

Objects of Ethnography

Moon rocks, a few small strips of meat dried Hidatsa-style before 1918, dust from Jerusalem, “a knot tied by the wind in a storm at sea,” bottle caps filled with melted crayon made for skelley (a New York City street game), “a drop of the Virgin’s milk,” pieces of the dismantled Berlin Wall.¹ Each object is shown to the public eye protected and enshrined. Were the criterion of “visual interest” to determine what should be exhibited, such rocks, bits of meat, dust, knots, and toys, if saved at all, would await attention of another kind—perhaps by microscope, telescope, laboratory test, nutritional analysis, written description, diagram, or report of miracles. Why save, let alone display, things that are of little visual interest? Why ask the museum visitor to look closely at something whose value lies somewhere other than in its appearance?

To suggest that objects lacking visual interest might be of historical or cultural or religious or scientific interest, while seeming to offer an answer, actually compounds the problem because it leaves unexplored several fundamental assumptions, first among them the notion of artifactual autonomy. It is precisely this autonomy that makes it possible to display objects in and of themselves, even when there is little to inspect with the eye.²

Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Such objects become ethnographic by virtue of

being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. They are ethnographic, not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo's studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves. It is one thing, however, when ethnography is inscribed in books or displayed behind glass, at a remove in space, time, and language from the site described. It is quite another when people are themselves the medium of ethnographic representation, when they perform themselves, whether at home to tourists or at world's fairs, homelands entertainments, or folklife festivals—when they become living signs of themselves.

Exhibiting the Fragment

The artfulness of the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt. Where does the object begin, and where does it end? This I see as an essentially surgical issue. Shall we exhibit the cup with the saucer, the tea, the cream and sugar, the spoon, the napkin and placemat, the table and chair, the rug? Where do we make the cut?

Perhaps we should speak not of the ethnographic object but of the ethnographic fragment. Like the ruin, the ethnographic fragment is informed by a poetics of detachment. Detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible. Lovers of ruins in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England understood the distinctive pleasure afforded by architectural fragments, once enough time had passed for a detached attitude to form. The antiquarian John Aubrey valued the ruin as much as he did the earlier intact structure.³ Ruins inspired the feelings of melancholy and wonder associated with the sublime. They stimulated the viewer to imagine the building in its former pristine state. They offered the pleasure of longing for the irretrievable object of one's fantasy. Nor were ruins left to accidental formation. Aesthetic principles guided the selective demolition of ruins and, where a ruin was lacking, the building of artificial ones.⁴ Restoration may be re-

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"Dried meat, Hidatsa style.
Collected by Gilbert Wilson,
pre-1918? Beef."

From the exhibition *The Way
to Independence: Memories of
a Hidatsa Indian Family*,
1987. Photo by Randy Croce,
Minnesota Historical Society.

sisted in cases in which the power of the ruin is its capacity to signify the destructive circumstances of its creation; the skeleton of the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima does just this. In the case of the Ellis Island restoration, a fragment of the ruin is exhibited as such, in a vitrine, as part of the story of the site. A history of the poetics of the fragment is yet to be written, for fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make a virtue, a vicissitude of history, or a response to limitations on our ability to bring the world indoors. We make fragments.⁵

In Situ

In considering the problem of the ethnographic object, it is useful to distinguish *in situ* from *in context*, a pair of terms that call into question the nature of the whole, the burden of interpretation, and the location of meaning.

The notion of *in situ* entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be re-created. The art of the metonym is an art that accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object. Showing it in all its partiality

enhances the aura of its "realness." The danger, of course, is that museums amass collections and are, in a sense, condemned ever after to exhibit them. Collection-driven exhibitions often suffer from ethnographic atrophy because they tend to focus on what could be, and was, physically detached and carried away. As a result, what one has is what one shows. Very often what is shown is the collection, whether highlights, masterpieces, or everything in it. The tendency increases for such objects to be presented as art.

The art of mimesis, whether in the form of period rooms, ethnographic villages, re-created environments, reenacted rituals, or photomurals, places objects (or replicas of them) in situ. In situ approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings. Because the metonymic nature of ethnographic objects invites mimetic evocations of what was left behind, in situ approaches to installation tend toward environmental and re-creative displays. Such displays, which tend toward the monographic, appeal to those who argue that cultures are coherent wholes in their own right, that environment plays a significant role in cultural formation, and that displays should present process and not just products. At their most mimetic, in situ installations include live persons, preferably actual representatives of the cultures on display.

In-situ installations, no matter how mimetic, are not neutral. They are not a slice of life lifted from the everyday world and inserted into the museum gallery, though this is the rhetoric of the mimetic mode. On the contrary, those who construct the display also constitute the subject, even when they seem to do nothing more than relocate an entire house and its contents, brick by brick, board by board, chair by chair. Just as the ethnographic object is the creation of the ethnographer, so too are the putative cultural wholes of which they are part. The exhibition may reconstruct Kwakiutl life as the ethnographer envisions it before contact with Europeans, or Hungarian peasant interiors, region by region, as they are thought to have existed before industrialization. Or the display may project a utopian national whole that harmoniously integrates regional diversity, a favorite theme of national ethnographic museums and Ameri-

can pageants of democracy during the first decades of this century. "Wholes" are not given but constituted, and often they are hotly contested.⁶

Representational conventions guide mimetic displays, despite the illusion of close fit, if not identity, between the representation and that which is represented.⁷ Indeed, mimetic displays may be so dazzling in their realistic effects as to subvert curatorial efforts to focus the viewer's attention on particular ideas or objects. There is the danger that theatrical spectacle will displace scientific seriousness, that the artifice of the installation will overwhelm ethnographic artifact and curatorial intention.

In Context

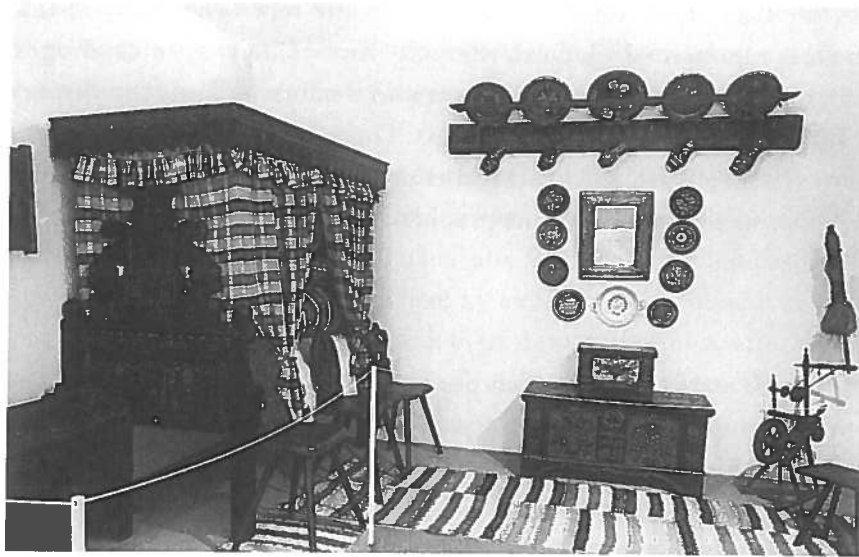
The notion of in context, which poses the interpretive problem of theoretical frame of reference, uses particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas. The notion expressed in a 1911 history of the British Museum that "the multifarious objects in the Ethnographical Gallery represent so many starting-points in the world's civilization" places those objects in context, not in situ.⁸ That context is signaled by the title of the chapter devoted to the Ethnographical Gallery, "Civilization in the Making."

Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones, explanatory audiovisual programs, docents conducting tours, booklets and catalogs, educational programs, lectures and performances. Objects are also set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships. In-context approaches to installation establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display. There are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies.

In-context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large num-

"Room of Sárköz from the second half of the nineteenth century."

Béri Balogh Ádám Museum. Photo by Gabler Csaba. Copyright
Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, Budapest.



"Popular art relics of the Bukovinian Székelys."

Béri Balogh Ádám Museum. Photo by Gabler Csaba. Copyright
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bers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another. Plants and animals arranged according to the Linnaean classification affirmed the goodness of the divine plan in Charles Willson Peale’s museum in Philadelphia during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers preferred to arrange his series of weapons according to formal criteria, from the simplest to the most complex, to tell the story of mankind’s inexorable evolution through stages of racial and cultural development.⁹ Even when the objects themselves are not arranged according to such conceptual schemes but according to geographic area, the viewer may be encouraged to “frame for himself a few general principles for which he can seek out specimens.”¹⁰

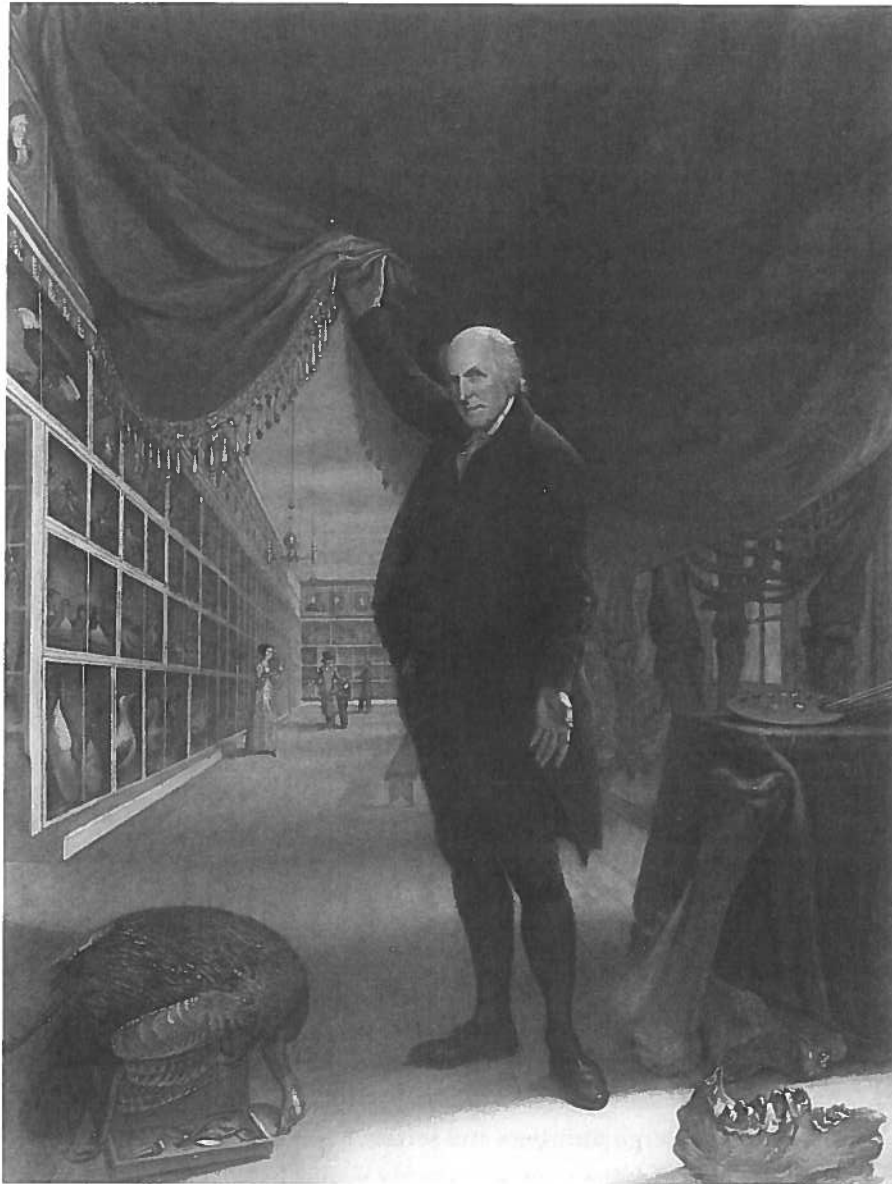
Whether they guide the physical arrangement of objects or structure the way viewers look at otherwise amorphous accumulations, exhibition classifications create serious interest where it might otherwise be lacking. “Than the Ethnographical Gallery in the British Museum there is no department the educational significance of which is so likely to be unappreciated,” wrote Henry C. Shelley in 1911, adding that visitors are inclined to indulge in laughter and jokes when confronted with “objects illustrating the manners and customs of what are known as the savage races.”¹¹ For instruction to supplant amusement, viewers needed principles for looking. They required a context, or framework, for transforming apparently grotesque, rude, strange, and vulgar artifacts into object lessons. Having been saved from oblivion, the ethnographic fragment now needed to be rescued from trivialization. One way of doing this was to treat the specimen as a document.

Rescuing the Fragment from Trivialization

The problematic relationship of in situ and in context, which are by no means mutually exclusive approaches, is signaled by Oleg Grabar in his comment about Islamic objects: “[T]hey are in fact to be seen as ethnographic documents, closely tied to life, even a reconstructed life, and more meaningful in large numbers and series than as single creations.”¹² Such objects, in Grabar’s view, are inherently multiple, documentary, and con-

The Artist in His Museum.

1822, by Charles Willson Peale. Oil on canvas, 103 3/4 in. x 79 7/8 in. Acc. no.: 1878.1.2. Courtesy of the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection).



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tingent. They were never intended to hold up to scrutiny as singular creations. Moreover, they are at their most documentary when presented in their multiplicity, that is, as a collection. Grabar diffuses their status as artifacts by according them higher value as "documents," as signs that point away from themselves to something else, to "life." At the same time, he hyperbolizes their status as artifacts by advocating that they be examined in "large numbers and series," a task anticipated and facilitated by the collecting process itself and well suited to typological exhibition arrangements.

Though once multiple, many ethnographic objects become singular, and the more singular they become, the more readily are they reclassified and exhibited as art. The many become one by virtue of the collection process itself. First, collecting induces rarity by creating scarcity: escalating demand reduces the availability of objects. Second, collectors create categories that from the outset, even before there is demand, are marked by the challenges they pose to acquisition: "By creating their own categories, all collectors create their own rarities."¹⁵ Third, the very ubiquity of the kinds of objects that interest ethnographers contributes to their ephemerality. Commonplace things are worn to oblivion and replaced with new objects, or are viewed as too trivial in their own time to be removed from circulation, to be alienated from their practical and social purposes, and saved for posterity.¹⁴ But no matter how singular the ethnographic object becomes, it retains its contingency, even when, by a process of radical detachment, it is reclassified and exhibited as art.¹⁵

Indeed, the litmus test of art seems to be whether an object can be stripped of contingency and still hold up. The universalizing rhetoric of "art," the insistence that great works are universal, that they transcend space and time, is predicated on the irrelevance of contingency. But the ability to stand alone says less about the nature of the object than about our categories and attitudes, which may account for the minimalist installation style of exhibitions of "primitive art." By suppressing contingency and presenting the objects on their own, such installations lay claims to the universality of the exhibited objects as works of art.

Ethnographic objects move from curio to specimen to art, though not necessarily in that order. As curiosities, objects are anomalous. By definition, they defy classification. Nineteenth-century advocates of scientific

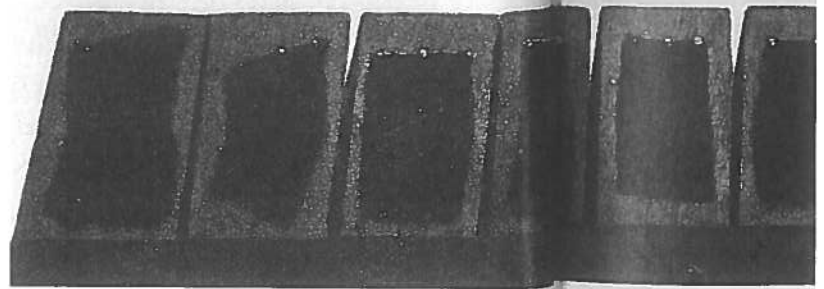
approaches to museum exhibition complained repeatedly about collections of curiosities that were displayed without systematic arrangement. But how could exhibitors be expected to arrange systematically objects that in their terms were unclassifiable? In what category might one exhibit the knot tied by the wind during a storm at sea that was donated to Peale's Museum at the end of the eighteenth century? Probably indistinguishable in appearance from a knot tied by human hands on land during calm weather, this object was an episode in an amazing story waiting to be retold rather than a member of a class of objects relevant to scientific taxonomies of the period.

What we see here are objects that had outlasted the curatorial classifications that once accommodated them in Renaissance cabinets and galleries. Singularities, chance formations that resulted from the "shuffle of things," did fall into a broad category, namely, *mirabilia*.¹⁶ This category included the very large and the very small, the misshapen and the miraculous, and the historically unique: for example, a hat with bullet holes associated with a specific historic event.¹⁷ By the nineteenth century, such objects were anomalous to natural historians interested in taxonomies of the normal, not the singularities of chance formation, though figures such as Joseph Dorfeuille continued to make teratology (the study of the malformed or monstrous) a major attraction in their museums.¹⁸

Exhibition classifications, whether Linnaean or evolutionary, shift the grounds of singularity from the object to a category within a particular taxonomy. For a curiosity to become classifiable it had to qualify as representative of a distinguishable class of objects. Peale, for example, was reluctant to show items that fell outside the Linnaean classification ac-

"Specialized Tests for Sense of Elegance. Quality in Fur. . . . Arrange these ten samples in the order of your feeling for their elegance if made into a woman's 'best coat'. . . . Be guided by your own personal liking or feeling of appreciation. . . . Be not influenced by knowledge of cost or fashion—try to respond to real quality."

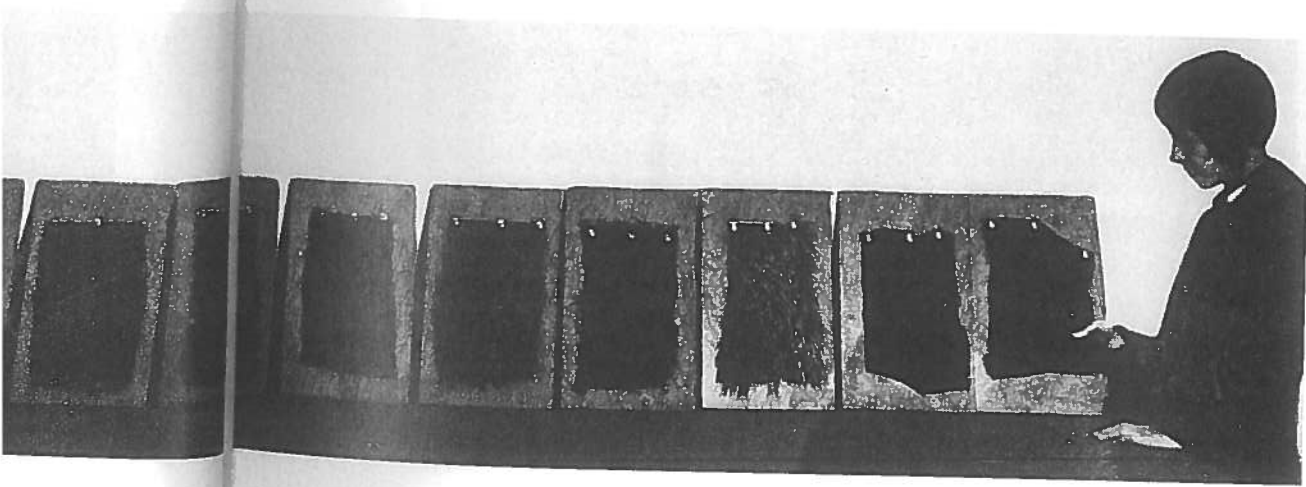
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ording to which he arranged objects in his museum in Philadelphia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His exhibits of plants and animals were normative: they featured typical members of each class. The comprehensiveness of the classification and orderly arrangement of Peale's collection testified to the purposiveness and goodness of God's creation, a message reinforced by quotations from the Bible mounted on the walls. With his fine American specimens, Peale intended to refute the view of Buffon, an eighteenth-century naturalist, that New World species were inferior to those of Europe. A mark of the seriousness and scientific nature of such exhibitions was the absence of freakish aberrations.¹⁹

In contrast, the exhibit for the International Eugenics Conference at the American Museum of Natural History in 1932 subjected to orderly arrangement the very anomalies (trembling guinea pigs, triplets, a picture drawn by a color-blind man, deformed eyeballs) that a century earlier would have appeared as curiosities defying classification. The structure of genetic inheritance now provided the matrix for the orderly display of nature's mistakes, long an attraction in cabinets and freak shows, and for eliminating such errors in the future—sterilization, antimiscegenation laws, and selective mating.²⁰ A logical outgrowth of the exhibition of racial types and the evolution of mankind, such eugenics exhibitions offered classifications that included the visitors themselves. These were interactive displays, for attendants handed out pedigree charts and blank schedules issued by the Eugenics Record Office and encouraged visitors to take tests for taste threshold and artistic capacity, for example, to rank fur samples. A "Eugenic Sterilization" exhibit was nearby.



Displays in the dime museum tested credulity—Ripley's Believe It or Not. Scientific exhibits struggled to achieve intelligibility—the object lessons of Dr. George Brown Goode, director of the U.S. National Museum. Exhibitions of art faced a different challenge. Refusing to define the objects in his collection either as curios (singular anomalies) or as ethnographic artifacts (representative examples of a class of objects), Hadji Ephraim Benguiat, a prime lender of Jewish ceremonial art to the Smithsonian Institution at the turn of the century, thought of his possessions as objects of art, a status derived from their perfection and his connoisseurship. Benguiat identified the classificatory skills of the art collector with his powers of discrimination. At the climactic instant of acquisition—each time he or she accepts or rejects an object—the collector “classifies.” Benguiat was interested in only one category, the perfect. This category was coterminous with his entire collection, seen as a supreme singularity made up of many singular artifacts. They were displayed accordingly.

Jewels and gems dazzle. They invite appreciation, not analysis. There is no place in this empire of things, ruled by the collector of collectors, for copies, photographs, models, homologues, dioramas, or tableaux. There is no place here for displaying continuous series of objects—without regard for the artistic excellence of each and every one—to make some historical point, no place for a system of classification that would array objects within theoretical hierarchies. Unmitigated excellence in everything shown, ubiquitous singularity, and the unifying principle of the collector's power—this is the message of the jewel box.

No matter how perfect this collection and each object within it, however, Benguiat's treasures could be reclassified for scientific purposes, and in the various exhibitions where they were featured, they moved from category to category.²¹

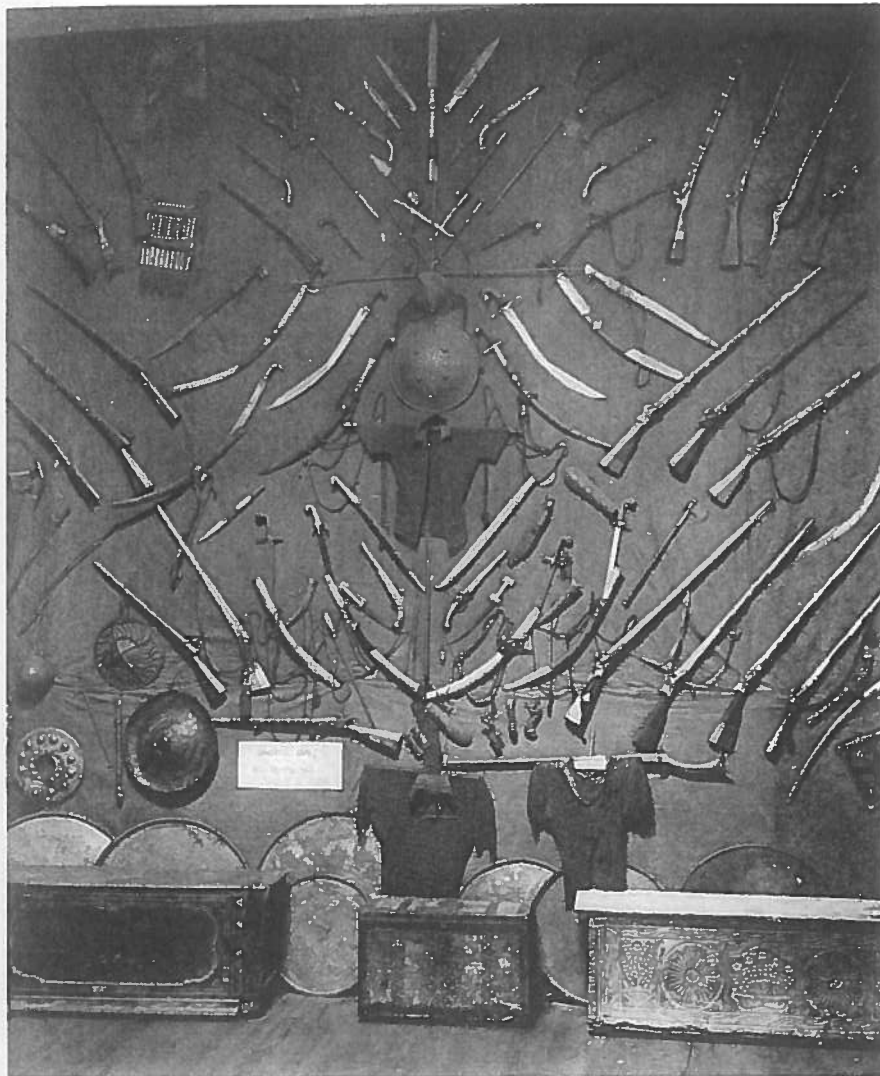
The Limits of Detachment

Not all that the ethnographic surgeon subjects to cognitive excision can be physically detached, carried away, and installed for viewing. What happens to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the animate? The in-



"Collection of Oriental Arms and Armor." Some of the arms shown here "belonged to the notorious brigand 'Katirjiani,' who was such a lover of fine arms that he frequently attacked a caravan and sacrificed the lives of his men just to acquire other specimens of arms, as the jewelled or inlaid decoration was always executed according to the personal taste of the owner, so that there are seldom two alike."

From *Fine Art Portfolio Illustrating Some of the Exhibits of the H. Ephraim Benguiat Museum Collection and the Historical Damascus Palace* (St. Louis: Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904), 29.



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tangible, which includes such classic ethnographic subjects as kinship, worldview, cosmology, values, and attitudes, cannot be carried away. The ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior—everyday activities, storytelling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds. Now you see it, now you don't. The immovable, whether a mesa, pyramid, cliff dwelling, or landform, can be recorded in photographs but presents formidable logistical obstacles to those who would detach and carry it away. The animate has been collected, both dead and alive. Dried, pickled, or stuffed, botanical and zoological specimens become artifacts for the museum. Alive, flora and fauna present storage problems that are solved by gardens and zoos in which living collections are on view. But what about people? Bones and mummies, body parts in alcohol, and plaster death masks may be found in museums. Living human specimens have been displayed in zoos, formal exhibitions, festivals, and other popular amusements.

If we cannot carry away the intangible, ephemeral, immovable, and animate, what have we done instead? Typically, we have inscribed what we cannot carry away, whether in field notes, recordings, photographs, films, or drawings. We have created ethnographic documents. Like ethnographic objects, these documents are also artifacts of ethnography, but true to what I would call the fetish-of-the-true-cross approach, ethnographic objects, those material fragments that we can carry away, are accorded a higher quotient of realness. Only the artifacts, the tangible metonyms, are really real. All the rest is mimetic, second order, a representation, an account undeniably of our own making. We have here the legacy of Renaissance antiquarians, for whom "visible remains" were used to corroborate written accounts. Objects, according to Giambattista Vico, were "manifest testimony" and carried greater authority than texts, even contemporaneous ones.²²

Textualizing Objects/Objectifying Texts

The priority of objects over texts in museum settings was reversed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Goode operated according to the dictum that "the most important thing about an exhibition was the label," a point restated by many who worked with him.²³

The people's museum should be much more than a house of specimens in glass cases. It should be a house full of ideas, arranged with the strictest attention to system.

I once tried to express this thought by saying "*An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen* (emphasis in original).²⁴

Museums were to teach "by means of object lessons," but objects could not be relied on to speak for themselves.²⁵

The curatorial charge was to create exhibitions that would "furnish an intelligent train of thought" by using objects to illustrate ideas.²⁶ Reacting to the apparent lack of logical arrangement in displays of art collections in many European museums and the low status to which so many private museums in America had descended, Goode had long insisted that the museum of the past was to be transformed from "a cemetery of bric-a-brac into a nursery of living thoughts."²⁷ His model for the public museum was the public library, though he believed that exhibitions had even greater potential as a medium of popular education. Objects were to be read like books: "Professor Huxley has described the museum as a 'consultative library of objects.'"²⁸ Curators were to objectify texts and textualize objects, hence the importance of an organizational scheme for arranging objects and labels to explain them and the willing acceptance of copies, casts, impressions, photographs, diagrams, and other surrogates for primary artifacts. Since the main purpose of a public museum was to educate, "for the purposes of study a cast was as good as an original," and in some cases better.²⁹ Copies came to play a special role.

Though proclaimed as a new approach to the exhibiting of objects, the textualized object was not new; it had been featured in demonstrations and illustrated lectures for centuries. Anatomy lessons were conducted at public dissections as early as the fourteenth century in Bologna, where, as the scholar read the anatomy text, the demonstrator dissected the body, and the ostensor, the one who showed, pointed a wand at the part of the body under consideration.³⁰ The French anatomy lesson during the seventeenth century was "a great social event that the whole town attended, with masks, refreshments, and diversions."³¹

The increasing emphasis on ostension—on showing—during the nineteenth century suggests a shift in the foundation of authoritative knowledge from a reliance primarily on rhetoric to an emphasis on information, particularly in the form of visual facts.⁵² By the end of the eighteenth century, Peale could boast that in the lecture room of his museum, presentations were illustrated with real specimens from his collection, consistent with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's admonition that "teachers never substitute representation for reality, show for substance—to teach, in short, from actual objects."⁵³ In this respect, Peale was in tune with a more general tendency of the period toward the "decidedly empirical or evidential nature of lecturing," though even under the guise of science, objects were used for their dramatic effect: "William Hazlitt was appalled at one of Carlisle's lectures on human emotions to find a dissected heart and brain being circulated among the audience."⁵⁴

In many ways, the approach to museum exhibitions advocated by Goode during the latter part of the nineteenth century should be seen in relation to the illustrated lecture, its history and requirements. Complaining in 1891 about the decline of "entertainments worthy of civilized communities—concerts, readings, lectures"—and the rise of illustration, including the diagram, blackboard, and stereopticon, Goode wanted the museum to fill the gap left by the decline of lectures and scientific, literary, and artistic societies.⁵⁵ The written label in an exhibition was a surrogate for the words of an absent lecturer, with the added advantage that the exhibited objects, rather than appear briefly to illustrate a lecture, could be seen by a large public for a longer period of time.

It is precisely in these terms that Washington Matthews introduced his lecture "Some Sacred Objects of the Navajo Rites" at the Third International Folk-Lore Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

Someone has said that a first-class museum would consist of a series of satisfactory labels with specimens attached. This saying might be rendered: "The label is more important than the specimen." When I have finished reading this paper, you may admit that this is true in the case of the little museum which I have here to show: A basket, a fascicle of plant fibres; a

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few rudely painted sticks, some beads and feathers put together as if by children in their meaningless play, for the total of the collection. You would scarcely pick these trifles up if you saw them lying in the gutter, yet when I have told all I have to tell about them, I trust they may seem of greater importance, and that some among you would be as glad to possess them as I am. I might have added largely to this collection had I time to discourse about them, for I possess many more of their kind. It is not a question of things, but of time. I shall do scant justice to this little pile within an hour. An hour it will be to you, and a tiresome hour, no doubt; but you may pass it with greater patience when you learn that this hour's monologue represents to me twelve years of hard and oft-baffled investigation. Such dry facts as I have to relate are not to be obtained by rushing up to the first Indian you meet, notebook in hand. But I have no time for further preliminary remarks, and must proceed at once to my descriptions.⁵⁶

In this demonstration of connoisseurship, the ethnographer is a detective who toils long and hard to decipher material clues. This master of induction competes both with the native informant and with other ethnographers, not for the objects, but for the facts that comprise his descriptions. His lecture is a long label, a performed description that elevates what would otherwise be viewed as "trifles." Neither the modest specimens nor the dry facts are expected to interest the listener. Rather, it is the ethnographer's own expenditure of time and effort—his expertise—that creates value.

This effect is achieved rhetorically, for the more unprepossessing the evidence, the more impressive the ethnographic description. Characterizing his own recounting of the facts as "minute to a tedious degree" and "not one half the particulars that I might appropriately have told you," Matthews admits to having reached the limits of his ability to describe when challenged by the drumstick on the table. Not even the Navajo can describe in words how the drumstick is made, "so intricate are the rules pertaining to its construction." Apologizing for not having fresh yucca on hand with which to demonstrate the process, Matthews offers to take anyone who is interested to the "yucca-covered deserts of Arizona" where he can "show him how to make a drum stick." In this way, Matthews con-

fronts two basic problems in ethnographic display. First he makes the apparently trivial interesting by performing ethnography (the illustrated lecture). Then he addresses the limitations of verbal description by offering to play Indian (the demonstration).³⁷ The profusion of facts that Matthews presents to his listeners, his apologies for their dry and tedious character notwithstanding, is a classic case of what Neil Harris has identified as the operational aesthetic—"a delight in observing process and examining for literal truth."³⁸

Exhibiting Humans

Not only inanimate artifacts but also humans are detachable, fragmentable, and replicable in a variety of materials. The inherently performative nature of live specimens veers exhibits of them strongly in the direction of spectacle, blurring still further the line between morbid curiosity and scientific interest, chamber of horrors and medical exhibition, circus and zoological garden, theater and living ethnographic display, scholarly lecture and dramatic monologue, cultural performance and staged re-creation. The blurring of this line was particularly useful in England and the United States during the early nineteenth century because performances that would be objectionable to conservative Protestants if staged in a theater were acceptable when presented in a museum, even if there was virtually nothing else to distinguish them. This reframing of performance in terms of nature, science, and education rendered it respectable, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. If in the scientific lecture the exhibitor was the performer, ethnographic displays shifted the locus of performance to the exhibit proper and in so doing, made ample use of patently theatrical genres and techniques to display people and their things.

In what might be characterized as a reciprocity of means and complementarity of function, museums used theatrical crafts of scene painting for exhibits and staged performances in their lecture rooms, while theaters used the subjects presented in museums, including live exotic animals and humans, and the technologies demonstrated there in their stage productions. Museums served as surrogate theaters during periods when

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theaters came under attack for religious reasons, while theaters brought a note of seriousness to their offerings by presenting edifying entertainment. In the drama of the specimen, the curator was a ventriloquist whose task it was to make the object speak. Through scenarios of production and function, curators converted objects into stories: they showed the process by which ceramics and textiles were manufactured, step-by-step, or how they were used in daily life and ceremony. The Smithsonian anthropologist Otis T. Mason was explicit on this point in 1891 when he defined "the important elements of the specimen" as "the dramatis personae and incidents."³⁹

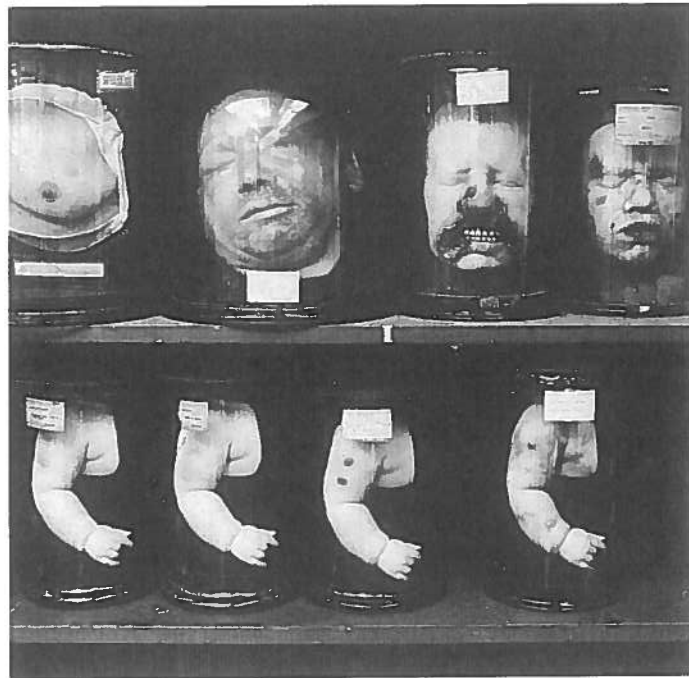
Living or Dead

Human displays teeter-totter on a kind of semiotic seesaw, equipoised between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead. The semiotic complexity of exhibits of people, particularly those of an ethnographic character, may be seen in reciprocities between exhibiting the dead as if they are alive and the living as if they are dead, reciprocities that hold for the art of the undertaker as well as the art of the museum preparator.

Ethnographic displays are part of a larger history of human display, in which the themes of death, dissection, torture, and martyrdom are intermingled. This history includes the exhibition of dead bodies in cemeteries, catacombs, homes, and theaters, the public dissection of cadavers in anatomy lessons, the vivisection of torture victims using such anatomical techniques as flaying, public executions by guillotine or gibbet, heads of criminals impaled on stakes, public extractions of teeth, and displays of body parts and fetuses in anatomical and other museums, whether in the flesh, in wax, or in plaster cast.⁴⁰ The body parts arrived not only as by-products of dissections but also as a result of amputations, for example, the trigger finger of a villain.⁴¹ Effigies of men tortured and executed in the very cages in which they were displayed were an attraction at the Münster Zoo.⁴²

Ethnographic subjects were easily incorporated into such modes of display.⁴³ The remains of the dead—tattooed Maori heads, Aztec skulls, and

bones removed from Indian graves—had long been excavated and shown as ethnographic specimens. Live subjects provided expanded opportunities for ethnographic display. While live, human rarities figured in museological dramas of cognitive vivisection. When dead, their corpses were anatomized and their bones and fleshy body parts incorporated into anatomical exhibits. The *vanitas mundi* was a way of exhibiting dissected materials: one such anatomical allegory was created out of the skeleton of a fetus, tiny kidney stones, a dried artery, and a hardened vas deferens. Articulated skeletons, taxidermy, wax models, and live specimens also offered conceptual links between anatomy and death in what might be considered museums of mortality.⁴⁴



"Specimens on Shelf." Wax models, circa 1850–1920. Top, left to right: Recklinghausen's disease of breast; active erysipelas on face; gangrenous ulceration of lip and nares; rupia (tertiary syphilis) of face. Bottom, left to right: arms of infants bearing vaccinia (cowpox) on sixth to eighth day, on ninth to tenth day, and on fourteenth to sixteenth day; arm bearing roseola varicella (chicken pox).

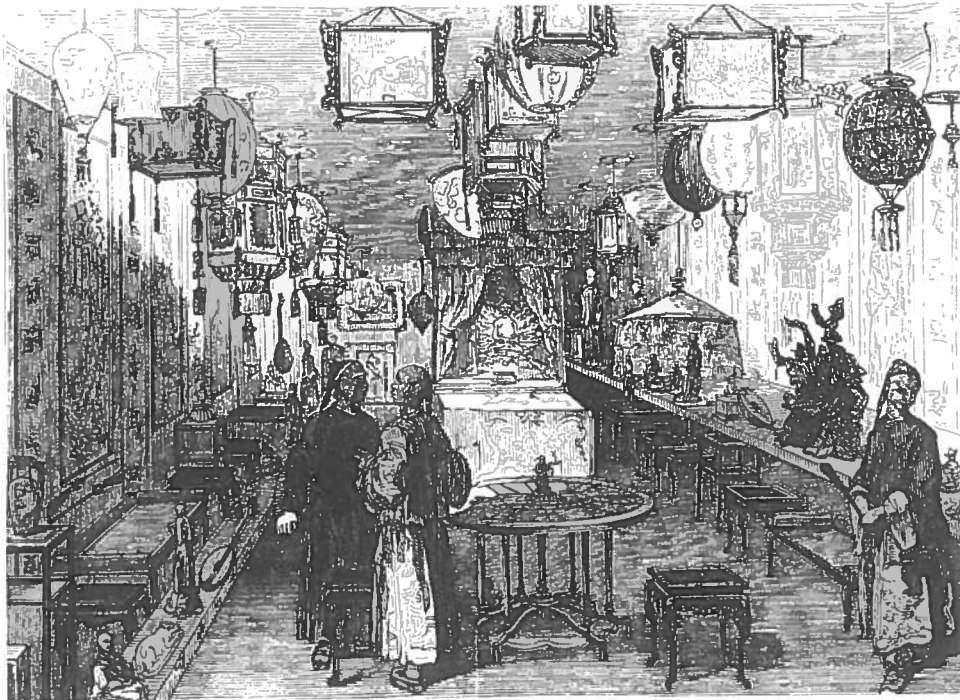
Collection of the Mütter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Photo Arne Svenson, copyright 1993.

Wax models as a form of three-dimensional anatomical illustration were commonly used to teach medicine, especially pathologies of the skin, and were featured in anatomical displays open to the public. Rackstrow's Museum of Anatomy and Curiosities, which was popular in London during the mid-eighteenth century, offered visitors wax replicas of the human body in various states of health and disease, inside and out, including reproductive organs and fetuses, some of them preserved in alcohol rather than represented in wax.⁴⁵ With the rising interest in racial typologies and evolution during the mid-nineteenth century, Sarti's Museum of Pathological Anatomy in London, and others like it, became the place to exhibit culturally constructed anatomical pathologies (parts of a Moorish woman's anatomy), missing links in the evolutionary sequence (wax figures of African "savages" with tails), and wax tableaus of ethnographic scenes.⁴⁶ As early as 1797, Peale had completed wax figures for "a group of contrasting races of mankind" that included natives from North and South America, the Sandwich Islands, Otaheite, and China. The faces are thought to have been made from life casts. The figures were outfitted with appropriate clothing and artifacts. Half a century later, the Gallery of All Nations in Reimer's Anatomical and Ethnological Museum in London featured "the varied types of the Great Human Family," including the Aztec Lilliputians that shortly before had appeared live in the Liverpool Zoo.⁴⁷

The "gallery of nations" idea, which since the late sixteenth century had served as the organizing principle for books devoted to customs, manners, religions, costumes, and other ethnographic topics, was easily adapted to the exhibition of ethnographic specimens.⁴⁸ A logical spinoff was the monographic display. Nathan Dunn's celebrated Chinese collection, which was installed in Peale's museum in 1838 and moved to London in 1841, offered, according to a diarist of the period, "a perfect picture of Chinese life."

Figures of natural size, admirably executed in clay, all of them portraits of individuals, are there to be seen, dressed in the appropriate costume, engaged in their various avocations and surrounded by the furniture, implements and material objects of daily existence. The faces are expressive, the

attitudes natural, the situation & grouping well conceived, and the aspect of the whole very striking and lifelike. Mandarins, priests, soldiers, ladies of quality, gentlemen of rank, play-actors and slaves; a barber, a shoemaker and a blacksmith employed in their trades; the shop of a merchant with purchasers buying goods, the drawing room of a man of fortune with his visitors smoking and drinking tea & servants in attendance; all sitting, standing, almost talking, with the dress, furniture and accompaniments of actual life. Some of the costumes are of the richest and most gorgeous description. Models of country houses and boats, weapons, lamps, pictures, vases, images of Gods, and porcelain vessels, many of them most curious and beautiful, and in number, infinite. Mr. Dunn was in the room himself and explained to us the nature and uses of things.⁴⁹



Saloon of a Chinese junk.

From *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1948. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

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1948. Photo
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The attention in this description to the individuation of faces reflects the more general preoccupation with “types” and the notion of physiognomy as a key to moral character.⁵⁰

Physiognomic types and their racial implications were presented not only in galleries of nations and in the later “types of mankind” exhibitions but also in crowd scenes and group portraits of life in contemporary European and American cities, as well as in the literature of the period. So great was the fascination with physiognomy that at Peale’s museum, where portraits of great men “etched the outlines of genius” and those of “savages” revealed their physiognomy, museum visitors could take home as a souvenir their own silhouette, made with great exactitude thanks to a mechanical device, the “physiognotrace,” invented in 1803 and demonstrated in the museum gallery.⁵¹

Dunn’s Chinese exhibition inspired other such displays, notably, scenes of daily life at the Oriental and Turkish Museum during the 1850s in London. Viewers were astonished by the wax figures, which a journalist of the time praised for their realism: “[T]he arms and legs of males are rough with real hair, most delicately applied—actual drops of perspiration are on the brows of the porters.”⁵² Clearly, the mannequins were more than clothes hangers, for not only ethnographic artifacts but also physiognomy was on display.

It is precisely the mimetic perfection of such installations, and perhaps also their preoccupation with physiognomy, that so disturbed Franz Boas, who resisted the use of realistic wax mannequins in ethnographic recreations. They were so lifelike they were deathlike. Boas objected to “the ghastly impression such as we notice in wax-figures,” an effect that he thought was heightened when absolutely lifelike figures lacked motion.⁵³ Furthermore, wax as a medium more nearly captured the color and quality of dead than living flesh, and in their frozen pose and silence wax figures were reminiscent of the undertaker’s art, a connection that wax museums capitalized on in deathbed and open casket scenes featuring famous persons.

Fear of verisimilitude did not inhibit Artur Hazelius, who in his effort to present Sweden “in summary” began installing wax tableaux—“folk-life pictures”—in the 1870s. Inspired by genre paintings, these senti-

mental scenes in wax integrated costumes, furniture, and utensils that Hazelius had collected in Sweden and other parts of Scandinavia. Featured not only in his Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography, which opened in 1873, but also at world's fairs in 1876 (Philadelphia) and 1878 (Paris), these displays utilized techniques Hazelius had seen at the many international expositions and museums he visited. He used the habitat group, a fixture of natural history museums. He turned to the wax tableau, which, like the *tableau vivant*, was often modeled on a painting or sculpture and captured a dramatic moment in a narrative. He also drew on the period room and travel panorama. By 1891, he had realized his dream of exhibiting Swedish folklife in "living style" at Skansen, his open-air museum. In addition to buildings, plants, and animals, the museum featured peasants in native dress, traditional musicians and artisans,

The Infant's Death, one of several "Swedish character groups" in the main building of the Centennial Exposition, Philadelphia, 1876. This "living picture" was based on Amalia Lindgren's painting (1858) and was shown again in 1878 at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.

From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 26 August 1876, p. 409.



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costumed receptionists and guides, restaurants, craft demonstrations, and festivals. Hazelius's Skansen museum became the prototype for hundreds of other open-air museums throughout Europe, many of them still functioning today.⁵⁴

Animal or Actor

People have been displayed as living rarities from as early as 1501, when live Eskimos were exhibited in Bristol. A Brazilian village built by Indians in Rouen in the 1580s was burned down by French soldiers, an event that pleased the king so much that it was restaged the following day.⁵⁵ "Virginians" were featured on the Thames in 1603.⁵⁶ Over a period of five centuries, audiences flocked to see Tahitians, Laplanders, "Aztecs," Iro-

Open-air museum of Skansen.

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quois, Cherokees, Ojibways, Iowas, Mohawks, Botocudos, Guianese, Hottentots, Kaffirs, Nubians, Somalis, Sinhalese, Patagonians, Tierra del Fuegians, Hlongots, Kalmucks, Amapondans, Zulus, Bushmen, Australian aborigines, Japanese, and East Indians. They could be seen in various cities in England and on the Continent, in taverns and at fairs, on the stage in theatrical productions, at Whitehall, Piccadilly, and Vauxhall Gardens, along the Thames, at William Bullock's London Museum (better known as Egyptian Hall because of its architectural style), in zoos and circuses, and, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, at world's fairs.⁵⁷

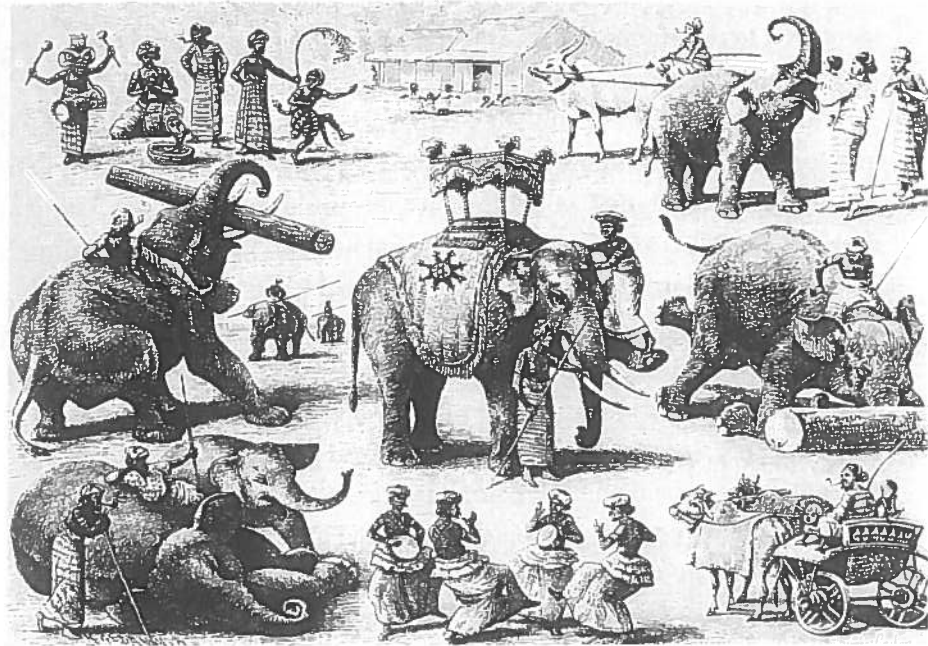
Basically, there were two options for exhibiting living ethnographic specimens: the zoological and the theatrical. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the distinction between zoological and theatrical approaches was often unclear and both were implicated in the staging of wildness, particularly in Carl Hagenbeck's productions. The zoological option depended on traditions of displaying exotic animals, including the circus, which featured trained animals, and the zoo, where live exotic specimens were shown in cages, in fantastic buildings, and, eventually, in settings re-creating their habitat in realistic detail, though here too animal acts could be found. It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for a living human rarity to be booked into a variety of venues—theaters, exhibition halls, concert rooms, museums, and zoos—in the course of several weeks or months as part of a tour.

London Museum, or Egyptian Hall, was dubbed the "ark of zoological wonders" by at least one observer of the period, because of the wide range of live exhibits, human and animal, presented there.⁵⁸ While the term "ark" evokes the discourse of natural theology, as opposed to natural history, and suggests that the sheer variety of divine creation rather than scientific classification was the focus, Bullock found in environmental displays a fine way to combine theatrical effect, the experience of travel, and geographic principles.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, geography was also an omnibus discipline devoted to all that is on the earth's surface, including people in their environment; geography subsumed anthropology and ethnography as subfields. Location on the earth's globe and relationships of specimens to landforms, climate, and local flora and fauna offered an alternative principle for arranging exhibitions of animals and people

Carl Hagenbeck's Sinhalese caravan.

From *Die Gartenlaube*, no. 34 (1884).

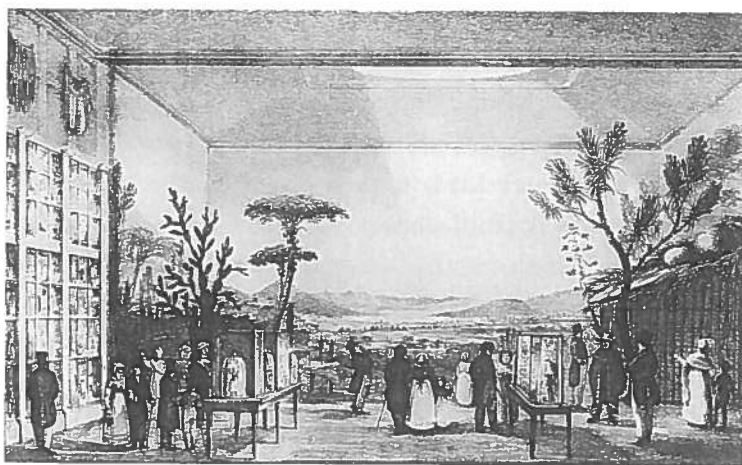


and encouraged environmental displays that showed the interrelation of elements in a habitat. Those who collected their own specimens, had firsthand knowledge of their habitat, and controlled how their materials were exhibited were more likely to present animals and people in their home environments. Like Bullock, who collected material for his displays while traveling and then tried to re-create the places he had visited, Peale hunted for many of his specimens himself, mounted them, and created settings for them based on his observations while hunting.

The passion for close visual observation on the spot had transformed how landscapes were experienced and described during the eighteenth century and shaped how specimens brought into galleries were exhibited, to the point that the experience of travel became the model for exhibitions about other places.⁵⁹ Visitors were offered the display as a surrogate for travel, and displays in turn participated in the discourse of travel, the

subject of chapter 3. Billed as travel experiences, panoramas were narrated by travelers who served as guides-at-a-distance through landscapes they had personally traversed. Individuals who had assisted hunters and collectors abroad were brought into exhibitions both to complete the scene and to comment on it, thus transferring to the re-created travel setting the roles of native guide and animal handler.

Returning from Mexico in 1823 with casts of ancient remains, ethnographic objects, specimens of plants and animals, and a Mexican Indian youth, Bullock designed an exhibition that would make visitors feel like they were in Mexico enjoying a panoramic view of Mexico City (painted on the wall) and intimate contact with its inhabitants. An observer of the period reported that “[i]n order to heighten the deception, and to bring the spectator actually amidst the scenes represented, [he presented] a *fac simile* [*sic*] of a Mexican cottage and garden, with a tree, flowers, and fruit; they are exactly the size of their natural models, and bear an identity not to be mistaken.” To complete the effect, Bullock installed the Mexican Indian youth in the cottage and had him describe objects to the visitors “as far as his knowledge of our language permits,” thus making him do double duty as ethnographic specimen and museum docent.⁶⁰



William Bullock's exhibit of Mexico.

Lithograph by A. Aiglo, 1825. Photo courtesy
Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

Living Style

The moment live people are included in such displays the issue arises: what will they do? In considering the options for presenting people in "living style," it is useful to distinguish staged re-creations of cultural performances (wedding, funeral, hunt, martial arts display, shamanic ritual) and the drama of the quotidian (nursing a baby, cooking, smoking, spitting, tending a fire, washing, carving, weaving).⁶¹

In a highly popular African display mounted in 1853 at St. George's Gallery, Hyde Park, thirteen Kaffirs "portrayed 'the whole drama of Caffre life' against a series of scenes painted by Charles Marshall. They ate meals with enormous spoons, held a conference with a 'witchfinder' . . . , and enacted a wedding, a hunt, and a military expedition, 'all with characteristic dances,' the whole ending with a programmed general *mêlée* between the rival tribes."⁶² Two decades earlier, in 1822, Bullock had a Laplander family and live reindeer perform at Egyptian Hall, where they drove their sledge around a frosty panorama fitted out with their tents, utensils, and weapons. The Laplanders had been brought to care for the reindeer, who, it was hoped, could be introduced into England, but when this proved impractical, the Laplanders were recycled as ethnographic exhibits.⁶³ Ethnologists in London kept track of new ethnographic arrivals and took advantage of their presence for their research.⁶⁴

Whereas the notion that native life was inherently dramatic allowed it to be staged and billed as theater, the ability of natives to perform, and particularly to mime, was taken by some viewers as evidence of their humanity. Charles Dickens, who was otherwise disdainful of the people in live ethnographic displays, commented on seeing the Bushmen in Egyptian Hall in 1847, "Who that saw the four grim, stunted, abject Bush-people at the Egyptian Hall—with two natural actors among them out of that number, one a male and the other a female—can forget how something human and imaginative gradually broke out in the ugly little man, when he was roused from crouching over the charcoal fire, into giving a dramatic representation of the tracking of a beast, the shooting of it with poisoned arrows, and the creature's death."⁶⁵ The Bushmen were installed against a scenic African background, and in addition to offering the "cultural performances" that so captivated Dickens, they slept and smoked, nursed an infant, and otherwise went about the business of daily

William Bullock's exhibit of Laplanders.

Engraving by Thomas Rowlandson, 1822. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.



Bushmen, with their agent, on display at Egyptian Hall.

From *Illustrated London News*, 12 June 1847. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.



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life.⁶⁶ What is so extraordinary about Dickens's statement is the implication that what makes the Bushmen human is not their ability to hunt but their ability to mime the hunt—that is, their ability to represent.

As the everyday life of others came into focus as a subject for exhibition, ethnography offered, at least for some, a critique of civilization. In his 1911 account of the British Museum, Henry C. Shelley commented, "Perhaps the hilarity with which the ordinary visitor regards the object lessons of ethnography arises from his overweening conceit of the value and importance of his own particular form of civilization. No doubt he has much in common with that traveller who lost his way on his journey and described the climax of his experience in these words: 'After having walked eleven hours without having traced the print of a human foot, to my great comfort and delight, I saw a man hanging upon a gibbet; my pleasure at the cheering prospect was inexpressible, for it convinced me that I was in a civilized country.'"⁶⁷ This is the ethnological effect in reverse: our own barbarity is experienced as civilized.

Exhibiting the Quotidian

Genre Errors

The drama of the quotidian feeds on what John MacAloon calls a genre error: one man's life is another man's spectacle.⁶⁸ Exhibitions institutionalize this error by producing the quotidian as spectacle, and they do this by building the role of the observer into the structure of events that, left to their own devices, are not subject to formal viewing. Following Dean MacCannell's analysis of "staged authenticity," such exhibitions "stage the back region," thereby creating a new front region.⁶⁹ In what is a logical corollary of the autonomous object, people, their realia and activities, are mounted in a hermetic aesthetic space—fenced off in a zoological garden, raised up on a platform in a gallery, placed on a stage, or ensconced in a reconstructed village on the lawn of the exhibition grounds—and visitors are invited to look.

There is something about the seamlessness of the commonsense world, its elusiveness, that makes such genre errors so appealing. For the quotidian, by virtue of its taken-for-grantedness, presents itself as given, natural,

just there, unnoticed because assumed. It becomes available for contemplation under special conditions, most commonly through the repetition that produces boredom, or through the comparisons (induced by contrast, incongruity, violation, and impropriety) that call the taken-for-granted into question.⁷⁰ The task of creating fissures that offer evidence that the ordinary is really there propels the fascination with penetrating the life space of others, getting inside, burrowing deep into the most intimate places, whether the interior of lives or the innermost recesses of bodies. In making a spectacle of oneself, or others, “what is private or hidden becomes publicly exhibited; what is small or confined becomes exaggerated, grand or grandiose.”⁷¹ The everyday lives of others are perceptible precisely because what they take for granted is not what we take for granted, and the more different we are from each other, the more intense the effect, for the exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary. Such encounters force us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, allowing us for a brief moment to be spectators of ourselves, an effect that is also experienced by those on display.

Imagine being installed in a room at an exhibition where one’s only instruction was to go about one’s daily chores just like at home—making coffee, reading the *New York Times*, working at the computer, talking on the phone, walking the dog, sleeping, flossing, opening the mail, eating granola, withdrawing cash from a money machine—while curious visitors looked on. The challenge in such displays is to avoid “performance,” that is, to maintain an asymmetrical reciprocity, whereby those who are

“Great Excitement—Indian Lady Throwing Out Dishwater” at the World’s Columbian Exposition.

From *Chicago Sunday Herald*, 17 September 1893.



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Contents of a New York apartment.

Displayed at the New-York Historical Society, 1995. *Inventory*, an installation by Christian Boltanski for *Lost: New York Projects*, a Citywide Project of the Public Art Fund. Photo by Dorothy Zeidman.



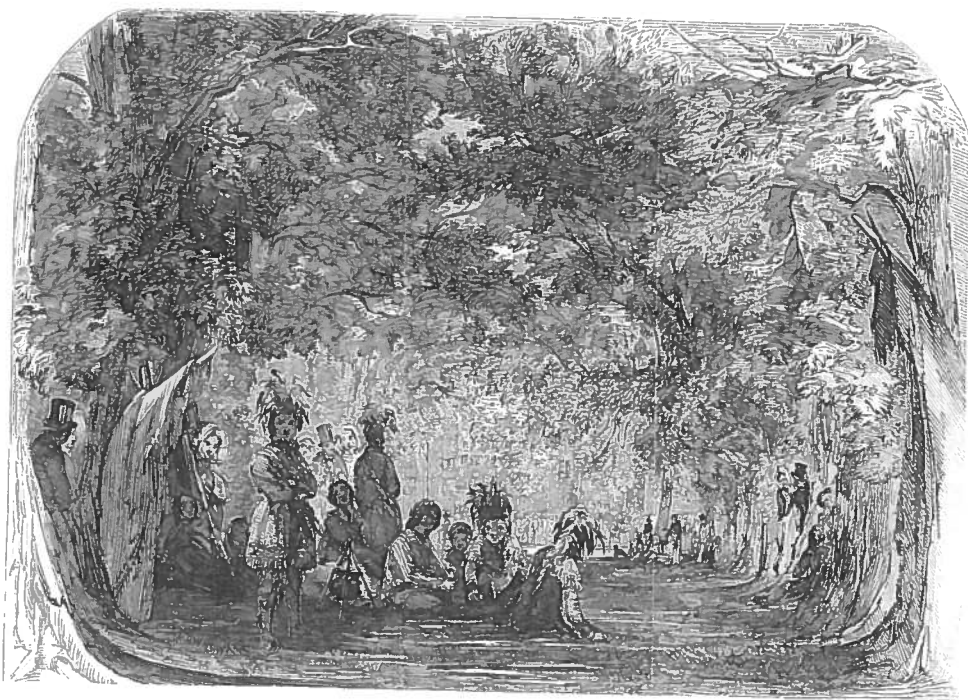
being watched go about their business as if no one were paying attention to them, though we have long known that what we observe is changed by virtue of being observed. Or, closer to home, imagine that the contents of your apartment are removed—everything in your medicine cabinet, kitchen cupboards, and wardrobe, your refrigerator and sofa, vacuum cleaner and radio, socks and laxatives—and installed in a local museum. Christian Boltanski effected precisely such a removal at the Baden-Baden Kunsthalle in 1973 and more recently at the New-York Historical Society in 1995. Titled “Inventory,” the installation served as “an ironically pathetic museum dedicated to an anonymous person,” someone close at hand and very much alive, though the experience was more like viewing the personal effects of the deceased—perhaps forensic evidence gathered by the police from the scene of a crime—or the possessions of a displaced person, whether confiscated or abandoned.⁷²

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The reciprocity of the museum effect can be triggered by a simple “turn of the head,” which bifurcates the viewer’s gaze between the exotic display and her own everyday world. A visitor to the Bushman exhibition at Egyptian Hall in 1847 commented, “It was strange, too, in looking through one of the windows of the [exhibition] room into the busy street, to reflect that by a single turn of the head might be witnessed the two extremes of humanity.”⁷³ The pane of glass that separated the illusion of being somewhere else from the immediacy of life on London streets was eliminated in presentations that depended in part for their effect on intensifying just such incongruities. In George Catlin’s display in London in 1844, “[t]he spectacle of Red Indians encamped [in four wigwags] and demonstrating their horsemanship on the greensward at Vauxhall, where eighteenth-century beaux had strolled with the belles of Fanny Burney’s set, must have been one of the more striking sights of the day.”⁷⁴



“Fête Champêtre at Charlton House—the North American Indians encamped in the park.”

Sketched by G. Harrison. *Illustrated London News*, 5 July 1845.

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To those who complained that “to place the savage man in direct contrast with the most elaborate of man’s performances is too abrupt a proceeding, besides being useless,” Dr. John Conolly, president of the Ethnological Society of London, answered in 1855 that the inclusion of ethnological exhibits at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham offered valuable contrasts. In his view, these displays “set off the splendour of . . . [man’s] performances when his social advantages are enlarged” and showed that everyone can “emerge from barbarism and want to refinement and enjoyment”—a message both of British superiority and of optimism in the perfectibility of humankind.⁷⁵

The incongruity of intercalating two different quotidian reaches an apotheosis of sorts in displays that presented exotic people not in their native habitat but in ours. Ironically, at least one observer of pygmies playing the piano in a well-appointed drawing room on Regent Street in 1853 thought this arrangement preferable to having them “set up on a platform to be stared at, and made to perform distasteful feats,” for among other things, “the visitor literally gives them a call, and becomes one of their society,” which is to say one’s own society. These pygmies had learned English and acquired the “rudiments of European civilization.”⁷⁶

The Museum Effect

Once the seal of the quotidian is pierced, life is experienced as if represented: the metaphors of life as a book, stage, and museum capture this effect with nuances particular to each metaphor. Like the picturesque, in which paintings set the standard for experience, museum exhibitions transform how people look at their own immediate environs. The museum effect works both ways. Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls. As the gaze that penetrated exhibitions of people from distant lands was turned to the streets of European and American cities, urban dwellers such as James Boswell reported that walking in the streets of London in 1775 was “a high entertainment of itself. I see a vast museum of all objects, and I think with a kind of wonder that I see it for nothing.”⁷⁷

Bleeding into the ubiquity of the commonsense world, the museum effect brings distinctions between the exotic and the familiar closer to home. Calibrations of difference become finer. The objects differentiated draw nearer. One becomes increasingly exotic to oneself, as one imagines how others might view that which we consider normal: writing about the *danse du ventre* in the Little Cairo area of the Midway Plaisance at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Frederic Ward Putnam commented that visitors might assume wrongly that this dance was "low and repulsive" because they did not understand it, but that "the waltz would seem equally strange to these dusky women of Egypt."⁷⁸

In America and England during the 1890s, recently arrived immigrants became the ethnographic other, in part as a way of creating social distance under the threatening conditions of physical proximity. A paper entitled "Mission-Work among the Unenlightened Jews," which was delivered at the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893 at the Chicago World's fair, characterized immigrants in London and New York as "half-dressed, pale-skinned natives in our own towns" and noted that "Borrioboola Gha has been supplanted by 'Whitechapel,' 'Mulberry Bend,' and the nearest district tenements."⁷⁹

The trope of the city as dark continent and the journalist and social reformer as adventurer-ethnographer was common in such mid-nineteenth-century accounts as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-1862).⁸⁰ One of the attractions of poor neighborhoods was their accessibility to the eye, their "intimacy at sight." Any stranger could see openly on the streets what in better neighborhoods was hidden in an inaccessible domestic interior, a closed carriage, or under layers of clothing. At the turn of the twentieth century in New York City, one writer remarked,

Mankind is not only the noblest study of man, but the most entertaining. People are more interesting than things or books, even newspapers. The East Side is especially convenient for observation of people because there are such shoals of them always in sight, and because their habits of life and manners are frank, and favorable to a certain degree of intimacy at sight. Where each family has a whole house to itself and lives inside of it, and

the members never sally out except in full dress—hats, gloves, and manners—it is hopeless to become intimately acquainted with them as you pass on the sidewalk. You may walk up and down Fifth Avenue for ten years and never see a Fifth Avenue mother nursing her latest born on the doorstep, but in Mott or Mulberry or Cherry Street that is a common sight, and always interesting to the respectful observer. When the little Fifth Avenue children are let out, if they don't drive off in a carriage, at least they go with a nurse, and are clothed like field daisies, and under such restraint as good clothes and even the kindest nurses involve. But the East Side children tumble about on the sidewalk and pavement hour after hour, under slight restraint and without any severe amount of oversight, hatless usually, barehanded and barefooted when the weather suffers it.⁸¹



Maypole on a Lower East Side street.

From E. S. Martin, "East Side Considerations,"
Harper's New Monthly Magazine 96 (May 1898).

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The blend here of repulsion and attraction, condemnation and celebration, so typical of the reception of ethnographic displays in exhibition halls, reveals that the source of the critique is also the basis of the appeal. "Intimacy at sight," which suggests a kind of social nakedness, combines with the "view from the sidewalk" to verge on what might be termed social pornography—the private made public. Or rather, disparities in class and in cultural definitions of private and public are exploited here: the discrepancy between what others make public that we consider private also generates voyeuristic excitement in zoos, particularly in primate displays. Similarly, in madhouses, which from the early seventeenth century in Europe also combined confinement with display, the public was free to enter and observe the ravings of lunatics.⁸² While respectability has the power to control access to sight, to conceal, poverty, madness, children, animals, and the "lower" orders of humankind reveal by exposing themselves fully to view. Historically, ethnography has constituted its subjects at the margins of geography, history, and society. Not surprisingly, then, in a convergence of moral adventure, social exploration, and sensation seeking, the inner city is constructed as a socially distant but physically proximate exotic—and erotic—territory. Visits to this territory tempt the adventurer to cross the dangerous line between voyeurism and acting out.⁸⁵

Slumming, like tourism more generally, takes the spectator to the site, and as areas are canonized in a geography of attractions, whole territories become extended ethnographic theme parks. An ethnographic bell jar drops over the terrain. A neighborhood, village, or region becomes for all intents and purposes a living museum in situ. The museum effect, rendering the quotidian spectacular, becomes ubiquitous.

The Panoptic Mode

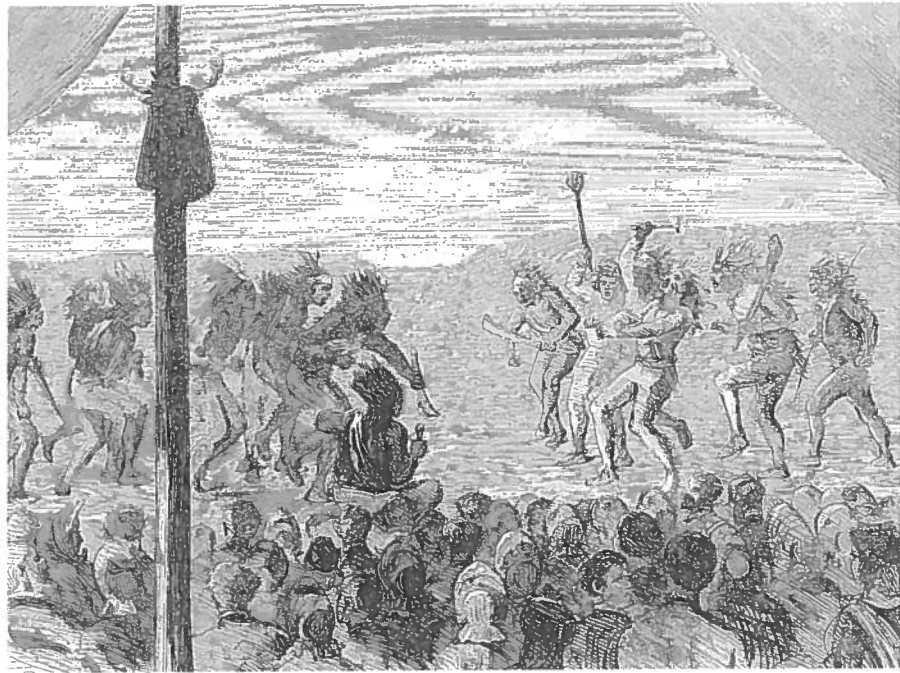
In contrast with the panoramic perspective of all-encompassing classifications, in situ approaches to the display of the quotidian work in a panoptic mode whereby the viewer sees without himself being visible. The panoramic approach lays out the whole world conceptually in a Linnaean classification or evolutionary scheme or experientially in a scenic effect, which makes such technologies of seeing as the eidophusikon, a small mechanical theater, and the related theatrical panorama and dio-

rama, so appealing. Offered a supreme vantage point, the viewer is master of all that he surveys. The view is comprehensive, extensive, commanding, aggrandizing. As a prospect, it holds in it scenarios for future action.⁸⁴

In contrast, the panoptic approach offers the chance to see without being seen, to penetrate interior recesses, to violate intimacy. In its more problematic manifestations, the panoptic mode has the quality of peep show and surveillance: the viewer is in control, like a warden in a prison. In its more benign mode, the panoptic takes the form of hospitality, a host welcoming a guest to enter a private sphere.⁸⁵ A recent guide to ethnographic re-creations of "homes" at the Field Museum in Chicago exemplified the panoptic mode: "Each of the houses has had part of the walls and roof removed so you may peek inside."⁸⁶ The issue is the power to open up to sight differentially, to show with respect to others what one would not reveal about oneself—one's body, person, and life.

Live exhibits as a representational mode make their own kinds of claims. Even when efforts are taken to the contrary, live exhibits tend to make people into artifacts because the ethnographic gaze objectifies. Where people are concerned, there is a fine line between attentive looking and staring. To make people going about their ordinary business objects of visual interest and available to total scrutiny is dehumanizing, a quality of exhibitions that was not lost on some viewers in London during the nineteenth century who complained about live displays on humanitarian grounds.⁸⁷

Live displays, whether re-creations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity, or realness. The impression is one of unmediated encounter. Semiotically, live displays make the status of the performer problematic, for people become signs of themselves. We experience a representation, even when the representers are the people themselves. Self-representation is representation nonetheless. Whether the representation essentializes (you are seeing the quintessence of Balineseness) or totalizes (you are seeing the whole through the part), the ethnographic fragment returns with all the problems of capturing, inferring, constituting, and presenting the whole through parts.



"War Dance—Indian Department," at the Metropolitan Fair in Manhattan, 1864, one of several Sanitary Fairs organized during the Civil War. Such performances, in combination with displays of artifacts, helped raise money for the medical care of the wounded, who had been dying in large numbers because of unhygienic conditions. The reciprocity of disappearance and exhibition, the former a condition for the latter, is expressed by one reporter, as follows:

In the Fourteenth Street Buildings BIERSTADT'S INDIAN WIGWAM has been constantly crowded by visitors desiring to study the habits and peculiarities of the aborigines. Several performances have been given daily by the Indians. Our sketch represents a WAR DANCE, as given on several occasions to the intense gratification of all spectators. Historically, no feature of the fair has greater interest than this in which the life of those who, only a little while ago, held undisputed possession of our continent, is reproduced by a handful of the once absolute tribes for the pleasure of the pale-faced race, whose ancestors pushed them into obscurity and historical oblivion.

Harper's Weekly (23 April 1864): 260.

Performing Culture

We might distinguish between the museum as a form of interment—a tomb with a view—and the live display, which is not without its own relationship to disappearance, as Native American performances in the nineteenth century attest. These metaphors have roots in the history of interment and incarceration as display traditions in their own right. Differences between them are expressed in the sensory organization of display.

The Senses Compartmentalized

The partiality so essential to the ethnographic object as a fragment is also expressed in the fragmentation of sensory apprehension in conventional museum exhibitions. With the important exceptions of popular entertainment, opera, masques and banquets, and avant-garde performance, among others, the European tendency has been to split up the senses and parcel them out one at a time to the appropriate art form. One sense, one art form. We listen to music. We look at paintings. Dancers don't talk. Musicians don't dance. Sensory atrophy is coupled with close focus and sustained attention. All distractions must be eliminated—no talking, rustling of paper, eating, flashing of cameras. Absolute silence governs the etiquette of symphony halls and museums. Aural and ocular epiphanies in this mode require pristine environments in which the object of contemplation is set off for riveting attention. Rules posted at the entrance and guards within ensure that decorum prevails. When reclassified as "primitive art" and exhibited as painting and sculpture, as singular objects for visual apprehension, "ethnographic artifacts" are elevated, for in the hierarchy of material manifestations the fine arts reign supreme. To the degree that objects are identified with their makers, the cultures or civilizations represented by works of art also rise in the hierarchy.

In contrast with conventional exhibitions in museums, which tend to reduce the sensory complexity of the events they represent and to offer them up for visual delectation alone, indigenous modes of display, particularly the festival, present an important alternative. As multisensory, multifocus events, festivals may extend over days, weeks, or months. They

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"'Tamil Theatrical Company.' From South India, their performances are of extraordinary length, and last sometimes for twelve hours."

From *Souvenir of Ceylon: 24 Choice Photographic Character Studies* (Colombo, Ceylon: Plâté, n.d.).



require selective disattention, or highly disciplined attention, in an environment of sensory riot. The closeness of focus we expect to sustain in silence for a one-hour concert is inappropriate for events so large in scale and long in duration. Participants in the Ramlila, a festival and ritual drama that extends over many days in northern India, bring food, sleep through parts of the event, talk to their neighbors, get up, walk around, leave, return. All the senses—olfactory, gustatory, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, visual—are engaged. The experience tends to be environmental, as episodes of the drama are enacted in various locations, rather than hermetically sealed into an aesthetic space created by a proscenium, frame, or vitrine. Sensory saturation rather than sensory atrophy or single-sense epiphany is the order of the day. Sensory apprehension and attention must be structured differently in such events.

Every Day a Holiday

The festival, both as it occurs locally and as an anthology of ethnographic displays, can be seen as a form of environmental performance. Though museum exhibitions can also be considered a form of environmental theater—visitors moving through the space experience the *mise-en-scène* visually and kinesthetically—they tend to proceed discursively. Arts festivals are generally less didactic and less textual. They depend more on performance, reserving extended textual analysis, to the degree that it is offered, for the program booklet, in this way avoiding the awkwardness of discoursing about living people in their very presence.

There is a convergence of sensibility here between ethnographers interested in the festival as a display genre and the discovery by the historical avant-garde of the theatricality of everyday life and their interest in vernacular genres. Rejecting the conventions of classical European theater, with its dependence on the dramatic text, formal theater architecture, and mimetic conventions, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, and eastern European directors working during the interwar years looked to Balinese and Chinese performance and European folk and popular forms for new artistic possibilities. Their artistic sensibility valorized forms that were otherwise of strictly local or ethnographic interest and offered the possibility of experiencing them with a distinctly modernist sensibility as models of pure theatricality. They created new audiences for “ethnographic performances” and a hospitable climate for festivals that excerpted and re-presented them.

Tourists who have difficulty deciphering and penetrating the quotidian of their destination find in festivals the perfect entrée. Public and spectacular, festivals have the practical advantage of offering in a concentrated form, at a designated time and place, what the tourist would otherwise search out in the diffuseness of everyday life, with no guarantee of ever finding it. Typically, local festivals are simply put on the tourist itinerary. A 1981 brochure issued by India’s Department of Tourism does just this.

Why festivals? Because they celebrate the joy of life. The Indian calendar is a long procession of festivals. The traveller may come when he pleases,

a spectacle always awaits him. If you find yourself in the right place at the right time, it is possible to go through the calendar with a festival daily! It may be the harvest in the south, the golden yellow of short-lived spring in the north, the seafront spectacle of Ganesh's immersion in Bombay, the fantastic car festival of Puri, the snake-boat races in Kerala or the Republic Day pageant in New Delhi. Each is different. Every region, every religion has something to celebrate. . . . Take in a festival when you come to India. No land demands so much of its legends—or, in celebrating the past, bedecks the present so marvellously.



Chinese New Year.

Chinatown, New York, 1985. Lion dance by Pak Hok martial arts club in front of a restaurant.
Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

While large festivals can usually absorb tourists with ease, producers may take steps to keep casual observers away from smaller events they might overwhelm. Still other local ceremonies that are extremely costly to produce thrive as a result of tourist interest and dollars: cremations in Bali, which require vast sums of money, can now occur on a larger scale and more often thanks to the revenues generated by tourists who pay to attend them.

Festivals are cultural performances par excellence. Their boundaries discernable in time and space, they are particularly amenable to encapsulation. Because whole festivals generally offer more than the casual traveler can consume, and because such complex events do not travel well, entrepreneurs often excerpt local festivals and incorporate their parts into other kinds of events. In an effort to make such attractions more profitable, as well as to restrict the access of tourists to areas of local life declared off-limits, events are adapted to the special needs of recreational travelers. Events staged specifically for visitors are well suited for export because they have already been designed for foreign audiences on tight schedules. Exported events developed for international expositions may be brought back home in the hope of attracting tourists into the local economy. Balinese performances developed for the Colonial Exposition in Paris in 1931 were brought back to Bali, where versions of them continue to be presented to tourists.

Import the tourist? Or export the village and festival? These processes are reciprocal. Ethnographic displays are not only a way to re-create the travel experience at a remove. Increasingly, these displays are introduced at the travel destinations themselves, where they may displace the travel experience altogether. All of Polynesia is represented on forty-two acres of the Hawaiian island Oahu, at the Polynesian Cultural Center: according to a 1985 promotional brochure, "[m]ore people come to know and appreciate Polynesia while touring these beautifully landscaped grounds than will ever visit those fabled islands."⁸⁸

As mass tourism has grown in the postwar period, festivals of all kinds have proliferated with the explicit intention of encouraging tourism. A 1954 guide to festivals in Europe makes this very point.

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[The abundance of festivals] means fun for everyone who wants to frolic with our friends abroad when they are in their most festive moods, or they can frolic with us if they are so inclined. . . . [Americans want to satisfy their] curiosity about how other people live. . . . As everyone knows, just about the best time to see the most people in any region is at a festival. That is also a fine time to learn what interests or amuses them, because a festival invariably reflects the character of the region in which it takes place and dramatizes the economic and recreational attractions, as well as the spiritual and aesthetic aims of the people.⁸⁹

We have here the major tropes of ethnographic display, from the perspective of the tourism industry—the promise of visual penetration; access to the back region of other people's lives, the life world of others as our playground; and the view that people are most themselves when at play and that festivals are the quintessence of a region and its people.⁹⁰ To “frolic with our friends abroad” becomes the paradigm for intercultural encounter. The foreign vacationer at a local festival achieves perfect synchrony: everyone is on holiday, or so it seems. But to know a society only in its festival mode, filtered through the touristic lens of spectacle, is to raise another set of problems—the illusion of cultural transparency in the face of undeciphered complexity and the image of a society always on holiday. To festivalize culture is to make every day a holiday.

Folkloric Performance

The living quality of such performances does not make them any less autonomous as artifacts, for songs, tales, dances, and ritual practices are also ethnographically excised and presented as self-contained units, though not in quite the same way as material artifacts. You can detach artifacts from their makers, but not performances from performers. True, artifacts can be photographed and performances can be recorded. But artifacts are not photographs and performances are not recordings. While the pot can survive the potter (though it too will eventually crumble to dust), music cannot be heard except at the moment of its making. Like dance and other forms of performance, musical performance is evanescent and in

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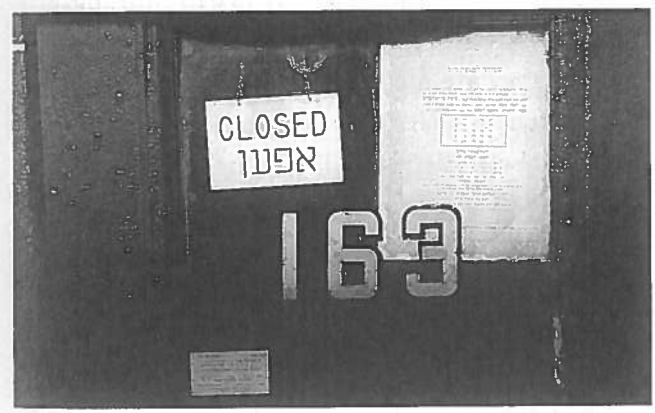
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Purim.

Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1982. Hasidic children, one costumed as the Biblical high priest Aaron and the other wearing an apron in the form of a Yiddish eye chart, deliver customary gifts of prepared food. Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.



Storefront in Hasidic Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1982. The sign says "closed" in English and "OPEN" in Yiddish.

Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

need of constant renewal. To achieve for drumming the sense of "realness" conveyed by the physical presence of the drum, we need the drummer. But a drummer drumming is no less an ethnographic fragment. The proscenium stage, master of ceremonies, and program booklet are to the drummer what the vitrine, label, and catalog are to the drum. The centrality of human actors in performance and the inseparability of process and product are what distinguish performances from things. While an artifact may be viewed as a record of the process of its manufacture, as an indexical sign—process is there in material traces—performance is all process. Through the kind of repetition required by stage appearances, long runs, and extensive tours, performances can become like artifacts. They freeze. They become canonical. They take forms that are alien, if not antithetical, to how they are produced and experienced in their local settings, for with repeated exposure, cultural performances can become routinized and trivialized. The result may be events that have no clear analogue within the community from which they purportedly derive and that come to resemble one another more than that which they are intended to re-present.

Embedded in the flow of life, artifacts and performances that have historically interested ethnographers are contingent: they are not generally made to stand alone, set off for exclusively aesthetic attention. Forms that are perfectly satisfying in their indigenous setting—chants, drumming, a cappella ballads, repetitive dance steps—challenge audiences who are exposed to them on stages where they are used to seeing opera and ballet. Professional folkloric companies adapt such forms to European production values. To hold the interest of new audiences, folkloric troupes design a varied and eclectic program of short selections. They also depend on musical accompaniment (such as piano or orchestra), European harmony, concertized arrangements and vocal styles on the model of European opera, and movement styles on the order of ballet to reduce the strangeness and potential boredom of a cappella song, unison music, and repetitive (and not apparently virtuosic) dance for unfamiliar audiences. To meet strict time requirements and deliver exactly what has been advertised and announced in a printed program, improvisation may be curtailed, if not eliminated. A tightly coordinated ensemble of trained professionals, often more or less the same age and physical type, wear stylized,

often uniform, costumes while executing highly choreographed routines with great precision. A frontal orientation accommodates the proscenium stage, to which is added theatrical effects (sound, lighting, sets). There is a tendency toward the virtuosic, athletic, dramatic, and spectacular.

The repertoires of folkloric troupes typically include excerpts from festivals and rituals—weddings, healing ceremonies, and hunting rituals are favorites. While such excerpts allude to the contingent nature of music and dance, they partake of theater, having been severed from their local social and ceremonial settings and reclassified as art. At the same time, the proprietary rights to the material have been transferred from local areas to the “nation,” where regional forms are declared national heritage. National troupes typically perform traditions from across the land, no matter what the personal histories of the performers. Since everyone can perform everything and everything belongs to everyone, differences do not differentiate. Polyglot programs, besides offering variety, generally represent an “imagined community” in which diversity is harmoniously integrated. Difference is reduced to style and decoration, to spice of life. Cultural difference is then praised for the variety and color it adds to an otherwise bland scene.

Such choices in repertoire and style are ideologically charged. Folkloric troupes attempt to find a middle ground between exotic and familiar pleasures and to bring these forms (and their performers) into the European hierarchy of artistic expression, while establishing their performances as national heritage. The more modern the theater where the troupe performs the better, for often there is a dual message: powerful, modern statehood, expressed in the accoutrements of civilization and technology, is wedded to a distinctive national identity. The performance offers cultural content for that identity. Such assertions are not confined to the concert stage. They are implicated in claims to territorial sovereignty, the drawing of political boundaries, the choice of official language, and many other matters of vital concern in the tension among nation, state, and culture. Claims to the past lay the foundation for present and future claims. Having a past, a history, a “folklore” of your own, and institutions to bolster these claims, is fundamental to the politics of culture: the possession of a national folklore, particularly as legitimated by a national museum and troupe, is cited as a mark of being civilized.

Folk Festival

As a venue for the representation of culture, the festival derives its celebratory tone and environmental approach to staging from the joyful events associated with the traditional feasts and fêtes that honor a religious anniversary, event, or personage. But unlike feasts (the etymological root of *festival*), which do what they are about, festivals of the kind that interest us here re-enact, re-present, and re-create activities and places in a discrete performance setting designed for specular (and aural) commerce.⁹¹ Such events acquire a distinctive (if plural) semiotic status. Quivering with issues of authenticity and iconicity, these events tend to make a clear separation between doers and watchers—or among kinds of doers—even with efforts to encourage “participation.”

These issues are dramatized by the highly successful Festival of American Folklife, produced annually since 1967 on the Mall in Washington, D.C., by the Office of Folklife Programs at the Smithsonian Institution. This pioneering program is sensitive to the issues raised here and addresses them by experimenting with new ways to present folklife to the public. Two cases are particularly instructive here: the Festival of India and the Old Ways in the New World programs. Seen in historical perspective, these programs blend the national and state pavilions and ethnographic villages, long a staple feature of world's fairs, and the homelands exhibitions and festivals that celebrated immigrant “gifts” during the first half of this century.⁹²

Festival of India Recognizing the festival as a readymade genre of presentation, the 1975 guidelines for the Festival of American Folklife advised the following:

Because many genres survive in the context of esoteric community celebrations and rituals, large scale traditional celebration events should be used as organizing structures for “Old Ways in the New World” programs. Such events can be parades, processions, picnics, festivals, religious ceremonies, wedding festivities, or any similar event in which performing arts are closely associated with other traditional expressive forms. . . . Celebration events should allow direct participation by Festival visitors.⁹³

However connected it may be to what communities do at home, the festival within a festival is a re-creation. At its most mimetic, it offers a sumptuous alternative to the sensory atrophy of the bare stage.⁹⁴ The festival-within-a-festival format also presents formidable ethnographic and logistical challenges, particularly at the points where the two festivals are incompatible.

This insight guided the decision in 1985 to embed a festival within a festival within a festival—the mela within the Festival of India within the Festival of American Folklife.

The Mela program on the Mall is really a fair within a fair. It is a composite mela, compressing both space and time to present selectively only a few of India's many traditions. Just as a mela would in India, the program encourages visitors to learn about and participate in Indian culture. The structures on the Mall have been built largely with natural and hand-crafted materials from India, while the site itself has been designed to reflect indigenous Indian concepts.⁹⁵

The *mela*, the fair that accompanies religious festivals in India, did indeed offer an ingenious format for displaying many kinds of artifacts, activities, and people (dance, music, acrobatics, street performers, religious observance, food, architecture, crafts) as they are integrated in their native setting. But of course this mela was to occur during a festival of our own making, and our festival and those of India are not necessarily compatible. Smithsonian festivals are events produced for the public with the taxpayers' dollars: they are not-for-profit ventures and studiously avoid the slightest hint of commercialism. Things are not for sale, except at the one small gift shop inconspicuously positioned at the edge of the main events. Goods are carefully selected for their appropriateness, and salespersons are expected to be well informed about the objects, their makers, and their makers' communities. They offer items relating to all the exhibits.

Indian fairs, by contrast, are full of things to buy. Each craftsperson and stall keeper competes with the others to sell goods. The Smithsonian mela on the Mall was a representation of a commercial environment,

Mela exhibition, Festival of American Folklife, Washington, D.C., 1985. Habib-ur-Rehman fashions a *taziya*, a facsimile tomb of Hussein, out of tied bamboo and cut paper. In the background are photo-text panels explaining Indian religions, fairs, festivals, cosmological concepts, and aesthetic traditions.

Photo courtesy the Smithsonian Institution.



which, while mimetically very complete, paradoxically stopped short of commercial exchange. Indeed, it was necessary to post signs in the stalls to indicate that the goods were *not* for sale. Perhaps as a concession to authenticity, visitors were actually allowed to make purchases at a few designated stalls as well as in the sales tent. What do you get when a commercial Indian fair is embedded inside a noncommercial Smithsonian festival? Stalls of goods for sale that cannot be sold.⁹⁶

Food presented a similar problem. Clearly, the Department of Health would not countenance unlicensed vendors from India feeding visitors to the Mall. Instead, an Indian hotel chain catered the festival from a central

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"These items are for display only," with graffiti "(they're dummies)," on signs in a market stall.

Mela exhibition, Festival of American Folklife, Washington, D.C., 1985. Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

post in the mela. Even were Department of Health requirements to be met, festival planners would probably encounter the resistance of local vendors to any intrusion on their economic turf by traditional cooks brought in for the day. Local commerce effectively inhibits efforts to re-create the culinary environment of traditional festivals.

Though intended as an evocative re-creation, ethnographically accurate and authentic in most details, the festival-within-the-festival is a distinct type of performance event, and the visitor inevitably experiences it as such. Though the intention may be to create the illusion of being in India, it is the re-creation itself that is experienced, with all of its tensions and ambiguities. When carried to extremes, as in the case of first-person interpretation at Plimoth Plantation, visitors experience the thrill of the hyperreal and at the same time perceive the fragility of the membrane that has been constructed to separate the present place and time from that which has been reconstructed.⁹⁷

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"Old and New at Caesarea's Ancient Theatre." Israeli folk dance ensemble at an archeological site near Haifa, ca. 1966.

Copyright by "Palphot," Herzlia.



Old Ways in the New World Raising yet another set of problems, the Old Ways in the New World program integrated the national pavilion, foreign village, and homelands exhibition in an attempt to juxtapose folk artists in immigrant communities with their counterparts in their home countries. This was also a way to involve foreign countries in a festival of American folklife. But the assumption of a Jewish "old world" presented insurmountable problems. There was no Old World, as the European Jewish communities, from which most American Jews derive, were largely destroyed during the Holocaust.⁹⁸ Eliding differences between Old World and homeland, Israel was selected as the Jewish Old World for the purposes of the festival. But the "old ways" of American Jews were not to be found in the newly formed Jewish state, which was itself a case of new ways in a New World. Nor was Israel willing to be cast as the repository of the old ways of American Jews—quite the contrary.

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"Amnon Oved (left) and Moshe Oved dance traditional Yemenite dances at the Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. [1976]. They are one of six groups of Israeli Jews who are demonstrating the richness of traditions found in Israel today."

Photo courtesy the Smithsonian Institution.



When working with the Ministry of Education and Culture in Israel to identify appropriate performers for the Jewish section of the Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife in 1976, I was instructed to bring the finest exponents of "authentic" traditional art forms. Some of the performers who met this standard were born in Yemen, Morocco, or Iraq and were advanced in years. Israeli cultural officials wanted to send Israeli folk dance troupes, arguing that they were young, athletic, lively, versatile, and specially adapted for the stage. Not only were the professional folk dance troupes costumed and choreographed, but, I was told, they had been trained to perform the music and dance of the many different Jewish communities living in Israel, as well as the horas and other dances associated with the new state. Their performances conformed to professional standards and were stylized to reduce their strangeness. These were precisely the groups the Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs had in-

structed me *not* to bring. The Israeli officials complained further that my choices would present entirely the wrong image of contemporary Israel and would offer a poor performance to boot: Israel and its culture were not to be represented by old immigrants performing exotic music of the Diaspora. Even to the extent that we succeeded in bringing traditional performers of our choice, we still faced the problem of relating these traditions to those of Jewish immigrants in America.

Staging Culture

A key to the appeal of many festivals, with their promise of sensory saturation and thrilling strangeness, is the insatiable and promiscuous human appetite for wonder. The irreducibility of strangeness, a feature of tourist discourse more generally, inscribes on the geography of the exotic a history of receding thresholds of wonder: as exposure exhausts novelty, new ways to raise the threshold of wonder must be found.⁹⁹ The passion for wonder also accounts for the primacy of spectacle as a presentational mode and for the tension between the very unspectacular nature of much material that we might want to present and the audiences' expectation that they will get a good show. Given the special way that spectacle works (clear separation of observer and actor, primacy of the visual mode, and an aggrandizing ethos), the spectacle of festival evokes what MacAloon has characterized as diffuse wonder or awe and precipitates intellectual and moral ambiguity, even with the various efforts to mitigate the effects.

We complain of ritual degenerating into spectacle, into sheer show. Historically, however, we have long valued the inscrutable strangeness of the exotic as an end in itself. The appeal of the villages on the Midway of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago depended largely on such mystification, and many multicultural festivals today still feed this appetite while at the same time encouraging understanding and reflection by offering "interpretation." That we objectify culture has long been recognized; festivals, however, also objectify the human performers and implicate them directly in this process. This is an inherently problematic way to confront cultural questions, for spectacle, by its very nature, displaces analysis and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization. The more ethnographic festivals and museum exhibitions

succeed in their visual appeal and spectacular effect, the more they re-classify what they present as art and risk appealing to prurient interest.

Fighting the spectacular and the illusion of re-creation, the Office of Folklife Programs at the Smithsonian Institution has long advocated what might be called an ascetic approach to staging.

Costumes used only for stage performances, or for other exoteric purposes, are not appropriate for the Festival. This matter should be thoroughly reviewed in the field and reiterated in formal invitations and correspondence with participating groups and individuals.

In 1974, all the Greek-American participants, and most of the foreign Greek participants wore ordinary clothes throughout the five-day presentation. Costume was not a part of the two Greek-American *glendis* held on the Mall, because it is not customarily worn at *glendis* in this country. A few elderly participants from Greece wore traditional clothes every day, as they always do at home.¹⁰⁰

The concern that costumes that are worn only for stage performances not be donned for the Smithsonian presentation presents a paradox: from the perspective of many participants, the folklife festival is a stage performance, so why not wear costumes? There is a conflict here between two aesthetics.

As the Smithsonian's guidelines suggest, festivals organized by dominant cultural institutions such as museums and state folklife programs or funded by state and federal agencies share a performance discourse that often stands in contrast (if not in opposition) to the ways communities stage themselves. These differences are more than matters of taste and style; they offer different approaches to the marking of authenticity. Hallmarks of the festivals mounted by professional folklorists in the past include a focus both on performers who claim the forms they perform as their birthright and on the traditional components of their repertoire. Performance practices that entail an adaptation to the concert stage are discouraged, despite the fact that communities have often developed their own troupes, costumes, repertoires, choreography, musical arrangements, interpretations, dramatizations, and other conventions for presenting their performing arts on the concert stage for themselves and for outsiders.

Such adaptations, often derided as touristic kitsch, are studiously avoided by folklorists in favor of a very different set of conventions, many of which have evolved specifically for the "folklife festival." Typically, solo performers and ensembles are selected from among those who normally play at a community's festivities. Wearing ordinary clothing, they play on a bare stage within a large tent, the audience seated on bleachers or benches, or they play on a concert stage in an indoor auditorium. High-tech sound equipment and professional stage technicians ensure the best possible acoustics and documentary recording of the event. Explanatory text panels may be mounted near the entrance to the tent, and a large photomural of the performer's home environment may serve as a backdrop. An informed "presenter" introduces the performers, with sensitive explanations about the history, context, and meaning of what the audience is about to hear. The program booklet supplements the presentation with illustrated essays about the communities and traditions featured at the festival. Formal concerts are complemented by interactive and didactic workshops, demonstrations, lectures, and films.

Performers are discouraged from the use of electronic instruments (though there are exceptions), "ethnic costumes," nontraditional repertoires, concertized performance styles, choreography adapted for the stage, and other overtly theatrical concessions. There is thus a suppression of *representation* markers and a foregrounding of *presentation* markers, an avoidance of the suggestion of "theater" and an attempt to achieve the quality of pure presence, of a slice of life. Given the history of national troupes and pavilions and homelands exhibitions, it is easy to see why groups would expect to appear in costume and in organized troupes. This is, after all, the public face, as they have constructed it, of their private lives. And given the way that spectacle brings authenticity into question, it is easy to see why an ascetic aesthetic to staging should appeal to festival producers aiming to present rather than represent that life.

Performing Difference

The interest in displaying performance or in using performance as a way of displaying culture is, like the series of objects arranged to show a con-

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tinuous historical process, linked to particular theoretical orientations. First, performance-oriented approaches to culture place a premium on the particularities of human action, on language as spoken and ritual as performed. Such approaches resist stripping the observed behavior of contingency in order to formulate norms, ideals, and structures of competency.¹⁰¹ Second, cultural performances as units of analysis have offered a distinct methodological advantage to those grappling with large and complex societies, where approaches that worked well in small settings are inadequate.¹⁰² The Manchester school of social anthropology found in “social dramas”—events that involved a breach of some kind and efforts to deal with it—a useful way to focus cultural analysis.¹⁰³ The sociologist Erving Goffman brought a dramaturgical approach to the analysis of ordinary social life in his own milieu. Third, performance, whether a focus for research or the basis of ethnographic display, is compatible with efforts among folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and anthropologists to deal with issues of diversity, pluralism, cultural equity, and empowerment, particularly when participants can control how they are represented.¹⁰⁴

The issue of who is qualified to perform culture is thorny because it reveals the implicit privileging of descent over consent in matters of cultural participation.¹⁰⁵ Though the guidelines for producing folklife festival programs stress visitor “participation,” they are also usually clear in specifying that the “performers” at the festival are to be those to whom the arts “belong” by virtue of their having been acquired in a traditional manner and setting, that is, by insiders from insiders—by descent, though this distinction is not rigidly applied. “Outsiders,” those who have chosen to learn the art even though they were not born into the communities that transmit it, are generally considered revivalists and may be excluded on this count, though here too the matter is more complicated. Thus those who are licensed to do are distinguished from those who are mandated to watch. The event is to be structured, however, in ways that will allow the watchers to “participate,” a notion that generally stops short of permitting them to perform the tradition themselves, except as they are invited to join a procession or the group dancing and singing.

The curatorial problem in folk festivals is the delicate one of determining not only what meets certain standards of excellence but, first

and foremost, what qualifies as authentic folk performance. As a result, performances at folk festivals are often artifacts of the discipline of folklore, whatever else they may be. We speak of the Child ballads, the Grimm *märchen*, the Perrault fairy tales, and other traditional forms that have been canonized in printed collections, museum exhibitions, commercial recordings, and folk festivals. We also create the criteria by which the multiplicity of forms we find can be sorted into their “preferred” and “residual” categories.¹⁰⁶

There is a danger in what Stuart Hall calls self-enclosed approaches, which, “valuing ‘tradition’ for its own sake, and treating it in an ahistorical manner, analyze cultural forms as if they contained within themselves from their moment of origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value.”¹⁰⁷ Further, those who organize folk festivals must accept the responsibility for representing those they include in “their most traditionalist form.”¹⁰⁸ While folklife festivals attempt to represent traditions that would otherwise not be exposed, it is also the case that those who perform tend to be represented exclusively in traditional terms.

Following Hall, we might consider the opposition of folklore/not folklore, not as a descriptive problem or a matter of coming up with the right inventory of cultural forms, but rather in terms of the “forces and relations which sustain the distinction, the difference” between what counts as a genuine tradition, a revival, fakelore, or elite culture. Hall suggests that the categories tend to remain, though the inventories change, and that institutions such as universities, museums, and arts councils play a crucial role in maintaining the distinctions: “The important fact, then, is not a mere descriptive inventory—which may have the negative effect of freezing popular culture into some timeless descriptive mould—but the relations of power which are constantly punctuating and dividing the domain of culture into its preferred and its residual categories.”¹⁰⁹ Similarly, by aestheticizing “folklore”—no matter what is gained by the all-inclusive definition of folklore as the arts of everyday life—we are in danger of depoliticizing what we present by valorizing an aesthetics of marginalization.

Though there are still many festivals devoted to the traditions of a single ethnic group, large-scale events sponsored by city, state, and federal

Factory workers in Troy, New York, present a Ukrainian wedding party, as remembered from their native village, at the homelands exhibition in the State Educational Building in Albany, New York, 1920.



agencies are generally multicultural in nature. They participate in the discourse of pluralism, of unity in diversity. They risk what might be termed the “banality of difference,” whereby the proliferation of variation has the neutralizing effect of rendering difference (and conflict) inconsequential.¹¹⁰ This is the effect, by design, of the pageants of democracy so popular during the first decades of this century.¹¹¹ Though offered as an alternative to the brutal efforts of nativists to suppress difference and preserve the preeminence of Anglo stock and culture, the unity-in-diversity discourse can also have a neutralizing effect.

In festivals of cultural performances, respectability and decorum, values of the dominant cultural institutions that stage the event, tend to diffuse the oppositional potential so essential to festivals. For this and other reasons, these festivals have a tendency to reinforce the status quo even as enlightened organizers and performers struggle to use them to voice oppositional values. Carnival represented is carnival tamed. In the case of the

homelands exhibitions and festivals, immigrant organizations were already doing a good job of supporting a wide variety of cultural activities. "National festivals" organized by immigrant groups in American cities during the last decades of the nineteenth century attracted tens of thousands of participants. In the homelands exhibitions and festivals organized during the first half of this century, "cooperation" between Americanization agencies and immigrant groups, however well-intentioned, also involved co-optation. Homelands exhibitions were designed to gain the trust of immigrants, who, it was hoped, would allow themselves to be helped by Americanization organizations. These events were not simply displays of immigrant gifts—crafts, music, dance, and wholesome values. Equally important—and the organizers were explicit on this point—they were good public relations for the Americanization workers and social reformers, who were themselves on display. Through such exhibits and festivals, they could show their success in working with immigrants and lobby for increased support.

Exhibitions, whether of objects or people, are displays of the artifacts of our disciplines. They are for this reason also exhibits of those who make them, no matter what their ostensible subject. The first order of business is therefore to examine critically the conventions guiding ethnographic display, to explicate how displays constitute subjects and with what implications for those who see and those who are seen. Museum exhibitions, folkloric performances, and folklife festivals are guided by a poetics of detachment, in the sense not only of material fragments but also of a distanced attitude. The question is not whether an object is of visual interest, but rather how interest of any kind is created. All interest is vested.

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6. See Edward M. Bruner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Maasai on the Lawn: Tourist Realism in East Africa," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994): 435-470.

7. See "Citizens Against Communist Chinese Propaganda," <http://www.afn.org/~afn20372/>. Updated 8/25/97.

8. See "The World-Folklore Theme Park," <http://www.chinapages.com/guangdong/guangzhou/gz_wftpl.htm>. Dated 1996.

Chapter One. Objects of Ethnography

I thank my colleagues in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, particularly Sally Charnow and Naomi Jackson, for their able research assistance; Michael Taussig, who convened a stimulating faculty colloquium, "Mimesis and Alterity," during the 1988-1989 academic year; and Edward M. Bruner, Allen Feldman, Brooks McNamara, and Richard Schechner. I am also grateful to William Taylor, William Leach, and Peter Buckley, who convened the Commercial Culture Seminar at the New York Institute for the Humanities, to Diana Fane, Stephen Jay Greenblatt, and Charles Musser for bibliographic leads, and to Amy Horowitz and the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, for locating photographs.

1. According to Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1978), 6, Virgin's milk is listed in inventories of the reliquaries of medieval French cathedrals. This essay is deeply indebted to the pioneering work of Altick. See the following publications, each of which accompanied an exhibition of an object listed here: Carolyn Gilman and Mary Jane Schneider, *The Way to Independence: Memories of a Hidatsa Indian Family; 1840-1920* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987); Amanda Dargan and Steven Zeitlin, *City Play* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Cyrus Adler and I. M. Casanowicz, *Biblical Antiquities: A Description of the Exhibit at the Cotton States International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1898); Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 42. Pieces of the Berlin Wall were frantically collected at the time the wall came down. Entrepreneurs sold pieces, charging more for those fragments "with color" than for those without a vestige of graffiti.

2. In the wake of the historical avant-garde and the challenges it posed to "the autonomy of art . . . [as] a category of bourgeois society," the problem of visual interest, a term I take from Svetlana Alpers's provocative essay, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smith-

sonian Institution Press, 1991), 25–32, is refigured—Duchamp's readymades, his urinal, were offered not primarily for their visual interest but as provocations. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, vol. 4, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 46, 51–52. Such provocations, which have the potential to make anything interesting, also challenge our assumptions about visual interest.

3. As William Insley, an artist working in New York City, commented on reading this essay, "What was absent from the ruin is often less marvelous than we imagine it to have been. The abstract power of suggestion [the fragment] is greater than the literal power of the initial fact. Myth elevates" (pers. comm., 16 November 1989). Insley makes architectural drawings of a future city of the imagination.

4. See M. W. Thompson, *Ruins: Their Preservation and Display* (London: British Museum Publications, 1981); and Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).

5. See, for example, Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), on the Mannerist fondness for the fragment and quotation and the uses to which body parts were put after anatomical dissections. See also Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *Fragments: Incompletion and Discontinuity* (New York: Literary Forum, 1981).

6. On cultural and national wholes, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991); Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

7. On the representational conventions informing the nature dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History, see Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936," *Social Text* 11 (winter 1984): 20–64. On the period room, see Stephen Bann, "Poetics of the Museum: Lenoir and Du Sommerard," in *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 77–92. On the re-creation of historical sites, see Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981): 63–96.

8. Henry C. Shelley, *The British Museum: Its History and Treasures* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1911), 301.

9. See William Ryan Chapman, "Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and*

Material Culture, ed. George W. Stocking Jr., vol. 3, *History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 15-48; and Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*.

10. Shelley, *The British Museum*, 304.

11. *Ibid.*, 299.

12. Oleg Grabar, "An Art of the Object," *Artforum* 14, no. 7 (March 1976): 39; and George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

13. Joseph Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions: The History of Art Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 74.

14. Alsop, *Rare Art Traditions*, 99, offers the example of a twelfth-century *armilla*, which the Nuremberg Museum bought for \$2,034,450: "the *armilla* looks like what it has become—a tremendous collectors' prize of the utmost rarity. But neither to the eye nor in almost any other way does the *armilla* look in the museum as it formerly looked, when it served as an epauletlike ornament of the hieratically grand ceremonial robes of Frederick Barbarossa—the purpose the *armilla* was originally made to serve."

15. Detachment and circulation are by no means a unique feature of ethnographic objects. It is the manner of detachment that makes an object ethnographic, historical, or artistic, a point underscored by E. H. Gombrich: "Nearly all the objects in our collections were once intended to serve a social purpose from which they were alienated by collectors. . . . The image was pried loose from the practical context for which it was conceived and [was] admired and enjoyed for its beauty and fame, that is, quite simply within the context of art" (quoted by Alsop, *Rare Art Traditions*, 99).

16. Francis Bacon referred to "the shuffle of things" in 1594. See Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, "Introduction," and Rudolf Distelberger, "The Hapsburg Collections in Vienna during the Seventeenth Century," in Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums*, 1, 34-35. See also Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

17. Th. H. Lunsingh Scheuleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities," in Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums*, 34-35.

18. See M. H. Dunlop, "Curiosities Too Numerous to Mention: Early Regionalism and Cincinnati's Western Museum," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1984): 524-548.

19. Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 202.

20. Committee on Publication (Harry F. Perkins et al.), "Part II. The Exhibit," in *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics: Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics held at the American Museum of Natural History, August 21-23, 1932* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1934), 486-510 and 28 plates.

21. On things, their collection, classification, exchange, transvaluation, and "social life," see Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 215-251; and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

22. Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 426.

23. Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941), 69.

24. George Brown Goode, "The Museums of the Future," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution . . . for the Year Ending June 30, 1889: Report of the National Museum* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 433. Goode delivered this lecture before the Brooklyn Institute on 28 February 1889.

25. *Ibid.*, 427.

26. Cyrus Adler, "Museum Collections to Illustrate Religious History and Ceremonials," in U.S. Cong., House of Representatives, *Miscellaneous Documents*, 53d Cong., 2d sess., 1893-1894, vol. 30: 759. This paper was read at the International Congress of Anthropology at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

27. Goode, "Museums of the Future," 427.

28. *Ibid.*, 434. Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) wrote on scientific education.

29. The quotation is from Adler, *I Have Considered the Days*, 67; see also Goode, "Museums of the Future," 435.

30. Luke Wilson, "William Harvey's *Prelictiones*: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theatre of Anatomy," *Representations* 17 (winter 1987): 62-95.

31. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), 366.

32. Trevor Fawcett, "Visual Facts and the Nineteenth-Century Art Lecture," *Art History* 6, no. 4 (1983): 442, contrasts the pedagogic mode of the illustrated medical and scientific demonstration lecture with the literary and rhetorical approach used by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his discourses on art to the Royal Academy, which were "purely verbal statements read aloud with a minimum of gesture or 'performance'" and without illustrations.

33. Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 100-101. Coleman notes the allusion here to Rousseau's *Emilius*.
34. Fawcett, "Visual Facts," 458. For a well-documented eighteenth-century example of the illustrated lecture as a theatrical form, see Gerald Kahan, *George Alexander Stevens and "The Lecture on Heads"* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984).
35. Goode, "Museums of the Future," 433. On the rise and decline of lecturing as a profession, see Donald M. Scott, "The Profession That Vanished: Public Lecturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America*, ed. Gerald D. Geison (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 12-28.
36. Washington Matthews, "Sacred Objects of the Navajo Rites," in *The International Folk-Lore Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. Helen Wheeler Bassett and Frederick Starr (Chicago: Charles H. Sergel, 1898), 227-247.
37. Anthropologists frequently "played Indian" as a way of demonstrating what was difficult to describe verbally: see, for example, Curtis Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846-1910* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 105.
38. Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 79. According to Harris, "In place of intensive spiritual absorption, Barnum's exhibitions [which exemplify the operational aesthetic] concentrated on information and the problem of deception. Onlookers were relieved from the burden of coping with more abstract problems. Beauty, significance, spiritual values, could be bypassed in favor of seeing what was odd, or what worked, or was genuine."
39. Otis T. Mason, "The Natural History of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 4, no. 13 (1891): 99.
40. See David Kunzle, "The Art of Pulling Teeth in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: From Public Martyrdom to Private Nightmare and Political Struggle?" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, part 3, ed. Michael Feher et al. (New York: ZONE, 1989), 28-89; Wilson, "William Harvey's *Prelictiones*."
41. The remains of criminals had long been displayed, whether as a deterrent to those who might contemplate similar actions, as punishment to an adulterer's surviving lover or as ghoulish attraction. See, for example, Joseph Dorfeuille's display of a criminal's head, heart, and right hand during the 1830s in Cincinnati, which is discussed by Dunlop, "Curiosities Too Numerous to Mention," 543.
42. David Hancocks, *Animals and Architecture* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1971), 108.

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43. Saartjie Baartman, who was exhibited in London in 1810 as the "Hottentot Venus," is a case in point. See Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 204-242.

44. See Scheuleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities," in Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums*, 115-120.

45. Altick, *Shows of London*, 55.

46. *Ibid.*, 340-341.

47. *Ibid.*, 285, 341.

48. The *Kleiderkammer*, which featured costumes from around the world, appeared in Germany as early as the sixteenth century. See Franz Adrian Dreier, "The *Kunstkammer* of the Hessian Landgraves in Kassel," in Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums*, 104-106.

49. Quoted by Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 280-281.

50. See Mary C. Cowling, "The Artist as Anthropologist in Mid-Victorian England: Frith's *Derby Day*, the *Railway Station* and the New Science of Mankind," *Art History* 6, no. 4 (1983): 461-477.

51. Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 192-193.

52. Quoted by Altick, *Shows of London*, 496.

53. Quoted by Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," in Stocking, *Objects and Others*, 102.

54. See Edward P. Alexander, "Artur Hazelius and Skansen: The Open Air Museum," in *Museum Masters, Their Museums, and Their Influence* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 239-275; and Mats Rehnberg, *The Nordiska Museet and Skansen: An Introduction to the History and Activities of a Famous Swedish Museum* (Stockholm: Nordiska Museet, 1957).

55. Steven Mullaney, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance," *Representations* 3 (1983): 45-48.

56. D. B. Quinn, "Virginians on the Thames," *Terra Incognita* 2 (1978): 7-14.

57. See Altick, *Shows of London*; Carl Hagenbeck, *Von Tieren und Menschen: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen* (Berlin: Vita Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1909); and Stefan Goldmann, "Zur Rezeption der Völker ausstellungen um 1900," in *Exotische Welten, Europäische Phantasien*, ed. Hermann Pollig et al. (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1987), 88-93.

58. See Altick, *Shows of London*, 280.

59. See Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*.

60. Quoted by Altick, *Shows of London*, 248.

61. I take the notion of cultural performance from Milton Singer, "Search for a Great Tradition in Cultural Performances," in *When a Great Tradition Mod-*

ernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization (New York: Praeger, 1972), 71.

62. Altick, *Shows of London*, 282.

63. *Ibid.*, 273-275.

64. In his *Address to the Ethnological Society of London, delivered at the Annual Meeting on the 25th of May, 1855* (London: Ethnological Society of London, [1855]), 4, John Conolly noted

the benefits that might be expected from the immediate direction of the observation of the Fellows of the Ethnological Society to any such [new importations of natives of other regions to this metropolis] that may be brought to our shores; and particularly to those brought to this country for exhibition. These benefits would partly consist of the counteraction of fraud; and would be partly derived from the additional illustration of the science we cultivate; as well as from the attention that could scarcely fail to be given to such efforts in favour of defenceless and ignorant natives of uncivilized nations, as ought to be forgotten by the happier inhabitants of Christian countries.

65. Altick, *Shows of London*, 281.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Shelley, *The British Museum*, 299-300.

68. The discussion of spectacle is indebted to John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1984), 241-280.

69. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 91-107. Following Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analyses of social interaction, MacCannell discusses these phenomena in terms of front and back regions.

70. See Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, eds., *Everyday Life*, Special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (1987).

71. MacAloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*, 244.

72. Brochure for *Christian Boltanski, Lost: New York Projects*, A Citywide Project of the Public Art Fund, 1995. The historical avant-garde and more recent experimental performance, performance art, and installation art explore the boundaries between life and art. See "Confusing Pleasures" in this volume.

73. Quoted by Altick, *Shows of London*, 281.

74. *Ibid.*, 278.

75. Conolly, *Address*, 4.

76. Quoted by Altick, *Shows of London*, 286.

77. *Ibid.*, 33.

78. Ralph W. Dexter, "Putnam's Problems Popularizing Anthropology,"

American Scientist 54, no. 3 (1966): 325. These dancers may well have been adept at European social dances, contrary to Putnam's assumption.

79. Minnie D. Louis, "Mission-Work among the Unenlightened Jews," in *Papers of the Jewish Women's Congress Held at Chicago, September 4, 5, 6 and 7, 1893* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894), 171-172. I would like to thank Shalom Goldman for making his copy of this volume available to me. Borrioboola-Gha appears in *Bleak House* as the faraway place where misguided philanthropists such as Mrs. Jellyby devote their energies to caring for the "natives," meanwhile neglecting the welfare of their own families and the poor in their midst.

80. See Christopher Herbert, "Rat Worship and Taboo in Mayhew's London," *Representations* 23 (1988): 1-24.

81. E. S. Martin, "East Side Considerations," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 96 (May 1898): 855.

82. See Altick, *Shows of London*, 44-45; Henri F. Ellenberger, "The Mental Hospital and the Zoological Garden," in *Animals and Man in Historical Perspective*, ed. Joseph Klaits and Barrie Klaits (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 59-92; and Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965).

83. See, for example, William Brown Meloney, "Slumming in New York's Chinatown, A Glimpse into the Sordid Underworld of the Mott Street Quarter, where Elsie Sigel Formed Her Fatal Associations," *Munsey's Magazine* 41, no. 6 (September 1909): 818-830.

84. On the prospect, see Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, 431-435. On the panorama as a discursive convention, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Conventions of Representation: Where Discourse and Ideology Meet," in *Contemporary Perceptions of Language: Interdisciplinary Dimensions*, ed. Heidi Byrnes, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1982 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982), 139-155.

85. On the panoptic, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

86. Nancy L. Evans, "*By Our Houses You Will Know Us*": *A Tour of Homes at the Field Museum* (Chicago: David Adler Cultural Center, 1989), 3.

87. John Conolly, *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London, Read at a Meeting of the Ethnological Society* (London: J. Churchill, 1855).

88. See Robert O'Brien, *Hands across the Water: The Story of the Polynesian Cultural Center* (Laie, Hawaii: Polynesian Cultural Center, 1983). The Polynesian Cultural Center is an outgrowth of the earlier Mormon mission settlement and the Hawaii campus of Brigham Young University. The center features Mormon Polynesians and serves as "a showcase for what the Mormon Church stands for." Here, in our own time, ethnographic performance serves "a Christian mis-

sionary effort of major magnitude" (89). See Andrew Ross, "Cultural Preservation in the Polynesia of the Latter-Day Saints," in *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life* (New York: Verso, 1994), 21-98.

89. Robert Meyer Jr., *Festivals Europe* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1954), ix-x.

90. I discuss these tropes more fully in "Authenticity and Authority in the Representation of Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Tourist Production," in *Kulturkontakt/Kulturkonflikt: Zur Erfahrung des Fremden*, 26. Deutscher Volkshundekongress in Frankfurt vom 28. September bis 2. Oktober 1987, ed. Ina-Maria Greverus, Konrad Köstlin, and Heinz Schilling. *Notizen* 28, Teil 1 (October 1988): 59-69.

91. See Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," 25.

92. See, for example, Allen H. Eaton, *Immigrant Gifts to American Life: Some Experiments in Appreciation of the Contributions of Our Foreign-Born Citizens to American Culture* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1932).

93. "Festival of American Folklife: Presentation-Oriented Guidelines" (Washington, D.C.: Office of Folklife Programs, Smithsonian Institution, 1975), 20.

94. The festival is in its way a corollary to the habitat group, only here an event structure guides a performance, where in the habitat group a mise-en-scène and arrested moment in an implied narrative structures a physical installation.

95. Richard Kurin, "Mela! An Indian Fair," in *1985 Festival of American Folklife* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution and National Park Service, 1985), 70.

96. My impression of the *mela* exhibition was very different from that of Richard Kurin, one of the exhibition's organizers. I was struck by the relative absence of the activities associated with selling that one would encounter at an Indian *mela*, while Kurin, who had to deal with the Smithsonian's rules and regulations, feels selling was in fact a notable feature of the Smithsonian *mela*. See his essay, "Cultural Conservation through Representation: Festival of India Folklife Exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 315-343.

97. See "Plimoth Plantation," in this volume; Steven Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study in Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993); and Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-116.

98. These problems arose in homelands exhibitions too, but for different reasons, namely, the preoccupation with citizenship. Diasporas were anomalous,

though the Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands in Cincinnati in 1913 addressed the issue by representing the Jewish Diaspora as a little world's fair of its own. I analyze this case in greater detail in "Exhibiting Jews," in this volume.

99. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Authenticity and Authority in the Representation of Culture."

100. "Festival of American Folklife," 22.

101. I have in mind sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, particularly the pioneering work of Dell Hymes and William Labov, and performance approaches to expressive behavior more generally—verbal art, ritual, and music—as seen in the work of Richard Bauman, Steven Feld, Richard Schechner, and others.

102. See Singer, "Search for a Great Tradition in Cultural Performances."

103. I have in mind the work of Max Gluckman and Victor Turner, among others.

104. See, for example, David Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

105. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Mistaken Dichotomies," *Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 400 (1988): 140–155, an earlier discussion of the issues raised here; and Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

106. Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 234.

107. *Ibid.*, 237.

108. *Ibid.*, 230.

109. *Ibid.*, 234. See also, "Destination Culture," in this volume.

110. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Making Difference: Mapping the Discursive Terrain of Multiculturalism," *Writings on Dance* (Sydney) 13 (1995): 55–61, and "Confusing Pleasures," this volume.

111. See David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Chapter Two. Exhibiting Jews

I am grateful for grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture to support the writing of an intellectual history of Jewish folklore and ethnology, of which this essay is part. I thank Grace Cohen Grossman for sharing her unpublished essays on the Smithsonian collections of Judaica; Vivian Mann and the Judaica staff of the Jewish