

Antropologia Portuguesa

Volume 18 · 2007

Departamento de Antropologia | Universidade de Coimbra

The poetics and prosaics of making exhibitions. A personal reflection on the Centenary Gallery

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Abstract By selecting and describing different life-stages in the production of one particular exhibition - the permanent ethnographic displays in the *Centenary Gallery* of the Horniman Museum, London - this paper examines the dialogical nature of exhibition making. From curatorial conception, through design, to the Museum's corporate modifications, the role of the curator as dominant producer is problematised and the differentiated languages of museum practice are interrogated. Attention is particularly focused on the intersections and interactions between and across these different professional languages which serve to constitute, transform and fix exhibitionary media.

Key words Museum ethnography; exhibitionary process; history of collecting; curatorship.

Resumo Por meio da selecção e descrição de diferentes momentos no ciclo de vida da produção de uma exposição – a exposição permanente da *Centenary Gallery* do Horniman Museum de Londres – o presente artigo analisa a natureza dialógica do processo de montagem de exposições. A análise dos processos de concepção, de design e de transformação da organização do museu, permitem problematizar o papel do curador e colocar em questão as linguagens diferenciadas da prática museológica. O debate é centrado nas intersecções e interacções entre as diferentes linguagens profissionais que servem para constituir, transformar e fixar os meios expositivos.

Palavras-chave Etnografia de museus; processo expositivo; história de colecções; curadoria.

“Museums are never *just* spaces for the playing out of wider social relationships: a museum is a process as well as a structure” (Macdonald, 1996: 4; original emphasis).

“The phenomenon of internal dialogism...is present to a greater or lesser extent in all the realms of the life of discourse ... in *literary* prose, ... dialogism energizes from within the very mode in which the discourse conceives of its object and its means of expressing it, transforming the semantics and the syntactical structure of the discourse. Here the dialogical reciprocal orientation becomes, so to speak, an event of discourse itself, animating it and dramatizing it from within” (Bakhtin *in* Todorov, 1984: 65; original emphasis).

The performative act of making or ‘writing’ exhibitions is a creative, prosaic, and political process. Whereas semiotic or post-structuralist approaches to interrogating the ‘exhibition/curator/visitor’ matrix as ‘text/author/reader’ can be innovative and insightful (Porter, 1996; Levell and Shelton, 1998); by concentrating on the end product, the exhibition, rather than the process of exhibiting they run “the risk of wishing to fix meaning to the exclusion of the ‘hidden history’ of production” (Lidchi, 1997: 199). Furthermore, by overlooking the issues of production and the identity of the producer/s, they have the propensity to fuel either the stereotype of the museum as an anonymous monologic authorial voice or that of the curator as the legitimate and singular, phallogocentric author (Levell, 1996). Although curators are generally responsible for originating exhibitions, the actualisation of display – the concepts, exhibits, texts, images, and spatial aesthetics – is the product of a complex process of communication, translation, and negotiation between internal and external subjects and agencies. Hence authorship as applied to exhibitions and curatorial practice is a problematic term and progressive curators, reflecting on their own experiences, have opted to re-inscribe their practice: describing their role as ‘facilitators’ (Shelton, 1995) or ‘translators’ (Mack, 2001). Such designations open the space for exploring the ‘dialogism’ or, what Todorov (1984: 60) examining Bakhtin’s work terms, ‘intertextuality’ of praxis,¹ that fashions the poetry and prose of exhibi-

¹ Todorov’s structuralist interpretation has been critiqued by Morson and Emerson for reducing the complexity of Bakhtin’s conceptual understanding of the term ‘dialogue’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 6).

tions. Following this line of enquiry, pursuing the literary trope as well as drawing inspiration from anthropological debates on 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), this paper takes the form of a critical, subjective, and unavoidably partial reflection, from a curator's perspective, on the dialogical relations and processes that constituted one particular exhibition, the *Centenary Gallery. 100 Years of Collecting*.²

The *Centenary Gallery* is a 'permanent' exhibition, located in the Emslie Horniman Gallery of the Horniman Museum, London; it opened to the public on 14 June 2002. The exhibition is intended to offer a series of quasi-chronological 'glimpses' at the history of the institution's ethnographic collections, collectors, systems of classification and display. The critical biography that follows examines some of the poignant material transformations or different life-stages of this exhibition: from its conceptualisation in the curatorial section of the Anthropology Collections and Research group; through its visual realisation by designers; to its final transformation, following its appropriation by public services, from a display orientated to the Museum's anthropology collections to a generic gallery to mark the institution's centenary. The first part of this biography presents a descriptive account of the context and processes involved in developing the thematic concepts of the exhibition. The second and third parts are oriented to illuminating and discussing some of the transformative or dialogical facets of the exhibitionary process as concepts, objects and texts were re-translated by designers into the poetic language of display, and further modified by public services into the prosaic language of the Museum Profession. Because the name of the exhibition was one of the ongoing points of dialogical divergence between curatorial and public service sections, as will be explained later, for the purpose of this exegesis, echoing Benjamin, I have chosen to refer to the exhibition as the *Ur-Exhibition*.³ Lastly, before entering the descriptive account, it should be

² First, I would like to thank Michael Cameron, who ensured that the actual process of making the *Ur-Exhibition* was deeply stimulating and challenging. I would also like to thank Maria Ragan of the Horniman Museum for generously and efficiently spending time to answer my numerous questions.

³ The prefix 'Ur' is utilised to denote original or primitive form. Benjamin adopted the term 'ur-phenomenon' to apply to images in which traces of the modern present could be discerned (Buck-Morss, 1989: 71-4). I have chosen to adopt the 'Ur' prefix and refer to

noted that the interrogation of the processes of consumption is a fundamental requisite of analyses that set out to investigate the dialogical nature of exhibitions, however such a line of enquiry falls beyond the remit of this particular paper.

The exhibitionary chronotope

For Mikhail Bakhtin every artistic form is organised and constituted by its own particular ‘chronotope’ (1981: 840). A specific field of interconnected time and space relations which are not so much “visibly present in activity as they are the *ground* for activity” (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 369; original emphasis). Although Bakhtin restricted his analysis of chronotopes to literary criticism, it can equally and usefully be extended to examine the spatial and temporal dynamics underscoring exhibitionary phenomena. With this in mind, in order to appreciate the character of the *Ur-Exhibition* chronotope, it is essential to historically position the exhibition in the wider Ethnographic Redisplay (ERD) Project and in so doing situate my role as curator.

The Horniman Museum has one of the largest public ethnographic collections in the United Kingdom, numbering in excess of 70,000 objects (Shelton, 2001b: 281). From the beginning of the twentieth century, these collections were displayed in the South Hall, a large, balconied and vaulted gallery. In the early 1990s, however, major structural faults necessitated the dismantling of the ethnographic displays and the closure of the South Hall for an extended period while extensive works were carried out to remedy, renovate and restore the gallery. This precipitated closure of display and gallery, in many ways marked a boundary or threshold in the institution’s history. It opened a creative space for reflection and action, for innovating exhibitions and transforming curatorial working patterns and practices (see Shelton, 2000a). With government funding, approximately £1.3 million (2.15 million euros)¹, set aside for the redisplay, as

the ‘Centenary Gallery’ as the *Ur-Exhibition* to distinguish the archetypical and conceptual exhibition from the end product.

¹ An exchange rate of 1.65 euro = 1 GBP has been adopted throughout this paper.

well as a number of significant changes in human resources, including the appointment of 1) a new energetic director, Michael Houlihan, who initiated a programme of organisational restructuring; 2) a new Keeper of Anthropology Collections and Research group, Anthony Shelton; and 3) an Exhibitions Manager, Claire West, to head the newly created Exhibitions team, an infra-structure was created to undertake one of the most ambitious redisplay projects in the Museum's history.

When Shelton commenced work on the conceptual framework of the ERD project, he proposed two permanent, interrelated exhibitions: one in the South Hall devoted to the Museum's African collections and another (in a then unspecified space with unstipulated funding) centred on collectors and the cultures of collecting. The former, as has been documented by Shelton (2000a), developed into the innovative, multi-vocal *African Worlds* exhibition; and the latter, developed into the *Ur-Exhibition*. In the early stages of the project, in March 1996, I was appointed on a temporary contract, to undertake research on the collections and thus develop the concepts for the *Ur-Exhibition*, which was then known as the 'Collectors Gallery'.⁵

From the outset, the two exhibitions were envisaged as being integrally connected, in conceptual, spatial and temporal terms. Through the provision of a critical path, the *Ur-Exhibition* was to offer visitors a journey through time - a series of frames illustrating and relativising the histories of objects, collectors, collecting, classification, and display. By extension *African Worlds*, situated in the adjacent gallery and linked by a small corridor, was to constitute the penultimate 'frame' in the *Ur-Exhibition* series, depicting the contemporary history of collecting and display. And the ultimate frame of the exhibitionary chronotope, was understood to integrate and envelope both galleries, including the temporary exhibition area (the South Hall balcony).

At a number of different levels, the *Ur-Exhibition* was intended to form a conceptual link, a dialogical and visual counterpoint, to *African*

⁵ From March 1996 to September 1998, I worked full-time on the *Ur-Exhibition* project. This was followed by a period of maternity leave. In September 1999, I returned to work on a part-time basis. I left the Museum, when my contract came to an end in June 2001, one year before the Exhibition opened. At the time of writing this paper, I have not viewed the *Centenary Gallery* as finished product.

Worlds. Whereas the latter was articulated as a low-density, non-linear multi-thematic exhibition aimed at an international audience; the *Ur-Exhibition* was imagined as a high density display; one that would highlight the Museum's general ethnographic holdings (specifically its Asian, native American, Oceanic and European collections) and echo in its visual crowding the Horniman's 'traditional' ethnographic display genre. This contrast prompted Michael Cameron, the designer of both exhibitions, to succinctly conceptualised the two discrete galleries as the white and the black boxes. In theory, the *Ur-Exhibition* provided the scope to illustrate the diversity and richness of the Museum's holdings using a narrative and visual language that would be familiar to the institution's primary audience, its local communities, whilst appealing to both national and international visitors.

Due to limited resources, combined with the complexity and logistics of the ERD project, it was not viable or perhaps even appropriate to open the two exhibitions concurrently. Therefore the inauguration was planned in two phases: *African Worlds* was to open first, followed three months later by the *Ur-Exhibition*. According more or less to plan, *African Worlds* opened in March 1999, however, the trajectory of the *Ur-Exhibition* was radically altered. This alteration had a marked bearing on the progress, content and fate of the exhibition. In brief, the Horniman Museum was granted £13 million (21.45 million euros) from the Heritage Lottery Fund to undertake a major re-building project, to rationalise the existing Museum and build a new extension, linking Museum and gardens, and providing an orientation space; new temporary exhibition, educational, and musical instrument galleries; a café, terrace, and shop. Institutional resources were again redeployed to dismantle existing displays in preparation for the demolition of a large aspect of the Museum building and the construction of a new wing; at the same time, curatorial, conservation, collections management, exhibitions, and education sections began working on the new galleries. It is noteworthy that this threshold period also witnessed changes in personnel and in the organisational hierarchy. Most significantly, Janet Vitmayer replaced Michael Houlihan as Director; Finbarr Whooley was appointed as Assistant Director (Communications); Anthony Shelton was promoted to Head of Collections, Research and Development; and Barbara Alcaraz was appointed as the first Health and Safety Officer. Moreover, the *Ur-Exhibition* project was

moved from the Anthropology Collections and Research group (curatorial) section and placed under the Communications section (the public services section).

For the duration of the demolition project, *Ur-Exhibition* activities were effectively frozen. Although concepts had been approved, objects selected, designs signed off, the gallery prepared (with display cases and integral mounts constructed *in-situ*), and text panels written, the exhibits could not be installed because of the building works. With the *Ur-Exhibition* in its final stages of production, institutional attention was redirected to the more embryonic display projects. At this stage, I was authorised to complete my research on the history of the early Museum, its collections and founder, Frederick Horniman (see Levell, 2000). It is the material vestiges of these biographies which form the nucleus of the Horniman Museum's collections today and functioned as the point of departure for the *Ur-Exhibition*.

Thematic concepts

As a curator presented with a brief to research the history of the ethnographic collections and formulate a working concept document for a permanent display orientated to the cultures of collecting, I was confronted by the knotted and obscure biographies and semantic complexities of objects and collectors. One of the first curatorial objectives was to survey the primary documents - the physical objects and aspects of the related archival material (acquisition registers, letters, reports, museum guides, and other ephemera) – and utilise this preliminary knowledge to formulate a practical pilot study.

Working from 'paper' indexes and archives, the first pilot study aimed to physically reconstruct aspects of some of the early collections, including Frederick Horniman's own. However, this methodological approach proved unsuitable: the study was aborted due to the impossibility of positively identifying by museum number, a significant number of ethnographic objects, particularly those belonging to the early period of the Museum's history. Although the Museum keeps registers listing all acquisitions from 1898 onwards, these are to a degree imaginary inventories. Over the course of the twentieth century, a substantial percentage of

objects have forsaken their discrete museum numbers, assuming they had ever been marked, and different numbering systems had been introduced, including a rather zealously employed no number, 'n.n.', convention. Therefore, no certainty could be attached to the identification or 'authenticity' of individual objects, especially those which formed part of type groups. For example, of a set of twenty or more Sri Lankan curing masks, the majority of which were 'n.n.' cases, it was not possible to isolate with any surety the group of 'Ceylonese Devil dancing masks' that Frederick Horniman had purchased in the late 1890s. Thus at an early stage, a consensus was reached: in the absence of criteria for authenticating source of acquisition, type objects drawn from the Museum's holdings would be employed, and this solution would be transparent in the labelling system. With this poetic licence approbated, work proceeded on further developing the concepts and making the initial selection of objects.

Archival research undertaken in the first year, reinforced and extended the hypothesis that the history of the Museum's ethnographic collections was marked by four *epistemic* fissures; discontinuities which noticeably coincided with changes in curator-cum-directors. Accordingly, these periods were named after the individuals who influenced their distinctive attributes: the Horniman period (1860-1901); the Haddon period (1901-1946); the Samson period (1947-1965); and the Boston/Houlihan period (1965-1998) (see Shelton, 2001a: 205-6). For the *Ur-Exhibition*, these four time-frames were adopted to systematize and timetable the research, and in due course they became the organising force, structuring the exhibition concept proposal (Levell, April 1997), as well as the exhibition itself.

The exhibition proposal, *The Collectors Gallery. A Textual and Visual Summary* (Levell, April 1997) was a 40 page bound document, consisting of descriptive prose, quotations, coloured images, and diagrams. It was compiled by the curatorial team in order to communicate (to the designers and museum personnel) the histories and intellectual, emotional, and visual languages and ideas that informed the exhibition concept. In brief, the document, which was composed in conjunction with object identification and selection processes, proposed eight key sections: 1) Frederick John Horniman: Tea, Tours and Treasure Trove; 2) Emslie and Eric Horniman: Artists and Adventurers; 3) A Princely Gift:

Illustrating Evolution; 4) 'Head-hunters': Alfred Cort Haddon and the Cambridge Circle; 5) The Encyclopaedia: An A-Z of Cultures; 6) Worlds in Jars: Models, Dioramas and Films; 7) Scholars, Travellers and Traders; and 8) A Cabinet of Trophies. Furthermore, these sections were amalgamated into four main themes: The Horniman Family; The Story of Evolution; the Museum as Encyclopaedia; and A Cabinet of Trophies. As well as describing the exhibition concept, the proposal highlighted a number of key issues for further discussion, including, for example, the inclusion or exclusion of certain collectors and specific types of material culture and the format of the interpretative panels. In particular, it noted that women collectors, textiles, and musical instruments were poorly represented or absent. As regards the format of the textual and graphic component, it stressed the need for the exhibition to include different levels or hierarchies of information. To achieve this objective, it suggested that four different levels of information could be employed: 1) an introductory text panel, describing the focus, content, and organisation of the exhibition; 2) four primary graphic panels, corresponding to and elucidating the four main themes; 3) 25-30 secondary graphic folios, each a page in length, exploring key sub-themes and structured according to the 'Dorling Kindersley' method;⁶ and 4) the inventory, providing basic labelling information: museum number, object description, provenance, date, and donor/vendor information.

Due to spatial limitations, it became apparent that it was not feasible to adequately illustrate all these elements. As time progressed, advancements in the research, critical reflection and object selection processes made it possible to pare down and refine these sections. Ultimately four core themes remained: 1) *The Gift: The Horniman Family*; 2) *The New Museum: Illustrating Evolution*; 3); *Scholars, Travellers, and Traders*; and 4) the *Material Culture Archive*. The first core theme, *The Gift*, centred on the origins of the Museum, in particular the biography of its

⁶ Spatial constraints precluded the provision of seating in the Emslie Horniman Gallery and therefore, it was imperative that the secondary graphic folios were constructed in a clear, concise and easily digestible format. Hence, the 'DK' (Dorling Kindersley) approach to presentation was proposed: each sub-theme consists of an introduction, 3-5 topics and a biography box, which are directly communicated by combining short informative texts with images.

founder, the wealthy tea merchant and collector Frederick Horniman (1835-1906) and the history of his first museum, its collections and display. Because this period of history has been well-documented (Duncan, 1972; Coombes, 1994; Levell, 2000; Shelton, 2000b, 2001a; Teague, 1993; 2001), it is not necessary to expound on the general narrative but rather focus on the threads that were extrapolated, and articulated in the *Ur-Exhibition*. When the original Museum closed in 1898, Frederick Horniman's ethnographic collections consisted of approximately 8000 objects: 42% of which were of Asian provenance (16% from India); 18% from Europe (16.5% from Great Britain; 13% from Africa; 5% from Oceania, and 4% from the Americas (see Levell, 2000). The other significant component of Horniman's original displays was his natural history collection; of particular note were the 16,000 plus specimens of butterflies, including type specimens, like the African *Papilio hornimani*, which was named after him. These numeric indices read in conjunction with primary source material led the curatorial team to identify and select three influential, nineteenth century discursive fields - Orientalism, antiquarianism, and natural history - to illustrate this timeframe.

The decision to delimit the focus of *The Gift* to these three fields was partly guided by the ideal of conceptual and visual coherency and further qualified by the desire to concentrate on Asian, European and native American material. Although African material culture (predominantly in the form of weaponry, domestic utensils, personal adornment and dress) as well as the Museum's distinguished collections of Egyptian antiquities and Benin artefacts constituted an important aspect of Horniman's original collection, with *African Worlds* highlighting such material, the *Ur-Exhibition* strategy was primarily, although not exclusively, orientated to objects from the other continental areas. Despite this proviso, African material was deemed an essential aspect of the *Ur-Exhibition*, inasmuch as it had the potentiality to create links between the two exhibitions. As such it was anticipated that the *Ur-Exhibition* would contain explicit textual and visual references to the Egyptian and Benin material on display in the South Hall, as well as examples of contemporary African material to illustrate, amongst other things, its vibrant and hybrid materiality.

The size and scope of Frederick Horniman's collections coupled with spatial restrictions, the problems of identification and availability of material, ensured that the material expression of this theme was to be a

partial, poetic and evocative glimpse at the history and passion of Horniman as collector and benefactor. By extension, the sub-sections on Horniman's son, Emslie, and grandson, Eric, as collectors were inescapably selective and imaginative representations. Although Emslie Horniman generously contributed to the growth and development of the Museum and its collections over the years - donating and presenting Asian, Pacific, African, European and native American objects - for the *Ur-Exhibition* his legacy was represented by a collection of mesoamerican terracotta whorls, small figurative ceramics and carvings, stone implements and arrow heads, which he acquired whilst visiting México City with his wife, Laura, in 1931. Furthermore, in relation to the secondary themes (articulated in the graphic folios), his biography and its material aspect were to be subsumed under the rubric of 'archaeology'.

Whereas Emslie's 'gift' was explored through mesoamerican archaeological material, the legacy of Eric, his son, was represented by an impressive collection of First Nation (Great Plains) beaded headdresses, clothing, and accessories; a number of which he acquired while touring America and visiting 'Indian' Reservations in the 1920s. The curatorial licence to restrict the representational and observational scope to the Americas was in large part motivated by contingencies of space and visual coherency. By focusing on native American material culture, the second, and third, generation of Horniman collectors could be differentiated from the fore-founder, while simultaneously offering a broader picture of the diversity of the Museum's holdings.

Adhering to the paradigmatic-rupture mode of interpreting the Museum's history, the second core theme, *The New Museum: Illustrating Evolution*, was orientated to the Haddon Period (1901-1946). Again, this epistemic rearticulation of subjects and objects in time and space, has been discussed elsewhere (Coombes, 1994; Herle, 1998; Shelton, 2001a; Levell, 2001) and therefore this part of the exegesis is primarily concerned with excavating and reflecting on the dialogical processes, between subjects and objects of knowledge, that translated and transformed this historical moment into an *Ur-Exhibition* time-frame. Although it was envisaged and hoped that this theme would be articulated in the display by two complementary narrative strands: one looking at collectors and collecting and the other at anthropology as 'science' in relation to the Museum's evolutionary displays, practically this dual approach

was not feasible. Therefore, as a contrast to the collector-centred first theme, for the second, it was agreed that the frame concentrate on the sensitive and polemical issue of examining social evolutionary theory. Within this schema, influential individuals and collectors, such as Alfred Cort Haddon, Herbert Spencer Harrison, and Augustus Pitt Rivers, were to be accommodated and profiled in the 'biography boxes' of the supporting graphic folios.

In keeping with Haddon's own research interests, it was proposed to centre this theme on one aspect of the historical display, 'Evolution in Decorative Art', to critically examine the defective and outdated nature of this racist hypothesis with material drawn from the Museum's Oceanic collections. Taking as a lead descriptions in the Museum guidebooks, Haddon's publications, as well as an historical photograph of 1904 (reproduced in Coombes, 1994: 152; Shelton, 2001a: 209; Levell, 2001: 264, showing the object series and linear mounting of Pacific material culture in the 'Evolution in Decorative Art' case); groups of type objects were selected for the *Ur-Exhibition*. Rather than adhere exactly to the historical exhibit, the social evolutionary timeframe was used as a point of departure, an opportunity to research, interpret, and exhibit the unique qualities of the Museum's little-known Oceanic collections. Consequently, the material selected for display, included recent acquisitions, such as four large Baining masks purchased in 1997, which gestured to the development of the Pacific collections as well as the artistic and performative creativity of contemporary Baining peoples of New Britain. This line of argument was amplified in the supporting texts, which focused on Pacific cultures and their material expressions, covering: Decorative Art from Oceania, The Maori of New Zealand, The Papuan Gulf, The Solomon Islands, and The Bismarck Archipelago.

Rather than pursue the four period epistemic pattern throughout the exhibition, which could prove to be restricting, static and somewhat predictable, the third core theme, *Scholars, Travellers, and Traders*, disconnected from this formula to offer a broader aperture to examine the history of institutional and individual collecting practices and sources. In so doing, it embraced the Samson Period (1947-1965), as well as the other three paradigmatic time frames. To a degree, it was part museum myth and part early research into the Samson Period that acted as a catalyst for the visual focus of this particular theme. During his eighteen year curatorship,

Otto Samson “established the tradition of curatorial fieldwork, which has become one of the hallmarks of the Museum’s distinct identity” (Shelton, 2001a: 214). He separated musicology from ethnography, instigated the formation of the Musical Instrument department and reorientated collecting policy and display away from evolution to material culture studies, with an onus on popular culture and decorative art. He also initiated a programme of temporary exhibitions. With his theoretical stance rooted in the German tradition of diffusionism and folkloric studies, a number of the redisplay he originated for the South Hall were typological and comparative in content, covering themes such as masks, puppets, magic and religion, sports and games (see Martínez Rodríguez, 2001). Recent research has mused, “it was his interest in folklore that may explain a noticeable preference towards costumes, masks, performance and music in his collecting for the Museum” (*ibid.*: 98) as well as his interest in developing the European collections.

With the desire to acknowledge Samson’s personal influence on the development of the collections and the need to exhibit the strengths and global scope of the ethnographic holdings while sustaining a visual and interpretive coherency, it was suggested that the *Scholars, Travellers, and Traders* theme focus on masks, puppets and other figurative representations relating to performance from around the world. This strategy facilitated a two-fold exploration into the cultures of collecting and the cultures of production and performance. Accordingly, the secondary graphic folios were to offer biography boxes on collectors, curators (including Samson), and artist-makers, while primarily profiling the originating cultures by exploring: European Performance Arts; Japanese Theatre; The Pacific: Spirits and Ancestors; African Fiesta; Masquerades in the Americas; Northwest Coast Spirit World; and The Hopi Pantheon.

The final core theme, the *Material Culture Archive*, offered a somewhat ironic look at the Museum as encyclopaedia and synthesized, modified, and expanded on two of the earlier themes described in the concept document: The Encyclopaedia: An A-Z of Cultures and Worlds in Jars: Models, Dioramas and Films. The inspiration for this theme was in part motivated by the research process, by the experience of working in the Museum store looking for specific objects. Notably this aspect of the research process occurred at a time when the Collections Management service was in the early stages of initiating its digitalised inventory of the

collections. Therefore to identify and locate objects in storage, it was necessary to rely on multifarious manual systems. Because there were no sources detailing the location codes of objects, it was essential to become familiar with a modified version of the Blackwood classificatory system (Blackwood, 1970): the original of which was developed at Oxford in the 1950s and is based on typological and function criteria. The Horniman-Blackwood system, which was composed of 48 main categories,⁷ was still being used at the Horniman Museum in the 1990s to classify, order, and store the vast majority of ethnographic material.⁸

At the Museum's Study Collections Centre, objects were stored according to their designated type and function, and further ordered by provenance (by continent and country criteria). Because the Horniman-Blackwood system had been employed at the Museum for a number of decades without the support of a benchmark or parallel system for cross-referencing classification, and by extension location, coupled with the turnover of personnel, users inevitably encountered complications, inconsistencies and anomalies sourcing objects. To select a case in point, though there are numerous others that could be drawn on for illustration: a collection of old English wine bottles, part of Frederick Horniman's original bequest, was divided between two classificatory categories. The first category was principal class, narcotics and intoxicants, and sub-class, containers, and the second, consisted of principal class, containers and

⁷ The 48 main categories (revised in 1974) are: Agriculture and Food Gathering; Aids (physical); Armour; Art (plastic); Barkcloth; Basketry-making; Beadwork; Buildings; Calculation and Recordings; Ceremonial Objects; Clothing; Containers; Currency; Domestication of Animals; Fire-making; Food Preparation; Furnishings; Furniture; Hunting, Trapping, and Fishing; Laundering; Lighting and Heating; Locks and Enclosures; Magic and Religion; Manufacturing Processes; Masques and Dramas; Mats and Matmaking; Measurement; Medical Science; Metal Working; Narcotics and Intoxicants; Natural Objects; Pastimes; Personal Adornment; Personal Protection; Photography; Pottery; Punishment and Torture; Skin Dressing and Leatherworking; Social Structure; Textiles; Thongs and String Making; Toilet and Hygiene; Tools; Tradesmen's Signs and Advertisements; Transport (land); Transport (water); Weapons; and Writing and Printing.

⁸ There are exceptions to this storage system, for example, oversized objects are stored together on the ground floor, as are some mono-cultural collections.

sub-class, material (glass). Thus the wine bottles were stored in two spatially distinct, discontinuous, and segregated areas.

For the *Ur-Exhibition*, to explore the variable character of classificatory systems and the central archival operations and encyclopaedic imaginary of the Museum, two distinct classificatory practices were enlisted and customized: the first, a typological-cum-functional system, echoing the Blackwood convention; and the second, an alphabetical method. To develop the first mode, the organisational form of structural functionalist monographs was examined and, in particular, A. R. Radcliffe Brown's *The Andaman Islanders. A Study in Social Anthropology* (1922) was selected as the key reference text. This re-reading facilitated an understanding of how early anthropological studies informed the character of the Museum's classificatory schema and vice versa. It simultaneously highlighted the textual expression of the break between anthropology and museum ethnography (Sturtevant, 1969; Shelton, 1992), with the former constructing material culture as a secondary manifestation of the functioning of social institutions and practices, and consequently relegating it to the appendices of the text. By melding Radcliffe Brown's categories (for example, habitations and housing, hunting and fishing, domestic implements and utensils, and personal ornament) with those employed by the Museum to catalogue and store its ethnographic specimens, seven key generic typological-cum functional classes were formulated: 1) *Materials and the Environment*; 2) *Shelter and Housing*; 3) *Social Organisation*; 4) *Food Production and Preparation*; 5) *Technology* (basketry, pottery, woodcarving, metalworking and textile production); 6) *Personal Adornment*; and 7) *Body Decoration*.

The second mode of classification, the *A-Z of Cultures*, was partly inspired by filing systems maintained in the Museum's anthropology department as well as its storage of collections. In evaluating and determining the content for the *Ur-Exhibition*'s alphabetical system of archiving material culture, consideration was first given to the criterion of 'ethnic group'. However, this proved to be unsustainable for the twenty-six letter-headed constituents. Consequently, it was resolved to utilise country provenance as the organising category, echoing the gazetteers of encyclopaedias. In each case, the letter-heading was by necessity limited to one country and a conscious effort was made during the object selection process to provide a balanced representation of the five continental areas.

Consequently, material culture from the following countries was selected: Australia, Bolivia, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Fiji, Guyana, Holland, India, Japan, Kenya, Lesotho, Myanmar, Nigeria, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Romania, Sudan, Tibet, U. S. A., Vanuatu, Western Samoa, Yemen, and Zimbabwe. Notably, there is no country to represent 'X' and it was mooted that this lacuna could either be filled by an imaginary realm (which could form part of an on-going education, community, or art project) or alternatively it could remain empty as an expression of absence.

Visual poetics

'Rhythm serves to strengthen and concentrate even further the unity and hermetic quality of the surface of poetic style, and of the unitary language that this style posits' (Bakhtin, 1981: 298).

The language of design also has the propensity to articulate objects and concepts, time and space, to create a unified, rhythmical poetic form, that is to say a highly structured aesthetic and expressive artistic genre of communication. But to achieve visual poetry without impairing the didactic and interpretive features of an exhibition, designers need to engage at an intellectual and sympathetic level with curatorial concepts and objects, and develop a grammar, language and style of display that embraces, enhances and communicates the original schema. For these cognitive, perceptive and creative processes to unfold and acquire a unified poetic form, designers and curators have to enter into dialogue and foster relations of understanding and reciprocity. In recognition of this, at the tendering stage of the ERD project, after the design companies had presented their ideas to the project management team, they were invited to meet members of the anthropology section for informal discussions. The contract for both galleries was awarded to Jasper Jacob Associates (JJA), a company based in southwest London.

One of the influential factors in the decision to appoint JJA was that their Creative Director, Michael Cameron, agreed to personally manage the project. From their tendering documents and initial discussions, it was apparent that Cameron was well-suited to the complex and intensive task

of formulating two distinct yet complementary languages of design for *African Worlds* and the *Ur-Exhibition* respectively. Having familiarised himself with the gallery plans, concept document, and the type of objects selected for display, Cameron began by developing a macro-spatial design and structure for the *Ur-Exhibition* gallery. Rather than reproduce traditional layouts, he drew on his extensive knowledge of art history and specifically his interest in the *De Stijl* group to formulate what became known as 'the grid'. In brief, the *De Stijl* group - a fraternity of Dutch artists active in the inter-war years - was concerned to promote abstract art, particularly the theories of Doesburg and Mondrian (two of its founding members). In general, its members rejected representational forms, believing that the purpose of art was to convey harmony and order, exemplified by the use of geometric lines and forms in monochromatic or primary colours. To show an example of the material expression of the *De Stijl* philosophy, Cameron selected Piet Mondrian's 'Broadway Boogie Woogie' (1942-3) and this work became the conceptual inspiration for the *Ur-Exhibition's* grid.

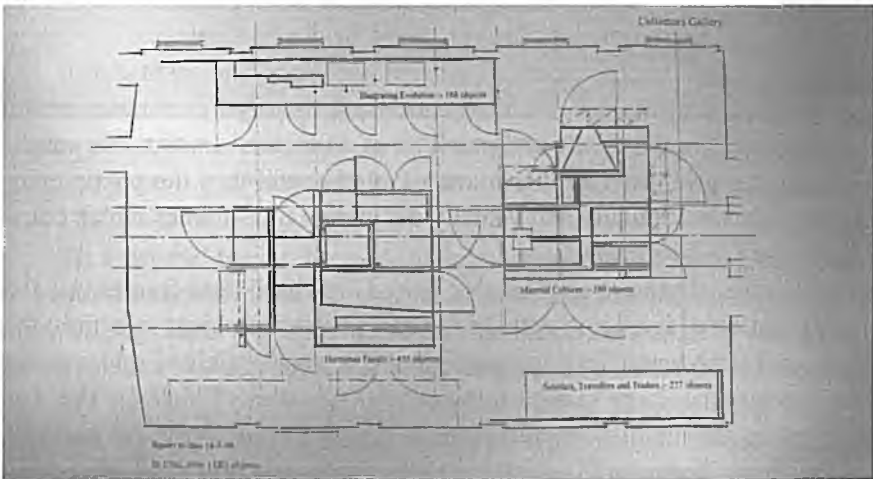


Figure 1. *Ur-Exhibition*: overhead plan of gallery, showing positions of the four display cases (originated by M. Cameron and C. Thomas).

In spatial and material terms, the grid was a three-dimensional frame of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines which was suspended on a parallel plane from the ceiling of the Emslie Horniman Gallery. In conceptual

and symbolic terms, the grid constituted the organising force and the core visual metaphor for the entire gallery. It structured space and time: the gridlines providing the axes for the four large, multi-faceted display cases, which corresponded to each of the core themes (figures 1, 2, 3 and 4). To give the impression that these bespoke cases were generated and suspended from the grid matrix, at floor level the lower sections of the cases were horizontally recessed. In certain areas, specifically in the *Illustrating Evolution* and *Material Archive* sections, vertical pilasters descended from the grid, puncturing and dissecting the interior of the display cases. These internal divisions provided vertical supports for horizontal mounting systems, and thus further expressed in three-dimensional form the *De Stijl* philosophy of order through geometry. Moreover, because the language of design articulated and reinforced the exhibitionary narrative, in the specific cases where the grid intruded and geometrically configured space, it functioned as a visual metaphor for 'scientific' determinacy, for expressing how the discipline of ethnography constructed its object of study, demarcating time and space to classify and order material culture. These ordered spaces were intended to contrast with the more open interiors of *The Gift* and *Scholars Travellers and Traders* cases, whose concepts and narratives were not so much concerned with the disciplinary and institutional discourses and technologies of classification and display but rather with the 'unscientific' predilections and passions of collectors. In sum, the multi-dimensional grid provided the frame of context and thus the poetic unity for the four conceptually and visually distinctive time-frames which constituted the *Ur-Exhibition*.

Another rhythmic element that united the visual time-frames was the incorporation of iconic objects. In the early stages of object selection, the curatorial team tentatively suggested that if it was possible to relocate and incorporate the large nineteenth century Apostles' Clock in the *Ur-Exhibition*, this unique timepiece could function as a superlative example of Frederick Horniman's antiquarian interests in salvaging and preserving European crafts and at the same time, it could act as a symbolic motif for the entire gallery, which was itself oriented to the marking and passing of time. At that time, the Clock, which is a richly carved mechanical model of the one in Strasburg Cathedral, was somewhat anomalously displayed in the natural history section on the balcony of the North Hall. Relocating it to the Emslie Horniman Gallery, it was contended, would improve both

an iconic artefact for the *Material Culture Archive* was based on two inter-connecting factors. First, due to an oversight that was later rectified, in the original plans there was no provision for a primary stand-alone graphic panel. Second, because the exhibits were subordinated to the classificatory systems and contained within the text panels and filing drawers, it would have been inappropriate and problematic to segregate and highlight one particular artefact in the actual display case.

When the Emslie Horniman Gallery first opened to the public in 1912, it functioned as a purpose-built lecture hall with row seating for 210 persons, a lecture platform, and a projection room at the back (see Levell, 2001: 272). Although it underwent numerous changes over the years in its rebirth as a temporary exhibition gallery, there were still visual vestiges of its former use, such as the projection room at the south end with viewing windows that overlooked the gallery. For the *Ur-Exhibition*, it was mooted that this overhead space could be utilised either to display material or preferably to project historical images onto the vertical or horizontal surfaces of the gallery and thus enhance the poetry and ambience of the exhibition. However, with economics dictating the nature and scope of the transformation, all schemes of utilising this historical viewing aperture were eventually surrendered. Yet as a compromise, to pursue the captivating notion of projecting archival images, the designers suggested employing four gobos: one for each of the thematic display areas. As a result of budgetary restrictions, ultimately only two gobos were retained in the final plans - one to project an image of Frederick Horniman with family and staff in the Museum's Ethnological Saloon in 1891 and the other, Alfred Cort Haddon 'in the field' with members of his groundbreaking Torres Strait Expedition dated to 1898.

⁹ These reference manuals owe their existence to a number of collection management employees, in particular, Adrian Holloway, who deserves special mention for nurturing the project. Altogether five sets were produced: one was given to the designers and the others were apportioned within the Museum to the following sections: Anthropology, Exhibitions, Conservation, and the Study Collection Centre.

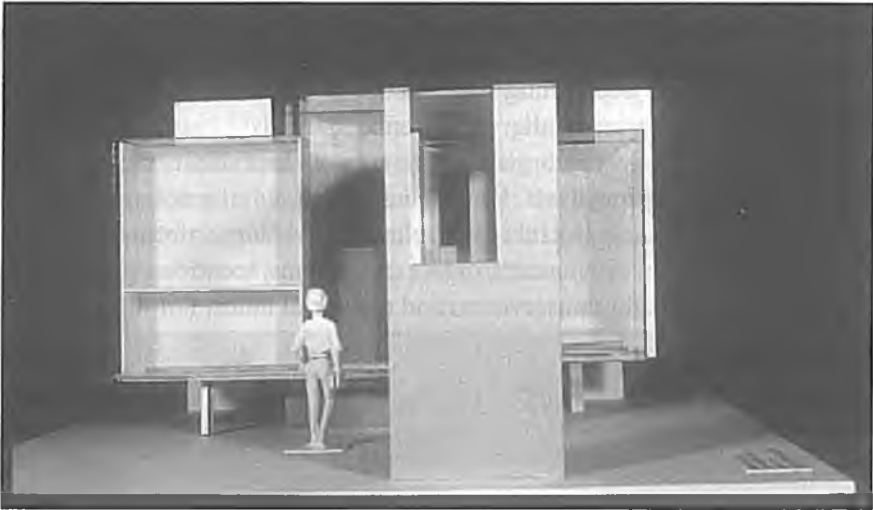


Figure 3. Ur-Exhibition: model of The Gift: The Horniman Family display case (originated by C. Thomas).



Figure 4. Ur-Exhibition: model of The Gift: The Horniman Family display case (originated by C. Thomas).

With the macro organisational structure of the gallery in place, in the form of the overhead grid, the four large display cases and their respective

primary graphics panels, the design team focused their attention on the micro spatial configurations, the inside of the display cases. To assist in their selection and positioning of objects, the curatorial team had compiled a set of 'Collectors Gallery Reference Manuals'.⁹ Each set consisted of four files, which were organised by core themes and contained over 1000 individual object sheets. Each sheet comprised of a coloured photograph of the prospective exhibit and relevant inventory information, such as museum number, provenance, object dimensions, location code, as well as additional fields for conservation and curatorial notes. For this phase of the design process, because a substantial number of the objects earmarked for display in the preliminary selection process had to be reduced, the curatorial team (Anthony Shelton and the author) worked in close liaison with the designers (Michael Cameron and Craig Thomas of JJA), addressing each case in succession.

Although certain thematic aspects of the *Ur-Exhibition* set out to illuminate the history of collecting and different display genres, at an early stage it was agreed that these illuminations should take the form of evocations rather than historical reconstructions. Thus *The Gift: The Horniman Family*, made no attempt to reconstruct Frederick Horniman's original displays but aimed to evoke the spectacular visuality and eclecticism embodied in his labyrinthine, twenty-four room house-museum. To achieve this poetic rendition, dramatic large singular artefacts and visually seductive groups of objects were selected as opposed to 'traditional' ethnological material culture. The aesthetic and epistemological bias inherent in this selection was in part justified by the theme's orientation to the discourses of Orientalism, antiquarianism and natural history, to Horniman's own predilections, in sum, to the material expressions of popular Victorian tastes.

Because *The Gift* was to be the first display case that visitors encounter on entering the gallery, it needed to create an immediate and potent impression, to entice visitors further into the exhibitionary ambient. Hence, in the gallery designs the Apostles' Clock was positioned at the forefront of *The Gift* case and to its left was a 1.5 metre high gilt, bejewelled Buddhist Shrine, which Horniman had purchased in 1895 during his tour of Burma (now Myanmar) (figure 5). The visual poeticism of this multifaceted case was further pursued with a dramatically lit tiered and recessed display of Sri Lankan masks; a life-size papier-mâché represen-

tation of Kali dancing on Siva; a cascade of drawers containing butterfly specimens; a series of brightly-coloured tropical birds in bell jars; and a spectacular display of native American beaded pipe bags, jackets, and feathered headdresses. In addition to the graduated-tiered recessing of objects, density and depth was given to the display by foregrounding smaller object groupings. For example, in front of the layered feather headdresses, a transparent angled horizontal plinth was designed to display Emslie Horniman's collection of mesoamerican archaeological material.



Figure 5. Artist's impression of the Ur-Exhibition, showing proposed position of Apostles' Clock, with Burmese shrine to its left.

Another facet of *The Gift* case where visual layering was to be employed to accentuate and enhance the exhibitionary narrative, was the display inset on the Benin material. In 1897, an article, 'Spoils of Benin in the Horniman Free Museum at Forest Hill', appeared in the *Illustrated London News* describing how 'the only curiosities to have survived the flames' that razed the King's compound during the British Punitive Expedition of 1897, had been 'rescued' by W. J. Hider, a naval officer, who then sold them to Frederick Horniman. A framed enlargement of this article, which has five black and white plates of the regal 'spoils' – two bronze bells, two ivory staffs, a carved wooden case, two fans, and two ivory bracelets – was to be reproduced on the front aspect of the case, pro-

viding an interpretative lens through which to see the authentic artefacts, which were grouped and positioned in the same format as those depicted in the 1897 photographic plates. In addition to narrating the Frederick Horniman story, this textual-visual reconstruction was to provide an alternative and supplementary reading of the Horniman's Benin material displayed in *African Worlds*.

In contrast to *The Gift*, which was a free-standing, relatively free-form, multi-faceted case, that gestured to the passion and curiosity of the Museum's founding collector in its rich polychromatic assemblages; the second case, *The New Museum* took the form of a 'traditional', albeit frameless, display case. Rectangular in shape, the case was grafted onto the gallery wall, and its contents were organised by linear series and typological groups. As mentioned, its interior was part dissected by the descending gridlines and further divided and ordered by a mounting system of geometric steel armatures (figures 6 and 7). These steel skeletons were an integral and perceptible aspect of the visual language of order; they provided the framework for the rows of bark belts, lime spatulas, arrow heads, etc. and for the grouping of lime containers, masks, paddles and ceremonial shields. Notwithstanding the linear ordering of the exhibits, a high density and depth of display was achieved through a structured layering of these specimen classes utilising the lateral horizontal plane of the case interior.

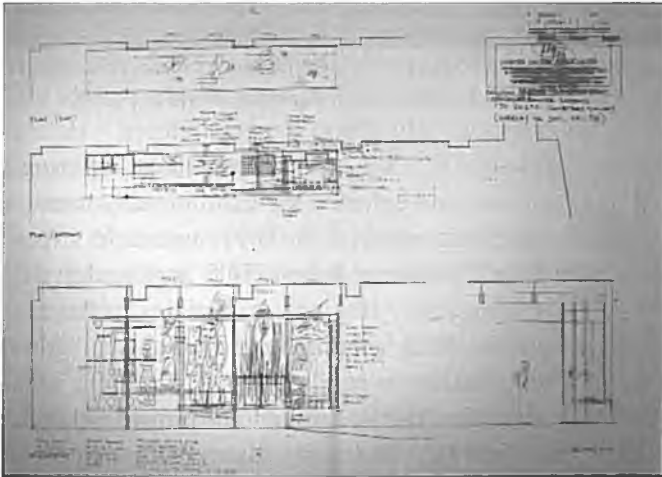


Figure 6. Ur-Exhibition: front elevation of The New Museum: Illustrating Evolution display (originated by M. Cameron and C. Thomas).

models of Solomon Island war canoes from the overhead grid outside the case. The designers were however reluctant to adopt this curatorial suggestion which, they argued, would destroy the language of order and containment, and obfuscate the vitality of the overhead grid, which constituted and linked the time-frames.

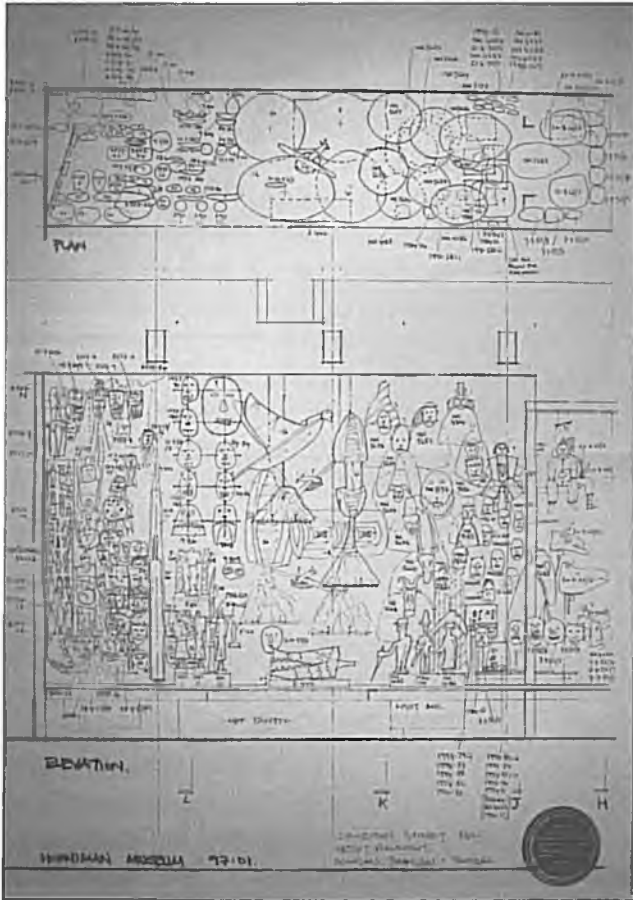


Figure 8. Ur-Exhibition: front elevation of Scholars, Travellers and Traders display (originated by M. Cameron and C. Thomas).

Of all the display cases, *Scholars, Travellers and Traders* contained the most dense and layered concentration of exhibits (figure 8). In dimensional form it was equivalent to the *New Museum* case, being positioned

against the wall of the gallery, but diagonally adjacent to the former. Although for visual impact, interpretation and coherency its objects were grouped into masks, puppets and other figural representations related to performance and further ordered in vertical sections corresponding to the geographic divisions (the Americas, Oceania, Africa, Asia, and Europe), the spatial organisation of these exhibits was neither determined nor restricted by the geometric order of the grid. Rather the objects were angled, floating and overlapping. One of the aims of the design was to convey the rhythm and movement of objects: the disorder, carnivalesque and colourful nature of material culture before it became the anatomised object of 'scientific' scrutiny and classificatory practices. In fact the visual poetry of this case was intended to create a dialectic interface with the *Material Culture Archive*, which was positioned opposite it. In effect the two cases could be loosely read as structural oppositions, between the raw and the cooked, between the wild and the tamed, between the state of objects before and after they enter the Museum. To illustrate more pointedly this right of passage, in the centre of *Scholars, Travellers and Traders* there were two, spectacular free floating Rappau headdresses used by the Uvol peoples of New Britain. Directly opposite these, in a structured space, classified under the heading Materials and the Environment, were another two Rappau headdresses. When these fragile headdresses were shipped from New Britain to Europe in the mid-1980s, the innumerable white feathers which are stuck into the pith of their intricate superstructures were removed and placed in a separate box. For the *Ur-Exhibition*, it was proposed that the decorative feathers be inserted in those headdresses selected for the *Scholars, Travellers and Traders* case to show what the complete objects look like in the 'wild' during the 'sing-sing Uvol' ceremonies, thus adding to the dramatic and vital ambient of the display. In contrast, it was suggested that those displayed in the *Material Culture* case remain in a de-nuded state, echoing the fashion in which they were stored at the Horniman, with their bodies secured to metal frameworks with tacking ribbon, their Museum tags visible and their feathers tied and labelled at their side.¹⁰

¹⁰ There was, it appears, some confusion with regard to the insertion of feathers. In the end, the conservation team 'completed' the headdresses in the *Scholars* case and put

The decision to retain the Museum tags on the *Material Culture Archive* exhibits was further extended to the A-Z drawer system. In discussing visual concepts with the designers, the curatorial team mentioned that in part they had been inspired to develop the theme of filing cultures, having experienced Terry Gilliam's installation for the *Spellbound. Art and Film* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery (22 February – 6 May 1996). This installation, which was based on themes from Gilliam's film *Brazil*, consisted of a gallery dominated by a vast wall of filing cabinets, with step ladders providing access to the higher drawers. With little interpretive information, visitors' experience of the installation was by intention subjective, interactive, and thought-provoking: they opened the drawers, somewhat like Pandora opening her box, to reveal a plethora of surprises, including the disordered contents of somebody's personal filing system, mirrors reflecting their own images, and a camera filming their voyeuristic intrusion into another's filing drawer. In a similar vein, for the *A-Z of Cultures*, it was suggested that a bank of metal filing cabinets could be created, gesturing to those retained in the Anthropology offices at the Museum for alphabetically storing documentation about collectors and collections. However, because of spatial restrictions coupled with the consideration of physical access, it was not possible to reproduce the dimensional form of filing cabinets. In order to accommodate this concept and classificatory system into the *Ur-Exhibition*, Cameron and Thomas designed a system of metal-fronted drawers - significantly more shallow in dimension than those of a standard filing cabinet - to form the base of the *Material Culture Archive* display case. Hence, the foundation of this large, free-standing display case was comprised of a succession of filing cabinets, each 3-4 drawers high. These drawers wrap around the entire case and were individually marked with the relevant alphabetic letter.

A simple functional system of display was developed for the *A-Z of Cultures* drawers as a means to convey the archival operations of the museum, to expose how its specimens are numbered, classified, labelled and stored. More specifically, the exhibits were inset in cloth covered Styrofoam, secured with visible straps, and accompanied by their hand-

'as many feathers as ... [they] could fit on with the documentary evidence' on those in the *Material Culture Archive* case (Ragan, 19 June 2002).

written labels - a sophisticated form of luggage tag, normally removed for display - which detail in varying degrees of consistency, museum number, object description, provenance, and location code. The retention and public disclosure of these labels served a dual purpose: it removed the necessity for the provision of a standardised exhibition label format and it visually illustrated and amplified the concept of the Museum as archive. To further the visual analogy of the encyclopaedic imaginary, in the concept document it was proposed that gazetteer-inspired information, such as, capital city, population statistics, ethnic and linguistic groups, main industries, geographical features as well as a map indicating country location, could be etched or transferred on the glass covers of the drawers. Rather than covering the entirety of the glazed surface, to facilitate the reading of both objects and texts, in the designs the exhibits in the drawers were positioned to allow an ample margin to accommodate the gazetteer graphics.

With regard to the upper part of the *Material Culture Archive*, Cameron and Thomas exploited the idea of the structural functionalist monograph to design and structure the interior of the case, which was penetrated and ordered by the grid. Seven large text panels, describing each of the typological-cum-functional categories were to foreground and dominate the case interior. To visually develop the monograph analogy as well as the underlying concept of order through textual systems and practices, these panels emulated in design the chapter pages of a book. Hence, the first panel consisted of the heading 'Chapter 1: Personal Adornment', followed by the body text, which described the category concerned and incorporated three captioned illustrations. These 'illustrations' were exhibits - a Naga headdress, a Naga helmet, and a Wai Wai hairtube - which were individually set in the body text in recessed rectangular apertures. This pattern was reproduced for each of the remaining six categories, for example, 'Chapter 2: Body Decoration' was illustrated with a set of Japanese tattooing implements, a model arm and leg depicting Sarawak tattoo designs and a number of related skin printing design blocks. On an angled plinth, at the front of the case underneath these panels, the possibility of displaying a selection of 'classic' anthropological texts was discussed.¹¹

¹¹ This display idea was never implemented (Ragan, 19 June 2002).

In sum, the *Material Culture Archive* was visually distinct from the other cases, specifically, *The Gift* and *Scholars, Travellers, and Traders*, which directly faced it to the north and west respectively. Whereas the latter two were effectively text-free with the onus placed on the visuality of the exhibits, in contrast the 'archive' subordinated the object to classificatory practices, to western epistemic orders, to interpretative strategies, to the authority of the written word.

In addition to the four main display cases, opposite the *Material Culture Archive* there was a small glazed alcove which was requisitioned to accommodate a reconstruction of a Tibetan shrine. Notably this element was not conceived until the design process was at an advanced stage. This alcove had originally functioned as a small, low-ceiling storage room recessed in the centre of the south wall with double doors opening onto the gallery. Because the gallery is classified as a listed building requiring consent from English Heritage for any structural alterations, rather than blocking the entrance the decision was made to glaze the front and utilise the interior for display. The resolution to transform the inner aspect into a Tibetan shrine was in part motivated by the nature and dimensions of the space as well as by the *Vodou* and *Condomblé* shrines in the South Hall. In the context of the *Ur-Exhibition*, the shrine reconstruction represented another genre of ethnographic display and it also provided a further visual link to the *African Worlds*' time-frame.

Performative prosaics

"There is interwoven with ... [the] generic stratification of language a *professional* stratification of language, in the broad sense of the term 'professional': the language of the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman, the politician, the public education teacher and so forth,...these languages differ from each other not only in their vocabularies; they involve specific forms for manifesting intentions, forms for making conceptualisation and evaluation concrete" (Bakhtin, 1981: 289).

Throughout the different life stages of an exhibition - from conception via production to public consumption - the language of exhibition is heteroglot. It is formed by the intersections of institutional, inter-organi-

sational, public and individual languages, which connect and generate new significations, both concrete and conceptual. In the final stage of production, the language of the *Ur-Exhibition* was significantly modified when it was intersected by the 'professional' prose of the Museum, which was itself intersected by the languages and directives of other agents and agencies. To examine in part these complex dialogic interactions and the resultant transformations, the last section of this paper will limit its focus to four crucial elements of display: space (the grid); objects (the Apostles' Clock and the Torture Chair); graphics (the inventory labels); and naming (the title of the gallery). Aspects which together serve to define every exhibition.

As discussed under 'Visual poetics', the core organising principle and visual metaphor for the spatial and conceptual design of the gallery was the three-dimensional grid. Because space and time were generated and ordered by the grid, there was an inversion of normative spatial dynamics: the display cases or time-frames were 'rooted' in the ceiling or rather the gallery design gave the illusion that the large, frameless display cases were suspended from the grid. This inversion of 'rootedness' was not a token design element, it was a significant aspect of the visual language, which was intended to draw the visitors' eyes upwards, towards the ceiling and the overhead grid, the structuring 'force'. When the health and safety report on the gallery was submitted, it was recommended that the recessed spaces under the display cases be covered over, to prevent the possibility of small children crawling underneath.¹² Consequently, the Museum decided to follow this recommendation and meetings were organised to discuss the designs, materials, and timetable for these structural modifications. At this stage in the proceedings, with decisions approved, the curatorial team was informed of the impending alterations. It submitted a defence of the design, explaining why the 'suspended' cases and the grid were of central importance and how covering the illusory voids would impair the concepts and poetics of display. Ultimately a compromise was reached: grills were to be used in place of solid panels, these were to be slightly recessed, and lighting was to focus on the cases rather

¹² Among other issues, the Health and Safety Officer suggested employing overhead lighting for the aisles and raised the question of locking some of the A-Z drawers to prevent congestion and potential accidents.

than the walkways between the cases, as had been suggested in the report.

In addition to the gallery modifications that issued from the Health and Safety document, there were a number of other significant revisions initiated or approved by the Museum executive. One amendment which possibly made the biggest impact on the exhibition ambient and curatorial morale concerned the Apostles' Clock. During the summer of 2000 representatives of the Horniman Museum who may not have been strong proponents of the proposal to relocate the Apostles' Clock initiated a series of dialogues with English Heritage. Working on the unresolved assumption that the Clock was an architectural feature rather than an artefact, they applied to the local council (the Planning and Highways Committee of Lewisham) for permission to move the Clock to the Emslie Horniman Gallery. At about this time, the anthropology section was asked to write a half page statement, for the record, outlining the reasons for the proposed relocation. Yet no information was provided regarding the significance, intended readership, or purpose of this report. Furthermore, during this period, members of middle and senior management, and a representative of the Museum's firm of architects, met with English Heritage's Inspector of Historic Buildings for the south-east London area, at the Museum to discuss the matter. Neither the anthropology section, in general, nor the curatorial team, in particular, were informed of this meeting. Following the visit, the Inspector wrote a letter to Lewisham Council objecting to the relocation.

According to protocol, arrangements were made for the Horniman Museum's application and English Heritage's letter of objection to be presented at a local Council meeting to decide the fate of the Clock. Notably, the 'applicant' on behalf of the Museum, proposing the case to move the Apostles' Clock, was the representative of the architectural firm used by the Museum. Moreover, it is significant that the applicant's case did not appear to present a united persuasive argument for moving the Clock. Indeed, in areas it appeared self-contradictory. For example, one of the Museum's supporting documents (the curatorial statement) noted that the Clock was 'never intended to be an architectural feature' (Levell, 14 August 2000); yet, in the same case file, another Museum statement mused: 'It could well be that the clock has never been moved in the last hundred years because it has been seen not only as an exhibit, but as an integral part of the architectural design and decoration of the North Hall'

(www.lewisham.gov.uk/). The day before the council meeting, the head of the curatorial sections at the Horniman Museum, was informed of English Heritage's earlier visit, the consequent letter of objection, and the imminent Council meeting. Notwithstanding the fact that matters had effectively advanced to the stage of refusal, the curatorial team composed an immediate reply to English Heritage's objections, a number of which were founded on inaccurate assumptions and lack of historical research. At this stage, it seemed improbable that the Planning and Highways Committee would contravene the 'knowledgeable' advice of English Heritage, the bastion and defining agency of the Nation's public legacies, which had raised a 'strenuous objection to the proposal and strongly urge[d] the Council to refuse the application' (www.lewisham.gov.uk/). Yet, the Council listened attentively to the curatorial defence and agreed to defer the case 'for further consideration by English Heritage and the Council' (www.lewisham.gov.uk/).

Following the deferral, the Horniman's curatorial section compiled a detailed seven page report, systematically addressing each of the objections and submitted this document to English Heritage and the Council (Levell, 17 January 2001). Nonetheless members of English Heritage Historical Analysis and Research Team (HART) were unmoved and merely reiterated that they maintained a 'strong opposition' to the proposal (www.lewisham.gov.uk/). Although in their final response, English Heritage stated that HART had conducted their own research and considered the detailed curatorial report on the Clock, it is unclear why a number of their arguments for retaining the Apostles' Clock *in situ* completely disregard the additional information that had been submitted to them. To take one example, 'public access'. English Heritage's original letter of objection noted:

'the proposed move...from its original position, where it can be viewed in the round, to a less prominent position in a side gallery would be neither 'desirable' nor is it absolutely 'necessary'. In fact, from its proposed position in the Emslie Horniman Collectors' Gallery, one could not view its intriguing display panel on the back, which surely would tend to make this a less suitable location' (Pagano, 20 October 2000).

This objection was reiterated in English Heritage's final report, under the heading 'Prominence and High Visibility':

'There is no evidence to support the assertion...that there would be "vastly improved public access". Rather, the proposed position would make the Clock actually less visible. The reasons are:

- i) One could not see the rear view of the clock (and its glass panel) without unlocking the case and climbing inside – a proposition which would hardly be practical, on a daily basis. This will render the back inaccessible for the general public.
- ii) The Clock will be less visible, particularly for the disabled and children, as the Clock will be on a plinth and therefore at a higher level' (www.lewisham.gov.uk/).

Yet this appears to disregard the following curatorial response:

'At present, visitors to the Horniman Museum can only view the 'intriguing display panel' ie. the internal mechanisms, on the back of the Clock, and gain an appreciation of the object 'in the round', if, and only if, they stand on the staircase leading up to the North Hall Gallery. (*Nb.* Young children and physically disabled visitors certainly cannot gain visual access to this back panel.) Moreover, the staircase is one of the Museum's primary fire escape routes and thus in line with health and safety requirements, visitors are not permitted to stand and view the Clock from this vantage point (confirmed by B. Alcaraz, Health and Safety Officer at the Horniman Museum).

With a grant of £13 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Horniman Museum is in the throes of a large-scale building project. As well as gaining new public spaces – galleries, café, and shop – the entrance to the Museum will be re-orientated [with new entrance ramps]. Visitors to the 'new' Museum, which opens in 2002, will enter the building from the gardens, arriving in the orientation space. The latter provides direct, ground-floor, access to the Emslie Horniman Gallery, which will contain a new permanent exhibition on the history of the Museum, its collectors, collections, and displays... It is proposed that the Apostles' Clock will be exhibited in this gallery, facing the main entrance, at the start of the case on the Horniman Family. In this key position, the Clock will enjoy a far more prominent position than it at present occupies. Furthermore, public access – physical, visual, and intellectual – will be greatly enhanced not impaired.

- a) Physical Access. In the 'new' Museum, the Emslie Horniman Collectors' Gallery will occupy a central not a peripheral position, as has been suggested. It will be one of the first exhibition areas the visitor enters.
- b) Visual Access. The Apostles Clock's 'intriguing back panel' will be made clearly visible at close range, through a specially designed 'window'. Visitors will no longer have to crane their necks as they walk upstairs to view this panel.
- c) Intellectual access. At present the Clock occupies an anomalous position in a gallery devoted to Natural History. If relocated to the Emslie Horniman Gallery, it would be displayed alongside other nineteenth century European wood carvings. Text panels would explain its significance as 'a model of the clock in Strasburg Cathedral' - a superb example or material testament of the Victorian collector's engagement with the Arts and Crafts Movement." (Levell, 17 January 2001).

The minutes of the final meeting to decide the fate of the Apostles' Clock, noted that 'if the Council were minded to grant planning permission for the proposal, then English Heritage would direct the Council to refuse permission' (www.lewisham.gov.uk/). Ultimately and understandably, the Council deferred to English Heritage, a professional agency which, one could argue, can exploit its cultural capital, perform acts of 'symbolic violence' and thus perpetrate its monologic authority. In turn, the Horniman deferred to the Council's advice and consequently the premium display area reserved for the Apostles' Clock was modified to accommodate an enlarged photographic reproduction of Frederick Horniman in place of the unique timepiece (Ragan, 15 May 2002). Notably, members of the curatorial team were not invited or informed of meetings within (or outside) the Museum concerning the Clock, nor those that took place to discuss and decided upon the substitute exhibit. In retrospect, the irony of the Apostles' Clock episode lies in the rather over-used mandate of Museum management which publicly propounds ideals of 'social inclusion' and 'access' while internally, at organisational level, either intentionally or unintentionally, nurture and perpetuate by action a culture of restricted access and closed communication.

Another significant act that further contributed to the redefinition of the *Ur-Exhibition* was senior management's decision to place the Torture

Chair on display. This 'fake' object, which had been purchased by Frederick Horniman from Willett of Brighton, had been considered for inclusion in the *Ur-Exhibition* in the early stages of planning but later rejected by both curators and designers for a number of different reasons. Therefore, no provision had been made in the exhibition designs or the interpretation of *The Gift*, for the inclusion of this piece. Nevertheless, at a late stage in the production process, in the lead up to the opening of the gallery, the Torture Chair was profiled in an article, 'Inquisition' torture chair goes back on show' by Maev Kennedy, the *Guardian's* arts and heritage correspondent (6 May 2002). It is conceivable that the late decision to include this exhibit was motivated by sensationalism rather than its relevance to the subject of the *Ur-Exhibition*.

Located on the peripheries of London, the Horniman Museum has in recent years endeavoured to court the National press, in its aim to gain a wider audience. In this light, with the *Ur-Exhibition* appropriated by public services and rearticulated as part of the events to mark the opening of the new building, it is plausible that the Torture Chair was requisitioned and utilised in press releases to attract press and public. Indeed, with the exception of a review article, marked by factual errors and plagiarised sections (Judd, 22 June 2002), the only broad sheet coverage of the reopening of the Horniman Museum was Kennedy's article. This piece of journalism was pitched somewhere between tabloid sensationalism and marketing jargon. The lead-in sentence concluded with the clichéd announcement: "one of the most gruesome objects in any British museum is back". This was followed by a paragraph seemingly from the marketing folios: "When the Horniman Museum, in Forest Hill, South London, reopens next month, with a £13 million extension doubling the size of Frederick Horniman's art nouveau original, the Spanish torture chair will be back on display as a star object" (Kennedy, 6 May 2002). In sum, the executive decision to present the Torture Chair as its 'star object', brings to mind Richard Dorment's incisive and damning article on museums and the curatorial profession: "All over Britain, the scholarship and seriousness that characterised the curatorial departments of old is being denigrated in favour of marketing, press, publicity and development" (29 July 2000). Interestingly, a similar, albeit implicit, criticism was made of the first 'show' that was mounted in the Horniman Museum's new temporary exhibition gallery: a gallery which was described in the Horniman Museum's application for government fun-

ding as a much needed space for showing more of the stored collections. The review of the Horniman Centenary Development, the 'new museum', which appeared in the *Museums Journal*, revealed that the debut temporary exhibition disregarded the Museum's ideals at a number of levels:

"...the bought-in Monster Creepy Crawly Show that fills the temporary exhibition hall. This sub-Disney mechanised assemblage of snails, flies and bugs, inflated to funfair proportions, is an aberration. If there is one thing worse than cheap and nasty it is expensive and nasty. With a special admission fee of £10 [16.5 euros] a family this hardly fulfils Horniman's mission of a 'free museum for the recreation, instruction and enjoyment, for the people of London, forever'" (Lewis, 2002: 40).

Like items of personal adornment, artefacts displayed publicly communicate the status and identity of the exhibiting subject. Similarly, the act of naming is an important stage in the life-cycle of an entity: it serves to define and fix the status and essence of the subject and thus the relations of producers and audiences to it. Moreover, the name of the subject is a fundamental social marker of identity. In the anthropology section's Quinquennial Review of 2001, the 'working title' of the *Ur-Exhibition* was 'THEATRUM MUNDI displaying collectors, objects, cultures'. Four months later, in a memorandum concerning 'graphics', it was noted that: 'another longstanding issue that needs addressing, in order to write the introductory text panel, is the name of the gallery. Have there been any further thoughts on 'Theatrum Mundi...?' (Levell, 25 April 2001). The suggestion 'Theatrum Mundi...', arguably offered a captivating inroad into exploring the history of collecting, particularly bearing in mind that Frederick Horniman's own collection had been frequently likened to 'a veritable cabinet of curiosities'. Moreover, from a more superficial perspective, this alluring title would complement *African Worlds*. However, it was eventually verbally rejected by senior management. The reasons for its rejection were never officially documented, however, in a meeting a member of senior management mentioned that it was felt inappropriate because members of the public would not understand its significance. Although in terms of immediate recognition of exhibition content or direct marketing strategies such a title may prove somewhat problematic, it is concerning that the museum profession can utilise

such incriminating value judgments about their visitors as primary rationalisations for ‘dumbing down’ museum practice, in general, and exhibitionary media, in particular. Although the rejected title may not have been appropriate, it is a potentially dangerous path to tread to assume that museum visitors do not have the intellectual capacity or inclination to learn.

In 2001, another name for the *Ur-Exhibition* was under consideration. The rather unoriginal yet potentially evocative title: ‘Treasures. One Hundred Years of Collecting’, which was formulated to appeal to the Museum’s corporate ideology and practice. However, when publicity for the *Ur-Exhibition* started to filter out of the Museum, it was apparent that the name ‘Treasures’ had been rejected. Although it is unclear what processes and which individuals intervened to decide on the final title for the exhibition, *Centenary Gallery: One Hundred Years of Collecting*, it is feasible that the decision to employ the rather lacklustre prefix, ‘Centenary Gallery’, notably a designation which bore no relation to the conceptual development and history of the exhibition and moreover offered no connotative inroad into the eclecticism and magic of the exhibits and displays, was possibly part of a wider corporate marketing strategy which absorbed the *Ur-Exhibition* into the Horniman lottery project to act as an advertisement for the ‘new museum’ rather than a component of the Ethnography Redisplay project.

As objects and naming serve to define an exhibition, the production of textual and visual graphics are equally an integral component of this process of identity construction. In the Autumn of 1998, twenty-six draft text panels including lists of suggested illustrations and picture sources had been submitted to the project management team as well as the education, anthropology and exhibition sections. Almost three years later, there still had been “no meetings or forums to critically discuss the form and, content, and format of the text panels” (Levell, 25 April 2001) and certain key issues concerning the graphics remained unresolved. One of the recurring problems that forestalled the production of the interpretative and graphics aspect of the *Ur-Exhibition* was the turnover of personnel. These changes included a new head of education, graphic designer, and most significantly a new project manager (Deputy Director (Communications)). Although it was mooted on more than one occasion by the project management that the Marketing section would organise community focus groups and an external reader would be sought to review some of the draft

texts, as had been the case for *African Worlds*, and the Education section would be involved in the interpretative aspects of the exhibition; it appears that these provisions were never actuated. Following a meeting to review the situation, there was only one formal interpretation forum to discuss graphics; all other discussions were either conducted informally or through the Horniman's well known culture of 'memo' writing.

One particular series of electronic 'memos' warrants discussion because they offer a further example of the stratification of language within the museum profession and also act as a preface to another stage in the life of the *Ur-Exhibition*, as it completed its transmutation to become the *Centenary Gallery*. In the planning stage of the *Ur-Exhibition*, one aspect of the graphics, that both curators and designers had failed to adequately address was a design strategy for the inventory, that is to say, a scheme for the provision of 'label' type information for the individual exhibits. Despite this temporary defect, all the parties concerned unanimously agreed that the provision of inventory data in the gallery was absolutely fundamental. As noted under Thematic Concepts, the curatorial team had stressed that the basic inventory information should where feasible include: museum number, object description, provenance, date, and donor/vendor information. To facilitate this mechanical aspect of the exhibitionary process, the computer-inventory arm of the Collections Management section was asked to provide this basic data. In response to this request, the documentation manager queried the inclusion of donor/vendor information:

"All this info is retrievable from MM [Multi Mimsi] in an automated fashion. A couple of points though (a) I would have to question whether we really should disclose acquisition source information. That type of information is governed by the Data Protection Act and is not usually made publicly accessible" (Julian-Ottie, 6 June 2001).

Having spoken to a number of members of senior management, the curatorial team accepted that this ethical issue had to be further explored, however, it responded by explaining:

'from a curatorial perspective, it is not unusual to find such information on object labels in newly refurbished galleries, in both provincial and national museums, up and down the country...perhaps [the] use of the

terms 'donor/vendor' is slightly ambiguous and should have been expanded to include collectors and makers. In naming individual collectors, vendors, benefactors, etc, it is not necessary to qualify the terms of their presentation. The situation (for labels at least) is far more complex and fluid with, for example, Edge Partington's Pacific collection being dispersed after his death and purchased at auction by Emslie Horniman for the Museum... So although MM [Multi Mimsj] could generate basic label information, with regard to 'source' information, if it is to be included in the gallery a curatorial input is most definitely required.

To return to the provision of collectors' names in ethnographic galleries: this very much reflects the new trends in critical museology, in theory and praxis; with a move towards excavating forgotten or repressed histories; providing visitors with a number of different reading codes, and being transparent about museum operations and practices. It is these museological trends that have informed the concepts underlying the Collectors Gallery. Moreover, because the 'Collectors Gallery' attempts to re-centre individuals (collectors, curators, makers) for visitors to make sense of the gallery (the displays and the interpretative graphics panels) it is important and imperative to mention the names of collectors/donors/vendors. Obviously we can screen the labels and, perhaps, withhold names if there are valid grounds for doing so. I have never in my frequent trawls through the Horniman archives ever come across a case of a collector/donor/vendor specifically stating that they do not want to be publicly acknowledged. In fact, theoretical works (and common sense) acknowledge that among the complex, intertwined psychological and sociological motivations for collecting, the accreditation of recognition and prestige can certainly be a contributing factor. Or... [is] there some legal document that the Museum has introduced to protect the identity of collectors, donors, and vendors? (Levell, 2001).

The memo ended by stressing the need to keep this category in place for the draft labels until an informed decision could be made. Although the Director noted these curatorial concerns, she felt she was not in a position to comment until she had toured the gallery and been briefed about the object labelling system and spatial constraints (Vitmayer, 7 June 2001). But no member of the curatorial team was asked either to accompany the Director on a tour of the *Ur-Exhibition* or to explain the then 'imaginary' object labelling system, its problems and potential solutions.

Indeed it appears that these curatorial concerns were not given a great deal of consideration and 'source' information was discarded from the *Ur-Exhibition's* inventory. With the standard labelling system for the *Centenary Gallery* consisting of: 'object name, provenance, descriptive text (short, where available), object number and thumbnail image (space permitting)' (Ragan, 15 May 2002).¹³ In effect, the Museum's decision to dismiss this category semantically transfigured one of the guiding principles that informed the concepts, the exhibits, display and design of the *Ur-Exhibition*. It is an extraordinary paradox and parody that a gallery devoted to exploring the history of collecting neither names nor identifies the vast majority of individuals whose legacies and creations, predilections and professions, personal passions and 'scientific' pursuits, have contributed to the richness of the Museum's ethnographic holdings and, more significantly, provided the exhibitionary content – concepts, objects and narrative – for an exhibition centred on 'one hundred years of collecting'.

In sum, making exhibitions is undisputedly an exhilarating and frustrating; exciting and tedious; satisfying and infuriating; creative and complex process. Although exhibitions can be regarded as institutional monologues, they are in actuality heteroglot productions, which are created at the intersectional zones of contact, communication, concord and conflict. Notwithstanding the ideals promulgated by mission statements and corporate aims, in reality, the museum profession is stratified by different languages and objectives. In a world of constantly shifting boundaries and job insecurities, curators, conservators, exhibition and documentation officers, educationalists, administrators, managers and so forth, strive to retain control over and extend their respective domains. These power struggles within the museum field are usually contained within the institution; they rarely seep out into the public sphere. With the exception of a few studies (Harwit, 1996; Henderson and Kaeppler, 1997; Butler, 1999) the politics and 'internal dialogism' of museological practice in general and making exhibitions is seldom acknowledged, studied or discussed. In good faith, this paper has centred on the heteroglossia of exhibitionary practice, the different phases and forms of communication, translation, negotiation, arbitra-

¹³ The gazetteer-like information for the A-Z drawers was also not pursued and the 'X' drawer was, it seems, inadvertently omitted from the final construction, consequently, there are only 25 'filing' drawers under the *Material Culture Archive*.

tion and production, to disclose further the dynamics, the complexities, the politics, the poetics, and the prosaics of the museological field.

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