

ANTHROPOLOGY, ART AND CONTEST

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On August 28 1963 a group of Yirrkala Aborigines from northeast Arnhem Land presented a petition to the Australian Parliament. In it they called for the government to reconsider their decision to allow a mining company to exploit their homelands. By those times their formal plea was not in itself unusual. What was unusual was that the petition was framed as a bark painting, showing the clan designs of all the areas endangered by the company's plans. Against a background of cross-hatching and triangular blocks of colour, a series of birds, lizards, fish, turtles, snakes and other animals surrounded the typewritten words of the paper. The traditional style of the frame complemented the modern text of the petition, thickening its context, adding further dimensions to its significance. The frame highlighted the fact that this was no conventional Western entreaty, that their argument was based on extra-European grounds. It demonstrated, in a visually striking manner, that the Yirrkala's claim to the land arose out of their spiritual relationship with it. They chose to present their plea in this manner because, in the words of one of them,

It showed, in ways in which raising a multi-coloured piece of calico could never do, the ancient rights and responsibilities we have towards our country. It showed we were not people who could be 'painted out' of the picture or left at the edge of history (Yunupingu 1993: 65).

In order not to be misrepresented by others at this critical juncture, the Yirrkala represented themselves. In order not to be painted out, they had to paint themselves in, according to their own designs.

Though the novel form of the petition gained it the attention of news journalists and captured public imagination, it still failed in its immediate objective. The mining leases were not revoked. But it was more successful in the longer term, as it led to the establishment of a Parliamentary Enquiry which played an important part in the process of achieving land rights for the Yirrkala and their neighbours. The petition itself, which became for its creators a symbol of their struggle for land rights, was prominently positioned in the new Parliament House in Canberra (Morphy 1991: 18). Through the skilful deployment of art, the Yirrkala had won recognition of their culturally distinctive claims to their homelands.

This particular event exemplifies an increasingly common, increasingly significant occurrence -- the use of art objects for contestatory purposes in the multicultural milieux we all now participate in. Maoris petition British museums for the return of the tattooed skulls of their ancestors. Native American artists make their claims through pictures. Colonized Melanesians challenge Western conceptions of them by recreating their artifacts and revitalizing the rites in which they were customarily used.

The political and economic reasons for this increasing prominence of art are not hard to discern. Many peoples, bent on self-determination and unhappy with the way they are represented by others, wish to represent themselves to others and art is one of the most powerful media by which to do so. Also, many peoples, aware of the inflated prices paid for 'important tribal pieces' on the Western art market, have come to revalue both the objects removed from their homelands and the objects they produce, while the rise of tourism has vastly expanded the market for their artifacts. Further, if the degree of structural difference between societies is being steadily eroded by the seemingly uncheckable advance of global capitalism, then art becomes, partially by default, a key means of proclaiming continuing cultural difference. None of these factors is primary, rather it is their interplay which has led to the recent emergence of art as a major contemporary site of cross-cultural contest.

The topic of art as contest in intercultural settings has been touched upon by some anthropologists (e.g. Thomas 1991) but, strangely, has not yet received the sustained attention it merits. A key aim of this book is to correct this omission. To that end, the contributors provide detailed and comparative analyses, based on extensive fieldwork, of a variety of cross-cultural contexts where peoples fight with art, where they negotiate and dispute the meanings it can bear. The contributors investigate how people use art objects, for example, to resist colonialism, to subvert racism, to demolish demeaning stereotypes, to better their own position or that of their own group, to defend a challenged notion of their people's identity, to reinvent that identity. Like a recent analyst of the roles art can be made to play, they think that 'art is not ancillary to or reflects the social scene but a major and integral part of the transaction which engenders political behaviour' (Edelman 1995: 2). The contributors examine, in short, how art is intertwined with empowerment, and artifact with advocacy.

All of the studies collected in this book have their clear limits. None of the contributors is trying to *reduce* the power of the pictures or objects discussed to the parameters of anthropological analysis. While the various contributors are able to tease out subtly the diverse contexts within which pictures are sited and interpreted, they do not pretend that the results of their intellectual approaches exhaust the range of potential meanings these objects may bear or the spectrum of responses they might evoke. But they do claim, *contra* those who assume the transcendence of their aesthetics, that all aesthetics are socially grounded and, as such, are appropriate subjects for social analysis.

Until relatively recently few anthropologists gave time to the study of art. Those who did were predominantly concerned with the uses of objects in traditional, supposedly unchanging societies. The few functionalists among them tended to focus on how local uses of the objects helped to sustain the present structure of a society, cataloguing carefully the various social functions indigenous items were meant to fulfill (e.g. Anderson 1979: 25--51; Glaze 1981). The structuralists who studied art regarded objects as forms of communication which attempt to resolve symbolically the existential contradictions of local life. Perceiving indigenous items as bearers of complex cultural messages, they acted as decipherers trying to break the local code (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1979; Rosman and Rubel 1990). However, despite the best intentions of their practitioners and the revelatory results of their analyses, both functionalist and structuralist approaches often served to highlight the interpretative power of the anthropologist at the expense of native exegesis or any acknowledgement of historical agency. Also, they tended to exaggerate local consensus about the meanings and roles of the objects and to over-emphasize the boundedness of particular cultures, as though they were wholes unto themselves.

The contributors to this book, striving to avoid their predecessors' pitfalls, do not regard societies as isolated, homeostatic systems coasting in a timeless 'ethnographic present'. Instead,

they provide fully historicized examples of societies undergoing change, of permeable cultures in contact with one another, all of them members, to a greater or lesser degree, of the same world system. These days, it would be difficult to sustain any other sort of view. !Kung San now have their paintings sold in London and Paris. Muslim middle-men of the Ivory Coast peruse the latest copy of *African Arts* to see how the market is moving. The land-diving islanders of Pentecost, Vanuatu, seek royalties from bungee jumping entrepreneurs around the world for breaching their 'cultural copyright'.

This is not simply to shift from a naive view of cultures as separate unto themselves to an equally simplistic view of cultures as coherent but dynamic groupings of people which bump into contact with one another, like intersecting circles in a Venn diagram. It is rather to see culture as a continuing construction, which both organizes and emerges from people's behaviour. The boundaries which divide off the people of one culture from those of another are not necessarily those rules, habits or dispositions which differentiate them structurally but those which its members choose to distinguish themselves from others. The culture of a people thus becomes open to a variety of definitions as different members interpret it in their own way for their ends, and the boundaries they choose need not coincide. Today, this process becomes ever more evident as the plurality of global communications continues to expand and as peoples increasingly enter the capitalist world-system. In this contemporary context, the potentially central role of art can be suddenly and starkly realized, with peoples reifying or creating their sense of culture through the use of particular objects. Here, art objectifies power.

Anthropologists of art frequently worry about how to define 'art', if they are to use it as a comparative concept. They often point out that no similar term exists in the particular societies they are studying. The problem here is how to compare something across cultures without the particular definition chosen predetermining the answers arrived at. The difficulty arises because Western ideas of art and aesthetics are themselves such historically particular products of European culture (Eagleton 1990; Staniszewski 1995). One possibility (Morphy 1993) is to employ the term in a broad sense in the hope that the resulting trawl of other cultures may net such a varied range of objects that the original definition will be reflexively revised. That hope may be praiseworthy but remains difficult to translate into action while non-white artists continue to be relatively powerless players within the Western-dominated world art market (Lippard 1990: 2--17; Fisher 1995). It is significant, however, that, to my knowledge, no anthropologist who has participated in this debate has acknowledged that the term 'art' or synonyms for it used in other cultures may well become themselves a cause for internal contest between interested parties. In these contexts, the question 'But is it art?' is not as a hoary chestnut to be ignored but a politically-motivated interrogatory to be studied. As MacClancy demonstrates in his chapter about the continuing debate between Basque nationalists, journalists and artists over the nature and aims of '*el arte vasco*' ('Basque art'), 'art' and its synonyms are not unproblematic terms but can themselves become sites of dispute as different parties struggle to impose their own definition.

A subsidiary aim of this collection is to contribute towards ending the idea that the anthropology of art is exclusively concerned with the study of non-Western societies and their art. This particular focus, a consequence of the history of the discipline, has for long smacked of the arbitrary and in the contemporary world appears not merely quaintly idiosyncratic but blinkered to present realities and verging on the neo-colonialist. At a time when established notions of culture appear to be dissolving before our eyes and the concept of creolization threatens to become the intellectual norm, it seems gravely out of place for anthropologists of art to continue to concentrate on the traditional production of images among 'the X' at the

expense of investigating, say, the discourses sustaining the Western art market.

The examples employed in this book are all of pictorial or sculptural art. This is purely for reasons of space and focus. Most, if not all, of the points made here about the use of pictures or objects could apply equally well to the production of films, poetry or music (Washabaugh 1996), the performance of beauty pageants (Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje 1996), the crafting of chocolates (Terrio 1996) or the sale of fashionable garb (Kondo 1992). But I had to be selective. I was editing only one book, not a series of volumes. However, when the staging of Miss World in India leads to terrorist threats and the deployment of 20,000 police (Bedi 1996) or when, in South Africa, the wearing of highly decorative anti-apartheid T-shirts is made a punishable offence (Williamson 1989), the general politicization of aesthetics in cross-cultural contexts cannot be put in doubt.

The contributors discuss a mesh of interrelated points. For the sake of expository convenience, I group them into several themes: anti-colonialism, anti-racism; painting propaganda, picturing power; individuals, groups, categories; art as property; concepts and objects; the marketing of art.

Anti-colonialism, anti-racism

What aesthetic strategies are available to those whose culture is bludgeoned by expatriate dominators? What artistic tactics can be employed by those uprooted and then exploited in their new homeland? How may they contest the model of themselves created by the colonizers? How, in other words, may they use art to fight the conditions of life and terms of thought set by the foreigners?

One way was to reject colonialism totally, and to persist in the production of indigenous forms which missionaries condemned as 'idols to devils'. The danger of adopting this tactic was its regressive and rigid character, threatening to ossify locals' sense of their own culture. As Svasek points out (this volume), some colonial art schoolteachers, wishing to 'save primitive culture', reinforced this tactic by obliging their students to make only traditional objects. But if peoples were to survive the continued residence of whites in their lands, the varied and steadily evolving nature of colonialism required them to adopt a more supple, creative strategy than outright rejection. In a climate of change, it was better to face the foe and watch his moves than to turn one's back, and not know where or how he might strike next.

Some indigenes accommodated to the change, without simply emulating the model of themselves set by the colonizers, by exploiting Western imagery for local ends, transforming it in the process. This must be seen as an essentially creative response to the challenge set by the foreigners' arrival. For instance, self-flattering Europeans have all too often interpreted local sculptures of whites as representations of themselves. This is frequently not the case, as the carved figures may well represent local gods or malevolent spirits. By clothing them in Western garb and giving them Western physiognomies, their artists tried to express in a modern mode the power of these local beings and, by expressing it, tried to control it (Cole 1990: 136--59).

Others appropriated Western images to boost positive forces, rather than to constrain negative ones. In the nineteenth century the armed Asafo companies of the Ghanaian Fante synthesized traditional and European iconography and motifs to produce a visual military style

(which continues today) meant to express 'the invincibility of the spirit, if not the war machine, of the Asafo' (Preston 1975: 68). Throughout much of the twentieth century, many Melanesians have formed or joined renovatory movements which have adopted visual or symbolic expressions of Western might: flags, badges, uniforms, instruments, architectural forms, etc. The key aim of these revitalization cults was not a simple-minded mimesis but a sophisticated taking on of whites' visual style in an effort to regain some of the power of which, they felt, the interlopers had robbed them. As a leader of the John Frum movement said to me during my fieldwork in Melanesia, they drilled like Western soldiers and prayed like Western believers because they waited John, on whose return 'We will masters of ourselves again, as we were before the whites came and told us we were nothing.'

One plastic possibility was to subvert the colonial status quo by creating images of the foreigner for satiric ends. Caricature and mimicry are the major modes here, for the white man was not seen as superior for long:

The natives began to know him better, and ceased devising tales which would explain his superiority. They soon found out that the white man was only another species of the human race. When they became familiar with him, they treated him to their mockery exactly as they did any member of their own tribe, especially when they recognized his weakness (Lips 1937: 14).

In colonial West Africa *Hauka*, performers of spirit-possession rituals, mimicked and mocked the ways of the white man in order to 'master' him (Stoller 1995). Among the Dogon, dancers entertain their audience by donning 'white man' masks and lampooning his alien ways (Maybury-Lewis 1992: 166--7). In Malawi, the Mana'anja aped, in their masked comedies, the key figures of Catholicism, especially Joseph and Mary, whose immaculate conception was the source of much ribald conjecture (Kramer 1993: 170). In southeastern Nigeria, the Owerri Igbo of southeastern Nigeria made *mbari*, house-like structures, as sacrifices to the gods in the face of impending disaster. Within them, alongside representations of deities, they included figures explicitly designed to provoke laughter, such as couples copulating in less common positions and caricatures of colonial officials with long thin noses and two-faced heads (Cole 1982).

One artistic way of breaking the new economic relations established by Europeans was for indigenes to make special effigies of merchants who swindled them. For instance, the Hermit Islanders of the Bismarck Archipelago off the Papua New Guinean coast carved figures displaying the ailments they wished to see afflict their exploiters: elephantiasis of the testicles and other causes of great pain. Lips (1937: 190-1) considers these objects, meant to operate via sympathetic magic, to have been 'central images in magic rites, by which the spirits were entreated to punish the evil trader'.

Other indigenes chose to challenge the colonial status quo more openly. Instead of trying to subvert the imposed model by the relatively private use of satire, they aimed to transcend it by acquiring competence at skills which some colonials claimed they did not possess. By proving their abilities in this manner, they directly exposed the constructed nature of the model and so undermined the ideological foundations of the colonialist project. In the process, the supposedly innate superiority of the colonizers was revealed as but an aspect of hegemonic rhetoric. In this intercultural arena, art can become a particularly powerful weapon in the fight for recognition of racial equality. For if colonizers upheld (as they did) artistic vision as one of the highest marks of civilization, then members of the colonized who could demonstrate their painterly prowess dramatically displayed the artifice underpinning their oppressors' supremacist

theories.

In colonial Africa for instance, British officials held that blacks were incapable of creating great art. All they could pretend to aspire to was craftsmanship. In the first half of this century a series of local artists set out to contest this racist caricature. Perhaps the best-known of them is the self-taught Nigerian Aina Onabolu (Nicodemus 1995a; Okeke 1995). By successfully becoming a master of portraiture, he strove to demonstrate that realistic painting was not exclusively European but a universal artistic medium, the rightful heritage of all cultures. By the 1950s, with independence looming, many local artists came to think it no longer so important to *dispute* colonialist superiority. Instead they sought to *displace* it by fabricating new national cultures and a new modernism.

Some indigenes attempted to subvert the racist order by taking a different tack: by taking on Western interpretations of blacks but revaluing its terms in the process, turning denigrated attributes into laudable virtues. Perhaps the most famous example of this strategy was the 'Négritude' movement led by Léopold Senghor, who in 1960 became the first president of Senegal. Exploiting his reputation as a poet and philosopher and his position as a national leader, he promoted the potential contribution of African culture to world civilization and provided comprehensive state assistance for local artists. To Senghor, artists had an integral role to play in the development of the new nation. '*Art Negre*,' he stated in a famous speech, 'saves us from despair, uplifts us in our task of economic and social development, in our stubborn will to live. . . Senegalese artists of today, help us live for today better and more fully.' He devoted 25% of the state budget to culture, set up *École des arts du Sénégal*, a national school of fine arts, drama, music and architecture, and had the state buy the best products of its graduates. Senghor, manipulating the rhetoric of European modernism and primitivism for his own Africanist ends, praised '*l'ame nègre*' as being emotive, spiritual, expressive and rhythmic. He called for an art that would assimilate Western experiments in art with these supposedly inherent African values. The predominant pictorial style which arose out of these efforts, known as the '*École de Dakar*', was characterized by semiabstract, modernist expressions of traditional African exotica. As critics have pointed out, the trouble with this well-intentioned but idealizing approach is that it can be seen as Africans internalizing European visions of them, aiding the perpetuation, rather than the dismissal, of primitivist and universalizing conceptions of blacks. Since the demise of the *École*, leading Senegalese artists have worked independently of the state. They try to create new pictorial forms, where art can be confrontational, transgressive and historically grounded (Ebong 1991; Harney 1996).

These varied responses to colonialism are not merely reactions by indigenes to check external pressures. They are at the same time internal attempts by members of peoples to recreate themselves in the transformative contexts of the colonialist project. To the American black cultural commentator bell hooks, they are attempts to recognize the existence of, and to substantiate non-Western subjectivities. She sees them as a way for oppressed peoples to construct a space for themselves, and so proclaims the need to 'set our imaginations free'. Acknowledging that 'we have been and are colonized both in our minds and in our imaginations', she calls for the promotion and celebration of creative expression (hooks 1995: 4). On these grounds, art is not a decorative border to the anticolonialist and antiracist struggles, but an integral, essential part of them. People, to be free, have to fight against both the objective conditions and the terms of subjectivity imposed on them. To do that, they need, among other things, to create and to share art.

Painting Propaganda, Picturing Power

Hitler knew well the power of paint. A failed painter himself, he knew that, if tightly controlled, the production of art could enhance the authority of his regime; if uncensored, it could contribute to its undermining. Thus culture had to be regulated ruthlessly and the avant-garde obliterated. At the infamous 'Degenerate Art' exhibition, staged in 1937 in Munich, his minions displayed what was unacceptable: contorted forms, violent colours, and disturbing subject-matter. After the calamitous period of the Weimar Republic, people needed to be 'healed', by the promotion and production of uplifting, realist portrayals of exemplary German types: the warrior, the factory worker, the mother. 'Pathological' expressionism with its primitivist focus was taboo (Hinz 1995; Whitford 1995). Little wonder then that a local anthropologist of art, Julius Lips, was constantly harrassed by Nazi officials searching for his 'Nigger pictures' -- photographs of tribal representations of Europeans (Lips 1937: xxviii).

In the twentieth century the totalitarian approach to culture has been an all too common strategy. Both Franco and Mussolini had artists fulfill their dictatorial wishes. After the Russian Revolution, Mayakovsky championed the ideological control of art and wished to help establish 'the dictatorship of taste'. Stalin wanted to transform artists into 'engineers of the human soul' (though he ended up only turning them into socialist realists). It is disturbing, then, that a group of St Petersburg artists has recently revived the Stalinist aesthetic. Lauding a classically derived realism, they condemn the epoch of modernism as a latter day 'Dark Age' infected with 'primitive, African, shamanistic' values (O'Mahony 1996).

Various nationalist groups have attempted to adopt comparable hegemonic strategies. To Basque nationalists (MacClancy), art was contemptible if not inspired by patriotism. Indeed pictures not inspired by patriotism could not be good art. They wanted, and were prepared to sponsor the production of, minutely detailed realist paintings of folkloric scenes portraying an impossibly ever-harmonic view of Basque rural life. Artists of the period chafed against these restrictions and nationalists only came to regard their works as acceptable when they gained national prestige and thus could be turned to propagandistic end. During the years of Francoist suppression these roles reversed somewhat as many Basque politicians remained quiet while artists became political protagonists, promoting 'Basque art' as a key instrument in the fabrication of an autochthonous culture. The democratic associations which artists established were to be the harbingers of a new form of independent self-government.

Beyond Europe, various revolutionary movements have upheld similar principles of promoting art for propagandistic purposes, often leading to the same tension between politicians and artists. Until its legalization in 1990, the African National Congress followed the orthodox Leninist line of 'art as a weapon of struggle'. Adopting the Russian *proletcult* model of revolutionary art, its leaders promoted the idea of a 'People's Culture', a flowering of proletarian art dedicated to the destruction of apartheid. But this view came to be internally contested as some of the ANC's most prominent intellectuals argued for the autonomy of culture. Unlike Lenin's epigones, they did not want *proletcult* to become an instrument of oppression. Anyway, as they claimed, art could not be a real instrument of struggle because it thrived on ambiguity, contradiction and the revelation of hidden tensions. This sense of artistic freedom did not mean lack of commitment to the struggle, rather the absence of control by ANC leaders (Elliott 1990);

Sachs 1990).

Most Fourth Nations artists who paint or sculpt in the modernist manner would tend to agree. While many of them wish at one and the same time to exploit the dimensions offered by the medium they choose and to make political statements, those statements need not be propagandistically clear. Indeed some of the most efficacious art produced by politicized contemporary artists is effective precisely because its meanings cannot be fixed. Many of this sort of canvases exhibit an empowering playfulness. In paintings by some native Americans, the complex and satirical figure of Coyote as Trickster has come to symbolize the relation of their culture with that of the dominant one, used by his portraitists to pass ironic comment on the portrayal of native Americans by non-natives (Fisher 1991). Jimmie Durham (1993), a Cherokee artist who exhibits internationally, comments sardonically on Western categorizations of others by presenting himself as a Caliban who knows the language of the colonizer better than he does himself. But for all its wit and humour, this playfulness is deeply serious. For as the Cheyenne artist Edgar Heap of Birds (1991: 339) says, expressive forms of communication 'must serve as our present-day combative tactics'. Thus while the Koorie art of urban Aboriginals may be described as 'angry, humourous, ironical, whimsical' (Ryan 1993: 60--2), it is still meant to proclaim *'Tyerabarrbowaryadu'*, 'I shall never become a white man'.

Individuals, Groups, Categories

Even today the vast majority of objects in a museum of anthropology are exhibited anonymously. All too often the accompanying label reads on the lines of 'Malangan, New Ireland, donated by Revd. J. Macdonald 1931' or 'Inuit two-face mask, Lower Yukon, collected by the Alaska Commercial Co., date unknown'. It is as though an object's Western provenance is as important as its ethnographic source, with the name of the ethnic group substituting for that of its maker. In these contexts the ethnic group *is* the signature, defining its origin, guaranteeing its authenticity. Justifiers of this practice might argue that many non-Western societies do not elevate individual creativity to the same obsessive extent as Europeans, though this is to ignore the degrees of innovativeness and individuality which non-European peoples do recognize in the production of art objects.

Indigenous constraints on individual expression may be real nonetheless, and in times of flux and development they may well be internally contested. Among traditional communities of the American Southwest, where egalitarianism is one of the highest social values, innovative artists successful at selling their works to Europeans were ostracized and accused of practising witchcraft. Some were banned from their home villages and their life threatened (Wade 1985). In the 1950s Oscar Howe, a native American from the Plains, was strongly criticized by local conservatives for painting Cubist-influenced works. A decade later a student of his who dared to include in his pictures images of ice cream cones, beer bottles and other artifacts of White culture had his exhibitions picketed by traditionalists demonstrating against his 'grotesque and shameful' depictions of native Americans (Highwater 1985). In India today, where religious dispute has so politicized social identities, traditional forms tend to be regarded, not as products ripe for commercial exploitation, but as resources to be treasured and respected. Thus local artists who wish to probe the way the past may be used for present purposes have to tread

particularly carefully (Roberts 1994).

Individual artists do not only have to face potential criticism from members of their own culture, they have as well to contest their ethnic categorization by Western art marketeers. Svasek shows that within a decade of independence, Ghanaian artists, disenchanted with the failed political programmes of national or pan-African unity, began to state that they did not wish to be viewed as 'African artists' but as individuals, as artists who happened to be African. To them the relevant distinction was no longer African and non-African, but those part of the international art scene and those not, and they knew on which side of the boundary they wanted to lie. By shifting allegiance to a cult of individuality, they acknowledge the change in contestatory arena. Their forefathers used paint to challenge the colonial status quo. They use it to criticize the limitations of Ghanaian politics and the unequal global distribution of economic power. As they are aware, Western exhibitors of art are often more interested in displaying unusual forms of modern African art, such as fantasy coffins, than works on canvas directly comparable with those produced by their counterparts in the West. The difficulty for indigenous artists who paint in a modern Western mode is that the majority of Euro-American buyers of art only appear to be interested in non-Western works to the extent that they are recognizably 'different'. At such times it seems as though the colonial stereotype of blacks has been replaced by a new, but equally distancing, equally restricting brand of exoticism.

The problem is most acutely exposed by Western art critics' use of terms such as 'transitional' and 'hybridity'. Usefully vague, 'transitional art' covers all work other than that which is unambiguously traditional or modernist. Thus it may include wirecraft, shop signs, tin windmills, and lorry decoration (Vogel 1991). Some indigenous critics charge that Western curators' concern with this broad range of objects feeds the prejudices of their publics, so denigrating the efforts of non-Western painters. Further, while 'transitional art' implies a sense of development, it also implies that its producers have yet to reach the same level as those who use the term. The Tanzanian painter Everlyn Nicodemus is pungent on this point:

The warped Western dealing with contemporary African art culminated in the 1980s with some big exhibitions and collections, blazoning abroad sign-paintings and folklore artefacts as genuine cultural expression, while suppressing the existence of modern, professionally trained artists. It came close to an ideological warfare against modern African art as such. . . We have seen that all this twaddle about. . . 'transitional' art is nothing but a refusal to acknowledge the paradigm shift which is at the heart of modern African art; it is a clinging to the same kind of prejudices against which Onabolu launched his war 90 years ago (Nicodemus 1995b: 35. See also Richards 1990; Oguibe 1993).

The idea of 'hybridity', popularized in anthropology by Clifford (1988: 1-17), is subject to similar strictures. Clifford wishes to celebrate cultural contaminations, in a world where surrealism is not out of place and it is notions of pure products which are crazy. Within the parameters of his postmodernity, hybrids are not odd by-products but the global order of the day. This idea of hybridity, however, threatens to mask particularity for the sake of an oversimplifying generality. Deploying it in a universalizing fashion, as Clifford does, runs the risk of celebrating a global notion of difference at the expense of recognizing local differences. Thus, though postmodernists proclaim a new anti-essentialism they end up in fact doing the opposite, by practising a time-honoured form of essentialist labelling. In the Western art world for instance, interest in the idea of 'hybridity' allows critics and curators to display 'their own

capacity for acknowledging cultural difference, while refraining from engaging with the stories and works that emerge from elsewhere' (Thomas 1996: 9). Also, 'hybridity' carries with it connotations of stasis. And what some non-Western artists wish to underline is not a static mixture but a perpetual flux between cultures, where none is dominant and the tensions between them remain unresolved (Samson 1995). Unlike a generalized hybridity, this sense of flux is grounded in the contingencies of space and time, providing these artists with a kind of rootedness in their contemporary predicament of multicultural particularity. Some non-Western artists are well aware of the dangers of 'hybridity', which they regard as the latest attempt by Westerners to exercise hegemony. As one Senegalese painter put it:

I am not between two worlds; I am not a hybrid -- I am Moustaphe Dimé and I represent only me. I will not let anyone (in the West) imprison me in a little ghetto (in Harney 1996: 50).

It is comments such as this which show that the need for non-Westerners to enlighten whites remains as pressing as ever. A rise in the number of indigenous critics writing about art might redress the imbalance somewhat. But even if their number were to rise, their effect would be limited. Because of the structure of the Western art market (Root 1996), they would have great difficulty gaining any visibility or regard, and they would still have to employ the terms of Western art discourse.

Non-Western artists, by entering the capitalist world-system, in however marginal a manner, inevitably surrender a degree of autonomy, and may well end up as minor actors in a play scripted and directed by others. As Frank McEwen, stimulator of the Zimbabwean 'Shona' school of sculpture, put it,

Promotion counts as much as the art, and if the promotion is right the art will be right, and if the promotion is wrong it will go wrong, and that's the whole answer. The future is in the hands of the promoters (quoted in Smith 1995).

Art as property

Art objects are things, and as such may be possessed. Until relatively recently the question as to whom these possessions belonged was regarded by curators of Western museums as unproblematic. Quite simply, applying European legal notions of possession, they considered objects in their collections as belonging to their museums. But with the rise of independent nation-states in former colonial territories, a new class of indigenous politicians, imitating the example of their erstwhile masters, wished to substantiate their nationalist ideologies by the consolidation of their national heritage. Their calls for the return of objects removed from their countries were later joined by those from ethnic leaders bent on the restitution of what they judged past wrongs. One consequence of these campaigns has been to make Western curators acutely aware of the inescapably political nature of the collections under their care and of their own position, willy-nilly, as political actors within these conflicts. As they are well aware, there are few outcomes which satisfy all parties.

In intercultural, international debates of this nature, the foremost considerations in any particular dispute are: how is the past constituted; who, if anyone, may be said to own the past (Warren 1989: 1); exactly what sorts of concepts of ownership are in play; the degree to which Western notions of proprietorship are appropriate or applicable; how well such ideas mesh with their indigenous analogues. Saunders, Napier and Townsend-Gault discuss various aspects of these considerations in a trio of dovetailing papers on the peoples of the Northwest Pacific coast, whose ways of life were made famous anthropologically by the studies of Franz Boas and his local co-worker George Hunt.

Regularly, the repatriation of objects to their land of origin helps to revitalize indigenes' sense of their own identity. However, it may also serve to re-ignite intra-tribal differences. Saunders shows that when Kwakiutl campaigned for the restitution of potlach regalia sequestered over fifty years before, the issue of their present ownership led to local division, with one group appealing to European ideas of genealogically-based inheritance and another wielding 'traditional' notions of proprietorship. The matter was only resolved by the distribution of the collection between two specially constructed museums run by locals. These museums have, in turn, become ways to underscore the differences between the two groups, as their controllers have deployed their objects in opposed ways. One set of controllers, emphasizing the common ownership of their regalia, reify their culture and do so in a manner which Westerners will understand. The other set, who stress individual ownership, do not exploit their collection to suggest that the Kwakiutl are a homogeneous group. They choose to leave the process of defining ethnic identity open-ended and ambivalent.

Anthropologists frequently discuss objects which they think such intimate aspects of parts of people's lives that they represent them as inalienable. However, as Napier highlights, many anthropologists fail to observe the extent to which inalienability is often not a timeless cultural quality but internally contested by different members or factions of the same group. One example he discusses is that of Louis Shotridge, a Tlingit and punctilious ethnographer in the pay of a university museum. When his hardup fellow tribesmen turned down the very large sum of money he offered for their greatest remaining treasures, which were being left outside and weathering badly, he attempted to steal them. The central question here is in what terms should his actions be evaluated? On the one hand, since Tlingit often use art objects as political weapons, some locals interpreted his efforts to acquire pieces still in use as a move for power, which they ensured he lost. On the other hand, he viewed himself as helping his culture, by helping to protect their most prized objects. There is no easy resolution and the alternatives are not necessarily exclusive. What, however, this problem does underline is the quandary which arises when one member of a group tries to commodify what some other members claim cannot be alienated. In these sorts of circumstances is a liminal character like Shotridge to be regarded as a thief, an aspirant politico, or an over-zealous anthropologist of his own group? One thing that is clear is that debate on these issues is not clarified by commentators perceiving inalienability as a commandment written in stone. People's ideas about the connections between persons and things are neither static nor politically innocent.

People may wish to possess the objects they produce. They may also wish to retain exclusive possession of some of the meanings they bear. Townsend-Gault shows that in contemporary British Columbia, locals deliberately do not disseminate certain bodies of knowledge, especially those concerned with spiritual matters. Instead they restrict the possible translations of the objects they reveal in order to protect knowledge integral to the self-representation of their culture. At the same time indigenous politicians and artists oppose the way non-indigenes present their culture in a sanitized, ossified manner of benefit only to the

provincial tourist industry. Rather than have their heritage 'whitewashed' in this manner, they strive for the right to represent themselves in the appropriate arena and in the appropriate manner, whether those be a 'welcome figure' in the University of British Columbia, a native-carved Queen's baton at the Commonwealth Games, or a chocolate frog moulded by a Haida artist and sold in Vancouver stores. By these twin processes of exclusion and of creative response to the evolving provincial context, indigenes attempt to preserve some sense of ownership over their culture and the way it is portrayed. They do not want others to gain possession of what they regard as theirs.

Concepts and objects

The history of Western understandings of others' art is a history of Western, not of others', conceptions: 'idols', 'ju-ju figures', 'fetishes', etc. Use of these terms is now considered tabu, except in academic discussions of their Western construction (e.g. Shelton 1995). Only the word 'tattoo' (Gell 1993) seems to escape all such censure.

Yet even though anthropologists have learnt to be much more circumspect in the terms they employ to classify the artefacts they study, it appears many conventional art historians are not so cautious. For instance, art historians of Cameroonian culture, as Fowler demonstrates, select pre-constructed notions (ones anthropologists would consider out of date) which they use to categorize objects in terms of tribes and regions, and which lead them to over-emphasizing greatly the role of palace and courtly arts. (For the latest example of this regaling tendency see Phillips 1995). To Fowler, arguing from his Cameroonian case, a thoroughgoing anthropology is potentially subversive of ideology, while art history appears to accept uncritically local representations of ideal states of power and being.

This might seem at first a cloistered controversy, one between scholars of neighbouring disciplines, of little relevance to the extra-mural world. Best to let academics fight out their own turf wars on the lawns of their college quads. But the reason why Fowler has chosen to present this particular example is that modern Cameroonian elites are well aware of the esteem in which their objects are held by Europeans. This knowledge enables them to exploit certain material symbols of power in their modernist project of constructing an identity located in a sense of traditionality. Thus they create local public and private museums, organize cultural festivals, campaign vociferously for the repatriation of appropriated chiefly funerary sculpture, and then fight vigorously when the object is returned but remains in the capital. In the example he gives, the celebrations on the 'homecoming' of one particular object, the Afo-a-Kom, were so great because it represented a rare indisputable triumph of the local over the global. The power of a chiefdom (the Kom), its chief and its mystical agencies (objectified in the figure itself) had defeated the mighty American market. The fact that American dealers had appraised the object in extremely high monetary terms only added to the victory, and the degree of its significance.

By maximizing the complex value of objects in this way, local elites manage to fabricate a very strong sense of identity which they can use to buffer the domineering proclivities of the state. By appropriating appropriations and by exploiting multiple categorizations, they thicken the contexts of the object and increase its power as well as that of themselves and of their group in the process.

All the sadder then, that the Afo-a-Kom gained a new significance a year later when it somehow found its way back to the New York art market (Greenfield 1989: 274).

The marketing of art

Many Westerners are only aware of non-Western art thanks, ultimately, to the international market in it. For it is above all the existence of this trade which has led to the survival of so many of these imported objects, and their continued production. Missionaries, colonial administrators, and members of expeditions may have brought items back primarily as souvenirs but most have survived because they had commercial value, being bought by dealers, artists, collectors and museums. The prestige with which famous artists and grand museums have indirectly endowed these objects has only helped to swell the trade. Indeed nowadays the role of the market has become so important it is difficult to look at many well-known pieces without thinking of what they are worth.

TRANSPORT OF VANUATU OBJECT HERE

The market is a constantly evolving one. As prices for the more expensive items rise beyond the financial level of most, buyers with cultural aspirations but without the means to fund them search for new kinds of objects to fulfill their desires. Artefacts once ignored are re-examined, and often re-valued. New sub-categories of marketable items are created. In the 1980s 'traditional textiles' became an established part of the market (MacClancy 1988). Then, African dealers re-presented sling shots and house-ladders as 'artworks' for sale (Steiner 1994). Recently, 'ethnic collectibles' and 'recycled art' (Cerny and Seriff 1996) have been recognized as distinct, emerging sectors of the trade, with some players in these new sub-markets already differentiating between 'low' and 'high quality' items.

The Western art market is a most unusual one. According to Marquis (1991), if conventional criteria of commercial law were to be applied, many of its participants would be arraigned for 'insider dealing'. Perhaps it is for this sort of reason that, as Satov demonstrates in his contribution, all players at the Western end of the tribal art trade -- appraisers, collectors, and curators -- deny any ability to influence the market. Curators of anthropology museums are keen to distance themselves from the London auction houses because they consider so many aspects of the market ethically dubious. They wish to bolster an identity of themselves as upright professionals untainted by the immoralities of this trade. Many of them contest commercially-oriented approaches to material culture which favour the aesthetic over the ethnographic. Yet, Satov argues, it is in fact very difficult for them to maintain this position with any consistency since many of them admit to the importance of aesthetics when buying objects and since the postcards in their gift-shops emphasize the artistry of artefacts in their collections. However marginal they may think their roles to be, they cannot easily disavow their effect on the market nor deny that they are among the beneficiaries of Western interest in the non-Western world. Anthropologists are not separate from their home societies. They, and their discourses, are component parts of them.

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The contestatory roles that art may play are many and diverse. Only a suggestion of that range can be provided within the compass of this book. However, what its chapters do demonstrate conclusively is that meaning should not be taken to be unitary unless it can be convincingly shown otherwise, and that a depoliticized notion of art threatens to perpetuate ideologies instead of critically analyzing them. The substance of the chapters also suggests that it is time to transcend simple binary divisions such as the global and the local, traditional artists and assimilated ones, market commodities and objects 'made for native use'. Rather we need to examine the historically particular and interactive nature of encounters between 'peoples', whether in colonial or neo-colonial times, whether in the African protectorates of the British, the indigenous and cosmopolitan areas of the northwest Pacific coast, or the museums and art galleries of the contemporary West. Instead of burdening ourselves with outdated, static notions of 'culture' and 'society', we need to follow the various ways people create and contest representations of themselves through art and its markets.

The study of art has remained on the margins of anthropology for too long. But as the potential political role of art becomes ever more manifest, the opportunity exists for its study to enter the centre-stage of the discipline. This book is a contribution to that end.

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