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The Liberation of Anthropology: A Rejoinder to Professor Trigger's "A Present of Their Past?"

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Professor Trigger is to be commended for raising once again the problematic relations between anthropologists and the peoples they study and for reminding us that anthropology was a child of imperialism and continues to work in its service. It is also important to note, however, that there has been a fundamental transformation in the nature of the people anthropologists mostly report on, from colonial subjects to disadvantaged citizens, and this has also fundamentally changed for all time the moral and political contexts of our work (Geertz, 1988). These developments pose special challenges for those employed in the classic state apparatuses like universities and museums, as Bruce Trigger reminds us so eloquently. What attitudes to these issues should we take, then?

Trigger takes a moral attitude towards the question of who owns the native past, emphasizing the history of mistreatment of Native Peoples and the appropriation of their cultures. The past, Isabel McBryde (1985:6) reminds us, "is the possession of those in power; the past belongs to the victors." This is an understandable position long established in anthropology, and I share many of the same sentiments. Because he starts from a moral position, however, he does not push as far as he otherwise might his analysis of the changing conditions of production and reproduction of the problems he identifies, nor does he

conclude with practical recommendations for change. Those who wish to change a system first need to understand it. Suggesting that the solution lies in having indigenous peoples assume a majority position in the fields of anthropology and museums is little more than another form of colonial appropriation, for it suggests that Native Peoples should become more like ourselves, and that would leave the institutions and their conditions basically unchanged. The institutions themselves must be reformed, for it is the structure of capitalist society that perpetuates and reproduces conditions of dominance and subordination, not the incumbents of particular offices.

A more radical solution than recruitment to anthropology is thus required for problems as severe as those Trigger describes. While it is unlikely that anthropology can play more than a minor role in bringing about such change, other than to raise peoples consciousness and to facilitate communication between them, there is one important step we can immediately take. That is to work towards more liberated forms of anthropology and curatorship, ones which will liberate indigenous peoples from the hegemony of academic and curatorial interpretations, and liberate anthropologists and curators from their status dependence on other cultures, along with

their tendency to romanticize them, so they can focus on empirical analyses of the systems of power and domination in our own society and how disadvantaged peoples are located within such structures (see, e.g., Nader, 1969, 1980). Freed to speak and work for themselves, Native People will choose their own professions and strategies, and it is quite possible that academic anthropology and museum curatorship will rank among the less interesting and useful to them. Anthropology, after all, is one of the lesser disciplines in terms of influence and respect. Law, social work, education, political science, business administration and accounting hold more practical value for subordinated peoples.

Professor Trigger is nevertheless justified in his criticism of museums, and he could have gone further as have members of the museum community. (See especially the "new museology" and "ecomuseum" movements which, in Canada, are best represented in the writings of Stevenson, 1987 and Rivard, 1984a, 1984b.) But he misses several crucial points about the conditions of museums. First, for all their faults, Canadian museums are, by and large, more actively engaged in progressive action than are university departments of anthropology. They are more closely connected to the publics they serve, including Native Peoples and other minorities, than are university departments. Though museums are keepers of other peoples material heritage, they preserve that heritage and make it widely accessible. University anthropologists, on the other hand, carry away intellectual properties in their notebooks and tape recorders and typically share only their academic reconstructions, usually only with their own colleagues, though sometimes they hire out as consultants to native groups. It is true that neither museums nor university departments of anthropology do much to alleviate the political domination and economic depravity of native communities, but even in what little they do there is little comparison between the two kinds of institutions: ethnology divisions within Canadian museums, on the average, work with more Native Peoples, hire more of them, train more, share more of their intellectual and material resources, repatriate more heritage, and inform larger audiences about Native history and culture than do Canadian university departments of anthropology.

Second, there are important structural differences between anthropology in museums and in universities. University anthropologists are protected by principles of tenure and academic freedom that allow them to speak for themselves; curators, on the other hand, serve as representatives of their

institutions and therefore carry greater administrative responsibilities. Museum work is also more interdisciplinary and collaborative, while academic work is more competitive and individualistic. The academic is thus freer to act for him or herself, relatively unencumbered by concerns for colleagues, department or university; the curator, on the other hand, has a wider range of responsibilities, legal obligations and moral concerns that extend beyond immediate colleagues to the institution and its sources of funding. And finally, university anthropologists for the most part govern their own departments or share the tasks with sociologists, whereas most museums with significant ethnological collections are not governed by anthropologists. I can think of only two or three of the 50 or so largest Museums in Canada whose directors are archaeologists, and only one that is directed by a social/cultural anthropologist (that's me); the rest are headed by natural scientists, art historians, and others.

No educational institution does enough, of course. Nevertheless, museums and universities can and do serve as buffers and mediators between the central powers of the state and peoples on the periphery, and there is certainly more they could do in that regard. So where should reform begin? Obviously the first step lies with the universities, where museum professionals are trained and from which Native Peoples are largely excluded. And here university departments could learn from museums, about how to cultivate a greater sensitivity to the needs and interests of *various* publics and how to fulfill in more practical ways their obligations to those publics. It is not sufficient for academic anthropologists, freed of social responsibilities by their own institutions, to demand that others should do more. They must first change themselves and their own social and economic conditions. Then perhaps they could join museum anthropologists out on the frontier between educational institutions and the public, accepting the responsibility to pursue in concert the principal mission of anthropology, which is to enable conversation across societal and class boundaries (Geertz, 1988: 147): "It is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way." When anthropologists sell out to one side or the other they do not add much to this discourse.

There are several points of disagreement with Professor Trigger's paper concerning his interpretation of the boycott of the Glenbow Museum's exhibition, *The Spirit Sings*. We have debated these issues elsewhere (Ames and Trigger, 1988; Hill, 1988), so only a few additional remarks are required here. Professor Trigger criticizes the McCord and other Canadian museums for not taking political stands on specific disagreements between various groups, arguing that it is not possible to separate culture from politics. He misunderstands the position of these museums (and of universities, one might add). They do not claim that culture is independent of politics, but that (a) access to collections and other forms of public knowledge should not be determined by political belief or racial origins, and (b) cultural institutions should be able to operate independently of the personal causes of politicians and others. A museum is not to be a weather vane, to twist and turn according to who blows the hardest from one day to the next. Anyone who would wish to reduce a museum or a university (or a university department of anthropology) to that level would have it destroyed. Obviously cultural events can be read as political statements. The question is whether curators and their institutions have the right to express their own points of view, or must submit to the political lines of various pressure groups. No professional, including a curator or an academic anthropologist, should be forced to serve as someone else's mouthpiece, whether that be for the Shell Oil Company or a Lubicon support group. I am surprised that anthropologists, including the 1987-88 executive members of the Canadian Ethnology Society, would advocate such a demeaning position for their own profession. Advocating a cause is one thing, but advocating the censorship of those who do not directly support one's own personal cause is quite another matter. That is fundamentally anti-democratic. Curators, like their academic colleagues, have a right to their own ideologies.

The ideological message *The Spirit Sings* exhibition intended to communicate was an important one: contemporary native groups share a sophisticated, complex and diverse heritage *that continues to be relevant to them and wider public understanding of that fact will help their cause*. Their past is an integral part of their present and therefore should not be artificially separated out and confined to academic texts or museum store rooms, as the academic supporters of the Lubicon would have it, but made more accessible *for everyone* (a principle Professor Trigger also supports in his paper). Many academics, perhaps reflecting the anti-historical bias of modern

society (MacCannell, 1976: 82-89; Lowenthal, 1985), are inclined to separate the present from its past. Some museums work to reunite the two, however, while Native Peoples never wanted them separated in the first place.

A museum's claim for autonomy is thus not a cry of political innocence but a call for the right to govern itself and to choose its own causes, and to be free to reject the attempts by political (and commercial) interest groups to *impose* their ideologies and restrictions. Of course loaning artifacts to *The Spirit Sings* exhibition can be considered a deliberate political act: it expresses public support for the purpose of museums and for the rejection of the idea that access should be determined by politics or race. I personally would go even further and declare *for* the objectives of *The Spirit Sings* and *against* the politics of suppression advocated by academic supporters of the Lubicon. Whether or not curators have the right to academic freedom, and I agree with Bruce Trigger that no freedom can be absolute -- and in fact the principle of academic freedom is not established in most museums -- curators certainly share the rights of all citizens to be free from unreasonable persecution and forcible suppression of their work. I reject the politics of extremism which would seek to impose one particular morality on us all (cf. *The Moral Majority*, *Pro-lifers*, etc.).

Trigger correctly notes that academic anthropologists have moved away from the study of museum collections, but this was not as he suggested because of any growing sympathy for Native Peoples. Anthropologists have always been sympathetically, and romantically, disposed towards "their" peoples (though increasingly their possessiveness is being rejected). The estrangement between academic and museum work resulted instead from the shift in anthropology towards a more social scientific, symbolical and idealist orientation around the middle of this century, coinciding with the shift in their location of employment from museums, where they associated with natural scientists, to universities where they joined social science departments (Eggan, 1954; Sturtevant, 1969; Ames, 1986: Chapter 3).

Trigger rightly points to the growing recognition that only Native People can speak for Native People, and this has certainly sensitized and is changing the relations between museums and indigenous populations (Ames, 1987; Ames and Haagen, 1988; Ames, Harrison and Nicks, 1988; Hill, 1988). Those relations are evolving in a generally progressive fashion, even though too fast for some and not quickly enough for others, and I am un-

aware of any evidence that Canadian museum support for *The Spirit Sings* has "seriously impaired" such relations, except perhaps with a few politicians. (It is interesting to note in this regard that more Native People visited *The Spirit Sings* exhibition than any other held at the Glenbow Museum.) All museum anthropologists I know welcome "increased input into the management of museum collections by Native People," and do not see this as a threat to their own responsibilities; nor do I know any museum anthropologists who manifest the "wagon train mentality" Trigger describes. The issue is how in put is to be achieved: through rational procedures that recognize the range of legitimate interests (including those of cultural leaders and native elders, and museums) or through the politics of attack and suppression? I have no doubt that the relations between museums and Native Peoples will continue to progress because there is a growing recognition of each others' interests. I am less sanguine about the relations between museums and academic anthropologists, however, because the academics appear to be making little effort to understand their museum colleagues. (How many museum anthropologists did Professor Trigger consult with before writing his paper, for example? And why did the 1987-88 CESCE executive vote to support the Lubicon boycott of *The Spirit Sings* without first having the simple courtesy of hearing the point of view of the Glenbow curatorial team?)

Professor Trigger is incorrect on several points relating to *The Spirit Sings* exhibition (Harrison, 1988). *The Spirit Sings* was organized by the Glenbow Museum alone. The Canadian Museum of Civilization only contributed some funds, services and assisted in the installation of the exhibition in Ottawa. It would be an exaggeration to say that "many museums around the world ... supported this boycott" and that "most of these museums made it clear that they were refusing to loan material ... because they wished to demonstrate support for the Lubicon Indians." Loan requests went out to 110 institutions and individuals around the world and subsequently 88 agreed to lend materials while 22 refused, and only 12 of those who refused reported to the Glenbow that the Lubicon boycott was their reason. And finally, no lending museum asked the Glenbow for changes in the exhibition content as a condition of the loan. That proposal was put forward by a Lubicon supporter in Calgary, who suggested that a section on contemporary land claims be included in the exhibition. The Glenbow considered, but, wisely or not, rejected that idea because it was felt that such an addition would detract from

the main purpose of the exhibition, which was to demonstrate the *continuing* relevance of the Native past. The Glenbow did, however, offer to arrange lecture series and workshops on contemporary issues but were advised by its Native Liaison Committee to keep out of Indian politics. (Professor Trigger himself notes that Native Peoples are claiming the right to speak for themselves.) A number of museums nevertheless did welcome the Glenbow's offer to include a statement at the end of the exhibition urging a satisfactory solution to Native land claims and other issues of self-government, and such a statement was added.

I agree with Professor Trigger that it would be regrettable if the split between anthropologists who work in museums and in universities were to widen for they share some interests and could work more effectively for change by acting together rather than in opposition. As one who has worked off and on in both camps since the 1950's and for the past 13 years as both a professor of anthropology and a director of a major museum, however, I would have to say that the responsibility for this division lies more with the academics. As Jamake Highwater (1981: 3) once remarked, the greatest distance between people is not space but culture. While we struggle to understand other cultures it is apparent that we also need to develop a better appreciation of the subcultures within our own discipline. We must first seek to understand before we seek to change. The challenge begins at home, in the universities. For anthropologists that is where the liberation movement starts. Only after anthropology has been freed from its myopic and possessive romanticism will anthropologists be able to work effectively for the emancipation of others.

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