

There is a Third World in every First World, and vice-versa.

—TRINH T. MINH-HA, "DIFFERENCE," *DISCOURSE* 8

10. On Collecting Art and Culture

THIS CHAPTER is composed of four loosely connected parts, each concerned with the fate of tribal artifacts and cultural practices once they are relocated in Western museums, exchange systems, disciplinary archives, and discursive traditions. The first part proposes a critical, historical approach to collecting, focusing on subjective, taxonomic, and political processes. It sketches the "art-culture system" through which in the last century exotic objects have been contextualized and given value in the West. This ideological and institutional system is further explored in the second part, where cultural description is presented as a form of collecting. The "authenticity" accorded to both human groups and their artistic work is shown to proceed from specific assumptions about temporality, wholeness, and continuity. The third part focuses on a revealing moment in the modern appropriation of non-Western works of "art" and "culture," a moment portrayed in several memoirs by Claude Lévi-Strauss of his wartime years in New York. A critical reading makes explicit the redemptive metahistorical narrative these memoirs presuppose. The general art-culture system supported by such a narrative is contested

throughout the chapter and particularly in the fourth part, where alternative “tribal” histories and contexts are suggested.

Collecting Ourselves

Entering

You will find yourself in a climate of nut castanets,

A musical whip

From the Torres Straits, from Mirzapur a sistrum

Called Jumka, “used by Aboriginal

Tribes to attract small game

On dark nights,” coolie cigarettes

And mask of Saagga, the Devil Doctor,

The eyelids worked by strings.

James Fenton’s poem “The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford” (1984:81–84), from which this stanza is taken, rediscovers a place of fascination in the ethnographic collection. For this visitor even the museum’s descriptive labels seem to increase the wonder (“ . . . attract small game / on dark nights”) and the fear. Fenton is an adult-child exploring territories of danger and desire, for to be a child in this collection (“Please sir, where’s the withered / Hand?”) is to ignore the serious admonitions about human evolution and cultural diversity posted in the entrance hall. It is to be interested instead by the claw of a condor, the jaw of a dolphin, the hair of a witch, or “a jay’s feather worn as a charm / in Buckinghamshire.” Fenton’s ethnographic museum is a world of intimate encounters with inexplicably fascinating objects: personal fetishes. Here collecting is inescapably tied to obsession, to recollection. Visitors “find the landscape of their childhood marked out / Here in the chaotic piles of souvenirs . . . boxroom of the forgotten or hardly possible.”

Go

As a historian of ideas or a sex-offender,

For the primitive art,

As a dusty semiologist, equipped to unravel

The seven components of that witch’s curse

Or the syntax of the mutilated teeth. Go

In groups to giggle at curious finds.

But do not step into the kingdom of your promises

To yourself, like a child entering the forbidden
Woods of his lonely playtime.

Do not step in this tabooed zone “laid with the snares of privacy and fiction / And the dangerous third wish.” Do not encounter these objects except as *curiosities* to giggle at, *art* to be admired, or *evidence* to be understood scientifically. The tabooed way, followed by Fenton, is a path of too-intimate fantasy, recalling the dreams of the solitary child “who wrestled with eagles for their feathers” or the fearful vision of a young girl, her turbulent lover seen as a hound with “strange pretercanine eyes.” This path through the Pitt Rivers Museum ends with what seems to be a scrap of autobiography, the vision of a personal “forbidden woods”—exotic, desired, savage, and governed by the (paternal) law:

He had known what tortures the savages had prepared
For him there, as he calmly pushed open the gate
And entered the wood near the placard: “TAKE NOTICE MEN
MEN-TRAPS AND SPRING-GUNS ARE SET ON THESE
PREMISES.”
For his father had protected his good estate.

Fenton’s journey into otherness leads to a forbidden area of the self. His intimate way of engaging the exotic collection finds an area of desire, marked off and policed. The law is preoccupied with *property*.

C. B. Macpherson’s classic analysis of Western “possessive individualism” (1962) traces the seventeenth-century emergence of an ideal self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods. The same ideal can hold true for collectivities making and remaking their cultural “selves.” For example Richard Handler (1985) analyzes the making of a Québécois cultural “patrimoine,” drawing on Macpherson to unravel the assumptions and paradoxes involved in “having a culture,” selecting and cherishing an authentic collective “property.” His analysis suggests that this identity, whether cultural or personal, presupposes acts of collection, gathering up possessions in arbitrary systems of value and meaning. Such systems, always powerful and rule governed, change historically. One cannot escape them. At best, Fenton suggests, one can transgress (“poach” in their tabooed zones) or make their self-evident orders seem strange. In Handler’s subtly perverse analysis a system of retrospection—revealed by a Historic Monuments Commission’s selection of ten sorts of “cultural property”—appears as a taxonomy wor-

thy of Borges' "Chinese encyclopedia": "(1) commemorative monuments; (2) churches and chapels; (3) forts of the French Regime; (4) windmills; (5) roadside crosses; (6) commemorative inscriptions and plaques; (7) devotional monuments; (8) old houses and manors; (9) old furniture; (10) 'les choses disparues'" (1985:199). In Handler's discussion the collection and preservation of an authentic domain of identity cannot be natural or innocent. It is tied up with nationalist politics, with restrictive law, and with contested encodings of past and future.



Some sort of "gathering" around the self and the group—the assemblage of a material "world," the marking-off of a subjective domain that is not "other"—is probably universal. All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self. But the notion that this gathering involves the accumulation of possessions, the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience), is surely not universal. The individualistic accumulation of Melanesian "big men" is not possessive in Macpherson's sense, for in Melanesia one accumulates not to hold objects as private goods but to give them away, to redistribute. In the West, however, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity.

Children's collections are revealing in this light: a boy's accumulation of miniature cars, a girl's dolls, a summer-vacation "nature museum" (with labeled stones and shells, a hummingbird in a bottle), a treasured bowl filled with the bright shavings of crayons. In these small rituals we observe the channelings of obsession, an exercise in how to make the world one's own, to gather things around oneself tastefully, appropriately. The inclusions in all collections reflect wider cultural rules—of rational taxonomy, of gender, of aesthetics. An excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to *have* is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire. Thus the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies—to make "good" collections.¹

1. On collecting as a strategy of desire see the highly suggestive catalogue (Hainard and Kaehr 1982) of an exhibition entitled "Collections passion" at the Musée d'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel, June to December 1981. This analytic collection of collections was a tour de force of reflexive museology. On collecting and desire see also Donna Haraway's brilliant analysis (1985) of the American Museum of Natural History, American manhood, and the threat of decadence be-

Whether a child collects model dinosaurs or dolls, sooner or later she or he will be encouraged to keep the possessions on a shelf or in a special box or to set up a doll house. Personal treasures will be made public. If the passion is for Egyptian figurines, the collector will be expected to label them, to know their dynasty (it is not enough that they simply exude power or mystery), to tell “interesting” things about them, to distinguish copies from originals. The good collector (as opposed to the obsessive, the miser) is tasteful and reflective.² Accumulation unfolds in a pedagogical, edifying manner. The collection itself—its taxonomic, aesthetic structure—is valued, and any private fixation on single objects is negatively marked as fetishism. Indeed a “proper” relation with objects (rule-governed possession) presupposes a “savage” or deviant relation (idolatry or erotic fixation).³ In Susan Stewart’s gloss, “The boundary between collection and fetishism is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy” (1984:163).

Stewart’s wide-ranging study *On Longing* traces a “structure of desire” whose task is the repetitious and impossible one of closing the gap that separates language from the experience it encodes. She explores certain recurrent strategies pursued by Westerners since the sixteenth century. In her analysis the miniature, whether a portrait or doll’s house, enacts a bourgeois longing for “inner” experience. She also explores the

tween 1908 and 1936. Her work suggests that the passion to collect, preserve, and display is articulated in gendered ways that are historically specific. Beaugé, Gomilia, and Vallée (1976) offer critical meditations on the ethnographer’s complex experience of objects.

2. Walter Benjamin’s essay “Unpacking My Library” (1969:59–68) provides the view of a reflective devotee. Collecting appears as an art of living intimately allied with memory, with obsession, with the salvaging of order from disorder. Benjamin sees (and takes a certain pleasure in) the precariousness of the subjective space attained by the collection. “Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order? You have all heard of people whom the loss of their books has turned into invalids, of those who in order to acquire them became criminals. These are the very areas in which any order is a balancing act of extreme precariousness.” (p. 60)

3. My understanding of the role of the fetish as a mark of otherness in Western intellectual history—from DeBrosses to Marx, Freud, and Deleuze—owes a great deal to the largely unpublished work of William Pietz; see “The Problem of the Fetish, I” (1985).

strategy of gigantism (from Rabelais and Gulliver to earthworks and the billboard), the souvenir, and the collection. She shows how collections, most notably museums—create the illusion of adequate representation of a world by first cutting objects out of specific contexts (whether cultural, historical, or intersubjective) and making them “stand for” abstract wholes—a “Bambara mask,” for example, becoming an ethnographic metonym for Bambara culture. Next a scheme of classification is elaborated for storing or displaying the object so that the reality of the collection itself, its coherent order, overrides specific histories of the object’s production and appropriation (pp. 162–165). Paralleling Marx’s account of the fantastic objectification of commodities, Stewart argues that in the modern Western museum “an illusion of a relation between things takes the place of a social relation” (p. 165). The collector discovers, acquires, salvages objects. The objective world is given, not produced, and thus historical relations of power in the work of acquisition are occulted. The *making* of meaning in museum classification and display is mystified as adequate *representation*. The time and order of the collection erase the concrete social labor of its making.

Stewart’s work, along with that of Phillip Fisher (1975), Krzysztof Pomian (1978), James Bunn (1980), Daniel Defert (1982), Johannes Fabian (1983), and Rémy Saisselin (1984), among others, brings collecting and display sharply into view as crucial processes of Western identity formation. Gathered artifacts—whether they find their way into curio cabinets, private living rooms, museums of ethnography, folklore, or fine art—function within a developing capitalist “system of objects” (Baudrillard 1968). By virtue of this system a world of *value* is created and a meaningful deployment and circulation of artifacts maintained. For Baudrillard collected objects create a structured environment that substitutes its own temporality for the “real time” of historical and productive processes: “The environment of private objects and their possession—of which collections are an extreme manifestation—is a dimension of our life that is both essential and imaginary. As essential as dreams” (1968:135).



A history of anthropology and modern art needs to see in collecting both a form of Western subjectivity and a changing set of powerful institutional practices. The history of collections (not limited to museums) is central to an understanding of how those social groups that invented

anthropology and modern art have *appropriated* exotic things, facts, and meanings. (*Appropriate*: "to make one's own," from the Latin *proprius*, "proper," "property.") It is important to analyze how powerful discriminations made at particular moments constitute the general system of objects within which valued artifacts circulate and make sense. Far-reaching questions are thereby raised.

What criteria validate an authentic cultural or artistic product? What are the differential values placed on old and new creations? What moral and political criteria justify "good," responsible, systematic collecting practices? Why, for example, do Leo Frobenius' wholesale acquisitions of African objects around the turn of the century now seem excessive? (See also Cole 1985 and Pye 1987.) How is a "complete" collection defined? What is the proper balance between scientific analysis and public display? (In Santa Fe a superb collection of Native American art is housed at the School of American Research in a building constructed, literally, as a vault, with access carefully restricted. The Musée de l'Homme exhibits less than a tenth of its collections; the rest is stored in steel cabinets or heaped in corners of the vast basement.) Why has it seemed obvious until recently that non-Western objects should be preserved in European museums, even when this means that no fine specimens are visible in their country of origin? How are "antiquitiés," "curiosities," "art," "souvenirs," "monuments," and "ethnographic artifacts" distinguished—at different historical moments and in specific market conditions? Why have many anthropological museums in recent years begun to display certain of their objects as "masterpieces"? Why has tourist art only recently come to the serious attention of anthropologists? (See Graburn 1976, Jules-Rosette 1984.) What has been the changing interplay between natural-history collecting and the selection of anthropological artifacts for display and analysis? The list could be extended.

The critical history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value, and exchange. Although this complex history, from at least the Age of Discovery, remains to be written, Baudrillard provides an initial framework for the deployment of objects in the recent capitalist West. In his account it is axiomatic that all categories of meaningful objects—including those marked off as scientific evidence and as great art—function within a ramified system of symbols and values.

To take just one example: the *New York Times* of December 8, 1984, reported the widespread illegal looting of Anasazi archaeological sites in

the American Southwest. Painted pots and urns thus excavated in good condition could bring as much as \$30,000 on the market. Another article in the same issue contained a photograph of Bronze Age pots and jugs salvaged by archaeologists from a Phoenician shipwreck off the coast of Turkey. One account featured clandestine collecting for profit, the other scientific collecting for knowledge. The moral evaluations of the two acts of salvage were sharply opposed, but the pots recovered were all meaningful, beautiful, and old. Commercial, aesthetic, and scientific worth in both cases presupposed a given system of value. This system finds intrinsic interest and beauty in objects from a past time, and it assumes that collecting everyday objects from ancient (preferably vanished) civilizations will be more *rewarding* than collecting, for example, decorated thermoses from modern China or customized T-shirts from Oceania. Old objects are endowed with a sense of “depth” by their historically minded collectors. Temporality is reified and salvaged as origin, beauty, and knowledge.

This archaizing system has not always dominated Western collecting. The curiosities of the New World gathered and appreciated in the sixteenth century were not necessarily valued as antiquities, the products of primitive or “past” civilizations. They frequently occupied a category of the marvelous, of a present “Golden Age” (Honour 1975; Mullaney 1983; Rabasa 1985). More recently the retrospective bias of Western appropriations of the world’s cultures has come under scrutiny (Fabian 1983; Clifford 1986b). Cultural or artistic “authenticity” has as much to do with an inventive present as with a past, its objectification, preservation, or revival.



Since the turn of the century objects collected from non-Western sources have been classified in two major categories: as (scientific) cultural artifacts or as (aesthetic) works of art.⁴ Other collectibles—mass-produced commodities, “tourist art,” curios, and so on—have been less systemati-

4. For “hard” articulations of ethnographic culturalism and aesthetic formalism see Sieber 1971, Price and Price 1980, Vogel 1985, and Rubin 1984. The first two works argue that art can be understood (as opposed to merely appreciated) only in its original context. Vogel and Rubin assert that aesthetic qualities transcend their original local articulation, that “masterpieces” appeal to universal or at least transcultural human sensibilities. For a glimpse of how the often incompatible categories of “aesthetic excellence,” “use,” “rarity,” “age,” and so

cally valued; at best they find a place in exhibits of "technology" or "folklore." These and other locations within what may be called the "modern art-culture system" can be visualized with the help of a (somewhat procrustian) diagram.

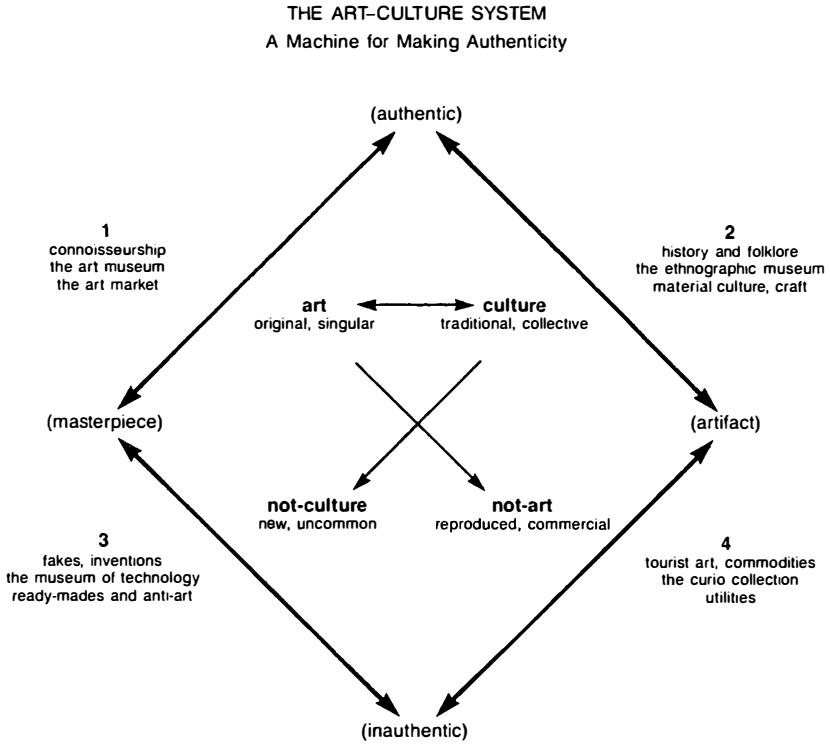
A. J. Greimas' "semiotic square" (Greimas and Rastier 1968) shows us "that any initial binary opposition can, by the operation of negations and the appropriate syntheses, generate a much larger field of terms which, however, all necessarily remain locked in the closure of the initial system" (Jameson 1981:62). Adapting Greimas for the purposes of cultural criticism, Fredric Jameson uses the semiotic square to reveal "the limits of a specific ideological consciousness, [marking] the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate" (1981:47). Following his example, I offer the following map (see diagram) of a historically specific, contestible field of meanings and institutions.

Beginning with an initial opposition, by a process of negation four terms are generated. This establishes horizontal and vertical axes and between them four semantic zones: (1) the zone of authentic masterpieces, (2) the zone of authentic artifacts, (3) the zone of inauthentic masterpieces, (4) the zone of inauthentic artifacts. Most objects—old and new, rare and common, familiar and exotic—can be located in one of these zones or ambiguously, in traffic, between two zones.

The system classifies objects and assigns them relative value. It establishes the "contexts" in which they properly belong and between which they circulate. Regular movements toward positive value proceed from bottom to top and from right to left. These movements select artifacts of enduring worth or rarity, their value normally guaranteed by a "vanishing" cultural status or by the selection and pricing mechanisms of the art market. The value of Shaker crafts reflects the fact that Shaker society no longer exists: the stock is limited. In the art world work is recognized as "important" by connoisseurs and collectors according to criteria that are more than simply aesthetic (see Becker 1982). Indeed, prevailing definitions of what is "beautiful" or "interesting" sometimes change quite rapidly.

An area of frequent traffic in the system is that linking zones 1 and

on are debated in the exercise of assigning authentic value to tribal works, see the richly inconclusive symposium on "Authenticity in African Art" organized by the journal *African Arts* (Willett et al. 1976).



2. Objects move in two directions along this path. Things of cultural or historical value may be promoted to the status of fine art. Examples of movement in this direction, from ethnographic “culture” to fine “art,” are plentiful. Tribal objects located in art galleries (the Rockefeller Wing at the Metropolitan Museum in New York) or displayed anywhere according to “formalist” rather than “contextualist” protocols (Ames 1986:39–42) move in this way. Crafts (Shaker work collected at the Whitney Museum in 1986), “folk art,” certain antiques, “naive” art all are subject to periodic promotions. Movement in the inverse direction occurs whenever art masterworks are culturally and historically “contextualized,” something that has been occurring more and more explicitly. Perhaps the most dramatic case has been the relocation of France’s great impressionist collection, formerly at the Jeu de Paume, to the new Museum of the Nineteenth Century at the Gare d’Orsay. Here art masterpieces take their

place in the panorama of a historical-cultural "period." The panorama includes an emerging industrial urbanism and its triumphant technology, "bad" as well as "good" art. A less dramatic movement from zone 1 to zone 2 can be seen in the routine process within art galleries whereby objects become "dated," of interest less as immediately powerful works of genius than as fine examples of a period style.

Movement also occurs between the lower and upper halves of the system, usually in an upward direction. Commodities in zone 4 regularly enter zone 2, becoming rare period pieces and thus collectibles (old green glass Coke bottles). Much current non-Western work migrates between the status of "tourist art" and creative cultural-artistic strategy. Some current productions of Third World peoples have entirely shed the stigma of modern commercial inauthenticity. For example Haitian "primitive" painting—commercial and of relatively recent, impure origin—has moved fully into the art-culture circuit. Significantly this work entered the art market by association with zone 2, becoming valued as the work not simply of individual artists but of *Haitians*. Haitian painting is surrounded by special associations with the land of voodoo, magic and negritude. Though specific artists have come to be known and prized, the aura of "cultural" production attaches to them much more than, say, to Picasso, who is not in any essential way valued as a "Spanish artist." The same is true, as we shall see, of many recent works of tribal art, whether from the Sepik or the American Northwest Coast. Such works have largely freed themselves from the tourist or commodity category to which, because of their modernity, purists had often relegated them; but they cannot move directly into zone 1, the art market, without trailing clouds of authentic (traditional) culture. There can be no direct movement from zone 4 to zone 1.

Occasional travel occurs between zones 4 and 3, for example when a commodity or technological artifact is perceived to be a case of special inventive creation. The object is selected out of commercial or mass culture, perhaps to be featured in a museum of technology. Sometimes such objects fully enter the realm of art: "technological" innovations or commodities may be contextualized as modern "design," thus passing through zone 3 into zone 1 (for example the furniture, household machines, cars, and so on displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York).

There is also regular traffic between zones 1 and 3. Exposed art for-

geries are demoted (while nonetheless preserving something of their original aura). Conversely various forms of “anti-art” and art parading its unoriginality or “inauthenticity” are collected and valued (Warhol’s soup can, Sherrie Levine’s photo of a photo by Walker Evans, Duchamp’s urinal, bottle rack, or shovel). Objects in zone 3 are all potentially collectible within the general domain of art: they are uncommon, sharply distinct from or blatantly cut out of culture. Once appropriated by the art world, like Duchamp’s ready-mades, they circulate within zone 1.

The art-culture system I have diagramed excludes and marginalizes various residual and emergent contexts. To mention only one: the categories of art and culture, technology and commodity are strongly secular. “Religious” objects can be valued as great art (an altarpiece by Giotto), as folk art (the decorations on a Latin American popular saint’s shrine), or as cultural artifact (an Indian rattle). Such objects have no individual “power” or mystery—qualities once possessed by “fetishes” before they were reclassified in the modern system as primitive art or cultural artifact. What “value,” however, is stripped from an altarpiece when it is moved out of a functioning church (or when its church begins to function as a museum)? Its specific power or sacredness is relocated to a general aesthetic realm. (See Chapter 9, n.11, on a recent challenge by Zuni tribal authorities to such secular contextualizations.)



It is important to stress the historicity of this art-culture system. It has not reached its final form: the positions and values assigned to collectible artifacts have changed and will continue to do so. Moreover a synchronic diagram cannot represent zones of contest and transgression except as movements or ambiguities among fixed poles. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, much current “tribal art” participates in the regular art-culture traffic *and* in traditional spiritual contexts not accounted for by the system (Coe 1986). Whatever its contested domains, though, generally speaking the system still confronts any collected exotic object with a stark alternative between a second home in an ethnographic or an aesthetic milieu. The modern ethnographic museum and the art museum or private art collection have developed separate, complementary modes of classification. In the former a work of “sculpture” is displayed along with other objects of similar function or in proximity to objects from the same cultural group, including utilitarian artifacts such as spoons, bowls, or spears. A mask or statue may be grouped with formally dissimilar ob-

jects and explained as part of a ritual or institutional complex. The names of individual sculptors are unknown or suppressed. In art museums a sculpture is identified as the creation of an individual: Rodin, Giacommetti, Barbara Hepworth. Its place in everyday cultural practices (including the market) is irrelevant to its essential meaning. Whereas in the ethnographic museum the object is culturally or humanly "interesting," in the art museum it is primarily "beautiful" or "original." It was not always thus.

Elizabeth Williams (1985) has traced a revealing chapter in the shifting history of these discriminations. In nineteenth-century Paris it was difficult to conceive of pre-Columbian artifacts as fully "beautiful." A prevailing naturalist aesthetic saw *ars Americana* as grotesque or crude. At best pre-Columbian work could be assimilated into the category of the antiquity and appreciated through the filter of Viollet-le-Duc's medievalism. Williams shows how Mayan and Incan artifacts, their status uncertain, migrated between the Louvre, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Musée Guimet, and (after 1878) the Trocadéro, where they seemed at last to find an ethnographic home in an institution that treated them as scientific evidence. The Trocadéro's first directors, Ernest-Théodore Hamy and Rémy Verneau, showed scant interest in their aesthetic qualities.

The "beauty" of much non-Western "art" is a recent discovery. Before the twentieth century many of the same objects were collected and valued, but for different reasons. In the early modern period their rarity and strangeness were prized. The "cabinet of curiosities" jumbled everything together, with each individual object standing metonymically for a whole region or population. The collection was a microcosm, a "summary of the universe" (Pomian 1978). The eighteenth century introduced a more serious concern for taxonomy and for the elaboration of complete series. Collecting was increasingly the concern of scientific naturalists (Feest 1984:90), and objects were valued because they exemplified an array of systematic categories: food, clothing, building materials, agricultural tools, weapons (of war, of the hunt), and so forth. E. F. Jomard's ethnographic classifications and A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers' typological displays were mid-nineteenth-century culminations of this taxonomic vision (Chapman 1985:24-25). Pitt Rivers' typologies featured developmental sequences. By the end of the century evolutionism had come to dominate arrangements of exotic artifacts. Whether objects were presented as antiquities, arranged geographically or by society, spread in panoplies, or arranged in realistic "life groups" and dioramas, a story of human

development was told. The object had ceased to be primarily an exotic "curiosity" and was now a source of information entirely integrated in the universe of Western Man (Dias 1985:378–379). The value of exotic objects was their ability to testify to the concrete reality of an earlier stage of human Culture, a common past confirming Europe's triumphant present.

With Franz Boas and the emergence of relativist anthropology an emphasis on placing objects in specific lived contexts was consolidated. The "cultures" thus represented could either be arranged in a modified evolutionary series or dispersed in synchronous "ethnographic presents." The latter were times neither of antiquity nor of the twentieth century but rather representing the "authentic" context of the collected objects, often just prior to their collection or display. Both collector and salvage ethnographer could claim to be the last to rescue "the real thing." Authenticity, as we shall see, is produced by removing objects and customs from their current historical situation—a present-becoming-future.

With the consolidation of twentieth-century anthropology, artifacts contextualized ethnographically were valued because they served as objective "witnesses" to the total multidimensional life of a culture (Jamin 1982a:89–95; 1985). Simultaneously with new developments in art and literature, as Picasso and others began to visit the "Troca" and to accord its tribal objects a nonethnographic admiration, the proper place of non-Western objects was again thrown in question. In the eyes of a triumphant modernism some of these artifacts at least could be seen as universal masterpieces. The category of "primitive art" emerged.

This development introduced new ambiguities and possibilities in a changing taxonomic system. In the mid-nineteenth century pre-Columbian or tribal objects were grotesques or antiquities. By 1920 they were cultural witnesses and aesthetic masterpieces. Since then a controlled migration has occurred between these two institutionalized domains. The boundaries of art and science, the aesthetic and the anthropological, are not permanently fixed. Indeed anthropology and fine arts museums have recently shown signs of interpenetration. For example the Hall of Asian Peoples at the New York Museum of Natural History reflects the "boutique" style of display, whose objects could never seem out of place as "art" on the walls or coffee tables of middle-class living rooms. In a complementary development downtown the Museum of Modern Art has expanded its permanent exhibit of cultural artifacts: furniture, automobiles, home appliances, and utensils—even hanging from

the ceiling, like a Northwest Coast war canoe, a much-admired bright green helicopter.



While the object systems of art and anthropology are institutionalized and powerful, they are not immutable. The categories of the beautiful, the cultural, and the authentic have changed and are changing. Thus it is important to resist the tendency of collections to be self-sufficient, to suppress their own historical, economic, and political processes of production (see Haacke 1975; Hiller 1979). Ideally the history of its own collection and display should be a visible aspect of any exhibition. It had been rumored that the Boas Room of Northwest Coast artifacts in the American Museum of Natural History was to be refurbished, its style of display modernized. Apparently (or so one hopes) the plan has been abandoned, for this atmospheric, dated hall exhibits not merely a superb collection but a moment in the history of collecting. The widely publicized Museum of Modern Art show of 1984, "'Primitivism' in Twentieth-Century Art" (see Chapter 9), made apparent (as it celebrated) the precise circumstance in which certain ethnographic objects suddenly became works of universal art. More historical self-consciousness in the display and viewing of non-Western objects can at least jostle and set in motion the ways in which anthropologists, artists, and their publics collect themselves and the world.

At a more intimate level, rather than grasping objects only as cultural signs and artistic icons (Guidieri and Pellizzi 1981), we can return to them, as James Fenton does, their lost status as fetishes—not specimens of a deviant or exotic "fetishism" but *our own* fetishes.⁵ This tactic, necessarily personal, would accord to things in collections the power to fixate rather than simply the capacity to edify or inform. African and Oceanian artifacts could once again be *objets sauvages*, sources of fascination with the power to disconcert. Seen in their resistance to classification they could remind us of our *lack* of self-possession, of the artifices we employ to gather a world around us.

5. For a post-Freudian positive sense of the fetish see Leiris 1929a, 1946; for fetish theory's radical possibilities see Pietz 1985, which draws on Deleuze; and for a repentant semiologist's perverse sense of the fetish (the "punctum") as a place of strictly personal meaning unformed by cultural codes (the "studium") see Barthes 1980. Gomila (1976) rethinks ethnographic material culture from some of these surrealist-psychoanalytic perspectives.

Culture Collecting

Found in *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 34 (1932):740:

NOTE FROM NEW GUINEA

Aliatoa, Wiwiak District, New Guinea

April 21, 1932

We are just completing a culture of a mountain group here in the lower Torres Chelles. They have no name and we haven't decided what to call them yet. They are a very revealing people in spots, providing a final basic concept from which all the mother's brothers' curses and father's sisters' curses, etc. derive, and having articulate the attitude toward incest which Reo [Fortune] outlined as fundamental in his Encyclopedia article. They have taken the therapeutic measures which we recommended for Dobu and Manus—having a devil in addition to the neighbor sorcerer, and having got their dead out of the village and localized. But in other ways they are annoying: they have bits and snatches of all the rag tag and bob tail of magical and ghostly belief from the Pacific, and they are somewhat like the Plains in their receptivity to strange ideas. A picture of a local native reading the index to the *Golden Bough* just to see if they had missed anything, would be appropriate. They are very difficult to work, living all over the place with half a dozen garden houses, and never staying put for a week at a time. Of course this offered a new challenge in method which was interesting. The difficulties incident upon being two days over impossible mountains have been consuming and we are going to do a coastal people next.

Sincerely yours,

MARGARET MEAD

"Cultures" are ethnographic collections. Since Tylor's founding definition of 1871 the term has designated a rather vague "complex whole" including everything that is learned group behavior, from body techniques to symbolic orders. There have been recurring attempts to define culture more precisely (see Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952) or, for example, to distinguish it from "social structure." But the inclusive use persists. For there are times when we still need to be able to speak holistically of Japanese or Trobriand or Moroccan culture in the confidence that we are designating something real and differentially coherent. It is in-

creasingly clear, however, that the concrete activity of representing a culture, subculture, or indeed any coherent domain of collective activity is always strategic and selective. The world's societies are too systematically interconnected to permit any easy isolation of separate or independently functioning systems (Marcus 1986). The increased pace of historical change, the common recurrence of stress in the systems under study, forces a new self-consciousness about the way cultural wholes and boundaries are constructed and translated. The pioneering *élan* of Margaret Mead "completing a culture" in highland New Guinea, collecting a dispersed population, discovering its key customs, naming the result—in this case "the Mountain Arapesh"—is no longer possible.

To see ethnography as a form of culture collecting (not, of course, the *only* way to see it) highlights the ways that diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement. Collecting—at least in the West, where time is generally thought to be linear and irreversible—implies a rescue of phenomena from inevitable historical decay or loss. The collection contains what "deserves" to be kept, remembered, and treasured. Artifacts and customs are saved out of time.⁶ Anthropological culture collectors have typically gathered what seems "traditional"—what by definition is opposed to modernity. From a complex historical reality (which includes current ethnographic encounters) they select what gives form, structure, and continuity to a world. What is hybrid or "historical" in an emergent sense has been less commonly collected and presented as a system of authenticity. For example in New Guinea Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune chose not to study groups that were, as Mead wrote in a letter, "badly missionized" (1977:123); and it had been self-evident to Malinowski in the Trobriands that what most

6. An exhibition, "Temps perdu, temps retrouvé," held during 1985 at the Musée d'Ethnographie of Neuchâtel systematically interrogated the temporal predicament of the Western ethnographic museum. Its argument was condensed in the following text, each proposition of which was illustrated museographically: "Prestigious places for locking things up, museums give value to things that are outside of life: in this way they resemble cemeteries. Acquired by dint of dollars, the memory-objects participate in the group's changing identity, serve the powers that be, and accumulate into treasures, while personal memory fades. Faced with the aggressions of everyday life and the passing of phenomena, memory needs objects—always manipulated through aesthetics, selective emphasis, or the mixing of genres. From the perspective of the future, what from the present should be saved?" (Hainard and Kaehr 1986:33; also Hainard and Kaehr 1985.)

deserved scientific attention was the circumscribed “culture” threatened by a host of modern “outside” influences. The experience of Melanesians becoming Christians for their own reasons—learning to play, and play with, the outsiders’ games—did not seem worth salvaging.

Every appropriation of culture, whether by insiders or outsiders, implies a specific temporal position and form of historical narration. Gathering, owning, classifying, and valuing are certainly not restricted to the West; but elsewhere these activities need not be associated with accumulation (rather than redistribution) or with preservation (rather than natural or historical decay). The Western practice of culture collecting has its own local genealogy, enmeshed in distinct European notions of temporality and order. It is worth dwelling for a moment on this genealogy, for it organizes the assumptions being arduously unlearned by new theories of practice, process, and historicity (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1979, Ortner 1984, Sahlins 1985).

A crucial aspect of the recent history of the culture concept has been its alliance (and division of labor) with “art.” Culture, even without a capital c, strains toward aesthetic form and autonomy. I have already suggested that modern culture ideas and art ideas function together in an “art-culture system.” The inclusive twentieth-century culture category—one that does not privilege “high” or “low” culture—is plausible only within this system, for while in principle admitting all learned human behavior, this culture with a small c orders phenomena in ways that privilege the coherent, balanced, and “authentic” aspects of shared life. Since the mid-nineteenth century, ideas of culture have gathered up those elements that seem to give continuity and depth to collective existence, seeing it whole rather than disputed, torn, intertextual, or syncretic. Mead’s almost postmodern image of “a local native reading the index to *The Golden Bough* just to see if they had missed anything” is not a vision of authenticity.

Mead found Arapesh receptivity to outside influences “annoying.” Their culture collecting complicated hers. Historical developments would later force her to provide a revised picture of these difficult Melanesians. In a new preface to the 1971 reprint of her three-volume ethnography *The Mountain Arapesh* Mead devotes several pages to letters from Bernard Narokobi, an Arapesh then studying law in Sydney, Australia. The anthropologist readily admits her astonishment at hearing from him: “How was it that one of the Arapesh—a people who had had such a light hold on any form of collective style—should have come further

than any individual among the Manus, who had moved as a group into the modern world in the years between our first study of them, in 1928, and the beginning of our restudy, in 1953?" (Mead 1971:ix). She goes on to explain that Narakobi, along with other Arapesh men studying in Australia, had "moved from one period in human culture to another" as "individuals." The Arapesh were "less tightly bound within a coherent culture" than Manus (pp. ix–x). Narakobi writes, however, as a member of his "tribe," speaking with pride of the values and accomplishments of his "clansfolk." (He uses the name Arapesh sparingly.) He articulates the possibility of a new multiterritorial "cultural" identity: "I feel now that I can feel proud of my tribe and at the same time feel I belong not only to Papua–New Guinea, a nation to be, but to the world community at large" (p. xiii). Is not this modern way of being "Arapesh" already prefigured in Mead's earlier image of a resourceful native paging through *The Golden Bough*? Why must such behavior be marginalized or classed as "individual" by the anthropological culture collector?

Expectations of wholeness, continuity, and essence have long been built into the linked Western ideas of culture and art. A few words of recent background must suffice, since to map the history of these concepts would lead us on a chase for origins back at least to the Greeks. Raymond Williams provides a starting point in the early nineteenth century—a moment of unprecedented historical and social disruption. In *Culture and Society* (1966), *Keywords* (1976), and elsewhere Williams has traced a parallel development in usage for the words *art* and *culture*. The changes reflect complex responses to industrialism, to the specter of "mass society," to accelerated social conflict and change.⁷

According to Williams in the eighteenth century the word *art* meant predominantly "skill." Cabinetmakers, criminals, and painters were each in their way artful. *Culture* designated a tendency to natural growth, its uses predominantly agricultural and personal: both plants and human individuals could be "cultured." Other meanings also present in the eighteenth century did not predominate until the nineteenth. By the 1820s *art* increasingly designated a special domain of creativity, spontaneity, and purity, a realm of refined sensibility and expressive "genius." The

7. Although Williams' analysis is limited to England, the general pattern applies elsewhere in Europe, where the timing of modernization differed or where other terms were used. In France, for example, the words *civilisation* or, for Durkheim, *société* stand in for *culture*. What is at issue are general qualitative assessments of collective life.

"artist" was set apart from, often against, society—whether "mass" or "bourgeois." The term *culture* followed a parallel course, coming to mean what was most elevated, sensitive, essential, and precious—most uncommon—in society. Like art, culture became a general category; Williams calls it a "final court of appeal" against threats of vulgarity and leveling. It existed in essential opposition to perceived "anarchy."

Art and culture emerged after 1800 as mutually reinforcing domains of human *value*, strategies for gathering, marking off, protecting the best and most interesting creations of "Man."⁸ In the twentieth century the categories underwent a series of further developments. The plural, anthropological definition of culture (lower-case c with the possibility of a final s) emerged as a liberal alternative to racist classifications of human diversity. It was a sensitive means for understanding different and dispersed "whole ways of life" in a high colonial context of unprecedented global interconnection. *Culture* in its full evolutionary richness and authenticity, formerly reserved for the best creations of modern Europe, could now be extended to all the world's populations. In the anthropological vision of Boas' generation "cultures" were of equal value. In their new plurality, however, the nineteenth-century definitions were not entirely transformed. If they became less elitist (distinctions between "high" and "low" culture were erased) and less Eurocentric (every human society was fully "cultural"), nevertheless a certain body of assumptions were carried over from the older definitions. George Stocking (1968:69–90) shows the complex interrelations of nineteenth-century humanist and emerging anthropological definitions of culture. He suggests that anthro-

8. As Virginia Dominguez has argued, the emergence of this new subject implies a specific historicity closely tied to ethnology. Drawing on Foucault's *Order of Things* (1966) and writing of the scramble for ethnographic artifacts during the "Museum Age" of the late nineteenth century, she cites Douglas Cole's summation of the prevailing rationale: "It is necessary to use the time to collect before it is too late" (Cole 1985:50). "Too late for what?" Dominguez asks. "There is a historical consciousness here of a special sort. We hear an urgency in the voices of the collectors, a fear that we will no longer be able to get our hands on these objects, and that this would amount to an irretrievable loss of the means of preserving our own historicity. There is a twofold displacement here. Objects are collected no longer because of their intrinsic value but as metonyms for the people who produced them. And the people who produced them are the objects of examination not because of their intrinsic value but because of their perceived contribution to our understanding of our own historical trajectory. It is a certain view of 'man' and a certain view of 'history' that make this double displacement possible" (Dominguez 1986:548).

pology owes as much to Matthew Arnold as to its official founding father, E. B. Tylor. Indeed much of the vision embodied in *Culture and Anarchy* has been transferred directly into relativist anthropology. A powerful structure of feeling continues to see culture, wherever it is found, as a coherent *body* that lives and dies. Culture is enduring, traditional, structural (rather than contingent, syncretic, historical). Culture is a process of ordering, not of disruption. It changes and develops like a living organism. It does not normally "survive" abrupt alterations.

In the early twentieth century, as *culture* was being extended to all the world's functioning societies, an increasing number of exotic, primitive, or archaic objects came to be seen as "art." They were equal in aesthetic and moral value with the greatest Western masterpieces. By midcentury the new attitude toward "primitive art" had been accepted by large numbers of educated Europeans and Americans. Indeed from the standpoint of the late twentieth century it becomes clear that the parallel concepts of art and culture did successfully, albeit temporarily, comprehend and incorporate a plethora of non-Western artifacts and customs. This was accomplished through two strategies. First, objects reclassified as "primitive art" were admitted to the imaginary museum of human creativity and, though more slowly, to the actual fine arts museums of the West. Second, the discourse and institutions of modern anthropology constructed comparative and synthetic images of Man drawing evenhandedly from among the world's authentic ways of life, however strange in appearance or obscure in origin. Art and culture, categories for the best creations of Western humanism, were in principle extended to all the world's peoples.

It is perhaps worth stressing that nothing said here about the historicity of these cultural or artistic categories should be construed as claiming that they are false or denying that many of their values are worthy of support. Like any successful discursive arrangement the art-culture authenticity system articulates considerable domains of truth and scientific progress as well as areas of blindness and controversy. By emphasizing the transience of the system I do so out of a conviction (it is more a feeling of the historical ground moving underfoot) that the classifications and generous appropriations of Western art and culture categories are now much less stable than before. This instability appears to be linked to the growing interconnection of the world's populations and to the contestation since the 1950s of colonialism and Eurocentrism. Art collecting and culture collecting now take place within a changing field of coun-

terdiscourses, syncretisms, and reappropriations originating both outside and inside “the West.” I cannot discuss the geopolitical causes of these developments. I can only hint at their transforming consequences and stress that the modern genealogy of culture and art that I have been sketching increasingly appears to be a local story. “Culture” and “art” can no longer be simply *extended* to non-Western peoples and things. They can at worst be *imposed*, at best *translated*—both historically and politically contingent operations.

Before I survey some of the current challenges to Western modes of collection and authentication, it may be worth portraying the still-dominant form of art and culture collecting in a more limited, concrete setting. The system’s underlying historical assumptions will then become inescapable. For if collecting in the West salvages things out of non-repeatable time, what is the assumed direction of this time? How does it confer rarity and authenticity on the varied productions of human skill? Collecting presupposes a story; a story occurs in a “chronotope.”

A Chronotope for Collecting

Dans son effort pour comprendre le monde, l’homme dispose donc toujours d’un surplus de signification.

—CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

THE TERM *chronotope*, as used by Bakhtin, denotes a configuration of spatial and temporal indicators in a fictional setting where (and when) certain activities and stories *take place*.⁹ One cannot realistically situate historical detail—putting something “in its time”—without appealing to explicit or implicit chronotopes. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s pointed, nostalgic recollections of New York during the Second World War can serve as a chronotope for modern art and culture collecting. The setting is elaborated in an essay whose French title, “New York post-et préfiguratif”

9. *Chronotope*: literally “time-space” with no priority to either dimension (Bakhtin 1937). The chronotope is a fictional setting where historically specific relations of power become visible and certain stories can “take place” (the bourgeois salon in nineteenth-century social novels, the merchant ship in Conrad’s tales of adventure and empire). As Bakhtin puts it: “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (p. 84).

(1983), suggests its underlying spatio-temporal predicament more strongly than the published English translation, "New York in 1941" (1985). The essay falls within a microgenre of Lévi-Strauss's writing, one he developed with virtuosity in *Tristes tropiques*. Specific places—Rio, Fire Island, new Brazilian cities, Indian sacred sites—appear as moments of intelligible human order and transformation surrounded by the destructive, entropic currents of global history.

In what follows I have supplemented the essay on New York with passages from other texts written by Lévi-Strauss either during the war years or in recollection of them. In reading them as a unified chronotope, one ought to bear in mind that these are not historical records but complex literary commemorations. The time-space in question has been retrospectively composed by Lévi-Strauss and recomposed, for other purposes, by myself.



A refugee in New York during the Second World War, the anthropologist is bewildered and delighted by a landscape of unexpected juxtapositions. His recollections of those seminal years, during which he invented structural anthropology, are bathed in a magical light. New York is full of delightful incongruities. Who could resist

the performances that we watched for hours at the Chinese opera under the first arch of the Brooklyn Bridge, where a company that had come long ago from China had a large following. Every day, from mid-afternoon until past midnight, it would perpetuate the traditions of classical Chinese opera. I felt myself going back in time no less when I went to work every morning in the American room of the New York Public Library. There, under its neo-classical arcades and between walls paneled with old oak, I sat near an Indian in a feather headdress and a beaded buckskin jacket—who was taking notes with a Parker pen. (1985:266)

As Lévi-Strauss tells it, the New York of 1941 is an anthropologist's dream, a vast selection of human culture and history.¹⁰ A brief walk or subway ride will take him from a Greenwich Village reminiscent of Bal-

10. It still is. Returning to the neighborhood where I grew up on the Upper West Side and walking between 116th and 86th Streets, I invariably encounter several races, cultures, languages, a range of exotic smells, "Cuban-Chinese"

zac's Paris to the towering skyscrapers of Wall Street. Turning a corner in this jumble of immigrants and ethnic groups, the stroller suddenly enters a different world with its own language, customs, cuisine. Everything is available for consumption. In New York one can obtain almost any treasure. The anthropologist and his artistic friends André Breton, Max Ernst, André Masson, Georges Duthuit, Yves Tanguy, and Matta find masterpieces of pre-Columbian, Indian, Oceanic, or Japanese art stuffed in dealers' closets or apartments. Everything somehow finds its way here. For Lévi-Strauss New York in the 1940s is a wonderland of sudden openings to other times and places, of cultural matter out of place:

New York (and this is the source of its charm and its peculiar fascination) was then a city where anything seemed possible. Like the urban fabric, the social and cultural fabric was riddled with holes. All you had to do was pick one and slip through it if, like Alice, you wanted to get to the other side of the looking glass and find worlds so enchanting that they seemed unreal. (p. 261)

The anthropological *flâneur* is delighted, amazed, but also troubled by the chaos of simultaneous possibilities. This New York has something in common with the early-century dada-surrealist flea market—but with a difference. Its *objets trouvés* are not just occasions for reverie. This they surely are, but they are also signs of vanishing worlds. Some are treasures, works of great art.

Lévi-Strauss and the refugee surrealists were passionate collectors. The Third Avenue art dealer they frequented and advised, Julius Carlebach, always had several Northwest Coast, Melanesian, or Eskimo pieces on hand. According to Edmund Carpenter, the surrealists felt an immediate affinity with these objects' predilection for "visual puns"; their selections were nearly always of a very high quality. In addition to the art dealers another source for this band of primitive-art connoisseurs was the Museum of the American Indian. As Carpenter tells it: "The Surrealists began to visit the Bronx warehouse of that Museum, selecting for themselves, concentrating on a collection of magnificent Eskimo masks. These huge visual puns, made by the Kuskokwim Eskimo a century or more ago, constituted the greatest collection of its kind in the world. But

restaurants, and so on. It is enough to seriously smudge at least the spatial distinction between First and Third Worlds, center and periphery in the modern world system.

the Museum Director, George Heye, called them 'jokes' and sold half for \$38 and \$54 each. The Surrealists bought the best. Then they moved happily through Heye's Northwest Coast collection, stripping it of one masterwork after another" (Carpenter 1975:10). In 1946 Max Ernst, Barnett Newman, and several others mounted an exhibit of Northwest Coast Indian painting at the Betty Parsons Gallery. They brought together pieces from their private collections and artifacts from the American Museum of Natural History. By moving the museum pieces across town, "the Surrealists declassified them as scientific specimens and reclassified them as art" (Carpenter 1975:11).

The category of primitive art was emerging, with its market, its connoisseurship, and its close ties to modernist aesthetics. What had begun with the vogue for *l'art nègre* in the twenties would become institutionalized by the fifties and sixties; but in wartime New York the battle to gain widespread recognition for tribal objects was not yet won. Lévi-Strauss recalls that as cultural attaché to the French Embassy in 1946 he tried in vain to arrange a trade: for a massive collection of American Indian art a few Matisse and Picassos. But "the French authorities turned a deaf ear to my entreaties, and the Indian collections wound up in American museums" (1985:262). The collecting of Lévi-Strauss and the surrealists during the forties was part of a struggle to gain aesthetic status for these increasingly rare masterworks.



New York seemed to have something unusual, valuable, and beautiful for everyone. Franz Boas liked to tell his European visitors about a Kwakiutl informant who had come to work with him in the city. As Roman Jakobson recalls:

Boas loved to depict the indifference of this man from Vancouver Island toward Manhattan skyscrapers ("we built houses next to one another, and you stack them on top of each other"), toward the Aquarium ("we throw such fish back in the lake") or toward the motion pictures which seemed tedious and senseless. On the other hand, the stranger stood for hours spellbound in the Times Square freak shows with their giants and dwarfs, bearded ladies and fox-tailed girls, or in the Automats where drinks and sandwiches appear miraculously and where he felt transferred into the universe of Kwakiutl fairy-tales. (Jakobson 1959:142)

In Lévi-Strauss's memory brass balls on staircase bannisters also figure in the collection of fascinating phenomena (1960:27).



For a European New York's sheer space is vertiginous:

I strode up and down miles of Manhattan avenues, those deep chasms over which loomed skyscrapers' fantastic cliffs. I wandered randomly into cross streets, whose physiognomy changed drastically from one block to the next: sometimes poverty-stricken, sometimes middle-class or provincial, and most often chaotic. New York was decidedly not the ultra-modern metropolis I had expected, but an immense, horizontal and vertical disorder attributable to some spontaneous upheaval of the urban crust rather than to the deliberate plans of builders. (Lévi-Strauss 1985:258)

Lévi-Strauss's New York is a juxtaposition of ancient and recent "strata," chaotic remnants of former "upheavals." As in *Tristes tropiques* metaphors from geology serve to transform empirical surface incongruities or faults into legible history. For Lévi-Strauss the jumble of Manhattan becomes intelligible as an overlay of past and future, legible as a story of cultural development. Old and new are side by side. The European refugee encounters scraps of his past as well as a troubling prefiguration of common destiny.

New York is a site of travel and reverie unlike the oneiric city of Breton's *Nadja* or Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*. For Parisian emigrés finding their feet on its streets and avenues it is never a known place, something to be made strange by a certain surrealist and ethnographic attention. Instead they are ambushed by the familiar—an older Paris in Greenwich Village, glimpses of the European world in immigrant neighborhoods, medieval buildings reassembled at the Cloisters. But these reminders are masks, survivals, mere collectibles. In New York one is permanently away from home, *dépaysé*, both in space and in time. Post- and prefigurative New York is fantastically suspended between a jumble of pasts and a uniform future.

Whoever wanted to go hunting needed only a little culture, and flair, for doorways to open in the wall of industrial civilization and reveal other worlds and other times. Doubtless nowhere more than in New York at that time were there such facilities for escape. Those possibili-

ties seem almost mythical today when we no longer dare to dream of doors: at best we may wonder about niches to cower in. But even these have become the stake in a fierce competition among those who are not willing to live in a world without friendly shadows or secret shortcuts known only to a few initiates. Losing its old dimensions one after another, this world has pushed us back into the one remaining dimension: one will probe it in vain for secret loopholes. (1985:262)

The resigned “entropologist” of *Tristes tropiques* remembers New York as the final glow and prophetic disintegration of all real cultural differences. Soon even the loopholes will be gone. Millennia of human diversity and invention seem to have been shipwrecked here, remnants and broken shards, good to evoke in escapist reveries, good to collect as art (or antiques), and “good to think with” in salvaging the cultural structures of a transhistorical *esprit humain*. The chronotope of New York prefigures anthropology.

Structuralist anthropology at least was conceived and written there. It is hard to imagine a better setting. Among New York’s jumble of cultures, arts, and traditions, as a professor at the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes, Lévi-Strauss attended Roman Jakobson’s celebrated lectures on sound and meaning. On many occasions he has testified to their revolutionary impact. Jakobson’s demonstration that the bewildering diversity of meaningful human sounds could be reduced to discrete differential systems through the application of phonemic analysis offered an immediate model for studying the plethora of human kinship systems. More generally Jakobson’s approach suggested a research program—that of discovering elementary cognitive structures behind the many “language-like” productions of human culture. Amid the cultural-historical jumble of wartime New York—too much in the same place at the same time—Lévi-Strauss glimpsed an underlying order.

The Elementary Structures of Kinship was researched in the New York Public Library reading room, where, beside what seemed to be a parody of a feathered Indian with a Parker pen, Lévi-Strauss pored over accounts of tribal marriage rules. The founding text of structural anthropology was drafted in a small, dilapidated studio in Greenwich Village, down the street from Yves Tanguy and a few yards (through the walls) from Claude Shannon, who, unknown to his neighbor, “was creating cybernetics” (1985:260).



Uptown at the American Museum of Natural History Lévi-Strauss could wander and wonder among the intimate, hyperreal dioramas of African animal species. Or he could marvel in the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians, where Kwakiutl and Tlingit masks in their glass cases whispered to him of Baudelairean *correspondances* (Lévi-Strauss 1943:180). Indeed by the 1940s a deep correspondence between primitive and modern art was widely assumed in avant-garde milieux. The anthropologist friend of the surrealists saw these magical, archaic objects as luminous examples of human creative genius. He wrote in 1943 for the *Gazette des beaux arts*:

These objects—beings transformed into things, human animals, living boxes—seem as remote as possible from our own conception of art since the time of the Greeks. Yet even here one would err to suppose that a single possibility of the aesthetic life had escaped the prophets and virtuosos of the Northwest Coast. Several of those masks and statues are thoughtful portraits which prove a concern to attain not only physical resemblance but the most subtle spiritual essence of the soul. The sculptor of Alaska and British Columbia is not only the sorcerer who confers upon the supernatural a visible form but also the creator, the interpreter who translates into eternal *chefs d'oeuvre* the fugitive emotions of man. (1943:181)

Human artistic creation transcends location and time. To communicate the incredible inventiveness he sees in the Northwest Coast Hall, Lévi-Strauss finds a revealing comparison: “This incessant renovation, this sureness which in no matter what direction guarantees definite and overwhelming success, this scorn of the beaten path, this ceaseless driving toward new feats which infallibly ends in dazzling results—to know this our civilization had to await the exceptional destiny of a Picasso. It is not futile to emphasize that the daring ventures of a single man which have left us breathless for thirty years, were known and practiced during one hundred and fifty years by an entirely indigenous culture” (1943:175). The passage is undoubtedly adapted to its occasion: the need to promote tribal works for an art-world public. (Elsewhere Lévi-Strauss would stress the systems limiting and making possible inventions by any local group or individual creator.) Here he insists only that tribal works are as inventive as that modern paragon of creativity, Picasso. Implicit in the conceit was a vision of human cultures as comparable to

creative artists. As I have already argued, the twentieth-century categories of art and culture presupposed each other.

The categories were, however, institutionally separated. If the surrealists could reclassify tribal objects by moving them across town from an anthropology museum to an art gallery, the end points of the traffic were not thereby undermined. The discourses of anthropology and art were developing on separate but complementary paths. Their evolving relationship may be seen in a legendary surrealist journal of 1942–43 edited by David Hare and dominated by its “editorial advisers” André Breton, Max Ernst, and Marcel Duchamp. *VVV*, according to its subtitle, aspired to cover the fields of “poetry, plastic arts, anthropology, sociology, psychology.” In fact it did justice to the first two, with a sprinkling of the third. (Only four issues of *VVV* appeared in two years.) Number 1 contained two short articles by Lévi-Strauss, one on Kaduveo Indian face painting, the other an obituary for Malinowski. The following number contained a note by Alfred Métraux on two ancestral figurines from Easter Island. And in the final issue Robert Allerton Parker fancifully interpreted complex line drawings from the New Hebrides (extracted from A. B. Deacon’s ethnography) under the title “Cannibal Designs.” In general material from non-Western cultures was included as exoticism or naive art. There were occasional photos of an Alaskan mask or a kachina.

In *VVV* anthropology was part of the décor of avant-garde art and writing. Serious cultural analysis made no real inroads into what were by now canonical surrealist notions of genius, inspiration, the irrational, the magical, the exotic, the primitive. Few of those around Breton (with the possible exception of Max Ernst) had any systematic interest in ethnological science. Lévi-Strauss’s contributions to *VVV* seem out of place. Essentially a journal of art and literature, *VVV* was preoccupied with dreams, archetypes, genius, and apocalyptic revolution. It engaged in little of the unsettling, reflexive ethnography practiced by the dissidents of the earlier journal *Documents* (see Chapter 4). “Mainstream” surrealism did not typically bring cultural analysis to bear on its own categories.

Surrealist art and structural anthropology were both concerned with the human spirit’s “deep” shared springs of creativity. The common aim was to transcend—not, as in *Documents*, to describe critically or subvert—the local orders of culture and history. Surrealism’s subject was an international and elemental humanity “anthropological” in scope. Its object was Man, something it shared with an emerging structuralism. But a conventional division of labor was solidifying. Within the project of

probing and extending humanity's creative esprit, the two methods diverged, one playing art to the other's science.



Modern practices of art and culture collecting, scientific and avant-garde, have situated themselves at the end of a global history. They have occupied a place—apocalyptic, progressive, revolutionary, or tragic—from which to gather the valued inheritances of Man. Concretizing this temporal setup, Lévi-Strauss's "post- and prefigurative" New York anticipates humanity's entropic future and gathers up its diverse pasts in decontextualized, collectible forms. The ethnic neighborhoods, the provincial reminders, the Chinese Opera Company, the feathered Indian in the library, the works of art from other continents and eras that turn up in dealers' closets: all are survivals, remnants of threatened or vanished traditions. The world's cultures appear in the chronotope as shreds of humanity, degraded commodities, or elevated great art but always functioning as vanishing "loopholes" or "escapes" from a one-dimensional fate.

In New York a jumble of humanity has washed up in one vertiginous place and time, to be grasped simultaneously in all its precious diversity and emerging uniformity. In this chronotope the pure products of humanity's pasts are rescued by modern aesthetics only as sublimated art. They are salvaged by modern anthropology as consultable archives for thinking about the range of human invention. In Lévi-Strauss's setting the products of the present-becoming-future are shallow, impure, escapist, and "retro" rather than truly different—"antiques" rather than genuine antiquities. Cultural invention is subsumed by a commodified "mass culture" (1985:264–267).

The chronotope of New York supports a global allegory of fragmentation and ruin. The modern anthropologist, lamenting the passing of human diversity, collects and values its survivals, its enduring works of art. Lévi-Strauss's most prized acquisition from a marvelous New York where everything seemed available was a nearly complete set of volumes 1 through 48 of the *Annual Reports* of the Bureau of American Ethnology. These were, he tells us in another evocation of the war years, "sacrosanct volumes, representing most of our knowledge about the American Indians . . . It was as though the American Indian cultures had suddenly come alive and become almost tangible through the physical contact that these books, written and published before these cultures' definite extinction, established between their times and me" (Lévi-Strauss 1976:50).

These precious records of human diversity had been recorded by an ethnology still in what he calls its "pure" rather than "diluted" state (Lévi-Strauss 1960:26). They would form the authentic ethnographic material from which structuralism's metacultural orders were constructed.

Anthropological collections and taxonomies, however, are constantly menaced by temporal contingencies. Lévi-Strauss knows this. It is a disorder he always holds at bay. For example in *Tristes tropiques* he is acutely aware that focusing on a tribal past necessarily blinds him to an emergent present. Wandering through the modern landscape of New York, far from encountering less and less to know, the anthropologist is confronted with more and more—a heady mix-and-match of possible human combinations. He struggles to maintain a unified perspective; he looks for order in deep "geological" structures. But in Lévi-Strauss's work generally, the englobing "entropological" narrative barely contains a current history of loss, transformation, invention, and emergence.

Toward the end of his brilliant inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, "The Scope of Anthropology," Lévi-Strauss evokes what he calls "anthropological doubt," the inevitable result of ethnographic risk-taking, the "buffetings and denials directed at one's most cherished ideas and habits by other ideas and habits best able to rebut them" (1960:26). He poignantly recalls Boas's Kwakiutl visitor, transfixed by the freaks and automats of Times Square, and he wonders whether anthropology may not be condemned to equally bizarre perceptions of the distant societies and histories it seeks to grasp. New York was perhaps Lévi-Strauss's only true "fieldwork": for once he stayed long enough and mastered the local language. Aspects of the place, such as Boas's Kwakiutl, have continued to charm and haunt his anthropological culture collecting.

But one New York native sits with special discomfort in the chronotope of 1941. This is the feathered Indian with the Parker pen working in the Public Library. For Lévi-Strauss the Indian is primarily associated with the past, the "extinct" societies recorded in the precious Bureau of American Ethnology *Annual Reports*. The anthropologist feels himself "going back in time" (1985:266). In modern New York an Indian can appear only as a survival or a kind of incongruous parody.

Another historical vision might have positioned the two scholars in the library differently. The decade just preceding Lévi-Strauss's arrival in New York had seen a dramatic turnaround in federal policy. Under John Collier's leadership at the Bureau of Indian Affairs a "New Indian Policy" actively encouraged tribal reorganization all over the country. While

Lévi-Strauss studied and collected their pasts, many “extinct” Native American groups were in the process of reconstituting themselves culturally and politically. Seen in this context, did the Indian with the Parker pen represent a “going back in time” or a glimpse of another future? That is a different story. (See Chapter 12.)

Other Appropriations

To tell these other stories, local histories of cultural survival and emergence, we need to resist deep-seated habits of mind and systems of authenticity. We need to be suspicious of an almost-automatic tendency to relegate non-Western peoples and objects to the pasts of an increasingly homogeneous humanity. A few examples of current invention and contestation may suggest different chronotopes for art and culture collecting.

Anne Vitart-Fardoulis, a curator at the Musée de l’Homme, has published a sensitive account of the aesthetic, historical, and cultural discourses routinely used to explicate individual museum objects. She discusses a famous intricately painted animal skin (its present name: M.H. 34.33.5), probably originating among the Fox Indians of North America. The skin turned up in Western collecting systems some time ago in a “cabinet of curiosities”; it was used to educate aristocratic children and was much admired for its aesthetic qualities. Vitart-Fardoulis tells us that now the skin can be decoded ethnographically in terms of its combined “masculine” and “feminine” graphic styles and understood in the context of a probable role in specific ceremonies. But the meaningful contexts are not exhausted. The story takes a new turn:

The grandson of one of the Indians who came to Paris with Buffalo Bill was searching for the [painted skin] tunic his grandfather had been forced to sell to pay his way back to the United States when the circus collapsed. I showed him all the tunics in our collection, and he paused before one of them. Controlling his emotion, he spoke. He told the meaning of this lock of hair, of that design, why this color had been used, the meaning of that feather . . . This garment, formerly beautiful and interesting but passive and indifferent, little by little became meaningful, active testimony to a living moment through the mediation of someone who did not observe and analyze but who lived the object and for whom the object lived. It scarcely matters whether the tunic is really his grandfather’s. (Vitart-Fardoulis 1986:12)

Whatever is happening in this encounter, two things are clearly not happening. The grandson is not replacing the object in its original or "authentic" cultural context. That is long past. His encounter with the painted skin is part of a modern recollection. And the painted tunic is not being appreciated as art, as an aesthetic object. The encounter is too specific, too enmeshed in family history and ethnic memory.¹¹ Some aspects of "cultural" and "aesthetic" appropriation are certainly at work, but they occur within a *current tribal history*, a different temporality from that governing the dominant systems I diagrammed earlier. In the context of a present-becoming-future the old painted tunic becomes newly, traditionally meaningful.

The currency of "tribal" artifacts is becoming more visible to non-Indians. Many new tribal recognition claims are pending at the Department of the Interior. And whether or not they are formally successful matters less than what they make manifest: the historical and political reality of Indian survival and resurgence, a force that impinges on Western art and culture collections. The "proper" place of many objects in museums is now subject to contest. The Zuni who prevented the loan of their war god to the Museum of Modern Art (see Chapter 9) were challenging the dominant art-culture system, for in traditional Zuni belief war god figures are sacred and dangerous. They are not ethnographic artifacts, and they are certainly not "art." Zuni claims on these objects specifically reject their "promotion" (in all senses of the term) to the status of aesthetic or scientific treasures.

I would not claim that the only true home for the objects in question

11. In his wide-ranging study "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" (1986) Michael Fischer identifies general processes of cultural reinvention, personal search, and future-oriented appropriations of tradition. The specificity of some Native American relations with collected "tribal" objects is revealed in a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities by the Oregon Art Institute (Monroe 1986). In preparation for a reinstallation of the Rasmussen Collection of Northwest Coast works at the Portland Art Museum a series of consultations is envisioned with the participation of Haida and Tlingit elders from Alaska. The proposal makes clear that great care must be given "to matching specific groups of objects in the collection to the clan membership and knowledge base of specific elders. Northwest Coast Natives belong to specific clans who have extensive oral traditions and histories over which they have ownership. Elders are responsible for representing their clans as well as their group" (Monroe 1986:8). The reinstallation "will present *both the academic interpretation of an object or objects and the interpretation of the same material as viewed and understood by Native elders and artists*" (p. 5; original emphasis).

is in "the tribe"—a location that, in many cases, is far from obvious. My point is just that the dominant, interlocking contexts of art and anthropology are no longer self-evident and uncontested. There are other contexts, histories, and futures in which non-Western objects and cultural records may "belong." The rare Maori artifacts that in 1984–85 toured museums in the United States normally reside in New Zealand museums. But they are controlled by the traditional Maori authorities, whose permission was required for them to leave the country. Here and elsewhere the circulation of museum collections is significantly influenced by resurgent indigenous communities.

What is at stake is something more than conventional museum programs of community education and "outreach" (Alexander 1979:215). Current developments question the very status of museums as historical-cultural theaters of memory. Whose memory? For what purposes? The Provincial Museum of British Columbia has for some time encouraged Kwakiutl carvers to work from models in its collection. It has lent out old pieces and donated new ones for use in modern potlatches. Surveying these developments, Michael Ames, who directs the University of British Columbia Museum, observes that "Indians, traditionally treated by museums only as objects and clients, add now the role of patrons." He continues: "The next step has also occurred. Indian communities establish their own museums, seek their own National Museum grants, install their own curators, hire their own anthropologists on contract, and call for repatriation of their own collections" (Ames 1986:57). The Quadra Island Kwakiutl Museum located in Quathraski Cove, British Columbia, displays tribal work returned from the national collections in Ottawa. The objects are exhibited in glass cases, but arranged according to their original family ownership. In Alert Bay, British Columbia, the U'mista Cultural Centre displays repatriated artifacts in a traditional Kwakiutl "big house" arranged in the sequence of their appearance at the potlatch ceremony. The new institutions function both as public exhibits and as cultural centers linked to ongoing tribal traditions. Two Haida museums have also been established in the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the movement is growing elsewhere in Canada and the United States.

Resourceful Native American groups may yet appropriate the Western museum—as they have made their own another European institution, the "tribe." Old objects may again participate in a tribal present-becoming-future. Moreover, it is worth briefly noting that the same thing is possible for written artifacts collected by salvage ethnography. Some

of these old texts (myths, linguistic samples, lore of all kinds) are now being recycled as local history and tribal "literature."¹² The objects of both art and culture collecting are susceptible to other appropriations.

This disturbance of Western object systems is reflected in a recent book by Ralph Coe, *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art: 1965–1985* (1986). (On inventive tribal work see also Macnair, Hoover, and Neary 1984; Steinbright 1986; Babcock, Monthan, and Monthan 1986). Coe's work is a collector's tour de force. Once again a white authority "discovers" true tribal art—but with significant differences. Hundreds of photographs document very recent works, some made for local use, some for sale to Indians or white outsiders. Beautiful objects—many formerly classified as curios, folk art, or tourist art—are located in ongoing, inventive traditions. Coe effectively questions the widespread assumption that fine tribal work is disappearing, and he throws doubt on common criteria for judging purity and authenticity. In his collection among recognizably traditional kachinas, totem poles, blankets, and plaited baskets we find skillfully beaded tennis shoes and baseball caps, articles developed for the curio trade, quilts, and decorated leather cases (peyote kits modeled on old-fashioned toolboxes).

Since the Native American Church, in whose ceremonies the peyote kits are used, did not exist in the nineteenth century, their claim to traditional status cannot be based on age. A stronger historical claim can in fact be made for many productions of the curio trade, such as the beaded "fancies" (hanging birds, mirror frames) made by Matilda Hill, a Tuscarora who sells at Niagara Falls:

"Just try telling Matilda Hill that her 'fancies' (cat. no. 46) are tourist curios," said Mohawk Rick Hill, author of an unpublished paper on the subject. "The Tuscarora have been able to trade pieces like that bird or beaded frame (cat. no. 47) at Niagara since the end of the War

12. The archives of James Walker, produced before 1910, have become relevant to the teaching of local history by Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation (see Chapter 1, n. 15, and Clifford 1986a:15–17). Also a corpus of translated and untranslated Tolowa tales and linguistic texts collected by A. L. Kroeber and P. E. Goddard are important evidence in a planned petition for tribal recognition. The texts were gathered as "salvage ethnography" to record the shreds of a purportedly vanishing culture. But in the context of Tolowa persistence, retranslated and interpreted by Tolowa elders and their Native American lawyer, the texts yield evidence of tribal history, territorial limits, group distinctness, and oral tradition. They are Tolowa "literature" (Slagle 1986).

of 1812, when they were granted exclusive rights, and she wouldn't take kindly to anyone slighting her culture!"

"Surely," Coe adds, "a trade privilege established at Niagara Falls in 1816 should be acceptable as tradition by now" (1986:17). He drives the general point home¹³: "Another misconception derives from our failure to recognize that Indians have always traded both within and outside their culture; it is second nature to the way they operate in all things. Many objects are, and always have been, created in the Indian world without a specific destination in mind. The history of Indian trading predates any white influence, and trading continues today unabated. It is a fascinating instrument of social continuity, and in these modern times its scope has been greatly enlarged" (p. 16).

Coe does not hesitate to commission new "traditional" works, and he spends considerable time eliciting the specific meaning of objects both as individual possessions and as tribal art. We see and hear particular artists; the coexistence of spiritual, aesthetic, and commercial forces is always visible. Overall Coe's collecting project represents and advocates ongoing art forms that are both related to and separate from dominant systems of aesthetic-ethnographic value. In *Lost and Found Traditions* authenticity is something produced, not salvaged. Coe's collection, for all its love of the past, gathers futures.

A long chapter on "tradition" resists summary, for the diverse statements quoted from practice artists, old and young, do not reproduce prevailing Western definitions. "Whites think of our experience as the past," says one of a group of students discussing the topic. "We know it is right here with us" (p. 49).

13. The common presumption that tribal art is *essentially* noncommercial ("sacred," "spiritual," "environmental," and so on) is of questionable value everywhere. A revealing case is the New Guinea Sepik region, where customary objects and lore have long been traded, bought, and sold. To a significant degree the involvement of local groups in the art markets of a wider world can be "traditional." Indigenous commodity systems interact with outside capitalist forces; they do not simply give way to them. The world system is thus dynamically and locally organized. A persistent tendency to see non-Western societies as lacking historical agency is corrected by a growing number of academic studies; for example Rosaldo 1980, R. Price 1983, and Sahlins 1985. These works undermine the binary ("Orientalist") division of human groups into historical and mythical, "hot" and "cold," diachronic and synchronic, modern and archaic. Sally Price (1986) draws attention to the diverse *historical visions* of non-Western, "tribal" peoples and to the role of art in articulating these visions.

"We always begin our summer dances with a song that repeats only four words, over and over. They don't mean much of anything in English, 'young chiefs stand up.' To us those words demonstrate our pride in our lineage and our happiness in always remembering it. It is a happy song. Tradition is not something you gab about . . . It's in the doing." (p. 46)

"Your tradition is 'there' always. You're flexible enough to make of it what you want. It's always with you. I pray to the old pots at the ruins and dream about making pottery. I tell them I want to learn it. We live for today, but never forget the past." (p. 47)

"Our job as artists is to go beyond, which implies a love of change, [always accomplished with] traditions in mind, by talking to the elders of the tribe and by being with your grandparents. The stories they tell are just amazing. When you become exposed to them, everything becomes a reflection of those events. There's a great deal of satisfaction being an artist of traditions." (p. 47)

"We've always had charms: everything that's new is old with us." (p. 79)

JAMES CLIFFORD

THE

PREDICAMENT
OF CULTURE

Twentieth-Century
Ethnography,
Literature, and Art



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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed by Joyce C. Weston

This book is printed on acid-free paper, and its binding materials have been chosen for strength and durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Clifford, James, 1945–

The predicament of culture twentieth-century ethnography,
literature, and art / James Clifford.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0–674–69842–8 (alk. paper) ISBN 0–674–69843–6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Ethnology—History—20th century. 2. Ethnology—Philosophy.

I. Title.

GN308.C55 1988

306'.09—dc19

87–24173

CIP

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