

THE MUSEUM AS THE CONSCIENCE OF POWER

Duncan Ferguson Cameron
Canada

The museum is a bramble patch of contradictions and conflicting arguments. It is not always what it appears to be. It is a promising harvest of lush berries and an entangling snare of thorns. The museum deals in truths that become false and lies that become true, yet it can be autonomous in its integrity while it must be a faithful servant to its masters. I want to go into this bramble patch with you this morning to find out not just *if* museums can make a difference in society, but more importantly, if they can, *how* they go about it.

I believe that museums *can* make a difference; that museums contribute to the maintenance of peace, the development of democratic societies and to their good governance. There has never been any doubt in my mind that the museum, as I understand it, is a socially useful institution. But I also know the bramble patch. I recognize the ways in which museums have been used to obstruct change and to help effect social change which most of us would consider insidious if not evil. The museum can be impotent, it can be put to political ends with impunity, it can rebel and be destroyed, or it can find ways to be an effective voice that must be heard. Finding the voice that must be heard is what I am searching for today, and I do so with some sense of urgency.

This is a time when, in the most developed and economically advanced of the liberal, democratic nations, we are seeing the disruption of social order, the breakdown of family and community, the loss of trust in our institutions and the culture of individualism corroding authority. Globalization and rapid technological and economic development in what we have been calling the Third World may bring with it such malaise in social order. There may be real shifts in fundamental values taking place as nationality and ethnicity vie for loyalty, and pluralism with cohesion seems problematic. We could not be addressing the issues before these meetings at a more critical time in the history of the Commonwealth. It is therefore with hope for tomorrow that I say I believe museums have the potential - not the power, but the potential - to contribute to change. If only it was as simple as making an action plan.

The sticking point is knowing how that potential can be realized, how to find that voice that must be heard. That is our dilemma and in approaching the issues before this conference I find myself on its horns, restrained by two conditions. The first of these is the view held in some museum circles that museums have power and should, with intent and by plan, be partisan, take sides if you wish, in the political and ideological struggles within their society. Such a view leads to fundamental moral and ethical conflicts with the nature of the governance and proprietorship of the museum itself. Museums, like all social institutions, are creatures of their society or of a subset of the larger society, brought into being to serve a particular purpose. Museums are not wild things, "Born Free." When a society or some group within it creates a museum and sets out its mandate, does that not establish from the beginning very limited degrees of freedom in determining the museum's future practice?

Secondly, the use of the word “museum” as a generic term, not just here but in our own vernacular, begs the question. We mean so many different kinds of institutions, organizations, facilities, activities, and perceived purposes that there is no definition at all. That a museum is a museum because we say it is a museum won’t quite do.

These conditions must be carefully considered before we talk about making an “action plan” for the twenty-first century. Too easily we could become the tools of particular ideologies; too easily we could defy our mandates and bring about the downfall or even the dissolution of our institutions. We could invent what we think we need for action, need to bring about change, or need to achieve our goals of social change, and then falsely name this pastiche a museum. My conservatism here is not pessimistic, however, for I do believe that museums *can* make a difference.

What I am going to do this morning is to sketch in quickly what I believe is the moral imperative for finding the museum’s voice for socially constructive change. Then you will know where I am headed in my arguments. Then, and at some length, I will tackle the complex problem of establishing criteria that help us to determine what a museum is and is not. This may give us a tool – an analytic tool – that will be useful as we examine options for the museums of tomorrow. Next I will turn to the controversial issue of the museum as a proactive agent of change, Yes or No? And out of this I will choose what I see as two of the most critical challenges to be faced in making an action plan for tomorrow. First, then, let me discuss the moral imperative for the museum as the conscience of power.

The museum, even within its pragmatic, limited degrees of freedom to depart from its mandate, or challenge the values of society or the policies of those in power, can be an agent of change, can be an effective voice in society. *That voice will only have the force and the resonance to be heard, however, as it resounds with the strength of the museum’s scholarship and the objectivity of its interpretation of knowledge and the human experience.* That voice must be heard in every corner, every nook and cranny of the community. And it must be heard clearly in the corridors of power. The strength of that voice lies in scholarship, objectivity and accessibility. The museum cannot confront power, but it can in this way, be the conscience of power.

Conscience is a moral sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, as felt by a person or a group, as in the idea of the “national conscience.” It is a moral sense which is not only felt but one which, because it is felt, affects behaviour. To be the conscience of power is to be the voice of what is right and wrong, true and false. It is a voice that speaks with the authority of disinterest in all that is partisan. It is not the goad or the burr under the saddle; it is not the nagging malcontent or the vociferous critic.

To be the conscience of power the museum must be the constant and clear-spoken presence of impartial integrity. When a museum is other or less than this it has failed in its mission as a moral agent of change.

Within this command, however, lies contradiction. As a “moral agent of change,” we are a participant, and therefore less than impartial. As having “impartial integrity,” we have placed ourselves outside of the social drama having neither agency nor role. Yet we want to fall

somewhere between Adam Smith's theoretical if not ethereal "Impartial Spectator" as social conscience and the idea of the "ideal observer" of modern philosophical discourse. It is perhaps best put as a command for moral resolve to step back from self or special interest so as to speak with the impartiality of confidence in rational conclusions.

The ideal of impartial integrity sounds well as a goal, but it still leaves us with the dilemma of how to reach such a lofty objective. Of the two conditions which restrain me from embracing this goal, and moving easily into the issues put before this conference, the most difficult to resolve is the lack of a consensus on what a museum is and is not. My concern is that we could go forward to our goal with an action plan without knowing if we were on land or sea or in the air, with troops or planes or ships.

Consider the ways in which architectural and urban metaphors have been used to describe the museum. Some call it the temple of the muses, a cathedral, a storehouse of knowledge, an archive, a shrine. Others see it as a cultural centre, an open forum, a discovery place, a learning environment or a "people place." Some describe museums as dark and dusty, quiet and closed, elitist and secretive. Museums are tombs, catacombs, mausoleums. But "No" say others. Museums are educational but they're entertaining and fun; they are open and public, reaching out into the community. They are bright and cheerful, noisy and busy, socially committed, participatory and inter-active. Museums are said to be centres of research, of community interaction, of popular education, and of entertainment. Is the museum some of these or all of these things?

The first problem is that all of the varied attributes listed above are no more than descriptions of something unspecified and thus unseen. It is somewhat like reading the labels and the text panel in the absence of the object. The official definitions of the museum produced by committees of museum associations are no better. Museums collect, preserve, document, interpret and exhibit this or that, but why? The best we have come up with so far are qualifying phrases such as "in the service of society," which are so vague that they reveal little. This may be because the unstated, unseen subject of our descriptions is assumed, taken for granted.

What most of us take for granted is the one and only model of a museum we know – the European/American model – which is modern, perhaps three hundred years old, crafted to serve the political, ideological and economic purposes of its time. It is also the particular museum model exported throughout much of the world during the colonial period and further exported during the post-World War II period of neo-colonialism. But this is the museum tradition we know, and it is but one, and only one, manifestation of the museum idea. We have too easily come to think of it as the all-purpose, universal model.

A museum that claims it is the "Window on the World," that pretends to represent not only my own beliefs and values but speaks with impunity about those of others, a museum that would represent my world only with material things, with objects – artifacts, specimens or works of art – leaving out my songs and music, stories and dances, a museum that reduces my treasures of understanding to trinkets of entertainment for strangers, is the museum I know too well. But it is not the museum of tomorrow.

If we want to talk about museums in the twenty-first century we must come to terms with

the concept of the museum as a socially potent idea that has manifested itself in different forms and in different cultures over the centuries. We must see the museum as an idea with exciting consequences that can be realized in new and different ways tomorrow.

The museum is a social phenomenon that has been a recurring motif in societies throughout human history. Societies may be formed because of race or circumstances but they are bound together by their shared beliefs. Sometimes we call this culture or tradition or ethnicity. In the modern era we have tried to build such a body of shared beliefs and values on the shoulders of nationalism. Be that as it may, it is *a shared system of beliefs and values*, and thereby a particular morality, which is the glue holding society together. And it is most important that these beliefs and values be maintained if the society is to survive as it is.

To effect this sharing it is necessary to give manifest expression to these beliefs so that they can be seen and heard, will be credible, and will become entrenched as received truth. To further this end these manifestations of belief need to be brought together in time and place, in whatever forms they may take, so that they are seen to be held safe by being in some manner accessible.

Put in other words, the argument goes that a group of people, having created a mythology, having devised explanations for creation, life, the phenomena of the natural world and death, and having made rules for social order based on its beliefs, will then express them through narratives, music and song, dance, through art and symbolic artifacts. They may find these ideas represented in found, natural objects. These are hallowed and, taken together as the collected manifestations of belief, they become not only the ingredients of ritual but also the embodiment of belief itself. That they are kept safe and that their deep meanings hold true can only be assured by their exhibition.

Within this pattern of social behaviour we find the beginnings of the museum idea. Those things that are thought to be important and of great value, because they express the society's truths, are selected out, chosen from among many others, to be included in a socially shared collection which then embodies the society's understanding of the world. It is not just the building of a collection of assumedly valuable things that is significant here. There have been and there are many private or closely held collections of the rare, the valuable and even what was thought to be sacred. The significance of what has been described here is the building of a *shared* collection, a *public* collection which must be preserved and protected and which will be publicly presented.

It does not matter if we think of all of this in terms of institutionalized religion and churches and temples, or if we are reminded of collections and rituals in tribal society, if we think of the British Museum or if we speculate about the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum or the spate of other contemporary museums venerating popular culture. It does matter that we remember that we are no longer talking just about collections of tangible objects – artifacts, specimens, works of art – but rather we are talking about public collections of all of the different modes of expression we have for giving substance to ideas.

The exhibition of socially shared collections, as a precondition of sustained belief, implies as I mentioned that there must be a time and a place. There was a time when calendars were no more than the set order of ritual reaffirmations of belief. The changing seasons and the movements of the sun, moon and the planets or the remembrance of great events determined appropriate times.

Whether the exhibition was of oratory and narratives, songs, dances, the parading of hallowed objects or mythical demonstrations of their powers, there had to be a site for such spectacles. The traditions of marking the days and times of special portent and of consecrating sacred, ritual places are as old as time. But the regulation of such times and places and spectacles has always been a fiercely held responsibility.

Recognized or legitimized authority is a prerequisite for maintaining social order. In a liberal democracy we see that coming from the bottom-up. Some believe that only organized religion can bring order out of morality. Others see a strong, parenting state as the means to good order. They see social order being imposed top-down. What we can say here is that maintaining the system of beliefs, values and morality, the foundations of social order, is of paramount importance to those in power in whatever social, political or ideological circumstance. The “fiercely held responsibility” of regulating the spectacles of belief has been and will be firmly in the hands of established authority. That is not to say whether it is the state or the church, the corporations or the wealthy elite or some other perceived centre of power in control. It is to say that an established authority will be the proprietor of whatever institutions have been created to guard and keep safe, to exhibit and interpret these manifestations of belief. Depending on our perspective and the circumstances we could be talking of socialization or indoctrination, propaganda or education. We could be speaking of schools and the educational system, or of flags and national anthems, and parades, or of historic sites and monuments, *or we could be talking about museums.*

To attempt to pull some of these statements together – and I concede that they are rife with generalizations – the museum idea is that a society, sharing a belief system, will manifest those beliefs as creative human expression or in the recognition of symbolism in products of the natural world. Taken together these symbols of belief constitute a collection that embodies truth, and that collection must not only be kept whole and safe but, as a shared collection, it must also be exhibited, be made accessible. Its importance to the maintenance of social order is so central that established authority will demand to be both its guardian and its proprietor.

What a simple, perhaps obvious idea, that those in power in a society will use all the available tools of moral suasion to maintain the beliefs and values upon which their power rests, that they will try to maintain the *status quo* in the name of social order and good governance. But how often do we think of the museum as a significant social institution in this grander scheme of things? It is time that we do.

There are three other facets of the museum idea that need to be considered. The first of these is that the proprietors of culture must engage others to do the work. They may be curates or curators, priests or teachers, but by whatever name there must be safe-keepers of the collections and those who will make it accessible through exhibition, ritual, teaching or performance. To use rather poetic language, *they are the servants of the guardians of culture, entrusted with the keys to truth.* I mean no irony here and I am not striving for eloquence without reason. I am purposefully stressing and making an issue of the onerous trust placed in those of us who work in museums and other cultural or educational institutions.

The second is the fact that in recurring motif, which I have been calling the museum idea, the creation of a *culturally specific collection* is described – a gathering of manifestations of beliefs

and values that are specific to the culture of the collectors. It has not been suggested that such a collection could include alien icons or the symbolic expressions of others. Such things as trophies of war would certainly enter the collections but their meanings would be found within the existing belief system so that the collection itself remained culturally focused. But even these minor intrusions into the collection of one culture's symbols of belief are the "thin edge of the wedge."

Soon the trophies of war and the produce of pillage become a significant part of the collection. We can then begin to build a stereotype of our enemy within the model of our own identity from our choice of their symbols. We can compare them to us. The problem is that all the meanings ascribed to both our symbols and theirs are derived from our value system. So the collection remains culturally specific despite the inclusion of these new misrepresentations.

For those of us working in museums today the landmark in the development of such culturally mixed yet still monocultural collections came with the growth of public museums in Britain and Europe in the nineteenth-century heyday of colonialism, and concurrently in North America. It was only then that the collections began to be purposefully assembled to interpret non-European cultures to the public. In that dark infancy of anthropology these collections were usually held in museums of natural history, and not in museums of human history or art, which speaks for itself.

We are accustomed to seeing the variously acquired troves of foreign treasures on display in our museums. Exhibits that purport to be the representations of alien cultures are commonplace. Many of us have accepted the explanation that this is all to the good, engendering our better understanding of cultures long vanished, or enhancing our understanding of the "other," our neighbours in this small world.

The counter-explanation is that when a society's collections manifesting its belief system, values and morality are extended to include alien cultural symbols it is an extension of the system to allow a comparative dimension. This is not an exercise in cultural relativity but in cultural imperialism. I liken it to studying comparative religion in a convent. Historically the evidence is clear that ideas of racial and cultural superiority, colonialism, imperialism, questionable foreign wars, and a host of other odiums have been made credible and acceptable in part at least through the possession and exhibition in museums of the cultural capital of others.

Cultural misrepresentation has been a much studied and debated museum issue in recent decades. As societies around the world become more and more culturally diverse, and as social order is sought in cultural pluralism, or in multiculturalism as it is called in Canada, the potentials of the traditional museum model as an effective contemporary social institution become more problematic.

On the one hand it is difficult to conceive of a culturally pluralistic museum, a sort of ecumenical, inter-faith, polysemic collection in a museum under one all-sheltering roof, devoid of any cultural dominance or bias and the resulting sins of misrepresentation. On the other hand, even in a world of increasingly culturally diverse societies, it is difficult to accept the idea that we must have a comparable diversity of museums as we have a diversity of places of worship. In the latter case, where do we find the coming together, the sharing of beliefs and values, which I have said

was the glue so essential to social order? My idealism says there are solutions and my pragmatism is left dumbfounded.

The third facet of the museum idea not yet discussed is the museum's capacity to change. It is one of human society's most striking attributes that while it has developed the most effective mechanisms for maintaining stability, or the *status quo*, it has always remained ready for and capable of adaptation to change. I will leave it to the sociologists and political scientists to argue which comes first, the cultural momentum for change or political and ideological innovation, but history has demonstrated again and again that to meet the needs of change we are so infinitely adaptable that a society is able to reconsider and recast even its belief system and thereby its values and morality.

It follows, of course, that the symbolism, the meanings, or the "truths" once inherent in all the collected manifestations of belief, in the museums by whatever name, are also changed. The good becomes evil, the important unimportant, the hero becomes the villain. This means changing the meanings of things and possibly their inclusion or exclusion in the collection. To the attributes of the museum idea, then, we must now add, alongside the purpose of maintaining social stability, a readiness to adapt to social change. In our own lifetimes I am sure we have all seen this process at work. If we have not seen it at first hand in museums and in school curricula at times of dramatic social and political change then we have surely observed the flexibility of professed beliefs in domestic politics and international relations. We have seen this social adaptability in various law reforms, the changing status of women, improvements in race relations and other revisions of accepted morality. It does, however, add further complexity to the museum idea.

What a patch of brambles! Why have I brought you here?

The first reason was to demonstrate as well as I knew how that the museum is a very complicated idea. If we want to see the museum effectively participating in positive social change we must have a full understanding of the institution we are engaging. We must study and understand the museum idea before we give it form, a name and a mission for the twenty-first century.

The second reason is to consider an analytic tool that may be useful when examining ideas for the museum of tomorrow. From the preceding discussion, and from other work undertaken in recent years, I have abstracted seven criteria for a museum. They do not constitute a definition of the museum idea for there is still much work to be done before such certainty. This is a working tool, to be sharpened, adjusted and improved as our understanding of the museum idea is refined. I should note that when the word "society" is used it can mean society broadly, as in a national or state society, or it can refer only to a smaller group such as a society of local farmers planning an agricultural museum, or an ethnic minority society operating a centre for traditional music and dance. It is enlightening to test these criteria against some of the museums one knows.

CRITERIA FOR A MUSEUM

The museum is an institution whose value to society is as a mechanism for maintaining social stability.

Proprietary right and control over the museum will be claimed by the source of legitimacy in that society, that is by those who have won the right to rule.

The proprietor will consecrate a site or sites for the museum, making it symbolic of authority and significant in its society.

The museum will have collections in any of many media either ephemeral and repeatable or permanent and recoverable, which are symbolic of its society's myths

The symbolic meanings of collection materials can be altered to accommodate changes in the dominant mythology.

The proprietor will appoint agents to protect, present and interpret the collections.

The agents will present and interpret the symbolic meaning of the collections, as truth, to some or all members of the society.

I said earlier that I was restrained in addressing the issues before this conference by two conditions. I have discussed one of these, the lack of a consensus on the definition of a museum. The other was my discomfort with the idea that museums should be politically active, which is to say partisan, in the process of social change. On that issue I must be clear.

I do not accept the idea of the museum as a revolutionary force, as a militant agent of change or even as an active player in the games of politics and ideological struggle. By the nature of its social invention, the museum is a rather tame, domesticated and dependent creature. It can be docile or impotent. It can be complicit in its master's wrongdoings. But as I have argued, it can also find its voice and become its master's conscience. It would be the judgment of a fool to be discouraged by the lack of a sword when the voice of conscience is a ready weapon.

I do not want to labour this point but I am concerned with the number of my colleagues who seem to feel that there is virtue in bringing their politics and causes and campaigns into the

museum. If the intentions of the museum's governing authority as they are set out in its mandate are supported through the museum's activities, and that is thought to be politically active, there can be little argument. If being politically active is to use the museum's resources to oppose the mandate of the governing authority then this is museum treason. There is no defence here for self-righteous rebellion.

Museums designed as instruments of social change can be treated at will by any group within the larger society. There are museums of many persuasions, some established with the mandated intent of controversy and contention. But those who commit themselves as employees or volunteers to the safe-keeping and public interpretation of a museum's collections have committed themselves to that museum's particular mandate and thus to the beliefs and values vested in these collections. Curatorial research may lead to new interpretations. Social change may cast a different light on collections. But the gulf between the impartial integrity of scholarship and the political bias of zealots is vast. It is not only a breach of trust but an insufferable arrogance when a museum worker sets out to be the partisan revisionist of the collective beliefs they have been engaged to both preserve and interpret.

I have spoken at length about the museum idea. I have had my say about the politicization of museums. Now it is time to move on and look forward to the next century and to the challenges given to this conference. I have said that to be the conscience of power was to be a constant presence of impartial integrity. To put life into that presence we must be able to speak with the voice of authority, and that, I said, comes only with sound research and scholarship. In today's museum world we seem to be surrounded by marketing wizards and management gurus, gift shop entrepreneurs and cultural tourism promoters. We have interpreters and programmers and volunteer coordinators. Where have all the curators gone? Perhaps I'm being too cynical or generalizing from what I see at home without knowing what you are doing in your museums. It is my perception, however, that the expensive, labour-intensive, time-consuming and sometimes almost invisible tasks of basic museum research are not being given the high priority they deserve.

Whether a curator is recording and documenting oral histories, studying the history of science and technology, trying to interpret the juvenalia or the last masterpiece of a painter or plotting local pollution levels against declining fish stocks, it is this work that brings new knowledge into the museum. It is only as the museum's research leads to fresh insights, clearer understandings and new perspectives that the museum's voice carries messages that will be listened to. The old, dusty, unchanging museum has a voice as compelling as last week's newspaper. The bustling, showbiz and blockbuster museum speaks with authority but carries messages to a waiting audience. I suggest then that the first challenge for the next century is full support for the intensification of curatorial research.

The second challenge is that created by the unprecedented mobility of world populations in the last half-century. Ever-increasing cultural diversity around the world is a fact. Cultural pluralism and harmony is an unresolved social ideal. These are present realities.

In the liberal democracies the large, urban museums cast in the European/American tradition, with culturally diverse collections, exhibitions and programs, are more culturally specific than I believe they now intend or want to be. The sites, the architecture, the design of interior

spaces and the modes of presentation and of the interpretation of collections are almost unavoidably in the particular cultural language of the proprietors. For the many who do not share this language it is intimidating. It is not their kind of house. The decentralization of such museums into shopping plazas, minority neighbourhoods and storefront museums has been tried but without any consistent pattern of success. The museum outstations are still branch plants and as such they have often been rejected as alien implants. Perhaps a diversity of culturally specific museums is the answer. Perhaps we each need to have our own kind of house for our own kind of museum.

Historically the established, traditional museum would build collections preserving the heritage (read beliefs, values and morality) of the dominant culture and would also build collections, by means fair and foul, for the interpretation of economically, politically or historically significant others. In the last fifty years, with increasing cultural diversity in both European and North American centres, some museums have tried to build relevant “ethnic” collections often by encouraging members of the visible minorities to donate their cultural property so that they could be better “represented” in the museum. All that has changed.

Over this same fifty-year period we have also seen a diminishing readiness among both immigrant and aboriginal minorities to embrace assimilation. Marginal groups within the society, and aboriginal groups in particular, now demand the repatriation of their cultural property, just as there are growing demands from foreign countries for the repatriation of cultural treasures lost to them during past colonization, during times of war and through illicit transactions. The trend, if it can be called that, is towards the reuniting of collections of cultural capital in the hands of the original owners. Concurrently, however, the building of non-European and non-American collections by the traditional museums continues though perhaps with greater sensitivity to contemporary issues.

In large, urban communities with significant cultural diversity, we see a reflection of these changes in the development of ethnic, or culturally specific museums, cultural centres, clubs and societies. Some of these are associated with places of worship while others are essentially secular. In the city of Calgary where I live there are twelve museums listed in the telephone book but another twenty-two institutions, large and small, would meet my criteria for a museum. Their collections are seldom of objects alone and are not necessarily kept at all times in a central location. They are often viewed by traditional museums as either social clubs with “folk” collections and activities, in the case of immigrant ethnic minorities, or in the case of aboriginal groups, as ethnology collections put to use in spiritual revival or cultural tourism or both. For the minority groups, however, they have established special places for special activities where they can come together to celebrate who they are with their symbols of tradition and belief. These are living museums.

The established museums have not yet recognized that they are now part of this new community of museums. They have yet to see how this new diversity of museums underlines their own specificity as the museums of the dominant culture. They still see themselves as the great panacea, the universal museums that can reach out and satisfy all of the cultural hungers in their diverse communities.

If there is any validity in this analysis, it shows museums as signifiers of change, and in this

case, participants in a contemporary social and political challenge of paramount importance. It is, of course, the challenge of moving from the demographic fact of cultural diversity to harmony in a culturally pluralistic society where there must be a core of shared beliefs, values and morality if there is to be social order. If there is to be peace, democracy and good governance this challenge must not only be taken up but every effort must be made towards its resolution. It is a challenge to political leaders and to governments and therefore a challenge to democratic society. What is the role of the museum?

Governments will adopt policies and develop strategies. Some may opt for a nationalist, assimilationist solution to cultural diversity and strive for unity through the propagation of a shared national heritage and thus shared values. Others may take a more daring path, and seek common ground within diversity while trying to preserve the dignity of difference. But whatever route is taken there will be the ever-present political temptations of expediency.

The political management of social change always carries a risk of the manipulation of public perceptions through historical revisionism and inventive mythologizing. Any strategy for resolution of the pluralism and unity issue will create opportunities for such deceptions and also for cultural misrepresentations naively employed to resolve the apparent contradictions of the culturally pluralistic society and the prerequisites of social order for shared beliefs, values and a morality.

The museum's role is not to set the agendas of government and it is not to subvert the democratic process of governance. But given the danger, or even the possibility, that some might try wittingly or unwittingly to build peace and democracy for tomorrow on less than firm foundations, it is imperative that the museum's role be as the conscience of power – that constant and clear-spoken voice of impartial integrity that must be heard. This must hold true not just in the current search for unity in the context of pluralism but always in the relationship of the museum to legitimized authority. Is research and scholarship, a striving for objectivity, and the effective interpretation of what knowledge we may have of this world and the human experience not only our strength but, more importantly, our most potent and valuable contribution?