

Review Essay

Civilizations on the Seine: Sally Price's *Paris Primitive**

Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly. Sally Price. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 224 pp.

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In 2001, as a visitor to Paris eager to finally see some of the city's renowned collections of Oceanic material culture, I set out early on a weekend morning to visit the Musée de l'Homme. Knowing something of the history of the museum and its location in the magisterial edifice of the Trocadéro, it was with a certain heightened anticipation that I walked into the museum's entryway to find myself face to face with a Rapa Nui moai—an imposing stone visage that, despite its popular over-exposure, still conveyed a sense of Polynesian dignity.¹

But whatever solemn power was imbued in that moment quickly dissipated as I proceeded toward the Oceania exhibit hall. Handed a crude paper flyer that mapped out the arrangement of exhibit halls, each representing a major geocultural region, I noted the location of Oceania and made my way upstairs to the top floor where, to my amazement, I found a cavernous room that had been completely emptied out. A few display cases pushed against the wall with a lingering relief map of Oceania the only evidence of its former function. This curious moment of discovery and disconnection led me, eventually, to learn something of the plans for the new museum, the Musée du Quai Branly.²

This experience was also the start of a curiosity that intensified when I visited the museum again two years later, in 2003, and encountered a hastily constructed barricade at the entrance to the former Oceania hall, along with a plywood board with handwritten messages of protest scrawled across it. The museum staff was, by then, in open rebellion against a policy that had closed the museum's ethnological exhibits and begun transferring its mammoth collection to a successor museum, conceived as a glamorous new center for the arts of indigenous peoples.³ On these occasions I had stumbled into two moments in a long simmering drama that would see the final demise of the once-renowned ethnology museum (and some would say of the entire genre) and the birth of another—the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB).

The other moment for me in 2001 came when visiting the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts, located on the other side of Paris, at Porte Dorée, on the edge of the park that once hosted the 1931 Colonial Exposition and now favored by families for weekend outings. Arriving at that museum in the late morning during the week, it was immediately apparent that we would have the museum almost to ourselves, except for one or two groups of school children arriving with their teachers on an educational field trip. Thus we had plenty of space to view works that have

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underwritten the importance of French museum collections for well over a century. The first, open gallery displayed examples of large shrine sculptures, houseposts, and drums from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands that made for an impressive display, especially when viewed in uninterrupted silence. Upstairs in hallways lined with glass cases of smaller objects, the variety and quality of the collections were obvious. The school groups seemed to glide quickly through the ethnological portion of the museum, ending up in the basement of the museum that housed an aquarium famous for its crocodiles.

I have begun this essay on Sally Price's book *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* with a short personal narrative in order to mark my own naiveté as an outsider to the complex history recounted in the book and to provide a glimpse of the contestations that have marked the MQB from its inception. Given the importance of the MQB project for French public culture and for the worlds of anthropology, art and museology generally, it was inevitable that the museum would become a lightning rod for commentary and controversy. From the time the project was first conceived in 1995 the MQB has generated an almost continuous stream of publicity and critical analysis in France. And with its opening in June 2006, its permanent exhibitions have been the subject of reviews by art critics, scholars, and journalists in a wide spectrum of media, both inside and outside France (Bensa 2006; Clifford 2007; Digard 2008; LeDébat 2007) as well as commentary from museum staff (Taylor 2008).

One of the principal lessons of the epic story of the MQB is the acute irony of an institution that professes to give les arts premiers ("indigenous" or "primitive" art) an honored place in the most respected venues of Western art exhibition, while erasing the very social and political histories from which they emanate. An important point emerging from Price's critique (and those of other writers) is that this effect is not simply a byproduct of the institution but a result of its exhibition practices. Ironically, the placement of indigenous objects in the center of the very center of world cultural tourism serves to further mystify their cultures of origin. To take Oceanic art for example, imagine that the take away message of a museum's exhibitions is appreciation for the cultural styles and forms of "other worlds," far removed from the familiar spaces of European viewers even though those worlds are home to busy circuits of tourism and militarization that link directly back to the centers of power in Europe and America. As Johannes Fabian (1983) noted long ago, such absences are not a matter of oversight or aesthetic choice, but of structures of cultural representation.

Since *Paris Primitive* was published in late 2007, a number of reviews of the book have also appeared that add another dimension to the MQB literature: commentary on the commentary. In writing this essay, I have the advantage of seeing what others have had to say (Grognet 2009; Kasfir 2008; Thomas 2008; Volkert 2008), including Price's own update in an essay in *Museum Anthropology* (Price 2010) as well as a new Postface in the French edition of *Paris Primitive* (Price 2011). It is clear that Sally Price's book is a landmark entry into the literature on ethnographic museums and the MQB in particular, especially for Anglophone audiences. It is also an important update of her earlier work on global practices of collecting and exhibiting "primitive art" (Price 1989, 2006).

As ethnographer and theorist, Sally Price is particularly well positioned to work on the story of the MQB. Given that her book *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* presents a framework for

analyzing the display of primitive art in Western galleries and museums, the MQB would have been an irresistible case study. Although an American anthropologist outside the national arenas of French art and anthropology, Price's considerable experience in France (three years) and the French Antilles (some 25 years) give her a strong basis for reading the often-convoluted politics of national cultural production, whether involving politicians, anthropologists, art collectors, or museum administrators. Even though writing from a classically "participant observer" position, with all its limitations, Price writes reflexively about issues and events that might well elude others more embedded in the drama that she relates. Of course "native" ethnographers to the MQB (curators, administrators who have their own commentaries on the institution) are likely to look at these same matters through a different optic.

Paris Primitive offers up both history and ethnography—history of the creation of the museum and ethnography of its interpretive and display practices. As history, the book presents a remarkably lucid story of the process of museum formation, recounting the epic struggles over its creation and design of its core exhibitions. Given the timing of publication, appearing just a year after the opening, the book ends up being more history than ethnography. In fact, two thirds of the book is devoted to institutional history and about one-third to descriptions based on observations made shortly after the museum opened its doors in 2006.

Thus Price had relatively little opportunity to explore the quotidian practices of museum staff or visitors' interactions with the exhibits and other parts of the museum. As she notes (177), she spent a week in the museum a year after its opening. One of the reviewers (Thomas 2008:291) criticized the author and publisher for rushing the book out, when delayed publication would have offered improved perspective from which to "assess the negotiation of the post-conceptual moment" and "to factor in what has become known as the "North American critique" of the MQB." Even though these criticisms now have a reply in the French edition with its lengthy Postface reflection on subsequent writings (Price 2011), I would suggest that there is no "post-conceptual moment" in the continuous development and redevelopment of museums and their aims. A narrative of origins, of museum making, is extremely useful, even if we do not see deeply into the complexities of the actors who populate the museum's "contact zones" once it comes into operation.

Whether recounting the decade-long process to establish the new museum or analyzing its exhibit designs, *Paris Primitive* is a story of the conflicting visions and ideologies that converged to define it. In the process, planning discussions and critiques reproduce longstanding French ideologies of culture and national identity. Price shows us that debates about the MQB may be read at many levels: as a story about the French national imaginary (as refracted through others once on the colonial periphery); as a story about the history of collecting and display of primitive art; and as a story about the interplay of science and art in French ethnographic museums.

While on the one hand a case study in museum definition and design, *Paris Primitive* is also a study of the cultural politics of the French national imaginary, and the public ideals that call for harmonizing ethnic and cultural difference under the banner of national culture or *laïcité*—an ideology that Price describes as "that uniquely French version of church/state separation... trumping rights of cultural difference when they come into conflict (38)." Here Price is clear about the need to explain to American readers that "the words 'cultural diversity' do not carry

the same meaning in France as they do in England or the United States (38).” She quotes Chirac himself on this point, characterizing the American “model for integration” as based on “juxtaposing communities that are both different from each other and unequal” (from Chirac’s book *La France Pour Nous*, cited by Price, p. 38). Price passes over this misreading of American ideals of multiculturalism with surprising ease, preferring no doubt not to slow her narrative lest it unravel as one presses for details. Indeed, it is a story that has been the subject of a considerable body of scholarship, a fact noted by a reviewer critical of omitted references (Thomas 2008:290), now addressed in the Postface to the French edition of Price’s book (2011).

But what is clear is that the battles over the MQB offer an acute lens through which to gauge the state of ideologies of culture and ethnicity in public (state) institutions. As is the case everywhere, the disconnections between rhetoric and reality pose questions about the politics of representation, about who, how and why idealistic visions of unity and equality are advanced at the same time that alternative visions and entrenched inequalities are occluded. In Price’s words, “glorification in more upscale settings” often coincides with “trouble on the street” (128), in this case, in the form of violent protests of alienated Islamic youth in the *banlieue*. This apparent dissonance seems fundamental to the conceptualization of the MQB, born precisely in President Chirac’s vision of elevating the value and dignity of indigenous cultures through an institution that would exhibit and interpret their works of art. Whereas his remarks on the occasion of the opening of the MQB famously underlined the importance of correcting historical injustices suffered by indigenous peoples (Clifford 2007) (an excerpt now permanently fixed by the museum entrance in the form of an inscription on a marble plaque), any dissonance for French society adapting to waves of immigration is politely submerged in policies that continue “...privileging national culture (while at the same time promoting the appreciation of foreign cultures in such controlled settings as museum displays)... (41).”

The opening chapters of *Paris Primitive* recount the origins of the museum in the politics of Presidential legacies—in this case, Jacques Chirac—situating the museum project within wider spheres of interest associated with French cultural policy and national identity. Price weaves these modalities into a narrative that alternately reads like a mystery novel and French Shakespearian drama with kings, princes, and palace intrigue (or at least presidents, academic nobility, and heroes and villains of the art world). Indeed, in his review for the professional journal *Museum*, James Volkert (2008) imagines what screenwriters might do with Price’s MQB “script” for a Hollywood film.

Price manages to digest an intensely complex history to make accessible, even compelling, a story of institution-building that was simultaneously loudly public (in national editorial pages, for example) and highly restricted (in the controlled and secretive ministries charged with implementing the project). The origin story recounted is especially important because it involves the fate of well-known national ethnology museums that saw their collections removed and consolidated in the MQB. For the Musée de l’Homme and the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie, the creation of the MQB required them to reinvent themselves as something new. This is a story that will be expanded in the future by other authors, who will see these events as one episode in a very long history of defining and redefining French “patrimony” and reconfiguring national culture through the refracted gaze of others (Deleporte 2006; Dias 2006; Stevens 2008; Trento 2005).

The Art(s) of Anthropology: Objectifying Culture at the Quai Branly

In 2007 the new National Center for the History of Immigration opened its doors in the building that had once been the Museum of African and Oceanic Art. When I asked a staff member of the MQB about that institution—its *raison d'être*—the first reply was a kind of sorrowful, “they have no collections.” This answer underlines the primacy of objects for the identity and mission of the MQB, defining its identity through a recombination of the discursive practices of both ethnology and fine arts museums.⁴ The interplay of these distinct, at times contradictory, practices makes up much of the drama in the museum’s origin story. Whereas it is possible now, five years since its opening, to see the museum as more than its permanent exhibitions, at its inception, the focus of the planners and certainly its early critics concentrated relentlessly on the significance of the objects and their presentation in the main galleries—a focus that signaled the ascendancy of fine arts discourse as the ground against which the figure of indigenous cultures would be interpreted. In the view of the designers, the sensibilities and techniques of art galleries would provide a strategy to move beyond the exhausted paradigm of 20th century ethnology museums. But the lingering ambiguity of an art museum that defines its identity in geocultural terms (Africa, Asia, Oceania, Americas) meant that the discourses of art and ethnology were fated to co-mingle in ways that prove to be endlessly ambiguous and contentious.

Defenders of the MQB periodically assert that the art/ethnography opposition is a false dichotomy. Indeed, Chirac himself, in opening the Louvre gallery, proclaimed that “The conflict between the so-called “aesthetic” and “ethnographic” approaches no longer applies” (2001:9). Yet, the process of planning and construction continually ran up against these dualisms, rooted in discursive practices that are much larger than the MQB. As an anthropologist who has long worked in and on the worlds of art collection, curation, and ethnographic interpretation, Sally Price tells this story with considerable nuance.⁵ The capsule history of museum planning presented in *Paris Primitive* finds the art/ethnology opposition embodied in some of the key actors who worked on the founding vision for the museum: This alignment is most sharp in the persons of two of the principals, noted anthropologist Maurice Godelier and art collector Jacques Kerchache, confidant of President Chirac. Whereas Godelier advanced a vision for a “post-colonial” museum that would be a site for collaborative research and interaction with indigenous societies, Kerchache articulated a view of the museum as a space for masterpiece works with universal aesthetic value, finally honoring the arts of the indigenous world with a venue worthy of their status (Godelier 2009b).⁶ In a chapter titled “Cohabitation,” Price provides a road map of these deliberations and includes a marvelous photo (49) of a team of five leading the planning effort including Maurice Godelier, Jean-Michel Wilmotte (architecture and interior design), Jacques Kerchache, Stéphane Martin (culture and arts administration) and Germain Viatte (contemporary art). Tellingly, the photo shows Godelier and Kerchache seated at the same table in separate spheres of conversation.

The results of this brief cohabitation are now a matter of public record. As Price describes in a chapter titled “A Dream Come True,” the most dramatic first accomplishment was the creation of a new gallery of primitive art in the Louvre as a precursor to the MQB.⁷ The Pavillon des Sessions, dedicated in April 2000, remains open today and is designated by the MQB website as “an embassy in the heart of the Louvre.”⁸ Yet, in that same year, citing his “marginalization” in the planning team, Godelier withdrew from the project—an event that, more clearly than

anything else, marked the demise of the ethnographic or scientific ambitions for the MQB as a “postcolonial museum.”⁹

In many ways, the Louvre gallery is a more pure expression of the artistic politics of Chirac and the aesthetic philosophy of Kerchache than the MQB itself.¹⁰ Displaying one hundred and seventeen “exquisite sculptures” (Price 2007:59) in singular cases spread around a spacious well-lit gallery, the Louvre features “masterworks” of art with few distractions of text or context. Even though the project had brought together an impressive array of scholarly and artistic talent to produce interpretive resources, including a beautifully illustrated book/catalogue (Chirac 2001) and an innovative multimedia database, these resources are clearly secondary for the visitor experience. The MQB website is explicit about this, saying that: “And although the aesthetic qualities of the works are the prime consideration [emphasis added]...visitors may also extend their reading on and understanding of the artefacts [with]...basic information provided on the cartels [and]...a dozen interactive screens [that give] access to complementary information on the history, context, use and society of origin of the items on exhibit.”¹¹

Despite idealistic statements about the combination of artistic experience and cultural education, the massive 477-page book-catalogue (English version) can only be relevant for specialists, and the multimedia stations are relegated to a separate room that goes unnoticed by most visitors.¹² If visitors to the gallery seek additional information at all, it is likely in the plastic placards that were only added after visitors complained about the lack of information.¹³ Price concludes, “The interpretive space seemed designed to discourage museum visitors from exploring the cultural worlds in which the objects on exhibit had been created (62).”

Looking at the actual exhibition spaces, Price’s assessment seems justified. But what of the materials themselves, produced as part of the overall project and available to those who wish to do their own exploring? *Paris Primitive* does not give these ancillary products much attention (although, see Price 2010, 2011 for more discussion). Both the book and the multimedia program (produced for sale as a CD-ROM are in themselves significant contributions to the body of interpretive work on the regions represented. Indeed, the CD-ROM was the focus for much of the work of Godelier and his colleagues, who envisioned a state-of-the-art, user-friendly compendium of ethnographic information linked to the masterworks using electronic media. Titled grandly, “Art and Civilizations: Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas,” the CD was released in 2001 with considerable media coverage, quickly selling out its first printing of 3000 copies. It is sold in a handsomely produced box that touts the CD as a “synthesis of art and scholarship” that presents each object “...in a two-fold approach: aesthetic and ethnological. Beyond the artist’s creation you will grasp the work’s history, function, lifestyles and thoughts of the as yet little known societies from which they came (Musée du Quai Branly and Réunion des musées nationaux 2001).”

Setting aside for the moment the Orientalizing reference to “little known societies” (many of which are among the most written-about societies of the anthropological literature), the CD project can be read as a legacy of the ethnological in the MQB project. It offers up encyclopedic information about each object including its (1) history, (2) aesthetics, (3) purpose, and (4) society of origin.¹⁴ In addition, Godelier devised several general themes with which to expand upon the significance of these objects for the lives of those who produce them, within a comparative

(scientific) framework (Price 2007:74, note 38). Nevertheless, indicative of the secondary status of this effort, the CD-ROM was produced to run on operating systems that were already dated when released and have become obsolete since (in the case of Macintosh computers, Classic 9). In 2007 the CD was available at the Louvre bookshop but not the MQB.

Moving from the Louvre gallery to the MQB offers a perspective capable of ascertaining some of the distinctive features of the latter. The MQB, of course, is not just a gallery in an art museum, but a museum that seeks to make its own identity as a museum of primitive art that celebrates the cultures represented. It has done this through its architecture—a grand new building and grounds designed by Jean Nouvel—and through its exhibits and activities. The fact that the architect, Jean Nouvel, also designed the exhibit areas, meant that the physical features throughout the museum would be molded to a consistent set of themes—themes that, in a few words, represent the tropes of nature/native/other.

One of the most prominent features of the museum's presentation of art and cultural identities is the idea of "civilizations." Talk of civilizations is derived from the language of the humanities, of high culture and refinement, and is only occasionally used in area studies scholarship. However, by defining itself as a museum of arts and *civilizations*, the MQB uses the discourse of "civilization" to elevate indigenous nonwestern cultures—cultures that, not long ago, were seen in need of civilizing. Nonetheless, in many ways, this strategy simply inverts and reproduces many of the same limitations associated with the now outdated practices of older ethnographic museums—a fact noted by a number of observers, including the head of the MQB's department of research and education, Anne-Christine Taylor (2006) (quoted by Price 2007:109-110). Just as the Musée de l'Homme organized its exhibition space around a limited number of color-coded regional exhibition halls, so the MQB presents its four civilizational areas (Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Americas) as color-coded regions.¹⁵ The baseline for understanding other cultures, then, is a kind of taxonomy of ethnicities associated through cultural commonalities—a plan that, even at the stage of architectural planning, evoked complaint from anthropologists objecting to the "closed box" model of culture (114). Despite a nod to trans-regional contacts and flows, as well as the periodic intrusions of Europeans, there is little information in the MQB exhibits to disrupt the essential foundation for these timeless categories for "ethnicities" and "civilizations."

One of the contradictions in the vision for the MQB only touched on in *Paris Primitive* is the problem of fitting indigenous or native cultures into the discourse of "civilizations"—a configuration that normally calls for large-scale, integrated cultural formations that reflect some degree of common identification.¹⁶ What, then, are the "civilizations" of the MQB? Early statements about the mission of the new museum, urging inclusion in the Louvre made it clear, by referring to the "other three-fourths" or "other four-fifths" of the world, that the defining axis was "non-Western": everything that museums of Western art, the Louvre in particular, exclude (36-37). But indigenous societies only compose about one-tenth of the world's population. Even if the category "indigenous" is open to definitional debates, the strong sense of "indigenous" or "native" in the work of Kerchache and Godelier is more specific than a generic category of the "non=Western."

To consider some of the problems of fitting indigenous cultures to the model of a few world civilizations, consider the example of Oceania. The color-coded spatial contiguity suggests that

Oceania, like the other large civilizational entities, exists as a cohesive geocultural identity based on cultural features of long duration (timeless, in fact). Yet, “Oceania” is ultimately a social construct, a product of (European) mapping practices and proclivity for taxonomy. Like the newly renovated Oceania gallery at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Kjellgren 2007), the MQB decided to expand the category of “Oceania” to include, somewhat ambiguously, insular Southeast Asia. Whereas the established tradition of “Pacific studies” focuses on the Pacific Islands region—Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia (another trio of historical artifacts), “Oceania” at the MQB includes insular Southeast Asia as well as the Pacific Islands area. It could be said that this kind of unconventional mapping is a good way to remind the viewer that such categories are always arbitrary. But for popular audiences who care little for such details, the likely lesson from a visit to the MQB’s permanent exhibitions is that nonwestern others live within essentialized blocs of cultural space.

The same representational practices operate all the way down, at lower levels of social categorization. Thus the Oceania exhibition makes prominent reference to “Melanesians” and “Polynesians.” Whereas the latter category does have substantial anchoring in culture and history, “Melanesian” is strictly a western formation applied variably to a geographic grouping of islands in the Southwest Pacific. Only academics and politicians talk about “Melanesians.” Yet in the labeling and guidebook representation of artworks from the region, the “Melanesians” take on a robust agency. And underneath “Melanesian,” we could say much the same about the identity of “Kanak” referring to the Melanesian residents of New Caledonia, composed of nearly thirty distinct language groups. Once deployed, these fictive categories take on the significance of “peoples” with their own traditions, characteristics, and sense of collective agency. Since political turmoil in the Southwest Pacific region over the last decade has produced a new set of media images of the region as an “arc of instability” associated with “ethnic” violence and failing states, such constructions reinforce a long history of racialized representations of Melanesia as an area characterized by conflict and violence. Media reports and policy papers flowing out of the region have often reduced complex economic and political struggles into “ethnic” conflicts rooted in tribal sentiments (White 2001). Placed against this background, the exhibition’s use of the ethnographic present to display objects of Melanesian culture associated with, for example, headhunting and ritual murder, produces troubling parallels to distortions already established in popular culture.

As has been repeated often in commentary about the MQB, the permanent exhibitions of the arts and civilizations of Africa, Asia, South America and Oceania reproduce longstanding ideas of the native as *primordial*. Indeed, that may be precisely the intent—an unmediated experience of the other, of altered senses and perceptions associated with a journey “out of time,” but it is one that, as most in anthropology have long ago concluded, is fatally flawed. As discussed by Price and innumerable critics, the MQB’s main exhibition halls unselfconsciously ignore decades of criticism of representational practices that use art and culture to imagine the “indigenous” or “native” as distant others living out of time and history. Exhibitions that focus on “masterpieces” of art whose mystery is amplified by lack of knowledge about the specific human contexts from which they derive are tailor-made to render exhibition spaces as, once again, shrines to the exotic.¹⁷

While appealing in the abstract, the view that valorizing the art of cultural others is a means of establishing an immediate, felt connection across cultural boundaries ignores the force of discourses of the “primitive” that are deeply rooted in Western culture. Any strategy of display that does not attempt to inform or guide viewer interpretation allows those ideas to reproduce themselves, even if in an emotionalized aura of aesthetic appreciation. Because neither contemporary voices nor histories of colonial entanglement find much place in the MQB’s main exhibits, there is little opportunity for the museum to disrupt or dislodge longstanding images of cultural others variously described as “primitive,” “traditional,” “tribal,” “native,” or “indigenous.”

The idea of engendering an unmediated experience of the other, of fostering a journey “out of time” works its semiotic effects as much through absence as presence. The absence is the missing subject, the people who are presumably the inheritors of represented traditions. For the most part the people of the host cultures are rendered voiceless, if not invisible, in the context of the MQB’s exhibits.¹⁸ Comments suggest that this has proven to be a notable absence for anyone from the cultures represented, such as the Inuit visitor quoted by Price as saying that he “came away with the feeling of having been parked in a big reservation for savages...” (173), or the participants attending a MQB conference who told Price that, for them, “the most important problem was that the knowledge, beliefs, and perspectives of native people have been largely brushed aside.”(178)

The irony in all this is that even though the MQB was born in a vision to address past injustices and challenge cultural hierarchies, its permanent exhibitions advance modes of representation that more often than not silence or erase the voices of indigenous people themselves. For anyone aware of the decades-long efforts to decolonize academic and cultural institutions, the apparent contradiction is inexplicable. *Paris Primitive* provides just enough history and ethnography to understand how key decisions emerged from national cultural institutions and, second, how the dominant vision for the museum translates into specific representational practices.

Dialogue?

From the first moments of planning the new museum, the word “dialogue” has been central to the vision for the MQB. Invoked often as a palliative, it has also raised questions posed by those who would like to look beyond rhetoric to ask questions such as “Dialogue for what purpose?” or “On whose terms?” (Digard 2008). The word “dialogue,” like its kindred term “encounter,” is inspiring and mystifying all at the same time. It speaks to idealistic visions and the almost universally valued need for improved mutual understanding, particularly across geocultural zones marked by histories of conflict and oppression. Yet when uttered (usually by highly educated and well placed individuals), it can distract and obscure as much as enlighten. In her assessment, Price acknowledges the idealistic statements about the museum’s mission but also probes areas where practice belies the continuation of longstanding hegemonies.

Much about the MQB, including its name, is intended to break from past practices that denigrate or diminish indigenous cultures. Yet even the act of planning, conducted by committees of elite French academic and political leaders, reproduced lines of distancing that the project professes to

challenge. The planning commission, for example, explicitly rejected the idea of including representatives from the cultures involved because it would become politicized, directed toward “ethnic militancy” (46-47). This decision is one of many that reflect a broad aversion to institutionalizing lines of difference that might harden into ethnic or cultural conflicts.¹⁹ In several passages throughout her book, Price notes that this approach is often expressed in a preference for conducting intercultural exchange at the level of international diplomacy, rather than through specific groups or individuals (126, 138, 177).

This proclivity for imagining the work of the museum as entering into relations at a high level of cultural or national exchange is often expressed in metaphors of state-to-state interaction. Thus, artworks, such as the masterpieces put on display at the Louvre or the MQB, become “ambassadors” for their culture. And the galleries that present them, like the Pavillon des Sessions, become “embassies.” Stéphane Martin, President of the MQB, has articulated this quite succinctly: “Art objects are also ambassadors for their culture, and in that capacity they’re an element in the dialogue between peoples (quoted by Price 2007:125).” How well does this metaphor work? What messages are conveyed and received in this diplomatic exchange? If diplomacy involves, in part, the celebration of identity, values, and histories to other nationalities, what is represented in this diplomacy of art? What is celebrated? *Paris Primitive* raises such questions, posed to readers who may themselves have a stake in (re)forming practices of cultural “dialogue.”

One way that Price takes on these questions is by looking carefully at the ways that objects are presented in the museum’s exhibits. By analyzing display practices and interpretive strategies she asks how some modalities of exhibition seem to foreclose cultural insight or historical understanding while others enable those same pathways. In an epilogue titled “Cultures in Dialogue?” that might usefully have come earlier in the book, Price sets out a framework for specifying the different options or “models” available to exhibit designers charged with the task of somehow representing the art of different cultures while breaking down barriers between viewer and viewed (170-171).²⁰ She describes four models as ideal types of (ethnographic) museum representation: (1) emphasize formal properties of the object; (2) foreground perspectives of the cultures of origin; (3) tell the story of colonial encounters and exchanges that set objects on their museum journey; and (4) present them as a window onto the pre-contact past.

Whereas the MQB emphasizes formal qualities of its art (model 1) and the context of the pre-contact past (model 4), rendered implicitly in the language of the ethnographic present, it distinctly avoids the perspectives of cultures of origin (model 2):

Bringing in native voices for some kind of participation was apparently raised as a possibility at the early stages, partly through Chirac’s expressed interest in including “*peoples autochtones*.” This option, however, was rejected. In the context of museums around the world in the twenty-first century, the MMQB stands out for the extent to which it passes up opportunities for integrating non-European perspectives.” [172]

Here the metaphor of objects speaking as ambassadors on behalf of their societies seems to stand in for the absent members of those societies unable to speak on their own behalf.

What about treatment of the historical circumstances through which artworks were obtained and journeyed to the museum collections where they are displayed today (model 3)? Price describes several cases that illustrate a degree of selectivity or conservatism that is not surprising in a national institution hesitant to open up histories of colonial domination and appropriation. However, where concern with object histories *is* more prominent is in the form of narratives about French travelers and collectors, including explorers, colonial officers, missionaries, art collectors, and so on. Price comments on the richness of detail on the MQB's website regarding biographic information for European explorers, anthropologists and collectors (152-153), in contrast with the paucity of detail about native artists or intellectuals. Anthropologist Aaron Glass noticed this phenomenon while on a guided tour of the exhibitions:

Perhaps the most telling and encapsulating moment for me came when [the curator] gave the conference group a tour. He paused at a couple Northwest Coast objects and declared: "These are very important pieces. We're very proud of these. We don't know anything about them, but this one used to be owned by Lévi-Strauss, and this one by André Breton.... [Glass 2007]

Similarly, the museum's guidebook introduction to "Oceania" opens with a one-page overview that is devoted largely to describing "the history of French collections in the Pacific since the early 19th century (MQB 2006:31)." And the 52-minute documentary film *Quai Branly: L'Autre Musée* available on DVD tells of the museum's design and construction through the travel narratives of seven "masterpieces" featuring those who collected them. The film opens with the story of the acquisition of the stone moai from Rapa Nui (that ended up in the entryway of the Musée de l'Homme before migrating to the Louvre), told almost entirely through the eyes of "an aspiring 22 year-old mariner Julien Viaud who would later become the well known traveler and writer Pierre Loti (Viatte 2006)."²¹

The prime example of the collector-hero, of course, is Jacques Kerchache himself. When Chirac spoke on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Louvre gallery, more than half of his speech was devoted to honoring his recently deceased friend (Price 2007:64-65). Nearly every interview, article, or film about the origins of the MQB includes biographical narrative of Kerchache, his passion for collecting primitive art, and his dedication to the museum project at the end of his life. His life story is constantly present, whether the "Indiana Jones" style film and slide show in the media room of the Pavillon des Sessions, on the museum's website, or in the ubiquitous publications available at the museum bookshop.

The fourth mode of presentation described by Price distances objects from both Native and Western perspectives by locating them in the pre-contact past. Whereas Price states that, "Over the past several decades, this approach has lost its claims to legitimacy in most parts of the world..." (2007:171), several recent exhibitions of Oceanic art suggest that this genre is alive and well, at least in American metropolitan art museums. In 2006 the Honolulu Academy of Arts, cooperating with Georg August University of Göttingen, sponsored a three-month exhibition of artifacts from the voyages of Captain James Cook. That show, titled, "Life in the Pacific of the 1700s," emphasized the mystery and "mana" of objects from a "little-known time," with almost no connection to the present (even though a great number of the objects continue to

be produced and used in the contemporary Pacific). The catalogue, for example, chose to feature only pictures of the objects and drawings of early explorers. As one Hawaiian reviewer commented of the exhibition, “It did not adequately acknowledge and emphasize the relationship between the past and the present and why that connection is vital to indigenous people today. As a Hawaiian, I am linked genealogically to the pieces from Hawai‘i lying behind the glass cases; they are my ancestors. The lack of interpretive materials in the galleries relegated the works to mere historic “objects.” (Andrade 2007:341).²²

More recently, the San Diego Museum of Art opened an ambitious exhibition in 2009 titled “Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form.” The catalogue proclaims, “Today, few Westerners are familiar with this remote region of the earth.” (Ellis 2009:13) and “...the early record remains extremely thin, and the distant past remains clouded in obscurity(Ellis 2009:15).” This, for a region that includes Hawai‘i, one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, major U.S. military installations across the north Pacific, and large island communities within settler societies such as New Caledonia and New Zealand.

Within the realm of fine arts and antiquities, the adjectives “remote,” “distant” and “little known” evoke classical models of connoisseurship that continue to be applied within gallery environments. Price presents several examples of works at the Pavillon des Sessions and MQB that illustrate this preference for antiquity and mystery, even when ethnographic information is available. A dramatic example worth repeating is the case of a large carved housepost from the island of Makira in Solomon Islands, installed in the Louvre gallery and described in an article by Deborah Waite in the catalogue of masterpieces (Kerchache 2001a:287). As discussed at some length by Brutti (2003:22-26) and Price (2007:76-78), the interpretation of the housepost in the gallery and catalogue ignore information obtained by anthropologist Sandra Revolon in the course of her research in the communities that produced the housepost. During fieldwork in the 1990s Revolon was able to obtain detailed information about the piece from interviews with villagers, including the name of the carver, likely time of carving, and significance of its motif (Lorenzo Brutti, conversation with the author, June 23, 2007; Brutti 2003). Yet, none of her information was used in the gallery or catalogue. Instead, the catalogue presents only a series of abstract speculations about the meaning of the carved figures (“...we do not know whether they are remote forebears or more recent relatives” [287]) and prefers to give the piece a much older date in the seventeenth century using carbon dating that is only useful to dating the wood, not the time of carving. Whereas the absence of ethnographic information may lend objects a greater air of both mystery and antiquity, utilizing a fuller interpretation based on fieldwork provides a direct connection with contemporary Solomon Islands community.

While a critical examination of museum labeling may identify ways that exhibition practices open up or close off opportunities for dialogue, a single-minded focus on exhibitions, particularly the permanent exhibitions, may miss much that goes on with the diversity of activities, not frozen in the iconography of collections. As James Clifford noted, “A tendency to dwell on the museum’s centerpiece, Jean Nouvel’s impressive, sometimes kitschy exhibition space, can obscure the diversity, tension, and potential of a large-scale project exposed to ongoing historical cross-currents (2007:9).” Keeping in mind the economic disparities in support for different branches of the museum (issues that do not escape Price’s eye for detail), its public face is one of wide diversity and activity. Even though most visitors to the museum may limit

themselves to the permanent exhibits and perhaps the bookshop and cafe, museum activities notably include temporary exhibitions, conferences, performances, and educational programs. All of these activities, noted by Sally Price in a recent update (2010), merit ethnographic attention that goes beyond the scope of *Paris Primitive*.

As Clifford, Price and others have observed, the temporary exhibits installed by the MQB have carved out a space for novel combinations of ethnography and art. Occupying three different locations in the museum allowing multiple temporary exhibits, these shows have presented a wide range of topics, styles and techniques, including ethnographic exhibitions that depart from the aesthetic of the main galleries. For example, an exhibit of the art of New Ireland (Papua New Guinea), installed in April-July 2007, organized by Philippe Peltier, Oceania curator at the MQB, and his counterpart, Michael Gunn, at the Saint Louis Art Museum, included the curators' own "dialogue" project to add context to the interpretation of the artwork (compare O'Hanlon 1993). They did this by returning to New Ireland with photographs to facilitate conversation about the objects—information ultimately included in a 302-page catalogue that includes both contemporary and historical photos of objects and the people who use them. Whereas this is all fairly conventional in ethnographic museums today, these approaches stand out at the MQB because of contrasts with its permanent galleries. The difference was marked particularly by the presence of a large video screen located in the center of the exhibition that added welcome life to the gallery by playing a video of a contemporary ceremony involving the same kind of objects shown on display.

In the years since its opening the museum has hosted numerous academic and professional conferences, usually in the mode of co-hosting with organizations who define the program and assemble participants. Such events have and will continue to provide opportunities for wide ranging exchange on the topics and issues represented at the MQB. One of the more ironic answers to Price's question about the potential for dialogue in the context of the MQB emerged when she herself presented a paper to a conference on Art and Anthropology held in the Claude Lévi-Strauss Theater at the Museum in June 2007. I was in the audience and interested to hear what kind of discussion might ensue. So I was more than a little surprised when the moderator of her panel concluded the session without the opportunity for audience discussion that had been offered to previous speakers. When Price writes about "opportunities lost" in some of the museum's institutional choices, she may now include some personal reflection (see Price 2010).

If one were to interpret the museum's identity from its self-presentation on its own website, one might conclude that its primary emphasis is upon activities: interactive programs, conferences, performances and so forth. Suggesting an orientation toward workaday Parisians rather than foreign tourists, the museum's homepage beckons the reader to "Escape the daily grind by stepping onboard the quai Branly." In addition to the permanent collection, the museum hosts a variety of shows, concerts, cinema and cultural activities throughout the year. The museum now urges visitors to "Prepare and enrich your visit. Thanks to the numerous interactive programmes on the website: 2D and 3D Flash visits, tailor-made-walks, themed modules... Another way of viewing the museum's collections."²³

Like most museums today, the MQB is concerned to develop education programs that reach out to a wider public. How and why it does so will have obvious effects on its identity as a center for

cultural education and “dialogue.” Current policy calls for reaching out to school groups, families, and children, so as to develop greater engagement with the museum and the cultures it represents. These efforts include free workshops in which native artists discuss and demonstrate various cultural practices (such as painting, singing, making instruments, or cooking), sometimes linked to temporary exhibits.²⁴ In listening to a museum staff member talk about these programs to reach children, I was reminded of a book available in the book shop, a kind of advice book for parents titled, *How to Talk to Children about Indigenous Art (Comment Parler des Arts Premiers aux Enfants)* (Glorieux-Desouche 2006). Acknowledging that such efforts can easily drift into caricature and a litany of curiosities, the intent of explicating and humanizing illustrates the diversity of approaches to be found in the wider spectrum of MQB media.

It might be said that the museum has taken on almost as many identities as it has constituencies. Who, then, are the visitors? Who is it that moves through the exhibit spaces, participates in educational programs, attends performances, and so on? What goes on in the museum’s contact zones? How might one sample the multiplicity of effects across scenes, activities, and audiences?

The sheer number of visitors to the museum offers one measure of its success in becoming a major site of cultural tourism. According to museum statistics, 730,000 paying visitors passed through the museum in 2008 (museum website, cited in Price 2010:1), a much smaller figure than the 1.5 million (paying?) visitors cited in its 2007 report (MQB 2007). Visitor statistics show that the majority of visitors are over 45 years old. Although the museum makes much of the importance of minority groups as an audience for museum programs, Price voices skepticism based on her own informal observations.²⁵ As of 2008, the only languages supported for group visits other than French were English, German and Spanish.²⁶

Conclusion

Whereas critics express alarm about the dominant modalities of representing art and culture at the MQB, anyone concerned about the invisibility of native societies and their struggles for recognition might well pause to consider the effects of an institution dedicated to celebrating indigeneity within the world’s busiest tourist zone. In a recent review of several notable exhibitions of Oceanic culture in England, accompanied by various activities involving Pacific artists and dignitaries, Polynesian performance artist Susanna Raymond lamented “...despite all this activity, the Pacific remained largely invisible to the public at large, thanks to a mystifying lack of interest in these happenings on the part of the mainstream national media, helping to push the Pacific further into the back rooms of obscurity (2008:284).”

Sited, self-consciously, in the “shadow of the Eiffel Tower,” the MQB is an extraordinary introduction into the world of tourist productions of fourth world cultures. Given its temporal scope, *Paris Primitive* does not have much to say about the museum as a place for tourist encounters, but it is those interactions that will be the economic driver of the evolution of the MQB in the central zone of Paris tourism. Recent promotional flyers distributed in Paris announce “Culture on the Seine!” offering package deals combining the Musée d’Orsay, river shuttle rides, and the Musée du quai Branly. What kind of formations will emerge in this context? Will the MQB offer a slightly revised version of the colonial imagination (updated to

honor former colonial subjects) or something capable of intervening in hegemonic forces of long duration? It may be that neither collectors nor scholars nor indigenous activists, but the relentless forces of globalization and commodification are likely to be the dominant forces shaping the future of the “primitive” in Paris.

In addressing these forces, it may be at least as important to turn an ethnographic eye to, for example, products for sale in the book store, films and performances put on in the museum’s theater, catered events at the *L’Ombre* restaurant, or products in the broader metropolitan culture.²⁷ In thinking through ways that it can make itself more relevant for families and children, the museum has been alert to tie-ins with popular culture. Thus when the Hollywood film *Indiana Jones: In Search of the Crystal Skull* appeared in May 2008, the museum quickly unearthed its own authentic fake (one of three notorious forgeries) to put on display as the focus for a children’s game guiding a museum visit. Even here, though, the trope of “mystery” trumped the opportunity for education, with publicity saying only:

Considered as a masterpiece at the time when it was exhibited at the musée de l’Homme, Paris, the crystal skull has fired the imagination of visitors. Since its discovery in the 19th century, the origin of this exceptional piece and how it was created have remained entrenched in mystery and it continues to fascinate the public as a vestige of an ancient and mysterious civilization.²⁸

It is inevitable, and no doubt desirable, for the MQB to engage with popular cultural productions of the primitive and exotic. As it does, we may ask: How do they contribute to the vision for the museum as a site for the recognition and empowerment of people who have long been the subject of Western imagination? Although empowerment is not a goal of the museum in its present incarnation, it was, after all, inspired by an impulse to redress injustice and erasure by creating a visible and prestigious space to valorize indigenous art, culture, and society. In Chirac’s original language, “This then is the mission of the future museum, to make a truly unique collection accessible at last, to develop a modern museology, to present knowledgeable and—if necessary—impertinent temporary exhibitions, to make available to all audiences, through the most modern technologies, a vast collection of documentary information (2001:9).”

Coming at a time when conventional ethnology museums face deep crises of relevance and funding, the MQB speaks seductively as a model for resuscitating the projects of museum anthropology and finding new publics for cultural education and “dialogue.” And in such style! As Sally Price writes in a recent reflection, however, “... a museum project that systematically fails to question or complicate such a vision carries serious potential dangers as well—especially if it centers on the theme of cultural difference (2010: 17).” It is that lack of critical reflexivity (a trait well known to state sponsored Museums everywhere) that may limit the ability to transform itself in response to future developments—ironically, a limitation that led to the demise of its predecessor museum across the river.

No one should be surprised that when indigenous culture enters mainstream spaces, it will be accompanied by the same kinds of distortion and mutation that have characterized colonial representations for centuries. There is, however, enough complexity and instability in the current configuration represented by the MQB that the worlds of anthropology and indigenous peoples

may find points of constructive engagement. Certainly that is the hope of critics who have noted that the museum is neither fixed nor finished and will continue to evolve, especially in its activities, media, and performative events (Taylor 2008). In identifying such possibilities *Paris Primitive* is a gift to the institution and its potential futures.

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I would like to thank Erwan Dianteill for the original invitation to write this review for the French journal *Gradhiva* (see note 1) as well as a number of colleagues who encouraged my own interest in the MQB and offered advice and information. I am grateful to Lorenzo Brutti for sharing his experience with the Museum and for facilitating contacts and providing guided commentary at the Louvre. I've also benefited from helpful conversations with Maurice Godelier and Sandra Revolon. Several members of the MQB staff facilitated a class visit to the Museum for my Study Abroad students in 2008, including Ann-Christine Taylor who generously provided an informed overview of the Museum and responded to questions. Finally, I've benefited from a continuing exchange with Sally Price who has read this review and provided regular updates and insights into her project.

Notes

1. This review essay has an unusual history. A brief note about its genealogy will help to explain the hiatus between the time it was written and publication today. The story is not unrelated to Sally Price's ethnography itself and the contexts of its reception at the Musée du Quai Branly. In 2008, a few months after the appearance of *Paris Primitive*, Erwan Dianteill, editor of the French journal *Gradhiva*, invited me to write a review of the book as either a normal short review or a longer review essay. This was an appealing invitation, given my own interest in the new museum and the fact that *Gradhiva*, a respected anthropology journal, had recently moved from its original sponsor, the Musée de l'Homme, to the MQB itself. Considering the location of the journal, I decided to write a longer review essay. However, by the time I completed that more than a year later, in June 2009, Erwan Dianteill had departed as editor so I submitted the paper to one of the co-editors, Ann-Christine Taylor, Director of Research and Education at the Museum. She informed me that the journal had a backlog and that the essay, which would have to be reviewed, would not come out until Spring or Fall 2010. She added, "If you find that too long a delay, please don't hesitate to 'reclaim' your paper." (email to the author, June 22, 2009). To this I responded that for me the timing was not a problem, "given the relevance of the article for the particular audience of *Gradhiva*" (email to Anne-Christine Taylor, June 22, 2009), and submitted the paper accordingly. When I had not heard news of the review by the end of 2009, I inquired about the status of the paper by emailing Dr. Taylor and subsequently the journal office staff. To my continuing puzzlement, none of my emails from that point onward were acknowledged. In short, the essay went into a publishing black hole. I am left to surmise that the lack of interest in the book review is consistent with the Museum's seeming rejection of the book itself, generally absent from the Museum bookstore and library of well-known works in anthropology and museology.

Since this essay was completed well after publication of *Paris Primitive*, it utilizes other reviews to gauge the book's reception among various audiences. I have not, however, attempted to incorporate works that have continued to appear about the MQB up to the present (such as, for example, Bromberger 2010 and Jolly 2011). And see the Postface to the French language edition (Price 2011) for discussion of many of the French commentaries on the museum since its opening. Publication of the French version of *Paris Primitive* should renew the possibilities that this remarkable ethnography will stimulate further discussion about the museography of the MQB and its significance for indigenous public culture in France and beyond.

2. In 2001, realizing the importance of these changes for Pacific Islands studies, I attempted to solicit an essay about the process of museum planning for *The Contemporary Pacific*, a journal that I edited at the time. That led me to learn that Maurice Godelier had just departed from the planning team, creating some uncertainty regarding who could best produce such an account. In the end we were not successful in enlisting an author to write an essay for us.

3. It is this kind of detail that Sally Price's account is especially careful to provide. In her chapter "Resistance Movement," she notes that the Oceania hall had been closed on March 10, in a sequence of closings that saw Africa, Oceania, American and Asia (and Arctic) closed in succession in the spring of 2003 (97).

4. In a passing comment in his review of the museum at the time of its opening, Michael Kimmelman, critic for the *New York Times* who wrote one of the most severe assessments of the MQB's galleries, alluded to the manner in which museum traditions have sorted out the choices of displaying primitive art: "If you're in the Metropolitan Museum, you know that an Italian altarpiece or an African mask is supposed to be visually striking, beautiful even. If the same objects are across Central Park at the American Museum of Natural History, they illustrate points about religion or ritual or handicraft or materials (2006)." Compare Price 1989, 2006.

5. Price writes that: "The tension created between [different modes of representation] has sometimes been glossed as a tug-of-war between "art" and "anthropology," but that clearly fails at this point in history to do justice to the complexities involved (171)." And, in regard to the social structures of planning, she cautions that "the fault lines erupting in the organizational structure were not purely a matter of incompatibility between aesthetic and ethnographic views," but "power plays and interpersonal rivalries" also played a role (56).

6. Numerous French anthropologists have expanded upon the vision for a 'post-colonial' museum (L'Estoile 2003; Price 2007), even if their views have earned them the label of "priests of contextualization" who misunderstand the nature of museography (Stéphane Martin, quoted by Michael Kimmelman (2006). at the time of the opening of the museum).

7. This of course initially ran against the Louvre's identity as the leading museum of Western artworks (through the 19th century). But with the political pressure from Chirac's legacy project behind it, the proposal succeeded.

8. <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/the-time-of-recognition/index.html>, accessed March 26, 2012.

9. Maurice Godelier, interview with the author, June 26, 2007.

10. Both Chirac and Kerchache were quick to proclaim the opening of a gallery of primitive art in the Louvre as a decisive moment in their effort to assure recognition for heretofore neglected or “despised” cultures of the non-Western world. Kerchache begins his essay introducing the catalogue by proclaiming, “The time for contempt is past. “Primitive art” has just entered the Louvre (Kerchache 2001b).”

11. <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/pavillon-des-sessions.html>, accessed April 9, 2012.

12. Since leaving the project Godelier has continued to articulate his vision, referring to the value of “combining the pleasures of art and knowledge” (Godelier 2009a). Regarding the use of supplementary materials in the exhibition halls, like Price, my own visits to the gallery in 2007 and 2008 found the room of media stations to be distinctly underutilized.

13. The text provided on the placards is essentially a condensed version of information in the catalogue and the CD-ROM (Lorenzo Brutti, interview with the author, July 18, 2007).

14. Price astutely notes that the information on histories of the objects is, in many cases, distinctly truncated, although overstates this as deletion of this fourth category of information on the CD-ROM.

15. Price notes that, during the planning process, there was a degree of disagreement about the geographic scope of the museum. Given Kerchache’s main interest, the core focus was Africa, joined by Oceania and the Americas. Some said that Asian arts already had their own museum, Musée Guimet, but Asia was ultimately added as the fourth area represented.

16. It may be illustrative, then, to recall that one of the most well-known usages in recent years is associated with writings of the political scientist Samuel Huntington who (in)famously argued that international conflicts in the post-Cold War world would be drawn along lines of “civilizations,” defined as the most general order of cultural identity, constituted by broad similarities in language, religion, social practices, and so forth (Huntington 1996). While attractive to those who saw a looming conflict between “Islam” and “the West,” his argument foundered on a host of contradictions associated with his attempt to define a discrete number of civilizational identities (he named eight) that corresponded with meaningful forms of cultural self identification at the highest level.

17. This aspect of the MQB appears in nearly every review of the museum with the almost ritual incantation of the trope of “darkness.” It is also the case, however, that even casual perusal of visitor comments on the information desk on several occasions easily turned up regular complaints about lighting. Recent alterations of lighting and labeling have apparently ameliorated these problems somewhat (Price 2010).

18. Indeed, “rendering invisible” was quite literal in the case of the catalogue (Brutti 2003). and CD-ROM. In the course of producing that collection, Kerchache told the research team that the

gallery of images used in the CD should not include images of people (Lorenzo Brutti, personal communication, June 2007). At the MQB, as was the case at the Louvre, interactive computer stations that present some engaging interactive videos aimed at cross-cultural education are located in a mezzanine bypassed by the great majority of visitors.

19. *Paris Primitive* offers occasional glimpses of perceived differences in national professional cultures (anthropology, museum administration, etc.) that offer one explanation for resistance to the adoption of alternative practices. For example: “French stereotypes of American political correctness (sometimes dubbed “hyperrelativism”) conjure up a vision of museum policies in which the members of a given culture are the only people entitled to speak about it—blacks monopolizing the discourse on African American culture, American Indians on their traditions, and so forth.”

20. Price presented this aspect of her study, four models for displaying the “primitive” art available to museums today, at an international conference on Art and Anthropology convened at the MQB in June 2007.

21. It is through Viaud’s eyes that the film viewer learns of his feeling that the very name of the island, Rapa Nui, connotes “sadness, savagery, and darkness.” Although focused on the heroic narrative of discovery and acquisition, the film does at this juncture insert a comment on the ethics of the time: “The brutality of the proceedings nevertheless bears witness to a somber period in the history of ethnographic collecting; a time when the works being collected were often pillaged with total disregard for the effect of their disappearance on local cultures.”

22. This sense of disconnection for native Hawaiians was heightened in an academic conference, held to explore issues of art, culture and identity in the Pacific, on a range of topics in the contemporary and historical Pacific. Although some received emails of invitation, no one from the community of scholars in Hawaiian studies working in Hawai‘i presented at the conference. And the only native Pacific Islander scholar participating, Professor Amy Stillman from the University of Michigan, would later write an essay about her feeling of alienation from the proceedings.

23. <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/accueil/index.html>, accessed April 2, 2012.

24. Virginie Guillemard, MQB marketing consultant, presentation to visiting group of students, June 19, 2008.

25. In terms of the evident presence of French minorities in the daily life of the institution, the National Center for the History of Immigration appears to have had more success in involving diverse communities in Paris. This was brought home to me visiting the NCHM in 2007 and 2008, seeing children and their families of African descent engaged in group activities around the public spaces of the center.

26. When visiting the museum in 2007, I was approached by a museum employee positioned by the exit door with a palm pilot in hand asking if I would participate in a survey. Beginning in French, but shifting to English he proceeded to run down a check list of questions about age,

education, nationality, motivation for my visit, satisfaction, and, finally, whether I had any parents or grandparents from the places represented in the exhibits. Obviously the museum is interested to know about its relevance for those whose culture is on display.

27. Regarding the store, I note the variety of titles of books and music CDs in the MQB's bookshop, which presents a broad and eclectic range of material that ought to be welcomed by anyone engaged with anthropology, art, cultural studies, ethnic studies etc. Items on sale in 2008 included some of the heaviest tomes of classic anthropology, from a 1085-page new edition (2007) of Lévy-Bruhl's writings (titled *Primitif*, gathering together *La Mentalité primitive*, *L'Ame primitive*, and *La Mythologie primitive* 1922-1935) to jazz and hip hop from around the world. In addition to books and music, the bookshop carries a selection of DVDs that includes numerous documentaries from Oceania (Papua New Guinea in particular) that one would be hard pressed to find on the shelves of museums or cultural centers elsewhere, including the regions concerned.

In connection with "the products in the broader metropolitan culture" I would cite, as an example, the appearance in 2008 of a special line of Pierre Hermé chocolates fashioned after selected primitive masks in collections of the MQB.

28. <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/actualites/exceptional-presentation-of-the-crystal-skull-from-the-musee-du-quai-branly-collections/index.html>, accessed June 14, 2008.

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