

## the objects of anthropology

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***All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916.* ROBERT W. RYDELL. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. x + 328 pp., photographs, illustrations, notes, references, index. \$27.50 (cloth).**

***Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture.* GEORGE W. STOCKING, JR., ed. History of Anthropology, volume 3. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. viii + 258 pp., photographs, references, index. \$25.00 (cloth).**

Collecting and exhibiting were prominent anthropological pursuits in the 19th century. Museums and world's fairs were anthropology's primary institutional homes. By the 1930s ideology and behavior had superseded artifacts as the subjects for ethnological investigation, while universities had eclipsed museums as institutional settings. Museum anthropology and material culture studies have remained peripheral during the past half century despite periodic declarations of support (for example, Collier and Tschopik 1954; Sturtevant 1969; Lurie 1981). Nevertheless, the role of objects in ethnology has been undergoing a quiet evolution that appears to be gaining momentum and coherence. Of special importance are the volumes reviewed here and in Volume 13 of *American Ethnologist* (Price 1986; Dominguez 1986), which examine the significance of artifacts for anthropology.

In 1893, G. Brown Goode, assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and an ichthyologist, who was put in charge of the anthropological exhibits at Chicago's World Columbian Exposition, epitomized the stunningly simple appreciation for the instructional value of objects, collections, and exhibits typical of 19th-century anthropology: "To see is to know" (Rydell 1984:44). "To a much greater extent than today," Stocking comments in his contribution to *Objects and Others*, "knowledge itself was thought of as embodied in objects" (Stocking 1985:114). Ethnology, then understood as the study of races, incorporated clothing and ornament with components of readily observed physical description (Chapman 1985). Artifacts and specimens were collected, classified, and arranged, often in evolutionary sequence, to display ethnological (that is, racial) characteristics.

By the end of the 19th century a fundamental change in the epistemological status of material objects was under way. The differences between peoples were no longer seen to inhere in things (for example, blood and brain size, weapons and costumes). Culture was disentangled from race. The significance of artifacts was to be found in related beliefs and social processes. Objects came to be seen as (sometimes, merely) manifestations or products of ideology and behavior. Ira Jacknis in his contribution to *Objects and Others*, "Franz Boas and Exhibits," examines Boas' defection from "the artifact-based utilitarianism" of his time (Jacknis 1985:108). Exhibits that presented evolution through deductively ordered sequences of objects were rejected because "the outward appearance of two phenomena might be identical, 'yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different' " (Boas, in Jacknis 1985:78–79). Objects, once the stuff of ethnology, had become epiphenomena.

The historical studies presented in *Objects and Others* and *All the World's a Fair* examine the treatment of ethnographic objects, collections, and exhibits beginning with mid-19th cen-

tury ethnology. What emerges is a compelling vision of ethnographic objects as complex social and semiotic facts having many significances (for example, as cultural heritage, religious symbol, art, historical document, commodity, educational experience, amusement) in relation to numerous constituencies (for example, dealers, ethnic groups, ethnographers, art historians, ethnohistorians, the public).

In the mid-19th century the constituencies of foremost importance were natural scientists, who sought human history in artifacts and specimens, and philanthropists, who were inclined to support collecting, exhibiting, and museum building. Curtis Hinsley traces the beginnings of the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard, in his paper "From Shell Heaps to Stelae." Hinsley's account of the Harvard Peabody exemplifies processes by which the two constituencies found each other (Hinsley 1985). George Peabody, the philanthropist who gave his name and his money to Harvard's anthropology museum, was originally from the Boston area. Peabody had made a fortune in London and returned in the 1860s to endow, among other institutions, museums of natural science. He was guided in his philanthropy by his nephew, the paleontologist O. C. Marsh, for whom he established the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University. According to Hinsley, it was March who urged that the Harvard Peabody be dedicated to the origins and history of the American races. Roots as well as kinship guided Peabody's philanthropy. On Boston's North Shore, where he was born, he endowed the Peabody Academy of Science (now the Peabody Museum of Salem).

Hinsley's research concentrated on the difficult early years of the Harvard Peabody. The museum's second director, F. W. Putnam, who was brought from the Salem Peabody, was a vigorous entrepreneur for anthropology museums. Putnam was instrumental in setting up anthropology sections at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the museum of the University of California at Berkeley. At Harvard, he strongly favored the concentration on America: "here we have everything of man dating back farther than anything in the old country; we must study the art of these races to find out about their migrations and distribution" (Hinsley 1985:55). Despite his entrepreneurial talents, Putnam had great difficulty garnering support for the Harvard Peabody's activities. Hinsley attributes some of the troubles to the social geography of eastern Massachusetts. Putnam and Peabody's North Shore origins made them outsiders to Boston's wealthy intelligentsia. More importantly, Hinsley relates that most of Boston's monied elite, among whom patrons had to be found, disapproved of the study of primitive societies. Typical of this opposition was a remark made by F. E. Parker in 1880: "knowledge should be useful and not simply curious; and the knowledge which was useful to us was not that of barbarians but that of cultivated races which had preceded us" (Hinsley 1985:54–55). In this intellectual environment, anthropologists had great difficulty finding support for research into civilization's primitive origins. Happily for the Harvard Peabody, a solution to the dilemma of the Americanist commitment in the context of potential patrons interested in old world civilization presented itself in the guise of Mesoamerican civilization: "at last, Peabody archaeology had found a subject that seemed comparable to that of the Mediterranean basin: a New World civilization worthy of a museum, worthy of investment, and worthy of study" (Hinsley 1985:71–72).

Ira Jacknis' most important contribution in "Franz Boas and Exhibits" is to demonstrate that this conflict between philanthropic and scientific constituencies was the major reason for Boas' final departure from the American Museum of Natural History. Boas had been brought to the American Museum of Natural History in 1896 by F. W. Putnam of the Harvard Peabody to set up the anthropology department. Boas soon found himself embroiled in controversy with the museum's administration over the work and purpose of the anthropology section. The trustees of the museum who owned the collections, funded expeditions and exhibits, and provided for the operating expenses were, as Jacknis points out, businessmen and philanthropists. They had established a museum, its collections and exhibits, as a monument to their generosity, for public edification, not for research. The trustees, as represented by the museum president, in-

structed that "field expeditions of the Museum must not be carried on for scientific purposes, but only to fill gaps in the exhibitions" (Jacknis 1985:89). Boas opposed their position:

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 [Jacknis 1985:89].

Despite this remark, Boas was, Jacknis shows, very concerned about the audiences for his exhibits and their perceived requirements: entertainment for the general public; instruction for the educated public; and research potential for the profession. However, his differences with the museum administration over the implementation of exhibit plans and the role of research were irreconcilable and finally in 1905 Boas resigned and took up his appointment at Columbia University full time. In this debate between Boas and the museum administration, another constituency was implicated—the museum-going public. This constituency, like the peoples on display, did not represent itself, but existed as a conceptualization of the parties to the debate.

Robert Rydell's monograph, *All the World's a Fair* chronicles the complex encounter among these constituencies of ethnographic objects ("primitives" who made and used the artifacts, anthropologists, fair organizers, and "the public") at the 12 international expositions or world's fairs held in the United States between the Civil War and the First World War. The fairs were visited by nearly 100 million people, probably the most far-reaching presentation of anthropological topics and themes ever. Rydell shows that the anthropology presented at the fairs was popular in two senses: exhibits were intended to draw a large audience, and the production of exhibits was controlled by nonanthropologists. While ethnologists from the Smithsonian and other museums, including Putnam and Boas, participated, Rydell concludes that the dominant forces in shaping these exhibits were the fairs' backers (wealthy individuals, heads of large mercantile establishments, railroads, industries, banks, newspapers, and so on) and the professional concessionaires—not the anthropologists.

Rydell identifies the purpose of the fairs: to "boost the economic development of the cities and regions in which they were held as well as to advance the material growth of the country at large. . . . They showed off the nation's economic strength and artistic resources. . . . They presented new mediums of entertainment and opportunities for vicarious travel in other lands" (Rydell 1984:2). The role of anthropological specimens, objects, and living ethnological displays, according to Rydell, was clear. Anthropological exhibits were enlisted to create a vision of progress, fundamentally racist, with white American society at the pinnacle and "savage" and "barbarian" races representing the origins and intermediate stages.

For museum anthropology departments, however, the fairs presented a "golden opportunity" (W. Hough of the U.S. National Museum, in Rydell 1984:97). Objects gathered for the fairs would eventually become part of a museum's permanent collection; exhibit preparation presented opportunities for research. For example, F. W. Putnam, head of the anthropology division of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, arranged for the collections made for the fair's exhibits to become the core of a new museum through the philanthropy of Marshall Field and other prominent Chicagoans. Smithsonian anthropologist Otis Mason saw the Chicago exposition as "an excellent opportunity" for research: "for testing the question—how far language co-ordinated itself with industries and activities" (Rydell 1984:57). However, not all museum professionals diverged from fair organizers in their view of the role of ethnology. Charles Rau, for example, who organized the Smithsonian's ethnological exhibits at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, held the view that

the extreme lowness of our remote ancestors cannot be a source of humiliation; on the contrary, we should glory in our having advanced so far above them, and recognize the great truth that *progress* is the law that governs the development of mankind [Rydell 1984:24].

Rydell demonstrates that these differences among practicing anthropologists mattered little in the face of the popular racist view of progress promulgated by the fairs' organizers into which anthropologists and their exhibits were incorporated. James Mooney helped put together an

Indian exhibit at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition at Omaha in 1898. Mooney was unable to get his own plan approved, but he believed the scheme to be followed would be "genuine presentations and not of the dime museum order" (Rydell 1984:112) and urged cooperation from the Bureau of American Ethnology. However, when the local Improved Order of the Redmen arranged a sham battle between whites and Indians, Mooney lamented, the exhibit "has degenerated into a Wild West show with the sole purpose of increasing gate receipts . . . in this place an ethnologist's time is wasted and his labor lost" (Rydell 1984:117). Nevertheless, Mooney continued to participate by organizing Ghost Dance performances and writing for the *American Anthropologist* on the ethnological characteristics of the Indians who had been exhibited.

The ethnological specialty of the fairs were the living displays or "villages," originated at the Paris exposition of 1878. These were introduced to the United States in 1893 at the Midway Plaisance of the World's Columbian Exposition. The Chicago fair's Midway Plaisance provided the model for that sleazy entertainment area that became ubiquitous at American fairs: the midway. The Midway Plaisance, which contained restaurants, entertainment facilities (including the newly invented Ferris Wheel) and "villages," was officially classified under the auspices of the exposition's Department of Ethnology, headed by F. W. Putnam. For the Midway Putnam organized living representatives of various Indian tribes into an exhibit in which he believed "the presentation of native life [would] be in every way satisfactory and creditable to the native peoples" (Rydell 1984:63). Rydell points out, however, that the placement of these living exhibits on or near the Midway defeated Putnam's intention.

The Chicago Midway was so successful that it was copied at subsequent fairs, including the "villages" that had been especially popular. An official of the Cotton States and International Exposition at Atlanta in 1895 commented on his fair's version: "Midway Heights possessed the features of the circus, the menagerie, the museum and the vaudeville, with an odd collection of strange nationalities forming a unique anthropological exhibit" (Rydell 1984:94). At this and subsequent fairs, the living exhibits were put together by professional showmen, not by anthropologists. By the time of the Portland and Seattle expositions in 1905 the ethnic "villages" had become a flourishing business. A firm called the International Anthropological Exhibit Company displayed Filipinos at the world's fairs, at Coney Island and other amusement centers, and at the larger state fairs. From the public's point of view, Rydell argues, exhibits done by Smithsonian and other professional anthropologists and exhibits on the Midway were all of a piece.

The visitor who had examined the series of figures from the Smithsonian Institution, representing the various types of man, could see many of them in very live flesh and blood by taking a turn through the Midway [W. G. Cooper, official historian of the Atlanta fair, in Rydell 1984:97].

In the midways both the people who performed in the "villages" and the anthropologists who helped organize the living exhibits were co-opted by the showmen and backers of the fairs. Rydell shows that, professional anthropologists notwithstanding, the overall effect of the anthropological exhibits at the fairs was to promote a crude view of progress as the triumph of superior races over inferior races through extinction and colonization.

William R. Chapman's paper on Pitt-Rivers and his collection, "Arranging Ethnology," and Jacknis' paper on Boas at the American Museum of Natural History focus on the tension within anthropology in the late 19th century (Chapman 1985; Jacknis 1985). Two major constituencies vied for control of objects' meaning: one, deductive and evolutionary, arranged like-objects by form, from simple to complex, to show evolutionary sequence; the other, inductive and geographical, arranged objects from a particular region or people as an illustration of racial/cultural characteristics. Eventually, with the growth of field research and of large collections with localized provenance, the deductive exhibits became increasingly difficult to arrange. The tremendous diversity of objects could not be incorporated into such simple sequences. Because the fashion was to display as much of a collection as possible, geographic

arrangements, grouped by tribe or region with information about manufacture or function, became more convenient.

Pitt-Rivers, a practitioner of evolutionary typology in exhibits, was a follower of Herbert Spencer and took to Darwin's theories with enthusiasm. Chapman observes that Pitt-Rivers saw his own work as parallel to that of naturalists, especially Darwin: "just as natural history collections conveyed the order and evolution of the natural world, so his collection showed a parallel evolution within the realm of human technology" (Chapman 1985:31). Pitt-Rivers adopted a natural history scheme, categorizing objects according to class, order, species, and variety. In his view contemporary aborigines survived in a state of "arrested development" and could serve as living illustrations of their forebears "whose implements are found low down in the soil" (Pitt-Rivers, in Chapman 1985:39–40). Pitt-Rivers believed that the manufactures of modern peoples could be compared and ordered to demonstrate historical connection and evolutionary order. The succession of forms could be established because of the operation of a principle of continuity or modification by small gradations.

Otis T. Mason at the U.S. National Museum also preferred typological exhibits "according to universal 'inventions' . . . so that specimens from diverse cultures [were] placed together according to the putative evolution of a technological type" (Jacknis 1985:77). Mason also constructed exhibits for the fairs arranged geographically to show the influence of environment. But Jacknis maintains that in all his exhibits "Mason . . . focus[ed] on the external *form* of the artifact, which was directly accessible to the visual inspection of the curator" (Jacknis 1985:79). Boas, by contrast, advocated a "tribal arrangement of collections" because

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" (Jacknis 1985:79, quoting Boas).

Boas' interests were shifting to "the psychological as well as the historical relations of cultures" (Boas, in Jacknis 1985:108) and eventually, like most anthropologists who came after him, he concluded that displays of artifacts could not adequately portray the "ethnic life" of a people. For many anthropologists, the case for artifacts seems to have become a case of all or none. When it was realized that collections and exhibits did not adequately portray the "ethnic life" of a people, ethnology deserted museums. Somehow the conclusion reached was that if artifacts weren't everything, they were nothing.

Ironically, at about the same time anthropology reached this strange conclusion, new constituencies for ethnographic objects were emerging. Elizabeth Williams in "Art and Artifact at the Trocadero" (Williams 1985) argues that the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of non-Western art came about as a result of the "primitivist revolution" in Western art. According to Williams, the first strong voice in favor of considering ethnographic objects as art was that of Emile Soldi, a sculptor who assisted in the preparation of ethnological exhibits for the 1878 Universal Exposition in Paris. Soldi "developed a plan for an historical school of the sciences and the arts which would include a 'Museum of Ethnography' with collections representing all stages in the evolution of the arts" (Williams 1985:153). Williams maintains that "Soldi's pleading for neglected artistic traditions was part of a long movement against classical aesthetics that began in the 18th century among collectors of archeological antiquities and encompassed such 'primitivist' schools as the French *primitifs*, [and] the German Nazarenes" (Williams 1985:153). However, Soldi favored not aesthetics but technology: materials, tools, and technical competence. E.-T. Hamy who became curator of the Trocadero, the ethnology museum created from the 1878 exposition, was concerned with the origin and development of the artistic impulse. "Hamy insisted that the intellectual, cultural and religious inspiration of the artist was primary" (Williams 1985:155). But he understood the evolution of art as grounded in cultural progress leading to European forms. Only with R. Verneau, Hamy's successor, during the period of the popularization of "primitivism," did a museum ethnologist focus on aes-

thetics. For Verneau, pieces could be "rare," "beautiful," "magnificent," and "worthy of a true artist."

Williams argues that the "primitivist revolution" in aesthetics

changed the canonical status of all artistic traditions the 19th century had considered "primitive." It was now impossible summarily to dismiss arts outside the classical tradition; choices, gradations, and preferences had to be expressed in specifically aesthetic terms . . . This change [was] wrought primarily by avant-garde artists (Williams 1985:163).

Artists and art historians had claimed ethnographic objects and a debate, still unresolved, ensued between those who attempt to apply a "universal" aesthetic to ethnographic objects and those who interpret ethnographic objects in the context of their uses and in the aesthetic terms of their makers (see Rubin et al. 1984, and Price 1986).

The acceptance of artifacts as art had further ramifications for the constituencies of ethnographic objects. Edwin L. Wade in "The Ethnic Art Market in the American Southwest, 1880–1980," examines the relationships between artisans, traders, art patrons, and anthropologists. From 1875–1920 traders acted as intermediaries for museum collectors, and railroads, promoting tourism, advertised Indian performances and crafts as attractions and souvenirs. Both the activities of scholar-collectors and tourist-souvenir collectors served to introduce "a cash economy based on the production of arts and crafts" (Wade 1985:171). Wade recounts that by 1920 objects made by Indian artisans had been accepted as art and "powerful art patrons and their preservationist associations . . . [had begun to] manipulate the imagery of Native American art . . . to save [it] from ruination at the hands of commercial traders" (Wade 1985:163, 176). The philanthropist-patrons intended to preserve native culture by identifying and encouraging "genuine" and "authentic" styles. Their efforts included the revival of archaeologically known styles, and the creation of tribal distinctions. Wade relates that artisans finally became a vocal constituency through the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. The "philanthropists" were accused of perpetuating a Hollywood image of native Americans. Artisans/artists began to take control of their own production. Many artists broke away from the production of marketable and identifiably "Indian" goods. Indeed, some artists, responding to a broader aesthetic climate, ceased to produce work recognizably "Indian."

During this period when artists, collectors, art historians, and dealers were accepting ethnographic objects as valuable art, anthropologists were moving away from museums and artifacts to universities and new sources of funding for research. George Stocking, in "Philanthropoids and Vanishing Cultures," shows how this move was facilitated by the major infusion of Rockefeller money into anthropological research between the two world wars (Stocking 1985). The Rockefeller philanthropic foundations were endowed by 1920 with \$450 million and in the 1920s developed a firm commitment to research and to institutions of higher education as the best means for attaining the goal of promoting human welfare. In the late 1920s the Rockefeller Foundation supported social science

based on first-hand observation of living human beings rather than on historical materials . . . a social science that would produce "a body of substantiated and widely accepted generalizations as to human capacities and motives, and as to the behavior of human beings as individuals and groups" [Stocking 1985:117].

Adherents of functionalism, both the Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown varieties, became the chief recipients of Rockefeller funding to study "vanishing cultures" in order to formulate "general laws of social life and social development" (Radcliffe-Brown, in Stocking 1985:33). The Rockefeller commitment to anthropology was short lived. By the mid-1930s the Foundation had turned away from anthropology to address "immediate problems of the today" (Stocking 1985:137). Before the First World War funding had come from museums, and every major university department was connected with a museum, as was the Bureau of American Ethnology. Rockefeller funding made a more behaviorally oriented research possible, without focus on objects and on the past. During the period of Rockefeller support over two million dollars

was supplied for anthropological research. Compared to the Bureau of American Ethnology in its heyday with 30 to 40 thousand dollars a year, only a fraction of which went to research, and the Jessup North Pacific expedition which spent 100 thousand dollars over a dozen years, the amount was enormous. "Rockefeller money played a major role in underwriting the field work experience of a large majority of the anthropologists trained in the interwar period" (Stocking 1985:139).

Stocking considers the extent to which "the anthropological research agenda may have been shaped by the self-interest or ideology of 'the Rockefellers' as representatives of corporate capitalism or western colonialism" (Stocking 1985:133). He concludes that the structure of decision making within the Foundation, and the positive view of social science created a research atmosphere relatively, if not completely, free of influence from capitalist or colonial interests. This possibility of relatively unhindered pursuit of research objectives through the combination of university appointments and foundation supported research lured anthropologists from museums where a tradition of control and interference by museum trustees and administrators prevailed.

As Wade observes, the last constituency to participate in the process of the definition and control of ethnographic objects were the people who made and used them (Wade 1985). Richard Handler, in "On Having a Culture," examines issues that have emerged in the postcolonial era. Former colonials and "tribes" have become vocal critics, maintaining that "museums have not merely misrepresented other cultures, they have oppressed and plundered them" (Handler 1985:193). The conditions of acquisition, rights to possession, and rights to interpretation of artifacts have become a matter of debate now that the power relationships of colonialism no longer serve to vest all these rights in one party. Handler examines the emergence of Québécois claims on things, *la patrimoine*, in the establishment of a Québécois national heritage through 60 years of historic preservation legislation. Handler follows the "debates over what should be included in the national heritage" (Handler 1985:198) and illuminates their political nature. His most important contribution is to show how cultural property is "both representative of and constitutive of cultural identity" (Handler 1985:211).

The often conflicting claims on artifacts outside anthropology made by ethnic groups, art museums, dealers, and others, have illuminated the complexity of ethnographic objects for anthropologists and revived attention to and debates over the interpretation of artifacts. Bruce G. Trigger analyzes the slow movement towards recognition of the interpretive possibilities of artifacts in his paper "Writing the History of Archaeology" (1985), which focuses on that sub-field of anthropology where objects have always been the *sine qua non*. Trigger observes that changing concepts of prehistory have had a major impact on the interpretation of collections: for example, the change in the 1930s from an evolutionary to a diffusionist culture-historical perspective, and especially the "general upheaval" created by the "New Archaeology" in the 1960s. Trigger argues that this new awareness has led to a wider recognition of the impact of developments outside the field, in particular the cultural context of practitioners. Archaeological practice and interpretation, according to Trigger, are now widely appreciated as shaped by social conditions, sources of money, the characteristics of the educational system, the political system, and class structure.

An important consequence of an awareness of objects' multiple constituencies and multiple significances is pursued by James Clifford in "Objects and Selves" (Clifford 1985): collecting and exhibiting must be understood as processes of appropriation and selection that are as revealing of the culture of the collectors as of the cultures of the makers. Clifford argues that the emergence of "possessive individualism" in 17th-century Europe provided the motivation for collecting in concert with political expansion. Collecting, in this view, is a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self. Rydell's analysis of world's fairs, Handler's discussion of Québécois nationalism, and Wade's discussion of the interplay between artisans, collectors, patrons, and traders in the Southwest provide support for this argument. Clifford makes a strong

case for preserving the historical relations of power in all collections of exotic objects, and for resisting the tendency of collections to become self-sufficient by maintaining the history of collecting and the original context.

The historical analyses presented in *All the World's a Fair* and *Objects and Others* are substantial contributions. Rydell's monograph and the papers collected by Stocking are rich in historical detail and well written. Together they constitute enormous progress toward an appreciation of the impact of objects, collections, exhibits, and museums on anthropology (and the impact of anthropology on objects). Moreover, these books demonstrate that analyses of the social and cultural history of anthropology can both illuminate the past and inform the future. A new perspective on objects is emerging in anthropology. Ethnographic objects, once understood as simple embodiments of other cultures, can now be appreciated as richly complex phenomena subject to a multiplicity of interrelated (complementary or conflicting) interpretations, inextricably bound to, and therefore linking, their makers, collectors, and interpreters.

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