PREFACE TO JOAN LESTER'S DOCTORAL THESIS

UNION INSTITUTE FOR GRADUATE STUDY 1995

My Early Years at Children's Museum: Living the Salvage Paradigm

In 1963,1 graduated UCLA with an M.A. in "Primitive Art" and a major in the so-called traditional art of Native Americans. After a brief but wholly unsatisfactory stint in a "Primitive Art" gallery, (4) I began my work as an "anthropology assistant" at the Boston Children's Museum. I am now embarrassed to admit that fresh from graduate school, I continued to be a full participant in the "salvage paradigm," the perspective that assumed that "authentic Indian work" exemplifying the pure, uncontaminated past, had been rescued by non-native anthropologists just before the destruction and annihilation of Native American cultures (Clifford: 1987, Berlo: 1992, Dominguez: 1987). Convinced by my schooling that native cultures were vanishing, or 'at best, only remnants of what once was, I taught only about the ethnographic present, worried about "gaps" in the collection, inappropriately purchased and handled sacred objects, and was largely unaware of the ongoing continuity of native cultures throughout Indian America. Like so many others trained to work in these late 19th century paradigms, I could not know that this Western-created view of native art history would, in less than two decades, begin to be rejected by the new art historians, interpretive archaeologists and post-modem anthropologists. In fact, the late 1960's were a transition period that would be followed by a major paradigm shift, a change in the interpretation of art history that Belting (1987) refers to as the end of the history of art. Thus departure signaled the end of the great, compelling, all-encompassing narrative that presented the history of art as linear, unidirectional and universal. From then on, the evolution of the art of a particular culture would no longer be judged exclusively by Western-created canons nor assumed to follow a single, pre-determined evolution from epoch to epoch where, within each general time period, there was an expected cycle of growth, maturity and decay.

An Assumption of Indian Extinction

From the 1930's to the 1960's, the Children's Museum presented Indians as a single topic, in an "Indian room" where objects from five different culture areas were exhibited, each in a separate exhibit case. The focus was, of course, on exhibiting the museum's objects. They were sorted by culture areas, with objects from many tribes were displayed in the same case. Although there was no storyline, the exhibit implied that these cultures existed only in the past. Darcy McNickle, who, like Bea Medicine, provided some of the initial 20th century native critiques "Of museum anthropology, noted that the result of all such displays was that "tribes were seen as components of culture areas, frozen in the days of Boas, Wissler and Lowie" (1970: 4:"7).

The Indian room exhibits were interpreted by non-native museum staff, for visiting school
groups. As an anthropology assistant in the late '1960's, I cheerfully taught children about the native past, using examples from the collections to describe buffalo hunts, dry farming, the insulating properties of Eskimo igloos and clothing and so forth. Although I had seen native people on my trips to the Northwest Coast and the Southwest, I did not connect their
contemporary reality with the distant, faceless Indians I had studied about in school and about whose past lives I was so intently teaching. Instead, I still accepted the myth that the real Native Americans were either gone or had been assimilated into the so-called mainstream. To reconstruct the now-vanished past, I used role-playing as a teaching tool, and collections objects, such as kachina masks, kilts and sashes; crest figures; and buffalo skulls and pipes as hands-on props (5), engaging the children in kachina dances, potlatches and even a sun dance, as they were once performed.

How could I have used sacred objects in personally edited re-enactments of religious ceremonies? In retrospect, I recognize that I simply did not know that my actions were both appropriative and disrespectful. I thought I was presenting native peoples in a positive light and intended that through my teaching, children would understand and appreciate how Indian people had lived and interacted with each other and their environment. At the time, I still believed in the full validity and authority of the curatorial voice, and the primary importance of focusing on and sharing objects from the collections with our public. I made the unilateral decision to use such objects to present past native cultures, believing that they were simply artifacts, and not understanding that they were, in fact, the physical manifestations of spiritual beliefs.

Of course, I now understand that I did not recognize contemporary native existence, nor its related corollaries, including the critical need for native involvement in the representation of their own culture, the essential relationship of native people to their own objects, and the right of native people to determine what sacred information or objects may be shared with non-natives.

My dismay at my early insensitivity and "appropriative representation" (Dominguez 1987) is mitigated a bit by the realization that other curators have followed the same paths, and that their colleagues have in turn questioned their intentions or actions: For example, in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art, Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, Rubin chose to look at the ways in which tribal art influenced modem art, clearly stating that" our exhibition does not focus on the origins and intrinsic meanings of tribal objects themselves, but on the ways these objects were understood and appreciated by modern artists" (1984: 1). Rubin, as curator, selected the content and focus of his exhibition. The criticism was deafening. Rubin's approach and label content stimulated a huge debate about the role of Western art historians and the ways in which they have unilaterally

chosen to interpret non-Western art. As Clifford (1988) explained, Rubin used the African pieces for his own ends, created the illusion of nonexistent "affinities," implied that such objects came from so-called "primitive" (as opposed to civilized Western societies), and appropriated and reclassified African works for his own imperialist ends. Furthering this dialogue, PhiIlips and Berlo (1992: 35) argue that the exhibit lacked a cultural understanding of the objects and their creators. Thus, even if Rubin chose to use them within a particular context, the exhibit did not reflect aboriginal understandings of these objects. If the exhibit had been multi-vocal, it might not have caused such controversy.

Similarly, in the exhibit *Into the Heart of Africa*, the curator, Jeanne Cannizzo, also made a unilateral decision to present a critical portrait of collecting and museum ethics during the colonization of Africa. Unfortunately, the curator assumed that her audience would understand the exhibit's intentions and deconstruct, for themselves, the colonial mind set (Ames: 1992: 157-58 Berlo and Phillips: 1992:32; Jones: 1993: 210-211; Schildkrout: 1991:16-23). Since only colonial voices were included, the public, and most important, the African-American community, instead, assumed that the exhibit supported and even served to glorify colonialism. The missing ingredient was, of course, African involvement in the exhibit's development and African commentary in the exhibit itself. Once again, the omission of native voices and the exhibit's failure to directly present its intentions led to this deeply flawed presentation.

Yet another exhibit, *The Spirit Sings,* relied exclusively on non-native curatorial voices and failed, again, to recognize the need, from inception to presentation, for native involvement in displays of their heritage. Among others, art historians and museum anthropologists such as Ames (1991), Berlo and Phillips (1992), Jones (1993), and Vogel (1990) have critiqued this exhibit. Although the surface controversy swirled around the

exhibit's sponsorship by Shell Canada, a corporation that was drilling on Lubicon Cree lands, I believe that Vogel's assessment (1990: 7) reached to the very heart of the issue. As she states"... people come before objects, and in fact, people's needs cannot be separated from how these cultural objects are used." She goes on to explain that in museums, the "people" are not only the public who comes to see the objects but the" host community" (the place from which the objects originate). It is only through involvement with all facets of exhibit development that the community gains essential access to self-representation. One critical outcome of this recent controversy is that it has ushered in a new era of collaboration between native First Peoples and Canadian museum professionals. This collaboration has included the creation of a Task Force and the publication of its jointly agreed upon' mission (Museum Anthropology: 1992: 6-20).

Just as museum exhibitions of native material culture provided the forum for a highly charged debate about the representation of non-Western cultures in Canadian museums, so too in the United States, the ownership and curating of Native American objects by non-native museums has led to challenging exchanges about the nature of cultural authority, and the misrepresentation and the appropriation of native culture. Within the past thirty years, these exchanges have led many museum professionals to engage in and move from discussion to real dialogue; and then to seek significant change. Perhaps this dialogue has centered around museums because their collections and modes of interpretation are so visible and accessible to all. This writer feels privileged to have been a participant in a profession where many were open to listening to native voices and native concerns and are now anxious to work towards new, more collaborative modes of representation.

Curatorial Appropriation: Filling Gaps in the "Traditional" Collection.

In the late 1960's, I did not consider the possibility of collaboration between non-native

museum professionals and Native Americans. Fully absorbed by the salvage paradigm, I instead told myself that it was my responsibility to review the museum's native collection of approximately 5,000 objects, and to carefully note where the "gaps" were (what objects were missing from a full representation of traditional art), and to fill them in as money and opportunities allowed. I reluctantly admit, again with the deepest embarrassment, to my own continuing participation in inappropriate appropriation (collecting) of sacred objects. During a summer trip to the Southwest, at McGee's Indian Trading Post, I was given the opportunity to purchase two Hopi Kachina masks for the Children's Museum. I called the museum director, Michael Spock, and argued that these two items would fill a significant gap in the collection and that I could also use them to teach about Pueblo religion. He authorized the purchase and, at the salesman's suggestion, I carried them out of the store and home in two brown paper bags (6).

How could I have been so unaware of native people's feelings about their sacred beings? I realize that my past comfort with this act derived again from my graduate school education. Masks such as these had been presented as "art", objects of aesthetic and cultural significance that would add intrinsic value to any collection. I bought into that mindset and felt a responsibility, as de facto curator, to acquire these "traditional" native objects for the collection.

Most important, I had never been exposed to current native belief systems and values. As a result, I was able to treat these receptacles for sacred living entities as things that could be casually handled and manipulated by the non-initiated. My now changed and ongoing understanding of these as sacred entities derives, in large part, from long and often troubling conversations with Rick Hill, Tuscarora. By alluding to the life and power of the sacred entities that I had previously perceived only as inanimate objects, Rick helped me understand the essential need to approach and treat such beings respectfully if I

wished to honor the perspectives and values of native people. By 1980, Hill was eloquently explaining these ideas in print, urging museum professionals to integrate a respect for native spirituality into their museum work. .

Today, in the late 1990's, it is no longer possible for curators to remain ignorant of native belief systems and values. In conversations, confrontations, published essays, novels and poetry, native people are beginning to assert their ownership of certain sacred objects (and human remains) not in museums. With the advent of the recent Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) legislation, museum curators are being asked to understand or at least accept the existence of a world view that differs from and may even dramatically contradict their own training in museum anthropology or art history. Rather than preserve, research, exhibit and interpret the silent but sacred objects in their collection, they are being asked to return some of them to their original owners!

Since 1971, the Hopi purchases made for the Children's Museum have been stored, with other Kachina regalia, behind a curtain. A sign on the curtain states: " *Sacred objects; do not view; please respect native culture and beliefs.*" Since the required 1993 NAGPRA inventory of our museum holdings, the Hopi Tribal Representative has had these masks on a list of objects slated for possible repatriation. I trust that they will go home.

The Assumption that Algonquin Peoples Are Extinct

As part of my participation in the salvage paradigm, I also lent my support to the assumption that native people in New England were extinct, developing both a curriculum unit, *The Algonquins*, and a wigwam exhibit that supported this hypothesis.

<u>Creating a Curriculum Unit: *The Algonquins*</u>

As part of a grant from the United States Department of Education to develop multimedia curriculum units, I and Binda Reich, a staff member who had a degree in anthropology from Harvard, created *The Algonquins* kit. Our project team also included two teachers and two
practicing anthropologists. To help children interact with these long gone people, we created a wide range of activities (setting traps, trying on clothing, hafting an arrow) that would help them gain a better picture of what we believed such a life might have been like. Our anthropological sources for these activities were far ranging, incorporating cultural information from tribes as far

North as the Naskapi in Canada to the Narragansetts in Rhode Island. Since there were (we then believed) no stories about these past lives, we wrote our own. We were, again, marginalizing and freezing people in an unreal, ethnographic present, claiming that as "scholars" and teachers, we had the right to speak for and serve as the sole interpreters of a culture that was not our own. And, of course, I know now that there is an ongoing oral tradition in New England that we could have used to suggest a sense of earlier people's lives. *How could we so totally leave out past native voices and ignore the native people actually living in New England? How could we turn such a presentation of native lives over to non-native "experts"?* We were honestly unaware of the continuing native culture in New England and totally dependent on the two practicing anthropologists, Jonathan Jenness and Fred Johnson, as the "experts" who would provide information and insights about a now vanished culture. As for our broad generalizations and cultural borrowing, those too were supported by the culture area approach, which, as Medicine points out, "categorized tribal entities... into static units bolstered by traits collected by the laundry list method" (1971:28).

Creating an Exhibition: Life in a Wigwam Long, Long Ago.

The museum director believed in interactive learning and suggested that an exhibit was needed to more fully engage visitors in a recreation of past Indian life. I chose Pueblo culture (a favorite topic in school curriculums), but indicated that since I had never been to the Southwest or seen a pueblo, I could not create an interactive exhibit that might require the creation of a Pueblo environment.

A trip to the Southwest, intended to solve that problem, created a new one. I returned to announce that now that I had met and spent time with several Hopi people (7), I no longer felt comfortable with an exhibit that would put people like themselves on display. It felt like voyeurism, and a violation of their hospitality. Instead, I proposed that we create an Algonquin wigwam, and describe the life of people long gone. Thus, we would still provide the visitors with an interactive Indian exhibit without "exhibiting" living people (or so I thought).

We hired Don Viera, a craftsman from Plimoth Plantation to build a full size, walk-in wigwam, and filled it with opportunities for hands-on activities, based on knowledge and activities developed for the curriculum unit. Again, our goal was to engage visitors so that they would gain a better picture of what we believed such a life might have been like.

The exhibit was extremely popular, and the public thoroughly enjoyed sitting on the skin-covered benches, trying on clothes, grinding com, drilling beads, hafting arrows and so forth. I was even asked to give a paper at the American Anthropological Association. In "*Doing Things the Way the Indians Did*" (1969), I suggested that using replicas of cultural objects, rather than simply looking at them in glass cases as mute testimonies to once active lives, helped visitors to understand their meaning and connect with the people who had created them and had now vanished.

At the risk of being repetitive, it should be obvious that the exhibit froze people in the ethnographic present, and generalized broadly about diverse peoples within a so-called culture area. As McChesney (1991: 17), among others (Clifford: 1987; Dominguez: 1987), has proposed, such exhibits create the distancing of the other, denying a social history of interaction, and ignoring the political and economic history that would, if presented, reveal deeply troubled relationships between Native Americans and Euro-Americans on this continent.

Of course, the exhibit also ignored contemporary native existence. By way of explanation (not justification) I simply didn't know that there were still native people in New England. In fact, the wigwam exhibit led to my first encounter with them. One day, in 1969, Ralph and Hazel Dana, Passamaquoddies, and Lavinnia Underwood, Cherokee, from Boston Indian Council, appeared at the wigwam and asked me why I was teaching only about the past when they were still alive. To be honest, still stuck in the salvage paradigm I discredited their claim of a "real" Indian identity and replied, with some measure of pride, that I was "teaching anthropology!

Studying at Harvard: Deconstructing the Salvage Paradigm

After seven years of working at the museum, I began to feel uncomfortable in my museum-acknowledged role as "Indian expert," believing that before I could really accept that designation, I needed more knowledge. I decided to take a leave of absence and go back to school (8).

Deconstructing Extinction: When Did Native People Stop Being Invisible?

Lippard, in Mixed Blessings (1990: 199) presents a question about when people on the cultural margin stop being invisible. For me that moment, or series of moments,

happened in 1970/71 while I was a graduate student at Harvard in the Department of Anthropology. After an uneventful first semester, in which I continued to work within the salvage paradigm, studying "extinct" cultures as diverse as the Maya and the Naskapi, I took the course, Social Sciences 152, The American Indian in the Contemporary United States, taught by Dr. Jerry Sabloff, with 14 Native American students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education participating as class members and section leaders!

That course was truly life changing. I could never again be who I was, believe what I had believed or know what I thought I knew. The cause was my collision, and interaction with the native teaching assistants and finally my ongoing dialogue with five of those fourteen Native American people (9). In 1991, Aldona Jonaitis described this kind of metamorphosis far more eloquently when she wrote, " I have undergone a transformation of both mind and soul. Mine is not a unique story, for every person who has had the opportunity to work with a Native community returns to her 'own deeply touched by the experience and profoundly changed" (1991:21).

<u>"I am a Native American"</u>

My very first memory, of many critical ones, was the' first day of class when Bill Demmert, Tlingit, stood up and introduced himself, first stating his native name, and then his clan, his band, his village, and his tribe. These were followed by "I am an Alaskan and an American". I was shocked. Here was a Harvard graduate student whose key identity was that of a native person, with kinship and roots to a particular community in a particular place. Following Demmert's lead, the other teaching assistants introduced themselves in similar ways.

Deconstructing the Grand Narrative: Whose History is This?

The class continued to produce surprises that forced me to reassess what I thought I

knew. As Sabloff presented descriptions of what had happened in American history, one or more of the native participants would counter with a different story that often. totally contradicted Sabloff's presentation (10). The ones I can still "hear" in my head involved a full description of Pope's rebellion, during which this Pueblo leader effected a secret alliance of nearly all the Pueblo peoples and succeeded in routing the Spanish; the destruction to tribes and buffalo caused by the railroad moving West; and the Homestead Act (what I would now refer to the Dawes act). The work of anthropologists who participated in the "salvage paradigm" was also subjected to native condemnation.

In each class, as I was confronted by these new stories that contradicted what I had learned in schools from kindergarten to college, I began to question all the history I'd been taught, and promised myself that from then on, I would attempt to also find the native perspectives, rather than blindly accepting the well established American myth. Art historians, artists and other scholars such as Hegeman (1994), Hinsley (1991), Jones (1993), Limerick (1995), Lippard (1990), Schimmel (1991), Slotkin (1993), Trembly (1993) and Treuttner (1991) have all written about this very issue, deconstructing the construction of an " empty" West available for Euro-American settlement and the myth of the "vanishing Indian"; decrying assimilationist propaganda and actions; and most important, questioning the exclusion of the grimmer side of American history, which involved the conquest and oppression of native cultures.

Deconstructing Museum Presentations and the Art-Artifact System

The questioning of history was intellectually challenging, but it didn't (yet) affect me directly nor force me to personally confront the profession I had chosen. But within that year, my own commitment to and belief in museums as educational institutions that preserve and interpret the things of the past and preserve them for the future, was also turned upside down. I had brought some of the curriculum kits developed at the

Children's Museum to show the native teaching assistants and proudly.spread out their contents on a table. One by one the native attendees turned their backs to me, refusing to look at the contents. Eventually, they simply walked out. As he was leaving, Hartman Lomawaima picked up a coiled Hopi basket and angrily commented, "That's my grandfather's. You have no right to own it" (11).

I was devastated, hurt by their apparent rudeness and deeply troubled by their anger. How could something as well intentioned and educational as a curriculum unit evoke such a violent reaction? What had I or museums done to native people to elicit such responses? If I was going to continue as a museum professional, I had to understand their rage. I dropped all my other Harvard classes in order to attend every section led by the native teaching assistants. For my term paper topic, I chose the question with which I was now obsessed: what role, if any, had museums played in the. stereotyping and misrepresentation of Native American cultures?

The American Indian: A Museum's Ere View.

In addition to reading about and describing the methodology of 19th century museum anthropologists as they installed and interpreted native cultures (Lester: 1972), I visited and evaluated four anthropology museums that had major exhibitions of Indian objects. I also

convinced a few more of the native graduate students to really talk with me. Thus, I spent long hours listening to and trying to absorb their frustration with the way museums had and continued to present native cultures. I walked through Harvard's Peabody Museum with Henrietta Blueye, Seneca, and Wayne Newell, Passamaquoddy, as they critiqued the intent and messages of the exhibits, indicating the past tense labels and the freezing of native people in what has come to be called "the ethnographic present" (Fabian: 1985), the description of time in which ethnographers chose the present tense to describe native

cultures at a given moment of time, thus implying that native cultures are static and unchanging. Blueye and Newell also pointed out the painful exhibition of grave goods and sacred objects; the use of general culture areas, rather than tribal affiliation; the monolithic treatment of individuals in any given group; the absence of native history; the absence of any information that confirmed contemporary existence; and the lack of any native involvement in the presentations.

All this interviewing, book research and on-site evaluations for my term paper led to an inevitable but deeply troubling conclusion: yes, museums had and were still directly playing a role in the misrepresentation of native cultures. In my term paper I concluded "The museum anthropologist, like others who have presented and explained the American Indian to the general public, must accept responsibility for the invisibility of the American Indian today."
(Lester: 1971: 59).

I audited the same course for two more years (a chance to solidify my thoughts and listen to other native graduate students), and continued my association and intense dialogues with the native students, but severed my official association with Harvard. Several incidents led to this difficult decision. When Dr. Sabloff had my paper? The American Indian: A Museum's Eye View, placed in the Tozzer library collection, an anthropology professor told his
students not to read it. And, in my next course, Anthropology S-134: Indians and Europeans: 1620-1970, the term paper assignment was to choose a native society and "argue the case for either assimilation or ethnic separatism for the individual culture in question." When I refused to write the paper, objecting that it was not appropriate for non-native graduate students to make such a decision or even assume that they should be involved in the process, the anthropology professor replied, "don't be so silly; just write

the paper." Incidents like these made it clear that I would not, at that time, find support for my questioning of anthropology and the museum profession at Harvard.

Reconstructing Museums: Everything We've Ever Done is Wrong

I left Harvard in 1971, returned to Children's Museum and announced to the Director, Michael Spock, that everything we'd ever done related to the interpretation of native cultures and the objects in our care was wrong! His simple response: "Fix it." Spock gave me a budget, personal encouragement and sat back to watch me begin the long process of trying to deconstruct and reconstruct our approach.

I understood that the Children's Museum needed to totally revise its presentation of native cultures. My dialogues and experiences with the native students at Harvard gave me the courage to try, and have continued to provide one of the foundations for my actions. Those dialogues have been reinforced and augmented by ongoing conversations with native people in New England, and include members of the Children's Museum Advisory Board, native staff and a multitude of other native people, primarily from this area, who were willing to share their thoughts, feelings and frustrations with a museum professional. Since it would take a book rather than a chapter to describe all of those conversations and the projects that grew out of them, I will concentrate on those that directly impacted my approach to and goals for the Tomah Joseph exhibition.

Native Cultures in New England Are Alive and Well

Upon my return to the museum, still guided by my Harvard mentors, I invited 30 Native American people from the Greater Boston area to the museum, to discuss how we, as an institution, might begin to change. It was an all but total failure. Distrust filled the room. What did we want from them? Were we just using them to get funding? Were "Indians in" and were we seeking to capitalize on this interest, and so forth.

Fortunately, that impasse was resolved in 1973 when American Science and Engineering, an educational publishing company, proposed publication of the 1964 Algonquins curriculum unit. Since it represented everything I now rejected (no native voices, a frozen past, no history, a culture area and monolithic approach; no contemporary existence),' I countered with a list of conditions, to which Michael Spock, the museum director, lent his full support. We would revise the kit if they would agree to native voices, native approval of all contents, paid informants (why should native people freely offer us their knowledge, when other consultants were paid for their expertise), money to travel to native communities and so forth. The publishing company accepted this proposal and our budget. Now I needed to find native people willing to work on such a project.

I had been told that there was, supposedly, an Indian community on Cape Cod. Was it possible that they were still native? If they were, would they work with us? Together with Judy Battat, a staff member with a degree in anthropology, I spent much of the summer in the native community in Mashpee, on Cape Cod, talking with and getting to know the people there. We asked questions, went to Pow Wows, hung around and even helped set up exhibits for a new tribal museum. By summer's end, the answer to my original question was a resounding yes. There was, indeed, a functioning, long- standing native community in Mashpee, another equally strong one in Gay Head, on Martha’s Vineyard and other smaller Wampanoag communities in the surrounding areas. And through our interest in the community and our stated desire to change how the museum presented native people, we had identified a group of Advisors who were willing to work with us on the now very outdated curriculum unit.

A New Curriculum Unit: Indians Who Met the Pilgrims.

Together with our Native American Advisory Board (I believe it was one of the first in

the country) we settled down to create a fully revised multimedia curriculum unit. A year later, together with Gladys Widdiss, Helen Haynes, Helen Attaquin, Cynthia Akins, Frank James and Tall Oak (the Native advisors) we published *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, a breakthrough curriculum that fully incorporated native voices (quotes as well as voices on tape), oral history and personal stories, photographs of people and places; connected the native past to the native present; and looked at the past history of Pilgrim-native relationships and at contemporary issues such as land claims and sovereignty.

In comparing the first curriculum unit, *The Algonquins*, to this community-centered kit, I am reminded of Clifford's comparison (1991: 212-249) between the grand, generalized narratives that often characterize dominant museum exhibits and the de-centered local expressions of identity and existence that are found in tribal museums. In *The Algonquins* curriculum unit, cultural outsiders pieced together a general, largely anonymous narrative from a wide variety of anthropological sources. *In Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, individual, identified Wampanoag Board members presented their local culture, and shared their ideas about oral history and other traditions, intercultural relations, and contemporary politics. In comparing my involvement in the first curriculum unit, *The Algonguins*, with *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, I am struck, also, by the change in voice. In *The Algonquins*, non-natives synthesized and presented information; in *Indians Who*, native advisors collaborated with non-native staff and their concerns and their own stories, told in their own words, were integrated into the final presentation.

Increasing Native Representation: Involvement in Museum Programs and Exhibits

Having begun to establish credibility with the Wampanoag community, we were able to continue working together, effecting changes that grew from and were often even inspired by this collaboration. In the 1970's and early 80's, there were three critical changes: a shift toincreased native presence on staff, increased exhibit presence, in the

form of a new Native American exhibit*, We're Still Here: Indians in Southern New England, Long Ago and Today*, and the creation and installation of a Northeast Native American Study-Storage facility.

A Native American Internship: Augmenting Native Voices and Native Presence

In spite of their relationship with the Children's Museum, the Wampanoag advisors were still outsiders. The Harvard graduate students, as well as the museum's Advisory Board, explained that if museums were really going to change, native people needed training so they could join museum staffs or start their own museums, and have an internal impact on the museum profession. To facilitate this process, the Children's Museum requested and received a two. year grant to train seven Native American interns.

Although I had no management experience, I was selected to head the internship program because, from a museum perspective, I was the person most directly involved with native content and the spokesperson for native issues at the museum. I was not entirely successful as a project administrator, but I was able to share my collections, program development and exhibition expertise with the interns. They were able, diffidently at first and more effectively as the year progressed, to express dismay over their lack of access to collections, the existence of sacred and human remains in the collection, and the wigwam exhibit that persisted in presenting past New England culture, even though native cultures had continued.

Although this initial foray into museum training was difficult for both myself and the interns, the overall results were, in retrospect, significant. Five of the seven interns are now working in or are closely associated with museums (12). Equally important, a first year intern, Paulla Jennings, became the head of the Internship Program in its second year, and the museum's first native staff member. Since 1979, there has always been at

least one native staff member involved in the interpretation of native cultures at the museum (13).

Who Speaks for Native People?

Even with the increasing presence of native staff, I was still considered their staff supervisor, and the designated spokesperson for native issues. However, I was, quite honestly, never comfortable in that position. As I look back at our respective roles, I see that for me the native staff quickly became colleagues and collaborators, and that we were, to cite Ames (1991: 7-15), really functioning in a complementary, bicultural relationship (14). I relied on them, as I did the advisors, to critique the content of my work for mistakes and inbred Western assumptions, and to collaborate with me on the direction of the Native American program. I understood that as Native Americans, they held knowledge, insights and expertise about their own culture that were of critical importance to any interpretation of that culture. They relied on me to provide exhibit and program development expertise, interpret museum issues and as the person willing to run interference for our program with the administration. From that perspective, I was one of their collaborators.

Although the museum eventually acknowledged our actual relationship, it was not willing to change the structure so that full control of the program would rest with a native person. Perhaps I was "easier to negotiate with" because I "spoke" the museum language and "understood" museums. Perhaps, as Ames has suggested (1992: 148), the museum feared losing its own institutional voice if it empowered native people to speak for themselves.

A New Exhibit: We're Still Here

Motivated by the above-mentioned intern concerns, and supported by the museum director, I was able to find funds to create a new exhibit that would connect the native

past to the native present Although I had assumed that it was time to take down the wigwam and develop an entirely different exhibit that would more sensitively and effectively interpret the continuity of native culture in this area, the Native American Advisory Board saw the wigwam as an important cultural symbol. Their statement that "you don't have to live in a wigwam in 1980 to be native" led to the creation of *We're Still Here: Native People in New England Long Ago and Today,* an exhibit that compared a full size wigwam with a contemporary native home.

The key message, as proposed by the Board, and developed by the museum, was that native people in Southern New England were still here and still participating in their own native culture, as well as that of the dominant culture. The Advisors brainstormed, made suggestions, critiqued my proposals for content and content presentation, offered photographs and artifacts, wrote or signed some of the labels, and exercised veto power when we didn't agree. Their presence in this home (kitchen, bedroom, living room, TV) was indicated by objects relating to contemporary native culture (a closet with regalia, dresser drawers with beaded jewelry, books with native title herbs drying, suitcases packed for a Pow Wow and so forth).

Within the past 15.years, many other major museum exhibitions throughout the United States, such as *Lost and Found Traditions* (Coe: 1986), *The Way to Independence* (GiIman,Schneider: 1987), *As We Tell Our Stories* (Williamson: 1989:4-23), *Creativity is Our Tradition* (Hill: 1992*), Visions of the People* (Maurer: 1993), Chiefly Feasts (Jonaitis: 1992), *A Time of Gathering* (Wright: 1989), and most recently, *Gifts of the Spirit* (Munroe: 1996) have been created that recognize the survival, strength and continuity of native cultures.

The National Museum of the American Indian, founded in 1989, has also accepted the

challenge of establishing native presence, affirming contemporary identity and reclaiming native representation. As Rick West, its first director, has explained, "Native museum professionals are reclaiming interpretation, taking back the right to curate and interpret their own culture in museums" (Dixon: 1992). All of the exhibits that this fledging museum has already created in temporary spaces or their New York facility, including *Pathways of Tradition, Creation's Journey, All Roads are Good, This Path We Travel and Stories of the People* have employed native voices and native world views to honor and celebrate the long and continuing history of native peoples.

Study-Storage: New Approaches to Native Collections

Like the cross-cultural dialogues about the survival and continuity of Native American cultures, the issue of access to, control over and ownership -of native-collections is being widely and intensely discussed in the closing years of the twentieth century (15). From a native perspective, the underlying problem is, of course, the removal from native communities and the placement in and control of these objects by a non-native institution. In such recontextualizations, it is the curator, rather than the community, who determines its fate. S/he had (has) enormous control, and the power to decide what will be collected, how objects will be stored, which objects will be exhibited, how they will be interpreted, who will be allowed to enter the storage areas, and which objects, if any, may be touched, handled, loaned and so forth.

As Native American Curator at the Children's Museum, I began to interact with these issues as early as 1976 when the interns, as well as our advisors, complained bitterly about their limited opportunities to see collections in storage, or exercise control over their treatment. To respond to these concerns, I devised a plan that would allow native people increased access to the Northeast Native American collection. Each object would be placed in a visible package that could be handled, allowing close but protected

examination of each item; the storage area would then be opened to specially interested visitors. By 1980, the entire Northeast Native American collection had been integrated into this system and installed behind a window wall in a storage area at the rear of the We're Still Here exhibit.

The installation of the Northeast collection in a Study-Storage system led to unforeseen Consequences. It forced me to deal with new issues related to sacredness and human remains, and enabled me, eventually, to look at the continuity of traditions, “tourist art,” and contemporary arts from a more native perspective.

Respecting Sacred Objects: Covering the Medicine Masks.

In 1970, the Grand Council of the Iroquois published a manifesto asking museums to cease their display and interpretation of their medicine masks. In 1975, Dawn Dove, Narragansett intern, observed that the Children's Museum held a collection of more than thirty of these masks. As part of her internship, she traveled to the Iroquois reservation at Onondaga to discuss the issue with Longhouse people. They requested that these masks no longer be accessible to the general public, even in storage. Instead, they suggested, that these living entities could be covered with calico and hung face to the wall, as they are in Iroquois homes.

When Study-Storage opened in 1980, the medicine masks were covered, hung in their own area and curtained from view. A sign states "Sacred objects. Please do not view. Please respect native culture." Only Longhouse people may have access to them or their documentation. Although, over the years, the covered masks have provoked curiosity and thus provided a wonderful opportunity to teach about the need to respect native belief systems, I trust that the museum will, eventually, receive a repatriation request for their return.

Phillips (1994: 12) has proposed a further deconstruction of Iroquois requests for the suppression of all viewing of the *Ga-go-sah*. Although she fully supports the spiritual reasons for not exhibiting or granting storage access to the *Ga-go-sah* (they are alive, powerful and even dangerous), she also, appropriately, suggests that the Iroquois request "signals a new phase of anti-colonial resistance whose goal is to terminate the long history of colonial surveillance of the Iroquois society to throw off the inquiring gaze of the outsider" (16).

<u>Respecting Native Sensitivities: Burying Human Remains</u>.

The interns had also indicated that they were uncomfortable in the museum's collections because they included the remains of a Native American from Nahant, Massachusetts. Before Study-Storage was created in 1979, the remains were removed from the Northeast Native American collection and, with the permission of the Director and the curator (myself), buried by native staff.

As I look back at both these adjustments to how objects would be treated, I realize that they are but two early examples of modifications accepted willingly by non-native museums in response to native sensibilities (17). Today, the new NAGPRA law is changing this balance of power and museums are having to negotiate with native representatives as equals.

<u>The Continuity of Native Expression</u>

The Study-Storage installation continued to raise issues that needed resolution. For example, through visitor interaction with the objects, I began to realize that the objects were, inadvertently, sending out the wrong message. Although our public programs and curriculum units now recognized the continuity of native culture, our collections did not.

When non-native visitors looked at the collection that included only ancient stone tools and objects collected during the mid to late 19th century, they could only assume that although native people once made functional and beautiful things, they no longer did. And if they weren't creating such objects anymore, they must have vanished or been assimilated into mainstream America.

In the course of my visits to and conversations with native people, I had been told that native artists were continuing to create objects similar to those made over a century ago. I requested and received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant to collect and document contemporary work that demonstrated the continuity of native traditions (18).

Collecting Contemporary Work. Over the period of one very special year, I traveled throughout New England meeting and interviewing native artists (basket makers, carvers, bead workers), photographing their process (when allowed to do so) and collecting selected work for the museum collection. As I was passed from one artist to the next, they taught me, through their work, that artistic traditions may evolve and change and still be viable. New materials or new forms may be introduced, and old materials and forms used in a new way, without negating the strong 'and ongoing connection between past and present creations. For example, contemporary war clubs carved with modern tools and ash splints woven into napkin rings or sewing boxes; and quahog shells transformed into modem jewelry are all part of and connected to ongoing traditions.

I was certainly neither the first nor the last person to recognize the vitality and continuity of Native American artistic traditions. As early as 1970, Peter McNair, Wilson Duff and Gloria Webster traveled throughout British Columbia, commissioning "the finest examples of contemporary work." Their resulting exhibit, The Legacy (MacNair, Hoover, Neary 1984), connected past traditions with their contemporary expression, thus

demonstrating survival and continuity.

These ideas have now gained still wider acceptance, in part through the work of Ted Coe, who, for 10 years, collected contemporary work throughout Indian America, and shared his findings in a ground-breaking exhibition and catalogue, *Lost and Found Traditions* (1986). Even Clifford (1987: 128-29) who suggests that Coe's original collecting intentions were still shaped by Western constructs, praises Coe for recognizing that these objects are part of ongoing, inventive tradition for incorporating the voices of artists, and for eliciting the specific meanings and the spiritual, aesthetic and commercial forces that contributed to their creation (19).

Tourist Art is Native Art

Although I was able to add contemporary work and thus contemporary presence to' the collection, my own learned preconceptions had traveled with me during the Folk Arts grant. I only collected new work that still looked like or was connected, in some way, to historic, 19th century examples and most often rejected art that was clearly made only for sale, such as birchbark bird feeders or "garishly" carved and painted root clubs.

In the early 1980's, I was also able to reconsider my own prejudices about "tourist art." Rather than a single moment of recognition, I know that this Western bias was slowly modified by interviews with contemporary artists and by conversations with native staff members. For example, while examining basketry molds and gauges with Penobscot basket makers on Indian Island (20), I began to realize that, for native people, basket making (was) is always part of who they are and what they do. Even when it incorporated new forms and new materials, it was still theirs, and still part of their ongoing story.

More important, as I listened to the basket makers, I began to understand that what

outsiders named and categorized as "tourist art" was simply the continuation and further evolution of a cultural tradition. Ash splint wastebaskets and teapots revealed continuity and survival as much as any other facet of native history. For these women, making baskets was, as McFeat says (1987: 62-65) Indian work; it guaranteed economic survival but it also allowed them to create objects that truly expressed who they were and had always been. In addition to providing a steady income in a time of cultural and economic oppression, weaving with splints allowed women to confirm and even proclaim their continuing identity as native people.

Phillips has consistently argued for the acceptance of hybrid forms as valid postcolonial expression (1994, 1993, 1990, 1989). They provide examples of cross-cultural dialogue and intercultural exchange. As she says, "these represent a heroic struggle for economic survival, and an attendant struggle to make meaning under conditions of devastating loss..." (1990:34). Clifford (1987:26) has also been a supporter of this new paradigm, arguing that "authenticity is (should be) reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a 1ocaI present becoming future".

Penobscot Root Clubs: A Continuing Tradition

Until the early 1980's, I had consistently rejected a box filled with examples of late 19th century New England "war clubs," with their alien faces and strangely carved roots. They were so totally unlike the elegant ball-headed clubs that had been used in the Northeast for centuries that they seemed to be an aberration, rather than a modification or different form of a war club. .

When I finally revisited the clubs (21), they hadn't changed but I had. Although I still found them "odd," I now understood they also revealed native survival, expressed cross-cultural conversations and native identity and were part of an ongoing and evolving

tradition. In this instance, the function of the clubs had changed (from weapon to art made for sale) but they were undeniably still an expression of the culture and history of native people. I hung the clubs in the Study-Storage window, added contemporary examples and used them to discuss and demonstrate one aspect of the continuity of Penobscot culture.

Ironically, my understanding of and respect for these clubs as an expression of cultural continuity is still changing. Since April 1995, Stan Neptune, a Penobscot carver and I have been working on their history and iconography. Rarely collected by museums due to the assumption that they were, after all, "only tourist work", we have, so far, found 279 examples, mostly in private collections (22).

With some embarrassment, I must now admit that the clubs that I once lumped together as "late 19th century tourist art" represent centuries of work. Rather than an alteration or departure from ball-headed clubs, they appear to express a unique Penobscot or Wabanaki tradition that has always been distinct from the ball-headed form. We are now able to propose -a sequence for their stylistic evolution, identify the carvings and motifs of specific artists, and are beginning to decipher their iconography (23).

Reconstructing "Impurity": Integrating Truly Contemporary Work.

In all of this collecting, I had, until the early 1980's, also shied away from completely new forms, such as beaded baseball caps, denim jackets edged with beads or T-shirts imprinted with native slogans that seemed to have no native precedent. They, too, are now part of the collection. Although, at one time, I rejected these as "breaks" with traditions, I now understand that there is no "break." This new work, like all the work that preceded it, expresses economic survival and the proclamation of an ongoing native identity, creative adaptations to intercultural relationships and a changing native history.

The Tomah Joseph Exhibition

This personal description of my museum journey brings me to the creation of the Tomah Joseph exhibition. What I hoped for and tried to create in the Tomah Joseph exhibit and catalog is conditioned and shaped by all that preceded it. I began by participating in the salvage paradigm, gradually learned from native people that it was deeply flawed, and have spent many museum years, under their tutelage, seeking to "fix" (deconstruct, revise, recontextualise, reinterpret) non-native museum-based interpretations of native culture, primarily at the Boston Children's Museum. As I look back, I see that the most consistent catalyst for my new perspectives has been my ongoing and often heated discussions and interactions with native people. My learning evolved from the processing, and reprocessing of ideas, feelings and explanations that native people presented to me. For their part, they were willing to share their frustrations and even rage about museums with me. For myself, it required a willingness to listen to their issues (as hard as that sometimes was), to re-evaluate my own assumptions and learning, and then very often, to try to really change the way I did museum work. It is this revised vision, a commitment to honoring native values, native representation and native control over their own physical and intellectual cultural heritage that I brought, in 1993, to my study of Tomah Joseph and the development of the Tomah Joseph exhibit.

PART ONE: ENDNOTES

Preface

1. I understand that there is no word for "art" within the Passamaquoddy or other native languages, and what non-native historians frequently refer to as "art" very often has deeper contextual meaning. But I agree with Margaret Archuelata, a native art historian, who recently explained (Atlatl Conference, Fall 1996) that "just because we didn't have a word for art doesn't mean that we didn't create it." Although an object's cultural meaning was the most important, the skill and creativity of its creator was also appreciated within the native community. From that perspective, while giving primary importance to its cultural significance, I will, when relevant, refer to Tomah Joseph's work as "art."

2. Tomah Joseph created narrative scenes on birch bark by outlining his figures with a pointed implement such as bone awl or a nail. As he cut into the bark, he removed its top

layer, exposing the lighter layer beneath. No word within the formal lexicon of art history terminology (etching, incising, sgraffiito, scraping) adequately describes this process. I have therefore, decided to use the word incised drawings, a term that contemporary Passamaquoddy people are comfortable with, and most frequently use to describe Tomah Joseph's process.