Review Article
Old Wounds and New Science: Indigeneity, Art, and Anthropology

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Janet Catherine Berlo, *Not Native American Art: Fakes, Replicas, and Invented Traditions,* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2023, hardback, ebook £31, pp.331

Jeffrey Gibson (ed), *An Indigenous Present*, New York: Big NDN Press, Delmonico Books, DAP, 2023, hardback, £67, pp.447

Cressida Fforde, Hilary Howes, Gareth Knapman and Lyndon Ormond-Parker (eds), *Repatriation, Science, and Identity,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2024, hardback, ebook, £130, pp.269

Emma Kowal, *Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023, paperback, £23.99, pp.248

Introduction

Conflicts around repatriation and decolonization have spurred museum efforts to recognize Indigenous peoples and the harm done to them by white others (I deliberately render as 'other' empires that boasted of conquest and genocide). The intensity and complexity of these controversies has resulted in a spate of books about Indigeneity, art, science, and anthropology in the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere. The year 2023 was particularly rich in this respect, and my goal is to draw attention to the distinct and diverse perspectives in several prominent books.

While I do not specialize in Indigeneity and museums, and I am not Indigenous myself, I bring to this discussion my knowledge of museology as well as a keen commitment to decolonization and inclusion in museums.

Arts and Authenticity

Not Native American Art by Janet Catherine Berlo plunges into the complexities of Native American art as it is produced, sold, used in rituals, and/or exhibited in homes, museums, and trading posts. The history of replicating such art for tourists and other non-Native people goes back to the eighteenth century, and objects' stories change as they are passed on. Berlo's analyses question not only what is authentic but also what is traditional. She demonstrates how neither is a static concept, and she reminds us of the limits of essentialism.

Berlo notes that not all duplication is intended to deceive. Copies are made for educational purposes (for instance, to enable study of an object when the original is fragile) or to display when an object is repatriated. Hobbyists replicate items to learn intricate artistic techniques and to demonstrate their appreciation of Native cultures. Digital technologies that produce close copies of items are also implicated in the ways in which Native American art is deployed as a global commodity, recreated in places as distant from the USA as Indonesia. Some of the reproductions are cheap and immediately recognizable; others are not exact replicas but rather in the style of Indigenous artefacts. It is beyond the scope of Berlo's book to consider the effects of one Indigenous group crafting goods from other Indigenous cultures, but this would be an interesting discussion. What does it mean to Indonesian artists when they can sell more reproductions of works by Native Americans than carvings of their own? How do Oaxacans who imitate Navajo rugs interpret their role in a global commodities exchange?

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Does this involvement stifle local cultures or create innovative hybrid possibilities?

Berlo conceptualizes Native American arts broadly, considering not only material objects, but also dances, clothing, songs, and other genres. This allows her to address the issue of Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples having to perform themselves for others as well as the perversities that occur when non-Natives perform in traditional genres such as hoop dances. Appropriation forms a central theme of her discussion.

The book has useful implications for other populations that have seen their art forms reproduced and sold globally – for instance, masks from certain parts of Africa or Egyptian 'papyri'. Moreover, Berlo's text is deeply relevant to museums which have been founded as or become the repositories of Native American arts. Many objects must now be repatriated, even as museums attempt to collect examples of work by emerging and established Native American artists. Berlo is quick to point out that 'museum experts can see what they want to see when offered objects unlike any known before' (40), especially when replicas are made by Native Americans for collectors and curators partly as a tactic to reduce looting.

Berlo's examples demonstrate her skill as a storyteller as she evokes positive and negative characteristics of re-enactors, hobbyists, WPA (Works Progress Administration) workers revitalizing Native traditions, and, well, crooks. Her rich narratives allow readers to perceive the twists and turns of appropriation and re-creation so they can reach their own judgments, and in doing so, the book may yield an understanding of why so many Native Americans accept Berlo's outsider scholarship.

Berlo is extremely careful to show readers nuances and complications to balance her argument; nevertheless, she effectively conveys the opinion that much reproduction of Native American art by non-Native Americans is harmful, because it may treat custom and tradition lightly; take work away from skilled Native American artisans; defraud purchasers and exhibitionary institutions; propagate false representations and romanticized nostalgia for past Indigenous cultures; or serve non-Native political, cultural, or spiritual agendas. I occasionally wished that she took a clearer, stronger stand, for instance, in analyzing the appeal of Native American cultures to Germans, ranging from readers of Karl May's popular fictions to Nazis in the 1940s and working-class individuals today. According to Berlo, the Nazis adopted what became the swastika from Native American culture; stories of Native American warriors and essentialized notions of Native American purity resounded with them as well. Yet the irony that supporters of a regime that conducted widespread slaughter 'embraced' (76) a culture that was itself the target of genocide is hard to miss. After the war, US servicemen brought imitations of Native American culture to Europe with them, perpetuating certain Europeans' fascination with the Indigenous people of the Americas. Some European hobbyists have become so skilled in Native American techniques that 'contemporary Czech quillwork ... has even been sold as nineteenth-century originals in Wyoming and elsewhere' (76).

Berlo sometimes steps aside when a stronger stance might be warranted:

> The need to replay the ennobling bits of Native American cultural history, with white men wearing the garb of the people their ancestors vanquished, suggests the working out of a deeply held cultural trauma, a topic beyond the scope of this book (125).

I would argue that understanding this 'cultural trauma' is central to analyzing the impulse to recreate, replicate, and even steal others' cultural productions. As she says in closing the book, no matter the intent, an effort by non-Native Americans to reproduce their art 'is never liberatory. It lacerates. It repeatedly reopens old wounds' (235).

While Jeffrey Gibson's *An Indigenous Present* addresses 'old wounds', it is immensely liberatory, an exciting and innovative venture into the work of Native American artists today. Native American voices are primary – this is an art book with essays interspersed throughout. The extent to which Gibson has foregrounded Indigenous peoples is evident when one considers that the title page does not appear until page 35, preceded by stunning original illustrations by a range of artists, some of whom are well-known, such as Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and James Luna, and others of whom are emerging. Among the artists featured later in the book are Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Brian Jungen, Erica Lord, and several collectives. Gibson's iconic beaded punching bags are not included.

Gibson challenges readers to think of Indigeneity in new ways; he asks, 'What do you think critique looks like for Native and Indigenous artists' (275)? Gibson presents the book as a 'counter example to earlier publications', which he perceives as being 'composed of academic essays illustrated with artworks by Indigenous makers' (43-4). Even the book's layout interrupts common ways of reading. On pages with images, artists' names are printed vertically, one letter at a time, and the table of contents mixes vertical and horizontal elements, disorienting readers accustomed to a purely horizontal text.

For him, the project began as a 'dream of community' (41), drawing together four themes: humour, materials and materiality, the body, and sound (44). Humour often emerges in reappropriations and irony. The New Red Order collective offers a mock *New York Times Magazine* cover, here titled *The New Red Times Magazine*, with a vista of the city upside down and a caption: 'Tired of living on stolen land? Give it back' (29). In Jamie Okuma's *Elk Boots* (20), Native American beading is applied to Giuseppe Zanotti boots with spike heels and elevated platforms. The emphasis on materials is further apparent in the range of media deployed by the artists – clay, beads, Nike Air Jordans, oil and acrylic paints, wood, steel, copper, and more. Techniques vary widely as well, including photography, LED, videography, painting, and sculpture. This panoply contributes to the joy in perusing the book. At the same time, the human body becomes both medium and message as when James Luna places himself in a display case in his *Artifact Piece* or when Rebecca Belmore offers *Fringe* (336-7), an image of a woman lying on her side with a row of stitches diagonally across her back, each stitch ending in a fringe of red beads that resembles a rivulet of blood. Inevitably, perhaps, the least effective part of the book is its treatment of sound, as videos and performances are reduced to stills.

The essays and interviews are wonderfully readable and offer strong theoretical commentaries on the content of the artworks. Philip DeLoria, speaking of the ways in which European and American anthropologists have used Indigenous items as 'found objects' for their work, asserts that 'the "modern", in its classic world-historical sense, rests upon a foundational act of definitional categorical, and heuristic violence, a naming of the Indigenous as a marker of *lack*' (165). Based on this point, DeLoria is quick to indicate that the concepts of modernity and primitivism are inventions, but he claims that the genius of Indigenous artists has been to adapt qualities of modernism for their own purposes: 'more than survival, more than resistance: a core continuity of wit, irony, fearlessness, endurance, and future-forward possibility' (166).

The liberation expressed by artists appearing in the volume derives from their ability to turn their art works into forms of criticism (175) devoid of jargon and deadly accretions of theoretical language. But it is also what Layli Long Soldier terms 'a freedom from denial' (218), an escape from the myriad ways in which white 'civilization' has ignored or disparaged Indigenous culture, trying to make it fit into its own paradigms. As Candice Hopkins remarks, NAGPRA (the US Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) and similar efforts promote particular notions of ownership, inheritance, and preservation. Alluding to Jose Esteban Muñoz's theories of the 'otherwise' and 'disidentification', Hopkins proposes a theory of 'repatriation otherwise' (275), involving Indigenous approaches to creativity and criticism, such as those seen in this book. Gazing at the art works themselves in the book's large, clear illustrations disrupts traditional modes of interpretation; Jarrett Martineau notes that 'Indigeneity is the noise to colonialism's signal' (346). The images comment on one another, as when new takes on Native American masks face each other or photographs bright with colour occupy opposite pages. In short, the book itself becomes a work of Indigenous art, not noise but powerful expression that finds its own signal.

Indigeneity and the Disciplines of Science and Anthropology

In contrast to the visual and verbal freshness of Gibson's book and the engaging storytelling in Berlo's volume, *Repatriation, Science, and Identity* is a more traditional scholarly collection of articles. The authors of the chapters demonstrate the ways in which scientific techniques ranging from craniometry to DNA sampling are used to identify the provenance of unidentified human remains so they can be repatriated. This makes the book pertinent to the many museums

and other institutions holding such remains. The primary focus is on the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Oceania. Some chapters provide historical analyses of the development and persistence of certain techniques, while others address the ethics of informed consent and the difficulties related to identification. Central questions are intellectually significant: what is consent? How do different peoples define the past? What is science? Is science scientific? Discussions address the questionable means by which consent has been obtained in the past in addition to the use of biological material collected for other purposes in identification. Articles also cover the mingling of old and new techniques, as in software that works with craniometry. The kind of commodification that Berlo describes also comes into play, because one of the reasons skulls and other remains cannot be easily identified is that they have been sold repeatedly. Moreover, readers are told over and over about the strange and dangerous persistence of craniometry as a tool for measurement and identification, even when it has been shown to be at best fallible and at worst useless. This undermines the credibility of what passes for Western science and draws attention to Indigenous ways of knowing.

The second chapter, 'Indigenous Bodies Are Not Your Property: Restoring the Authority of Indigenous Consent Restores Justice,' by Honor Keeler, begins with an Indigenous story about gender, ownership, and consent. The argument of the chapter is that Western systems continue to treat Indigenous peoples – living or dead – as property. This relates not only to human remains but also to the bodily integrity of Indigenous women and their right to freedom from interpersonal violence (20). This connection is eye-opening, as is Keeler's section on the many harms wrought on Indigenous peoples by those who oppose repatriation. Framing the issues as ones relating to human rights highlights their importance.

The authors are, for the most part, rightly critical of approaches that have been taken, and innovative practices receive scant mention. The most successful chapter is '"We are Taking It Back to Our Homeland; We Are Free to Move On": Repatriation of Blood Samples to the Galiwin'ku Community' by Azure Hermes, Sharon Huebener, Simon Easteal, Lyndon Ormond-Parker, Alice McCarthy, Rosemary Gundjarranbuy Garrawurra, and Ross Mandi Wunungmurra. Indigenous voices are most prominently included in the chapter, and while their project was successful, the scientists note that the effort was 'long, logistically difficult, time-consuming and expensive. The substantial challenges involved in conducting research in this way are not easily recognized or rewarded within a biomedical environment' (207). But the benefits are many: 'enhancing the understanding of cultural differences, righting past wrongs, contributing to the cultural life of the community, influencing institutional decision-makers and improving the conduct of research' (207). This is especially notable in a world where universities, scientific organizations, and exhibitionary institutions receive resources for research, while Indigenous communities do not (251).

A strength of the book is the way chapters refer to each other, so that the whole builds and coheres. Chapters are well organized, and many of the contributors identify as Indigenous themselves. As a scholarly work, it is carefully researched, thorough, nuanced – and occasionally tedious. I only wish it were riskier. Despite the inclusion of so many Indigenous authors, the text sometimes feels distant from the lived realities of tribal communities, and their losses seem muffled. Certain chapters lack the immediacy of the voices in the two volumes discussed above. Perhaps this is because the emphasis is on Western science; perhaps it is because the text is a bit ingrown – Cressida Forde, the first editor, is also series editor, and other editors of the book are named as authors of several chapters each.

Emma Kowal's monograph, *Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia*, addresses some of the same issues and historical/scientific wrongs. Kowal's approach is less traditional. It is grounded in anecdotes which serve as springboards for the development of intricate and sophisticated theory. Each of the six chapters focuses on a particular topic, such as the use of hair samples in identification; the roles of Indigenous peoples who appear 'white' in the building of the Australian nation; the use of Indigenous cold tolerance in scientific experiments; and the problems with moving from postcolonial to decolonial methods of museum display. Chapters refer to each other, but the thread of an argument is occasionally lost among the complexities brought to light. At times, the text is digressive, and I found it difficult to follow which events in different chapters were contemporaneous with each other. However, readers who are willing to move in and out of the text will be helped by a timeline

of events and a list of 'dramatis personae' in the appendices.

Kowal's thesis is that the relationships among anthropology, science, and Indigeneity are 'haunted' in two ways. On the one hand, the 'possibility of Indigenous biological differences and the scientific efforts to demonstrate them ... are lingering, recurring, intangible, melancholy, evocative, troubling, and discomforting' (19). At the same time, science itself is haunted by the ghosts of past theories, experiments, collections, and fieldwork. Kowal expands on this idea by drawing on theories of the uncanny and repression, specifically, the elision of 'histories of violent dispossession across the continent' (10). These notions are exemplified in the anecdotes, as when Kowal explains that early theories that Indigenous groups would become extinct reappeared in later fears that the intermingling of races would lead to the disappearance of Indigenous peoples or, alternatively, the disappearance of 'whiteness'. Allusions to the Stolen Generation and the White Australian policy bolster this discussion.

How are Kowal's analyses relevant to collecting and exhibitionary institutions? The descriptions of the gathering of biological collections for scientific study and the frequent absence of Indigenous consent are clearly pertinent to sites that hold human remains; similarly, descriptions of best practices are helpful. Even these can involve complexities, however, as when Museums Victoria's prominent repatriation efforts were coupled with the transfer of additional remains to the institution from other sites (145). The final chapter's discussion of a statue of Baldwin Spencer once situated in a museum case, essentially reversing relations of settler-spectator to Indigenous-object to be viewed, is fascinating. The statue's transfer from exhibition to increasingly restricted levels of storage is shown to accompany the transition from a postcolonial approach imbued with irony about white settlers to a decolonial present which centres Indigeneity and moves settlers to the margins. Yet Kowal notes that even this movement has its disadvantages, rendering postcolonialism itself a ghost, a kind of knowledge that is itself marginalized. Such twists of thought in Kowal's analyses are always thought-provoking.

Conclusions

Kowal's ability to hold opposing ideas in play and to demonstrate contradictions recalls the questions about authenticity and authority raised in Berlo's book. Kowal's remarks about the irony of postcolonialism and its continuing referentiality to settler culture are visualized in some of the works in Gibson's beautiful book. And of course, her analysis of the evolution of biological sampling techniques and the development of genomic theory complements Fforde et al.'s volume.

In 2024, readers must wonder why so many of the scholars writing on Indigeneity (including myself) are not themselves Indigenous. At the same time, this observation keys into some of the most complex ideas voiced in these four books, the ways in which repatriation initiatives and other efforts to benefit Indigenous peoples are haunted, to use Kowal's expression. They bring scholars, museums, and community members back around to troubling questions of how to define Indigeneity and identify Indigenous peoples without relying on essentialism or violating bodily integrity; how and to whom objects and human remains should be entrusted; who has the authority to represent Indigenous peoples; and so forth. The expression 'nothing about us without us', while inspiring, becomes subject to discourse and disquisition when 'us' is self-defined but also dynamic, and 'nothing' is revealed to be very much 'something', even if it has historically been repressed or rendered invisible. It takes bold artistic visions like those in Gibson's book to assert the power of Indigenous expression in a time when scientific genomics and the nature of anthropology continue to be mired in debate.