



**THE**

**INBETWEENNESS**

**OF THINGS**

**MATERIALIZING  
MEDIATION AND  
MOVEMENT  
BETWEEN WORLDS**

B L O O M S B U R Y



**FIGURE 2.1** Feather headdress in its vitrine as displayed at the Penacho: Pract & Passion exhibition, Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 2012. APA-PictureDesk.

# 2

## The inbetweenness of the vitrine: Three *parerga* of a feather headdress

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### The plume, the vitrine and the parergon

El Penacho, the fragile feather headdress that is the focus of this chapter (Figure 2.1), cannot be encountered except through the parergon of its vitrine, the architecture of thick glass that stands between it and us. As Jacques Derrida (1979) has argued, while parerga, such as the frames of paintings, are supplementary to works of art, they are not easily detached from them and instead form an ambiguous unity with the works, framing our perception and understanding of them. The vitrine, it might be said, holds the object it displays in a 'parergonic embrace' (Schachter 2014: 3).

Since the sixteenth century this headdress has passed through numerous vitreous parerga and, indeed, at the time of writing, it is awaiting installation in yet another, which has been especially designed for it in a new gallery of the Weltmuseum (World Museum), Vienna. This chapter traces the movements of the feather crown through three such cases. While the object appears to remain the same, it may also be said to change according to the interpretative context that each of these vitrines produces. The three vitrines represent three moments in the headdress's movement: the *Wunderkammer*, the soft politics of post-war international relations (including the power of museum

conservation in this context) and the potential of copies to break free of parergonic framings.

The vitrine is the 'inbetween' that distinguishes the museum from other spaces in which social and sacred practices engage material objects. The space of the museum vitrine thus constitutes an inbetweenness in all the objects it houses (Welchman 2013). It is justified by conservation demands, strengthened by technological advances, enforced by national law and institutionalized by design. It affects the ontology of the treasure, the art object, the collection on display; it demands particular attention, and asserts particular value. It may be more modern, more expensive, and more visually and physically present than the actual object it displays. The vitrine is in this sense a parergon: that which is 'against, beside, and above and beyond the ergon, the work accomplished, the accomplishment of the work' (Derrida 1979: 20). Other parerga include picture frames, plinths that hold the sculpture high above the viewing body and drapery that keeps the sculpted nude partly covered. These architectural elements are the cues to reading the contents they frame as desirable, aesthetic, elevated objects.

In its inbetweenness, the vitrine exits the flow of time. Like the watery glass that flows slowly downwards, always, with gravity, the vitrine materializes only the potential of suspension in between states. It blurs the image with age, with the historical specificity of its design (the *Wunderkammer* is dated: pre-Enlightenment) and the failure to replace a vitrine can make a museum look self-conscious, a museum of a museum (like the Victorian Pitt Rivers).

Materializing historical classificatory practices, the vitrine is constitutive of suspended transits for material objects. A glass case was never the origin of ethnographic display things from the world. The glass between the artefact and the viewer is the epistemic membrane crystallized around an object. In the vitrined relationship between us (modern, civilized, cosmopolitan) and them (ancient, primitive, immobile), there is an alienation of cognition from identification and embodiment. Glass walls are the most insidious kind of alienation: transparent but impenetrable. In the Weltmuseum, the vitrine is a parergon of another world, the frame that frames the gap between colonized object and the completeness of context.

El Penacho – the plume – is the oldest-known feather headdress. Traditionally – though doubtfully – claimed to be the crown of the Aztec king Montezuma, it is like the bird from whose feathers it is made: shimmering to attract attention. Since the age of the *Wunderkammer*, however, this feather headdress has hovered in a succession of glass cases designed to resist movement and still the forces that might cause it to disintegrate into thousands of small feather particles. Encased in glass, this prize of colonial conquest is caught in suspended animation between Austria and Mexico.

Fragile and balding, the headdress spans 3x4 metres from its gold crown to the tips of its quetzal bird feathers. Spreading out in a luminescent green arc, it was made to be worn by humans who were closest to the realm of gods. The resplendent feathers are associated with the wind god Quetzalcoatl. Coatl is a snake, and the green feathers of Montezuma's crown would have snaked in the wind – they still would if not for the stillness of the air within the glass chamber. The quetzal's red breast feathers are said to have been dyed with the blood of the Aztecs killed during colonization.

In its original context, the movement of the crown's plumes activated connections with invisible spirits and they were worn with the understanding that ancestors born by the wind were articulated in the movement of feathers. The glass of the vitrine intervenes in this relationship between spirits in the wind and feathers worn as the spirits' avatars. For conservation science there is only the destructive force of wind that moves through the matter it buffets. The violence in the movement of the feathers experienced during el Penacho's journey to Europe is registered in the fragile state of the material. The same wind that the Spanish boat caught between Central America and Europe, and the swing of the sea as it sailed from Veracruz, must have caused damage to the fragile cargo on board, buckling el Penacho's feathers into shapes of resistance.

El Penacho's movement between Mexico and Austria is a lingering unknown that continues to tax historians and curators. While its attribution to Montezuma drifts in a lack of historical evidence, time lapses and anachronisms of interpretation (see Nuttall 1888; Nowotny 1960; Anders and Kann 1996; Feest 2012: 5–28), to Mexicans, el Penacho outlines the space of the absent and deceased body of the heroic emperor and represents the end of the Aztec Empire itself. It is one of the very few feather artefacts that has survived from the time of the Conquest, and is typical of the regalia that Montezuma and his priests wore. The crown's life therefore begins in a period of violent change for the Aztecs, corresponding with the overthrow of their empire in 1521. At this time the Aztec world was fundamentally transformed, and material things such as el Penacho are stubborn reminders, as contemporary Maya assert, that '*Weyanone*', '*Aqui estamos*', 'we are still here'.

The passage of el Penacho from the new to the old world did not leave a paper trail. Historians are yet to find a line in a ship's records that includes a feather headdress in its inventory of possessions amassed in Mexico and bound for Europe (Russo 2011). Nor has the hand that took the crown left a line for us to identify him by. It is unclear exactly what date and what route el Penacho took from Central America. While it does not appear in the list of things Hernán Cortés acquired in Mexico, in 1577 it is described for the first time in the inventory of the Swabian Count Ulrich von Montfort zu

Tettngang's collection among 'all sorts of Moorish armory and featherwork' (*Allerlei mörsche Rüstung und Federwerk*). It was subsequently acquired by the Habsburg archduke Ferdinand II when he purchased part of Montfort's collection. In the 1596 inventory of Ferdinand's still extant cabinet of curiosities in Ambras Castle, Innsbruck, the feather headdress is recorded under the similar classification of 'Moorish hat'. Thus the life of el Penacho went from being the material avatar of Aztec spirits, inspired by the spectacle of the quetzal, to becoming a vitrined signifier of global power.

## Vitrine 1: Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck, 1595

In Schloss Ambras, in the Tyrolian Alps, may be found the *Wunderkammer* of Archduke Ferdinand, one of the few Renaissance collections still intact and in situ. As the son of the emperor at the height of the Habsburg Empire, Ferdinand was able to collect widely and install his *Wunderkammer* in the castle he gifted to his wife, Philippine Wesler. The work of a cultured romantic rather than a man of military prowess, this *Wunderkammer* in the classic sense displays art together with science, non-European together with European. Among these wonders of the world was el Penacho, the feather headdress from Mexico.

In the sixteenth century, there does not seem to have been a hierarchy in the way the objects in these *Wunderkammer* were organized (Bredenkamp 2000). In one case after another, material was classified according to type – gold, silver, feathers – but also lumped together were incommensurables: Turkish costumes, china, crocodiles. The displays of these cabinets of curiosity fell somewhere between ignorance and order. At Schloss Ambras, the vitrines of the *Wunderkammer* are the kind of beautiful custom carpentry that is now fetishized as antique – floor to ceiling glass cases in rooms fitted especially for the purpose of display. The spectatorial pleasures in this court moved easily between play-fights and aesthetic treasures of a world discovered and conquered (Bůžek 2009). The wealth of the New World colonies was distilled into containers, while the craftsmanship of European artists provided the parerga. The levelling effect of these vitrine parerga are given in defence of the Eurocentrism of the *Wunderkammer*. Here, European scientific instruments lay beside the ritual artefacts of animists, unfettered by later evolutionary arguments.

Walking through this *Wunderkammer* gives an impression of great delicacy, wonderful artistry and the excitement of 'extremophilia'. Freakishly complicated forms of nature and culture are the signature style, if anything, of the *Wunderkammer*. Paintings of *Haarmenschen* – people who are blackened

by the amount of hair growing over their bodies and faces – and of unicorns were hung with pride in the Ambras collection (Zapperi 2004). Behind glass in a vitrine of their own and sometimes behind a curtain – a red velvet parergon – a natural marvel could be encountered as *imponderabilia*. *Mirabilia* – things that inspire wonder, including people living with physical deformities and freakish bodies – set off the other perverse wonders of nature.

On occasion, Ferdinand, Philippine and their guests would take things out of the vitrines and wear them. Blackface masks, for example, were worn in play-battles with the 'Moors' that were staged in the courtyard outside the *Wunderkammer*. The Siege of Algiers in 1541, at which Cortéz was present, was one inspiration for theatrical battles (Russo 2011: 237). The collections from the Americas and Africa were often called 'Moorish' in the age of the *Wunderkammer*, as a general term meaning 'foreign' (Bujok 2009: 19). In 'Cabinet 9' of the Ambras Castle collection was what seemed to be a Moorish skirt, or perhaps a hat; it was not certain, hence Cabinet 9 was dedicated to the category *Varia*, variety. The *Varia* were exhibited between cabinets displaying precious metals and stones that had been shaped by European craftsmen into a contortion between *Naturalia* and *Artificialia*. The aesthetic frisson of these things was in the play between naturally occurring objects and human-made artefacts. Montezuma's crown was encased in Cabinet 9 alongside bundles of bird of paradise feathers, examples of *Naturalia*. New World peoples and their *Artificialia* were ambiguously placed close by on this continuum.

Vitrines painted with bright coloured backgrounds, dramatically lit, made this *Wunderkammer* not only spectacular, but also frightening. Visual titillation was part of the larger experience in the court at Ambras. Display of wealth and power and all the attendant other-worldliness grew in the sheltered fortress on the mountain above Innsbruck. Some privileged artists of the time like Albrecht Dürer also enjoyed cabinets of curiosities as they filled them with wonders 'from the new land of gold [Mexico]' (Goris and Mariler 1971: 64). After visiting a display of gifts given to Cortés by Montezuma in Brussels in 1520, Dürer recorded in his diary: 'I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart so much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art, and I marvelled at the subtle *Ingenia* of people in foreign lands' (ibid.). Though he concludes that 'I cannot express all I thought there', the Northern Renaissance master's acknowledgement of the Mexican objects as having great artistry was enough. The *Wunderkammer* does not have the same snobbishness about items of ethnographic or merely cultural interest versus high art. It did not yet matter who made the marvel, or where it was made. The objects seemed to stand on the merit of their extraordinariness, and then, as if to turn this on its head, they were all subjected to the parergon of the vitrine. This was the moment of their birth into museal being. Shed of the

power with which they might have been imbued in another context, in the *Wunderkammer* they became pure display. The audience, historical viewers through to those of the present day, have the power to make of the objects behind glass what they will. The objects hover, spectacular and ready, but, for the most part, not going anywhere.

## Vitrine 2: Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 2012

In the early nineteenth century the imperial collection from Ambras Castle was transferred to the Baroque palace of Lower Belvedere in Vienna. The headdress was subsequently accessioned into the collections of the K. K. Naturhistorisches Museum (the Imperial Museum of Natural History) and was restored in 1878, though identified at the time as a mantle rather than a crown. El Penacho was again transferred with the founding of the Museum für Völkerkunde in part of the Hofburg Palace complex in 1928. After surviving the Second World War in storage, the headdress featured in an exhibition of treasures from Austria (*Meisterwerke aus Österreich*) sent as part of a cultural diplomatic mission to Zurich. It was returned in a damaged state in 1947, and after further restoration work was placed back on display in a new vitrine at the Museum für Völkerkunde, never to travel again. Despite intensifying demands to repatriate the headdress from the 1980s, el Penacho has remained a centrepiece in the modern museum, immobilized in a succession of increasingly sophisticated cases.

When I encountered el Penacho in 2012, after a major refurbishment project at the Museum für Völkerkunde and soon before the museum was renamed the Weltmuseum, the headdress was poised at an angle of 45 degrees in another new custom-built vitrine at the centre of a special exhibition titled *Penacho: Pracht & Passion* (Penacho: Glory & Passion). The exhibition, which granted free access to Mexican citizens and was accompanied by a Spanish version of the catalogue, focused on the art of museum conservation and studiously avoided any reference to the by-now vociferous repatriation lobby.

Pressed up against the vitrine in which el Penacho was displayed, I was more aware of the glass placed between the headdress and me than of anything else. I stood back and looked at others looking. Some visitors ambled by aimlessly, most were arrested for a time. They fascinate me, these people who come to the museum. I talked to young Mexicans, evidently surprised and awed in the presence of this object. They have grown up learning about the Aztec Empire, and objects like this crown stand most powerfully for their identity. Many think that it was because of Maximilian, the Habsburg emperor



of Mexico between 1864 and 1868, that the headdress came to Vienna. In fact, Maximilian came to Mexico some three hundred years after the crown had departed, but the association speaks volumes of the lingering feeling of material and emotional suspense between Mexico and Austria since colonization (Elderfield 2006; Gallo 2010; Ibsen 2010). The fact that the crown in its vitrine is framed by the stately interior of the Hofburg Palace, the seat of the Habsburgs at the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is not lost on me.

The vitrine's inbetweenness accentuated this sense of suspense within the museum's royally coloured marble rooms. The Russian doll-like architecture that surrounded the crown included a black box that created a theatre around the vitrine. There were no seats but after a while one leant against the back wall of the blackened space to watch the spotlighted centre. The dimensions of this vitrine theatre were such that only a small group of visitors was able to wander through at a time. The air was poor and the glass was smeared from fingers pressed against it in a careless attempt to see the crown better. When I visited, dust had already gathered on the glass ceiling of the vitrine, which was backlit by the synthetic ochre sun installed as faux skylight coming from the ceiling.

This redisplay of the headdress in 2012 was advertised as 'demystifying' (*Wiener Zeitung* 2012). Focusing on the scientific process of restoration, the *Pracht & Passion* exhibition said nothing of the demands for its restoration to Mexico. Echoing this word is intentional, for it is ironic that the same term is used to justify opposite ends. Thus the same word can be used to describe the process of repairing a work of art so as to restore it to its original condition and the action of returning the object to a former owner or place. The Museum für Völkerkunde performed one restoration to avoid doing the other. Thus the new glass case and support added the parergon of scientific conservation to the previous powers of public display from princely accumulation. This high-tech case was purpose designed for the crown to counter any vibrations that could adversely affect it in its fragile state. Indeed the vitrine signified el Penacho's extreme fragility and the impossibility of its movement, including its return to Mexico.

The vibration-proof design of the case and mount resulted from the discovery that the headdress was losing many of the individual barbs that make up its feathers. They were found, to the horror of the conservators, lying on the sheet on which the headdress was previously supported. As well as defining the specifications of its new vitrine, the conservation scientists who analysed the headdress also reported that the levels of vibration encountered in transporting it – by air, for example, to Mexico – could destroy its fine and brittle feathers. When the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico requested a loan of the headdress for its temporary featherwork exhibition *El vuelo de las imágenes: Arte plumario en México y Europa* (Russo, Wolf and Fane 2011), they were presented with a specialist engineering report, which stated that a special vibration-proof case

would have to be built to transport it to avoid damage. The cost of manufacturing such a case was, of course, prohibitively expensive for the Mexican museum. Indeed, due to the cost of the required expertise, the Museo Nacional de Arte was only able to commission a separate independent engineering report with the assistance of the Mexican president's office.

There was an air of conspiracy when I interviewed the key actors on this matter in Vienna in 2014. The head scientist advising the conservation team had been both eager to participate in my research and vague about his availability. It was not until the end of our interview that he explained he had to seek the museum's approval before speaking to me. He was one of the few who had met in a closed room of the Hofburg Palace to discuss the repatriation at the highest level of government. I wondered why the head scientist had to be briefed before he spoke about this topic. The former director Christian Feest was quick to say that it was the Mexican museum that commissioned the conservation report from the counter-vibration expert directly.

Ironically this second report was prepared by the same Austrian engineering company that had prepared the first one for the Museum für Völkerkunde. It is based on tests of the vibration in the gallery under different conditions, from a crowd of visitors and a glass cleaning in the anyway always-heaving Hofburg architecture, to the effect of an airplane. All this can be mathematically predicted, and the more the vibration, the larger the container necessary to counter that vibration, according to the laws of physics. The resulting document looks like an engineering report but reads like a science fiction joke. On the last page there is a drawing of the 300-metre-long and 50-metre-high airplane that would be necessary, in the mathematic model, to buffer the velocity of take-off and landing to meet the conservation requirements set by Vienna (Wassermann 2012). Since such an aircraft does not exist, it was deemed unreasonable and unaffordable for the Mexicans, hence the headdress could not be loaned and, supported by scientific rationale, must remain a captive in its vitrine in Vienna. The case around the crown again asserted its inextricability from the object.

As I write, the Museum für Völkerkunde – now Weltmuseum – is again closed for refurbishment. When it reopens, el Penacho will be transferred into yet another new state-of-the-art, vibration-proof vitrine sited in its own room in the Hofburg Palace: a new high-tech *Wunderkammer*.

### **Vitrine 3: Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, 1940**

There is a copy of el Penacho in a vitrine in Mexico City, which is less about impenetrable protection and more about simulating the parergon of the original

in Vienna. In a memo written before the copy of the crown was installed, the museum notes that while the crown has not arrived they have already built the vitrine (Guzman and Vera 2012: 108). It stands again as a frame, symbolic of the power it will contain. In photographs taken at the press conference in 1940 the new Penacho is flanked by Daniel Cosío Villegas, author of *Modern History of Mexico*, and the pre-Columbian archaeologist Alfonso Caso. The vitrine adds to the monumental height of the crown that is already as tall as many of those who stand beside it. Portable, it is presented by the throng of dignitaries and reflects them as if in a huge mirror, before being hung in the gallery.

The portraiture and self-reflection in this copy vitrine continues with full force in the age of the 'museum selfie'. Hundreds of thousands of photographs must have been taken in front of the Penacho copy in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City by now. In the central space of the Mexican museum the copy el Penacho is displayed vertically at a height that invites visitors to photograph themselves as if wearing the crown (Figure 2.2). The significance of such a gesture has a broad spectrum, from the playful to the esoteric. Prior to the *Penacho: Pracht & Passion* reinstallation, the headdress was displayed in a similar manner at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna. In the *Pracht & Passion* vitrine I saw in 2012, it was laid at a 45-degree angle in a case with vertical glass sides that reach high and wide around the headdress (Figure 2.1). The design is justified on the basis of conservation standards, but this makes it impossible for visitors to identify with el Penacho by framing themselves with the crown in the selfie photograph.

The ways the vitrines enable – or disable – audiences to interact with the crowns in Vienna and Mexico City speak of the very different political positions of the state to the constituencies represented by the 'national treasure'. The Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City classifies the Aztec as a pinnacle of civilization, with Teotihuacan's material culture, including el Penacho, as primary evidence (Paz 1968). The copy crown is symbolic of pre-contact power, but the Weltmuseum sees it as its duty to safeguard and maintain the original as a part of the 'World Heritage' that it came to possess 'in good faith'. As the current legal owners of el Penacho, the Republic of Austria is the custodian of this cultural heritage, a heritage that is itself suspended between the histories of two empires and two nation-states.

In Mexico, the Museo Nacional de Antropología invites identification with the display of the commissioned copy – and an array of other copies have now followed. *Concheros* dancers campaigning for the repatriation of the original outside the museum in Vienna have performed in replica feather crowns in a display that embodies the entrapment of the crown within the vitrine (Figure 2.3). The power of performative acts is a tool for political self-identification (the 'selfie' has been theorized by Shipley [2015] in such terms). But what of those who perform their opposition to the vitrine, not



**FIGURE 2.2** *The vertical display of the el Penacho copy in its case in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, invites visitors to photograph themselves as if wearing the crown. Photograph by Alberto Yanez.*

with the visual tricks of photography, but with their own copies of the crown? These *Concheros*, who have been termed by Galinier as ‘Neo-Indian’ (2013), religiously make feather crowns for their ‘dances of conquest’ in Mexico City (Rostas 2009). How should we understand the process of making, wearing and dancing a feather headdress like el Penacho? What inspires the *Concheros* to make these crowns? When they are worn, what happens to their dance? The crown *does* things. It has effects. But how does this work? The references for these copy crowns are old and new. Their makers do not struggle for authenticity. Indeed, some of the makers in Mexico City are oblivious to the ‘ur-crown’ in Vienna, but their statements about the significance of their feather headdresses echo what is said of the precolonial priests’ rituals. The feather crowns guide and constitute their wearers, as many objects do.

If objects also stand in for absent people then the problem of authenticity and moral right can be approached differently. In this way the Mexican repatriation claims can be understood as being about Montezuma, rather than being about the crown itself. This is why it has also proven unsatisfactory to protestors campaigning for its repatriation to have historians debunk the claim that links the provenance of the headdress with Montezuma, the last indigenous emperor of Mexico. While the authenticity, name and status of the original headdress are in question, the Viennese enjoy the cruel irony that the copy of the crown is more correctly Montezuma’s than Vienna’s own since it happened to be made by a traditional craftsman named Francisco Montezuma (van Bussel 2012).



**FIGURE 2.3** *Protestors campaigning for the return of the feather headdress in Vienna, 2007. Photograph by Douglas Sprott.*

Indeed, over the years, in repeated processes of restoration, the original crown in Vienna has been flattened, new feathers have been added, pure gold has been replaced with gold plate, and other substitutions have been made (Trenkler 2012). After so many changes to the original, a question is raised in the Mexican literature whether Mexico even wants it back in such an altered state. What of the 'original' crown actually survives? How much is it artefact and how much artifice? Despite this, there are still ongoing requests for a return of el Penacho from Vienna.

When repatriation is negotiated at the highest diplomatic level, the object and its authenticity itself disappear behind political or corporate interests. Instead, it is a history of relationships, gifts, favours and opportunities that are being weighed up. At the other extreme of this abstract bargaining between politicians, diplomats and museum directors of representative national collections, however, is the physical presence of the object.

## Conclusion – smashing the vitrines?

The stasis of inbetweenness always has a shadow of transportation. The journeys that an object has completed are engrained in its very materiality. Where it stops, for the time being, and where it started being separate, the

transport in between becomes an important part of the story. The inability to now move el Penacho due to its fragility has become the basis of the denial of the demand for repatriation that Mexico has been making since the 1980s. Movement is absorbed into immobility, life is stilled to a promise of eternity. In the narcissistic reflection of the glass the European visitor can see themselves and the world, and thus the illusion of universalism and cosmopolitanism. Made invisible, through an invisible glass shield, it is a *Vitrinendenken*, a 'thinking through vitrines' (Carroll 2013), which guides the audience through enlightenment museums. Herein lies the difference between the *Concheros's* view of the feather crown and the *Weltmuseum's*. In the performance of identification with Montezuma, the meaning of the crown changes. No longer is the suspended inbetweenness that the *Weltmuseum* conserves with science the only authority.

Anticipating the latest redisplay of the feather headdress at the *Weltmuseum*, the three vitrines I discuss in this chapter raise a more provocative question in relation to museum display. What would a museum without vitrines look like and how might the kinds of community engagement we have witnessed around el Penacho help us to imagine this break? In the afterword to his book *My Cocaine Museum*, the anthropologist Michael Taussig conjures the image of the gods imprisoned in museum cabinets awakening and escaping their bondage:

I can only hope that the gods asleep in the museum – all 38,500 of them – will awaken and come to life with the tinkling of glass as the vitrines give way. This is my magic and this is why I write strange apotropaic texts like *My Cocaine Museum* made of spells, intended to break the catastrophic spell of things, starting with the smashing of the vitrines whose sole purpose is to uphold the view that you are you and over there is there and here you are – looking at captured objects, from the outside. But now, no more! Together with the previously invisible ghosts of slavery, the awakened gods will awaken remote pasts and remote places (Taussig 2004: 315).

El Penacho, too, has been visited by priests and shamans who would break the spell of things and free the spirits of the headdress from the vitrine that encases them.

The replica crown in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico is no substitute for el Penacho, but perhaps copies provide a 'third way' out of the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between how a living community wants to use a ceremonial object and how a museum must scientifically protect it. For the priests, who are able to speak to the spirits through the object, power

does not reside only in the original. In a contemporary ceremony, and with the agreement of the spirits, it is possible to transfer the ritual efficacy from the original to a copy.<sup>1</sup> Such re-enactment is cast by historians who resist these claims (Feest 2012) as a self-conscious version of historical ritual, an invention of tradition that creates a distance between the participant and some perceived authenticity of the ritual from the past. Yet the possessions of the past can also possess those who wear them. The parergon is one kind of spell that protects and captures the object, the spoken spell another.

## Note

- 1 Interview with Kajuyali Tsamani, March 2016.

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