Communicating Cultures
Conference Proceedings

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Exhibiting otherness: Problems and prospects

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Imagining Otherness

Let me start with an observation of Oscar Wilde's that "the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people" (1971:684). The arts and humanities and the fora in which they are displayed exhibits are instruments of such invention. Through them, imaginary Japanese are invented as others such as curriculum and museums, along with imaginary cultural selves to accompany them. All reside cheek-to-jowl within the cultural institutions created by that other invented entity, 'the Western World': imaginary Japanese, artificially constructed 'American literature', capriciously named 'Renaissance painting', and 'Halls of Western Civilisation' that embody our customary, narrow use of 'civilisation' for Western cultures (as in my former place of employment, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History).

The construction of cultural identity is neither arbitrary nor inconsequential: in museums the invented other is often placed downstairs from the upstairs domicile of European and American art 'traditions' which museums and exhibits invent and claim. In museum exhibits as much as in other cultural forms, the construction of cultural identity through exaggerated differences or oppositions may be alternately a mode of exploration and understanding or an act of discrimination. The most relevant materials for understanding the ideologies of cultural identity are how such exaggerations are used, and how they are linked with other sets of representations (Boon 1982).

Consider the fate of Tippoo's tiger (Archer 1959). A barrel organ crafted in the shape of a tiger gnawing at the throat of an Englishman, it was originally commissioned by the Indian Sultan Tippoo as a sign of resistance to the extension of British imperial rule. Captured in the sack of his city, it was conveyed to the Colonial office and displayed there until it finally came to rest in the most British of British museums, the Victoria and Albert, part of a two-sided colonial image of self and other. Originally displayed as an imperial trophy, it has recently been reinstalled as part of a permanent exhibit on the princely courts of Southern India. Although the curators were not terribly fond of it, the highpoint of the school visit to the Victoria and Albert was making the tiger (barrel organ) roar by pulling its tail. Destroyed by German bombs during the WWII bombing of London, it has since been restored and put back in its "rightful" place, now more British self than colonial other. History has a way of playing tricks. Could it become the subject of a repatriation claim?

"How did you come to invent yourself?" asks a character in the English movie version of *Dangerous Liaisons*. No doubt, we could reply, while inventing the other. I do not wish to be misunderstood. Inventions are not only inevitable, they are an integral part of the formation of culture. Cultural and personal identities are made through constructing other cultural entities, often thought to lack what those constructing the identity possess (Said 1984; Turner 1978). The cultural materials out of which identity is fashioned are the rhetorical, poetic, and visual devices through which people understand their world.

The products of the cultural imagination are clearly as political as they are poetic. They have a tendency to harden and assume the aura of the uniquely real and natural, sometimes to become representations of domination. One of my favourite examples of museum representation of the dominated other is the delicately fig leaf-covered Canova that dominates the stairs of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, an early imperial collection set within a self-consciously imperial city (Canova 1976:112, figure 174). The Canova statue portrays Theseus clubbing a centaur into submission. Centaurs - exotic, mythic savages residing on the outside edge of the imaginary geography of Classical Greece - are represented with half-bestial bodies reflecting their "half bestial nature" (OED).

That astute observer of European politics and culture Walter Benjamin made the following observations on the violent origins of civilisations:

> rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them ... Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in procession. They are called cultural treasures ... [which] .... owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries (1969:256).

For the moment I will continue to focus on visual imagery displayed in cultural institutions. The political and ideological nature of exhibits portraying the Exotic Other is particularly developed in displays that construct opposed categories of the familiar and exotic, particularly when familiar and exotic are set in a temporal framework in which 'they' precede us (Fabian 1983). Again, consider the example of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and its solitary Hall of Western Civilisation. After incorporating Ancient Egypt, the hall deliberately concludes with a window overlooking classically-derived architecture of the Internal Revenue Service Central Office, of all buildings! The continuity of a culture that advances from Ancient Egypt to contemporary Washington is juxtaposed to the

fragmented world displayed in the museum's halls of exotic 'other cultures' from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the New World. In principle, the organisation of the Hall of Western Civilisation is no different than that of the Hawaiian luxury hotels commissioned by developer Christopher Hemmeter, who asserts that:

The human race has always put a premium on scale. The Pyramids are just thrilling structures! Washington, D.C. is monumental. The great capitals of the world are all the same. There is a grandness of scale, a noble feeling (Hopkins and Fuller 1990:25).

The Hall of Western Civilisation is itself a set of representations set in the representational context of the National Museum of Natural History, which is situated next to the National Museum of American History. The history of names of the museums at the Smithsonian resonates with the nation's classification of cultures. Recently, the National Museum of Natural History dropped the appellation "National Museum of Man". The National Museum of American History is actually the renamed National Museum of Science and Technology (circa 1965).

The organisation of Smithsonian museums reproduces a classificatory scheme in which people of colour are encapsulated in a museum dedicated to mirroring the order of nature, while the generally middle-class products of Americans are honoured in a museum that tells what appears to be the inevitably linked story of American History and technological advancement. Colonial history, the very context within which many Natural History collections were acquired, is given little place in this structure. Even the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African Art exhibits its Benin Bronzes (acquired after the Hirshhorn Museum of Contemporary Art found them unsuitable) without reference to the so-called "punitive expedition" which initially brought them into European and American collections.

The Smithsonian is a very complex and elaborate series of institutions, but the devices it has historically used to represent cultural diversity build on the very same logical and textual means by which any classificatory scheme is produced - including those schemes through which one thinks of one self as same or different from another.

The dilemma of identity, of defining who I am or am not is more than the subject matter of introductory courses in Philosophy. It is a universal dilemma that is resolved, if resolved is an appropriate term for answers that are always unfinished, in all societies and in different spheres of activity. Let's continue to look at visual imagery inside and outside of museums.

From Cartoon to Exhibit

The editorial page of the Saturday Washington Post carries an array of political cartoons published by other papers during the preceding week. For May 7, 1988 (pg. A23) there was a remarkable cartoon by Wright, originally in the Miami News. It showed black figures of Ronald and Nancy Reagan in "native" grass skirts dancing around what appears to be a sacrificial shrine. Ronald holds a goat over his head and Nancy a chicken in each hand. Ronald says to Nancy "What's the astrologer say to do next, Nancy?" Answer; "Sacrifice the goat, singe the chickens and pound the lizard to powder!" This cartoon was a response to recent news reports that the Reagans had used astrological advice to schedule their participation in events.

The cartoon evoked a curious echo for me. The image of the Reagans reproduced, quite deliberately, the popular imagery of the witchdoctor. Herbert Ward's 1890 Victorian travel book, *Five Years with Congo Cannibals*, contains a strikingly similar illustration, drawn without the same satirical intent. It portrays a "witchdoctor", against a black figure against a light background, dancing around a fire, clothed in similar sketchy costume, and holding over his head a "fetish" figure.

Although the parallels between the Ward engraving and the Washington Post editorial cartoon are striking. I do not suggest that the editorial cartoonist was copying Ward. Both draw upon a stock of deeply held and patently enduring cultural imagery about the "other", that generalised artefact of the colonial and imperial encounter. As pictures and texts they embody cultural, historical and social concerns about which their creators need not be consciously aware. A striking observation was made by a colleague, that both the Reagans and the Ward witchdoctor had assumed classic ballet positions. The two illustrations exemplify the paradox of representing the other: that is, difference can only be communicated in terms that are familiar.

A representing strategy in which difference predominates I call exoticising, and one that highlights similarities I call assimilating. Recent writing about anthropology, art history and exhibitions has been obsessed with exoticising strategies; they are the predominant concern in recent writing about popular literary genres, such as travel accounts. All accounts of other cultures or works of art are organised by the two strategies of eroticising and assimilating. No matter whether we are describing a text or an exhibition, otherness is either made strange by exoticising or made familiar by assimilating.

In exoticising the differences of the other are portrayed as an absence of the qualities that dominant, often

colonising, cultural groups possess. Three features of civilised man are missing in the person of the "witchdoctor" in the cartoon and engraving. These are rationality, symbolic (as opposed to true) animal sacrifice, and an orderly bourgeois sense of propriety. Imagine what little effect the Washington Post cartoon would have had if the Reagans were standing primly behind a lectern that supported a holy book, dressed in vestments and "sacrificing" only bread and wine.

Both the editorial cartoon and the engraving represent savages as controlled by emotions and unable to calculate rationally. This is not merely myth-making isolated from real life. This is the stuff out of which our beliefs about how other people act is fashioned. Just listen to the radio or watch the news on TV and learn that black South Africans belong to "tribes" when they are in conflict with each other and have political parties when they dispute with the white regime. Closer to home, in the U.S., in "my" hemisphere you can learn that the leaders of Medellin Cartel of cocaine dealers in Columbia are part of a "clan" of closely knit persons who act in concert. If the other is different from us, one feature of that difference is that "he" belongs to social groups that claim his loyalties in ways that impede rational calculation.

Otherness can also be positively valued; look at some of the recent writings about American Indians or definitions of Afrocentricity that romanticise minority and third world cultures as possessing a less aggressive attitude towards nature and a more group oriented attitude to social life. These assertions embody a depressingly familiar set of beliefs: that the "other" lacks the rationality of modern man, or that his thought is embodied and circular rather than linear. These images of the other are turned not so much on their head as on their side. The values may be different, but the racial and ethnic stereotypes are shockingly familiar.

The image of the other is not derived only from assertions about cultural differences. The use of a ballet pose to portray the Reagans and the African witchdoctor was probably not consciously intended; neither was it accidental. Negative images need positive associations to make them work. If this were not so, the consumers of the image would have nothing onto which to graft cultural, racial or ethnic differences. The politics of producing the image of the other requires a poetics of difference and similarity. The familiar is the bridge through which we appropriate the exotic, just as the exotic is the means through which we construct the familiar.

Cultural Ambivalence, Cultural Diversity

My point in this essay is that cultural diversity is, and has always been, an inevitable condition of cultural existence - but that the fact of diversity has not been a barrier to the erection of attitudes to other cultures that range from admiration to ambivalence through hatred or even resistance. This complex of attitudes towards 'ethnographic' or 'non-Western' objects (and those who make them) is apparent in the strikingly different ways that similar objects are treated in different museums, or even in the treatment of one object over time. The collection and exhibition history of one classic object of ancient Mesoamerican culture provides a striking and instructive illustration. This is the great Coatlicue, Aztec representation of a goddess, known as the "Lady of the Serpent Skirt". The great Coatlicue is an enormous and powerful statue of an Aztec deity, now regarded as a masterpiece of pre-Columbian art. It is surely the signature object for the National Museum of Anthropology, the nationalist showcase in Mexico City. Discovered on August 13, 1790, during a municipal excavation in Mexico City, she was first taken to the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico as "monument to Mexico's past". Rejected by the university administration as unsuitable for exhibiting next to Greco-Roman materials, she was shortly thereafter ordered to be reburied after fears were expressed that the object might incite the subjected native population to rebellion. In 1804, at the request of the assiduous Alexander von Humboldt, the Lady of the Serpent Skirt was disinterred, examined by him, and immediately reburied - in what must be one of the oddest 'private showings' in the history of art. At the start of the 19th Century the figure was once again uncovered and placed in the university courtyard, and was subsequently put in a corridor behind a screen "like an object that provoked both curiosity and embarrassment", as Octavio Paz would later write (Paz 1990). Today the figure occupies a place of honour atop a pedestal in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

Fear, embarrassment, curiosity, secret veneration, object of national pride, specimen of science, example of great art - this is the history of just one object. Perhaps when we know more about how others regarded the figure we might be able to add 'icon of oppositional culture' and 'occasion for ironic commentary' to our list of the complex and often contradictory attitudes so frequently expressed towards this exotic object.

By invoking the history of the Great Coatlicue I am trying to illustrate the linkages among systems of power and systems of representation that can only be uncovered by examining the politics and poetics of exhibits within a single frame of reference. But as important as it is to show that systems of discourse and systems of control are linked, it is equally important to remind ourselves that they are not simply coordinated (Boon 1990). It is easy and tempting to fall into the trap of conflating political consequences with the visual and

textual means by which the consequences are achieved. Even great works of art can be used for bad purposes. Canons change even when the political systems with which they are linked do not change.

We know why the construction of canons has come under such severe criticism, because they are lists which exclude whole spheres of artistic production and the peoples who make those works of art. But canonisation has its effect on the works that are included in them. There is a kind of downsizing (to use the language of academic and industrial bureaucracy) in interpretation that happens. Interpretations that run counter to dominant political consequences are eliminated from that context of canonisation. The works enshrined in canons are made far more coherent and simpler than they were ever intended to be.

If that is true for the literary and artistic canon, what about the cultural canon for there are canonical cultures, as well as some recent candidates for canonisation. They are called civilisations. In museums they are put in "Halls of Western Civilisation", and juxtaposed to Halls of Culture, as in the Smithsonian Institution. In art museums they are set in chronologies that suggest we can trace discrete lines of aesthetic progress. At this point I am reminded of what Mahatma Ghandi said in response to a journalist's question, during a visit to England. When asked what he thought about Western Civilisation, he replied "I think it would be a good thing". There may be civility in the west, but surely not as much as we have been taught nor is it a uniquely Western possession. Moreover the very idea of a demarcated culture or civilisation sets up peculiar boundaries and creates exclusions where none need exist.

Many of the features that are thought of as the historical possessions of the west, science, theories of morality, can be found elsewhere and elsewhen, but not unless one admits the possibility that they can exist. Edward Said's powerful criticism of Orientalism is relevant here. The negative features by which other cultures are defined induce the perception that the positive features by which one's own culture is defined is limited to one's own culture (1984). This is how canonical cultures are made; positive attributes such as morality, rationality, civility, science are defined as the unique inheritance of an historical stream culminating in the present time and space. This is the stuff out of which Halls of Western Civilisation are made and also the stuff over which cultural wars are fought. Yet, morality, rationality, civility and science are not easily defined nor unproblematic terms. The literature in the philosophy of science contains fierce debates over how science is to be defined and where it can be found. One distinguished philosopher, Michael Polanyi, used a well known account of discovery procedures used in African divination as a model for laboratory science. On a more immediate level, recent work in Africa has shown that Mende women use a more environmentally sustainable and sophisticated model of genetic modification than commonly used in the laboratories of the companies that produce green revolution crops (Karp 1986). Even some acts which resist claims of cultural hegemony, such as Afrocentric claims that the black family is the oldest on earth or that mathematics was invented in Ancient, black Egypt, can also erect hegemonic claims to why they appropriate the language of dominance (White 1993)

Surely, someone might object, this is precisely what museums should not strive to do. They should focus on and exhibit the universal in art and culture, show what we all share as members of the human race, and record and preserve the best of what we have done. I agree. Museums have no justification whatsoever if they abandon the job of conserving and documenting the history of the species. But if some features of what humans do and what humans make is shared; there is also a great deal that different people do not have in common. The crucial task for museums, it seems to me, is to create a space where differences can be shared and universals explored.

Museums are children of the enlightenment and this filiation imposes a burden on them. The Enlightenment strove to exhibit the universal, but far too often, it practiced a kind of exceptionalism that showed that the universal was "imperfectly developed", to use Locke's phrase, in exotic subjects. There is a vast literature demonstrating that the very same ideological structures that defined the universal capacities of "man", and I use that gendered term in quotes, also generated a set of explanations that accounted for the failure of other cultures, usually colonised cultures to exhibit universal attributes. "White, but not quite", is the phrase Homi Bhabha uses to describe the colonial version of this exceptionalism (Bhabha 1982).

Looking at the Enlightenment from the margin, rather than from the center, from the experience of being an object rather than being a subject, Carlos Fuentes describes this structure as distinguishing between centrality and eccentricity (1974):

> The wily old dictator, Porfirio Diaz, who ruled my country for over three decades and who did not delete his expletives, once remarked: "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so near to the United States".
> My purpose tonight is to offer some random reflections on what I call central and eccentric writing, on writers who are either near to God and far from the Devil, or the other way around. A writer born in Poland or Mexico, so far from the gods and so near to the devils, realises before he is out of knee pants that

it is one thing to write from within a culture that deems itself central and another thing to write from the boundaries of eccentricity - and eccentricity defined by the central culture's claim to universality. The central culture tends to believe that it speaks with the words of God or, at least, that it has a direct and open line to the ear of the Divinity. With the voice of Jupiter, Whitman spoke of Democracy with a capital D; Jean-Paul Sartre argues as though he were the proprietor of dialectics; John Galsworthy wrote his novels as though he were the final arbiter of good manners - not to mention that imperialist Atlas, Rudyard Kipling, who regarded three-fourths of the world as "the white man's burden". In this way, the central culture is seen by the marginal cultures as offensive, self-serving, devouring, one that imposes its own values and is scornful of any values that are alien to it.

If we have developed a defensive stance, it is because of the offensive one of the central cultures which has put us in the situation of the scalded cat: we are wary of boiling water.

Behind these unselfconscious attitudes, I came to realise, stood the weighty conviction, elaborated by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, that human nature is always one and the same for all men, although imperfectly developed, as Locke put it, in children, madmen, and savages; and that this true human nature is to be found, permanently fixed, in Europe and the European elites. Only Europe, declared Herder, is capable of living historically. After the French Revolution, to be universal meant to be a part of the dominant classes, conditioned by the limited geography, the linear time, the future-oriented and progress-imbued culture of the commercial and industrial West. And the elites of the West certainly needed this justification and certainly made full use of it. Externally, they imposed their universal human nature on the imperfectly developed savages of their colonial empires. Internally, they put their imperfect children to work in sweat shops and their imperfect madmen - William Blake and Emily Bronte, Nerval and Nietzsche, Poe and Baudelaire - remained outside the glowing hearth of the law of human nature, under which all men were equal insofar as all were men of means.

In effect, demanded Montesquieu, how is it possible to be a Persian? Or, indeed, a Nigerian tribesman, a Peruvian peasant, a Chinese coolie, or a Mesopotamian soothsayer and also aspire to the

> true, universal human condition as embodied by the well-bred croquet players on a well-cut Sussex lawn? (pp. 86-88)

Montesquieu's question is valid. How do we get outside of our own habits of perception and structures of experience to be able to appreciate another form of social life? The good news is that this is possible and the bad news is that it is difficult. We are all experienced with knowing otherness in one way or another. All of us learned an alien culture when we grew up and made it our own. We learn alien ways of life whenever we enter new experiences and find that our second hand worlds are not commensurate with other people's second hand worlds. The faculties of sympathy and imagination which we used to acquire our own cultures can be used to understand others (Karp and Kendall 1982).

Still, it is necessary, vitally necessary to acknowledge that imagining how others live, think and feel is neither the same thing as living as others do, nor is it necessarily more than a beginning, and if that imagining is done through visual media such as museum displays, its difficulty is increased. Our imagination of otherness needs to be formulated in such a way as to be corrigible in the light of experience - this involves more effort than we are willing to risk most of the time, and it also makes us accountable for our constructions of otherness, acquired at second-hand or not.

This position, that we may know otherness without owning it, but that we can be asked to justify the claims to knowledge that we do make is a defence of pluralism in a world that acknowledges the fact of cultural diversity, because it must, but organises diversity in terms of a hierarchy that distinguishes between canonical and non-canonical cultures, as it is able. Pluralism is not the only alternative. Relativism is also a possibility. Unlike the pluralist attitude I described above, relativism argues that cultures are incommensurate, separated from one another and centered on themselves (Berlin 1977, Boon 1982). The rhetoric of black separatism in the U.S., "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand" is simply another form of relativist assertion. I much prefer the sweatshirt logo I saw recently, "It's a black thing, let me help you understand". There is a world of difference between the exclusionary relativism of the first statement and the inclusionary pluralism of the second. Yet both are attuned to inequality and differences in power and position.

Any basis for constructing identity allows the possibility for claims of exclusivity. Yet any identity claim also contains the possibility for sharing the experience invoked and for erecting a boundary that can be crossed rather than closed. The sociologist Georg Simmel titled a collection of his essays 'Bridge and Door', in order to illustrate how thresholds might lead to very different kind of social experience. Pluralism looks for bridges to cross while relativism looks for doors to close. In museums we have a choice. We can make our

collections and do our exhibits in a relativistic spirit, which denies the possibility of contrast and comparison and see cultures and arts as discrete rather than overlapping. The other option is to work within the framework of pluralism and seek to see cultures as overlapping, and persons as repositories of multiple identities that do not make a coherent whole. Then we are involved in a complex dialectic of asserting identity and difference, showing what we share and how we differ - even if what we share is a social system that leaves some of us comfortable and some of us less well off.

Pluralism asserts that there is value to be derived from immersion in multiple traditions, but it does not assert that we need give up a critical stance - either to our own or other cultures. It does argue, however, that no cultural tradition is exempt from criticism - especially one's own. In my view museums are institutions which are ideally suited for the practice of pluralism. As institutions of public culture, museums are spaces in which the different communities are exhibited for themselves and for others. We are now a point in which we need to move beyond the critique of museums so ably made by scholars such as Bennett or the contributors to my own edited volumes. We have a broad understanding of how museums have acted as institutions of what the sociologist C. Wright Mills calls "The Cultural Apparatus".

If we believe in museums, however, and accept the critique, we need to begin the task of rethinking curatorial practice and administrative policy in museums. My own belief is that the very nature of the museum forces it to cross cultural boundaries, to mediate among communities and across identities. In a complex society, public institutions in general and museums in particular mediate among the different cultural orientations that make up the social whole. In this sense museums are fundamental institutions of the public sphere, both expressive of the diversity that is characteristic of a complex society and shaped by that diversity. The most fundamental consequence of this view of museums is that museum professionals are and need to think of themselves as public scholars. By invoking the concept of public scholarship I intend to focus our attention away from those scholarly practices which are made only for like minded and like trained professionals, and towards The production of knowledge that crosses The boundary between The professional and The public. This is the vocation of the museum professional. Like a child growing up or an anthropologist in another society, the museum professional is always involved in the practice of mediating and communicating among communities with different cultures - even when those communities are part of the same society.

It may be that Oscar Wilde is right. Cultures are invented entities and museums are instruments of invention. Perhaps another way of stating this partial truth is to observe that display institutions are spaces for the exercise of the imagination. The act of imagining is not as idiosyncratic as we think. It combines fantasy with morality. In our imaginative lives we relive what we have been and what we can be, as well as what we are not. How we imagine ourselves and the society to which we belong is surely critical for how we manage the future and think about the past. The fate of museums is to be fundamentally implicated in the moral imagination of the society of which it is a part. How the moral imagination is shaped and for whom is the responsibility of museums and the professionals who inhabit them.

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RESPONDENT

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I should begin by thanking Professor Karp for his thoughtful and thought-provoking paper, which followed on from themes raised by this morning's speakers. The issues discussed in his paper are very important for us in museums in Australia at present. They have been, of course, debated at length over the past decade: how museums construct cultural identities, or fragments of cultural identity; how, in the process, we have chosen to acknowledge and then negotiate cultural pluralism; what hierarchies of representation we have established and how these are changing. Because, of course, these constructions are always changing, as Nicholas Thomas' paper this morning made clear. All of this has taken place against a backdrop of more-or-less intense political debate about constructions of the nation in Australia. One dimension of this debate is the so-called Republican debate. Crudely put - will late twentieth century Australia finally cut the imperial umbilical cord and launch itself as the newest republic in the Asia-Pacific region? It is my quiet hope that the recent blockbuster interview with the Princess of Wales has taken us one step closer to this goal.

Why do I mention the republican issue here? Because the twin debates - about what constitutes 'the nation' and what constitutes the 'culture of museums' intersect at many points. Again that point was made by both speakers this morning and has been made by Ivan Karp in other writings. Now one of the joys of this respondent's position it seems to me, is that there is no time to do more than just throw out points briefly. Unlike Ivan, I do not have to give lengthy expositions to back them up. I hope what they can do though is to link some of the theoretical issues raised in Ivan Karp's paper, with the politics of contemporary culture in Australian museums. Here goes:

Both Australia as a nation and Australian museums are engaged in a process of dismantling imperial structures. For museums that process is especially urgent. It is the context, in particular, for negotiations between Indigenous people and museums. Museums cannot, in my view, escape the imperialism of the past, nor should they attempt to do so. It structured the content of many collections in this area and the ways in which those collections were placed in museums. In some instances it has structured the ways in which those collections have continued to be held in museums, rather than elsewhere - as Bob Anderson reminded us this morning.

Negotiations are now taking place within a complex political context which includes rejection of past models, reconciliation between peoples and suggestions for ways forward, both together and separately - all against a political background of Mabo. Within museums, exhibition galleries showcase these transitions, with all their cultural contradictions and inconsistencies. It is important to acknowledge though that this is a dynamic process. There has been change and it is important to recognise this. The dynamism of this process, and the ways in which relations of power and authority are shifting in this area, are important factors.

Constructions of 'the nation' and constructions of public culture have both been challenged by the politicisation of cultural diversity in the last ten to fifteen years. Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world and museums are moving to acknowledge this. In the process, former assumptions about the authority of the museum to speak for others has been challenged - but only partly dislodged I think. Once again we are engaged in a process of negotiating on a wide range of issues, which include the politics of access to public space, the nature of the history we present and the view of contemporary culture we reflect.

Again I stress that this is a dynamic process and one which is shifting constantly. There are perhaps two quite opposed ways in which we might view these changes:

Either: as important shifts in the culture and authority of museums towards pluralism (or democratisation?);
Or: as minor concessions to process, which have maintained both the essential product and the ultimate authority of the museum pretty well intact. Nicholas, I think was circling this argument this morning.
I'd like an each way bet on these at the moment.
In the conclusion to his paper Ivan argued:

Pluralism asserts that there is value to be derived from immersion in multiple traditions, but it does not assert that we need to give up a critical stance - either to our own or other cultures. But it does argue that no cultural tradition is exempt from criticism - especially one's own.

That point leads on, it seems to me, to a series of questions:

Firstly: Is this, indeed, what we are doing? Are we approaching all cultural presentations from a critical perspective, or are there exceptions, exclusions, cultural no-go areas, some of which we acknowledge and some of which we do not? Ivan made a point about the danger of the stereotypes.

Secondly: How critical is critical? When does adopting a critical perspective become too 'heavy handed'? In dismantling the master narratives, where should we set the limits before the backlash sets in? It would be simplistic to suggest that Ivan Karp's paper is in conflict with the paper Nicholas Thomas presented earlier this morning. But there are some areas of dissonance. Ivan urges us to be critical. Nicholas warns us of the dangers of making that criticism too explicit. His point about the

Voices exhibition was that it recontextualised within a framework which actually reaffirmed some existing hierarchies (in that case pakeha historical chronology), while dismantling others (eg. the masculinity of war history). I liked his notion of telling stories in parallel from different cultural perspectives. But, in Ivan's terms - do we then critique both? I would remind you that his paper began with a reference to academic innocence.

My third question: What is the role of the museum in this process? Within the framework of the old museology, the *museum* assumed critical authority. It no longer claims this authority whatever it may do. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki's message is that museums should 'consult, consult, consult'. The issue to be resolved within the context of the new museology though, is how to negotiate through the consultation process to a compromise position (or positions), and where all parties to negotiation allow the compromises to be.

This is the process that constructs the new myths - to replace the master narratives.