1939, arranged and designed by René d'Harnoncourt for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, was one of the first and historically most important showcases that promoted Native American art as fine art. This exhibition is discussed

in connection with my analysis of "Indian Art of the United States," 1941, which was a direct result of the success of the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition. These two exhibitions are generally credited with changing the American public's attitude towards North American Indian art (Jonaitis 1981:4). Although the 1927 Canadian exhibition cannot be said to have had the same continent-wide importance as the American exhibitions, it is nevertheless important to examine it in detail, both as a parallel Canadian example and as an early manifestation in this country of the gradual reclassification of native American art from ethnographical specimens to works of art starting in the 1920s.

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— as happened in the 'masterpiece-exhibitions' and in the 'renaissance' of contemporary Northwest Coast native art.

In Chapter Four I leave the overview of historic phases in the development of exhibitions of native artifacts to consider the most recent example of a large scale exhibit of native art, "The Spirit Sings." I present a detailed analysis of the installation, considering particularly the use of colour-coding, showcase design, and the use of contextualizing material. I discuss the ways in which "The Spirit Sings" installation was related to earlier models, the ethnographic or the art exhibit format. The stated intentions of the curators as well as reactions from reviewers and the general public are integrated into this discussion. I then turn to an analysis of the negative reaction to "The Spirit Sings" which led the Lubicon Band and many supporters to recommend the exhibition be boycotted. I argue that some of the reactions triggered by the Lubicon protest can be read as a challenge to the 'object-system' within which we, in Western culture, function, as James Clifford has shown (1988).

"The Spirit Sings" represents, in my view, a turning point in Canadian museum history. This thesis seeks to contribute to the knowledge of Canadian museum history by analysing this landmark-event in the context of past exhibits or museum installations presented as detailed historical analyses. I conclude that "The Spirit Sings," occurring at the moment of breakdown of an earlier paradigm of cultural representation gave rise to debates that have served to focus

attention on problems inherent in the relation between native people and museums in the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY ETHNOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS.

ORIGINS OF THE ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM.

In this thesis I refer to 'the anthropology museum' as a generic term for a museum, collection or museum department devoted to the study of the human history of non-Western peoples. Anthropology museums exist today under names such as Museum of Anthropology, Ethnographic Museum, Museum of Man. However, in North America the dominant form of the anthropology museum has been the Natural History Museum (Frese 1960).⁷

The story of the anthropology museum, as most museum historians acknowledge, is part of a larger history of the modern Western museum, notably the public museum with its democratic promise which in turn results from eighteenth century Enlightenment concepts.⁸ The fundamental paradigm shift that took place during the Enlightenment has been stressed in recent critical theory concerned with museum representation.⁹ It is outside the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough examination of this larger perspective, although it is important at least to note the existence of a wider context for the

⁷ Some museums have tried to reflect the changing emphasis in the museum concept by changing the name. The National Museum of Canada, for example, became the National Museum of Man (separate from the National Museum of Natural Sciences) in 1968. During the late 1980's the name was changed again to the Canadian Museum of Civilization (MacDonald 1989:4-5).

⁸ For general, factual historical information of relevance for anthropological museums, Frese 1960 remains the most comprehensive. Other sources of information are Wittlin 1970; Hudson 1975 and 1987; Alexander 1979.

⁹ See, for example, Clifford 1988, Bennet 1988b and Jordanova 1989.

classification of North American Indian artifacts as ethnographic objects.

North American Indian artifacts have been collected by Europeans for centuries. The oldest surviving objects are reputedly two pairs of moccasins decorated with dyed porcupine quills brought from Indian North America by Jacques Cartier in the 1530s (Feest, 1984:85). Other items were brought back to Europe by military personnel, missionaries, traders and explorers. Such objects were chosen as memorabilia from "savage lands" for a wide range of reasons (Feest 1984:88).¹⁰

Some of these objects ended up in the private collections of monarchs, scholars or other collectors of Renaissance Europe. These Curiosity Cabinets, or 'Kunst- und Wunderkammern', included, as the German name indicates, both collections of art (in the sense of objects demonstrating human ingenuity) and 'natural' marvels (Feest 1980:9). Such private collections became the core of the first public museums. This was so in Britain's first public natural history museum, the Ashmolean Museum, which was founded in 1683 based on the collections of the Tradescant family (Alexander 1979:43). Another example is the British Museum, founded in 1753, the world's first great national museum. It was based on the private collection of physician and natural scientist John Sloane (Alexander 1979:44). Similar developments from private collection to public museum took

¹⁰ See Wittlin for a categorisation of collecting motives in the pre-public museums (1970:3-74). Feest gives an account of some of the specific circumstances surrounding the early collecting of North American Indian material (1984).

place all over Western Europe beginning in the late eighteenth century (Key 1973).

The Natural History Museum is closely related to the development of the modern natural sciences. As such, it is a product of the new Enlightenment belief in the power of human understanding to comprehend the universe, and the effort to find natural, rather than supernatural, explanations for the workings of the universe (Berkhofer 1979:39). Gradually, the theological learning of the Church was replaced by a scientific approach to knowledge of the world.

With the growing importance of the natural sciences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the collecting and display of "natural curiosities" began to be approached more systematically — they became specimens. The same cannot be said of man-made objects which retained their classification as "artificial curiosities" well into the nineteenth century, and whose acquisition was often incidental to collecting natural history specimens (Feest 1980:10). This situation began to change dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century, a time of major museum building in Western Europe and, slightly later, in America (fig.1). This change in collecting and display is ultimately tied to the development of anthropology into what has been called a mature science, and particularly to the development of the theory of cultural evolutionism.

During the nineteenth century theories of evolution dominated scientific thinking, and evolutionist theory profoundly influenced the growth of both the natural and social sciences as they differentiated

and became specific disciplines (Frese 1960:19). As Berkhofer explains, much that had puzzled previous generations suddenly became explicable according to the laws of evolution.¹¹ The most famous work, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, 1859, was part of a larger trend.

The evolutionary foundation of the natural sciences had profound implications for the emerging sciences of human societies and cultures. The history of human customs and institutions came to be seen in terms of genesis of growth, of transformations from step to step in a sequence of development (Berkhofer 1979:51). It seemed as if a continuous stream of development could be traced from man's ancestors to the first human beings, and then onwards through the evolution of culture to what was considered to be the very peak of human achievement — Western civilization (Frese 1960:45).

The anthropological interest in 'primitive' peoples dates from this era and is reflected in the anthropology museum. The assumption was that these peoples could be equated with those living at "the birth of human culture" (Frese 1960:48).¹² A full-fledged theory of social evolution was expressed in Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery Through*

¹¹ The formation of the solar system and the classes of stars represented stages in the evolution of the universe. In geology, fossils allowed dating of the various strata of the earth. Stratigraphy revealed the changes occurring in organic life during past ages and permitted developmental series in paleontology. Archaeology discovered the Stone, Bronze and Iron ages (Berkhofer 1979:50).

¹² The German word for primitive peoples, *Naturvölker*, expresses this idea of a development from nature to culture.

Barbarism to Civilization, 1871. "The North American Indian," regarded as a collective unity, was here placed above the lowest stage of "savagery," but clearly below "civilization," according to the latest scientific methods derived from the natural sciences (Berkhofer 1979:53).

Systematic collecting of objects from 'primitive' peoples came into prominence with the scientific basis of the new anthropology. Previous collectors had chosen outstanding objects and those that appealed primarily to the emotions as strange, rare, ingenious or marvellous items. Now, however, mundane, everyday utensils were also collected systematically, to fill in knowledge of earlier stages of human development, perceived as a progressive linear development. Impetus for collecting came from the need to gather evidence 'before it was too late,' before these cultural forms had either vanished or been totally altered and absorbed by dominant Western culture (Alexander 1979; Berkhofer 1979).¹³ 'Salvage ethnography' had come into being; the salvaged material had become 'ethnographic objects' and the big, public Natural History Museum of the West became the new home for the tobacco pipes, war clubs, wampum belts, moccasins, cooking utensils, canoes and other creations of North American native peoples.

The economic and political expansion of Western Europe during the nineteenth century was another factor which influenced and corresponded with the Museum Age and the establishment of

¹³ On 'salvage ethnography' see for example Gruber 1970.

anthropological museums (Frese 1960). The evolutionary theories which dominated the natural sciences and anthropology during the nineteenth century had an overt ethnocentric bias which corresponded to the political and ideological climate of the time. North Americans and Western Europeans saw themselves as the summit of civilization. The great Natural History Museum, devoted to showing the evolution of natural and human life, was an appropriate expression of the ideological climate of this period. Such is the heritage of the anthropology museum, with which later generations have been having increasing difficulty.

THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM, FROM 1880.

When the Smithsonian Institution was founded in 1846 it inherited the collections of the National Cabinet of Curiosities (Goode 1881:605). Ten years later it had also acquired the collections resulting from the United States Exploring Expedition under Charles Wilkes, 1838-1842, which were well suited to establish the scientific orientation of the museum (Hinsley 1981). With the 1880s a new phase began for the Institution, which was now the National Museum and "the authorized place of deposit for all objects of natural history, mineralogy, geology, archaeology, ethnology ... belonging to the United States..." (Goode 1881:605).

During its earliest phase and until the 1880s the Smithsonian's interest in anthropology had focused on the North American Indian and on the effort to 'salvage' objects and information before it was too

late. Collecting was often carried out by explorers, professional collectors and other volunteers loosely connected with the Museum (Hinsley 1981). As a result, the collections accumulated rapidly, creating huge cataloguing and research backlogs.

A visitor's guide to the museum published in 1880 gives an idea of the public displays of the anthropological material on hand. The Anthropology Hall occupied the entire second story of the central building, and the ethnological material was displayed in more than 150 cases with "no attempt made at a scientific classification or description of the specimens" (Hinsley 1981:75). Many objects and descriptions still testified to the collecting interests of an earlier era: one case contained, among other things, "a tomahawk presented to Davy Crockett by the young men of Philadelphia"; "fragments of one of the bolts to which Columbus was chained in San Domingo," and "an old English battle axe from Windsor Castle." (Hinsley 1981:75)

During the first phase of the National Museum, then, collecting, research and publication were emphasized. When George Brown Goode was appointed as director, a new phase began which emphasized popular education as an important aspect of the museum's activity. Under Goode and the ethnologist Otis Mason the ethnology exhibitions were reorganized according to the evolutionary theories which dominated anthropology at the time. These exhibits were the

first in the U.S. National Museum that illustrated the evolutionary theories directly in the public displays.¹⁴

THE ESKIMO EXHIBIT, 1886.

The Eskimo collection of the U.S. National Museum was chosen as the first to be reorganized because of the relative completeness of its collections. To this end Mason used a checker-board system. He explained the concept of the design in this way:

Supposing there are six great divisions of men and six ways of supplying wants. You will then have 36 exhibits, and if they were laid out in a vast room checker fashion you could study the ethnology of mankind by going from north to south, or activities of all mankind by moving east to west. This would represent any epoch of the world. And if you had a building of several stories, each one would represent a grade of culture and these would constitute the synoptic series of *all activities of all peoples in all ages*, 216 exhibits in all. (Mason qtd. in Hinsley 1981:120)

The idea was that by arranging the show-cases like the grid of a checker-board, the visitor would be able to choose the aspects he was most interested in. By walking down one axis of the checker board he would encounter the various "inventions"¹⁵ of one single cultural region; moving along the other axis he could follow one single invention in different cultural regions (Hinsley 1981:97-98).

When Mason in the 1886 Eskimo exhibit defined a number of "culture regions," he intended to account for local variations. Mason's

¹⁴ General Pitt-Rivers in England was at the same time establishing his museum in Oxford according to the same principles (Hudson 1987).

¹⁵ Mason's definition of "invention" was very broad, encompassing technical, as well as cultural processes. In fact all human activities directed towards change could be understood as resulting from invention (Hinsley 1981:89).

concept of the culture area was not the refined concept later developed and implemented by students of Franz Boas at the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Wissler 1914), but Mason's classification, at least partially arranged by ethnographical area in his Eskimo displays, was due to a dawning realization of the complexity of cultural phenomena (Hinsley 1981:110). Environmentalism – the effect of physical environment – was the theory accounting for the actual diversity among people otherwise classified as belonging to the same "stage" of development. The basic assumption of Mason's anthropology, however, remained his strong belief in an underlying system, an ordered universe, which was reflected in the exhibits in the National Museum. Mason envisaged the "checker-board" display as *the* grand scheme which could provide the solution for ethnological exhibitions in the rest of the museum.

Not all the ethnographic collections in the U.S. National Museum were considered complete enough to portray the "total life story" of a tribe, as did the the Eskimo exhibit. For such material Mason advised that it be grouped according to type "in synoptic series illustrating the progress of the race" (Hinsley 1981:97). These typological series of objects represented Mason's concept of universal "inventions," such as fire-making, transportation, the crafts of pottery or basketry, etc. (Jacknis 1985:77). Fig. 2 shows an example of a showcase organized in this way according to typology and evolutionary development.

'THE LIFE GROUP'.

Although Mason in 1887 conceived of his "ethnic idea" organized in checker-board fashion, as the solution for the ethnographic exhibitions that should be implemented wherever possible, this very rigid scheme was somewhat modified in the actual exhibits of the 1890s when the life-group became a prominent feature of the ethnographic displays (Boas 1907:925). As its name suggests, a life-group is a life-sized group of figures (at that time made of wax, papier maché or plaster), usually showing native people engaged in some characteristic work or demonstrating how costumes were worn. The Swedes were the first to develop the use of life-groups in ethnographical displays during the 1870s (Jacknis 1985:81).

Life-groups had proven a great success in the big international fairs and expositions (Jacknis 1985). Because of their appeal to the general public they came to play an increasingly important role at the National Museum, as well as in other museums at the time¹⁶. At the Paris World Fair in 1889 the elaborate life-groups in many of the ethnographic displays greatly impressed Otis Mason, who decided to use this technique at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (Mason 1890). The National Museum's use of life-groups in the Government exhibitions at the Chicago World Fair in 1893 was a break-through in

¹⁶ The desire to create entertaining, crowd-drawing exhibitions as a means to educate or socialize unruly parts of the population was grounded in the particular social and political situation in the United States around the turn of the century (Jonaitis 1988). See also Greenhalgh's essay which deals with the different emphases on education and entertainment in English and French expositions respectively (1989).

technique and set a trend in American exhibitions at subsequent expositions. The U.S. National Museum afterwards included many of the groups in its permanent exhibitions (Cole 1985; Ewers 1956).

The origin and history of the art of 'primitive' peoples was widely debated during the second half of the nineteenth century (Hinsley 1981:103).¹⁷ In the U.S. National Museum the prevailing attitude was reflected in the work of William Henry Holmes, who was employed as an "artist-anthropologist" during the 1880s (Hinsley 1981). Holmes understood art in accordance with current evolutionary theories. According to these, the art of 'primitive' peoples was regarded as devoid of the qualities which characterize artistic creations at more civilized stages of development. Holmes believed that geometric designs, originally suggested to the artists, by, for example, the imprint on wet clay of woven material or basketry, belonged to an earlier stage than pictorial designs. Holmes' interest was in the universal history of art, not in particular tribal histories (Hinsley 1981). Although empirical research was the foundation of his work, he, in the words of one biographer, "never contended that he was depicting the evolution of any particular design; his series were instead illustrative of what he called 'general tendencies' and 'general laws'." (Thoreson qtd. in Hinsley 1981:104)

¹⁷ For a general introduction to Western perceptions of Primitive Art, see chapter one in Goldwater (1938).

Environmentalism also played an important role in Holmes' and the other National Museum anthropologists' theories, with regard to art. "Primitive" peoples were seen as directly influenced by the physical environment, and art was understood as a simple response to physical environment, available materials, technique, and tribal rules (Hinsley 1981:104).

SCIENCE WITHIN A CHRISTIAN PARADIGM.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century the team of Goode-Mason-Holmes in the U.S. National Museum was fully in tune with the dominant trends in American anthropology — with the evolutionary theories with their ethnocentric implications, and with what Hinsley describes as their pious mission (1981:117). This was evident in their refusal to secularize their scientific ideas. Mason and Holmes were interested primarily in the building of theories, in finding answers to the big questions of human origin and development, which the theories of evolution seemed to provide. For this generation of National Museum anthropologists the answers always asserted an underlying order (Hinsley 1981). In that sense they were still operating within a Christian paradigm.

The assumption of an ordered universe, of a 'grand scheme' pointing toward a final cause which could, eventually, be perceived through reason, lent itself well to static museum-exhibitions. Mason's idea of a grand scheme, his devotion to systems, as exemplified in the checker-board idea, was conceived as a theory to be illustrated by

objects.¹⁸ In their striving for order the anthropologists at the U.S. National Museum took a conservative stand,

By displaying order in the tangible works of man through all ages and places, they would confirm cosmic purpose... The anthropologists of the early National Museum sought to contain the world within walls and categories; they sought old verities, not new truths (Hinsley 1981:84).

This assertion of order coincided with a growing doubt with regard to the implications of modern life (Hinsley 1981:83). European avant-garde artists, architects and craftspeople tried in various ways to come to grips with the contradictory implications of modernity. These included such diverse artistic movements as Art Nouveau, the Secessionists, the Expressionists, the Cubists, de Stijl, Bauhaus and the Surrealists.¹⁹

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, FROM 1900.

In 1887 Franz Boas had initiated a debate about exhibition principles, when he criticized the newly arranged ethnology exhibitions in the U.S. National Museum²⁰. Boas clearly did not share Mason's belief that a schematic, static design like the checker-board idea was suited to illustrate the life of other 'civilizations,'

¹⁸ Goode wrote, for example, "An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well selected specimen" (1888:262)

¹⁹ George Grant has remarked that the thinker who has most profoundly faced what it is to be modern was Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900 (1971). The Secessionists, for example, were influenced by Nietzsche.

²⁰ The debate consisted of four articles in *Science*, two written by Boas, one by Mason and one by Powell (1887). Hinsley provides a detailed summary of the debate (1981:98-100).

I cannot agree with Professor Mason's proposal of arranging the cases like a checker-board. In ethnology all is individuality. We should be compelled to leave long rows of cases empty, as certain phenomena occur in very few tribes. It would be almost impossible to show in this way all important ethnological phenomenon, the historical development of tribes, the influence of neighbours and surroundings, etc. (1887a:589)

Ethnology for Boas was not a matter of discovering 'the grand scheme,' as it had been for Mason. As a consequence his 'ideal ethnology museum' was different.

It is my opinion that the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes. I believe that this object can be accomplished only by *tribal* arrangement of collections. (1887a:589)

This theoretical disagreement was profound and indicates the beginning of what has been described as the shift from evolutionary to modern anthropology (Stocking 1968). According to Stocking this shift was implied in the change in the concept of *culture* which took place in Boas' thinking between 1887 and 1911 (1968). During this period, the humanistic culture concept of the evolutionists, which was absolutist, progressive, and singular, and assumed the notion of degrees of culture, was replaced by an anthropological culture concept, which was relativistic, homeostatic, pluralistic and regarded all as equally cultured (Stocking 1968).

Boas' critique of the 1887 exhibits in the U.S National Museum constituted an important step in the development of anthropological theory away from the evolutionary theories. In his critique, Boas

argued that "the particular grouping of specimens was a classificatory act, which, in turn, would communicate to the visitor a particular theory of (material) culture" (Jacknis 1985:92). Boas criticized the Smithsonian displays because they reflected what he regarded as erroneous theories.

Ten years later Boas had an opportunity to design his own ethnographic displays for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In 1896 the Museum embarked on the large Jesup North Pacific Expedition, which lasted until 1902 and which greatly enlarged the collections of Northwest Coast material. As a result a complete hall in the American Museum was devoted to the peoples of the North Pacific (Jacknis 1985). The North Pacific Hall is the most fully documented installation by Franz Boas, and it was also the one in which he would have been most engaged, as the Northwest Coast was his area of expertise.

Before Boas' reorganization of the Northwest Coast material it had been grouped for display mainly according to collector (Jacknis 1985:94). Now Boas was able to employ the tribal organization he had recommended in the debate in *Science*. The tribal organization of objects in the big showcases along the two long walls were meant to be viewed systematically by the "serious visitor" (fig.3). This visitor, aided by the numbering and labelling of the cases, would ideally first walk down one side of the hall and then back the other side. A row of table cases, containing archaeological specimens, filled up the centre-

aisle in order to prevent the visitor from wandering "from right to left without order" (Jacknis 1985:93).

Starting from the geographic north, the order of presentation was Tlingit; Tsimshian; Haida; Bella Coola; Kwakiutl and Coast Salish replicating the ethnic map of the region. This pattern has since become the standard way of presenting Northwest Coast material. Boas also included material from interior Plateau tribes, which are neighbours geographically, but belong to culturally distinct groups. This, according to Jacknis, was to ascertain and illustrate the effects of local history and environment. It was a way to point out the arbitrary nature of selecting and isolating an area for display (1985).²¹

The presentation within the tribal units was arranged according to categories such as "the use of natural products"; "basic industries," "house furnishings," "dress and ornaments" "trade and barter"; "hunting and fishing," "travel and transportation," "armour and weapons," "musical instruments," "decorative art," "clan organization" (Jacknis 1985:93), which represent the kind of categories the ethnologist used in the study of other cultures. Fig. 4 shows an example of a single showcase addressing the topic of "ceremonials" among the Bella Coola people.

Explanatory texts were regarded as an essential part of the installation, not least by the museum administration who complained when labels were not in place early enough (Jacknis 1985). In

²¹ The refined concept of the culture area by Boas' students was developed in response to this problem. (cf. Wissler 1914)

addition to the specimen labels, case labels and the monographs resulting from the Jesup expedition were added (Jonaitis 1988).

Boas fully recognized that not all visitors to the museum were seriously interested in a detailed examination of the displays. To accommodate this fact he tried to arrange some of the material in synoptic series (Jacknis 1985). A synoptic display is an arrangement of objects according to category (transportation, fishing implements etc.), a modified typological display. The synoptic displays were placed in five polygonal cases just inside the hall where they could be seen by people who were not going to spend much time in the hall, and at the same time they would serve as an introductory overview for people who did move on to see the rest (Jacknis 1985). The rationale behind Boas' use of the synoptic displays, which inevitably invites comparison between cultures, seems to be a belief (or experience) that this display type appealed to the public.²²

Another element meant to attract the general public, the "casual visitor," was a life-group and a Kwakiutl village model situated at the two ends of the hall. The life-group, called "Uses of Cedar" (fig. 5), demonstrated physically some of the many uses of red cedar, while a case label ensured that the point was not missed:

A woman is seen making a cedar-bark mat, rocking her infant which is bedded in cedar-bark, the cradle being moved by means of a cedar-bark rope attached to her toe. Another woman is shredding cedar-bark, to be used for making aprons. A man is taking red-hot stones out of the

²² Otis Mason, for example, gave this reason (Hinsley 1981).

fire with tongs made of cedar-wood, and is about to place the stones in a cedar box (qtd. from Jonaitis 1988:151).

Boas' initial enthusiasm for the life-group led him originally to plan an extensive implementation of them (Jacknis 1985). After observing the public's reaction to the new life-groups, however, he became more sceptical and in the end used them more sparsely (Jacknis 1985). What Boas had observed was the fact that people were more intrigued by the technical aspects of the installation, than by the content or message of the display.

When the technical perfection of the striking exhibits is very great, the danger is ever-present that the admiring public will not see the idea that is to be conveyed by the exhibit, but will forget even to look for it in its admiration of the technical skill exhibited in the installation. For instance, in an exhibit of gulls hovering over the waves of the sea, it is only too likely that the visitors will ask 'How are they suspended?' and that upon coming back from the museum, they will tell their friends of the skill exhibited in the invisible suspension of the birds, but presumably they will not know what birds they were (Boas 1907:923).

In the North Pacific Hall the Cedar-group served therefore mainly as an eye-catcher.

The idea of organizing an exhibit at two levels, as Boas attempted with his distinction between a "serious" and a "casual" visitor, was not an entirely new concept at Boas' time. It reflected the idea of separating study collections from the public exhibitions as William Henry Flower, who became director of the Natural History Museum in London in 1884, had suggested in 1889. During the 1890s, Flower was a spokesman for what came to be called "the new

museum idea" (Hudson 1987:72; Sheets-Pyenson 1988:6). Flower had pointed out that the failure of most museums derived from the fact that they confused two separate functions: their service to scholars and their service to the general public. Exhibitions ought to be for the instruction of the general public, Flower argued, whereas study collections could serve the experts (Hudson 1987:72). Yet, most museums attempted to combine the two functions, and Boas' American Museum was no exception.

Although Boas would have welcomed an opportunity to separate the research collection from the public display (Jacknis 1985), he did not share W.H. Flower's analysis that the instruction of the people was a matter which was being sacrificed to the interests of the scholar. On the contrary, Boas demonstrated with his emphasis on the "serious" visitor in the North Pacific Hall where his sympathies were. In 1905 Boas resigned his position as a curator at the American Museum, and he never again held a museum position. Jacknis suggests that Boas had concluded that "the sort of anthropology he was interested in was better carried out in an academic milieu." (1985:77) This point seems justified also by an article by Boas published in *Science* in 1907, called "Some Principles Of Museum Administration."

In this article Boas bluntly stated that the justification of the large museum (such as the U.S. National Museum and the American Museum) lay in its usefulness for science (1907:930). Large museums, according to Boas, must be the storehouses for collections which form entire series relating to the same question. The museum must

preserve these collections "for all future time" and not allow them to be scattered or to deteriorate (Boas 1907:930). In other words, to Boas the museum was a collection of artifacts; its function was to preserve the artifacts in order for scientists to use them for research and documentation. Exhibitions for the general public were not in 1907 regarded by Boas as a large museum's primary task.

Boas did, however, discuss exhibitions for the general public as one of the three objectives a museum "may serve." As many as 90% of the visitors to such institutions as the U.S. National Museum and the American Museum sought "entertainment" from the museum, Boas admitted. The general audience is not interested in "labels illustrated with specimens," Boas asserted in reply to George Brown Goode's maxim. He recommended selecting a striking object or exhibition which could stand out from the rest of the collections. In this way the attention of the visitor would be captured, and at the same time the rest of the collections could indicate to the visitor that there was more to be learned. In the popularization of exhibits, Boas argued, "every kind of inaccuracy should be most carefully avoided" and "attempts to make all problems appear childishly simple by the elimination of everything that is obscure should not be tolerated" (1907:923). Boas, then, was concerned with the accuracy of science. For him, the public display was of less importance. The classificatory system used in the exhibition did not have to reflect or illustrate the theories:

Nothing perhaps helps more to convey the idea of completeness and of the uselessness of further effort than the presentation of a whole museum as a complete

finished exhibit, in which everything has its place in a definite system (1907:927).

Boas' 1907 article indicates his fundamental doubt about the museum *exhibition* as a medium. Such a doubt was not, as we have seen, present in 1887 in his discussion of exhibition principles with Otis Mason, nor during his time as a curator for the American Museum where he devised two levels of display for the Northwest Coast material. After his resignation from the museum, Boas challenged the taken-for-granted link between the organization of objects in a museum and the production of knowledge²³.

It ... happens frequently in anthropological collections that a vast field of thought may be expressed by a single object or by no object whatever, because that particular aspect of life may consist of ideas only...in no case do specimens alone convey the full idea that a collection is intended to express (1907:928).

Whereas Boas apparently accepted the consequence of this conclusion and left the museum altogether, his students did not. Until about 1930 museums continued to be a major locus for anthropology as Boas' students filled many North American museum positions (Jacknis 1985:108).

THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL MUSEUM, FROM 1910.

On September 1, 1910, the first Department of Anthropology in either museum or university in Canada was founded at the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada, whose collections were being moved to the just-completed Victoria Memorial Museum building in

²³ Cf. Jordanova (1989).

Ottawa.²⁴ Edward Sapir, a highly respected linguist who had studied with Franz Boas, was appointed head of the Anthropology Division. This was an important development for Canadian anthropology. Until this time anthropological work under the Geological Survey had been carried out only sporadically and as an activity subordinate to the geological functions of the Survey (Hall 1983).

In the Summary Report for 1910 Sapir summarized his plans for a systematic anthropological survey of Canada's native peoples:

The plans for the Anthropological Division include field work among the native tribes of Canada for the purpose of collecting extensive and reliable information on their ethnology and linguistics, archaeological field work, the publication of results obtained in these investigations, and the exhibition in the Museum of specimens illustrative of Indian and Eskimo life, habit and thought (Summary Report 1910:7).

In an article in *Science*, entitled "An Anthropological Survey of Canada," Sapir outlined the scope of the work as an "ideally complete survey" of Canadian native tribes (1911:789). "The subject matter of the work undertaken," as Sapir expressed it, could be "conveniently classed under the heads of ethnology, archaeology, physical anthropology, ... and linguistics" (1911:790). This organization of the Division reflected the developing North American structure of four sub-disciplines promoted by Franz Boas (Darnell 1976:101). Sapir saw his appointment as head of the Anthropology Division at the

²⁴ For detailed accounts of the Survey's history and the establishment of a proper museum, see Waiser 1981 and Zaslow 1975. With regard to the role of Canadian anthropology in relation to the Geological Survey, see Hall 1983. For an account of tendencies in early Canadian anthropology in general, see Cole 1973.

Ottawa Museum as a chance to build up a major research organization like the Bureau of American Ethnology in the United States. Perhaps reflecting Boas' attitude, the exhibition activity of the museum was never Sapir's priority (Sapir 1911:793). The establishment of better and more representative collections, however, was regarded a matter of urgency in line with salvage anthropology:

Now or never is the time in which to collect from the natives what is still available for study... What is lost now will never be recovered again (Sapir 1911:793).

CANADIAN ANTHROPOLOGY HALL(S), 1913-25.

In the first years after the museum was completed in 1910 preparations for the public displays took place. Showcases were ordered and material was selected, described and labelled (Summary Report 1910-1913). In 1913 the first anthropology hall was opened to the public and Dr. Sapir gave a detailed account of its organization in the Summary Report to the Department for that year (Summary Report 1913). Sapir explained that due to lack of space²⁵, the representation of Canada's five culture areas outlined in the program for the division was reduced to the three areas best represented in the collections: the Northwest Coast, Eskimo and Eastern Woodlands (Sapir 1911:790).²⁶

²⁵ It appears that Anthropology was initially allotted one exhibition hall (Summary Report 1913), later *two*.

²⁶ In the following analysis I will be referring to native cultures and tribes with the terms used by Sapir at the time.

Figs. 6 and 7 show two views of the hall of Canadian Anthropology in 1915; fig. 8 illustrates the organization of one of the showcases. This hall was located in the west wing of the second floor (cf. fig.9)²⁷. According to Dr. Sapir's account, the cases on the right of the hall, the north side, were devoted to "exhibits illustrating the culture of the West Coast Indians," while those on the left, the south side, contained the exhibits of "the Eskimo and Eastern Woodlands tribes" (Summary Report 1913:356). Material from the Plains and from the Plateau area (of the interior British Columbia) had to be placed in storage "for want of adequate exhibition room," reported Dr. Sapir (Summary Report 1913:356). Some Eastern Woodlands tribes were also omitted from the exhibition, for the same reason.

The Northwest Coast was represented by the following groups: Nootka, Coast Salish, Kwakiutl, Tsimshian, Haida and Tlingit. The order reflected the geographical principle previously applied in Franz Boas' New York display. Within each tribal group objects were similarly organized according to categories such as "fishing and hunting implements," "clothing," "ceremonial objects," "basketry" or "weapons." This organization, which Sapir referred to in detail in his annual statements to the Ministry of Mines, reflected the sub-categories of anthropological field research. Rather than representing a standardized set of categories — such as: "food," "fishing,"

²⁷ There is some inconsistency in the sources when referring to the exhibition halls of the Victoria Memorial building. The only two anthropology halls to have been in use prior to the 1950's are hall 8 and 9 in fig. 9. I shall refer to them as the *west centre* and the *west wing* halls, respectively.

"hunting," "dwellings," "dress," "transport," "religion," "social life" and "art." as was the case in 1939 — the categories used in 1915 reflected the actual collections.

As the material had to be divided between big upright cases and table cases, the straight tribal organization appears to have been impaired at times, despite efforts to ensure that the

table and upright cases have been so grouped as to bring ethnological exhibits of the same tribe that have been divided between the two types of case as close together as practicable (Summary Report 1913:356).

The Tlingit display, for example, consisted of only one category, "basketry," whereas the Haida material, the best represented tribal group, used four and a half upright cases and three half table-cases to display "boxes," "men's and women's implements," "matting/basketry," "fishing tackle," "canoes and weapons," "grease dishes and musical instruments" [sic], "masks," "games and ornaments," "carvings," "(other) ceremonial objects," "spoons and other implements" (Summary Report 1913:356). The somewhat arbitrary grouping in some cases undoubtedly reflected the need to use the available showcases in the most economical manner.

In 1913 when the exhibition hall opened to the public the labels included only the tribal names, whereas specimen labels had "yet to be added" (Summary Report 1913:358). There is no indication that the categories actually used in the distribution of material in the cases were ever explicitly stated on labels. Nevertheless, Sapir had a system in mind when he organized the first anthropological exhibits, a system

based on the categories of anthropological field research. As fig.8 illustrates, these categories were fully visible in the 1915 displays, even if they were not named.

The south side of the exhibition hall was taken up in 1913 entirely with "material from the Eskimo and tribes of the Eastern Woodlands" (Summary Report 1913:357). The "Iroquoian tribes" were stressed in the Eastern Woodlands section. However, the attempt seems generally to have been to include most tribes within a culture area despite the fact that some would be much better represented than others.²⁸

As fig.6 and fig.7 show, larger objects were placed outside the showcases. Objects placed against the walls in 1913 were three Kwakiutl house posts, two larger models of Bella Coola totem poles, one Nootka house post and a cast of a petroglyph (Summary Report 1913:358). The tops of the cases were used for the exhibition of larger objects,

the chief of these being two Eskimo kayaks, a Malecite canoe, an Iroquois fish trap, four models of Iroquois and Wyandot bark houses, two Malecite house models, three fish spears of the Eastern Algonkin tribes, and two Nootka shafts of whaling spears. (Summary Report 1913:358)

²⁸ Some of the problems in the early exhibitions were related to the problem of data insufficient to establish the range of each culture area, as Sapir pointed out in 1911(791). This was particularly true of the Eastern Woodlands region, which was seen as encompassing tribes that are now associated with the Atlantic (or Maritime) region, Eastern Subarctic and Northern Woodlands.

As well, a series of Indian busts, "courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History, New York," could be seen as they were placed on top of the appropriate cases (Summary Report 1913:358).

What Sapir referred to as a "special feature" was the display of different canoes and kayaks suspended under the ceiling or placed on top of cases. The big, Haida war canoe formed the centrepiece, with smaller canoes and a kayak symmetrically placed around it (Summary Report 1913:358). The idea of exhibiting all the canoes from different parts of the country together is an example of a typological display principle. Other typological (or synoptic) displays in this first installation included "a series of Huron trap models" and an exhibit of "various types of harpoon, spear, and lance, also canoe models and paddles, from various Eskimo tribes" (Summary Report 1913:358). The tribal organization principle was in this way complemented by modified typological displays. As we have seen earlier, this had also been the case in Boas' own exhibits in the American Museum of Natural History.

In 1916 the Centre block of the Canadian Parliament burned down and the House of Commons sat in the Victoria Memorial Building until the Parliament Building was rebuilt. Between 1916 and 1920 the Museum was therefore closed and most of the exhibits stored (Russell 1961). When the museum moved back during 1920-21, a certain amount of remodelling of the interior seems to have taken place.²⁹ It

²⁹ Architectural drawings (114-C) at the Department of Public Works, dated 1920, indicate this.

is likely that this was the time when the Anthropology Division was allotted the additional exhibition hall.³⁰

In 1925 Edward Sapir resigned as head of the Anthropology Division and was succeeded by another staff member, ethnologist Diamond Jenness. Jenness had been employed by the Museum on a permanent basis since 1919 and shared the Boasian approach to anthropology (Swayze 1960; McDougall 1981; Taylor 1988). During the following decades a reorganization of the ethnological exhibits was carried out. This reorganization resulted in the 'permanent' installations that were in place through the 1950s. (Annual Reports 1926-1947)

THE ANTHROPOLOGY HALLS C. 1925-1940.

On January 5, 1927, the Victoria Memorial Museum officially became the National Museum of Canada (Waiser 1981). The allotment of an additional exhibition hall to anthropology made it possible to realize Dr. Sapir's original intent and represent all five culture areas in exhibitions. The additional hall, the west centre hall, was used to accommodate the Plains and Plateau material, while the Westcoast, Eskimo and Eastern Woodlands exhibits remained in the west wing. This installation was reported to have been completed in 1929 (Annual Report 1929:9).

³⁰ In 1925 Dr. Sapir refers explicitly to "the two anthropology halls" (Summary Report 1925:36).

Fig. 10 shows the Plains-Plateau installation as it appeared in 1934. Glass-fronted cases were placed at a right angle to the walls, permitting the hall to be lit by daylight from the many large windows. The objects were arranged in a grid-like fashion inside the showcases, as they were in the 1915 displays, although the cases were now slightly less crowded (compare with fig.8). A general development with regard to aesthetic taste may have dictated that the new cases were less packed than they were twenty-five years earlier.³¹ There are no reports on how the material was organized, except that some cases contained synoptic displays. One of these was on cradle boards, one on musical instruments (Annual Report 1929:9). The 1934 photo reveals a strict glass case arrangement, without any other visible exhibition devices such as life-groups or dioramas. Such features were, nevertheless, planned as part of the reorganization of the exhibitions. In the 1926 Annual Report it was revealed that "the creation of a series of habitat groups [was] under consideration" (Annual Report 1926:6). In 1927 it was reported that a model of a Plains "habitat group" was ready, consisting of a "Sarcee tipi, fully furnished, two women painting a record of war exploits on a blanket" (Annual Report 1927:5). It appears that a full scale group was never carried out after this model, and it is unclear whether or not the model was ever exhibited.

³¹ The same development could be observed in the American Museum of Natural History, where a lot of items from Boas' 1899 installation were placed in storage just ten years later (Jonaitis 1988). See also Witteborg with regard to the development of exhibition design at the AMNH (1958).

Changes were made in the west wing hall as well. Fig. 11 shows the hall in 1934. In general, the space was utilized in a more effective way. Large cases and objects were placed along the walls and the low table cases in the centre gave a less claustrophobic atmosphere. The material in the cases had been revised, rearranged and re-labelled. A model of a Kwakiutl village, scale 1 inch to 1 foot, was constructed and exhibited at the Central Canadian Exhibition in Ottawa in 1936 and then in the lobby of the museum (Annual Report 1936:12). It was then incorporated in the permanent ethnological displays (National Museums 1939).

The Eskimo section remained in the west wing. In 1934 it was augmented by an "Eskimo igloo habitat group" (fig.12) which was "the first of what is hoped will be numerous natural-scaled or reduced-scale reproductions of the modes of life of the native people of Canada" (Annual Report 1934:8).³² In 1939 another life-size figure had been added to the Eskimo display, "an Eskimo hunter watching over the breathing-hole of a seal," and one more life size figure was reported finished at the same time portraying an "Indian trapper" (Annual Report 1947:4). These may have been the only full scale figures to be completed and installed during this period (National Museums 1939; National Museum [1954]). The planned implementation of "numerous" life-groups thus never materialized during this period, probably due to economic restraints.

³² This seems to confirm the fact that no full sized groups had in fact been installed earlier.

In 1938-39 the west centre hall was reported "almost finished," while the west wing was still being revised. During the 1930s the biology division of the museum completed several large habitat groups, first a bison group, then a musk oxen group and a polar bear group (Russell 1961:27). As a result the biology division needed more exhibition space and acquired half of the west centre hall from Anthropology. Loris Russell, then Director of the Natural History Branch of the Museum, wrote in 1961,

the [zoological] displays were moved into the west-centre hall of the second floor, here restricting the ethnological displays to half the space they had formerly occupied. However, Douglas Leechman and W.G. Roberts completely redesigned these exhibits so that a more attractive presentation resulted. The west hall of the second floor was also redesigned during the late thirties, incorporating the Plains Indian material and the material representing the West Coast Indians and the Eskimos. An improvement was the new arrangement of exhibits by topics rather than by tribes (Russell 1961:27-29).

The reduction of exhibition space to one and a half halls is verified by other reports³³. The organization according to topics, rather than tribes, appears to have been completed along with this reorganization described by Russell. Whereas Sapir's first exhibitions had been closely modelled on Franz Boas' idea of tribal organization, the 1939 anthropological exhibitions were organized according to systematized subjects, the anthropological 'categories' of field research. A main problem with the tribal organization in regard to visual display was

³³ The *Annual Reports* for these years do not indicate a reduction of anthropological exhibition space or a reorganization of the exhibits. By 1954, however, such a development seems to have been completed (National Museum [1954]:6-7).

that the collections usually revealed a very uneven amount and quality of material from various tribes. In the 1939 exhibits, tribal attribution would have appeared only on the specimen labels, as objects from different tribes were exhibited together to illustrate the following categories: "food," "fishing," "hunting," "dwellings," "dress," "transport," "religion," "social life" and "art" (National Museums 1939). Russell's remark that these exhibits represented an improvement is understandable in terms of the visual impression and orderliness they represented. The 1939 exhibits communicated both visually, and explained, with signs and labels, how the material was organized.

This change was most likely the result of gradual alterations, rather than a dramatic new orientation. Boas' recommendations had been adjusted to practical museum use. The more finished displays of the 1930s were not different in approach from the exhibits of 1915. They were, however, more explicit in their communication as they revealed the ethnographic classification upon which the research had been based. The presentation of objects was rooted firmly in the scientific ethnographic position of the West.

This difference in appearance between the 1915 exhibits and the 1939 exhibits points to the centrality of a debate between scholarship and presentation that continues to be a major issue for contemporary museums. Most recently MacDonald and Alsford have presented a museum history that distinguishes between the "traditionalists" who (still) regard the artifacts and the collections as

of primary importance, and others who believe that education of the public is the most important concern for the museum (1989:34-35). This perspective expresses in contemporary terms the so-called "new museum idea" which was promoted between 1890-1910 (Sheets-Pyenson 1988:4-8), as a result of which education came to be seen as the primary purpose of the museum.³⁴

SUMMARY.

The modern anthropology exhibit is a relative newcomer in the museum world. In the U.S. National Museum's organization of ethnological material in evolutionary series in the 1880s we encountered an early example of a museum exhibit design that reflected the underlying scientific theory of cultural evolutionism.

Boas' Northwest Coast Hall in the American Museum of Natural History was almost contemporary with the Smithsonian displays. However, Boas strongly disputed evolutionism, and he sought to have 'his' exhibits reflect this. His aim was not fully accomplished, as his reflections in the 1907 article in *Science* revealed. In his 1907 statements (1907:927-928) Boas identified a conflict between scholarly goals and popular educational entertainment in the development of the ethnology exhibit which has only recently been addressed by contemporary critics. Boas realized that there are problems inherent in representing other cultures by means of a

³⁴ Most museum historians share this perspective. For some of the clearest statements, see Witteborg 1953; Hudson 1975 and 1987; Sheets-Pyenson 1988 and MacDonald 1989.

museum exhibition. The early Canadian anthropology exhibits in the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa represent what is usually seen as typical 'Boasian' exhibits. The first installations were directly modelled on Boas' organization according to tribes. Later the installations were adjusted, revised and the organization of the material more explicitly indicated. In all three examples analyzed in this chapter the organization of material reflected scientific theories and research methods, but to different degrees. Whereas the evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century anthropology lent themselves to instructive, visual displays, the developing Boasian theories encountered fundamental difficulties in the efforts to give visual forms to anthropological insights by means of the museum exhibit.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER ONE.

- Fig. 1 Museum construction, diagram after Frese (1960:10)
- Fig. 2 U.S. National Museum, c.1890: Showcase showing the evolution of spindles, shuttles and looms. Jacknis (1985:78)
- Fig. 3 American Museum of Natural History, North Pacific Hall, c. 1902. Jonaitis (1988:206)
- Fig. 4 American Museum of Natural History, North Pacific Hall. Case of Bella Coola Masks, c.1905. Jonaitis (1988:208)
- Fig. 5 American Museum of Natural History, North Pacific Hall. Life group exhibit of the "Uses of Cedar," c. 1904. Jonaitis (1988:152)
- Fig. 6 Canadian Anthropology Hall, 1915. National Museums of Canada. Ottawa. 29153
- Fig. 7 Canadian Anthropology Hall, 1915. National Museums of Canada. Ottawa. 29154
- Fig. 8 Detail: showcase, Canadian Anthropology Hall, 1915. National Museums of Canada. Ottawa. 29152
- Fig. 9 Floor plan, 1926. Zaslow (1975:48)
- Fig. 10 Plains-Plateau installation, Anthropology Hall, 1934. National Museums of Canada. Ottawa. 78191
- Fig. 11 West Wing Hall, 1934. Russell (1961)
- Fig. 12 Eskimo Igloo habitat group, 1934. National Museums of Canada. Ottawa. 77499

Time-distribution of the origins of museums.

The diagrams show the number of existing anthropology museums founded in each of the periods indicated, with respect to Northern and Western Europe, and to the U.S.A. and Canada. (Frese 1960:10)

FIG. 1

U.S. National Museum case, ca. 1890, showing the typological evolution of spindles, shuttles, and looms (negative number 21389, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution).

FIG. 2

FIG. 3

FIG. 4.

FIG. 5

FIG. 6.

FIG. 7.

FIG. 8 .

Geological Survey, Canada

Floor plan of Victoria Memorial Museum. The horizontally shaded part is occupied by the National Art Gallery and the oblique shaded parts by the Geological Survey and administrative offices of the Department of Mines. 1—Entrance hall, which reaches the full height of the building. 2—Galleries around entrance hall on second, third, and fourth floors. 3—Lecture hall, with gallery on second floor. 4—Library, two stories in height. 5—Paleontological exhibits. 6—Offices and collections of biological division. 7—Biological exhibits. 8, 9—Anthropological exhibits. 10—Offices of anthropological division. 11—Work rooms for preparation of biological and paleontological exhibits. Elevators are represented in solid black.

FIG. 9.

FIG. 10

FIG. 11.

FIG. 12

CHAPTER 2

EARLY AMERICAN ART EXHIBITIONS.

PRIMITIVE ART AND PRIMITIVISM IN MODERN ART.

While anthropologists like Otis Mason and William Henry Holmes of the U.S. National Museum had included 'the arts' as part of their study of 'primitive' peoples towards the end of last century, a very different approach to native art developed during the first decades of the twentieth century. For several decades a subjective aesthetic attitude toward Primitive Art dominated (Goldwater 1938).³⁵ Just as eighteenth century intellectuals had used myths about 'the primitive', the 'Noble Savage', as instruments of contemporary social criticism (Rubin 1984 1:6), twentieth century European modernist artists championed 'the primitive' – 'primitive' art, rather than primitive life – in order to criticize artistic conventions.

Art historian Robert Goldwater, in his seminal work *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 1938, described the phenomenon that a sequence of artistic generations (expressionist, cubist, abstract, surrealist) were attracted to Primitive Art. He described this as the artists "taking over" from the ethnologists (Goldwater 1938:274). During a period of about fifty years in this century, modern art was profoundly influenced by non-Western art – starting with some African and Oceanic tribal art

³⁵ I use the term Primitive Art to describe the way in which modernist Western artists in the first half of this century referred to the art of non-Western peoples. The term cites the art-historical category (cf. Price 1989). For discussions of terminology see Goldwater 1938, Anderson 1979 and 1989, Rubin 1984.

Other forces were at work in the United States which also eventually contributed to the reclassification of native American art from ethnographical objects to works of art. A key factor was the existence of a craft tradition among native peoples of the Southwest, the Pueblo and the Navajo, which impressed many non-natives interested in art (Schrader 1983). The American painter John Sloan was one of the people who was deeply impressed by the native art traditions as well as by contemporary Indian painting (La Farge 1931:109). He became an advocate of contemporary Indian art and arranged an exhibition of works by San Ildefonso painters in New York in the 1920s. In 1931 he assembled a large-scale exhibition in cooperation with the anthropologist Oliver La Farge in the Grand Central Galleries in New York called "Exposition of Indian Tribal Art" (Schrader 1983). A publication was put together "to accompany the first exhibition of American Indian art selected entirely with consideration of aesthetic value," as the title page announced (La Farge 1931). In the 1930s, with President Roosevelt's New Deal, a change took place in official American policy towards the native Indian population away from assimilation toward an emphasis on cultural diversity and the encouragement of 'Indianness'. This new attitude supported the work of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board - an institution that promoted contemporary Indian arts and crafts as a means to improve the sociological situation of the American Indians and preserve their distinctiveness (Schrader 1983).

One of the earliest shows to present African tribal art in America was held in November-December of 1914 in New York at Alfred Stieglitz' Gallery "291" (fig.1). The title of the exhibition organized by artist and collector Marius de Zayas was "Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art" (Levin 1984).³⁹ The next show at the Stieglitz Gallery presented both African tribal art and modern works by Picasso, Braque and others (fig. 2).⁴⁰ The fact that Primitive Art was exhibited in a gallery devoted to Western avant-garde art suggested an affinity between the two. The contemporary design of the installation by Edward Steichen further emphasized this. When galleries that were committed to the promotion of modern art showed Primitive Art, they demonstrated that they considered this art equal to the other art promoted and shown in the gallery. When Primitive Art was displayed side by side with modern art, this 'equalization' was emphasized even further. Instead of serving Western science as 'specimens' locked up in the glass cases of the ethnographic museum, the same objects could now be appreciated in a new way — as art.

Palette Gallery in November-December 1916. This show became the point of departure for a Parisian vogue for "art nègre" (Paudrat 1984:155).

³⁹ Robert Coady was probably the first in New York to show Primitive Art in his gallery during the spring of 1914 (Levin 1984:464).

⁴⁰ My sources refer to only one African exhibit at Stieglitz' Gallery, the 1914 show, which took place from November 3-December 8 (Paudrat 1984:153). The installation photograph and accompanying text reproduced in Paudrat (fig.2) seems, however, to indicate that a second exhibition took place in "1914-1915" which *combined* tribal and modern art. Since other sources do not refer to the presence of modern art in the 1914 exhibition (Levin 1984, Paudrat 1984), I believe there must have been two different shows.

By the 1920s a general interest in Primitive Art was well-established within art circles, including not only experimental art-galleries, but also museums, as the following examples illustrate. At the Denver Art Museum, Frederic Douglas had been exhibiting native art since the mid-1920s (Cole 1985:285), and during these years the Brooklyn Museum rearranged some of its ethnographic material as 'masterpieces' of Primitive Art (Rushing 1988:47-48). In Germany, the Folkwang Museum in Hagen had exhibited paintings by modern Expressionists with Primitive Art before 1921 (fig.4).

NORTH AMERICAN NATIVE ART.

African and Oceanic art belonged to the first wave of Primitive Art to enthuse European and American artists and collectors. North American native art, and Northwest Coast and Inuit art⁴¹ in particular, later came to play a similar role - especially for the Surrealists. Cowling has documented how the Surrealists' interest in Northwest Coast and Inuit art predates their arrival in the United States in the early 1940s (1978). The earliest exhibition to show Northwest Coast objects as *art* may have been a show called "Objects of Indigenous American Art" in 1920 at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London. This show displayed mainly Meso-American pieces, but also included "twenty-one Northwest Coast items" (Cole 1985:284). In his preface to the exhibition catalogue, C.H. Read of the British Museum stated

⁴¹ The terms "Inuit art" and "native art" are terms that reflect the current usage when referring to traditional and contemporary art made by North American native artists.

that this was the first exhibition, at least in England, to view "autochthonous" American art as "art" (Cole 1985:284). The 1936 exhibition "Exposition d'Objects Surréalistes" held in Paris (fig.3) displayed objects made or found by the members of the group side by side with "Melanesian carvings, Pueblo Indian 'kachina' dolls, Pre-Columbian pottery and Eskimo masks" (Cowling 1978:497). Prior to the 1936 exhibit, a few shows including Northwest Coast and Inuit art attracted a select, limited, audience (Cowling 1978:486-488). Exhibiting and collecting Northwest Coast and Inuit art was a way in which the Surrealists could express their affinity for these art forms — and validate them as well as their own art.

During the 1940s, when the Surrealists were in exile in the United States, new possibilities arose as the artists gained greater access to both public collections and to a market in North American native art. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, shared the Surrealists' enthusiasm for Northwest Coast sculpture and mythology. In an article about a visit to the North Pacific Hall of the American Museum of Natural History he predicted that:

the time is not far distant when the collections of the Northwest Coast will move from anthropology museums to take their place in art museums among the arts of Egypt, Persia and the Middle Ages (1943:175).

This happened for a brief time in 1946 when one of the Surrealists, Max Ernst, collaborated with the American painter Barnett Newman to curate an exhibition of Northwest Coast painting at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York (Carpenter 1975:10).

Other forces were at work in the United States which also eventually contributed to the reclassification of native American art from ethnographical objects to works of art. A key factor was the existence of a craft tradition among native peoples of the Southwest, the Pueblo and the Navajo, which impressed many non-natives interested in art (Schrader 1983). The American painter John Sloan was one of the people who was deeply impressed by the native art traditions as well as by contemporary Indian painting (La Farge 1931:109). He became an advocate of contemporary Indian art and arranged an exhibition of works by San Ildefonso painters in New York in the 1920s. In 1931 he assembled a large-scale exhibition in cooperation with the anthropologist Oliver La Farge in the Grand Central Galleries in New York called "Exposition of Indian Tribal Art" (Schrader 1983). A publication was put together "to accompany the first exhibition of American Indian art selected entirely with consideration of aesthetic value," as the title page announced (La Farge 1931). In the 1930s, with President Roosevelt's New Deal, a change took place in official American policy towards the native Indian population away from assimilation toward an emphasis on cultural diversity and the encouragement of 'Indianness'. This new attitude supported the work of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board - an institution that promoted contemporary Indian arts and crafts as a means to improve the sociological situation of the American Indians and preserve their distinctiveness (Schrader 1983).

EXHIBITION OF CANADIAN WEST COAST ART. NATIVE AND MODERN, 1927.

In December, 1927, the National Gallery of Canada opened an exhibition of Northwest Coast art, including both native art and works by Canadian artists from Paul Kane to Emily Carr who had "recorded their impressions of that region" (National Gallery of Canada [NGC] 1927).

The Director of the National Gallery, Eric Brown, was aware of the changing regard for native art. In a letter a couple of months prior to the exhibition, he explained that this would be the first time the exhibition of native work was "artistic first and ethnological after."⁴² Whether or not it was the first time an exhibition stressed the aesthetic aspects rather than the ethnographical in a show of North American native art is questionable, given the precedents noted in the introduction to this chapter. Nonetheless, the frequent claims for primacy in displaying native art as art during the 1920s and 1930s testify to the fact that this was perceived as a time of change from an 'objective' ethnographic approach to a subjective attitude to these artifacts as fine art.

The show at the National Gallery of Canada, entitled, "Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art. Native and Modern" seems at the very least to have been the first Canadian museum exhibit to combine native

⁴² Brown to Gibbon, Oct. 10th, 1927. NGC Archives, 5.5-W West Coast Native Art 1927-28.

art and non-native art in the same show. In his introduction to the exhibition Brown explained that the purpose was

to mingle for the first time the art work of the Canadian West Coast tribes with that of our more sophisticated artists in an endeavour to analyze their relationships to one another, if such exist, and particularly to enable this primitive and interesting art to take a definite place as one of the most valuable of Canada's artistic productions. (National Gallery of Canada 1927:2)

As the photographs (figs. 5-10) show, the installation of "Canadian West Coast Art" did indeed "mingle" the two kinds of art. Eric Brown had devoted a whole floor of the National Gallery, then located in the East Wing of the Victoria Memorial Building, to the purpose.⁴³ Fig. 8 gives a view of the long exhibition hall facing East. Its relative spaciousness allowed enough room for paintings and other items to be placed next to each other rather than 'in layers'. Instead, most works, native and non-native, were hung side by side, at eye level, as is customary with paintings. The rest of the installation photographs illustrate sections of the exhibition. A closer examination of these will help determine the exhibition principles used.

In fig. 7 a selection of native and non-native works formed a 'group' located between two doors. The centrepieces were native: on the wall was a "very old" Northwest Coast woven wool blanket from Skateen, and directly underneath it, on a pedestal, a food storage box and a food tray (cat. nos. 113 and 109, National Gallery of Canada 1927). Arranged symmetrically on each side of the blanket were two

⁴³ NGC Archives, 5.5-W West Coast Native Art 1927-28.

groups of five paintings. The four paintings closest to the blanket were in a vertical format, with the two smallest closest to the centre on both sides. All four paintings were depictions of totem poles by Emily Carr.⁴⁴ Four small horizontal *Rocky Mountain sketches* (cat. no. 80, National Gallery of Canada 1927) by Vancouver artist Charles C. Scott were located two above each other on each side to harmonize with the group of vertical pictures. A pair of decorated native paddles - hung vertically on the wall, one on each side - completed this 'group'.

Fig. 9 shows a very similar grouping of objects: in the centre on the wall was a large painted partition board, and directly underneath, placed on a pedestal covered by a rush-mat, were a carved and painted chest and a small decorated settee. All of these were the work of the Tsimshian people (cat.nos. 107, 108, National Gallery of Canada 1927). Eight non-native paintings were arranged symmetrically, four on either side of the native works. The four immediately to the left and right of the partition board were portraits of Tsimshian chiefs wearing frontlets, possibly by Edwin Holgate.⁴⁵ The four remaining vertical paintings were totem pole 'portraits,' most likely by Emily Carr.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ To the right, closest to the centre: *Totem Poles, Skidegate, Queen Charlott Islands*; and next to it: *Sitka, Totem Pole, Alaska* (cat. nos. 17 and 16, National Gallery of Canada 1927)

⁴⁵ See fig. 11 for an example of Holgate's style in some of his works included in the exhibition (Barbeau 1928:182).

⁴⁶ See fig. 12 for an example of Carr's totem pole pictures. (Barbeau 1950-51, vol. 2:488)

The formal arrangement of works in an aesthetically pleasing way was the main principle of installation in these examples. Works were grouped according to size, format, and possibly, colour. They were arranged symmetrically, often with smaller works on either side of larger ones. Native works were not grouped together, but placed adjacent to the non-native works.

Although a relation may be found between the great Tsimshian partition board in fig. 9 and the exhibition of portraits of Tsimshian chiefs next to it - this kind of relationship was not used systematically in the exhibition. The exhibition of the Chilkat robes illustrates this point. The Skateen blanket in fig. 7 was listed in the catalogue under "Chilkat Robes." The catalogue text explained that the present style of Chilkat robes we know today goes back "at least a hundred years." The Tlingit weavers of the village Chilkat were the traditional makers of Chilkat robes; however, explained the catalogue, "the Niska (Tsimshian) claim that their women also knew how to make similar blankets in the old days," and continued, "... the very old Skateen blanket, exhibited in the southern room, and collected on the upper Nass, is said to be of Niska make ... it is of unique historical value" as the Skateen blanket may be a precursor for the 'classic' Chilkats (NGC 1927:11-12). Besides the Skateen blanket (fig.7), two 'classic' Chilkats were in the exhibition. One can be seen in fig. 8 to the right of the door on the far wall. This Chilkat robe was displayed with a small mask centred immediately above it, and one on either side of it. Centred directly beneath it on a pedestal were two kerfed food storage

boxes (one on top of the other). Together these items constituted an entity similar to the 'trophy-displays' of an earlier era.⁴⁷ Immediately to the right of the Chilkat, also at eye-level, was A.Y. Jackson's painting of the native village of Kispayaks, (Barbeau 1932:332) and underneath this another large kerfed food tray. Thus, the exhibition did not emphasize the connection the catalogue pointed out between the classic Chilkats and the Skateen blanket.

The exhibition did not exploit another possibility inherent in the material in the exhibition, namely a juxtaposition of the actual Chilkat blanket and a painting illustrating how such blankets were worn as ceremonial robes by some chiefs. The exhibition included several such representations: Paul Kane's *Babine Chief* (cat.no.48), W. Langdon Kihn's *Chief Earthquake* (Leechman 1928:332), and the painting which can be seen on the left in fig. 10. In the exhibition, the Chilkat robes were displayed in three different locations, each as a focal point for a group of objects. Each was treated as a unique work of art and displayed because of its own aesthetic merits.

Similar formal (aesthetic) principles lay behind the display of the other native works in the exhibition. There was no attempt in the installation to group native objects together in 'categories,' as was the custom in ethnographic displays and as was done in the catalogue (see fig. 14). In an article written five years after the exhibition, Marius Barbeau explained that, in the exhibition, native wood carvings and

⁴⁷ Frese (1960:252) uses the term "trophy display" for the decorative arrangement of ethnographic objects. Often spears and arrows would be displayed radiating from a centre (cf. figs.13-13a).

ancient costumes had been shown "beside modern paintings which illustrated their backgrounds" (1932:337). This appears in fact not to have been the case – except in a very general sense. The installation did not apply a rigid juxtaposition of native objects with paintings that could, to use a current word, contextualize them.

The native objects in this exhibition were displayed intermingled with non-native works in the manner of an art show – the message being: this is art. Stylistic differences between, for example, art from the Northern peoples on one side and the Kwakiutl on the other were acknowledged in the catalogue text:

The Haidas, the Tsimshyan [sic] and the Tlingit, to the north, were by far the best carvers and weavers. Their style was smooth, elaborate and refined... The southern tribes, on the other hand (the Kwakiutl and Nootka), could not boast of like refinement... When they depict animals, the contortions of the face and the body usually belong to caricature rather than sincere realism. (Barbeau in National Gallery of Canada 1927:3)

The Sisiutl (two-headed serpent) in fig. 10 exemplified the 'southern' style of the Kwakiutl, while the painted crest hats underneath were decorated in the 'northern' style. The contrast in style or expression, then, was a principle in the grouping of the native objects in this and other cases, thereby emphasizing the contrast, variety and individuality of the objects.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Compare with the analysis of "Arts of the Raven" below. In that exhibition the stylistic differences between 'northern' and 'southern' styles were emphasized by the installation.

NATIVE OBJECTS AS ART.

As the analysis of the installation of the 1927 show has revealed, native art objects were not treated as ethnographic objects in the way they were displayed. They were not grouped in 'ethnographic categories.' Instead, the more spectacular, large pieces (such as the Chilkat and Skateen blankets, the painted hide or the decorated partition board) served as centrepieces for groups of smaller-scale work, native or non-native. In other cases large, non-native paintings functioned as centre-pieces. The effect of hanging native and non-native works side by side — an Emily Carr painting next to a carved wooden ladle, for example — was similar to what happened when avant-garde artists exhibited their own works side by side with African tribal carvings or other Primitive Art, described earlier in this chapter. It served to validate the non-Western carvings or other art forms as *art*. Similarly, in the 1927 National Gallery show the incorporation of the native pieces into a conventional gallery setting, made a statement that these items were on par not only with the works selected for this exhibition but also with the Western art-tradition in general. Northwest Coast weaving, carvings, and other items were here transformed from ethnographic objects (all were museum items, most of them lent by the National Museum) into works of art — a transition which was accomplished by the installation.

'MODERN' ART.

While the selection of native works included in the exhibition was undoubtedly the responsibility of Marius Barbeau of the National Museum, Eric Brown's selection of artists and works for the 'modern' part appears to have been at least influenced by Barbeau.⁴⁹ This section included eight works by Paul Kane resulting from his trip across Canada to the west coast between 1846-48⁵⁰ and Frederick Bell-Smith's *Mist and Glaciers of the Selkirks* from 1911, a rugged Rocky Mountain landscape rendered in a romantic fashion. The term 'modern' used in the title by the organizers of the exhibition is therefore not to be taken in the usual art-historical sense of 'avant-garde' or even 'twentieth century.' Apart from Kane and Bell-Smith, though, all other artists were contemporary. Emily Carr was the main contributor, with twenty-six paintings, forty items of pottery and four hooked rugs in the exhibition (NGC 1927; Hembroff-Schleicher 1978:117). Both Brown and Barbeau praised her enthusiastically to the press and considered her the greatest "find" in the exhibition. Most of the Carr paintings included in this show dated from 1912-13, a very productive period in the artist's life (Reid 1973:156). They were the results both of a commitment Carr had made in 1907 to paint the totem poles and Indian villages of the West Coast "before they are a thing of the past" (Cole 1985:282) and of a trip to France in

⁴⁹ See letter from Barbeau to Brown, dated 3rd Oct. 1927, in which Barbeau discusses the choice of a number of artists (NGC Archives 5.5-W West Coast Native Art 1927-28).

⁵⁰ From the Osler Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum.

1911 in order to familiarize herself with more modern painting styles (Shadbolt 1979). Among the other artists were Edwin Holgate, represented with thirteen works, among them *Gitsegyula* (Barbeau 1928:167) and the portrait of *Chief Githawn, Salmon-Person* (Barbeau 1932:333). A.Y. Jackson's paintings in the exhibition included, for example, *Kispayaks Village* and his *Gitsegyula Village* (Barbeau 1928:70;54), and Annie Savage was represented with her oil *Temlaham, Upper Skeena River* (Barbeau 1928:222).⁵¹ Pegi Nicol exhibited four portraits, and Florence Wyle two plaster relief heads and a group of totem pole plaster models (NGC 1927).⁵² The Winnipeg artist Walter J. Phillips exhibited a "colour print" with motif from Alert Bay, and a couple of temperas and a water colour from Mamalilicoola.⁵³ The Rocky Mountains were the theme in several artists' contributions, Vancouver artist Charles H. Scott, and Group of Seven members Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald and Fred Varley - who all exhibited "sketches" (NGC 1927). The American painter William Langdon Kihn was represented with twelve works, many of them portraits of native people, such as *Chief Earthquake* (Leechman 1928:332).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Reproduced in Barbeau under the title *Where the Native "Paradise Lost" of Temlaham Used to Stand* (1928:222).

⁵² The works of these three female artists were most likely the results of trips to Skeena suggested by Barbeau (Barbeau 1932; Luckyj 1983:94).

⁵³ NGC Archives, 5.5 -W West Coast Native Art 1927-28.

⁵⁴ Other works by Kihn are reproduced in Barbeau (1928:3:22:38). Kihn's works were not listed in the catalogue (NGC 1927), but appear on a separate typewritten list (NGC Archives, 5.5 -W West Coast Native Art 1927-28).

What these artists had in common was subject matter; they depicted the landscapes of the Northwest Coast and its native population in their representational art. In one respect, therefore, the juxtaposition of native and Western art differed from the avant-garde shows described earlier in this chapter. "Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art. Native and Modern" could not claim an affinity between the non-native and the native art similar to that of the avant-garde shows. Such an affinity was based on the rejection of certain Western art conventions by modernist artists, who instead adopted some of the formal solutions found in Primitive Art. In the Canadian West Coast exhibition the 'modern' artists on display were Canadian or American non-native artists, Western artists, working fully within the Western representational art tradition, who had adopted West coast subjects and themes for their art.

A NATIONAL ART.

Although the relationship of direct artistic influence between the native and the 'modern' art, which the exhibition set out to explore (cf. Brown National Gallery of Canada 1927:2), was *not* emphasized in the installation, the concept of a direct relationship between native and 'modern' West Coast art was nevertheless pursued in contemporary exhibition reviews. Speaking to the *Ottawa Citizen* just before the exhibition opened, Barbeau claimed that the idea underlying the show was

that the artistic work of the western Indians has so much character and life to it, so much which modern artists

find inspiring, and so much which is distinctively Canadian and which might well be used to help form the basis of a national art, that the promoters of the exhibition decided to put on a show which would include the aboriginal art, both ancient and modern, and, through the paintings of modern artists, show the reaction [sic] it had on white painters (Ottawa Citizen 1927a).

Douglas Leechman (also of the National Museum) explained in *The Studio*

Side by side with the work of Indian craftsmen are shown pictures, sculpture, pottery and textiles by modern Canadian artists, *owing their inspiration to the native designers* (1928:331; my italics).

Similarly the *Montreal Gazette* stated that "the present-day paintings show the wealth of material that they [the native works] provide for decoration and design" (1928). The *Toronto Globe* suggested that industrial leaders "seeking something purely Canadian in design" should consider the "Canadian West Coast Art" exhibition for inspiration:

Perhaps the white leaders of today can do something to perpetuate the Indian's art, even though done by "mass production" (1928).

Guy Rhoades in *Saturday Night* agreed and found "the usefulness" of the native art to lie in the way it might be adopted in the decorative arts of today, pointing to Emily Carr's pottery and hooked rugs as an example (1927).⁵⁵ Brown had done the same in the exhibition catalogue where he referred to "Miss Emily Carr ... whose pictures of

⁵⁵ The idea that native art could serve as a source of inspiration for modern Canadian design had already been promoted for several years by Harlan I. Smith, an archaeologist of the National Museum notably in his *An Album of Prehistoric Art* (1923).

[native art] and designs translated into pottery, rugs and other objects, form one of the most interesting features of the exhibition (National Gallery of Canada 1927:1).⁵⁶ Brown lamented the disappearance of the traditional native Northwest Coast art as "more regrettable than can be imagined." However, he claimed,

Enough ... remains ... to provide an invaluable mine of decorative design which is available to the student for a host of different purposes and possessing for the Canadian artist the unique quality of being entirely national in its origin and character (National Gallery of Canada 1927:2).

A relationship was here postulated in which the white Euro-Canadian - "Westcoast art," as represented in this exhibition, was seen as an heir to historic (or prehistoric) *native* art. The native Northwest Coast art was seen as the original *Canadian* art (with indigenous motifs and materials), but it was considered doomed, due to contact with white culture. White Canadian artists were encouraged to claim aboriginal art as part of their national heritage in their quest to create a "true Canadian art." A similarly nationalist argument which encouraged Indian motifs as a basis for a national art was also being put forward in the United States at this time by contemporary artists such as Marsden Hartley and Max Weber (Levin 1984).⁵⁷ The nationalist argument was used to the extent that it was convenient.

⁵⁶ Two of Emily Carr's hooked rugs can be seen in fig. 9. On the wall to the far left, the "Raven rug," and on the far right, the "Finnback whale rug." In fig. 6, the rug to the far left is by Emily Carr (NGC archives, 5.5-W West Coast Native Art, 1927-28). For examples of Carr's pottery with Indian motifs, see fig. 15.

⁵⁷ The National Gallery show did in fact show both native and non-native works which, strictly speaking, originated outside Canada's borders - the Chilkat Blankets

In retrospect the attitude to Canadian native art and crafts expressed by organizers and reviewers of the 1927 show was patronizing, advocating appropriation of native culture in Canada to establish a distinctive Canadian national art. In Canada at this time assimilation of native people was official policy (Hill 1984; Duffek 1983). A native arts or craft production was not encouraged officially until 1937 when a marketing programme was established under the Welfare and Training Division, a Branch of Indian Affairs (Nicks 1990:14). The aim of this programme was to develop marketable crafts in an endeavour to alleviate the increasing need for economic aid to Indian communities during the Depression (Nicks 1990:14). Commercial production was of prime importance in this project, whereas preservation of arts and crafts for their cultural or historical significance was not even a consideration (Nicks 1990:15). At a non-official level, however, the Canadian Handicraft Guild in Montreal⁵⁸ had been lobbying for some time for government programmes of this kind in order to encourage good native crafts to be produced. This the Guild saw as vital to the preservation of "Indian culture" (Hill 1984:16).⁵⁹

of the Tlingit (inhabiting the Alaskan coast), and the contemporary New York artist W. Langdohn Kihn.

⁵⁸ Founded in 1906 on the basis of the Women's Art Association of Montreal, which was founded in 1900 (Hill 1984:16)

⁵⁹ In British Columbia the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Arts and Crafts, was founded in 1940 by Alice Ravenhill in an effort to accomplish the same thing (Hill 1984:17).

INDIAN ART OF THE UNITED STATES, 1941.

The biggest and most influential exhibition of this period to promote North American native objects as art, "Indian Art of the United States" opened on January 22, 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA] in New York. This was not the first exhibition at that Museum to feature the art of non-Western societies as *art*.⁶⁰ According to several scholars, however, it was probably the most influential exhibition in terms of its effect on the public's perception of a non-Western art tradition (Rushing 1988:3).⁶¹

D'Harmoncourt's 'design strategy' in the 1941 exhibition was an elaboration of ideas tried earlier on a smaller scale at the 1939 "Golden Gate International Exposition" in San Francisco. In both cases, the purpose was to validate contemporary Indian arts and crafts as fine art. In the San Francisco exhibition, this compatibility was demonstrated in the presentations at the end of the exhibition, a gallery of temporary exhibits displayed in two model rooms and in an Indian court yard (fig. 16). The gallery presented fine examples of Indian arts and crafts solely as works of art (Schrader 1983). The court yard included craft demonstrations by native craftsmen and

⁶⁰ Earlier exhibitions at the MoMA included "American Sources of Modern Art" (1933), which had attempted to show an affinity between modern, Aztec, Maya, and Inca art; "African Negro Art" (1935); and "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" (1940) (Rushing 1988:2-3).

⁶¹ The following presentation is based to a large extent on W. Jackson Rushing's essay: "René d'Harmoncourt and Indian Art of the United States: Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern" (1988), which will be published in a forthcoming anthology, *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, University of Washington Press, Janet Catherine Berlo (ed.).

artists. The model rooms were furnished to prove "how effectively fine Indian products blend with contemporary backgrounds, contributing new colour and new forms to any modern home" (d'Harnoncourt qtd. in Rushing 1988:19). The design strategy d'Harnoncourt developed to promote the compatibility of Indian art and the modern home was to "emphasize the contemporary quality in both the Indian work and the display apparatus." The latter should be "very contemporary and Fifth Avenue in the best sense of the word" (d'Harnoncourt qtd. in Rushing 1988:6). In the store, special care was taken to emphasize "Fifth Avenue," the exclusive visual emphasis of modern commercial design rather than a romantic period look or a museum atmosphere. Items were displayed as modern commodities, and not systematically according to which tribe or area they came from (Schrader 1983).

As a background to understanding the contemporary Indian material in the San Francisco exhibition, d'Harnoncourt provided a number of displays which served as "an introduction to North American Indian cultures." As the same approach was followed in the 1941 exhibition it is worth dwelling on this aspect of the 1939 exhibition here.⁶² Historical Indian art was presented as a series of culture area installations: The Eskimo Hunters; The Northern Fishermen; The Hunters of the Plains; The Seed Gatherers of California; The Woodsmen of the Eastern Forests; the Pueblo Farmers;

⁶² Schrader 1983 provides a very detailed account of the physical installation of the 1939 exposition, whereas the available descriptions of the 1941 exhibition are not as detailed in this regard.

the Desert Dwellers; The Navajo Weavers; the Navajo Silversmiths; and the Navajo Sandpainters (cf. fig. 16). Much care was taken to evoke the right atmosphere in each of the galleries through colour coding, dramatic lighting and the proportions and shapes of the rooms (Schrader 1983). A "totem pole tower," for instance, displayed trunks of totem poles and monumental Northwest Coast sculpture in a highly evocative setting. The tower was 50 feet high and was painted in horizontal bands of grey, which became gradually lighter from bottom to top to suggest the foggy atmosphere of the Northwest Coast (Schrader 1983:188; fig. 17). Next to the Northwest Coast galleries, was the wide Plains room, with a high ceiling flooded with bright, diffused light. The display units here were kept low to help give the impression of unlimited space (Schrader 1983:186). The Eastern Woodlands room, by contrast, had been designed "to give the visitors a feeling of being enclosed" (Schrader 1983:186). Wooden columns were placed in this room "to suggest the interior of a forest." Stylized green canvas leaves were hung from the ceiling, helping to create "the impression of following a forest pathway" (Schrader 1983:189). The Pueblo room was circular, to symbolize the spiritual and economic cycle of the Pueblo farmers; the ceiling was sky blue, the walls white, and the display platform an adobe colour. In the Navajo section, too, the colours were highly suggestive of the natural environment: the walls were white, the partitions turquoise blue, and the slanting platforms on which the weavers' products were displayed were

painted a deep orange colour to resemble the colour of the sandstone cliffs of the Navajo regions (Schrader 1983:190).

D'Harnoncourt's elaborate displays at the 1939 International Exposition attracted much attention, and the invitation to mount a similar exhibition of Indian art at the Museum of Modern Art was a direct result of the success in San Francisco (Schrader 1983). D'Harnoncourt was able to elaborate on his exhibition strategy in the 1941 exhibition, so the MoMA-exhibition came to include three levels, instead of two as in San Francisco. In addition to the contemporary and the historic, contextualizing exhibits, a 'pure art' display was added (Rushing 1988).

The three sections were called Prehistoric Art, Art of Living Cultures, and Art for Modern Living, and each of these levels occupied an entire floor at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition in New York started on the third floor with a selection of prehistoric pieces chosen "for their aesthetic value only" and installed "as one would install any gallery of small sculpture using simple pedestals and cases standing before plain walls" (Rushing 1988:25). This was the pure art-display which supplemented the 'design strategy' of the 1939 exhibition (fig.18). There were, however, a couple of remarkable exceptions to the 'gallery-style' of this display. One was a darkened gallery, built as a series of kivas⁶³ lit only through the top of each space, thus creating the feeling of 'being there'. These dark chambers

⁶³ A "kiva" in the Pueblo-cultures of the Southwest is a ceremonial chamber symbolizing the opening into which the first people emerged from the earth.

were the surroundings for adobe panels with reproduced prehistoric Pueblo murals. Another was the installation of a full-scale (12.5 by 60 feet) canvas mural reproduction of pictographs from Barrier Canyon, Utah (Douglas and d'Harnoncourt 1941:97f).

On the second floor, Living Cultures presented historic art in evocative settings, much as had been done at San Francisco (Schrader 1983). Emphasis was given to the aesthetic qualities of the objects. In the Northwest Coast display, for example, a selection of masks was exhibited in their own space and lit from below to indicate their status as individual masterpieces (Rushing 1988:28). Although the overall purpose of the displays on the second floor was to contextualize the historic art, they clearly reflected the clean, streamlined look of contemporary modern design (Rushing 1988:28).

The first floor of the exhibition was devoted to Indian Art for Modern Living and consisted of three galleries. One contained contemporary painting and sculpture; one was a "study gallery" focusing on contemporary Indian art's contribution to modern life through an installation of objects, charts and texts; and the last was devoted to "Indian contributions to modern decorative arts" (Rushing 1988). For d'Harnoncourt this final gallery was of vital importance. To him, the enrichment of contemporary culture was Indian art's "concrete contribution" to modern American society. He was convinced that the viewers would realize the value of contemporary Indian art when they were shown that it harmonized with the artistic concepts of modernism (Rushing 1988:30).

"Indian Art of the United States" is one of the landmark exhibitions of native North American art. The fact that it was shown at MoMA had in itself very strong validating power, but the exhibition's great influence was undoubtedly due also to its innovative, contemporary design. It was not 'simply' an art exhibition, imposing Western gallery methods on non-Western art forms, but a carefully considered didactic exhibition which was able to deal with the audience's "horizon of expectation" — the exhibition was able to align itself with the audience's previous cultural, ethical, and aesthetic experience vis-a-vis Native America (Rushing 1988:42). It is clear from the critical response cited by Rushing that "Indian Art of the United States" was received enthusiastically by the general public, critics, art lovers and anthropologists alike, and that this was due mainly to the successful design of the installation which was both educational and entertaining (Rushing 1988:4). As Alfred Barr, Jr., said about d'Harnoncourt in 1968:

He avoided both the purely aesthetic isolation and the waxworks of the habitat group... The presentation of the works of art achieved both aesthetic and intellectual delight (qtd. Rushing 1988:5).

D'Harnoncourt himself explained the purpose of the exhibit in this way at the time:

Since we are interested in showing Indian culture through Indian art, and not Indian art as an end in itself, we can never forget the place of each specimen in its native civilization and must consider many points that would be insignificant in an art-for-art's-sake display (qtd. in Rushing 1988:6).

FIG.
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separated by fifteen years. This was probably due to the timing of each. The Canadian exhibition was mounted at possibly the lowest point of native self-esteem in a period of severe external assimilationist pressure (Patterson 1972, Duffek 1983), while the American exhibitions were results of an official policy for encouragement of native cultural independence (Schrader 1983). In the Canadian exhibition the interest in native art was in traditional art, regarded as products of 'a vanished culture'. The aboriginal Canadian art was thus appropriated in the quest to establish a national art. The American exhibits were, by contrast, mounted in an effort to promote distinct contemporary Indian arts and crafts.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO.

- Fig. 1 Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art. Exhibition of African Sculpture at Gallery 291, New York, Nov.-Dec. 1914. Originally published in Camera Work, Oct.1916. Rubin (1984,vol. II:463).
- Fig. 2 Detail of Edward Steichen's installation of works by Braque and Picasso together with African Sculpture at "291," New York, 1914-1915. Rubin (1984,vol. I:152).
- Fig. 3 Exposition d'Objects Surréalistes, 1936. Cowling (1978:486, fig.33)
- Fig. 4 Installation before 1921, Folkwang Museum, Hagen, Germany. Rubin (1984, vol II:380)
- Figs. 5-10 "Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern." National Gallery of Canada, 1927. NGC photo archives.
- Fig. 11 Edwin Holgate: Qawm. A Chief of the Kitselas. Barbeau (1928:182)
- Fig. 12 Emily Carr: A Skidegate totem pole. Barbeau (1950-51,vol. II:488)
- Fig. 13a Trophy-display, Frese (1960:Pl.IV)
- Fig. 13b Trophy-display, Rubin (1984,I:137)
- Fig. 14 Catalogue page, National Gallery of Canada, 1927
- Fig. 15 Emily Carr pottery, displayed in private home. (Tippett 1979:135)
- Fig. 16 Floor plan, Golden Gate International Exhibition. Schrader (1983:187)
- Fig. 17 Fishermen of the Northwest Coast Gallery looking towards totem pole tower, Golden Gate Exhibition. Schrader (1983:65)
- Fig. 18 "Indian Art of the United States," Museum of Modern Art. Photo-archives: Museum of Modern Art.

FIG. 1

Lincoln sculpture at 241 New York November-December 1914 Published in Camera Work October 1917.

View of Edward Steichen's installation of works by Braque and Picasso together with Primitive objects at "291," New York, 1914-15. Left to right: Pablo Picasso, *Bottle and Glass on a Table* 1912, Kota reliquary figure, and wasp nest belonging to the artist Émile Zola. Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz.

FIG. 2

FIG. 3

Fig. 4. Museum display case, Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany.

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FIG.
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FIG.
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FIG.
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FIG.
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FIG.
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FIG. 11

2

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

225

FIG. 12

FIG. 13a

Installation view of Congolese objects at the Exposition Universelle, Brussels, 1897 (in what is now the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale)

FIG. 136

EXHIBITION OF CANADIAN WEST COAST ART

No. 106 CARVED BATONS

The larger of the two beautifully carved batons is Haida, while the smaller is Niska (the northernmost of the three Tsimshian nations). The connoisseur may discern in them the essential characteristics of Haida and Tsimshian art at their best. The first is highly decorative; the style is mature and the lines perfectly smooth and firm, the figures are boldly treated—the beak of the Raven is curved down to fit the shape of the stick. The small Niska staff is none the less the better of the two, for its unique native beauty, the refinement and delicacy of its plastic forms and the finished blend of ancient style and inspired realism.

The Haida baton was a high chief's possession, fondly displayed in tribal ceremonies. The Niska cane was the secret charm of a medicine-man, the presumed reproduction of his magical dreams, wherein spirits appeared to him and enabled him to cure diseases. It was said to become alive during the shamanistic performances of the owner.

(National Museum. The first, from the early collections collected at Hazelton by Marius Barbeau). The second,

No. 107 PAINTED AND CARVED BOARDS

The small boards carved in relief are the work of Haida artists. They represent the Grizzly-bear and the Raven, both the coat-of-arms of leading families on the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Raven with a fine decorative treatment is one of the finest carvings of the kind.

(National Museum. From the early collections)

The cedar board with a low-relief picture of the Finback whale split in halves, is part of a chief's ceremonial settee

(National Museum. Early collections).

The mural painting with a long projecting beak is the largest now in existence and possibly the finest. It is from Gitwinkul, a Tsimshian village. The Songyak—Kingsher—which it represents is a family crest. The board served as rear partition in a feast house; the precincts behind it contained the sacred possessions and the ritualistic mysticacies of the owners.

(National Museum collected by Marius Barbeau)

8

EXHIBITION OF CANADIAN WEST COAST ART

The large carving on the opposite wall represents the Sisutl, a double-headed monster with fins, belonging to the supernatural world of the Kwakwaka'wakw and the Nootka. Its apparition from behind the curtain of mysteries in the feast house caused the ceremonial death of the guests, who were later brought back to life by the host.

(National Museum, from the early collections)

The painted carving over the decorated robe at the entrance also represents the Sisutl, the double-headed monster. It comes from the Nootkas, of Western Vancouver Island. The grotesque style of the Nootkas, as here illustrated, is either a degenerate form of the northern art or, else, it represents an early stage, beyond which the Southern West Coast tribes did not advance.

(National Museum. Collected by E. Sapir)

No. 108 CARVED AND PAINTED CHESTS

The three beautiful chests here exhibited count among the finest specimens of Niska (Tsimshian) handicrafts. One of them, with splendid high relief carving, represents the Beaver, an emblem of the owner. The other, in the same room, represents the Grizzly-bear sitting up, also a family badge. The third, and largest, is decorated in flat conventional style, like most of the painted boxes.

These were used by a few high chiefs of the Tsimshian. It was their exclusive privilege to sit and dance on these boxes in the winter festivals of their tribes.

(National Museum, Montreal Art Gallery). The Royal Ontario Museum Collected by Marius Barbeau.

No. 109 FOOD BOXES AND TRAYS

The Haidas and the Bella Bellas made and traded with other tribes innumerable boxes and trays of this kind, which were used for storing or transporting food. Some of these articles are beautifully ornamented with painted figures and low relief carvings. The four sides of the boxes are from single cedar slabs, steamed and folded at the corners. As they were a trade article their designs are not coats-of-arms, but merely conventional figures, without ideographic significance.

9

FIG. 14

Emily's curio pottery displayed in Kate Mather's home. Courtesy Mrs Charles S. Band.

FIG
16

The totem pole display was an awesome sight seen from the Gallery of the Fishermen of the Northwest Coast. (National Archives)

FIG. 17

CHAPTER 3

ART AND CULTURE IN RECENT CANADIAN EXHIBITIONS.

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO CANADIAN NATIVE CULTURE.

In Canada the most significant museum exhibitions of Indian art as art have been concerned with Northwest Coast art. Two landmark exhibitions that need to be examined in this context are the exhibition "Arts of the Raven" at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1967, and the permanent installation in the new Museum of Anthropology, at the University of British Columbia [UBC], Vancouver, which opened in 1976. These displays were intended to stimulate popular recognition of Northwest Coast artifacts as art. A third example is the new anthropological exhibit opened in January 1977 at the British Columbia Provincial Museum. The ethnology installation, "First Peoples of British Columbia," will be analyzed as exemplifying a contemporary anthropological museum installation.

In the previous chapters it was important to turn to American examples in order to illustrate general tendencies which influenced Canadian examples. When dealing with the more recent history of the 1960s and 1970s, the Canadian exhibitions stand independently as clear statements which reflect our specific history. Before turning to the examples, a brief outline of some of the historical and political events which have influenced the cultural climate of the 1960s and 1970s to favour native Indian art is in order.

Prior to the 1960s the official policy in Canada towards native people can be described as assimilationist. As early as 1830, steps were taken to assimilate the native population:

The intention of civil government, now that Indians no longer were militarily useful, was to concentrate Indians in settled areas, or reserves; to subject them to as much proselytization, schooling, and instruction in agriculture as "circumstances" made necessary; and to do these things at least in part with the Indians' own funds. The strategy was based on an assumption that complete assimilation was "the only possible euthenasia of savage communities." (Miller 1989:99-100)

The Indian Act of 1876 enshrined the paternalistic attitude of white society towards the native population. In efforts to Christianize and 'civilize' the native Indian population, amendments to the Indian Act made some important cultural manifestations in native cultures illegal. Examples are the Potlatch of the Northwest Coast peoples which was prohibited from 1884 to 1951, and the Sundance ceremony of the Plains tribes, which was outlawed through amendments to the Indian Act during the 1920s (Hill 1984:13). Educational programs, especially residential schools, isolated native children from their parents and from their traditional habits, customs and languages. These programs were intended to break up Indian societal relationships by replacing traditional native patterns and values with those of the European (Hill 1984:16).

In 1960 native Indians obtained the right to vote in Canadian federal elections. In the 1960s, Tom Hill has argued, Indian communities across Canada began speaking out against their social conditions. Improved communications made the native people aware

of the political activities of other minorities, such as the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Hill 1984:20). When the Government in 1969 issued its "Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy" (the White Paper) in an effort to promote "full and equal [Indian] participation in the cultural, social, economic, and political life of Canada," Indian political leaders "found themselves actively engaged in opposing the implementation of this new policy" (Hill 1984:26). The Indian chiefs of Alberta, for example, made their statement in a paper titled "Citizen Plus," or the Red Paper (Patterson 1972:180). In this paper they pointed out that, "Justice requires that the special history, rights, and circumstances of Indian People be recognized." They also called for the acceptance of diversity and pluralism in Canada's cultural life and insisted that Indian children learn Indian history and customs (Patterson 1972:180). Attitudes in white society towards traditional native culture were changing from "general disdain to acceptance, and some time admiration" (Duffek 1983:29). This shift, Duffek has pointed out, was vital to the development of a milieu in which native arts, as expressions of native traditions, could again flourish (1983:29).

NORTHWEST COAST ART.

As we have seen, the 1927 exhibition "Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art. Native and Modern," was not the type of landmark exhibition which could produce broad public recognition of Canadian

native art as art. "Arts of the Raven" at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967, by contrast, *did* achieve this aim. Wilson Duff later stated that "Arts of the Raven" was "the threshold over which Northwest Coast art had come into full recognition" (1975:13).⁶⁵ Although historical Northwest Coast art had enjoyed recognition as art for a long time among scholars and some artists outside of Canada, the "Arts of the Raven" was an exhibition which served to establish Northwest Coast art as great art for the general public in Canada.

"Arts of the Raven" did not go un-noticed abroad. The French curator Marcel Evrard was inspired by "Arts of the Raven" to mount an exhibition of Canadian native art in Paris, "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada," in 1969.⁶⁶ Before turning to "Arts of the Raven" itself we will look briefly at the French exhibition. The two exhibitions, "Arts of the Raven" and "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada," had intended the same goals and similar means. As well, the material available about the French exhibition helps the interpretation of "Arts of the Raven."

"Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" was shown at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris between March and September 1969. It followed a line of controversial but popular exhibitions organized by the Société des Amis du Musée de l'Homme

⁶⁵ See also Ames 1981 and Hill 1984.

⁶⁶ The same exhibition was shown in Ottawa at the National Gallery of Canada from November 1969 - January 1970. The idea for the exhibition originated with the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. The pieces were assembled from 11 Canadian museums through the cooperation of Dr. William E. Taylor, director of the National Museum of Man, and Canada's Department of External Affairs (NGC Archives, newspaperfiles: Newsletter May 30, 1969).

and Marcel Evrard during the mid 1960s. The 'line' in these exhibitions was the presentation of Primitive Art as works of art — as masterpieces. As Michel Leiris, one of the co-organizers, explained about the first of these exhibitions⁶⁷:

The directors of the Musée de l'Homme wanted to call the public's attention to the fact that this is not only a museum of "documents" but also a museum of art. Objects that we considered very beautiful were smothered by quantities of others of mainly scientific interest. Connoisseurs were able to spot them. But what about the public? ... We decided to make things easier. But we also decided that we had to be less specialized and bring in a fresh way of looking at things. So we asked someone who was not a member of the staff to choose the objects. Marcel Evrard ... simply wandered through our departments — Prehistory, Black Africa, Madagascar, Oceania, America — and chose, on the basis of his own aesthetic preferences, the most beautiful objects in the museum. (Leiris in Clay, 1966:59)

That exhibition caused "quite a stir among experts and even in the press," and was by some accused of "popularization" and of being an "easy approach" which "stripped these objects of their religious meaning by using an 'artistic presentation' with carefully calculated light effects" (Leiris in Clay, 1966:58). Michel Leiris explained:

Our determination to show these works in all their artistic purity must be interpreted as a reaction. All too often, when ethnologists refer to the works of art in the Musée de l'Homme, they accumulate such a mass of technical and sociological information that they tend to forget the work of art itself. We have liberated it and given it the place of honour. (Leiris in Clay 1966:51)

Of the 184 artistic masterpieces assembled for "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada," 123 were from the Northwest

⁶⁷ "Chefs-d'oeuvre du Musée de l'Homme," 1965

Coast, 59 items from Eastern Canada and the Plains, and 21 pieces were pre-historic Eskimo carvings of the Dorset and Thule cultures. Marcel Evrard explained the "preponderance" of Northwest Coast art in the exhibition as a result of the aesthetic selection criteria. In his introduction to the exhibition he praised the exceptional artistic productivity and originality of the Northwest Coast peoples as a remarkable phenomenon which merited this special attention:

Of the primitive art that has been "discovered" by the 20th century to challenge the traditional emphasis on classic antiquity, the art of the northwest coast offers a unique example of geographic concentration, unity of style and preeminence in its close relationship to social phenomena. ... When one considers the exceptional productivity and originality, in artistic terms, of the peoples inhabiting the fringe of coast isolated by the Rockies..., it is all the more surprising that there is nothing comparable emanating from the rest of the continent...(Société des Amis du Musée de l'Homme 1969 n.p.)

Judging from contemporary reviews, the art in "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" was displayed in an evocative atmosphere, created partly through use of lighting at "fire-pit level" and sound-tracks of native songs. One reviewer noted:

The lighting and arrangement give an impression of sun in the forest for the Northwest Coast Indian display and the bleak, cold beauty of the Arctic for the Eskimo works. (Creery 1969)

Another in particular singled out the display of the tiny Dorset pieces:

The Canadian Eskimo art is displayed ... in showcases which have been lit so skilfully that in one or two cases it seems as if an image has been suspended in a cube of dim light. In this way the magic of this series of 21 miniature sculptures ... is accentuated. (Grand 1969b)

Fig. 1 shows a section of the installation in Ottawa.⁶⁸ An Ottawa reviewer described the showcases in this way:

Tiny exquisite carvings ... are displayed inside apparently solid columns extending from floor to ceiling. At eye-level each column becomes transparent and is illuminated within, affording each exhibit the sharply focused light and clarity of definition usually reserved for tanks of glittering miniature fishes (Bergia 1969).

The showcases used here bear no resemblance to the traditional Victorian showcase used in the anthropological displays described in Chapter One. The structural framework of these cases (the columns) visually 'disappears,' while the total attention of the visitor is drawn to the well-lit showcases which display the objects. Jewellery displays — 'Fifth-Avenue' style — were probably closer to the intentions of the curators.

With the installation design, "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" distanced itself clearly from the early ethnographic displays, by using contemporary design such as that pioneered by René d'Harnoncourt in 1941. The organizers of "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" had, furthermore, freed themselves from the obligation of considering the objects from *within* the originating culture. The task they had assumed here was not that of the anthropologist. In his Preface to the

⁶⁸ These showcases would have been the same as those used at the Paris show. What might have worked out differently in Ottawa would have been the relative spacing between cases, ceiling heights, colours and lighting intensity. Some reviews of the Ottawa show seem to indicate that the Ottawa show was less successful in creating the "magic ambience" which was so praised in Paris (Ayre 1969; Andrews 1969).

catalogue, Christian Zervos expressed the prevailing approach to art as a universal language:

At this cross-roads of history in a world which changes before one's very eyes and where an ever more intricate and exorbitant technology dominates our methods of thought and feeling, we are fortunate to be given the opportunity of coming into contact with works which have the freshness and limpidity of spring water and which make it quite clear that art, whether it be "primitive" or "sophisticated," can only result from a union of matter and creative ability; a union in which there is ceaseless and reciprocal exchange expressed in universal language. (Société des Amis 1969 n.p.)

ARTS OF THE RAVEN, 1967.

"Arts of the Raven. Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian" was organized and shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery [VAG] from 15 June - 24 September 1967. Doris Shadbolt organized the exhibition in association with three experts on Northwest Coast art and culture: Wilson Duff, of the UBC Department of Anthropology; Bill Holm, author of the pioneering formal analysis *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (1965), and, the artist Bill Reid, who was introduced as a "Haida craftsman and authority on the Indian arts" (Vancouver Art Gallery 1967 n.p.).

In the *foreword* to the exhibition catalogue, Shadbolt stated,

The intent of this exhibition is to make an explicit and emphatic statement ... this is an exhibition of art, high art, not ethnology. (Vancouver Art Gallery 1967 n.p.)

"Arts of the Raven" was thus considered by the organizers as an emphatic contribution — on the side of art — to the shift in focus from ethnology to art. This shift was also reflected in the installation.⁶⁹

Fig.2 shows a plan of the organization of "Arts of the Raven" at the Vancouver Art Gallery, then located at 1145 West Georgia Street.⁷⁰ The visitor entered the exhibition through the foyer where s/he was first confronted with "a stunning suspended mask" (B.C. Motorist 1967) before entering Gallery 1 where the theme of "faces" was explored through a display of masks and headdresses. Some of these were displayed against a black wall in a semi-circular arrangement, dramatically lit from inside (Calver 1967; Lowndes 1967a). In gallery 2, one of three small court yard galleries, the theme was "small sculptures in wood" — among which were the exquisite raven-rattles. One of the reviewers considered this gallery her favourite, and mentioned that the raven rattles were suspended so that "the flight of the raven could be observed" (Lowndes 1967c). Her description and enthusiastic reception of the dramatic lighting, and the imaginative suspension of the shamans' rattles indicate that the installation of "Arts of the Raven," at least in these displays, employed the same kind of magic ambience which enchanted the Parisian viewers of

⁶⁹ Archival photographs of the installation of this exhibition have been examined in the VAG. Practical and economic circumstances have prevented me from making more extensive use of these and from including them as documentation in this thesis.

⁷⁰ The plan is made on the basis of architectural drawings in the library of the VAG. The distribution of galleries in the "Arts of the Raven" exhibition is based on information provided by the press reviews as well as on archival photos in the VAG.

"Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" discussed earlier.⁷¹

Other galleries were more prosaic, judging from the contemporary reviews. Gallery 3, for example, was devoted to "interpretation" and featured a map and texts on wall panels, described by one reviewer as "extremely readable" (Calver 1967). Gallery 4 exhibited works in slate, ivory, horn, bone, and silver, materials which, according to the catalogue "offered a challenge different from wood, the material traditionally associated with Northwest Coast art" (Vancouver Art Gallery 1967 n.p.).

The north gallery, Gallery 5 in this exhibition, was devoted to the theme of "flat design" in art works such as the wooden chests of the Haida or Tlingit peoples, feast bowls of the Haida and Tlingit, Chilkat textiles, coppers and painted designs on hats, paddles or bags. A special didactic feature of this gallery was described by some reviewers as a "highlight of the exhibition" (Lowndes 1967a; B.C. Motorist 1967). Bill Reid had chosen a particular painted cedar box, a Tlingit box with a seal design, from the American Museum of Natural History (cat. no. 293):

It's just an old, scruffy box, but I think it's terribly beautiful, so we're doing something spectacular to make people look at it. (Lowndes 1967a)

⁷¹ Marcel Evrard's acknowledgement of inspiration from "Arts of the Raven" in his foreword to "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo art from Canada" appears to give further credence to this argument (1969 n.p.).

What they did was to build a 'walk-in-box,' 8 feet by 5 feet, around the small Tlingit box (which was placed on a pedestal so that it could be viewed in eye-height) – consisting of walls of photo enlargements of the four sides of the box.

From Gallery 5 the visitor entered the largest of the galleries, Gallery 6, which housed an exhibition of Charles Edenshaw's works, as well as a section devoted to large scale masterworks. The concept of displaying works by an individual, named, native artist must be seen as a statement that recognizes the professionalism of the native artist and brings him or her into a context of art history. It thereby breaks with the ethnographical tradition of treating art as part of a group culture, or as the product of anonymous craftsmen or artists.

The masterpiece gallery, also part of Gallery 6, included such monumental works as totem pole sections (fig.4), the Tlingit Raven Partition Screens from the Denver Art Museum, as well as smaller objects such as head dresses, stone objects and carved staffs from the Tlingit, Haida, Bella Coola and Kwakiutl peoples. The totem poles were placed in beds of gravel, as were large objects such as the painted boxes in some of the other galleries (cf. fig.5). The use of gravel, or beach stones, as the backdrop for these freely exhibited pieces (they were not placed in showcases) may be interpreted as a way of contextualizing these objects within the natural environment of the British Columbia coast — as yet another way of giving the exhibition ambience. This association may have been emphasized by the use of green or blue colour on the walls and/or the use of

with the museological approach otherwise taken by the museum which emphasizes individual contemplation by the museum visitor and rejects the highly structured didactic exhibition.⁸⁰

The main exhibition galleries of the MoA are as we have seen, organized as 'masterpiece displays,' where the visitor is encouraged to experience the objects as works of art. Director Michael Ames has defined the purpose of these displays as that of showing

Northwest Coast objects as aesthetic objects and provide contextual information in a low-key format, so that the interpretation does not intrude upon the objects.⁸¹

According to Ames the reason for this is that "museums are not good educators."⁸² The Museum of Anthropology has questioned the *effectiveness* of the educational exhibit, and has chosen, rather than competing with "books, and universities and classrooms, and maybe films, [which] are more efficient as educators," to do what a museum or an exhibition can do well, namely "inspire and un-settle" people; create or provoke experiences in people; get them excited; make them wonder, marvel, think, ask questions..."⁸³. In the MoA individual contemplation is encouraged in the public displays and the 'museum experience' appears un-structured. However, as Vastokas' reading of the installations suggests, the architectural space and the

⁸⁰ Sometimes referred to as "contextual" exhibits, see, for example, Vergo, ed. (1989:48).

⁸¹ Michael Ames, personal communication, Vancouver, May 1989.

⁸² The educational aspect is heavily emphasized in museum histories presented by Hudson 1975 and 1987, Alexander 1979 and MacDonald and Alsford 1989 as being the purpose of exhibits; poorly recognized as such by early exhibits, but drastically improved over time.

⁸³ Michael Ames, personal communication, Vancouver, May 1989.

from a detached, scholarly interest to an emphatic understanding which was reflected in both the literary style and the photographic illustrations of publications of the period. Photography, according to Jonaitis, was an excellent medium in which to convey an ambience of mystique (1981:19). As an example she refers to a special issue of *Artscanada* from 1973 in which Eberhard Otto provided the photographs for an article on "Kwakiutl Winter Dances" by Peter MacNair, and she suggests that the "deep spiritual experience" of the Winter Ceremonies, as MacNair described them,

is visually conveyed by Eberhard Otto's dramatic photographs. The Sea Monster mask, strikingly lit to create harsh contrasts between dark and light, disturbingly cut off by the edge of the photograph, appears to be moving in a diagonal direction towards the viewer, ready to overwhelm him or her with terrifying, super-human force (Jonaitis 1981:19).

It thus appears that a general receptiveness towards the spiritual, mysterious or magical aspects had emerged in the 1960s affecting Northwest Coast art in particular, as Jonaitis has suggested. This receptiveness was reflected in the exhibition designs such as "Arts of the Raven" and "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada."

"Arts of the Raven" and "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" were exhibitions that promoted North American native art as *art* by showing selected historic 'masterpieces' in installations that disassociated themselves from traditional ethnographic exhibitions through the limited use of text labels and by the use of

modern, 'Fifth Avenue' design.⁷² It appears that the exhibition design was able to create a 'magic' atmosphere, which seemed congruent with the nature of the exhibited works. "Arts of the Raven" and "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" both made emphatic statements that those exhibitions were about art — not ethnography.

The small gallery at the end of "Arts of the Raven" was devoted to "the art today." Thirty contemporary works of art by Canadian artists Douglas Cranmer, Bill Reid, Robert Davidson, Henry Hunt, Tony Hunt, and American artists Bill Holm, Don Lelooska Smith, and Michael Johnson were exhibited here. Thinking back about "Arts of the Raven" in 1986 Doris Shadbolt explained:

We had decided after much deliberation to include as an addendum to the collection of older traditional "masterworks" a small room of works by contemporary Indian artists, largely as a means of reviewing for ourselves just what was being done in that area (Shadbolt 1986:6)

With this statement Shadbolt has indicated that what later came to be known as the Northwest Coast Art 'renaissance,' the emergence and blossoming of contemporary Northwest Coast art, was then taking form. The catalogue emphasized the contemporary perspective and relevance of this phenomenon:

⁷² This change of emphasis was also reflected in the choice of exhibition titles. 'Masterpiece' became a key word in titles during this period, whereas references to 'primitive art' were avoided (cf. McCook 1069b:38).

But these are arts in a different sense. Though truly enough of Indian descent, they are now Canadian art, modern art, fine art. (Vancouver Art Gallery 1967 n.p.)

CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ART.

The 'renaissance' of Northwest Coast art, the blossoming of contemporary Northwest Coast native art based on historic tradition, is a manifestation of a shift in attitude in white society towards native people, and in native people towards their own heritage. Although the Northwest Coast art 'renaissance' is perhaps the most spectacular and the best documented (Vastokas 1975; Ames 1981; Duffek 1883). Native artists throughout Canada manifested their talent and their cultural heritage in the production of contemporary 'Indian Art'. Norval Morrisseau and the so-called Woodland School (or the Legend painters) constitute one of the early directions which contemporary native artists chose; other native artists have followed more individualistic paths.⁷³

In Canada Indian art and Inuit art have separate but related histories. The success of Inuit art on the contemporary art scene was firmly established during the 1950s and may well have primed the ground for the acceptance of contemporary Indian art. A number of major exhibitions celebrated the centennial year including the Expo '67 Indian exhibit in "Man and his World" — and "Arts of the Raven." Both of these comprised historic Indian art which served to enhance

⁷³ Since 1978, also, regular Native Artist Conferences have taken place. One of the issues which still rages is whether or not artists of native ancestry should label themselves Indian artists. (Ames 1987:14-20).

and popularize the ethnic identity for the art-public and -consumer (Hill 1984:20). Tom Hill has summarized the trend in this way:

Whether out of genuine appreciation, guilt over past sins, or a need to acquire something Canadian, the art-buying public chose to look at the new art emerging from Indian communities as a significant statement from a fellow Canadian (1984:21).

MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, UBC, FROM 1976.

On the 30th of May, 1976, the new Museum of Anthropology [MoA] opened on the University of British Columbia campus in a building designed by Canadian architect Arthur Erickson. The university museum, connected with the Department of Anthropology at UBC, had existed since 1947 in cramped quarters with very limited exhibition space. The creation of a new museum building provided new possibilities for the presentation of artifacts. The Northwest Coast collections of the MoA are the focus of the museum and the new museum building has been designed with the presentation of particular pieces in mind, namely totem poles, house posts and other monumental carvings (cf. fig.6) (Erickson 1988). This represented an important departure from usual practice where art had to fit predetermined space often resulting in cutting totem poles into several pieces.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ This is the case, for example, in the Royal British Columbia Museum where a number of truncated poles are on display as part of the First Peoples exhibit, while others are on display in a glass enclosure close to the entrance to the Museum. Meanwhile, the nearby Thunderbird Park displays replicas of poles in a more 'natural' setting.

Fig.7 shows a schematic plan provided by the museum.⁷⁵ The primary exhibition areas include The Ramp, the Great Hall and The Masterpiece Gallery.⁷⁶ The Ramp consists of six exhibit bays along a gently descending ramp. Examples of monumental Coast Salish and Kwakiutl sculptures are exhibited on one side of the Ramp. Haida sculptures are installed across from these along the other side, thus emphasizing the contrast between two styles, the 'northern' and 'southern' styles (cf. figs. 8 and 9). At the end of the Ramp, the visitor enters the main gallery of the museum, the bright and spacious Grand Hall, which rises to a height of 15 meters (forty-five feet). This is the place where the monumental masterpieces of Northwest Coast art can be viewed in their full height (cf. fig. 10). Vastokas has described the psychological experience created by the architectural space and the installation:

Upon entry, the visitor is automatically drawn to Gallery I [the Ramp], a long, relatively narrow passage that leads directly before him. He is compelled to follow this route by the promise of a brightly lit space at the end. As he moves through this gallery, viewing monumental Northwest Coast carvings that face him on either side, he descends gradually as the floor slopes downwards, as if he were walking down a sloping or terraced beach. Nearing the end of the passage, a sense of psychological compression gives way as the gallery's space begins to open upward and outward, as if he had been moving through a funnel ... the visitor experiences a sudden visual release. He has entered Gallery II, the main gallery

⁷⁵ For a more accurate perspective, see the Isometric plan of the Museum, reproduced f.ex. in Ames (1977:66).

⁷⁶ Although this analysis reads the MoA as a historically specific response, the analysis is in this case also based on actual observations of the installations in May of 1989, which is why I have chosen to present them in the present tense.

[the Great Hall]. After the relatively low ceilings of Gallery I, he finds he has been propelled into a vast, open and light filled space of psychological repose. (Vastokas 1976:4)

Vastokas goes on to characterize the experience of being in the Great Hall as a place where the body experiences a sense of peace and rest, while the imagination starts to move. The imagination can take flight here, since there is no precise distinction between interior space of the gallery and exterior space of beach, sea and sky, according to Vastokas. The Great Hall:

thus suggests an almost mystic opening, not only to an exterior landscape environment, but to a cosmological beyond, to other worlds, to other realms where only the imagination can travel (1976:4).

To complete the tour of the museum before discussing some of the details of the installation, Vastokas continues:

After the dramatic release and subsequent repose experienced in the main gallery, the visitor is finally attracted by a narrow passage to his right, compelled once again to begin his exploration of the Museum in anticipation of new treasures. In this instance, however, he is directed by the nature of the gallery's space past miniature rather than monumental "masterpieces" on display in a series of elegant glass cases. (1976:9)

Fig.11 is a look into the Masterpiece Gallery as it appears today.⁷⁷ The Masterpiece Gallery includes "miniature masterpieces in wood, bone, ivory, horn, argillite (slate) and fine metals," according to the published Guide to the Museum (Rowan and Stott 1982). On display here are both contemporary pieces, for example by Bill Reid, as well as

⁷⁷ Compare with photos of original installation in Vastokas (1976:8, 9). The Masterpiece Gallery today exhibits fewer items than originally, according to director Michael Ames due to technical problems with the shelving system.

historic and pre-historic pieces. The guiding principle has been to exhibit the objects aesthetically to their best advantage. In the Masterpiece Gallery the scale of the room is such that small objects can be appreciated. A screen of hemlock trees along the windows filter the light to create a forest atmosphere. At the end of the row of trees, a sudden full glimpse of the sea and mountains provides (at the moment) an interesting juxtaposition. One of the ways in which the architecture relates to the exhibits is the alternation between admitting the outdoor scenery in, and excluding it. In this way artifacts and scenery do not compete for attention, although the landscape is meant to be seen in relation to the exhibited works (cf. fig. 12a-b).

The exhibition halls for the Northwest Coast art include no wall-panels and only aesthetically pleasing labels for the most prominent objects (fig.14). The labels have a minimum of text. Instead of descriptions of function and location, a drawing based on archival photos of the object *in situ* provides this information⁷⁸. Textual information is minimized in order to disturb the visitor's individual contemplation of the objects as little as possible. The objects are, as Michel Leiris had earlier written, "liberated," and have been given "the place of honour."

The Ramp, the Great Hall and the Masterpiece Gallery are the main exhibition galleries of the museum. In galleries five and nine, and occasionally in the Theatre gallery, temporary exhibitions are

⁷⁸ These drawings, however, do not bear information about their sources.

held. These may or may not have anything to do with Northwest Coast art or culture, and they may differ considerably in approach from the permanent galleries.

Another feature of the museum is the research collection. This includes the entire ethnology collection (with the exception of textiles) which is made accessible to students and scholars as well as to the general public in a series of drawers and wall cases (fig. 13). This 'visible storage' as it is also called, was conceived in connection with the design of the new museum. The idea of visible storage is to make the museum more democratic. A large proportion of any museum's collections is usually kept away from the public exhibits in storage. The process of selecting what the public should see in the exhibitions is done by the curators, and the public is presented with the 'best', the most 'representative' or the most complete pieces. In visible storage the idea is to give the general public access to the complete collections. All of the museum's holdings are visible and identifiable in this storage. However, they are not exhibited, and they are not intentionally grouped in any way than the most obviously practical (things from the same culture area stored together).

The concept of the visible storage received much attention when it was new. The architect claimed that it was "the most important and original feature" of the new museum (Erickson 1988:88). More recently, the director of the museum has played down the importance of this feature.⁷⁹ The concept of visible storage, however, is consistent

⁷⁹ Michael Ames, personal communication, Vancouver, May 1989.

with the museological approach otherwise taken by the museum which emphasizes individual contemplation by the museum visitor and rejects the highly structured didactic exhibition.⁸⁰

The main exhibition galleries of the MoA are as we have seen, organized as 'masterpiece displays,' where the visitor is encouraged to experience the objects as works of art. Director Michael Ames has defined the purpose of these displays as that of showing

Northwest Coast objects as aesthetic objects and provide contextual information in a low-key format, so that the interpretation does not intrude upon the objects.⁸¹

According to Ames the reason for this is that "museums are not good educators."⁸² The Museum of Anthropology has questioned the *effectiveness* of the educational exhibit, and has chosen, rather than competing with "books, and universities and classrooms, and maybe films, [which] are more efficient as educators," to do what a museum or an exhibition *can* do well, namely "inspire and un-settle" people; create or provoke experiences in people; get them excited; make them wonder, marvel, think, ask questions..."⁸³ In the MoA individual contemplation is encouraged in the public displays and the 'museum experience' appears un-structured. However, as Vastokas' reading of the installations suggests, the architectural space and the

⁸⁰ Sometimes referred to as "contextual" exhibits, see, for example, Vergo, ed. (1989:48).

⁸¹ Michael Ames, personal communication, Vancouver, May 1989.

⁸² The educational aspect is heavily emphasized in museum histories presented by Hudson 1975 and 1987, Alexander 1979 and MacDonald and Alsford 1989 as being the purpose of exhibits; poorly recognized as such by early exhibits, but drastically improved over time.

⁸³ Michael Ames, personal communication, Vancouver, May 1989.

organization of the objects in an art-gallery mode in fact constitute a particular kind of museum experience. The spatial experience of the visitor in the main exhibition galleries is carefully planned to move the visitor emotionally and aesthetically, in order to facilitate the experience and appreciation of the monumental carvings, the masterpieces, on display. Vastokas has pointed out that Erickson's architecture creates a setting for the experience of the objects that is congruent with the culture it frames (1976). Although the installation intends to 'liberate' the objects from the imposition of Western culture, to let the objects 'speak for themselves,' it is nevertheless a modernist Western space and the exhibit takes place wholly within the modern paradigm of Western culture. The Northwest Coast items on display as 'art works' in Arthur Erickson's modernist tribute to Northwest Coast culture still serve 'our' purpose - they are for our pleasure and wonder, and they are suitably validated as great 'art'. James Clifford has described how the categories of 'art' and 'culture' in the twentieth century serve as a paradigm for classification; they constitute, in his words, an 'object-system' (1988). Clifford's contribution will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

SUMMARY: THE 'ART-APPROACH'.

The Museum of Anthropology can be seen as a strong Canadian manifestation of the 'art approach' — as a reaction against the dominant science paradigm. The priority of emotional appeal over cognitive content here is similar to the approach taken in "Arts of the

Raven" and in "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada." In 1969 Zervos had compared what he regarded as the universal, humanistic appeal of art with "the freshness and limpidity of spring water," and saw it as an antidote to a world "where an ever more intricate and exorbitant technology dominates our methods of thought and feeling" (cf. Société des Amis 1969). In other words, 'art' was regarded as a liberating force in a technologically oriented modern society. Consequently, some museums saw it as their task to *liberate* objects of art - from their fate as objects serving science (cf. Clay 1966:51). The UBC Museum of Anthropology was one of them. Here monumental carvings were displayed freely, not truncated or put into glass cases, and free of intrusive interpretive texts.

In connection with the 1969 exhibition Marcel Evrard had expressed the hope that the monumental carvings which could not be brought together for that exhibition in sufficient numbers, would one day take their place in one exhibit as a tribute to the cultures which produced them:

...Magnificent specimens are stored in Vancouver to protect them from the elements and others are exhibited in museums in Victoria, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Hopefully they may some day be reunited in an exhibition as a tribute to a great art. (Société des Amis... 1969 n.p.)

The Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver is conceived as such a tribute. The architecture in the case of Erickson's building for the Museum of Anthropology serves as a celebration of Northwest Coast art and may very well represent a high point in the recognition of Northwest Coast art in Canada to date.

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL MUSEUM, FROM 1977.

The British Columbia Provincial Museum⁸⁴ in Victoria moved to its present location in 1968. The move offered an opportunity to remodel the older exhibitions over the following decade (Corley-Smith 1985). The anthropology exhibits opened in January, 1977, as "The 12,000 Year Gap: Archaeology in British Columbia" and "First Peoples: Indian Cultures in British Columbia." The First Peoples exhibits are an important example of an alternative contemporary exhibition mode for ethnology exhibits to that adopted by the UBC Museum of Anthropology.⁸⁵

THE BACKGROUND.

There was a long, intricate prelude to the choice of design concept for the museum installations in Victoria. The earliest plans for the Ethnology Division had called for a fairly traditional Boasian representation of the West Coast peoples according to tribe. Each would be dealt with separately in relation to the anthropological categories of "technology," "food gathering," "canoe and house building," "social structure," "ceremonies" and "cosmology" (Corley-Smith 1985:29). A first attempt to create new exhibits went ahead during the late 1960s. Growing discontent among the staff with the

⁸⁴ Now the Royal British Columbia Museum.

⁸⁵ Some of the planning for these ethnology galleries dates back to the late 1960's, and the installations were completed in 1977; however, the installations are still in place, virtually unaltered. My own observations date from May of 1981 so I refer to them in the present tense.

new installations led to a revision of plans and the adaptation of a different design approach (under a different designer) in the early 1970s.⁸⁶ The inspiration for the new direction was Stephan de Borhegyi, Director of the Milwaukee Public Museum, who was called in as a consultant (Corley-Smith 1985:28). The Milwaukee Public Museum was regarded as a leader in museum display at the time because of its naturalistic recreation of a turn-of-the-century street scene (Corley-Smith 1985:28). The British Columbia Provincial Museum adopted the illusionistic design concept, and 'ecology' was chosen as a common theme for the exhibits of Natural History, as well as for Modern History and Ethnology. The ethnology galleries developed a new story-line that had as a theme the difference between 'coastal' and 'interior' living during the pre-contact period as two different responses to the environment. As well, the new story-line contrasted pre- and post-contact life.⁸⁸

THE INSTALLATION.

The floor plan in the museum's guide helps to illustrate how the installations were realized (fig.15). The ethnology exhibits are organized chronologically, from the time before contact until the present. The last exhibit bears the title "The Land 1763-1976,"

⁸⁶ Peter MacNair, personal communication, Ottawa, July 1989.

⁸⁸ Halpin has criticized the choice of 'ecology' as a basis for the story-line (1978). Personal communication with Peter MacNair, the curator in charge of the ethnology exhibits has confirmed that curators by the late 1960's no longer had full authority over the exhibits. Not only administrators, but increasingly also the exhibit designers made important decisions concerning the displays. The choice of 'ecology' as a theme was beyond the control of the Ethnology Division.

thereby extending the subject into contemporary times. They start on the mezzanine with the story of the First Peoples prior to contact (black arrows on the map). The post-contact displays are situated on the main floor directly underneath the mezzanine displays (red arrows, fig.15). These exhibits run along the sides of an inner courtyard, known as the 'art gallery'.

The pre-contact exhibits are systematic, starting with the most basic categories in anthropological research, specifically "technologies," "transport," "demography," "society," and ending with the spiritual activities in "cosmology" and "shamanism" as is customary in ethnographic exhibitions (cf. Wissler 1914). The displays demonstrating 'technologies' feature prominently and are subdivided into 'food quest' (coastal or interior) or 'household industries' (coastal or interior). The 'food quest' includes separate displays for 'fishing,' 'processing,' 'sea mammal hunting,' 'intertidal gathering' on the coast, and 'hunting' in the interior. Among the 'household industries' are 'bark and roots,' 'bark weaving,' 'hides, bone and antler,' 'Coast Salish weaving,' 'Chilkat weaving,' and 'woodworking'.

One of the most praised of the 'technology' displays is the fishing diorama which introduces the First Peoples' section (fig.16). In this diorama the illusionistic technique was carried to new heights of naturalism. It was an immediate success with spectators, who found themselves "nearly holding their breath" when viewing this underwater scene illustrating different fish traps (Corley-Smith

1985:33). In other displays relating to the 'food quest,' various ingenious techniques were developed to create natural-looking dead fish or fresh berries (Corley-Smith 1985:41).

In 'woodworking' (fig.17a) a nude, male figure demonstrates how wood is worked with an adze. Next to him, the process of making a bent-wood (kerfed) box is illustrated by showing the box at different stages of the process (fig.17b). Finally the technique of decoration is indicated through the exhibition of tools, templates and a finished decorated box. 'Woodworking' is a good example of the didactic clarity of some of these displays, where explanatory texts play only a secondary role. Fig.17a gives an impression of how the transparent showcase that houses this display allows an instructive juxtaposition with the carved totem poles in the gallery court yard below indicating some of the spectacular results of 'woodworking'.

In 'Coast Salish weaving' a female mannequin demonstrates weaving (fig.18). The convention of using mannequins in ethnology displays to demonstrate work processes or to illustrate how clothes are worn goes back to the last century, as we saw in Chapter One. While the design team was insistent on the inclusion of mannequins in these ethnology halls, the curators would have liked to eliminate them. Possible unwanted effects of using naked mannequins to demonstrate weaving and woodworking were considered, and the choice of a "young, maidenly" woman for the Coast Salish display was in particular considered to be unfortunately close to Western commercial stereotyping of women. The curatorial concern with

regard to the mannequins, however, was to ensure that they were "ethnologically correct" – and it is not incorrect, MacNair has argued, to show Coast Salish Women weaving without clothes on⁸⁹.

In the rest of the 'household industry' exhibits the artifacts are contextualized through other means, such as photos, text and 'functional' display methods (fig.19).⁹⁰ In the Chilkat Weaving exhibit (fig. 20), a Chilkat Robe is thus displayed as though it were on a loom with a pattern board next to it.

In the 'Cosmology' display masks portraying mythological beings are exhibited in a dark environment (fig.21). A dramatic effect is created when the masks are highlighted in turn according to their appearance in narrated native stories. The emphasis in this display is on the stories (tape with two native elders narrating). The objects illustrate the story which in turn provides the dramatic context to which these masks belong.

'Shamanism' is the last theme explored in the pre-contact displays. An effective transition to the second part of the exhibits is obtained through the exhibition of artifacts, or artworks, which in themselves demonstrate an influence from white culture. A Tsimshian mask depicting a white man, an object of exceptional quality, is allowed to speak for itself (fig.22), testifying to the encounter with the

89 MacNair, personal communication, Ottawa, July 1989. See also Corley-Smith 1985:43.

90 Frese uses the term "functional display" about objects displayed in the position they would be used (1960:148). See also Ewers 1956.

white man in its subject matter, as well as illustrating how artistic creativity has found other than traditional expressions.

The post-contact displays also operate within anthropological categories in the organization of their displays, but with different emphasis. Whereas the pre-contact displays emphasize 'technologies' with many instructive displays of 'how things were done,' the post-contact displays emphasize the societal changes brought about by the white man.

One section deals with some of the effects of Christianity on native spiritual life. Native people were Christianized and expected to give up their 'heathen' practices, including their ceremonial gear. One of the most striking of the post-contact displays is called 'heathenism'. A badly burned mask which has been rescued from the flames is placed alone on a pedestal in a room covered with images of the Christian church on the walls (fig.23). A label reads:

'My grandmother told me that when Christianity came her uncle went down to the beach and burned everything. He had heard that the Lord will not receive you if you still look to your treasures.' Kitamaat woman.

In this display an art object, a mask (in itself marked by historic events) is contextualized by means of an authentic document and wall-sided photo-enlargements of the church (as a symbol of Christianity).

Another post-contact display, one in which artifacts could not so easily be used, is the story of smallpox in the demography section (fig.24). More than life-size photo-enlargements of faces of older native people and of decaying totem poles cover the walls, together

with newspaper articles which document the smallpox epidemic of 1862. As the visitor physically walks through this section, s/he listens to a short, narrated account of the small-pox epidemic which "decimated the population at the height of its flowering." That the narrator is Haida artist Bill Reid may not be clear to the visitor, but the native perspective is unmistakable: "the light in the villages burned very low for 100 years ... too powerful to die. People are still here."

PRESENTATIONS FROM NATIVE POINT OF VIEW.

The smallpox section is an example of how some of the post-contact displays transcend the 'objective' scientific orientation of traditional anthropological displays. The photographs, the newspaper excerpts and the narration of the sound-track in the smallpox exhibit have replaced the artifacts - and, more importantly, the museum has here taken on a 'native view point' (especially the narration by Bill Reid). The catastrophic effects of the meeting with the white man's culture is reported, not as inevitable - but as an interlude in a continuing vital native culture.

The pre- and post contact displays are all organized around an open court yard - referred to as an art gallery, fig.25 (Corley-Smith 1985:30). A Kwakiutl house is included in the court yard exhibition. It is a full-size house which the visitor can enter (fig.26). Inside the house is a simulated fire-pit and various artifacts. A panel informs the visitor that this house belonged to Chief Jonathan Hunt. A label explains:

You are privileged to enter the house of Jonathan Hunt, Chief Kwakwabalasami, of Fort Rupert. The frontal paintings on the house, its carved posts, dance screen, speaker's figure, log drum and other ceremonial objects, all reflect the rights this Kwakiutl Chief inherited from his parents or obtained through marriage. By legal agreement, Chief Kwakwabalasami permitted this museum to exhibit his house and some of his privileges. The house and its furnishings were carved, for the most part, by the chief's son Henry Hunt and grandson Tony Hunt. (qtd. in Halpin 1978:46)

The house was properly potlatched - in order to establish the continuing claim to the house and family privileges shown within it (Corley-Smith 1985:45). The house is therefore not a 'stage-prop' simulating a Kwakiutl house. It is an actual house, belonging to the Hunt family, with the family privileges intact. Within the museum it is a symbol of the continuing traditions of Kwakiutl culture. The Hunt house is one example - within the museum exhibits - of how this museum has been engaged, not only in the preservation of artifacts, but also in the process of encouraging the culture of contemporary Indian people (Corley-Smith 1985:45).

THE PRESENTATION OF ART.

Art is given a prominent place in the presentation of the cultures of the Northwest Coast peoples in this 1977 ethnographic exhibit. The whole court yard is devoted to art, in one way or another. The Hunt house illustrates Kwakiutl architecture, and provides a context for the masks and other carvings relating to the Hunt family. In the space in front of the Hunt house, (truncated) totem poles of various West Coast cultures are displayed - some of them consisting of

two or three sections to fit the space (fig.25). A sound-track of ravens and other birds encourages the visitor to imagine 'being there'. A third context for carved Northwest Coast masks is provided in the form of a reconstructed cave. The significance of this cave depends on a myth: the Dance of the Animals, a dance belonging to the late Mungo Martin (Corley-Smith 1985:45). In the reconstructed cave the masks and recordings of the songs are intended to recreate the mood of the myth for the viewer (Corley-Smith 1985:46). A fourth example of an art-display are the showcases upon the walls of the courtyard. These displays are grouped according to the people who produced them: Bella Coola; Haida; Tsimshian; Nootka; Coast Salish; Southern Kwakiutl; Northern Kwakiutl. Each case is accompanied by a text panel on the wall explaining the characteristics of the style. Fig.27 shows Tsimshian artifacts displayed as individual works of art. The wall panel for the Tsimshian wall case reads:

Tsimshian sculpture is the most refined and sensitive of all Northwest Coast carvings. Modelling is smoothly transitional, although anatomical features like the cheeks are prominently refined. Tsimshian masks were used exclusively in special dramatic performances involving the acting out of particular spirit names. Carved frontlets on the other hand represent crest figures.

These showcases do not isolate the individual objects in each their case, but nor are the pieces explicitly related to the others in the case in any other way than by style. The objects are grouped together here, not because they relate to the same function, but because they can serve as representatives of an artistic style. The wall cases serve to provide a neutral setting for the study of stylistic features, which the

public is invited to examine. The pieces in the cases are not dated, and 'art' is in this sense presented as a timeless, universal category.

There are two different display modes at work in this section of the ethnology galleries. The artifacts in the Cave of the Dancing Animals and in the Hunt house are contextualized, whereas the ones in the wall cases are presented in a formal, aesthetic installation, which is also didactic (the visitor is guided in regard to which formal features to look for). It is a presentation, however, which does not go beyond the most basic art historical need to distinguish the difference in stylistic means.⁹¹

In the ethnographic galleries of the British Columbia Provincial Museum art was given a prominent place in terms of the amount of space dedicated to it (the whole court yard). The fact that this installation was being planned at the height of the Northwest Coast 'renaissance' of native art, undoubtedly contributed to 'justify' this. The isolation of 'art' as a category within the exhibition as a whole sends several messages, some of them contradicting each other. One message was a confirmation that Northwest Coast art in the 1970s was an important contemporary phenomenon, and by singling it out in this historic display the installation emphasized that importance as well as the continuity between the past and the present. This is the positive and intended message. Another message produced by the isolation of 'art' from the chronological exhibits of 'pre- and post-contact

⁹¹ For a discussion of the neglected role of art historians in Canada in the field of native art, see Vastokas 1986/87.

material,' however, was that art is 'timeless' — outside history. Whereas the implication of universality and timelessness to a certain extent was promoted in the 'masterpiece exhibitions' of native art referred to earlier in this chapter, such a statement is out of line with the general ethnological approach adopted in the rest of the installation. 'Art' exists as a separate, isolable category only in Western — not in Northwest Coast — culture. 'Art' treated as a separate category belongs, in an ethnological context, to the Boasian exhibit where the categories of field research are reflected in the exhibition. To be in accordance with this concept, 'art' belongs in both the pre-contact and in the post-contact displays. The combination of contextualized displays in which art objects are integrated artifacts into most of the exhibits and a few exhibits focusing only on formal qualities is not successful.

SUMMARY.

The "First Peoples" installation in the British Columbia Provincial Museum has been analyzed as an example of a recent ethnographic exhibition approach. In its over-all approach, this installation belongs to what I have referred to as the contextualizing exhibit, or the didactic, story-line approach. However, an important break with the traditional 'objective' presentation took place in some of the exhibits, as shown in the analysis, when a native view-point constituted the basis for the presentation. Furthermore the installation acknowledged, through the generous allotment of space in

the court yard to 'art', the contemporary importance of Northwest Coast art — and emphasized art as an important link to native customs and traditions which are still viable.

In this chapter I have also analyzed two Canadian exhibitions of Northwest Coast art, "Arts of the Raven" and the UBC Museum of Anthropology's installations, which were more exclusively committed to presenting Northwest Coast artifacts as *art*. The French exhibition of "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" helped to situate the Canadian exhibits in the genre of 'masterpiece-exhibitions', which approached native art as a universal category, a category of transcendent humanism which could challenge the priority of technology and science.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER THREE.

- Fig. 1 "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada," 1970. National Gallery of Canada. Photo: John Evans, Ottawa.
- Fig. 2 "Arts of the Raven." 1967. Vancouver Art Gallery. Floor plan of exhibition space.
- Fig. 3 "Arts of the Raven." 1967. Vancouver Art Gallery. VAG Annual Report, 1967
- Fig. 4 "Arts of the Raven." 1967. Vancouver Art Gallery. VAG Annual Report, 1967
- Fig. 5a-b "Arts of the Raven." 1967. Vancouver Art Gallery. VAG Annual Report, 1967
- Fig. 6 Museum of Anthropology, UBC. Arthur Erickson's sketch showing placement of artifacts. (Erickson, 1988:89)
- Fig. 7 Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1976. Plan of museum from Mini-guide.
- Fig. 8 The Ramp. Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989. photo: Lis Stainforth
- Fig. 9 The Ramp. Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989 photo: Lis Stainforth
- Fig. 10 The Great Hall. Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989. Erickson (1988:81-82)
- Fig. 11 Masterpiece gallery. Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989 photo: Lis Stainforth
- Fig. 12a - b Masterpiece gallery, detail Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989. photo: Lis Stainforth
- Fig. 13 Visible storage, Museum of Anthropology, UBC. 1989. Vastokas (1976:10)
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- Fig. 15 Floor plan, Royal British Columbia Museum.

- Fig. 16 "Fishing" diorama. Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13202-34A
- Fig. 17a "Woodworking." Royal British Columbia Museum PN13494-22A
- Fig. 17b "Woodworking, detail." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13203-3
- Fig. 18 "Coast Salish Weaving." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13494-17A
- Fig. 19 "Bark and Roots." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN16039-17
- Fig. 20 "Technologies," general view. Royal British Columbia Museum, 13497-19A
- Fig. 21 "Cosmology." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13494-24A
- Fig. 22 "White man" mask. Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13494-29A
- Fig. 23 "Heathenism." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13497-36A
- Fig. 24 "Small-pox." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13498-3
- Fig. 25 "Art gallery" court yard. Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13200-2A
- Fig. 26 "The Hunt House," interior. Royal British Columbia Museum, PN13499-3,4,5
- Fig. 27 "Tsimshian Art." Royal British Columbia Museum, PN15521-13

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

FIG. 3

FIG. 4.

FIG. 5a

FIG. 5a

Top: The Museum of Anthropology was designed around the massive carvings in its collection, as a sketch plan shows. Three smaller galleries are staggered down a gentle slope to the Great Hall, whose space is partially defined by the vise of the immovable concrete tankers that are on the site. COLLECTION CENTRE CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE/ CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE

Bottom: Part of the power of the museum is in the flow of space from the entrance to the Great Hall. A sketch section traces its rhythm, beginning with the three low brows over the entrance that impose a reverential mood. COLLECTION CENTRE CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE/ CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE

FIG. 6.

FIG. 7.

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

FIG. 10.

FIG. 11

FIG. 12 a

FIG. 12 b

David Hardy, a member of the Museum's technical staff, and Inge Rims, Curatorial Assistant, demonstrate the use of the Museum's open storage system. The former leads through the cat dogues, while the latter examines and takes notes on objects in glass-covered drawers.

FIG. 13 .

FIG. 14.

FIG. 15

Third Floor.

Modern History Gallery.
 The 12,000 Year Gap — Archaeology.
 First Peoples — Native History.

Features: Turn of the Century Townscape,
 Farm Diorama, Reconstructed Cannery,
 Sawmill and Mine, A Working Water Wheel,
 Reconstruction of Captain Vancouver's Ship
 H.M.S. Discovery, A reconstructed Pit House,
 Totem Pole Gallery, Kwakiutl bighouse,
 Argillite Carvings, Lounge Area (smoking).

FIG. 16

FIG
17a FIG
17b

FIG. 18

FIG
2 FIG
10

FIG. 21

FIG. 22

FIG
2

FIG
24

FIG
25 FIG
26

FIG. 27

CHAPTER 4**DID THE SPIRIT SING?****THE ART VERSUS ETHNOGRAPHY DILEMMA**

The dual purpose of "The Spirit Sings. Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples" was reflected in its full title. The primary purpose of the exhibition was defined by the co-ordinating curator as that of bringing the more than five hundred "objects of native Canadian manufacture" drawn from national and international ethnographic collections together to

emphasize diversity, continuity, adaptability, and resilience of the native cultures of Canada, which incorporate a world-view distinct from that of mainstream Canadians. (Harrison 1987:10)

The exhibition was, as one reviewer expressed it, primarily about *culture*. (Stott 1988).

"The Spirit Sings" was also the most important successor to date to exhibitions such as "Canadian West Coast Art. Native and Modern," 1927; "Arts of the Raven. Masterworks of the Northwest Coast Indian," 1967 and "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada," 1969, (all of which contributed to establish Canadian native art as *art*) as well as to more recent exhibitions which have explored particular aspects of Canadian native art: "Athapaskans. Strangers of the North," 1974; "Images of Stone. B.C.," 1975; "Bo'jou Nejee," 1976; "The Coming and Going of the Shaman," 1978; "The Inuit Amautik," 1980; "Patterns of Power," 1984; "From the Four Corners,"

1984 (Patterson 1987)⁹². The other purpose of "The Spirit Sings" was stated as the exploration of the

variety, richness, and depth of aesthetic traditions found among the indigenous populations of Canada at the time of contact (Harrison 1987:10).

"The Spirit Sings" thus attempted to explore both the aesthetic traditions of Canada's native peoples, and the cultures themselves with special attention paid to the cosmologies of which they were an integral part. In her most recent book, anthropologist Sally Price has described the dilemma that curators in the second half of this century have faced when mounting exhibitions of The Other:

One option is to let the aesthetically discriminating eye be our guide on the basis of some undefined concept of universal beauty. The other is to bury ourselves in the "tribal lore" to discover the ritual function of the objects in question. These two routes are generally viewed as competitive and incompatible, especially in the context of museum presentations, where ... curators are expected to choose between the "beauty" and the "anthropology" of their material (1989:92-93).

In the following section I will analyze how "The Spirit Sings" attempted to overcome the art versus ethnography dilemma.

⁹² These exhibitions originated with the following institutions: National Museum of Man; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; National Museum of Man; Winnipeg Art Gallery; Winnipeg Art Gallery; McMichael Canadian Collection; Art Gallery of Ontario.

THE SPIRIT SINGS, 1988: THE INSTALLATION AS REPRESENTATION,⁹³

In "The Spirit Sings" the artifacts were organized in six galleries on the basis of six distinct culture areas. The sequence of these was geographical — moving from east to west: the East Coast, the Northern Woodlands (here including the Eastern Subarctic), the Northern Plains, the Western Subarctic, the Arctic, and the Northwest Coast (fig.1a-b). Each section was clearly distinguished from the others through colour coding (of walls, showcases and fabric), through the choice of showcase design, and through different use of space. According to Head of Design at the Glenbow Museum, Rick Budd, these physical and colouristic features served the purpose of providing a sensory and physical threshold between the galleries and they were selected mainly according to their ability to suggest natural and physical characteristics of a region. His idea was that the design should create a "feeling for regional geography," but other concerns, such as portability and flexibility (the exhibition had to travel to Ottawa), limited these efforts to "the use of colour, special lighting and sound effects, case architecture and gallery densities."⁹⁴

⁹³ A version of this analysis was presented to the conference on Cultural Studies and Communication Studies, Carleton University, 8 April 1989. The analysis is based on the Ottawa installation augmented with ample information on the original Calgary installation provided by Rick Budd, chief designer at the Glenbow Museum, and Martin Green, designer for "The Spirit Sings" in Ottawa.

⁹⁴ Direct quotes in the following refer to Mr. Budd's answers in a questionnaire from me, dated March 1989.

COLOUR AND SPACE.

According to the Chief of Design at the Glenbow Museum, the idea in the East Coast gallery was to create associations to "ocean, forest and cool climate." The colours, three bluish shades of green, played an important role as did the illusion of space. The experience of space, its relative openness or denseness, was achieved simply through the distribution of showcases (structures). The East Coast gallery was not as spacious as some, nor as dense as others (figs.1 and 2). In the Northern Woodlands gallery the goal was to create a feeling for an "(autumn) forest"; this was done by colours (red ochre or rust, dark brown) and through the relatively closely spaced distribution of vertical structures (the showcases) to suggest the denseness of a forest (fig. 3). In the gallery of the Northern Plains the images, according to the designer were "grasslands, summer, warm climate, sparse, open space." These were achieved through the use of light earth colours (sand, rust), showcases with open backs, and a distribution which enhanced a feeling of openness (fig.4a-b). In the Western Subarctic gallery the intent was to create a feeling for a "misty, cool climate and tundra"; this was done mainly through the use of the grey/green, purple/blue, and grey colours (fig.5). In the Arctic gallery the "dawn" or "twilight" of a "cold climate" was indicated by the choice of colours (blue/grey and purple), figs. 6 and 7. The "barrenness" of the region was emphasized in the showcase design: the table-cases emphasized the idea of a low horizon, with a frosted glass backing as yet another

reference to the climatic or physical characteristics of the region (fig.8). The tall cases containing Inuit parkas looked like ice cubes with their panels of tempered glass (figs.6 and 7). The final gallery, the Northwest Coast gallery also attempted to achieve an illusion of "ocean and forest of a cool climate," thus completing the "journey" across the continent, from sea to sea. Three shades of bluish green were used, different than those in the East Coast gallery. The reference to "forest" was obtained through a dense distribution of vertical structures such as the "totem pole" cases, and through the use of gobos⁹⁵ projected on the wall (fig.9).

The installation of "The Spirit Sings" was, then, based on a design concept which emphasized the physical or climatic characteristics of each region through the use of colour and density. By the 1980s anthropologists had rejected the idea that physical environment and climate largely determines cultural features⁹⁶. This exhibition, however, continued to refer to the idea of environmental determinism through its installation. Had the installation been concerned *primarily* with the task of highlighting the formal, aesthetic qualities of the objects, this could have been achieved through a different use of colour. In the Northern Woodlands gallery, for example, a large number of the exhibited objects were made of dark,

⁹⁵ Gobos are special filtering screens which can be used with slide projectors to make 'patterns.' Three different gobos were used in the Glenbow exhibition: in the Northern Woodlands, the Western Subarctic and in the Northwest Coast galleries. In the two first galleries the pattern was primarily projected on the floor.

⁹⁶ As a design-device this concept dates back to René d'Harnoncourt's installations of 1939 and 1941 described in Chapter Two.

reddish wood, which made them 'blend in' with the warm rust-coloured nuance of red, referred to as 'red ochre,' chosen as the main colour of that gallery (fig.10). As noted, this was an intended association with "autumn forest." A deep, bluish green, for example, if it had been used for the interior of the Woodland cases containing the war clubs of polished, rich wood (fig.10) or the painted Naskapi coats (fig.11a) would have *contrasted* with the objects, and given them greater emphasis as art objects.

It is interesting to note, though, that although relatively saturated, the colours used in the installation were considered "too sedate" to be used in the public relations material associated with "The Spirit Sings." These included the logo for the exhibition, the introductory room of the exhibition itself, the printed material and the banners adorning the Lorne Building while the show was on display in Ottawa (cf. fig.12a-b).⁹⁷

SHOWCASES.

Beside the colour scheme, the major component of the design concept was the showcases themselves. Six basic types of case design, with variations, were used. Like the colour scheme, these were intended to reinforce the individuality of each gallery. They clearly distinguished each gallery and varied the conditions for viewing the

⁹⁷ Ruth Phillips has commented on the problematic rationale behind the use of the colour scheme of the public relations material (purple, turquoise and red), in a paper given at the Cultural Studies Conference, Carleton University, April, 1989. A modified version of this paper was published in *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Spring 1990:13-21.

objects. In some galleries the cases emphasized aesthetic experience, while in others they strongly suggested ethnographic associations.

One case-type used in "The Spirit Sings" was a traditional, front-loading, hinged showcase. This type (with variations) was used in several galleries, such as the East Coast, Woodlands, Plains and Subarctic galleries (cf. figs. 2; 10; 13; 14). The case structure (frame) of the cases of this type in the Woodlands gallery (figs. 10; 11a-b) was painted dark brown, with a case interior of a rust coloured fabric. In this gallery there were relatively many objects in each case, arranged either in grid-like fashion (as in figs. 10 and 11b), or *not* (as in cases exhibiting clothing, such as fig. 11a). Conspicuous case labels and identification tags (numbers) and occasional photographs occupied space in the cases. The Woodland cases, such as figs. 10 and 11a-b, bear a clear resemblance to display cases used in early ethnographic displays (cf. figs. 3 and 4, Chapter One). The dark brown colour of the Northern Woodlands cases made these look like the hard-wood cases from the end of last century. The relatively numerous objects and the prominent labelling reinforced this impression.⁹⁸ The result was that the design of the Northern Woodlands gallery conveyed a strong impression of a traditional, nineteenth century ethnographic display in which the objects were exhibited as scientific specimens, rather than aesthetic expressions. In the East Coast, Plains, and Subarctic galleries the cases of this type were generally less crowded, painted in

⁹⁸ The designers of "The Spirit Sings" acknowledged that a certain "period look" resulted from the choice of this case type, an image they found "very appropriate."

lighter colours (sand, green, or blue) and often without a solid back (figs. 2; 13; 14). The association with the traditional ethnographic showcase was thus less emphatic.

A second type of showcase was referred to by the designers as the "totem pole" case (figs. 15 and 16). In "The Spirit Sings" it was used to convey verticality and the idea of trees, and, as we have seen, this type was chosen for galleries where the "forest" impression was felt to be appropriate, most extensively in the Northwest Coast Gallery. Other names for this showcase design are the "treasure" case (Rivet 1948) or "black box" (MacDonald and Alsford 1989). This type of case is designed to emphasize the aesthetic qualities of an object, by removing distracting context, and by allowing an object to be viewed from all angles, in proper lighting and at eye level. It belongs in the context of aesthetic displays. As we have seen, this case type was used extensively in the 1969 show "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada" (cf. Chapter Three: fig.1).

Some of the cases used in the Arctic and the Northwest Coast galleries could be described as neutral (figs.7 and 17) because these cases impose a minimal frame between the object and the viewer. They attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible, to serve only as prop and protection without diverting attention from the object itself. Objects displayed in these more neutral cases, including the "totem" cases, made a stronger artistic impression than equally outstanding objects displayed in other types of cases. The value judgement that results, that the Northwest Coast pieces, for example, are *art*, whereas

the Woodlands pieces are not, was not the stated intention behind the installation. It was not, however, totally accidental that the Arctic and the Northwest Coast galleries made the most extensive use of this case type. Inuit and Northwest Coast objects have most readily been accepted as art, in the modern Western sense of the term.

CONTEXTUALIZATION.

The inclusion of information in the form of text presented a problem for the organizers of the exhibition and was one of the most heavily criticized aspects of the exhibition. The 'text-question' confronted the organizers of "The Spirit Sings" with a choice between two models for presentation, the aesthetic or the ethnographic. In "The Spirit Sings" the coordinating curator, Julia Harrison, chose to include, in her words, "a book length text on the walls"⁹⁹. This seemed a contradiction: if this was an art exhibition, why then did it not use a strictly aesthetic exhibition format (with a minimum of text), as done for example in the recent installation of African, Oceanic and American art at the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art in New York? As Susan Vogel, who was responsible for the new installation of the African collection in that institution, explained:

Text and photos can be very distracting in a gallery where art is exhibited because we are so much more accustomed to looking at them and because they are so much less demanding than a work of art ... Studies have shown that museum visitors may spend more time on these intended aids than they spend actually looking at the works of art. (Vogel 1982:40-41)

⁹⁹ Julia Harrison, personal communication, Carleton University, November 2, 1988.

"The Spirit Sings" not only included information in the form of text (on case labels and wall panels), it also included photos of documentary material of various kinds (historic photos, artists' representations) as well as sound tapes of native music in the appropriate galleries, while a video-film served as an introduction to the exhibition as such. This contextualization privileged the ethnographic display model over the art display.

ART AND CULTURE .

The dual purpose of "The Spirit Sings" was reflected in the choice of the six guest curators, among whom were ethnologists and art historians, specialists in their respective areas.¹⁰⁰ Thus, by combining art historical and ethnographic expertise "The Spirit Sings" attempted to bridge the gap between art and ethnology by focusing on their common subject: the objects themselves.

James Clifford has analyzed the way that Westerners relate to objects by classifying them as either *art* or *culture*,

In the early twentieth century, as *culture* was being extended to all the world's functioning societies, an increasing number of exotic, primitive, or archaic objects came to be seen as "art." They were equal in aesthetic and moral value with the greatest Western masterpieces. By mid-century the new attitude toward "primitive art" had been accepted by large numbers of educated Europeans and Americans. Indeed from the standpoint of the late twentieth century it becomes clear that the parallel concepts of art and culture did successfully,

¹⁰⁰ The curators were Ted J. Brasser (ethnologist, Plains); Bernadette Driscoll, (art historian, Inuit); Ruth B. Phillips (art historian, Northern Woodlands); Martine J. Reid (ethnologist, Northwest Coast); Judy Thompson (ethnologist, Western Subarctic); Ruth Holmes Whitehead (with a training in philosophy, Maritimes).

albeit temporarily, comprehend and incorporate a plethora of non-Western artifacts and customs ... Art and culture, categories for the best creations of Western humanism, were in principle extended to all the world's peoples. (1988:235)

"The Spirit Sings" belongs to the late twentieth century phase described by Clifford in that it combined ethnography and art in the same exhibition. As an art exhibit it went beyond the mere promotion of native art as *art*, which had characterized earlier exhibitions in this field, the 'masterpiece-displays.' Ruth Phillips, curator of the exhibition's Northern Woodlands section, explained the approach taken to art in this exhibition:

Woodlands languages have no words for "art" or "artist," and the use of these terms in discussions of Woodlands Indian objects and their makers represent the imposition of essentially Western concepts on native culture. ... However, substitutes to the term "artist," such as "craftsperson," "maker," or "creator," lack the important dimension of aesthetic expression that is present in the objects and genres under discussion. (Phillips 1987:86)¹⁰¹

Phillips' definition is an important acknowledgement of the existence of an aesthetic framework for native art and the possibility of establishing a history of native aesthetic concepts:

Although we lack explicit statements of ideals of beauty by Woodlands Indians artists and patrons, their taste and stylistic choices are embodied in the objects they made. By studying these objects, we can identify consistent

¹⁰¹ The terminology of the other curators was less radical: Harrison consistently referred to "objects" or "cultural material," rather than to "art"; Thompson and Driscoll sidestepped the issue by referring to "artistic expression" (of the Northern Athapaskan), or "artistic tradition" (of the Inuit parka). Brasser and Whitehead referred to "items," "objects," "work," or "souvenir art" for Plains and Maritime artifacts; while Reid was able to follow a by now well-established tradition and refer to "the art of the Northwest Coast" (Glenbow Museum 1987).

approaches to the handling of space, colour, line, texture, and form. (Phillips 1987:86)

In addition to dealing with the aesthetic aspects of Canadian native cultures around the time of white contact, "The Spirit Sings" also attempted to situate these in the larger context of the individual cultures. The main emphasis here was on cosmologies:

The entire project aimed at reassembling early contact period material from Canada's native populations to give some insight into the *philosophies and worldviews* of these peoples. (Harrison 1987:12; my italics)

This emphasis had resonance with many reviewers. Arnold Edinborough in the *Canadian Churchman*:

...religion is obvious everywhere in the exhibition: in the symbolism of decoration; in the ritual object of shaman and chief; in the use of available materials to celebrate the riches of the creator's gifts. Christian missionaries denied the power of all this. They brought their own living God with them and attempted to destroy the Indian's beliefs. ... In 1988, however, we are all concerned with the environment and with what we as arrogant immigrants have done to it. ... If we listen, the native peoples can teach us much, and there is no more involving way of listening than to walk slowly amongst the splendid objects of "The Spirit Sings" (1988).

and Stephen Godfrey in the *Globe and Mail*:

What the European settlers appear to have brought to North America was an ability to divorce form from function and art from daily life. What they found were people for whom so-called "decoration" was usually a means of paying homage to the symbols of nature which ruled their world. "The Spirit Sings" provides a superb glimpse of that gap in understanding, highlighting a history in which life *was* culture, and myth more important than fact (1988).

Stephani Kerr, of the *Calgary Sun* was overwhelmed by "The Spirit Sings" because it offered

a perspective that can only come when one is afforded a glimpse of continuity that is beyond one's own experience (1988).

and John Clark, in the *Calgary Herald* found that the clear and powerful tepee imagery in the Plains Gallery could knock Western neo-primitivists like A. R. Penck or Julian Schnabel "right off the wall":

... but the most telling contrast is that it was made by artists who weren't alienated from their world and who were still in touch with the forces of the Earth. It is this realization that makes the experience of "The Spirit Sings" not only a sad one from our perspective, but in its own way surprisingly shocking (1988).

Mark Abley, in the *Montreal Gazette* cited a pantheistic statement included in the exhibition by Anna Jameson, a nineteenth century traveller among the Ojibwa, and continued:

The rugged pantheism that informs so much of "The Spirit Sings" helps to make it a subtly political show. For a time of acid rain, poisoned waters, dwindling forests and vanishing wildlife, the faith that underlies these handmade objects should act on many visitors as both an inspiration and a challenge (1988).

The other reactions indicate that they did. These reviews reflect what Dean MacCannell has called a longing for authenticity (1976). In *The Tourist, A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, MacCannell analyzed our post-industrial, modern society and found that

For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler life styles. (1976:3)

"The tourist," MacCannell argued, is "one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" (1976:1). Modernity institutionalizes spuriousness and the belief that

somewhere, only not right here, not right now, perhaps just over there someplace, in another country, in another life-style ... there is *genuine* society (MacCannell 1976:155).

According to MacCannell, other cultures (in the form of museum experiences or "touristic encounters") appeal to modern man as "revealed objects," as pre-modern remnants (1976:84). As we have seen, this response was amply documented in the reception of "The Spirit Sings." When Clark (in the *Calgary Herald*) found the comparison between Western and native art "a sad realization" from *our perspective*, he expressed a very different reaction to native art and culture than that prevalent during the earlier periods I have analyzed. In 1927, 1941 and 1967, native art could be accepted as equal to, and in some cases perhaps superior to Western art. This did not mean, however, that the native cultures in question were regarded as equal, let alone superior to ours (cf. Duffek 1983). In the post-industrial, modern society of the late twentieth century, face to face with looming ecological disaster, a receptiveness to other world-views, based on a harmonic relation to the earth and other living beings, takes on a new meaning. These reviews express a receptiveness, a

willingness to 'listen,' which is characteristic of an advanced phase of post-industrial modern society.¹⁰²

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SPIRIT SINGS.

James Clifford has illustrated how we, in our culture in the twentieth century, classify objects and assign them relative value by means of what he calls the "art-culture system" (1988, see diagram below). Within this 'system' contexts are established to which objects "belong" and among which they circulate (Clifford 1988:223). Movements towards positive value proceed from bottom to top and from right to left. Applied to the field under discussion in this thesis, North American Indian artifacts, the two main contexts are the ethnographic museum which houses the objects we have classified as "cultural objects" (zone 2), and the art museum where we may exhibit objects we consider to be works of art (zone 1). The creation of Primitive Art as a concept, for example, marks a movement from zone 2 to zone 1 in the model. Objects reclassified in this way obtain more status or prestige in our society. The reclassification was in fact an 'upgrading'. Movement can also take place, as the diagram shows, from zone 4 to zone 2 (and then again from zone 2 to 1). Objects which have been classified as 'curios' or 'tourist art,' that is, they have not been considered authentic enough to be a true expression of their culture, may in fact be reclassified as worthy cultural artifacts that do

¹⁰² Whether this phase is to be considered a late phase of modernity, as MacCannell suggests, or a post-modern phase, is a discussion outside the scope of this paper. MacCannell rejects the term 'post-modern' as an adequate term for the late phases of post-industrial society in which we live (1989).

express important features of their culture. This process is also an upgrading of the status of the objects.

Beginning with an initial opposition, by a process of negation four terms are generated. This establishes horizontal and vertical axes and between them, four semantic zones: (1) the zone of authentic masterpieces, (2) the zone of authentic artifacts, (3) the zone of inauthentic masterpieces, (4) the zone of inauthentic artifacts (Clifford 1988:224).

The model illustrates *possible* movements. Reclassification of non-Western art from curios in zone 4 to cultural artifacts in zone 2 occurs regularly, as does reclassification of cultural artifacts to art,

illustrated on the model as a migration of objects from zone 2 to zone 1. Sometimes, objects from zone 4 may eventually end up in zone 1, moving from 'tourist art,' to 'ethnographic specimens' (museums acquired them), to sculptures, 'art'. Objects cannot, however, travel directly from zone 4 to zone 1.

The 'art-culture system' is *one* system in which native artifacts take part, namely the dominating 'object system' of Western culture. This system, however, marginalizes other systems such as, for example, spiritual 'tribal' contexts (Clifford 1988:226). Although our value system and our classifications do not include categories such as 'sacred,' this does not mean that objects cannot also participate in traditional spiritual contexts outside our 'system'. In connection with the controversial exhibition "'Primitivism' in twentieth Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984, the Zuni people were able to prevent exhibition of one of their war gods, arguing that in traditional Zuni belief war god figures are sacred and dangerous, and should not be seen. The Zuni in this case challenged the dominance of our 'object-system,' by rejecting our classification of their objects and insisting that *their* 'categories' be respected (Clifford 1988). As we shall see, a similar case can be argued in relation to "The Spirit Sings" where a False Face mask was removed from display on the request of a native group.

NATIVE CONCERNS: A CHALLENGE TO OUR 'OBJECT-SYSTEM'.

In her Introduction to the publication accompanying "The Spirit Sings," co-ordinating curator Julia Harrison explained not only the goals of the exhibition but also its intended audience:

A major exhibition of native cultural materials collected during the early phase of European contact would expand *our* knowledge of the original diversity and complexity of native cultures and would lead to a greater appreciation of the roots of contemporary native populations. (1987:11, my italics)

It seemed self-evident to the organizers that the exhibition would also be of value to native people interested in interpreting their own history (1987:11). The Introduction testified to an awareness of the fact that this exhibition represented "ideas and interpretations offered by the learned *outsider*" and claimed:

Critical to the collective approach was the awareness that the material presented in the exhibition and in the essays is not definitive but *only one set of interpretations*. It intends to initiate a dialogue with those interested in the subject, most particularly Canada's native peoples themselves. (1987:11, my italics)

The academic (or scientific) aim of the exhibition is expressed in these statements, together with an awareness that this exhibition was by *us* about (or for) *them*. Others did not see the exhibition as justified on these grounds, as the negative reactions to "The Spirit Sings" and the support for the boycott of it showed. A native reader wrote to the *Edmonton Journal* :

I feel the exhibit is historically inappropriate ... Potential visitors can rightfully be asked by the Lubicons to vote with their feet and not attend. (Aviron 1988)

Stephen Hume, of Southam News, called "The Spirit Sings" "an act of national hypocrisy" (1988b).

It is as though the Berlin Olympics had put on a display of Jewish religious objects to celebrate the diversity and pluralism of German culture (1988a).

Hume could not accept "The Spirit Sings," because "the beautiful works of sensitive and intelligent artists" on display were "debris that we robbed from the cultural traditions that we first demolished" (1988b). Other readers agreed with Hume, in a letter to the editor:

We are, like Hume, disturbed by the 'ethical gymnastics' of curators who have made careers by separating the esthetic value of native art from the social reality of those who produced it. (Dion 1988)

Brian Maracle in the *Ottawa Citizen* ¹⁰³ wrote:

"The Spirit Sings," this exhibition of irrelevant beauty, needs to be balanced by a companion exhibit that would showcase the ugly and mundane realities of native life (1988).

Behind these angry reactions was the call for a boycott of the exhibition by the Lubicon Band in support of their unsettled land claim. From the initial use of the boycott to exert political pressure on the government, the exhibition itself came under scrutiny too, as several of these reactions show.

The response of potential lenders to the boycott was mixed. According to the Glenbow Museum, only twelve out of more than ninety lenders (in twenty countries) refused to lend some 140 objects to the exhibition because of the boycott, while other sources counted

¹⁰³ Maracle also writes under his Iroquois name Owenadela.

twenty-three museums as active boycott-supporters.¹⁰⁴ In Canada no museum which was asked to lend to "The Spirit Sings" refused; however, the Canadian Ethnology Society (CESCE) declared itself in support of the boycott (Harrison 1988a:7). Bruce Trigger, honorary curator of the McCord Museum resigned this post in protest against that museum's refusal to honour the boycott (Henderson 1987). Trigger, and others who supported the boycott, argued for the moral obligation of anthropologists to serve as political advocates of native people (1988). Professor Trigger reminded us that:

professional and legal concerns are bound to pale into insignificance beside the cultural, ethical, and political issues that are being raised with respect to the rights of Native People. (Trigger 1988:11)

Trigger saw "The Spirit Sings" as an example of the neglect by museums across Canada of such moral and political concerns "in mounting a major exhibition in the face of protests from associations representing most native groups" (Trigger 1988:20). Furthermore,

Native feelings were ... outraged that an exhibition which was advertised as glorifying the creativity of Native Peoples at the time of European contact should be sponsored by one of the oil companies that was actively engaged in destroying the economy and way of life of the Lubicon Band (Trigger 1988:5).

Critiques of a general tendency in museum exhibits to perpetuate a "Golden Age" myth by glorifying the past while neglecting the present, as expressed in the above statements by Maracle and Trigger, are found in much recent scholarly criticism of

¹⁰⁴ The difference in numbers results from different interpretations of the reasons given for refusal of loans, see, for example, Feest 1987 and Halpin 1988.

representations of The Other.¹⁰⁵ Bernard Ominayak, chief of the Lubicon Band, echoed the same view in an interview in 1987:

they're trying to ... say how well off these Native people are in this province and what a rich culture they have and so forth. The reality is a totally different picture altogether. We're using the boycott to talk about what reality is really like for the native people in this province and country (Dolittle et al. 1987:31).

The Glenbow Museum was criticized for mounting an exhibition that 'celebrated the past' while remaining silent about the present. The museum chose not to let these issues affect the installation of "The Spirit Sings." Although there were 'gaps' in the display because of pieces withheld due to the boycott, such gaps were made as invisible as possible. In the installation of "The Spirit Sings" there was no response to the pressure from boycott supporters to make a link between the historic presentation and the current political reality (especially the land claim issue) of contemporary native peoples. The only visible result of the pressure within the exhibition was the inclusion of a text-panel at the end of it, in which some 36 signatories

expressed their hope for an expeditious and just resolution of all Canadian land claims, and related issues of compensation, self-determination and self-government (Lowey 1988c).

As the corporate sponsor as well as both the boycotting and the lending museums had signed the resolution, this panel was not a forceful political statement.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Turner and Bruner, eds. 1986 and Marcus and Clifford, eds. 1986.

¹⁰⁶ See also the debate between Michael Ames, Director of the Museum of Anthropology, UBC and Professor Bruce Trigger, McGill University, broadcast on

THE AUTHORITY OF INTERPRETATION.

"The Spirit Sings" controversy raised the large question of authority in interpretation which is today troubling museums in Canada. During the showing of "The Spirit Sings" the curators' authority to interpret was specifically challenged when an Iroquois False Face mask, selected for display in the Woodlands Gallery, was temporarily removed from the exhibition in Calgary, following a court injunction granted to the Mohawks of the Kahnawake reserve in Quebec (Lowey 1988a). False Face masks have healing powers controlled by designated medicine societies. They are sacred, and members of the society control who may see the masks. The display of such a mask in a museum therefore, according to the Mohawk,

violates the intended purpose of the mask and its sacred functions, constitutes a desecration, and ridicules and misrepresents the spiritual beliefs and practices of the Iroquois, including the Mohawk nation and its members.
(Lowey 1988b)

In the case of "The Spirit Sings" the sacredness of the False Face mask was disputed by the Glenbow Museum, who could refer to the fact that this particular mask has been owned by the Royal Ontario Museum since the 1920s, and that it had already been displayed in a major show, the 1969 "Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada"(Lowey 1988b). The Glenbow Museum and the guest-curators

CBC's Morningside, for two opposite views on the museum's role in relation to the boycott of "The Spirit Sings" (*Vanguard* 1988).

acted on the belief that this mask was no longer regarded as sacred. The Glenbow Museum won the legal battle and placed the mask on display again.¹⁰⁷ The fact that there were no objections to the 1969 display of the mask, while its presence in "The Spirit Sings" was protested is clear evidence of increased confidence among native people in asserting control over their cultural heritage since the 1960s (cf. the introduction to Chapter Three in this thesis).

The False Face mask incident is one example of a growing demand from native people to be consulted about the use of their objects in museum displays.¹⁰⁸ As Christopher McCormick, spokesman for the Native Council of Canada, said in a recent conference¹⁰⁹:

We *were*, we *are*, and *will be* the First People. We will refuse to allow people to appropriate or interpret our cultures for their own ends. It will be our elders, our specialists, our historians and our anthropologists, our scientists who from now on will be the interpreters of our Culture. That is what self determination means and we will have no less.¹¹⁰

A related issue concerns the ownership of museum objects. Native groups are increasingly challenging museums with regard to

¹⁰⁷ Despite the legal support of the Calgary Court to the Glenbow Museum, it was decided by the Canadian Museum of Civilization to have a replica carved for the Ottawa venue of the exhibition to replace the original mask.

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that the responsible curator did not consult the native side in this case. The question is often who in the native community has the power over the objects and who should be consulted.

¹⁰⁹ "Preserving our Heritage" at Carleton University, November 3-5, 1988.

¹¹⁰ Videotapes of the conference are available for viewing at the Assembly of First Nations' library, Clarence Street, Ottawa. See also Blundell and Grant's summary of the conference in *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Winter 1989 :12-16.

the ownership of some native material, especially human remains and sacred objects, and have fought cases for repatriation of objects.¹¹¹ According to the *Calgary Herald* the day after the opening of "The Spirit Sings," the Mohawk nation was asking for the return of the disputed False Face mask in addition to "a wampum belt, a chief's crown, moccasins, several pouches, a knife and sheath, and a prisoner's halter." It was also reported that a Micmac tribe was considering legal action to retrieve the big canoe on display in the East Coast gallery, while the Huron might join the legal battle to regain a wampum belt (Lowey 1988a:A2).¹¹²

CONCLUSIONS.

As we have seen, "The Spirit Sings" was an exhibition focused on historic 'objects' — on drums, rattles, parkas, moccasins, canoes, soul-catchers, burden-straps and many other items produced by the native peoples of Canada. The items selected for this show were chosen because of their ability to illustrate artistic traditions and as the aesthetically most outstanding¹¹³ individual pieces testifying to the artistic wealth of the native peoples inhabiting this region at the time of contact. In this sense they were clearly regarded as works of art. The exhibition format, however, was not primarily aesthetic. The showcases, for example, included a melange of the different

¹¹¹ See, for example, Inglis 1979 and Webster 1988 on the repatriation of the Potlatch Collection from the Museum of Man in Ottawa to the Kwakiutl Museum at Cape Mudge and to the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay.

¹¹² These actions were not, in fact, brought to court.

¹¹³ Ruth Phillips, personal communication, Ottawa, September 1988.

approaches introduced in both ethnographic and art museums over the previous 100 years — some were 19th century 'anthropological-style' cases, others were 'treasure' cases belonging to art displays of formal isolation. Certain choices, such as the use of life-groups, dioramas or mannequins were consciously omitted,¹¹⁴ whereas other ethnographic features were present. The show was contextualizing with its references to climate and physical conditions and in the composition of the museum-experience as a journey from east to west through galleries defined by culture area. The installation rejected both the illusionistic and highly didactic ethnographic exhibition format, as well as the extreme art installation with the formal decontextualizing of the artifacts. The mixed installation techniques implied a tacit recognition of problems inherent in exhibitions of The Other - no one model was fully acceptable.

The installation in this manner sent contradictory messages and confused the public, as reactions to the exhibition indicate (the installation was criticised from 'both sides'). The installation design was thus unsuccessful in conveying the Glenbow Museum's attempt to acknowledge as equally valid the two different approaches which have historically been applied to native objects in Western museums, as ethnography or as art.

¹¹⁴ Julia Harrison, personal communication, Ottawa , November 1988.

THE SPIRIT SINGS AS A CATALYST.

As the analysis has shown, it was not *the installation* of "The Spirit Sings" that was innovative. Neither was the particular installation design in itself controversial to the degree the actual debate about this exhibition seems to indicate. The intense scrutiny of the exhibition, which the boycott sparked, highlighted the problems inherent in exhibitions of The Other today — the use of sacred objects in exhibitions, the question of repatriation of artifacts, of sponsorship, the question of native consultation and control in the presentation of native history in exhibits, the imposition of the 'art' category on non-Western cultures.¹¹⁵ All of these issues were addressed by a conference arranged by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association at Carleton University in November 1988. The conference, entitled "Preserving our Heritage" was the result of a promise made by Dr. George MacDonald, Director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in the spring of 1988 at the press conference held to announce the Ottawa venue of the show. The promise was in response to criticism of that museum's support of "The Spirit Sings." The conference was to provide a forum in which the problematic issues could be debated.

Many native leaders at the Ottawa conference advocated self-determination in cultural matters, as did McCormick, cited earlier in

¹¹⁵ One assumption was that "The Spirit Sings" subscribed to the 'Golden Age -myth'. As the analysis has shown, the aim of TSS was quite the opposite: to bring the artistic traditions of Canada's native peoples out of the 'mythological past' and into a historical framework.

this chapter. Ames has noted that there is now a "growing public sentiment both among the audiences of anthropology and within the profession favouring this move among indigenous peoples" (1989:16). The fact that this conference took place in itself expressed a willingness to bridge gaps and embark on "a different kind of relationship," as George Erasmus phrased it in his opening speech. Consensus at the conference was that a partner relationship between native peoples and museums is desirable.¹¹⁶ As the lessons of "The Spirit Sings" indicate, the nature of our world today makes it "increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way." Ruth Phillips concluded in her paper to the Ottawa conference that we will continue to need museums in the future, precisely because of their potential as mediating institutions. We need them, she argued quoting Clifford Geertz "to enable conversation":

to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way (Phillips 1988:66).

A recognition of the fact that the issues addressed at the Ottawa conference require long-term solutions resulted in the formation of a Task Force on Museums and Native Peoples which met for the first

¹¹⁶ Native-run museums were not considered the only solution. Examples of already existing "native-run" institutions serving a museum-function in Canada include the Cape Mudge museum on Quadra Island and the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia.

time in February of 1990. Research committees will work in a variety of policy areas as follows:

repatriation - to develop a recommended policy on repatriation of objects from Canadian institutions and private collections and to address the display of sacred materials and human remains;

access - to examine how the terminology and classification systems now used by museums can be clarified to meet concerns of Native peoples and how Native communities/cultural organizations may better access the collections and programming of established institutions;

interpretation - to study how the history and culture of Native peoples may be more accurately portrayed through museum exhibitions and programming (Canadian Museums Association 1990b:1).

A NEW RELATIONSHIP.

There are already examples of emerging new relationships between museums and native people in Canada. At the "Preserving our Heritage" conference, Peter MacNair of the Royal British Columbia Museum drew attention to the native carving program and to the establishment of a 'potlatch collection' at that museum, which he had initiated fifteen to twenty years ago.¹¹⁷ In the use of the potlatch collection, which includes pieces to be used in contemporary potlatch celebrations, the museum has shifted the focus from preservation of historical artifacts to the encouragement of contemporary (traditional)

¹¹⁷ See Ames 1981, Duffek 1983 or Shadbolt 1986 for more information about the carver-in residence program at the RBCM referred to by MacNair at this conference.

cultural practices. Ames has noted that this practice has placed native people in a new role in relation to the museum:

Indians, traditionally treated by museums only as objects and clients, add now the role of patrons (1981:12)

The Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island have thus become patrons when they commission pieces of potlatch paraphernalia from the museum for their current cultural needs.

Another exhibition pointing toward the future was "The Legacy." Originally assembled by the British Columbia Provincial Museum in 1970-1971, it was an immensely successful exhibition which continued to tour British Columbia and Canada until 1980. (Then, a new and different version was established for showing in an international context in Edinburgh, entitled "The Legacy. Continuing Traditions of Canadian Northwest Coast Indian Art").¹¹⁸ The display of recent native works of art in "The Legacy" countered the stereotypical perception that native art must be old to be authentic,¹¹⁹ and demonstrated that "authenticity is produced, not salvaged" (Clifford 1988:250). The exhibition also presented these pieces as 'art', and in this way the objects, and their makers, were able to enjoy the social prestige associated with 'art', rather than the curiosity interest usually allotted to 'Indian handicrafts' or ethnographic objects.

¹¹⁸ The original Legacy consisted of about 90 artifacts "assembled ... to represent the current state of Northwest Coast Indian art." These pieces were acquired as the best that could be found or commissioned for the exhibition (MacNair et al. 1984:9).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Clifford's evaluation of an American exhibition, curated by Ralph Coe "Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965-1985" (1988:249).

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

The Museum of Anthropology at UBC has also hosted exhibitions of contemporary native art during the last ten years or so. Karen Duffek has recently considered several of these, among them the 1986 exhibition: "Bill Reid: Beyond the Essential Form"; the 1988 exhibition "Bob Boyer: A Blanket Statement"; and two coming exhibitions: "Lyle Wilson: When Worlds Collide" and a group-exhibition curated by native artist Robert Houle: "Sovereignty and Subjectivity." A common element in these exhibitions is the fact that the presented art forms transcend our usual definitions and categorisations, argues Duffek. In Reid's case, his work:

creates a definition of Haida art that refuses to be bound by the authoritative voice of museums and anthropologists in their determinations of other peoples' authenticity (1989:27).

Whereas Boyer's work

brings together the language of modernism with that of Native design and philosophies, and so also blurs the distinctions between the past and present, the traditional and modern, the regional and universal (1989:27).

In these exhibitions native artists draw fragments together of the past and present, the political and spiritual, the urban and natural environments, to create new definitions of their continuing cultures. This is an on-going process, and museums need to relinquish control over this process of definition, concludes Duffek (1989). The Museum of Anthropology has encouraged such processes by hosting the exhibitions and by inviting native curators.

Both the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Museum of Anthropology have thus in their activities sought to make the museum, as an institution and as a physical space, available to the native community. The MoA offers the physical museum building (which is inspired by native architecture) as a frame for native social events, as well as mounting such exhibitions of native art as referred to by Duffek above. The RBCM offers financial support and encouragement to traditional cultural practices, as described by MacNair above. The influence of the anthropological museum today, as these examples illustrate, may go far beyond the static installations of their permanent collections.

NATIVE CONSULTATIONS.

At the "Preserving our Heritage" conference, several native representatives indicated that increased consultation with native people about museum presentations were desirable.¹²⁰ A recent exhibition, "A Time of Gathering" at the Burke Museum in Washington, responded directly to the controversies raging around "The Spirit Sings" at the time it was being organized.¹²¹ As a direct consequence "A Time of Gathering" was planned and designed in close consultation with native representatives. The result was that a

¹²⁰ This is an often repeated suggestion for a 'solution' — as was the case in Robert Sullivan's paper "Forging a closer relationship with native people" to the 1989 annual meeting of the Canadian Museums Association. The Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History is currently redesigning its "Native Peoples Gallery" in consultation with local native representatives, according to Ronald Borden, director of SMNH, at the same conference, May 1989.

¹²¹ According to Ruth Phillips' personal communication with Robin Wright, curator of "A Time of Gathering."

prominent portion of the exhibition introducing the historical exhibit was a native-curated section addressing contemporary issues — completely uncensored by the museum.¹²²

There are, however, problems inherent in the use of native objects in exhibitions which are not solved by such consultations, or by letting native people be 'in control'. An example is offered by Clifford in a recent interview in *Art in America* which problematized this 'solution'. The Portland Museum of Art, Oregon, is in the process of reorganizing its collection of Northwest Coast art. Native elders were consulted early in the process, and Clifford recounts how he witnessed one of these consultations between the museum people and the elders. Certain objects were brought out and the elders were asked to interpret them and say how they felt about them:

I guess we were expecting the elders to explicate them in some sort of detailed way: this is how this object functions, it was made by so-and-so, this is what its power is in terms of the clan, in terms of our traditions - whatever (Clifford 1989:153).

The objects did not become the subject of much direct commentary by the elders. Instead they served as "kind of aides-mémoires for the telling of rather elaborate stories and the singing of many songs," Clifford reports, and asks how the museum is to respond to the discrepancy between our relation to these visual objects (as objects of art) and the native elders' own use of them which is quite different? (1989:153) Clifford's own answer is the suggestion of "the possibility

¹²² Ruth Phillips, personal communication, Ottawa, September 1990. The catalogue for the exhibit was still unpublished by this date.

of organizing imperfect translations, juxtapositions, discrepancies around these displaced objects." It is possible, argues Clifford,

to represent the discrepancy between object and context prominently in the exhibits,

and that is

different from seeing different isolated cultures and talking about some unbridgeable ethnocentrism (1989:153).

Clifford's answer is one of the most recent critical contributions in this area. It brings the question past the point of advocating native consultations and addresses the difficulties in applying 'the results' in concrete, physical displays.

SUMMARY OF THESIS.

The choice of "The Spirit Sings" as the point of departure for this thesis was based on the hypothesis that this exhibition, and the controversy sparked by the boycott, constituted a watershed in the history of the museum representation of native art and culture. The thesis has examined the nature of this watershed in order to clarify 'where we are right now' and 'where we seem to be going'. My analysis confirms that "The Spirit Sings" indeed was a watershed in Canadian museum history. From the initial use of the boycott to exert political pressure in the land claim issue, the content and structure of the exhibition itself came under investigation. The issues examined in relation to "The Spirit Sings" (sacred objects repatriation, sponsorship, the authority to interpret) are issues that go beyond this particular exhibition. In the event, "The Spirit Sings," was

successfully shown and the museum community was forced to confront the problems inherent in the kind of exhibit it is.

These problems were initially addressed at the "Preserving Our Heritage" conference. This conference, informed by a spirit far from the angry confrontations between boycott-supporters and 'non-boycotters', led to the establishment of a forum for long-term negotiations of the issues raised — the Task Force on Museums and Native Peoples.

We have experienced with increasing intensity during the 1980s a questioning of the legitimacy of exhibitions of native cultures mounted on the terms of the dominant (Western) culture. This problem pertains not only to the native cultures of Canada, but is a global phenomenon.¹²³ Cultural practices, including exhibitions, anthropological practices and the function of the art market, have been critically examined from a variety of perspectives. A 'crisis' situation has increasingly been acknowledged. The myth of ethnographic exhibitions as reconstructions of 'the truth' has been effectively challenged by proponents of a 'new anthropology' during the last decade. The challenge to scientific objectivity as the foundation for anthropological practices, in fact constitutes a challenge to the scientific paradigm of museum representation. In retrospect it becomes apparent that the 'art-approach' in exhibitions of native art was an attempt to modify the overriding scientific paradigm. The

¹²³ Aboriginal Australian art has been the focus of much recent critical investigation. See, for example, Fry and Willis 1989.

answer to 'where we are now' is that we are in the process of experiencing the breakdown of a paradigm. Academic criticism as well as public, and particularly native resistance to certain cultural practices ('controversial exhibitions') are signs of that. It is too early to know what new 'models' will emerge. Will museums manage to redefine their roles in the future to serve different audiences? Will future exhibitions be explicit about the standpoint from which they speak? Will we experience an influx of native-curated exhibits? Will future exhibitions speak with many voices? And will the audiences be ready? These are questions which cannot be answered at the present time.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER FOUR.

- Fig.1a - b Floor plan and model showing distribution of showcases. Glenbow installation. Glenbow Museum
- Fig.2 East Coast gallery. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.3 Northern Woodlands gallery. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.4a Northern Plains gallery, Glenbow installation. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.4b Northern Plains gallery, Ottawa installation. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.5 Western Subarctic gallery. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.6 Arctic gallery. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.7 Arctic gallery, showcase. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.8 Arctic gallery, frosted back showcases. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.9 Northwest Coast gallery. Photo: Glenbow Museum
- Fig.10 Showcase, Northern Woodland gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.11a-b Showcases, Northern Woodlands gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.12a Introduction room. Photo: Glenbow Museum.
- Fig.12b Promotion material, Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Fig.13 Showcase, Northern Plains gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.14 Showcase, Western Subarctic gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.15 "Totem-cases," Western Subarctic gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.16 "Totem-cases," Northwest Coast gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth
- Fig.17 Showcase, Northwest Coast gallery. Photo: Piers Stainforth

FIG. 1a

FIG. 1b.

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FIG.
4a. FIG.
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FIG
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FIG.
11a.

FIG.
11b.

FIG
12a.

THE SPIRIT SING
Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples

A Glenbow Museum exhibition
Shell Canada Limited - exclusive corporate sponsor
An Olympic Arts Festival presentation

OTTAWA
June 30-November 6, 1988

FIG
12b.

FIG.
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FIG
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