

# Speaking For or About Others? Evolving Ethnological Perspectives

Ann Lane Hedlund

Last April, three University of Colorado students in the Fine Arts Department—Laura Shurley, Melanie Yazzie, and Kenn Yazzie, all Navajos—mounted an exhibition in which they satirized the common public misperceptions of Indian people and Indian arts and crafts. In the gallery they put forth their own unique identities as emerging artists who draw from and react to their native roots. They confronted viewers with reproductions of billboards, heaps of cheap souvenirs sold at roadside stands, and stereotypes from books and photographs. They also created their own self-conscious images to express themselves—“broken’ photo-transparencies of themselves set against maps of their home regions—to symbolize the transitional stage between their native culture and that of the dominant Anglo society” (Alan 1992). They used other contemporary photographs and both modern and traditional Navajo music too. One came away, according to one reviewer, feeling the ironic wit of their juxtapositions and, especially, the bite of their experiences as “the other”—as American Indian youths, as students, as artists. One of the press photos shows the three sitting, arms and legs akimbo, in front of a billboard that says “SEE NAVAJO RUG WEAVER AT INDIAN GALLERIA.”<sup>1</sup> In the same photo, a smaller sign with an arrow pointing to the three seated artists says, “INDIANS, INDIANS, THREE LITTLE INDIANS.”

In contrast, an exhibition at the Denver Art Museum, *Contemporary Navajo Weaving: The Gloria F. Ross Collection*, four months later and thirty-five miles away, was not a self-conscious statement made by Navajo artists themselves. Women from the reservation did not select and organize the works on display. They did not choose to make an exhibit although they agreed to be in one. They were consulted, listened to, quoted, photographed and filmed, but—for many reasons (especially time and money, which often tend to submerge acknowledgment of other priorities like

institutional tradition and lack of sensitivity)—their involvement extended only to responding to proposals by the exhibit’s Anglo curator, me, and to making suggestions. The exhibit was engineered by an anthropologist working with an art museum; it does not pretend in any way to be a native product.

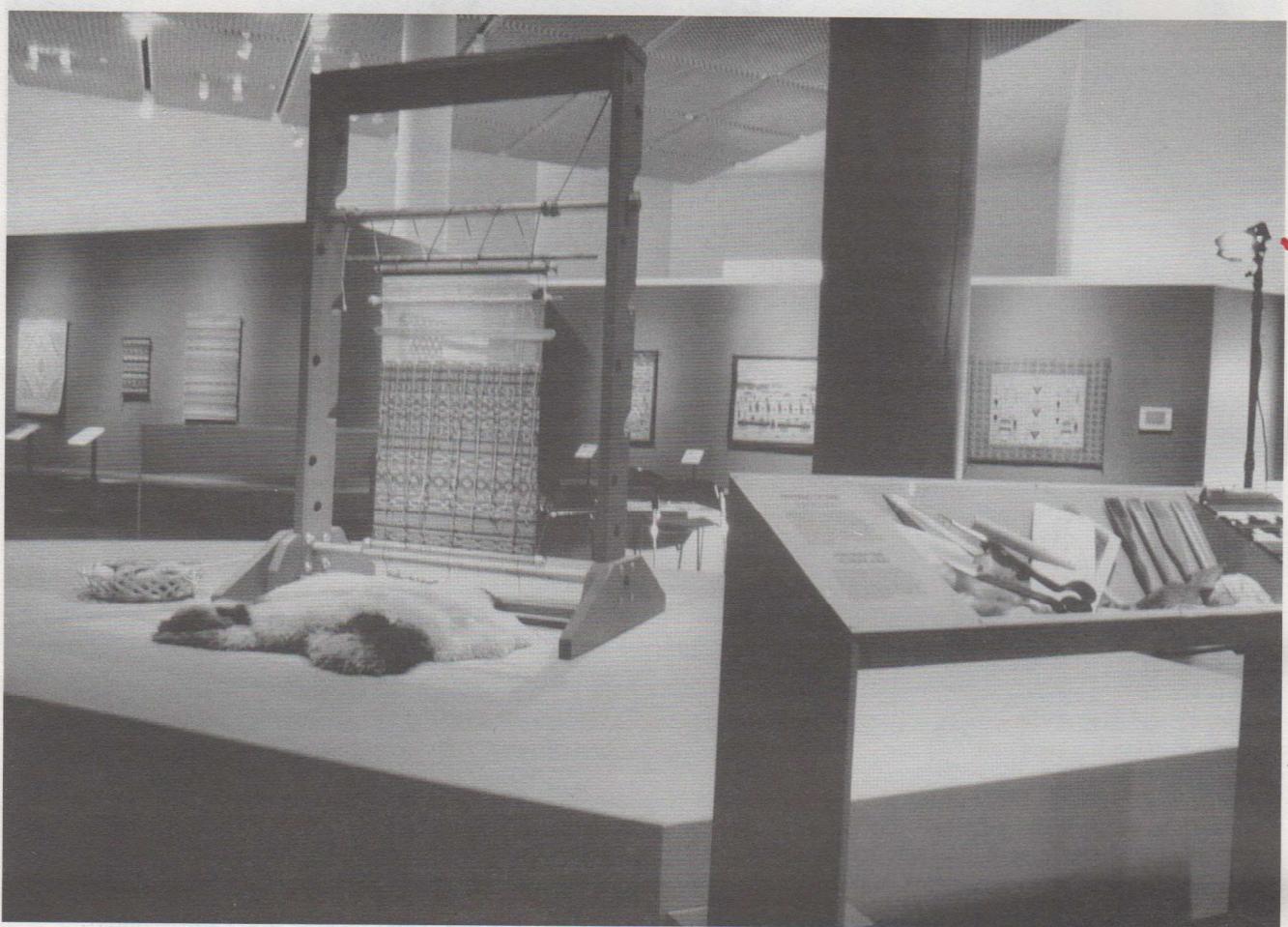
But neither was this Denver Art Museum show an “Indian Galleria” with a stereotyped Rug Weaver put in a glass box or on a pedestal, and on billboards along Highway 66 proclaiming her wares’ values in the same tones that they extol “two eggs, toast and coffee for 99 cents” or “pecan rolls, three for a dollar.” As a consequence of my ethnographic fieldwork, the Denver exhibition presents some of the weavers’ views along with their original woven works. The rugs and tapestries are, of course, personal statements in themselves, if we can only learn to view them as such, instead of as collectively and anonymously produced native craft items. And further, by listening to many, many Navajo women, and their families and friends, I have learned that there are many eloquent voices to be heard.<sup>2</sup> As Michael Ames writes:

There are many voices, many stories. They do not add up to one consistent view, nor should they, because they represent different people with different interests and experiences. We nevertheless need to listen. The articulation of native points of view may serve to remind us that outsiders do not have the final word. It is the continuing interaction between these various perspectives that is important (1986:46).

## Introduction

My title for the present paper comes from Michael Ames’s essay on the politics of interpretation in *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. There, he comments:

If museums empower people to speak for them-



2. The Denver Art Museum installation, July 1992. (photo: Denver Art Museum)

challenges of speaking forthrightly *about*, from even a clearly acknowledged perspective—in my case, that of anthropologist coming from a dominant society surrounding the Navajo Nation.<sup>4</sup>

It is important at the outset to note the longterm struggle that social scientists and humanities scholars have had with authorship and its acknowledgment—museums are far from alone in this self-inquiry and in receiving accusations from outsiders. The predicaments (cf. Clifford 1988) and crises (cf. Marcus and Fischer 1986) for museums are pre-saged by those delineated by scholars focused on literary criticism, the history of anthropology, ethnology, and other fields as well.

However much scholars like Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and George Marcus thought it was complex and challenging for the anthropological enterprise, the extension of the ethnographic problem to museums multiplies the problem's complexity, both in terms of the layered processes and roles of interpretation and the nature of a three-dimensional, multi-sensory product. The curator does not control even

the basic processes that an academic ethnologist might.<sup>5</sup> For us “museum types,” layers of complexity compound through the translative editorial processes of exhibition design, educational programming, and public relations. Notions of authorship become blurred as teamwork progresses. Geertz’ simple and once seemingly sufficient triad—“native,” “author,” and “reader”—becomes a much more complex set that also includes administrators, development officers, designers, educators, donors, board members and others.<sup>6</sup>

By examining the sequential stages of exhibit planning and implementation and the concomitant roles that figure into each activity, this paper explores the mechanisms by which the thirty-four makers of displayed Navajo rugs were involved and represented, insulated and excluded, in and from the exhibit-making processes. For purposes of analysis, seven stages of exhibition and program development are outlined—from initial research, collecting, writing, and film production, to exhibition design and installation, and finally to inaugural opening and subsequent

travel to other venues. This approach doesn't presume to explain precisely how or why a particular project may proceed, but begins at least to unravel the structure surrounding exhibit-making interactions.<sup>7</sup> I maintain that the roles played by all parties involved are far more diverse than current commentary might intimate. Such diversity certainly affects the opportunities for inclusion and exclusion of native peoples and others traditionally left out of exhibit decision-making. This paper barely touches on each of the many roles played by staff and consultants and leaves their full analysis for future work. Nevertheless, at the very least these layered sets of interactions are acknowledged as keys to understanding and to enhancing current and future museum undertakings.

### The Denver Art Museum exhibition

The exhibition of contemporary Navajo weaving and *about* contemporary Navajo weavers (prepositions take on new power here!) opened at the Denver Art Museum in 1992 and travels in 1994-95 to Phoenix, Washington, DC, Omaha and New York. The basic introductory text for the Denver installation read:

*Weaving is my life* — Ella Rose Perry  
*I put everything into weaving a rug* — Rose Owens

The Gloria F. Ross Collection celebrates the diversity and vitality of Navajo weaving during the 1980s and 1990s. This exhibition represents 34 Navajo artists who draw from the past while looking to the future. Each rug and tapestry is a personal statement.

A major premise of the exhibit is that Navajo rugs are works of art, valuable to the weavers and to other viewers for their visual impact as well as for their other cultural connections. The concept of art as "significant, or appropriate, form" —is employed, widening art's definition to accommodate modern multicultural society (cf. Lippard 1990). Universal assumptions about art are avoided and cultural relativity is invoked, in the sense, for instance, that people from different societies see beauty and place value on process/products in different ways. Visual expression, technical challenges, material dictates, historic background, economic concerns—all are parts of the artists' world and these are noted within the exhibit, catalogue, and film. So, too, inspirational sources, individual biographies, family and professional relationships, and the growth of individual repertoires are considered. Recognizing and acknowledging the Navajo artists as any mainstream artists might be, becomes important in order to get beyond biases toward Navajo weaving as craft, as trader-driven, as economically imperative, rather than as art and as

individual visual statements of self, as many of the weavers themselves say.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Henry Glassie (1991), who asked Turkish craftspeople what they would like to have collected and exhibited (and by whom), Gloria Ross and I retained responsibility for collection-making (with oversight by the museum's Curator of Native Arts and the Collections Committee). It has been, admittedly, a very personal as well as curatorial process, with aesthetic, intellectual and emotional biases at play. In one sense, it was the museum profession's ideal—a distinctly active rather than passive collecting process (cf. Burcaw 1975 and Alexander 1979), following from previous ethnographic research.

External guidelines were drawn up in advance to ensure coverage of certain regional styles and innovative trends and for consonance with collections already at the Denver Art Museum:

- To acquire some of the finest specimens of modern Navajo weaving available today in order to represent the best artistic and aesthetic qualities of the craft;
- To illustrate current trends in Navajo weaving by seeking as wide a range of styles, materials, and techniques as possible, including both representative ("typical") and aberrant examples;
- To acquire pieces with as much documentation as possible about their construction (i.e., native names, type of wool and yarn, dyes, etc.), their makers (ethnographic background, individual biographical data), and their culture (historical, economic, symbolic significance);
- And lastly, to complement the present permanent collections with examples that extend stylistically and temporally the interpretations of Navajo weaving already possible (Hedlund 1992:11).

In the exhibit, a second introductory label explains the collection:

#### THE COLLECTION

An active collaboration among Gloria Ross, curator Ann Hedlund, and the Navajo weavers brought the Gloria F. Ross Collection into being. Owned by the Denver Art Museum, the collection now numbers thirty-eight masterworks and is still growing. Ross and Hedlund agreed the collection should:

- highlight the beauty of the weaver's art;
- illustrate current trends in design, materials, and technique; and
- document the artists' lives and their attitudes toward their work.

The collection reflects Ross's interest in tapestry making as a fine art and Hedlund's firsthand knowledge of the artists' lives. They

acquired pieces directly from the weavers and from trading posts, galleries, and auctions in Arizona and New Mexico. Three works are commissioned designs; all others are the weavers' own.

Exhibition text further attempts to make transparent who the collectors are, and as such we became subjects, like the weavers, within the exhibit:

#### THE COLLECTORS

Gloria Ross has lived in the world of tapestry making since the mid 1960s, when she established a tapestry workshop in her native New York. She soon began collaborating with weavers in the U.S. and abroad whose techniques could complement the work of the long list of artists who designed for Gloria F. Ross Tapestries. She visited the Navajo Nation in 1979 to find weavers willing to work from imagery she provided. She also began collecting original Navajo rugs. On that first trip she met Ann Hedlund, who introduced her to many Navajo weavers.

Guest Curator Ann Hedlund is associate professor of anthropology and director of museum studies at Arizona State University. A weaver herself, she has lived in Navajo country and has interviewed the weavers, their families and local traders since the 1970s. Together, Ross and Hedlund have selected some of the finest weaving produced in the Navajo Nation today.<sup>9</sup>

Various components of the exhibit were designed to talk about weavers' views toward their work and to bring in their own voices on the subject. Tapestries on the wall were accompanied by extended labels for each artwork and thematic section labels for each group of works. As I've been doing for nearly decade,<sup>10</sup> my labels incorporated first person statements by the artists as well as photographic portraits. For example,

Nááts'ílid (Rainbow) 1990  
 Irene Clark  
 b. 1934  
 Crystal, New Mexico  
 A Gloria F. Ross Tapestry designed by Kenneth Noland

"Weaving, that's all I do. I'd rather weave than go out and get a job."

Irene Clark combined native lichens and the wild "Navajo tea" plant to make the gold, orange, and brown in this commissioned tapestry. She bought commercial yarns for the other colors. Weaving a rug this wide was challenging—"I had to weave all the way across," Clark says. She explains why she named the work Nááts'ílid (Rainbow): "In our culture, the rainbow paves the path to beauty and harmony. The Navajo people and our government are protected by the rainbow." The collection contains two other rugs by Clark (15 and 16).

And another example:

Teeec Nos Pos Raised Outline Rug, 1991  
 Larry Yazzie  
 b. 1955  
 Tuba City/Coal Mine Mesa, Arizona

"I start with Teeec Nos Pos designs I find in the books. Then I interchange the designs and mix the colors until they look right to me."

Larry Yazzie is one of a growing number of male weavers. He learned from his sister after a stint in the army and now supports himself by weaving full time: "Food on the table and clothes on the family's back—it's like any job," Yazzie says. But it's also more: "Weaving is part of Art. Instead of holding the paintbrush, you use yarn and wool." Yazzie dedicates this rug to his late brother, Andrew Yazzie, who was an excellent weaver.

Scrapbooks are many weavers' common and favorite means of sharing experiences with me when I'm in the field. Thus, the exhibit team decided to incorporate this into the exhibit to share another part of weavers' lives with museum visitors. A table with a scrapbook and another with other reading material were important gallery inclusions. And, after a five-week training program, a dedicated corps of volunteer docents, including a number from Denver's minority ethnic communities (Black, Hispanic and Native American), offered tours in the gallery.

To help museum visitors explore ethnoaesthetics—the different ways that people see design—as I've done in the field, the exhibit's interpretive programs borrowed directly from my ethnographic fieldwork. In a field pilot, I showed weavers a series of images and asked which ones are more similar to each other, which one stands out as different. When this variation on a standard psychological test with words (Bernard 1994) is done enough times with enough images, certain aesthetic sensibilities may begin to be differentiated by the analyst.

The educator, exhibit designer and I designed this activity as a flip-chart game. The gallery game's main theme was that there are "many ways of seeing." Such an activity acknowledges field methods explicitly; admits the presence of the ethnographer/collector/observer; and represents weavers (albeit selectively) by their own first person statements. Furthermore, it engages gallery visitors in a hands-on activity that allows them to compare their views with those expressed by weavers.

#### DESIGN GAME

We all look at designs in our own way. This game lets you compare your sense of design with that of Navajo weavers. There are no right or wrong answers—just different ways of seeing. . . .

#### MORE ABOUT THIS GAME

This game is like one that exhibition curator Ann Hedlund uses in her research with Navajo weavers. She studies ethnoaesthetics—how different societies decide what makes a design look good or bad.

In one study, Hedlund showed weavers sets of cards and asked which rugs looked the same and which different. She also asked questions like "Which is the most Navajo?" and "Which is the most difficult to weave?"

She learned that Navajo weavers:

- emphasize how a design is made
- use pattern, not color, to distinguish between designs
- value strong light/dark contrasts
- focus on borders more than center designs
- use designs that “look good to me”

She found that weavers don't usually:

- have standard names for rug styles or geometric motifs
- use color in shared symbolic ways
- talk about the meaning of specific designs

For most weavers, the process is as important as the product.

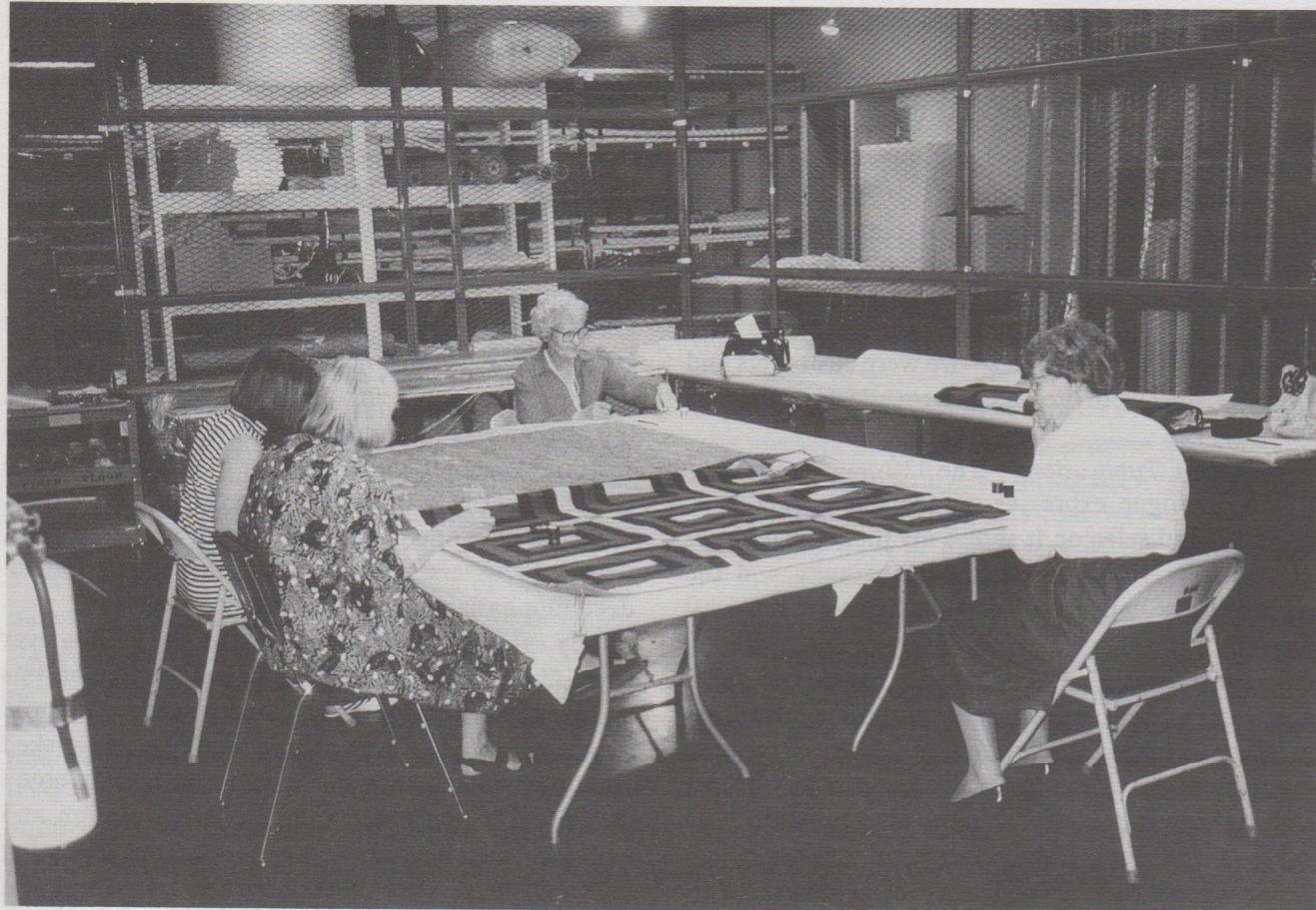
Because the weavers almost all mentioned the importance of explaining the methods and materials of weaving, a central area with a loom, yarns and tools with “touch-me” components were installed in the gallery.

As further aspects of the exhibition are described in the following sections, it is perhaps appropriate to move from this discussion of the exhibit to a sketch of the processes and roles involved in its production, and their implications for engaging native involvement.<sup>11</sup>

### The exhibit-making process

#### 1. Ethnographic research — Opportunities for native

involvement begin at the beginning of research, not when objects eventually reach museums. In recent decades ethnographers have moved nominally from seeking informants to enlisting consultants. Twelve years of field research preceded the actual exhibit—living on and around the reservation for various periods of time, I visited, watched, interviewed, and worked alongside weavers to learn about their lives and work. I used standard ethnographic techniques: census gathering, genealogy charting, map-making, and especially fieldnote-taking and photographing while observing and participating in Navajo households and communities. Weavers were initially, quite frankly, sources of information, but as soon as I made contact, we were both implicated in something larger than just information-mongering, that evolved into reciprocal sharing. In the largest sense, some weavers became my teachers, I was their student and sometimes apprentice. Others remained more distant informants, or slightly more engaged consultants. Clearly some of us became friends and, in a few cases, established fictive kin relationships. This research/learning stage continues throughout all the other stages and right up through the present.



3. Volunteers mounting the Ross Collection textiles for exhibition, June 1992. (photo: Ann Lanc Hcdlund)

2. *Collecting* - I was drawn into the collecting endeavor by Gloria F. Ross, a New York tapestry *éditeur* who originally came West to commission weavers to work from designs she gave them, but who simultaneously became enthralled with the weavers' own designs and who generously established a research and purchase fund at the Denver Art Museum and contributed a number of works from her personal collection in order to establish this collection. As partners and friends, Gloria and I have traveled together on the Navajo Reservation each summer since 1979 and her goals, opinions and tastes are reflected in the collection just as mine are.<sup>12</sup> In relationship to the Denver Art Museum, I began to serve as a research associate and guest curator and Gloria became a major donor.

When possible, we purchased directly from the weavers, usually as works found already in progress or as special commissions. Because weavers are in the position of selling their wares for their livelihood, they took the position of sellers and we became their clients. From another perspective they were the artists and we the patrons, they the producers and we the collectors. In this commodification process, obligations and counter-obligations are formed; power relationships inevitably established.<sup>13</sup>

We also acquired rugs from trading posts, independent dealers, auctions, and galleries as well as directly from weavers. Through our purchases from these middlepeople, weavers were implicated whether they wanted to be or not; they could control copyright (as any artist can; more on this later) but their market presence left no choice about including their works in the collection. Our relationships with sellers also forged new roles—we were customers and advisees; they were brokers, intermediaries, advisors.

3. *Catalogue/Publication* — The 112-page color illustrated catalogue expresses my viewpoint as author, observer, and selector. It shows my theoretical biases as one interested in individual biography and the privileging of native voice. I emphasize intracultural diversity and a range of behavior over cultural norms; treat tradition and authenticity as flexible, mutable entities; and seek a balance between economic imperatives and more ideationally based values and motivations. There is asymmetry and direction in this set of relationships—I'm almost always behind the camera and computer, selecting and re-viewing. Readers read the weavers' own words but the selections are mine and serve the author's purposes.

Each weaver, and many members of their families, reviewed the text concerning her or him and provided comments and corrections. Although their works were permanent possessions of the museum, the weavers did have the opportunity to remove their names and/or the images of themselves and of their works from the book if they wished. Unlike numerous previous publications in which native artists' works are illustrated without regard to copyright laws, I informed all weavers of their rights and requested one-time, non-exclusive rights to reproduce their original designs. Only two, a mother and daughter, decided to remain anonymous and to limit their participation for reasons of privacy and because of "local rivalries, family jealousies and financial concerns" (1992:12).<sup>14</sup>

Thus, we have the author, or ethnographer, and her subjects, who are the objects of discussion, who also have limited power as editorial commentators. Beyond the content specialists, the museum's general editor, copy editor, and publications designer, helped to shape the book's image and message. The book conforms to certain museum precedents for its catalogues and to preconceptions held by the general editor about how an art museum's exhibition catalogues should appear and what they should contain. It is important to note that rarely does an author singlehandedly control the final published product (thank goodness!). Organizational structure, titles, illustrations, and the ways that content is presented may all be adjusted and controlled by an editor.

4. *Exhibition Planning and Installation* - The goals and purposes of the exhibition itself do not pretend to be other than outsiders' goals and observers' models—speaking about, not for. Displaying Navajo weaving in an urban art museum setting was a distinct decision to acknowledge the visual power of the works, while challenging the notions of a universal concept of Art. This was only one aspect, but a very important one, that the weavers themselves acknowledged and indeed emphasized in conversations.

Any exhibit is a series of translations, getting ever more distant from its sources and subjects, and this was certainly no exception. While weavers were told their rugs would be in an exhibit, and they were asked what they'd like to say to the audience, they weren't consulted on the order and layout, the design and coloring, the text and signage. Exhibit planning involved me as curator/scriptwriter, an educator, a senior designer, and a coordinating curator/department



4. Weavers (foreground, left to right) Barbara Ornelas, Irene Nez, Mary Lee Begay, Grace Henderson Nez, Irene Clark, and Ella Rose Perry, with Ann Hedlund and Gloria Ross at the exhibition's opening reception for museum members. Denver, Colorado, July 1992. (photo: Nancy Blomberg)

ment head. Implementation further included a Native American intern, the designer's staff of technicians, carpenters and painters, an editor and the editorial and graphic design staff, the museum's photography department and, more ancillary, all other departments within the museum—administration, public relations, development, membership, museum store, and so forth. Outside of this process, the weavers were the subjects and peripheral consultants; the museum staff acted in their professional capacities.

5. *Film Production* - Because analysis of the fifteen-minute film that was created especially for in-gallery showing constitutes a paper in its own right, I won't address the subject here.<sup>15</sup> Suffice it to say that the process of film-making opens up all sorts of opportunities for collaboration and, at the same time, multiplies the complexity of teamwork and authorship by adding a cast of seeming "thousands"—producers, director, camera, sound and light technicians, editors, soundtrack mixers, and so forth, each with his or her own ideas and contributions to make. Weavers were actively engaged in the filming activities but were

entirely left out of all editing and post-production work that ultimately determines and controls the film's message and content. All weavers who were "stars" were also recipients of review copies of the video version of the film.<sup>16</sup>

6. *The Inaugural Opening* — Social events are important markers in the exhibition process and shouldn't be overlooked in analysis. During the week of July 11, 1992, fourteen of the thirty-four weavers and their families—a total of about seventy-five Navajo people—traveled to Denver to celebrate the opening. They joined approximately 1,600 other people at the Friday night opening. This was the culmination of continuing and repeated efforts over more than three months to inform and invite, to fund and to fete.<sup>17</sup> No weavers were hired to demonstrate or to be "exploited" for educational purposes during the celebrations. The weavers and their families were honored guests and guest artists; the curator and museum staff were the hosts.

Earlier on opening day, a luncheon press conference offered members of the media a chance to meet

the curator, museum staff, and a number of the weavers. Some of the Navajo women had prepared speeches of gratitude and welcome, and proudly posed by their tapestries for press photographers.

The asymmetrical and directional relationships, with museum and curator in authority positions, naturally continued, but roles did reverse somewhat at certain junctures. Although this large urban museum could be an isolating and formidable place, Navajo visitors incorporated it into their experience, meeting it on their own terms. Weavers initiated various reciprocating gestures—as with their book signing during one event, and their forthright stance during the press conference. As one woman stated in a speech she gave at a farewell brunch held in the weavers' honor, amidst many thanks and signs of appreciation for the museum's efforts: "It's because of my weaving that I'm in Denver now enjoying myself. Because of my rugs, I've been to a lot of places—Connecticut, Washington, Alabama. I've known Gloria Ross and other people from New York and all [kinds of] places, personally and by mail. I am well-known for my rugs. Lots of you [weavers] here have been lots of places because of your rugs too. We are well-known because of our weaving." The 'subjects' of the exhibit arrived at the opening, not just to be acknowledged passively, but to take part, to claim the work as theirs, to take credit, to enjoy what they, not the ethnographer/curator or anyone else, had initially sown.

**7. Future Venues** — The exhibition travels on to other institutions across the country, adding further role complexity along the way. Each museum must address its own particular audiences' needs and each staff will have different composition. The story is further modified by visual and textual editing at each venue.

A bilingual conference held in March 1994 when the exhibition traveled to The Heard Museum involved three major groups—scholars working on Navajo weaving, the general public including museum members and collectors, and Navajo weavers as experts in their own right. There were further multiplied voices and more varied expectations, which await critical inspection and analysis.<sup>18</sup>

### Future prospects—conclusions

Through all the questioning and doubting, Michael Ames still admits possibilities and opportunities for anthropologists, and concludes, "Important roles for museums remain" (p. 149). He optimistically quotes Clifford Geertz:

The task for anthropology . . . is "to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way" (Geertz 1988:147; cited in Ames 1992:149; as cited also in Phillips 1988:60).

Geertz calls for new interpretive formats in written ethnography; others search for other evocative and humanistic conveyances of cultural experiences (cf. Marcus and Fischer 1986; and works by Bruce Grindal, Robin Ridington, Barbara and Dennis Tedlock, and other humanistic and interpretive anthropologists). Museums talk about and experiment with increased "context" and more "text," both literally and figuratively.

Geertz also goes on, perhaps rather slyly, to say, "Once ethnographic texts begin to be looked at as well as through [more prepositions!], once they are seen to be made, and made to persuade, those who make them have rather more to answer for. Such a situation may initially alarm . . . [b]ut it can, given tenacity enough and courage, be gotten used to." (Geertz 1988:138; brackets are added). More than getting used to it, why not take creative advantage of the opportunities to collaborate?

And yet there are still other alternatives, where non-Indian curators need not take the initiative. In my 1992 catalogue, I wrote,

The Ross collection reflects my interpretations of the many voices that belong to contemporary Navajo weavers. Indeed, these weavers and their families are part of the intended audience for this book and exhibition, and so our dialogue continues. I look forward eagerly to the time when Navajo weavers organize museum collections, exhibits, and catalogues and independently take museum projects in new and unforeseen directions. New directions might mean entirely different intentions, goals, or formats, and I relish the thought of what I cannot yet imagine. (Hedlund 1992:12).

In addition to the lively Boulder installation described at the beginning of this paper, there have been other projects driven by Navajo individuals. Harry Walters curated *Navajo Weaving: From Spider Woman to Synthetic Rugs* at Navajo Community College's Ned Hatathli Culture Center in 1977. Ruth Roessel has written eloquently from her own perspective of Navajo woman and weaver as well as of scholar and

teacher (1981, 1983). Weaver D. Y. Begay is an active participant in planning a major catalogue and exhibition of historic Navajo blankets and rugs at the National Museum of the American Indian, scheduled for 1995, and was involved in the 1994 exhibition, "The Image Weavers: Contemporary Navajo Pictorial Textiles," at the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe. Most recently, weavers Grace Henderson Nez, Mary Lee Begay, Lena Lee Begay and Gloria Jean Begay co-curated "Hanolchaadí: Historic Navajo Textiles Selected by Four Navajo Weavers," for which I served as coordinating curator, at the Museum of Northern Arizona during 1994-95.

So, as professional perspectives evolve, especially in response to native peoples' concerns, are the roles of ethnologist/curator and informant/subject merging in collaboration? This paper, I hope, has shown, if nothing else, that the roles of all actors involved in exhibit-making are far more multiplex than this first question allows for. I think we should encourage a diversity of approaches, rather than striving for always having a single standing advisory committee of native people, or habitually seeking one significant native participant as figurehead, or systematically using native terms or quotations in text panels.<sup>19</sup> We should be doing all these things, but as many papers in this conference attest, museums and ethnographers must explore many alternatives, according to the specific situation, subject matter, and audience. In conclusion, I say thank goodness for diversity, not just in the peoples and topics represented, but in creative and thoughtful roles and especially in individual solutions. Often it seems a miracle that exhibits are produced at all, and incorporating further points of view without advance planning and special funding could result in prohibitive time and money costs. Given the many roles and complex interactions present in every exhibition undertaking, native consultants' participation must be better integrated into the process from the very beginning if museums are to move away from their presumptive stance of speaking for others and, instead, to call themselves collaborative institutions. ♦

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Peter Welsh and the graduate students who participated in two "Critical Issues in Museum Studies" seminars that Peter and I co-taught at Arizona State University during 1992 and 1994. Discussions that took place in and out of the classroom during those semesters contributed much to my thoughts in this essay. The exhibition, catalogue, and film were supported, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

### Notes

1. To me, "Rug weaver" as they've used it looks and sounds suspiciously like "Ugh Weaver," mindful of further, offensive stereotypes of inarticulate, primitive people.
2. In my catalogue to the show, this discovery is qualified, "Because I'm not a Navajo weaver, I do not write from the weavers' perspective, but I have tried to observe and listen closely and have begun, at least, to understand how little of the weavers' own perspectives are represented in other collections or publications. The Ross Collection reflects my interpretations of the many voices that belong to contemporary Navajo weavers" (Hedlund 1992:12).
3. Peter Welsh (1992:7) notes that proclamation of "a paradigmatic, philosophical, epistemological shift" in our field is perhaps dangerously "a self-congratulatory and radical-chic revolution."
4. Trudy Griffin-Pierce recently makes another prepositional distinction the implications of which I find rather interesting: she says that when she embarked upon her study of Navajo ethnoastronomy, "I did not want to learn about Navajo culture so much as I wanted to learn from Navajo culture" (1992:xiv, original emphases). And Lucy Lippard raises a related distinction when she writes that *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* "is not a book 'about' artists of color in the United States," that is, it "is not a survey of art from the Native, African, Asian, and Latino American communities," but rather, "The book is above all a record of my own still-incomplete learning process" (1990:4).
5. Geertz bluntly states that "almost all ethnographers are university types of one sort or another" (1988:130). While he may include museum curators as "university types," because of curators' responsibilities to the public, beyond "a lifetime lecturing to classes and arguing with colleagues" (p. 130), I would maintain that he has ignored a significant group with magnified responsibilities to and puzzlements about the issues he raises more narrowly.
6. A related problem in properly wielding "museum authority" and seeking to share or turn over authorship, as Welsh (1992:8) has noted, is that most attempts result in identifying "individuals who meet institutionally defined criteria to fill institutionally defined roles for producing institutionally defined outcomes." How do we get beyond these systems within which we are already working?
7. Institutional circumstances and, especially, individual personalities and histories add unpredictable and idiosyncratic elements to the process and are not addressed here, despite the fact that these can often make or break a project.
8. Zolberg (1992:105) notes the common love-hate relationships between mainstream artists and art museums. This of course can apply whether the artists are white, Native American, or from other minority groups. In this sense, I do not mean to imply that certain challenges of representing and speaking about Navajo weavers are necessarily peculiar to working with Native American or minority artists.
9. Because of its East Coast audience which presumably required more contextual and cultural information, and without fear of losing its identity as an art museum by including such explanation instead of the traditionally terse object labels used in many art museums, the National Museum of American Art's Renwick Gallery requested from me a different text for the introduction. It

seems also that the Renwick conservatively interpreted the original reflexive tone as too museum-oriented rather than object-focused. The results used in Washington:

A Navajo rug is the unique product of many people, ideas, materials, and processes. In northern Arizona and New Mexico today, literally thousands of weavers sit at their looms, creating rugs of long-lasting beauty. These weavers share a centuries-old heritage rooted in their own Athabaskan Indian beliefs and in tools and practices borrowed long ago from neighboring Pueblo Indians. Navajo weavers' diverse resources and their ability to absorb influences while retaining a strong native core give weaving its enduring yet innovative character today.

Weaving is practiced for many different reasons. Many women weave because their mothers and grandmothers wove before them. Weaving is an integral part of traditional women's roles. It supports families and shapes their entire way of life. Income contributes to household expenses while other tasks continue—watching children, herding sheep, doing household chores, planning ceremonies, visiting neighbors.

Other Navajo women think of weaving as an appealing alternative to jobs away from home. They keep their personal freedom while earning a living. Weaving is a means of creative expression. Increased commitments to high quality and successful marketing indicate a growing professionalism. Moving away from Navajo custom, which avoids singling out individuals, many weavers are known by name. And, a few men are joining women at the looms.

Some weavers make rugs and tapestries without economic incentives, placing personal expression and cultural revival above financial return. Some emphasize weaving as a special marker of their Indian identity. A few save their handwoven rugs as heirlooms for their families. Others treat weaving as a hobby, a recreational activity that is rewarding in and of itself.

Not all weavers work consistently throughout their lives. Some give up weaving when they marry and begin a family or when they find a job. Others only start weaving after adulthood, perhaps after losing a job or when their children start school. They may be motivated by income or by more esoteric concerns and a fascination with their own heritage. The important issue, however, is that they know how to weave and, with that understanding, they remain part of the larger community of Navajo artists.

Weaving is hard work and involves many skills that must be controlled with care. Today, weavers continue to work at the same upright loom that was adopted by the Navajos from Pueblo Indians in the 17th century. Their relatively simple frame loom and hand-made tools have not changed significantly over the past three and a half centuries.

Influenced but not determined by local traders and distant buyers, the weavers' own decisions chart the course for current trends and future changes. Beyond the basic tools and processes, weavers select from many raw materials, designs, and marketplaces. They mix and match natural and synthetic dyes, handspun and commercial wool yarns, traditional and idiosyncratic designs. The rugs and tapestries shown here, all woven between 1980 and 1992, celebrate the artists' eclectic approaches.

This exhibition results from the longterm collaboration of over 30 Navajo artists, collector Gloria F. Ross, and anthropologist Ann Lane Hedlund. It grows out of

Mrs. Ross's professional interests as a successful tapestry *éditeur*. She first consulted Ann Hedlund in 1979 when she decided to commission Navajo weavers to make tapestries based on Kenneth Noland designs. By then, Gloria Ross had already been working with leading American artists for over twenty years, translating their designs into tapestries in her own New York workshop and in well-known weaving centers abroad. As Dr. Hedlund introduced Mrs. Ross to Navajo weavers and their world, the vitality of modern Navajo weaving compelled the two women to share the weavers' own artworks with a broader audience.

Gloria Ross founded the permanent Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving at the Denver Art Museum in 1980, beginning with the gift of several rugs acquired during her Navajo travels. Ann Hedlund, now an Arizona State University professor, selected and documented additions to the collection and curated this exhibition. Together they continue to visit the Navajo Nation and to be inspired by the creativity of Navajo weavers today.

This exhibition was organized by the Denver Art Museum and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Denver Metropolitan Scientific and Cultural Facilities District.

10. Richard West (1993) comments favorably on one of the labels in an exhibition I curated at the Millicent Rogers Museum, Taos, New Mexico, in 1984. The text quotes a statement by Popovi Da, a San Ildefonso artist.
11. The anthropological concept of "role" was first used by Linton (1936) and has been elaborated by many others since. The term appears here with the dual connotation of Linton's "role" (e.g. "the behavior of status-occupants that is oriented toward the patterned expectations of others [Merton 1968:41]) and of "status," referring to the actual position held within a social system (cf. Stoller 1981).
12. The irony of naming the collection only after the major funder rather than after both of us, each who actively formed the collection, has not been lost on either of us. Although the profession now urges curators to acknowledge authorship of exhibitions, are we ready for curators to take responsibility, by name, for the collections they personally assemble? Although there is historic, after-the-fact precedence (the Cushing and Stevenson collections at the Smithsonian, for instance), I doubt any living ethnographic curator with a normal size ego would feel comfortable about this (and of course some of Cushing's collections are known by "the Hemenway Expedition," financed by Mary Hemenway). If we are to take the recent name change at the University of California-Berkeley's Museum of Anthropology—from Robert Lowie, founding anthropologist, to Phoebe Apperson Hearst, major donor—if anything, museums are moving in the reverse direction!
13. It would be folly for any museum curator or other scholar active in the Southwest field to presume to work independently of the Indian arts market. Academic scholarship and commerce have been entwined since before the turn of the century. From purchasing personal garments made of new or recycled ethnic cloth to commissioning pieces for museums' permanent collections, we are all implicated. Indeed this has recently begun to be fruitful terrain for thoughtful critical inquiry.
14. In that case, the two women expressed displeasure in having any of their family history shared. Because their names have been published previously (albeit without

their permission) they initially agreed to the use of their names but not their home area. After learning of their distress, I suggested anonymity and they agreed (although any southwestern textile aficionado will be able to identify their distinctive work).

15. Critical and useful views of ethnographic filmmaking have recently appeared in a number of scholarly sources. The rich literature of visual anthropology could well be brought to bear upon the critique of exhibition-making, too.
16. To date, none of the Navajos involved have expressed anything but pleasure in the final product. Like the field of exhibition evaluation, the process of eliciting constructive pre- and post-production opinions from lay participants warrants considerable study in the future.
17. Because many of the weavers weren't acquainted with Denver nor with museum openings, I used a series of letters, questionnaires, phone calls and personal visits to let weavers know what would be happening. Teresa Wilkins, a graduate student at University of Colorado, was hired specifically to be the visitors' liaison and local arrangements coordinator.
18. For one review of the event, see Stanfill (1994).
19. Emerson said it best: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds"!

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