

# **What moves? Museums and transculturalism**

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Unbearbeitetes VORTRAGSMANUSKRIPT

## **Introduction**

My title – What moves? – is intended to signal a number of different concerns that I think bear on the question of museums and transculturalism:

1. What moves physically between and within places? Objects or things and people are our main candidates. Some of the kinds of patterns involved in such movements also shape the scope for certain other kinds of movements.
2. What more intangible qualities move alongside objects and people? For example, what kinds of knowledge or impressions about a particular culture or past might be conveyed?
3. What kinds of movement are involved here? Are they just one-way? Are they just between fixed units or can they also transform these in the process? Can they entail forms such as the ‘hybrid’?
4. What causes affect or emotion? I am thinking especially here of affective dimensions of exhibition. I don’t plan to say a lot about this but I think that it is an important area to take into consideration in exhibitions and perhaps still rather weakly developed and understood. (See Macdonald 2007 for a review.)
5. What kinds of moves – or approaches - might museums make or take in order to produce the kinds of alignments and processes that they wish to encourage.

I do not intend to work through each of these in turn – partly because they are so interrelated. But what I say will touch upon all of these, especially the question of the kinds of movements that museums might be implicated in and help to produce. In

particular, I will look at some of the museological approaches that we have seen – and consider others that we might see – and will consider what other kinds of moves these might produce.

### **Moving objects and the nature of the museum**

Museums have long – always – been involved in dislocating and relocating cultural objects. This is integral to what most of them do, and are. That is, museums move things from one place and settle them in another – the museum. Fundamental to the ethnographic museum, in particular, though not alone, is that it contains objects that have come from elsewhere and that, in a sense, ‘stand in’ for ‘other cultures’ – both specific other cultures and for the idea of other cultures in general (see Shelton 2006 – also an excellent overview discussion of the history of developments in ethnographic museums, including in Switzerland).

What effects this produces have been the subject of some debate – debate that bears upon how we understand the nature of the museum itself. On the one hand, there have been Foucauldian analyses by scholars such as Tony Bennett (especially 1995) and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) that have looked at the ordering and disciplining aspects of museums. These analyse how objects are fitted into existing schemes, how they uphold stereotypes and are part of wider practices of governmentality.

Ethnographic museums, within this kind of perspective, are primarily entangled in matters such as drawing boundaries between self and other, civilized and less civilized; with demonstrating colonial power and success; and perhaps in instructing in notions of progress or evolution (see e.g. Bennett 2004).

On the other hand, is the ‘contact zones’ argument of James Clifford. He draws on ideas that complicate some of the more usual uni-dimensional accounts of colonialism, and the terminology of ‘contact zones’ from Mary Louise Pratt, to investigate the museum as a site of encounter – a domain where differences can be brought together and new perspectives enabled.

These two perspectives are not necessarily as completely opposed as some have suggested. We should note that the Foucauldian perspective has been especially applied in relation to nineteenth century examples. Even then, however, there may

have been an excess that escaped the predominant purpose and drift of the museum governors. I have written of this before as ‘object excess’ – the capacity of objects in particular to summon up more than the frameworks within which they are officially contained (e.g. Macdonald 2002). For example: the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford – often seen as the prototypical typological evolutionary museum (and usefully retained today in its original form – see <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/>). But does anybody ever see it as an evolutionary account? From my own experience of sending students there I suggest that few do without prompting. One reason why they do not is the fascinating qualities of the individual objects – of which there are so many – which prompt other kinds of reflections and deflect from the intended framework. This is object excess.

Equally, we might temper a pure contact zones perspective with consideration of the politics of multi-culturalism and the governmental frameworks within which some of the moves, popular in Britain under names such as social inclusion, are being conducted. How far, for example, do these really make a difference to so-called ‘communities’? Do they disrupt assumptions about ‘cultures’ or affirm them? Do they serve to fix differences and ideas of distinct communities in rather conservative ways?

There are very few really detailed in-depth studies of this that I am aware of. However, it is certainly clear from some of the UK government’s statements about museums that it sees them as potential instruments for fostering senses of inclusion and managing potentially problematic differences between communities (see Sandell 2003). The kind of cultural differences that museums are to display, then, should be ones that are relatively ‘soft’ and preferably attractively scenic. Racist ideas within a particular community or, say, a graphic illustration of Halal butchery or mention of something like female circumcision would be problematic. It is clear, therefore, that there are important questions that deserve attention concerning what museums put in or exclude – and at the processes of debate involved. This includes the question of who gets to count as part of the ‘community’? Take the case of a proposed exhibition about dowry among South-Asians in Leicester (Poovaya-Smith 1991). The young women were keen on an exhibition which pointed out what they saw as its pernicious effects. The male elders – who were the official community spokespersons – however, effectively threatened to break off all future support for the museum if such an

exhibition went ahead. What is clear from this is that museums are neither only places in which to settle social ordering, nor inevitably open and safe contact zones, but also contested terrains, as has been famously said (Karp 1991).

### **Researching translating objects**

Because there is a lack of relevant in-depth research on the relationships between ‘communities’ and museums – despite the increased number of such initiatives and the calls for more – I have with colleagues (Kate Pahl and Andrey Rosowsky of the Department of Education, Sheffield University) submitted a research proposal to look at the traffic of objects between a ‘community’ – the South-Asian community in Sheffield – and a museum – Weston Park Museum, or the city museum, in Sheffield. Entitled *Translating Objects: displaying South Asian material culture at home and in a city museum*, the research involves:

- *a home-based study*, with members of the South-Asian community (as self-defined – the community has many official groups, who have been consulted about the research). This will look especially at objects that are put on display at home, though will also discuss with participants objects that are not displayed but that are invested with significance, perhaps having been brought from India or Pakistan. A key focus here is the place of objects – or not – in narratives of belonging and of movement, including how these might be used between generations. An initial small pilot study carried out by Kate Pahl and Andy Pollard (see Pahl and Pollard 2006) highlighted some fascinating phenomena – such as sometimes rather conventional artefacts being very highly valued (e.g. a tea-set) or artifacts being turned into a displayable ‘collection’ by all being sprayed with gold paint.

This research is to provide the basis for *an exhibition* in the city’s main museum, Weston Park Museum. The home-based study is to be accompanied by *a museum-based study*, looking especially at the making of the South-Asian objects exhibition and which of the objects displayed the museum decides to keep as part of its permanent collections. This will be carried out within a broader framework of analysing the museum’s collecting practices and social inclusion policies; and

exploring ethnographically what kinds of ideas about ‘community’ etc are mobilised in day-to-day museum practice.

The research will also then include a *reception study* to look at what members of the original community made of the exhibition and whether they have revalued any of their objects or revised any of their display strategies on the basis of the museum experience. And it will consider the views of the museum staff involved and of other visitors.

### **The translocation of culture**

One dilemma for museums in these kinds of contexts relates to a set of interesting arguments made by anthropologist Pnina Werbner on the basis of long-term research among Pakistani communities in Britain in an article called ‘The translocation of culture: migration, community and the force of multiculturalism in history’ (2005). She does not write specifically about museums but about culture more generally.

She refers to two ‘paradoxes of culture’ that she argues are generated by ‘the dislocations and relocations of transnational migration’.

1. ‘The first is that in order to sink roots in a new country, transnational migrants in the modern world begin by setting themselves culturally and socially apart. They form encapsulated ‘communities’.’ i.e. to gain a sense of belonging in a new place may entail cultural separation from it.

2. ‘The second, more theoretical, paradox is that in such encapsulated communities culture is both open, changing and fluid and yet experienced as a powerful imperative.’ She also rephrases this as: ‘Second, that within such communities culture can be conceived of as conflictual, open, hybridising and fluid, while nevertheless having a sentimental and morally compelling force. This stems from the fact, I propose, that culture is embodied in ritual and social exchange and performance, conferring agency and empowering different social actors: religious and secular, men, women and youth.’ In other words, although often depicted as incompatible, culture may be both contested and hybrid but also as quite directive and strongly moralised.

In the article she plays the argument between, on the one hand, politicians etc who tend to evoke quite essentialising ideas about communities and community difference; and on the other, cultural critics who tend to evoke openness, and ideas of hybridity, the creole, the cosmopolitan and so forth. Her position, which is in many ways a very standard ethnographic or social anthropological position, is to argue that we need to take a historical or situated perspective to see what is going on at a particular time. What is going on, she argues, is that notions of ‘culture’ are harnessed to ‘community’, but not in a fixed manner, like an ‘identity-badge’. Instead, it is ‘negotiated, fluid and often contested and conflictual’ – but to different degrees at different historical moments. This is partly so because of the different ‘social actors’ involved – ‘religious and secular, men, women and youth.’ But it is also because, as part of these processes, culture is constantly reinvested with affect and moral force – it is made to matter.

So what does this mean for museums? We might suggest the following:

- that any museum involved in culture work connected to such ‘communities’ enters and inherently contested zone
- that community members, or some of them, may want to use museums to do their traditional task of ‘museum-izing’ and identity-badging
- that if museums want to do something different, they may run up against those community members who want them to do the traditional activity
- that if they employ culture – say, the gifts or cricket that Werbner discusses – they may be dealing with cultural forms that are the subject of considerable affect and strong, and even conflicted, meaning.

These are not the only difficulties no doubt and my point is not that all, or even any, are necessarily the case with reference to any particular example. It is simply to reiterate the point that this may be fraught and difficult ground.

For the rest of this paper I want to turn to look at some of the approaches that museums have used in recent years in relation to what might be called the multicultural challenge.

## **Multiculturalism**

In multicultural approaches ‘communities’ or groups are presented as more or less discrete ‘cultures’, generally illustrated through an at least partly distinctive material culture. The now traditional ethnographic types of display that largely superseded the evolutionary – though which could also be accommodated within evolutionary schema – can in many ways be seen as examples of a multicultural approach in that they entail multiple cultures being displayed alongside one another., each with their separate space and boundaries.

But the term ‘multiculturalism’ is more often used in relation to a challenge to the homogeneity of the nation-state, i.e. multiculturalism is used to question the idea of the nation-state as a single culture and – as part of a *politics of recognition* or *identity politics* – to acknowledge, and even celebrate, the nation’s cultural diversity. Many museums have taken this route to at least some extent. On the Canadian Museum of Civilisations website, for example, they express clearly the idea of this as a kind of duty (<http://www.civilization.ca/visit/indexe.aspx>): ‘Because Canada is a multicultural society, the CMC feels that it has a mandate to look at the civilizations of origin of Canadian immigrants’. Interestingly in this case, the mandate is not to all of those peoples who live in Canada today but only to those who are aboriginal to it.

The kinds of displays that this kind of multiculturalism typically produces often partly replicates the earlier kind of display. In other words it produces an exhibition of relatively discrete cultures within the nation – or sometimes, say, within Europe.

The kinds of criticisms of multiculturalism (in various contexts, not necessarily always museums) that are sometimes raised include the following:

1. That it reifies cultural differences – or ‘museumises cultures’ (Friedman 1997). It does not look at the in-between, the hybrid, the moving.
2. That it suffers from a ‘samosas, saris and steel drums syndrome’ – that is, it picks out fairly stereotypical differences, especially artefactual.
3. That it focuses on ‘comfortable difference’ and typically doesn’t include more problematic differences.

4. That is ignores questions of power, discrimination, the state etc, flattening everything into an equality of cultural diversity.

John Hutnyk, quoted in Werbner, puts it as follows:

‘On the Left the argument is that the superficial celebration of multiculturalism – of exotic cuisines, popular music or colourful festivals and rituals – disguises continuing economic and political inequalities. Rather than addressing these, the state funds multicultural festivals and turns its back on real problems of deprivation, prejudice and discrimination (Hutnyk 1997). Hence, multiculturalism and identity politics obscure the common oppression of the underprivileged within capitalist society and divide anti-racist movements (Sivanandan 1990: 51–52 *passim*).’

5. The kind of affective relationship with the viewer that multicultural representations produce tend to position visitors as relatively dispassionate observers, and even reproduce colonialist modes of viewing, in which cultures presented as spectacle or ‘colour’ (see, for example, Mitchell 1991, Sturken and Cartwright 2001)

### **Ethnography as art**

A rather different way of avoiding some of the dilemmas of representing ethnographic materials has been the turn to displaying (at least some of) them as art. At one level, this might be argued to be a radical move, one which disturbs the usual exclusion of such works from the high cultural domain of ‘art’ and which promises to give proper value both to the works themselves and those who produce them. It is a move that has been made by some very notable international museums. In Britain, for example, the former Museum of Mankind, a branch of the British Museum, with its own separate building and a history of some much discussed, and often at the time progressive, displays, has been closed down. Items from its collections have instead been displayed within the main British Museum building, the presentation of which has itself been reconfigured as one of ‘world cultures’

([http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/world\\_cultures.aspx](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/world_cultures.aspx)). In many ways this is a bold move, one which can also relativise the European collections, making them part of a wider, global, spectrum. However, the largely aestheticised displays can also mean that the artefacts on show are largely there as objects of contemplation. Their

uses and contexts are often not included in information about them. In fact, in the BM there is often more attempt to do so than in some other museums of this type. The starkest example is the new Musee du Quai Branly in Paris (<http://www.quaibrantly.fr/>). Here, a vast number of often stunning ethnographic artefacts is largely displayed as individual art works. There are occasionally information-points loosely connected with the objects on display, but these are not nearby and are often hard to find; in general they seem to consist of existing films and so forth that were not specially made to provide information about what is on show.

But although the aesthetic style is that of art, many of the objects nevertheless lack the names of their makers – and so they hover oddly, aspiring to be art but not quite making it, but not objects that are part of more collective lifeworlds either. Moreover, they are not presented historically – unlike almost all ‘Western art’ – and so they seem to stand as eternal objects, the kinds of things that such cultures (those which bear labels such as Oceania or Africa) have long produced and continue to do so. This has the result that such cultures themselves seem frozen in time – outside the usual temporalities of change and development.

### **Migration**

A very different approach, which really privileges temporality, that has been used in more recent years is to focus on migration. Examples include Ellis Island Immigration Museum, NY (<http://www.ellisland.com/>), the Immigration Museum, Victoria, Melbourne (<http://immigration.museum.vic.gov.au/>), and Projekt Migration (<http://www.projektmigration.de/>) which was shown in various places in Germany, including Cologne. (There is also an Immigration Museum in Hong Kong, which is part of Immigration Services institute whose remit is to train immigration officials (<http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/museum.htm>) – which is a good reminder of some of the other dimensions of such a process.)

In some ways this can be a very successful approach in that it provides a historical depth that is often lacking in multicultural style exhibitions. It can also:

- look at changes over generations, perhaps increasing cross-over, interaction or even blending – or, theoretically at least, greater attempts to preserve and differentiate cultural difference;

- look at state relations and questions of power and discrimination; *Projekt Migration*, for example, included powerful displays on processes of Anmeldung – and when I was there some people seemed to me to be visiting to try to figure out how to deal with this process (e.g. the kinds of questions that you have to deal with in applications for the right to stay). Issues such as finding work and making ones way in a new country – which may be central to people’s experiences – can also be made central with such a focus.

- work well with narratives about belonging or not belonging – and can potentially relate these better than in a multicultural artefactual approach.

But – one thing that made me uncomfortable in some of these displays is that they seem to contain an unspoken other, the non-migrant. At least, this seemed to me to be so in parts of *Projekt Migration*, where it was as though set against a background of a known German culture, the German population being implicitly portrayed as though static and fixed. Migrants were somehow always non- German – they were others, Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, Turks etc. This was so even despite attempts at hybridity. The kind of hybridity involved seemed to be the ‘hyphenated’, discussed so well by Ayse Caglar (1997), which consists of two separate things brought together with a hyphen: Turkish-German, say. It continues to contain within itself the possibility of somehow dissolving these two out of one another.

In affective terms, presentations in terms of migration are mixed. While some of this can seem to position visitors as dispassionate observer, displays can also incorporate moving personal narratives, and also art works by migrants or on migration in quite creative ways, as was well evident in *Projekt Migration*.

One more specific type of migration narrative is that of slavery. At present there are many initiatives to create museums and exhibitions of slavery. In the US, for example, a National Museum of Slavery – that is in fact privately funded – is due to open in

June 2007(<http://www.usnationalslaverymuseum.org/home.asp>). In Britain there are many initiatives as part of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery, most notably the International Museum of Slavery that will open in Liverpool in August 2007 (<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/>). I have discussed some of the background and controversies surrounding such exhibitions elsewhere (article in *Museumkunde*, forthcoming). The most exciting question is what they will look like when they open and how they will be received. As an approach, they clearly offer the potential for highly politicised presentation. But whether they will and how far they will present the history that they document as clearly past or as part of an ongoing present, remains to be seen. In any case, they only tackle a specific dimension– albeit an extremely important one – of the range of histories and experiences involved in cultural diversity.

### **Many faces**

Another approach, that is sometimes used alongside others but that is perhaps worth identifying in itself too, is one that I call the many faces of our city/country approach. What it entails is usually a city being portrayed through depictions of lots of images especially of the faces of different inhabitants of the place. These are often accompanied by short descriptions of particular individuals.

This has some good points:

- by presenting people as individuals it is able to side-step the ‘presenting a culture’ dilemma
- it also allows complexity in individual presentations – so don’t have to be either/or
- it highlights the complexity of a city – with also, for example, very conventional-looking people also revealing more complicated identities etc (though this is not always done).
- affectively, it can work quite well through the personalization

But... it can be

- so personalised that you don't get any kind of broader picture – how many people of this background are there in the city?
- in danger of reducing people to a slightly more complex local colour – doing nothing more than telling us that the city has lots of different kinds of people? My own personal sense of boredom at this approach after the first few may be just my own response, but it might also be because it's all just one same nice and comfortable message
- as with many of the other approaches, usually disconnected from politics, discrimination, problematic difference etc

Museologically, it is an approach that typically does not usually use objects, or if it does, these are usually very secondary; the photograph/video and accompanying narrative are the main media.

### **Transcultural display**

The term 'transcultural' is a problematic one – with some using it to mean just any kind of traffic between cultures. Here, I look at a gallery that was given this name as an example, and also to explore the notion of transculturalism involved. The Transcultural Galleries in Bradford were opened in 1997, curated by Nima Poovaya-Smith, who was herself thoroughly versed in post-colonialist critique (<http://www.asht.info/Cartwright+Hall.html>; see also Macdonald 2003; Poovaya-Smith 1998). Her aim in the galleries was to avoid reifying cultural difference, or using it simplistically as an identity badge. So rather than presenting distinct 'communities' the galleries include objects that are not part of a single overarching narrative or framework but that operate in terms of loose ideas about various different kinds of relationships with the city – Bradford. So, some works are by artists who live there, some by those who comment upon it. Many are by South Asians but this is not exclusive. So the gallery does not become one that seeks to present pure South Asian content – instead it purposefully avoids this, while retaining a this emphasis, which reflects both the collections on which it draws and the population composition of the area in which the museum, Cartwright Hall, is located.

Important in this approach, then, is that there is no one fixed frame. It also privileges objects and uses them to articulate more complex relations. So, for example, it draws on similarities of form or colour, using them to make perhaps unexpected links that are not framed by overarching taxonomies or schemes. This is interestingly like ideas in contemporary material culture studies of following the object, that is, of conducting social or cultural analyses in which objects are made the central focus and the ways in which they link different players and move in and out of different worlds is the account followed (see, for example, Latour 1987, Marcus 1998; and below). This avoids having to frame a study via ideas of ‘community’ or ‘culture’ in the first instance

As an approach, this transcultural one can be quite compelling visually, because the visual is central to what motivates display. In this way it can also be quite productive of ideas – because it plays with partial connections (a concept used well by Marilyn Strathern 1991), provoking via juxtaposition and making good use of the museum as a medium. In other words, it also involved what Rosmarie Beier-de Haan discusses – in a very insightful account – *Inszenierung* (staging), a theatrical use of the medium (2005, 2006). This is very different from an approach that strives primarily for representation.

It may, however, be the case that a display like this can be very confusing to visitors, precisely because it eschews a single narrative or governing principle. Maybe by doing so, rather than fostering senses of connection, it prompts visitors to relate to art works individually, as isolated pieces, rather than to link them in the ways that were hoped. Governed not by a specific set of ideas, but by what appealed to the curator, often for reasons of what struck her visually, perhaps this kind of approach cannot lift much beyond an ‘auteurist’ approach that remains with the author (see Bal 2006). It is also mainly, though perhaps not entirely or even necessarily, aestheticized and relatively de-politicised.

### **Objects as curiosity**

This is a potentially similar idea and I mention it only in passing. It has, however, been noted by some commentators, most notably Stephen Bann, that there has been a

growth in curiosity-cabinet (*Wunderkammer*) style exhibitions since the late twentieth century. As he explains:

Curiosity has the valuable role of signalling to us that the object on display is invariably a nexus of interrelated meanings – which may be quite discordant – rather than a staging post on a well trodden route through history. (Bann, 2003, p.120)

As I have written of this elsewhere (2006: 93-4):

Objects understood as curiosity rather than as exemplars of an underlying system, exhibit what Bann calls ‘typological exuberance’ (2003: 125), and draw attention to questions of their selection (by making this unclear or indeterminate) and to their possible multiple meanings and associations. By undercutting the rationale of the chronology or taxonomy, objects themselves come to the fore. *They* are the ‘nexus of meaning’ rather than its illustration. As such, they can become the beginning point for analyses that trace links and cross boundaries in ways that defy more conventional approaches, as has been argued for the new material culture studies (Miller, 1998; Thomas, 1991) and illustrated particularly well in relation to memory (Kwint, Breward & Aynsley 1999; Crane, 2000). Moreover, as curiosities, objects become more open to both apprehension through, and analysis in terms of, the sensory or existential (Bann, 2003).

### **Cultural unsettlement**

This is the term that I use to describe purposeful museological attempts to disrupt the more usual assumptions, boundaries, or ways of seeing – especially those that involve a good deal of reflexivity about the museum form itself. This approach does not seek representation of a particular group, and indeed is likely to avoid trying to present a particular group’s perspective. Equally, it is not concerned to transmit a particular body of knowledge or set of facts. Instead, the aim is to stage a particular three-dimensional experience in order to provoke reflection among visitors. This might be linked to their own experience, viewpoints or ways of seeing; and it might be about a

relatively specific topic or perhaps a more general attempt to set forms of representation themselves – including, perhaps most often, the museum form – into question.

In a recently published book, Paul Basu and I have collected a number of examples of this form – a form that we there call *exhibition experiments* (<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/book.asp?ref=9781405130769>). In the introduction, we give a longer history of some kinds of experiments or provocation, including, for example, the work of Fred Wilson. We might also have looked at the earlier work of artists such as Herbert Beyer (see Stanisewski 1998; also Macdonald 2007). Many of these involve some kind of artistic intervention or provocation; and in the context of ethnographic museums Nuno Porto describes the shift towards such exhibitions as one from exhibition to *installation* (2007). In relation to artistic installation we include a number of examples of provocative works. To briefly describe just one of them: we include a chapter about a work of Ann-Sofi Siden, called *Warte Mall!*, that was concerned with sex-work and sex-tourism on the German-Czech border (Carolin and Haynes 2007). This unsettling exhibition also threw into relief questions of power and gender, and the nature of viewer-viewed relationships, in part by positioning visitors in as voyeurs.

Nuno Porto's own discussion of ethnographic exhibitions traces a history that includes the innovative work at Neuchatel Ethnography Museum, especially by Jacques Hainard and Roland Kather. He then discusses in more detail a number of exhibitions held at the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Coimbra, Portugal, in which he has been involved. Often created on shoestring budgets, these exhibitions were informed by theoretical developments in social and cultural studies, including the 'writing culture' critiques. In response, they sought to make transparent – or at least more transparent – their own representational techniques. This entailed active and reflexive use of the three dimensional form, and different kinds of mediatory techniques, to draw attention to, or perhaps subvert, particular ways of seeing or given ideas. In *Angola in Black and White*, for example, the uses of photography by the colonial authorities in Angola, including in their own museum (the Dundo Museum) were displayed, often using formats to raise questions about the reproduction of images, their circulation and roles in colonial surveillance and ordering as part of a

regime of 'print colonialism'. In addition, the installation the exhibition raised – in physical rather than verbal form – questions about the position of viewers of this material today and what might be entailed in the continuing circulation of such images.

One risk of such forms of exhibition is that they may not work – perhaps they will simply be misunderstood and seen as confusing. They might also sometimes be interpreted as representational – and thus potentially as having got somebody wrong. The classic example of this is the misunderstood attempt to use irony in the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum (Riegel 1996).

Many unsettling exhibitions are concerned centrally with museum exhibition as a form itself – an unsettling which if repeated too often might cease to be unsettling at all.

### **What moves should museums make?**

At the heart of the question of what museums should do is that of how the role of the museum is understood. Who is it for? What is its role seen to be. For many people, the museum is surely seen as about representation and about conveying particular knowledge. One reason for increased interest in museums from communities or groups that were previously excluded – or at least not included in ways that they might like or of their own choosing – is that they now seem to have the opportunity to be represented, to be seen – as self-determining communities or groups – within museums. This is not necessarily something that they will want to give up, having waited so long for this opportunity. It is however not something that necessarily sits easily with the idea of the museum as a site for provocation or unsettling.

Such tensions exist not only as abstract or theoretical debates but in real political, social and economic contexts. These vary between different countries and between different kinds of museums. And they make a real difference. In Britain at present, for example, there is money available for museums to undertake broadly representational and multicultural initiatives, sometimes involving weak forms of hybridity. 'Many faces' are frequently to be found in contemporary museum displays. This is, usually,

a fairly comfortable and known approach – much less risky than unsettlement or provocation.

So, in conclusion, while representation and provocation are not necessarily inherently impossible to bring together, they draw on different models of the role of the museum. For this reason, in actual practice they may be extremely difficult to accommodate. Yet, if museums avoid provocation and unsettlement they risk not only becoming an identity-badge mechanism for different groups but also potentially much less interesting spaces for visitors of all kinds.

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