

# ROUTES

*Travel and Translation  
in the Late  
Twentieth Century*

JAMES CLIFFORD

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## *Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections*

The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology is itself a famous artifact. Arthur Erickson's glass-and-concrete adaptation of Northwest Coast Indian styles simultaneously soars and crouches on a dramatic cliff-top, looking out toward Vancouver Island and the setting sun. In early evening the reflected light makes visible a towering wall of windows between crowds of old totem poles within the building and new ones scattered outside.

The Kwagiulth' Museum and Cultural Centre, on Quadra Island, just off the east coast of Vancouver Island, is built in the spiral shape of a sea snail, symbolizing the importance of the sea in the lives of this Native American fishing community. It stands beside an elementary school and a church in Cape Mudge Village, a line of houses facing Discovery Passage, through which on summer nights cruise ships glide on the inland route to Alaska. Behind the museum, the remains of a totem pole, covered with wire mesh, decompose in the grass.

The Royal British Columbia Museum is a large white box. It shares civic space in downtown Victoria with government buildings, hotels, and tourist shops featuring English and Scottish collectibles. The museum's entrance is dominated by a large gift shop selling Native American jewelry, artifacts, books, and curios. Outside, in an open shed, a Hesquiaht/Nuu-Cha-Nulth artist from western Vancouver Island, Tim Paul, who has been senior carver at the museum since 1976, works on a replacement for an old totem pole in Vancouver's Stanley Park.

The U'mista Cultural Centre is located in Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island, near the northern tip of Vancouver Island. It adjoins a looming brick structure, formerly the St. Michael's Residential School for Indian Children, which now houses the Nimpkish band's administrative offices. The center extends downhill toward the harbor, ending with an exhibition space in the style of a traditional big house. Up the hill, beside a much larger ceremonial house, stands the world's tallest totem pole, enshrined in the *Guinness Book of World Records* and supported with guy wires, like an enormous radio antenna.



I went to Vancouver in August 1988 to teach in a summer institute. On long weekends I visited the four museums. What follows are reflections by an outsider, a white American visitor, lingering on the two institutions where I was able to spend the most time: the UBC Museum of Anthropology and the U'mista Cultural Centre. While I draw on conversations with curators and local people and on printed information, what follows are primarily personal impressions of locales, buildings, and styles of exhibition. I barely hint at the four museums' complex local histories, specific audiences, and internal debates. These reflections are closer to travel writing than to ethnography or historical research.

I had become interested in the four museums while writing an essay on collecting in Western museums and in anthropology (Clifford, 1988). The essay analyzed the "art-culture system," which has determined the classification and authentication of artistic or cultural artifacts in Europe and North America since the late nineteenth century. Why do certain non-Western objects end up in fine-art museums, others in anthropology collections? What systems of value regulate the traffic among diverse collections? The essay ended by evoking several contestations of the art-culture system by resurgent native groups that have not, as predicted, disappeared into modernity's homogenizing stream or into the national melting pot.<sup>1</sup> Their current productions did not fit easily into prevailing definitions of either art or culture. I suggested that these groups had been both playing and subverting the dominant art-culture game. Theirs were different, not separate, paths through modernity (no one escapes the market, technology, and the nation-state). The repatriation of objects from national museums to new tribal institutions such as the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum seemed to be a striking example of

how a dominant practice of collection and display has been turned to unanticipated ends. Master narratives of cultural disappearance and salvage could be replaced by stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle.

Many Northwest Coast communities have survived and resisted the violence visited on them since the mid-nineteenth century: devastating diseases, commercial and political domination, suppression of the potlatch, forced education in residential schools and by missionaries.<sup>2</sup> Despite enormous damage to indigenous cultures and continuing economic and political inequality, many tribal groups and individuals have found ways to live separate from and in negotiation with the modern state. In the anthropological and museum milieus I frequented, the political climate was charged in ways I had never felt in other metropolitan settings: New York, Chicago, Washington, Paris, London. On the Northwest Coast today, struggles over land claims, the repatriation of museum collections, and

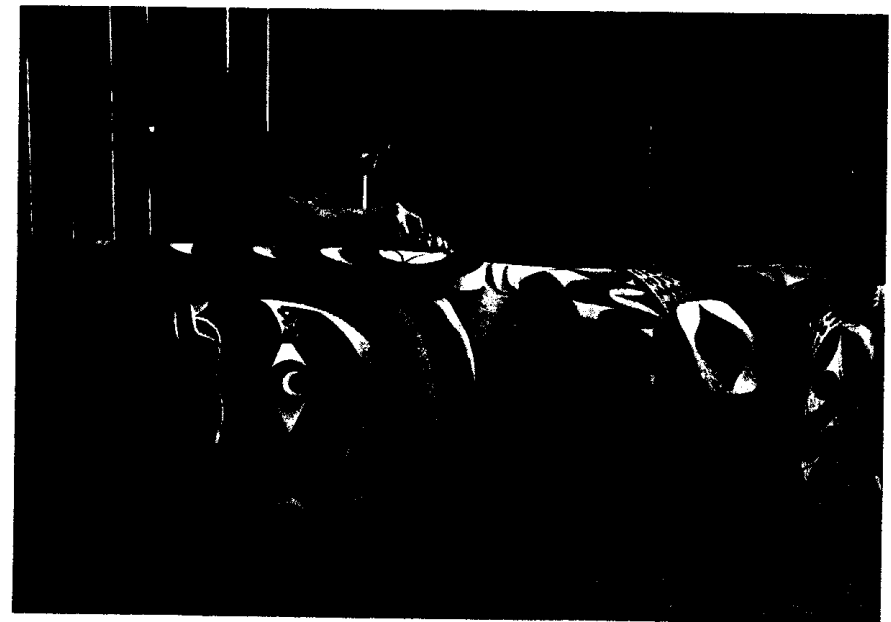


Figure 5.1. Tim Paul, senior carver, working on a totem pole in the public carving shed of the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria. Photo courtesy of the Royal B.C. Museum.

community constraints on scientific research are increasingly common. Indigenous art (carving, building, painting, printmaking, jewelry and blanket design), work that participates simultaneously in market and museum networks and in tribal ceremonial and political contexts, is a leading public manifestation of cultural vitality. A recurring pressure and critique—the threat at least of public embarrassment, and even of legal intervention—is felt by anthropologists and museum curators concerned with ancient and modern Northwest Coast Indian traditions.<sup>3</sup>

I had come to British Columbia expecting to focus on the two Kwagiulth tribal museums, but I found I could not ignore the province's "major" displays of Northwest Coast work in the museums at UBC and Victoria, which are responding in their own ways to the evolving context. They offer revealing counterpoints to the innovations at Alert Bay and Cape Mudge Village and help make clear that no museum in the 1990s, tribal or metropolitan, can claim any longer to tell the whole or essential story about Northwest Coast Indian artistic or cultural productions. Indeed, all four museums display the same kinds of objects—ceremonial masks, rattles, robes, and sculpture, as well as work produced for the curio and art markets. In four different contexts, these objects tell discrepant stories of cultural vitality and struggle. All four museums register the irruption of history and politics in aesthetic and ethnographic contexts, thus challenging the art-culture system still dominant in most major exhibitions of tribal or non-Western work. All mix the discourses of art, culture, politics, and history in specific, hierarchical ways. They contest and complement one another in response to a changing historical situation and an unequal balance of cultural and economic power.

It should be noted, however, that my overall comparative approach tends to limit what can be said about the four museums. They are seen less as specific articulations of local, regional, or national histories and more as variants within a unified field of representations. Such foreshortening is particularly questionable with respect to the tribal museums and cultural centers, institutions that both do and do not function on the terms of the dominant, majority culture. They are, in important aspects of their existence, minority or oppositional projects within a comparative museological context.<sup>4</sup> But in other crucial aspects they are not museums at all: they are continuations of indigenous traditions of storytelling, collection, and display. Some of these Kwagiulth traditions are touched on in what follows. Overall, however, my comparative approach tends to stress

entanglement and relationship rather than independence or an experience significantly outside the national culture. Moreover, the latter dimensions of tribal life are not adequately captured by terms such as "minority" (denoting a location defined in relation to majority power). The missing tribal perspectives will have to be supplied in depth by other writers better placed and more knowledgeable than I am. This essay is strongly oriented, and limited, by the comparative museological context in which it seeks to intervene.<sup>5</sup>



① The Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria spreads its permanent installation over two large floors. The route through the exhibit is linear, chronological, and didactic, making extensive use of written and recorded explanations, period photographs, and documents. The first half of the installation, upstairs, focuses on precontact Northwest Coast aboriginal ecology and society. It explains adaptations to the environment, technology (weaving, canoes, costumes, houses, utensils), masks, and mythology. Elaborate traditional costumes are displayed on life-size mannequins. A silent video projection (from Edward Curtis' early film *In the Land of the Headhunters*) shows traditional canoes with masked dancers in the bows. (It is mesmerizing to see these familiar masks and canoes in motion.) Early prints and wall-size photographs suggest the aboriginal world in the early years of contact. In a dark space, masks are illuminated sequentially, with recorded voices recounting their different myths.

White culture, commerce, and power arrive *in medias res* as one descends to the lower floor. At the bottom of the stairs, Haida shaman figures, carved for the first time in the 1880s and 1890s, reflect the decline of the traditional shaman's authority. A Tlingit sculpture of a Christian priest signals the new forces with which native populations would have to negotiate. Their initial success, a change and diversification of cultural and artistic production in response to outside stimuli, is illustrated with exhibits from the flourishing curio trade. However, this portrayal of non-catastrophic cultural contact is soon interrupted by dramatic evocation of the smallpox epidemic of the 1860s. The visitor walks through a passageway where the walls are covered with large, haunting Native American faces (portraits by Edward Curtis) and where a recorded voice details the drastic population decline, cultural crisis, and subsequent struggle simply to survive. This harrowing passage is followed by an evocation of mission-

ary influence (photos of students in uniform, a broken mask—but nothing on the complexity of conversion and what it may have meant from an Indian viewpoint). A section documenting the potlatch follows, with photographic and documentary evidence of its suppression by the Canadian government. This central ceremony in Northwest Coast cultures was thought to be a “savage” custom because of its dramatic dances and “excessive” redistributions of wealth. The exhibit includes hostile newspaper accounts, and defenses of the potlatch by Franz Boas. In this historical exhibit one can spend a good deal of time reading texts, both modern explanations and contemporary documents.

The trail then leads into the largest room of the installation, containing a reconstructed chief's house, a cluster of totems, and, in surrounding

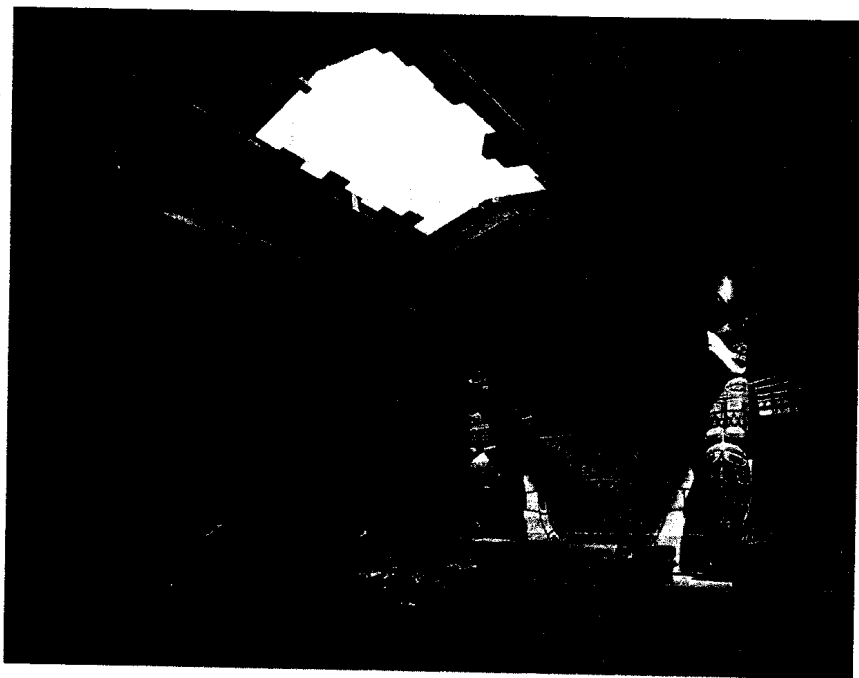


Figure 5.2. Inside the Chief's House (Jonathan Hunt House), Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria. Photo courtesy of the Royal B.C. Museum.

cases, masks and other ceremonial and artistic objects arranged by tribe—Tsimshian, Bella Coola, Tlingit. The exhibition continues through the dimly lit long house, atmospheric with simulated fire and recorded chants, into the final section, entitled “The Land: 1763–1976.” Here photographs and texts evoke the long struggle over land use and possession, including a Coast Salish delegation to London in 1906 and recent land claims (a large photo of Athabaskan Indians blockading a rail line in 1975).

Overall, the exhibit's historical treatment is unusual in its complexity and especially in its introduction of white power so early in the sequence. Change is not compartmentalized or added on at the end.<sup>6</sup> The large culminating room with its chief's house and old artifacts is preceded by missions and the potlatch suppression and is followed by land struggles. Thus, it cannot appear simply as an archaic traditional space but is presented, rather, as a powerful site of cultural authenticity surrounded by conflict and change. The historical sequence suggests that the traditional objects on display were not necessarily made prior to white power but in relation to and sometimes in defiance of it.<sup>7</sup> The general historical approach of the Royal British Columbia Museum is linear and synthetic. It tells a story of cultural adaptation, crisis, and conflict on a broad regional scale. History as experienced by specific groups and the contributions of mythic traditions and local political agendas to different historical narratives are subsumed in the overarching sequence. As we shall see, history has a different inflection at the U'mista Cultural Centre.



② At the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, the objects on display sometimes seem to take second place to Arthur Erickson's building and its clifftop setting—something that cannot be said of the big windowless box in Victoria. Of the four museums, UBC is the only one that begins to do justice to the monumental aspects of Northwest Coast carving and spatial design. The structure provides large and small spaces, but is dominated by its Great Hall, a soaring room whose massive concrete beams evoke the features of a traditional big house. But unlike the traditional space, all shadow and flickering firelight, the UBC Great Hall is bathed in daylight, with one towering wall entirely of glass. In this space objects are guaranteed maximal visibility, often from several sides. The first sentence of the guide-brochure announces: “The Museum of Anthropol-

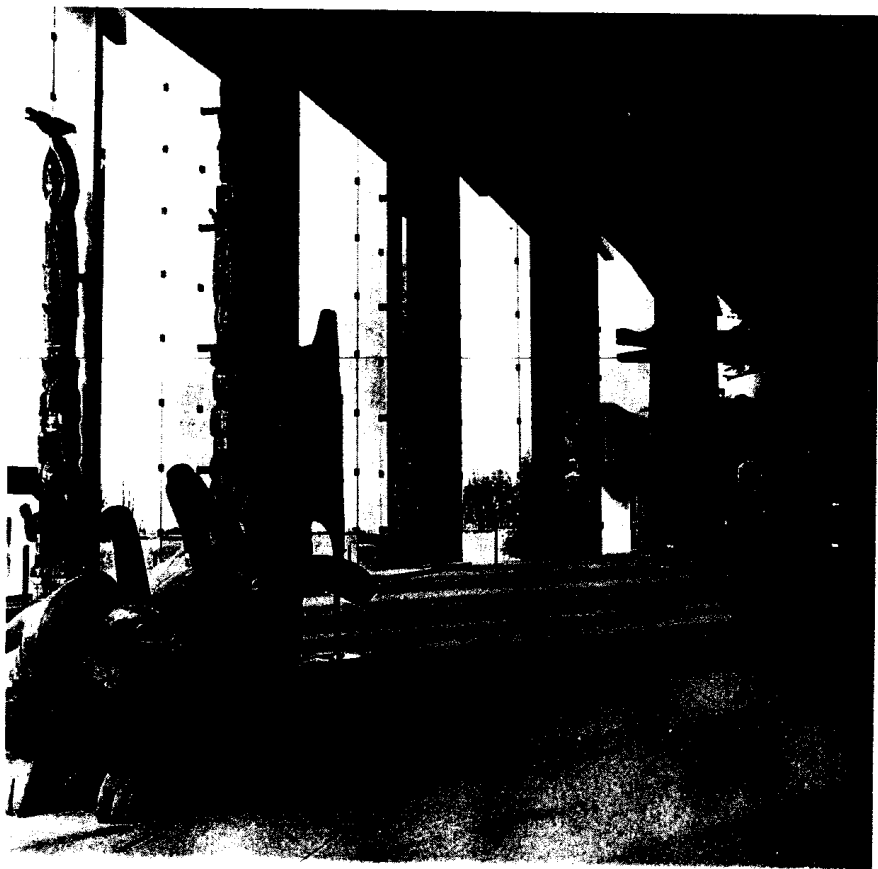


Figure 5.3. Great Hall of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver. Photo by W. McLennan; courtesy of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

ogy displays Northwest Coast Indian artifacts in ways that emphasize their visual qualities, treating them as works of fine art."

On entering the museum, one descends a ramp directly into the Great Hall, which contains old totem poles, house posts, boxes, and feast dishes. Among them one discovers two marvelous large sculptures by Bill Reid (the contemporary Haida artist who is a kind of presiding spirit in the museum), representing a sea wolf with killer whales and a crouching bear. The label for *Bear* reads as follows:

Cultural group	Haida
Place	Vancouver, B.C.
Date	1963
Object	Contemporary carving
Description	
A50045	<i>Bear</i>
	Carved by Bill Reid
	This sculpture can be gently touched.

Most labels in the Great Hall, equally terse, include small drawings of each work in its original setting. These unobtrusive, somewhat idealized contexts are designed not to compete with the visual impact of the artifacts. (There are no such drawings of the Reid sculptures, for an obvious reason: their original setting is the museum.)

In the Great Hall everything is larger than life, but accessible, translating to some degree the *presence* of these carvings which are simultaneously monumental and intimate. (At Victoria, the largest old poles are behind glass.) In their original settings the poles, posts, and entryways were often attached to dwellings, and lined public sidewalks. People passed among them every day. The Great Hall, with no glass separating visitors from the artifacts, with ways to walk around them, and with inviting places to sit nearby, reproduces something of this intimate monumentality.

A certain ambiguity of indoors and outdoors is also created. The Great Hall is designed so that totem poles and houses in the traditional style recently constructed behind the museum are visible from within, becoming part of the display. Two Haida houses and several poles were made between 1958 and 1962 by the Haida artist Bill Reid, helped by the Nimpkish (Kwagiulth) artist Doug Cranmer. (Their cooperation signals the fact that in the emerging general context, and especially in a major urban museum, the category of Northwest Coast art and culture often takes precedence over specificities of clan, language, or village.) Poles by other contemporary artists representing different traditions are scattered on the grounds. The proximity of these new works to the old artifacts gathered behind the wall of glass makes very clear the museum's most important message: tribal works are part of an ongoing, dynamic tradition. The museum displays its works of art as part of an inventive process, not as treasures salvaged from a vanished past.

Leaving the Great Hall, one passes from the monumental to the miniature. The Masterpiece Gallery contains small objects, chosen for their



Figure 5.4. *The Bear*, contemporary carving by Bill Reid. Collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver. Photo by W. McLennan; courtesy of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

quality of workmanship: carvings in wood, bone, ivory, argillite; curios, combs, pipes, rattles, and jewelry. Again, the mix of old and new portrays traditional art in process. Elaborately engraved bracelets in the trade metals gold and silver, by the late nineteenth-century artist Charles Edenshaw, are placed beside comparable work by contemporary innovators Bill Reid and Robert Davidson. The gallery is dark; objects are displayed with boutique-style lighting and minimal labels, all emphasizing the message that these are fine-art treasures.

The theater, behind the Masterpiece Gallery, is used for small displays, lectures, film screenings, storytelling sessions, and demonstrations of Native American crafts. It adjoins a small temporary exhibit space and the UBC museum's best-known museographic innovation: its research collec-

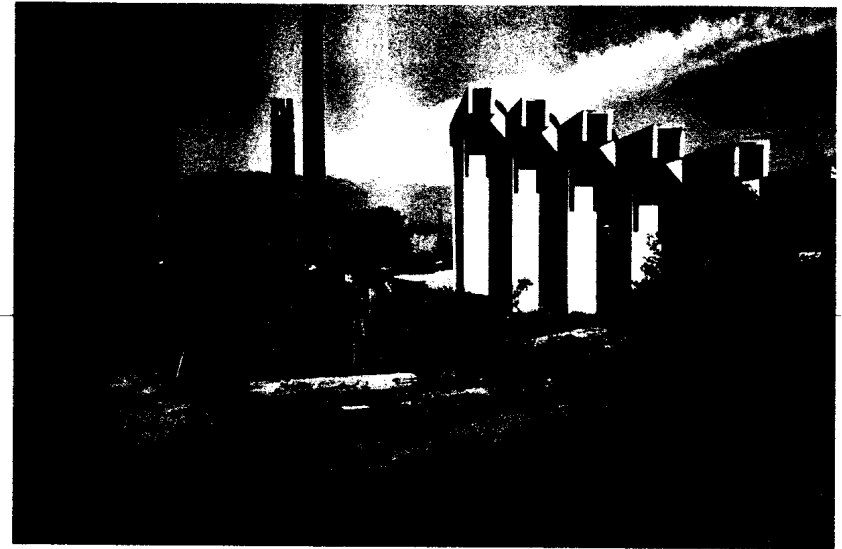


Figure 5.5. Foreground: Haida house and totem poles made in 1962 by Bill Reid and Doug Cranmer. To the right is the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Victoria. Photo by James Clifford.

tions organized as visible storage. Works from various North American native cultures as well as from China, Japan, Melanesia, Indonesia, India, and Africa are stored in glass cases or in drawers that can be freely opened by the public. Extensive documentation on each piece is available in printed volumes. Here the presentation runs opposite to the aestheticizing approach pervasive elsewhere in the museum. Massed, stored objects do not appear as art masterpieces. Instead, taxonomy is featured: a large case of containers holds boxes and baskets of all shapes and sizes from around the world.

The drawers full of small pieces provoke an intimate sense of discovery, the excitement of an attic rather than the staged sublimity of great art. The visible-storage section compensates for the selectivity and minimal explanation of the permanent installation with a surfeit of artifacts and information. What is excluded by the two strategies, an elaborated historical narrative, is signaled by the marginal inclusion of one object, tucked in a corner on the way out of the permanent installation. An angel

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carved in 1886 by the Tsimshian artist Freddy Alexei for a Methodist baptismal font points to the elaborate story of culture contact, missions, colonization, and resistance that is told in Victoria.



The Royal British Columbia Museum's "black-box" installation creates a dark, wholly interior environment where sequence and viewpoint are controlled for explicitly didactic purposes. The UBC Museum of Anthropology offers a large open space, bathed in light, linked to smaller galleries, and accessible from more than one direction. While there is a preferred general route through the Museum of Anthropology, it is not a linear progress, and the permanent installation's message does not depend significantly on sequential passage. Attention is directed to the individual objects rather than to any narrative in which they are embedded. Developed historical contextualization is largely absent.

One of the indices of a historical approach, in contrast to an aesthetic one, is the systematic use of photographs, particularly in black-and-white or sepia. (Color photographs signal contemporaneity, black-and-white the past.) Historical photographs show the exhibited objects, or objects like them, in use, often including "impure" or "irrelevant" surroundings. Impressive shots of Northwest Coast Indian villages around the turn of the century reveal what are now often considered to be sculptures or artworks attached to and holding up houses. Sometimes a person in suspenders or high-button shoes can be seen on the boardwalk. Three of the four museums I am discussing make prominent use of old photos, sometimes dramatically enlarged. The UBC Museum of Anthropology, however, does not display any photographs at all in its permanent installation. This fact signals its distinctive strategy.

Although both the UBC and Victoria museums contextualize tribal objects in multiple ways, the dominant approaches of their permanent installations are strikingly different and complementary, one showing historical, the other aesthetic, process. The latter emphasis, at UBC, culminates in the rotunda area facing the visible-storage section, a space designed for Bill Reid's monumental carving *Raven and the First Men*, which depicts a Haida creation myth. Video programs document the production of this commissioned masterpiece; they also show the raising of a totem pole carved by Reid in the Queen Charlotte Islands and Nishga artist Norman Tait teaching young Native Americans to fashion a canoe.

Over the past decade, the UBC Museum of Anthropology and the Royal



Figure 5.6. Angel carved by Tsimshian artist Freddy Alexei in 1886 for a Methodist baptismal font. University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. Photo by James Clifford.

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British Columbia Museum have opened their collections and educational programs to Native American artists and cultural activists. Both their permanent and temporary Northwest Coast exhibitions reflect the currency of tribal art, culture, and politics. Although the extent of their response is limited and their modes of display and contextualization do not break sharply with traditional museum practices, the two museums are unusual in their sensitivity to the vitality and contestation of the traditions they document.

The Royal British Columbia Museum has for some time encouraged Native American artists to use its objects as models and has hired artists as staff members. It has commissioned new traditional works and loaned them out for ceremonial use. An open, functioning workshop greets visitors on their way into the museum, while the conclusion of the permanent Northwest Coast installation gives historical depth to current land-claim movements, a struggle spanning more than a century. The installation ends with a gallery of Haida argillite carving, explaining that the art form originated in contacts with white traders and that it has been lately revived. After documenting the loss and suppression of very sophisticated carving techniques and principles of composition, the exhibit ends with the statement: "Only recently have these principles been rediscovered and mastered. Contemporary Haida art is experiencing an inspired resurgence, and it is hoped that this exhibit will contribute to its rebirth."

The UBC Museum of Anthropology makes room for work by prominent twentieth-century artists—Reid and Davidson. In the museum theater, women from the nearby Musqueam band demonstrate their revived weaving techniques. Major shows are being planned in collaboration with Native American artists, and indigenous curators have been instrumental in past exhibitions.<sup>8</sup> White staff members at UBC speak of moving from a "colonial" to a "cooperative" museology. Whatever one's feeling about the obstacles to such a transition—the risks of liberal paternalism, the stubborn custodial power of the museum, an unwillingness to look critically at the history of specific acquisitions—it is rare to hear such priorities so clearly articulated by North American museum professionals.<sup>9</sup>

The Victoria and UBC exhibits show how a sense of cultural and political process can be introduced into two important current contexts for displaying tribal works: the historical and the aesthetic. But in roughly characterizing the two institutions, I have focused on their permanent installations, both planned in the early seventies, and not on their more diverse temporary exhibitions or their archival, research, and outreach

activities. In these more flexible areas, we can see a tendency to multiply explicit interpretive strategies, a trend characteristic of the changing and contested political context. For example, the familiar argument in major art and anthropology museums over the relative value of aesthetic versus scientific, formalist versus culturalist, presentations seems to be giving way to tactically mixed approaches. Some degree of cultural contextualization is present in all the museums I visited. So is an aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, the most formalist treatment in my sample occurs in an anthropology museum, with a resulting impression of art as cultural process.

Treatment of artifacts as fine art is currently one of the most effective ways to communicate cross-culturally a sense of quality, meaning, and importance.<sup>10</sup> This need not be done in ways that simply equate non-Western and Western aesthetic criteria. Each of the four museums, with its distinct mix of contextualization and narration, leaves open a possible aesthetic appreciation of the objects on display. Each evokes both local and global meanings for the interpretive categories (or translation devices) of art, culture, politics, and history.<sup>11</sup>



The two tribal museums in my collection suggest another comparative axis. Along this axis, the aesthetics-oriented UBC museum and the history-oriented Victoria museum are more alike than different, both sharing an aspiration to majority status and aiming at a cosmopolitan audience. By contrast, the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum are tribal institutions, aiming at local audiences and enmeshed in local meanings, histories, and traditions.

Viewed schematically, majority museums articulate cosmopolitan culture, science, art, and humanism—often with a national slant. Tribal museums express local culture, oppositional politics, kinship, ethnicity, and tradition. The general characteristics of the majority museum are, I think, pretty well known, since any art or ethnography collection that strives to be important must partake of them: (1) the search for the "best" art or most "authentic" cultural forms; (2) the interest in exemplary or representative objects; (3) the sense of owning a collection that is a treasure for the city, for the national patrimony, and for humanity; and (4) the tendency to separate (fine) art from (ethnographic) culture. Carol Duncan's (1991) study of the Louvre as the prototypical national museum provides some of the relevant genealogy (Horn, 1984; Coombes, 1988). The majority museum's attitude to what it considers the local museum's

"provincialism" and "limited" collection is familiar. The other side appears in a pointed comment about the UBC Museum of Anthropology by a staff member at one of the Kwagiulth tribal centers: "They've got a lot of stuff there, but they don't know much about it."

The tribal museum has different agendas: (1) its stance is to some degree oppositional, with exhibits reflecting excluded experiences, colonial pasts, and current struggles; (2) the art/culture distinction is often irrelevant, or positively subverted; (3) the notion of a unified or linear History (whether of the nation, of humanity, or of art) is challenged by local, community histories; and (4) the collections do not aspire to be included in the patrimony (of the nation, of great art, and so on) but aim to be inscribed within different traditions and practices, free of national, cosmopolitan patrimonies.

The oppositional predicament of tribal institutions is, however, more complex than this, and here the tribal experiences recall those of other minorities. The tribal or minority museum and artist, while locally based, may also aspire to wider recognition, to a certain national or global participation. Thus, a constant tactical movement is required: from margin to center and back again, in and out of dominant contexts, markets, patterns of success. Minority institutions and artists participate in the art-culture system, but with a difference. For example, the U'mista Cultural Centre produces and exploits familiar "museum effects" (Alpers, 1991). But as we shall see, it also questions them, historicizing and politicizing positions of viewing. On the one hand, then, no purely local or oppositional stance is possible or desirable for minority institutions. On the other, majority status is resisted, undercut by local, traditional, community attachments and aspirations. The result is a complex, dialectical hybridity, as Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (1991) shows for much contemporary Chicano art and culture. This mix of local and global agendas, of community, national, and international involvements, varies among tribal institutions, as will become apparent in the contrast between Cape Mudge Village and Alert Bay.



The Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre is conventional in appearance. Beyond the reception area and gift shop, one large semicircular room with a loft displays traditional artifacts in glass cases, along with carved house posts, a totem pole, and a suspended canoe. Downstairs, a basement room is used for audiovisual presentations and school and community

events. The overall aesthetic is modernist—clean-lined, brightly lit, uncluttered. Enlarged historical photographs of the region are distributed along the curving wall. A visitor from the city would not be immediately struck by anything unusual in this museum's style of display.

On closer inspection, anomalies appear. The masks in glass cases are labeled with a descriptive phrase or two, sometimes including the information: "Used in such-and-such a ceremony." As I pondered the museum's role in a living Native American community, the verb's tense became ambiguous. A question arose about the objects' current cultural or ceremonial use, a question I had never felt obliged to ask when viewing tribal artifacts in a metropolitan museum. Moreover, each label at the museum concludes with the phrase "owned by" and an individual's proper name. Are all the objects on loan to the museum? A question of property, never highlighted in such displays, is raised. In fact, the named owners are individual chiefs. The objects belong to specific families since, traditionally, there is no such thing as tribal property. Their current home in a tribal museum is the result of a political arrangement.

The objects displayed at the Kwagiulth Museum and at the U'mista Cultural Centre were forcibly acquired by the Canadian government in 1922 following a major "illegal" potlatch, the largest ever recorded in the region. The potlatch was hosted in late 1921 by Dan Cranmer (a Nimpkish from Alert Bay) in collaboration with his wife, Emma Cranmer, and her family (Mamalilikulla from Village Island, where the potlatch was held), assisted by Chief Billy Assu (a Lekwiltok of Cape Mudge Village). Over six days, Dan Cranmer distributed an impressive collection of goods to a large group of guests participating at the ceremony. Because the potlatch was held in winter at a remote location (Village Island is now uninhabited), it was hoped that even an occasion of this size could be hidden from the authorities. But the Indian agent at Alert Bay, William Halliday, a former Indian residential-school administrator imbued with civilizing zeal, learned of the event and decided that this would be a good opportunity to eradicate the "primitive," "excessive" potlatches in the region. Mobilizing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, he had the participants arrested, tried, and condemned to prison.

A deal was then offered. If those condemned and their relatives would formally renounce the potlatch and surrender their regalia—coppers, masks, rattles, whistles, headdresses, blankets, boxes—there would be no imprisonment. Some resisted and served their time. But many, demoralized and fearful that their kin would suffer, gave up the cherished artifacts,



Figure 5.7. Main gallery of the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre, Cape Mudge Village. Photo by James Clifford.

a priceless collection of more than 450 items that ended up in major museums in Ottawa and Hull, as well as in the Museum of the American Indian in New York. The authorities offered token payments, amounts bearing no relation to the objects' value in the native economy. (Coppers, for example—highly prized plaques worth many thousands of dollars because of their prestigious histories of exchange—were “bought” for less than fifty dollars.) The punishments and loss of regalia dealt a severe blow to the traditional community: large-scale exchanges disappeared, and ceremonial life and social ties were maintained with difficulty in the face of socioeconomic change and hostility from government, missions, and residential schools.<sup>12</sup>

But the lost treasures were remembered, and with legalization of the potlatch and a general cultural resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s a movement for repatriation emerged. It was all too clear that the artifacts had been acquired by coercion. Thus, after considerable discussion, the Museum of Man in Hull (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) agreed to their repatriation. The Royal Ontario Museum followed suit later. But certain conditions were imposed. The objects could not be given to individual chiefs and families, since it was feared that they would not be properly cared for or would be sold for large sums to private collectors. The regalia had to be housed in a fireproof tribal museum. There was disagreement, however, over where the museum should be built. In the years since 1922, the survivors of the great potlatch and their descendants had gathered in two Kwagiulth communities, Cape Mudge Village and Alert Bay. Eventually, with government and private funding, two museums were built and the repatriated objects divided between them. Family authorities who had a claim to specific objects decided where they would go. In case of dispute or uncertainty, the regalia was distributed following a principle of equal quantities to each locale.

The two museums are different in many respects: architecture, form of display, local political significance, range of activities, and reputation. The Umista Cultural Centre is part of a larger, more mobilized Kwagiulth community and the area around Alert Bay is home to a number of widely known Native American artists. The Centre functions as an artistic and cultural catalyst for the region and is also connected with the wider museum world of Vancouver, Victoria, and beyond. Its director, Gloria Cranmer Webster, daughter of Dan Cranmer, academically trained and an active participant in national and international forums, gives the center an outward-looking dynamism. By contrast, the Kwagiulth Museum and

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miko*

Cultural Centre on Quadra Island has an intimate, somewhat sleepy feel about it. Its cultural activities are more circumscribed and village-centered. It has not, like U'mista, produced widely circulated videos on the suppression of the potlatch or the return of the lost regalia.<sup>13</sup> The Kwagiulth Museum presents its treasured heritage simply, with brief explanations of the pieces' history and traditional meaning. It shows the people they belong to. Here the objects are not cultural property (as in the majority museums) or tribal property (as in the U'mista Cultural Centre) but rather individual (family) property. The objects are displayed in ways that emphasize their specificity and visual appearance. A visitor can, without much distraction, engage them as great art. In its general style of contextualization the Quadra Island museum is compatible with the UBC Museum of Anthropology, though its use of historic photographs adds a different dimension. And unlike either the Royal British Columbia installation or, as we shall see, that of the U'mista Cultural Centre, the display does not subsume individual objects in a larger historical narrative.

Objects here are family and community memorabilia. To an outsider, at least, a great part of their evocative power—beyond their formal, aesthetic values—is the simple fact of their being here, in Cape Mudge Village. In a local museum, “here” matters. Either one has traveled to get here, or one already lives here and recognizes an intimate heritage. Of course, every museum is a local museum: the Louvre is Parisian, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a characteristically New York establishment. But while major museums reflect their city and region, they aspire to transcend this specificity, to represent a national, international, or human heritage. At places like Cape Mudge Village and Alert Bay the surrounding community and history is inextricably part of the museum's impact. An outsider wonders about local involvement with the institution, what it means to band members. In Cape Mudge Village, kids ride up to the door on bikes; one wonders how often they go inside (to see a relative working behind the desk?). What do they think of the contents? What have they been taught about them? Questions like this do not immediately arise with regard to large metropolitan museums and their public. (Why? Taking tribal museums seriously forces the question. Why is it hard to see majority museums in terms of the imagined communities they serve and the local knowledges, aspiring to universality, that they express?)

Cape Mudge Village is a relatively prosperous fishing village. The wooden houses are strung out, one or two deep, facing the water, reminiscent of the Kwagiulth communities in the old photos. The museum

lines up beside the school, the cemetery, a church. A woman working in the gift shop responds to my comment about the band members' reactions to the regalia's return by saying, “Yes, it's nice for them to have the artifacts nearby.” (“Nearby” . . . A daily presence and feeling of kinship? A message of pride and local control? A remembered history of loss? What are the local meanings of her word “nearby”?) This specificity of meanings alters the perceptions of a visitor accustomed to majority museums' exhibits of tribal art and culture.



I become conscious of the change while in the gift shop of the Kwagiulth Museum. I notice that postcard photos by Edward Curtis are for sale there, sepia portraits of Kwagiulth men and women from the early part of the century. They are all too familiar to me. I know them from coffee-table books, from calendars (with titles like “Shadows”), from posters on dormitory walls. My first reaction is disappointment. Have I traveled all the way to Quadra Island to encounter these well-known, even stereotypical, faces? I know how staged many of the Curtis portraits are (Holm and Quimby, 1982; Lyman, 1982). Perhaps some of these people are wearing the wigs and costumes he carried with him and used to create a purified image. In any event, I strongly doubt that this man on a postcard—with a ring through his nose, wearing bark clothing, holding a copper—appeared that way in everyday life. Picking up a different postcard, I see a color portrait of a man wearing a vest decorated with buttons and a fur headdress with a carved face inlaid in abalone. On the back of the postcard the man is identified as “Kwakiutl chief Henry George of the Na-Kwa-Tok tribe in a Kla-sa-la (Peace) headgear at the opening of the Kwakiutl Museum, June 1979.” This is not Henry George's everyday appearance. I look again at the Curtis postcard and turn it over, expecting a caption like the one Curtis gave it: “Nakoaktok Chief and Copper.” That caption appears, in quotation marks, and is surrounded by other specifications: the Nakoaktok are identified as Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl); and the caption continues, “Hakalaht ('Overall'), the head chief, is holding the copper Wamistakila ('Takes Everything Out of the House'). The name of the copper refers to its great expense, which is valued at five thousand blankets.” Holding the Curtis portrait in Cape Mudge Village, I realize that it represents an individual, a named ancestor. What the image communicates here may be quite different from the exoticism and pathos registered by an audience of strangers.



Figure 5.8. Two postcards on sale in the gift shop of the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre, Cape Mudge Village. Courtesy of the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre.

Later I come across a similar revelation in Ruth Kirk's book *Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast*. A Hesquiaht/Nuu-Cha-Nulth elder, Alice Paul, looks at one of Edward Curtis' most striking images—a woman, in traditional bark clothing and basket with headband, staring out to sea—and sees her mother. Alice Paul's mother worked in a cannery while her husband shipped out on a sealing schooner. She was picked by Curtis because she was good at making the necessary bark clothes and baskets quickly. "I always see her picture . . . Every time I look at the books, she's there. But they never use her name, just 'Hesquiaht woman.' But I know her name. It's Virginia Tom."<sup>14</sup> (Kirk relocates the old image in a narrative of Hesquiaht/Nuu-Cha-Nulth women's accomplishments, juxtaposed with a contemporary photo of Virginia Tom's granddaughter, a graduate of the University of British Columbia law school. This is emphatically not Curtis' story.)

I'm unexpectedly reminded of Cape Mudge Village in the gift shop of the UBC Museum of Anthropology. An elderly man and a teenager are commenting on a catalogue about Musqueam weaving, searching in it for a picture of the girl's aunt. The Musqueam (Coast Salish) reserve is just a few kilometers away. They find the picture. After visiting the Kwagiulth Museum I can no longer forget the questions of kinship and ownership that must always surround objects, images, and stories collected from living traditions—questions elided in majority displays, where family relationships and local history are subsumed in the patrimony of Art or the synthetic narrative of History. But what is the ongoing significance of collected objects, images, and stories for Native American communities? For specific clans?

I'm not suggesting that the local connection is always present or meaningful, just that I can no longer ignore the issues of ownership and the histories of collecting that lie behind institutions such as the UBC Museum of Anthropology. Nor can I accept without pause the sweeping Northwest Coast emphasis at either the UBC or Victoria installations. It is true that something important is represented: a regional history and aesthetic achievement in process, on a scale sufficient to vie for importance and power in the national, cosmopolitan milieu of the majority museum. But something is missed: a density of local meanings, memories, reinvented histories.

Revisiting the Museum of Anthropology, I recognize local meanings in a temporary show installed in the theater, "Proud to be Musqueam."<sup>15</sup> Its opening case contains an enlarged photo of band elders and small children

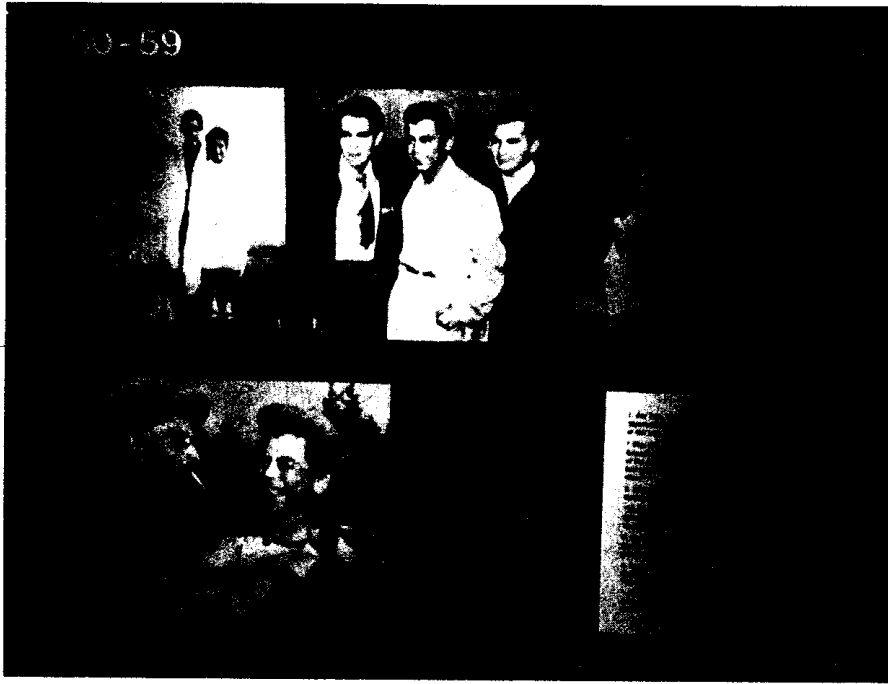


Figure 5.9. Section of the "Proud to be Musqueam" exhibition, August 1988, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. The text reads:

1. Joe Dan, Howard Grant, May Roberts, Wendy (Sparrow) Grant, Eileen (Charles) Williams. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Dan. "This is a really nice picture. It's one of my favorites. This is a picture of confirmation. In a lot of the families they had to go to first communion. Church was a big thing then."

2. Bill Guerin, Johnny Sparrow, Andrew Charles. Courtesy the *Vancouver Sun*. "They were the first elected chief and council at Musqueam and the youngest in Canada. The picture was in the *Vancouver Sun*."

3. Matilda Cole, mother of Ed Sparrow; Lloyd Dan, son of Vernon and Elizabeth Dan; Alice Louie, grandmother of Lloyd and Joe Dan.

4. James Point, father of Tony Point and Johnny Sparrow, son of Rose and Ed Sparrow. Courtesy the *Vancouver Sun*. "James Point is signing over the chieftainship. Johnny Sparrow's the next chief. The photo was also in the *Vancouver Sun*."

Photo by James Clifford.

in 1988, a blanket woven by Barbara Cayou in 1987, and a piece of basket three thousand years old. The main exhibit is a sequence of photos documenting the band's history from the late nineteenth century to the present. The exhibit's Musqueam curators, Verna Kenoras and Leila Stogan, consulted with band elders and amassed more than 150 photographs. They have displayed their selection chronologically, making sure that each extended family on the reserve is represented. Labels are composed in the first person, and individuals in the photos are identified by name and family relation ("son of," "daughter of"). For a pre-1900 image, the curators write: "We weren't so lucky with this picture, because we didn't have the names of any of the ladies. That was really sad." According to museum staff, the exhibit's comment book registers an unusual level of interest from an international public, with reactions often addressed directly to the curators. When it leaves the Museum of Anthropology, the exhibit will be housed permanently in the Musqueam Elders' Center.



Photographs and texts also construct history at the entrance to the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay:

The Kwagu'l chiefs were discussing the creation of their ancestors while waiting for the second course of a feast given by one of the chiefs of Tsaxis. At first no one spoke for a while. Then Malid spoke, saying, "It is the Sun, our chief, who created our ancestors of all the tribes." And when the others asked him how this was possible, for the Sun never made even one man, the chief was silent. Others said, it is the Mink, Tlisalagi'lakw, who made our first ancestors. Then spoke great-inviter, saying, "Listen Kwagu'l, and let me speak a really true word. I see it altogether mistaken what the others say, for it was the Seagull who first became man by taking off his mask and turning into a man. This was the beginning of one of the groups of our tribe. And the others were caused when the Sun, and Grizzly Bear, and Thunderbird also took off their masks. That is the reason that we Kwagu'l are many groups, for each group had its own original ancestor."

A chief visiting from Nawitti disagreed, and the Kwagu'l of all four groups became angry. For the Nawitti believe that the Transformer (or Creator) went about creating the first ancestors of all the tribes from people who already existed. But the chiefs of the Kwagu'l scoffed at this, saying, "Do not say that the Transformer was the creator of all the tribes. Indeed, he just came and did mischief to men, when he made him into a raccoon, land otter, and deer, for he only transformed them into

animals. We of the Kwagu'l know that our ancestors were the Seagull, Sun, Grizzly Bear, and Thunderbird." (Adapted from a discussion recorded by George Hunt, 1903)

This text is one of a dozen displayed along the entry corridor, where creation stories are paired with old village photographs (in this case "Taxis, Fort Rupert, Kwagu'l," by Edward Dossetter, 1881). The pairings represent each of the principal native communities of the region, whether currently inhabited or not. The impression, as in the text just cited, is of difference and debate, diversity within a shared social and linguistic context (the feast and discussion). Introducing the paired photos and texts, the center's opening statement directly challenges the way these different but related peoples have been identified by outsiders: "Ever since the white people first came to our lands, we have been known as the Kwawkw'w'aths by Indian Affairs or as the Kwakiutl by anthropologists. In fact, we are the Kwakwaka'wakw, people who speak the same language, but who live in different places and have different names for our separate groups." And introducing the origin stories, the statement ends with a strong claim:

Each group of people on earth has its own story of how it came to be. As Bill Reid says in his prologue to *Indian Art of the Northwest Coast*: "In the world today, there is a commonly held belief that, thousands of years ago, as the world counts time, Mongolian nomads crossed a land bridge to enter the western hemisphere, and became the people now known as the American Indians. There is, it can be said, some scant evidence to support the myth of the land bridge. But there is an enormous wealth of proof to confirm that the other truths are all valid." These are some of our truths.

From the outset the U'mista Cultural Centre strikes an oppositional note, highlighting the politics of identity (conflict over the right to name, circumscribe, and essentialize specific groups) and of history (discordant true stories about where a people has come from and is going; the conflict of scientific history and local myth or political genealogy). From the outset, the power to reclaim and recontextualize texts and objects "collected" by outside authorities is demonstrated. Many of the creation stories quoted in the entryway are "adapted from Boas and Hunt, *Kwakiutl Texts*, 1903-1906." The gleanings of "salvage ethnography" are recycled, part of a renewed articulation of Kwakwaka'wakw identity and authority.

At the end of the long entry corridor, the visitor enters the "Potlatch

more  
more  
more  
same



Figure 5.10. The potlatch collection along one wall of the big-house gallery, U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay. Photo by James Clifford.

Collection" in its big-house setting. Here the regalia from Dan Cranmer's great potlatch are displayed around the walls of a large room in the approximate order of their appearance at the ceremony. At the door, one reads two recollections by elders who were present at the surrender of the objects in 1922:

And my uncle took me to the Parish Hall, where the chiefs were gathered. Odan picked up a rattle and spoke. "We have come to say goodbye to our life"; then he began to sing his sacred song. All of the chiefs, standing in a circle around their regalia, were weeping, as if someone had died. (James Charles King, Alert Bay, 1977)

My father took a large copper, it is still there. He took a large copper and paid our way out of gaol. For the white people didn't know that it was worth a lot of money. They didn't believe that it was expensive.

Every one alive on earth has a story of their people; this is now part of our story, that we went to gaol for nothing.

There was no end to the things that Dan Cranmer did; even if people wanted it to end, it will be remembered. (George Glendale, Alert Bay, October 19, 1975)

In the dark big-house room, spotlights illuminate the regalia. The smell of wood is pervasive. Massive cedar beams and posts support a high ceiling. The objects on display are bolted to iron stands on raised platforms against the walls—which is where, at an actual potlatch, the audience would sit. (Patrick Houlihan [1991] remarks that sometimes it seems as if the artifacts are observing us.) Two large doors at the far end of the room can be opened on ceremonial occasions, giving direct access to the beach. Although the big house is primarily a museum (there's no smoke hole, and security cameras are mounted atop the great beams), the room can be used for other purposes. Elders teach young children songs and stories. Dance groups meet here (one notes a large log for rhythm pounding that is mounted on casters). And an elaborate Maori carving lying on a bench recalls a recent transpacific encounter in which a Maori delegation was received at the center.

Inside the big-house gallery the atmosphere is intimate; no glass separates observer from observed. The regalia, massed in a ritual procession, function as a group with a collective tale to tell. While it is possible to admire their individual formal properties, aesthetic attention is interrupted by historical and political discourses. (Indeed, some critics of the display find that its crowded presentation and lighting style do not bring out either the objects' formal strengths or the way they would appear at a potlatch, dramatic in the firelight.) Here coppers, masks, and rattles represent a very specific potlatch. Any other uses and meanings the objects may have had for their owners are subsumed (as are their owners' individual names) by the history of Dan Cranmer's ceremony and the regalia's return. *U'mista* is a Kwak'wala term denoting a state of luck or good fortune enjoyed by those captured in war who manage to return home safely.

Visitors to the exhibit learn about the 1921 potlatch, the surrounding climate of repression, and local memories of this history. The information is conveyed by interspersed quotations from oral testimonies and the historical archive. Contrary to a guiding rule of aesthetically oriented presentation, visitors are offered a good deal to read in close proximity to the objects. And in contrast to familiar ethnographic contextualizations, the objects are not specifically labeled or located by function (as they are at the other three museums). Indeed, they are not labeled at all, in the

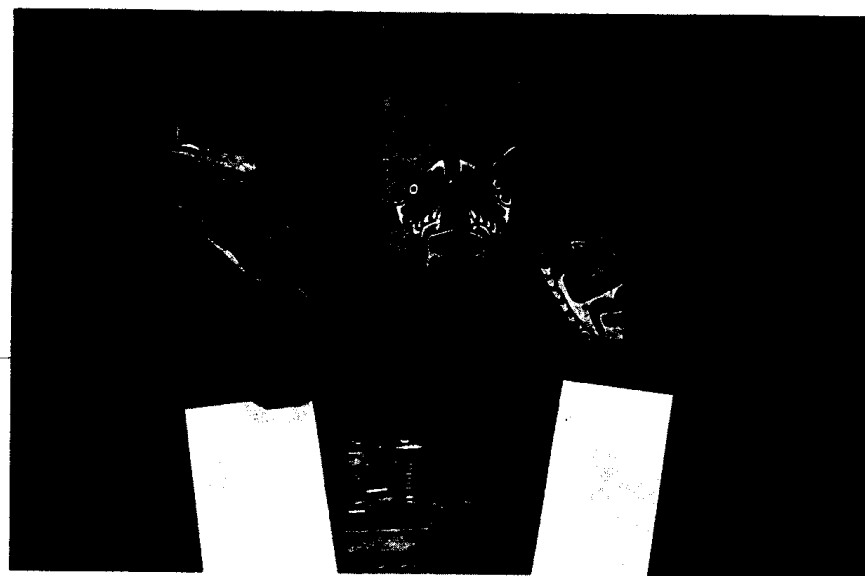


Figure 5.11. Masks from the potlatch collection with historical texts, U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay. Photo by James Clifford.

usual referential sense. Instead, large white cards are propped on the platform among the regalia, bearing texts and quotations selected by Kwagiulth community members. The cards include recent reminiscences by elders; quotations from the Indian agent Halliday's reports, paternalistic in tone; descriptions by other agents and missionaries of "heathen" customs; a 1919 petition by chiefs protesting the suppression of the potlatch (they note the economic loss to those possessing important coppers, listed by name and dollar value, and ask to be left alone); a message to Franz Boas from a Kwagiulth chief (essentially, "if you come to change our customs then leave; if not, you're welcome"); a quotation from a 1922 letter by the Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies (pointing out that Dr. Boas is an American; he should mind his own business and not get mixed up with defending potlatches); and so forth. The texts are powerfully evocative: voices from a troubled past that provoke curiosity, admiration, dismay, regret, anger . . . One of the briefer cards deserves quotation in full:

I am returning to you cheque N. 3799 for \$22.00 in favor of Abraham which he refuses to accept for his paraphernalia as he says the sum is absolutely too small for the paraphernalia he surrendered. He wants me



to tell you that he would rather give them to you for nothing than accept \$22.00 for them.

Most of the other cheques have been paid out to the Indians and while some have thought the price very small, they have accepted them. (W. M. Halliday, Indian Agent, Kwawkwalth Agency, Alert Bay, May 1, 1923)

With regard to the cheque for \$22.00 in favor of Abraham, I am returning it herewith and would ask you to request him to accept this amount. All these articles are now in the museum and the valuation was fixed by officials of that institution. (Duncan C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, May 16, 1923)

Michael Baxandall (1991) reminds us that labels are not properly speaking, descriptions of the objects to which they refer. Rather, they are interpretations that serve to open a meaningful space between the object's maker, its exhibitor, and its viewer, with the last-named given the task of intentionally actively building cultural translations and critical meanings. In the U'mista Cultural Centre's big house, the space between label and object has been widened dramatically, thus openly soliciting the viewer's constructive role. No relationship of direct reference remains between text and artifact. Evidence of an important story about the objects has simply been brought nearby. While reacting to the visually evocative carvings, the visitor pieces together a history. Since the objects' very visibility and presence here are inextricably tangled in that history, the objects themselves can never be treated as icons of pure art or culture. The display's effect, on me at least, was of powerful storytelling, a practice *implicating* its audience. Here the implication was political and historical. I was not permitted simply to admire or comprehend the regalia. They embarrassed, saddened, inspired, and angered me—responses that emerged in the evocative space between objects and texts.

There are, of course, at least two principal audiences for the exhibit. For local Native people, the display tells their history from their standpoint, drawing on oral memory as well as archival sources. (The resulting history may be contestable in some particulars by other groups of Kwakwaka'wakw, as we shall see.) Overall, a message of hope and pride is salvaged from tragedy. The simple presence of the regalia in Alert Bay is a sign of cultural resilience and an open-ended future, confirming George Glendale's feeling that "there was no end to the things that Dan Cranmer did." But a casual visitor can only guess at Native responses. I wonder what effects are felt when the printed cards propped in the big-house

gallery are removed. And what about those visitors who have not internalized what Baxandall calls the "museum set"? How does the museum as Kwakwaka'wakw "box of treasures" continue and transform traditional forms of wealth, accumulation, collecting, and display?<sup>16</sup> What stories do these objects tell and retell? I know very little about how this exhibition instructs and implicates diverse indigenous audiences. What is being communicated? What specific tribal authority is displayed here?

For outsiders such as myself and white Canadians of the region, the exhibit tells our history, too. It is a history of colonization and exploitation for which we, to the extent we participate in the dominant culture and an ongoing history of inequality, bear responsibility. We encounter an informing and a shaming discourse. Any purely contemplative stance is challenged by the unsettling mélange of aesthetic, cultural, political, and historical messages. This history forces a sense of location on those who engage with it, contributing to the white person's feeling of being looked at. The historical display at the U'mista Cultural Centre is thus markedly different from the historical installation at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, which has the sweep, the nonoppositional completeness, characteristic of majority History. To identify an object as "used in the potlatch" is not the same as showing it to be property from a specific potlatch and part of an ongoing cultural struggle. The narratives of (objective) History and (political) genealogy do not coincide.

The difference between the guiding emphasis at UBC (majority, aesthetic) and at U'mista (tribal, historical) should be equally clear. To portray an object as fine art in an ongoing Northwest Coast tradition downplays its role as contested value in a local history of appropriation and reclamation. The objects in the U'mista collection of potlatch items are community treasures, not works of art. But while the two emphases do not coincide, neither do they entirely exclude each other. I have said that one of the most effective current ways to give cross-cultural value (moral and commercial) to a cultural production is to treat it as art. In the temporary galleries following the big-house room at the U'mista Cultural Centre, old and especially new art is displayed, including transitional work from the 1940s and 1950s by master carver Chief Willie Seaweed of Blunden Harbour.<sup>17</sup> (At the UBC Museum, although both old and new art are featured, the historical links between them are downplayed: there is no work by Willie Seaweed or Mungo Martin, a bit by Charles Edenshaw.) All of the art represented at Alert Bay retains a strong historical cast. And it is difficult to separate art from culture in a print of a killer whale by



Figure 5.12. Masks from the potlatch collection, U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay. Photo by James Clifford.

Tony Hunt, which contains a statement of the work's destination for use in a potlatch. In one display area, two recent acquisitions are juxtaposed: an old mask and an antique sewing machine, the latter identified as belonging to Mary Ebbets Hunt, Anisalaga, 1823–1919, originally from Alaska and wife of the Hudson's Bay agent in Fort Rupert. Her handsome machine more than holds its own among the artworks while recalling an important lineage. (Mary Ebbets Hunt was the mother of George Hunt, Franz Boas' collaborator and an ancestor of many important Kwagiulth community members.)<sup>18</sup>

The different cultural and political inflections of art and history in Vancouver, Victoria, Cape Mudge Village, and Alert Bay do not preclude overlap and communication. The museums have cooperated since the early 1980s, sharing curatorial expertise and exhibits. One of my aims in bringing out the strengths and limitations of majority and tribal institutions has been to argue that none can completely cover or control the important meanings and contexts generated by the objects they display. Thus, exchange and complementarity, rather than hierarchy, ideally should

characterize their institutional relations. Of course, there are real obstacles to such relations: inequities in endowment, prestige, access to funding. But as tribal perspectives gain in national visibility, and as majority collections lose their claim to completeness and universality, it is to be hoped that institutional relationships will reflect the changes.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of tribal museums and cultural centers makes possible an effective repatriation and circulation of objects long considered to be unambiguously "property" by metropolitan collectors and curators. The idea of majority institutions such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Museum of the American Indian representing Native American cultures to the nation as a whole is increasingly questionable. So is the very existence of elaborate, enormously valuable, noncirculating collections. With better professional communication, with the manifest ability of local communities to do sophisticated, different things with artifacts from their heritage, and with the increased ability of citizens (and research scientists) to visit remote places, even the dominant scientific and political rationales for centralized collections may be questioned on their own terms. A more diverse, interesting, and fair distribution of cultural "property" should be actively encouraged by governmental agencies and private funding sources.

After visiting the U'mista Cultural Centre, I found myself reacting impatiently to accounts of protracted negotiations over the fate of the Museum of the American Indian and its cavernous Bronx warehouse bursting with Native American artifacts, most of which have never been, and may never be, displayed. Should this major, "irreplaceable" collection be attached to the American Museum of National History, subsumed by the Smithsonian Institution, or located in the Customs House in lower Manhattan? Should H. Ross Perot be allowed to move it to Texas? Does it belong to New York State? Or is it a national treasure that belongs on the Mall in Washington? (Eventually it was decided to create a new museum at the Smithsonian and use the Customs House as an adjunct.) Reading about the many millions of dollars being raised to save this unwieldy collection, I couldn't forget that the Alert Bay and Cape Mudge Village museums must constantly struggle to obtain grants for the most basic operating costs, thus diverting energy from community projects. Several large crumbs from the tables in New York and Washington could support them and dozens of emerging tribal museums. A worse irony: somewhere in the cavernous Bronx warehouse are thirty-three pieces of regalia from the Village Island potlatch. George Heye, the ever-acquisitive architect of

the New York collection, bought them from W. M. Halliday in Alert Bay. (A card in the U'mista Cultural Centre display documents this purchase for an "excellent price," remitted to Ottawa. Halliday is reprimanded by his superiors for losing the pieces, seen as *Canada's* loss.) To date, the Museum of the American Indian has refused to return these last missing regalia (Webster, 1988).



Having contrasted the majority institutions in my collection with each other and with the tribal centers, I would like to suggest some differences between the two tribal museums. The U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum on Quadra Island adopt quite different strategies for displaying their shares of the returned regalia. In Alert Bay, the permanent exhibit represents the colonial history of the potlatch and particularly the story of Dan Cranmer's great ceremony of 1921 on Village Island. In Cape Mudge Village, this history is recounted but not featured; the name "Cranmer" has no prominence. In Alert Bay, a dozen or so Kwak'waka-speaking communities and origin stories are invoked, and the Cranmer potlatch story comes to stand for their common colonial history. The home to which the regalia have returned is a broad Kwakwaka'wakw unity-in-difference—a "tribal" unity forged by a common culture and history of alliance, oppression, and collective resistance.

In Cape Mudge Village, the word *Kwagiulth* in the museum's name refers to a broader unity and to a limited group of families. The home to which the objects have been repatriated is a community composed of named chiefs and families with continuous claims to specific objects. In his recently published memoir, Chief Harry Assu (a Lekwiltok) of Cape Mudge Village expresses the two agendas:

Here at Cape Mudge we set up the Nuyumbalees Society to get a museum going and bring back the potlatch regalia. We chose the name Kwagiulth Museum because we wanted it to be for all our people, not just our Lekwiltok tribe. At Cape Mudge we are located where all people can easily call on their way down from our northern villages to the city—Victoria or Vancouver. It's a good place for getting together. *Nuyumbalees* means "the beginning of all legends." The legends are the history of our families. That is why our chiefs show our dances in the potlatch, so that our legends are passed on to the people. (Assu and Inglis, 1989: 106)

Harry Assu portrays the museum as primarily a site of gathering and a place for display of family histories within a diverse larger unity now denoted by the term *Kwagiulth*. Objects in the returned collection are linked to empowering family stories; they are shown in a manner analogous to the way dances are performed in the potlatch.<sup>20</sup> The audience for the museum is *Kwagiulth*, and the institution is conceived within a distinct idiom and practice of ownership, rights, and display. The museum institution, imposed as a condition of repatriation, has been reconceived in traditional *Kwagiulth* terms. Harry Assu continues: "It has all worked out pretty well. All our stuff that was brought back from Ottawa is in glass cases in the museum according to the family that owns them. That's what the masks and other things mean to us: family ownership. We are proud of that! It tells our family rights to the people. With our people you don't talk about what rights and dances you've got; you call the people and show them in the potlatch" (Assu and Inglis, 1989: 106).

The museum speaks for family rights to the (*Kwagiulth*) people. It does not foreground the different goals of speaking for all the *Kwagiulth* to one another and to a nontribal audience. The museum's primary role, in Chief Assu's account, is the expression of local family pride and rights—in objects, stories, dances, political authority. This is the prime significance of the exhibition design organized by family ownership.

Similar family claims exist in Alert Bay, but they are not featured in the U'mista display. Reflecting the fact that after sixty years there are conflicts over proper family attribution (not everyone agrees with all the *Kwagiulth* Museum's labels), the U'mista Cultural Centre asserts ownership at a broader level: the objects appear in the museum as treasures and historical witnesses for the Kwakwaka'wakw. In effect, the U'mista Cultural Centre aspires to a kind of majority status within the dispersed but emerging tribal unity formerly called the Southern Kwakiutl.

Perhaps we can distinguish cosmopolitan and local emphases within the shared spectrum of tribal institutions, emphases that suggest somewhat different audiences, aspirations, and politics. The U'mista Cultural Centre is both a community center (with oral-history, language, video, and education programs) and an outward-looking institution (producer of programs for wide distribution, collaborator with majority museums on traveling shows, and the like). The U'mista Society shares the aims of the Cape Mudge Nuyumbalees Society in its capacity as community catalyst and as site of storage and display for objects and histories of tribal power and significance. It also acts in the wider world of museums. For example,

its tenth-anniversary exhibit on the crucial work of Mungo Martin during the worst decades of oppression will travel to Cape Mudge Village, Victoria, and UBC, as well as several other museums in Canada and possibly the United States. Gloria Cranmer Webster, as center director, has a background of collaboration with majority institutions in Victoria and with UBC.<sup>21</sup> And the center involves prominent local artists, notably Hunts and Cranmers, whose audiences reach well beyond Vancouver Island.

The U'mista Cultural Centre also appropriates majority anthropological tradition. Franz Boas, the white authority who put "Kwakiutl" on the social-scientific map, figures as a kind of house anthropologist. His collected Kwakiutl texts are adapted and quoted; he emerges as an ally in the potlatch exhibit. A "family" tie runs through Boas' ethnographic collaborator, George Hunt, grandfather of the important Kwagiulth artist Henry Hunt, many of whose family now live and work in Alert Bay and nearby Fort Rupert. In 1986 the U'mista Cultural Centre organized a reunion attended by thirty-four members of the Boas family, including Franz Boas' daughter, Franziska, and many Hunt descendants. Among the gifts exchanged were copies of correspondence between George Hunt and Franz Boas. Pursuing these Boas contacts, the center has tracked down early recordings of local songs, currently held in remote places such as Washington, D.C., and Indiana.<sup>22</sup> Salvage anthropology is repatriated.

The Quadra Island museum does not range as widely. It does not, like the U'mista Centre, portray its collection as Kwakwaka'wakw art, history, and myth, thus reclaiming in a new context the scope of Boas' "Kwakiutl" culture. Its aims are more modest, and even, in certain areas, implicitly critical of the U'mista agenda. The fact that Dan Cranmer's potlatch is highlighted in a museum directed by his daughter cannot be politically neutral. Indeed, authorities from other Kwagiulth families have taken somewhat different views of the Village Island potlatch, its animating personalities, and its continuing significance. The leading role of the Cranmers, the Hunts, and the U'mista Cultural Centre has not gone unquestioned.

At the end of the potlatch sequence in Alert Bay, we read the following testimony: "When he came home your father (Dan Cranmer) was dressed like this, bare feet in his shoes. He gave away everything. He did everything at once, to make us proud. At one time, to do all the different great things among our people. Others did one thing at a time; he was the only one who did it all at one time, because his wife was a wise woman" (Agnes Alfred, Alert Bay, 1975). The praise for Dan Cranmer is complicated by a

final phrase giving credit to his wife. The phrase, enigmatic to an outsider, is elaborated in a book by Agnes Alfred's granddaughter Daisy (My-yah-nelth) Sewid Smith, *Prosecution or Persecution*, published in connection with the opening of the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre in 1979. The book, which contains accounts by potlatch participants Agnes Alfred and Herbert Martin describing their imprisonment, portrays the Village Island ceremony as collaborative work by three families, the Cranmers (Nimpkish) of Alert Bay, the Mamalilikulla nobility of Village Island, and Chief Billy Assu, a Lekwiltok of Cape Mudge Village. Daisy Sewid Smith's account gives the initiating role in the affair to Dan Cranmer's wife, Emma Cranmer, and her family. A large quantity of goods and money was gathered by Emma Cranmer's relatives and Billy Assu to facilitate Dan Cranmer's marriage repayments. Cranmer also received help from his own family (Agnes Alfred and others) to make possible the great giveaway. In Daisy Sewid Smith's version of the Village Island ceremony, Dan Cranmer appears as a central participant in a collaborative event, not as its leader. Her account brings into prominence the organizing role of Emma Cranmer and her sense of deep responsibility and guilt for those who went to prison. (She was spared, since her Nimpkish family-by-marriage surrendered their regalia.)

According to Daisy Sewid Smith, her father, Chief James Sewid, initiated the repatriation process. He insisted that Ottawa should "remember that these artifacts belonged to individual chiefs, not the tribe, and no one had the right to speak for it." A committee of elders representing the families principally involved decided that the required museum should be built at Cape Mudge Village. "Later certain members of the Nimpkish Band changed this and wanted it to be in Alert Bay. So it was decided to have two museums and that each family decide where they wanted their artifacts displayed" (Smith, 1979: 3). The division of the artifacts between two museums was not accomplished without disagreement over the proper way to commemorate the Village Island potlatch and to display its regalia. *Prosecution or Persecution* counterbalances any appearance of Nimpkish prominence.<sup>23</sup>

I have mentioned briefly the family histories active in the aftermath of the great potlatch and in the creation of the two museums. My intention in opening up issues I can only begin to understand is not to assert the truth of one version of events over another, or the authenticity of one museum relative to another; I want simply to make visible to outsiders the complexity that is hidden behind words such as "local," "tribal," and

“community.” For it is too easy to speak about “local history,” the “tribe,” or the “community” as if these were not differently interpreted and often contested. We need to keep in mind the constitutive disagreement featured in the Kwagiulth creation story quoted above—emblematic of a vital diversity within a shared culture and history.<sup>24</sup>

It would be wrong, indeed, to overstate the rivalries. The communities formerly called Southern Kwakiutl are united by a strong sense of common history, culture, kinship, and ongoing oppression. The sense of a broader Kwakwaka'wakw identity represented at the U'mista Cultural Centre is a strong reality. And wider still, the domain of Northwest Coast culture and cooperation is itself an important tribal force. (A painting by Bill Reid is displayed at the U'mista Cultural Centre; the Nimpkish Doug Cranmer worked with the Haida Bill Reid on the houses and poles behind the UBC Museum of Anthropology.) At an even more global level, the alliances of postcolonial and “Fourth World” politics impinge. The name of a women's video crew at the U'mista Cultural Centre, the Salmonistas, puns on “salmon” and “Sandinista,” in reference to Alert Bay's sister relationship with a Nicaraguan fishing village. There are plans for a Kwagiulth visit to New Zealand, reciprocating the recent Maori delegation.



I returned from British Columbia with a more complex sense of distinct, but interrelated, contexts for displaying and circulating Northwest Coast artifacts. Each of the four museums is caught up in shifting power relations and competing articulations of local and global meanings. Tribal identity and power have always been fashioned through alliances, debates, and exchanges—between local communities and, since the mid-nineteenth century, with intrusive whites. These processes continue in contemporary cultural life. And as institutions such as the two Kwagiulth centers gain in visibility, escaping a merely local or minor status, they challenge the global visions embodied in the major collections. Simultaneously they function as cultural centers, sites for community education, mobilization, and the continuity of tradition. Majority museums, cosmopolitan institutions for telling inclusive stories about art and culture, begin to appear as more limited national institutions, rooted in specific metropolitan centers. These “centers” are themselves the products of powerful cultures and histories, now contested and decentered by other cultures and histories. The effects of this decentering are beginning to be felt in the major

museums of Victoria and Vancouver. How much they respond and how quickly remains to be seen.

On the Northwest Coast, as elsewhere, the economies and institutions of the modern nation-state have systematically exploited, repressed, and marginalized the traditional cultures of native peoples. An unequal struggle over economic, cultural, and political power goes on, continuous in many respects from the days of Dan Cranmer's potlatch of 1921. But at least one thing has changed. It has become widely apparent in the dominant culture that many Native American populations whose cultures were officially declared moribund, who were “converted” to Christianity, whose cultural traditions were “salvaged” in textual collections such as that of Boas and Hunt, whose “authentic” artifacts were massively collected a century ago, have not disappeared. In some parts of their life dramatically changed, in others profoundly connected to tradition and place, these tribal groups continue to resist, reckon with, adapt to, and ignore the claims of the dominant culture. Exploitation—substandard schools, inferior health care, poor job prospects—continues in many places. So does political resistance and the crucial resource of a strong, supple tradition.

On Vancouver Island, the potlatch is back; so are most of the regalia confiscated in 1922. But at a price: objects illegally taken were not directly returned to the families that owned them. Rather, a museum, and in the end two museums, were imposed. It is hard to imagine a more Western, metropolitan, elite institution. Yet we have seen that it, too, can be taken over and displaced. Notice, for example, what happens to the word “museum” in a passage by Chief Harry Assu. He is evoking the Kwagiulth Museum's opening ceremony of 1979 (an event similar in spirit to the event inaugurating the U'mista Cultural Centre in 1980—recorded in the center's film *Box of Treasures*): “The Spirit of Dancing, referred to as *Klassila*, had been imprisoned in Ottawa for many years and was now being released to the Kwagiulth people. The Power of the Spirit was symbolically thrown from ship to shore, where it was ‘caught’ and set the catcher dancing. He in turn hurled the spirit across the beach and through the museum doors. The spirit had entered the ceremonial house (museum).”

*Paradise*

Figure 6.1. James Bosu at the height of the Sekaka Pig Festival, 1979. From O'Hanlon (1993), Plate 7.

You are walking up a ramp—wheelchair access—into a place called “Paradise.” There is a subtitle: “Continuity and Change in the New Guinea Highlands.” This is the Museum of Mankind, Mayfair, London. A six-foot color photo awaits you at the top of the ramp. A genial-looking man stands casually in front of a corrugated iron wall and frame window; he wears a striped apron of some commercial material, exotic accoutrements, and a gigantic headdress of red and black feathers. His face is painted black and red; a bright white substance is smeared across his chest. He looks straight at you, with a kind of smile. Arrows, on either side of the image, point left.

You follow the arrows into a light, open gallery with curving walls and raised display platforms, several spaces flowing into one another. A feeling of calm: gentle music (flutes, voices, Jew's harp), colored objects in front of soft painted landscapes, uncluttered . . . a high valley. Paradise.

A small space near the entry contains background information on the Wahgi Valley. Photographs show a street scene, a contemporary house, a netted bag whose design is based on the flag of Papua New Guinea. There is information on social structure, contact with Australian explorers in the 1920s, and the traditional livelihood. Change is there from the start: “Sweet potato, the staple food today of both the Wahgi and the herds of pigs they raise, probably only arrived in the area a few hundred years ago, with as profound effects as the recent adoption of the cash crop of coffee.”