Objects and Others

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FRANZ BOAS AND EXHIBITS

On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology

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Franz Boas is remembered as the founder of professional anthropology in this country, and for more than sixty years, the professional anthropology he did so much to shape has found its primary institutional locus in a particular setting: the university department. But Boas himself entered anthropology in the midst of what is often called its "museum age"—1880–1920 (Sturtevant 1969:622). His first anthropological employment was in the recently founded Royal Ethnographic Museum of Berlin, where as an assistant under Adolf Bastian from mid-1885 to mid-1886, he spent much of his time preparing for exhibition the artifacts that had been brought back by Johan Adrian Jacobsen from the Northwest Coast of North America. Boas' attraction to the peoples who were henceforth to be the ethnographic focus of his professional life began with these objects, which embodied a "flight of imagination" sharply contrastive to the "severe sobriety" of the eastern Eskimo, whom he had studied while undertaking ethnogeographic researches in Baffinland in 1883–84 (1909:307). Given a chance to meet their creators when Jacobsen brought a troupe of Bella Coola to Berlin in January 1886, Boas quickly began developing plans for the fieldwork he was to undertake that fall—the collections from which were sold to the Berlin museum. Settling afterwards in the United States, Boas was unsuccessful in seeking a position at the American Museum of Natural History, and his first regular jobs in this country were as geographical editor for the journal *Science* and as docent in the Department

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of Psychology of Clark University. His links with the world of museum anthropology remained strong, however, and were reasserted in the aftermath of his resignation from Clark, when the major regional anthropological figure, Frederic W. Putnam of Harvard's Peabody Museum, took upon himself the role of Boas' institutional patron (cf. Stocking 1968, 1974).

Putnam was supervising the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and he chose Boas as his second-in-command. Although Boas himself did no collecting for the Exposition, and much of his effort was devoted to organizing fieldwork in physical anthropology, he did supervise a large team of local experts in gathering an impressive array of Northwest Coast specimens. When the Exposition was over Boas worked for nine months packing, moving, and setting up the collections in the new Field Columbian Museum, but the job he hoped would be permanent was forestalled by the political machinations of government anthropologists (cf. Hinsley & Holm 1976).

Throughout this period, Boas had been conducting fieldwork on the Northwest Coast for the Bureau of American Ethnology and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and in the fall of 1894 he carried on a further fieldtrip funded jointly by the British Association, the U.S. National Museum, and the American Museum—hoping that out of this might eventuate a permanent job. It was in response to the request of Otis T. Mason, of the National Museum, for a "pretty complete collection illustrating the whole winter dance ceremonial of [the Northwest Coast] tribes" (FBP: FB/OTM 5/20/94) that Boas, with the help of his Kwakiutl assistant George Hunt, undertook the most intensive participant-observation work of his career. Upon his return, Boas worked for two months preparing a "life group," a dramatic tableau of costumed mannequins, which the National Museum exhibited at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta in the fall of 1895.

Meanwhile Putnam, who had just accepted the direction of anthropology at the American Museum, was negotiating with the Museum's president, Morris K. Jesup, to commission Boas to make "as complete a collection as possible of models illustrating the different tribes [of the Northwest Coast] and dressed in the garments of the people, and arranged in groups so as to illustrate the life history of each tribe represented" (FBP: FWP/FB 7/16/94). Boas was later asked to return to the Museum to supervise the installation of the material he had collected that fall. Putnam hoped that this would be the opening wedge in his protégé's permanent appointment; and indeed, after several months of work, in January 1896 Boas was appointed Assistant Curator of Ethnology and Somatology, about six months before Jesup and Putnam were able to negotiate for him a parallel appointment at Columbia University.

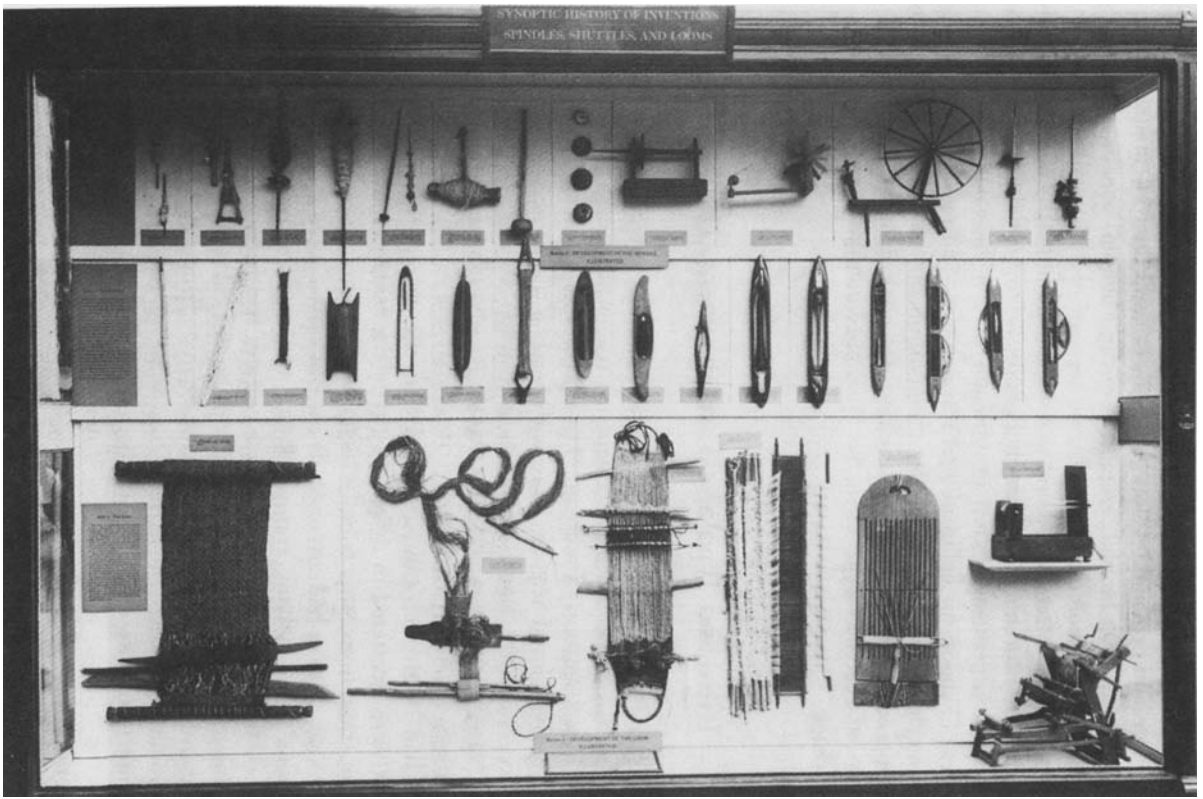
Boas' first regular museum position was also to be his last. Although he

held the American Museum appointment during what was probably the critical decade in the establishment of his intellectual and institutional leadership in American anthropology, it was a decade marked by increasing conflict of purpose and personal tension between Boas and the Museum administration. By May 1905 he had resigned from the Museum, concluding on both pragmatic and theoretical grounds that the sort of anthropology he was interested in was better carried on in an academic milieu. By emphasizing this shift, some historians (e.g. Darnell 1972:8–9) have left the impression that Boas had a superficial interest in museums, or that he valued them only as sources of support for fieldwork and research. By focusing on his exhibits, a medium dedicated to the popular presentation of anthropology, this essay attempts to cast light upon an alternate path, once of great concern to Boas, which has become lost to us in the Boasian reorientation of American anthropology.

Tribal and Typological Arrangement, 1887–1895

To replace Boas' early anthropology in its museum context, we may note that his first major theoretical statement on specifically anthropological issues came in a discussion of museum classification. In an exchange of letters in 1887 in the journal *Science*, Boas, with barely a year of museum experience, took on two of the leaders of American anthropology, Otis T. Mason of the U.S. National Museum and John Wesley Powell of the Bureau of American Ethnology (B.A.E.). In studying the collections in the National Museum, Boas had been disappointed to find that the objects from the Northwest Coast were "scattered in different parts of the building, and . . . exhibited among those from other tribes" (1887a:62). Encouraged by Director George B. Goode, Mason had arranged all his material according to universal "inventions"—fire-making, transportation, the crafts of pottery or basketry, etc., so that specimens from diverse cultures had been placed together according to the putative evolution of a technological type.

Against Mason's typological evolutionary scheme, Boas posed his own nominalist *Geisteswissenschaftliche* viewpoint (cf. Stocking 1974:8–12). The attempt to classify ethnological phenomena as "biological specimens" that could be "divided into families, genera and species" was based on the assumption that "a connection of some kind exists between ethnological phenomena of people widely apart." But in the human sphere, where every invention was the product of a complex historical development, "unlike causes" could "produce like effects" (1887a:61). The outward appearance of two phenomena might be identical, "yet their immanent qualities may be altogether



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

different." Groupings based on a "deductive" approach to "analogies of outward appearance" were therefore bound to be "deceptive" (1887b:66). Because "in ethnology all is individuality" (ibid.), the object of study must not be "abstractions from the individual under observation," but "the ethnological specimen in its history and in its medium" (1887a:62).

Mason's interest in the adaptive utilitarian function of different inventions in serving various "human wants" led him to focus on the external *form* of the artifact, which was directly accessible to the visual inspection of the curator. In contrast, Boas was advocating a transfer of anthropological interest from the external form to an artifact's *meaning*, which was not easily accessible to psychological interpretation in utilitarian terms, because the same object might carry a number of different meanings:

> The rattle, for instance, is not merely the outcome of the idea of making noise, and of the technical methods applied to reach this end: it is, besides this, the outcome of the religious conceptions, as any noise may be applied to invoke or drive away spirits; or it may be the outcome of the pleasure children have in noise of any kind; and its form may be characteristic of the art of the people. (1887b:65)

Thus the same implement, judged from a formal point of view, might belong in a number of different departments of a typologically organized museum.

In the long run, this shift from form/function to meaning was to have indefinitely ramifying consequences for the future of American anthropology; but in the context of the 1887 debate, the problem it raised was the alternative principle of museum arrangement. If one could not group specimens by their surface characteristics, how would the curator know which rightfully belonged together? The answer was based on the cultural holism Boas had imbibed from the German intellectual tradition. Just as Boas had suggested that "the art and characteristic style of a people can only be understood by studying its productions as a whole" (1887a:62), so more generally the meaning of an ethnological specimen could not be understood "outside of its surroundings, outside of other inventions of the people to whom it belongs, and outside of other phenomena affecting that people and its productions" (ibid.). The solution to the problem of arrangement was thus "a collection representing the life of one tribe." Boas' "ideal of an ethnological museum" was one that would be organized by a "tribal arrangement of collections" (1887b:66–67). Practically, Boas suggested the exhibition of "a full set of a representative of an ethnical group" with tribal peculiarities shown in "small special sets" (1887c). Boas insisted that such an arrangement was not a classification, but a grouping only "according to ethnic similarities."[1]

1. Boas' advocacy of the geographical order was not original. In fact, his 1887 debate was

In his response, Mason gave no ground. Calling Boas' suggestion that unlike causes could produce like effects "a very ingenious one," Mason claimed that "it has nothing to do with the case," and reasserted the importance of the biological method in ethnology (1887:534). Mason was willing to admit "geographical areas" as one of the "classific concepts" by which museums could be organized—others being material, race, social organization, environment, structure and function, and evolution or elaboration. But as he later maintained, "They are all good, each bringing out phases of truth overlooked in others and it is only by a comparison of results that the whole truth may be reached" (1890:515). In defending his exhibit scheme, Mason pointed to his audience. People with all sorts of specialized interests—soldiers, potters, musicians, artists—"desire to see, in juxtaposition, the specimens which they would study" (1887:534). Therefore, "in any museum every thing should tend to enlist the sympathies and cooperation of the greatest diversity of mind." Boas had convinced no one in Washington, where it was established policy to place no object on exhibition "which is not of evident educational value and likely to interest and instruct a considerable percentage of the persons visiting the Museum" (Goode 1882:1).

Yet, within less than a decade, the National Museum began to arrange its exhibits according to a regional plan. While some (Brown 1980) have interpreted this as evidence of theoretical convergence between Boas and his Washington colleagues, it seems that true to Boas' dictum, appearances are deceiving, and unlike causes can produce like effects (cf. Hinsley 1981:112). For a short time Boas and Mason overlapped, using common terms and appearing to arrange exhibits in similar patterns, but they differed fundamentally in the total conceptual system of which these terms and patterns were a part.

The stimulus for this convergence was Mason's preparation of the Smithsonian's ethnology displays for the Chicago World's Fair. Setting out to select representatives of the major stocks as depicted in the B.A.E.'s 1891 map of American Indian language groups, Mason soon realized that the character of the artifacts clustered not according to language or race, but according to local environmental zones. Although his cases at the Fair were still arranged by language stock, the message communicated to the public, and subsequently elaborated by Mason, was that "the arts of life . . . are in each culture area indigenous," and "are materialized under the patronage and directorship of the region . . ." (1894:215).

Although Mason had begun arranging exhibits according to locality even

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reminiscent of one conducted a half century earlier between the Dutchman Philip von Siebold, taking the regional position, and the Frenchman Edmé-François Jomard, proposing the cross-cultural system (cf. Frese 1960:38–42). Boas would have been familiar with a geographical system from the institutions of his museological mentors, Bastian in Berlin and Putnam in Cambridge.

as he was being challenged by Boas, he was constrained from using this principle more broadly for several practical reasons. Many of his specimens had "false location and insufficient data" (1889:90), and since "it is often begging the whole question to assign a specimen to a certain tribe," he felt that "no harm can possibly come from putting things that are alike in the same case or receptacle" (ibid.). Full tribal displays were also forestalled by the chronic lack of space (1895:126). But perhaps most important, it was only with the field research and collecting of B.A.E. ethnologists like James Mooney, stimulated by specific commissions for the Fair, that Mason was to have enough reasonably complete and well-documented collections to allow such a tribal presentation.

The Chicago Fair was also the scene for the introduction to America of the "life group," a form of ethnographic display seemingly more in tune with Boasian principles.[2] Although the Smithsonian had used single mannequins to display clothing as early as the 1876 Centennial Exposition, only in 1893 were groups of such costumed figures arranged in dramatic scenes from daily life and ritual. Mason himself had been impressed with the village encampments of tribal peoples at the 1889 Paris Fair; the life group would give permanence to such compelling pictures, which were a popular success at several turn-of-the-century world's fairs (cf. Holmes 1903:201). Like the culture area, the introduction of the life group was stimulated by the more intense fieldwork sponsored by the Bureau of American Ethnology. Though the attractive designs were worked out under the direction of the artist-turned-archeologist William H. Holmes, many of the groups were based on the direct advice of experienced collector/ethnographers like Frank H. Cushing, James Mooney, and Walter J. Hoffman.[3] Like the habitat group in biology (Parr

2. European museums had adopted the life group several decades before their American counterparts. Growing out of a long tradition of waxworks, the first life groups were part of commercial exhibitions, such as the Chinese Collection and the Oriental and Turkish Museum, both of London, opening in 1842 and 1854, respectively (Altick 1978:292–93, 496–97). One of the first museums to exhibit these tableaux was the Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography, opened in Stockholm in 1873. The vivid and innovative display techniques of curator-director Artur Hazelius became widely known after he exhibited life groups at the Paris World's Fair of 1878 (Alexander 1983:245–46), and during the next decade many museums, especially in Germany and Scandinavia, began to install them.

3. Mooney and Cushing agreed with Mason that life groups should be arranged on the basis of "geo-ethnic" units, but they clashed over the implementation of this goal. During the installation of the Smithsonian exhibit at the Chicago Fair, Cushing edited Mooney's labels and "ordered additional artifacts from other tribes to be included in the Navajo and Hopi exhibit," based on Mooney's collections (Colby 1977:283). While Cushing regarded the culture within a region as essentially homogeneous, at least for purposes of display, Mooney proposed selecting one representative tribe from a region and exhibiting artifacts only from that single tribe, adhering to stringent standards of accuracy and detail (Mooney 1894). This opposition between a regional and tribal approach surfaced again in 1907 when George A. Dorsey criticized the areal displays of the post-Boasian American Museum.

1959) and the period room in history and art (Alexander 1964), the contemporaneously introduced life group was anthropology's attempt to create a functional or contextual setting for its specimens. Artifacts were thus displayed in association with related specimens from specific cultures, as Boas had called for. But instead of communicating cultural integration by means of object juxtaposition and labels, to be synthesized in the viewer's mind, the life group was a presentational medium, allowing these cultural connections actually to be *seen*. Not surprisingly, the life groups were enormously popular with visitors, and within a year, Putnam and the American Museum were making plans for their own series of life groups.

In spite of the new features the National Museum began to introduce in the mid-nineties, Boas and his colleagues were still far apart. Mason and Holmes never gave up their evolutionary and typological schemes; they merely augmented them with tribal and regional arrangements. Even more fundamentally, they saw their exhibits in a different ideological perspective. Mason foresaw a time when by "the multiplication of wants" and "the refine-

Life-group exhibit of Kwakiutl hamatsa initiate and attendants at the U.S. National Museum, ca. 1896 (negative number 9539, courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution).

ment of taste" the whole world would become "an unique, comprehensive and undivided home for the whole race" (1894:215). But according to Boas, "the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes" (1887b:66).

Nevertheless, the experience of Mason and Holmes reveals that there was more involved in museum display than the conceptual issues addressed by Boas. Theoretical conceptions could only be realized to the extent that available materials and media allowed, and their realization was constrained also by the goal of attracting large appreciative crowds. As we shall see, Mason's movement toward a more Boasian stance foreshadowed Boas' move—for equally pragmatic reasons—toward a more Masonian position. It is against this theoretical and practical context that Boas' exhibits at the American Museum must be seen. Having criticized the Washington establishment, Boas now had a chance to put into practice his ideals of museum anthropology.

Constraints of Power, Money, and Authority

The exhibits here attributed to Boas were not his alone, since a museum display is the product of collaborative labor performed within a particular social system. The museum is an institution with roles for patrons and trustees, administrators, curators, scientific assistants, preparators, custodians, and visitors. Boas' tasks as curator were largely defined by the expectations others had of his role and he of theirs. We must begin, therefore, with a consideration of the resources Boas was given and of the freedom with which he was allowed to use them.

Like everything else at the American Museum of Natural History, anthropological exhibits were funded through a combination of public and private sources. The Museum's 1869 charter had called for the City of New York to pay for the land, building, and maintenance. Unlike the National Museum, which was beholden to a general, national constituency, the American Museum was thus compelled to attract the city's masses if it wanted to be assured of financial support. But the collections were owned by the twenty-four trustees, who funded expeditions, exhibit installation, and other operating expenses. Drawn from the financial elite of the city—bankers, railroad presidents, manufacturers, merchants, and lawyers—the Museum's supporters were businessmen, not scientists. Moreover, they tended to be nouveau riche, with a desire to prove their worth and bring glory to their city. By and large

they were sceptical of research; as one said, this was better left to the Germans (Kennedy 1968:122).

Boas therefore often found that in order to support his vast plans of collection, research, installation, and publication he had to go beyond the trustees to a circle of patrons more favorably disposed toward his work. Flattering letters to possible patrons were a distinct genre of Boasian correspondence (Stocking 1974:285). Boas was able to play on a number of "soft spots": Archer M. Huntington and the Duc de Loubat had serious anthropological interests; Jacob H. Schiff and Henry Villard were German-born; railroad owners like Villard and Collis P. Huntington were asked for funding for expeditions to regions through which their railroads ran, citing the anticipated increase in "interest of the public" which exhibitions might stimulate (AMAC: FB/C. F. Newcombe 5/20/01). But Boas' most generous patron was in fact the Museum's president, Morris K. Jesup, a retired banker who gave $250,000 for an expedition to the north Pacific coasts of Asia and America.

Then, as now, most wealthy patrons were more willing to donate magnificent collections than to pay for more mundane operating costs, despite the fact that the cost of collecting was "insignificant as compared with the expense of installation" (AMCA: FB/MKJ 12/11/97). In 1895 Boas estimated that it cost the museum $200 per life group figure, most of it due to the great amount of skilled labor necessary (FWPP: FB/FWP 12/5/95). Thus it tended to be the lot of the dedicated trustees to make up the deficits.

As the ultimate source of funds (directly, from their own pockets, or indirectly, through their political connections), the trustees were the ultimate authority in museum governance. The board, however, usually acquiesced in the decisions of the President. This was especially true during the term of Jesup, who served from 1881 to 1908, and was largely responsible for making the Museum a great center for research and exhibition. Until 1901, Jesup was both chief executive and operating officer; after that the zoologist Hermon C. Bumpus assumed responsibility for much of the day-to-day running of the institution, first as assistant to the President and then as Director.

During Boas' tenure the Department of Anthropology consistently listed the largest staff of curators—three when he arrived, four by the time he left. As in a university, curators were ranked by full, associate, and assistant level, and in anthropology, they were designated also by regional (Mexico and Central America) and subdisciplinary specialty (ethnology or anthropology). In addition to permanent curatorial staff, the Museum hired on contract a series of field researchers. After making their collections, men such as Alfred Kroeber, Waldemar Jochelson, and George Hunt often spent a period in residence writing up their research, preparing labels, and directing exhibit installation.

Each department also employed a set of "scientific assistants," or support personnel. In 1903 these included a secretary, a card cataloguer and label-

writer, a general installer, a model maker, a figure maker, and a general assistant (AMDA: Departmental Report, Fall 1903). The number of such assistants varied, depending on the tasks at hand and support from the central administration. Craftsmen with special skills could also be hired on contract, and various workers were delegated from the office of the superintendent: carpenters, printers, and floor attendants.

For Boas the points of tension within this structure arose when he had to deal with the central administration. Within his own department he seems to have wielded complete control, with curators as well as assistants, assigning tasks as he saw fit. Extra-departmental relations, however, were a constant source of frustration. His own museum preparators were frequently called off departmental work to do other tasks, making it difficult to plan coordinated efforts. Necessary supplies and labor were often not forthcoming. One petty, but typical, complaint to Jesup illustrates the general problem:

> For the arrangement of one case in the north Hall . . . I need a number of wooden stands, which have been made and partially painted. Mr. Wallace [the superintendent] informs me that there is no appropriation for giving these stands the second coat of paint that they require. I beg to ask for authority to have these stands painted, since the case looks very bad in its present condition.
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> (AMDA: FB/MKJ 1/19/99)

Much more serious, though, were Boas' relations with his superiors in the museum hierarchy. As chairman, Frederic Putnam was his immediate supervisor. When, for instance, Boas proposed the Jesup Expedition, the President insisted that Putnam direct the project, at least on paper (Mark 1980:39–41). But as Putnam was only at the Museum one week out of four, Boas was in effect free to direct the department's affairs. This very absence, however, led to severe strains between the two. By 1902 it appeared to Boas that their work was at cross-purposes, due to a lack of full communication (FBP: FB/FWP 4/6/02), and the following year Boas objected to Putnam's supervision on grounds that are obscure, but which seem to have stemmed from Boas' position as professor at Columbia (FBP: FWP/FB 2/6/03). The impasse was effectively resolved by Putnam's resignation from the Museum at the end of 1903 (cf. Mark 1980:43–46).

With the central administration, Boas insisted on a fairly autonomous position: "if an institution wants me, it does not want me merely to carry out orders, but also to lay plans for work" (FBP: FB/FWP 12/18/95). Accordingly, Boas requested that he be allowed to communicate directly with President Jesup. Throughout his tenure Boas continually called attention to his "inferior position," and threatened, on at least one occasion, to go elsewhere (AMDA: FB/FWP 12/1/98). Although Jesup seems generally to have ap-

proved of Boas' research, to the extent that he could understand it, Boas' exhibits continually dissatisfied him. He often complained that there were not enough labels (FBP: FWP/FB 7/2/96), and he once felt he had to direct Boas "to state that the Eskimo clothing is the real genuine article not manufactured" (FWPP: FB/FWP 2/11/97). After viewing an Alaskan display which displeased him, Jesup demanded the final say over installation (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/12/96). This divergence between Jesup and Boas over who was to have final authority for the displays was in fact the expression of underlying differences of attitude, philosophy, and purpose which were resolved only by Boas' resignation in 1905.

Constraints of Audience and Purpose

Boas defined three purposes for museums: entertainment, instruction, and research (1907:921)—each of which was correlated in a general way with three museum audiences: children and the great body of less educated adults; elementary teachers and a limited group of more educated adults; and advanced scholars (AMDA: FB/MKJ 5/28/98). For each group of visitors Boas offered a different kind of exhibition.

> Just as our school system requires, beside primary and grammar schools, high schools and universities, so a large museum should fulfil the function of a primary objective school for the general public, as well as serve those who strive for higher education and help to train the teacher. The educational methods of university, high school, grammar school, and primary school are different; and thus the methods of exhibition must differ, according to the public to which we appeal.
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> (FBP: FB/MKJ 4/29/05)

Much of Boas' exhibit activity was predicated upon the belief that the majority of visitors—as much as 90 percent—"do not want anything beyond entertainment" (1907:922).

> The people who seek rest and recreation resent an attempt at systematic instruction while they are looking for some emotional excitement. They want to admire, to be impressed by something great and wonderful; and if the underlying idea of the exhibit can be brought out with sufficient clearness, some great truths may be impressed upon them without requiring at the moment any particular effort.
>
> (Ibid.)

To appeal to such audiences Boas tried to overlay education on a base of entertainment, by using a few striking displays such as life groups, arranged so that their main point was instantly perceptible.

Boas had more trouble with the second level, those seeking "systematic instruction" (1907:925), for he believed that their educational needs would in fact be best served by small museums, such as could be instituted in schools. A large museum could not be effectively arranged so that all didactic systems of interest were contained, and if only one such system were adopted, the collections would be artificially confined. Aside from separate branch museums, Boas recommended arranging for this second audience small synoptic series in each hall or gathered together in one hall.

It was in such a series of educational displays, proposed to President Jesup in the late nineties, that Boas came closest to Mason's approach. Boas suggested an exhibit that would show "how the most primitive tribes depend entirely upon the products of their home, and how with the progress of civilization wider and wider areas are made to contribute to the needs of man." Such exhibits "would become of great interest to the tradesman," Boas hoped, "showing the development of the trades of the carpenter, the blacksmith, the weaver, etc. in different cultural areas." (AMDA: FB/MKJ 5/28/98).

Building on his earlier training in an embracive tradition of geography, Boas often spoke of human history as an intimate part of the environment: "the description of a country as the theatre of historical events is the best basis for elementary teaching of Natural Sciences" (AMCA: FB/MKJ 3/2/97). Three proposed exhibits on New England at the arrival of the Pilgrims, the discovery and conquest of Central America, and Arctic whaling were to show "the nature of the country, its products, its inhabitants, the manner in which the natives utilized the products of nature and how the immigrants utilized them" (ibid.).

Although none of these was ever built, Boas' conception of them shows that he took very seriously the problem of finding suitable topics for different segments of the general audience of a large urban museum of natural history. As he worked on these proposals over 1897 and 1898, Boas consulted with school officials so that the exhibits would form "the strongest possible stimulus to the system of teaching in our Public Schools" (ibid.). Echoing the founders of many Gilded Age museums, Boas pointed to the "interests of manual and technical training" (AMDA: FB/MKJ 5/28/98), hoping, as they did, that manufactures would be improved by the exposure of craftsmen to the accumulated heritage of the world's cultures (cf. Goode 1889:72–73). But perhaps the most important component of this audience was the many newly arrived and poorly educated city dwellers. "No other portion of our people are in more urgent need of educational advancement, and the instruction of no other class will act more favorably upon the whole body politic" (AMCA: FB/MKJ 3/2/97). It was precisely for these nonprofessional patrons that the city supported the Museum, and Boas worked to meet their needs.

The scientists, however, the smallest sector of the museum audience, were

for Boas the most important part: "the essential justification for the maintenance of large museums lies wholly in their importance as necessary means for the advancement of science" (1907:929). If research on material culture were not done at the large museum it could be done nowhere, for it was "the only means of bringing together and of preserving intact large series of material which for all time to come must form the basis of scientific inductions" (ibid.). A prime example of such collection-based research was Boas' 1897 study of "The Decorative Art of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast." Drawing only from American Museum collections, Boas was able to codify for the first time the formal principles of this style.

For Boas, advanced research was intimately linked to advanced instruction, and he worked carefully to match the needs and opportunities of university and museum. By 1899, the year he was made a full professor and the Columbia Department of Anthropology became autonomous, Boas felt that the Museum's ethnological collections "are now well arranged, and can be used to advantage for advanced instruction and for research" (AMCA: FB/MKJ 12/31/98). That year he initiated ethnology courses taught at the Museum and illustrated them with specimens, and in 1902 even offered a successful course in museum administration.

At this point both university and museum needed one another. During the summer graduate students "carried on field-work for the Museum, and have thus enjoyed the advantage of field experience" (FBP: FB/N. M. Butler 11/15/02), while the Museum gained well-documented collections. During the academic year, the graduate students "based their researches largely on the collections of the Museum" (ibid.). The students thus received professional training, the results of which were embodied in the exhibits and publications of the Museum. The program's success can be seen in the work of Columbia's first Ph.D. in anthropology, Alfred L. Kroeber. Kroeber's expedition to Arapaho territory, funded by Mrs. Jesup, returned to the Museum with its first collections from the American Plains. Kroeber then combined artifactual and textual evidence for his thesis on Arapaho decorative symbolism (1901).

Scientists shared with the general public the need actually to *see* the collections in order fully to exploit them. In recounting how he had come to write his famous article on Eskimo needle cases (1908), Boas remarked:

> With the problem of the influence of traditional styles upon invention before my mind, I went through the collections of the National Museum, and happened to find in one case most of the needle-cases here discussed assembled. Without being able to see them, I am sure the point would never have come home to me.
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> (FBP: FB/A. M. Huntington 4/13/09)

Accordingly, Boas recommended that because of "the multiplicity of the points of view from which the material can be viewed," as well as differences in "size, form, and material," anthropological material "can only be stored satisfactorily in such a way that each specimen can be seen" (1907:930–31). But if scientists needed to see specimens, they did not need elaborate exhibits, especially those with a high ratio of models and mannequins to actual artifacts.

The fieldtrips that generated both the study collections and the exhibits thus had quite different goals for Boas and the administration. Of the Jesup Expedition to the Northwest Coast, Boas wrote:

> The work which we are carrying on is by no means primarily collecting, but it is our object to carry on a thorough investigation of the area in which we are working. The specimens which we obtain are not collected by any means from the point of view of making an attractive exhibit, but primarily as material for a thorough study of the ethnology and archaeology of the region.
>
> (AMDA: FB/G. M. Dawson 5/2/99)

Director Bumpus thought otherwise. "Field expeditions of the Museum must not be carried on for scientific purposes, but only to fill gaps in the exhibitions: . . . if accidental scientific results can be had, they are acceptable, but . . . they must not be the object of field-work" (FBP: Memo, Interview with Jesup & Bumpus 5/17/05).

At the beginning of his tenure, however, Boas still felt that these diverse interests could be harmonized. Collections were to be divided into an "exhibition series" for the general public and a "study series" for the specialist. "All specimens that do not serve to illustrate certain facts or points of view must be excluded from the Exhibition Series and included in the Study Series" (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96). Thus while the exhibition series was almost wholly dedicated to "Public Instruction," the study series served the advancement of science. Such a division, dating back at least to Louis Agassiz in 1860 (Meyer 1905:324–25), had become widely adopted by Boas' time, especially by American museums. Over the decade he remained at the Museum, Boas was to find that it was no easy thing to realize this dual ideal in practice.

Boas and the Practice of Museum Exhibition

What did Boas' exhibits look like, and why? In evaluating these exhibits it is necessary to consider to what extent the displays flowed directly from Boas' conscious intentions, and to what extent they failed to match these goals.

As a case study we will consider in detail the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians. This hall, from his major area of research and exceptionally well-documented for a turn-of-the-century exhibit, received the most direct and continuous attention from Boas, and thus best embodied his vision of exhibition.

In addition to his strongly held views on the theoretical implications of museum exhibits, Boas approached his task with an implicit philosophy of the exhibit process itself. For a man whose work reveals a certain aversion to visual thinking (Jacknis 1984:43–52), Boas was quite sophisticated in his understanding of how the average visitor experiences a museum exhibit. With an approach evidently derived from his earlier doctoral research on psychophysics as well as his own observations on visitor behavior, Boas strove to gain the attention of the viewer, to concentrate it upon a single point, and then guide it systematically to the next in a series of points. The constant danger was the loss of attention, either through confusion due to the multiplicity of points, or boredom due to the repetition of effects. As we go through Boas' exhibits we will see these principles applied again and again on various levels.

The structure of our discussion will mirror that of the museum as the visitor traces a route through a hierarchy of nested spaces—the permanent environment of the building, creating the halls, which enfold the temporary and movable "museum furniture" (cases and mounts), and a range of nonspecimen components (mannequins, models, graphics, and labels), surrounding the objects themselves (cf. Brawne 1982:9–37).

The Museum Building

Boas arrived at the Museum in a period of vast expansion (Wissler 1943:table 6). In 1896 parts of two halls were devoted to anthropology; by the time he left there were eight (about two-thirds for ethnology, the rest for archeology), most of them housed in a separate anthropology wing that opened in 1900. But in spite of this generosity of space, Boas did not get the kinds of spaces he wanted. Like most curators, he had little to say about the planning, even for the wing built during his tenure, complaining later that "a thorough reorganization of museum administration will not be possible until the plan of operation of the museum is decided upon before the museum building is erected" (1907:933).

Believing as he did that the major purpose of a large museum was to accumulate the artifactual base for scholarship, and that, on the other hand, the exhibits were primarily for the general viewer, Boas thought that "the line between the exhibition halls open to the general public and the study collections open to students should be drawn much more sharply than is generally done" (AMDA: FB/F. Hooper 6/13/03):

> In planning a museum, I should be inclined to arrange a series of exhibition halls for the public on the ground floor. . . . Above these I should arrange a number of halls with lower ceilings for study collections, but accessible to the public. Here the cases can be placed close together; and systematic arrangement would be the prime object, not attractive exhibitions. These halls would be used by teachers, high-school scholars, students, etc. . . . Over these halls would be storage-rooms, workshops, offices, etc.
>
> (Ibid.)

He in fact recommended a ratio of one unit of exhibition hall to two units of study collections to one unit of work-rooms.

For the thwarting of this plan Boas blamed the Museum's architecture.

Hall of the American Southwest and Mexico, American Museum of Natural History, ca. 1902 (negative number 488 [photograph by E. F. Keller], courtesy of the Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History).

"The whole museum . . . is laid out in large magnificent halls [and] the proportional amount of space available for storage in a building of this kind is so small that full use of the stored material for scientific purposes is entirely out of the question" (1907:932). At a time of such active collecting, even the construction flurry of the nineties could not keep pace, and the high-ceilinged halls robbed needed space from storage areas. Specimens had to be stored wherever there was room, often in the exhibition halls themselves (AMDA: FB/MKJ 3/25/99).

In a period when lighting was still largely natural, illumination was another structural feature over which the curator had little control. The Northwest Coast Hall was part of the original museum building, and large glass windows had been generously donated by Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., a founder-trustee and owner of a plate-glass company. But with the glass coming down almost to the floor along both side walls, there was a terrible problem of reflection in the cases, which was "particularly disturbing in ethnological collections on account of the smallness of the objects" (AMDA: FB/MKJ 1/11/97). Fading was also a problem: "the skylight destroys our specimens, and . . . attendants in the halls are required in order to regulate the light according to the position of the sun and clearness of the sky" (AMDA: FB/MKJ 6/13/99). Although by the turn of the century artificial illumination (a circle of bare bulbs ringing each column and a decorative fixture over each large case) helped brighten evenings and dark days, it did not yet allow the special effects of later museum dioramas.

Hall Arrangement

Much of the curator's art lay in the proper juxtaposition of objects, whether in cases or in halls. Boas had argued in 1887 that the particular grouping of specimens was a classificatory act, which, in turn, would communicate to the visitor a particular theory of (material) culture, and despite some concessions, he was generally able to arrange his American Museum halls in accordance with these ideals.

The content of the halls was determined by provenance, subdiscipline, and size. By and large, all anthropology halls were contiguous, on each of four levels. Halls were apportioned on the basis of collection strengths, with an entire large hall each for Northwest Coast ethnology and Mexican archeology. In the case of relatively small collections such as South America or the American Southwest, archeology and ethnology were combined. Where possible, neighboring halls were devoted to contiguous regions: the Eskimo were next to the Northwest Coast, Siberia adjacent to the Eskimo. A residual hall, the West Vestibule, held the oversized items such as totem poles, tipis, and petroglyph casts (cf. Hovey 1904 for a complete listing and description of the Museum's halls).

In arranging cases within a single hall, Boas strove to direct visitor attention along a structured path. Viewing order was suggested most directly by the sequence of numbers and letters over each vitrine, which also served as an index to descriptions in a guide leaflet. Boas tried to avoid a large central aisle flanked by rows of cases, because visitors would "wander from right to left without order and it is impossible to compel them to see the collections in such a manner that they will have the greatest possible benefit from a short visit" (AMDA: FB/MKJ 1/11/97). His preferred solution was to install a partition down the center, with the cases set up against it: "By dividing the Hall into two longitudinal halves . . . visitors are compelled to see the collections in their natural sequence, and even if they pass through only one half of the Hall will be more benefited than when seeing one alcove here, one there" (ibid.). A bonus in this plan was the potential use of the added wall space for maps, diagrams, large labels, murals, and the like.

From the evidence at hand, it seems that Boas never fully implemented this scheme, though he came close in his Northwest Coast Hall, where two parallel rows of low desk cases for archeological specimens stretched between a life group and a village model in large cases at either end. While it was possible to walk down a small central aisle between the two rows, most visitors walked along the outer sides, passing next to the large alcove cases holding the bulk of the collections. Within the latter, specimens were arranged according to two separate principles: "First, a general or synoptic collection of specimens obtained from the entire area, designed to illustrate the culture of the people as a whole; Second, several independent collections, each illustrating the peculiarities of the culture of a single tribe" (Hovey 1904:41).

The synoptic series, installed in the first five polygonal cases along one side, was grouped by cultural domains: the use of natural products, basic industries, house furnishings, dress and ornaments, trade and barter, hunting and fishing, travel and transportation, armor and weapons, musical instruments, decorative art, and clan organization. Following these, the cases in the tribal series snaked up one side of the hall and down the other, in order from north to south (of both the hall and the region): first the Tlingit, then Tsimshian, Haida, Bella Coola, Kwakiutl, Nootka, and Coast Salish, followed at the end by exhibits from the geographically neighboring but culturally distinct interior Plateau tribes. Boas included them in both the Jesup Expedition and the hall resulting from it in order to ascertain and then illustrate the limits of the culture area and the effects of local history and environment. Within each of these tribal units materials generally followed the sequence used in the synoptic series, with local omissions and additions.

Such a scheme served several functions at once. Prepared primarily for the general visitor (FBP: FB/MKJ 4/29/05), the briefer synoptic series was a kind of "condensed culture," presenting the main outlines of the culture area. The

rest of the collections, arranged geographically, explored in greater depth more specialized topics. Given the shortage of usable storage space, this dual plan effected a compromise between heavily didactic displays open to all, and the closed storage areas open only to qualified researchers. Finally, the bulk of the geographically arranged collections would form the "indifferent background" necessary to set off the few striking displays. Boas seems consciously to have intended that a great part of the exhibits would be ignored by the general public (1907:923–25).

Installation

In a period of burgeoning collections and additions to the building, the order and arrangement of halls was constantly being changed; the Northwest Coast Hall was substantially altered in almost every year of Boas' tenure. The Northwest Coast collections filled only the east half of the Ethnology Hall when it opened on November 30, 1896, the other half being occupied by material from the Eskimo, northern Mexico, and Melanesia. Although they included Boas' Kwakiutl life group and a model of a Kwakiutl village, and the introductory synoptic series was already in place, many of the Northwest Coast materials were prior holdings, arranged simply according to who had collected them (FWPP: FWP/Report to MKJ 6/96). Upon completion of the new wing, the other specimens were moved out, leaving the entire hall for the rapidly accumulating specimens of the Jesup Expedition, and in 1901 the previous arrangement by collector was replaced by Boas' tribal scheme. Though the *Annual Report* for 1902 claimed the hall to be "completed in its main features," it saw several further changes before Boas left. Following the visit of George Hunt in the spring of 1903 the Kwakiutl collections were rearranged, and where necessary, recatalogued and relabeled. Later that year Salish and Sahaptin collections were rearranged, and in 1904 the Emmons Tlingit basket collection was added, along with new models of Kwakiutl fish traps and Kwakiutl case labels.

Although Boas worked, where possible, toward a permanent installation, he realized that for most of the halls it was "necessary to make the principle of arrangement somewhat elastic, allowing for the introduction of material that . . . will fill gaps in existing collections" (AMDA: FB/MKJ 11/14/97). While some of this flexibility was achieved by changing labels and moving cases, most came from leaving space within the case. Not appreciating Boas' motives, Jesup expressed his concern that "the collections were spread over great spaces, and it looked to me more as if the aim was to get [more] cases than the proper use of those we had" (AMCA: MKJ/FWP 8/2/02). But faced with the alternatives of closing the hall until the entire display was complete, or adding specimens haphazardly as they arrived, Boas chose to adhere to a structured scheme: "It would seem best to prepare first of all those exhibits

which will make clear the idea of the whole arrangement and then add gradually the details as time and funds will permit" (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96).

In the midst of this constant exhibit activity, Boas insisted that the Museum maintain the proper atmosphere for viewing the collections. Recalling the "sanctuary" in the Dresden Museum, in which the Sistine Madonna was exhibited, he insisted that

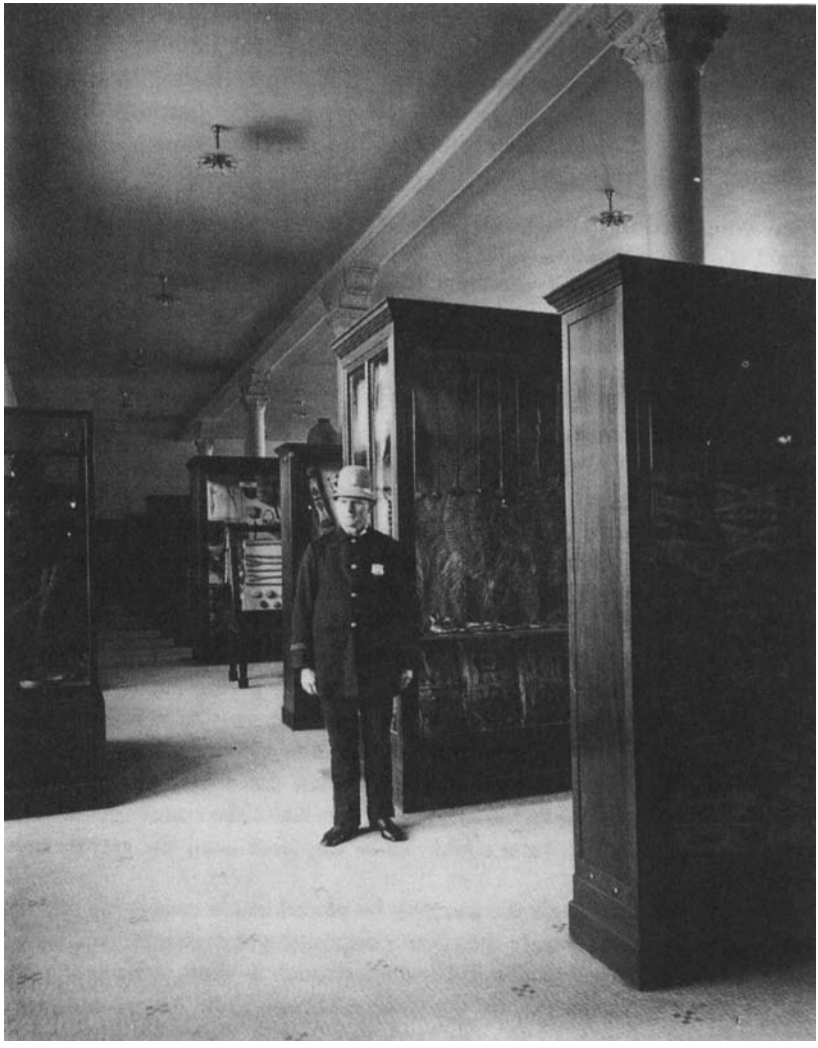
> everything in the hall should be calculated to increase the impression of dignity and of aloofness from every-day life. No dusting, no mopping, no trundling-about of boxes, should be permitted in a hall visited by the public, because it disturbs that state of mind that seems best adapted to bring home the ideas for which the museum stands.
>
> (1907:932)

Cases and their Contents

Unlike earlier private "cabinets," the major public museums of the late nineteenth century employed a range of devices to clarify and explain the import of the object at hand. Technological innovations were adopted as rapidly as they were introduced. Accordingly, Boas' museological concerns were forced to descend to the level of cases, mannequins, models, mounts, graphics, and labels.

Cases served several functions. They stored and supported specimens, in addition to protecting them against dust and the prying hands of visitors. Boas was contantly berating the administration for sending him cases which would not lock and for not giving him enough security guards. Although many of the cases in the Northwest Coast Hall dated from the opening of that part of the building in 1877, all new cases had to be custom made in the Museum's shop, and artifacts could not be displayed until the requisitioned cases were supplied.

Boas insisted that single mannequins be placed inside cases with the artifacts in order to demonstrate the correct disposition of costumes, ornaments, and tools: "arranging ethnological specimens such as dress, ornaments, etc. without them would be exactly the same as though Prof. Allen would hang unmounted skins in his cases, or as though Prof. Osborn would leave his specimens imbedded in rock and unmounted" (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96). Scattered around each hall there were plaster busts, depicting racial features and the art of face painting (cf. Anon. 1906). Almost every hall also contained a detailed model of native habitations, although on a scale of 1:20—since it was "impossible to show full size native habitations, because they take such a vast amount of space without being thoroughly instructive" (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96). Diagrammatic models were used extensively to demonstrate special topics, like the different stitches used in basketry, or the iconography of Northwest Coast designs.



Hall of Plains Ethnology, American Museum of Natural History, ca. 1904 (negative number 42642 [photograph by I. I. C. Orchard], courtesy of the Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History).

Graphic material in the cases consisted of drawings and photographs. Especially in his displays of art, Boas employed explanatory drawings: "When I say for instance, this [design] is a beaver, I want to point out on a good sketch, what parts characterise the beaver" (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/16/95). Although enlarged photographs were used in the cases, Boas did not employ them as systematically as the National Museum. When it came to the supporting elements within the cases, Boas and Putnam both felt that "the only conspicuous thing we wish to have in the case is the object itself, and next to that the label; but [that] the mounting should be as inconspicuous as possible" (FBP: FWP/FB 11/18/95). Accordingly, the small metal stands used to support artifacts were painted the color of the shelves. Because he found that the standard bluish-white labels contrasted too much with the mostly dark specimens, "so that the whole case assumes an appearance of restlessness," Boas tried to "quiet down the appearance of the whole Hall" by using case labels matching the shelves and specimen labels approximating the specimen color (FWPP: FB/FWP 9/12/96).

Attention was again concentrated in the arrangement of the artifacts on the shelves: "I have selected from among the material all the typical specimens and have arranged them so that each case presents a certain point of view in Indian life" (FWPP: FB, as quoted in FWP report to MKJ 6/30/96). Furthermore,

> In arranging the collections I have, of course, not crammed the cases, but placed the material so that it can be seen to advantage. I do not believe that we can interest the public, if we do not give each specimen a chance to be seen individually and so that its label can be studied in connection with it.
>
> (FWPP: FB/FWP 9/12/96)

Although in contemporary photographs we see cases that appear quite crowded, it may be that Boas was forced to display more of the collection than he would have wished, because of a lack of storage space. Alternatively, our sense of what is crowded and what is spacious may have changed over the decades, as the general cultural shift from Victorian plenitude to Art Moderne spareness produced a re-evaluation of aesthetic sensibilities in museum display (cf. Harris 1978:159–68). Be that as it may, Boas' successor, Clark Wissler, in 1908 found plenty of specimens that could be profitably removed (AMNH Annual Report for 1908:36, cf. Dorsey 1907:585).

Life Groups

The life group mode of display would seem to be the perfect device to depict the kinds of local and contextual meanings and functions Boas was trying to get across, and at first, Boas' plans were extremely ambitious. After outlining eight groups, comprising twenty-eight figures, he estimated that he

Case of Bella Coola masks in the Northwest Hall, ca. 1905 (negative number 386 [photograph by R. Weber], courtesy of the Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History).

would need another twenty groups with about seventy additional figures (FWPP: FB/FWP 12/5/95). Yet by early 1900 only twenty-three figures had been completed, and many of these were used individually, not in groups (AMDA: FB/MKJ 2/24/00). Despite their popular appeal, the problems they presented in scientific and artistic veracity seem to have made them not worth the great effort they entailed.

Of all contemporary exhibit techniques the life group called for the greatest amount of materials, time, and skill. Several media were then available for modelling the figures, among them wax, papier-mâché, and plaster (cf. Goode 1895). Like the National Museum, the American Museum used plaster, which was relatively easy to work with and durable, and provided a good surface for paint. The life group preparator for the American Museum was

Caspar Mayer, whom Boas regarded as a sculptor of "great talent." "He is particularly well fitted to our work on account of the strong tendency to accuracy and realism," and as "an enthusiastic student [he] is really grasping the scientific aims of his work" (FWPP: FB/FWP 8/5/96).

The method developed by Mayer involved taking plaster life casts of the face and various body parts (FWPP: FB/FWP 10/1/96; Wissler 1943:222). These casts came from diverse sources: some were collected along with the artifacts in the field (as were the casts for Boas' two Kwakiutl groups), some from the visiting circus or the Carlisle Indian School, and some from occasional visits of natives to New York. Occasionally, when casts from life were unavailable, model makers worked from photographs and measurements. Boas himself demonstrated the poses for the National Museum figures (cf. Hinsley and Holm 1976:308–10), and had his field photographer record several poses for the American Museum cedar crafts group (cf. Jacknis 1984:33–36). Clay molds were made from the preliminary casts, and the parts of the body were joined with modelling clay. The whole was then reproduced in a

Franz Boas demonstrating a pose of the Kwakiutl hamatsa dancer for model makers at the U.S. National Museum, February, 1895 (negative number 8304, courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution).

final plaster cast, and the skin color painted on. The figures were then combined with artifacts, again, either collected specifically for the display (as for Boas' Kwakiutl groups) or drawn from existing collections. This entire process was guided, whenever possible, by the original field collector.

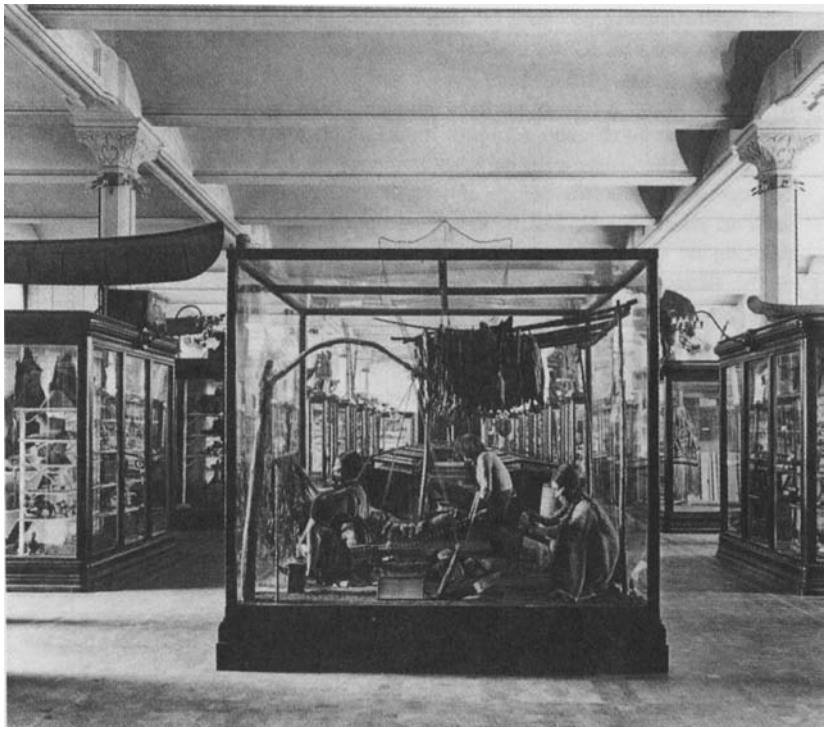
Most of the groups produced during Boas' tenure came from the Northwest Coast and Eskimo—regions strongly represented in the Museum's collections, where Boas' own expertise sped matters along. Although documentation is vague, apparently groups from northern Mexico, the American Plains, and Siberia were also completed before 1905. In their subject matter, Boas' groups were hardly distinguishable from those of Holmes and other contemporary museum anthropologists. Typically, each group showed "a family or several members of a tribe, dressed in their native costume and engaged in some characteristic work or art illustrative of their life and particular art or industry" (AMAC: FWP/MKJ 11/8/94). The groups frequently depicted the construction of artifacts as well as their use. Because Boas tried to represent both male and female subsistence activities, and children were usually included in larger scenes, a home scene was the perfect condensation of these characters and activities. In keeping with Boas' theme for the educational displays, most scenes demonstrated the relation of man to nature. The Kwakiutl cedar crafts group vividly illustrated the role of this plant in their life: "A woman is seen making a cedar-bark mat, rocking her infant, which is bedded in cedar-bark, the cradle being moved by means of a cedar-bark rope attached to her toe" (Boas 1900:3–4). The other figures included a woman shredding bark, a man painting a box, another man tending a fire with tongs, and a young woman drying fish over a fire.

For Boas, the primary purpose of the life group was to catch the visitor's attention and direct it to more specific exhibits (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96). Speaking of the cedar crafts group, he wrote:

> I have taken notice that on Saturdays when the Public leave the Lecture Hall, they invariably look at the group and then turn to the adjoining case and I find by their remarks that I succeeded in reaching the end that I had in view in this arrangement. The visitors discuss the uses of the implements comparing them to those they see in the group and stop to read the labels.
>
> (Ibid.)

Given their role as glorified stop signs, Boas invariably tried to position life groups in a central aisle adjacent to the larger cases holding the primary collection.

Yet despite their evident success, life groups from the beginning had for Boas a series of drawbacks: the inherent limitations of realism; the distraction caused by impressive display techniques; and the dulling of effect through repetition. Although the life group strove in principle for realism, the circumstances of museum exhibition conspired to defeat that goal:



The Northwest Coast Hall from the south, ca. 1902 (negative number 351 [photograph by E. G. Keller], courtesy of the Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History).

> It is an avowed object of a large group to transport the visitor into foreign surroundings. He is to see the whole village and the way the people live. But all attempts at such an undertaking that I have seen have failed, because the surroundings of a Museum are not favorable to an impression of this sort. The cases, the walls, the contents of other cases, the columns, the stairways, all remind us that we are *not* viewing an actual village and the contrast between the attempted realism of the group and the inappropriate surroundings spoils the whole effect.
>
> (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96)

The larger the group, felt Boas, the harder it was to achieve the illusion of reality, because more of the distracting background would be included in the vista, and because even with ample museum space the group would be crowded, compared to its natural state. Boas therefore recommended that only small, unified groups be constructed.

The limitations Boas faced become clearer when he described what would be necessary for a really successful illusion:

> In order to set off such a group to advantage it must be seen from one side only, the view must be through a kind of frame which shuts out the line where the scene ends, the visitor must be in a comparatively dark place while there must be a certain light on the objects and on the background. The only place where such an effect can be had is in a Panorama Building where plastic art and painting are made to blend into each other and where everything not germane to the subject is removed from view. It cannot be carried out in a Museum Hall.
>
> (Ibid.)

In fact, however, all the life groups constructed by Boas or the National Museum were meant to be viewed from all sides, without the illusionistic painted backgrounds and lighting effects of the diorama—which were popularized only after 1910 by Clark Wissler at the American Museum (1915), and Samuel Barrett at the Milwaukee Public Museum (1918).

Realistic effects were equally elusive in the case of mannequins, especially when they were viewed at close range.

> No figure, however well it may have been gotten up, will look like man himself. If nothing else, the lack of motion will show at once that there is an attempt at copying nature, not nature itself. When the figure is absolutely lifelike the lack of motion causes a ghastly impression such as we notice in wax-figures. For this reason the artistic effect will be better when we bear in mind this fact and do not attempt too close an approach to nature; that is to say, since there is a line of demarcation between nature and plastic art, it is better to draw the line consciously than to try to hide it.
>
> (FWPP: FB/FWP 11/7/96)

In order to stylize the figure Boas recommended three methods: figures should be shown in a moment of rest, not at the height of action; skin color and texture should be an approximation only; and the hair should be represented by paint or modelling, not by actual hair. Although wigs of real hair were in fact used, otherwise the groups under Boas' direction do follow these strictures.

Boas was also concerned lest "the element of impressiveness" that life groups possessed might "overshadow the scientific aim which they serve" (ibid.). He was also critical of museums in which "the group is arranged for effect, not in order to elucidate certain leading ideas" (ibid.). In a later essay Boas gave an example from the American Museum habitat dioramas. Visitors marveled at a case of gulls hovering with no apparent support over ocean waves. Rather than studying the bird and surroundings, they came away in-

stead with "admiration of the technical skill exhibited in the installation" (1907:923).

In this context, more was not better. For with the "undue multiplication of groups of the same type," the "impressiveness of each is decreased by the excessive application of the same device" (1907:925). Again Boas offered evidence from his own experience: "Any one who will observe the visitors of the United States National Museum strolling through the Catlin Hall, which contains the Indian groups, will readily see how the first group seems very interesting, and how quickly the others appear of less and less interest and importance" (ibid.). Familiar with the psychophysical principle that the repetition of a stimulus led to habituation, Boas felt that such large displays should be used sparingly and set off against an "indifferent background." Thus, although Boas believed life groups to be a necessary display technique, especially for the general visitor, they forced to his attention the compromises he had to make in the attempt to popularize anthropology.

Labels and Texts

By its nature the museum display communicates primarily through the medium of tangible objects. The extent to which words—in the form of labels, pamphlets, or monographs—were able to complement, supplement, or supplant the object became for Boas the ultimate limitation to the possibility of a museum anthropology.

Labels were quite important to Boas. The departmental secretary acted as label-writer, whenever possible basing the copy on the monographs prepared by the original field collectors. Labels were arranged hierarchically: each case contained a large, summary label such as "Nootka" or "Northern Plains Tribes"; smaller labels announced smaller units such as "Ceremonials" or "Games"; near each specimen was a tag with basic identifications. Similarly, the import of the life groups was spelled out with a set of labels, each commenting on a different aspect of the scene.

For such popular halls as the Northwest Coast and Mexico, brief pamphlets were prepared, "easily read as one passes from case to case" (Gregory 1900:63). Boas' guide to the Northwest Coast Hall, printed in November 1900, proved to be so popular that all five thousand copies had been given out within seven months (FWPP: FWP/MKJ Report for 1901). For those wishing further detail, copies of the monographs prepared by Museum scientists were chained to the appropriate cases. Collections were in fact installed as nearly as possible in the order of the treatment in the monograph, so that each publication was "a full description of the contents of a case or of several cases (AMDA: FB/H. C. Bumpus 8/21/02). By 1902, however, some of the monographs were getting too heavy to attach to cases, and thereafter visitors wishing to consult them were directed to the Museum's library (AMDA: FB/

H. A. Andrews 9/16/02). From labels for the general visitor to monographs for the advanced scholar, each visitor was thus offered verbal information at the level he or she desired. Here again we see how Boas attempted to harmonize diverse interests by a system of overlay and juxtaposition.

But from the very beginning, Boas felt that the exhibited artifacts were ultimately subordinate to the monographic interpretation of the scientist. Upon hearing that the Chicago Fair administration would not pay for the publication of scientific reports. Boas complained to Putnam that

> The specimens are only illustrations of certain scientific facts. . . . The specimens from the North Pacific Coast are interesting, but their vital interest lies in their interpretation. . . . The collections will remain dead letters until this interpretation which is indicated on the labels is substantiated in a report.
> (FWPP: FB/FWP 12/11/93)

When Mason and Goode commissioned Boas to prepare an annotated description of the Northwest Coast artifacts in the National Museum, they intended to use this catalog as a basis for exhibit labels. Goode stressed to

The Northwest Coast Hall, northern end, American Museum of Natural History, ca. 1902 (negative number 12633, courtesy of the Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History).

Boas that it would be inappropriate for them to publish the manuscript Boas intended to submit, which consisted largely of social and linguistic data. "The work of the Museum is limited," Goode maintained, "to the administration of the collections under its charge"—the main object was "to bring under control the *collections* which we now have" (FBP: GBG/FB 2/5/95). Yet by this time Boas had largely completed the manuscript, and although "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians" did discuss the cultural context of artifacts, using National Museum specimens as illustrations, it was hardly an annotated catalog.

During Boas' American Museum tenure, his policy of delaying labeling until the corresponding monographs had been completed was a continuing bone of contention. Although Jesup had instructed that any collection placed on exhibition "should be a complete thing labeled and defined," he had been "surprised" after a visit to the halls, to find "how little I knew or could find out about them" (AMCA: MKJ/FB 8/2/02). In reply Boas simply asserted that "publication, installation, and labelling go hand in hand": "Every contribution to the publications of the Museum in this section is a contribution to our labelling" (AMDA: FB/H. C. Bumpus 8/21/02).

From there the disagreement rapidly spread to the relation of fieldwork and research, and to its communication in exhibition. Bumpus admonished Boas, "I cannot help feeling that I may have made a fundamental mistake in yielding to the urgent appeals for purchases and continued field work and the general enlargement of our collections, rather than to have first cared for the proper installation of the material actually on hand" (AMCA: H. C. Bumpus/FB 12/18/03). Denying that fieldwork interfered with the work of installation, Boas argued that the "fragmentary state of most of our collections" in fact necessitated more fieldwork for proper installation. "In the three halls in which our fieldwork has been most systematic, the labelling is most complete and satisfactory" (AMDA: FB/H. C. Bumpus 8/21/02). Thus did a disagreement over labeling—a matter of exhibit installation—escalate to a challenge to Boas' basic conception of a professional anthropology. Such strains could not go long unresolved.

Boas' Resignation from the American Museum

Having come to feel that these frustrations and constraints were not accidental, but the expressions of inherent limitations in museum anthropology, Boas began in the fall of 1904 the final train of events that led to his resignation. That October he informed the administration that "the work in the Museum did not seem to me profitable, and I preferred to be relieved of administrative duties . . . but that I would like to continue the scientific

work in which I am particularly interested" (FBP: FB/H. F. Osborn 5/6/05). Bumpus, however, instead asked Boas to take on an added responsibility when the Departments of Ethnology and Archaeology were recombined after having been separated in 1903. Realizing that a suitable replacement could not be found, Boas acceded to a unified chair, but only under strict conditions: more money was to be pledged for fieldwork, and Boas was to have complete and total control over the new department. After five weeks of review of departmental activities, Boas submitted a report to Bumpus. This report, and Bumpus' fierce attack upon it, proved to be Boas' final undoing at the Museum.

Boas made a series of appeals to President Jesup, which led to a May 17 meeting with the Director and the President. When Jesup sided with Bumpus, Boas decided his position was untenable, and by the end of the week had submitted his letter of resignation, citing "fundamental differences of opinion relating to administration between the director and myself" (FBP: FB/MKJ 5/23/05). An agreement with the Museum called for his functional separation as of July 1, 1905, but for his continued supervision for one more year of the scientific work of the department—essentially the editing of the Jesup Expedition reports.

The divergence of the two sides came out clearly in the prime grievances cited by each. For Boas, authority was the stumbling block. He refused to allow the Director to appoint someone not under his own direct control to carry out installation work, and he objected violently to Bumpus countermanding orders he had issued for such work. He was "absolutely unwilling to be curator and as such responsible for the department, and to have no other function than to carry out the instructions of the director" (FBP: FB/H. F. Osborn 5/6/05). As far as Jesup and Bumpus were concerned, the main problem had to do with Boas' exhibits. Thus, Bumpus directed Clark Wissler to redo the Blackfoot Indian display so that it would then be "intelligible, instructive, orderly, and attractive" (FBP: HCB/FB 4/28/05), and he found the Mexican Hall "entirely unworthy" in either "scientific or educational" terms (ibid.)—noting specifically the lack of systematic order and comprehensible labels. But, in the end, the two problems of authority and exhibit style were one, for what bothered the administration was not so much Boas' research, but his exhibit work, and it is in this arena that they attempted to intervene. Although his ultimate interests lay elsewhere, Boas would not yield responsibility for public displays in his department.

A microcosm of these divergent positions and a precipitating cause for Boas' resignation was the installation of the Peruvian collection. According to Jesup, this collection, which had been "gotten together at large expense," had remained in the Museum "for a long time without any approach to ade-

quate classification, instructive labeling, or creditable exhibition" (FBP: MKJ/FB 4/28/05). Instead of waiting for Boas, Jesup directed Bumpus and Adolphe Bandelier, the collector, to arrange the exhibit. In keeping with systematic arrangements elsewhere in the Museum, the team devised a scheme of fixed categories, either by function (house life, industries, personal adornments) or by material (stone, wood, clay). To someone who had advocated the position that "in ethnology all is individuality" in a debate almost two decades earlier, the Bumpus-Bandelier scheme must have been especially frustrating; and to have such a typological exhibit imposed in his own department from without only compounded the problem. As for the delay in arranging the collection since entering the museum, Putnam had responded to this issue when it had first arisen in 1897: "It is often necessary to spend days upon a specimen which is afterward put on exhibition in a few minutes, and only the final result, the simple exhibition of the object, is noticeable" (FWPP: FWP/MKJ 5/10/97).

But there were probably also more profound ideological differences at issue. Echoing the optimistic evolutionism so widespread in his age, Jesup had called for "a series illustrating the advance of mankind from the most primitive form to the most complex forms of life" (FBP: Notes of interview with MKJ & HCB, 5/17/05). Echoing his earlier remarks that "civilization is not something absolute . . . and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes" (1887b:66), Boas, in one of his final pleas to Jesup, talked of his desire to impress upon the general public "the fact that our people are not the only carriers of civilization, but that the human mind has been creative everywhere" (FBP: FB/MKJ 4/29/05).

The clash between Boas and Jesup was inevitable, given their fundamentally opposed opinions about the Museum's audience and purpose. Jesup, himself not a trained scientist, wrote: "In my experience, I find that any one who is capable of interesting children or youth in *any* subject will always get and retain the interest and attention of older people" (FBP: MKJ/FB 5/2/05). Although Boas recognized the two levels of a general and advanced audience, he refused to reduce the displays to the lowest level: "By adapting every exhibit to the level of the needs of the uneducated, we frustrate our object of adding to the knowledge of the educated who come here in search of more special information" (FBP: FB/MKJ 4/29/05).

Attacking the facile popularizers of science, Boas later warned of the danger when "intelligibility is too often obtained by slurring over unknown and obscure points which tend to make the public believe that without any effort, by listening for a brief hour or less to the exposition of a problem, they have mastered it" (1907:922). Boas wanted his exhibits to "bring out the sublimity of truth and the earnest efforts that are needed to acquire it" (1907:923). He

had long believed that the needs of various audiences could be reconciled, even within a single exhibit, but if he was forced to choose, he felt that specialized interests came first.

Two years after his resignation Boas summarized his experience in a general essay on the "Principles of Museum Administration." Although he still held out hope for the proper scientific use of museums, the essay represented his museological swan song. Over time, Boas' confrontation with "the limitations of the museum method of anthropology" began to resonate, theoretically and institutionally, throughout American anthropology. By 1907 he had concluded that "the psychological as well as the historical relations of cultures, which are the only objects of anthropological inquiry, can not be expressed by any arrangement based on so small a portion of the manifestion of ethnic life as is presented by specimens" (1907:928). This theoretical reorientation took some time to establish itself. Boas' own attempt to move anthropology from an artifact-based utilitarianism to a more contextual, relative, and psychological stance was to find its major methodology in the creation of native texts, which in many ways still possessed an object-ive character. A more observational and behavioral kind of anthropology had to await the work of his students in the twenties (cf. Stocking 1976:13–23).

As far as the institutional base of anthropology was concerned, Boas by 1905 had come to question his earlier position that "university instruction" and the "general educational aims of the Museum" were both "very easily harmonized" (FBP: FB/Zelia Nuttall 5/16/01). Nor were his experiences unique. Of the early joint university-museum programs, which existed at Harvard, Pennsylvania, Berkeley, and Chicago, as well as at Columbia, only the one at Harvard continued to thrive as such; and because it concentrated almost solely on archeology, it was the exception which proved the rule (cf. Darnell 1969:140–264). At all the others the same kinds of constraints, though in different combinations and emphases, worked to divide the interests of the museum and those of the university. Although museums continued until 1930 to be a major locus for anthropology, especially for research (cf. Stocking 1976:9–13), the end of the "museum era" had long since been foreshadowed in the end of Boas' own museum connection.

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FBP. Franz Boas Papers, Professional Correspondence. American Philosophical Society. Philadelphia.

FWPP. Frederic Ward Putnam Papers. Correspondence. Harvard University Archives. Cambridge, Mass.