Chapter Four

Curiosity Cabinets, World's Fairs, and Ethnographic Museums

The material culture of indigenous peoples has at the center of the three enterprises of their contact with European that we have discussed so far in this chapter: the Spanish, the Dutch, the Portuguese in Africa, and the English in South Pacific. It occupies that central position for three reasons. First, the existence of native peoples were often crucial for European forms of wealth. This is most clearly true in the case of Portuguese and South Asianists, but to some extent it holds for the Dutch and English as well. Second, native indigenous objects expressed the beliefs and were integral to the practices of the cultures that produced them. Insofar as they supported unconvertible forms of life, they were obstacles to conquest, colonization, and conversion. Finally, the material culture of indigenous peoples, Portuguese and European collectors, and European institutions of knowledge and power were the sites of contestation and negotiation.

As expressions of continental freedom and potential rallying points of resistance, indigenous objects, especially those with religious significance, were dangerous to the Europeans who were joined in the first centuries of the early 16 expansion of the capitalist system. But the images were also valuable, and the Europeans who were joined in the first centuries of the early 16 expansion of the capitalist system. But the images were also valuable, and the contact with the nature of their terrorizing power. They dreamed of their original energy, they could be subjected to a new set of cultural practices. Many of the objects brought back to Europe were incorporated into private and public collections where they were catalogued, studied, and placed on display. In this chapter, we will trace the rise of such characteristically European institutions as the curiosity cabinet, the ethnographic museum, and the world's fair.

The primitive accumulation of capital that lay at the origins of the modern world system is the commercial century involved the exploitation of indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas in Europe. Among these treasures were objects that are now in the collections of museums and private collections. Many of these objects were ritual objects, objects that were used in the practice of religion, objects that were used in the practice of cultural transformation. Much of European was fully in the grip of the Renaissance. Through that movement, they were a culture in transition. The rise and fall between humanity and models of visual representation, it was not merely fashioned holiday. It was a time of transition. The Renaissance was a time of transition. It was a time of transition. It was a time of transition. It

whose moral superiority they recognize and whose authority they will be less and less tempted to contest. [24]

Among the millions of visitors to the Palais des Colonies, two in particular are worthy of note. The impressionist painter, Camille Pissarro (then actually in his post-impressionist phase) was unable to resist attending, though he was repelled by the pavilion's blatant imperialist arrogance. Pissarro's friend and former student, Paul Gaugin also visited. It was there that he resolved to leave France for Tahiti.[25] The TrocadÀ)_Àro and the Palais des Colonies were a homage to the nation's imperial destiny. But they were built just in time for the avant-garde to arrive.

A few decades before these aesthetic innovators attended the French exposition, a German émigré in his thirties took out a library card at the British Museum. As ethnographic objects were piling up in the Department of Antiquities, he began work on a multivolume analysis of the capitalist mode of production. One of its most important sections is titled, “On the Fetish Character of Commodities and Its Secret.”

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[1] Hodgen, Margaret T.; Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964) p. 118
[2] Hodgen, Early Anthro., p. 121
[3] Van Holst, N. *Creators, Collectors, and Connoisseurs: The Anatomy of Artistic Taste from Antiquity to the Present Day*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1967. p. 104
[4] Feest, p. 86
[5] From Africa, p. 125
[6] Feest, From North America, p. 86.
[7] Larencich-Minelli, Laura; “Museography and Ethnographical Collections in Bologna Duing the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” The Origins of Museums, ed. Oliver Impey and Aurthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 20

[8] Feest, Christian; “Mexico and South America in the European Wunderkammer” in Origins of the Museum, p. 240
[9] Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean; Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 90
[10] See Hooper-Greenhill's discussion pp 91-104
[11] See Yate's description, pp.136-139
[12] Yates, p. 154
[13] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, p. 108
[14] Olmi, Giuseppe; “Science-Honor-Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” in *Origins*, p. 7
[15] Mayr, Growth of Biological Thought, p. 173
[16] Collectors and Curiosities, p. 220.
[17] Ibid, p. 217
[18] See Caygill, Margorie; Treasures of the British Museum (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985) pp. 182-187.
[19] Ibid., p.184.
[20] *Handbook*, p. vi
[21] Paudrat, pp. 132-33
[22] Peltier, p. 106
[23] *Reflections*, p. 153
[24] *Gaugin*, p. 99.
[25] Ibid., p. 97