

## Travelling objects: the Wellcome collection in Los Angeles, London and beyond

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# Travelling objects: the Wellcome collection in Los Angeles, London and beyond

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This paper presents some of my research into the historical medical collection acquired by and on behalf of the pharmaceutical magnate Henry Solomon Wellcome (1853–1936). Specific aims of the paper are to consider how historico-geographical factors and the agency of objects influence the collection and re-collection of material cultures across time and space. I trace the movement of 30 000 objects in 1965–66 from the original Wellcome Collection in London to what is now known as the Fowler Museum at UCLA. I pay particular attention to the ‘Wellcome Year’ celebrations that marked the arrival of the ‘great gift’ in California, and explore the networks through which the travelling objects moved. From these starting points, and positing an active interpretation of material forms, the article demonstrates how people–object–place relations and shifting systems of value shape the ongoing history and geography of collections within and between certain places. I also explore how sites can be changed as a result of collections’ geographies.

Collections and practices of collecting are inherently geographical. The gathering of a collection involves processes of acquisition and exchange, which necessarily stretch across space; the storage, or display of objects in particular sites; and the ongoing management, or care, of objects, whereby collected material may be archived, dispersed or disposed of. Collections and collected objects thus carry a multitude of meanings that are intimately linked to such spatial dimensions. In this context, as Duclos has argued, the perspective of cultural geography has much to offer the study of collections and collecting.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging the significance of what she calls the ‘cartographies of collecting’ is not simply a matter of mapping the origins and destinations of objects. It is also to recognize that the establishment and ongoing lives of collections are intrinsically spatial processes. Whilst such connections may seem self-evident, geographers have only recently begun contributing to this area of study.<sup>2</sup>

In my own research as a cultural and historical geographer, I have been working through various different ideas in relation to the making and remaking of the extraordinary historical medical collection acquired by the pharmaceuticals magnate Henry Solomon Wellcome. Wellcome was born in Almond, Wisconsin, on 21 August 1853, to a family of humble means and pious convictions. In his youth Wellcome sought part-time work with his uncle, who ran a small drug store, and subsequently moved

east to Rochester, to pursue a career as a prescriptions clerk at the age of 17. He enrolled as a pharmacy student at Chicago College, completing his degree in 1874 at Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. After graduating, he gained employment with Caswell Hazard and Co., a pharmaceuticals company based in New York, and then McKesson and Robbins as a travelling salesman. Wellcome gained considerable renown for his work and in 1880 moved to London, where he co-founded Burroughs Wellcome and Co. with Silas Mainville Burroughs (1846–95). The firm grew to become a major player in the pharmaceuticals business and was an antecedent to Glaxo Wellcome, which is now known as GlaxoSmithKline. After Burroughs' death in 1895, Wellcome became sole director of the company and subsequently devoted more time to pursuing outside interests. In particular, he was able to nurture his collection of objects made in the belief that it would promote an understanding of 'the history of medicine and mankind' from evolutionary perspectives. By the time of his death in 1936 the collection had grown to an estimated one million objects, approximately three-quarters of which were classified as 'ethnographic'.

Since its inception the Wellcome collection has aroused considerable fascination, bemusement and occasional ridicule owing to its enormous size and range. However, very little research on it has been conducted to date, and most studies have been limited in scope. The collection is generally interpreted by historians as the product of Wellcome's own, somewhat idiosyncratic, vision of history, as expressed in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum (WHMM) in London, where a small proportion of the collection was exhibited between 1913 and 1931.<sup>3</sup> Researchers limiting their studies to Wellcome and the museum offer a partial view, privileging practices and spaces of display in this specific context over other aspects of this collection's development. In some senses this is typical of work on many different sorts of collection. As Susan Pearce explains, studies often place too much emphasis on more 'visible' phases or renowned moments of their development, 'at the tip of the iceberg', thus bypassing equally important aspects 'hidden under the surface'.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, such projects often fail to demonstrate how collections are enmeshed within diverse cultures and networks of collecting and the mutual constitution of relational biographies involving objects, people and places.

In my own work, in which I pay particular attention to the shifting fortunes of material classified in the WHMM as 'ethnographic', I have therefore chosen to explore some of the manifold geographies of this collection, focusing on 'travelling objects' rather than only considering one site or moment in time. Thus, when exploring the period of the collection's establishment, I have not limited my research to Wellcome and the Historical Medical Museum. Other foci of enquiry have included different scenes of acquisition, such as the field or auction houses, and the networks that objects became a part of before and during their subsequent donation or sale to the collection. The influence of many different individuals, institutions and places therefore become apparent in all their variety. I also follow Mieke Bal's suggestion that collections should be viewed as changing narratives, which continue to evolve beyond the period of their establishment.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Wellcome Collection, this has involved researching its ongoing life histories, specifically the movements and reuse of the collection after its

founder's death when acquisitions ceased. After this event the collection was reassessed, and gradually scattered to more than 100 different institutions as part of a systematic process of dispersal. As Table 1 demonstrates, 'ethnographic' material alone was dispersed to over 30 museums in the UK and overseas. Eventually it became a widely spread diaspora now resident in sites across the globe.<sup>6</sup>

Contingent factors specific to particular places and moments in time have influenced the ways in which objects have been re-collected in different locations. To demonstrate this point, this paper focuses on one specific case study to trace the movement of 30 000 objects in 1965–66 from the Wellcome Trust in London to the then Laboratory of Ethnic Arts and Technology at UCLA.<sup>7</sup> Here, I pay particular attention to the 'Wellcome Year' celebrations which marked the arrival of the first set of objects in California in 1965. Central to these was a public exhibition held at UCLA's new Dickson Art Gallery and the production of a catalogue, both titled *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA*.<sup>8</sup>

One useful starting point from which to think through the shifting interpretation or cartography of 'Wellcome' objects as they travelled across the Atlantic is James Clifford's art-culture system which sets out to explain such cultural processes.<sup>9</sup> Clifford's scheme works as a form of 'semiotic square', mapping a 'historically specific, contestable field of meanings and institutions'. These are organised into four semantic or classificatory zones: authentic masterpieces (in relation to the art museum/market and notions of connoisseurship); authentic artefacts (typically describing the classification of objects as material culture in many ethnographic museums); inauthentic masterpieces (such as fakes, ready-made art objects); and inauthentic artefacts (such as tourist art and curio collections) (see Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> Clifford asserts that at any time, most objects are placed within one of his four classificatory zones, or are otherwise in transit between any two zones. According to Clifford, movement between the authentic masterpiece of zone one and the authentic artefact of zone two is most common. He notes that 'examples of ["non-Western" objects moving] in this direction, from ethnographic "culture" to fine "art", are plentiful'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, whereas Wellcome's museum in 1930s London had presented material as 'ethnographic', in California objects were described and displayed as artworks. This is a familiar pattern of categorization for many objects collected from non-Western places since the 1900s. As George Stocking also notes,

Whether defined as 'art by metamorphosis' or created as 'art by designation', objects that once went into museums of ethnography as pieces of material culture have become eligible for inclusion in museums of fine art.<sup>12</sup>

Described as a 'machine for making authenticity', Clifford's framework is not a fixed system into which objects can be slotted. Rather, it serves as a means to articulate the cultural processes of the sort investigated in this piece. However, as I go on to discuss at a later stage, the model has some limitations. In particular, I argue that greater attention should be paid to contingent historical-geographical factors in relevant contexts to understand the systems of authentication at work in all their complexity and specificity. To demonstrate why, this paper unpacks the processes at work in Los Angeles, London and beyond.

TABLE 1 The dispersal of 'ethnographic' objects from the Wellcome Collection, by original place of origin. (Source: G. Russell, 'The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum's dispersal of non-medical material, 1936-1983', *Museums journal* 62 (1986), supplement S3-S29.)

Institution	Africa	North America	South And Central America	Asia	Oceania	Europe (excl. UK)
Bath, John Judkin Memorial						
Birmingham City Museums						
Cambridge University						
Museum of Anthropology						
Derbyshire Museum Loans Service						
Edinburgh, Nat. Museums of Scotland						
Glasgow, Hunterian Museum						
Glasgow, Museum and Art Gallery						
Halifax, Bankfield Museum						
Hastings Museum and Art Gallery						
Ipswich City Museums						
Leeds City Museum						
Leeds University						
Liverpool Merseyside County Museums						
London, BM: Museum of Mankind						
London, BM: Natural History Museum						
London, Horniman Museum						
London, HM Tower Armouries						
London, Science Museum						
London, University College						
Manchester Museum						
Newcastle upon Tyne, Hancock Museum						
Norwich, Sainsbury Centre						
Oxford Ashmolean Museum						
Oxford Pitt Rivers Museum						
Ghana, Accra National Museum						
New Zealand Cornsortium						
Nigeria, Lagos, National Museum						
Sierra Leone						
South Africa, East London Museum						
UCLA, Los Angeles						
Zambia, Kampala, Zambia Museum						
Zambia, Livingstone Museum						
Zimbabwe, Queen Victoria Memorial Museum						

I also propose that greater consideration should be afforded to the agency of objects within this schema. Drawing on the ideas of Alfred Gell, I argue for an active interpretation of the travelling objects, premised on the idea that the nature of objects is

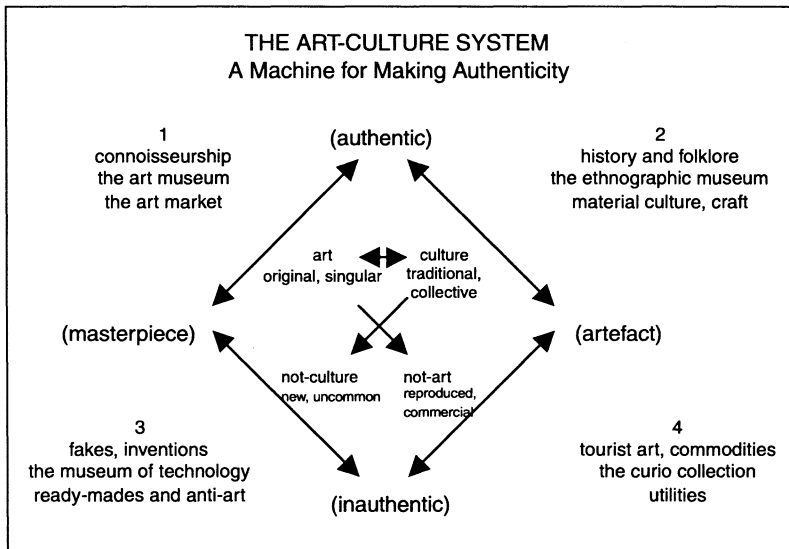


FIGURE 1 James Clifford's 'Art-culture system'. (Source: J. Clifford, *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 224.)

a function of the social-relational matrix in which they are embedded.<sup>13</sup> Gell's aim, and indeed one of my own intentions here, is 'to explore the domain in which "objects" merge with "people" by virtue of the existence of social relations between people and things, and persons via things'.<sup>14</sup> From his perspective,

agency is attributable to those persons (and things) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention rather than the mere concatenation of physical events. ... Wherever an event is believed to happen because of an intention lodged in the person or thing which initiates the causal sequence, that is an instance of 'agency'.<sup>15</sup>

Gell argues, as I do, that objects are not self-sufficient agents, but are secondary agents in conjunction with certain specific (human) associates. It is therefore important to examine the second-class agency which artefacts acquire once enmeshed in a texture of social and spatial relationships, and, in these contexts, to treat artefacts as agents in a variety of ways.

Using this approach, I will show how some of the travelling objects were harnessed through the 'Wellcome Year' celebrations which marked the receipt of the first set of objects in 1965. These events enabled UCLA to become a prominent player on the local, national and international museum scene, indexing the agency of the objects as they travelled to and were re-collected at this new site. I will thus demonstrate how people-object-place relations and shifting systems of value have influenced the ongoing history and geography of the collection within and between certain places, and how different sites have also been changed as a result of the collection's evolving geography. The exhibition and associated lecture series, which brought together

parties from external institutions, also sparked interdisciplinary intellectual debate. These ongoing dialogues subsequently influenced shifting approaches towards 'non-Western' objects in California and elsewhere, beyond the realms of the Wellcome collection.

## **The movement of the 'great gift' to Los Angeles**

As suggested above, a study of the networks involved in the transfer of objects to UCLA and their subsequent consumption in this location should be viewed in the context of contingent historical-geographical factors operating at local, regional, national and international scales.

Key actors in this story are two Los Angeles residents, Franklin D. Murphy and Ralph Altman. Murphy trained as a doctor but pursued a managerial academic career, becoming chancellor of UCLA from 1960 to 1968. He also had a wide set of interests, including a passion for what he termed 'primitive' or 'ethnic' art. Murphy had developed an interest in Pre-Columbian and other 'primitive' art forms when travelling in Central and South America in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Once in Los Angeles, he became acquainted with 'Altman's antiques'. This gallery had been established by Ralph Altman (and his wife); opened in 1946 and originally specializing in eighteenth-century furniture, it was latterly known for its 'primitive' and 'folk' art material.

It was more than a business; it developed into a cultural centre where experts and novices avidly discussed the art forms that so intrigued them. The Altmans' shop provided an atmosphere that enabled individuals with similar interests to build special relationships. One such relationship arose between the Altmans and the Murphys.<sup>17</sup>

In an obituary, Murphy noted: 'Ralph Altman was a pioneer in leading many in the Los Angeles community to an appreciation of the values inherent in these objects until recently often dismissed as bizarre or merely unusual.'<sup>18</sup> Altman not only owned a shop, but had also been employed as a lecturer in the UCLA art department since 1956.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that Murphy's interest in 'ethnic art' was encouraged by his relationship with this expert. In spring 1962, Murphy asked Altman to curate 'Primitive arts', an exhibition for the UCLA Art Galleries, a show which included 500 rare works from over 30 countries.<sup>20</sup> Soon after, in September 1963, Murphy established the Laboratory of Ethnic Arts and Technology at the university. Altman was appointed as the first Chief Curator of the new enterprise, and remained in the position until his death in 1967. He was only employed at the museum for a few years, but played a crucial role in negotiating the donation of the Wellcome material and planning its future use at UCLA.

The new institution at UCLA therefore emerged because of the collaboration and commitment of a small network of interested people in Los Angeles. Furthermore, it was as a result of the establishment of the Laboratory of Ethnic Arts and Technology at UCLA that part of the Wellcome Collection was dispersed here in the 1960s. In 1964 Noel Poynter, the director of the London-based Wellcome Historical Medical Museum

and library, visited UCLA. He realized that the vision for UCLA's centre for 'ethnic arts' reflected certain aims outlined by Henry Wellcome decades previously. Albeit from very different starting points (as explored below), Murphy and Altman, like Wellcome before them, were keen to promote a heavy focus on research, links with institutional learning, and hence a greater understanding of 'primitive' cultures. These connections were emphasized in 1965 by Altman:

The correspondences are indeed so profound that most of the ideas Wellcome had expressed to the Royal Commission [on National Museums and Galleries] in 1928 could be taken for a policy statement of UCLA's Museum of Ethnic Arts.<sup>21</sup>

John Boyd of the Wellcome Trust shared these sentiments, writing to Murphy in December 1965: 'I have no doubt whatsoever that the old man [Wellcome] himself would . . . be happy to think that at long last his efforts to stimulate interest in the art of primitive peoples were bearing fruit.'<sup>22</sup>

At the time of the material's transfer, the UCLA museum was a very new institution, and its identity was still beginning to emerge. The receipt of the donation from the Wellcome Trust therefore made a huge impact. Prior to the addition of the Wellcome objects, the UCLA 'ethnic art' holdings were relatively limited.<sup>23</sup> A fair degree of effort had been made to develop the collection by improving links with other institutions and 'cultivating' collectors; but progress had been relatively slow. Consequently, Murphy was delighted to accept the substantial donation of material from the Wellcome Trust. This swelled the museum's collections and also had the potential to raise its profile.

At a local level, Murphy was able further to champion his own and the university's 'artistic' and 'cultural' credentials through the development of the new institution, bolstered by the receipt of the Wellcome material.

Dr Murphy realized the importance of an ethnic arts museum to various [university] departments, faculty and student research, and the diverse community surrounding the UCLA campus. He envisioned a [centre] that would build from the world's cultures excluding only traditional Western 'fine arts'. The study of the history and cultural context of ethnic art would promote greater understanding of the world's peoples. . . . Los Angeles was and remains a multi-cultural city. A museum of ethnic art could serve to increase the knowledge of various ethnic minorities about their cultural heritage and honour their accomplishments. In addition relatively unknown art forms could be given a wide audience in the community.<sup>24</sup>

After Murphy's death in 1994, Chris Donnan, director of the Fowler Museum, noted: 'One of the things [Murphy] wanted UCLA to have was a collection encompassing artistic traditions of the non-Western world . . . he was way ahead of his time.'<sup>25</sup>

Murphy was also able to link its creation to his interests in philanthropy, civil rights and outreach work in the community. As he recognized, the period of his chancellorship took shape during 'a pretty bubbling time'.<sup>26</sup> Most notably, these years were marked by student disquiet over the Vietnam war and civil rights protest on a local and national scale. Prior to the Watts uprising of August 1965, UCLA and USC were largely detached from the growing racial tensions on their doorsteps. As Horne explains, the vast majority of students attending UCLA were white, whilst those from ethnic minorities that did apply and took up places often struggled in an atmosphere of institutional racism.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the promotion of Murphy's new UCLA institution,



through the Wellcome Year celebrations of 1965, could be interpreted as a middle-class, liberal attempt to improve race relations in the city at this time. Indeed, Murphy had organized a high-profile meeting with Martin Luther King in April 1965,<sup>28</sup> just four months prior to the Watts uprising in Los Angeles. The meeting also took place one month before the arrival of the Wellcome material in Los Angeles and eight months prior to the exhibition in which select pieces were displayed at UCLA (see following section). Murphy thus demonstrated his support for liberal, middle-class sectors of the civil rights movement during the 1960s. His belief in public art and the potential power of philanthropic schemes was also apparent throughout his career as chancellor and afterwards.<sup>29</sup>

The developments also had the potential to improve the university's standing both regionally and nationally. During Murphy's time as chancellor, UCLA broke away from UC Berkeley, thus raising the incentive to strive for a stronger identity for his institution through initiatives of this sort. An arts commentator from San Francisco claimed that the Wellcome collection was 'the kind of thing that can change the entire cultural life of an area lucky enough to acquire it'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the receipt of this material encouraged Murphy to propose a change of name for the 'laboratory', which now gained the title of 'Museum'.<sup>31</sup> Murphy's ambitions to raise its profile were timely in view of developments being made by west and east coast universities to improve their own collections. In a letter to Clark Kerr, President of the University, Murphy wrote:

As far as adding the word 'Museum' it would have been premature and perhaps pretentious prior to the acquisition of the Wellcome Collection. Now, with the materials in hand, we are quite justified in using the word as Harvard is with the Peabody, Pennsylvania with its University Museum, and Berkeley with Lowie etc.<sup>32</sup>

Murphy also had international ambitions, declaring: 'it is one of the finest such collections ever brought together, and it has the effect of catapulting UCLA into the front rank of institutions around the world in the matter of these kinds of holdings'.<sup>33</sup> He saw the arrival of the Wellcome gift as instrumental to his broader ambition to lead UCLA towards 'major scholarly distinction in worldwide terms'.

It is unlikely that the objects would have been lauded so enthusiastically had they been transferred to a comparable institution in the UK, where the Wellcome Collection gained limited respect and remained little known during the decades after its founder's death. However, due to the specific circumstances that I have begun to describe, it is unsurprising that the transfer of Wellcome material to UCLA was henceforth frequently referred to in public and private as a 'great' or 'unprecedented' gift.<sup>34</sup>

## **The Wellcome Year and its legacies**

The Wellcome Year events of 1965/6 were the means through which the arrival of the gift and the wider institution were promoted in various different ways appropriate to this place and moment in time. Central to the celebrations was *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection*, an exhibition which opened on 5 December 1965 and ran

until 13 May 1966. Altman selected pieces for display from the first shipment of 15 000 objects, which arrived in early summer 1965. The choice of objects to some extent reflected the variations in surviving material cultures of particular places, and the tastes of earlier collectors. However, Altman's approach and selections also seem to have been influenced by certain protocols and trends influencing many leading curators in North America at this time.

First, the exhibition and catalogue organized objects into distinct geographical areas: Polynesia, north-west coast America, Malaysia, Pre-Columbian America, Africa, New Guinea, Melanesia and Australia (see Figure 2). In the areas of the display, larger and/or more eye-catching objects were selected and positioned to stand out from the crowd. These denoted a snapshot view of a particular region, or even an entire continent.<sup>35</sup> A series of masks offered a spectacular vision of the 'North West Coast America' (see Figure 3). Elsewhere, a group of weapons displayed alongside a single power figure provided a very particular view of Africa and African 'art'. The prominent or focal use of weapons and more especially *minkisi* (or power figures) has been and remains a common feature of exhibitions displaying African objects, whether as art, artefact, ritual or scientific object.<sup>36</sup> A hierarchy of value also determined certain choices such that 'ritual objects, high status and rarity all tend to imply each other in the labels of High Primitive Art'.<sup>37</sup> Following such codes, objects with formal aesthetic qualities fitting high modernism *and* the 'capability' to express shamanistic exorcistic power were deemed to be examples of the 'highest most authentic art'.<sup>38</sup> Notable examples corresponding to these criteria included totemic ancestor figures and reliquary masks.

The means of display favoured by Altman (see Figures 3 and 4) also reflected certain contemporary curatorial trends fitting 'the modernist conception of the autonomous universal art object [which] requires works of . . . art to be well spaced and carefully lit

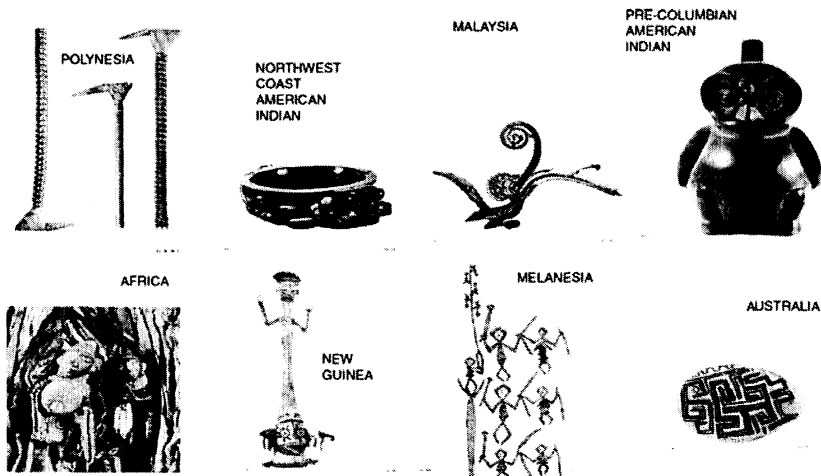


FIGURE 2 *Masterpieces* catalogue: chapter title pages. (Source: UCLA Museum and Laboratories of the Ethnic Arts, *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1965).)

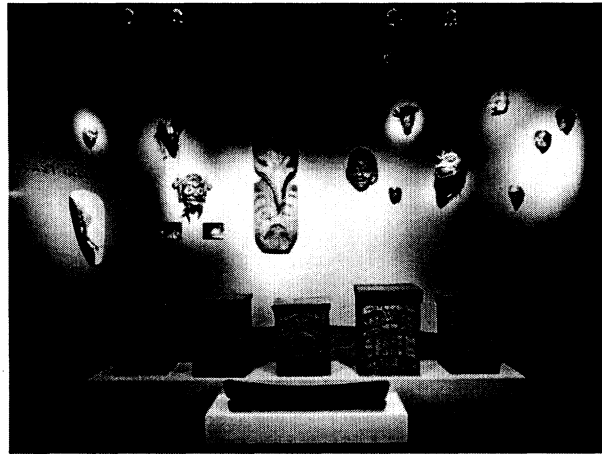


FIGURE 3 'North West Coast American Indian' displays from the UCLA exhibition, 5 December 1965–13 May 1966. (Source: UCLA University Archives.)

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so the viewer can concentrate on their formal qualities'.<sup>39</sup> In the 1965 catalogue, the 128 images of objects were also presented in line with similar artistic traditions. Again, objects were depicted in isolation against plain backgrounds through the medium of black and white photographs (see Figures 2 and 5). The text accompanying objects in the exhibition and catalogue was also typical of an established aesthetic tradition for

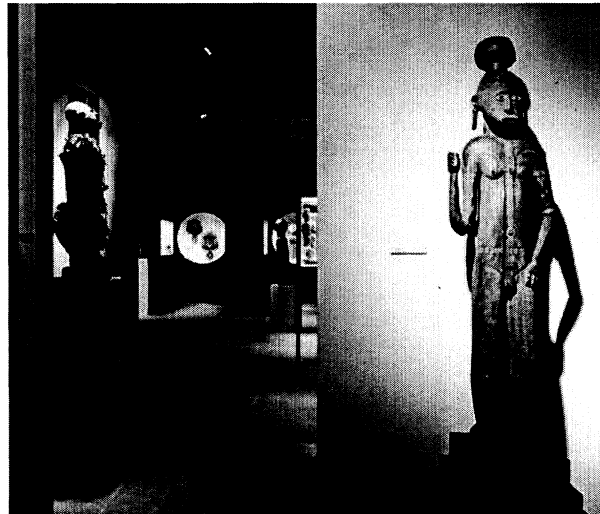


FIGURE 4 Three of Altman's 'masterpieces' at the UCLA exhibition. Left to right: a figure from the Mayumbe; the Janus-faced image of the Kuta; a figure from the Admiralty Isles. (Source: UCLA University Archives.)

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FIGURE 5 Altman's 15 'Masterpieces' (left to right, as detailed in Table 2). (Source: UCLA Museum and Laboratories of the Ethnic Arts, *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1965).)

representing primitive art.<sup>40</sup> Much of the supporting information from the catalogue drew on sources written by art historians whose work had discussed the aesthetic dimensions of comparable pieces.<sup>41</sup> Where they were included, cultural references tended to be very brief and invariably emphasized particular aspects of their use, for instance mentioning that a piece may have been used as part of a secret society's ritual ceremonies.

By drawing on the notion of the 'masterpiece', Altman also associated the exhibition with a particular approach to 'primitive art' which necessarily emphasized specific pieces in the exhibition and catalogue, highlighting their rarity, authenticity and value. In an introduction to the catalogue, Altman noted:

[All] the objects on exhibition are "masterpieces" inasmuch as they were made by people who mastered their craft. A few, [the 15 appearing in Table 2] however, appear to represent particular high points of artistic achievement in their class.<sup>42</sup>

Photographs of each of the 15 'masterpieces' were included in the catalogue (Figure 5), some being pictured more than once to emphasise their exceptional status. Figure 4 demonstrates the ways in which three of the 'masterpieces' were highlighted in the space of the exhibition; left to right, a figure from the Mayumbe; the Janus-faced image of the Kuta (displayed inside a circle in the background of the photograph); and, in the

TABLE 2 Details of Altman's 15 'masterpieces', as described in the exhibition catalogue. (Source: UCLA Museum and Laboratories of the Ethnic Arts, *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1965).)

Object description	UCLA accession no.
1 A 'great mask' from New Caledonia	X65-7799
2 A statue from New Caledonia	X65-5224
3 Figure from the Admiralty Islands	X65-4990
4 Ephemeral sculpture from the New Hebrides	X65-7791
5 Ephemeral sculpture from the New Hebrides	X65-8800
6 Ephemeral sculpture (Eharo mask) from Papuan Gulf, New Guinea	X65-4344
7 Mask from Cameroon	X65-5820
8 Mask from Yoruba	X65-7432
9 Figure from the Mayumbe	X65-5837
10 Figure from Mbole	X65-7486
11 Figure from Teke area	X65-5463
12 Janus-faced image of the Kuta	X65-3800
13 Mask from Tsimshian Indians	X65-4273
14 Mask from Tsimshian Indians	X65-4267
15 Mask from Tsimshian Indians	X65-8554

foreground, a figure from the admiralty Isles. Many of the objects used in press releases advertising the exhibition were also drawn from the selection of 15 objects.<sup>43</sup>

The choice of 'masterpieces' and an emphasis on specific aspects of these objects' past lives is revealing. As pointed out in the UCLA exhibition catalogue, four of the 15 had previously been owned by the Surrealists André Breton and Paul Eluard, prior to their acquisition by Wellcome agents at a Hotel Drouot sale in 1931.<sup>44</sup> This sale has been described as one of the most important auctions of 'primitive art' held in Paris between the wars.<sup>45</sup> The provenance of the objects – in particular their affiliation to known European artists and an influential art movement – undoubtedly added to the cachet of these objects for the purposes of this exhibition in UCLA, where the style of display reflected modernist art shows. For, as Errington suggests, the perceived value of objects as 'primitive art' is increased if they were once associated with Cubists, Surrealists and other modernists. She also notes how 'wooden sculptures from Oceania that could have influenced the Surrealists' are 'in the innermost core of [high primitive art]'.<sup>46</sup> It can be no coincidence that three of the four 'masterpieces' of 1965 fit these precise criteria. For example, Figure 6 depicts a figure from the Admiralty Isles ('masterpiece' 4 in Table 2 and one of the objects shown in Figure 4), as presented in the 1931 Hotel Drouot catalogue, produced for the sale of Breton and Eluard's collection.

By conforming to various norms associated with the display and interpretation of 'primitive art' as discussed above, Altman was presumably trying to emphasize that the newly arrived Wellcome collection, the recipient institution and its curators were worthy of international recognition in this field. The UCLA exhibition took place during the 'golden age of primitive art' in the United States which ran from the mid- 1950s to the mid- 1970s. This era is generally discussed by academics in relation to New York,



FIGURE 6 One of Altman's 'masterpieces' (a figure from the Admiralty Isles), as presented in the Hotel Drouot Catalogue for the sale of Breton and Eluard's collection, 2–3 July 1931, Plate XII. (Source: Wellcome Library, London.)

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rather than Los Angeles or other locations in North America.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Shelly Errington even makes an explicit link between the period of primitive art's ascendancy and the lifetime of New York's Museum of Primitive Art, open from 1957 until 1972. The exhibition therefore seems to have been an attempt to put UCLA's new museum, and Los Angeles more generally, on the map in North America, as a response to events dominated by New York up to this point. Through the careful selection and presentation of certain objects for display, in combination with a highly focused promotional campaign, foundations were laid on which to build a respected international museum with a small part of the Wellcome collection at the heart of its newly created identity. By focusing on specific pieces, brought together in an exhibition and catalogue, the curator appealed to recognizable narratives of interpretation. Thus, the Wellcome Year celebrations became embedded within particular

systems of authentication which fit well with James Clifford's art-culture system introduced earlier.

As part of this plan, the *Masterpieces* exhibition was used as an opportunity to bring together interested parties and to cultivate new donors.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the period of the collection's establishment in the early twentieth century, Wellcome and his curators had also attempted to create and cement relationships by holding events in the space of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. For instance, in 1913 the institution's newly opened exhibits were incorporated into the seventeenth International Congress of Medicine. In fact, the launch of the institution was timed specifically to coincide with this conference. In latter years, between 1928 and 1930, the museum held no fewer than five lavish receptions, hosted in conjunction with learned groups and societies. These included the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Folklore Society, with whom Wellcome and his curators hoped to build closer links. Individuals invited on such occasions included senior curators from the British Museum, Horniman Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum, as well as influential anthropologists such as Professor Malinowski.

Similarly, the UCLA exhibition of 1965 was a carefully organized networking and promotional event. Using exhibited objects as the focus, the Wellcome Year exhibition aimed to raise the profile of the new 'Museum' and university as a whole whilst also developing closer links with the Wellcome Trust in London. At the exhibition's opening, Professor John Boyd and Noel Poynter from the Wellcome Trust joined 40 other guests, including handpicked academics from the host university and beyond, curators from a range of institutions, high-level directorial staff from UCLA and press representatives. Figure 7 depicts 'the symbolic transfer of the Wellcome Collection to UCLA'; here Murphy is shown receiving a 'Wellcome' object from one of the Wellcome trustees.

The arrival of the great gift, and the new institution, were further promoted through the Wellcome Year lectures. The list of well-respected academics invited to take part in



FIGURE 7 Chancellor Murphy and John Carter of UCLA, with John Boyd of the Wellcome Trust (left to right), at the opening of the 1965 *Masterpieces* exhibition. (Source: *Wellcome News*, (Winter 1966), p. 10.)

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the series was impressive, including the British Museum's William Fagg and other contributors drawn from universities and museums across Europe and North and Central America.<sup>49</sup> The interests of those involved in the lectures covered a wide spectrum of fields. A promotional flier read as follows:

In the lecture program, internationally distinguished art historians and anthropologists will explore the role and freedom of expression of the artist among American Indian, African and Pacific Island cultures. This subject, largely unknown, will be discussed by the art critic who views the works of art of alien cultures from our own standpoint; by the archaeologist who endeavours to bring dead cultures back to life by studying their material relics; and by scholars who went to study the arts and artists among the peoples who produced and lived with the objects we now admire as art.<sup>50</sup>

By inviting academics and curators from a range of high-profile universities and museums, Murphy and Altman hoped to further align themselves, the exhibition and new institution with various influential international networks.

Altman organized the Wellcome exhibition to lock into a particular 'tournament of value'<sup>51</sup> which privileged the interpretation and presentation of 'non-Western' objects as aesthetic 'masterpieces' in line with certain modernist ideals. However, the curator's personal views seem to have been more sympathetic to ideas and approaches discussed in the Wellcome Year lectures. The latter focussed around a discussion of individual creativity and cultural contexts in relation to the analysis of 'primitive' art. William Fagg, one of the more famous contributors to the lecture series, had become a vocal advocate for the study of objects as ethnography and art.<sup>52</sup> Altman's own commentary to the series called for further research into the 'arts of specific human groups . . . . . monographs that are based on investigation of the arts and the artists among the people who produced them', thus encouraging further studies of art in its cultural contexts.<sup>53</sup> The presented papers were eventually published as *Tradition and creativity in tribal art*, a volume edited by UCLA scholar Dr Daniel Biebuyck.<sup>54</sup> This book has since been celebrated for its flexible approach to the interpretation of objects, demonstrating that, unlike the *Masterpieces* exhibition, 'anthropology has long resisted the most obvious dimensions of an autonomous art perspective, and indeed all boundary marking'.<sup>55</sup>

The two contrasting events enabled the Wellcome Year celebrations to promote the reputation of the institution in particular ways, speaking to diverse audiences with differing approaches to objects. One can also note how the exhibition and lecture series shaped the future use of the Wellcome Collection and other objects at UCLA in quite different ways. In particular, the selection of particular objects for the *Masterpieces* exhibition seems to have influenced object lists drawn up by curators at UCLA in latter years. Each of the museum's numerous publications since 1965 has included at least one 'Wellcome' piece, most of which were originally shown in 1965 (see Table 3). Some objects have been displayed or published on such a regular basis that they could be described as unofficial logos for the museum itself. These include a Yoruba mask, an Eharo mask and a Cameroon mask, the latter featuring on fliers produced for the museum since 2000 (Figure 8). All three masks were also amongst the 15 pieces singled out by Altman as special 'masterpieces'.<sup>56</sup>



TABLE 3 'Wellcome objects' in 'Fowler Museum' publications since 1965

Publication	No. of Wellcome objects
Mary Nooter Roberts and Alison Saar, <i>Body politics: the female image in Luba Art and the Sculpture of Alison Saar</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2000) Monograph series 29	17
Henry John Drewal and John Mason, <i>Beads, body and soul: art and light in the Yoruba universe</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998)	5
Elisabeth Cameron, <i>Isn't s/he a doll? Play and ritual in African sculpture</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1996)	5
Ruth Phillips, <i>Representing woman: Sande masquerades of the Mende of Sierra Leone</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995)	4
Mary Jo Arnoldi and Christine Mullen Kreamer, <i>Crowning achievements: African arts of dressing the head</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995)	6
Doran Ross, ed., <i>Visions of Africa: the Jerome L. Joss collection of African art at UCLA</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1994)	1
Doran Ross, ed., <i>Elephant: the animal and its ivory in African culture</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1992)	32
Chris Donnan, <i>Ceramics of ancient Peru</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1992)	4
Marla Berns and Barbara Rubin Hudson, <i>Essential gourds: art and history in north-eastern Nigeria</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1986)	5
Jerome Feldman, ed., <i>Eloquent dead: ancestral sculpture of Indonesia and Southeast Asia</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1985)	25
Herbert M. Cole, ed., <i>I am not myself: The art of African masquerade</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1985) Monograph series 26	8
Herbert Cole and Chike Aniakor, <i>Igbo arts: community and cosmos</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1984)	22
Barbara Birney, <i>Mosaic Image: The first twenty years of the Museum of Cultural History</i> (Los Angeles, Regents of the University of California, 1984)	12
Paula Ben-Amos and Arnold Rubin, ed., <i>The art of power, the power of art: studies in Benin iconography</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1983) Monograph series 19	25
Christin Mamiya and Eugenia C. Sumnil, <i>Hevebe: art, economics and status in the Papuan Gulf</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1982) Monograph series 18	33
Doran Ross and Timothy Garrard, eds, <i>Akan: transformations. Problems in Ghanaian art history</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1983) Monograph series 21	4
Cecelia Klein, ed., <i>Mother, worker, ruler, witch: cross-cultural images of women</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1980) Pamphlet series, Vol. 1, no. 9	5
Mary La Lone, <i>Culturas nativas de Norteamerica</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1980)	7
Marla Berns, <i>Àgbáyé: Yoruba art in context</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1979)	3

**Table 3** (Continued)

Publication	No. of Wellcome objects
Chris Donnan, <i>Mocbe Art of Peru</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1979)	14
Carolee Kennedy, <i>Art and material culture of the Zulu-speaking peoples</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1978)	3
<i>Artistic traditions of Peru</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1978)	81
G.-A.G. Stein, <i>Death's door</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1975)	5
Rocha <i>et al.</i> , <i>Beliefs, belonging...becoming</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1974)	2
G. Ellis, <i>Gods, people and animals from Mexico</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1973)	1
P. Altman, G. Ellis and R. López, <i>Image and identity: the role of the mask in various cultures</i> (Los Angeles, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1972)	2
Robert Farris Thompson, <i>Black gods and kings: Yoruba art at UCLA</i> (London, Indiana University Press, 1976)	1
G. Ellis, <i>Ralph C. Altman Memorial Exhibition, The Museum and Laboratories of Ethnic Arts and Technology</i> , UCLA, 8 April–30 June, 1968 (Los Angeles, Ethnic Art Galleries of University of California, 1968)	3
R. C. Altman <i>et al.</i> , <i>Art of New Guinea: Sepik, Maprik and the Highlands</i> (Los Angeles, Ethnic Art Galleries of University of California, 1967)	3

Staff working with the collection today remain well aware of the historical relevance of the Wellcome donation to the institution and influence of the *Masterpieces* exhibition of 1965. Employees whom I met during a visit to the now Fowler Museum in 2002 were able to pick out several of the Wellcome objects in the stores of the museum with great ease and enthusiasm (Figure 9). This simple observation testifies to the fact that specific objects from the Wellcome collection have been repeatedly displayed in exhibitions and publications. Furthermore, Wellcome material received by UCLA has a far more coherent and celebrated identity than those objects transferred by the Wellcome Trust to other, often more established institutions, including the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum, during the process of dispersal. In this respect the Wellcome collection in California is not so much 'a phantom of the museum world' as it may be in other places, where it often remains forgotten and neglected.<sup>57</sup>

As noted above, the exhibition and lecture series each spoke to diverse audiences, with differing approaches to objects. On the surface, these coexisted in harmony, and were both used to promote the new institution. However, archival evidence from the period points to the battle of wills and clashes of opinions which bubbled under the surface at UCLA concerning the use and interpretation of (Wellcome) objects which had become part of the institution's collections. Unease became increasingly evident after Altman's death in 1967. In particular, members of the anthropology and archaeology departments lobbied for a shift of focus away from modernist aesthetics, as witnessed

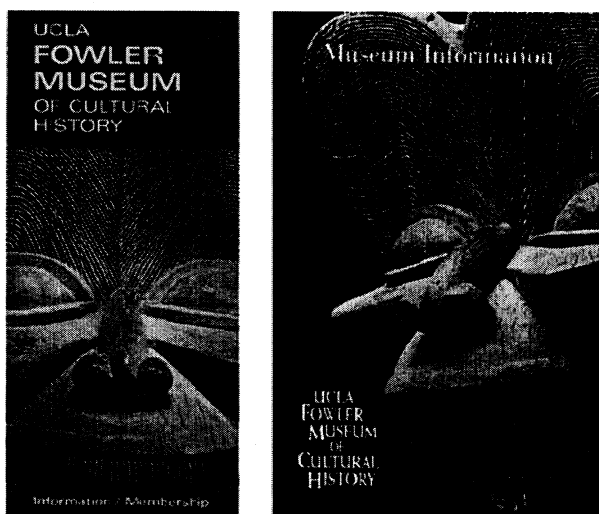


FIGURE 8 Fowler Museum promotional leaflets, 2002, featuring ‘Cameroon mask’, one of Altman’s ‘masterpieces’

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in the *Masterpieces* exhibition, towards a more cultural interpretation of material along the lines of the lectures.<sup>58</sup> Thus, whilst the *Masterpieces* exhibition undoubtedly influenced the selection of specific objects for later UCLA exhibitions and publications, the approach towards objects espoused within the Wellcome Year lecture series anticipated (and perhaps informed) the interpretive and curatorial strategies apparent at UCLA after 1965. In particular, subsequent exhibitions at UCLA placed emphasis on the context of objects’ assumed original use in practice, and their relevance to the ‘history of culture’.

This is apparent if we follow the presentation of one of the ‘masterpieces’ of 1965 – the Eharo mask introduced above and appearing in Figures 2, 5 and 9 – within two UCLA

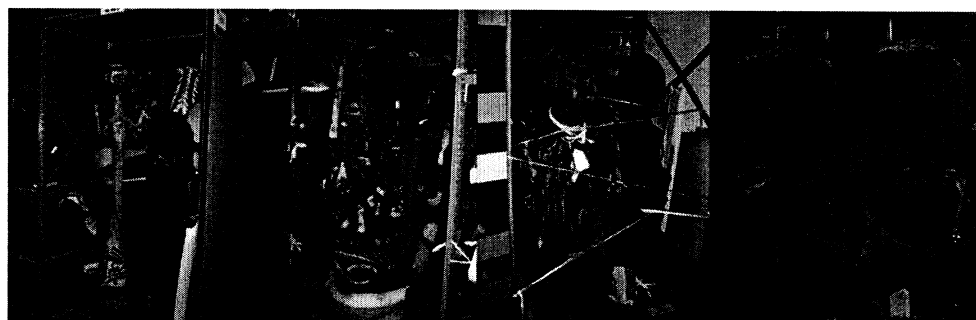


FIGURE 9 ‘Wellcome’ objects in the Fowler Museum stores, March 2002. (UCLA accession numbers, left to right: X65-4344; X65-7432; X65-5837; X65-5820. Photographed by author.)

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exhibitions. In 1972 (April–June), the mask was one of the 170 items displayed in *Image and identity*. Rather than focusing solely on aesthetics, this exhibition explored the universality and diversity of masks through time and space, emphasizing their role in practices of assuming and obscuring identities. For instance, the Eharo mask was grouped with other masks used originally to entertain audiences during ceremonies.<sup>59</sup> In 1982–83, the Eharo mask appeared again in *Hevebe: arts of the Papuan Gulf*. Within the gallery, a series of photo-murals was reproduced and displayed amongst the exhibited objects, depicting the elaborate cycle of ceremonial activities in which the objects displayed would have played an intrinsic part. The authors of the exhibition catalogue also evoked the ceremonies in which the masks were used. Museum audiences and readers were therefore encouraged to imagine the use of masks as active objects. In contrast to the 1965 *Masterpieces* exhibition, the masks were no longer positioned as mute, passive, ahistorical museum pieces devoid of cultural context or agency.

Parallels can be drawn between the *Hevebe* exhibition and calls to emphasize the active use of objects in the context of performance or lived experience. Such calls have gained momentum since the 1990s, and have been championed by scholars including John Mack and Chris Gosden. These and other academics argue that the meanings and very materiality of many objects should not or cannot be understood outside the context of active performance.<sup>60</sup> However, this shift in approach can be traced back to the volume of lectures published in 1969 which Marcus and Myers recently celebrated for its flexible and original approach to the interpretation of objects.<sup>61</sup> From this perspective, the intellectual agendas borne of the Wellcome Year lectures signalled a pivotal moment in the shifting interpretation of non-Western objects in California and elsewhere.

## Discussion and conclusions

A central aim of this paper has been to trace the stories of a set of ‘Wellcome’ objects as they moved between different historico-geographical contexts or cartographies of collection. James Clifford’s art-culture model was presented as one possible model through which to understand the shifting interpretations and strategies at work in London and Los Angeles.

As noted earlier, the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum exhibits in London were biased towards the second of Clifford’s culture zones. Here, many of the objects on display were classified as ethnographic, a label which in itself is more than merely incidental. Indeed, it played a key role in the authorization and differentiation of particular forms of knowledge, especially in the field of anthropology as presented from evolutionary perspectives in this and many other UK museums in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, the selection and presentation of objects in the 1965 *Masterpieces* exhibition was arguably skewed towards ‘connoisseurship/the art museum/market’, the first of Clifford’s zones. In their new site of re-collection, objects were no longer presented as examples of primitive medicine. The role of evolutionary theory, a key organizing

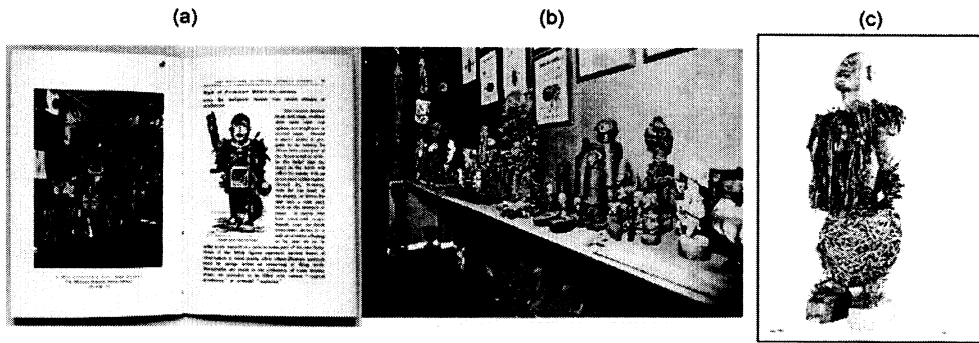


FIGURE 10 Depiction of African *nkisi* figures: (a) Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, Handbook of the Historical Medical Museum (London, Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, 1920); (b) Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, Hall of Primitive Medicine, 1913 (London, Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, 1913); (c) *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1965)

principle of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, was also roundly rejected at UCLA. Altman noted:

Primitive artefacts are certainly not primitive in the sense of being crude, unskilled or childlike; nor can they be regarded as the first rungs of the ladder of evolutionary progress towards the arts of our own civilisation. They differ so much from one another in form and content that retention of the term appears to be only justified as a matter of convenience.<sup>63</sup>

Images of exhibits in London and Los Angeles illustrate the contrasting modes of display and classificatory systems at work in the two historico-geographical contexts. For example, one could compare the exhibition of nkisi figures in these two locations. In the London museum and handbook (Figure 10a and 10b), power figures were described as ‘fetishes’ in the context of ‘primitive medicine’ and narratives of evolution. In the 1965–66 UCLA exhibition, a larger nkisi was displayed in isolation, along the lines of other ‘masterpieces’ noted earlier in the paper (see Figure 10c).

However, as I have already demonstrated, the movement of material from London to Los Angeles did not represent a clear-cut shift in the interpretation of objects. In particular, the Wellcome Year lecture series and many UCLA exhibitions (after 1970) approached non-Western material from more inclusive perspectives, appreciating their importance in terms of both ‘art’ and ‘culture’ rather than merely as aesthetic objects or ‘masterpieces’. Clifford himself points to the ambiguities and complexities of his ‘art-culture’ system, noting that ‘given’ meanings are often in flux and open to contestation. The case study explored in this paper not only highlights the fluidity and ambivalence of authentication systems but also demonstrates the influence of contingent spatial and temporal contexts. Furthermore, ‘the very frameworks in which cultural activity is to be evaluated – authenticity, continuity, and so on – have been and are developed, contested, and reformulated within increasingly diverse, overlapping spheres of participants in both art worlds and anthropology’.<sup>64</sup> Thus, attempts to navigate ‘the

translation between art-world discourse and that of anthropology . . . . [demand] a genuinely dialogical stance, and a recognition that the boundary between “art” and “anthropology” has never been very clear.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, ‘tournaments of value’ emergent in specific locations, such as London or Los Angeles, were influenced by the legacies of systems of authentication which operated in other historical-geographical contexts. For instance, notions of value attributed to certain objects by the Surrealists in Paris in the early twentieth century later became part of modernist aesthetic ideals. These dominated North America during the ‘golden age’ of primitive art, influencing how certain objects were presented in UCLA during the Wellcome Year. Thus, as objects are used in specific places and then subsequently travel between different locations, past meanings can resurface within new sites of re-use.

In London, however, the past histories and use of the ‘Surrealist’ objects had been ignored in the interim, when they were part of the Wellcome Collection of the 1930s. Whilst Wellcome’s agents purchased considerable quantities of material, described by their past owners on the Continent as ‘art’, the founder of the London-based collection did not take seriously such approaches to material culture. Neither were such pieces incorporated into the management of the collection within the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. Indeed, Wellcome categorically dismissed their value as ‘art’ objects:

There has for some years been carried out a special propaganda in Germany, France and Belgium by a group of dealers whose purpose is to excite popular interest and clamour for African Negro art, comparing it with the work of the great masters of high culture and of civilised periods not only in Europe and Asia, but also the great art work of the great pre-history masters in the caves of France, Spain etc. This mania is comparable to the Cubistic schools of so-called art.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst part of the original Wellcome collection, these objects, originally owned by art dealers and artists, were re-designated as ‘ethnographic/ethnological’ specimens, rather than as primitive art. Processes of collection and re-collection in particular locations, can therefore lead to points of connection (in 1960s Los Angeles) or indeed disconnection (in 1930s London) between other places and moments in time (in this case 1930s Paris). It is therefore necessary to recognize the potential messiness of systems of interpretation beyond the timeless historical account that Clifford’s model could be seen to present. The cartographies of collection and recollection will only then begin to be appreciated in all their complexity, with sufficient attention being paid to the web of historical and geographical contexts involved.

Furthermore, this case study highlights how objects can become artefactual signs (or indexes) of human/social agency within shifting systems or cartographies of classification. As we have seen, objects from the so-called ‘great gift’ in UCLA were displayed as ‘masterpieces’ and/or were discussed in relation to ‘new’ intellectual agendas formed as a consequence of the Wellcome Year lecture series. As a result, Altman, Murphy, their institution and associated parties were able to gain respect as new entrants on the local, regional, national and international museum scene. Thus, this is not simply the story of boxes of passive objects crossing the Atlantic ocean to be ascribed new meanings in

their new resting place. Rather, I have demonstrated how the objects themselves took on a form of agency within the context of performative exchange and re-collection within networks linking London, Los Angeles and elsewhere.<sup>67</sup>

As witnessed in this case study, the agency of the objects (as indexes) can be closely linked to their mediatory function in particular historical-geographical contexts. We have seen how the arrival of the 'Wellcome objects' in Los Angeles, and their subsequent re-collection as part of the *Masterpieces* exhibition and lecture series, exemplifies the potential mediatory role of objects in particular social processes. As Alfred Gell has indicated, objects lead 'very transactional lives', and social-object relationships 'occupy a certain biographical space, over which culture is picked up, transformed, and passed on, through a series of life-stages'.<sup>68</sup> The objects that constituted 'the great gift' were therefore part of active processes involving indexes and effects.

Moreover, earlier encounters can index objects' later biographies and their intended receptions in new destinations.<sup>69</sup> It is therefore important to establish the histories and geographies of particular indexed objects as a (messy) sequence or pattern of related actions which may have far-reaching, though often non-linear, legacies in other times and spaces. I have demonstrated how different aspects of objects' changing relational histories, at work in London or Paris, have played a role in their reception in another time and place, namely Los Angeles in the 1960s. Thus, collected objects play active roles within *ongoing* systems of negotiation and change in different space-times, and are part of the mutual constitution of biographies involving associated people, place and objects. As Henare suggests:

Accumulations [of objects in museums] were built up across time, through sequences of exchange, the vestiges of which have arrived (often purposefully) in the present. To understand them we must follow the movements of things, trace the unfolding of their lives across time, and examine the histories that brought them into our presence and into museums, the stratigraphy of contemporary collections.<sup>70</sup>

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mona Domosh, Felix Driver and the three anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also very grateful to members of staff at the Fowler Museum, UCLA University Archives and Wellcome Trust Library. My PhD was funded by the ESRC (award R42200134247).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> R. Duclos, 'The cartographies of collecting', in S. Knell, ed., *Museums and the future of collection* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999), pp. 49–50.

<sup>2</sup> A diverse set of papers presented at the IGU in Glasgow, 2004, on 'Geographies of collecting' reconfirmed how and why space and place matter to this field of study.

- <sup>3</sup> The few existing studies which refer to the collection include H. Turner, *Henry Wellcome: the man, his collection and his legacy* (London, Wellcome Trust Heinemann Educational, 1980); G. Skinner, 'Sir Henry Wellcome's Museum for the Science of History', *Medical History* 30, (1986), pp 383–418; J. Symons, *The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine: a short history* (London, Wellcome Trust, 1993); R. Rhodes-James, *Henry Wellcome* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1994); K. Arnold and D. Olsen, eds, *Medicine man: the forgotten museum of Henry Wellcome* (London, British Museum Press, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> S. Pearce, 'Collections and collecting,' in Knell, *Museums*, pp. 17–21.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Bal, 'Telling objects: a narrative perspective on collecting,' in J. Elsner and R. Cardinal, eds, *Cultures of collecting* (London, Reaktion, 1994), pp. 97–115.
- <sup>6</sup> For more on the dispersal see G. Russell, 'The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum's dispersal of non-medical material, 1936–1983', *Museums journal* 62 (1986), supplement, S3–S29.
- <sup>7</sup> Much of the Wellcome collection's 'ethnographic' material was gradually dispersed from 1936 onwards. However, a proportion of the collection remained in the hands of the Wellcome Trust in the early 1960s. Other than three UK institutions – the British Museum, the Science Museum and Pitt Rivers – UCLA received the largest amount of material classified as 'ethnographic'. An initial shipment of 15 000 Wellcome 'ethnographic' objects arrived at UCLA in 1965. The remaining objects were transported to the university the following year.
- <sup>8</sup> Catalogue details: UCLA Museum and Laboratories of the Ethnic Arts, *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1965).
- <sup>9</sup> J. Clifford, *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 222.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 223.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 224.
- <sup>12</sup> G. Stocking, 'Essays on museums and material culture', in G. Stocking, ed., *Objects and others: essays on museums and material culture* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 6.
- <sup>13</sup> A. Gell, *Art and agency: an anthropological theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 16–17.
- <sup>16</sup> This aspect of Murphy's biography serves as an interesting parallel to Wellcome, whose interest in 'primitive' peoples, objects and tropical medicine strengthened during his travels in South America, prior to his move to London.
- <sup>17</sup> B. Birney, *The mosaic image: the first twenty years of the Museum of Cultural History* (Los Angeles, Regents of the University of California, 1984) p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Foreword written by Murphy in G. Ellis, *Ralph C. Altman Memorial Exhibition, the Museum and Laboratories of Ethnic Arts and technology, UCLA, 8 April–30 June* (Los Angeles, Ethnic Art Galleries of University of California, 1968).
- <sup>19</sup> Altman is listed in the course guide for 1956 as teaching modules on 'primitive', 'ancient' and 'folk art', in the context of 'non-western cultures'.
- <sup>20</sup> Altman had already proved himself to be a competent curator when working for Claremont University Southern California and Washington State Museum, Seattle. He had organized two exhibitions at Scripps College, Claremont – 'the California Exhibition of North American Indian arts' in 1950, and a local exhibition of African art in 1951. He had also been a guest curator at the Washington State Museum, Seattle.
- <sup>21</sup> *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA*, p. 6. One aim of the 1928 Royal Commission referred to here was to discuss options for the future of the British Museum's ethnographic holdings. As the founder of a very large collection of ethnographic objects



- himself, Wellcome was called to give evidence as a witness. Wellcome's testament is one of the few direct public statements detailing his motivations and intentions for the collection.
- <sup>22</sup> 20 Dec. 1965; UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148.
- <sup>23</sup> Two major acquisitions to date had been as follows. 1963 saw the purchase of 3 500 Congolese objects accumulated by Jean-Pierre Hallet, collected from the Lega, Hutu and Tutsi cultures of the Congo basin between 1948 and 1960, and supported by good documentation. In 1964, the University received materials from Nubian excavations of Professor Alexander Badawy.
- <sup>24</sup> Birney, *The mosaic image*, pp. 4–5.
- <sup>25</sup> Cited in an obituary, 'Former chancellor remembered as Renaissance man: hundred honor memory of Franklin Murphy', *UCLA today*, (22 July 1994), p. 12.
- <sup>26</sup> Quote by Murphy, cited in *UCLA Magazine*, summer 1994, p. 15.
- <sup>27</sup> G. Horne, *Fire this time: the Watts uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995).
- <sup>28</sup> As demonstrated in an image from *UCLA today* (22 July 1994), featuring the two men standing side by side.
- <sup>29</sup> Murphy's commitment to public art was perhaps most evident in the creation of the Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA, dedicated in 1967. In an obituary published in the *UCLA Magazine* (Sept. 1994), Karen Mack wrote: 'Murphy understood that assembling artistic and scholarly treasures meant building strong bridges between the university and the philanthropic community.' Murphy's interest in and influence on the national arts community grew over the years, through connections with (amongst others) the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Ahmanson Foundation, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the National Gallery of Art and the J. Paul Getty Trust.
- <sup>30</sup> Alfred Frankenstein, the distinguished critic of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, quoted in Frierman's obituary of Ralph Altman (1909–67), reproduced in Ellis, *Ralph C. Altman Memorial Exhibition*, p. 9.
- <sup>31</sup> The change was from 'Laboratory of Ethnic Art and Technology' to the 'Museum and Laboratories of Ethnic Art and Technology'.
- <sup>32</sup> Letter from Murphy to President Clark Kerr, Berkeley Campus, 17 Aug. 1965; UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148.
- <sup>33</sup> Letter dated 15 Oct. 1965, written to Vice-President Harry Wellman, Berkeley Campus; UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148.
- <sup>34</sup> Museum staff I met at UCLA continue to use such highly positive terms and to express their continued gratitude to the Wellcome Trust, though none of these employees was working at the time of the transfer.
- <sup>35</sup> Subdivisions of material within each of the broad 8 geographical zones were generally defined in terms of the designated country of origin (e.g. Nigeria or New Hebrides) and, where identifiable, an object's allotted 'tribal' or 'cultural' affiliation (e.g. for Nigeria, Ibibio, Yoruba). Common 'types' of object were then displayed together within these subsections. In the case of the New Guinea displays, one of the sections included a cluster of material from the Papuan Gulf Elema. Object types shown together for this section were Eharo masks followed by war shields and spirit boards.
- <sup>36</sup> E. Schildkrout and C. Keim, eds, *The scramble for art in central Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); J. Mack, 'Fetish? Magic figures in Central Africa', in A. Shelton, ed., *Fetishism: visualising power and desire* (London, Lund Humphries, 1995), pp. 53–66; J. Mack, 'Justified by deeds: the borders of magic and medicine', in K. Arnold, M. Baldwin and J. Mack, eds, *Abracadabra: the magic of medicine: an exhibition at the Wellcome*

- Institute for the History of Medicine* (London, Wellcome Trust, 1996), pp. 7–16.; B. Geoffroy-Schneiter, *Primal arts: Africa, Oceania and the Southeast Asian islands* (London, Thames & Hudson, 2000).
- <sup>37</sup> See S. Errington, *The death of authentic primitive art and other tales of progress* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), p. 91.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.
- <sup>39</sup> See E. Court, 'Africa on display: exhibiting art by Africans', in E. Barker, ed., *Contemporary cultures of display* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1999), p. 152. Indeed, the 1965 exhibition resembled certain modes of display showcased in *Art/Artifact*, an exhibition curated by Susan Vogel which toured a number of North American museums between 1988 and 1990 and examined 'problems' associated with displaying African objects. In particular, the UCLA exhibits incorporated 'simple white space with objects displayed purely for their formal qualities' and also resembled 'the Art Museum, presenting isolated "Masterpieces"' (*ibid.* p. 155). See also Vogel's own description of the exhibition: S. Vogel, 'Always true to the object, in our fashion', in I. Karp and S. Lavine, eds, *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), pp. 191–204.
- <sup>40</sup> The presentation of objects in the catalogue resembled *Masterpieces of African Art Exhibition at the Brooklyn Institution of Arts and Science* (Brooklyn Institution of Arts and Sciences, 1954).
- <sup>41</sup> Such as: W. Fagg, 'On the nature of African art', *Manchester Lit. and Phil. Soc., Mem. And Proceedings* 94 (1952–53); W. Fagg, 'The Allman collection of Benin antiquities', *Man* 53 (1953), p. 201; W. Fagg, *Nigerian images* (London, 1963).
- <sup>42</sup> *Masterpieces from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection at UCLA*, p. 7.
- <sup>43</sup> Appearing in 'A prime collection of primitives', *Herald Examiner* (30 Jan. 1966) were: the Janus-faced image of the Kuta, one of the Tsimshian masks (no. 15) and the mask from Cameroon. The Mayumbe figure appeared in 'Treasure of ethnic art at UCLA', *Los Angeles Times Calendar* (5 Dec. 1965), and the Yoruba mask appeared in 'Great Wellcome collection of ethnic art given to UCLA by Wellcome trustees', *UCLA from the chancellor's desk* 8 (Jan. 1966).
- <sup>44</sup> Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 11 in Table 2.
- <sup>45</sup> L. Tythacott, 'Souvenirs of the travelling surrealists', in M. Hitchcock and K. Teague, eds, *Souvenirs: the material culture of tourism* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000), pp. 72–78; E. Maurer, 'Dada and Surrealism', in W. Rubin, ed., *Primitivism in 20th century art: affinity of the tribal and the modern* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1984), pp. 535–93.
- <sup>46</sup> Errington, *The death of authentic primitive art*, p. 98.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; Clifford, *The predicament of culture*.
- <sup>48</sup> In a letter to Murphy dated 3 Nov. 1964, for example, Altman notes: 'Mrs Webster Plass of Philadelphia, a great collector of African sculpture and a friend and patron of William Fagg of the British Museum, is a potential donor to be "cultivated". I have known her for years, and so has Dr Biebuyck.' Altman anticipated at an early stage that this collector should be invited to the celebration. UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148.
- <sup>49</sup> These included Dr A.A. Gerbands of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, who gave a lecture on 'The concept of style in non-western art' on 14 Jan. 1966. William Fagg of the British Museum presented a paper on 'The African artist' on 10 Dec. 1965. Fagg was a celebrated figure in the field of African art, writing many frequently referenced books on the subject, four of which were cited in the 1965 catalogue. Dr Jean Guiart of the Institut Français d'Océanie, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, gave a lecture on 'The artist as an individual in New Caledonian society'. Two of Guiart's books were cited in the 1965 exhibition catalogue. Ignacio Bernal,

Director of the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Chapultepec, Mexico, presented 'Individual artistic creativity in Pre-Columbian Mexico' on 11 Mar. 1966. Two speakers represented East Coast institutions: Robert Goldwater, Director of the Museum of Art, New York City, and Professor of Art, New York University, and Robert Thompson, Professor of Art at Yale University. Goldwater gave the opening lecture on 6 Dec. 1965, 'Judgements of primitive art, 1905–1965'. Thompson gave a lecture entitled 'Abatan: a master potter of the Egbado Yoruba' on 11 Feb. 1966. In 1971 Thompson authored an important UCLA publication, *Black gods and kings: Yoruba art at UCLA* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1971), in connection with the then Museum of Cultural History, UCLA. Four panellists contributing to a debate closing the symposium series were drawn from UCLA (Altman and Biebuyck), from Berkeley (Dr William Bascom, Director of the Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology and Professor of Anthropology, UC Berkeley) and from Indiana University (Roy Sieber, Professor of Art).

<sup>50</sup> UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148.

<sup>51</sup> This term was first coined by Arjun Appadurai in *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> When Fagg retired from the British Museum's Museum of Mankind, he took a post at Christie's, appraising objects for the 'tribal art' market. After his appointment, text describing objects in sales catalogues began to reflect Fagg's particular approach. See M. Satov, 'Catalogues, collectors, curators: the tribal art market and anthropology', in J. MacClancy, ed., *Contesting art: art, politics and identity in the museum world* (Oxford, Berg, 1997), pp. 215–41.

<sup>53</sup> R. Altman, 'Commentary', in D. Biebuyck, ed., *Tradition and creativity in tribal art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), p. 187.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> G. Marcus and F. Myers, eds, *The traffic in things: refiguring art and anthropology* (London, University of California Press, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> The Yoruba mask appears in at least five other UCLA publications, four of which were associated with exhibitions also including the object: Thompson, *Black gods and kings*; M. Berns, *Àgbáyé: Yoruba art in context* (Los Angeles UCLA Museum of Cultural History Pamphlet Series, vol. 1, no. 4); D. Ross and T. Garrard, eds, *Akan: transformations problems in Ghanaian art history*, (Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, 1983); H. Drewal and J. Mason, *Beads, body and soul: art and light in the Yoruba universe* (Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998); H. Cole, ed., *I am not myself: The art of African masquerade* (Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1985). The Eharo mask has appeared in at least three other publications: P. Altman, G. Ellis and R. López, *Image and identity: the role of the mask in various cultures* (Los Angeles, UCLA, 1972); C.J. Mamiya and E.C. Sumnil, *Hevebe: art, economics and status in the Papuan Gulf* (Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, Monograph series no. 18, 1982); Birney, *The mosaic image*.

<sup>57</sup> This phrase was used by curators of *Medicine man: the forgotten museum of Henry Wellcome* (June–Nov. 2003). They describe the neglected status of the Wellcome Collection as follows: 'Scattered as ghostly fragments that have settled in hundreds of institutions, where, except in two or three large repositories, barely a few scholarly keepers with good memories can recall their origins, the Wellcome Museum has all but been forgotten – a phantom of the museum world': Arnold and Olsen, *Medicine Man*, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> As noted in correspondence files from the UCLA University Archives, Box 93, file 148. Professor Delougaz, the Near Eastern archaeologist appointed director of the institution in 1970, also encouraged this shift in curatorial style.

<sup>59</sup> According to the text, 'the Eharo mask of the Papuans provides entertaining interludes between sacred initiation rites, yet the masks are made under the same conditions of secrecy

- as the ritual ones' (Altman *et al.*, *Image and identity*, p. 13). A variety of 'purposes' for which masks are used were also explored: 'concealment', 'social control', 'metamorphosis', 'physical protection', 'spirit manipulation', 'curing', 'fertility', 'power' and 'death, burial and perpetuation'. Other more general themes examined masks in relation to their 'perspective in time', their wide 'geographic distribution', 'materials' and 'form and western response.'
- <sup>60</sup> J. Mack, ed., *Masks: the art of expression* (London, British Museum Press, 1994); C. Gosden and Y. Marshall, 'The cultural biography of objects', *World archaeology* 31 (1999), pp. 169–78.
- <sup>61</sup> G. Marcus and F. Myers, eds, *The traffic in things: refiguring art and anthropology* (London, University of California Press, 1995), p. 7.
- <sup>62</sup> A. Coombes, *ReInventing Africa: museums, material culture and popular imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1994).
- <sup>63</sup> From an introduction to 'Primitive arts', an exhibition curated by Altman in 1962. Cited in Ellis, *Ralph C. Altman Memorial Exhibition*, p. 10.
- <sup>64</sup> Marcus and Myers, *The traffic in things*, p. 35.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.
- <sup>66</sup> Wellcome Archives: WA/HMM/RP/MAL/6, 9 Jan. 1930.
- <sup>67</sup> For a further discussion of objects, performance and institutional exchange (in relation to repatriation), see F. Myers, 'Social agency and the cultural value(s) of the art object', *Journal of material culture* 9 (2004), pp. 203–11.
- <sup>68</sup> Gell, *Art and agency*, p. 11.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.
- <sup>70</sup> A. Henare, *Museums, anthropology and imperial exchange* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 9.