COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT AS CRITICAL MUSEUM PRACTICE

Edited by Cara Krmpotich & Alice Stevenson

UCLPRESS

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Introduction: collections management is/as critical practice

Cara Krmpotich and Alice Stevenson

Introduction

There is a common misconception that collections management is simply a set of rote procedures or technical practices that follow universal standards of best practice. We take a different view. This volume recognises collections management as a political, critical and social project – one that involves considerable intellectual labour that often goes unacknowledged within institutions and the fields of museum and heritage studies. To that end, the chapters assembled here bring into focus the knowledge and value systems, ethics and pragmatics that are the foundation of collections management. We consider such foundations to be plural and contextual, acknowledging that, rather than there being particular cultural modifications that are sometimes required in specific cases (e.g. Indigenous care), there exists worldwide local knowledge of place and material that is relevant to how collections are managed and cared for. Through discussion of different sorts of collections (e.g. natural history, anthropology, photographic, community history, public art and working collections) and different types of management activity (e.g. cataloguing, preventive conservation, handling) contributors develop a reflexive practice that localises and acts back on how core collections management standards are conceptualised, negotiated and enacted. Most importantly, it creates a critical dialogue about the underlying philosophies, values and ethics that determine what might be acceptable collections practices.

A strong body of critical literature for collections management and care has yet to be developed. It has been observed that 'modifications to best practices for collections have lagged behind other areas of museum

practice' (Jones et al. 2018, 2), while scholarship on the topic has been described as 'scant … despite the fact that these are critical functions in most museums' (McCarthy 2015, xl). Shelton (2013, 8) meanwhile has identified a distinction between 'operational museology' and 'critical museology', noting that 'the disciplinary architecture and institutional cultures of operational museology have escaped sustained analysis or deconstruction'. Similarly, as Alberti (2005) notes, mundane procedures and daily practices have been largely neglected in museum histories (but see Turner 2020).

There are a handful of textbooks devoted to collections management and care (Fahy 1994; Hillhouse 2009; Matassa 2011; Simmons 2006; Simmons and Kiser 2020), or reviews of improving technologies for monitoring and control (e.g. Windsor et al. 2015). Almost all are oriented toward technical guidance, procedure and policy, rather than critical reflection, with a few, now quite dated, exceptions (Case 1988). While ethical conundrums may be raised as points of interest in these volumes, the underlying value positions of 'best practice' are rarely questioned or historicised. Alternatively, special volumes have been dedicated to the care of Indigenous, sacred, ceremonial or secret items (Clavir 2002; Coote 1998; Martinez 2022; Flynn and Hull-Walski 2001). Arguably though, these volumes risk segregating and Othering ethnographic collections and Indigenous values, rather than re-imagining collections practices writ large across disciplines. Garneau (2022), for instance, gives voice to a widespread concern amongst Indigenous peoples about the presence of a meteorite at the Royal Alberta Museum, labelled with its incredible age (4.5 billion years old), but not its identity as Pahpamiyhaw asiniy, the Manitou Stone. Woodham and Kelleher (2020) provide a useful parallel example of the need to understand the care requirements for slag rock, whose very name and existence as a waste or by-product can work against it. Co-stewardship models are forefronted in both cases to connect those who care intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically and spiritually with those who are professionally concerned. Co-stewardship is, moreover, a way to recognise and justify the human efforts of care at the scale museum collections demand.

As institutions largely established in colonial contexts, museums held a utopian promise of completeness and authority (Basu and De Jong 2016), but therein lies the rub. In 2004, Michalski, a conservator with the Canadian Conservation Institute, voiced his scepticism of overly prescriptive, universal standards for collections care. It is an unease later reflected in the UK Museums Association's consultation of

more than one thousand museum professionals on the status and use of collections, which documented a narrow focus on basic collections work because of the perceived need 'to meet inflexible sector standards' (MA 2020, 4). As Michalski further unpacks, these can create undue hardships on cultural institutions: they can detract attention from larger, more pressing issues specific to a location or a collection; they can give staff the sense that the work of collections care is done, rather than always ongoing; and – critically – they can leave conservators and collections managers operating in a bubble, rather than as part of an integrated team in a museum. Writing in an Australian context, Pickering (2020) further reminds us that Indigenous collections staff may be asked to take on routine management tasks that put them at spiritual and physical risk.

Paradoxically, aspirations and expectations to meet professional standards may perhaps also be a reason why collections management activities are so often comfortably considered 'behind the scenes'; these largely unattainable standards leave modern day practitioners nervous about admitting to the reality of limited documentation, fluctuating environments and/or unstable conditions of the collections. Several of our contributors acknowledge explicitly instances of a 'failure of care' and its implications as the basis for proactive, redressive and transparent action (Prosper; Zetterström-Sharp; Niala and Ondeng'). This is one motivation for this volume: to make visible the depth and complexity of the challenges that often impede the implementation of standards and showcase some of the critical work that is being undertaken to address them. While this has been hinted at in sector guidance (e.g. Simmon's [2006] last chapter is 'when policy meets reality'), it deserves more attention, especially in the context of sector-wide concerns from decolonisation through to climate change.

Elsewhere in scholarship, conservation practice has acknowledged a more dynamic practice of care that is cognisant of object provenances, histories and biographies, as well as the multiple interest groups that impinge upon effective decision-making in conservation (Peters 2021, 8). These reflections offer provocations to collections management and care more broadly. What if the scholarship for museum studies took its perspective and departure points from collections management rather than its more usual curatorial grounding? What if rather than critical studies from the outside in – that is to say by emphasising the museum's exhibitionary and representational activities – our critical gaze came from the inside (the collection) outwards?

Asking such questions poses other disciplinary challenges, such as: what are the distinctions and overlaps between curation, conservation, preventive conservation and collections management responsibilities?; how is collections management geographically variable; how is it approached in parallel spheres (e.g. archives, libraries, but also anthropology, public history, art history, critical studies/cultural studies)?; and what dynamics are created when people come to the profession through tailored training pathways and then interact with staff and management coming from other sectors such as business and for-profit industries, immigration and resettlement sectors, or social service organisations? There remains good reason, however, to orient our perspective through the lens of collections management since, following Michalski (2004), we characterise collections care as being a whole-organisation endeavour, a site for operationalising museums' missions and values. As Portini et al. (2019) demonstrate, this can even be the case with Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which is a shared responsibility across all members of museum staff. This shared responsibility becomes clearer when we interrogate the definition of collections management, which is our departure point for the overview of this volume's five parts.

Defining collections management and care

Simmons (2015, 221) defines collections management as 'everything that is done to care for and document collections and to make them available for use'. In this volume we seek to expand on what 'care' entails and what the significance of 'use' is. We suggest reorienting Simmons' definition from what is done to care for collections, to what is done to care for collections *and* their users. And rather than 'use' being the end goal, we recommend 'use' be a starting point to rethink collections work.

'Care' is at the heart of museum definitions, conveyed through terms like 'safeguard' and 'preserve' or through phrases such as 'hold in trust'. Historically, care was evidenced in the physical longevity of objects. Regimes of care were determined by material and surfaced in strategies that promoted physical longevity and material integrity. In addition to the materials of artefacts, the substance of collections work became expressions of care: acid-free and inert materials, custom-made mounts and powder-coated enamelled shelving. As Woodham and Kelleher (2020) observe, a 'well-managed collection' (that is, one that

is well-documented and well-stored) is an expression of museological care. Woodham and Kelleher's observations draw our attention to the distinctions and commonalities between 'care' and 'management'. This likely reflects the increased professionalisation of the museum sector throughout the twentieth century (Buck and Gilmore 2010; Simmons 2015) and it reflects museums' increased preference for the rational and orderly (MacNeil et al. 2020). In contrast, 'care' also evokes the personal and affective, and perhaps even an individualised and chaotic approach – one that is potentially perceived in gendered terms as with stereotypical assumptions of women as 'care-givers' for the 'housekeeping' of museums (Beverung 2009).

Woodham and Kelleher go on to observe that evidence of care is a necessary condition for museum stakeholders to access and recognise the value of collections. How staff work with collections tells the public what museums' values and commitments are. Staff who create and implement best practices have tended to presume that people who visit museum collections share in their understanding of what constitutes 'good' protection. Yet, Indigenous critiques of museums have expressed time and again that often there is a disconnect between Indigenous expectations of care and museums' expressions of care (Krmpotich and Peers 2013; Davis and Krupa 2022; Migwans 2022; Weasel Head 2015; in this volume, see Fortney; Kapuni-Reynolds; Kuaiwa; du Preez; Sentance). What museums understand as care (untouched items, safely away in storage, away from light, cushioned in archival materials), is very often experienced as neglect. When collections staff invigilate research visits, staff understand this as an act of care for those objects, and a way to enact professional responsibilities. Conversely, racialised visitors accustomed to being followed in retail shops and suspected of theft, can feel this as an act of surveillance and distrust (Brucculieri et al. 2022). Specialist and/or culturally-related groups pose questions to staff about collections that they are passionate and knowledgeable about, only to find out that museum catalogues (which hold the kinds of information museums cared to collect) very often cannot answer their questions.

Increasingly, whether in world heritage sites, cultural centres, or 'traditional' museums, it is recognised that collections managers need to care for *both* objects and people (Jones et al. 2018). For example, Segadika's (2006) work with the World Heritage Site Tsodilo in Botswana documents the ways 'managing' and 'preserving' the site entails a relationship between people (communities, publics, visitors, staff),

material culture and intangible culture. As Emerson and Hoffman (2019, 258) note with reference to archaeological collections:

> We are not managing the collections. We are managing the ways in which people create, document, interpret, analyze, and access the collections. And because we are managing people, there are, inevitably, social and political issues that need to be addressed.

And this represents a professional shift – perhaps even a paradigm shift – for collections stewardship. This shift toward care for people is reflected in several chapters in this volume where 'rehumanisation' is a term commonly used by practitioners and scholars to describe attempts to revise policies, whether that be for repatriation (Russo) or deaccessioning (Durrant).

Another reason for revising the scope and nature of collections management definitions is that what constitutes a museum collection is itself expanding. This includes calls for greater attention to accumulations of photographic resources in museums (Edwards and Morton 2015) and a reappraisal of the status and significance of casts and replicas, with new guidance being introduced to challenge the lack of documentation and care given to such materials (Foster and Jones 2020). Museums are increasingly identifying digital materials as objects in their own right, requiring decisions that work through issues of preservation, storage, documentation, research, access, sustainability and power (Turner, Muntean and Hennessy; see also Anderson et al. 2018; Prendergrass et al. 2019; Taylor and Gibson 2017). More challenging still are collections of gaming design or social media interactions, with the concept of the 'digital object' itself still emergent in the sector (Meehan 2020). The authors in this volume show us the many ways collections matter, and the range of ways staff and publics interact with collections.

Given these concerns, we offer an expanded, more critical remit for a definition of collections management:

> Collections management is a set of practices that considers, enacts, and reappraises practices of documentation and care. These practices help to navigate the needs of communities, publics, and professionals in responsive ways that enable collections to actively and meaningfully contribute to individual and community life.

We remain mindful that, in most museums, the vast majority of artefacts are *not* on display, yet they nevertheless remain integral to the identity

and work of museums. This means that collections management staff share in museums' responsibilities to engage publics, build knowledge and contribute to civic life. To this end, rather than collections management being a prerequisite for use, we argue that use should inform documentation and care, and guide policy. In some specialist contexts this is already the case, such as in decisions for how to care for objects in handling collections being used by children (Hall and Swain 1996), or the need for registration transfers, as well as licence plate and insurance renewals for automobile collections (Gates 2020). Collections management will remain a vital component of internal museum operations, but it can also be an integral tool for expressing a museum's concern for the people for whom the collections are significant. In so doing, the relationality of such work is foregrounded.

Relationality also raises the ongoing challenges of conflicting priorities. Different regimes of care and what they entail may challenge authority and expertise, involve an emotional toll and/or manifest in feelings of anxiety and distrust. Reflections on collaborative practice in museums have largely examined instances of co-curation with the recognition of problematic institutional barriers and micro-aggressions in exhibitionary projects (Wajid and Minott 2019). However, the need for shared authority through 'radical trust' as identified by Lynch et al. (2010) may need to be extended to other areas of more routinised museum practice in which the museum cannot control the outcome. Beginning a critical investigation of relationality and the dynamics of radical trust from a collections management viewpoint brings new perspectives to how authority and expertise play out in museums. Bryant (2022) exposes the extent to which collections management work in support of digitisation, access and cultural recuperation is increasingly carried out by contingent labourers who have little authority or capacity to 'speak for' an institution or commit to the kind of long-term community relationships recommended in the literature. Thus, while the potential for collections management to contribute to change-making in museums is significant, Bryant's research reminds us that institutions rely on and are characterised by the people who work in them.

These new roles and responsibilities for collections management can be daunting to staff who feel chronically underfunded and understaffed. The chapters in this volume are careful to not ask collections management to *do more*, but rather to *do different*. Our intention in articulating this expanded definition and critical vision for collections management is to emphasise its integral role within cultural institutions, in building and sustaining relationships and enacting institutional change.

Part I: Making and unmaking museum collections

As material destined for a collection passes across the museum threshold, standardised operations of registration, numbering and marking transform its status into that of a 'museum object'. Such processes are thought to make these objects traceable and usable, a *rite de passage*, equivalent to what has been described as 'sacralization' (Riggs 2017, 130). That frequent characterisation is deliberately Eurocentric since for many communities these acts can be regarded as violence against objects themselves, especially those that are deemed sacred (Soares; Abiti and Mbewe). In questioning seemingly technical and straightforward museum procedures, this part reveals conceptual challenges. Notably, while critical questions are posed about which artefacts are suitable subjects for these actions, few questions are asked of the procedures themselves and whether they are necessarily appropriate and what sorts of museum objects are being created by their application. Here, authors address whether certain things should be documented, who should be the agents of documentation and how registration procedures might also be involved in unmaking and remaking collections.

Many of these questions and imperatives were thrown into relief by the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s, the global repercussions of which led to multifarious localised collections solutions to common problems. As a period of prolonged collective trauma, acquiring material that memorialised the experience became a commonplace priority for institutions. Existing literature on 'dark heritage' and practices in 'memorial museums' could be appealed to here as frameworks for thinking through aspects of this work (e.g. Thomas 2022), although the majority of titles are curatorially focused on voice, narrative, and representation rather than the policies and documentation activities that underpin these. In the USA, for instance, alongside the pandemic, Black men and women were killed at the hands of police officers, compounding collective trauma and pushing museums to further ask how they should respond. Museum leader Johnnetta Cole connects ideas voiced by Stephanie Cunningham, expressing that community-focused museums 'are able to be more culturally responsive because community care', *as opposed to collections* 'is at the center of their practice' (Cole et al. 2020, 303 emphasis added).

While we take the position that community care is not inherently distinct from collections care, we recognise that very often when an ethics of care is invoked, how it manifests in everyday workplace procedures is less often unpacked. Miles and West's chapter on collecting during the

pandemic for the London Transport Museum, in contrast, attends to the ethics of care in routinised practice and outlines the practical steps necessary to achieve them. They highlight how although such actions have been framed relative to a popular interest in rapid-response collecting (e.g. Debono 2021), these were not appropriate from a documentation point of view in the context of traumatic events. Rather, the wellbeing of donors and museum staff required a slower approach to contemporary collecting.

This theme of slowing down is central in Prosper's chapter, as he says 'in order to focus differently, listen carefully and act ethically'. What these approaches privilege is an opening of space to form relationships between collections and people. While slowing down in an area of work that is often already resource limited is challenging, Prosper identifies the significance of small gestures, but also the wider repercussions and weaknesses that they reveal in larger infrastructures.

Sutherland-Steward offers a case study that operates at the speed of volunteerism, but which nevertheless seeks to act in the full spirit of care for a digital collection and for the Black community in Windsor whose stories it shares. Sutherland-Stewart focuses on the human, relational ethics, and the operational workflows of creating the Jackson Park Project Digital Archive, initiated before the widespread arrival of AI and the 'scraping' of online repositories. The ubiquity of digital datasets creates even more imperative for the close, considered, slow work of understanding how and under what circumstances data is created and shared in the first place (Cowan and Rault 2018; Pickover 2008). The chapter emphasises the importance of being mission-driven and developing digitisation approaches that can be applied consistently and humanely; Sutherland-Stewart reflects on the challenges of this in a volunteer-run organisation.

The following two chapters grapple with uncomfortable tensions in museum categorisation processes, which on the one hand impose oppressive indignities upon cultural belongings for affected communities, but which on the other hand may remain integral to tracing past histories and significances. Soares's contribution presents a complex history of making and remaking of the Nosso Sagrado collection ('Our sacred' collection) through different museum regimes: its creation through violent police raids in Brazil on terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious houses); its time imprisoned and denied proper documentation in Rio de Janeiro's Civil Police Museum where it was considered criminal evidence of 'black magic'; and finally its transfer to the Republic Museum where the collection is mediated between the worlds of community and museum, resulting in a best practice that has to be constantly renegotiated and challenged.

Stevenson, Fforde and Ormond-Parker, meanwhile, look at one of the most invasive collections management practices – that of physically marking collections. Generally conceived to be a technical activity guided by specific materials, this chapter reviews some of the cultural, religious and ethical conditions that are equally important to consider. One focus is human remains, where markings upon ancestors are both an affliction and benefit; they may be stark reminders of colonial violence, but often they are the only clue as to their identity in repatriation processes. As with Soares's account, there persists an uncomfortable tension in the realisation that liberation from collections is often dependent upon the very collections management processes responsible for their confinement.

The remaking and unmaking of collections is the central theme for Durrant's chapter, which grapples with one area of management that elicits strong, usually negative, reactions: disposal and deaccessioning. Durrant seeks to disrupt negative perceptions by offering a beneficial disposal reality that nuances the object biography to envisage museums as places of longevity rather than of permanence (see also Krmpotich). Durrant posits that museum staff need to learn to 'let it go', assuring us that 'the inevitability of loss can be countered by the hope of a reimagined or repurposed life'. This rallying cry of hope and imagination is given momentum in Odumosu's part response, 'in a multiverse of timelines and possibilities'. Perceptively, she recognises the constraints imposed by 'the realities of experiencing already existing consequences; already living the future that had been seeded'. This is a powerful framing tool for collections management and its policies, data and practices that seem so inescapable and demarcate the boundaries of the day-to-day collection activities in our institutions. Re-envisioning the foundations – the 'institutional soil' – of museums, she contends, is key to a transformative vision of institutions like the museum.

Part II: A universal approach? Accessing, handling and enlivening collections

Universality as an intellectual and ethical imperative has substantially shaped museum work. Critiques of the universal – including universal museums – contribute to necessary conversations encouraging the decolonisation of cultural institutions. At the same time, the ethical impetus of universal design, or De Kosnik's 'rogue' universal archives (2016), offer alternative sets of values with which to imagine the universal in museums.

Part chapters consider how collections handling, storage conditions and research guidance may itself need to be shaped by public and user needs rather than vice versa. Once transformed into a museum object, material may be more reverentially treated and direct access carefully controlled. The manipulation of objects, specimens and documents is usually framed by professional handling guidance that may authorise only certain individuals to touch them and dictate how they may be touched, while what can be done to a museum object is further mediated by policies and procedures, as well as sites of practice, be that storage facilities or conservation laboratories. Codes are often predicated on the assumption of a universal, rational body, but what constitutes appropriate – or 'safe' – handling and touch is variable for bodies enabled or disabled by physical, cultural, social, economic and emotional conditions.

Beale and Pyrzakowski confront and reappraise enduring collections management values regarding preservation, handling and safe conditions when asked to investigate the possibility of preparing precious, elderly yidaki in their care for playing by Yolungu musicians and exhibiting in the South Australian Museum. They model a pluralist response that learns from Indigenous and conservation expertise that meets the needs of the yidaki, the musicians, and themselves as staff with professional, ethical responsibilities. Likewise, Garside, Rātima-Nolan and Rogerson revisit another central and enduring tenet of collections management: that handling is best done with gloves. Their positionality – working within the British Library; Rātima-Nolan's application of his experience and knowledge as a Maori man; surviving the COVID-19 pandemic – gives voice to the breadth of variation and exceptions surrounding glove use in collections. Significantly, they draw our attention to the ways white gloves have become part of a public psyche, reinforced through popular entertainment and media staging. As a visual symbol and shorthand for practices of 'care', visitors to collections and professionals alike can feel pressured into a performance of care that works against scientific evidence, cultural values and professional expertise.

Cecilia's chapter also brings into focus the dynamics between publics and museum staff. She reminds us that the universal design, inclusion and accessibility work of collections management can not only be directed toward museum publics. She pushes us to ask how collections management allows some bodies, and not others, to take up the work of collections care. We hope her chapter will likewise encourage crip curation and critical disability studies to see collections management as a site for critique, intervention and reinvention.

All three of these chapters confront a tension between the exception and the rule, making visible the ways in which exceptions can be generative for re-articulating collections management work and ethics. One additional area in which we see tremendous promise for pluralising collections practices is the 'working collection.' We maintain that *all* collections should be understood as 'working', though this requires frameworks of care that allow artefacts to thrive in working environments. To this end, Krmpotich offers criteria to guide collections care and decision-making premised on a dual desire for collections to be active, and to age well. Her 'healthy ageing' approach to collections care draws on cases of 'exceptional' care in museums (musical instruments and Indigenous cultural belongings) to make the case for plural standards of care in museums that discourages objects from becoming shut-ins. Spary's chapter illustrates the realities of a 'working collection' on a significant scale. Sharing responsibility for the Historic and Decorative Arts Collections at the Palace of Westminster, Spary reflects on the symbolic and practical importance of this collection in the operations of government. Rather than restrict engagements with the collection, Spary and her colleagues employ practices that affirm the importance of historic material culture in our day-to-day lives – a theme that continues in the next two parts.

In her part response, Romanek brings a keen scholar-practitioner critique to the chapters, allowing her to recognise the sensorial qualities of collections management and the 'real-time' decision-making and consequences it entails. Crucially, Romanek consciously invokes a collective 'We', reminding us that change in museums happens when we take action; it is not the sole responsibility of the chapters' authors in distant museums, but all of our responsibilities in our own locations. Her response poetically unites museums' publics ('the workers') with museums' staff, reminding us of our universal humanity.

Part III: Community brilliance in shaping collections management

Given the importance of material culture in human lives, cultures globally have developed practices of curation and care relevant to local ontologies and environments (Kreps 2003). Yet it is Western museum ideals that have dominated best practice guidance. In centring community brilliance, we attend to the multiple geographies and centres where precedents are being set for collections management as the sector confronts the colonial and imperial logics underlying these ideals.

Early actions in support of decolonisation and social justice within museums frequently focused on public spaces, with attention to voice, self-representation, authority and the politics of exhibitions. More recently, collections practices have become an integral focus in the decolonisation of museums (Dalal-Clayton and Rutherford n.d.; Spears and Thompson 2022), and as important sites for anti-racism (Momaya 2018; Odumosu 2020) and queer action (Drabinski 2013; Sullivan et al. 2022). Cataloguing schemas, acquisition strategies, deaccessioning and repatriation approaches, preventive conservation activities, digital asset management and access to collections all contribute to the infrastructure of museums. Increasingly, these practices are understood to manifest enduring values that perpetuate colonial and racialised discrimination. Decolonising, Indigenising, queering, and anti-racist approaches require museum staff to work against practices as neutral, natural and objective, and to proactively intervene in collections 'best practices', asking 'best for whom?' and 'best for what?'. Here, the emphasis is not upon being 'correct', but to value the dialogues and questioning of the process.

To this end, the chapters in this part speak to the value of localised approaches to collections care for communities themselves; that is, not only to change Western museums in metropoles, but to expand what we recognise as important cultural spaces and collections care in the first place. Kapuni-Reynolds, du Preez and Kuaiwa address the role of language revitalisation and knowledge practices as they are connected to collections, but the value of such cultural practices permeates far beyond the walls of the museum. McCarthy, Sadlier and Parata illustrate the ways that Māori have influenced collections care in Aotearoa New Zealand for 40 years in ways that have been dialogic, but we might also say 'diplomatic' in that enacting such practices of stewardship manifest Māori sovereignty and self-determination as agreed to in the Treaty of Waitangi.

There is a Pacific focus to the part (Fortney; Kapuni-Reynolds; du Preez; Kuaiwa; McCarthy; Sadlier; Parata; Russo), attesting to Indigenous leadership within the settler colonial museum landscapes of Canada, the United States, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. Writing from Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory, Fortney describes the overlaps between intellectual and physical access. She adopts the Salish terminology of 'belongings' in place of artefacts (now common across Canada in reference to Indigenous material heritage), though her chapter also emphasises the ways museums are responsible for fostering a sense of belonging in and to their spaces and practices. She challenges readers to assess how welcoming their collections and collection spaces are, from

the first act of successfully identifying one's belongings in a database, to one's experience in collections spaces, to the kinds of supports provided during repatriation. Russo focuses on repatriation, from the perspective of policy and Indigenous agency. She documents a museum's transition, and describes policy at its best: a tool that enables transparent, equitable, and responsible decision-making. International declarations and working group reports provide precedent for both Russo and Fortney's work, though both authors make clear the localised work required to bring broad recommendations into meaningful practice. Russo's chapter demonstrates the immediate impact of community-engaged care. In parallel, McCarthy, Sadlier and Parata describe the effects of museum policy that centres Māori values of mana taonga for Māori, but also for non-Māori collections of art and history, and for museum practices outside Aotearoa New Zealand. As they write, 'the community *outside* the museum becomes a participant *within* the museum alongside professionals'. Changes reverberate locally and beyond.

Abiti and Mbewe and Cai write from non-settler colonial contexts, but where externally-imposed values of heritage and preservation have nonetheless (re)shaped museum practices. Writing from the perspectives of national museums in Uganda and Zambia, Abiti and Mbewe experience Euro-American museum practices as abusive. They explore the ways local knowledges can be the basis for effective care of collections and in so doing recalibrate the ethics upon which museums operate. Abiti and Mbewe refuse a neutered history of museum practice, and confront the ethics of government and missionary collectors, while recognising the ways in which their museums have come to be important sites for post-colonial nation-building and history telling. Their chapter centres the question common to all the chapters in this part: who has the power to make decisions about keeping, displaying, and knowing? Cai's chapter is an important reminder that to Indigenise, or decolonise, heritage sites will not inherently look the same in all places. Cai sensitively documents the decision to display human remains at the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Malaysia. In the Kadazan-run museum, caring for the skulls involves ritual attention as well as interpretation, display, and positive relationships with the associated spirits. Incorporated into performance and touristic attraction, the skulls are not made to change for the visiting public – rather, the public is asked to conduct themselves in particular ways according to the needs of the skulls and their spirits. Cai's chapter resists an easy binary between Western and Indigenous traditions, as well as assumptions about what humanising care may look like. Connecting her chapter to the others in this part is an interest in the ways museum

procedures, policies and values can be a site for cultural survivance. As Kapuni-Reynolds, du Preez and Kuaiwa eloquently voice: 'if you think these Hawaiian collection items are important and Hawaiian knowledge is important, then Hawaiian people are also important.'

Sentance's part response centres humans, and the relationships institutions (should) have with communities and nations, as the purpose for our work in museums. Policies, he reminds us, are not simply documents gathering 'proverbial dust,' they are living practices. So too is the facilitation of collections visits, database maintenance, storage procedures and record-keeping. Survivance, but also self-determination, agency and sovereignty bring about the conditions that assist Sentance and colleagues to 'work with love in our hands' – a recursive manifestation of care for Ancestors, belongings, and the relationships they engender.

Part IV: Collection management's publics

The 2020 UK Museum Association's consultation of UK museum professionals documented a culture of collections work and audience work occurring in silos. Yet the interface between 'back of house' and 'front of house' is increasingly being blurred. For instance, Chapman (2015) has highlighted how object images and collections are increasingly part of a museum's digital site, meaning that work that used to be done for internal purposes now *also* has external or public-facing purposes. Likewise, when descendent communities enter museum collection spaces to visit their cultural belongings, storage practices and workspaces are keenly experienced by relatives of those belongings. 'Back-of-house' work becomes 'front-of-house' work. Working collections are also very specific contexts in which a key part of collections management is advocacy among the collection's daily users.

This part asks how collections engagements with and for the public shapes collections practices, public perceptions and museum relevance. Contributions attend to the tensions between collections work and the goals of democratisation, multivocality and responsibility. They also ask questions about the relationship between the digital and the physical, whether that be related to artefacts or audiences. Most importantly, contributions consider how collections work is changed when it includes a responsibility to care for both people and objects with the implication that it is necessary to understand collections work as central to the work of decolonisation, reconciliation, anti-racism, sustainability, civic action and social justice, as well as equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility.

While work in the digital realm – whether through blogs, social media, or other web-interfaces – tends to be orientated toward giving the public insights into these areas, it is also an opportunity to get public feedback and participation in collections management and care itself. For example, Mickletz and Arenstein (2019) have examined the use of social media platforms in raising public awareness of integrated pest management, encouraging the audience to participate in combating pest activity. More creative still are theatrical performances, such as *The Acquisitions Panel*, an interactive performance focusing on decisions around whether to collect (Fast Familiar 2022). Crowdsourcing large cataloguing projects is another well-known example, such as MicroPasts, a web-enabled crowd-sourcing project which allows the public to contribute to collections documentation and research (Bonacchi et al. 2014).

What, however, are we as museum professionals giving access to when we promote collections information and seek engagement? There is a perception among the public that museum records contain more information than they often do. As almost all authors in this part note, this is a major point of frustration for many when the information that has been historically recorded is the information that is privileged by previous museum practitioners through fields such as object description, rather than observations on object use, significance or associated people. The very structure of collections management systems, Zetterström-Sharp, Niala and Ondeng point out in their conversation (as does Zalm in the subsequent chapter), were not designed to hold the types of information important to communities or the public. This leads Niala to ask: 'How do you convince a community member that information is not there, without having to go through a traumatic process explaining how their culture has not been valued?' One answer is that the most useful information and support is realised where personal relationships exist between communities and museum staff to facilitate communication, in contrast to most online databases which were considered 'shallow and unhelpful'.

Zalm's chapter takes us to the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen where similarly focused work on the database – its language, terms, and absences – has been actively tackled, despite the historical complexities of the systems in place. Here the intersections of internal classifications and public presentation were enmeshed with displays following the classifications employed to catalogue the collection, thereby highlighting how systems have agency to physically structure institutions, materialising them in ways that make change even harder. While these examples, as in Part III, largely focus on cultural collections, the issues raised regarding

documentation, cataloguing structures and access to stored material are just as relevant for science collections, as the work of Ashby and Machin (2021), and Das and Lowe (2019) demonstrate.

Towards the end of Zalm's chapter, physical access to collections in storage is raised as an implication of documentation systems. Beale's chapter takes this theme forward. Museum sector efforts to make accessible material not on display has a long history of experimentation from efforts to establish visible storage (Ames 1977) or provide store tours (Keene 2005), to more novel public engagement events via social media (Corsini 2017). Using a storage project at the South Australian Museum as a case study, Beale's chapter considers rebuilding collection infrastructure in a way that both protects the collections but also improves the experience of physically accessing collections for First Nations communities. In contrast, the final chapter in the part grapples with unconventional, albeit entirely common, locations where collections are 'stored'; public art, a space that often pushes heritage professionals to engage with a wider range of expertise in adjacent fields and entails distinct forms of care. Maltby's examples, set in a cemetery, an industrial landscape and an airport, emphasise how publics and collections care can be entangled. Notably, decisions on preventive care have to prioritise public safety over 'best practice' material care.

Rutherford's part response draws out the significance of the more human-centred approaches that these chapters collectively advocate for, while acknowledging the limitations of technological solutionism, the pragmatics of resource allocation and the ongoing tensions between aspiration and practical realities of collections work. New ways of working will not eliminate these tensions and indeed these tensions should be kept visible as a reflection of the continuing need to think through how practices of care meet the needs of both objects and people.

Part V: The ethics of sustainability, preservation and stewardship in collections care

Much of collections management is concerned with controlling the threat of environmental change. Usually, that environment is within the museum itself, however climate change poses significant external environmental risks: rising sea levels, desertification, wildfires and acidification of oceans. Natural and cultural heritage, and the institutions that care for heritage, are increasingly feeling the pressures of climate change (Cameron and Nelson 2015; Harrison and Sterling 2021; McGhie 2022; Mínguez García

2019). Most of the chapters here engage with proactive efforts to control environments ethically and responsively, but there are extreme events beyond anyone's control that not only severely impact museums and collections, but also endanger their staff and communities (e.g. Kikuchi 2015). For collections managers, emergency preparedness and disaster planning includes increasingly frequent and intense environmental climate hazards, as well as armed conflict and pandemics.

On top of this, in the Anthropocene, museums themselves have come to acknowledge the threat that they may have on the environment through their extensive use of plastics, the carbon footprint of their activities and the propensity for growth rather than sustainability. Collections staff and conservators now find themselves balancing multiple preservation concerns: in-situ artefacts and heritage sites; museum, gallery, library and archives buildings; and local and global ecologies. Contributions in this part present emerging and shifting values toward 'preservation' that look both within and beyond the museum.

Generating, evaluating and deploying evidence regarding climate and artefact change is central to Argyropoulos, Karolidis and Pouli's chapter. Conscious that environmental standards and associated best practices have originated in particular geographies and climates, the authors set out to understand the specificities of Eastern Mediterranean climates, and to develop localised best practices that address Greece's open air heritage sites, underwater heritage, and artefact collections housed in museum stores and exhibition spaces. While their chapter reflects more than 20 years of research in the region on sustainability and heritage, they draw attention to the ways more recent events – from COVID-19 to the war in Ukraine – influence the broader environmental parameters in which museums operate.

Ahmed and Newell document how the Australian Museum is actively integrating choices that neutralise the carbon footprint of operational decisions, though they also speak of the importance of storytelling and interpretation to the work of preservation. Their story is one of urgency, aggressively addressing emissions and their carbon footprint, not unlike the urgency with which collections managers are accustomed to responding to an infestation. Through their collections, building, vision and policy, their natural history museum seeks to enact care directed inward to their visitors and artefacts, as well as outward to their city, country and neighbouring nations. Their chapter also encourages us to remain open about who in museums is responsible for implementing practices of preservation, conservation and care.

The energy consumption required to operate museum buildings according to current environmental standards is exacerbated when museums' digital collections and assets proliferate. Turner, Muntean and Hennessy examine the demands and opportunities of caring for digital collections, from technical infrastructures to intellectual property regimes to the social relations that adhere to belongings. They observe how reconceiving collections management as a responsibility to steward 'in the meantime' rather than in perpetuity can unsettle our assumptions and establish more just criteria for decision-making. Much as Argyropoulos, Karolidis and Pouli attend to the influence of global events for local practice, Turner, Muntean and Hennessy argue that the global phenomenon of digitisation is emplaced, and practised locally in museums, with people and within world views.

Nakamura and Yamauchi's conversation considers what happens when museums, cities or nations ignore local knowledge. Yamauchi recounts experiencing the Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami that followed from the Rias Ark Museum of Art, near the Sanriku Coast – a location whose history is replete with tsunami events *and* knowledge of how to live with the sea. He identifies the central roles of art, history and art history in documenting and communicating knowledge that can literally save lives, and also inform sound relationships with our environments. Echoing Ahmed and Newell's description of their natural history museum's commitment to the future, Nakamura and Yamauchi each take up responsibilities directed toward a future including memorialisation, documentation, artistic response, salvage, civic dialogue and humility. In this way, like Ahmed and Newell's chapter, Nakamura and Yamauchi discourage a silo-ing of who does the work of care, management and preservation in museums and galleries. Their chapter brings the volume full circle, with the creation of new collections as a means of future care for people.

In his part response, Yiu takes up the notion of 'burden'– a term that is in stark contrast to the idea of care. He draws our attention to museum artefacts that are 'high maintenance', but also the burden of holding on to increasingly untenable museum traditions. Yiu's observation attests to the ways our own best practices can create burdens and obstacles to our work of care, and as all the chapters in this volume do, encourages us to engage in a thoughtful reevaluation of our goals, values, assumptions, practices and theories.

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Part I
Making and unmaking museum collections

1

Documenting COVID-19: sensitivity, care, collaboration

Ellie Miles and Rosamund Lily West

Introduction

This chapter introduces the work London Transport Museum's Documentary Curator programme has been undertaking since 2018. We outline the circumstances of London Transport Museum when the first COVID-19 wave came to Britain, with the closure of the museum and subsequent drastic reduction of staff, and how this impacted on our collections management procedures. As the pandemic unfolded, there was mounting pressure to collect using the rapid response collecting methodology. However, we (the authors) decided on a different, deliberately slower, approach that centred the welfare of donors and museum staff, putting care and sensitivity at the heart of our practice. This new approach in collections management and donor relationships has fed into the wider work of the documentary curator. We outline the kinds of disruption that museum processes faced during the pandemic. Reflecting on this period, we argue that living and working through the early stages of the pandemic had significant consequences on collections management that have endured beyond the initial circumstances that brought them on. We argue for the significance of 'slow' contemporary collecting and a greater transparency around considerations of ethics.

London Transport Museum and the Documentary Curator programme

London Transport Museum explores the link between London's transport and the growth of London, and the significant impact transport has on

the social and cultural life of London since 1800. The museum holds more than 500,000 objects, including locomotive engines, buses, uniforms, posters and oral histories. The Documentary Curator programme, supported by Arts Council England, began in 2018 to record and document contemporary London. Two documentary curators (job sharing one full-time role) bring contemporary material into the collections. From 2018, the documentary curators were Susanna Cordner and Ellie Miles. Then, from April 2020, Rosamund Lily West replaced Susanna Cordner. Similar to the rest of the curatorial team, the documentary curators carry out collections management tasks in place of any registration staff. This contemporary material complements the museum's historic collections as well as increasing the representation and diversity in the collections. Inevitably, from early 2020, this work involved documenting the impact of COVID-19 on the capital.

The museum is an arm's-length subsidiary of Transport for London (TfL), the local government body responsible for Greater London's transport system. TfL employs more than 27,000 people, including the museum staff. The workers who kept London's transport running during the pandemic became critical to London's experience of the early pandemic, when public health restrictions meant that the public transport network was mainly used by workers who couldn't work from home. There was a national focus on 'key workers', people in typically public-facing roles who could not work from home, such as healthcare and transport workers. Of these groups, evidence shows that some key workers, such as bus drivers, suffered disproportionately compared to the UK's population as a whole: 'bus drivers had a statistically significant, two-fold excess in mortality in March to May 2020' (Goldblatt and Morrison 2021, 67). The museum needed new processes which would hold space for transport workers and key workers to represent their experiences of the pandemic in their own voices.

London Transport Museum during the pandemic and the first lockdown

On 23 March 2020, the UK's first lockdown was announced. London Transport Museum had already closed to the public on 17 March and instructed its workforce to work from home, away from the museum's public galleries, but also away from museum stores, meeting rooms and offices. London Transport Museum used the UK government's

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('furlough') extensively to try and mitigate the financial effects of the period (Her Majesty's Government 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, London Transport Museum had just under 200 employees, but then existed on a staffing level of 38 people from April 2020. This included one of the documentary curators, Rosamund Lily West. More of the museum workforce were slowly brought back from furlough when required. However, a proportion of the museum's workforce employed through an employment agency lost their jobs.

The remaining workforce focused their efforts on financial stability, web content and sales, alongside collecting the experience of the pandemic. Over the coming months, more of the team returned but there was disruption to the museum's processes of decision-making. With a large proportion of the workforce furloughed, many of the groups and boards who endorse, recommend and approve decisions were not meeting regularly or were not quorate. Those that were prioritised their time around immediate financial concerns. Thus, our forum for discussing new acquisitions did not meet from March 2020 until February 2021.

In the past, London Transport Museum has done contemporary collecting through methods that include public call-outs, such as 'Journey to Pride' (Miles 2019) and 'Where are all the women?' (Brown 2018), which use press releases to promote collecting activity to the public. Other London museums, such as the Museum of London (2020) and the Museum of the Home (2020) were publicly discussing their COVID-19 collecting, and appearing in press and media to make public appeals for material to collect. This created the desire within London Transport Museum to publicise our COVID-19 collecting, for instance through online content. However, in this instance, the documentary curators advocated that London Transport Museum pursue a more tailored approach specific to the pandemic and the ethical concerns it raised. Knowing a great deal of collecting work was being undertaken by colleagues at other organisations, while being aware of the limitations on our capacity, we were keen to focus our efforts on donors and materials that closely matched our collecting remit. We advocated for a collecting model more suitable to the needs of the donors we would hope to reach, who, of course, included transport workers. This differentiated the collecting work from more general interest, open-ended collecting methods that we had used in the past.

Changes in donor relationship and collections care and management

The restrictions we were living and working within meant our collections management processes had to adapt to the unfolding situation. We used the disruption to our practical ways of working to create time to develop a more empathetic collecting process. After sector discussions, we decided that a 'wait and see' approach would be preferable despite concerns material would be hard to acquire once each phase of the pandemic had passed (Debono 2021, 180). For London Transport Museum and the documentary curators, documenting COVID-19 would have involved interacting with frontline TfL workers or other frontline workers using the transport network. Given the pressure such people were under, we decided it would be unethical to contact these potential donors to discuss museum acquisitions. Thus, our methods deliberately went against the idea that 'Rapid Response Collecting has been a most apt methodology with which to document the COVID-19 pandemic' (Debono 2021, 179). Instead, we observed the news, social media and TfL internal communications and kept a 'wish list' of objects and stories we might wish to tell with the view to approaching donors in the future at a less sensitive time. Thus, the traditional model of building donor relationships only after a potential acquisition or collaboration presented itself had become unsuitable. Due to the sensitivity of the situation, the need to put the welfare of the donor first was more important than ever.

As curators, we had to stop and think critically about how to collect respectfully and sensitively from key workers. We discussed this with external colleagues in London-based institutions that, like London Transport Museum, had an association with an organisation that represented frontline workers during the pandemic, such as the Royal College of Nursing and the Postal Museum. Thus, we were able to formulate a preliminary collecting plan of what to collect and prioritise based on projected short-, medium- and long-term timeframes based on key principles of care, consideration and collaboration. This enabled us to advocate to the museum's senior leadership for a slower, more considered approach to collecting. Despite the experience of travelling and working on the transport network being a core story represented within the museum's collections, we chose to hold back from this approach during the pandemic for ethical reasons. We considered potential issues with donors working on the frontline such as trauma, whistleblowing and the impact on any future public enquiry that, for instance, conducting an oral history could have.

Collections management

The museum accreditation scheme in the UK includes the requirement for accredited museums to meet, or have a plan to meet, nine primary collections management and documentation criteria. This includes criteria for both object entry and object acquisition, as laid out in Spectrum's standard of collection management and documentation, administered by the Collections Trust (Collections Trust 2017). As an accredited museum, London Transport Museum's policies and procedures were developed, and are maintained, to meet these criteria. The museum's collections management became a social and critical practice, documenting and operating within a traumatic and ongoing situation.

For long periods we were unable to access the museum's stores, either because of workplace restrictions or the national restrictions on non-essential use of public transport. Thus, while lockdowns were in place in the UK, the stores became inaccessible to us (although at times colleagues who lived within walking distance, or who had cars, were able to arrange to be at the store while practising social distancing). Subsequently, several of Spectrum's primary procedures, such as 'object entry' and 'acquisition and accessioning', became impossible to fulfil. This forced a delay, creating conditions for us to usefully explore what it might mean to decouple the ideas of 'rapid response' and contemporary collecting.

We had no access to object entry forms, so did not have the ability to record legal ownership of objects or provide receipts for object owners. At first, with much of the curatorial team furloughed and thus not able to work, the documentary curators had neither the capacity to develop an alternative process, nor the seniority to have such a process approved. We prioritised consideration of the needs of potential donors above developing an alternative process. Thus, objects we wished to acquire remained with donors for months while we kept in contact to maintain the crucial donor relationship.

The practical limitations on our work supported our assertion that we needed longer to consider the pre-assessment of ethics and rights associated with acquisitions (part of Spectrum's 'object entry' and 'acquisition and accessioning' standard, but now very much prolonged). The Spectrum standard for object entry stipulates that: 'You assess and mitigate any potential risks to people or other objects from incoming objects' (Collections Trust 2017). This is to 'quarantine items potentially infested with pests that could damage your existing collections' (Collections Trust 2017). There were initial considerations about surface

transmission of COVID-19 should objects arrive infected with the virus. There were also considerations to donors regarding the potential risks associated with donating or discussing an object or experience, a concern that we describe in greater detail.

Donor considerations

The first of these potential risks was grouped around mental health and wellbeing, and the potential to re-traumatise or trigger a trauma reaction by discussing objects and experiences relating to the pandemic. Unlike other London organisations such as the Wellcome Collection and the Science Museum, London Transport Museum was not used to dealing with the trauma of an unfolding event. Indeed, the Science Museum began collecting around COVID-19 in February 2020, attesting that 'collecting COVID-19 objects is a task that medical curators have been training for all their professional lives' (McEnroe 2022, 21). At London Transport Museum, we worked from the assumption that the pandemic would be a distressing, stressful and, for some, traumatic event – especially for transport workers. The Museum of Homelessness' work and writing guided us on dealing with trauma, the specifics of collecting trauma and distress and the need for safeguarding (Turtle and Turtle 2020, 23–6). We actively signposted resources to donors, such as MIND, NHS talking therapy services and NHS 'Coping well with COVID' webinars.

These considerations also applied to ourselves as museum staff as 'many people had pressing concerns such as their own health, the health of friends and family, financial burdens and caring responsibilities' (Mulhearn 2021, 25). Pre-COVID-19, the two documentary curators would work on their own separate collecting projects. We decided to work on COVID-19 collecting together, not only because it was a major event to document, but also so we were able to informally support one another. However, we were only able to do this once Ellie Miles was brought back from furlough. Before this, Rosamund Lily West was working on COVID-19 collecting in isolation as the only other member of the curatorial team who was not furloughed was the Head Curator. TfL also had support in place that we were able to access, if necessary. We also decided to undertake Mental Health First Aider training, run by MHFA England. This, to some extent, gave us the tools to recognise mental health issues in ourselves, colleagues and, potentially, donors.

Another important concern related to the period was that of economic uncertainty. Trade unions were forthright in their criticisms of employers, including TfL, for not safeguarding their workforce adequately, especially during the onset of the pandemic. Museums' focus on individual stories, objects and oral histories could have been tantamount to inviting individuals to be forthcoming with criticisms of their employer during a period of huge economic uncertainty. We did not want to invite transport staff to criticise their employer when job losses in other sectors were common. Also, it put us, as TfL employees, in a difficult position as our jobs were not 'essential' to the running of TfL and there were redundancies across the heritage sector during this period. Moreover, critical roles such as cleaning were performed by outsourced contractors (RMT, undated). The precarious conditions of outsourcing that save money and make it profitable for organisations are the same conditions which make these roles, stories and experiences difficult to collect.

Objects collected

To avoid working with donors and confronting the ethical issues described above, we limited our donor interaction to TfL workers who had already come forward in the press. One such individual was Overground driver Narguis Horsford, who appeared on the cover of British Vogue in July 2020 (London Transport Museum 2021/231). In her Wayne Hemingway–designed Overground uniform, the TfL roundel clearly visible on her outfit, the cover's headline reads, 'The New Frontline: celebrating courage in the face of adversity'. This object represents the story of how key workers, like Overground drivers, were celebrated in the early days of the pandemic. That a TfL worker could be on the cover of British Vogue, in her TfL work uniform, was exceptional. As this story had received considerable press attention, we contacted Narguis through TfL and arranged an oral history interview with her, capturing her experience in her own words (London Transport Museum OH363).

We were also able to collect objects generated by TfL, thereby bypassing the individual donor relationship. One such object was a face mask exemption badge (Figure 1.1). These were produced by TfL in large numbers and available to anyone who wanted to declare their exemption from wearing a face covering. Despite the generic nature of such an object, we still had to exercise the sensitivity and care learned through our museum pandemic experience. This object shows the need for people to

Figure 1.1 2021/229 Face mask exemption badge, 2020. ©TfL, from the London Transport Museum collection.

display their face covering exemption status in the context of TfL policing the wearing of face coverings in the pandemic, as well as public feeling towards the wearing, or not, of face masks. These considerations extend to how we discuss and catalogue these objects as well as if they were to go on display.

The lessons we have learned, and continue to learn, through our COVID-19 collecting inform our collecting in other areas. Alongside the COVID-19 collecting, the documentary curators are collecting around themes such as the new Elizabeth line, suicide prevention, women's safety and welfare and the legacies of Caribbean recruitment. Some of these areas have not been addressed directly in the museum's collecting before now. Concerning our collecting around suicide, we are being mindful of staff mental health and wellbeing because, as with COVID-19, this is an issue that impacts many. When presenting this suicide-related material to the museum's Collections Development Group in summer 2022, we warned members of the group about the content of the material, allowing them to opt out of reading the proposal or taking part in the meeting's discussion. This embeds sensitivity and care into our processes. After acquisition, this ethos continues within our collections management processes. We have been working with the rest of the curatorial team on labelling records that contain language or material that could cause trauma to, for instance, a researcher.

Conclusion

The disruption to our work caused by the first UK lockdown created scope to change our approaches to contemporary collecting. The conditions of the first UK lockdown were not all repeated in subsequent lockdowns, but we have not reverted to pre-pandemic methods. Approaches we developed during the first period of disruption have gone on to inform our work more generally outside of those specific limitations. The pre-approval period of assessing objects, ethics and rights has become more explicit. Previously, these assessments were sometimes made by an individual curator and might be implicit. The ethics of an acquisition were not recorded on acquisition proposal forms, for example, the way that other considerations were. The museum's acquisition proposal form has a 'Reasons against acquisition/loan' section in which the proposing curator can raise any ethical issues, and these are discussed in the Collections Development Group, but we are looking at embedding this process more formally. Our new ways of working encourage, invite and sustain accountability and scrutiny for these judgements. Within the wider curatorial team, we have also seen a growing awareness of the curators' potential capacity to cause harm by collecting.

Looking forward, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the lives of TfL workers and those using the network, the museum must continue to adapt. COVID-19 is something the museum is likely to be collecting around for years. The practice of waiting with care and sensitivity can be applied to other museums, collections and projects. However, this practice, and subsequent long timelines, is not easily applicable to funding bodies or applications and requires advocacy within an organisation.

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2

A failure of care: unsettling traditional archival practices

Sony Prosper

This is a lightly revised and edited version of a presentation titled 'A Failure of Care: Unsettling Archival Practices' as part of a panel titled 'Between Critique and Practice: Unsettling Collections Management through Anthropology' at the 2022 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting

Introduction

In an edited book titled *Collections Management as Critical Museum Practice*, it is worth beginning by noting that I am not a collections manager, but feel free to consider me an interlocutor of some sort. Instead, I am a former librarian, archivist, curator, and, at the time of writing, a PhD candidate in Information at the University of Michigan, trained in Western practices of archiving, curating and librarianship. By that, I partially mean practices centring paper and text-based documents and materials. It's important to explicitly note that my view does not 'come from nowhere' but somewhere. I am a Black, African American, Haitian American man, the son of Haitian immigrants to the United States, US-educated, heterosexual, able-bodied, and have ego investments and a set of privileges, including being a graduate-degree holder writing in English, for example. This is important because it influences how and what I present to you – just like you, my audience influences what I present and write to you.

This chapter takes up a question Theaster Gates asked in a 2016 interview on his *How to Build a House Museum* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario: 'Who feels responsible for the failure of care around

the legacies of great Black people around the world?'. Particularly, how do those who feel responsibility and care for the legacies of great Black people unsettle traditional archival practices or enact a Black archival practice? A couple of examples from my past and ongoing work provide a backdrop through which to critically reflect on the unique methods used throughout two partnerships and which also, in turn, point to moments and opportunities to unsettle and go beyond traditional approaches and practices (descriptive and otherwise) within archives, special collections libraries, and possibly museums.

Using the methodology of critical reflection sets the stage for me as a (former and future) practitioner to examine my biases and implicit assumptions. According to Christine Morley (2008, 266), critical reflection as a research methodology is 'the process of identifying the ways in which we might unwittingly affirm discourses that work against us, and the people we are working with, through examining our implicit assumptions'. Additionally, I will use the theoretical frameworks of critical archival studies, anti-racist action and Black Archival Practice to understand how and why those who feel responsibility and care for the legacies of Black people enact Black archival practices and, in turn, unsettle traditional archival practices. By examining myself and the projects, this chapter introduces traditional archival practices while also juxtaposing them against practices that intentionally and unintentionally unsettle those practices.

Through examining myself and my work, I challenge 'fixed and restrictive ways of thinking' about archival practices. I instead propose new pathways toward change in the field. The examples of work with the Black Bottom Archives (BBA) and the Madison County African American Historical Association Inc. serve as concrete deliberations on how these frameworks can guide archival work. The two examples emphasise the need for community-centred and driven archival praxis rather than established, institutional, top-down and authority-driven principles that demand objectivity, neutrality and unquestioned power dynamics.

Partners

It is important to note that this chapter centres my perspective of the partners involved and thus lacks the full and rich perspective of the partners themselves. BBA is a grassroots effort documenting community

histories and performing memory work outside traditional archival institutions. In BBA's own words, it is a

> … community-driven media platform dedicated to centering and amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Black Detroiters through digital storytelling, journalism, art, and community organizing with a focus on preserving local Black history & archiving our present' (Black Bottom Archives 2015).

The archive was founded in 2014 by Detroiters Camille Johnson and Paige PG Watkins and made public in January 2015. Watkins was the BBA's Director from its founding until 2022. The director is joined by a team of 10–12 staff, interns, contractors and advisors.

The Madison County African American Historical Association Inc., like many other projects documenting the legacies of Black people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, does not have a legible outward-facing mission statement or digital presence containing such information. But it was clear in my conversations with Nancy Garnett-Williams, the brainchild behind the association, that one of the central missions was to preserve, digitise, and exhibit material from the Madison County Order of Odd Fellows Lodge, as well as preserve the building in which those materials were housed. In pursuing such a mission, Nancy founded the association in 2012.

Critical archival studies as foundation

Critical archival studies provides my starting point for understanding how the archival field views its present and future multi-dimensional entanglement with records, collections, users and communities. This framework, first introduced by Caswell, Punzalan and Sangwand (2017), outlines three core tenets: (1) explain what is unjust with the current state of archival research and practice; (2) posit practical goals for how such research and practice can and should change; and/or (3) provide the norms for such critique. In this way, critical archival studies, like critical theory, is emancipatory in nature, with the ultimate goal of transforming archival practice and society writ large.

Archival practices serve as an ideal example of what happens when previous efforts neglect to understand, conduct and evaluate their work in relation to a broader historical context and contemporary

discourse. This includes archival representation (under which we can place archival description, archival management tools, collection management and records management, for instance). The practices of archival representation and description have been tackled without much forethought, concern or vision for its liberatory or restorative potential – likely a result of archival description serving primarily, if not solely, as an institutional, top-down and authority-driven management tool for the growing amount of collections and records. Within the context of digital projects and archives, practices of archival representation also tend to lean toward the technical aspect of digitisation efforts, with less focus on the restorative and liberatory possibilities of archival representation. This disregard for the ethical implications of archival representation mirrors the history of collection management practices in libraries (e.g., bibliographic cataloguing practices) and museums (e.g., card catalogues and databases) where derogatory terminology, outdated or overly celebratory descriptions and verbiage, colonial and racialised descriptions, absences, omissions, silences and outright disrespectful and harmful information abound (see also Abiti and Mbewe; Soares; Zalm, this volume).

Anti-racist as action

In tandem with critical archival studies as a framework is the framework of anti-racist action or us acting against racism. Here, it's worth repeating the question: 'Who feels responsible for the failure of care around the legacies of great Black people around the world?' Several leading archival theorists and practitioners like Bergis Jules (2016) have framed Gates's question as a responsibility to act. Implicit within such a call is the need for anti-racist action. The call is not only to acknowledge past harms but commit to unsettling and unlearning harmful anti-Black and white supremacist practices, improving those practices, and if need be, discarding them in the process of building other practices for the future.

Archival practices serve as an ideal example of practices in need of anti-racist action. From the increased use of critical race theory in the literature to extensive studies on the legacy of Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Arabic (mis)representation in cultural heritage collections, archival representation work requires reckoning with uncontested bias, inappropriate norms, absences, silences and erasures.

Black archival practice

Black Archival Practice, the third framework informing my critical reflection methodology, is a relationship to memory and evidence that recognises Black humanity and complexity. It is a powerful form of memory work that includes naming what hides in plain sight, excavating and recovering what lies below the surface and offering this to a public through storytelling and curation (Sutherland and Collier, 2022; Okechukwu, 2022; Omowale, 2018). Because of this, Black Archival Practice is an important element of collective memory work in Black communities. Black Archival Practice starts from the point that archives and dominant archival practices are not neutral. Care work and an ethic of care are central to Black Archival Practice, particularly in how community members collectively embark on the processes of representation and description (e.g., identifying and naming objects and sites), excavating and recovering historical narratives and using archival objects through community-based storytelling.

Black archival practice is not new but provides a phrase for the memory work of Black people throughout the African Diaspora living in oppressive conditions in which their lives, cultural practices and histories have been exploited, repressed, misrepresented and erased. An early and legible example of Black archival practice is the Schomburgian archival genealogy and tradition.[1] Despite the oppressive conditions, Black people have always found ways of archival and cultural preservation (e.g., storytelling, public writing, performance, Caneval or Carnival, formal archiving of narratives and objects in personal collections, community organisations, fraternal social orders and historical repositories).

Analytically, functionally and professionally, the separation of cultural heritage practices like collection development and collections management makes sense. However, it can be difficult to disentangle such functions within the context of Black archival practices. Arguably, such practices are more so viewed as contingent on the larger goals of historical reclamation and storytelling rather than strictly tied to institutional or professional notions and divisions.

In the case of the Black Bottom Archives and the Madison County African American Historical Association Inc., I noticed, acted on and missed opportunities to unsettle archival practice. As a curator and archivist at the University of Virginia (UVA) Library, I helped to acquire, process, digitise and transcribe the collection Nancy Garnett-Williams donated, which we later titled the Madison Friendship Lodge Grand United Order of Odd Fellows Collection. As a PhD in Information student

at the University of Michigan, I have worked with PG Watkins and the Black Bottom Archives. For the purposes of this paper, I will explore the unsettling (or lack thereof) of archival practices within UVA Library through the areas of acquisition/appraisal and archival representation, processing, description and collections management. I will also point to work needed both within and in proximity and relevance to BBA that readily brings to light opportunities to unsettle traditional archival practices.

Acquisition, appraisal (and ongoing extraction?)

A key practice and the first stage in many cultural heritage institutions revolves around acquiring, appraising and collecting collections. But then that begs the question, who gets to decide what's valued, acquired, described, and preserved in perpetuity? To ask such a question in the first place requires unsettling notions of (institutional, professional and archival) neutrality. Here it is worth switching to a story of Nancy Garnett-Williams and me meeting for the first time.

On an afternoon during the summer of 2018, Molly Schwartzburg, one of the curators at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library and Archives at UVA, and I visited Nancy for the first time. Nancy had reached out to the Special Collection Library to see whether we could help her preserve the Madison Odd Fellows Lodge collection. The African American community in Madison County created the Madison County Odd Fellows lodge in 1880 under the purview of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOOF). Founded in 1843, the GUOOF was the first Black fraternal and social order in the United States of America. On this particular afternoon, we arrived at the original building in Madison County, where the collection was located, and met Nancy and one of her cousins in person for the first time.

Nancy loved to talk. As she gave us a tour of the building and provided what context she could about the building's history, she said, 'You know, when I bought this building, I didn't realise it used to be the Madison County Odd Fellows Lodge. I felt the spirit move me to acquire the building, and so I did.' She loved to make references between and during her stories, many of which she followed with a pause. After an hour of talking and touring the building, she decided to show us the collection.

The collection contained minute books (Figure 2.1), financial records, correspondence, event programs, proceedings, a cemetery plat, a framed fraternal collar (Figure 2.2), a fraternal apron and a flag, among

other things, all written, text-based documents legible to dominant archival structures and practices and dominant forms of knowledge production. Just as important, if not more, the collection contained the records of one of Virginia's earliest African American fraternal lodges. It also provided a glimpse into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American fraternal organisation life, particularly during a period that actively excluded African Americans.

Nancy ultimately blessed the UVA Special Collections Library with the collection. But I felt restless for some reason. What possibilities were open as a result of the collection coming to the Library? Preservation was the immediate go-to, sure. But then that begged the question, what conditions and circumstances led to this institution being so well-resourced? Did it not make more sense to redistribute funds to Nancy to help her maintain sovereignty and stewardship over the collections? What possibilities were now foreclosed as a result of Nancy's donation to the Library? What if Nancy had refused to donate the collection, not because she did not necessarily trust the Library, but because she understood the possibilities and futures that were lost once the archives entered a predominantly white archival institution embedded in a white supremacist and settler institution? How could an ecosystem like that begin to understand, let alone care for, such a rich archive of Black life? How could traditional descriptive practices even begin to describe such an archive?

I want to point to two things in that reflection and story. The first is that through the lens of critical archival studies, anti-racist action and Black Archival practice, it is possible to keep track of what was lost and gained as the collection transitioned under Nancy's care and stewardship to UVA Library's hands. The second is, given the reality that the collection was now embedded at UVA Special Collections Library rather than the Madison Lodge building, how was I to proceed with processing and describing the collection?

Archival processing and description

The acquisition and appraisal phase set the stage for working with Nancy on the processing, description and preservation practices that best addressed the collection. I recognised the potential of offering my skills, labour and expertise but did not want to replicate a white coloniser saviour complex or mentality. I wanted and needed community and user input, even if it contradicted my training in traditional practice or
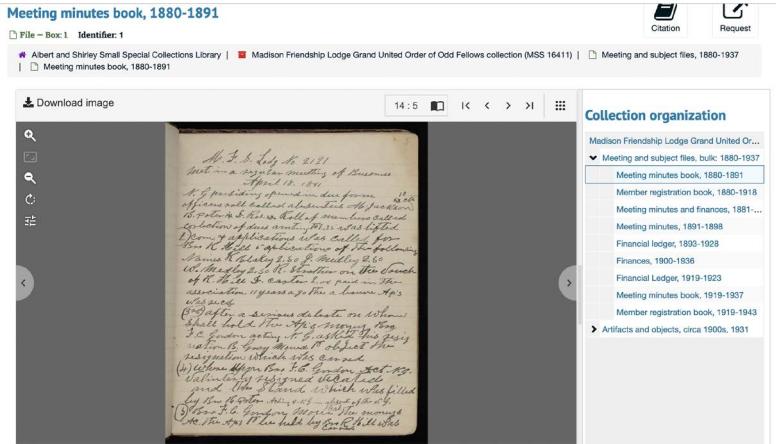
Figure 2.1 A digital image of Madison Lodge Odd Fellows meeting minutes (1880–1891) in ArchiveSpace.

required extra time commitments. This method functioned as a way for both parties to better define and achieve the processing phase. By working with Nancy, I aimed to amplify the knowledge held by her and viewed my knowledge of archival representation, description, and processing as simply a starting point. By insisting on this, the use of my time, even if repetitive or slow, with donors and collaborators like Nancy, allowed me to maintain track of collaborators' needs even at an institution's expense. In 'Toward slow archives', Christen and Anderson (2019) note the necessity for slowing down in order to focus differently, listen carefully and act ethically. Additionally, Silverman argues for a collaborative, processual and slow museology that tracks 'knowledges and their translation' and the relationships between museums and communities (2014). The slow work with the Odd Fellows collection also resulted in us digitising and transcribing the collection.

Here, I must acknowledge that moving toward such work would have been much more difficult without supportive leadership and colleagues and attention to the overall vision of the work. By emphasising the long-term gains (e.g., increasing capacity and opportunities for collaboration, local engagement and community participation), I could aim for slowing down while also ensuring this would not be seen as a lack of work.

Still, as of crafting this piece, I think I missed some clear, low-hanging and readily available opportunities to unsettle specifically archival description, particularly in light of the emergence of reparative description projects within traditional archival institutions, including the
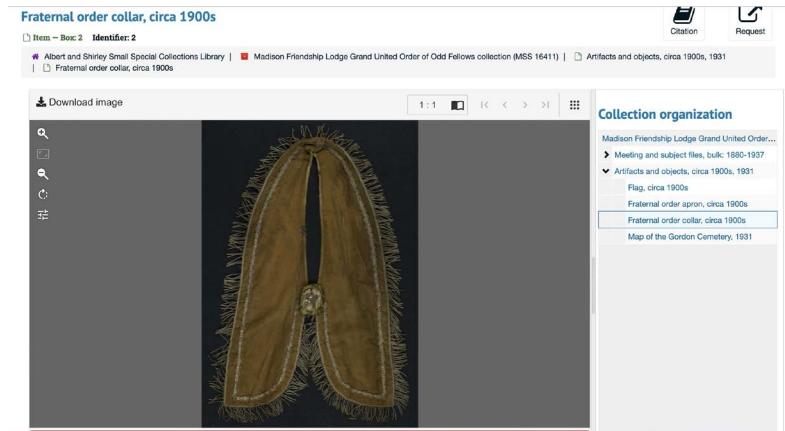
Figure 2.2 A digital image of an Odd Fellows fraternal order collar (circa 1900s) in ArchiveSpace.

University of Virginia Special Collections Library, over the past few years. As defined by the Society of American Archivists' Dictionary of Archives Terminology, reparative description is the 'remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resource'.[2]

The first example of missed opportunities is the existing finding aid created through ArchiveSpace, an open-source, web-based archives information and collection management system. The finding aid could include language that moves further from a neutral voice and more toward one of care. For example, the historical note could contain more context around the origins and reasons for the creation of the Madison Friendship Lodge. The note reads, 'Madison Friendship Lodge No. 2121 of Madison County, Virginia was founded in 1880 in Madison County, Virginia. The Lodge is a branch of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America, an African American fraternal order founded in 1843 in New York'. The note is fairly barebones and could mention more explicitly how the existence of both the Madison branch lodge and GUOO emerged, in part, from the white Independent Order of Odd Fellows national organisation excluding African Americans. The arrangement note also could further avoid passive voice and read out as 'The processing archivist has imposed a chronological order except for the "Meeting minutes and finances" and "Finances" folders'.

Although somewhat outside of my purview, I could have also worked to ensure the collection had more Library of Congress subject headings in order to produce more access points and make the collection more discoverable (e.g., Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (People) 1890–1900, African Americans (Men) 1890–1900, African Americans (Organisations) 1890–1900, Fraternal organisations 1890–1900.

These are just a few examples, small actions they may seem, of a much larger series of actions and projects that are required within many traditional cultural heritage institutions. That is, moving away from a neutral voice towards one of respect and care, avoiding passive voice and using active voice in the creation, indeed knowledge production and construction of collection guides like finding aids, and using all possible resources and tools at hand to make the collection more discoverable.

Several positive outcomes and results could emerge from reparative descriptive work. They are ongoing opportunities for collaboration, local engagement or participatory approaches; improving descriptive information that reflects current terminology, culturally appropriate and accurate language; culturally appropriate access and use parameters; a holistic curation approach; and enhancing the value of the description for users. However, reparative description faces a few limitations. It is only one step in the creation of equitable archives. It does not necessarily deal with larger structural and systematic issues. It does not deal with the problems of how collections were created and acquired. It does not address the always loud and pressing issues of power. It does not address issues of access and use. Indeed, the times I asked Nancy about creating the finding aid, she could not understand why it was structured the way it was and asked if there were better ways to access and use the collection digitally. Reparative description, while necessary, requires other steps and frameworks in order to sufficiently unsettle cultural heritage practices and achieve our ends, whatever those may be.

Black Bottom Archives and black archival practice

For the Black Bottom Archives, the means and ends of cultural work occur largely outside the practices, discourses of representation and bounds of traditional archival and cultural heritage institutions like the UVA Special Collections Library. In 2014, Paige 'PG' Watkins and Camille Johnson decided to create the Black Bottom Archives, in part to combat negative representations of Black Detroit (Prosper 2022). Black Bottom was a predominately Black neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century,
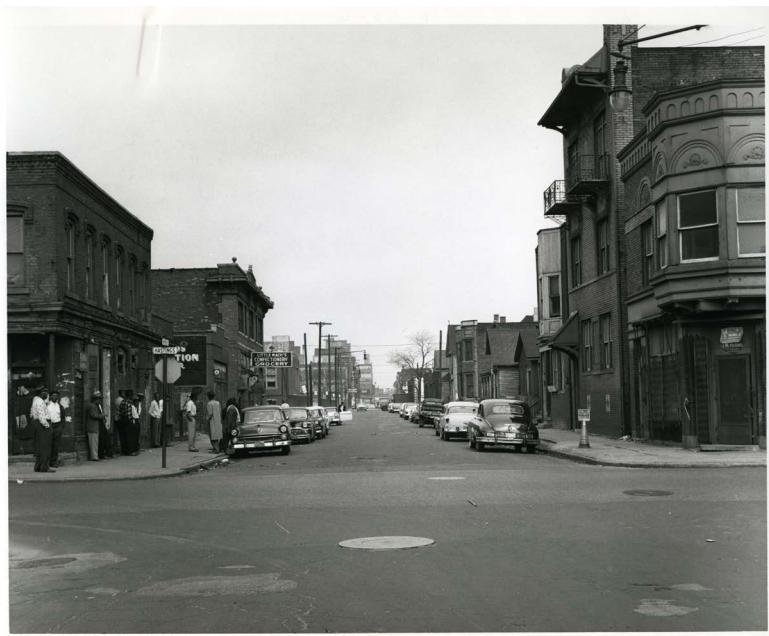
Figure 2.3 An archival image of Black Bottom, with unnamed people standing on the corner. Detroit Historical Society.

but federal and city legislators proposed and passed a series of plans to demolish the neighbourhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Before Watkins and Johnson founded the Black Bottom Archives, there was almost no material on the neighbourhood in the existing traditional archival and special collections institutions in Detroit, let alone materials from the perspectives of Black Bottom residents. As far as I am aware, the situation remains the same today.

The Detroit Historical Society and Burton Historical Special Collections Library at the Detroit Public Library hold most of what exists at traditional institutions, including a series of photographs that arguably require reparative descriptive work. Above is one of those images (Figure 2.3).

In the photograph, several men and a woman stand at the intersection of Winder Street and Hastings. None of the men look toward the photographer. The photographer seems more interested in capturing the corner than the men themselves. Who is the photographer? Why did they take the photographs? With the entrance of the images into cultural heritage institutions, what role do cultural workers like archives and

archivists play regarding these photographs? Is it merely to preserve and manage them as collections? What is seemingly left of the Black Bottom neighborhood are these photographs by an unknown person. They are seemingly objective and neutral. But what purposes did the photos serve? Where does the photographer focus their camera? What is centred? Who is ignored and left unnamed? Where and what is the role of archives and archivists in all of this? A reparative description project, among other actions, would be worth pursuing to address many of these questions.

Engaging in a Black Archival Practice, Watkins and the Black Bottom Archives have not necessarily centred these questions but instead centred and met the Black Detroit community where they are. In other words, they have identified and named what hides in plain sight, claimed and reclaimed (intellectual, historical, and physical) space, and have, in the spirit of the Schomburgian archival genealogy, excavated and recovered Black narratives, realities and experiences. Their website announces their presence, 'The Black Bottom Digital Archive is here!', in bold olive green text and invites users to 'Check out ... where memories and experiences of those from the long-gone Black Bottom neighborhood are preserved for future generations'. Digitised archival images, featuring faces and names, are layered over a map, and prominent buttons encourage searching through the archive, volunteering or donating to BBA.[3] There is a zine, short audio clips and contributed writing from multiple authors, and projects involving youth archiving, community research and streets views are prioritised.

In terms of identifying what hides in plain sight, the everyday, the mundane, the Black Bottom Archive offers viewers a rich and diverse view of the once blossoming Black neighbourhood. Through collectively collected oral narratives and visuals, the Archive also makes users aware of the displacement and removal efforts that took place to destroy the neighbourhood.

The BBA features oral histories, each with time-stamped descriptions of the interviews providing a summary and archival description, rather than something like a traditional collection guide or archival finding aid. In fact, in my conversations with PG, my expertise was simply a starting point. When the proposal, for example, for creating collection guides that ran closer to official finding aids came up, PG and BBA's response was to let the community decide how they wanted their stories placed and displayed on the site. Rather than dismiss everyday knowledge, which many trained cultural heritage professionals and institutions do by foregrounding forms of elite professional expertise, PG and BBA instead

respected community knowledge by further contextualising it with their own words and historical knowledge.

These are just a couple of examples of why the Black Bottom Archives is an expression of Black Archival Practice that unsettles traditional archival practices (descriptive and otherwise) and discourse. BBA centres naming what hides in plain sight, excavation and recovery, and storytelling in its form and function. BBA was and continues to be created in the context of collective work and a collective ethics of care.

Much work remains to be done, but these two concrete examples provide a view of two different entry points for thinking about the need for community-centred and community-driven archival praxis rather than established, institutional, top-down, and authority-driven principles that demand objectivity, neutrality and unquestioned power dynamics. The first is from the purview of being embedded within a traditional cultural heritage institution. The second is from being embedded within the community itself. Both projects, the work with Nancy Garnett-Williams and Paige 'PG' Watkins and Black Bottom Archives, in tandem, are reminders, in Ruha Benjamin's words, to 'remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you [unsettle] and dismantle the ones you cannot live within' (2019, 14).

Notes

1   A reference to Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, an Afro-Puerto Rican bibliophile, collector and writer. His work led to the establishment of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, one of the most renowned institutions devoted to archiving the African diasporic experience. An early articulation of the Schomburgian archival genealogy and tradition can be found in Schomburg's 1925 piece *The Negro Digs up His Past*.
2   Definition from https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/reparative-description.html
3   The Black Bottom Archives site is available at http://www.blackbottomarchives.com/

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3

Deciding whether and how to build a digital archive: lessons from the Jackson Park Project

Tonya Sutherland-Stewart

Introduction

Since 2017, the Jackson Park Project (JPP) has worked to memorialise the Emancipation Day celebrations, known at the time as 'the Greatest Freedom Show on Earth,' that took place in Windsor, Canada between the 1930s and the 1960s. The Jackson Park Project was created as the grassroots initiative of three founding members to promote this piece of Black Canadian history through the development of a television series and documentary based on these celebrations, classroom educational resources and a digital archive of material related to the celebrations. When I became involved in the Jackson Park Project in early 2018, our team primarily envisioned the project as an avenue towards the development of a television series. As a recent graduate with a background in history and a growing interest in Black Canadian history, I was drawn to this exploration of my community's heritage. Though no one on our then three-person volunteer team had archive or museum-related training at the time, the idea of archiving our research to better share the Greatest Freedom Show's history with a wider audience slowly formed into the concept of the Jackson Park Project Digital Archive. Over time, I came to occupy the volunteer role of Director of Archival System Development, and the team imagined the digital archive would: identify and collect materials to digitise; identify individuals with whom to conduct oral history interviews; process archival materials; conduct historical research about materials in the archive; support community outreach and network building activities and curate content, for example, in online exhibitions and reading lists for audiences.

During the same period, I began a Master of Museum Studies programme, and decided in late 2019 to conduct a nine-month long feasibility study about the development of the Jackson Park Digital Archive as part of my degree. The study underwent a number of transformations throughout its life, informed by various activities in an effort to learn more about archival practices. These included conducting an oral history interview with 95-year-old Ona Mae Allen (see later in this chapter), attending workshops, consulting experts in the cultural heritage field, travelling to Windsor to digitise an unprocessed collection and researching across a vast array of sources. A feasibility study report, completed in April 2020, expanded on the process of learning about digital archive development and made short, mid-range and long-term recommendations for the development of the digital archive given the volunteer nature of the JPP. I then presented a condensed version of the report to the rest of the Jackson Park team, which had grown to four members, in September 2020.

This chapter will not attempt to relay every topic that was touched on during the feasibility study, but will instead share and discuss the aspects of the study that had the most significant impact on the development of the digital archive during and after the study's conclusion: namely, the development of processes, decisions around standards, and metrics that support the planning and 'scaling up' of the work from the feasibility study to the full collections. These realisations came through conducting two case studies during the feasibility study involving the oral history interview with Allen and the digitisation of parts of community historian E. Andrea Moore's photographic collection.

Developing a mission statement and a collection policy

The grassroots nature of the Jackson Park Project meant that in 2019 it did not yet have a mission statement or formal organisational structure, though various expressions of the desire to 'memorialize the Emancipation Day Celebrations that took place in Windsor, Ontario from the 1930s to the 1960s' had served as de facto mission statements (Sutherland 2018). It was of foundational importance for the feasibility study to explore the development of a mission statement for the Jackson Park Project, in order to describe what the archive would be and achieve over its lifetime. The absence of a formal mission statement and collecting policy was felt when making decisions about what digitisation activities should be prioritised. To begin the process of creating a mission statement, I followed Reibel's

([2008](), 9–10) template for informal collections seeking to become more formalised and developed the following draft statement for the Jackson Park Project's Digital Archive:

> The Jackson Park Project Digital Archive is a *not-for-profit* educational association that collects, preserves, and interprets the history of the Emancipation Day celebrations that took place in Windsor, ON (which were also known as 'the Greatest Freedom Show on Earth'), with special emphasis *on the period between 1930 to 1969*, by the collection of artifacts, documents, oral histories, and other cultural objects, preserving them, and interpreting them to the public by means of *virtual exhibitions*, educational programs, lectures, public events, and publications, and to encourage others to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of these Emancipation Day celebrations and do everything worthwhile to carry out our purpose.

The team also identified the official adoption of a code of ethics as a goal for the digital archive, so that its present and future team could be held accountable to a professional standard of practice. Professionals I spoke to in the heritage field suggested that the JPP adopt the Canadian Museums Associations or the Association of Canadian Archivists' code of ethics. There are also codes of ethics surrounding the conducting of oral history interviews (Oral History Association OHA n.d.), and these were included for the team's consideration. Although the JPP has not yet formally adopted a code of ethics, in both the case studies described below, I came face-to-face with how codes of ethics affect community heritage work.

Following on from the need for a mission statement, it was also necessary to create a formal collection policy outlining criteria for accessioning material. The question of what to include in the digital archive seemed straightforward initially, but the feasibility study quickly revealed a number of questions for careful consideration. Prior to the feasibility study, Jackson Park team members typically stated that the digital archive should collect materials that relate to Emancipation Day in Windsor. However, it had not been established how closely related items needed to be in terms of subject matter, geography and time period to be incorporated into the digital archive. For instance, Black communities in Windsor have celebrated Emancipation Day since 1834 (Henry 2010), and these early celebrations created a legacy on which the 'Greatest Freedom Show on Earth' was built. Should the Jackson Park team therefore make an effort to preserve information related to these earlier celebrations to provide context to our area of study? These contextual materials could prove to be

useful, but imposing firmer boundaries on what the digital archive collects makes the process of assessing and acquiring materials easier as it would give the digital archive team frameworks to guide decision-making.

There was also the question of what types of material the digital archive should collect, and from whom. When questioned, the non-archival members of Jackson Park expressed the desire that the digital archive should serve the team's internal research needs, the needs of educators wanting to teach Black Canadian history and the needs of members of the public who want to learn about these celebrations. Additionally, the JPP team had already engaged in unmanaged collecting of digitised objects including: photographs, documents, posters, programmes and other ephemera from the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Collection; an oral history interview with the Reverend Lily Francis (audio and video) and interviews of community historians Irene Moore Davis, Leslie McCurdy and Kimberley Simmons, which the team filmed for a docuseries trailer. Some of these items, like the interview footage, were natural byproducts of the work done by other branches of the Jackson Park Project. The team digitised some of the E. Andrea Moore Collection during a research trip to Windsor because of a pragmatic need to continue research with the materials once the team left Windsor. However, this activity was unmanaged collecting in the truest sense, as a lack of time, resources, and staffing meant that there was little record keeping. The existing approaches also favoured internal uses of digitised materials, whether created by the JPP team or digitised for use by the team.

In an effort to begin to manage these 'unmanaged' collections (Kipp 2016), a draft collection policy was written during the study to help guide the archive's future collecting activities. Again, a template in *Registration Methods for the Small Museum* (Reibel 2008, 10–11) was used to draft the following policy:

> It is the policy of the Jackson Park Project Digital Archive to digitise and collect only those objects that pertain to the Emancipation Day celebrations that took place in Windsor, ON, which were also known as 'the Greatest Freedom Show on Earth,' or are associated with a person, place, or event that related to these celebrations, or, to a limited extent, are typical or representative of objects made or used for these celebrations; and that are historical, cultural or aesthetic in nature; that cover the period from 1930 to 1969; and for which the Jackson Park Project Digital Archive has ultimate use and for which the archive can care under standards acceptable to the archival field at large.

Type	Example
Digitised objects	Relevant parts of the Moore archive; historic photographs; historic documents; object photos; research notes from researchers.
Born-digital	Social media content (round table discussion videos, films, Instagram posts, JPP media interviews); JPP lesson plans; oral histories (audio/video); docuseries; behind the scenes footage; TV interviews with Windsor historians.

Table 3.1 List of objects to collect for the JPP Digital Archive.

This rudimentary policy aimed to empower the digital archive to be selective about the material it would collect, while also being broad enough to allow for flexible interpretation. When written, it was imagined as functioning more as the policy for Jackson Park's external, public-facing archive, even as the JPP needed a policy for preserving and managing the content – akin to 'digital assets'– it creates as an institution. The policy would benefit from language that enables removing material by deaccessioning, as this is an unavoidable step in some objects' lifecycle. Likewise, we recognise the policy should include an obligation to review and update it at regular, specified intervals, to help ensure that the archive's collecting practices and its stated objectives stay in line as the archive progresses and grows. These remain as next steps for the digital archive.

I considered the Jackson Park Project's past collecting activities, the draft collection policy, and communications with the JPP team about the digital archive to generate an initial list of objects that the digital archive might collect (Table 3.1).

Even within this list of collectable materials, there remains a need to further distinguish between what content would be accessible to members of the general public, to academic researchers, and to members of the JPP team only. At the time of writing, this has been determined on a case-by-case basis.

Case study: the oral history interview of Ona Mae Allen

An opportunity arose to conduct and process an oral history interview as part of the feasibility study's scope. During late 2019, an acquaintance introduced me to Ona Mae Allen, a 95-year-old woman who was one

of the first Black nurses in Ontario. Having grown up in nearby Buxton during the time of the Greatest Freedom Show, Allen had memories about attending Emancipation Day celebrations in Windsor. This made her an extremely attractive oral history candidate and, given her age, the JPP team agreed that meeting and interviewing her should be of the highest priority. Prior to this opportunity, I had some experience processing oral history interviews by creating transcriptions and indexes, but had never organised or conducted one. After an introduction by phone in October, an interview at Allen's home was scheduled.

What followed was an interview that was informal and conversational in style. Interview topics had been prepared ahead of time by the JPP team, but Allen did not receive a copy of the topics until the day of the interview. Listening back to the interview, I recognised how I could have structured the questions to better reflect the de facto mission of the JPP and, as a result, to generate a digital recording that contained clearer and more stories related to the Greatest Freedom Show. This would have both honoured Allen's memories and stories, and better reflected her incredible insights on the Emancipation Day celebrations. My dissatisfaction with the interview process and resulting digital recording reinforced for me the importance of clear collecting policies and the value of best practices.

More pragmatically, the interview was recorded with a borrowed Sony digital recorder, and a back-up was recorded using the cell phone app MyRecorder. The unfocused nature of the conversation led to frequent stopping and restarting of the Sony recorder, meaning that the most complete recording was made using the poorer quality app, which recorded approximately 1:45:00 of audio. Most of the labour for the interview came during the processing phase. Due to my inexperience, too much time elapsed between conducting the interview and processing, and the lack of informative file naming made identifying and ordering the different files challenging.

As part of the feasibility study, we explored different preservation methods, and the effects of creating an interview transcription compared to an interview 'index,' which summarises an interview's contents with relevant timestamps (Eidinger 2019). Professional standards recommend creating transcriptions for oral history interviews because a written copy creates an extra level of preservation and because an interview that exists in multiple formats increases accessibility. However, transcription can be a labour-intensive process requiring up to eight hours to transcribe one hour of interview (Eidinger 2019). Indexes are less labour intensive because they only require summarising, but they lack the same level of preservation as a transcription.

To be able to get a more direct understanding of the pros and cons of these choices, myself and another volunteer created both a partial transcription (of the first 10 minutes) and a partial index (of the first 30 minutes) of the interview. The amount of time it took to complete these activities was tracked so that this data could be used when planning future interviews and workflows for JPP staff and volunteers. As the volunteer did not have prior experience, they required training and were given the Baylor University Institute for Oral History *Style Guide* (2018) because of its comprehensiveness. Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (2012) models for transcription and 'chronologies' were used to format both documents. It took the volunteer just over three hours to transcribe the first 10 minutes of the interview, which aligns with the generally accepted timeframe for transcription. Meanwhile, it took me 90 minutes to create the index of the first 30 minutes of the interview.

The costs and benefits of the transcription and the index did not decisively establish whether the digital archive should transcribe or create indexes of future oral history interviews. The additional layers of preservation and accessibility make transcriptions a highly attractive option. It is also possible that transcriptions may streamline and encourage greater user access, because they allow interested users to search the document for words or phrases of interest, whereas a user working with an index must either listen to the full interview or rely on the index and accept that the information they are seeking was fully captured by the summarised interview. However, the sheer time investment required for transcription makes it an impractical option as long as the digital archive team consists of only one person.

Setting up, conducting and processing the oral history interview was a valuable experience. Circumstances dictated that the interview happen in the early phases of the feasibility study, and thus my process of researching and developing processes and standards for the digital archive was just beginning. As a result, Allen's interview would not be a strong candidate for inclusion into the digital archive based on the mission statement and collection policy that were later drafted, and on the best practices outlined by institutions like the Oral History Association. By the standards of the collection policy, this interview had a tenuous connection to the Greatest Freedom Show, though it did include valuable insight about attending the celebrations as a spectator, and provides informative context about the time period in which the celebrations took place. This lack of focus was due to my inexperience as an interviewer, and resulted in a wandering,

fragmented interview. More evaluation needs to be done to determine if it is appropriate content for public consumption, but this experience also helped the JPP team understand how to generate the kinds of digital content it desires and emphasised the importance of training and the place 'best practices' can have in assisting grassroots cultural organisations.

Accessioning records

Museum best practices indicate that when acquiring material, it is extremely important that an archive or museum gets proper documentation to demonstrate their legal right to that object or its use, and keeps clear, well-organised and maintained records of the documentation required when collecting material. Any documents created during the process of acquiring a collection, including personal communications, notes, bills of sale and so on, should be saved and kept in a file dedicated to that particular collection that is filed with all of the other records for this collection (Reibel 2008, 25). Alongside this, the JPP is mindful of what it is to be custodians of a community's history, cognisant that these materials represent people's family members and stories, and all too often heritage institutions have neglected or misrepresented Black histories.

In its earliest days, the Jackson Park Project had little consistency regarding creating, organising, and keeping track of information related to rights to use content. For example, while there was a verbal understanding that Irene Moore Davis, President of the Essex County Black Historical Research Society, had given verbal permission to other members of the JPP team to use the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Collection after digitising it without restrictions, there was no documentation that clearly stated Jackson Park's rights to use the collection. The agreement relied on people's memory. Furthermore, it was unclear whether Moore Davis held 'good title' to the collection, and therefore whether she had an 'unrestricted right' to freely share the collection of items brought together by her mother and community historian, E. Andrea Moore. The time period in which the Greatest Freedom Show took place also means that many materials could still be subject to copyright. This was especially important to clarify for Jackson Park's social media team, which posts archival photos to our social media platforms, has done an art installation using the archival images and wants to film material that would clearly be inspired by these images.

If a dispute ever arose about the JPP's use of the collection, the only written documentation that existed to confirm Jackson Park's right to use the material consisted of emails that I had exchanged with Moore Davis about crediting the content on social media, and about the plans for the Windsor Digitization Trip made during the feasibility study. Conversations between the JPP team and Moore Davis continue in a joint effort to establish who holds title of the objects, and to pursue a signed usage agreement for the ease of future record-keeping and reproduction.

Clarifying usage practices and agreements is critical because the collecting the JPP team has done and intends to do has largely been from private collections. The onus is on the digital archive to ensure that any potential donors understand what the Archive will be doing with their materials, and to document this agreement. Conducting the feasibility study helped the JPP access resources, ranging from professional literature to professionals themselves who shared institutional documents. For example, Collection Manager Lisa Uyeda shared the Nikkei National Museum's accessioning forms including Limited Copyright, Deed of Gift, Interview Consent, and a Usage Agreement. Helpfully, the forms were shared with express permission to modify and use them for the digital archive's purposes as needed.

In a similar vein, the need for a physical space was also explored during the study. There has never been a dedicated physical working space for the digital archive, or any part of the Jackson Park Project, though conversations about the merits of acquiring a space have happened throughout the Project's development. During the study, other members of the JPP expressed the desire that the work remain remote 'for the short term [and the Project will] work toward an acquisition of a physical space as needs and finances warrant in the future' (C. MacDonald, personal communication to author, 20 February 2020). While staying remote was the more cost-efficient option, the lack of physical workspace shaped the development of the digital archive significantly. It is still the norm for archives to physically collect the content they later digitise (H. Adams, personal communication to author, 7 April 2020), and not having physical access to the materials affects how the digital archive goes about its activities, the structure of the team, and the costs of the archive.

Case study: digitizing the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Collection

In contrast to the serendipitous interview with Allen, digitising the E. Andrea Moore Collection was a cornerstone activity of the feasibility study. The Jackson Park team became aware of the collection's existence in the early stages of the project through our connection with Irene Moore Davis, Moore's daughter who continues her mother's commitment to community history. The collection, which dates from the 1800s to early 2000s, is a mix of family records and materials related to the Black community in the Windsor area. This content made the collection highly attractive to the JPP team, initially for research purposes, and a number of items relating to the Greatest Freedom Show were digitised during the team's first research trip to Windsor in 2018, including organiser meeting minutes, advertisements and professional photographs of the celebrations.

From an archival perspective, the E. Andrea Moore Collection is an 'artificial collection,' with items collected from disparate sources and therefore removed from their provenance and original order (Cole 2021). It was partially arranged by an archivist in 2007 who produced a fonds finding aid, but a large section of the collection, namely the Emancipation Day celebrations photographs, were not processed, and items were not digitised. I arranged for a trip to Windsor to continue the digitisation effort, introduce more order to the JPP records of this collection and inform future digitisation work.

Preparations for the digitisation trip began in fall 2019 by reviewing the E. Andrea Moore Collection's finding aid and identifying materials of interest for digitisation. While all of 'SERIES II: Emancipation Celebration Records 1937–1983' was of interest, priority was given to the materials within that series that the JPP team had partially digitised in May 2018:

- Subseries 2: Emancipation Celebration Programmes 1937–1983. The JPP team had scanned units 13 to 25, correlating to the years 1952 to 1967.
- Subseries 3: Photographs. The JPP partially digitised this subseries focusing on the folders labelled Grandstand, Miss Sepia, Parade, Talent, Photos Misc 1 and Food.

One challenge to selecting materials to scan for the February 2020 Windsor trip was that none of the collection documentation described the number of items in the collection, so it was difficult to select series that could

be completed during the trip. With this in mind, the following materials were requested from Series II: Emancipation Celebration Records with the knowledge that they would need to be assessed before digitisation began, and the work plan would need to be adjusted accordingly:

- Subseries 1: British-American Association of Coloured Brothers of Ontario Papers 1944 –1969.
- Subseries 2: Emancipation Celebration Programmes, units 1–12 (years 1937–1950).
- Subseries 3: Photographs.

If time permitted, the other items to be digitised included family records, miscellaneous booklets and ephemera. When I made these selections, the digital archive had no collection policy, making it difficult to determine what would be most relevant to the project. As with Allen's oral history interview, this lack of guiding criteria affirmed why developing a policy needed to be a priority for the JPP.

Before the trip, I did some preliminary processing of the material scanned in May 2018. I used an Excel spreadsheet to begin recording information about the scans in a central location. This was challenging as file names had not been changed during the scanning process, which resulted in the back and front of many photographs becoming dissociated from each other. The JPP did not use specific metadata guidelines when creating this spreadsheet and information was recorded based on what felt most relevant. As part of the feasibility study, we did track the time it took to complete this data entry: over eight hours was spent to complete the rudimentary cataloguing spreadsheet of 213 entries.

The goal for the February 2020 Windsor trip was to create records that preserved the relationship between the objects in the collection, and to gather concrete data about how many materials would be left to digitise at the end of the trip to create a 'logical exit'– that is, a clear stopping point that could be picked up in the future with little confusion (Kipp 2016).

The digital archive volunteer assisted me on the trip with scanning and data entry aspects of the digitisation process. Upon arriving in Windsor, we picked up the archival materials from Irene Moore Davis: nine Hollinger boxers and one banker box, which held the unprocessed photographs. We used a Canon CanoScan 5600F scanner, borrowed from a JPP colleague, for the digitisation, two laptops with Windows 10 software, and had a USB and 1TB external hard drive for back-up. A cataloguing kit, lent by the Japanese Canadian Culture Centre, with

Figure 3.1 Workspace for the Windsor Digitization Trip. Photograph by Tonya Sutherland-Stewart.

archival quality pencils was also used. After setting up a workspace (Figure 3.1), the 10 boxes were sorted to create a priority list of material to digitise. The banker box containing unprocessed photographs was the highest priority because the JPP team had partially digitised them in May 2018 (though these scans lacked metadata), and because photographs were highly valued for the Jackson Park Project's social media, video platforms and other visual distribution.

Over the course of the trip, a workflow for scanning the photographs was established:

- An item was removed from the banker box, briefly examined and measured, with measurements recorded in a notebook to create a paper 'accession ledger'. The item was also given a temporary ID number and a descriptive title.
- The item was scanned at a resolution of 600 dpi. It was saved as TIFF file to the 1 TB hard drive, with a file name that matched the temporary ID number.
- The ID number was written on the back of the item with archival quality pencil, and returned to the box in its original place.

Figure 3.2 One of the scanned images, showing a young child leading a turkey, brings fun, playfulness and joy into view within Black history. Catalogued under temporary ID number 2020-01-12. Courtesy of the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Collection.

It was not possible to scan every item in the unprocessed photograph series by 19 February. However, the digitisation trip resulted in 185 scans of previously undigitised items (see Figure 3.2 for an example), complete with accession ledger records for each. An additional 77 accession records were created for items scanned in May 2018, or not scanned at all. Furthermore, the accession ledger was updated so previously scanned items were identified as having been digitised and ID numbers were assigned to reestablish the relationships between items in the box. Sixty-five photos in the banker box that had been scanned in the May 2018 trip did not receive accession ledger entries due to time constraints. All materials from the E. Andrea Moore Collection were returned to Irene Moore Davis, along with a copy of the scans saved as TIFF files (14.2 GB of data) on the USB stick, at the end of the trip.

Afterwards, we continued to process the scans that were made while simultaneously recording data about the digitisation process to assist with future planning. JPEG access copies of the TIFF files were made using Photoshop to create another copy of the material for preservation, and to have a copy that could be uploaded to Google Drive to share with

the rest of the JPP team. The size of the collected scans was reduced down to 13.2 MB in JPEG format. The scans were backed up using the '3-2-1 principle' (Levkina 2014), with one copy residing on the Jackson Park external hard drive, one copy on my personal external hard drive, and one copy on the USB that remained in Windsor with Irene Moore Davis. The '3-2-1 principle' is similar to the 'LOCKSS' concept, which is both a general recommendation that 'lots of copies keep stuff safe', and a project run by Stanford University's libraries to act as a 'digital preservation partner' to institutions wanting to improve their digital preservation capabilities (Stanford University n.d.).

The next significant challenge lay in creating a third Excel spreadsheet catalogue for these scans. Kipp's (2016, 89–90) method of creating a 'matrix' that ranks categories of information and their priority to a project was used to develop a metadata approach meaningful to the JPP. The uncertainty regarding the ownership of content in the collection meant that photographs were given temporary ID numbers instead of accession numbers. However, for the sake of simplicity, these temporary numbers were designated using the trinomial number system that is common with accession numbers (Reibel 2008, 42–43).

Overall, the Windsor 2020 digitisation trip resulted in higher standards for the archival and collection management processes of handling the E. Andrea Moore Heritage Collection. While the spreadsheet was incomplete at the end of the feasibility study, it acts as a potential finding aid that can be of use for both the JPP team and Irene Moore Davis. Additionally, the trip created a strong base to plan future digitisation trips, from information about digitisation workflows, to timeframes and necessary resources and equipment.

Conclusion and next steps

Conducting a feasibility study was a valuable learning opportunity for the development of Jackson Park's digital archive and to my own knowledge as an emerging heritage professional. There were significant findings that came out of the study that addressed the desires and realities of community-led heritage work. With regards to the Jackson Park digital archive, it was determined that while it would be possible to continue some archival activities with a single team member working on a volunteer basis, progress towards expanding the digital archive would be very slow and limited. It did not seem feasible that the current structure would be capable of keeping pace with the growth of the other branches

of the Jackson Park Project as their work progressed and additional digital content was created.

The most important thing that the feasibility study identified was the need for the JPP to formalise aspects of its operations, even as a volunteer-run organisation. In this chapter, I shared the importance of formalising JPP's mission statement, policies and practices, which in turn helped clarified the status of the E. Andrea Moore Collection and guide work with oral history interviews. Recruiting and onboarding additional staff and volunteers for digital archiving tasks will be necessary, but this only reinforces the benefit of clear policies and practices that will allow the JPP to make constructive use of people's time and energies. Further discussion needs to happen around procurement of a content management system, the suitability of specific metadata standards, and what kinds of institutional partnerships can benefit the JPP. Ultimately, the JPP seeks to move toward greater control of its digital content and to operate with stable funding.

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the goals outlined in the study's final report. Notably, I moved from having the time and resources to deeply investigate archival development to needing to seek and secure employment in the face of economic instability as a new graduate in a field heavily affected by the pandemic. Since graduating in April 2020, I held short-term work contracts at four different heritage institutions, where I worked with archival records in some capacity. These jobs have both directly and indirectly helped the development of the digital archive, as each placement allowed me to grow my professional network, gain more familiarity within industry standards like RAD and Nomenclature 4.0 and compare and contrast different approaches to managing archival records. All of this has shaped the developments that have happened since undertaking the feasibility study. One of my employment contracts that emphasised conducting oral history interviews led me to create an oral history toolkit, which has been repurposed for use by the Jackson Park Project. This toolkit, which includes a biographical profile of the interview subject, a consent form, a list of potential questions and prompts, and a worksheet that tracks communications with the interview subject, has streamlined the JPP's process of conducting oral history interviews.

However, my post-graduation employment experiences have reinforced some concerns about long-term funding for digital archive employees and projects. Much of the funding available to non-profit heritage organisations are given on a finite, project-based timeline. This means that work must be shaped to meet the objectives stipulated by a grant, and that funding for regular operating costs can be difficult to

secure. The JPP has continued to seek out funding from diverse sources, but the challenge of retaining team members in these circumstances has been felt. This story is not unique within the heritage sector, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer solutions to this widespread problem.

Positive change has also occurred. In 2021, the JPP officially incorporated as a not-for-profit organisation. On the journey to incorporation, the draft mission statement that was outlined in the feasibility study was accepted by the Jackson Park team, and has been reworked with team input since. At present, the team defines the Jackson Park Project as:

> A multiplatform not-for-profit corporation created to explore, memorialise, and celebrate the history of the Emancipation Day celebrations that took place in Windsor, Ontario. Our project focuses on the celebrations from the 1930s to the 1960s, through the development of educational resources, a digital archive and entertainment, such as a historical drama and documentary; furthermore aiming to encourage ongoing conversations about these celebrations, and their place within the larger landscape of Canadian history.

Though at times slow, the work to commemorate this piece of history continues to be a work in progress.

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4

Collecting the sacred: the transition of diasporic objects in between museum regimes

Bruno Brulon Soares

On 21 September 2020, a historical restitution ceremony took place in Rio de Janeiro's old Republican Palace, a building representing the history of the Brazilian Republic from the time when Rio was the capital city.[1] The building, which has housed the Republic Museum since 1960, received a visit from ialorixás and babalorixás, priests and priestesses of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé[2] and Umbanda[3], along with *their sacred* collection: 519 objects apprehended by the local police in violent raids on terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious houses) between 1889 and 1945, during the first decades of the Republic. This disputed material, imprisoned by the State, had been subject to repeated claims for repatriation by the povo de santo, the religious people whose descendants were violated by the police and alienated from their heritage.

The memory of slavery, colonial oppression and black resistance has always been in dispute in Brazilian museums as cross-cultural spaces for narrating the nation. As museum practice has evolved in the country, social movements have challenged curators in public institutions to share collection management responsibilities and establish new forms of collaboration. However, in the past, these museums did not conceive 'collection management' as a central part of civic participation. Most of the existing collections in public institutions reflect the manifestation of State power that nurtured the colonial imagination of Brazilian elites. The arrival of the Nosso Sagrado collection ('Our sacred' collection) in the Republic Museum, celebrated by the religious community, marked

not only a long and arduous process of negotiation but also the chance for a critical revision of the museum regime in which diasporic objects are preserved, curated and displayed.

In this chapter, I observe a context of dispute and cultural exchange between different regimes of heritage that configures the transition of the Nosso Sagrado collection from the Civil Police Museum to the Republic Museum, both State institutions in Rio de Janeiro. My interpretation of Afro-Brazilian material culture draws from Roger Sansi's conception of a culture that is neither solely a repressed essence nor an invention, but 'the outcome of a dialectical process of exchange between the leaders of Candomblé and a cultural elite' (2007, 2). Such an approach, in the case of Nosso Sagrado, encompasses the Police repression against terreiros as well as the strategies for resistance of members from the religious communities, including their relation to museums.

I argue that the restitution of diasporic objects, marked by a violent process of repression and silencing of certain voices, is dependent on perceiving museums as liminal spaces where we may witness 'the materialization of movement and mediation between worlds' (Basu 2017, 4). By exploring the role of museums in creating meanings and authorising subaltern agencies, this chapter seeks to evince some of the stakes of collections management, raising a reflection on the mechanisms and machinations that bring about new forms of conversion in the processes of documenting and preserving. Such an approach allows us to understand the transformative role of a museum in the return of a contentious collection to the people who reclaim it as *their sacred.*

A disputed collection

The collection, formerly named 'Coleção de Magia Negra' (Black Magic Collection), originates from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century systematic apprehensions. Back then, it was common for the police to disband the Candomblé houses and to put sorcerers on trial, confiscating their instruments and sacred objects as 'weapons of sorcery'. The Penal Code of 1890, conceived as a milestone of Brazil's First Republic, transferred to the state some of the regulatory mechanisms established since the colonial period, including the accusations and the persecution of 'witches' or 'sorcerers' in places of worship – mainly terreiros. In this Code, as noted by Maggie (1992), articles 156, 157 and 158 referred to crimes against the public health, including 'the illegal practice of medicine in general' as well as, more specifically, 'practicing spiritism, magic and

its spells, the use of talismans and fortune-teller cards to stir feelings of hatred or love, inculcate cure of curable or incurable diseases, in short to fascinate and subjugate public credulity'.

The result of this institutionalised persecution was twofold: inside the terreiros, the use of syncretism as a strategy sought to transform the rites and imageries under the influence of Catholicism; in contrast, public institutions, including the police, gathered material evidence and specialised information on the Afro-Brazilian cults, which publicly reaffirmed the belief in their sacredness and in the efficacy of their 'spells'. In parallel, two distinct heritage regimes formed. In 1945, the collection of apprehended objects under police jurisdiction in Rio de Janeiro materialised the beliefs in 'black magic' and was entangled with racist stigmas. By the end of the 1970s, the existence of these objects kept as 'criminal' evidence in the Civil Police Museum catalysed a revolt by researchers and part of the local religious community. The police never really considered returning the collection to the terreiros; Brazil was under a military dictatorship and far from accepting the right to freedom of religion as part of democracy.

Thirty years later in 2017, when the movement 'Liberte o Nosso Sagrado' ('Liberate Our Sacred') was initiated, a more vigorous social visibility led State institutions to start a reparation process that is still ongoing today. As the study by museologist Pamela Pereira (2017) shows, the reclamation of sacred objects by African Brazilian groups was part of a broader context of demands for restitution and repatriation of museum objects in Brazil. It dates to the 1980s, a period immediately after the end of the dictatorship regime in the country, in the wake of a process for the democratisation of culture followed by the transformation of the official discourses of public museums.

Over the years, the assimilation of Afro-Brazilian religious objects in museums has presented multiple contours, either categorised as criminal artefacts of 'black magic', as objects of 'folklore' or as 'African art' (Conduru 2019). Notably, by the end of the twentieth century, some social scientists severely criticised the 'culturalist' approach of ethnologists more concerned with the protection of an objectified cultural heritage than with the racial politics constitutive of Brazilian diaspora (Sansi 2007). The dispute over collections of Afro-Brazilian cults has been embedded in a broader dispute over cultural identities and the right of self-determination in the public sphere, one that in the case of Nosso Sagrado involves museum work and the technical knowledge produced and adopted by the institutions holding these collections.

The imprisonment of Afro-Brazilian materials: a historical overview

The terms 'feitiço' and 'feitiçaria' are colonial notions that appear in Portuguese legal documents against sorcery, issued by King João I in 1385 and 1403 forbidding his subjects to 'work spells or bonds, or invoke devils' (obrar fetiços ou ligamentos, ou chamar diabos; Pietz 1987, 31). As several authors have shown, these terms are in the root of the 'fetish', a notion first used by European travellers in West Africa in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to identify the African religions and the objects of cult they encountered (see, for instance, Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; Sansi 2011). Since then, the material links between Africa and sorcery are used to prove that African legacies in the modern world are historically separated from European culture. The persecution of sorcery in African diasporas helps to reproduce an imaginary of otherness and a hierarchical division between modernity and the past.

However, it is important to consider that the way African material culture is perceived in the process of incorporating sorcery into modernity is marked by an ambiguity that is part of the flow of transformations initiated since early colonisation. As previous studies have shown, since the colonial period and much later in the Republic, even though local elites denied the legitimacy of Afro-Brazilian cults (the 'macumbas'), they were still willing to avail themselves of the efficacy of their practices (Rafael and Maggie 2013). In this context, the repression of Candomblés and Umbandas during the First Republic is part of a broader process of producing and reproducing social inequalities (Maggie 2011).

The history of Rio de Janeiro as the capital of the nation throughout the nineteenth century reflects the different ways the local government grappled with the uncertainties of independence and the conflicting agendas that shaped their response. As demonstrated by Thomas Holloway (1993), during the troubled period between the 1830s and 1840s, as Brazilians sought to erect and shape the institutions that would set apart the newly independent nation from Portugal, efforts were made to establish a distinctively urban police force as a response to an increasing need for order.[4] From the 1840s to the 1860s, Rio's police were delegated wide authority to keep the behaviour of the city's population within acceptable bounds and 'to punish those who stepped over the line' (Holloway 1993, 3). Policing the nation's capital was an institutional response for the security of Brazil's political elite, to the threat posed by the non-elites – including those considered culturally uncivilised.

Perceived in its historicity as an instrument of the modern state, the police in the capital city of Rio were established in the early nineteenth century as part of Brazil's transition from colony to nation. Despite the rhetoric of a change from colonial domination to liberty during that time, 'the new officials were functionally similar to the lesser magistrates of the old regime' (Holloway 1993, 28). As part of the country's colonial legacy and with the authority to judge and punish people who offended the established order, the police in Brazil had no professional structure and were not separated from the judicial system.[5] As observed by Holloway (1993, 6–7) despite major changes since slavery was declared illegal in 1888, Brazil still lives with the legacy of the social relations, institutions and attitudes built up over the previous 350 years, which enabled many situations where the police took repeated and acknowledged action for which there was no legal basis.

When looking at the relations between the monarchy and the police in imperial Brazil, Holloway concludes that the reciprocity between the source of state authority and the economic elite explains much of the conservative evolution toward political independence in Brazil and the concurrent development of state institutions. Following his perspective, we can see how the sense of '*justice*' in the Brazilian Republic refers to those *adjusted* to a racist and colonial society[6] with very evident hierarchies. In order to find clear definitions of those who should be repressed to maintain the order, the categorisation of African diasporic culture and religion as reprehensible was part of a tacit agreement – not necessarily legal – between white elites and Republican institutions.

In the First Republic in Brazil (1889–1930), the apprehension of Afro-Brazilian religious materials from terreiros followed a Code that reflected categories of objects also useful to understand hierarchical separations within society. According to Maggie (1992), the repression against Afro-Brazilian cults was directed to those practicing the so-called 'evil magic' (magia maléfica) or 'black magic' (*magia negra*), which supposedly were used to do harm to others. What was at stake was 'precisely the belief in magic and the way it relates to religion' (Maggie 1992, 25), which means that while the (Christian) religion of the elites was to be respected and nurtured, the other forms of 'non-civilised' cults should be repressed as its counterpart.

The persecution of Afro-Brazilians since the early 1800s by the imperial police was part of the modus operandi of this institution in the capital, with their brutal attacks at the batuques, the gatherings of common people, mostly slaves, who socialised, drank sugarcane brandy (cachaça) and danced to music in the outskirts of the city (Holloway 1993,

34–35). There were also violent assaults on quilombos, the encampment of escaped slaves that formed in the wooded hillsides surrounding Rio, close enough to the urban centre. A particular kind of expertise to identify the practice of 'sorcery' (or 'feitiçaria') spread all over the city and in its peripheries, and marked police work in the capital, to the point that police in Rio played the role of an 'oracle', according to Maggie, identifying the sorcerers through their 'magic' expertise.

The real cultural context from which the objects were 'collected' and how these cultural differences related or dialogued is difficult to recover from the perspective of the powerless sectors of society, with little ways of recording their actions and cultural productions. Material evidence of Afro-Brazilian terreiros have in great part been destroyed or hidden, including through syncretic camouflage and religious conversion. Thus, the material evidence of their resistance and cultural survival is available primarily through the record of their actions found in documents left by the very institutions created to repress them – including the police and its collections of criminology.

While public museums work for the pacification of history by adopting domesticated categories to present their collections, the collecting methods remain concealed in their forgotten archives, absent in most objects' documentation. The apprehended objects of cult that finally arrived in the hands of their religious owners reveal a past of incarceration and racism reflected in museums and yet to be overtaken.

Collecting 'black magic': heritage under police arrest

The gathering of objects from Afro-Brazilian cults in museum collections predates the Republican period. As an example, the 'African' collection (coleção 'Africana') of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro (MN/ UFRJ) included a set of objects donated by the Police of the Court from apprehensions in 'houses of fortune' ('casas de dar fortuna'), an old denomination for the Candomblés dating back to 1880 (Soares and Lima 2014). The information on such objects in the institutional archives and correspondences is, however, scarce and their inscription in the museum inventory presents contradictory data. What changes in regard to the materials apprehended by the police in the first decades of the Republic is the newly invented role of the 'experts' (peritos) – those responsible for certifying that these objects were in fact used to do harm or in the illegal practice of medicine. As an authorised certification that corroborated with the work of the Police, and by recognising the objects within a

certain system of beliefs and attesting to the 'spells', these experts helped to 'describe the belief in a proper manner, distinguishing, classifying, and hierarchizing the rituals' (Maggie 1992, 149). They therefore produced the 'materialisation of magic' by establishing systematised collecting processes that originated scientific collections of 'black magic'.

The polarisation between 'white magic' and 'black magic', as well as low or high spiritism, can be perceived as hierarchising classifications not only of belief, but also of moral and social criteria. As Maggie (1992, 22) notes, the classification of macumbeiro[7] as a synonym for the sorcerer serves to delegitimise its subject in the religious field and in their position within the social stratum. The construction of a scientific expertise for 'black magic' and for the understanding of sorcery is strictly connected to the necessary opposition between 'good' and 'evil', benefit and harm, *white* and *black*, in the structuring of Brazilian identity. As Douglas (1984 [1966], 4) demonstrates, gestures of separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions 'have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience'. In so far as 'ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements', such rejected elements are the by-product of a system of classification (Douglas 1984 [1966], 36). Rather than being expurgated, eliminated from the system itself, these elements are acknowledged as part of a transgression, so that the moral world inside the order can continue to be respected.

Probably the first time the term 'black magic' was used in the heritage context in Brazil was May 1938, just after the foundation of the National Artistic and Historic Service (SPHAN), when its first 'ethnographic' collection was listed as cultural heritage to be protected (Case 0035-T-38). The collection was to be inscribed as No. 001 in the book of *Archaeologic, Ethnographic and Landscape Heritage*[8], and it was then popularly known as the 'Museum of Black Magic'. Despite its ethnographic classification, it was kept in the section covering drugs, narcotics and frauds of the Auxiliary Police First Precinct, whose mission was to suppress 'low spiritism and faith healing' (Rafael and Maggie 2013, 287). It was not until 1945, for reasons not precisely known, that the collection was moved to the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police Museum, then named the Museum of the Federal Department of Public Safety of Civil Police.[9]

The museum, self-declared as a 'criminal museum', was originally created as part of a reformulation of the Department, aiming at scientific advancements and safeguarding the institutional memory. In the 1940s, it assumed the educational role to 'highlight facts that may interest policemen or students of the Police School, serving at the same time for study and stimulus' (Costa 2000, 69 in Pereira 2017, 33). Its structure

comprised several collections (listed here by number of associated records), including: obstetrics, 32 [registered artefacts]; narcotics, 36; fortune-telling, 8; evidence, 5; palmistry, 4; false identity cards – foreign, 31; false identity cards – Brazilian, 17; pharmaceutical material, 48; gambling, 91; historical documents, 3; and black magic, 254, the biggest collection in the museum.[10]

It is worth noting that in the 1940s, the debate around the category of ethnographic objects in Brazil was populated by controversy among intellectuals, and in the context of SPHAN it mainly referred to cultural heritage that could not be inscribed under the label of 'Fine Arts'. With an evolutionary value attached to the label, the 'ethnographic' served to place objects from non-European cultures as inferiors according to European criteria (see Gama 2018). Denounced by several Brazilian authors, these objects were for many years not a central interest for SPHAN's directors nor were they valued in the heritage policies from the period that mainly focused on the preservation of colonial references attesting to the triumph of European tradition (Corrêa 2009). As observed by Corrêa, it was not SPHAN's initial practice to produce technical reports and material research to justify the registration of an object or a collection. Therefore, there is no information available on the criteria and values invested in the 'Black Magic' collection that can justify its registration as cultural heritage.

Curiously, most of the existing information on the objects that survives was accumulated by the police, and not by the heritage institute that secured its preservation over the years. As Pereira recalls (2017, 34–35), in the decades following the museum's inauguration, one of its directors intended to make an exhibition of the objects, consulting the local knowledge of religious leaders. As was very common in Rio's society then, he was a frequent visitor to Umbandas, and supposedly had consulted people from terreiros to learn about the meaning of the different pieces in possession of the police. Contradictorily, he was responsible for discarding the original paperwork that documented the context and places where the objects were apprehended, leaving them devoid of any reference to their provenance – a central issue for their return to the sacred spaces from where they were taken.

Nevertheless, a list of objects comprising the Black Magic Museum, requested by SPHAN in 1940, provides some precise information on the items and indicates some partial knowledge of Afro-Brazilian religions and beliefs by those in charge of caring for the objects. Decades later, an exhibition in the 1990s included a display of the objects that took into consideration their sacred meanings and their place in a terreiro. As

narrated by Lody (2005), some of the ritual separations in Candomblé and Umbanda were preserved in the museum's display: the spirits of light were kept carefully separated from the spirits of darkness; images of Exu were separated from those of other orixás; and certain artefacts used in beneficial spells or interventions were placed on a separate shelf from those used against adversaries.

In a way, the work of the Police Museum prolonged and preserved the sacred power of the objects in its controversial collection. Nonetheless, its original interpretation as criminal material was never really abandoned. The objects were displayed in the permanent exhibition next to flags of the Integralistas (a 1930s neo-fascist movement in Brazil) and objects belonging to famous communist figures, such as Luiz Carlos Prestes' typewriter (Rafael and Maggie 2013, 291), gathering in the same exhibition space the different testimonies of crimes and offenses condemned by Brazilian society.

Agreeing with Maggie on what refers to the work of the police in the Republican period, we can see how Brazilian institutions were impregnated with the belief in magic, allowing the State to intervene in the sacred world and distinguish who were the legitimate 'priests' and 'priestesses' (pais de santo and mães de santo). Looking back at the history of these disputed objects, it becomes evident how the relentless persecution of Afro-Brazilian cults followed by the accumulation and preservation of their collections has relegated a specific kind of critical heritage to the present generation. By inventing and interpreting a collection of 'Black Magic', the Civil Police Museum has preserved its own violence and historical racism as a part of Brazilian national heritage.

Restitution of the sacred: when technical museum work intersects with religion

The collection of sacred objects preserved by the Police comprises diverse ritual materials including atabaques (traditional drums), sculpted saints and orixás, paintings and representations of caboclos (important spiritual entities), costumes and ornaments of specific orixás, guias (sacred beaded strings), pembas (chalk stickers), talismans, a vast collection of pipes, a few settlements (the assentamentos, or sacred altars), and other objects used in the sacred life of terreiros.

The acknowledgement by religious leaders of this important collection dates to the 1970s, after the first study by Maggie, Monte-Mór, and Contins (Maggie at al., 1979). However, a history of police

persecution and violent apprehensions within terreiros was already a part of the memories transmitted through generations of religious leaders. This is the case of Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, the main leadership in the movement for the restitution of the Nosso Sagrado collection. Her personal story, as the mãe de santo in terreiro Ilê Omolu Oxum, is marked by a legacy of resistance against religious racism in Brazil and by her exemplary activism for human rights within her own community and in collaboration with other religious groups. Her terreiro, located in the city of São João de Meriti, in Rio's metropolitan area, preserves an ancestral collection of objects from the nineteenth century that survived police apprehensions in Bahia and in Rio and that tell the story of Candomblé in Brazil. That collection is now presented in a memorial-museum that, according to her, is a testimony to the will of the orixás to preserve their sacred materials.[11]

Known as one of the most important religious leaderships in Rio de Janeiro, Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum was introduced to Candomblé in 1968 by her grandmother and ialorixá Iyá Davina, who first mentioned to her the existence of objects that belonged to their ancestors, 'stolen' by the police and 'imprisoned' in a museum. In her own words, the materials under police arrest are not 'a collection', and she is reluctant to apply the term 'acquisition' to their violent apprehension: they are 'our sacred' ('nosso sagrado') (Meninazinha de Oxum et al. 2001, 76). Such an affirmation was carried on throughout her fight for the objects to be returned to the terreiros, with her own experience in a memorial-museum as proof of the fact that museum work should not be separated from the sacred preservation of religious rites and their materials.

In 1999, when the Civil Police Museum closed for repair, the sacred objects misrepresented in its main exhibition were finally removed from public access. For more than two decades, up until the transfer agreement with the Republic Museum, the collection remained stowed away in boxes and out of sight. Meanwhile, the claims raised by Mãe Meninazinha gained the hearts of other leaderships from houses of Umbanda and Candomblé in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the support of intellectuals, politicians and some museum professionals. In 2014, upon several claims for repatriation, the Civil Police Museum removed any reference to the objects from its institutional website. A process of silencing the collection competed against the growing campaign for its restitution to the sacred houses.

Amidst this turbulent context, the cause gained the attention of academics and professionals from the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (MN/UFRJ) in favour of incorporating the collection into their reserves. While Mãe Meninazinha still thought that

the best place for the collection would be in a religious space or in a community museum in a terreiro, she was convinced that the involvement of a national institution to give new care to these materials would secure their transfer from the Police's reserves. However, this first approach from a museum with an important ethnographic collection was never made official and the process of negotiation with the religious people was hindered due to the museum fire in September 2018. The main claims still insisted that the objects be returned to sacred houses, and Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum was already in dialogue with other babalorixás to conceive a repatriation that involved different terreiros. The main issue, however, was the fact that the Police preserved almost no information on the original terreiros from where the objects were taken, and it was known that many houses were closed or had been completely destroyed after the police action in the previous centuries.

The realisation that the transaction for their 'liberation' from the police was dependent on the very institutions responsible for their apprehension came with time and after a long process of heated debates. When the *Liberte o Nosso Sagrado* movement was created in 2017, the claims from religious leaders from different houses were already well known and were gaining more supporters from civil society. In 2018, members of the movement approached the Republic Museum to discuss a possible collaboration. The museum, making use of its legal status as a national institution, started a formal negotiation with the Police, and on 23 August, the chief of Civil Police in Rio de Janeiro signed an agreement with its director for the transfer of the collection. The main requirement, from both the museum and the religious leaders, was that the management of the collection in the new institution was based on a process of intense collaboration and co-curation between museum professionals and members of the religious community.

The context of this reparation to Afro-Brazilian groups in Rio is not an isolated act, and perhaps it could never be accomplished as such. It was part of a broader anti-racist fight that reached the heritage sector in Brazil more vigorously in the past few years, as seen in the preservation of the history of slavery in Cais do Valongo,[12] declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017 and whose preservation involved local black communities. The transfer of objects between institutions was also possible thanks to the commitment of specific actors in the cultural sector, including the involvement of members from the Secretary of Culture of Rio de Janeiro State, and that of SPHAN. As a result, on 7 August 2020, the transfer agreement was finally signed by both museums.

In September 2020, the collection entered the museum, finally becoming accessible to the religious people from different houses of Candomblé and Umbanda. The following year, on 19 June 2021 a new ceremony took place at the terreiro Ilê Omolu Oxum, the house of Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, in which the museum director and technical staff were present to sign the definitive transfer document with the endorsement of several religious leaders and members of communities. The agreement states that, from that moment, the ownership of the collection is officially transferred to the Republic Museum whose care will be based on collaborative management involving the povo de santo. Even though this unique repatriation, with the mediation of the state, was far from being fully accomplished, that historical moment marked an unprecedented conquest for Afro-Brazilian religions, and it opened a great opportunity for museums to critically revise their traditional practices and political role within society.

Sharing authority and learning from the sacred: the museum as a liminal space

After their celebratory transfer to the new museum environment and the signed agreement on shared curatorship between the museum and the representatives of religious communities, questions can still be asked in the face of an ongoing reparation process. To whom do these objects fully belong? Among the different groups and leaderships represented, who can determine their sacred value and significance? What is the extent of religious methods that can be adopted and practiced in a museum of the state that narrates the history of Republican power? Is the environment of a non-religious museum suitable for a sacred collection? And, why are the objects in this particular museum?

In response to this last question, Mário Chagas, the museum director, will simply say, 'Ask the orixás!' In each step of the negotiations between religious leaders and the museum, the African deities were consulted. After several decades of uncertainties regarding the future of the collection, Chagas is proud to say that the orixás have chosen the museum. In fact, the original idea defended by Mãe Meninazinha, that the objects return to the terreiros, was never considered by the state and the lack of information on the objects' origins could have made this an impossible restitution. The Republic Museum was then a necessary third party in the negotiations, making possible the repatriation of this liminal collection – in between a museum regime and their rightful place with the believers.

But this return to the sacred was not due to a difference in faith – as the belief in Candomblé and Umbanda is not solemnly shared by those making the claims. The liberation of the objects from the jurisdiction of the police represents an unprecedented restitution to those violated in their rights to believe and to publicly express the religion of their ancestors. Justifying the housing of the collection in the Republic Museum, Chagas refers to an institutional compromise with diversity and with the promotion of Brazil's multi-ethnic identity. Furthermore, he defines this collaboration as an action of reparation and social justice, one that is taking place in the very palace where state documents were issued to persecute terreiros in the past.[13]

The museum, then, adopted a critical approach to its own institutional history and opened up a space for reviewing its contribution to a necessary revision of past actions. Inspired by a discourse of Social Museology and the notion of 'shared management' (or co-curatorship) of the collection, the museum accepted a difficult task of rethinking the objects in multiple voices. The first challenge was to find consensus among leaders and filhos de santo from different houses and religious traditions. Listening to the different voices and taking their lead in a gentle collaboration is something observable when visiting the museum's reserves. In this sense, the building of mutual trust was a main goal from both parties, and the involvement of members of the religious groups became a key factor since the beginning, when the museum hired new staff members to work with the incoming collection. Once again, the orixás were consulted through the work of Mãe Meninazinha, who helped in the selection process of the new professionals.

The urgency to change the collection's name from 'Black Magic' was a first imperative shared among the different actors in dialogue. 'Nosso Sagrado' was adopted after the objects entered the reserves, inspired by the namesake movement baptised by Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum and Mãe Nilce de Iansã. The re-appropriation of the collection by the religious communities involved in its preservation takes over the political role to affirm a sacredness that will extirpate the racist connotation in which it was embedded. This requalification of the collection also has an effect on the museum itself, as a place 'inbetween' worlds of meaning and value, according to the notion proposed by Basu (2017). The museum, thus, can be perceived as 'the space across which meaning is translated (in the sense of being 'carried over') from one context or domain to another, giving form to ideas and descriptions of the world otherwise inexpressible' (Basu 2017, 9).

When the objects were being unpacked in the museum reserve, even the order of the boxes to be opened was defined bearing in mind the sacredness of their contents: the staff were instructed to first unpack the sculptures of Exu (the deity who opens the communication with the other orixás), secondly the atabaques (the drums used to initiate a ritual).[14] While the pieces were being revealed, the museum reserve was transformed into a place of great festivity with chanting and clapping hands in celebration of the liberation of a sacredness kept apart for so long. The reception of the objects in the new museum environment was also a reencounter with the ancestors, as some of the members of the communities represented will testify: 'it was almost a big liberation party, where our ancestors are celebrating with us on a great Candomblé or in a gira of Umbanda'.[15]

The ongoing process of co-curation, based on shared knowledge and procedures, is not perceived as a given, nor as a one-way action from the museum to the communities. In fact, the museum staff involved in the reception and preservation of the collection sees the participation of the authorised voices from terreiros as the only way possible to manage these materials, preventing themselves from operating in disconnect with their sacred meanings and based on the techniques commonly adopted in the care of permanent collections. Thus, an important turn in the museum attitude presents itself when staff members realised that their common knowledge for documenting, conserving and displaying the collections were not in great part applicable to the Nosso Sagrado. The storage and conservation needed to be reconsidered, taking into account the religious aspects and the sacred function of each object. Traditional documentation sheets and certain categories needed to be reinvented, and in many cases where textbooks and manuals did not have the answers, the staff deferred to the deities, through the mediation of ialorixás, for answers from the orixás.

The museum in itself becomes a mediator: a liminal space where multiple regimes of knowledge and value can coexist. Here the specificity of this collection is that it can tell multiple stories and present a plurality of meanings, some of them yet to be revealed. It is evidence of institutional racism in the history of the Brazilian Republic, but it is also the connection of the present generation of priests and priestesses with their violated ancestors. Nosso Sagrado holds in itself hope and distress: the belief that a violent past can be amended, while the story it holds is of a nation built on the persecution of those perceived to be in discord with the established order and the dominant canon of knowledge – defined 'since the West left witchcraft as it embraced the Enlightenment' (Maggie 2011, 146).

Have the Police of Rio the Janeiro defined the life of the objects in Nosso Sagrado once and for all? Can a past of institutional injustice and racism be amended by the public recognition of a sacredness long suppressed and still threatened by religious prejudice? While Brazil's society still shows great difficulty in dealing with its constitutive cultural differences through the recognition of its colonial past, only time will tell if the faith deposited in museum work can open new ways of seeing and relating to Afro-Brazilian heritage in central public institutions.

Collecting uncertainties, sharing some faith

Reports from the second decade of the nineteenth century show that at a time when nearly half the population of Rio was enslaved and the transatlantic slave traffic was unrestricted, 80 per cent of those judged in a court of law were enslaved people and 95 per cent of those had been born in Africa. Another 19 per cent of the total were formerly enslaved, which means that only one per cent were free persons who had never been enslaved.[16] Liberating Brazilian society from this past, when institutions worked together for the stigmatisation and punishment of racial minorities, is not an easy task, nor one that can happen with the transfer of a collection between state museums.

There is more to repairing past injustices that is out of the reach of museum professionals and the communities working with them. But the involvement of communities in the work of public institutions is an important step for implementing the idea that museums are made by all and through various collaborations. Moreover, it is an indication of the possibility to transform the very institutions used to stigmatise and exclude, to repair injustices and heal historical wounds. And if the faith in museums and in the re-appropriation of objects in light of current claims can give us some hope, it also presents some great challenges for museum professionals dealing with the unknown and the uncertainty in the management of collections.

Understanding museum work in its potential for reparatory action is an imperative legacy for professionals in the face of displaced materials from situations of violence and injustice. But for museum staff and researchers who are used to finding assertive answers when interrogating the past, dealing with a collection that was deprived of proper documentation may defy their own reliability on their learned scientific categories. After the entrance of the Nosso Sagrado into its reserves, the Republic Museum has been trying to follow its usual procedures of preventive care, conservation,

photographing, documenting, restoring and, finally, exhibiting. Nonetheless, what the museum staff has quickly realised is that the care of a sacred collection, when considered through the eyes of the filhos de santo, babalorixás and ialorixás, puts into question the very museum procedures and 'best practice' manuals used for the preservation of its existing collections. Currently, the museum technical work is being revised, for instance, with the redefinition of categories in the documentation sheet used to classify objects that have no identifiable authorship but are related to a specific orixá. Furthermore, discussions have been initiated on materials that cannot be exhibited to the public due to their sacredness, and the creation of educational materials to combat religious discrimination is also being considered by the museums' educators and some ialorixás.

The reinscription of a 'Black Magic' collection into the sacred, despite the loss of information about the objects and their provenance, imposes the re-affirmation of these materials in a different regime of value – one that differs even from their original significance in terreiros. In this shared museum regime, where a new form of communication between past and present can be inaugurated, something else is materialised beyond the institutional racism denounced by historians and museum experts.

It was not my intention to discuss museum authority nor the disputes that are internal to any collaboration involving cultural heritage, but rather to understand how the sharing of perspectives over a collection may generate new ways of objectifying culture. As Sansi notes, objectification does not preclude politics, but it is, in many ways, a precondition of any meaningful social action. In Sansi's perspective, 'it is precisely because culture is objectified that it can be discussed, used and appropriated by social actors' (2007, 3). When the objects of persecution re-enter the reserves of a public museum, a new form of appropriation is put in place. In the new museum regime, culture is objectified by the very subjects of objectification – the communities persecuted by the police, studied by the scientists and marginalised from society. This way, culture, 'as historically formed ways of life' (Sansi 2007, 4), can be re-enacted in the museum displays; it can finally be used, manipulated and transformed, at the same time transforming the lives of its users.

This re-objectification entangles new subjects into the museum, opening the so-called forum to liminal existences and marginal forms of relating to material culture. It goes without saying that this inconclusive process is still an open window for the challenge of social participation in collections management, one that pledges new forms of negotiation between museum professionals, agents of the state and the communities invested in the restitution of their sacred.

Uncertainty involving collections is never an easy burden for museums to carry, but it is a fundamental element of any ritual in a terreiro. To understand these objects in their processes of objectification, rather than attached to fixed and stable systems of classification, may liberate the museum from its own colonial methods and procedures. The truth that there is no single truth to explain the sacred in the collection is a first step towards the acceptance of other voices and expertises that are not necessarily 'scientific' because they are not necessarily 'enlightened'. In this gesture of faith, a more nuanced practice – and a more colourful museology – may arise.

Notes

1   Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil from 1763 to 1960, when it was officially transferred to Brasília.
2   According to Sansi (2007, 1–2), the origin of the term 'Candomblé' is unknown in the Brazilian diaspora. It seems to have appeared in Bahia in the first half of the nineteenth century 'in reference to parties of slaves and freed slaves (sometimes in the plural, Candomblés), and also in connection with the practice of sorcery (feitiçaria)'.
3   The origins of the term 'Umbanda' are unknown in Brazil, but its etymology derives from the Banto linguistic branch that was introduced in the colony with enslaved people from Western and Southern Africa. The term designates a syncretic religion that was born in Rio de Janeiro in the early twentieth century, with influences from African and indigenous cults as well as from Christianity. In its popular sense, Umbanda 'is much more the result of diverse contacts, cultural circularities and intersections that are codified in multiple ways', as defined by Luiz Antonio Simas (2021, 26).
4   In Rio de Janeiro, regular policing began in 1808 with the Police of the Court, established in Brazil following the transfer of the royal family from Portugal in January that year. It had responsibility for public works and ensuring the provisioning of the city in addition to personal and collective security (Holloway 1993).
5   In colonial times, rudimentary vigilance in the Brazilian capital was carried out by an unarmed civilian watchman (guarda), hired by the town council to make the rounds and keep an eye out for suspicious activity, and the neighbourhood inspector (quadrilheiro), appointed by local judges. According to Holloway (1993, 29), these functionaries, who were not even considered 'officers', had no more powers of arrest than any ordinary citizen.
6   Here, the adjustment of certain identities refers to those individuals or communities who 'fit' into the project of the nation, and in the name of which the nation state will act.
7   The definition of the cults to be persecuted by the state was altered with the new Penal Code enacted in 1940, defining that 'Candomblés and macumbas were the ones that misapplied the precepts [of religion], because their adherents were ignorant and uncultured' (Maggie 1992, 264). After heated debates, the new Code was voted on in 1942, and since then people that were accused under Article 157 were designated 'macumbeiros'.
8   The inscription on the *Livro de Tombo Arqueológico, Etnográfico e Paisagístico* refers to cultural goods 'belonging to the categories of archeological art, [and] popular or indigenous ethnography' (Brasil, Decreto-Lei nº 25/1937).
9   *Museu do Departamento Federal de Segurança Pública da Polícia Civil*, renamed as *Museu da Polícia Civil* (Civil Police Museum) in 1954.
10 According to a 1946 report of the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs of the Federal Public Safety Department, recovered in Rafael and Maggie (2013).
11   The Memorial-Museum Iyá Davina, located in the Ilê Omolu Oxum, is a referential place for the memory of Candomblé in Rio. The 'museum' was conceived by Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum in 1997 and is now maintained with the support of several other *ialorixás* and *filhos de santo* of the *terreiro*.

12 Cais do Valongo, situated in the dock area of the city, is considered the location where the
    greatest number of Africans arrived in the Americas to be enslaved (an estimate of 900,000
    people). It was unearthed in 2011, initiating a long process of negotiations around its
    preservation. It is still a place of great dispute around the memory of slavery in Rio de Janeiro
    (Vassallo and Cicalo 2015).
13 Verbal information during a visit to the reserves of the Republic Museum, when the collection
    was made accessible for the first group of researchers on September 2021.
14 This collaborative process is carefully narrated by Chagas et al. (2021).
15 See the various statements from pais and mães de santo, in Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum,
    Mãe Nilce de Iansã, Versiani, Maria Helena and Chagas, Mario (2021). In Judite Primo and
    Mário Moutinho (Org.), Sociomuseologia: Para uma leitura crítica do mundo. Lisboa: Edições
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16 Holloway (1993) takes these data from a police report from 1810 to 1821.

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5

Bane and boon: critical contexts of object marking

Alice Stevenson, Cressida Fforde and Lyndon Ormond-Parker

In 2018, photographer Betoul Mahdey began a photo archive of the inscriptions inked directly onto the ancient artefacts in the Baghdad Archaeological Museum. Most had been acquired and documented during foreign archaeological missions (Figure 5.1). She shared her images with Iraqi-artist Hanaa Malallah, who in turn began to further query the markings:

> How is it possible for an ancient object to retain an identity outside the colonialist archaeologist's coding system, on which retains a resonance of its significance for those peoples who identify it as their own historical and cultural identity?

> How can we construct a new history and aesthetics for this archiving system (as numbers on the surface of ancient artefacts) which narrate the ancient objects colonialist journey? What do these codifications mean to non-archaeologist viewers? (Malallah 2022, 23)

Physically applying or marking an object with a registration, inventory or accession number is integral to its transformation into a museum artefact; an act of authority, ownership and control seeking to stabilise and institutionalise culturally significant categories (Jenkins 1994, 257). The procedure of assigning an artefact or specimen with a unique number or providing a contextual label is also identified as being essential to avoid one of the 10 agents of deterioration that affect collections – dissociation – the accession number or markings often extending into and tethering

Figure 5.1 Photograph of the artist work 'The Numbering of Artefacts' by Hanaa Malallah displayed at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, January – March 2022 as part of the exhibition *Co-Existent Ruins*. Malallah edited Betoul Mahdey's photographs of Iraqi people in the street in 2019–20 to conflate the coding of the museum artefacts with the faces of Iraqi people. Photograph © Alice Stevenson and courtesy of Hanaa Malallah.

an object within an ecosystem of related historical documentation. In collections management, whether or not to employ a particular marking technique is usually informed by the material properties of an object, but this chapter takes its cue from Malallah to enquire about the broader histories, meanings and implications of such practices.

To this end, this chapter reviews some of the cultural, religious, political, moral and ethical conditions that are equally important to consider, together with the public value of making transparent object markings. The significance of inscribing and re-inscribing numbers or other such marks as an act of critical collections management and care is highlighted in moments where source communities are confronted

with labels, particularly obtrusive ones, which may cause grief, anger, or confusion, but possibly also feelings of relief that the markings ensure that remains are identifiable as specific ancestors or items as sacred belongings. Markings can be both bane and boon (something that is both a benefit and an affliction). How are marks on repatriated objects or ancestors regarded and treated? In what contexts should old markings be removed or displayed? Through examples of curatorial, artistic, and registration practice, together with case studies from the repatriation of human remains that two of this chapter's authors have been involved in (Fforde and Ormond-Parker) we address these questions. In so doing, we argue that there can be emotional, political and cultural contexts informing what is often considered a technical and objective procedure meaning that critical reflection, dialogue and negotiation with relevant communities to inform decision-making is often needed.

Marking technologies and motivations

The addition of written information to an object or specimen physically alters it and for this reason has been described as 'one of the most invasive procedures undertaken in registration' (Buck and Gilmore 1998, 65; Beale and Pyrzakowsik, this volume). The nature of such interventions has shifted over time as the longer-term material consequences of these became apparent, and as philosophies of collections care have evolved. Early strategies of using 'China ink' or 'Brunswick black thinned in turpentine' (Petrie 1904, 52) may be irreversibly absorbed into the surfaces of artefacts, while for darker materials and wood, scratching numbers into the surface was common or else a layer of quick drying white enamel could be painted on (NPS 1940). In other cases, the paints used to brand objects were lead-based, meaning that efforts to subsequently remove them were potentially harmful not just to the objects, but to museum staff and researchers. Shellac was frequently used throughout the twentieth century, first as an overcoat to protect marks, then as an undercoat. However, the substance was found to break down and age, often severely darkening and obscuring the numbers written beneath. Since the 1980s, techniques to ensure that markings are secure yet reversible have embraced the use of a discrete clear coating for non-porous, non-plastic artefacts, such as the clear thermoplastic acrylic resin Paraloid (formerly Acryloid in the US) B-72 in solvent. It first began to be used in conservation around the 1960s and when dry acts as a surface on which a number can be inscribed, before the addition of a further

coat of resin to protect it from loss or abrasion (Koob 1986; Sullivan and Cumberland 1993). Usually, these can be mostly removed with the use of solvents such as acetone. For surfaces unsuited to this method – including those of soft leather, plastics, rubber, and lacquer – a variety of other mechanisms are possible, such as tying on acid-free tags onto strings of small beads, sewing cotton labels onto textiles, inserting a Tyvek label into fluid specimen jars, or using starch paper on basketry or other plant-based items, to provide a space for a number or other mark.

The choice of marking technology is not, however, restricted to the material properties of things but may also be dependent upon cultural, religious, or security needs. Malaysia's Islamic Arts Museum, for example, published separate rules for handling Muslim art objects to maintain boundaries between sacred and polluting materials. One principle is that substances considered to be polluting need to be kept away from the sacred, meaning that brushes made of pig bristle or solutions incorporating pig fat cannot be used in marking anything bearing a holy text (Paine 2013, 65). While the practice of directly numbering human bone was common in the past (see contexts of repatriation section below), today it is usually recognised as not being suitable for all examples. The UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) report advises, for example, that although numbering on bone 'is standard practice for English remains, this is not always acceptable for those from other cultures' (DCMS 2005, 19). The equivalent German report recommends that inventory numbers should be placed in invisible locations and be removable (DMD 2021, 32).

Cultural value and security may also influence systems of object marking. There are examples, for instance, of coding systems marked onto objects in times of war to inform evacuation priorities, as was implemented in Dutch Museums, like the Rijksmuseum. From 1939, paintings at the Rijksmuseum were marked on the reverse of their frames and panels with a three-colour system dividing them into categories of 'irreplaceable', 'difficult to replace' and 'replaceable' (Ekelund and van Duijn 2017). More recently, SmartWater liquid has been used to print unique chemical signatures onto objects, which is invisible in normal light. Some 273,000 stone, ivory, ceramic tile, glass and pottery artefacts cared for in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad and the Slemani Museum in Sulaimani have been labelled in this manner, with a view to protect them against theft and trafficking (University of Reading 2020). The selection of numbering techniques may also be influenced by the needs of access and inclusion. Hand-numbering requires a level of dexterity in manipulating B72 barriers and steady writing skills in rendering codes

in a small, legible typeface, but laser-printed numbers can allow more members of staff, or even volunteers, to safely and neatly apply numbers (Braun 2007). And in some cases, such as with working collections, frequency of use has necessitated establishing protocols on engraving numbers permanently onto collection items (see Spary, this volume).

The significance of object numbering for collections and publics

The attribution of a museum code to an object confers significance and can elevate whole categories of material to collections status. Reproductions are good examples of this. Historically, plaster casts and facsimiles in other materials formed a core part of museum collections in the nineteenth century but faced mixed fortunes throughout the twentieth (Frederickson and Marchand 2010). In the absence of registration, these materials have been vulnerable to neglect and disposal. Increasingly, the value of these assemblages is being recognised with moves to absorb them into primary accessioned collections, with specific advice on numbering formats developed to acknowledge the 'composite biographies' (Foster and Jones 2020) they materialise of both the original and its derivative (Park 2010).

Numbering and marking therefore plays a significant role in the creation of museum objects, yet the visibility of these inscriptions has shifted over time and with different gazes. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, markings were placed in prominent positions, assertively applied directly on to the objects without a barrier and in large typeface (Figure 5.2). They perhaps reflect the confidence of museum expertise, authority and ownership for the long term. Such strategies ultimately draw attention to that text, disrupting other forms of more holistic object engagement – feeling, holding or knowing an object in a more direct, embodied and sensory way. Coote (2012, 13), for example, notes that writing on a museum object may be seen as integral to it, as constituting an essential truth about it, be that its date or locale. The dates or provenances inked, etched or stamped onto material can readily provide leading interpretive assumptions about that object serving not to locate that artefact within its original contexts, but within institutional histories that sought to secure its place within taxonomic sequences. Equally, however, other types of inscriptions despite being writ large across the most visually arresting parts of an object, may be erased by particular ways of looking that seek an uninterrupted aesthetic

Figure 5.2 An example of the large and prominently placed accession number on a fragment of an ancient Egyptian limestone stele of a man named Tjanefer. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum.

engagement that erases marks of contact, order and control. One example is a 1970 painting of a Zuni Earthenware bowl in the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology which ignored the large catalogue number inked across the centre of the original from which the still life was painted (Nichols 2014, 153–54).

Today, numbering practice seeks to ensure discrete object marking, that is as small as possible while still remaining legible. The shift to discrete, removable marking as best practice might correspond to changes in rhetoric around museum 'ownership' towards museum 'stewardship' and recognition that museums do not hold things in perpetuity. Changing aesthetic values may also have had a part to play. Advice on marking often emphasises that 'the number should not be visible when the object is on display' (Matassa 2011, 83) and that it should be 'unobtrusive (not directly visible when the object is on display' (NPS 2020, Appendix JI). This compunction extends to museum labels where accession numbers are often excluded from display texts, with the assumption that gallery visitors will not be interested. The conceptual artist Fred Wilson in his famous institutional critique *Mining the Museum* challenged and subverted such conventions in his installation 'Collection of Numbers 76.1.25.3– 76.1.67.11; white drawing ink, black India ink and lacquer, c. 1976' in which he flipped a series of arrowheads on display in the Maryland

Historical Society, Baltimore, to make the accession numbers inscribed onto them visible (Corrin 1994, 14). In the work's title and in this action, Wilson conveyed the significance not just of the objects, but of how museums deal with them; 'the registration system has eclipsed the object registered' (Stein 1993, 112). And like Malallah's prompt, is arguably a subtle reminder of the US Bureau of Indian Affairs practice of surveilling Native Americans with numbering systems (González 2011, 343).

In other contexts, there may be little choice but to exhibit objects with markings visible. The First Nations curators of the Australian Museum's display of lithic finds in the *Bayala Nura: Yarning Country* gallery, for example, faced such a dilemma. The artefacts they wanted to display were so small that many had information inked across both sides; one face with provenance information, the other with the museum's identification number. Thus, although the preference was to not display the markings, in practice that was not possible. For one thing, the markings were a crucial means of identifying specific items amidst a multitude of small, similar-looking artefacts that could easily shift around the display due to floor vibrations. Curators were also conscious of the harm that could be done to the object in removing the notations and the detrimental impact that this could have on the potential for future scientific analysis. In this situation the compromise was, where possible or necessary, to preferentially display the artefacts with provenance information visible. This permitted the artefacts to be linked to country, creating a clear connection between suburbs, areas and locations like the iconic Bondi Beach and First Nations peoples. As the curator, Courtney Marsh, noted, '[I]t was a choice to reaffirm that the land which we currently call Sydney has always been and always will be Aboriginal land and hold culture and its people in its soil'.[1]

But what do the public make of such numbers? Malallah queries this in the opening quote to this chapter, asking what museum registration codes mean to non-specialists. As the link to more information about an object, moves have been made to explicitly draw the public's attention to the power of such markings. *Museum Hack*, a US organisation that offers 'Renegade Tours', notes that most individuals who join their tour groups have no idea what the decimal numbers on objects and labels denote, but when informed of their purpose visitors were able to undertake their own further research on an object's provenance through online databases; '[H]ow empowering is that to a visitor?' declares Oleniczak (2013). Such assertions are a provocation to museums to embrace and make transparent their collections management procedures.

Coding information

David Jenkins (1994) observed that object marks and numbers are the site of intersection between object and archive, collapsing the distinctions between them and binding objects with others in a chain of significance that forges collections. In other words, differentiating a miscellaneous mass of assembled material into a usable set of artefacts or specimens. The equation between coding systems and knowledge is not, however, always straightforward; numbering and marking logics are often time limited. Some registration codes may place objects into a sequence that reflects the organisation of the collection, but other cataloguing systems do more than inventory. The latter may include acronyms that locate that object with reference to particular collectors or locations. London's Institute of Archaeology, for instance, has inherited an especially complicated system introduced by archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, comprising individual letters for countries (E for Palestine, G for Mesopotamia), a code for individual archaeological sites (e.g. EXIX for Jericho), and then a context code such as for an individual tomb number on a site and another number for each item in the tomb (Sparkes 2012). The result is single archaeological fragments bearing excessively long, unintuitive, ambiguous markings on small objects. One example is EIII.1iig/3.2, inked onto an individual basalt bowl fragment, the different Roman (ii) and Arabic numerals (III) easily confused given the small handwriting. The uninitiated would struggle to understand the logic of the system.

While location markings may be the site of acquisition, it may also be a reference to organisational space, with cultural material and human remains being numbered to identify their storage location within an institution such as a specific drawer, shelf, or cupboard. For example, in the historical anatomy collection at the University of Edinburgh, postcranial human remains in the 'race' collection were stored apart from the same individual's crania. While the crania were largely kept in an annexe to the University's anatomy museum (known as the Skull Room), the very large quantity of associated postcranial skeletal elements were stored in canvas bags in bespoke drawers in the technicians' workroom on the floor below. These postcranial elements numbered in their hundreds and were almost all those of Indigenous Australians, the large majority Ngarrindjeri Old People[2] stolen from their burial places by the Adelaide Coroner and Edinburgh Medical School alumni, William Ramsay Smith in the 1890s and early 1900s (Fforde 2009; Wilson 2009; Hemming et al 2020). All crania in the 'race' collection were marked prominently with the University's unique geographical numbering system which enabled

basic provenance to be established. Some of the larger postcranial bones were similarly marked or labelled, but in all cases the canvas bags they were kept in were labelled with a system that described the drawer and bag they were located within. A single catalogue (known as the 'Anatomical Museum Catalogue') linked the locational system (drawer number) with the geographical system. For the vast majority of the ancestral remains lying in the workroom drawers, without the Anatomical Museum Catalogue, it would be impossible to unite them with their associated cranium.

In the 1950s, the technician's workroom was emptied and the drawers containing post-cranial remains were placed in the Anatomy Department basement. By the time that the first major repatriation of Indigenous Australian ancestral remains occurred in 1991, institutional memory about the drawers, what they contained, the existence of the Anatomical Museum Catalogue, and thus how to unite them with crania that were still located in the Anatomy Museum annexe had been almost completely lost. This situation led to crania being repatriated from Edinburgh without the rest of the individual, the consequences of which were dire. Discovery of the postcranial skeletal elements in the basement drawers occurred in the mid-1990s. After a major project in 1998/9[3] that located all the extensive archival documentation (only a very minimal catalogue had been returned with the crania in 1991), searched for all missing Australian ancestral remains, and united the information with the ancestral remains in a database system, the postcranial skeletal elements formed the second major repatriation from the University of Edinburgh in 2000. In this (perhaps unique) example, the disciplined and detailed introduction of a locational numbering system reflected the separation of people's bodily remains according to notions of value (crania were perceived to be more useful for racial science), architectural constraints (no space in the Skull Room), aesthetics and utility of display, and likely the status accorded to medical institutions for whom large anatomy museums were often the centrepiece.

As Svanberg (2015) has cautioned, collections, and the systems they create and consolidate, have their own agency that structure the institutions they are in. But that also means that marking systems, styles of numbering, labelling choices, individual handwriting and bespoke coding provide a stratigraphy of human agency in shaping collections. The ability to interpret and research object marks and labels, therefore, becomes an area of expertise that collections staff often develop (e.g. see Carnall 2017) while other systems and 'acts of inscription' need to be 'excavated' (Wingfield 2013). In the case of the University of Edinburgh,

only those aware of the way each system worked and interconnected were able to decipher the code and in 1997 the location and marking codes had to be 'relearned' by the repatriation project team, and continues to be passed on to Ngarrindjeri repatriation practitioners. Thus absorbed (and moulded) into institutional structure, the humanity of the deceased became swamped with interconnected mechanisms of objectification. However, gaining understanding of the past (and very disciplined) application of the intricate and unique numbering systems used at Edinburgh through the repatriation project was the route by which the skeletal elements were reunited and source communities identified.

The bane and boon of numbers: repatriation practice

In a video installation at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum's exhibition *I Miss You* – the final exhibition of 96 Benin artefacts before their return to Nigeria in 2022 – Nigerian art historian Peju Layiwola is seen reverently removing tags from the displayed objects. In media interviews she explains this symbolic act:

> It's like putting numbers on people and putting them in jail … taking off those marks that have no meaning in the culture … we don't put numbers on ancestors.[4]

If object marking and inventorying are acts of authority, ownership and control, then confronting them and dealing with them by those marginalised and harmed by those activities can be empowering and challenging, eliciting a range of responses.

For source communities, encounters with museum items, sacred possessions and ancestors can be emotionally intense (Fforde et al. 2022). This is especially the case for human remains. For instance, when a delegation from the Haida community visited the British Museum in 2009 to meet ancestral remains, the conservator made efforts to prepare them. The remains – in this case a mandible tied to a cranium – bore an obtrusive accession number painted across the back. Rested on a cushion, the remains were positioned so as to make this registration number less immediately visible and then it was covered. Gathered around their ancestor, the Haida prepared themselves as the cover was removed from the skull. The attendant conservator Sherry Doyal recalled that 'those standing behind winced at the sight of the accession number' (Krmpotich and Peers 2014, 142).

Markings, and particularly numbering, may be a painful indignity imposed by the colonial state, and then, to add insult to injury, they are relied upon to find ancestral remains and bring them home. It is a tension that those who have worked on repatriation cases recognise as putting affected communities into a difficult position. At the Pitt Rivers Museum, general practice has been not to strip away object numbers as these were deemed integral to the object's physical and intellectual history. However, there have been contexts of removal, particularly during repatriation processes, where numbers can be a confronting reminder for Indigenous people of the status of their ancestors as scientific specimens within institutions (Fforde et al. 2020, 550). For instance, in preparation for visits from Haida community members, conservators removed museum labels so as not to cause community members any offence but these were reattached at the end of the visits (Krmpotich and Peers 2014, 55).

Paradoxically, on the one hand numbering is dehumanising but, on the other, by connecting the ancestral remain to their source community it is the route by which re-humanisation can take place. Such marks then become a vector of possibility that changes the way an artefact or 'set' of remains is regarded. To put this into context, human remains collections in many institutions are vast. Redman (2016), for example, reports conservative estimates for the US: the number of Native American remains in US museums is thought to be around 500,000 (excluding additional African Americans, European Americans, and Indigenous peoples from around the world). In Europe, there are thought to be an additional half a million sets of Native American bodies and body parts. It is a huge task, but vital:

> There's still remains kept in institutions overseas, and Aboriginal people want those remains brought back. It's just human dignity that these remains should be returned back to people and the country from where they were taken, and treated as human beings. The reason why they're in museums is because they're objects of study, but really our people see them as their family and their ancestors, and they want those remains brought back, and placed back in the country so that the connection between spirit and land can be restored.

> Neil Carter, Repatriation Officer, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, 2020 (Ormond-Parker et al. 2020, 178).

Unless culturally decorated, human remains look very similar the world over. Consequently, the information encoded in numbering, markings and

labelling is essential for, and central to, repatriation processes. Acutely vulnerable to being separated from associated archives and catalogues (particularly in a long and common history of transferral from/within one institution/collection to another), because of their invasive embodied *permanence,* it is only the presence of numbering and marking that can enable the origin of a human remain to be located and their kin community identified. This fact alone directly undermines the very presumptions upon which such remains were often collected; to demonstrate (and in reality artificially construct) racial difference. Skull measuring reified pre-conceptions of racial difference and hierarchy. The micro acts of marking, documenting and spatially organising remains concluded the reification processes – tangibly and permanently 'attaching' the deceased to a meta strata of intellectual theorising that had little to do with reality and whose legacy echoes today. The archive produced evidence of racial 'types', rather than this being an inherent property of the remains themselves (Sekula 1986; Riggs 2017). Such statements are problematic for those who continue to consider forensic anthropological techniques, particularly craniometry, as valid and accurate means of identifying ancestral origins. But such techniques are increasingly criticised (e.g. Elliot and Collard 2009; Kallenberger and Pilbrow 2012; Konigsberg et al 2009), not just for their scientific bases but for their affirmation of underlying and harmful assumptions which uphold racial logic (Bethard and DiGangi 2020; DiGangi and Bethard 2021).

In collections research to support repatriation practice, numbers serve many purposes. For the majority of cases, their importance is straightforward; they connect the individual ancestral remains to their identifying provenance information in the holding institution's archives and catalogues. For some cases, however, they have particular additional significance and utility. Unique in shape, colour, prefix, code and sequence to particular collectors and institutions, familiarity with numbering systems can reveal the journey that human remains have taken between different collections. This, in turn, can assist in locating any identifying information in the archives of collections which the ancestral remain has passed through, but which may not have journeyed with them. Although critical for repatriation practice, ancestral remains transferred from one institution to another are rarely accompanied by all their associated documentation and are particularly vulnerable to disassociation at these points of transfer. The consequence for repatriation researchers is that they must trace which institution/s an ancestral remain has passed through with particular focus on locating the first institution that a remain entered, and then find any associated documentation accordingly. While

it is *possible* that basic catalogues may travel with a transferred collection, original letters from donors — with the often-detailed provenance information they contain — rarely move beyond the 'original' institution, and are often lost within it. In preparing Australian ancestral remains for return from the Royal College of Surgeons of England, for instance, one individual whose provenance as Australian was unclear carried a number that identified it as once being part of the collections of the Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM). Research at the AWMM, showed that this Maori ancestor had been used as exchange currency by the AWMM in the late nineteenth century.

As described above in the case of the University of Edinburgh, if an individual is represented by more than one skeletal element, the same identifying number may be written (via direct marking or on associated label) on all anatomical parts. This frequently occurs in relation to the mandible and cranium of the same individual, and often in relation to the cranium and long bones of the same individual. Numbers can thus serve to unite the bones of one individual that may have been separated – even between different institutions. But there are examples in which separation has occurred when only one part of an individual was transferred to a different institution. Thus, in a recent repatriation from the Natural History Museum in London to Hawaii, it was discovered that the mandible of one of the crania to be repatriated had, in a previous transfer, been left at the Science Museum in London. Hawaii had previously repatriated from the Science Museum and a quick check of records showed that the mandible of this individual was part of that repatriation. Because they shared the same number, the cranium and the mandible can now be reunited back in Hawaii.

Sometimes details of provenance, racial grouping, and/or donor name are written on the human remains themselves. Such information, and any numbering systems, can fade over time and disappear from detection by the naked eye. While in some senses this visual deletion relieves the viewer from the often-brutal evidence of racial logic and collecting objectification, it also makes locating source communities impossible. In a repatriation project at UCL in the early 2000s, an author of this chapter (Fforde) identified a number of 'race' collections in various departments in this organisation. While attempting to identify an orphan collection in the UCL Anatomy Department which had been received from another, unknown institution without any catalogue information, a small number of human remains were viewed under UV light. This technique revealed information written on the remains that had been either completely absent under natural light, or very difficult to discern.

The information revealed in this manner helped provenance many of the ancestral remains at UCL and assisted in repatriation processes. Though application of UV light is a non-destructive process which is highly successful for revealing information intrinsic to successful repatriation, its use requires careful consideration as it may be contrary to cultural protocols of the deceased's community who seek to bring them home. This observation speaks to the need for meaningful and equitable collaboration throughout the repatriation process with the relevant cultural authorities involved. Such collaboration is also critical to successfully navigate the dilemma that while numbers are confronting reminders of colonial violence, they are essential for linking each individual to their historical documentation, and thus for repatriation practice.

In repatriation, ancestral remains can pass through many different agencies before they are returned to their community, and they may stay in the community for many years while reburials are organised and the required funds raised. Again, each point of transfer increases the chances that remains may be separated from their associated documentation. In such circumstances it is not hard to see why placing remains in boxes that do not exhibit that individual's museum number (forcing the communities to confront the remains to discover the information written on or tied to them), or introducing new numbers without linking them to old systems, can produce acute complexities for repatriation practitioners. In the case of the repatriation of Ancestral Remains or Objects, institutions should consult with receiving communities about their requirements for the handling of their objects or Ancestral Remains and provide communities with a detailed account of their known history, accompanied by copies of the archival record (Pickering 2020) including an explanation of any markings. During the consultation process, discussion on the removal of markings should also be canvased.

Conclusion

Returning to the provocation at the opening of this chapter ('How is it possible for an ancient object to retain an identity outside the colonialist archaeologist's coding system, on which retains a resonance of its significance for those peoples who identify it as their own historical and cultural identity?') the answer is: often with some difficulty. It is frequently only the markings added to remains that provide the traces of identity which have otherwise been stripped away by historic claims to scientific progress. Those who have closest claim to such remains are

further alienated by these activities since reading markings requires its own set of skills, dispositions and expertises, ones that are not frequently discussed beyond institutional confines. Museums could do more to make visible in their displays and online resources the rationale behind object marking, empowering the public to use them as clues to histories of collection and categorisation, and discussing them with communities affected by them, bracing them and helping them to identify their old people, ancestors or sacred possessions.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Email correspondence with Alice Stevenson, 14 April 2023. Quote used with permission.
2   Old People is the Ngarrindjeri term for their ancestors and is increasingly used throughout Australia to refer to ancestors and ancestral remains particularly, but not exclusively, in the repatriation context. All Indigenous Australian ancestral remains once housed in the University of Edinburgh Anatomy Department have now been repatriated to Australia. For a history of the University of Edinburgh's involvement in the removal of Indigenous human remains and their repatriation, see Fforde 2004.
3   Undertaken by Cressida Fforde, Lyndon Ormond-Parker (at that time employed by the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action) and Trevor Anderson on behalf of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, Adelaide, and funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.
4   https://www.dw.com/en/last-show-of-benin-bronzes-in-cologne-before-their-return /a-61749285.

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6
Humanising collections disposal

Jennifer Durrant

Introduction

Museums are compelling storehouses that safeguard remnants of the past to tell stories of human relationships with the world, and with each other. By collecting, displaying and researching this substance of other lives, museums enable people today to make sense of the world and their place within it. As a professional sector we have moved beyond the educational mission of our Victorian forebears and now shape contemporary museums as places of emotion; of wonder and awe, of inspiration and spirituality, and of guilt and shame. We promote the emotional resonances imbued in physical objects and believe that meaning can be found in pottery fragments or taxidermy specimens as much as in Renaissance paintings. Yet questions of value and volume remain unanswered: when is enough, enough? How do we decide what is important, and how can we let go of things which are not meaningful enough?

While many museums define themselves and their social value through new acquisitions (Cannadine 2018, 33) the counteraction of object removal is a more limited occurrence. 'Disposal', or 'deaccessioning', generates strong reactions of revulsion, fear, or wary acceptance. It remains one of the most difficult aspects of contemporary collections management (Atkinson 2019) despite the ethical imperative for sustainability (Durrant 2021, 79–80; Merriman 2008). But disposal is more than a sustainability issue as it can be a positive 'source of creative dynamism' (Harrison et al. 2020, 478) which enrichens and enlivens a museum's activities (Jones et al. 2018). How much more could museums achieve if the professional response to disposal was relief rather than regret?

In this chapter I wish to disrupt the persistent negative perceptions of deaccessioning by offering a new disposal reality. My vision broadens the professional framing of disposal to consider it alongside other modes of object removal. Some of these processes are regulated, and I propose 'Six Rs' of formalised removal to offer a grounding for disposal practices. In addition, I identify six removal processes which are ad hoc and unregulated. Within them all I suggest we step back from the theoretical and practical boundaries of collection types and subjects, and regard any physical item in a museum collection as an 'object' deemed important because of our human relationship with it. This enables us to consider the broad range of collections 'losses' (processes by which items leave a museum collection) and see that disposal is just one possible outcome for a museum object.

Further, I propose that we reframe loss as a beneficial process rather than a negative failure of professional duty. For it is a truism that museums are littered with the legacy of absence: objects which were once present but have been removed through diverse actions and philosophies. Loss, and the feelings it provokes (which include the longevity of grief), are inevitable aspects of human existence. It is therefore an inevitable aspect of museum practice. If we utilise the nuanced understanding of object biographies and lives (Holtorf 1998; Joy 2009) we can see museums as homes of longevity rather than of permanence, with an object's loss from its 'museum life' as a new life stage – even the final moment of 'death'. Taking this view, we can acknowledge the emotional encumbrances each practitioner brings to disposal. Despite the objective and structured disposal processes advocated by professional bodies (e.g. American Alliance of Museums 2012; Museums Association 2014a), individuals bring a plethora of subjectivities to their work. Acknowledging the humanity within the process might lighten the emotional burden of choosing to let objects go. I propose that by looking so intently at other people's stories, practitioners have been encouraged to negate their own emotional interactions with these objects.

To conclude, I investigate 'loss' in more detail by examining museum actions within UK archaeological practice. It is pertinent to remember that museums comprise one aspect of the heritage scene, and museum practitioners are one set of actors within the greater story of making, defining, collecting and preserving 'archaeological' objects. By identifying these processes of loss and value creation I suggest the life of an 'archaeological object' is a process of luck and survival, in which museum staff play no greater role than other people within the object's life.

The change of mindset I propose may not be easy, but it is within reach as the sector becomes adept at acknowledging difficult truths. Regarding disposal within this broad framework demonstrates the dynamism and transience of collections, and lessens the perception that our contemporary disposal actions are contrary to what museums are and do. Exploring this palimpsest of practice is relevant, for 'if we begin to see museum collections as historically contingent and partial … then this frees us up to take our own responsibility for active stewardship of collections' (Merriman 2004).

Conflicts within collecting

The 'problem' with the size of collections is an established trope as museums have 'too much stuff' (National Museum Directors Conference 2003) with only a small percentage on display or in active use (Fabrikant 2009). Some museums make a virtue of their collection size, with Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM) branding itself 'Home to a Million Thoughts' and bravely declaring in its Courtyard Gallery that 'this display contains about 0.01% of RAMM's collection' (Figure 6.1). Such stored collections require significant resources to safeguard them for future generations, and make them accessible to present day researchers, artists, or local communities. This, of course, assumes that the museum has fully catalogued its collection and knows exactly what it has, where it is, and its potential uses.

These vast collections are under scrutiny as society asserts that 'Museums are not neutral' (Autry and Muraski 2022). The histories of collections and collecting practices contain potential discord for present day audiences. Collections are not the 'objective encyclopaedia' that many of our forebears aspired to create (Jones, Tisdale and Wood 2018, 4) but have been subjectively shaped by museum staff; they have become 'delightfully contentious' (Knell 2007, 3). As contemporary practitioners, we better understand that museums operate within temporal and social contexts. As individuals we are urged to be reflexive in our work (Museums Association 2015, 3), to consider our own 'background, assumptions, position and behaviour' (Finlay and Gough 2003, ix). It is our ethical duty to consider how our own work entwines with, propagates, or disrupts our inherited legacies.

At this individual level the 'emotional labour' of museum practice is also firmly recognised (Fredheim et al. 2018, 45). Many museum staff embody a deep personal investment in their professional identity, as

Figure 6.1 The Courtyard Gallery at Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, declares the extent of its stored collection. © 2022 Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter/Exeter City Council.

'[working in] the arts … requires an involvement of heart and mind that means the personal and the professional are never separate' (Adshead and Horne 2021, 114). For curators and collections staff this attachment to objects is perhaps especially strong. For example, one former curator reflected about his new academic role that, 'I am surprised by my slight disquiet at having no collection of my "own" – things that I can play with as I like' (Oliver Watson in Rosler et al. 2013, 31). Therefore, museums are not neutral, and neither are their staff. Indeed, as human beings we can never be so, as any physical object will evoke emotions 'whether we think we are examining it dispassionately or not' (Watson 2020, 158). Museum practice is a tension between professional ritual and personal encounter.

Re-defining object removal

Against this backdrop of size and subjectivity the UK practice of 'disposal' is presented as a formal process defined by an ethical and practical *Toolkit* (Museums Association 2014a and 2014b), which is under revision at the time of writing. The *Toolkit* methodology suggests a uniformity of practice is possible across museums of different size, governance and mission and offers a clear distinction between the motive for an object's removal, and its desired outcome. The 'curatorially-motivated disposal' process endorses an expert-led process, often underpinned by a collections review of significance and use, with objects removed if they lack value or purpose within their current museum context. Objects recommended for disposal may be interesting or beautiful, but they will duplicate other items, fall outside the museum's remit or be beyond institutional conservation or curation capabilities (Museums Association 2014a). Projects such as Bridport Museum's *The Right Stuff?* (31 October 2019 to 31 March 2023) demonstrate the successful application and communication of these ethical criteria to museum audiences.

By contrast, 'financially-motivated disposal' typically arises from a stakeholder desire to release the economic value of an object. These sales can be ethical, and within American practice may offer a funding source for new acquisitions (e.g. Boise and Dunbar 2021). But the motivation to select an object purely for its financial value is an ethically dangerous position for museums, as economic value is prioritised above public access. In the UK such disposals generate vociferous opposition, evidenced by the sale of the ancient Egyptian statue of Sekhemka by Northampton Museum in 2014 (e.g. BBC News 2014; Quirke, Bussmann and Stevenson 2015). The repercussions for UK museums failing to follow ethical disposal guidance include expulsion from sectoral bodies and the withdrawal of funding, as experienced by Northampton Museum in the wake of their controversial sale (Anonymous 2014).

The language of disposal is partly to blame for professional aversion to the practice. 'Disposal' alludes to rubbish and implies power held by those making the decisions (Oxford English Dictionary). These notions clash with the framing of museum objects as set apart and cared for by professional guardians. Accordingly, the term 'refining' (Beverley Cook, quoted in Stephens 2015) is becoming more common within the UK as it suggests a process of thought and care. Furthering this change of perception, I propose a new revision to the professional vocabulary and mindset. I suggest that disposal, or 'refining', can be regarded as one of 'Six Rs' of formalised collections removal. Each is guided by

sectoral documents (e.g. Arts Council England 2022; Baxter et al. 2018; Collections Trust n.d; Museums Association 2014b), although the boundaries between the practices may not be clearly discernible. They comprise (in alphabetical order):

- Rationalisation (the large-scale removal of material, often prior to acquisition, such as within commercial archaeological archives).
- Refining ('Curatorially-motivated disposal'; the sorting of existing museum collections).
- Repatriation (the return of objects to a nation or state).
- Research (destruction or damage to an object for scientific analysis).
- Restitution (the return of objects to an individual or community).
- Revenue ('Financially-motivated disposal'; the sale of objects).

To view disposal in this context offers a new perception for practitioners. No longer are they working in a silo to refine a collection, but their work forms part of a much larger context of ethically-guided removal practices.

To further unburden our practitioner selves from the emotional entanglement of object removal, it is imperative we regard these six regulated processes alongside the 'unregulated' actions. These loss processes include decay, theft, damage, artistic intervention, exchange and 'trading up', and procedural hiccups, and the intellectual losses arising from such actions. I propose that within this holistic view of collections removal the 'difficult' practice of disposal diminishes in stature against the background of object loss.

Decay

The stated purpose of museums to 'safeguard' socially important items (Museums Association 1998) is at odds with the fundamental nature of physical existence: like our human selves all objects have a finite lifespan, and their 'sacred' museum status cannot prolong life indefinitely. The demise of many museum objects will not be witnessed within our professional lifetimes but is a predictable loss for our future colleagues to encounter. Still, 'problem' materials such as 1950s plastics which 'deteriorate rapidly in ways that fall nothing short of catastrophic' (Madden and Learner 2014, 5) urge our sector to reconsider our preservation task. One response is to extend life for as long as practical, with the goal of 'longevity' rather than 'permanence' gaining credence within conservation practice (Pye 2016). This presents practitioners with the difficult decision of deciding when the object has become beyond

social value and is therefore in need of disposal. But decaying items can find new meaning, for example as practice pieces for conservation students or testing of new techniques (Morgan 2016). While it will become increasingly necessary for museum staff to learn to 'let it go' from the traditional museum context, sometimes the inevitability of loss can be countered by the hope of a reimagined or repurposed life.

Theft

Theft removes an item from public access for private gain and can present a highly visible absence. Commonly, thieves target high value artworks such as Frans Hals' *Two Laughing Boys with a Mug of Beer* stolen from a Dutch museum in 2020 for the third time in its history (BBC News 2020). Such losses to public access are heartfelt and for some museums they leave a visible scar. This physical absence is powerfully witnessed at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, USA, where empty frames remain in the place of 13 paintings stolen in 1990. The risk of theft can be mitigated through risk assessment and security procedures (Matassa 2017, 44–60) which may alleviate professional guilt after the event, with blame projected onto devious criminals.

But theft is not solely an external action undertaken by individuals without subscription to museum practices and mission. For example, a most extreme example of 'sectoral shoplifting' came to light in 1954 when John Nevin was found guilty of stealing over 2,000 items during his 23-year career as a museum assistant at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Anonymous, 2013). When alerted, police found his home filled with objects in practical use and on display, with others 'Inside the bag of a vacuum-cleaner, hidden in the dust' (Anonymous, 2013). Fortunately, many of the objects were returned to the museum and it is to their credit that the story has been acknowledged and shared in recent years (Ravilious 2020). Smaller examples of 'sectoral shoplifting' are known (e.g. Bailey 2020, 237) but rarely publicly documented, and I posit that other instances by staff, volunteers and researchers remain undetected.

Damage

Removal by damage arises from either accidental circumstance or wilful intent. Like theft, these risks can be assessed and mitigated to a certain extent. Sudden losses include the flooding of storerooms at Pontypridd Museum in 2020 which caused staff 'to throw [items] on the skip after documenting' (Curator Morwenna Lewis, quoted in Kendall Adams

Figure 6.2 A broken ancient glass vessel was conserved to create a new museum life. © 2022: Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter/Exeter City Council.

2020). Despite the excellence of contemporary conservation practice some objects will be beyond salvage in such circumstances. These losses are heartfelt, but we might accept them as a facet of our physical existence.

It may be harder to accept damage which occurs through museum activity. Such was my own experience as a curator at Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter, where within my remit were several boxes of ancient Cypriot, Greek and Mesopotamian ceramic and glass objects labelled as 'damaged, need conservation'. The cause of the mass breakage event was not documented, but institutional memory recalled the collapse of storage racks nearly fifty years beforehand. It is not known how many objects were destroyed during that accident. The remaining broken objects were 'lost' to museum audiences until project funding enabled their conservation and new life (Figure 6.2).

While it can be tempting to criticise predecessors' practice, and indeed fear of judgement is commonly felt by contemporary practitioners (Museums Association 2020), it is dangerous to project backwards our contemporary ethical and practical standards. Instead, within our position of reflexivity, it is important to accept that museum staff are mere mortals and accidents happen. Contemporary ethics asks us to attempt to understand actions within the context in which they occurred (Blackburn 2001, 113). By regarding past actions with empathy rather than judgement it is possible to lament, accept and mentally prepare for future losses (Wilson 2014, 26).

Generating a more guttural response are incidents of wilful damage, powerfully witnessed by the 'Just Stop Oil' campaign from 2021, which targeted public artworks with superglue and foodstuffs. Damage inexorably alters an item and affects its perceived aesthetic, intellectual or financial value, and this loss of integrity and meaning is to be grieved. For example, following the slashing of Gainsborough's *The Morning Walk* at London's National Gallery staff described the painting to have 'fallen in value' despite over 80 hours of conservation work (Larry Keith, quoted in BBC News 2017).

While wilful damage generates a strong emotional response it may be beneficial to regard such actions from a wider viewpoint. Given time and space, object damage can instigate a powerful storytelling narrative. It is here that the longevity of museums is pertinent as we envisage future audiences and their interaction with the damaged item. A profound example of this evolving storytelling is witnessed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery where a 'blue heritage plaque' records the slashing of a painting by Bertha Ryland in support of the Suffragette movement (BBC News 2018). Her destructive act, abhorred by the museum at the time, has become a powerful positive testament to cultural history. As a sector we condone wilful damage within the scientific rationale to analyse objects to create new understandings, through the formalised practice of 'Research' mentioned earlier in this chapter. Wilful damage by those outside the sector presents an entirely different scenario, but its acceptance and reimagining can provide an emotional balm through the power of storytelling.

Artistic intervention

This removal process has grown in prominence and is mirrored by the private art world. In both settings, artists set out to destroy items which, for some audiences, contain value. The provocation of destruction incites emotional and intellectual response as the protagonist seeks audience interaction to shape the destructive outcomes. In the private art world this audience engagement was central to Damian Hirst's burning of physical artworks in place of their NFTs (McIntosh 2022), and in the highly provocative *Jimmy Carr Destroys Art* aired on UK television in November 2022. Museum examples have less dramatic outcomes but are motivated by the same premise of choosing to 'save' individual items in preference to others. This provocation formed the central tenet within the exhibition *Kill Your Darlings* at Perth Museum and Art Gallery (12 February to 8 May 2022) in which visitors were asked to vote for their favourite item,

with the 'least popular' item to be destroyed (Kendall Adams 2022). With the powerful motivation to incite intellectual reflection these actions demonstrate a distinct, but rare, process of museum loss. The fundamental aspect which separates these interventions from curatorially-motivated disposal is that the underlying motivation is not a gentle removal of an object, but an antagonistic provocation to illicit an emotional response to loss and salvation.

Exchange and trading-up

Having explored four examples of actions primarily undertaken by people outside the sector I now turn to two removal processes enacted by museum practitioners. The first is of exchange or 'trading up', whereby an object is sold to or swapped with an object from another museum or a private collector, to generate new acquisitions. Importantly, this practice differs from curatorially-motivated transfer which seeks to rehome an object with no expectation of recompense or replacement. In the UK, exchange was a regular historical removal practice as curators sought to 'gap-fill' and improve their 'encyclopaedic' collections. The process relied on 'duplicates' which could be removed without loss of meaning to the remaining collection (Howarth 1902). While duplication remains in museum parlance (Museums Association 2014a) the concept is perceived with some difficulty (e.g. Nichols 2022) within our contemporary understanding of the multifaceted values each object presents (Keene 2005).

This exchange process presents a duality as the permanent removal of an object is balanced by an acquisition. For our curatorial forebears this duality of loss and gain was perceived as a significant benefit to their museum. Such was the case with another example from my own curatorial experience, with the historic 'trading-up' of numismatics to develop a comprehensive collection of locally minted coins. For example, archival documents record a sale of 14 seventeenth-century trade tokens which the curator described as 'die duplicates in inferior condition to specimens at RAMM [Royal Albert Memorial Museum]' and regarded as 'surplus to the museum's collection' (RAMM archives, letter on file).[1] Several locally minted medieval coins were purchased in their place. It is interesting to note that despite these actions the numismatic type series remains 'incomplete' as curatorial priorities and practices have altered with time and changes of staff. Still, the legacy of such historic exchanges can present a contemporary duality: an uncertainty of which objects were removed, alongside an acknowledgement of the items that exist in

their place (e.g. Dowler 2023). Exchange therefore presents a complex interplay of loss and gain which has shaped extant collections and merits further academic exploration.

Procedural hiccups

The second professional removal is a common occurrence within museums, despite the practical requirements for documentation outlined in sectoral guidance (e.g. Arts Council England 2018). In the spirit of reflexive awareness and understanding I offer it here as the non-judgmental term 'procedural hiccups'. These removals are caused by human or system errors and include misplacement in store, or long-term loans which have been forgotten. Given the sectoral reliance on fixed term roles, heavy workloads and the continued presence of 'curatorial memory' (also known as, 'I know where it is, I'll update the record later') it is a reality that such situations occur more often than ethical ideals advocate.

In some situations, these objects become 'the vanishings' – objects whose existence is recorded in the accessions register or catalogue system but whose current location is not known. Such vanishings may be revealed during documentation or inventory projects and can generate bemusement as the missing item would not be considered suitable for accessioning within contemporary standards. Occasionally, these losses are shared on social media with one practitioner exclaiming on Twitter, 'Apparently we should have a dried parsnip in the collection. Collected in Morocco in 1936. Where is it?!' (@InbalHarding, 24 November 2020). Sometimes it is possible to surmise that an object is no longer extant, but many of these mysteries are never resolved. In contemporary practice they emphasise the importance of documentation procedures to prevent future mysteries occurring.

However, some 'vanishings' do make miraculous homecomings. For example, in 2022 East Riding Museums Tweeted the story of a wicker safety helmet which 'had gone missing for some years. However, the heroes at @NESMUSE [National Emergency Services Museum] discovered this loan, and returned it to us!' (@ERMuseums, 10 May 2022). Procedural hiccups are therefore unlike other removal processes as they embody an optimistic hope of joyful rediscovery. Still, 'The elation of finding a lost object doesn't justify the panic of trying to find the object' (@themuseumfolk, 27 July 2022) and these examples clearly demonstrate the emotional investment museum staff imbue to 'their' collections.

Intellectual absence

In outlining these six unregulated processes of object removal I have shown a diversity in the agents of change: museum practitioners, external individuals, and the natural world. Despite this variety they demonstrate a commonality as the physical removal generates an intellectual absence. Indeed, this intellectual loss is as important as the physical loss in our consideration of the emotional impact of removals, for 'the value and the magic reside in the knowledge about the object, not the object itself" (Janes 2009, 88). As well as evidencing the legacy of past documentation failures such intellectual losses occur in contemporary practice with emails deleted when staff leave, of information kept digitally but not printed for physical archiving, or with the accidental renaming of computer files. Although less glamorous and exciting than interacting with physical objects, the dissociation of information (Waller and Paisely, n.d.) demonstrates the importance of maintaining knowledge systems and documentation procedures. Loss encompasses more than the physicality of the object, and our understanding of the emotional impact must acknowledge the importance of knowledge management and legacy.

Further, I suggest it is important not to regard object loss as a simple status of 'presence' or 'absence'. As witnessed throughout this chapter, museum collections contain subtleties of uncertainty and questions of temporality. These can create a duality in which an object is both within and outside the museum collection. Objects may be akin to 'Schrodinger's cat', at the same time present and absent from the collection. This abstract idea is practically evident in the 'procedural hiccup' when an object is thought to exist within a storeroom but its physical location cannot be verified. Unlike the unfortunate cat in the famous scenario, within the museum context the act of 'opening of the box' may not resolve the quandary.

Collections dynamism and its perception

Museum collections therefore represent a multitude of human relationships, interaction, stories and associations. Objects only exist in museums because of their previous, current and future relationship with humans, and individuals play an intrinsic role in shaping museum collections. They are 'dynamic' entities (Mendoza 2017) as objects come and go during the lifespan of an institution and its evolving mission and functioning. This new understanding of transience is well demonstrated

by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's *Dynamic Collections*, launched in 2022, to enable 'collections to evolve to meet the changing needs of the communities around them' (National Lottery Heritage Fund 2022).

But an important difference between the removals processes explored in this chapter is how they are perceived by museum professionals. Some, such as theft and wilful damage, are openly acknowledged because they clearly act against social definitions of lawful action and the 'common good'. The black-and-white of property ownership, which underpins UK law, entreats the 'respectable' (Douglas 1966, 4) and 'trusted' (Ipsos MORI 2020) museum profession to respond with dismay or condemnation to actions which challenge public preservation and access.

The legalities of other removal processes are less clearly defined. Here is situated the repatriation debates with blurred lines between legal technicalities and ethical desirability: the debates of what the sector can do versus what it should do (e.g. Herman 2021; Hicks 2020). Other removals counteract situations which clearly breach contemporary ethical standards. Here is found the restitution of artworks acquired during the Nazi occupation of Europe, with attempts at reconciliation between museum and individual, and contemporary and past practice (see for example Woodhead 2013). Laws can, and do, change according to shifting perceptions of ethical rights and wrongs.

For curatorially-motivated disposal, the boundaries of 'correct' action may not be clearly definable (Durrant 2022). The practice is located within an ethical melee of ideas, understandings, and actions of what is best for an object, its host museum, and the communities these represent, with diverse views held by individuals within and outside the museum context. Often there is no 'right' course of action.

What these perceptions have in common is the sense of loss that accompanies the removal of an object from the museum context. But if we accept that objects have 'lives', then we can accept an object might have a 'better' life outside of the museum context. It may be necessary, and even 'kinder', to let an object 'die' from its current museum existence. Taking this idea back to the wider human world, death and feelings of loss are inevitable aspects of the physical world, although 'loss is not always recognised as central to the fabric of human experience' (Machin 2014, 11). My suggestion that this is highly relevant for museums might be regarded as overly emotional, but 'making sense of experience is central to the processing of loss and change … and exploring these larger themes of meaning facilitates a move towards the reconstruction of a more satisfying and coherent narrative' (Machin 2014, 53–54). Ultimately, I propose it may be helpful for museum practitioners to acknowledge these human

realities in their daily work. By accepting museum removals as losses which can lead to ongoing feelings of absence and grief, experienced by institution and professional alike, we can accept the disruption to the 'ordered narrative' (Wilson 2014, 26) of our museum lives and learn how to negotiate future experiences.

Re-assessing disposal from archaeological collections

Each of the processes discussed in this chapter removes an object from public ownership; an item which was previously deemed as 'important' and set apart to be safeguarded. But, as I have emphasised, museums do not operate in isolation. In my proposal to acknowledge the humanity of disposal it is important to explore how collections are formed, to contextualise the museum practitioner's role in creating, perpetuating, or disrupting notions of 'significance' and 'loss'. There is no better example for this exploration than the extensive archaeological collections residing in UK museums.

Archaeological collections form a core part of the British museum landscape (Pearce 1997) and have burgeoned with the creation of 'archaeological archives' from developer-funded projects (Paul 2020, 17–18). These numerous and voluminous assemblages – of objects, paper, photographic and digital material – have challenged archaeology curators to consider how their practices relate to wider heritage processes, and the necessary rationalisation of material before and after deposit with the museum (Baxter et al. 2018). Despite 30 years of discussion (e.g. Payne 1992) many museum staff remain hesitant about rationalisation within the museum setting (Paul 2020, 232). I suggest this hesitancy could be addressed by regarding archaeological assemblages as complex survivors of multiple loss processes, and the museum as one part of that lifecycle. For, 'there are cultural and natural patterns affecting what goes into or on the ground to form an archaeological record, what is preserved for archaeology to discover, and what archaeologists remove and retain from the ground to study' (Hurcombe 2007, 14).

The starting point in this narrative is the muddy ground of the archaeological site. This is the first encounter with loss, as the 'archaeological finds' have already been disposed of by human agency – whether thrown away as rubbish, intentionally buried or accidentally dropped. Disposal is the action by which archaeological objects enter existence as, 'By falling into disuse and disregard, a transient object can one day be revalued … as an archaeological artifact or relic, as rare and exceptional' (Reno 2017, viii).

Concurrent with this value-creation-from-loss is an associated process of 'targeted disposal', as the Planning Archaeologist decides which development projects merit archaeological surveillance, and which areas within those sites will be monitored. Here too is situated 'inadvertent disposal', with objects lost before discovery due to changes in burial conditions (Rowlatt 2022). Put simply, we will never know what existed but was lost before it could be discovered. Within our landscape there are unknown quantities of 'Schrodinger's cat' objects.

The next disposal stage occurs with the professional finds specialists and their utilisation of retention policies, which may or may not be agreed with the museum in advance (Boyle and Rawden 2020, 11). In the process of cataloguing and analysis these individuals make subjective disposal decisions to retain or discard material for the archaeological archive. Many items are disposed of during this stage and some re-discarded objects acquire a life of social significance outside of the museum context. For example, from the 1.5 tons of Roman tile processed during excavations at Princesshay, Exeter in 2005–6, only a small portion was deposited with the local museum. While the majority was redeposited onto the building site as hardcore, many fragments were taken home by site staff as 'interesting mementoes'.

The next disposal process brings us inside the museum context when an archaeological archive has been accessioned into the collection. Here, curators and conservators make subjective decisions about the relative importance of object types within the archive, and allocate resource priorities for conservation, photography or display, and decide the level of detail to which parts of the archive are catalogued within the collections database. In this 'intellectual disposal' museum staff select or disregard objects for display, shape interpretative stories to be shared with visitors, or select objects for researchers. In situations where a museum lacks a specialist archaeology curator this can become 'ignorance disposal', with objects side-lined due to a lack of awareness of its potential. In both situations, while an object may physically exist in a museum collection its 'life' may be more dormant than other items, and a prevailing 'under-use' may lead to future prioritisation for curatorially-motivated disposal.

Museum staff therefore play a partial role in the disposal of archaeological objects from public access. Further, this narrative of commercial archaeology discovery-and-disposal is also only one aspect, as museums develop their archaeological collections through other acquisition sources. For example, the UK's National Council for Metal Detecting declares over 24,000 members (National Council for Metal Detecting n.d.), many of whom regularly search the countryside for

Figure 6.3 Jennifer Durrant processing metal-detected finds for museum acquisition. © 2022: Hampshire Cultural Trust.

material evidence of our ancestors. Some of these 'finds' become public property when acquired by a museum (Figure 6.3). But this action is another contrast of gain and loss, as individual detectorists decide what is worth keeping while out in the field, and then decide what – or whether – to record their finds with professional archaeologists within the Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk). Subsequently, these Finds Liaison Officers are 'selective' about which items to record from the thousands shown to them each year (Portable Antiquities Scheme n.d.), due to practicalities of time and the volume of material. Similarly, within the allied process for administering finds legally defined as 'Treasure', museum staff decide which objects they wish to acquire, but can only do so if funding is sourced to pay the 'finder's reward' as required by the Treasure Act 1996. Many objects of demonstrable social value are lost to public access due to financial and practical realities.

Disposal from archaeological collections is therefore a complex interplay of actors and actions, with disposal occurring from the moment an item enters the ground. Loss processes are integral to the creation and shaping of museum archaeology collections, and those museum staff enacting decisions within a formal curatorially-motivated disposal process are merely one set of actors in the long story of an object's life and death.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter I have sought to emphasise three things: the need to view museum practices within social and temporal contexts, the inevitability of loss within human existence and the need to consider the humanity within professional actions. For some museum staff these proposals will be obvious, as they already embrace reflexivity in their work and take an interest in social practices. For others, these suggestions will challenge the perceived objectivity in their work and be regarded as sentimental and irrelevant. Neither view is right or wrong, as such responses demonstrate the diversity of individual perception and understanding of the world.

The commonality I wish to develop is a shared reality; that the process of disposal – of considered 'loss' – is one action in an object's lifespan as it travels through time and place. An object's life story is a process of survival, and while its existence in a museum is usually longer than the staff who are tasked to care for it, the notion of perpetual longevity is a fallacy which needs revisiting.

Within this new mindset I am not advocating the widespread dismantling of museum collections. But I firmly suggest that we cannot, as a professional sector, justify the retention of items which no longer serve a social purpose, which were accessioned in error, or which have been abandoned on museum doorsteps instead of the rubbish bin. Our professional duty is to understand how contemporary actions interact with those of our forebears, our present-day audiences and institutional needs, and to document our actions for future colleagues to understand. For, 'We are the future generations of the past, and decisions must always be made in the present' (Fredheim et al. 2018, 31). Being proactively aware of loss enables us to regard disposal as a core function of museum life, embrace the opportunities it offers, and demonstrate how our actions will sustain the life of museums into the future.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the many people who have openly discussed their museum work with me, and thereby shaped my thinking. I particularly thank my former colleagues in Exeter, especially Dr Julien Parsons for permission to recount tales of institutional practice, and Thomas Cadbury and Holly Morgenroth for their assistance in sourcing images and archival details. My thanks also to Ella Ravilious, Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, for sharing insights about Mr Nevin. I am grateful to Pam Young, Head Registrar at the Victoria and Albert Museum, for introducing me to her phrase 'procedural hiccups' and agreeing to let me share it here.

Note

1   RAMM archive reference: 24 October 1997, Antiquities collection file reference 24.67.

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Part I Response
In a multiverse of timelines and possibilities...
Temi Odumosu

> *How do we create and proliferate a compelling vision of economies and ecologies that center humans and the natural world over the accumulation of material? We embody. We learn. We release the idea of failure because it's all data. But first we imagine. We are in an imagination battle.* (brown 2017)

'We are in an imagination battle' (brown 2017, 15). These words written by pleasure activist adrienne maree brown in her book *Emergent Strategy* (a loving thesis on change-making), have been a constant source of solace and inspiration over the last few years. They hit the heart, at first like a lightning bolt, and then quietly, slowly, unfolded as an invitation to dare to court possibilities for alternative futures, right here and right now. In my teaching this statement urged a reevaluation of what the classroom is really for. Could I/we support and inspire students enough to find the courage for authentic being, writing and action? (Authentic being seems necessary for a healthy imagination to thrive). A cluster of associated questions have fed into courses from cultural studies to information science. For example: what failures of imagination have caused the conflicts in this place? Or, why is it that we memory workers seem to be repeating ourselves when we talk about sharing power in museums? Or, why can't Amazon reviewers handle a Black actor playing Tudor queen Anne Boleyn? Taking their starting point in the space of imagination, these questions have become pause points that insist on truth telling, and the admission of limitations within a context of non-judgement. Sometimes the sobering answer to all these questions is: because people just don't like, or want, change.

Like many provocative statements, I have taken this one for a long and winding walk, especially into various parts of the cultural heritage sector. Considering its multiple components and the evocation of a battle, focus shifts to the tensions involved in reclaiming spaces of autonomous possibility against an inheritance of 'controlling images' (Hill Collins 2000), 'white body supremacy' (Menakem 2017), and 'imperial duress' (Stoler 2016). For cultural heritage professionals who both protect and actualise human creativity, what does it mean to consider the imagination itself in a sustained fight or conflict? Is it *this* battle that is the bug in the mother code – the source of all the disturbances interrupting the work of 'decolonising', of diversifying workforces and intervening in collections practices that seem to have existed forever? How do we retool and nourish this curious intangible asset that we know requires encouragement, fresh air and plenty of space? Often, it is worth backtracking when the questions get too intense, to think through the very ways organising structures and their restraints come into being, thereby producing battlegrounds. Backtracking to remember how systems like the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress Subject Headings use/d language to legitimise and sustain biases (see Drabinski 2013). Backtracking to human zoos and world fairs and stereographs and whipping posts, and all those other technologies designed to racialise and satiate *schaulust* – the obsession with looking and gawking at others (Mirzoeff 2011). Our imaginative battles often have clear and distinct origins. There are traumas and scars left by the process, stifling joy and expressive freedoms. Over time the wear and tear effects the whole climate.

On the second week of my course on Afrofuturism, I gave our students a time travelling exercise called 'Rewind and fix', in the hope of training the muscles for speculative thinking. Reaching fast consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant collective turning point in our shared timeline as a species, revealing major inequities and resource disparities as well as producing a thick layer of medical waste for future archaeologists to ponder, the challenge was set: 'Imagine that you had all the information we have now, back in 2020, what area of life would you improve and how would you go about doing so?' The class deliberated in groups and set about thinking how they would retroactively address problems that we are currently living with and through in 2023. With media references to films and TV programmes like *Quantum Leap*, or *Back to the Future* as well as the work of science fiction authors such as Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor, the students understood the expansiveness of the task at hand. And yet much talk of policy and revising budgets and institutions abounded. Creatively, I was slightly dismayed. The archive

of yesterday had already solidified into an imaginative black box that required intervention of large governmental or corporate stakeholders with whom the class had the least amount of direct affiliation. Few people radically reimagined the everyday ordinary (masks, working practices, cooking, water use, intimacy), except for a group that wanted to provide frontline health workers extra time off, and another group who wanted to address loneliness with even more activities online. The ideas presented made sense but were somehow constrained by the realities of experiencing already existing consequences – already living in the future that had been seeded.

Our futures – yet to arrive but becoming – will also be paved with false starts and good intentions gone awry. We know this from past experiences. But the terms of our getting there, the quality of the questions that we ask, and the possibilities we make space for, are concerns for our students and are deliberations explored by the essays presented here. In her book *Viral Justice* (2022), Ruha Benjamin leans on a history of Black feminist thought and praxis to develop a micro theory of change where justice blooms and ripples outwards from the small scale, through the metaphor of seeds planted in plots. In Benjamin's imagining, seeding is about nourishing potentialities in wholesome earth. Plotting is about using available space well, in addition to ensuring that such space is healthy by 'questioning the scripts you've been handed and scheming with others to do and be otherwise for the collective good of all' (Benjamin 2022, 24). Plotting is thus a material practice and strategic collaboration in arenas of influence, from the family to the boardroom. If we think about museums as an ecosystem of plots (databases, records, labels, galleries, metadata, meetings, storage as plots), such an approach seems productive when we begin to revision the ways in which collections could communicate forwards in time from our current coordinates in history. The pivoting and adjustments, the pauses and second guesses, the questioning of values and conditions, the restlessness and the reality checks that reveal themselves in the case studies discussed in this part, are precisely the ways in which institutional soil needs to be broken up, overturned and revived to support the growth of new life, meaning changed ecosystems.

'We are in an imagination battle', and one of the assertions of this clarion call is to fundamentally reconsider our terms of reference. The 'scripts', the stories, the means and methods of description, the ones making decisions, and institutional relationships to time: who gets to decide in perpetuity what and how objects need to be saved? Could we finally accept that things can also die in museums, and preparations must

be made for the loss and impending grief? The previous essays, and the case studies they unfold, share a commitment to collections stewarding that is doubly rigorous and humane. They insist that breaches in care need to be repaired, while at the same time finally articulating a range of vulnerabilities and contradictions involved in looking after other people's belongings. We hear that authority and value are constitutive in museum meaning-making, and that the power-practice of collecting requires a series of invasive moves haunted by empire building: marking, separating, sorting, categorising, silencing, polluting, reifying. As Benjamin extols, naming and preparing for 'the world we cannot live without' also necessitates a reckoning with the 'world we cannot live within' (2022, 279); to scrutinise how and why harms are enacted in the organisation of knowledge so that problems are not repeated. In these case studies, literal and symbolic harms need to be assessed together, and as these authors show, the pain points are indexes for unfinished histories, as well as threats in/to our present time.

Digitisation adds another layer of methods and responsibilities to collections stewardship, giving questions of care, power, and sovereignty a different tone. Museums rely on, and are now enmeshed with, corporate technologies for which they have little to no control, bringing other vulnerabilities to the surface: What does it mean to become a museum data body? How much data is enough data to produce coherent, meaningful records? And what does 'processing' do to the integrity and treatment of a collection? Image files will need to be compressed and 'lossless', not opened or edited, if they are going to stand a chance at being readable in another decade. Pixels degrade even faster than material things. But at the same time digital surrogates are being employed for diplomatic means, to travel beyond institutions, and build connections with communities whose access to physical collections is constrained or limited. The digital record or object becomes an extended discursive terrain, a satellite community plot. What will they grow here?

To consider the becoming and unbecoming of collections through the framework of imagination is to court the proposition of permanently unsettled collections. As the essays in this part attest, these disturbances (some quiet, others loud) are not only a remedy for complacency but a means of finding out where institutions stand – something like an ethical GPS. This unsettling might mean accepting that traditional modes of authority and communication recede into the background. It could also mean explaining/confessing to visitors about the ways in which a collection is already at the middle and not the beginning of an unfolding story. At its most radical, such unsettlement could be directed

toward a decolonial politics of refusal, in which 'the very processes of objectification/subjection, the making of possessors and possessions, the alchemy of becoming-claims' is fundamentally challenged and enacts redress (Tuck and Yang 2014, 814). All roads are possible, with open hearts and transformative vision.

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Part II
A universal approach? Accessing, handling and enlivening collections

7

Challenging ableism: including non-normative bodies and practices in collections care

Rafie Cecilia

Introduction

Increasingly, issues around equality and inclusion of people with disabilities in museums have been debated among scholars and practitioners within the frameworks of human rights and social justice. Access and inclusion are profoundly connected to the way people with disabilities make meaning, how they develop cultural capital and how they form and refine their identities in museums through interactions with objects and collections. Museums have been discussed as institutions that have the potential to 'engage in activist practice' and bring about social change (Janes and Sandell 2019). Several research projects looked at issues around access to collections (Candlin 2010; Cecilia 2022; Hayhoe 2017; Kleedge 2018) and representation in the interpretation of objects associated with disability (Dodd et al. 2008, 2010; Janes and Sandell 2019; Sandell et al. 2010). While these projects successfully advocated for re-evaluating people with disabilities as audiences and stakeholders for the interpretation of objects, they did not consider the engagement of people with disabilities with collections and museum professionals beyond functional access.

Cachia (2023, 3) argues that 'access is a necessary tool in helping to decolonise the museum so that these institutions represent the needs of a diversity of museum visitors and users'. This chapter takes Cachia's argument further by problematising how access and, in general, diversity initiatives within collection care tend to be part of a 'culture of compliance' (Sandell 2019, 171), rather than a genuine commitment to

social justice. I argue for going beyond the functional access perspective of the 'culture of compliance' in favour of including non-normative knowledge and embodied practices into discourses around collections and care. This approach challenges ableism in a profession that is grounded in normative bodily practices and values that leave little space for the participation of non-normative bodies in the decision-making around objects' conservation and care.

While preparing this chapter, I was quite surprised that scholarship discussing the intersection between disability and collections solely focused on artistic, curatorial and activist practice, albeit in rich, contextual and intersectional ways. In 2022, Cachia edited the ground-breaking volume 'Curating Access', presenting a compelling account of the advocacy, experimentation and outcomes of accessibility in both disabled curatorial and artistic production. Contributors to the volume included visual, sound and performance artists, curators, activists and scholars. Issues around the care of objects and the values they embody are richly discussed within the framework of arts and curatorial practice, but no direct voices from the care profession are mentioned. Similarly, the Beyond the Visual symposium, held in October 2022 at the Wellcome Collection, featured an impressive list of speakers with and without disabilities: artists, academics, curators and writers, who discussed intersectional, interdisciplinary and multisensory approaches to objects' displays, interpretations, interactions and modes of engagement. The absence (which reflects the one in the literature) of people formally responsible for the care of collections, their modes of display and physical engagement was striking. This suggests a wider scope for a social and cultural shift underway across museums in the way we look at collections and the care we afford to objects.

Museums are increasingly acknowledging the need to decolonise their collections and practices, representing and respecting the diverse identities embodied in their collections (Cachia 2023). For instance, looking at our relationship with objects and their care through critical disability lenses enables innovative and new kinds of critical and creative care practices. Therefore, this chapter starts with the idea that access to objects and collections is intersectional. The Black Lives Matter movement from 2020, and the Just Stop Oil protests of 2022, among other social justice movements, are changing the way we conceptualise objects in museums and the level of access we afford. Objects' conceptualisations and access to them are deeply connected to the care museum professionals afford to collections. This connection becomes clear when we start to think about affordances of care as

intersectional, and about collection care professionals as having a responsibility towards the people who identify with, share values with and derive meaning from objects.

Following the dis/ability approach fostered by Boys (2017) and the other contributors to *Disability, Space, Architecture: A Reader*, this chapter uses an emancipatory framework to challenge the normalisation of specific kinds of bodies as well as traditional Western methodologies in collection care. Although it may not map onto traditional collections management ideas of care, the collection care explored here directly influences objects' displays, modes of interpretation, and spatial positioning (Goudas 2020). People responsible for object care are directly involved with the creation of the museum experience of those artefacts. The care we afford to objects has an impact on the way disability is understood, interpreted and presented. This chapter explores examples of alternative methodologies, including creative disability research methodologies, artistic creativity and participatory practices, aiming to bring forward non-normative knowledge and embodied critical practices into discourses around collections care. By arguing that care practices of disability-related collections are heavily charged with political meaning and power, this chapter advocates for the enabling of people with disabilities to claim ownership in the production of knowledge to regain their physical space in the care about their heritage.

Emancipatory research

In museum discourse, visitors' bodies have been traditionally disenfranchised and reduced to 'eyes only', putting the body on a lower level conceptually in relation to objects (Buck 1997; Harris 2015; Rees Leahy 2012). Conversely, in the discourse around museum professionals caring for collections, normative bodily techniques and practices (correct handling, careful moving, precise marking, firm touch, ability to climb ladders or handle heavy objects) dominate the field. These normative bodily techniques and practice are usually presented as neutral and necessary for collections safeguarding. In reality, they are often discriminatory as they actively exclude people with disabilities, and they need to be problematised as such.

While a strong tradition acknowledges and discusses the interpersonal and object-mediated museum experience, professional bodies and their lived experience of disability (or lack thereof) are often relegated to marginal roles without being understood and analysed.

A critical acknowledgement of the embodied reality of lived experiences requires the embedding of emotional and bodily responses, highly emotional engagement, and the understanding that bodies bring into the museum multiple narratives that unfold in the way professionals care for objects and the values they represent (Buck 1997; Harris 2015). This would help to understand how the body inscribes thoughts, feelings, emotions, meanings and memories in the objects.

Objects that have a connection with, embody values around, represent or hold significance to people with disabilities are usually cared for, interpreted and displayed by non-disabled people without a lived experience of disability (Cachia 2022). Critical disability theory challenges oppressive colonial cultural constructs and knowledge by considering lived experiences of disability. It rejects assumptions that bodies are normal or deviant and that facts and values are objective, apolitical and beyond cultural influences (Newman 2022). Within this framework, the case studies here challenge normative professional practices around bodily engagement with collections, and ableist views of the perceived ideal bodies that can care for collections. These are discussed within the framework of emancipatory research and its founding principles (Cecilia 2022; Moussouri 2007):

- Control: people with disabilities and the organisations representing them should be involved and have a say in research and collection-related processes.
- Accountability: researchers and museum professionals should be accountable to people with disabilities and their organisations by establishing and reporting to an advisory group consisting of people with disabilities.
- Choice of methods: museum methods should reflect the needs of the project and of collections and take into account the agenda and goals of the organisation and stakeholders involved either directly or indirectly.
- Empowerment, dissemination, and outcomes: emancipatory research, and emancipatory museum practice should aim to produce knowledge that benefits people with disabilities and assist them in overcoming barriers. Findings and outcomes should be shared with people with disabilities and the organisations that represent them and be disseminated widely. People with disabilities should feel ownership of the information and independently use it to their benefit.

Disability representation and collection care

In the past, discourses around disability in museums and cultural heritage collections were relegated to the realms of education and visitors' studies. The fact that people with disabilities have been actively excluded and constantly underrepresented in the workforce is only just being recognised (Fox and Sparkes 2020; Goudas 2020; Hunt and Kitchen 2020; Pring 2019). Change in the way disability is considered is emerging within the heritage and artistic workforce (Cachia 2022, 2023; Cecilia et al. 2023; Fox and Sparkes 2020; Hunt and Kitchen 2020; Pring 2019). Institutional, attitudinal, physical and digital barriers in museums are still prevalent, and actively hinder the recruitment and retention of professionals that identify as having disabilities, resulting in discriminatory professional practices. The inclusion of people with disabilities in the profession is still largely considered at a legal level only, rather than within a value-led approach. It is necessary to challenge the system of social norms and normative practices, which happen to be discriminatory in nature towards what are perceived to be 'ideal' bodies. Non-normative bodies are left out of the museum workforce due to what is still largely supposed to be the very nature of the profession. This attitude automatically leaves out key players in the discourse around care of collections. Goudas (2020) argued that there is a systematic lack of understanding that the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce is crucial to allow people with disabilities to be not only part of the conversation but also included as valuable contributors to the practice.

The UK National Lottery Heritage-funded initiative 'Curating for Change' (2020) shows how, in the UK, museums are keen to diversify their workforce as well as their audience, but they need specialist support to help with the process (Fox and Sparkes 2020). They claim this on the basis of the over 30 museums that responded to the call to participate in the programme, which offers fellowships to people with disabilities to explore museum collections for overlooked stories from the histories of people with disabilities (Fox and Sparkes 2020). While the project focuses on curatorial practices, findings are helpful to identify challenges around embedding change within the museum sector as a whole. Opportunities to participate and lead within the cultural sector are often relegated to educational and curatorial roles. Within the museum sector, only 4 per cent of the workforce openly identifies as D/deaf or disabled (ONS Labour Force Survey 2022). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail barriers to the recruitment of professionals with disabilities, it is

important to briefly outline recruitment issues as well as how museums embed diverse perspectives in their practice:

- inaccessible recruitment practices that either do not accommodate different needs or place the burden of asking for specific accommodations on the applicant
- lack of flexibility as to working patterns, in particular before the COVID-19 pandemic, when hybrid working patterns were rarely considered
- use of inaccessible technology, like collections managed by software inaccessible via screen readers, content not captioned, or images not described
- unnecessary physical characteristics requirements that align with traditional characteristics of non-disabled bodies, including manual dexterity, or the ability to lift objects or to stand for long periods of time, which could be easily met through alternative provision such as Access to Work.

Job descriptions, especially at entry level for collection care and conservation-related jobs, often include essential physical requirements that respond to an ableist view of the human body, which seems inherent to the way we understand the museum profession. The current lack of knowledge in the sector as to how best support and nurture people with disabilities in the workforce results in discrimination, underrepresentation and a lack of opportunities (Fox and Sparkes 2020). Museums strive to become inclusive institutions while they perpetuate the very same ableist discrimination that they try to fight with an anti-ableist interpretation of their collections.

Discriminatory recruitment practices and the resulting lack of diversity in the profession have a significant impact on the way diversity in collections is understood and represented. Hunt and Kitchen (2022) argue that museums are not currently empowering spaces for employees with disabilities, which has a negative impact on the effectiveness of museums as empowering spaces for visitors. Similarly, Walters (2009) argues that accessibility and inclusion measures are often ineffective as museums regulate and describe themselves as 'accessible' when in reality their understanding of access is limited. In the literature, there is limited consideration of how including people with disabilities in the workforce impacts the visitor experience. Fox and Sparkes (2020) argue that due to the lack of people with disabilities in curatorial roles, the challenges are significant in terms of telling authentic narratives that relate to disability

history. Hunt and Kitchen (2022) take this notion further, discussing that a more diverse workforce, representative of people with disabilities and other groups, has the potential to enhance and offer new ideas and approaches to interpretative narratives within museums.

The idea that diversity in the workforce greatly contributes to an equitable representation of diversity in the museum comes from the very roots of discourses around representation. In fact, studies around the equitable museum representation started from a reinterpretation of collections. The work of Sandell and colleagues initiated conversations both in relation to access and as a cultural and political issue of representation (Dodd et al. 2004; Dodd and Sandell 2001; Janes and Sandell 2019; Sandell 2017; Sandell et al. 2010; Sandell and Nightingale 2012). In this sense, representation comprises how museums started to respond to the lack, or distorted representation, of certain cultures and specific communities (including people with disabilities) in their collections and exhibitions (Sandell 2007).

The mixed-method research project *'Buried in the Footnotes'* and *'Re-thinking Disability Representation'* by Dodd and colleagues (2004; 2008) offer an informative discussion of how museums understand and interpret disability-related materials in their collections. Findings show a wealth of relevant materials in several collections, rarely displayed in a meaningful way to directly acknowledge the relation to disability (Dodd et al. 2004). The projects also found that if disability-related material is presented, it is mainly displayed within a negative and stereotypical representation framework. Findings also highlight the richness and diversity of responses from visitors to equitable representations and interpretations of disability, people with disabilities and disability-themed narratives in collections and exhibitions (Dodd et al. 2008). Museums play a crucial role in reframing how society perceives disability (Sandell et al. 2010) by 'reframing, informing and enabling society's conversations about difference' (Sandell 2007, 173).

Disability-related collections, archives and records rarely include perspectives of people with lived experiences of disability. Historical interpretations were typically created by 'gatekeepers' like carers, doctors or educators (Pring 2019). Therefore, equitable representation advocated by Sandell, Dodd and their colleagues is achieved not only by acknowledging and making explicit the link between the objects and disability but also by diversifying the practices around collections, ensuring that the voices of people with disabilities are heard. Within the debate on representation, museums are called to reconsider ways of presenting disability and people's lived experiences of disability in their

collections. They are called to listen to the voice of people with disabilities, to include them in the decision-making process and policy developments, and recognise the importance of the history and narratives of people with disabilities and their value to society.

While collections are central in discourses around representation, the people who care for the collections are rarely part of the very same discourses. Equitably representing and amplifying the voices of people with disabilities means also, if not primarily, providing care in line with what people who derive meaning from objects want and value. Care of disability-related objects, just like interpretation and presentation, cannot be separated from the voices of people with lived experiences of disability. The lack of perspectives of people with disabilities on the way collections are cared for is effectively a missed opportunity to embed new perspectives on ways to meaningfully engage with objects, including caring for communities.

Discourses around what collection care professionals bring to the conversations around disability and how caring differently for disability-related objects widens the way we think, present and care for objects that embody disability narratives is rarely discussed in the literature. These conversations are significantly more common in discourses around curatorial practice and art practice. These fields have been more exposed to political debates and activist intervention. Indeed, inclusive approaches to collections care seem to predominantly come from the intersection between art, indigeneity and cultural heritage. Methodologies coming from critical disability art practice and critical Indigenous disability studies help understand how collection care directly influences objects' displays, modes of interpretation, spatial positioning and interpretation. In the next sections, I present and discuss examples of alternative methodologies, namely disability-led art practice, participatory co-design and critical disability Indigenous methodologies, to bring forward non-normative knowledge and embodied critical practices into discourses around collections and care, going beyond the framework of material preservation.

Disability-led creative art practice

For more than 50 years, artists with disabilities crafted their own ways of engaging, creating and making sense of objects, installations and artworks. Artists with disabilities have led the changes in how disability is represented and integrated into a number of cultural fields, from art,

Figure 7.1 Artwork 'Excerpts from Colour Journal' by Emilie Gossiaux (2022) for Wellcome Collection's *In Plain Sight* exhibition. © Wellcome Collection/Steven Pocock, 2022.

history and curatorial practice, to design (Pring 2019). Disability art takes the experience of disability as a creative entry point. It specifically employs disruptive politics to recognise the role of people with disabilities and artists as cultural participants (Chandler 2019). Artists with disabilities are at the centre of rethinking the relationship between artefacts and the beholder, from the work of vision impaired visual artist Emilie Gossiaux, who reproduced complex visual concepts in her work and critically reflected on the idea of seeing colours through the mind's eye (Figure 7.1), to that of deaf sound artist Christine Sun Kim, whose performances challenge understandings of how sound operates in society (Figure 7.2). These artists embed in their works reflections and ideas on what disability brings to the experience of art, effectively disrupting modes of engagement, and changing the conceptualisation and understanding of multisensory experiences.

Creative art practice led by artists with disabilities has disrupted modalities of engagement with objects and the built environment. It challenges how we look at access and representation issues to environments and collections in artistic and creative ways (Cachia 2023). Artists with disabilities often start from and embed 'unruly or nonconforming or miss-fitting bodies' as creative generators (Boys 2018). The experience of disability fosters conceptual and creative aspects of access grounded in sensorial culture, offering insights into 'disabled embodiment' itself (Cachia 2023, 6). While not all disability art represents explicitly the experience of disability, it all springs from the experience of disability (Frazee 2001, cited in Johnston 2009). Therefore, seeing, hearing and feeling it must happen with all its historic and biographical resonances to fully appreciate it (Frazee 2001, cited in Johnston 2009).
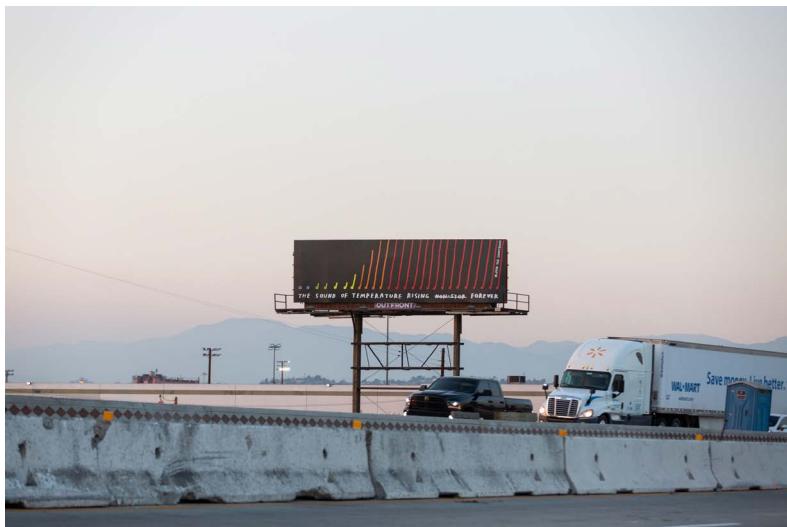
Figure 7.2 'The Sound of Temperature Rising Non-Stop Forever' by Christine Sun Kim (2020), Los Angeles, USA. Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.

An example of such work is offered by the work of Action Space. Action Space is a UK-based disability visual arts organisation and series of galleries that supports learning disabled artists to develop and sustain successful artist practices, accessing the same opportunities and taking part in the same exhibitions, projects and events as their peers (Action Space n.d.). Action Space aims to challenge existing preconceptions and remove barriers faced by learning disabled artists. Their work with learning disabled artists aims to realistically establish a professional career for them in the contemporary arts sector, and a community of practice through inclusive participatory practice and intersectional mentorship (Action Space n.d.). 'Community of practice' here is understood through Chandler and her colleagues' lens: 'a group of practitioners dedicated to codesigning cultural practices born out of a disability community that centralises people with disabilities and our politics through an ethics and politics of desiring difference for its disruptive potentiality' (2022, 206).

A large percentage of the artists that work with Action Space have limited verbal skills and many have additional sensory and physical disabilities, as well as mental health and behavior management issues. Within its practice, Action Space witnesses how language and neurodivergent ways of processing, understanding and expressing

information is a significant barrier to normative knowledge and value exchange. Challenging normative and ableist conceptions of knowledge and value, Action Space looks at art as a unique tool for developing innovative ways to broaden ideas of communication and values that goes beyond usual language-based frameworks.

Through their commitment to professional development of learning disabled artists, Action Space challenges care for people through innovative approaches of politics of governance, led by learning disabled artists and grounded in building relationships within the local community of practice, and responding to the community's existing and emerging needs. This is achieved by co-developing, testing and implementing participatory methods, based on the creative practices of learning disabled and autistic artists, that can enable their equal engagement in organisational decision-making. Additionally, it is achieved by making visible and valuing learning disabled and non-speaking creative methods for communicating ideas, values, priorities and needs, sharing experiences and making decisions. This leads to building shared knowledge about values and care for disabled artists, so as to amplify and improve disability-led principles and practices, which empowers marginalised creative voices to have an equal say in showcasing disability arts, serving the community and offering opportunities to develop inclusive arts practices.

The emphasis on disability-led curation and care for the community of practice is particularly relevant if we look at the shift in traditional museum collections' care values.

When we consider the notion that care of collections involves caring for people and relations and knowledge, not only physical artefacts, questions arise around the political structure of power around epistemologies of care. Disability-led creative art practice develops the political power of people with disabilities over their narratives, values, knowledge and artworks. It directly challenges cultural misrepresentation, establishing disability as a valued human experience, shifting control to people with disabilities so they may shape their narratives through affordances of care for artworks, people and communities, bringing this disability-controlled narrative to wider audiences (Abbas 2004). Acknowledging the political nature of care enables artists with disabilities to embrace and develop politics in their art practice, and take leadership and mentorship roles in the decision-making process. Chandler and colleagues (2022) discuss mentorship practices as a way to resist the idea that disability is an individual experience. This understanding leads to the acknowledgement that disability art is not an individual or siloed

experience, but that it includes the curatorial modes of display and engagement, and the care for the community of practice of artists with disabilities, through the care afforded to artworks and to people. This ultimately subverts the hierarchy of power and value in the museum and art world, from mainstream museum curatorial and collection practices to the care of the artist as a person and that of their community of practice.

Disability-led participatory co-design

When working with disability-related collections and exhibitions, participatory design is a common approach. A productive example of the challenges that collection care as a profession faces when thinking about access creatively and through participatory lenses is offered by the comparison with the challenges museum architecture and building design face. The DisOrdinary Architecture Project has been leading the discourse around participatory approaches to design to move beyond the idea of compliance when thinking about access to the built environment (DisOrdinary Architecture Project 2018). Zoe Partington, co-founder of the project and vision impaired artist, explains that there is often a disconnection between architects and designers and the needs of users with disabilities, which can be overcome through participatory dialogues, practices and engagement. The DisOrdinary Architecture project starts from the idea that buildings are not neutral spaces, and that a participatory, disability-led methodology is crucial to change professional attitudes and enable a cultural shift. Boys (2018) argues that starting from difference and working from the creativity of artists with disabilities has a tangible possibility to impact the sector in the longer term. She describes small actions towards disability-led creative practice as a way to change, over time, the way the sector operates.

The temporary exhibition *In Plain Sight* (IPS) (Wellcome Collection 2022) provides a fresh perspective exemplifying how a participatory and disability-led approach allows exhibition teams to move past 'disability accommodation'[1]. Between 2018 and 2022, I collaborated with the Wellcome Collection IPS exhibition team to experiment with disability-led participatory approaches to bring forward creative modes of practice. The exhibition is grounded in disability studies around the way visual culture and vision are understood in museums. It explores the different ways of seeing and being seen by others (Wellcome Collection 2022). It challenges the central place that sight holds in society through the different experiences of sighted, partially sighted and blind people.

The exhibition contains a wide range of artworks and installations, including the work of several artists with or without disabilities, asked to reframe and reconceptualise the sense of sight beyond traditional modalities of engagement with the beholder visitors. At the same time, we brought together a group of visitors who identified as disabled, and in particular, vision impaired, to creatively collaborate with the exhibition team to make decisions about exhibition themes, design objects and their interpretation. This collaboration started from the idea that objects connected to or representing disability stem from the lived experience of disability. Therefore, they must be experienced with all of the historic and biographical affordances, in order to be fully appreciated.

The collaboration was led by both the creativity and the lived experiences of participants with disabilities. The principle of the collaboration was that embedding critical disability thinking and intersectional access from the initial stages of the exhibition development would create an empowering accessible environment, through a creative critique of normative traditional modes of display, interpretation and engagement. Through a series of focus groups over the course of three years, the participatory approach provided a rich understanding of the meanings of objects, effectively shaping and refining exhibition themes and their curatorial interpretation. Participants posed several challenges to collection care professionals and curators, from lighting levels, tactile access, modes of displays and interpretative resources.

The main lesson learnt from the participatory approach was that disability-related objects and disability-related displays need to embed the disabled intersectional experience from the beginning of the exhibition's creative effort. Involving artists and participants with disabilities in early conversations about the exhibition development allowed us to move from building content and spaces **for** people with disabilities as passive users, to co-designing an exhibition with an equal relationship among the team. In terms of the care afforded to objects, discussions around multisensory and multimodal modes of engagement challenged the relationship between material preservation and audience needs. The presence of collection care professionals in the focus groups enabled discourses and shaped decisions around different modalities of engagement, essentially acknowledging the physical and political reality of disability in practices of care. Participants actively questioned decisions regarding the display of objects behind cases and the interpretation of material culture. In particular, they explained how not being able to gain a multisensory understanding of objects connected to sight loss actively created a barrier between them as an audience and their heritage. While

most understood concerns related to preservation, they advocated for the possibility of creating intimate connections with objects from their claimed heritage beyond functional access.

Tactile exploration went beyond understanding materials and shapes. The value of multimodal physical engagement with objects was the value that individuals and the community of practice derived from their histories, their heritage and the material culture. The resulting participatory decision-making process enabled participants to 'have a say' about the way their heritage is displayed, and to have power over the narratives represented. The variety of ways people interacted with and physically responded to objects influenced those care-based decisions that are often considered neutral within mainstream discourses. For example, during and following the participatory focus groups, museum professionals negotiated modes of multisensory engagement with objects and materials in the exhibition, such as art installation and glass frames. Additionally, other objects deemed as 'low risk' were specifically sourced and included in the display, like ceramic, modern and low-value metal and textile amulets to protect vision.

The participatory approach also resulted in the creation of accessible and creative audio descriptions, where artists, curators and stakeholders shared their perspectives, understandings, legacy and meanings. Participants explained how objects representing different vision modalities were displayed, directly affecting the way they felt represented by the display. This process allowed us to craft an exhibition that represented objects through the lenses of creative access, rather than functional access. Participants explained how the collaboration process allowed them to regain 'agency' and feel 'visible and represented' in the choices made. This approach further created a rich disability-led experience of objects and themes. Participants advocated for both interpretative and descriptive information about the objects. The curatorial interpretation of the objects and their role within the exhibition themes was not deemed enough. Participants advocated for a profound description of the materiality of the objects, of the physical reality of handling them, using the professional vocabulary and expertise typical of the museum professionals that afford care to objects. Strategies of display and engagement with objects that hold meaning for vision impaired visitors were charged with activist values. However, while disability-led in principle, the approach still presented limitations. For instance, no one in the museum exhibition team identified as vision impaired. While I coordinated the collaborative process with vision impaired stakeholders, I do not identify as vision impaired either. The disability-led creative

effort came from the outside, on an ad-hoc base, effectively leaving the profession 'untouched', replicating workforce patterns of passive ingrained ableism. While the Wellcome Collection aims to always develop their inclusive effort, this participatory approach was limited to the *In Plain Sight* exhibition and is not currently integrated further into the museum practice.

Despite these limitations, the exhibition is still a testament to the value of creative and experimental access for a wider care of collections, beyond the mere curatorial effort. Participatory and disability-led creative approaches to care and interpretation represent a refreshing methodology that enables people to connect with objects and the value they represent in new ways, and builds the capacity to listen to the voices of people who are represented in the exhibition, bringing forward their perspectives and ideas. The collaborative participatory approach only further highlighted the need for people with disabilities to take on leadership roles in establishing a critical disability framework for the care, the presentation and the interpretation of objects. The advocacy of people with disabilities is not solely participating in culture, but creating it, shaping and stretching it beyond its tidy edges (Frazee 2001, cited in Johnston 2009).

Critical Indigenous disability methodologies

Critical Indigenous disability methodology is a valuable framework to challenge how cultural heritage practices perpetuate Eurocentric and Western biases, including ableism and disablism (Watson and Hiles 2022). It combines critical disability theories and decolonial methodologies from Indigenous studies. Effectively, it aims to create both new understandings of disability and create new systems that can hold, prioritise and even desire such understandings (Chandler 2019). Critical Indigenous disability methodology does not align with colonial identity categories, and it focuses on how the centring of difference in the creation, display and experience of art disrupts and creates new cultural practices (Chandler 2019). Visibility of cultural production and practices is seen as a way to enable greater exposure to communities of people with disabilities, advocacy and politics through the representations of embodied diversity and encountering culture, thus contributing to the advancement of disability rights and justice.

Within Western colonial and neo-colonial frameworks, people with disabilities have a long history of being put on display in ways over which they had no control. These displays are often violent and violating,

effectively stealing the bodies on display and using them against the community of people with disabilities (Clare 2001). Scholars have long advocated for disability to be represented from within the diversity and intersectionality of the community of people with disabilities, de-centering non-Native voices and challenging ableist readings (Cachia 2022; Chandler 2019; Hammond et al. 2018). Indigenous methodologies offer a framework to discuss a wide range of cultures and modalities that contribute to disrupting and dismantling existing structures oppressing people based on gender, disability and indigeneity, by looking directly at lived experiences (Newman 2022).

Indigenous methodologies within critical disability theory comes from the broader understanding of indigeneity as 'a state of being associated with peoples who have established a presence, social formations, and relationships with the land before modern settler colonialist cultures arrived and oppressed them' (Newman 2022, 12; Rifkin 2017). Within Indigenous methodologies, knowledge and culture are contingent and derive meaning from place and contextual social, political and local situations. Larkin-Gilmore and her colleagues (2021) argue in favour of an 'Indigenisation' of disability studies within the context of First Nations and Native American Indigenous studies. Their edited book explores transformative possibilities of critical indigeneity and disability studies, to uncover meanings of sovereignty, self-determination and ableism. They advocate for a paradigm shift of looking at Indigenous people with disabilities and their lived experiences of ableism as bearers of 'valuable lived knowledge' instead of looking at them as a passive object of research.

Larkin-Gilmore and her colleagues (2021) establish three core themes of critical Indigenous disability methodology – kinship, place and knowledge-making – as methods to dismantle more of the barriers between Indigenous people with disabilities and the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in charge of caring and looking after their narratives and collections:

- **Kinship** is understood as the embodiment of relations and practices that change the meanings and values that are attached to bodily and behavioural practices. Indigenous-disability methodologies expand the understanding of kinship as a source of power and a central force.
- **Place** refers to human-made spaces as well as natural land that shape relations of care and define relations of power. Within Indigenous methodology, place offers opportunities to reflect on reciprocity

with, and responsibilities to, non-human kin. In particular, within Western biomedical models, ableism has consistently disconnected Indigenous people with disabilities from their places, imposing colonial structures.

- **Knowledge-making** is the product of the intersection between kinship and place, which act as foundations on which knowledge grows. Indigenous and disabled knowledge-making requires a confrontation with the material consequences of ingrained structures and systems of powers like colonialism, imperialism and ableism.

While Larkin-Gilmore and her colleagues' work does not relate directly to collection care in Western museum contexts, these principles are easily recognisable as crucial to establish connections between the practice of care and the communities whose lived experience and histories shape the tangible and intangible values associated with objects and collections that represent them. The example discussed below shows an archaeological approach to Indigenous methodology: an analysis of Indigenous knowledge practice of Aboriginal Australian poetry. This example shows the broad scope of this approach to decolonising different fields and practices where disabled and Indigenous identities intersect.

Studies around embodied disability indigeneity are essential to decolonising understandings of contemporary, as well as past, Aboriginal and Indigenous cultures. Situating the understanding of disability within complex Indigenous knowledge structures and systems shifts the system of values associated with objects depicting and relating to disability. Indigenous disability knowledge is rooted in the rich lived experience of individuals and communities. There is a significant tension between different systems of knowledge and culture around disability and who controls them (Latukefu 2006). Therefore, disability must be understood within the framework of the ongoing effects of postcolonial violence (Seppälä et al. 2021). Doing 'research' about and performing care of objects connected to Indigenous experiences of disability are themselves acts of '(post)colonial violence' (Kuppers 2013, 179). Indigenous disability knowledge of the lived experiences of Indigenous people is central to shaping an Indigenous de-colonised practice mindful of power relations, sovereignty and the need to reclaim control over Indigenous ways of knowing (Smith 1999).

In her research about Aboriginal Australian contexts and understandings of disability, Kuppers (2013) challenges Western research approaches using traditional Aboriginal poetry and art practices. A

complex intersection of community poetry writing, reading, reciting and audiencing, brought together narrated lived experiences of disability and shared understanding among the community. Similarly, intense shared experiences of art production and exchange took place in community-based and disability-led art workshops, where art became an intercultural encounter (Kuppers 2013). This rich methodological framework uncovered how developmental narratives and sovereignty perspectives often clash, due to the complex nature of lived experiences of disability, compared to the static nature of Western research frameworks around it.

This example shows that critical disability Indigenous methodologies present elements of critical arts practice and disability-led participatory approaches. However, this approach is far more radical than the other two, especially when considering issues of care for objects, practices and people. Cultural and ethical frameworks surrounding the care of Indigenous collections should include values defined by source communities, thus enabling care that safeguards tangible characteristics as well as intangible values and meanings. The Indigenous critical disability perspective adds an additional element: that of the different understandings of the lived experiences of disability. Objects and practices that relate to and embed elements of the lived experience of disability must be afforded care through the lenses of Indigenous understanding of diversity. In understanding disability-related objects and practices from Indigenous communities, it is necessary to acknowledge embodied sovereignty and culturally specific disability knowledge.

Conclusion

The discussion of disability-led art practice, participatory approaches and critical disability Indigenous methodologies demonstrate that, as Cachia (2023) resolutely puts it, disability is praxis and not simply policy. The difficulties of finding examples of critical disability theory employed directly in the care of collection (in favour of curatorial and art practices) shows that collection care is still largely left out of official and political discourses around critical disability theory, despite creative, intellectual and intersectional considerations in collection care practice. Care work, including caring about access, interpretation, design, as an act of care toward disability communities is often left to the realm of curators and designers, thus stripping collection care as a profession of its intrinsic political nature and responsibility towards communities. This can be achieved by embracing the idea that people define objects' meanings and

that collections' care must consider the identities, values and beliefs of individuals, groups and communities and their relationships with objects.

Embedding critical access in conversations around collection care from different disability perspectives opens up new layers of creativity and social engagement, enabling a shift in thinking about 'care' as just for objects to objects and the people they represent and that draw meaning from them. People with disabilities reclaim their stolen place in the museum world and their stolen stories from object narratives, through affordances of care that include disabled perspectives and foster a plurality of understandings of disability. Care afforded to objects must be looked at as intersectional, and critical disability must be considered as a crucial component of the effort to decolonise collections.

Finally, access and inclusion from a collection care standpoint are often thought of as a practical concession that needs to be negotiated, rather than an act of care towards disability communities and their values. Disability-related practice in the care of collections must move past functional access and the 'culture of compliance' checklist for meeting the needs of audiences with disabilities in the museum. The examples discussed above show how this is achievable only through the embodiment of creative and critical practices, as well as the inclusion of people with disabilities in the decision-making process. This can be through consultation, but needs to happen primarily at the institutional level. Changing the way we think about the profession from an institutional perspective includes reframing embodied characteristics required for collection managers' roles, and challenging existing recruitment bias.

Understanding the political and intersectional nature of care and embedding access considerations in the process has a direct effect on the way collection care professionals perceive their responsibility towards objects and the people they represent. Collection care is not a neutral and functional practice. It is embedded in the meaning and the experiences it facilitates, and the values it represents. Caring for objects that embody disability-related values and meanings, and/or represent disability is a political issue, and it requires a deep reflection on normative ways in which we afford care.

Note

1   'Disability accommodation' refers to when museums consider access-related needs of potential disabled visitors once exhibitions and displays are already designed and finished (Cachia 2023, 2).

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8

Playing the odds: the fine line between keeping an object safe and making it accessible

Alice Beale and Tom Pyrzakowski

Introduction[1]

One of the first lessons I learnt when I started my museum career was not to pick up an object by its handle. This rapidly evolved into 'an object should not be used how it was in life, before it entered a museum', by being given a 'look but do not touch' status through the application of a tiny inked number and a single line in a weighty registration tome. This advice has served me well through the various collections I have looked after and it is often the first thing I teach to volunteers, interns or new staff. Not so long ago, one of the researchers at my present institution sagely repeated back to me, 'Never pick an object up by the handle,' when viewing the broken handle on a wooden shield. It was pleasing to hear my words had resonated and were being applied.

As my collection handling skills expanded and I managed more complicated collections this rule was never questioned in terms of how I handled objects. In part this is because the advice was sound and helped protect the collection material from inadvertent handling damage but it also blinded me to other lives these object might lead or handles that others may hold.

The South Australian Museum holds significant collections from Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as collections from First Nation communities from across the globe. There are around 50,000 items (if you don't count the more than two million stone tools which sit in the Archaeology collection) and each of these items has a story to tell. Frequently you can see the hand of the maker

in a clay pot or smell the smoke from fires embedded in money coils from Santa Cruz. In acrylic paintings from Australian Western Desert communities it is possible to spy the footprint of a dog which ran across the canvas during the painting process. You can see or smell the living cultures in these items and while people often refer to museum collections in storage as dead, if you look closely enough you can see that they are merely dormant waiting for the right person to speak for them. Combine these stories with considerate exhibition design, sympathetic mounting and dramatic lighting and the objects will come alive. I have participated in the process more times than I can count, and it is an honour and a joy to be a part of it. Throughout it all I have stuck to the fundamental 'no-handles' rule that I learnt at the beginning of my career. That was until 2016 when I was confronted with a request that would make me question my training and led to a project to wake the deepest sleepers in the collections.

In this chapter, South Australian Museum designer Tom Pyrzakowski and I detail the step-by-step process we developed in consultation with Yolgnu community and conservators from Artlab Australia to awaken a historic collection of yidaki.[2]

Yidaki

The yidaki, known more commonly but incorrectly as a didjeridu, or frequently described in museum collections as a 'drone pipe,' is a musical instrument from Northern Australia. Yidaki are cylindrical instruments frequently made from hollowed out stringy bark trees that make a droning sound and has been widely accepted both in Australia and around the world as a distinctive Australian sound. The South Australian Museum holds approximately 100 of these instruments with some of the earliest examples dating from the late nineteenth century. They have a variety of designs both painted and engraved with some still retaining the beeswax mouth pieces that allowed for easier playing or the resin repairs to patch holes or cracks in the length of the instrument.

Each of these instruments has a registration number with an 'A' prefix inked onto the surface. Sometimes this number is small and discreet and applied with a barrier layer so that it can be removed if needed. Others have large permanently inked marks in places so obvious that it is jarring and detracting from the design or visible hand of the maker. They sit on powder coated metal shelves lined with soft archival materials in storage units on a compactus base allowing for their shelves to be closed when

not needed. For most of the time they sit in the dark, silent and waiting. That was until a new exhibition featuring these historic instruments was proposed.

Yidaki: Didjeridu and the Sound of Australia opened at the South Australian Museum in 2017, developed in collaboration with Yolngu people of Northeast Arnhem Land, specifically Mr Gurruwiwi[3] and his family. For the South Australian Museum this exhibition was different. It had started as a museum initiative to put on an exhibition about Didjeridu and a desire to play the collection instruments. However, it would instead become the first time an exhibition was told entirely from the perspective of the most relevant authorities, in this case the Yolngu, reflecting a change in the way the Museum considered its custodianship of its cultural object collections. There wasn't one curator imposing their vision on the show. Instead, the entire museum team travelled to Northeast Arnhem Land to learn – to be instructed in a better way of making exhibitions and a better way of managing collections (Carty 2019, 393).

> In the words of Mr Gurruwiwi,
>
> I'm going to tell you stories. I'm going to help you all, because you and I are citizens – brothers and sisters. I am welcoming you all, wherever you are from, so you all can see what I have to teach you.

The final result was a show without lengthy didactic texts and object labels, replaced with videos featuring the traditional custodians of the yidaki telling you about their instrument from their perspective. Vibrating plates were scattered around the exhibition space that would pulse in time with notes being played from yidaki so people could feel the instrument resonate in their bodies in addition to seeing and hearing them. Standard museum cases were left in storage and in their place were cases designed to mimic the stringy bark forests that yidaki are sourced from. The instruments were suspended inside acrylic tubes, giving the impression they were floating. While you were appreciating the instrument in its tree you also heard the music of the yidaki completing the immersive experience of the exhibition. However, this music was not from a contemporary instrument played to simulate the instrument in the case but instead the music of the very instrument you were standing in front of – an instrument that up until a year prior had been sleeping.

What seemed like an easy and natural thing when standing among the simulated stringy bark forest in the exhibition was in fact a long, often fraught process that pushed the limits of professional ethics and

practicality. We were buoyed through the process by the lessons the Yolngu had taught us at the beginning of the project. When we had travelled to Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, we were instructed how to make a Yidaki. By extension, we were taught that a Yidaki was more than an artefact to be conserved – it was an expression of living culture, and the most important part of the instrument was its sound, and that in applying principles or long-term object care we had damaged that sound.

To play or not to play

An initial review of literature in Australia revealed that while there had been some isolated attempts to play musical instruments in museum collections, a broad set of guidelines on the process had not been developed. This was not the case in other countries where the debate around whether musical instruments in museum collections should be seen and not heard, or played for all to enjoy, is long and varied. The issue has been so prevalent that in 2022 the Library of Congress sought out pop star Lizzo through Twitter to visit and then play examples from the world's largest flute collection. Library of Congress staff were reportedly 'up for the challenge' of allowing James Madison's crystal flute, a rare example of its type, to leave the institution and be played the following night at a concert (Library of Congress 2022).

In 1967 Berner, van der Meer and Thibault published a set of principles for the care and restoration of musical instruments in museum collections. Published by the International Council of Museums, these principles detail practical guidelines for restoring and playing musical instruments, including avoiding modifications to parts of the instrument responsible for sound and avoiding the replacement of individual parts. They also advised against removing modifications to an instrument that have been made after its playing life has ceased but retaining any modification made while still in use. Unsurprisingly these guidelines focused on Western instruments and went as far as to say: 'In ethnological collections the sounds produced by certain instruments are often less important than other factors such as shape, ornamentation and their social function' (Berner, van der Meer and Thibault 1967, 8).

Over time musical instruments in collections have been played and these principals have been updated. Barclay et al. (1985) provided guidance on how to regulate access to musical instrument collections. These recommendations acknowledge and attempt to resolve some of the tensions between the two responsibilities of musical instrument

collections in museums: preservation and access. With specific reference to wind instruments, Barclay et al. (1985, 5) warn that the dangers of playing these types of instruments are more extreme than other types of instruments, advising that moist air – which is impossible to avoid while playing – can cause cracking. Recommendations for the safe playing of these instruments included warming the instrument prior to playing and limiting the playing time. The latter was specifically preventing an instrument to be played for so long that condensation appears.

In 2005, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council published their 'Standards in the Museum Curation of Musical Instruments' and advised in relation to wind instruments that 'moist warm breath can cause severe damage to wind instruments; the strictest care should be taken to ensure that rules governing their playing are observed' (p. 30).

Playing of wind instruments was of greatest concern in the literature, with the unease mostly focusing on the moisture introduced during the playing process. Stringed instruments on the other hand can be managed in such a way to reduce their risk of damage, with Barclay et al. (1985, 5) suggesting, for example, not tightening strings to a high pitch. Ultimately we were to discover that our adherence to keeping moisture away from the instruments also had a detrimental effect. Our first instinct was that playing the instruments couldn't or shouldn't be attempted and it seemed like the literature was supporting this. These recommendations were, however, written from an international rather than local perspective and were ultimately overridden by the authority of the Yolngu and a commitment to the life of the collections.

There is also another body of relevant international literature which speaks to First Nations perspectives on the care of material culture. Clavir (2002) compares the practices of conservators versus the view of First Nations communities around these issues, highlighting that Western views of preserving the physicality of an object are often in tension with First Nations views of the tangible being vessels for intangible heritage. Equally, Krmpotich and Peers (2013, 185) consider the subtle difference of referring to change in objects use when it happens through handling by source communities. While not dealing directly with musical instruments, these works echo the Yonlgu views.

The team, made up of staff from the South Australian Museum and conservators from Artlab Australia, was initially concerned with risks to the instruments through over-handling, and the vibrations caused when the instruments are played. Our thoughts focused on what the warm moist air introduced to the instruments while being played would do to their internal and external structures. Many of the instruments were

decorated using natural pigments with little to no binding. We expected these painted surfaces would be negatively impacted through the playing process. It was only when committed to the project that we realised we had a bigger challenge to overcome.

The South Australian Museum, like many collecting institutions across the globe, maintains stable environmental conditions in its collection and exhibition spaces. The Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) on their website recommends the following environmental conditions for a temperate climate like those found in Adelaide, South Australia:

> Temperature range: 15-25°C with fluctuations no greater than 4°C in a 24-hour period.
>
> Relative Humidity 45-55 per cent RH with fluctuations no greater than +/- 5 per cent in a 24-hour period. (Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material 2018).

These conditions, which are well accepted in the industry, have contributed to the long-term preservation of the organic materials in the museum's collection. They have helped to preserve the wooden instruments, preventing cracking, warping and paint loss that would have occurred in unstable environmental conditions. What these conditions have failed to achieve is to maintain the purpose of the yidaki; having reached an equilibrium with the surrounding environment, these instruments were now too dry to be played. Didjeridu that have been allowed to dry out, like the ones in the collections, produce a less resonant sound than ones regularly played and regularly exposed to moisture (Ryan 2015, 6). We had preserved the object, but not the instrument. Mr Gurruwiwi, Yidaki master and member of the Yolngu community, was the first to advise us that in attempting to preserve these instruments, we had negatively impacted their ability to be played. Even in Yolngu country, a part of Australia with a tropical climate, it is common to place an instrument in a lake, river, or bath prior to use. Mr Gurruwiwi suggested we do the same.

This posed a significant issue for the team. Even with a full commitment to returning these instruments to a playing condition, we needed to do so in a way that presented the least amount of risk to the instrument. The instruments had been at rest for a long time – certainly longer than any Yidaki in Northeast Arnhem Land would have been and the only comparable case study we had was for instruments still being

actively used. We were prepared for some damage to occur as part of the re-humidification process but wanted to minimise the damage as much as possible; placing them in any body of water was out of the question.

Methodology

We decided we would need to create a system for gradually returning moisture to the instruments in a way that was inspired by the Yolngu community we were working with, without directly soaking the instruments. Our first challenge was to establish how much moisture we needed to reintroduce to the collection, so we set about collecting data to help inform this. Using an inductive moisture meter, the team tested stringy bark trees on Yolngu country, Yirrkala, Northern Territory and yidaki that were actively being used. From this testing, we determined that we needed to reach a moisture level of between 15 and 20 percent. By comparison, the historic collection of instruments sitting silently on museum shelving had readings of between zero and one per cent moisture.

Selection of instruments was the next hurdle to overcome. There was no way to reawaken the complete collection of 100 instruments, nor did we necessarily want to. In the end, the choice came down to a mixture of curatorial considerations and condition assessments. As the exhibition was a Yolngu story told by Yolngu people, we focused on instruments from Northeast Arnhem Land or other Northern Australia locations. We then considered the aesthetics of the piece, asking ourselves if it would work well in the exhibition. Did it contribute to the story? Finally, condition was the ultimate arbiter, although vulnerability did not dissuade us from awakening an instrument. For example, A47797 from Milingimbi has a painted design at the top and the bottom, which was vulnerable. One of only two from Milingimbi in the collection, this instrument is also the oldest of the two examples, but it was still submitted to the process. Cracks, on the other hand, were enough to exclude an instrument from selection as existing damage would have compromised their sound.

Armed with our data and our instruments selected, we started to design a way to slowly and gently build the moisture content in the instruments. To assist with this process, we created a purpose-built crib, made from a wooden frame with transparent plastic sides that would hold the instruments and form a chamber. As we wanted all the instruments to be ready at the same time, the crib was designed to hold multiple layers.

Figure 8.1 Collection instruments in humidification chamber. © South Australian Museum.

Each instrument was supported on a metal cross bar that kept it separated from the layer above and below. In total there were three layers with seven instruments able to fit in the crib at one time (Figure 8.1).

To increase the moisture content in the instruments, we used a humidifier to introduce water vapour into the chamber. The humidifier was attached via a hole in the plastic and filled with deionised water. We kept every step of the process gradual and monitored the condition of the instruments closely. To be on the safe side, we first tested the process on a recent instrument purchased from the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala. Prior to being placed in the chamber, our test yidaki was artificially dried so that its moisture content simulated those in the collections. This allowed us to test our method and monitor change in condition.

Our goal was always to produce a controlled atmosphere where the instrument would gently absorb the moisture in the environment. We were careful not to introduce extreme environmental variation and we certainly did not want pools of water to accumulate in the chamber. As mould was an issue, we installed small fans designed for cooling computers to keep the air circulating. We also installed environmental

Figure 8.2 Monitoring moisture levels in the instrument. © South Australian Museum. Author: Alice Beale.

monitoring equipment so we could track changes in environmental conditions (Figure 8.2). On the first day we started at 50 per cent humidity, which replicated the average conditions in our storage facility, and added an additional five per cent every couple of days. In the interest of fire safety, we only kept the humidifier running when there were staff in the vicinity to monitor it – approximately seven hours a day.

Our test instrument was left in the chamber with the collection yidaki and became part of the testing regime. The instruments were actively monitored twice a day using invasive (on the test instrument) and non-invasive (on the collection instruments) moisture meters.

From beginning to end, we kept the instruments in the chamber for 18 days with the deadline being prescribed by the arrival of the Gurruwiwi family, who had come to Adelaide to record the exhibition soundtrack with the revitalised instruments. By that stage, the humidity in the chamber had reached 87.9 per cent and the moisture content in the collection instruments was sitting between 13 and 15 per cent.

When Mr Gurruwiwi and his family arrived, we removed the yidaki from their crib and transferred them to a recording studio. Prior to this, the Yidaki were tested in the collections where their music resonated with the 30,000 other objects held in storage. We kept the yidaki wrapped through this process to contain as much moisture as possible. The day

was spent recording both single notes from the instruments and songs relevant to them. Once the session was concluded, the instruments were rewrapped and returned to the collection where they commenced the last step in their process.

We had taken such care to raise the moisture content of the instruments to where they needed to be, now we needed to take just as much care to return them to museum conditions. It would have been both impractical and dangerous in the long term to keep these instruments in playing condition, so the process needed to be reversed. The reality is this is the only request we had ever received to play instruments in the collection and we haven't received one since, even with all the publicity around the exhibition. Therefore, keeping the objects at playing condition unnecessarily posed an unacceptable risk. Consequently, the instruments went back into their chamber to resume their humidification process, only this time we reduced the amount of water vapour and lowered the relative humidity in the chamber. Eventually the instruments had returned to equilibrium with the store, and they could be returned to their shelves. Again, they were silent, but they did not have to wait in the dark for long as soon they would be exhibited in their stringy bark cases along with their song. They would travel not only Australia, but also to Japan where they would bring their sound to tens of thousands of people. Furthermore, we now had a blue print on how to recreate the process and a precedent should community wish to play these instruments in the future.

Acceptable risk?

Before, during and for a little time after the re-humidification, team members did ask themselves whether they were doing the right thing, so it is prudent to examine the question of acceptable risk a bit further.

Did we put collection items at risk? – Yes

Did the instruments that spent time in the chamber get damaged? – Yes.

Was it worth it? We would argue yes but let us interrogate this a bit more.

If we return to our earlier principles, we did not modify any feature of the instruments, and while we did indirectly modify the resonator, this was in an effort to return them to their original state as working instruments. Technically, we did not allow the instrument to be played so long that condensation occurred, but we did keep them in a chamber with

87.9 per cent humidity, so perhaps that last point is moot. Finally, the only rule we put around them being played was to find an alternative to placing them in a river as Mr Gurruwiwi has suggested, instead creating a dry river.

The principles that guide the playing of musical instruments have been developed over years and changed to address the shifting needs of institutions and collections, as these in turn have changed to meet the needs and expectations of contemporary society. They are good resources and can guide the work of collection professionals working towards creating better access while protecting collections for future generations. Depending, however, on how you frame them, they could be interpreted to suit a risk-averse or risk-tolerant mind set.

At the beginning of this paper, Beale reflected on the fundamental rule of collection management and it is worth nothing that the initial gut reaction when the question of playing the Yidaki was posed was no – the risk is too great. However, time spent with the Yolngu and learning about Yidaki from them has a way of reshaping how concerned you are about damage, or at least highlighting that the real damage was caused when the instruments were silenced by the very controls meant to protect them. One of the instruments that went into the chamber has subsequently developed a very large watermark. This instrument is elaborately decorated using ochre that comes away with the lightest of touches. The watermark is obvious and detracts from the design, just like the large and unsightly registration marks mentioned previously. If it was to come up for sale on the market, the watermark would lower its value and yet the importance of its voice has not been damaged. Arguably, the safety of the instrument's voice is the more important of the two values, as this is what is more important to Yolngu.

Yidaki: Didjeridu and the sound of Australia was designed to be an immersive exhibition that invited visitors to follow the process of making a Yidaki while also learning the importance of the instrument (Carty 2021, 30–1). Between the films where Yolngu cultural leaders taught visitors about yidaki, to the vibrating floor where you felt the sensations of the instrument, and finally to the calling of the West Wind (the return of the sound of the Yidaki from Milingimbi Island), which happened every 40 minutes, visitors followed the same journey the museum team had when they arrived in Yirrkala a year earlier. Among all of it, a small selection of instruments from the collection could be seen and heard. From the oldest instrument, which had been in the collection for more than 100 years, to the youngest, which had only been acquired the year previously.

Had we continued to view the principals with a risk-averse mindset as we had in the beginning, perhaps we would have stopped at the idea that the shape and decoration of the instruments were more important than their song. The Yolngu would disagree and their patience and expert teachings have shown these museum professionals a better way.

> Yidaki is like a symbol of our culture, but its more than that, they're also our spirt. Yidaki is our breath, our voice – Larry Gurruwiwi

Notes

1   The opening section of the paper is a personal reflection from Alice Beale.
2   This chapter is an expanded version of information published in Beale et al. (2018).
3   Since the exhibition Mr Gurruwiwi has sadly passed away. Out of respect for Yolngu custom his first name is not used in this paper.

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9

Managing a working collection: the Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts Collection at the Palace of Westminster

Emily Spary

Introduction

The Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts (HFDA) Collection at the Palace of Westminster contains almost 11,000 accessioned objects, which contribute to the daily functioning of the UK's House of Commons and House of Lords. The Collection forms part of the wider Heritage Collections at UK Parliament,[1] and is a key component of the interiors and furnishings in the Chambers, lobbies, offices and facilities of this iconic building. Ceremonial objects are used as part of the traditions and pageantry of Parliament, while office spaces combine nineteenth-century desks and chairs with twenty-first-century technology.

The Palace of Westminster, the seat of UK Parliament, is celebrated for its architecture, history and heritage. In 1970, the Palace became a Grade-I listed building and since 1987 has held UNESCO World Heritage site status, with parts of the oldest space in Parliament, Westminster Hall, dating from 1097–9 (Fell and Mackenzie 1988). Over the centuries, the building has witnessed historical, political and architectural change, yet still retains its iconic status. As historian Cannadine (2000, 11) describes it: 'the Palace of Westminster is one of the most famous and instantly recognisable buildings in the world … its picturesque pinnacles and cloud capp'd towers create a Gothic Revival fantasy on London's skyline that is by turns familiar, unique and much loved.' The HFDA Collection at Parliament, largely the work of Gothic Revival architects and designers

Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), contribute to this status. While many people are unaware of the importance of the furniture and interiors to the running of the building, it can be argued that the significance of the Collection is defined by its continued use for the purpose it was originally designed.

With much of the collection in regular use it can be described as a 'working collection' – a collection of objects that continue to be used for their original purpose (Pye 2016). Working collections vary in type, mostly discussed as exhibits in science, transport and industry museums where machinery or vehicles are operated for the purpose of better understanding how objects have been used in the past from a technical perspective (Pye 2016; ABTEM 2018). Working collections are also found in organisations within historic buildings, such as cathedrals, churches, schools and private homes. In these instances, caring for heritage objects is not the primary purpose of the institution, even though the collections may be integral to their function, history and significance (Staniforth 2006b).

This chapter explores how working collections challenge the norms of managing historic objects using UK Parliament's Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts Collection as a case study. Both internationally accepted standards for collections management and existing guidelines for working collections will be referenced in relation to the use of the HFDA Collection at Parliament, illustrating their usefulness and limitations. Working collections fall outside of conventional museum practice and can demonstrate how collections management may need to be more flexible to adapt to individual circumstances (Kipp 2016).

The projects considered in this chapter – location control, collections advocacy, and object marking – cannot provide an exhaustive outline of the team's collection management activities but will illustrate the complexities of a working collection, how practical interventions aid processes, and the intersection with other workstreams like conservation and engagement. This part of the heritage sector has received little attention, yet the study of working collections reveals there is potential for museums and institutions to learn something from their unique challenges and approach.

Approaches to collections management: standards for museums and historic houses

Collections management in UK heritage organisations is guided by several internationally accepted approaches and standards. These have developed over the last 50 years, and continue to be discussed, revisited

and refined. Matassa (2011) outlines some key developments including the formation of the UK Registrars Group in 1991 which brought together informal work produced since the 1970s. This was followed by publication of the Collections Trust *Spectrum* guidelines in 1994 which have been updated regularly. These cover procedures for object entry, acquisitions and accessioning, location and movement control, inventory, cataloguing, object exit, loans in and out, and documentation planning, as well as additional advice on tasks such as condition checking and valuation (Collections Trust 2017). If a collection meets these requirements, then according to *Spectrum* its documentation is 'fundamentally sound' (Collections Trust 2017). Although the Collections Trust refers to these procedures as 'suggestions' for managing collections, meeting the requirements it sets out is crucial for the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme (Arts Council England 2018). Later in 2009, the British Standards Institution published a code of practice for collections management providing a 'framework of fundamental principles needed to manage cultural collections' (BSI 2009, 1).

These collections management guidelines are typically written with the museum in mind but can be applied to other environments such as historic houses. *Spectrum's* introduction acknowledges the procedures 'may also be useful to similar institutions with museum-like collections' (Collections Trust 2017) but offers little advice in the way of alternative approaches. There are a wide variety of institutions who manage historic collections with a different set of requirements and environments. In literature specifically for historic house interiors, such as *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping* (2006), issues like open display and the impact on collections management and care are addressed. A fundamental difference from collections in museums is that 'objects cannot be considered on their own but must be treated as part of a much larger, and often more significant, whole' (Staniforth 2006b, 3). The assemblage of objects within the whole interior is just as important as the individual objects themselves. This impacts how objects are experienced, as 'the maximum historic and artistic value of an object is only realised when the context of that object in its natural setting is fully exploited' as its designer or owner originally intended (Child 1994, 141).

This approach to displaying collections shapes how they are managed. Keeping the 'spirit of the place' alive (Rowell 2006, 12) means most objects will be on open display and some, such as clocks and carpets, continue to be used as part of a room display (Staniforth 2006b). Objects in historic houses are at higher risk of being touched, as well as being more vulnerable to the agents of deterioration, than those in display

cases where environmental conditions can be more closely monitored and controlled (Staniforth 2006a). English Heritage (2010) outlines the key risk factors for historic house collections on open display: light, humidity, dust, dirt and use, pests, display and storage methods, and lack of appropriate disaster planning.

Practical solutions can be embedded into collections management to limit the impact on objects, such as implementing a rotating programme of objects on display, applying UV filters to windows, and ensuring regular cleaning (Staniforth 2006b). The management of visitors also plays a part. Encouraging no touching of objects, enforcing a designated and supervised visitor route and the use of barriers can ensure the safety of historic items on open display (Matassa 2011). Combined with standard museum guidance, these resources provide extensive advice for collections management in historic houses, but what about working collections where the objects themselves are in active use in some capacity?

Applying guidelines to working collections: significance, handling, and adaptation

Working collections, often called 'living' or 'operational' collections, consist of objects that are still used to demonstrate or carry out their original function. They are commonly exhibited in science, transport, industry and open-air museums, and most definitions refer to their use in those environments 'where the emphasis is on preserving cultural, scientific, or technical process rather than the object, or where objects or specimens are assembled for regular handling and teaching purposes' (ICOM 2017, 10). This definition applies elsewhere within the 'whole range of acknowledged heritage' (Pye 2016, 9), as inhabitants of private country houses usually use historic items in their daily lives, such as furniture, textiles, or ceramics (Capadose 2006).

One could argue, however, that all objects in museums and heritage sites are 'working' by being on display (Pye 2016). According to Pye, the damage paintings suffer through light degradation is no different to the wear and tear of historic parts in an operating machine, stating 'just as the image is the essence of a painting, so the function is the essence of a mechanism' (2016, 9). In both cases, the aim is to preserve the 'intangible aspects of the heritage' (Lewis 2004, 5). This is linked to the adaptations adopted in historic house environments, and Jackson and Nicholson (2006) outline this in the context of working historic vehicles.

If the operation of heritage objects results in degradation, then why keep them working? The justification lies in the benefits to our engagement with objects, explored by Mann's work on the Science Museum in South Kensington. Within the context of working museum vehicles, Mann (1994, 135) outlines his acceptable levels of use of objects in museums: '1. To explain how things work, 2. To show how things sounded/looked/felt, 3. To show technical/social/economic change, 4. To contrast good/bad or expensive/cheap vehicles.' His approach suggests there are aspects of some objects that cannot be fully grasped without operating them. Pye's assessment of the Science Museum's working objects draws on their fundamental role in research and learning. As it 'becomes possible to work out how machines were constructed and how they behaved' (Pye 2016, 16), the users of the collection (curators, researchers, visitors) can gain a more nuanced understanding of their design.

Museums and heritage sites with working objects can generally refer to traditional museum practices to manage their collections, but some guidelines are tailored to their specific use, such as the manual produced by the Association of British Transport and Engineering Museums. This focuses on the care of larger and functioning transport objects but claims to be applicable to other types of collection including social history (ABTEM 2018). The ABTEM guidelines were produced as a response to feedback that there was a lack guidance for these collections and outline specific recommendations for the safe operation of objects and approaches to care and conservation. The section on documentation directs readers to *Spectrum* for collections management guidance, as it is aimed at objects that are operated by museum staff.

The guidelines provide a useful framework for assessing significance, stressing that the starting point is always the object itself and its operation. This can reveal information about an object's manufacture and past use that are unobtainable through documentation and oral testimony and determines the extent to which an object will be operated (ABTEM 2018). Pye describes a working object's significance as 'the accretion of everything that has happened to it physically (including repairs and conservation) and the accumulation of different values' (2016, 7).

In this review thus far, these guidelines apply to collections that are only handled by museum professionals. Where do Collections Managers in private historic houses, cathedrals, churches, schools and government buildings look to for guidance? These organisations vary in size but often have collections being used daily. An example of guidance for this type of collection is the *Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011,* which provides

a framework for cathedrals to care for and maintain their buildings and collections. Like ABTEM's guidelines, it focuses on conservation, particularly the process of altering building fabric, but also outlines the necessity for an inventory of collections. However, neither the measure, nor the accompanying users guide (*Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England* [2019]) provide any detail on how to carry out an inventory or the minimum requirements of data to collect.

There is no mention of objects being regularly handled in these guidelines, except in discussions of handling collections. Handling collections exist to enhance visitor experience and learning, as touch aids the understanding of objects (Candlin 2010). Pye argues that we should 'not only display museum objects but make them physically accessible through handling and investigation' (2016, 1). However, these collections are usually established and managed as separate entities to the core collection in line with learning and education strategies. For example, the National Museum of Ireland's *Handling Collection Strategy* where the collection is expanded through 'potential donations of original objects to the Handling Collection and the potential of deaccessioned objects from the NMI's Core Collections' (2020, 3). This is not relevant to working collections, as in this instance only objects deemed insignificant to the collection are handled.

There is an acknowledgement in the literature that formal standards cannot cover everything and that the guidelines can be adapted to museums, historic houses and any organisation with a collection. In her guide for *Managing Previously Unmanaged Collections,* Kipp stresses the need for all collections to embrace adaptation and flexibility as 'every situation and every collection is different and deserves plans and solutions that are especially tailored to this need' (2016, 172). However, this advice is vague, and it is clear very little literature exists to guide the management of working collections outside of the museum.

Background to Parliament's Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts collection

The Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts Collection is one of six collections at UK Parliament, the others including: the Parliamentary Art Collection, the Architectural Fabric Collection, the House of Commons Library, the House of Lords Library, and the Parliamentary Archives. The overarching aim of Parliament's Collections is shaped by the strategies of both Houses, which focus on supporting Parliamentary democracy by

providing excellent services to Members and Peers (House of Commons 2023; House of Lords 2019). The HFDA Collection supports the business of both Houses by providing furniture for offices and buildings across the Parliamentary Estate, caring for objects to be used in ceremonial events, and conserving objects to maintain their working condition. The collection includes seat furniture, tables, desks, carcase furniture, ceramics, silver, clocks and mirrors. Approximately two thirds of the collection is in use across the Estate, which includes the Palace of Westminster and a number of other buildings including Portcullis House, Richmond House, and the Norman Shaw buildings.

Understanding the original approaches and beliefs of the designers responsible for most of the collection provides valuable context to how it should be managed. The furniture was predominantly designed after fire destroyed almost all of the Palace of Westminster on 16 October 1834. A competition decided that the design of the New Palace of Westminster would be to the drawings of winning architect Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860), who employed Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) to help him achieve his Gothic Revival vision of the New Palace (Stanton 1971).

Barry and Pugin's House of Lords Chamber opened in 1847 and the Commons Chamber was completed in 1852 (Hill 2007). Most items were produced for a specific position in the Palace (V&A 1974), which resulted in a hierarchy of design with a 'variety of decorations which preserved distinctions of status in rooms and their occupants and yet formed an integrated whole, of great subtlety and splendour' (V&A 1974, 8). Pugin's ongoing influence on the Palace is a result of his design principles, which shaped the entire decorative scheme at Westminster (Wainright 1994).[2] He thought objects and buildings should focus on comfort, cleanliness and durability (Hill 2007) and furniture was designed to suit the setting it was intended for, hence the simpler designs in the Commons areas and more decorative ones in the Lords (Atterbury 1995).

The Palace suffered further damage a century later during the Second World War. On 10 May 1941, a bomb destroyed the House of Commons and damaged Westminster Hall (Stamp 2000, 149). A new Chamber was proposed, and the architect chosen to design it, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), was an advocate of the Gothic style although with a more modern approach (Stamp 2000). As with Pugin, Scott designed the entire architectural scheme including a hierarchy of interiors, furnishings and ornaments, and many of these items are part of the HFDA Collection.

Approach to collections management at Parliament

The Heritage Collections team uses professional guidelines and advice to manage the HFDA Collection. The Collections Trust *Spectrum* 5.0 guidelines provide the basis of their approach, along with the BSI *PAS 197: Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* guidelines, which outlines 'a strategic and integrated approach to collections management' (BSI 2009). At the time of writing, the standards guiding all processes related to managing, conserving and engaging with the collections are currently under examination as part of a wider Parliamentary Standards review process.

A few publications provide some background to the past management of the collection, including a report by the V&A (1974) which examined the interiors and furnishings of the House of Lords and provided recommendations for their future management. No equivalent report was conducted for the House of Commons. Church (2000, 177), who worked with the Collection in the 1990s and early 2000s, explained that programmes of conservation and restoration of Pugin's interiors only gathered momentum in the 1970s, which 'facilitated a greater understanding of Barry and Pugin's vision, and rehabilitated the building's validity as a cultural expression of shared history'.

The progression of the documentation of the HFDA Collection at Parliament aligns with the wider context of developments in collections management. The first pilot audit followed by inventory and accessioning of the collection began in 1994, just as the first edition of *Spectrum* was published. As Church's (2000) review explained, the collection only started to receive the required specialist care and management from the 1990s with a notable professionalisation of the team over the last decade. The importance of this is acknowledged by the current team, as past collections management approaches inform present decisions (Pearce 1992). The Heritage Collections Team currently uses Axiell's EMu collections management system (CMS) to manage and record all information about the Collections. Workstreams are underway to deal with inherited documentation issues and to improve data on the CMS, which supports conservation, engagement, and research, enabling more efficient management of the collections.

The team works to manage, conserve and research the HFDA Collection for two key reasons. Their first collective aim is to maintain the 'living tradition' (Stamp 2000, 160) of Pugin and Scott's interior schemes by enabling the use of the collection items, with the overarching priority of keeping the businesses of the Houses going. Secondly, their

work concerns accessibility for both the Collection's daily users and the public who can visit an established line of route through the Palace. The Collection falls within ICOM's definition, where the 'cultural, scientific or technical process' (ICOM 2017, 10) being conserved is the original function and location of the furniture within the Palace of Westminster. How the Collection is managed centres on ensuring objects are in use wherever is possible and suitable. However, unlike in a museum, objects are used across buildings where heritage is not their core function, and this necessarily determines how collections management is approached.

A key factor is the Parliamentary calendar. Although access to collections within museums may be limited by visitor opening times or by location if objects are stored in offsite locations, this can be mitigated. For example, if an object requires conservation, it can be swapped out from display with another object. Within Parliament, the team must plan around recess and sitting periods of the Houses to carry out Collection audits or conservation work, which are often different for the Lords and Commons. Where objects are in regular use as part of the mechanisms of Parliament, such as the despatch boxes in both Chambers, they can only be worked on when the House is not sitting and must be retrievable within 24 hours in the event of a recall of Parliament. Access to many spaces must be prearranged when they are not in use, whereas a curator or collections manager in a museum may be able to spot-check items during opening hours.

In 1987, former MP Robert Cooke explained how the frequent movement of furniture limited extensive research into the Collection (Cooke 1987). This is still relevant, however is now managed as part of ongoing improvements to location control. Object moves are supervised by members of the Collection team and updated on the CMS, but location control becomes difficult when mobile and frequently used items, such as Portcullis chairs (Figure 9.1), are moved between rooms by users without the Collections team being informed. This is managed in a variety of ways, including regular audits, stakeholder engagement and collections advocacy.

A rolling programme of planned and reactive audits of spaces across the Estate is in place as part of the Collection's location control. This depends on when offices are vacant, either in recess periods or when Members, Peers or staff are moving offices. Object moves are tracked through Parliament-wide systems and rely on good working relationships with different teams, including porterage, maintenance and cleaning teams. Parliament's buildings are managed using an Integrated Workplace Management Solution (IWMS), which requires users to submit a request

Figure 9.1 An image of a House of Commons Portcullis chair, one of the most frequently used objects in Parliament. Portcullis Chair by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin © UK Parliament POW 00791.

to move or repair furniture. Requests related to historic furniture are directed to the HFDA team to manage and supervise, although this does not prevent a collection user moving a smaller object like a Portcullis chair without approaching the team. The IWMS relies on awareness and cooperation, which is challenging in an institution where most people have priorities that are unrelated to historic collections. Advocacy for the Collection is essential; engaging with collections users to share stories and the significance of the collections strives to achieve a collective sense of care and respect for these historic objects. This is embodied through talks, tours, displays, small publications and engagement through the processes of providing or conserving furniture for offices.

Use of collections

Historic furniture is used throughout the Parliamentary Estate and the continued use of the Collection is inherent to its significance. Where possible the Collections are used in the locations they were originally

designed for, in alignment with Pugin and Scott's original hierarchies of design for the Palace. This aspect of the Collection's significance shapes how it is managed in terms of where and how objects are used. For example, furniture upholstered in red leather would only be provided for Lords' spaces, and green for Commons' areas, as these are their symbolic colours.

ABTEM's definition of significance is a useful framework to refer to in the context of the working collection at Parliament. For working collections, the moment that an object is accessioned and becomes a museum object does not have the same meaning. Working objects are significant because they continue to be used. However, this does not mean they are not treated without the care that a museum object receives. As already outlined, the team follows all sector guidance to document and care for the Collections, even if this can be more difficult due to the nature of the building and its inhabitants. For example, when objects are moved, best practice object handling is followed. However, it is impossible to ensure users of the collection employ 'best practice' as sector standards would define it, as this would prevent it from being used in the first place.

There is a distinction between internal and external users of the Collection in terms of access. Internal users are defined as Members, Peers and Parliamentary staff who work in the buildings across the Estate and often interact with the Heritage Collections daily. External visitors are members of the public on tours, those giving evidence at Committees, or people visiting to lobby their MP. Public access to the Collections is more controlled, along a designated visitor route with supervision from Visitor Services and Security staff. The safety of the Collections is paramount, and Matassa's observation that 'if members of the public are allowed into secure areas they must be carefully monitored' is pertinent (2011, 59). During tours, some objects are covered with Perspex cases or roped off, such as the letter racks in the Commons chamber or the Woolsack in the Lords Chamber. Here, the public are users of the Collection in the traditional museum sense and can look at objects, but not touch them.

In contrast, the use of collections by internal users must be managed differently. The key distinction is touch. Across the Estate, those that work in the building sit on Pugin seats, work at Scott desks and debate across the despatch boxes in both Chambers. As well as the significance of who designed or made these objects, the part they play as physical elements of political history is significant. An inevitable consequence of this use is general wear and tear, just as Pye (2016) outlines with working exhibits in museums. At Parliament this is recorded and monitored through damage reporting, walkarounds and condition checks during audits. Measures

to prevent damage are implemented where possible and appropriate, such as covering tabletops with glass tops, and are also a key part of the Collection's conservation management.

The approach and ethical discussions around conserving a working collection is a rich topic and beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to understand how conservation links to collections management and day-to-day care. Audits are not limited to location control but are crucial for ensuring objects are still in a stable condition to be in use. Just as an industrial machine in a working museum exhibit would be regularly assessed and maintained (ABTEM 2018), the furniture at Parliament needs to be kept in good working order. This fulfils the team's responsibility to care for this publicly owned collection, but also ensures it is in the best possible condition for users to enable the business of each House. In the Chambers of both Houses, visitors are not allowed to sit on the benches and bespoke covers were made for the seatbacks where visitors often rest their hands during tours. This preventative measure protects the objects from excessive wear and ensures their continued use by collections users (MPs and Lords) when Parliament is in session.

Damage can be managed and mitigated through stakeholder engagement, taken on as part of the team's approach to collections management. With thousands of people working on the Parliamentary Estate, it would be unreasonable to expect them all to know about the collection and its significance. Educating users and the public about the significance of the objects is an important activity for the HFDA team for safeguarding the collection. Collections advocacy takes the form of booklets, digital content and talks or tours, so collections users are equipped to spot or prevent damage. If users better understand the significance of objects in their offices, they often become advocates themselves. This is, however, a time-consuming process, as like any heritage collection there are numerous stakeholders to target (Rivers and Umney 2003).

The materials produced for internal users do, however, cross over with the team's typical collections engagement activities. Access to the collections goes beyond internal users or a physical visit to Parliament, as the team engages with wider audiences through social media, talks, external loans, and a dedicated Heritage Collections Website. Displaying the collections online allows more people to learn about objects used in the ceremony of Parliament, as well as those in use off the visitor route and relies on continuous documentation work 'behind the scenes' to improve catalogue data and images. The use of objects at Parliament has broadened the scope of collections management and the team has to look beyond guidelines to ensure its success.

Object marking and location control

The use of a working object can complicate object marking as this example will explore through the State Silver collection at Parliament. A minimum requirement in the *Spectrum* Inventory standard is that 'every object (or group of objects) has a unique number securely associated with it, linking your records to the physical items they describe' (Collections Trust 2017). Object labelling should be secure, reversible, safe for the object and discreet, yet visible and convenient for museum staff (Matassa 2011). This is fundamental to collections management, particularly for location control if collections are frequently moved. The collection moves frequently at Parliament; in 2022 almost 300 objects were moved each month on average. Tracking a large number of movements is reliant on objects being easily identifiable by their accession number.

The objects in the HFDA collection are stamped and barcoded with their accession number. This approach to object labelling is inherited from the first inventory undertaken in the 1990s. There is no documentation outlining the reasons for this decision to label the collection in a permanent manner. However, this approach is understandable within the context of a working collection and its significance; the collections are integral to the building and will always be connected to it. Barcode stickers were added from 2005 and linked to the CMS with the intention of making spot checks more efficient, although are no longer used in practice for this purpose. These marks are now part of each object's history, and are recorded as inscriptions on the CMS, noting their location on the object, their content and the date of creation, if it is known.

Over recent years, the team have improved the documentation of the State Silver collection which falls under their care. As with the rest of the collection, the silver at Parliament is part of the day-to-day working of the building; it is both on display and used for events. The set was originally made for the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons in 1835 by Garrard and intended to remain within the Speaker's House, and small numbers of the collection have been in use since then (Riding et al. 2000). It contains over 1,300 objects, including a dinner service with flatware, serving dishes, eating plates and other items such as candelabrum, snuff boxes, and the oldest object in the HFDA Collection, a tankard dating to 1649.

In 2021, a full audit of the silver collection was carried out which included updating locations, inscription information, measurements, object types and materials on the CMS. The project allowed the team to resolve any documentation discrepancies, including past numbering

issues such as disassociation, as many items were not labelled when they were first accessioned. Groups of like objects, such as particular types of flatware, were accessioned in batches with incomplete records copied from one master record, which duplicated information such as measurements and hallmarks. In the past, some pieces had also been barcoded; a poor choice from a conservation perspective as they often fall off when an object is cleaned. During the audit, objects were temporarily tagged with acid-free paper labels marked with their accession number, however a solution was required for long term object marking.

Labelling this part of the collection needed to meet certain criteria: to be discrete as with all object marking, and to withstand use of the objects and potential cleaning. Looking to published guidance on object marking was insufficient, as the continued use and handling of objects is not considered as a factor when determining how to label objects. Instead, the team considered the approach of another collection with working objects – Royal Collection Trust – who have engraved silver items in their collection as it is in frequent use during events. Although it is not reversible, it does not wash off or damage objects with adhesive. All detachable parts are numbered, and they are engraved close to the hallmarks for consistency.

Alongside discussions on the benefits and challenges of different methods of marking, benchmarking with an institution that has a similar

Figure 9.2 A knife in the collection being engraved by hand. © Jessica Taylor UK Parliament.

working collection aided the team's decision-making process. Like the Royal Collection Trust, a key aspect of the significance of Parliament's state silver lies in its continued use, and from a practical perspective this is only viable if objects are effectively labelled. This engagement with external colleagues is an example of Kipp's idea of the importance of community in collections management and demonstrates how exchanges of experience between working collections are essential for 'troubleshooting problems' (Kipp 2016, 41). Shared experiences are invaluable for explaining, justifying and arguing for the individual needs of collections with challenges that fall outside of standard museum practice.

The team agreed the new approach to object marking and each object in the silver collection was engraved with its unique object number (Figure 9.2). A standardised process was put in place, including the size of the engraving, the consistent placement of the number and that each detachable part was numbered (for example a muffineer where the base and lid come apart). The engraving is discrete, roughly two millimetres high and is most easily read using a magnifying glass. It is in a consistent place on each object, close to the hallmarks and on the underside of the object. Each engraved accession number is recorded as an inscription on the CMS with its location and date of engraving. The numbers do not impact the overall appearance or function of the objects but provide an enormous improvement to collections management and as a result, the care, safety and security of these significant items. Ultimately this enables the team to meet the standard for location control, which would not be possible with a reversible marking method.

This project highlights the importance of context in decision-making when managing working collections. Guidelines and widely accepted best practice are fundamental, however they cannot meet the needs of all collections. It is not that collections management should be done differently, but perhaps that the scope of organisations considered in these guidelines could be widened. Often these experiences are not published as practitioners are afraid of criticism, and because the wider heritage sector may not appreciate the specific needs of working collections.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the importance of adaptation, flexibility and collaboration in collections management, which are required to ensure the longevity of the collections. The experiences, challenges and lessons that

come from working collections significantly depend on organisation type. Working exhibits within museums are very different to working objects within an institution (a school, religious building, or private home) where the internal users of the building also use the objects within it. The use of objects at Parliament, a working building, determines how the team access them and impacts the approach to collections management. It results in increased spot checks, a need to collaborate with other teams on furniture provision and moves, and the importance of advocating for the collection to the wider Parliamentary community.

In many ways the team's collections management aligns with museums and established best practice, such as the management of object information on a CMS. In terms of its infrastructure, the team follows a set of guiding documentation policies and procedures, and the approach is updated with sector developments and experience. However, the nature of the building and its users shape the extent to which guidance aimed at museums can be implemented. The standards created by the team reflect this, and ensure that even where best practice is adapted, it is still consistent across collections to ensure optimum care and management of objects. This was highlighted by the approach taken to engraving the silver in the Collection. The project would be considered outside of best practice for a museum, however proved an essential step in caring for and effectively managing the use of these objects. In these instances, methods can be adapted with careful consideration of options, weighing up benefits and limitations and consulting other collections facing similar challenges.

Relationships with other organisations are vital for guiding working collections where literature and published advice lacks helpful information, or in many cases, does not acknowledge working collections. Where working collections are discussed, the focus is on the ethics of conservation, but does not admit the nuances of collections management with working objects. In these guidelines, the focus is working exhibits in museums where standard documentation and management processes apply, rather than institutions where collections are physically handled.

Internal collaboration is also of heightened value to collections management, with processes established to improve location control, such as the porterage team only moving historic objects with the team's permission and supervision. Collections management is essential to other activities such as engagement, collections advocacy and conservation planning. These activities are intertwined as increased engagement with users improves collections management and good management ensures users can continue to access and use objects.

Despite their operational differences, working collections and those in museums are striving for the same aim – to care for the collections and ensure they can be enjoyed by future generations. However, collections management for working objects must sometimes go beyond and adapt widely accepted approaches to consider the correct course of action for particular situations. Best practice still exists for a working collection, but it has been redefined to suit the unique challenges and requirements of the institution it is integral to.

Notes

1   The Heritage Collections contain 26,000 objects comprising the Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts Collection, the Parliamentary Art Collection, and the Architectural Fabric Collection.

2   Pugin's architectural approach is outlined in his *True Principles* (1841, 1): '1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.'

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10

Gloves in the twenty-first century: beyond the pandemic

Paul Garside, Scott Rātima-Nolan and Cordelia Rogerson

Introduction

Using gloves, white cotton or otherwise, to handle cultural heritage has been normalised over past decades through institutional policy and media coverage. Their use inherently suggests the importance of the cultural material and propels it into the particular status of museum artefact. Arguably, the use of gloves has become a performative action addressing and expressing the status of the handler and the material, and is often disconnected from specific collection care issues or the need to address cultural interpretation of materials.

The 2020–22 pandemic forced a reassessment of touch. Suddenly, contact with any exposed surface was potentially dangerous for human beings, requiring a ruthlessly clinical approach to cleanliness. Rather than the human touch damaging the material, the scenario was reversed. Post-pandemic, the impact of touch, and indeed its absence, will have a greater focus and awareness generally. Thus, it is apt to evaluate this impact on collections, how this may enable interpretation for communities and what the barrier of a glove impedes, enables or implies. Institutional requirements to mitigate collection risks will still be needed, yet from a straightforward collection care perspective when are gloves appropriate? What is required or desirable from an inclusive, sustainable and practical sense? Ultimately, when evaluating the use of gloves, two questions must be considered and answered: 'Why choose to wear gloves?' and 'Why choose *not* to wear gloves?'. Factors which may inform these answers are discussed below and developed further in three UK case studies, two

examining post-COVID-19 strategies at the British Library and Horniman Museum (London) respectively, and one a Māori experience of handling practices at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Cambridge).

Background

Gloves are an important tool in the field of cultural heritage, but as with any tool, their appropriate use requires an understanding of the context in which they are used and an informed process of decision-making. When handling cultural heritage artefacts, gloves create a barrier layer, and the implications of this barrier must be considered. It may be beneficial – preventing the exchange of chemical and biological agents, safeguarding against physical harm. These benefits are often reciprocal, protecting both the handler and the object. However, if used inappropriately this barrier may be detrimental, not only by limiting dexterity and reducing the tactile cues that enable good handling, but also by removing aspects of interaction with an object that can be vital to its cultural meaning and integrity. Furthermore, the use of gloves can create conceptual barriers in addition to the more obvious physicochemical ones. They can be used to signpost the difference between a heritage professional and a member of the public, as well as between an item which has 'value' and one that does not.

In order to understand current advice and attitudes to glove-wearing, it is important to appreciate how their use has developed within the field, providing a context in which different (and evolving) recommendations, perceived suitabilities and institutional approaches can be considered. For example, Baker and Silverman (2005) note that the adoption of gloves to handle books and paper appears to be a relatively recent one – perhaps as recent as the late twentieth century, with no mention of their use being found in two significant publications on handling these items from the mid-1980s. However, the appropriateness of glove use for other types of materials and formats has long since been recognised. For example, the potential damage that bare skin can cause to photographic materials has been known since the mid-nineteenth century.

Similarly, the appreciation of gloves as a risk to collection items is not new. Kroeger (1903, 320) notes:

> Books must not be handled with dirty fingers, and what is as bad for fine books, must not be handled with gloves. Readers must be required to remove their gloves in turning over the leaves of handsome, illustrated volumes, though they are frequently reluctant to do so.

As Baker and Silverman (2005) indicate, this refers to the gloves worn for fashion rather than protection, but it clearly demonstrates an understanding of the problem.

Development of policy on the use of gloves in cultural heritage collections must also be appreciated in terms of the availability of novel technologies and materials. Protective rubber gloves intended for surgery were first developed in the 1890s, with disposable latex gloves being introduced in the 1960s (Barton 2018) and disposable nitrile gloves becoming available in the 1990s. Thus, access to gloves suited to particular applications or usages also influences the extent to which they are used.

Furthermore, it must be recognised that 'intangible' considerations regarding the use of gloves are also important to this decision-making, but these can be more difficult to quantify. These factors derive from institutional and professional policies and traditions, underlying assumptions about the perceived role of heritage professionals and reputational concerns. As a result, gloves may be used in a performative rather than practical manner. There is also an increasing understanding that these choices must be informed by the cultural appropriateness of glove use, particularly when considering the handling of artefacts by members of originating communities. An appreciation of societal trends should also be taken into account, especially the greater ubiquity and normalisation of glove-wearing in a post-COVID-19 world.

Any decision to use gloves must be tailored to the material nature of the objects being handled, the nature of the task, the wider context of the institution, the collection and its history and, in particular, the needs of communities to whom the items are important. This is a complex process, and many of the decision-making factors may be contradictory. If these questions are framed purely in a conventional collection care context, it also has the potential to be exclusive, placing the authority to make such decisions solely within the remit of heritage professionals. An alternative to this tailored but time-consuming and involved process can be to take a blanket approach to the use of gloves, across institutions, collection areas or material/object types, indicating that gloves should be worn (or not worn) as a matter of course. This has the advantage of presenting a clear policy, and is accessible to non-specialists, but lacks nuance and may promote outcomes which would otherwise be seen as inappropriate.

Performative use of gloves

The use of gloves in the heritage sector has a strongly performative aspect. In the popular imagination, heritage professionals are identified by their use of the iconic 'white cotton gloves' (effectively becoming the 'regalia' of the role), and this usage of gloves also denotes that an object being handled has importance. Thus, gloves impart a perceived status to both the wearer and the collection, and can create and designate a barrier between the public and the profession. The extent to which this impression exists can be seen in the way 'white gloves' are used as a shorthand for the profession and its activities, for example in the 'White Gloves Experience' offered by the Okanagan Heritage Museum, which allows visitors to experience the work of museum professionals and '[put] on the special curator gloves' (Patel 2020), or the use of the term rhetorically in the title of an article on historic vehicle preservation, 'Do you wear white gloves when changing a tire?' (Gates 2019).

Choices about the use of gloves within a particular institution can be strongly influenced by the history and accepted practices of that institution, and this may exert a stronger influence than an evaluation of the appropriateness of glove-wearing based on material considerations. Part of this may stem from the perception that the use of gloves is an indicator of good stewardship, reinforced by the public view of white gloves as a badge of expertise. Reputational issues may also play an important role, influenced by a public perception that gloves are always necessary when handling collection items, regardless of the nature of the item or the context in which it is being used. This idea has become so ingrained that many heritage professionals will be familiar with complaints received from the public if items are seen to be handled without gloves, even if such handling is appropriate, sympathetic to the object and in keeping with institutional or professional guidelines (Grosvenor 2012; Crow 2014; Alvis 2023; British Library 2011; Schuessler 2023). Thus, the wearing of gloves may be seen to be a greater signifier of 'good practice' than the actual quality of object handling.

Practical use of gloves

For a collection care professional, probably the most immediately obvious response to the question of glove-wearing is to consider the material vulnerabilities of the objects they are handling: will the surface be at risk of contamination, discolouration, staining, corrosion or other damage, if

placed in contact with bare skin? Equally, does the object present a health and safety concern that might be mitigated through the use of gloves (Museum of London 2013)? Another factor that may be considered is improved handling, if gloves are selected to enhance the grip on slippery or awkward to hold materials. Situational factors are also important. Non-accessioned objects, new acquisitions or designated handling collections may be treated differently to established collection items, and emergency responses, such as salvage situations, will also require a different approach to this decision-making.

A variety of factors may militate against the use of gloves. Gloves may offer no advantages, if the materials being handled are not vulnerable to contamination or damage through skin contact. They may reduce dexterity and sensitivity of touch, increasing handling risks (in the field of surgery, the balance between an effective barrier and impaired dexterity was recognised as early as the 1890s, shortly after surgical rubber gloves were first introduced (Schlich 2013)). Their use may inspire spurious confidence, especially in staff or volunteers with limited handling training or collection care experience. They can be a source of health and safety concerns, due to issues such as latex allergies (Gawchik 2011) or increased susceptibility to heat rash. And they can also be a source of the very contaminants that they are intended to mitigate, either acting to transfer soiling between surfaces or by harbouring moisture and oils from the skin (a particular problem with the iconic 'white cotton gloves' (Baker and Silverman 2005)); in some cases, residues or breakdown products from components of the gloves may also be damaging (Hoffman 2009). Finally, although individually inexpensive, their use is resource intensive and can represent a significant waste-stream which must be dealt with appropriately, bringing into focus issues of sustainability. These factors are discussed in greater detail below.

Gloves and objects

Gloves can protect collection items. Many materials are vulnerable to surface contamination, chemical attack or physical damage resulting from touch, which can be mitigated by a suitable choice of gloves, and this may also facilitate safe manual handling of objects. Acids and other residues from skin can have a deleterious effect on a range of materials found in heritage collections, including metals, vulnerable photographic materials, lacquer, chemically unstable ('sick') glass, fine bindings and animal skins; warmth from hands can also potentially damage gilding (Caple 2011; Carter and Walker 1999; National Trust 2006; Museum

of London 2013; Barker 2010; Rogerson et al 2016; van der Pal et al 2021). When dealing with such classes of materials, use of gloves would be strongly recommended. For some materials, staining or marking is a possibility when handled without gloves, but more significant damage is unlikely. These materials include unglazed ceramics, card mounts for prints, drawings and textiles among others, and in these cases the use of gloves may be considered optional, with the final decision being based on an appropriate assessment of risk (Caple 2011; Museum of London 2013). For the final class of materials, those largely insensitive to skin contact but potentially vulnerable to the physical effects of handling (especially abrasion or snagging), use of gloves would not generally be considered appropriate, although ensuring hands are clean and dry would be essential. This category includes paintings, polychrome surfaces, unmounted textiles, leather and paper (Caple 2011; National Trust 2006; Smith 1987).

The recommendation against use of gloves would also hold when dealing with objects where direct contact is necessary to ensure a secure grip – for example, stained glass, books, large furniture and sculpture (Caple 2011). The situation is complicated, of course, when considering mixed media objects containing materials with a range of vulnerabilities, and any decision should always be supported by a proper understanding of risks. It should also be noted that advice on the suitability of use and type of gloves is not always consistent between different sources, and that different disciplines within the profession may have differing agendas. For example, for unglazed ceramics, Caple (2011) suggests that the use of gloves is optional and should be determined by an assessment of the situation, whereas the Museum of London (2013), with a stronger emphasis on archaeological materials and evidential residues, recommends that gloves should always be worn for these items. Therefore, it is important to remember that advice is not only context dependent, but that it may change as the understanding of the material properties and behaviours (of both artefacts and gloves) develops.

Gloves and hazards

Gloves can protect handlers of collection items. Many objects have aspects of their composition or construction that can present health and safety concerns, which it is possible to mitigate through the appropriate use of gloves (Museum of London 2013), as illustrated in Figure 10.1. These issues can be chemical (either intrinsic, such as toxic pigments, or as the result of past treatments, including pesticides, deacidification residues,

Figure 10.1 Using gloves to handle a Royal Scots Belgic shako, due to concerns of possible historical treatment with an arsenical pesticide. Courtesy of University of Glasgow, with thanks to Dumfries Museum for permission to publish.

etc.), biological (as a part of the object, through mould growth or – as has become an issue of increasing concern over the course of COVID-19 – contamination of surfaces with pathogens) or physical (if the object has sharp or abrasive surfaces, or is hot or cold enough to present a risk). Conservation treatments may also introduce short-term risks such as solvents used for cleaning or treatments – Figure 10.2). If gloves are worn in these situations, care must be taken that they neither lead to inappropriate overconfidence in handling hazards nor act to transfer hazardous materials to other objects, surfaces or equipment.

The nature and extent of these risks will also vary from person to person, influenced by factors including pregnancy, long-term health conditions (such as asthma, allergies or auto-immune disorders) and frequency and duration of exposure. Although many institutions have policies dealing with the handling of potentially hazardous material, in some instances the interpretation and response to these risks may be made by individuals as an appropriately informed decision; in particular, this may occur when collection items are handled or used by members of

Figure 10.2 Using gloves during the wash treatment of a textile.
Courtesy of University of Glasgow.

originating communities, for whom the decision-making process will also
involve a range of additional, culturally specific factors (see, for example,
the account of the Haida visit to the Pitt Rivers and British Museum,
related by Krmpotich and Peers (2013)).

The use of gloves in disaster recovery or salvage situations raises
additional issues (Dadson 2018; Matthews and Feather 2017; Hamlyn
2021). While gloves can make some items harder to handle, the safety
of responding staff is of paramount concern and they may be exposed to
a range of unpredictable hazards. Obvious examples arise directly from
the incident – object contamination by water, mud, soot, smoke, glass
or other debris – but the collection itself may present hazards, such as
broken glass, metal edges and leaking contents from sealed vessels).
Ideally a range of standard gloves plus protective gauntlets should be
available, with their use primarily dictated by safety concerns. Caution
and the use of suitably protective gloves should be a starting point rather
than an escalation.

Choices of gloves

If gloves are to be worn, it is then necessary to consider the type of gloves
that will be suitable. Options include cotton, latex, vinyl and nitrile, as
well as more specialist options for particular applications (National Trust
2006; Barker 2010).

The UK's National Trust (2006) offers specific advice on the types of gloves that are appropriate to different materials and situations; a total of 18 different types of gloves and hand protections are noted. For example, vinyl gloves are preferred to cotton when handling unframed paintings, glass or fixtures such as light fittings, both to avoid snagging and improve grip. Clean cotton gloves, however, are favoured for historic wallpapers. Polyethylene gloves are recommended for photographic materials to avoid abrasion, given cotton provides an inadequate barrier and some surgical gloves can deposit residues that may damage silver nitrate-based materials (Hoffman 2009). Decisions on use of gloves also need to be made with an awareness of available resources. If, for example, vinyl or cotton gloves are not a first choice in a given situation, they may still be the best option if that first choice is not available (Barker 2010).

The complexity of the decision-making around the choice of glove-type requires an understanding of their properties, not only in terms of aspects like chemical composition, but also more subtle features such as breakthrough times, which are dependent not only on composition but also quality or grade. Such properties may vary significantly between 'food', 'chemical' and 'medical' grade examples. The behaviour of users must also be considered, taking into account factors such as comfort, the frequency with which gloves will be removed or changed and whether or not they will be re-used.

Gloves and sustainability

Heritage institutions are increasingly engaging with the need to support and demonstrate sustainable practice, driven by a combination of legislation, resource management requirements and stakeholder expectations. This will inevitably impact on choices around gloves. Cotton gloves may be biodegradable, but cotton is known to be an environmentally problematic resource, and furthermore these gloves require regular comprehensive washing if they are to be used in a manner compatible with good collection care. Gloves made from synthetic or semi-synthetic polymers are typically regarded as single use, though careful, limited reuse may be possible with minimally soiled gloves; after use, they must be disposed of in some way, potentially creating a significant waste-stream.

Recycling nitrile gloves is possible but requires a specialist contractor or services provided by some of the major suppliers (which are generally only for their own products). This limits the practicality of such schemes for relatively small-scale users, including most heritage

institutions, and represents an additional operational cost. Minimising costly recycling programmes appears prudent against diminishing year-on-year budgets, hence decreasing the use of single-use gloves is also key; this may additionally be supported by the use of thinner gloves, thus using less material overall. Furthermore, it is not necessarily clear what happens to nitrile gloves collected for recycling. Simply stating that nitrile gloves can be recycled is not sufficient justification for widespread use and guilt-free purchasing, and runs the risk of merely being a 'greenwashing' exercise, unless genuine sustainability benefits can be demonstrated. A holistic viewpoint is necessary, incorporating practicality, sustainability and financial viability – examples of these considerations can be seen in the British Library and Horniman Museum case studies.

Alternatives to gloves

If a decision is made not to wear gloves, then it must be done so with an understanding of other precautions or mitigations that should be taken. The simplest is to ensure that artefacts are always handled with clean, dry hands. This solution is readily available and easily implemented by all stakeholders and audiences, not just collection care professionals, although it is important to be aware of inadvertent behaviours that can lead to re-contamination of hands after washing, including unconscious grooming (van der Pal 2021). Good handling training is also vital (Marzo 2018), but this requires a greater investment in resources, which may be more difficult to justify for those who only engage with collection items occasionally or as a one-off; it is also highly dependent on the composition, fragility, format and physical situation of the objects being handled. One solution is to limit handling only to trained professionals, but this introduces a range of problems in its own right, creating barriers to access and potentially alienating communities from whom collections derive. It is necessary to consider who will be handling objects, and how they will be doing so, which may encompass a wide range of individuals: staff trained in collection care practice, non-collections staff, interns, volunteers, researchers and members of the public, among others. This can present a problem, for example, in smaller institutions that rely heavily on volunteers, where it can be more difficult to ensure consistency and application of training (Moreno 2007).

A particular factor which must be borne in mind is the use of hand sanitising gels and sprays. In a post-pandemic world, the use of these agents has become ubiquitous, and can have two potential impacts on collection handling. The first is that while hands treated with such agents

may be *sterile* they are not necessarily clean; dirt and other materials can still be present on the skin. The second is that many commercially available sanitisers also contain additives such as scents and moisturisers, which may remain as a residue on the skin and can be transferred to items being handled (Costantini et al 2022; Ryan et al 2022).

Cultural implications of glove use

The ability to handle – and perhaps use – an item directly, without the presence of a barrier such as gloves, may be of vital importance in appreciating, understanding and respecting not only a cultural heritage artefact but also the community to which it is connected (Krmpotich and Peers 2013; Rātima-Nolan 2022). Equally, in some cases, the use of gloves may be appropriate even when it is not mandated by physical or chemical vulnerabilities, if it is culturally appropriate only for certain individuals to handle an object directly (Haakanson and Steffian 2004). Institutional knowledge alone cannot be relied on to provide guidance for proper handling and respect for cultural heritage items, and genuine engagement with relevant communities is essential to ensure correct understanding, and therefore that respect is shown to both the item and the people to which it is connected (Krmpotich and Peers 2013; Rātima-Nolan 2022). This is set within a wider change in emphasis for many institutions, from 'ownership' to 'stewardship' (Brown and Peers 2003; Stanley 2007).

However, it is not always clear who is responsible for decisions on appropriate handling or use, and what guidance or policy is applicable. Consequently, the situation may arise in which gloves are worn by visitors who believe that they are respecting institutional requirements, without collection care staff indicating that this is not necessary as they in turn may feel it is inappropriate to appear to be questioning such a decision. This may be exacerbated by high-level institutional attitudes that prioritise preservation of collections over all over considerations, including access, interpretation and engagement (Classen and Howes 2006; Candlin 2004). As a result, heritage institutions can then appear at odds with communities seeking to reconnect to ancestrally-linked material, particularly where touch is an important part of that reconnection process, and can unwittingly be seen by those communities in a negative light. Glove policies should be tailored accordingly and have the flexibility to allow appropriate context-dependent judgements to be made. Ideally, there should be no 'one-size-fits-all' recommendations, although this can present problems when institutions wish to develop

collection care policies which are both appropriate and easy to apply. Openness and clarity of communication are vital, and can be supported by advice and guidelines designed to facilitate more inclusive engagement, such as those provided by the Indian Arts Research Center (2019a,b). These issues are explored more fully in the case study, 'Māori Experience of Taonga in Collections', below.

Case studies

The British Library

As the national library of the United Kingdom, the British Library (BL) preserves and gives access to the world's most comprehensive research collection, providing information services to academic, business, research and scientific communities and to anyone who wishes to consult the material either physically or in digital form. From a conservation perspective, this remit is interpreted as ensuring that the collection should be both accessible for use and preserved for as long as possible.

The BL's physical collection numbers an estimated 170 million items relating to every age of written civilisation, and undergoes significant increase annually; this represents material in numerous formats and from all cultures, dating from 3000 BC to the present day. While primarily paper- and film-based, the collections include an extensive array of material types and the majority of items comprise more than one material.

Importantly, the BL is a working Library with a user focus, which strongly differentiates the Library from a museum context: in short, the whole physical collection is potentially available to be handled. Caring for the collection is a library-wide concern, and all procedures and activities are designed to reduce risk. Although the responsibility for doing so lies with every member of staff and user coming into contact with items, Preventive Conservation, a team within the Collection Management department, provides the lead in setting and supplying standards, policy development, advocacy and advice, which includes the use, or not, of gloves.

For general use in reading rooms and across all library functions where collections are handled, gloves are not generally recommended. Instead, clean dry hands are endorsed. For specific collections, circumstances or materials where handling without gloves poses a higher risk (for example, metallic objects or photographs), the use of gloves may be appropriate. Such material is accessed under greater supervision in dedicated areas.

Risk to collections is the uppermost consideration when formulating these policies. The 10 agents of deterioration are all relevant to the BL collection (CCI 2017). Yet these risks do not exist in isolation, so responses to risks – such as the use, or not, of gloves – must be based on a comprehensive understanding of the nature of an individual item, its specific vulnerabilities and its requirements for use. Furthermore, solutions to any such problems must not exacerbate other risks or introduce new ones.

Physical forces, including general wear and tear, are evaluated to be the highest overall risk to the BL collections, including: forcing book spines open; dropping; tearing pages; and knocks and bumps associated with handling. Transporting collections from storage to reading rooms and within the reading room also risks physical damage.

To promote understanding rather than dictate a static policy to readers or staff, collection handling training, supported by video guidance (British Library 2019) advises users to consider the advantages and disadvantages of glove-use. The approach asks individuals to evaluate risks, emphasising that gloves should not be worn just because of a perceived norm with historic material. Users are advised that wearing gloves can:

- Contribute to loss of dexterity – rendering it harder to assess the fragility of the paper or substrate and creating a greater risk of damage.
- Pick up and transfer dirt between materials.

This standpoint is drawn from extensive practical experience and observation over the 50-year lifetime of the BL, as well as published research. The overall aim is to ensure gloves are used in appropriate circumstances, not all circumstances. The video guidance is presented alongside other videos demonstrating suitable handling techniques for a range of formats, thereby giving a holistic and contextualised overview of collection-use, rather than merely the right or wrongs of gloves.

Operational considerations sit alongside the risk management approach for gloves use. Across sites, the BL's 12 reading rooms have 1,200 reader desks and accommodate 400,000 reading room visits per year. In February 2023, 10,852 items were consulted in 4,865 distinct visits (a high number but still a 40 per cent drop from pre-COVID-19 years). If gloves were used for all visits, or even a significant proportion, then tens of thousands of pairs of 'disposable' gloves would be required annually. Purchase, storage, distribution, waste collection and eventual

recycling would necessitate much larger budgets and teams to manage these processes. The scale of BL operations render such activity unfeasible on a day-to-day basis.

The BL's commitment to sustainable practice also impacts on these considerations: 'The Library needs to provide stable and reliable collection storage while seeking to minimise the impact that its buildings and operations have on the environment' (British Library 2022a, 51). By 2025/26, the BL has committed to reduce its overall waste by 15 per cent, and within this ensure that less than 5 per cent goes to landfill and at least 70 per cent is recycled; by 2021/22, 73 per cent recycling was already achieved (British Library 2022a). To further embed a culture for sustainable practice, in 2023 a full time Sustainability Manager was employed for the first time.

In addition to formal governance, less formal but structured methods also have a significant impact on effective practice. A staff led network, the Sustainability Group, was established in 2020 to develop practical actions enabling a sustainable workplace (British Library 2022b). In 2023, the Group has over 150 members from all departments. The Group originated with staff in the conservation department whose trajectory as professionals is preservation – both of cultural heritage and beyond. Sustainable practices within conservation and in general collection care activities, including support of reading rooms and library users, are therefore at the heart of decision-making. Inevitably, single-use or low repeat use consumables, such as disposable gloves, became an early topic for discussion and exploration.

Despite the holistic risk approach at the BL, encompassing risk, operational and sustainability factors, the perception and general expectation around the use of 'white' gloves for historic material continues to be a theme in feedback. Regularly, users or viewers of television programmes who see handling without gloves respond in alarm or consternation. To this end, a response is provided detailing the risk management approach and the balancing of deterioration factors. Moreover, the BL Press Office reports that filming requests for library collections can demand the use of gloves specifically because of the perception that this is correct and expected.

Therefore, awareness and communication of risk, appropriate use and management of expectations are key to glove use in BL operations. Unsurprisingly, training and communication is an annual theme for the work of Preventive Conservation within the Library.

The Horniman Museum

The breadth of collections, material types and access needs at the Horniman Museum makes decision-making about the use and appropriateness of gloves a complex and many-layered one (Ridley 2022). To consider just three of the collection areas: the anthropology collection contains textiles, painted wooden surfaces, unpainted wood, basketry, bark cloth, lacquers, japanned surfaces, leather, hide and plastics, among other materials; the natural history collection includes taxidermy, fossils, entomological samples and fluid-preserved specimens; and the music and ethnomusicology collection contains a wide variety of musical instruments, encompassing a broad range of materials, with the added complication that some are still accessed for use.

As an aspect of collection care policies developed from the 1980s onwards, use of gloves to handle collection items has been generally encouraged where appropriate to safeguard both collections and users, informed by factors including material and physical composition, possible past treatments such as pesticide use, surface dirt and intended use. When gloves are not worn, clean, dry hands are always recommended. These recommendations are part of the broader suite of collection care support and advice, which incorporates appropriate housing and storage of objects, along with suitable training for staff, tailored to different levels of experience, expertise and access requirements.

These considerations required review and revision during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision was made to donate the museum's supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) to the National Health Service (NHS); nitrile gloves along with masks and plastic aprons were sent to the Mayor of Greenwich's appeal for PPE, organised by the Collections Manager, and nitrile gloves along with Tyvek suits to Charing Cross Hospital (Imperial Trust) Intensive Care Unit, organised by the Conservation Manager. As more normal activities began to resume, resupply within the museum was difficult due to their limited availability. The pandemic also increased awareness of issues such as surface-mediated transfer of contaminants. At the same time, increasing concerns about the emerging climate emergency prompted questions about the sustainability of materials used by the museum. Both circumstances made it necessary to think about the role of gloves, how their use might need to change and what types of gloves should be used, as well as placing a greater emphasis on cleaning, quarantine and rotation of objects. One outcome was a need to re-introduce a wider use of cotton gloves due to their greater availability than nitrile gloves, as well as their washability

and re-usability. This, in turn, made it necessary to ensure clarity regarding materials or situations for which cotton gloves would not be appropriate, in most cases due to poor grip, limited protection or both. It was made clear, for example, that they should not be used with polished ceramics, glass, taxidermy, fluid-preserved specimens and heavy objects. The choices in this decision-making were not necessarily clear-cut, and establishing the correct balance is still an ongoing process. Re-use of minimally soiled nitrile gloves was also accepted, especially as limitations in recycling options for these items became apparent.

Significant parts of the museum's collection are open to wider access and handling in a variety of different ways, and this also informs decisions on the use of gloves. For example, instruments from the music and ethnomusicology collections are still occasionally played, access is provided to source communities for artefacts originating in their societies and cultures (as discussed in more detail below) and the museum also has a large collection of items acquired specifically for public handling and interaction. Support for access of this kind varies by collection type and audience; advice is given on proper handling, and gloves are provided if appropriate. Where necessary, items (such as musical instruments) may be cleaned, but also come with a disclaimer that perfect removal of pesticide, dirt or other residues cannot be guaranteed. Decision-making is informed and tailored to the needs of those accessing the collection, and considered on a case-by-case basis.

These factors are of particular importance when working with source communities, ensuring that engagement and access (including handling and use) are not discouraged or subjected to arbitrary limits. In such situations, decisions on handling and glove use would be made on an individual basis, and ultimately would come down to case-by-case choices. To inform these choices, collection care staff provide health and safety advice, discuss the use of gloves, ensure they are available if requested, offer guidance and explanation on specific issues such as the presence of vulnerable metals or the possibility of pesticide residues. The decision-making process is fluid and inclusive, and based on a willingness to share knowledge and to learn. An important factor in the process, however, is the appreciation that the presence of collection staff may, itself, have an influence on these decisions.

Māori Experience of Taonga in collections

Taonga are heirlooms and treasures – items which have been imbued with power accrued over generations (MacAuley 1999; Rātima-Nolan 2022); they are forever spiritually linked to Māori and are not seen as

'objects' within Māoridom. Taonga which have been taken overseas or stored in an institution such as a museum do not lose this link; even if physically separated, they are not divorced from Māori and iwi (tribes). Māori, Pasifika and other Indigenous peoples are increasingly asserting ancestral rights to taonga held in western collections (Peers and Brown 2003; Stanley 2007), and so these heritage institutions need to aware of this and be cooperative and flexible in making taonga available, especially where they may have originally been acquired in ethically dubious circumstances (France-Presse 2018; Corlett 2021).

Reconnection with taonga can be deeply moving, and can help an institution to be seen as a kaitiaki (guardian), rather than simply as a repository of potentially stolen or looted material. Reconnection is a reciprocal process, a passing of both mauri and mana to and from the taonga; doing so acknowledges and pays respect to the ancestors who may have made, worn or wielded the taonga, and also breathes life back into the taonga from the descendent or connected individual. This restores the mauri that may have been lost when it was treated simply as a museum 'object' rather than something special and sacred. Reconnection takes place through touch, either with bare hands or through the act of hongi – the pressing of noses and the breath of life.

As noted above, gloves create a barrier. True reconnection is not achieved if this barrier is placed between the handler and the taonga itself, and an insistence on glove-wearing may be perceived as a western 'block' on the process of reconnection, preventing the deep and emotionally resonant uplift in mana and mauri which is important for both the taonga and the ancestrally-linked holder. Furthermore, the use of gloves can not only be seen as coldly scientific, but also highlights the power imbalance between the institution and the originating community, with both acting as an overt symbol that the taonga is perceived as 'museum property' (Makoare 2005). This can exacerbate the distress that may come from the original acquisition of the taonga. Although collection care considerations may underpin glove policy in an institution, they cannot be the only factor in such situations, and the needs of all audiences and stakeholders must be regarded and respected (Hand 2020).

The tikanga (correct practices and behaviours) associated with handling taonga provide guidance on how this may be done. If the taonga is durable enough, and there is no clear evidence or history of pesticide use, it should be made clear that clean, dry hands are acceptable to handling. To encourage and support proper cleaning of hands, a wahi whakanoa (Tokalau 2020; Blackman 2022) can be employed, a bowl or structure bearing water for the ritual washing of hands. This act removes

personal tapu, which could damage the mauri or life force of the taonga, and render the individual 'noa' or normal, with the water being the conduit; it also serves as an excellent way of ensuring clean hands before going into a collection area. The ritual act of washing may additionally place the whānau or visitor in a calm, mindful context, which can be helpful for handling.

It is important to note, however, that not all Māori are fully aware of the tikanga. They may not realise that gloves are not always needed. Equally, they may wish to avoid giving offence to the holding institution, if they believe that mandatory glove use is an institutional policy. The ability to insist in a large institution can be very difficult, especially in a foreign land. Where the tikanga or the giving/receiving of mauri through touch is not known, glove-use, through media saturation, can also appeal through its perception as 'ideal' curatorship, a desire to avoid being seen as willing to cause harm and a concern that actions or requests may damage future Māori-institution relations. In cases like these, the institution should offer the option to handle taonga without gloves and provide supporting advice (Hand 2020). For those who are strong in their tikanga, this would immediately show an organisation deeply understanding and committed to being a proper and active kaitiaki, and for those who are not, they would nonetheless be immensely appreciative.

This approach can be illustrated by the 2019 visit by a group made up of iwi from the North Island's Tūranganui-a-Kiwa (Poverty Bay) area, as well as representatives from Te Aparangi (The Royal Society of New Zealand), to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge. The purpose of the visit was to view and reconnect with taonga that had been brought to England in 1771 from Captain James Cook's first voyage into the Pacific and Aotearoa New Zealand. This provides excellent insight into the collaborative approach towards the kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of taonga held in heritage institutions, some of which may have been obtained through violence towards Māori.

The MAA approached this visit with experience gained from their long-standing policy of facilitating community access to taonga, highlighting possible risks such as potential pesticide residue and unrecorded conservation treatments, but recognising the importance of tactile connection in community interactions, and leaving the choice of glove usage to the individual (Hand 2022). This approach had been honed in previous collaborations and community interactions, and aligns with practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, in museums such as the Auckland War Memorial Museum (Pine 2022) and Tūhura Otago Museum (Arun

2022). Nick Tupara (Ngāti Oneone) was one of the group who journeyed to the MAA in 2019 (Tupara 2022), and noted:

> We went on that journey in order to make a cultural engagement, one that was essential both for our well-being and for that of our taonga … museums are barriers to our reconnection to our taonga, there to be viewed behind glass or in containers, and gloves are an extension of that, an effort to preserve time in a case, and anything else is seen as an intrusion by museums. For us, caring for the physical taonga requires the institution to also understand the spiritual aspect of the taonga (Figure 10.3).

Coming to the United Kingdom, Nick had expected to be told to wear gloves, but on being told it was his choice, he elected not to (although some of the group did). Nick described the moment of picking up a taiaha, a wooden weapon, as 'a profound engagement to touch without barriers, one that gave a deeper meaning in terms of being able to reconnect'. He continued,

> … it felt tika, truthful, to hold that taonga crafted by our tipuna [ancestors]. I really got a sense of the mātauranga [knowledge]; that was that koha [gift] to me, our tipuna speaking across time to engage with their people, to me, to pass on to their whakapapa, to us. I felt at ease to hold, to wield this taonga. And our koha to the museum was to reconnect, to reinvigorate the taonga, and to orientate them as they were used to, to give back, to demonstrate to the museum that [ancestral, lived] knowledge they didn't have.

The MAA, with their proactive support for the varied nature of community interactions and a understanding of how gloves can affect the transferral of mauri and mana, was able to provide an environment where Māori in turn were able to give back to the MAA, through their knowledge and lived experience. For example, Nick was able to demonstrate, through his knowledge of Mau rākau, the correct ways to both hold and wield the taonga, as his tipuna would have done, gifting that knowledge to the MAA, which would not have been possible while wearing gloves.

The process of reconnection, enhanced and accentuated through karakia (prayer) and by physical touch, provided a much deeper experience that not only benefited but empowered both the institution and tangata whenua, and revitalised the taonga themselves. In situations

Figure 10.3 Nick Tupara (Ngāti Oneone) reconnects with a tiheru (canoe bailer) during the group's visit to the United Kingdom in 2020. Courtesy of Rachel Hand.

like these, the flexibility of institutions like the MAA to support direct touch to taonga, showcases the institution as a responsive, respectful and mindful kaitiaki. Such actions can go a long way to building bridges between heritage institutions and communities.

Conclusion

Decision-making on the use of gloves to handle cultural heritage artefacts is not straightforward, so 'one-size-fits-all' approaches should be avoided. A wide range of factors need to be borne in mind when choosing an appropriate outcome, including collection care requirements, access needs, health and safety issues, training and experience, situation and context, glove types, institutional policies and cultural appropriateness; other factors, such as availability of resources and sustainability concerns, may also influence decisions. These decisions are not necessarily simple or obvious, and should be based on an informed, pragmatic risk management basis to achieve the most appropriate outcomes.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank their colleagues at the British Library and at the University of Glasgow for their help and support. PG would like to particularly thank Charlotte Ridley for the information she provided that formed the basis of the case study on the Horniman Museum. SRN would like to thank Nick Tupara for his kōrero and sharing the tikanga around our taonga, and Rachel Hand for her kind support and information.

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11

A healthy ageing approach to collections care

Cara Krmpotich

Introduction

Collections management, in large part, seeks to interrupt the natural ageing process of material objects. Together with conservators, collections managers create and mitigate environments that minimise objects' exposure to 'agents of deterioration' (Canadian Conservation Institute 2017): using inert packing materials and filters, collections are buffeted from the effects of light, the appetites of insects, the fluctuations of seasons, human contact and even physical proximity with other objects. The ideal for museum artefacts is often to mimic a kind of suspended animation; any signs of change or ageing should reflect an object's pre-museum life, not an ongoing life within the museum itself. While collections staff know that stopping an object from ageing is impossible, museum best practices advocate for slowing the ageing process as much as possible. In the museum sphere, active signs of ageing carry negative connotations, and imply an absence of care. But, if ageing is an inevitable process in an object's life, is there scope to reimagine how we care for ageing objects and to adjust professional expectations and practices accordingly?

In this chapter, I sketch out a model for a new ethics of collections care that draws from a model of human care, in which human beings and museum artefacts would share a key characteristic: a desire for healthy ageing. I offer this model to add to the possible benchmarks museum staff can use to express and evaluate care of collections. I am not proposing every museum reject existing standards, but rather seek to expand the range of acceptable standards for museums to choose from.

This is also not an argument to anthropomorphise artefacts. Rather, my proposal builds on precedents within already existing museum practices in which continued use and interactions with objects are understood to improve the longevity and well-being of artefacts. Musical instruments, for example, present a special class of museum object whose integrity includes an ability to produce sound as readily as the preservation of their physical form (see Beale and Pyrzakowski, this volume). For nearly four decades, museum staff working with historic instruments have recognised the need for instruments to be played if they are to age well (Barclay 1982; Lamb 2007). Likewise, Indigenous advocates have also emphasised the need for cultural belongings to have human contact, and be included in ceremony and cultural practices to remain spiritually well (e.g. Chavez Lamar 2019; Tapsell 1997; and see Kapuni-Reynolds; du Preez and Kuaiwa; McCarthy, Sadlier and Parata (this volume). Collections professionals working with ethnographic collections have adjusted their practices to support active handling and the integration of cultural belongings in community events (Clavir 2002; Gadoua 2014; Hays-Gilpen and Lomatewana 2013; Isaac et al. 2022; Krmpotich and Peers 2014; McCarthy 2016; Peers and Brown 2015; Richardson 2011). Heritage workers in living history sites, or responsible for machinery, further attest to the value of collections that 'run', work, or can be inhabited (Jordan and Cockbain 2006; Perry 2006; for a dissenting perspective on this, see Mann 1989).

It is important that the precedents for a healthy ageing model come from a variety of origins; this is not an argument to appropriate Indigenous world views and apply them in non-Indigenous settings. It is, instead, an argument to take seriously practices that challenge museum norms and to ask whether they can become central rather than peripheral or exceptional. Furthermore, a healthy ageing model that can speak to multiple kinds of collections is important if it is to be enacted in a variety of museums. A particular asset of a healthy ageing approach is that it stands to offer an ethical model for collections care that can be enacted in small and medium-sized museums just as readily (if not more effectively) as in large institutions. In many ways, my proposal for an ethics of care based in healthy ageing reflects Candlin's (2016) interest in 'micromuseology', in which she asks what museum studies would look like if it was written based on the activities of smaller, single-object-oriented, often amateur or hobbyist museums.

I was inspired to pursue a healthy ageing model by the interactions between senior Indigenous women living in the city of Toronto, Canada, and a collection of cultural belongings, often of a similar age to the

women, stewarded by the cultural and social service organisation, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (Howarth and Knight 2015; Krmpotich et al. 2016; Krmpotich 2018).[1] The flexibility of working with a community collection (as opposed to a strictly museological collection) allowed for the kind of decentring encouraged by Candlin. Although we used museum knowledge to support the safety of the artefacts, we did not need to prioritise accreditation criteria or professional standards. We were able to follow community values and priorities without creating tension between the people-focused aspects of the work and museological expectations of what caring for objects should look like. In five years working with the senior women and senior artefacts, we cared about, and cared for, both people and artefacts and were able to assess how a shift in priority from stasis to activity affected the health of the collection. This experience 'managing' a community collection resonates with evidence from within the museum sector that indicates there is space to recalibrate our sense of what values and actions constitute responsible, ethical and professional behaviour.

Healthy ageing

In 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a report on healthy ageing, taking the position that ageing is positive, and elderly people are valuable (2015, 25). Subsequently, the WHO declared 2021–30 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing, which sought to enact a global collaboration to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live. The need for healthy ageing measures has become all the more apparent as nations continue to understand the severity of COVID-19 for seniors, both in terms of the risks of the virus itself as well as the consequences of social isolation. This is not dissimilar to the rethinking happening in museums regarding preservation that comes at the expense of access and engagement.

Most museum scholars and practitioners interested in healthy ageing focus on the value of museum visits and programmes for human well-being (Camic and Chatterjee 2013; Chatterjee and Noble 2016; Silverman 2010). In the UK we find localised programming integrating 'museum kits' and handling collections to support patient care and the overall wellbeing of seniors (e.g. Chatterjee and Noble 2009; Phillips 2008; Solway et al. 2015), as well as broader partnerships exploring the institutional and social linkages between museums and public health (O'Neill and Hooper 2020). In Canada, there are multiple programmes

co-delivered by the Alzheimer Society and art galleries and museums designed for individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's and their care givers, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Windsor, Royal Ontario Museum and The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery. Additionally, beginning in 2018 in Montreal, doctors are allowed to prescribe visits to the Musée Des Beaux Arts to assist with patient wellbeing (Musée des Beaux Arts 2018). Preliminary research by Beynon (personal communication October 23, 2023) is shifting the focus from visitors to volunteers, and takes up a healthy or successful ageing lens to the ways volunteerism in museums can provide opportunities for ageing adults to have a sense of purpose, identity and social connections – three characteristics identified in gerontology literature as central to successful ageing. Meanwhile, the American Alliance of Museums has been surveying and reporting on museums' roles in supporting 'Creative Ageing' (Schwarzer 2021), encouraging museums to expand their audiences for education, and to recognise the benefits of lifelong learning for the growing demographic of seniors in the United States.

I argue that healthy ageing as a framework holds the potential to reimagine not only human wellbeing, but also artefact wellbeing and care. It provides an additional ethical perspective upon which to construct and evaluate 'best practices' for collections management.

The WHO observes that older age frequently involves significant changes, including shifts in role and social positions, and the need to deal with the loss of close relationships (WHO 2015, 25). Undoubtedly, when objects enter a museum, they undergo a shift in role and social position. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998) writes of the ways ethnographic items in particular are excised from their original contexts, and relocated (if not dislocated) to the museum. For some kinds of objects such as artworks, entering a museum may enhance their role and social position. For other objects, entry into a museum removes them from daily routines and special occasions. For all objects, their primary relationships are likely to change as duties of care transfer from owners and donors to registrars, curators, and conservators and domestic settings give way to storage cabinets or public galleries. External critiques of museums depict the museum as a place where objects die, and caution that museum processes that seek to slow material ageing can cause a social death (Candlin 2015). For those working in museums, objects are not 'dead', but current best practices of care that restrict light exposure, handling and usage are readily perceived by communities of origin as neglect. Artefacts that are kept in the dark, with minimal staff or visitor interactions, very much resemble 'shut-ins'.

It is within a context of shifting roles and relationships that the WHO (2015, 28) defines healthy ageing. They describe healthy ageing as:

> ... the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. Functional ability comprises the health-related attributes that enable people to be and to do what they have reason to value. It is made up of the intrinsic capacity of the individual, relevant environmental characteristics and the interactions between the individual and these characteristics.

'Healthy ageing' in a museum context, then, would entail developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older objects. It requires attention to the intrinsic qualities of the artefact, the environment in which it lives, and the interactions between artefact and environment. Ultimately, a healthy ageing approach in museums requires staff to create sympathetic environments and to attend to the attributes that enable older objects to be and to do what the objects have reason to value.[2] Before addressing the question of what objects value, it is worth recognising that current collections management practices already attend to 'the intrinsic capacity' of an individual artefact through, for example, condition reports that document materials, stability, wear or points of weakness. Curatorial expertise further considers intrinsic capacities of objects whether tied to their materiality or associated intangible knowledge. And preventive care in museums already focuses on the environment and the interactions between an artefact and its environment. In short, museum practices and structures already exist in ways that can support a healthy ageing model. But, to enable older objects to be and to do what they have reason to value requires a re-articulation of museum practices. *What* we do in museums does not always need to change to support healthy ageing, but *why* we do it – our ethical principles informing collections care decisions – does.

What do ageing objects value?

In order to clarify their statement that people need to be able 'to be and do what they have reason to value', the WHO focuses not on *what* people value, but rather on the conditions that make it possible for people to express and enact their values. The WHO offers a set of characteristics for ageing people that contribute to a state of functional ability, and in turn help them achieve whatever it is that matters to them. Ageing

individuals, they posit, need: to have a role or identity, relationships, security, the possibility of enjoyment, autonomy and the potential for personal growth.[3]

It is relatively easy for collections managers to imagine how ageing museum artefacts could have a role or identity, relationships and security. Registrars identify and name artefacts as standard documentary practice, while cataloguing puts those items into relationships with other artefacts in the collections. Exhibitions, in turn, are premised upon manifesting physical and intellectual relationships between objects. Programming extends this further, utilising physical and intellectual interactions between people and objects to establish material and intangible relationships between persons, concepts and artefacts. Preventive conservation actively considers security and, as Michalski (2004) describes it, seeks to minimise risks to collections at all times. All of these existing actions could be extended or further supported through a healthy ageing approach to the work of collections management. Attending to cataloguing backlogs and reparative description (Dalal-Clayton and Rutherford n.d.; Wood et al. 2014) is all the more important, for example, if we understand that such records are essential for museum staff and audiences to know an object's identity and relationships, and how these may have changed through time. Investments in collections spaces that provide safe environments for an object to fulfil its role(s) and be in relationships would recognise that 'security' extends beyond preventing theft and vandalism, to consider notions of emotional security – the creation of 'brave' or 'safe' spaces, and familiar or comforting surroundings (see also Fortney and Beale, this volume).

Providing objects opportunities for the possibility of enjoyment, personal growth, or the expression of autonomy requires more lateral thinking and care to not simply anthropomorphise artefacts and their desires. Caution needs to be taken that we do not presume objects value or need the same things as ageing human beings. Nevertheless, it seems safe to speculate that for most artefacts whose origins include human social and cultural worlds, existing as a museum 'shut-in' away from other objects, human interlocutors and the world around them, limits those artefacts' likelihood of experiencing enjoyment, autonomy and personal growth. We might also consider the analogy that museums are carceral spaces, and that visiting cultural objects in museums is akin to visiting family in prison. Separated by glass, under the watchful eye of guards/staff, on a schedule determined by someone else, it is hard to imagine such visits as autonomous or enjoyable. When thinking of the rights of humans if and when their functioning declines, the WHO cautions 'institutional

settings are sometimes seen as dehumanizing and as posing structural and cultural barriers that impede social interactions' (2015, 36). It is worth imagining what interactions with collections can and do look like when music or food is involved, or similarly fresh air, games (Krmpotich and Peers 2014), creative expression (Northington 2021, 33–6; Ortega-Pol 2021, 31–2; Schwarzer 2021, 40–44; Udevitz 2021, 37–9), and physical intimacy (Chavez Lamar 2019; Peers and Brown 2015). Such interactions as they exist in museum studies and museum anthropology literature do so in tension with 'normal' collections practices. Healthy ageing as an approach would normalise such collections environments, and understand staff as having a responsibility to make such interactions possible. A successful museum would be one that preserves social life, not only an object's physical life.

The WHO's openness to what are desirable roles, identities, relationships and expressions of autonomy, enjoyment and personal growth is well-suited to the heterogeneity of museum collections. Fossils, cellos, spinning wheels and family photographs may need and desire very different things. Again, rather than seek to predict what any one ageing individual may want or desire, the WHO turns to social and physical processes, asking how ageing people achieve what matters to them. They identify an additional five abilities as necessary conditions for ageing individuals to achieve what matters to them. What these five abilities suggest is that, contrary to collections management best practices that seek stasis, a healthy ageing approach to collections care requires movement, engagements and activity. Translating the WHO's framework from human care to collections care, a healthy ageing approach would mean museum artefacts need the ability to: move around, build and maintain relationships, meet their basic needs, learn, grow and make decisions and contribute.

It is important to emphasise that collections management activities, then, would no longer be assessed by the absence, or minimisation, of change. Rather, healthy ageing approaches to collections management would be assessed by how well staff decisions enable objects to move around, build and maintain relationships, meet their basic needs, learn, grow and make decisions and contribute. This is not a model of *constant* movement and interaction; it anticipates the need for rest and respite. As such, moving around, building and maintaining relationships, and meeting basic needs are components of healthy ageing that have ready parallels with current collections management strategies. Learning, growing and making decisions, as well as contributing, are more akin to autonomy, personal growth and enjoyment, and require lateral thinking.

'Moving around' is usually considered one of the riskiest behaviours in collections management as it involves handling, lack of control and vibrations, all of which are understood as risks to the physical longevity of an item. However, within a healthy ageing framework, mobility for the elderly is desirable and necessary. Mobility supports autonomy and relationship building. Applied to museum settings then, collections management would need to also understand mobility as essential for artefact wellbeing. Collections management values and language would need to reflect this shift in perspective. Our job becomes one of encouraging mobility and creating mobility devices that recognise the necessity of movement, rather than characterising movement primarily as a high-risk scenario.

In our work with the senior women and collections at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, we implemented a joint storage and movement strategy for the collection using sturdy, but lightweight Rubbermaid totes. When stored in a working office space, the opaque plastic kept the light out, and deterred insects, dust or other debris from settling on the artefacts. When being transported next door to the seniors' residence Common Room for artefact handling and talking circle sessions, they could be carried across the laneway even in rainy, windy or snowy conditions. Normally, the economics of museum best practices means it is cheaper to move people than objects; this design for collections care made it easier to move objects to people. In this instance, the objects were moving a relatively short distance on a frequent basis. In comparison, long-term loans within museum practice already anticipate movement over a longer duration and potentially greater distances. Either way, the overall goal remains an approach to collections care that recognises that an artefact's capacity to move prevents isolation, prevents neglect and encourages relations. Mobility equals care, not risk.

Relationships are an increasing focus of museum and heritage work, as well as museum anthropology. This is true for source community involvement in exhibition building and collections visits (examples of which are cited throughout this chapter), but it is also an apt description for linked data projects, localised cataloguing schemes and digital reunification projects that seek to create connections across institutions and between collections and publics (e.g. Allison-Cassin 2016; Geismar and Mohns 2011; Newell 2012) By utilising metadata in tandem with community-centred and scholarly research, cultural institutions are seeking ways to reconnect artefacts based on origins, geography, material or medium, subject, creator, function or other connections – in essence, expanding upon the range of relationships

their original catalogues anticipated to make legible a fuller range of relationships desired by communities and publics. As Co-Director of the Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC), I have shared responsibility for 22,000 digital records representing Indigenous heritage of the Great Lakes held in cultural institutions around the world. We endeavour to find ways to augment or adjust traditional museum catalogue records and archival finding aids to assist people in locating and effectively connecting to cultural belongings – with a current emphasis on Indigenous youth, artists, makers and researchers. Since its start in 2005, GRASAC has, for example, included seasonal time and ceremonial time fields in our database to facilitate a broader range of temporal relationships beyond the Gregorian calendar (Krmpotich 2017). We are also currently trying out a new method for writing descriptions of cultural belongings based on the philosophy that these items are relatives; this overrides an impetus to create catalogue records that fulfil a functional need to locate items in museum storage. In this re-cataloguing work, we are guided in our writing to create descriptions that, if a person were to encounter them online, they would feel comfortable reading them as descriptions of their human relatives. This is a humanising act, directed toward the cultural belongings and those individuals, communities and nations related to them (Dalal-Clayton and Rutherford n.d.). But we are also mindful of the relationships that exist between the cultural belongings and plant and animal nations and relatives, as evidenced within the materials the belongings are comprised of. Our work is also considering how these non-human relationships can be more fully acknowledged in our records.

Whether items need and want to move around, or need and want to feel secure in their relationships, their basic needs need to be met. In many ways, current museum practice does this well. Museum best practices, for example, were used to design a support for a hide bag decorated with beadwork and shells in the collection of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. It is on a board to provide support, and gently held in place with cotton twill tape. Through a healthy ageing lens, this board support becomes a mobility device – akin to a walker or mobility scooter. It encourages mobility, which in turn can encourage interactions with others and the potential to build new relationships. Museum practice can turn to conservation advice for musical instruments, which exists as an exception compared to most museum best practices. Instruments must be played to stay healthy – that is, when we understand their sonic capacities as essential to

their functional ability and healthy ageing. Historically, museum best practices recommended interventions and treatments that favoured instruments' physical rather than sonic longevity. Haida wooden wind instruments at the British Museum, for example, were treated with arsenic to counteract the wood's attractiveness to pests. In storage, the instrument was not played and it dried out. Whereas the instrument's basic needs to produce sound required the moisture in human breath, it received arsenic treatments instead to meet the museum's need for physical longevity. Today, its basic needs as a musical instrument are compromised. Any time a person wants to make sound with it, we risk ruining its ability to ever make sound again. During a visit from a Haida delegation to the British Museum in 2009, museum staff supported Jason Alsop's desire to try playing the instrument. This was a gesture toward its basic needs – but much too late. The basic needs of musical instruments and the capacity of musical instruments to push and clarify our sense of 'functional ability' can inspire us to rethink collections care more broadly.

The capacity for museum artefacts to 'learn, grow, and make decisions' can be difficult to articulate without anthropomorphising them or without adopting cultural ontologies in which animacy is understood to exist in objects (Bennett 2010; Bruchac 2019; Raymond 2021). The former, as I have stated, is not my goal; the latter may be necessary and perhaps already quite familiar to those who care for collections. In this instance, it can be helpful to start with cultural objects that are understood to be animate and to have agency. As Matthews, Roulette and Brook Wilson write, 'Anishinaabe other-than-human persons [e.g. ceremonial objects] have the capacity to act in the world, and that, given the right social environment, this can happen in museums' (Matthews et al. 2021, 5). Precisely because Anishinaabe pipes can be diplomatic actors, Matthews, as Curator of Anthropology at the Manitoba Museum, and her colleagues revisited their perception of pipes as 'sacred' objects inappropriate for public display to ask what roles pipes-as-diplomats could and should play in the museum (see also Haakanson 2004). The *We Are All Treaty People* exhibit team was advised by Elders and Chiefs that pipes were central to communicating the intentions of Indigenous peoples and the treaty agreements they made. Moreover, certain pipes were identified as having 'the necessary combination of competence and public purpose to be comfortable in an exhibit', and even that certain individual pipes would 'appreciate' the task of educating members of the public about Indigenous treaty-making practices (Matthews et al. 2021, 13–14). Museum staff worked with Elders to create a way of inviting the

pipes to be in the exhibition; it was understood that the pipes themselves would decide whether to take up this diplomatic and teaching role for a twenty-first century audience.

In accepting the invitation to be part of the exhibit, the pipes are contributing to treaty education in the province of Manitoba. Museum collections are formed because of a belief that museums contribute to society – usually expressed as the potential to educate, inspire, if not 'improve' citizens, and ultimately to be a 'force for good in the neighbourhood' (Ward 2020, 126). But to 'contribute' in the sense the WHO describes requires the artefact (not only the visitor) to play an active role. The pipes described 'contribute' as *teachers*, not passive instruments. The capacity for active contributions is also described by Spary (this volume), who chronicles the ceremonial and essential role of parliamentary collections in the conduct of government. Similarly, the Haida Gwaii Museum and American Museum of Natural History arranged for the loan of a carved bentwood chest to Haida Gwaii, Canada from the New York museum in order that the chest could be physically included in a potlatch where the political leader, carver, and singer Guujaaw claimed the chief's name Gidansda. The chest attested to Guujaaw's matrilineal family history and his clan's rights and responsibilities. The presence of the chest worked in tandem with Gidansda's regalia, newly carved boxes and settee, and coppers, contributing to Gidandsa's legitimacy to take up the role of clan chief.

The notion of contributing can also bridge the healthy ageing of collections to broader museum work, outside the usual purview of collections management. Artworks and artefacts included in museum kits as described at the outset of this chapter provide the basis for therapy through conversation, creative expression and storytelling, even though they were likely not originally created with a therapeutic function in mind. In these instances, the artworks and artefacts might be understood to *grow* as they expand their range of purposes through participating in these programmes. This prompts me to question whether collections staff would entertain the idea of adding 'therapeutic' to such objects' functional descriptions and catalogue records, reflecting this continued evolution in their biographies.

Conclusion

A healthy ageing approach allows/requires collections managers to shift their notions of risk, risk management and ethical stewardship. Underlying the WHO's advocacy for healthy ageing is a recognition that,

> [a] paradigm shift is needed in the way that society understands ageing. Pervasive ageist stereotypes of older people as uniformly frail, burdensome and dependent are not supported by evidence and limit society's ability to appreciate and release the potential human and social resources inherent in older populations. (WHO 2015, 159)

Indeed, Matthews et al. (2021) describe the Manitoba Museum's work with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, Elders Council of the Manitoba Chiefs, and the pipes themselves as a paradigm shift. Healthy ageing, then, requires museums to lift the limits they have set on artefacts to better release and utilise their potential in collections. A growing number of museum programmes involving active handling provide evidence that collections are not at risk through handling and activation, and stand to contribute to society broadly when allowed to be involved in activities outside the narrow scope of museum exhibitions and education.

In our bi-weekly artefact handling sessions with seniors, we would enjoy lunch together: a potluck of salads, sandwiches, baked goods and coffee. There would be apple pie and coffee cups on the tables, alongside the collections. It was a decision that most collections managers would label as risky, if not reckless, unprofessional or unethical. However, those were the necessary conditions to care for that collection and that group of seniors.

It is important to state clearly that healthy ageing does not mean a collections care approach where artefacts are in *constant* movement, activations or public-oriented roles. Indeed, the WHO's observations about healthy ageing note that as part of the ageing process, individuals tend to select fewer and more meaningful goals and activities; optimise their existing abilities through practice and new technologies; and compensate for the losses of some abilities by finding other ways to accomplish tasks (WHO 2015, 38). In thinking about healthy aging for artefacts, museum staff would need to share in the responsibility of selecting meaningful activities, investigating the ways new technologies could be assistive and thinking creatively about how collections are integrated into activities, within and beyond the museum.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Bradley Clements, Megan Hull and Alice Stevenson for commenting on early drafts of this chapter, offering thought-provoking and conceptually rich responses and questions to the idea of healthy ageing. This chapter has also been enriched by audience questions following the presentation of this material at the University of Toronto Scarborough's Anthropology department seminar, Master of Museum Studies Community Conversations and graduate Collections Management class. Any omissions or oversights remain my responsibility.

Notes

1   There are some quite old things in the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto's collection (circa 1880–1890), but many of the items in the collection share similar life spans with the seniors: roughly 60 to 70 years old. The geographies of the objects also complement the geographies of the seniors. They come from multiple communities across Canada, with significant connections to urban locations as well as ties to reserves. The collection joined the Toronto Indigenous community in 1976, when the Anglican Church Women dispersed what it called its 'curios' collection. Sixty-seven First Nations pieces were given to Mildred Redmond, a formidable figure and Indigenous rights activist, whom many of the women knew and remembered fondly (Krmpotich et al. 2016).

2   Arguably, healthy ageing strategies are not only directed toward older objects, but can begin at the outset of an object's life and/or when an object is accessioned. When museums commission artworks, for example, it is not uncommon for them to set parameters that enable that artwork to age well in a public setting. My thanks to Bradley Clements for questioning when processes of healthy ageing begin.

3   LaPlaca Cohen and Culture Track's 2021 report, *Untapped Opportunity: Older Americans and the arts* (2022) identifies three very similar priorities for ageing adults, specifically in terms of why and how they engage with arts and culture: a desire for belonging, learning new things, and a sense of accomplishment. Feeling a sense of accomplishment, I argue, resonates with the ability to contribute, discussed further in this chapter.

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Part II Response
Claim what is stored here
Devorah Romanek

> Come to the museums. On all the gates, the pillars, put up posters:
> 'Workers enter here. Claim what is stored here. It is yours. Labor of
> artists; for the mind must be worked before it yields, plowed, hoed,
> watered and weeded, till the ripened vision is plucked by the acting
> hand; and for what use? Not to be wiped on aching eyes; not to be
> draped a shroud of dreams upon a stillborn day! but plans to be
> enacted; visions to be made real within the workers world.' (Salzman
> and Zanderer 1978)

Thus concludes American Imagist poet Isidor Schneider's poem, 'To The
Museums', as found in a collection of Social Poetry of the 1930's, and
a clarion call echoed more broadly in the chapters in this part about
contemporary collection care in museums. The call for greater access in
museums has been around for a while. In Museum Studies, the protests
at art museums in the 1960s and 1970s are sometimes cited as an origin
point for such a demand (Wallace 2017); sometimes with Ivan Karp and
Steven Lavine's *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991) being a great encapsulation of
thought from the 1980s. But the questions – what is going on here, what
are museums about, who are they for, who do they exclude, who do they
oppress, and what are they doing? – has always been there, since the
moment people began to display things in glass and later acrylic cases.
From the inception of museums, some have been displayed, some have
been invited to see what and who is on display, and others have been
excluded from this invitation.

  For example, in 1696, some 40 years after the founding of one of
the earliest museums proper, the *Museum Wormianum* in Leiden (Worm
1655), Hans Sloane, the founder of the British Museum collection,
published his *Catalogus plantarum* (Sloane 1696), a catalogue of his

Jamaican botanical collection. It was written in Latin, and Sloane was determined to 'present himself not just as a traveler or empirical collector'(Byrnes 2017). Colonists in Jamaica, however, complained that they could not read Latin. People have been clamouring for access to museums and their collections for a long time. Inclusion joined this conversation in the twentieth century, as has the call for decolonisation, even as many have questioned the ability to decolonise what is considered by many an inherently colonised space (Kassim 2017; Lorde 2018).

In the chapters in this part some novel things are happening. In the concepts, examples, and case studies on offer, we see real change in motion and action, finally and at long last. Yes, throughout the history of museums change has taken place, but against the drumbeat of demand for greater access and inclusion, at best we, or many of us who work in the field, generally agree that this boat has been way too slow to turn. 'We' have in fact inhibited its turning. In the chapters in this part, we do see awakening of objects that have been silent and waiting (Beale and Pyrzakowski); reconnection of people to ancestrally-linked material (Rogerson, Garside and Rātima-Nolan); a way forward beyond a culture of compliance to a genuine commitment to social justice (Cecilia); 'an argument to take seriously practices that challenge museum norms and to ask whether they can become central rather than peripheral or exceptional' (Krmpotich); and the necessity of practicing adaptation, flexibility and collaboration in managing museum collections in order to honour process and intangible heritage as much as the object proper (Spary).

One of the most powerful and useful aspects of this collection of chapters is that this conversation centres on collection care. Much of the conversation around access and inclusion in museums, as all of the authors in this part address one way or the other, has long been about access for visitors to exhibitions, focused upon museum curators, designers and educators as agents in the museum who are concerned with this idea. However, these chapters invite in so many other necessary agents and functions in the museum vis-à-vis collection care functions, blowing the conversation open, and expanding it to where it needs to be for real action to take place, and for genuine change in such institutions to take hold.

That the action of these chapters takes place 'back-of-house' sort of (because the back-of-house/front-of-house dichotomy often employed in museums is itself challenged by the type of collections highlighted in these chapters) brings this wider museum conversation about access and inclusion finally into its proper broad context. Great hay is often

made, as it should be, about how much of museum collections reside in storage, accessible only to museum staff and privileged researchers. The conversation now finally includes the back-of-house collections care realm, making it feel as though Pinocchio might actually get the chance to be real. Pinocchio is an intentionally mined metaphor here, because the whole museum needs to be a part of the decolonising action of creating access and inclusion, and without all actors in museums being a part of this endeavour, and without all aspects of access being considered, we who work in museums have been no better than the wooden Pinocchio with his dishonesty and tell-tale nose, not meaning what we say.

This is what communities and individuals who have been excluded in and from museums need: not just a chance to participate in how they are represented front-of-house, but an opportunity to engage with, in the deepest sense, the material culture that is, after all, theirs. To make music, put hand, lips and hearts to what is truly theirs.

Alice Beale and Tom Pyrzakowski, both of the South Australian Museum, offer a real-time look at re-awakening collections through a project with Yidaki, more commonly but incorrectly known as a didjeridu, that reside in the South Australia Museum collection. The authors take us on a sensory journey, as many chapters in this part do, to think anew about what standards in registration and conservation and overall collection care could look like when working with collections that have deep community ties. The chapter details the process developed in consultation with Yolgnu community and conservators from Artlab Australia to 'awaken a historic collection of Yidaki'.

Beale and Pyrzakowski outline how traditional museum standards inhibit community engagement with objects, and in fact can damage objects. They draw this conclusion when they learn, through community engagement, that what is most important about this musical instrument is its sound, not its form or surface decoration. Indeed other authors in this part make similar observations about musical instruments specifically (Garside, Rātima-Nolan and Rogerson; Krmpotich) as well as other objects that are or could be meant to be used and perhaps should be made accessible for use and/or kept in some kind of working or operational – functional – condition (Cecilia; Krmpotich; Spary). In keeping with the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century-theorising in cultural anthropology and museum studies (think of the postmodern lineup from Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean François Lyotard to James Clifford and Francis Fukuyama [Klein 1995, 275]), the project in question evolves to base the collections management strategy on local needs, making the plan contingent on what the living Yolngu participants desire and want.

However, in this scenario this involves edge-of-your-seat, real-time risk-taking in relation to museum collection care, the conservation-minded equivalent of submerging the museum collection yidaki in a river.

The revelations regarding the long-term damage caused by the application of common museum standards in relation to collections care invite philosophical interrogation of what a museum is and who it is for, a theme variably intoned throughout all the chapters here. Much in this chapter, and in others, considers what living people need, as individual agents and as part of communities, but here the question centres on sound, and how historical cultural objects can create contemporary, needed sound, as part of an ongoing lineage of intangible heritage, contrasting the sound of silence with the living song, and how this might weigh against the conventional notion of 'damage' when museum objects are put into contemporary use.

One of the real strengths of this chapter is its detailed tracing of the journey and methods of decision-making and practice to accommodate community needs. It makes clear that breaking with long-held standards to achieve a mutually desired outcome, desired by both the community and museum, can be at once risk taking as well as deeply thought through. The authors make clear that this process was challenging, but well worth the effort: 'What seemed like an easy and natural thing when standing amongst the simulated stringy bark forest in the exhibition was in fact a long, often fraught process that pushed the limits of professional ethics and practicality'. Overall, this chapter does a remarkable job highlighting how a reconsideration of collection care standards in working with community can reawaken not just objects, but museums as well, inviting new relationships with community that keep collections alive and relevant.

In Chapter 10, Paul Garside, Scott Rātima-Nolan and Cordelia Rogerson use three case studies to illuminate flexible approaches to one of the most commonly recognised practices of collection care: the wearing of gloves while handling collections. Indeed, as the authors point out throughout the chapter, glove-wearing is such a commonly recognised practice of collections care it has become a trope and I would venture even a meme (Figure S2.1). The authors point out that the general public's recognition of glove wearing equaling good collection care puts museums and heritage institutions at a disadvantage in taking flexible approaches when handling collections, because the public themselves are often outraged by a lack of glove wearing - one of the Frankenstein's monsters that museums have created that have grown beyond our control in public perception of museum collections.
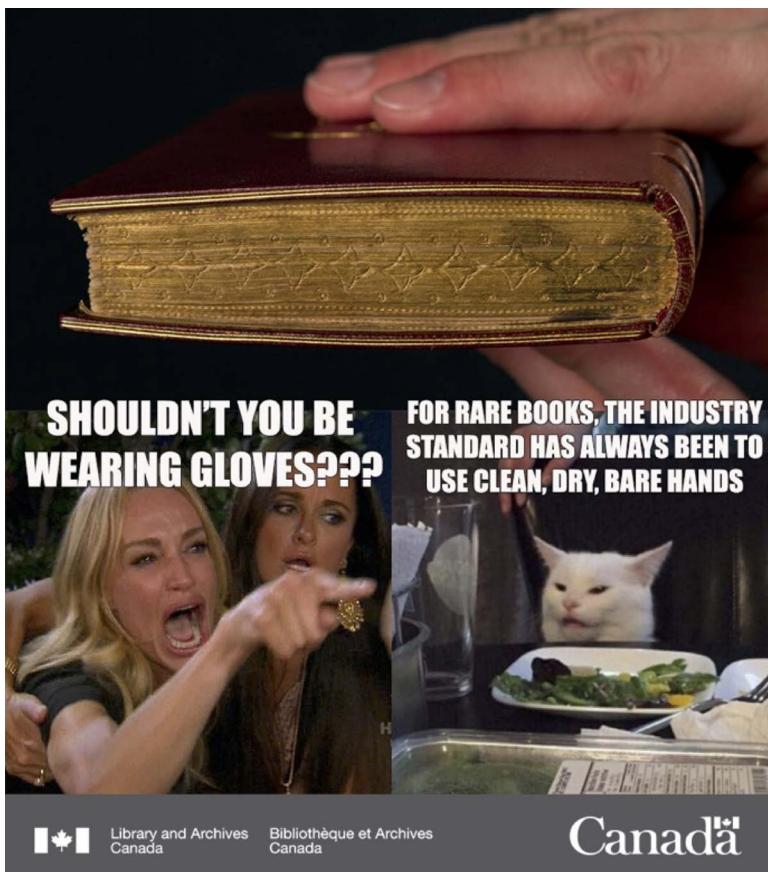
Figure S2.1 Library and Archives Canada meme, from their Facebook page, encouraging publics to learn more about the nuances of glove use. Posted 6 January 2020. https://www.facebook.com/LibraryArchives.

This chapter packs a contemporary punch by taking as its starting point the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has altered global understanding of human touch and of gloves. This underscores that gloves provide protection in two directions, protecting both museum objects and people, a point made throughout. Through three varied case studies, the authors make it clear that gloves can be both a physiochemical and tactile as well as a conceptual barrier, which has human and cultural implications. They make clear too that these barriers come to manifest not only between objects and persons, but between groups and hierarchies of people, between glove and non-glove wearing people, and this can signify variably in a museum and heritage context.

The British Library case study affords the opportunity to consider an actively used collection, a working collection if you will, the first of two such examples in this part. One of the highlights of this part is the question of sustainability in general, and as specifically related to the quantity of gloves that would be needed at the British Library if a more traditional and blanket approach to glove-wearing were taken. Other chapters consider sustainability from a number of perspectives, lending greater integrity and implication to the discussion. Sustainability and climate change have to be on every heritage sector worker's agenda, as Janes and Sandell's excellent 2019 work, *Museum Activism* argues, including Lyons and Bosworth's attention in that volume to the museum's role in climate change activism.

The next case study considers the use of gloves in the Horniman Museum collection, which also considers COVID-19 and the climate change emergency. However, the Horniman is a more conventional museum than the British Library with more typical museum collections, making the Horniman's move of donating all their gloves to local authorities in need during the COVID-19 crisis a much more interesting look in some ways regarding glove use (or not) in collections handling and care. Further, given the anthropological nature of that collection, the authors delve into the issues of community engagement with collections in a more in-depth manner than the British Library case study.

It is the third case study, the one at the University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology that really dives into the issue of gloves and how they factor into community engagement with collections, as it observes Māori experience of Taonga (heirlooms and treasures) in collections. This example calls into question the very nature of what an object is or might be, as Maori concepts of Taonga are seen to be imbued with power accrued over generations (MacAulay 1999; Rātima-Nolan 2022 cited in Garside, Rātima-Nolan and Rogerson this volume). The necessity of touch, with hands or nose, as part of the reciprocal transaction of connection and power makes clear that gloves can be an inhibition. The deft and flexible approach required for decisions in the use of gloves that this chapter articulates is not unlike the previous chapter, and the need for contingent thinking and practice that does not rule out informed, pragmatic risk management. The inclusion of thoughts on sustainability are also likewise appreciated and timely.

Chapter 7 by Rafie Cecilia is dense in both practical connections and theoretical deep-dives, as Cecilia takes on challenging ableism and including non-normative bodies and practices in collections care. Here the thinking is both local and contingent, but also broad when the author

asks us to consider, writ large, non-normative knowledge and embodied practices. It especially challenges us to consider how ableist museums and heritage institutions can be not just when dealing with those outside the institution, but also in our hiring practices. This chapter does indeed hit close to home. As the author makes clear, no meaningful change can happen until museums engage in more diverse hiring practices than they do currently. The author also makes the essential point that 'affordances of care are intersectional', highlighting the ways in which contemporary social movements are really bringing this idea and accountability to our institutions.

Here too the author illustrates the way that the exclusion of non-normative bodies and practice are human and political. It does not let us off the hook as far as our own moral implication is concerned, making clear that museums are not, and never were, apolitical, and that we cannot shirk our role on the political stage. Overall, I would say this chapter and the following by Krmpotich are the most humanising of those in this part, intoning 'when we consider the notion that care of collections involves caring for people and relations and knowledge, not only physical artefacts, questions arise around the political structure of power around epistemologies of care'.

In laying out his argument, the author uses numerous case studies involving artists and inclusive art projects giving us ample avenues of entry from which to approach this topic. Through these examples the author makes clear that we in museums have real scope to facilitate larger societal change toward a more socially just world. In addition to questions of inclusion, Cecilia takes care to highlight the potential for disruption, good trouble if you will, through the inclusion of non-normative bodies in accessing and engaging with museum collections, highlighting the notion that 'disability is a valued human experience' that ought not be excluded from these activities. When the author dives into critical disability Indigenous methodologies, we are again likewise returned to the theme that in consideration of access and inclusion, 'knowledge and culture are contingent and derive meaning from place and contextual social, political and local situations'.

Cara Krmpotich makes a compelling case for the healthy ageing of objects and collections concerning collections care, taking us on a clear but profound journey into both theory and practice, beginning with the proposition that rather than objects being held in 'suspended animation' in collections, they indeed do and should have an ongoing life in the museum itself. In this way the author makes a case for seeking to 'expand the range of acceptable standards for museums to choose

from'. Krmpotich makes this case by setting human ageing into analogy of the ageing of objects and collections. The author explicitly invites us to consider the ways in which a 'shift in priority from stasis to activity … [effects the health of collections]', health and wellbeing of humans and museum objects taking a central role in this chapter. The amount of agency the author affords collections and objects, in addition to humans, is expansive, giving us new ways to think about the dialectical relationship between people and things, in a sort of Hegelian everything-is-everything turn that puts Hegelian universality to good use in terms of localised relationships (for example, see Hegel's Science of Logic, Book 1, Section 1, Chapter 1 [Hegel 1969]).

In keeping with some other more well-known theorists who are not necessarily explicitly cited, the author also makes a case for emancipation of objects by intoning the notion of museums as carceral spaces. This brings to mind Foucauldian ideas (see *Discipline and Punish*), which here too, becomes useful in consideration of the dialectical nature of human/object relationships that the author implies. The thinking here is complex and outside the box, but the author gives us practical examples as a guide, which includes adding to the registration database, 'seasonal time and ceremonial time' to facilitate a broader range of temporal relationships beyond the Gregorian calendar (Krmpotich 2017). Overall, this chapter exposes tender human relations that are at stake.

Chapter 9 is a look at managing a living collection at UK Parliament by Emily Spary. Here, as in all the chapters, a case is made to keep decisions of collections care contingent and flexible, particularly in relation to a collection that is a working collection. The author, in following the use of the Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts collection at the Palace of Westminster of the UK's House of Commons and House of Lords takes us on a detailed and specific journey. Though focusing very specifically on the building where parliament resides, the author ties the unconventional approach to collections care to the 'living' and 'operational' aspect of the collection. Notably this is tied into the place within which the collection lives, invoking the 'spirit of the place', by which, like in all of the other chapters here, great agency and force is given to the collections themselves. The author makes clear that it is the intangible heritage, the use of the collections in the very workings of government, that is most in need of preserving.

In this chapter, many agents are involved beyond the collection, moving parts all – the representatives of government, custodial staff, the building itself, those that care for collections, and of course, the collections themselves. Here practical actions, like tracking and numbering and

with human relationships that keep it all running, is in constant motion. Within this, the author makes clear, the human relationships perhaps play the most crucial role in making it all work. Spary makes the point so many other authors in this part have made, that human concerns and relationships tend to fall outside of standards of museum practice, but must be brought to the table. Here I freely extrapolate from the author's citation of ICOM's 2017 *Code of Ethics for Museums* that states 'process rather than the object' is what dictates collection care in this instance, as is the sum conclusion the author offers.

All of the chapters in this part make compelling and similar arguments from different perspectives, giving us a great guide to contemporary collections care practice, as well as asking salient and urgent questions. They all make clear that in museums we are indeed in a great era of change, a long waited for and needed era of change, that has required back-of-house functions to join the conversation on decolonisation, access and inclusion. I jump back to a quote from the chapter by Krmpotich, which I think sums up the main point we would all do well to keep in mind when working with museum collections: '*What* we do in museums does not always need to change to support healthy ageing [of collections], but *why* we do it—our ethical principles informing collections care decisions—does'.

And so we return to Schneider's poem that started us off; why do we do it? We do it for the people, the communities of origin, the Yolgnu, the readers of books, the Māori, the non-normative of body and mind, the collections themselves and what they value, the workers of Parliament or otherwise, for the people.

'Workers enter here. Claim what is stored here. It is yours.'

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Part III
Community brilliance in shaping collections management

12

On language, access and practitioners: beginning a conversation on decolonising and indigenising the care of kapa collections at Bishop Museum

Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, Kamalu du Preez and Sarah Kuaiwa

Introduction

The Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum (Bishop Museum), located on the lands of Kaiwiʻula in Kapālama, Oʻahu houses the largest collection of kapa (Hawaiian barkcloth) in the world. Ranging from samples said to be collected during Captain James Cook's visits to the Hawaiian islands, collections gifted to the museum by numerous aliʻiwāhine (chiefesses), Western-style kapa clothing produced in the nineteenth century, and contemporary pieces made by kapa practitioners in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the collection's breadth and diversity of form and design serve as a vital source for reconstructing kapa history and culture in Hawaiʻi. Of equal significance are the ways that the collection has served as an inspirational source for kapa practitioners who have worked to revitalise, elevate and reincorporate the art of ka hana kapa (the practice of making kapa) into everyday ʻŌiwi (Indigenous-Hawaiian) life.

In 2021, Bishop Museum received a one-million-dollar (USD) grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation ʻto diversify the pipeline of future cultural heritage professionals, increase the number of historically underrepresented Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the field,

and demonstrate how museums can change their practices and positively impact their communities' (Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum 2022). Titled the *Te Rangi Hiroa Pacific Curators and Caretakers Program* in honour of the museum's first Māori and Indigenous director (Te Rangihīroa, also known as Sir Peter Buck), the grant resulted in the hiring of new staff members to support ongoing efforts of better caring for the institution's world-renowned ethnological collections. Two curators were hired during this process, one of whom is our co-author Sarah Kuaiwa, an 'Ōiwi scholar specialising in nineteenth-century kapa history. Sarah joins staff like Kamalu du Preez, a kapa practitioner and cultural specialist who has worked at Bishop Museum caring for Indigenous belongings for over 20 years.

This conversation-turned-chapter does not offer concrete examples or solutions to decolonising and Indigenising the care of kapa collections at Bishop Museum. As Kamalu and Sarah indicate in their remarks later in the chapter, this kind of work has only recently begun and is simultaneously taking place alongside a 'backlog' of projects and pressing issues that staff members in the Ethnology Department are working to address. Additionally, their day-to-day workload involves numerous collections access visits that they organise and facilitate for 'Ōiwi and non-'Ōiwi researchers, cultural practitioners, and community members. The Ethnology team is committed to providing as much access as they can to the wider community. However, the time, people and resources it takes to host these visits mean less time and energy working through their backlog and addressing other critical needs of the collections they care for. These challenges are not unique to Bishop Museum – understaffing, and lack of resources are issues that many institutions face – but naming them within the context of this essay and edited volume is a firm reminder of the challenge and labour of envisioning and actualising decolonising and Indigenising initiatives within our institutions (Cairns 2018; Macdonald 2022).

In lieu of technical descriptions and directions on how to decolonise and/or Indigenise museum collections, this chapter takes a step back by providing intellectual and textual space for Kamalu and Sarah to reflect on their work thus far and to imagine the future of kapa collections at Bishop Museum. Citations are offered throughout the conversation to guide readers towards other resources to learn more about 'Ōiwi history and politics, as well as varying discourses on museum decolonisation and Indigenisation. As emphasised throughout our conversation, decolonising and Indigenising Bishop Museum requires an array of 'first steps', including reckoning with the racist legacy of the museum's first director and curator, William T. Brigham; cultivating a space where the

knowledge of practitioners revitalising and transmitting the art of ka hana kapa is taken seriously and on par with the knowledge that academic researchers generate from the kapa collection; recognising the vital role of language and cultural resurgence within the context of the museum (Kaʻōpua 2015); the role of Hawaiian language primary source materials in developing deeper knowledge and understanding of their collections; and lastly, foregrounding and prioritising the importance of access to the kapa collection (and other collections that their team care for) for the broader community.

Kapa Collections And ʻŌiwi Resurgence

Halena: Aloha mai kākou e nā hoa (greetings friends). Thank you for joining me today for this conversation. To begin, please talk about your relationship with the kapa collection at Bishop Museum and ka hana kapa.

Kamalu: My relationship to the kapa collection is that of a practitioner and as an employee of Bishop Museum working to care for and understand mea kupuna (ancestral belongings) or mea noʻeau kahiko (skillfully made belongings from the distant past) and their relevance in today's world. I've been a kapa practitioner for over 15 years, having learned it from my kumu (teacher, mentor) Moana Eisele. Before that, I spent 5–7 years learning about kapa through Hawaiian art classes and readings on Hawaiian history and culture. Academic research is where many of us start learning about kapa unless you were born into the practice. It's a common way for Kanaka ʻŌiwi to be introduced to this work in addition to learning from the kapa displayed in Bishop Museum exhibits.

Sarah: My relationship to the kapa collection at the Bishop Museum and ka hana kapa goes back 10 years. I am a researcher and academic who studies nineteenth-century kapa, but I am not a kapa practitioner. I was introduced to the kapa collections at the Museum through Kamalu as an intern. Seeing the collections then and hearing Kamalu's perspective on the collection over the years has challenged my idea of what contemporary 'practitioning' should and can look like, especially in relation to the use of museum collections as sources of information and inspiration. These formative experiences pushed me to imagine how these collections can continue to serve people better, especially around issues of access.

Halena: Mahalo for your responses. Sarah, you were recently hired as a curator at Bishop Museum and have some previous experience working with this kapa collection. What are some of the challenges that you and the institution face in caring for kapa collections?

Sarah: As an institution, Bishop Museum prides itself on its Hawaiʻi and broader Pacific specialisation. However, the mseum has not invested in collections care in the ways it should have over the last century, in addition to not understanding the value of the kapa collection for our communities (Kelly 1994). Therefore, one of the biggest challenges we currently face is our inability to expand our collection spaces to provide adequate care for and access to our kapa.

Kamalu: There was a conservation survey on the collections conducted about a decade ago that assessed the value of our collections and identified priority collections for conservation work (Hee et al. 2012). The first collection identified was the Museum's featherwork; the second was the kapa collection. Where are we today in addressing the concerns raised then? There is still work to be done.

As Sarah has mentioned, our primary challenges as an institution involve inadequate space, money, and time, as well as prioritising the care of these collections. I would add that to care for these collections in a culturally-contextualised way, especially by Kanaka ʻŌiwi with a pilina (relationship, connection) to those ancestral belongings and practices, bring forth other physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual challenges that we consider on top of the work of cultivating institutional change and transformation (Kapuni-Reynolds 2015). These challenges are multi-layered, especially when attempting to care for these belongings from a cultural perspective, which may involve limiting access to certain objects for spiritual or conservation purposes. Given these challenges, how do we make it better for everyone? How do we make access to our collection more meaningful for those involved?

Halena: If we're thinking about a critical collections management practice, it begins by recognising how collections care limitations and challenges exist within larger structural issues in any given institution. Additionally, we must weigh these concerns against the shifting value of kapa collections to our communities over time. Understanding these multiple contexts works towards developing better practices of care for and access to kapa collections at Bishop Museum and elsewhere.

Our next question asks you to reflect on kapa-making today. What are some of your observations? What is the role of kapa collections at Bishop Museum and elsewhere in perpetuating this art form?

Sarah: While Bishop Museum has the largest collection of kapa in the world, there has been an increased interest in international kapa collections. Some museums have made efforts toward bringing

practitioners to their institutions to see their collections and to share their knowledge about kapa in ways that most practitioners would otherwise have a difficult time accessing. Inviting and hosting practitioners, as well as recognising them for the knowledge they carry, is also an opportunity for museum professionals to launa (meet, introduce themselves) with those actively working to perpetuate the art form. Through my own research, the kapa collection at Bishop Museum and other institutions throughout the world have provided an opportunity to recreate a 'kapa timeline' that traces how this practice and form of material culture changed overtime – something that the historical narrative and ethnographic research surrounding kapa did not allow for until relatively recently (Kuaiwa 2021; Figure 12.1).

Kamalu: Before the internet and the ease of travelling internationally, practitioners relied primarily on Bishop Museum and other kapa collections found in Hawai'i-based museums to learn about kapa. When Moana Eisele first started making kapa, few people were doing public education about kapa and kapa-making; it was almost seen as a theoretical project or legendary practice for a select few. Thus, for Kumu Moana and Nā Hoa Hoʻāla Kapa, a group of practitioners dedicated to revitalising ka hana kapa, education and raising awareness in the community was an important first step (Francis 1997). Today, kapa and kapa-making have come a long way. There are interisland and international gatherings where kapa practitioners can meet and share their ideas (Christophe 2020). Internationally renowned Kanaka ʻŌiwi fashion designers, like

Figure 12.1 Kapa akuʻehala is an example of one genre of Hawaiian kapa created in the nineteenth century. Bishop Museum Archives, Q216731.

Manaola Yap, have looked at kapa collections as small children, became practitioners, and integrated kapa material and motifs into their designs. Many continue to draw inspiration from works like *Ka Hana Kapa* (1911) to develop their own creative kapa designs and to innovate in other Hawaiian art forms, such as the ways that kapa designs and motifs have inspired new designs for uhi (tattoos) in the practice of kākau (tattooing). Within the context of ongoing Hawaiian language resurgence, we're also relearning the huaʻōlelo (words) associated with kapa and kapa-making, words that provide us with language to discuss certain designs or processes, as well as language to understand the kaona (layered, double, hidden meanings) embedded in these words, objects and collections (McDougall 2016; Arista 2010).

We are in a place and time where kapa is again becoming involved in ʻŌiwi life from birth to death. It was and is such a significant and intimate part of Hawaiian culture that we cannot live without it. I know of people in the kaiāulu (community) who say, 'My wahine (woman, wife) is hāpai (pregnant), and we're hoping to have a kapa to wrap the baby.' The fact that these are normal conversations again is a testament to the Hawaiian cultural renaissance and the ongoing work of revising narratives of our past through Hawaiian language primary source materials (Arista 2020; Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al. 2014). One of the most important texts that have been written about Hawaiian life, besides *Nānā I Ke Kumu* (Pukui et al. 1972a; Pukui et al. 1972b), has been *The Polynesian Family System of Kaʻu* (Handy and Pukui 1998), which gives a glimpse into everyday ʻŌiwi life and death practices. Reading these texts, in addition to the ability to read other accounts in Hawaiian language newspapers and unpublished manuscript collections in archives, creates a fuller picture and context for understanding the Hawaiian past. I know Sarah can speak to this too because her research has unfolded tenfold, even thousandfold, with the inclusion of Hawaiian language source materials.

Sarah: My scholarly work draws heavily on Hawaiian language primary source materials to reinterpret kapa collections and give us more historical context. What I am trying to do is to figure out how our ancestors made these items and thought about them through our language and the practice of ka hana kapa over time, something that many practitioners are doing across the various Hawaiian cultural forms they reproduce and continue to practise today.

Reckoning with institutional legacies

Halena: That is a great segue to our next question. What would a decolonising approach to caring for and accessing kapa collections look like?

Sarah: I'll go first, then Kamalu can chime in because this is Kamalu's lifework here –decolonising institutions.

Kamalu: (Begins to laugh) I'm laughing because it's a process, right?

Sarah: It's a process. We are in the thick of it right now. We're in the weeds. The first thing that comes to mind regarding decolonising, caring for, and accessing kapa collections is looking salvage ethnography in the eye and saying 'no'. There is a history at Bishop Museum of putting salvage ethnographers on a pedestal, which is extremely detrimental to the Hawaiian community. Everyone is affected by the legacy of salvage ethnographic work in Hawai'i, seen and unseen. It has affected the way that we think about ourselves, and it has affected the way that we think we can move forward. For example, I grapple a lot with William T. Brigham, the first director and curator of Bishop Museum, in my work. It's no secret that he was a racist and a bigot, and people have been saying that but what does it mean to grapple with him *in text, in intellectual production*? It's something extremely hard to do that is connected to ongoing issues of coloniality in Hawai'i, including the politics of who gets publishing contracts and who does not; the ability of those who have the luxury, time and resources to conduct their research and access collections without having to worry about Hawai'i's high cost of living or other issues that impact Hawaiian families. There are a lot of hurdles that we have not been able to get over in the past 100 years since Brigham announced himself as a kapa expert (Brigham 1911).

Halena: Can you elaborate more on that Sarah?

Sarah: Brigham was producing knowledge about a lot of different Hawaiian cultural practices at a time when he genuinely believed that Hawaiian peoples were going extinct. This is in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the Hawaiian population plateaued and increasingly intermixed with different ethnic groups. The Hawaiian population was not declining in the same way that it was in the early nineteenth century. But Brigham had a sense that just because Hawaiian cultural practices were not done in the same ways as when he visited Hawai'i in the 1860s, that suddenly, Hawaiian culture was disappearing before his eyes, and we were running towards extinction as a people.

The ability to make an umbrella statement for all cultural forms and all Hawaiian peoples is a terrible misuse of power and authority.

While we can say in context, 'this is how a lot of people felt,' the effects of that are something we still live with. The most detrimental part is that since *Ka Hana Kapa* was published in 1911, we haven't had the opportunity to publish a response. Brigham became the canon, one of the few people who wrote on Hawaiian kapa specifically at the time, and it's an interesting double-edged sword because this is such an important text. We honour and are grateful to have the publication, but when you read the introduction, you realise how much he was writing against us and how little he knew. The proof is in the 100 years of published materials, correspondence and unpublished manuscripts about kapa that preceded him. He desired purity and authenticity, using these ideas as measuring sticks to describe and define 'Ōiwi life (Brigham 1911, 1–2). That's probably the biggest thing we need people to recognise – that there is more to the story of kapa than what Brigham led us to believe.

It is also important for our staff to recognise, especially those working on a day-to-day basis to care for these collections, that the way we have been conditioned to think about our collections is a direct result of Brigham's legacy as our curator and director. How do we start to push past that and create better solutions and research that disprove and push back on the things he has written, when they are cemented into people's minds?

Kamalu: Initially, Bishop Museum was established as a memorial to Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, as well as a beacon for Native Hawaiians and the people of Hawai'i to learn about the past (Rose 1980). But Brigham and his cronies (many of whom were not legitimate, vetted academics) chose to change the museum into a natural and cultural history museum, making Bishop Museum into a Western institution that represented Hawaiian life and culture as something that would die out. Many of his colleagues were not Hawaiian language speakers. They did not have the ability to talk to people. Although *Ka Hana Kapa* is the most comprehensive work on kapa, kapa-making and kapa plants, we can compare Brigham's work to the scholarship of Te Rangihīroa, which tended to look at language and material culture simultaneously (Buck 1957). Another example is Joseph Swift Emerson, who spoke Hawaiian and recorded Hawaiian terms and other information related to the objects he collected from community members (Summers 1999).

I see decolonisation and Indigenisation as separate processes. Decolonisation works to name and dismantle oppressive systems that continually decentre Indigenous ways of thinking and doing in the world

(Lonetree 2012). In terms of kapa collections, it begins by recognising how terms like tapa, which became a catch-all word for various forms of Pacific 'barkcloth' since Cook's expeditions in the late eighteenth century, need to be interrogated and historicised. Simultaneously, Indigenisation, the process by which Indigenous peoples transform museums to better serve their communities, works in tandem with decolonisation by creating spaces for Indigenous peoples to reconnect with museum collections in ways that promote language and cultural resurgence (Zawadski 2018; Cairns 2020).

Strengthening ties to language, plants and identity: Indigenising the care of and accessing Kapa Collections

Halena: Language seems to play a key role to think through museum decolonisation and Indigenisation. As Sarah's scholarship with Hawaiian language primary source materials demonstrates, it allows us to develop a more robust understanding of kapa and its use over time than what we have been led to believe by works like *Ka Hana Kapa*. This leads us to our next question. What would an Indigenising approach to caring for and accessing kapa collections look like?

Sarah: In my mind, what I identify 'Hawaiianess' to be is the relationship between 'āina (land), 'ōlelo (language), kanaka (people), and akua (higher beings, elementals). It's those four things. Colonialism has severed those relationships in different ways, and many of us are trying to get back to some sort of balance between these things (Trask 1999; Tengan 2008). Reclaiming and knowing our language is a huge part of this work (Kikiloi 2010; Kawai'ae'a et al. 2007). The other thing that comes to mind is our relationship with plants and collaborations across multiple fields to deepen our understanding of that relationship. Hawai'i has the highest rate of extinction for Indigenous and endemic plants worldwide. It is a very bleak status. The staff at Bishop Museum are keenly aware of this. But what we need to do is re-integrate the knowledge around native plants with kapa collections and then with practitioners.

I have a lot of friends who work in conservation and only now are they realising that the plants they propagate have a cultural purpose. Meanwhile, for the practitioners or kanaka (Hawaiian peoples) in general, many go their whole lives without seeing these plants and kapa collections. There's a huge disconnect between the production of kapa and the conservation of plants when those two things are closely related.

The common denominator here is care. Museum staff and academics need to figure out ways to work collectively to promote and enhance the care of our collections and native plants.

For too long, kapa makers and other practitioners have had to be 'creative' in how they recreate certain art forms because they just don't have access to kapa collections. How do we start to change that? It requires a lot of reconfiguring for people who work in the natural sciences, of how they think about the plants they work with and their purpose and value. It also means that people like us, who sit in the intermediary between those in the conservation world and practitioners, need to cultivate those relationships. We can assist on the plant side, which is a huge part of it. Kamalu, you should talk a little more about the plants practitioners need as part of their practice.

Kamalu: Everything begins with and is perpetuated by pilina (relationships). Our pilina to ʻāina was and continues to be actively severed by the processes of settler colonialism in Hawaiʻi (Trask 1999; Fujikane and Okamura 2008; Osorio 2021). People are reconnecting to their genealogies, but they have to realise that their genealogies are tied to places, and those places are where our kūpuna (ancestors) still reside; they are places that give us mana (spiritual power, energy, Handy and Pukui 1998).

When you have people coming from the natural sciences, many of them conduct research for scientific purposes. It is from and for a certain context. As the Indigenous people of Hawaiʻi, re-establishing our familial relationships with the natural world is part of the work that we do in the natural sciences and other fields (Vaughan 2018; Kamelamela et al. 2022). Many of us have lost these connections to the ʻāina. If you know your family is there, you can recognise that nā kini akua (the multitude of deities and elementals) are actually in the ʻāina and have been around you all this time. It's important to talk about Akua (God in a Hawaiian-Christian context), nā akua (deities and other elementals) and ʻaumākua (family guardians and ancestors). Our relationships with these beings are all still familial. How you relate to them is based on your positionality and where you are.

If you are an urban kānaka that does not have ʻāina and lives in a city, you can begin to cultivate those relationships by growing plants. Practitioners grow all kinds of plants, whether it is lauaʻe (a type of fern) or nīoi (Hawaiian chilli pepper) because the act of nurturing, of mālama (caring for something), reignites those ancestral ways. There are these 'mini steps' we can do, and yet many Kānaka do not think about these practices

because they are all trying to make a way to live in a world ruled by the evils of colonialism, like capitalism (Maile 2019). Not everybody has the privilege of having great careers, jobs and education. I know it's a lot, but what are those things that interfere with our relationship with the ʻāina and our reconnection and learning of our language? Everything is about process and access. Practitioners understand that you can't just go out and buy things. You have to grow your own crops or find a place to grow these things because it all comes from the ʻāina, and you need to exert that energy back into it, that mana. It's all of these things. So many things have to do with the ʻāina and our relationship with it, which will improve over time. #Landback. That's basically what it is. There's so much we can learn from our friends in conservation. Our kūpuna never separated science and culture – they were the same thing (Nuʻuhiwa 2019). We need to figure out ways of weaving this knowledge back together.

'Mini-steps' towards Indigenisation: committing to meaningful access

Halena: Since we're talking about Indigenising approaches to caring for and accessing kapa collections, what are some ways that Bishop Museum has taken those 'mini-steps' to Indigenise the care of kapa collections at your institution?

Sarah: One way we have prioritised Indigenisation is that when people ask to come and see the kapa collections, we do our best to provide that access. When we talked earlier about the lack of finances, space and historic priority for these collections, what that means for us, as people who work in these spaces every single day, is that it takes us a lot of time and energy to prepare for and host meaningful access visits to the collections. Currently, we don't have a usable database. It requires a lot of institutional knowledge from people like Kamalu to navigate; it requires a lot of hands and coordination to move these things. As a small team, it takes up all those collective hours and planning to make a single access visit happen. Our team is of the mindset that this is a huge part of our job, and we are more than willing to do this work, to make sure these things remain accessible to people, but it requires many hours of planning and facilitation that take away from the time and energy we have in a workday to address other pressing issues and priorities.

The other way we have tried to Indigenise our practice is to provide staff time to do their own research. There are many practitioners and museum visitors that come to Bishop Museum with a lot of questions, and there is a

tendency to perceive Bishop Museum staff as people who should know all the answers about Hawaiian history and culture, which can be a burden at times. While we try our best to answer these questions, sometimes we cannot answer them succinctly because we have not had ample time to conduct the research ourselves. In the past five years, especially people like myself and Kamalu have been given some time to go back and do the things that need to get done, to help answer those questions, and to help make things easier for different levels of staff now and in the future to allow these collections to be utilised. We have a long way to go, in ways that we don't even fully know yet because we're still meeting every challenge every single day and taking it as it is. The fact that we have a majority of Native staff on board who rises to that challenge is a testament to our dedication toward this.

Kamalu: When we go to other museums to access collections, we often think that it is done quickly in an accessible way. But sometimes, we must turn that idea on its head because everything takes time. The most precious thing that we can give to people is time. One of the things that some people do not understand about our practice at the museum is that it is not only the physicality of moving things from one place to another place and then packing it up again, but it is also about being able to spend time with the practitioners who might know something about it or not, or just regular folks wanting to know about kapa.

Access is a double-edged sword for us at the museum. It is not for a lack of knowing that is important, but we must learn how to make it meaningful for all parties involved. The other thing we are learning from our kūpuna (elders) is that not everything is for everybody, like saying, 'Oh maybe we can't unroll the kapa moe ipo (kapa blanket for love-making) because it's so fragile, but maybe there's something else in the collection that we can provide access to as another example' (Kapuni-Reynolds 2015). Thinking of access in this way means developing that cultural knowledge to know when the right time is to show certain things and to whom. We try not to gatekeep, but oftentimes it is tied to time and resources. Access to be effective requires another team besides curatorial and collections management to physically move things and put them out for viewing – a team we do not have yet at the Museum.

The possibilities of how we can store, care for and provide people with access to the collection are based on how we manage space and care for the items. We're also trying to consider the cultural context in which they were used or stored, which is different from standard museum practice. Halena, you already know from our conversations how we try to store

things in a certain way to be more culturally appropriate, but we haven't been able to accomplish this as a whole because of our limited storage space (Kapuni-Reynolds 2015). We don't want certain things sitting at the feet of people. We don't want certain items above others. Do we put everything on a roll? Do we have space for another roll? We need a whole textiles storage and access building or a centre. We're actively thinking about these things because it is about the process, and we want to support communities, practitioners and people on the inside caring for the collections. We know there needs to be another level of care rooted in 'Ōiwi practices. It is not just checking off a number or shifting things from left to right. We're trying to figure out and codify what we do, and how we would like to do things with improved resources, and then share out methods and processes.

Imagining the future of Kapa Collections at Bishop Museum

Halena: Why do we need decolonising and Indigenising approaches to caring for and accessing kapa collections?

Sarah: The reality is that most people do not have the ability to access these collections. Every day, Kamalu and I host people in the collection who previously thought Bishop Museum was not available to them. Native peoples do not have access to their mea kupuna, and are we going to accept that as the norm? Or are we going to try to do something better about that? The most disappointing part about this is that it has taken Native staff to sound the alarm on these things and put in the hard labour to develop plans and processes to decolonise or Indigenise an institution (Cairns 2018). But if we talk about what the future looks like, we are trying to address these issues and concerns now so that people after us can focus their energies on making the museum accessible to more Kanaka 'Ōiwi.

Kamalu: It is important to know that if you think these Hawaiian collection items are important and Hawaiian knowledge is important, then Hawaiian people are also important. You cannot have kapa without having a relationship with living Hawaiians with varying levels of Indigenous knowledge and relationships to these collections. If you value an object, even as a work of art, then you cannot dismiss its relationship to its origin community, the creator community as well as the depth of knowledge that is found in that relationship. Knowledge has many sources: from pages within Hawaiian language newspapers, experience

passed down through kupuna, or gained experience through 'ma ka hana ka 'ike' (a Hawaiian saying referring to the knowledge gained through doing). There is value in practitioners saying, 'This is how I learned how to make this through this process, perhaps this is the way they made it.' To be honest, we don't know how each and every piece of kapa was made. We have an idea, but it would be arrogant to think that we know exactly how everything was made because then we would sound like the colonisers. We can talk about process, we know how our kūpuna perhaps made certain things, but we also need to allow ourselves some grace and the ability to be opaque at times because that's our right. That's for us to claim, enact and define.

Halena: We have one more question to wrap up our conversation today. Mahalo to both of you for sharing your mana'o (thoughts) and experiences. What do you imagine the future of kapa collections care and kapa-making to be?

Sarah: Although I am commenting specifically on kapa collections and kapa-making, I think the dream of many Indigenous museum professionals is to see museum collections continually activated by practitioners and community members in responsive ways that promote healing and deeper understanding of and relationship to our ancestral belongings (Lonetree 2012). Cultural practices can continue in ways that maybe it hasn't over the past 100 years or has despite certain struggles. There's a generation of practitioners who fought for kapa-making to continue into this current moment. How will we fight so that it can continue and be better for future generations?

Kamalu: We did not talk too much about this, but there are so many pieces of kapa all over the world. I hope that one day all of these pieces can be reunited. In some ways that will help us to restore how we look at kapa more holistically. How can we see it (the objects, the practices, the words, and stories associated with kapa) in its entirety? How can we understand the innovation, the creativity, the beauty, the technical knowledge of our kūpuna unless we can see our kapa in its entirety? I hope that one day these things can be reunited, physically or digitally. Additionally, we have to recognise kapa-makers in the community and collect their work so that more people can see that it's a living practice and has a relationship not only to textiles and fashion but even seeing it on things like malo (loincloth) for the three-remaining historical ki'i akua (idols) of Kūka'ilimoku (Kahanu 2009; Tengan 2016). Those are some of the things we want to see happen so that we support the continuity of ka hana kapa and everything related to it.

Sarah: One last thing: I want more Indigenous people leading these efforts. That feels like something redundant to say, but at the same time, it always needs to be said. I see Kamalu as a huge mentor who has supported me as I finish my PhD., but that's a huge thing for my upbringing in this field. It's important that I pay it forward to other people.

Kamalu: I certainly do see you as part of my kapa practice, not as a practitioner, but as someone I've mentored to learn how to care for kapa collections at the museum and to recognise the importance of practitioners within these spaces. Aunty Moana would be really happy; she'd be over the moon that genealogies of care and practice go on (Kapuni-Reynolds 2017). You are a part of my kapa genealogy. For kapa practitioners, it's not always about the thing that we make; it is also about the people that we bring to this to elevate the practice and to elevate the knowledge of our kupuna, which Sarah is doing. She will continue to do that. We need to make these spaces filled with more Indigenous peoples. You can't talk about us without us. We're not dead, we're all here. We carry that trauma of ongoing colonisation, but we also carry the joy we experience when we reconnect to our cultural practices and beliefs. We are each doing that in our own way.

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13
Shifting organisational culture through repatriation policy

Anna Russo

'Thank you for not making us beg for the return of our ancestors.'

Aboriginal community representative receiving repatriated ancestral remains, 25 June 2021.

Introduction

Australian museums have collected the skeletal remains of thousands of Aboriginal people and placed them in boxes. Many were collected to support racist theories and for most of the last 100 years, science has underpinned requests for access and influenced repatriation. Almost half (close to 5,000 individuals) were collected by the South Australian Museum from burial sites in South Australia, affecting almost every Aboriginal language group in South Australia.

Despite carrying responsibility for care of these remains, the South Australian Museum operated a repatriation policy between 1987 and 2017 that waited for Aboriginal communities to knock on the museum's door and ask for the repatriation of their ancestors while approving researchers' requests to access ancestors for scientific research. Even though there had been significant changes in South Australia's Aboriginal heritage protection legislation beginning in 1988 and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2007, museum policy did not change. In 2017, new museum staff embarked on an organisational shift that would flip the museum's outdated policy into a more contemporary policy recognising Aboriginal authority in decision-making about their ancestors' remains. This chapter traces how Aboriginal voices were given space

and authority to develop a museum policy that has transformed the South Australian Museum's programme of repatriation of Aboriginal ancestral remains.

Aboriginal remains at the South Australian Museum

The collection of almost 5,000 Aboriginal ancestral remains by the South Australian Museum is more than half of all ancestral remains collected by all Australian museums put together. Until recently the general public had little to no knowledge of the scale and scope of the museum's collection. Public understanding of how or why the collection grew to such an astounding number was similarly vague and rarely discussed. The restricted public knowledge was paralleled by limited engagement with Aboriginal communities and a track record of poorly resourced, ad hoc repatriations.

Not unlike other museums across Australia, the South Australian Museum repatriation programme relied on communities to initiate repatriation processes by asking for their ancestors. The process was slow, constrained and guided by an institutional policy that was narrow in scope and that largely ignored Aboriginal cultural authority and progress in standards for cultural recognition. In the 30 years of operation, the policy had led to repatriations to only two South Australian Aboriginal communities despite the fact that the collection affects at least 19 South Australian Aboriginal language groups. Continuing with this policy, approach and trajectory would guarantee an outdated repatriation process that would take multiple decades and pass the emotionally complex task of reburial on to future generations of Aboriginal leaders.

In 2016 a newly appointed Head of Humanities immediately recognised the inadequacies and risks of the existing policy and repatriation arrangements and in early 2017 launched an external review and transformation led by a reference group of Aboriginal leaders experienced with repatriation. A further decision was taken to support policy renewal through a new senior position in the Museum's staffing structure: the Museum's first Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager.

Within twelve months, the Reference Group presented the Museum Board with a policy that placed Aboriginal cultural authority at the centre of decision-making about Aboriginal remains. The implementation strategy was a four-year (2019–2022) repatriation plan underpinned by active engagement with Aboriginal communities. Despite the COVID-19

pandemic disruptions, the strategy derived from the new policy position has been successful. Seven Aboriginal communities have laid more than 500 ancestors to rest in just four years. Community trust in the South Australian Museum has grown and repatriation in South Australia has never been as active as it is today. Integral to this important work has been truth-telling and respectfully acknowledging Aboriginal communities' repatriation achievements at both the policy and practical levels.

Early history of Aboriginal remains at the South Australian Museum

In the early days of European settlement of the Adelaide plains, newspapers often reported disturbances of Aboriginal grave sites and reburials occurring quite quickly and usually close to original grave. However, even before the Museum existed, collections of Aboriginal ancestral remains were being assembled in Adelaide. Groups like the Royal Society of South Australia who met in places like the South Australian Institute, Gawler Institute and Port Adelaide Institute lectured in natural science and often used Aboriginal remains as props for talks about race. Some ancestral remains were displayed as part of the discussion while others were shipped abroad as examples of theories of race differences and eugenics and to impress powerful European peers and mentors. Establishment of the University of Adelaide, the Adelaide Medical School and Adelaide Museum strengthened participation in these groups and it became more common for discovered Aboriginal remains to be taken to these institutions rather than be reburied. From at least 1887, the Museum Committee led by Dr Edward Charles Stirling publicly exhibited Aboriginal skulls along with other examples of 'relics of dead humanity'.[1]

Dr E.C. Stirling's public roles from the late 1880s to 1919 included chair of the Museum Committee, Museum Director and Honorary Curator of Ethnology. His influence at the university came from being the university's Professor of Physiology, a University Council member and for a short time, a State politician. Along with a cohort of powerful men along North Terrace, Stirling influenced parliament's laws and the conditions enabling systematic collecting of Aboriginal ancestral remains for the Adelaide Museum's collection.

As a member of university council, Stirling recruited the university's inaugural Professor of Anatomy, Professor Archibald Watson. Watson and Stirling are implicated in records of Aboriginal remains entering

the museum collection and/or secretly shipped abroad rather than being buried. They embedded a culture across the two institutions that encouraged the collection of human tissue samples and bone specimens from pathological examinations, transactions of human remains out of Australia and a trade of human remains without regard for cultural traditions or family.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Museum's collection of Aboriginal crania was touted as world class and was being used for research purposes by local and visiting scientists. Germany's Wilhelm Krause left Adelaide in 1897 with at least four Aboriginal skeletons supplied by Professor Watson (Winkelmann 2020).

In 1911, following two large burial site discoveries, Stirling publicly criticised government officers, describing 'a chaotic manner' in which they managed both discoveries. This was hardly true, but in his view, when police turned museum officers away from one of the discovery areas, there had been a missed opportunity to collect important scientific data. Subsequently Stirling persuaded the Commissioner of Crown Lands to issue an instruction that ensured the Museum would thereafter be the recipient and repository of all Aboriginal remains disturbed on Crown Lands. This order followed on from Stirling's 1890 success in convincing the Police Commissioner to direct mounted police in rural areas to send all Aboriginal remains from those areas to the Adelaide Museum. Stirling's influence probably also extended to the General Secretary of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery who placed newspaper advertisements inviting people with 'Aboriginal Weapons and Remains' to offer these to the Museum as gifts or for sale.[2]

In 1912, the Federal Government prohibited the exportation of Aboriginal skeletons, thereby ensuring that all Aboriginal remains discovered in South Australia stayed in Australia. With the commissioners' directions and orders in place, newspaper ads offering to buy Aboriginal remains, and a prohibition on export, the structural conditions were in place for the Museum's collection of Aboriginal ancestral remains to grow at a steady rate and at little to no cost to the Museum.

In 1919, Stirling died and Watson left Adelaide. The professors' legacy was an institutional culture passed on to the next generation of academics and museum officers who continued to grow the collection of Aboriginal remains. By 1925, the Adelaide Museum and the University of Adelaide together possessed the largest collection of Aboriginal skulls in Australia. The number was reported as approximately 700 and the majority of these were in the Adelaide Museum.[3] The Museum maintained a steady rate of collection growth and in 1950 the Museum collection

stood at 1007 skulls and about 4500 individual bones and many scientists were building their careers on the bones of Aboriginal ancestors including samples of teeth borrowed from Aboriginal skulls.[4]

In 1965, new legislation (*Aboriginal and Historic Relics Act*) named the Director of the Museum Department as the protector of Aboriginal 'relics' including remains. The General Orders continued in various forms until the 1970s. Aboriginal ancestral remains continued to be brought to the Museum right up until the introduction of South Australia's *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*, which began the State's legislated process of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal heritage, including Aboriginal remains. Despite this significant change, the Museum's approach to repatriating Aboriginal ancestral remains to Aboriginal communities lagged far behind the expectations and ambitions of Aboriginal people.

The Museum's first repatriation policy (1987)

The Museum's first 'humans remains' policy was approved by the Board in June 1987.[5] The policy was most likely a response to the South Australian government's proposal of new Aboriginal heritage legislation that introduced Aboriginal peoples' right to heritage protection and preservation when acting in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. The Bill was a significant departure from the museum's previous position as the protector of Aboriginal relics, including remains. The proposed Act prescribed that any interference with Aboriginal remains (for example invasive research) could only be authorised by the Minister and only after consultation with Traditional Owners and a new all-Aboriginal, Aboriginal Heritage Committee. Leading up to the introduction of the new Act, the museum articulated its view that the heritage and scientific values of its collection of Aboriginal ancestral remains were inseparable and that access for scientific research approved by the Board should remain available. The Museum's response to this significant legislative change was to introduce a 'Human Remains' policy that spoke to the ambitions of Aboriginal people but retained the primacy of the Museum and science as out-valuing Aboriginal peoples' rights.[6] The policy stated:

> The Museum's view is that its Human Biology Collection is an extremely important one, and that in general it should be available for research. We do, however, support Aboriginal requests for a greater say in access and storage location and arrangements. We also agree that certain types of remains should be returned.

We want to actively engage Aboriginal people who have relationships with parts of the Collection in consultation over the whole issue. We want to let them know what is in the Collection and argue the case of the benefits to Aboriginal people of continued research.

We also want to hear Aboriginal views on the matter. In our consultations we would like to explore the possibilities of, for example, local 'keeping place' arrangements. Access could then only be gained through consultation with the relevant Aboriginal groups and the merits of research obtained by that access would have to be demonstrated and discussed at that stage. Some communities may choose to continue to store remains with which they are associated, in the S.A. Museum, while maintaining rights to control access.

In relation to returning ancestral remains, the policy said:

Aboriginal opinion and custom varies considerably on the matter of human remains. Given that we have material from all over Australia, it is difficult to produce a simple, blanket policy regarding return of material. We also seek policy input from those Aboriginal individuals and groups that have relationships with the Collection. However, in the meantime the Museum will consider requests for return of remains which are in certain categories:

1. Where material is the remains of a known and named Aboriginal person, whose lineal descendants are identified, and make a request for the return of those remains.
2. Where the material is post-contact in nature.
3. Where it can be shown that the material was obtained by illegal or unethical means.

Despite proclamation of the new State legislation that foregrounded the rights and views of Aboriginal people in the protection of Aboriginal heritage, the Museum Board retained a policy that said understanding Aboriginal people's repatriation ambitions was complicated and, in the meantime, it would continue to provide access for research purposes, including destructive sampling.

In 2007 the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (UNDRIP) plainly said Indigenous people have the right to repatriation of their human remains and States have a responsibility to transparently facilitate repatriation using process developed with the relevant Indigenous people.[7] In 2009 the Australian Government

formally supported the Declaration. Despite these significant milestones in human rights standards, the Museum's policy remained unchanged.

The Board's passive repatriation process that relied upon Aboriginal communities requesting returns and which the Board would only consider under limited circumstances was not a defensible or appropriate framework for the Museum's custodianship of the largest collection of Aboriginal remains in the southern hemisphere in 1987 and by 2017 the position was untenable.

Repatriation under the old policy

When Aboriginal-led calls for repatriation of Aboriginal remains gathered momentum across Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the South Australian Museum Board also approved its first repatriations. The returns responded to ad-hoc requests and were either transfers among the state museums or to interstate land councils. The Australian Government's Return of Indigenous Cultural Property programme provided impetus and resources for repatriation from the Australian museums. Under the programme, the South Australian Museum returned some ancestors closer to Country but only two South Australian communities reburied some of their ancestors. Despite the national momentum and resources, the Museum didn't have a dedicated repatriation manager and there was no strategy.

Since the very early days of the collection, the scientific value of Aboriginal remains has been argued as broadly beneficial. During repatriation 'negotiations', discussion would turn to the benefits of scientific research, noting the Museum saw itself as the expert on this question. The institutional attitude was evident when a request for repatriation of one the largest collections from a single burial site was considered in 1991. Before deciding on the local repatriation request, Graeme Pretty, the Museum Senior Curator, Archaeology was actioned to test the professional world's opinion on what impacts reburial would have on the progress of bioanthropology and medicine. Pretty launched an international fax crusade. In his cover letter to peers and colleagues around the world Pretty warned of the potential loss and asked each professor to argue 'a case against surrender' of the remains to the Aboriginal descendants. The responses were full of arguments for preservation of the remains for future scientific purposes.

The 1990s saw an international shift to rehumanising ancestral remains and moves away from eurocentric research projects relying on Aboriginal remains, however, the Museum Board continued to approve research proposals into the twenty-first century framed by its 1987 policy. Into the early 2000s, a few researchers began working closely with local Aboriginal people to answer questions posed by the Aboriginal community, but most researchers applying to work with the remains in the Museum had either no or only tenuous connections to community. Some proposals started to investigate questions that might assist repatriation of remains without provenance. However, given the scale of the task was to repatriate almost 4,000 ancestors from known burial sites to known communities, focus on this type of scientific research was a mismatch with the actual work required.

When the Australian Government released its updated *Policy on Indigenous Repatriation* in 2016, it provided another opportunity for the Museum to review its position and practice in relation to national standards. However, the Museum did not oversee a systemic policy review nor respond with a holistic, culturally appropriate repatriation strategy. By 2017, the Museum's *Policy on Human Skeletal Remains Collection* adopted in 1987 had not been reviewed or amended in over 30 years.

A crisis and the Pickering Review

The Museum's Aboriginal Advisory Committee[8] worked hard through successive chairs to steward the Museum Board's moral compass and attitudes towards the respectful care and repatriation of Aboriginal remains. Tensions between cultural authority, cultural protocols and the ambitions of non-Aboriginal scientists challenged this work. Access to ancestral remains for scientific research was often argued to the Committee as to the benefit of Aboriginal people as a whole even though, upon reflection, the research output was clearly academic publication, not community dissemination.

In the context of an outdated policy and a period of transition in Museum leadership, increasing scrutiny by Aboriginal communities and government agencies of the Museum Board's processes for approval for access to Aboriginal remains for scientific research erupted as an institutional crisis in 2016. The Museum's Aboriginal Advisory Committee sought advice from Professor John Carty, the newly appointed Head of Humanities, on the adequacy of the museum's 1987 human remains policy. Together they explored the value of establishing a reference group

to guide policy renewal and development of an associated repatriation strategy. The new Head proposed a strategy of a revised staffing structure implemented through the Museum's change-management process to focus on repatriation and an independent review of the museum's 1987 human remains policy. The proposal was supported. A moratorium was placed on all access to ancestral remains for research purposes while policy and procedures were reviewed and the review outcomes considered.

Professor Michael Pickering from the National Museum of Australia was invited to review the museum's human remains policy. Pickering reported aspects of the 1987 policy that were likely to be out of step with Aboriginal communities' expectations for the management, research and repatriation of ancestral remains. He also noted deficiencies in collection management best practice and risks with compliance with State based heritage protection legislation. The four key recommendations on how to approach a redress of these shortcomings were:

1. The South Australian Museum should develop a policy on human remains that meets, if not exceeds, current industry and professional standards.
2. The policy should be accompanied by detailed governance procedures.
3. Indigenous community representatives should be involved in the development of any new policy.
4. Policy and procedures should articulate with state legislation.

The key recommendations were supported by detailed discussion in four areas of potential policy development: Governance; Collection management; Responsible research; and Repatriation. It was clear that each policy area required referencing to the Museum's responsibilities embedded in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988,* other established national protocols and community expectations (such as the *AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies [2012]*). In addition to application of the legislation, a new policy needed to connect and clearly articulate the Museum's ambitions with Aboriginal communities' expectations.

The review coincided with structural change and recruitment of a full time Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager to lead the policy redevelopment, create a stronger and strategic alignment between the Museum and the State Government's department for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and promote a greater internal understanding of the Museum's responsibilities under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*.

The review's recommendations underpinned terms of reference for the Museum's first ever Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and Repatriation Policy Reference Group.

A new approach to policy development

The Ancestral Remains and Repatriation Policy Reference Group worked with the Museum staff through the review recommendations and provided cultural guidance on new policy development. Membership was drawn from the Museum's Aboriginal Advisory Committee and Aboriginal elders with direct experience in repatriation and reburial of ancestral remains. The Group also invited representatives from the State department for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation with experience administering protection and repatriation of ancestral remains clauses under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*. The Museum's newly appointed Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager, Anna Russo, became the group's executive officer, leading the approach to policy development.

By carefully applying the underlying legal frameworks in concert with a sound understanding and reflection of Aboriginal community expectations, the Reference Group approached policy renewal as an opportunity to reposition the Museum as an Australian exemplar for care and repatriation of Aboriginal ancestral remains. The reference group met five times over 12 months and maintained its focus on shifting the Museum Board's historical perspective of Aboriginal remains as Aboriginal heritage with scientific value to a perspective of culturally appropriate recognition and respect for deceased humans displaced from their original burial locations.

The Group reviewed repatriation policies from museums and institutions around Australia and international practice. It referenced the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and sought to align policy with legal obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*. Input was also sought from the National Advisory Committee on Indigenous Repatriation, and staff from across the South Australian Museum and the National Museum of Australia.

The Group's first decision was to protect all the ancestors. The policy needed to apply to all human remains in the Museum's care, not just the Aboriginal ancestral remains. The policy also needed to protect ancestors that had been 'deaccessioned' from the registers but still held in the Museum's Keeping Place. For the Group, it was paramount that all the ancestors would be treated equally and cared for to the same

standards. The Group then moved through the key policy areas including the definitions of ancestral remains and repatriation; a policy position on the display of ancestral remains, modified remains and burial goods; responsible research expectations; and decision-making authority across the repatriation process.

Definitions

Two terms in particular required clarification: ancestral remains, and repatriation. The Group's decision was for alignment and consistency with external and national conventions by adopting the Australian Government's definition of 'ancestral remains' embedded in repatriation funding agreements between the Museum and the Australian Government. The ancestral remains definition in these agreements included the whole or part of human skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth; soft tissue including organs; samples of hair taken from individuals both deceased and living at the time of the removal; and casts taken from any of these. The Group applied this definition to ancestral remains from all cultures. The definition was far more encompassing than the guidance given by the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2005) (which underpins all UK Museum human remain policies and which has been looked to as an exemplar by EU countries, such as Germany) (see also Forster et al. 2017). Given the Museum's large collection of Aboriginal hair samples and the mixed arguments occurring at the museum and in the Aboriginal community regarding propositions the hair be accessible for research purposes, the decision made an important statement about the cultural value of human hair in Aboriginal cultures and the Group's view of scientific value in relation to Aboriginal remains.

Over a number of years, around 1,000 ancestors in the Museum's Keeping Place, the restricted storage facility dedicated to securely storing the ancestral remains, have been 'deaccessioned' from the Museum's register with the intention of being returned to Country. For various reasons, these ancestors are still in the Museum's Keeping Place. There had been reports that these ancestors had been 'repatriated'; meaning to the Group members these ancestors had been returned to Country and reburied. The Group believed that saying these ancestors had been 'repatriated' while they were still on a shelf in the Keeping Place no closer to home and with nobody working with the affected community to get them home, was confusing. Members saw repatriation as the physical return of an ancestor to Country, not the administrative process of deaccession. The Group defined 'repatriation' as the unconditional return

of ancestral remains and associated burial goods to Country of origin, not just communities. The definition set the policy lever for the Museum to implement a programme of repatriations to Country coordinated by the dedicated repatriation manager actively working with Aboriginal communities.

Display

The Group was emphatic that Aboriginal ancestral remains and associated burial goods should not be displayed. At the time there were no Aboriginal ancestral remains on display and there had not been for some time.

For ancestral remains and burial goods from foreign cultures, the Group acknowledged that there are a wide range of views associated with human remains, mortuary rituals and the display thereof. Their view was that where displays of human remains clearly offended the community of origin, the display could act as a disincentive to engage with the museum, thereby undermining the museum as a place of civic service. The Group adopted a principal of cultural context. In this way displays could be decided through consultation with both the relevant representative body of the foreign community as well as consultation with the host Aboriginal representative body.

Research

The Group wanted to reflect Aboriginal tradition and authority in decision-making and placed Aboriginal communities at the centre of decision-making about scientific testing of Aboriginal ancestral remains, including hair samples. The Group adopted a position of approved research being limited to non-invasive (i.e. observational) research that supported returns to Country and which was of primary benefit to the Aboriginal community. Observations such as those that could confirm the sex and maturity of an ancestor were supported, as the information would form an important part of planning reburial ceremonies.

The position addressed a key risk identified during the Review regarding governance and legislative compliance in relation to decisions about invasive testing of ancestral remains. The position proposed to mitigate the Board's risk of breach of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988* and shift the notion of Aboriginal ancestral remains being in the service of science to Aboriginal communities controlling the scientific value of ancestral remains.

It was clear this fundamental shift would challenge scientific researchers expecting access to ancestral remains for scientific purposes through a Museum Board approval process. The Group's aim was not to remove the accessibility of ancestral remains to science, but to shift the control of the scientific value of ancestral remains to Aboriginal communities. The new policy enabled this important distinction by asking Aboriginal communities seeking invasive research to request repatriation of their ancestral remains. To date, no Aboriginal community has removed their ancestors from the Museum in order to conduct invasive scientific testing, even though the mechanism to do so exists.

Hair of named Aboriginal people

Thousands of human hair samples collected from living people in the twentieth century by the Board for Anthropological Research presented the Reference Group with unique complexity. Protected by the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*, there were ethical questions surrounding the historical collection of the hair samples and research propositions that could affect the broader Aboriginal community in the future. Adding to the complexity was the fact the Board had already approved access to several hair samples for an existing research project. The Group remained firm that the question of value was one to be determined by Aboriginal people in accordance with the traditions, customs, observances and beliefs ascribed by Aboriginal tradition.

Without undermining this principle, the Group accepted that the human hair samples were attributed to named individuals and these individuals (or their direct descendants) could use their authority and autonomy to determine use of their specific hair sample. Notwithstanding an individual's choice to participate in a research project, the broader question of impact on the community as a whole needed consideration. After careful deliberations, the Group decided to maintain the principle of acting in accordance with Aboriginal tradition and to split the question of overall merit from personal decisions to participate. It did this by asking that to consider a request for access to any hair sample, the Board would require evidence of consultation with the relevant Aboriginal representative body on the merit of the research question proposed. If access was approved, it would be conditioned with the relevant individual's (or their direct descendants') fully informed consent, Ministerial authorisation under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988* and research ethics approval.

Testing the concepts

Once the Group had settled on the policy concepts and principles, these were explored and tested in a forum held with 50 Traditional Owners representing the Aboriginal communities affected by the museum's collection of ancestral remains. Using public engagement techniques, five questions that directly related to the Group's deliberations and policy direction were posed. Small groups worked on a large white paper answering one question each. Then, in succession, the groupwork answers were passed from one table onto the next. As the next group was able to quickly review the previous group's responses, the technique encouraged each successive group to delve deeper into the question than the previous group. By the end of the cycle, the participants' responses to the five questions could be tested against the Reference Group's draft policy. Outcomes of the forum's group work aligned with the Reference Group's work and with all feedback considered, the Museum Board approved the new *Management and Repatriation of Ancestral Remains and Burial Goods Policy* in December 2018, immediately replacing the 1987 policy.

The new policy provided a starting point for an approach that placed Aboriginal communities at the centre of decisions about the care and repatriation of ancestral remains. Implementation of the policy was likely to reveal areas that required further discussion or clarification and it was anticipated the policy would evolve alongside the Museum's engagement with Aboriginal communities.

By the end of 2018, every Aboriginal community affected by the Museum's holdings of ancestral remains had been informed about the new approach and invited into a programme where they would be supported to develop community-specific archival resources for community consultation and fully-informed, community-led decision-making. The decisions would in turn inform community-led, museum-funded repatriation plans focused on returns to Country and reburials.

Implementation and performance

Following its first two years of operation, the *Management and Repatriation of Ancestral Remains and Burial Goods* Policy was internally reviewed. The review focused on policy purpose, definitions and cultural authority in decision-making and specifically sought feedback on the responsible research clauses. The relevant clauses were tested using four survey statements, each with a five-point Likert scale (Strongly

Disagree to Strongly Agree) along with an opportunity to provide a free text comment against each statement. Agreement rates were calculated by aggregating the total responses for agree and strongly agree and presenting this as a percentage of all responses for each question. A final open question provided an opportunity to discuss potential improvements to the policy.

Written correspondence with the survey and a survey link was circulated to Aboriginal organisations and government agencies supporting repatriation. In addition, the survey was circulated to all Department of Environment regional landscape boards, reflecting the high participation rates of local Aboriginal communities on these boards and the use of conservation and recreation parks as reburial grounds. Face-to-face consultation was undertaken with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement and South Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council. Feedback was received from 13 respondents through either completed surveys, face-to-face discussion or in written correspondence. Over half of the feedback received was from Aboriginal representative bodies or parties.

The results against the four statements (Figure 13.1) suggested the policy structure was broadly supported, however, there was a
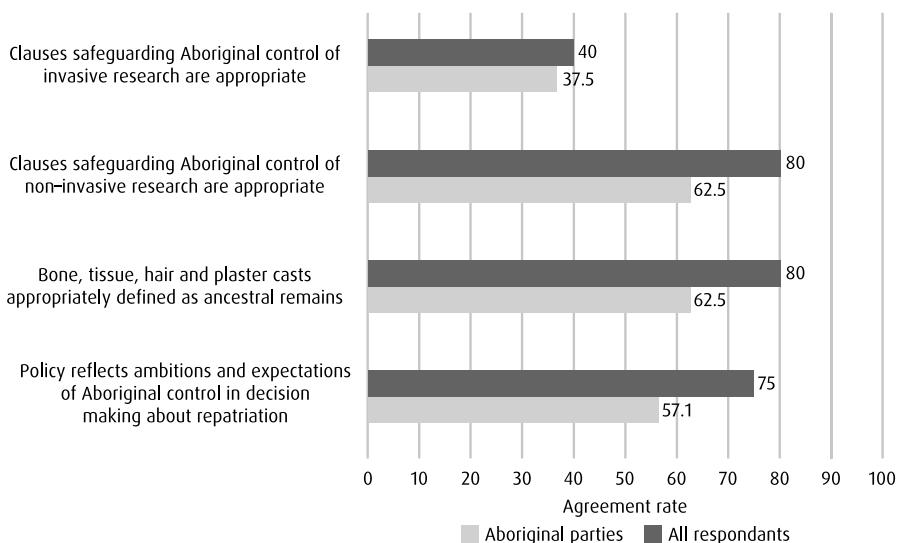
Figure 13.1 Bar chart showing agreement rates % on survey of policy statements.

need to strengthen the clauses safeguarding Aboriginal control of invasive research.

Clauses safeguarding Aboriginal control of non-invasive research were rated highly among both the Aboriginal respondents (80 per cent) and respondents overall (62.5 per cent). Eighty per cent of Aboriginal parties agreed the inclusion of human bone, tissue, casts and hair were all appropriately defined as Aboriginal ancestral remains. In terms of being responsive to or reflective of Aboriginal expectations, the policy also scored highly among the Aboriginal respondents (75 per cent). Government parties were less satisfied with the policy in this respect, pushing the overall agreement rate for this item down to 57.1 per cent. Aboriginal parties (40 per cent) were dissatisfied with the clauses safeguarding Aboriginal control of invasive research and this response was closely mirrored by the overall respondents (37.5 per cent).

Free text comments focused on responsible research (most notably in relation to the Aboriginal hair samples), appropriate resourcing and community consultation.

In response to the low agreement rate to clauses safeguarding Aboriginal control of invasive research (40 per cent) and the contention raised in comments about the Aboriginal hair samples, it was proposed that clauses be added to the policy to clarify the research approvals granted prior to 2018. Amendments were made to align rules for any future requests for access to the Aboriginal hair samples to those in place for all other ancestral remains. The changes reflected the high agreement rate among Aboriginal responses (80 per cent) and overall (62.5 per cent) that the policy appropriately defined hair samples as 'ancestral remains'. Adjustments reflecting the feedback were approved by the Museum Board in July 2021.

Kaurna Wangayarta Reburial Memorial Park – a model for large scale repatriation

In the short time since the Museum's new community led repatriation policy was adopted, hundreds of Aboriginal ancestral remains have been returned to Country in repatriation projects led by Aboriginal representative bodies from all over South Australia. One of the most complex returns to Country was led by the Kaurna People, the Traditional Owners of the Adelaide Plains, who co-designed and constructed a new reburial and memorial park within Adelaide Cemeteries' Smithfield Memorial Park. Resourced by the South Australian government, the South

Australian Museum, Adelaide Cemeteries, the University of Adelaide and the Australian Government Indigenous Repatriation Program, the Kaurna community has reburied over 350 Kaurna ancestors at *Wangayarta*, their new reburial memorial park.[9]

Settlement of the City of Adelaide and its surrounds began in the early 1830s and almost immediately disturbed Kaurna ancestors. For around 100 years, between the 1880s to early 1980s, Kaurna ancestors dug up from grave sites to make way for development of the greater Adelaide area were transferred to the Adelaide Museum. By the end of the twentieth century, hundreds of displaced Kaurna ancestral remains were being cared for at the Museum. The Kaurna community had a strong ambition to rebury their ancestors on Country but such a large-scale repatriation needed land that would not only be a place of respectful reburial, but also provide security and protection in perpetuity in the context of a metropolitan city landscape. In response, the Kaurna community wanted to create a new type of reburial place that was culturally respectful and dealt with the risk of further disturbance of reburied ancestors. The question of location was resolved in 2019 when Adelaide Cemeteries offered two hectares of undeveloped land within the protection of one of its large memorial parks just north of the city. The Kaurna leadership seized the opportunity, and the Kaurna pilot repatriation project was funded by the State government and coordinated from the South Australian Museum. Kaurna leaders formed a project reference group supported by a network of government agencies. The Museum appointed landscape architects and the Group encouraged the community to work together to co-design *Wangayarta* (a combination of Kaurna words meaning grave + land). The community-led design speaks specifically to Kaurna culture with elements of traditional burial customs embedded in the design principles. Four burial mound sites were designed for reburial of ancestors from the four geographic areas of Adelaide: north, south, east and west. During construction, the mound areas were spread with soils from all parts of Adelaide as a way of bringing Country to the reburial park – Country the ancestors themselves once walked across. Kaurna-led archival research documented the original burial locations, providing the community with provenance certainty, and information was shared through community meetings, workshops and a regular community newsletter. Reburial ceremonies were held in the northern mound in December 2021 and western mound in June 2022. The reburials were preceded with cultural preparations by Kaurna elders that included wrapping and smoking the remains of each ancestor. Kaurna leaders, State politicians and senior museum and university staff at each

reburial ceremony have recognised the impact of institutional cultures and attitudes towards ancestors on Kaurna people today; reflected on the work done together to right the wrongs of the past; and committed to continuing this important journey of healing together. Building on the community-led experience, Adelaide Cemeteries dedicated additional land adjacent to Wangayarta to develop a contemporary Kaurna cemetery where Kaurna people who pass away today can be buried near their ancestors. Re-burying the ancestors did not mean their stories were buried with them. The archival research will inform high school history curriculum resources developed by the Museum's Aboriginal Education Program Coordinator with the Museum's Kaurna Repatriation Officer.

The Kaurna Wangayarta repatriation project rehumanised the Kaurna ancestors and combined their return to Country with truth telling and memorialisation. The project model has been adopted by other Aboriginal South Australian communities with a similar scale of repatriation ahead. Understanding and resourcing community repatriation ambitions has become the South Australian Museum's core repatriation focus and includes supporting Kaurna leaders to share their Wangayarta experience and knowledge with other Aboriginal communities.

Conclusion

After over 30 years of disjointed ambition and ad-hoc repatriations, the Museum Board's decision to appoint the Museum's first Aboriginal Ancestral Remains Policy Reference Group and Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager transformed the Museum's repatriation programme. The group of Aboriginal elders drew on their own experiences and expectations and carefully considered legal requirements. Their ambition was to place Aboriginal people and cultural authority at the centre of decisions about Aboriginal ancestral remains. The Group tested their ideas with the broader Aboriginal community and presented a compelling policy driven by community expectations and acknowledgement of the truth; that the Museum's collections were built on historical attitudes towards Aboriginal people and their ancestors that were dehumanising. The Group successfully shifted the Museum Board from arbiters of requests for access to Aboriginal remains for scientific research to active supporters of community ambitions to return ancestors to Country in culturally appropriate, respectful ceremonies.

In the four years since the policy was adopted, Museum leaders have apologised to Aboriginal people for the hurt caused by the actions

of Museum staff that came before them. The proactive, engagement-based repatriation strategy that cascaded from the community-led policy renewal has activated an unprecedented number of concurrent community-led repatriation projects. The capacity building has resulted in hundreds of respectful reburials of ancestors by descendants in a relatively short space of time. For an Aboriginal community faced with the challenge of reburying hundreds of ancestors in a metropolitan city or large town, the Kaurna Wangayarta project is an exemplar of unlocking community ambitions and resourcing these appropriately.

Every single return to Country is significant, emotional and difficult. By including Aboriginal peoples' voices in policy renewal, the Museum Board has come to recognise every successful repatriation and reburial relies on respecting Aboriginal agency and authority and has embedded this into the museum's organisational culture.

Notes

1   *Evening Journal* 17/10/1887 p. 4. See also exhibits described in *Adelaide Observer* 6/8/1898, p.34
2   *The Advertiser* 25/2/1911 p. 12
3   *Advertiser* 23/6/1925, p. 12
4   For example see *News* 4/10/1950, p. 16. Professor of Dentistry T.D. Campbell's study of native teeth
5   *Policy on Human Skeletal Remains Collection 1987*
6   *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988* s37. Preservation of right to act according to tradition. *Nothing in this Act prevents Aboriginal people from doing anything in relation to Aboriginal sites, objects or remains in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.*
7   UNDRIP Article 12.1 'Indigenous peoples have the right to …. and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.' and 12.2 'States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned.'
8   established under the *1976 Museum Act. Named changed in 2021 to Aboriginal Partnership Committee.*
9   In Kaurna language 'wanga' means 'grave' and 'yarta' means 'land, earth, ground, soil, country'. https://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/wangayarta. Accessed 29 August 2022.

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14

Kaitiakitanga: Māori collection management in Aotearoa New Zealand

Conal McCarthy, Laureen Sadlier and Moana Parata

Introduction

Museums and art galleries in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) were founded in the nineteenth century on British models. The professional practice of collection care and management in local institutions has been broadly similar to that in the United Kingdom. However, since the 1980s there have been efforts to change the ways in which objects are understood, handled, documented and stored in response to indigenous Māori ways of doing and being. This chapter surveys current practice in the sector and considers how Māori collection managers (CMs) and registrars do their everyday work behind the scenes at the museum and gallery, what is in line with local and international practice, and what is different, reflecting Māori values and practices in relation to material culture, spiritual beliefs and community needs. In doing so, collection managers have become kaitiaki Māori, stewards or guardians of taonga or treasures which are managed in partnership with iwi or tribes. This partnership is in accordance with the country's founding document the Treaty of Waitangi, which guarantees Māori people rangatiratanga, chieftainship or control over their cultural heritage. The chapter draws on the extensive experience of two Māori professionals, exploring their personal approach to their practice, ideas for the future and plans for the training of the next generation of kaitiaki Māori, alongside the theoretical and historical analysis of an academic who has researched the evolution of Indigenous

museum practice. Together we will sketch an outline of what we refer to as kaitiakitanga, or Māori collection management.

Collections management: history, theory and practice

What is the place of museum practice within museum studies, and in particular collection care and management? While there has obviously been much useful academic research on what museum professionals do in museums, professional readers do not always find much writing specifically dealing with museum practice in the growing literature of museum studies, which has been focused on academic theory rather than day-to-day operational work, on what professionals say and do, in other words, their practice (McCarthy 2015a). Unfortunately, the necessary emphasis on *theorising* museums (Macdonald and Fyfe 1996; Shelton 2013) resulted in the disconnection of much critical writing *about* museums from current practice *in* museums (Grewcock 2013; McCarthy 2016; Spiess 1996; Starn 2005). The problem in the existing literature is that writers from outside institutions have enthusiastically interrogated museum objects, displays and programmes, but, because they have not necessarily worked within these organisations, this writing is often preoccupied with public spaces front of house rather than what happens behind the scenes (Gillespie 2001; Macdonald 2002).

The major books which have defined the field of museum studies over the last 35 years have mainly been concerned with political and theoretical issues and do not often deal directly with core dimensions of practice. There are of course professional standards and ethics frameworks, and online resources on aspects of collections, but these tend to focus on the 'how to' not the 'why?'. Aside from these manuals and technical guidelines, it is surprising that the large edited collections and readers in museum studies do not touch on collections management more directly, which is an absolutely essential function within collections-based institutions, but which has attracted little sustained critical analysis in publications with comparison to, say, the plentiful work on the history of collections and collecting (Karp and Lavine 1991; Preziosi and Farrago 2004; Carbonell 2004; Corsane 2005). Not as much research has been published by museum professionals about their own work, probably because registrars, collection managers and curators have been so busy that they did not have time to write about their work, or when they did it was not necessarily encouraged or valued. We certainly need more critical analysis and writing by

CMs about their work, a gap which the present volume addresses. Moreover, there is an urgent need to bring together theory and practice within the same integrated model in order to research and write about aspects of professional practice hitherto under-examined (McCarthy 2015a, 2016).

One of the most useful overviews of this topic which includes theoretical analysis *and* practical process is by John E. Simmons (2015). Simmons defines collections management as 'everything that is done to care for and document collections and to make them available for use'. Collections management 'encompasses the acquisition, accession, registration, cataloging, care, use (for exhibition, education, and research), and disposal of objects and specimens and their associated information, as well as collection security, conservation, storage environments, and access' (Simmons 2015, 221). The author goes on to provide a historical survey of the development of collections management in relation to related areas like registration, conservation, curating, informatics, etc., and importantly to present a theoretical model for the practice of managing collections which brings together the key elements: 'order and disorder; growth and loss; and preservation and deterioration' (Simmons 2015, 232). He argues that museum theory has had a 'significant impact on the practice of collections management' as the idea of the museum has evolved from the storage of subject matter to functions-based operations or collection use (Simmons 2015, 235; see also van Mensch 2004), increasingly involving the source community and wider public in the process of looking after artefacts and making them accessible to visitors, users and stakeholders. The case study examined in this chapter provides an example of this process of opening up collections, and collections management, to communities.

However, an appreciation of what goes on behind the scenes should not merely validate 'best practice' which sometimes harbours conservative tendencies and a reluctance to provide access to communities. Critical theory is also needed to interrogate the wider social and political dimensions of collection care and management. In sum, we need more writing about collection management, ideally from practitioners, but writing that is both grounded in practice *and* theoretically attuned. In this chapter, our contribution to this effort is to provide a critical analysis of the ways in which collection management in museums in Aotearoa NZ has developed in response to indigenous perspectives on material culture heritage. We look at the indigenous challenges to, and adaptations of, conventional collections care and management, which is sometimes in line with mainstream practice and at other times in tension with it. In

doing so, we consider how this emerging Māori museology critiques, recalls and revises museum practice and museum studies as part of a wider movement towards indigenisation and decolonisation (McCarthy 2019; McCarthy and Tamarapa 2022).

Collection management in New Zealand museums: Kaitiakitanga

The history of museums in Aotearoa NZ follows the trajectory mapped out in the international sphere: museums modelled on British precedents in the Victorian period were gradually transformed from amateur private concerns to more formal scientific institutions aimed at public engagement, and the increasing size and complexity of collections led to a specialisation and professionalisation of roles from the mid-twentieth century (McCarthy 2015b). By the 1980s there were positions for collection managers in museums and registrars in art galleries who did some of the work previously done by curators (by now more focused on acquiring collections and developing exhibitions). Like the international literature, there is very little writing specifically dealing with the management and care of museum collections (Thomson 1981; Hogan 1995; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2022). Typically, CMs see their role as complementary to curators and other colleagues – whereas the curators deal with the intellectual aspect of collections, CMs are responsible for the physical handling, care, movement and storage of the objects. For example, Carolyn McGill, a very experienced professional at Te Papa, NZ's national museum, who manages a large and varied history collection, sees herself as the ears and eyes of objects, an advocate for them in discussions about their acquisition, storage, movement, display and interpretation, which is often at odds with what curators or educators want to 'do' with the objects (McCarthy 2018). A feature of the local museum sector is the quick uptake of new technology, with most collections now managed online through sophisticated digital databases, and increasingly platforms which provide access to the public across collection categories and different institutions in the sector, leading to a convergence of GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) (Chapman 2015; Wellington and Oliver 2015).

This typical story of growth, progress and improvement in managing collections belies a less straightforward and darker underside. Obviously any collecting institution in a former settler

colony has had to reckon with a troubled and difficult past in which objects were alienated from the colonised and displayed according to the norms and values of the dominant colonising culture (Tapsell 2015a). Aotearoa NZ was no exception to this despite an unusual degree of Māori engagement with 'Pakeha' museums, anthropology and heritage (McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Tapsell 2019). Research on the changing relationship between museums and Māori (McCarthy 2011) found that the professionalisation of museum practice from the 1980s protected entrenched interests, thereby resisting change and inhibiting experimentation, by smothering Māori efforts to regain control of their alienated ancestral heritage. Things arguably got worse rather than getting better. Before this, for example, in the early-to-mid 1980s when the ground-breaking exhibition *Te Maori* initiated sweeping changes in the ways in which Māori objects or taonga (treasures) were dealt with in collections, exhibitions and public programmes, it *was* possible for widespread change to occur. This was because the sector was relatively unprofessionalised, open to tribal influence, and porous; that is to say, it was relatively easy for people to move from outside or front-of-house roles or enter the sector and work in museums without credentials hindering access. Many of the Māori CMs and other staff who started working in museums in this period had no qualifications or experience and simply learned on the job, but their impact on museum practice was profound.

In itself, local museum practice was a relatively self-interested and conservative European paradigm that resisted the Māori control of Māori tribal culture (Mead 1985a, 1985b; Tapsell 2015a). Having said this, many Pakeha professionals were welcoming and willingly handed over control of Māori collections to Māori staff. Moreover, assertive Māori professionals have engaged effectively with museums over the last 30 years so that now many aspects of museum practice are strongly inflected by Māori perspectives and values (McCarthy 2011; Tapsell 2006). These areas of change can be briefly summarised here, and below we explore further how they are applied in practice through a closer analysis of the work of two kaitiaki Māori.

Collection care incorporates elements of tikanga (cultural practices and protocols), as well as mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), in the management of what are called taonga (treasures) by kaitiaki (literally 'guardians', but this is also the term used for Māori collections staff). At Te Papa in the 1990s these changes included the following:

- Taonga are to be understood and treated as living ancestors not artefacts.
- Collection managers are to act as Kaitiaki or guardians not gatekeepers.
- Collections are to be managed and stored in a culturally appropriate manner with reference to tikanga.
- Collections are to be classified and documented using Māori language and philosophical frameworks.
- Handling, storage, packing and transport are to reflect a Māori world view.
- Māori ritual concepts and practices are to be observed – i.e. tapu and noa, mauri, whakapapa, water, food, blood and other cultural restrictions (see Glossary in McCarthy 2011).
- More access to collections must be possible for descendent source community – spiritually, physically, virtually.
- In addition to preservation and conservation, there is an overall goal of reconnecting taonga with iwi.

(McCarthy 2011, 125)

The tikanga employed in collection stores when handling, or working in the immediate area of taonga Māori, include the following (some of these are a matter of personal choice):

- Do not eat food or drink.
- Do not stand or step over any taonga.
- Be aware of the language you use.
- Check if there are any iwi-specific tikanga requirements for a particular taonga.
- Say karakia/prayers.
- Do not work on carvings (if considered tapu).
- Do not work on kōiwi/skeletal material.
- Do not use certain treatments e.g. conservation with saliva.
- Do not work on taonga while menstruating.

(McCarthy 2011, 126)

Much of this transformation of NZ museum practice centres around the Māori concept of taonga tuku iho (ancestral treasures), and the ways in which it has been empowered by the Treaty of Waitangi, NZ's founding document signed in 1840 (Durie 1998). This document, which guarantees Māori control over their own affairs in general and their taonga in particular, has in recent years become the blueprint

for bicultural development in which indigenous people have taken responsibility for their culture and resources (Kawharu 1989). The word taonga has a complex genealogy but has come to be interpreted as 'cultural heritage' in modern times, and refers to a broad range of tangible and intangible resources, heirlooms and carvings to natural resources such as fishing grounds, cultural practices and beliefs (Mead 1991, 2003; Tapsell 1997).

In the last few years at Te Papa the word mana (power, authority, reputation, respect) has been added to taonga resulting in a powerful policy which not only captures the efficacy of these object as powerful object beings, but also encapsulates indigenous ownership and management rights in cultural heritage more broadly. As Hakiwai and Schorch argue, mana taonga is an indigenous principle which allows museums to develop a 'structured process of engagement with its communities' by recognising the 'living relationships' between taonga and their communities of origin (2014, 197–8). Māori policy analyst Cath Nesus wrote in 2004 that: 'This concept provides *iwi* and communities with the right to define how *taonga* within Te Papa should be cared for and managed in accordance with their *tikanga* or custom' (2004, 14). Kaihautū (Māori Director) of Te Papa, Dr Arapata Hakiwai, argues that mana taonga recognises that Māori people should have access to their culture on the basis of the relationships they have with this living ancestral heritage, and they therefore should be involved in their care and management internally as well as participating in exhibitions and public programmes externally (Hakiwai and Schorch 2014, 197–8). In this formulation then, the community *outside* the museum becomes a participant *within* the museum alongside professionals.[1]

Interestingly, the concept of 'mana taonga', though contested in some quarters, has now been extended to other non-Māori collections in Te Papa, such as art, history, and Pacific cultures, to other museums, and even overseas (Dorfman et al 2015; Hakiwai and Schorch 2015). Originally seen as a way of empowering Māori co-management of taonga Māori collections in museums, it has been extended to facilitate the collaboration of *all* source communities in the management and use of their cultural heritage (Bennington 2004, 11; Mallon 2019). Following the Māori-led model of community ownership of/involvement in collections, history curators work with communities in co-collecting projects, art curators involve artists in the interpretation of their work, and Pacific curators co-curate exhibitions with communities (McCarthy 2011, 140; Mallon in McCarthy 2011, 251; Gibson 2016).

Moreover, the notion of taonga has been extended beyond material 'artefacts' to a range of tangible and intangible material held in different kinds of collecting institutions – galleries, libraries, archives and museums – as well as cultural and natural heritage managed by various organisations; film, photographs, manuscripts, oral and performing arts, landscapes, flora and fauna. The diversity and complexity of taonga, and the complex challenges required to manage them, are described in the Waitangi Tribunal report WAI 262 (Ko Aotearoa Tēnei 2011) on heritage and intellectual property, which has yet to be seriously addressed by government and public institutions, especially the vexed question of ownership. One Māori professional, a former collection manager at Te Papa and now the manager of the Whakatāne museum and archive, has gone so far as to say that ultimately all taonga Māori should be returned to Māori control if they so desire. 'My goal should be to empty my museum,' he contends.[2]

Despite the common foci and approaches apparent in kaitiakitanga, there is a variety of practice and critical debate within and beyond this emerging Māori museology. These issues are discussed at gatherings such as the annual hui of the Kāhui Kaitiaki network, or the wānanga taonga at Hongoeka marae facilitated by Awhina Tamarapa from the Museum and Heritage Studies programme at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. Some Māori professionals, for example, argue that curators and collection managers are *not* kaitiaki, and that it is the original source community, the whānau, hapū and iwi, who are the stewards and caretakers. Māori staff in museums, they point out, are kaipupuri, who hold/store taonga on behalf of the community until such time as they are able to look after it themselves. Te Kenehi Teira, former kaihautū of Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, made a distinction between kaipupuri (Māori museum staff), kaitiaki (the owner/source community), and tautiaki, which is the go-between role of researcher/trustee/consultant, who may not be connected with the taonga by whakapapa, but who works with the kaitiaki and the institution to facilitate research, interpretation and access (Smith 2019).

In the next section we profile two co-authors of the current chapter, Laureen Sadlier and Moana Parata, both experienced Māori CMs who have been interviewed by fellow co-author Conal McCarthy. Though Sadlier and Parata are both graduates of Museum and Heritage Studies, their route into museum work was through learning on the job rather than formal qualifications. Through dialogue about, observation of, and reflection on, our ongoing work, we consider the similarities and differences not just with the care and management of Māori collections

but museum practice in general and also our involvement in teaching students, supervising interns and providing professional development and training for the current and future generations. It is clear that we, Moana Parata and Laureen Sadlier, aim not only to advance the practice of collections management, but also to critique and revise it, according to our own Māori perspectives on ancestral heritage; what has become known as kaitiakitanga or guardianship/stewardship of taonga Māori.

Moana Parata Kaitiaki Māori: profile of a Māori collection manager

Moana Parata, a Māori woman of Ngāti Toa tribal descent who lives at Hongoeka marae on the coast north of Wellington, started working at the then National Museum in 1994, which became Te Papa in 1998. Initially doing data entry on a part-time contract, she has worked her way up to the position of Kaitiaki Taonga Collection Manager Humanities.

Reflecting on her 27 years working at the museum with taonga Māori collections, she says that much has changed, from conditions where staff in white coats worked in an academic, scientific environment to the current situation where in her work, and in the wider institution, things move between two worlds: Māori and Pakeha, the professional museum world and the spiritual realm of Māori ancestral treasures.

Moana did not know much about museum work when she began, and was afraid to even enter the collection store at first, but was guided in her work by the respected elder Aunty Bessie Walters (a Ngāti Porou woman who had married into Ngāti Raukawa) working at the museum. Her own father, elders and extended family also supported her and endorsed her work, helping her to keep culturally safe while working with the taonga which are seen by Māori communities as objects of great power which have to be dealt with very carefully. Today, Moana is one of the most experienced and highly regarded CMs at Te Papa and is also a leader in her own tribal community. She is in many ways a typical museum professional who follows many of the same regulations and processes that her Pakeha colleagues do. But if we were to follow her through the day, we would see that, while recognisable as museum practice, the things that she does are at times different, at times diametrically opposed, to what is understood as museum 'best practice'.

Entering the collections store in the morning, she says a karakia (incantation) to spiritually clear the way for her work. When she gets home, she washes herself with water, or goes to the seashore near her

house, to ritually cleanse herself from the tapu associated with the taonga. Sometimes during the day the atmosphere in the collection store gets taumaha ('heavy'), so she walks to the bowl of water outside to sprinkle herself with water, to restore the balance of tapu and noa (sacred/ restricted, and everyday/ordinary). While in the museum generally she follows the institutional policies and her manager's directions, inside the carving collection store, Te Ahuru Mōwai, she is her own boss, answerable to the whānau, hapū and iwi (family, sub-tribe and tribe) connected by blood (genealogy/whakapapa) to the taonga she cares for.

Like other CMs at Te Papa, her daily tasks involve handling, moving, packing, cataloguing, recording and so on, as well as attending meetings with colleagues to talk about acquisitions, exhibitions and community engagement. But there are key differences. When she works with taonga, she treats them with great respect, and talks to them, as she would people. When she holds them, she does so with gloves, and treats them with care, but also what she calls aroha (love/empathy). Rather than seeing the objects as inert things, she regards them as taonga, ancestral heirlooms which contain mana (power, authority, respect) and mauri (spiritual essence), object-beings who are analogous to and treated like a person. Moana cares for the tangible *and* the intangible. She listens to the taonga and senses when they are restless. She is aware of, and can communicate with, the unseen, the spiritual realm which taonga inhabit, something largely invisible to other staff, even Māori staff. At times, you get the sense talking to Moana that it is the taonga who are the kaitiaki – they look after her as well as vice versa.

Like other CMs she does not allow food in the collection store, and is careful to sprinkle herself with water after handling the taonga at a bowl placed for that purpose outside each store room. Some of these protocols are shared by other collections staff, who do not eat or drink in their office area, where taonga are sometimes placed, out of respect for Māori values. Many of these protocols are standard museum practice anyway, but Māori CMs also abide by the specific set of traditional customary concepts mentioned above: mana, tapu, noa and mauri (authority/power, sacredness/restricted, and life spirit) (See Mead 2003; Tapsell 1997; Glossary in McCarthy 2011).

Moana does much of her work on the computer through the collection database KEmu, an international collections management system (CMS) which has been adapted to Māori needs. The interface is ubiquitous but the taonga are described using Māori words and concepts, and the specially-devised thesaurus categorises them according to Māori principles (see also Lamb 2022). At times the arrangement of objects in the collection store (and the design of exhibitions front of house)

reflect these principles too: the genealogy of the tribe (whakapapa), the authority/status and reputation (mana) of the taonga along with the people who owned and used it. Taonga associated with food (noa), for example, are kept apart from those connected with death (tapu).

When asked what a CM is, Moana responds that she asks her boss the same question! She refers to herself as a kaitiaki (guardian, caregiver). This word has the sense of collective stewardship which avoids the sense of a gatekeeper. Kaitiakitanga, she adds, is about access to taonga for her people, keeping the doors open, not closed. She sees her role as working alongside the whānau, hapū and iwi who are consulted on the care, interpretation and display of their culture. This is the principle of co-management referred to above, mana taonga, meaning that the authority/responsibility for taonga lies with those who have genealogical links to them. For Moana, this entails being a go-between or facilitator with other museum staff, in terms of maintaining tikanga, the correct cultural management of taonga according to the tribe's wishes, whether this is a conservator, a mount maker, an educator or even a curator. For Moana, the mana taonga policy is a vehicle for whānau, hapū and iwi access to the collections stored at Te Papa.

In the past there has been tension between kaitiaki Māori making taonga available for their people, and other staff who have been seen to restrict access, such as loans and conservation, where preservation conflicts with access. Moana notes that this has improved in recent years, partly due to new thinking about care of collections (Sully 2007), partly because of Treaty claims which have facilitated repatriation or required museums to return or facilitate access to taonga through cultural redress processes. Another factor is governance, where Māori trustees on the museum's board ensure tribal voices are heard by management. Sometimes iwi assert their authority directly. Moana cites a particular case where a loan for a carving was denied due to its fragility. When the tribe found out, kaumātua (elders) travelled to Wellington and confronted the management, demanding to know who denied their request and why. The museum reviewed their processes and since then it has been much more common for taonga to move in and out of the museum on short term loans, for example cloaks for a graduation ceremony, carvings for an important hui (meeting), weapons such as greenstone mere for a tangi (funeral). Staff oversee these loans, and still have to take care of the object, but it is now commonplace for taonga to leave the museum in the care of the community. For example Moana often takes taonga to hearings of the Waitangi Tribunal which happen on tribal marae, and she describes this experience of reconnecting community to their cultural heritage as empowering, inspiring and enriching.

Laureen Sadlier: moving between two worlds

Laureen Sadlier (Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Manu) grew up with her grandparents on the East Coast, spending a lot of time on the tribal marae. When she was older she moved to the city to find work, and joined a training scheme set up by the Museum of New Zealand in 1988. After this internship she started working at the Porirua Museum which was right across the road from the Takapuāhia marae, and which was frequently visited by local Ngāti Toa people. Then in 1990 she moved on to the Maritime Museum in Wellington which eventually became Wellington Museum as part of a larger family of museums called Experience Wellington. By this time she was a registrar/collections manager, overseeing a large and diverse social history collection in an offsite facility, a big team of volunteers, an active programme of deaccessioning and much more. In 2011 she moved to Pataka Art + Museum in Porirua, becoming a collections and exhibitions manager in a vibrant institution that held collections of art, history, Māori and Pacific culture. At the same time she completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies. With wide experience behind her and highly developed logistics and people management skills, she has now become a museum director.

In reflecting on her career over many years, Laureen feels that a collection manager/registrar is in essence a 'guardian' of the collection, who is concerned for its knowledge and physical wellbeing, and who provides accurate data and safe access for communities. She has always worked closely with curators and other staff, but believes CMs have a different approach, balancing access/exhibitions and wider public engagement with the wellbeing of the collections. She sees herself as an advocate for the object, at times at the expense of the 'dreams' of curators and the 'deals' of managers, trustees or politicians who make promises that put the object at risk, or 'embarrass' it. These elements sound very familiar in any CM's job description, and of course Laureen has mostly worked with non-Māori collections in mainstream institutions, but there are subtle differences. When she talks about 'embarrassing' objects she is thinking of the 'era' the object comes from, and the 'people who were associated with it', whose mana also have to be respected. She gives an example of an exhibition design where a toilet pan was going to be placed in front of a historic photo of an early whaling station which included several Māori people who were prominent ancestors of living descendants. In Māori terms this is a definite transgression of the laws of tapu and noa, which stipulate that ordinary/everyday/profane things should be kept apart from those that are sacred or restricted. We can see

then that Laureen's role encompasses standard collections management activities, but extends beyond it, to an awareness of intangible values and wider social connections.

As a manager who is now responsible for leading teams of curators and collections staff, she aims to bring them together in an integrated process to avoid the conflicts that sometimes arise. She has observed that communities these days are more aware of stored collections and want access to them, but this takes time and resources. Developing the collections and exhibitions requires both research by curators but also input from collections staff who actually spend more time with the object and have a direct appreciation of their material properties. The split between curators and collections staff is unfortunate, and perhaps they should be re-integrated into one position that does both roles, so that they can work *up* from the objects and collections, not *down* from the theory or exhibition concept. Again this vision of an integrated approach to physical *and* intellectual care reflects the Māori word kaitiaki, used for all staff involved in museums regardless of what department they are in – everyone is a kaitiaki who answers to the museum, the taonga and the people to whom it belongs. Thinking back over her work in the museum sector, Laureen has seen a gradual increase in Māori staff working in museums, not just working with taonga but in other general roles – a 'colouring up' of the institutions which has reaped many benefits.

Laureen identifies certain traits that mark out the distinct practice of kaitiaki Māori and how it has diverged from conventional collections management. A key one is greater flexibility about taonga moving in and out of the museum collection. Pātaka has become very flexible, for example they will allow taonga to go out for an important hui (meeting) at a local marae, such as a hearing of the Waitangi Tribunal. More traditional staff may object to this practice and the risk to the object it entails, but she accepts that they are not going to come back pristine because they are going to be used; and there are positives, as 'letting taonga go out builds good relationships with iwi'. She continues:

> You have to be aware that taonga have roles they need to play, whether they are being held, someone is having a tangi (cry) holding it, whether haka (posture dances) are being performed over it – that's why they exist … you can't treat everything with the same standards of museum practice.

In her work, Laureen observes many of the same Māori cultural practices as Moana at Te Papa, in terms of the rules of tikanga, keeping food and drink away from taonga, and saying karakia, for example, to keep herself safe. She pays particular attention to certain taonga such as personal items like jewellery and also weapons. When working with weavers, who come in to see cloaks in the collection to aid in their work making new cloaks, she will allow them to lift the garment to see how it is made (see also Te Kanawa 2021; Lamb 2022). Each case is different and she has to make a decision how to handle it: whereas she may let artists touch taonga, and expert musicians play musical instruments (taonga puoro), she usually stops young males from picking up weapons such as mere or taiaha, lest they get carried away and damage them and hurt someone in the process.

There is definitely a tension, which she has often discussed with Moana, between Western notions of conservation and the impulse of Māori communities to access and touch objects that connect them to their ancestral culture and identity. Kaitiaki Māori have to wear 'two hats': 'For me it's about people *and* it's about collections, and reconciling the two, that's the path we walk.' This means having to take on the role of teaching in order to:

> … help non-Māori staff understand a Māori way of working with the collection and doing those things that we do like karakia and how to treat taonga that are connected with food and keeping it separate from items of personal adornment, say, and making sure the wider team understand how to handle, store and access them differently. It's important that those that are not Māori understand why we do things and try to make them comfortable doing those things themselves. If we are to become bicultural then we have to allow other people to handle our taonga.

On this point, Laureen disagrees with those who say that only Māori staff should manage Māori collections (see also McCarthy 2011, 123). She feels that non-Māori *can* manage taonga Māori collections, especially unprovenanced collections lacking a direct link to place and people or in situations where there are no Māori staff. Indeed she argues, contra much current rhetoric, that 'everyone needs to look after them, and to understand why we need to do it the way we do'. On the other hand, Laureen believes it *is* very important to teach Māori communities to look after their own taonga, even if this eventually puts the museum out of

business. In Porirua, she shows young Ngāti Toa people the basics of collection care so they can look after their taonga themselves – 'So you don't have to be there, they can do it!' This is a remarkably open attitude to museum expertise, not at all concerned with professional boundaries which exclude those who are not accredited or qualified, but aware of the bigger picture, reconnecting Māori to their heritage.

In addition, Laureen has been actively involved in efforts to train the next generation of kaitiaki Māori. She has researched, planned and implemented internships for young Māori people to get them involved in museum work leading on to careers in the sector. Indeed, both Laureen and Moana are aware of the need for succession planning, for getting Māori into museums to look after taonga, but also to set up their own cultural centres. Like their professional practice, which moves between two worlds – standard collections care and an emerging Māori museology – they do not reject western approaches outright but value both museum practice and tikanga Māori, a compromise of *both and* rather than *either/or*.

On the issue of training, although both Laureen and Moana have learnt on the job and done postgraduate study, they do not believe university courses will meet the challenge of getting more Māori into the museum sector, including collections staff. They think that the process needs to start much earlier; school leavers need to be shoulder-tapped, given the opportunity to get hands-on work experience in museums including on-the-job training and only later pursue university qualifications. As it is, very few Māori come into the sector through master's degrees in Museum and Heritage Studies, regardless of the fact that these courses include extensive Māori content including aspects of kaitiakitanga (McCarthy and Tamarapa 2022). Higher degrees, and the critical analysis that comes with academic theory, are important to build the cultural depth needed in this field, Laureen believes, but at the moment we need much higher numbers of young people coming in to the sector at a lower level who can be nurtured, mentored and guided into careers such as collection management. Active discussion about training and qualifications are taking place, including among the authors of this chapter, on how to realise this shared vision of a distinct field of Māori museum practice, kaitiakitanga, which builds on collection care and management, but steers it towards the goal of Māori cultural development.

Notes

1   It should be noted that the concept has been disputed by critics like Māori academic Professor Paul Tapsell, who argued that it usurps a traditional practice and overrides local tribal authority with a government mandate. See Tapsell 2006.
2   Mark Sykes Potae quoted in a session at the wānanga taonga, Hongoeka Marae, 31 August 2022.

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15

Reconciling with ourselves: how do we decolonise collections management practices in museum spaces and systems?

Sharon Fortney

Introduction

In my role as Curator of Indigenous Collections and Engagement at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV), I find myself frequently positioned on the border of two systems of knowledge production as they relate to the care of Indigenous belongings. First, and foremost, I am responsible to a diversity of Indigenous community members, whose belongings are housed at the museum.[1] I strive to ensure that the museum is an accessible and safe place to visit – and that while they are here, they will see their family and community belongings cared for in a respectful manner. Secondly, I am part of a curatorial team responsible for caring for what is viewed as the City of Vancouver's collection and ensuring that museum standards are met in terms of environment, object care and handling and security. I am fortunate that my co-workers prioritise making the collection accessible to Indigenous community members, both virtually and in-person, and are willing to implement changes in response to community identified needs. There are times where implementing change is impeded by current staff capacity and the funding limitations which are common to non-profit organisations like ours. However, decolonisation should always start by recognising a power imbalance when it comes to our relationships with people outside of our respective institutions – self-awareness and historical consciousness should always guide the work we do. In this chapter, I

will explore how we might destabilise current collections management practices as a means of decolonising museums with ethnographic collections.

Agency, decision-making and preservation

When Indigenous (and other minoritised) source communities enter museum storage areas, or search for belongings in our handy online databases, they encounter the knowledge frameworks of our museological profession. Whereas many of us, as museum professionals, could argue that our practices are about care of the object or maximising space or increasing accessibility, it is important to consider how we define those priorities and whose values are being prioritised. How can we employ standards of care that are guided by the cultural protocols of Indigenous and other source communities? Where do we start?

The long-term preservation of an object is the usual goal for museum conservation, and managing activities where an object will undergo change, such as handling, is key to that practice. A former colleague, conservator Miriam Clavir, wrote:

> Conservators approach preserving the cultural significance of a heritage object by preserving its integrity (which they can "read" through scientific evidence) and its aesthetic, historic, and conceptual integrity (which is interpreted through scholarship in related disciplines as well as "read" through physical evidence). Many [Indigenous people], on the other hand view the preservation of the cultural significance of a heritage object as inseparable from the preservation of traditions, oral history, community, and identity as [Indigenous people]; preservation is about people, and objects have their role in cultural preservation. (2002, xvii)

At times, the preservation of an object may not honour the original intentions of the community. For example, MOV repatriated a mortuary pole that had been resting in its oversize storage facility for several decades. The family's original intention was to place the pole outdoors so it could return to the earth – a cultural practice that was disrupted when the pole was illicitly sold and shipped south to Vancouver for sale in the 1960s. In 1968, the Department of Indian Affairs asked MOV to acquire the pole to prevent its export into the United States. At the time, MOV was the only museum in the area with the funds to intervene. Once

acquired, the mortuary pole was never exhibited due to its poor condition and monumental size. In 2019, when it was repatriated to its place of origin, those community members now responsible for it decided the best cultural practice was to burn it. For many cultures on the Pacific Northwest, ceremonial burnings are a way of transferring property, gifts, and food to ancestors and recently deceased relatives in the spirit realm.[2]

For this specific repatriation, MOV supported the work by giving conservation advice on how to best deal with a foam that had previously been used to stabilise the piece, to ensure there were no dangerous fumes or contamination of soil. Staff at MOV agree that repatriation is not about institutional transfers that require museum grade facilities or dictating standards of care. Rather, it is about understanding that agency was removed from an individual, a family, or community by coercive historical processes – and that redressing that wrongdoing requires letting go of notions of cultural preservation that may not be shared by the community members who are engaging in the repatriation process. It is about completely relinquishing control. We recognise that this attitude should extend to care of items that remain as part of the collection, although we cannot implement or support practices that result in physical loss of a belonging while they remain accessioned, due to our mandated stewardship role in preserving the City of Vancouver's collection.

When we are visited by community knowledge holders, we are often informed that certain cultural protocols need to be followed for cultural safety. If we ignore those protocols, we risk harm to community members who enter our storage facilities and exhibition spaces, and to ourselves. In Canada, the most frequent examples of this sort of implementation tends to relate to collections that are viewed as 'culturally sensitive', because they are either spiritual in nature or involve ancestral remains. By following cultural rules, when they are known, we show our respect for Indigenous and other source communities. We recognise their agency when it comes to ways of caring for their cultural heritage.[3] When this happens, museum spaces – both physical and virtual, can become a resource that helps to reinforce those teachings for younger community members and those who may be disenfranchised because of the legacies of colonialism. It is also part of the work we must do to make our facilities welcoming places.

The first step in the process is to consider how we approach care of Indigenous belongings housed in our respective museum. Are we using one approach for all collections? Or, when possible, do we consider the unique needs of each community whose heritage is under our care? Are there institutional mechanisms in place to respond to community

requests, and how do we prioritise these actions? Are we reactive in this work, or proactive? Do these ideas carry through into the institution's collections policy? If not, how, and when could they be incorporated? How often is the collections policy reviewed?

It is also important to consider whether we treat all types of collections in a consistent manner to be sensitive to the needs of Indigenous communities. In the 1990s, while working at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, I observed that members of the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot Nation) routinely guided Ethnology Department staff on best practices for care of their belongings in collections storage but had less direct influence on the work conducted in other museum departments. When it came to archival materials that related to spiritual knowledge, photographs of Sundance ceremonies for example, some archival staff raised the question of censorship when it was suggested that such images should no longer be publicly accessible given the private nature of such ceremonies. Some staff struggled with the necessity of removing such images from public view when they had previously been published in books and periodicals, arguing that people already had access to them. A key way to implement Indigenous agency into the care of collections is by respecting what is deemed private versus public within the respective communities. Although imbalances occurred in the past, we perpetuate them if we do not respond after acknowledging them.

In Canada, many Indigenous communities now require researchers to apply for a research permit to study their heritage materials, work with community members, and interpret or write about their history. To ensure that research protocols are being followed, one of the nations the MOV works with directed us to remove catalogue records for their belongings from the museum's online database. This was to ensure that researchers seek research permits from the community before accessing information about their belongings and other traditional knowledge and interpreting them.[4] Our team responds quickly to these types of requests as we prioritise relationships to the three host nation communities upon whose territories Vancouver exists, and want them to have longevity.

The response required staff to consider the placement of specific archaeological sites, and whether other nations in the region had equal claim to certain belongings held at the museum. Records for belongings from regional archaeological sites that fell within the traditional territories of multiple nations, like the Glenrose Cannery site, remained publicly accessible for the other nations who also claimed ancestral connection, while belongings from all the sites within close proximity to the community's current village site were removed from public access.

Although the museum has removed specific catalogue records from being accessed in the public portal, researchers can still access information via previously published museum notes and in the museum galleries and promotional materials.[5]

The above examples centre around decision-making over preservation of Indigenous belongings. The remainder of this chapter will critically discuss how museum professionals configure space and the ways that our choices reflect culturally embedded knowledge practices and values. It also asks whether our professional practices can be reconfigured so that, spatially and intellectually, we are encouraging Indigenous agency, more ethical relations to collections and communities, and the decolonisation of knowledge production. Can we move beyond recognition of shortcomings to actual processes that resolve the tensions inherent in these colonial spaces?

Agency and accessibility in museum spaces

One of the best ways to see if your museum is meeting the needs of Indigenous, and other source communities, is to consider how easy it is to host an unscheduled visit within your storage area. I personally find it quite difficult as the MOV's ethnographic collections, although sorted regionally – Northwest Coast, Plateau, Subarctic, Arctic, Plains, Eastern Woodlands – are not sorted by nation, but instead are arranged functionally. For example, all the Indigenous basketry from the Pacific Northwest is shelved in the same aisle, regardless of style, materials or community of origin. A Coast Salish cedar root basket may share shelf space with a Nuu-chah-nulth wrapped twined basket and a Haida spruce root basket with false embroidery, because they are of similar size, or there is an appropriate amount of shelf space to house the group. Likewise, the Northwest Coast masks are stored together in one section (except for a few secret society masks sequestered in the Culturally Sensitive cabinet); all of the carved boxes and bowls, all of the model totem poles and souvenir carvings, feast spoons, paddles and more are grouped together on the shelves, without tags to identify their source communities.

Information that relates to provenance (where it was made, when it was made, what it was used for, who made it and who owned it) resides separately in the museum's database and/or accession files. Over time, staff may come to know select belongings in the collection, but when you are working with thousands of objects, the memory aid provided by

the museum's collection database becomes a necessity, especially when working with community belongings that have been housed in such a dispersed manner.

While many Indigenous visitors enjoy browsing the aisles of storage, they most frequently want to see belongings from their own communities, or lineages, which at MOV can be scattered not only within the ethnographic and archaeological holdings, but also within the museum's History, Natural History, and Olympic Legacy collections, depending upon the life history of a specific item. For example, types of Indigenous belongings placed into the MOV History collection may document specific types of events or issues, such as Pride Parade T-shirts designed by Host Nation artists to show support for Vancouver's LBGTQ2S+ community, or disassociated items that have come to be identified as personal belongings of specific types of individuals such as former missionaries or Indian Agents.

In this latter instance, the museum's use of departmental classification perpetuates a diaspora of belongings within the museum's storage areas. Connections to source communities have been unintentionally severed because different cataloguing conventions are utilised within different 'departments' within the same institution. For example, when objects were previously catalogued into the MOV 'History' collection, the culture field was often intentionally left empty.[6] The result was unintended, but symbolic, violence towards the Indigenous communities from which these belongings originated. By imposing different cataloguing conventions on belongings removed under duress by colonial agents – or those reluctantly sold during periods of economic hardship created under colonial governance – Indigenous heritage items were further disenfranchised from the knowledge frameworks in which they were originally created. Their connection to source community was effectively silenced. As we move towards implementing a new collections database system, we are implementing change by adding cultural terminology and subjects into these types of records.

Implementing change is seldom an effortless process and can require an investment of considerable time and resources to resolve. To truly understand, and restore, Indigenous knowledge frameworks requires the involvement of specialists with linguistic proficiency. Indigenous languages convey Indigenous epistemologies; gaining insights into such categories of knowledge can be difficult to accomplish when working with communities with endangered languages and few fluent speakers. Consultation, whether it pertains to exhibit development, educational programming, or collections management, needs to be specific and long

lasting to be truly effective. For this reason, it is usually best to start such efforts with the host nations within whose traditional territories an institution resides. In instances where collections are far removed from their communities of origin, possibly on another continent, the size of the collection might be the determining factor for implementing such changes.

While reorganisation of collections storage may be an intended goal, a first step should be to identify and re-organise these collections digitally. One of the first areas to revisit is the lexicon for the Culture field. In Canada, many Indigenous communities have returned to using traditional names to identify their communities, but often museum collections databases carry forward outdated terms. In 2010, while working at UBC on the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), I was tasked with reviewing provenance terminology from participating institutions to help the computer programmers unify these terms when they were imported into the RRN database. Typically, the further away from the Pacific Northwest an institution was located, the less accurate their terminology became, most likely because there were no staff members with expertise in the region.

Records from the American Museum of Nature History (AMNH), for example, used the term Cowichan (Quw'utsun) in place of the linguistic term Halkomelem – a language with three dialects representing Island, Downriver, and Upriver speakers. When looking at 'Cowichan' records in the AMNH online database I found it important to look at the location where pieces were collected to accurately identify source communities. For instance, several pieces could be catalogued as Musqueam or Snuneymuxw – nations that do not identify themselves as Quw'utsun people but as neighbors, friends or relatives.

In addition, when I first arrived at MOV it was difficult to search certain collections because a variety of cultural terms (and spellings) had been entered into the Culture field. (For example, Sliammon and Tla'amin in culture for the same community.) To make it easier to find belongings for Indigenous community members, I spent a great deal of time reviewing the culture terms employed for the ethnographic and archaeological collections from the Pacific Northwest to ensure that they were entered in a systematic way. Updated nation names had been entered into the culture field in several records, but often in an inconsistent manner. This made it especially hard to search the 'Coast Salish' collections to see what was there. In the end I chose to move these terms into a Nation field (and standardise the spellings), and to use broader, more recognisable terms for the culture field. As MOV is

centrally located in 'Coast Salish' territory, the term 'Coast Salish' is used in the culture field not to validate it as a linguistic term, but to recognise the ongoing connections between these communities and to help locate specific types of belongings if requested. For example, if a Salish weaver were to visit, they might ask to see examples of Salish blankets and other weavings like tumplines. In the past, when items were catalogued specific to each nation, it was harder to locate groups of objects that might be of interest to community members looking to revitalise traditions or just expand their personal knowledge. These decisions relating to data management united regional belongings, common to several neighboring nations, virtually, and while these collections may not be comprehensive individually, they represent a scope of activities when combined.

In 2021, as the MOV curatorial team prepared to transition to a new collections database, much thought was given to not just maintaining but improving accessibility for community members using our public portal. For Indigenous communities, this included consideration of the need to support language revitalisation – and we questioned if the new platform would be capable of displaying Indigenous language terms, specifically special characters not found on standard keyboards. This is necessary if we wish to include the Indigenous names of belongings, people, and communities, as well as materials.

We also began revisiting our cataloguing conventions, adding 'Culture' and 'Nation' to History collection records when appropriate, adding clarifying notes to the 'Artefact History' field and identifying new 'Subjects' of interest. At weekly collections meetings, the MOV curatorial team routinely discussed what terminology should be added to the 'Subject' field to allow belongings residing in different departments to be linked, to recognise and respond to current events, and to promote increased awareness of diversity. Examples of recent additions include Indigenous Fashion, Contemporary Indigenous Art, Indigenous Activism, Missionaries, Indian Agents, Indian Hospitals, Residential Schools, Black History, Women's History, Racism and Stereotypes, and LGBTQ2S+.

This work on our collections database helps us to virtually sort, and reorganise, the collection. This is a prerequisite for making changes in our storage facilities. While we may have some ideas of ways to improve access in storage, informed through personal experience hosting visits, it is necessary to undertake detailed consultation with community members before implementing changes. The mantra 'nothing about us, without us' should extend beyond research ethics, writing and exhibitions, to include how we care for Indigenous belongings.[7]

Reconsidering categories of knowledge and applying them to storage

When I think about how to successfully implement Indigenous Knowledge into collections management practice, I often think of the practices I saw implemented at the Makah Cultural Center in Washington State on a visit with Musqueam community members, organised by Museum of Anthropology (MOA) staff, in the early 2000s. The storage facility housed a substantive collection of archaeological belongings from the Ozette site, an ancestral Makah village site that was preserved by a mudslide. Belongings in that facility were stored by the house groups or social units (Mauger and Bowechop 2006, 58), a means of keeping family possessions together. Labels were implemented to advise female community members not to handle the whaling gear, and items of personal property were also identified and grouped together. Makah language was used in conjunction with English for labelling throughout the storage facility (Mauger and Bowechop 2006, 61).

As MOV considers ways to decolonise its collections management practices, there is recognition among staff that this means applying for grants to enable work with community members so that we can better understand what it is we need to do. Yes, we can sort the belongings geographically – South Coast, Central Coast, and Northern Coast – and then group them by community of origin, but this work should extend beyond these measures to ensure cultural safety for community members who visit. This requires outside guidance and is a daunting task when you consider the number of communities represented by the Northwest Coast collection, and our position as an underfunded non-profit caring for the largest civic collection in Canada (Watt 1982, ii).

Pragmatically, the first approach must be to better understand the needs of local Coast Salish communities – specifically Vancouver's host nations, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, and their neighbors and relatives from Tsawwassen, Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, and Stó:lō Nations. To undertake such consultation requires grant writing for project specific funds; as a result, we are approaching this work in phases. Initial consultations will center around the best way to care for ancestral remains housed at the museum, the museum's existing repatriation policy and appropriate care of belongings associated with burials or considered culturally sensitive. In the future, we will consider ways to re-house the Northwest Coast collections to ensure that they are more accessible to community members.

Having undertaken several repatriations in recent years, staff are embarrassed that we are storing ancestral remains in cardboard boxes (some of which have been renumbered multiple times). Having heard that the provincial museum had rehoused ancestral remains in cedar boxes, we initially thought to apply for funds to do the same. The intention was respectful care. However, when our team investigated this and other initiatives, and considered the matter in more depth, we realised that our personal experience has been that each community approaches this type of work in a different manner and that decisions about care must continue to be made on a case-by-case basis. To complicate things, several of the remains come from archaeological sites that fall within overlapping traditional territories, requiring consensus from multiple nations. We recognised that we could not emulate the work of another institution but needed to undertake our own consultations to ensure we were working in the right way, to ensure the cultural safety of community members in our city as well as those visiting from other regions.

The question of how to incorporate the cultural categories of knowledge into storage and exhibitions is not a new one. In 2006, I participated in consultation sessions with Coast Salish communities on the project 'Bridging Knowledge Communities' led by Sue Rowley at the UBC Museum of Anthropology (MOA). For this work our team hosted a group meeting at MOA attended by representatives of several Coast Salish communities from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. We then scheduled follow-up visits to each community. The intent of the project was to implement cultural knowledge within the Multiversity Galleries – a new version of visible storage at MOA. The communities that were selected for visitation were the ones that were best represented in the museum's Coast Salish collections.[8]

At the end of the project, I felt dissatisfied with what we were able to accomplish. Although the new storage galleries included labels with interpretation, and the design of the space allowed for new types of collections to be visible – such as larger weavings displayed in specially designed drawers, imported from Italy – I felt the design of the cabinetry still imposed constraints on sharing Indigenous categories of knowledge. All the baskets remained housed together, weavings were housed together, as were hats, paddles and so on. Beyond the new exhibition cases, and labels with contextualising photos, everything remained similar to previous incarnations (but with fewer objects on display as the project also included compact storage units within an expansion of the non-public storage spaces). To truly showcase Indigenous knowledge

frameworks, required community consultation and research to occur prior to facility and gallery design.

Ultimately, what I felt was needed for success was the meaningful inclusion of Salish language speakers to convey semantic relationships, and an ability to visit each of the participating communities more than once to identify priorities and review decision-making for their community's belongings. One display element which I felt best accomplished the goals of the project was the installation of a Musqueam mortuary canoe, previously displayed in an exhibition titled *To Wash Away the Tears*. In this piece, several diverse belongings were brought together to celebrate the life of a Musqueam woman (Fortney 2009, 164–6). When the family chose to donate the canoe to the museum at the end of the exhibition, this highly personal assemblage was numbered as one belonging, keeping all the diverse memorial gifts united in one place; perhaps for this reason it speaks more to the idea of Indigenous Knowledge frameworks than any other element within this area of the Multiversity galleries.

In the Coast Salish section of the so-called 'multiverse', some members of the curatorial team felt the need to address the absence of ceremonial items such as masks and dance regalia, which are considered culturally sensitive by Coast Salish community members. These items were first removed from public display in the 1980s at the request of Musqueam community members (Fortney 2009, 157). This act recognised that such belongings remained objects of power, capable of causing harm to museum visitors including younger community members. The expressed concern was that many visitors, unaware of the reasons for the absence of masks and other types of regalia, would assume that Coast Salish communities lacked these types of belongings and would fail to understand how vital spirituality is to these communities. After consulting with Musqueam community members, on whose territory the museum was situated, the response was to include silhouettes of spirit dancers as a subtle projection in the back of one of the display cabinets. Although these currently remain on display, they are so subtle that on a recent visit when I recalled the process of creating the silhouettes, a newly hired staff member told me that they had not previously noticed the two projected figures.

Organisational structures and institutional priorities

Just as an institution's organisational chart conveys information about power dynamics within an institution, among its staff members, it also reveals what types of activities are deemed most important. Thus, organisational structure of staff within a museum can directly impact how collections are stored and cared for. In mid-size to larger museums, curatorial practice is often task oriented, with some curators being responsible for exhibitions and programming related activities, while others are tasked specifically with the care and conservation of museum collections.[9] When this happens, the former tasks are frequently given more value than the latter by museum management, due to the demonstrable link between visitation and revenue generation. I have observed that this frequently leaves members of the collections team feeling undervalued and under-resourced, as workload tips in favour of those activities that facilitate exhibitions – loans, condition reporting, and mount-making (for display rather than storage).

When the collections management role is positioned as supportive of exhibitions and programming, preservation and care are seldom a primary, or even parallel, goal. In this scenario, collections management activities are often viewed as institutional expenses or in-kind contributions for project grants, as opposed to exhibition projects which attract revenue through visitation – something that can also be directly tied to measures of institutional relevancy through visitor statistics and peer awards. When collections and conservation staff spend a majority of their time moving and preparing objects for display, collections management tasks, specifically those relating to maintaining databases – aiding the questions of 'how do we find it' and 'how do we know what it is' – while still deemed important, become less urgent. The same holds true for projects to re-house collections to facilitate community access, which require the purchasing of replacement conservation supplies, available space for sorting, and dedicated staff to not only sort and re-house objects, but to track and update locations in the museum's database.

In Canada, many non-profit museums are systemically underfunded, requiring staff to mould their activities and priorities to available funding resources. MOV, for example, has traditionally been unable to secure funding to digitise Indigenous belongings originating from outside of the province of British Columbia, because the main funding opportunity – the British Columbia History Digitization Grant (administered by the Barber Learning Centre) specifically targets provincial rather than national heritage items.

Although a desire for reconciliation has increased funding for projects that benefit Indigenous communities, geographical proximity frequently remains a determining factor, as local governments and private sponsorship actively seek to fund opportunities that will strengthen their ties to 'host' nations. Fortunately, since 2020, a private donor agreed to provide funding to digitise Indigenous collections from outside of the province of British Columbia at MOV. This has enabled staff to focus on increasing access for non-local Indigenous communities, including Inuit, Northern Plains, Eastern Woodlands, South and Central American, African and Oceanic ethnographic collections housed at MOV.

In museums with ethnographic collections, museum work should always prioritise providing access, listening to and implementing the expertise of Indigenous and other source communities regarding the correct interpretation, documentation and storage of their community and family belongings. As institutions of colonialism, this is part of the redress we must actively seek to undertake. However, this is not a simple task when there is a diversity of communities and geographic locales involved. For this reason, implementation of Indigenous agency tends to be more easily realised when it is linked to representing Indigenous identities in museum galleries and programming spaces. When it comes to collection management practice, implementation tends to be narrower, focusing on specific types of belongings; those recognised to have spiritual significance, such as mortuary objects, and those known to have ceremonial purpose such as secret society items and ceremonial pipes. In some institutions, this recognition is supported by repatriation activity of items obtained under duress, such as those acquired during the period of the Canadian Potlatch Ban 1885–1951, or those taken from sites now protected by heritage conservation laws (Miller 2018).

However, outside of First Nations Cultural Centers and Tribal Museums, Indigenous agency is generally not enacted on a broader level when it comes to collection management activities relating to storage. There are likely several reasons for this, though one directly correlates to people: collections staff are not part of the source community, and frequently not privy to Indigenous knowledge categories inherent to Indigenous languages, requiring fluency to comprehend.

Similarly, by defining repositories as 'storage areas', we position these spaces as functional places rather than political or ceremonial ones. For example, the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre calls their repository 'The House of Respect and Care Taking'. This conveys something much more significant than 'storage' – a term that enables perceived limitations of space to become a rationale for

Figure 15.1 Northwest Coast boxes in the compact storage unit at MOV. Shelving is hung uniformly, and belongings are not sorted by communities of origin. Photo by Sharon Fortney.

implementing museum specific categories of knowledge. This can lead to the perpetuation of this form of knowledge production.

On many occasions I have observed that museum staff will suggest that containers are stored together because they occupy less space when grouped together, yet boxes, bowls and baskets range in dimensions

Figure 15.2 Interior Salish basketry in storage at MOV. All of the baskets are of a similar style of manufacture, but specific communities are not sorted in a manner that reflects the idea that collections are belongings of specific families or communities. Photo by Sharon Fortney.

from small to large and do not always utilise all the available space. At MOV, for example, some of the shelving in the compact storage unit where the Northwest Coast collection has been housed are hung in a uniform manner (that does not utilise all the potential space), yet the

argument that it is 'storage' and 'more efficient' has at times been voiced by other members of our collections team (Figures 15.1 and 15.2). Plans to re-house the Northwest Coast collection are now acknowledged as a priority, but such a project requires a funding source, dedicated staff for the duration of the project, and space for sorting the belongings before they are re-housed. Although there is intent, it will undoubtably take many years to implement, especially with the ongoing focus on exhibitions.

Reconciliation and IBPOC movements (Indigenous (people), Black (people) and People of Colour) have increased the interest and urgency felt by many institutions to diversify their staff. Increasingly in Canada, we are seeing the creation of museum positions specifically for Indigenous Fellows, Programmers and Curators. The term 'Indigenous' has gradually replaced 'First Nations', acknowledging that the first peoples of Canada include First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. In many urban centers, the Indigenous community is multifaceted and diasporic, and those applying for Indigenous positions may themselves be from communities outside of the region and have little knowledge of the traditions of their host nations.

Diversifying staff is an essential element of decolonising practices and making institutions more welcoming to Indigenous and other minority community members. However, when it comes to collections care it is unfair to designate the responsibility for decision-making to one individual, such as an Indigenous Curator, as they cannot speak for every community represented in the collection, nor are they necessarily positioned to represent the interests of everyone within their own community. Indigenous communities, like other communities, are diverse and often diasporic. Age, gender, personal history (including lineage and society memberships) will offer different perspectives, and levels of expertise, on appropriate care of specific types of belongings.

Indigenous staff can advise on how to best connect with community members to discuss these questions; how to best compensate these community members for their time and expertise; and how to create an environment of cultural safety for those involved. They can also facilitate taking staff out of the museum and into local communities – if we want to decolonise our practices, we also need to consider the inherent power imbalance in always requiring community members to travel to us to talk about the care of their heritage and history.

While today this practice is becoming more widespread, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary provides an interesting example of an

earlier effort. Former Director, Robert R. Janes wrote about drastically restructuring that institution in the early 1990s and the hiring of the first Indigenous staff member into the Ethnology Department of Western Canada's largest museum:

> My final illustration of recent upside-down thinking is the Siksika (Blackfoot) man who serves as our Treaty 7 Community Liaison. This is the terrible sort of job title which results when people are unable to be honest about what is really going on. We are apparently unable to give him any curatorial rank, because he has no formal degrees or extensive experience, in a museum-related discipline. Public funding agencies, as well as hypersensitive colleagues, do not look kindly on the careless use of these honorific titles. Fortunately, these conventions have minimal meaning for the individual in question, much to Glenbow's benefit. He continues to be one of the best ambassadors that Glenbow has ever had, speaking tirelessly and from the heart to wide-eyed school children, alienated street kids, strident students of contemporary art and respected adults who have never spoken to an aboriginal person. Both his spirit and his legitimacy come from the fact that he was raised in a traditional Siksika family by an honoured grandfather, and he knows of what he speaks (1997, 117).

While at Glenbow, Clifford Crane Bear, my colleague mentioned above worked closely with Gerald Conaty, Senior Ethnology Curator, in addition to other members of the Ethnology team and Education department. Changes enacted during this era included: the addition of a smudge table at the entrance to the Ethnology Storage area; the creation of a Culturally Sensitive area with its own smudge table in a secluded corner of the Plains collection; the establishment of a First Nations Advisory Committee with representatives from across the province (with rotating hosts and locales for meetings); and workplans that expected members of the Ethnology department to leave the museum to visit community members. As stated above, this was viewed as a means of correcting a power imbalance created when community members are always required to come to the museum to speak to the people caring for their belongings.

Working on contract collections management projects for the Glenbow Ethnology Department 1996–99, I attended several First Nations Advisory Council meetings, a two-day culture camp for staff held at Siksika designed to foster cultural awareness and sensitivity among all museum departments, and on two occasions attended Sundance

Ceremonies at Kainai – one year witnessing a repatriated Holy Woman's headdress return to use, and the next the transfer of medicine bundles among their sacred Horn Society. These experiences profoundly influenced my expectations of museums and their role in redressing the legacy of colonialism.

At MOV, increasing Indigenous access to belongings held in storage is an ongoing priority. Recent exhibition projects *c̓əsnaʔəm: the city before the city* (2015) and *Haida Now* (2018) have brought large groups of Indigenous community members into storage to study belongings from their communities. Visits for each of these projects were facilitated by Guest Curators from these two communities, Jordan Wilson of Musqueam and Kwiaawah Jones of the Haida Nation, respectively. MOV Staff also host individuals, family groups and artist cohorts, and routinely lend support to local programs such as the YVR Art Foundation Scholarship program for Indigenous artists and the Native Youth Program from the UBC Museum of Anthropology.

Access to belongings in exhibitions is facilitated by a policy adopted in 2015 to grant free admission to the galleries for those who self-identify as Indigenous. As Canada's historical legacy has been to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities, first through residential schools, and later the child welfare system, we have removed the barrier that may be created by the requirement of 'proof' in the form of a government-issued status card. Visitors simply self-identify, and a special bar code is scanned by the visitor services team to help the museum track visitor statistics for the annual report.

The museum acknowledges its role as caretakers, rather than 'owners' of Indigenous belongings. Cultural protocols are honored when requests are made by Indigenous artists, and other individuals, for access to heritage objects in the collection. Careful consideration is given when previous owners from the community are unknown, and when the belonging in question is a secret society item not to be handled by everyone. A recent request to exhibit a 'Whole Being Frontlet' at the Bill Reid Gallery required the featured artist to seek a letter of support from their Nation, which was happily provided. This recognised not just the high commercial value associated with the piece, but its cultural significance as well. Caring for Indigenous belongings includes recognising and honouring protocols regarding transmission of knowledge and privileges within individual communities, to avoid causing further harm to the community.

Assessment: does our work actually support indigenous agency?

Throughout this chapter I have mentioned Indigenous Agency several times. It is an important consideration as we continue to steward collections that were, in many instances, removed under duress through colonial polices such as the Potlatch Ban and Indian Residential School Act. Indigenous Agency was a central topic of discussion in *Reassembling the Collection: Ethnographic museums and Indigenous Agency*, yet remained a largely theoretical exercise as there were only two chapters that included Indigenous voices – both times in collaboration with a non-Indigenous scholar. Increasingly, Indigenous voices are at the forefront of newer publications, such as: *Unsettling Native Art Histories on the Northwest Coast* and *Where the Power is: Indigenous Perspectives on Northwest Coast Art*.

Reflecting upon agency in my own work at MOV, after five years I have finally moved beyond responding to existing exhibition projects, initiated years previously, to ones that are directed by my own community engagement. It is refreshing to be able to ask, 'What could we do together that would benefit your communities?' rather than saying, 'We are doing an exhibition about…' and asking the communities to generate specific types of content (and then have it vetted by their elders and knowledge holders).

In 2022, in partnership with Vancouver's host nations, I launched a knowledge repatriation project at MOV. This project recognises that our institution can directly respond to the needs of local communities by creating learning opportunities and curriculum resources that return traditional ecological knowledge while helping to generate language resources that aid in efforts to increase fluent speakers. The first initiative is reintroducing knowledge relating to coiled cedar root basketry, an ancient skill that has been lost in the Greater Vancouver area. A basket maker from the Interior Salish community of Mount Currie was approached to teach the process from start to finish, beginning with harvesting of materials – bitter cherry bark, canary grass, cedar sapling wood and cedar roots. Each activity is being photographed and video documented. Language teams from the nations will later translate everything into the two local Salish languages, hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh sníchim.[10]

Recognising that our institution is beginning to generate digital collections as part of our exhibition work, and other community engagement projects, we have begun a preservation survey of our existing

audio-visual and digital materials in anticipation of developing policies for their ongoing preservation and access. The materials generated by the Knowledge Repatriation initiative will benefit directly from this work.

Our videography, and consent process, also provides for copies of all raw footage and films to be distributed to the archives of each of the participating nations for their own purposes. As a project coordinator, I am mindful of the fact that coiled basketry was a skill that only ran in specific families among the Coast Salish. My colleague Jasmine Wilson and I are participating equally as learners in this project, both of us granddaughters and great-granddaughters of root weavers. As participants on the harvesting excursions may change from month to month, depending upon the capacity of each of the participating nations, we may serve as local resource people after the project is completed. Ultimately, the digital collections being generated for this work will provide a legacy for future learners.

Notes

1   MOV Staff began using the term 'belongings' to refer to Indigenous collections in response to feedback given during community engagement with the Musqueam community for the exhibition *cⁱəsnaʔəm, the city before the city* curated by my colleagues Viviane Gosselin and Jordan Wilson.

2   Each community has their own ways of doing the work, and special consideration must be given when a request is made to do a burning in another community's traditional territory as customs vary and historical relationships may factor in. In another instance, a repatriation of an associated belonging was blocked by a neighbouring nation, so cultural advisors requested that the belongings be loaned for a ceremony where they would be passed through smoke from the fire to transfer them back to their original owners.

3   At MOV, staff have been making changes to their professional practices since the release of *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples Task Force Report* (Nicks and Hill 1992). Many of the recommendations in this earlier report align with those found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report and UNDRIP.

4   These requests were made after a researcher from a nearby university requested access to information on archaeological collections not included in the research permit issued by the nation. In this instance, they were requesting information on ancestral remains – something that had not been discussed with the community.

5   This collection is featured in the exhibition, *cⁱəsnaʔəm, the city before the city*, which is described in detail on the MOV website.

6   At time of writing, the History Collection at MOV numbered 43,328 objects and 28,123 (or 64 per cent) of those items had no culture listed in the database. This is after targeted efforts by the current collections team to identify items made by Chinese Canadians, First Nations, and Black Canadians.

7   Nothing about us without is a sixteenth-century democratic slogan from Central Europe that was adopted for disability activism in the 1990s and has more recently been applied to Indigenous data sovereignty (Bull 2019).

8   Musqueam, Squamish, Stó:lo, Snuneymuxw, Quw'utsun, Songhees, and Tseycum Nations were consulted for this project.

9   Examples of Western Canadian Institutions that have distinct Curator of Collections and Collections Manager or Registrar positions, past or present, include the Glenbow Museum, the UBC Museum of Anthropology, and the MOV.

10 Our project budget includes funding for the language teams to do this work. We recognise that it can take considerable time and research to create terminology for traditional skills that are not currently practiced by community members.

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16

Handling collections in the museum against cultural ethics

Nelson Abiti and Mary Mbewe

Introduction

The collection of cultural objects by museums very often disrupts sacred values and Indigenous management practices. Gender requirements and functionality are all crushed in the museum system. Once cultural objects enter the museum, they undergo required processes of the profession: accessioning, numbering, registration, labelling, storage and conservation (see Stevenson, Fforde and Ormond-Parker, this volume). Museum experts and staff assume a higher authority against Indigenous processes and practices by which the objects were originally managed. This chapter views preservation requirements, storage spaces, exhibition display and handling of museum collections as abusive. Against the museography of handling collections, the chapter proposes that, while efforts have been made to decolonise representation in museums, codes of ethics regarding systems of handling remain anchored in Western philosophies rather than local cultural ethics. Drawing on professional experience in both the Moto Moto Museum (Zambia) and the Uganda National Museum, this chapter proposes that the future of museums requires a rethinking of handling of collections with cultural ethics at the fore.

In Africa, museum collections essentially emerged from the governance systems of colonial rule and the collectors that promoted them. These collectors included, among others, colonial administrators, missionary groups, military expeditions, explorers and, latterly, anthropologists and ethnographers. Their models of practice focused on registering cultural objects as valuable collections, measured according to age, aesthetics and the influence of dominant community narrations,

mainly undertaken by the collectors. As James Clifford questions: '[On] what epistemologies? what political agendas? with what degrees of authority? representing whom? - remains to be seen.' (Clifford 2007, 7). Henrietta Lidchi (1997, 161) elaborates, noting that 'a disciplinary framework of science' was deployed for the study of material culture so as to fulfil the information needed for ruling the colonised societies. Therefore, ideas about accessioning, naming and labelling artefacts can be understood as providing information for British citizens enabling them to become acquainted with the skills of administration and governance that enabled the classification of African societies by tribe or ethnic groups (Bennett 1995, 81). For example, spears are serialised and described with ethnic labels, and are kept together. The collectors identified the objects according to the nomenclature of disciplinary methods derived from anthropology, history, art history, natural history and archaeology. Conversely, Indigenous communities had made the cultural objects according to their needs. The production and use of such cultural objects manifested different physical and spiritual regimes of care, distribution practices and their suitability for use in public functions. Museum practices counteracted processes of life during birth, growth and burial of the dead. Cultural objects that were not allowed to be seen by either men or women in the society were forcefully and brutally taken away from the custodians and became collections in museums with and without the consent and/or under duress of the Indigenous owners.

Collecting was not simply a hobby but a means of imagining societies, an accumulation by self-directed citizens for imagining themselves into being (Macdonald 2006, 81). Importantly, this imagining saw colonial selves as superior to other cultures. In this sense, middle class citizens became agents of colonialism who included the administrators, missionaries, engineers, doctors, members of local community, friends and families of colonial agents and travellers (Coombes 1997, 158–159; Price 2007, 254). When such objects entered the private homes of individuals and then public museums, they were transformed into a 'collection', especially through the museum practices of recording, photographing, measuring and cleaning, cataloguing and storing (Macdonald 2006, 82; Price 2007, 118). Clifford (2007, 15) argues that ethnography cannot be removed in a museum when the histories of collecting practices, markets and their display continue to depict other nations as uncivilised in contemporary times. Consequently, we assert that collecting by ethnographic museums was and is a form of violence. In many cases, the violence is more overt. For example, collectors, who were mainly missionary anthropologists, worked with colonial soldiers

whose methods of acquisition were cruel and vicious. They invaded the privacy of our Indigenous communities. They arrested and killed them. They confiscated their regalia (Abiti 2022, 33). Then they wrote of their experiences encountering such materials and they in turn became authorities. Missionaries coercively and disruptively stripped away Indigenous knowledge and memory of cultural objects.

Below we describe examples from Uganda and Zambia that make clear the way collections were handled at the expense of local and emplaced cultural ethics. The national museums in both countries have inherited colonial approaches to care in museum contexts, and we consider what museum practices might look like if they instead took up Indigenous practices and ethics. We discuss sacred objects, such as umbilical cords in Uganda which are kept sacred by mothers as objects of fertility. We also look to Zambia, where the collection and display practices of chisungu (female initiation objects) demonstrate how museum practices are antithetical to the cultural practices that the objects represent. How did curators, who had no idea of their sacredness, keep these sacred objects? If the objects were not allowed to be seen by men, how did the curators handle such objects? Who recorded the objects, and who photographed them? Did museums have an understanding of the trauma being inflicted on the descendants of the sacred objects who might have sought out these objects for solutions to their problems? As Nelson Abiti notes, the loss of the intangible memories contributes to behavioural challenges emerging from hopelessness and violence (Abiti 2022).

Collections in Uganda Museum

Uganda became a colony under the British protectorate rule in 1894 (see Mamdani 2018). The Uganda Museum, located in Kampala, is the oldest colonial-founded cultural institution in the Eastern Africa region (Peterson 2015, 5; Posnansky 1963, 149). In 1907, the British Commissioner George Wilson worked with Governor Hesketh Bell to instruct the colonial officers to assemble artefacts for the museum. The colonial officers then started to acquire artefacts coercively and punitively from the people in Bunyoro, Ankole, Bugishu, Busoga, Acholi and other areas. During this period, several ethnological artefacts were looted, including agricultural implements, cooking items, basketry, blacksmith tools, native weapons, and fertility, religious and healing objects. The collectors and museum administrators at that time transformed the objects into ethnological or ethnographic artefacts that

were then inventoried, renamed and stored as specimens for scientific studies at the colonial offices of the Botanical, Scientific and Forestry department in Entebbe (Posnansky 1963, 149).

Although the artefacts were first stored at the Entebbe administrative offices of the Scientific Department of the protectorate government, the collections were reminders of transformational ethnographic representations whose aim was to promote (and simultaneously denounce) 'otherness' (Peterson and Abiti 2022). For instance, anthropologist John Roscoe was commissioned in 1889 by the British government to travel to Uganda to begin collecting objects from Buganda, Bunyoro and Ankole (Michaud 2016). Roscoe performed the role of missionary, imperial agent and anthropologist, studying tribes in Uganda that helped the scientific and colonial occupation of Uganda by the British (Michaud 2016, 58). Roscoe published a book called *The Baganda* that revealed how he collected artefacts from the communities in Buganda Kingdom. He directed his book explicitly to scientists and government officials to help them understand, or more accurately, to criticise the social life of Ugandan people. The Indigenous people were missionised into Christianity and made to criticise their own ways of life. As John Cinnamon argues, anthropological knowledge became texts for Africans to view themselves as 'the other' (Cinnamon 2012, 103–4).

At the same moment, Christianity made converts surrender their cultural objects that were interpreted to be demonic and primitive. In Uganda, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) settled in Kampala in 1877, before the colonial administration took over the territory of Uganda as a protectorate. The CMS made new converts and elites discard their cultural ways of living. In contrast to representing the everyday life of the artefacts, colonial collectors used ethnographic practices to re-label cultural objects as fetishes and charms, witchcraft and primitive art. The Indigenous people who visited the protectorate museum referred to it as enyumba ya mayambe (a house of spirits) and the curator was called omukulu ya amayembe (Deming 1966, 2). The Indigenous people in Uganda at that time were unhappy about the display and the labelling of the cultural artefacts with its negative connotations of witchcraft and fetishism (Abiti 2022). It is our view that the irresponsible care for the artefacts began here, at the moment of collection and with the labelling of the objects (see also Soares this volume).

Care for the artefacts

In the present day, we have encountered problems with conservation practices at museums that reflect tensions related to whose cultural ethics direct decision-making. Before being collected, the artefacts were kept in houses that were conditioned to be dry, having earthen and cow-dung materials smeared on the floor. The rooms were warm and smoked or sun-dried. This action, this Indigenous knowledge, kept the artefacts in good condition. The pots had cooking stains but were washed every day, while the milk gourds (ebyanzi) were smoked with a special grass to remove bacteria. In contrast, most of the artefacts in museums are packed in boxes and some have been treated with chemicals. The DDT pesticides that were used on the artefacts are permanent and hazardous to human health; in such instances, the museum objects are not supposed to be handled by human beings.

Why should we consider traditional conservation approaches? It should be understood that traditional approaches to preserving artefacts moved with knowledge practice. In Uganda, knowledge was purposely aimed at sustaining humanity and the environment. The most effective preservation materials used for the care of the artefacts included cow dung and plant leaves, while smoking methods were used to ensure the survival of the artefacts and to reduce deterioration. In order to prevent insects and pest infestation, cow dung is dried and burnt to deter the insects from feeding on the organic materials of artefacts. In some cases, the renewal of such skills would act as a process of ceremonial events in order to commission new artefacts. For example, when the specific drummer had smoked and sun-dried their drum, a communication is made and during the time of using the drum, the care for the skin to prevent damp conditions is enhanced at the same time drums are tuned for the musical performance. Yet in a museum, fire is seen as a disaster and policies and regulations do not allow any method of using fire or smoking within the museum environment.

Curators at the Uganda Museum experience challenges caring for the cultural objects that are meant to be sacred and used regularly by the descendants but have become stuck in museum facilities. Although attempts have been made to undertake preventive conservation practices, there are critical challenges to implementing traditional approaches by the curators and that seem to reinforce ideas of the need to keep things in storage. Most of the objects are stuck on shelves, hidden behind polythene to avoid dust. There are no visible policies for deaccessioning in these museums, yet it is easy to accession collections

as museum property. Essentially, conventional museum ethics has oppressed cultural ethics as to who makes decisions concerning the care of cultural artefacts. Should curators seek permission from Indigenous communities or do Indigenous communities have a right or authority to access museum artefacts to undertake Indigenous care practices? These troubling experiences have led Indigenous people to feel guilty while working in museums due to the conflicting practices of care within the museum. In our opinion the idea of museum care for cultural artefacts extends beyond maintaining ritual remains; it requires us to rethink caring practices of human touch and re-establishing use of the artefacts within their Indigenous communities.

One of the assemblages Roscoe 'acquired' was a set of ritual objects belonging to a legendary chief named Kibuuka in the kingdom of Buganda, which were stolen during the Church Missionary Society rivalry with the Roman Catholic Church against Indigenous religion in 1889. Kibuuka was known to be a superior god during the reign of King Nakibenge of the Buganda kingdom in the seventeenth century. Kibuuka's remains had been preserved by his kingdom in a barkcloth. The jawbone, umbilical cord and other objects were kept by priestess Muzingu in a shrine for worship in Mpigi within the Buganda area (Roscoe 1911, 285–6; Welbourn 1962, 16). Roscoe shipped the artefacts to England in 1902 and handed them to the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology as they were, sealed in a barkcloth (Bennett 2018, 212). As agents of colonial rule, Kagwa and Roscoe gained economic benefits through the military actions of the religious wars during the British inventions in Uganda to loot the ritual artefacts.

Before Uganda's independence, the Buganda minister of education, Abubakar Kakyama Mayanja, campaigned for the return of the Kibuuka objects in 1961. Mayanja then wrote a letter to the Vice Chancellor of the Cambridge University Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology (CMMA) requesting for the regalia of Kibuuka (Bennett, 2018). After the Kibuuka objects were returned to Uganda in July 1962, they were first remade into historical objects and subsequently national treasures. They were then integrated into the ethno-history gallery of the Uganda Museum (Peterson 2015, 15). Yet Kibuuka's objects were returned only as a long-term loan by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge to the Uganda Museum. Mayanja's political pursuit for the return of Kibuuka in 1961 was therefore determined by Cambridge University who made the decision to place the Kibuuka objects in a museum (Abiti 2022, 36).

Although the artefacts were originally being preserved and kept within a barkcloth, Roscoe unpacked the artefacts, photographed them and Cambridge University returned the artefacts without the barkcloth. It was on this basis that the Kibuuka objects ended up being displayed at Uganda Museum without the barkcloth, transformed into viewable artefacts. Since 1961, the continued retention of the Kibuuka objects in Uganda has been contentious. In November 2007, Kibuuka's followers stormed the Uganda Museum, intending to seize the relics. They were, however, prevented by the police guards of the Uganda Museum (Thomas 2016, 333–42).

Objects in the Moto Moto Museum in Zambia

The Moto Moto Museum, located in Mbala, about 1,000 km from the capital Lusaka, is one of Zambia's five national museums. The Moto Moto Museum's history is encapsulated in the establishment of the Catholic Church in Northern Zambia by an order of mostly French priests called the Missionaries of Africa, popularly known as the White Fathers. The White Fathers arrived in Northern Zambia in 1886. Although their conversion work focused on different groups of people in Northern Zambia, such as the Mambwe, Lungu, Namwanga and Bisa, their primary interest was the Bemba, the most dominant group. In 1889, the British South African Company brought Bemba country under their control with the help of the White Fathers. This occupation followed a series of events in which, after the death of Chief Mwamba, one of the most prominent Bemba chiefs, the leader of the Missionaries of Africa in the territory, Bishop Joseph Dupont temporarily and dubiously installed himself as chief. Dupont handed over the Bemba country to the British South African Company after negotiating for a concession of a vast portion of prime land with accompanying judicial powers, which was to be the base for the expansion of the White Fathers' activities in the territory.

From the beginning, the production of the ethnographic heritage of the Bemba and other groups was a core part of the White Fathers' proselytising work. The missionaries conducted ethnographic studies to make the work of Christian evangelism possible. Missionary work and converting Africans to Christianity was premised on prohibiting competing African religious practices and customs. Understanding Indigenous cultures was critical to these processes. The French-Canadian priest, Jean Jacques Corbeil, started collecting cultural objects as part of his ethnographic studies from the 1950s. These came to constitute the

Moto Moto Museum which had belonged to the missionaries from its inception until 1974 when it became a national museum after the priests handed it over to the government of Zambia (Furnis 1968, 5).

The chisungu female initiation collection

Chisungu is a female puberty initiation ceremony practised by most ethnic groups in Zambia but predominantly by the Bemba of Northern Zambia. Chisungu dealt with the transition from girlhood to womanhood in Bemba society and involved secret rites that formalised the entry of girls who had come of age into womanhood and formalised their right to marriage and reproduction (Richards 2022 [1956]). Unlike similar ceremonies in other parts of Africa, chisungu did not involve circumcision or virginity testing. In a month-long secluded ceremony, elderly, specialised women called banacimbusa used objects, songs, dances, performances, floor and wall paintings, and most importantly, moulded pottery figurines collectively called mbusa to impart esoteric knowledge to the initiates. This knowledge embraced various practices and beliefs, including religion, sexuality, marriage, childbirth and rearing, family and social obligations. Women held all the authority in this critical rite, whose ramifications embraced the health and wellbeing of the individual, the lineage and the entire social body. The significance of chisungu went beyond ensuring the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It was at the heart of ensuring the health and progress of society and defining the difference between different generations of women, between men and women, and between initiated and uninitiated women. The most important aspect of the rituals is that they were secret. The emblems/objects, songs, teachings and everything that went on during the rites were only known to the initiated women. Men especially were not allowed to have knowledge of or see the rites. The objects that were used to impart the teachings to the initiates were symbolic, and their meanings only known to those who had gone through the rites.

Corbeil began attempting to collect chisungu in 1956 but was unsuccessful until around 1960. By 1979, the collection of chisungu objects had exceeded 300 single objects (Furnis 1968, 5). Given the highly secretive nature of the chisungu ceremonies and objects and that only initiated women had the right to access this knowledge and these spaces, how did Corbeil come to collect female initiation objects? What does this tell us about the gendered and violently invasive nature of this ethnographic research and collecting instance?

Until 1962, Corbeil could not observe and collect chisungu initiation objects due to their sensitive nature and the secrecy of the ceremony. By his admission, narrated in the preface to the book he published on chisungu, his informants mistrusted him and thought him a spy (Corbeil 1982, 7). This is not surprising. For decades, missionaries prohibited the ceremony and remained suspicious of women because of their immense authority on rituals, marriage and reproductive health. The ceremony went underground. Women denied continuing the practice to missionaries and anyone who asked. In 1957, anthropologist Audrey Richards returned to her former field sites and saw no traces of chisungu. When asked about it, her informants exclaimed, 'The missionaries have abolished it!' (in Corbeil 1982, 7).

His opportunity came around 1962, in a series of events highlighting the asymmetrical circumstances in which Corbeil made these collections and the violent and unjust political and epistemological contexts under which the chisungu collection was founded. Corbeil narrated these events in the preface to his chisungu book and numerous interviews with magazines regarding his museum work. In 1960, Helena Mubanga, a Bemba royal princess of Mubanga village in Chinsali district (the same district where Audrey Richards had conducted her chisungu research in 1931), left the Catholic Church to join the Lumpa Church, an African independent church. However, due to the terror that Lumpa Church members experienced because of the negative reaction to the church by missionaries and the state, Helena requested to be readmitted to the Catholic Church Mulilansolo Mission in 1962. Corbeil, stationed at the mission, assented to this request on the condition that Helena showed penance for leaving the Catholic Church by revealing the secrets of the chisungu ceremony to him. In the foreword to his book, Corbeil narrated how this conversation went: 'Helena, you can come back, but you have to be punished as you deliberately left the church you were baptized in. So as your punishment, reveal to me the initiation ceremony of the girls,' (Corbeil 1982, 8).

Alarmed at this unusual request, Helena refused to divulge the details of the ceremony. Corbeil was not only male, but he was also a white missionary. He, therefore, could not be allowed to know the details of the ceremony as an uninitiated person and missionary of the Catholic Church, which was well-known for its hostile attitude towards such African practices as chisungu. Corbeil, however, went on to convince her, 'If it is a bad ceremony, I should know about it as a priest who is responsible for souls. If it is a good ceremony, why not reveal it to me?' (Corbeil 1982, 8-9). After much hesitation, Helena agreed to secretly sing

some of the initiation ceremony songs to Corbeil and his male African clerk, who recorded them under cover of night. When the community members realised what was happening, they forbade further revelation of the secret knowledge of the ceremony.

Using the same argument that missionaries had the right to knowledge about these practices, Corbeil convinced the women in charge of the ceremony to reveal further details. About 20 midwives arranged a mock ceremony in the priests' residence at the mission. Here, the nacimbusa re-enacted the ceremony for Corbeil, another priest Charles Van Rijhoven, who operated the tape recorder, and Micheal Longe and Tandeo Chintu, two male African catechists/teachers who acted as interpreters. Later, Corbeil observed the actual ceremonies in the community, including the secret aspects that took place in enclosed spaces in the village and the bush. These and subsequent encounters led to the collection of more than 100 songs and dozens of objects, including clay models, floor and wall models and paintings (Carey 2003, 5–6; Corbeil 1982, 1–3).

It is clear from this instance of collecting such sensitive cultural objects that missionaries like Corbeil abused their positions of authority and thus collected from positions of power. Due to their sacredness and the secrecy and mystery around them, these chisungu objects aroused the most curiosity and were an attraction in Corbeil's African ethnographic artefacts collection. Helena Mubanga remained one of Corbeil's chief informants at the ceremony. Accession registers in the Moto Moto Museum show that she continued supplying Corbeil with objects and information on the ceremony as late as 1976.

This event between Corbeil and Helena Mubanga was not just an isolated instance of ethnographic collecting or a lucky break, as Corbeil was prone to narrate it. This narrative of a clever, lucky break, which continues to be reproduced through the guided tours at the Moto Moto Museum to date, obscures the highly inappropriate contexts under which Corbeil made this breakthrough in collecting chisungu objects. The objects that Corbeil collected underwent processes of musealisation. They were labelled, documented and displayed in the Museum's public galleries. Corbeil also sold several of the chisungu objects to the British Museum, as reflected on the museum's website.[1] These processes transformed the chisungu practices and went against the logic of what these practices represented before and against what their practitioners believed. This form of coercive access to and control of knowledge was more than just about knowing, understanding, ordering customs and governing a people, as scholars have generally argued regarding

colonial knowledge projects (e.g. Rassool 2015). It was about breaking the backbone of society by violating its most sacred institutions through knowing and publicly displaying its most sensitive and intimate practices – practices to do with sex, reproduction, fertility, and thus regeneration.

In 1963, Corbeil collected a set of waist beads in circumstances that were deeply unethical. The waist beads and other personal sacred paraphernalia belonged to Prophetess Alice Lenshina, the leader of the Lumpa Church. After banning and burning her church, killing hundreds of members of her congregation and arresting her, the government confiscated the spiritual and personal items that belonged to Lenshina. Corbeil convinced the government to donate these to him for preservation and added them to his collection. He displayed these items, including the waist beads, at the Moto Moto Museum, first in Isoka and then Mbala. The museum displayed these as part of the ethnographic exhibit under the theme of spirit possession and divination (the narrative created by the missionaries about Lenshina's prophetic and spiritual gifts). Unfortunately, the exhibits lacked any information about their ownership, provenance, or violent circumstances under which Corbeil collected them. They were thus stripped of the contexts and information related to their origin and ownership before entering the museum. But the implications of collecting, musealisation, and displaying such deeply personal objects go beyond issues of ownership and provenance. These collecting practices were destructive of intimacy and understanding around marital relations. They were thus utterly invasive and unethical. They reveal an underlying brutality in this appropriation, which has not received adequate attention. Personal items like beads and waist girdles are sensitive and private objects that should never have been collected or displayed. Their originating cultural practices and norms went against their collection and public display. The nacimbusa prepared them and infused them with charms and herbs that ensured women's fertility and sexual and reproductive wellbeing. In many African cultures, women wear waist beads and waist girdles to signify maturity, status, femininity and womanhood and as an essential aspect of sexual activities between husband and wife. They are among the most private accessories for a woman.

These contexts point to the inherent inappropriateness of the museum, especially the colonial ethnographic museum as a colonial knowledge project. Other than an institution of ordering knowledge and society, the museum here also represents a forum for enacting, embedding and reproducing white male authority and changing the gender dynamics when missionaries used black young men to collect and thus access knowledge that men were not allowed to. Furthermore,

the notion of the Western museum founded as it is on the practices of collection, preservation and public display was at odds with Indigenous cultural practices, such as these involving issues of knowledge and objects, whose practices hinged on secrecy and non-display (Simpson 2006).

Additionally, the collection of the chisungu objects and their musealisation were at odds with the cultural practices and codes that guided their practice. At every chisungu, the nacimbusa created a new set of emblems. The nacimbusa destroyed the mbusa upon completion of the rituals. The mbusa were destroyed in the river or buried under a mufungo tree. The knowledge of where the nacimbusa buried the mbusa was to remain secret. The main reason for the destruction of the mbusa and their disposal in secret places was spiritual. During each chisungu, a spiritual connection was made between the nacimbusa, the nacisungu, the mbusa emblems, and the spiritual world. As a result, magical/spiritual powers are embedded in the chisungu objects. This affected the initiate's wellbeing and fertility.

Consequently, the mbusa emblems were also potential tools to harm the initiate. If a person with ill intentions, bad karma, or a bad spirituality handled these mbusa, this could also have ramifications on the fertility and wellbeing of the initiate. Furthermore, because of the liminal nature of the chisungu rituals, the initiate and the mbusa emblems were considered 'hot', having immense spiritual and magical potential. Hence, the mbusa were dangerous, as they could be used for witchcraft and other rituals outside their intended purpose.[2]

Consequently, they were not meant to be collected, kept or handled by anyone other than the woman in charge of the rites. Musealisation of such objects then raises questions of conflict and contradictions between museum curatorial practice and Indigenous practices. This is not just the case of museum objects in the colonial period. The chisungu things are still on display in the Moto Moto Museum today. Part of the decolonisation agenda in the museum should focus on museum practice and not just on questions of epistemology and provenance. Such decolonised practices would consider that not all museum objects should be on display or in the museum.

Conclusion

Saloni Mathur writes, 'Western cultural forms need to be removed from the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected and placed instead in the dynamic imperial contest in which they

were produced' (Mathur 2007, 7). This is essential, she continues, to overcome the 'conceptual cleavage' of a modern, historicised West and traditional, anthropologised other. Throughout this chapter, we have introduced museum artefacts whose norms in their native practice go against their musealisation in ways that are insensitive and do not take into consideration the models of the native practices. In so doing, we encourage a museum practice that that is sensitive and respects Indigenous knowledge and practices.

It is our view that museums take responsibility for what they hold and do so in ways that do not reproduce and perpetuate colonial violence. This approach envisages that museums will relinquish their colonial power of dominance towards Indigenous knowledges by accommodating native approaches to access and privacy, spiritual care and physical preservation.

Notes

1   See for example, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1972-14-317
2   Telephone interview with Stephen Mwila, Education Officer Moto Moto Museum, Kabwe 3 August 2021. Whatsapp Conversation with Victoria Chitungu Phiri, Keeper of Ethnography, Choma Museum, 1 August 2021.

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17

Decolonising collection management in an indigenous ritual house in Malaysia

Yunci Cai

Introduction

In this chapter, I critically examine the perspectives and treatment of human remains in an Indigenous ritual house, based on the case study of the Monsopiad Cultural Village, an Indigenous museum in the eastern Malaysian state of Sabah. I do so to make a case for the need to consider the multiple museologies that exist in non-Western contexts, especially the different Indigenous approaches and practices that exist in non-settler contexts. In what follows, I explore the socio-cultural contexts surrounding the acquisition and display of these human remains and consider how the Monsopiad Cultural Village draws on vernacular beliefs and practices in the management and interpretation of the ritual house and its collection of heirlooms, focusing on alternative approaches to the treatment of human remains, and the stipulation of certain ritual observance on visitors to the ritual house. In so doing, I also show how such Indigenous approaches to the care, management and interpretation of the ritual house and its collection is a manifestation of Indigenous survivance, which can offer a route to self-representation and self-determination for the Indigenous Kadazan people in contemporary Malaysia.

Background

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, human remains were regularly collected by Western museums from archaeological and anthropological explorations, or as pathological specimens and human

curios. Up until the 1940s towards the end of European colonisation, Indigenous remains were also taken from Indigenous peoples through warfare, looting, or theft and sold to museum institutions worldwide (Korff 2021). Once collected, these human remains are often dehumanised as museum objects or specimens, or treated as amusement in freak shows, devoid of human dignity. Although Indigenous peoples, particularly those from the settler states of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and US, began to request the return of and reparations for their ancestral remains in the 1970s, initial responses from museums were lukewarm. Australia, for example, recorded its first overseas repatriation of Indigenous remains from the UK only in 1990 (Korff 2021).

The beginning of the 2000s marked a watershed in the ways we perceive and treat human remains, especially in Western museums, where human remains came to be classified as special kinds of collections, which need to be treated with different ethics and dignity. These transformations in the ways human remains are viewed in museums can be attributed to the emerging Indigenous rights movement, especially in settler states, where there is growing realisation and recognition that many of the Indigenous remains were illegally and unethically taken, and ought to be returned to the communities that own them. Some governments responded with the institutionalisation of national restitution programmes aimed at recovering the Indigenous ancestral remains from Western museums. In 2003, the New Zealand government appointed Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of New Zealand, to develop a formal programme for the repatriation of koiwi and koimi tangata (Māori and Moriori skeleton remains) to the local iwi tribes (Te Papa, n.d.). In Australia, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for the Arts, initiated the International Repatriation Programme (IRP) to facilitate the return of Indigenous remains held in overseas institutions, which enabled some 1,000 remains to be returned to First Nations people from 2000 to 2009 (Korff 2021). The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), enacted in 1990, requires all federally-funded agencies and museums in the US to return Native American human remains and cultural items to their source communities (National Park Service 2022). While the NAGPRA legislation does not extend to overseas collections, it nonetheless sets strong imperatives for overseas museums to return Native American remains.

The ICOM Code of Ethics (2017), which represents more than 40,000 museums in over 141 countries, stipulates that human remains must be displayed and researched according to professional standards, and where known, consider the community, religious, or ethnic interests

and beliefs from which the remains originate, with tact and respect for feelings of human dignity of all people. It also requires museums to address requests for removal from public display and return expeditiously and with respect and sensitivity (ICOM 2017). It does not prohibit the acquisition of human remains provided that these can be housed and cared for securely (ICOM 2017). It is fair to say that the ICOM Code of Ethics guidelines are quite generic and do not address sufficiently the wide-ranging usage and treatment of human remains in museums.

In her seminal work 'Liberating Culture', Kreps (2003) argues that the hegemony of a Eurocentric perspective of museology conceals different approaches to museology and calls for the need to liberate our thinking from this Eurocentric perspective to recognise other museological manifestations in the non-Western world. In the two decades following her assertion, Indigenous museology has emerged as a prominent sub-field that explores non-Western practices and approaches within museology. However, the academic literature and discourses on Indigenous museology has to a large extent been dominated by the experiences and approaches of Indigenous communities in the settler states of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and US, which in turn creates a dominant counter-discourse for non-Western museology based on settler colonial experiences.

On the treatment of human remains in museums, there has been a counter-discourse among Indigenous communities in settler states that advocates for the return, reburial and re-humanisation of all Indigenous remains to their source communities. Such a discourse has also been echoed by some African scholars such as those in South Africa and Zimbabwe, who question the logic and need for the continued retention of non-Western remains in museums to advocate for their repatriation to source communities (Rassool 2015; Mubaya 2015). Such emerging scholarship has highlighted that museums may not adequately reflect the perspectives and approaches of other non-Western Indigenous communities, such as those from Sabah and the wider Borneo region.

Among the Indigenous communities of Sabah, and the wider Borneo region, human skulls are considered prized heirlooms, or Pusaka, and they have been collected and handed down over generations for centuries. As such, the collection of human skulls can be conceived as an Indigenous museum practice. These human skulls are ascribed either individual or communal ownership even when they have not been treated or altered, unlike in some jurisdictions such as the UK where human remains are not normally subject to rights of ownership unless they have been treated or altered. Furthermore, the human skulls belonging to an

Indigenous community often originate from rival ethnic groups rather than their genetic kin, complicating the direct application of dominant guidance and protocols on the care of human remains that advocate for the return of human remains to their genetic kin. Additionally, as the collection of human remains has historically been an intimate part of their cultural practices, the burials of these remains often signify the demise of the beliefs and culture of an Indigenous group. It is therefore important for us to consider the treatment of human remains in other non-Western contexts within their own epistemologies and community protocols rather than to apply Western standards and expectations, or the dominant counter-narrative advocated within certain non-Western contexts, on how they should be perceived and treated.

Primary data for this study are derived from my long-term ethnographic fieldwork with Indigenous Kadazan community at the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Kampung Kuai-Kandazon in the District of Penampang, Sabah, East Malaysia from March to June 2015. This was followed by annual short stays with these families to understand ongoing changes until 2019, when restrictions imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic prevented further visits. My study is complemented by reviews of colonial ethnographic accounts and secondary literature on the cultural heritage of Sabah's Indigenous communities. In analysing my findings, I am cognisant of how my positionality as an ethnic Chinese Singaporean, trained in a Western institution in the UK has a bearing on how I am perceived by the Indigenous communities, and how I interpret my field observations.

The Monsopiad Cultural Village and its ritual house

Established on 1 May 1996, the Monsopiad Cultural Village is the oldest cultural village in Sabah. Situated on the native customary lands of the Moujing family, the open-air museum complex comprises a Kadazan longhouse, a community hall for cultural performances, an in-house café, a small souvenir shop, a life-size granary known as the Tangkok, a ritual house (Figure 17.1) and a staff dormitory. It has on display the material culture of the Kadazan people, including equipment for the making of their 'traditional' rice wine, hunting equipment such as blowpipes and traps, as well as musical instruments such as the gong ensembles. The cultural village presents the cultural heritage of the Kadazan people, focusing on the history of Monsopiad, a local warrior who lived in the area some 300 years ago. It has on offer a cultural package, which includes
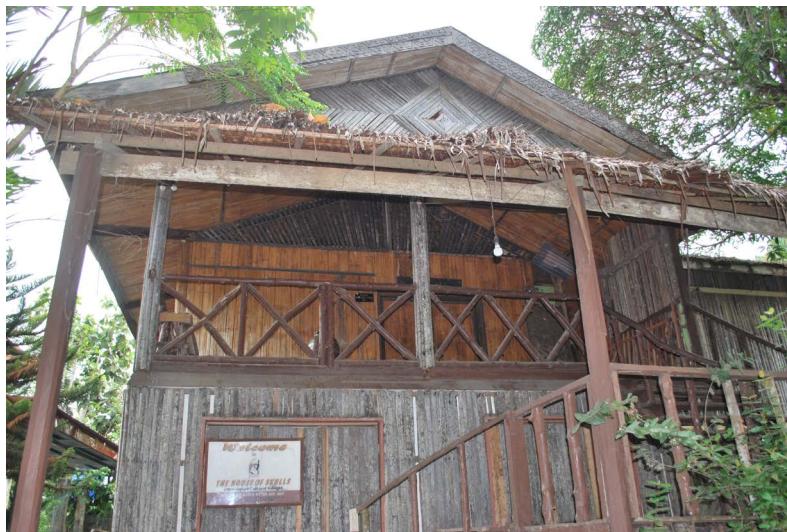
Figure 17.1 The ritual house in the Monsopiad Cultural Village, also known as 'House of Skulls'. Photograph: Yunci Cai.

a tour of the cultural village, detailed explanations of their cultural heritage, such as the Kadazan headhunting tradition, demonstrations of crafts as well as cultural performances staged by a group of Indigenous young adults employed to work at the cultural village.

A key highlight of the Monsopiad Cultural Village is the ritual house that holds a collectison of 42 human skulls believed to have been captured by Monsopiad (Cai 2020). The ritual house was the former home of the late Gundohing Augustine Dousia Moujing, the sixth direct descendent of Monsopiad and the custodian of the skulls. In the 1990s, inspired by the frequent visits made by tourists to see the ritual house and its collection of human skulls, a British entrepreneur who is married to the niece of Dousia Moujing lobbied his uncle to place the surrounding lands, the ritual house and its collection of human skulls on lease to him for the establishment of the Monsopiad Cultural Village as a tourist attraction. The direct descendants of Monsopiad, including Dousia Moujing, agreed to the proposal, as they perceived the partnership as a mutually beneficial collaboration. As part of the agreement, the Moujing family moved to a new house built on an adjoining plot of land, with the existing house and the skulls within it converted into a ritual house, which was branded as the 'House of Skulls', and presented as a key attraction of the cultural village. The skull collection is now in the custodianship of Gundohing

Wildy Dousia Moujing, the seventh direct descendent of Monsopiad, who is also the current Village Headman of Kampung Kuai-Kandazon. He inherited the skulls in April 2016, as the eldest son, after the death of his father, Dousia Moujing.

Indigenous beliefs and practices on headhunting in Sabah

For a long time, the subject of headhunting on the island of Borneo, where Sabah is located, has intrigued many Western travellers and ethnographers, who have sought to explain the cultural practice and its associated cultural taboos (Furness 1902; Evans 1922; Krohn 1927; Rutter 1929; Wyn 1974; Hoskins 1996; Phelan 2001; Gingging 2007; Metcalf 2010). But the practice was largely discontinued in the nineteenth century, when it was discouraged as a backward, barbaric and uncivilised practice by British colonial officers who took over the administration of Sabah in 1881. Owen Rutter (1929, 182) has attempted to provide a context for this cultural practice in North Borneo by describing its emic motivations:

> The taking of his first head denoted a youth's entry into manhood. It proved him to be a tried warrior and he was then entitled to receive his first tattoo marks. The possession of a head also entitled him to win the favour of the young woman of his fancy and to press a suit which would have been less successful had he been unable to show any such material proof of his prowess. But this was not all. The souls of those whose heads have been taken were believed to follow their victors to the spirit world; and naturally the greater number of heads a man obtained the greater respect was he likely to win from his fellows both in this life and the next. That was undoubtedly the idea which underlay the custom of obtaining the head of an enemy, or of sacrificing a slave, on the death of a chief.
>
> In addition to the advantage accruing to the individual from the possession of a head, there were also definite advantages accruing to the community. In times of sickness or famine, a head feast was considered necessary to avert the threatening disaster, and the association between headhunting and a fruitful harvest was close, and probably intimately connected with the primordial ideal of human sacrifice being necessary to placate the spirits of the crops.

Historically, human skulls were hunted and collected by the Indigenous peoples in Sabah, and the wider Borneo region, and prized as heirlooms, or *Pusaka*, to serve socio-cultural and religious objectives, such as for initiation into adulthood, for oath-making and the sealing of peace between feuding communities, for placating spirits to ensure a good harvest or to avert a natural disaster, for symbolising the wealth and social status of a family or as trophies for inter-tribal attacks. They also believed that the human skulls were their spiritual guardians, who would protect their families and properties from harm, ward off sickness and ensure success in their various pursuits. The spirits of the skulls not only comprised the spirit of the deceased but also part of the spirits from the village from where the victim had come, with the strength of the spirits increasing proportionately with the social status of the victim. The capture of a human skull also signified the transfer of spiritual power from the victim's village to that of the new owner. The ownership of more human skulls thus not only signified greater spiritual strength, and hence more protection for the owners, but also indicated the higher social status of their owners.

Once incorporated as possessions of an Indigenous group or community, these human skulls were treated as spiritual or religious objects that required regular appeasement to maintain their spiritual powers, without which the skulls may seek revenge by bringing bad luck and misfortunes would befall on the descendants of the family or community who own them. According to the beliefs of the Kadazan community to which the human skulls in the Monsopiad Cultural Village belong human skulls needed to be appeased every 40 years with a *Magang* ceremony: an elaborate ceremony comprising several days and nights of chanting, feasting, dancing and sacrifices of different animals, conducted by a group of Kadazan ritual specialists known as *bobohizans*.

Indigenous treatment of human remains in the ritual house

An elaborated *Magang* ceremony was conducted for the 42 human skulls held in the Monsopiad Cultural Village between 4 and 10 May 1974 when they moved into the ritual house when it was newly constructed to replace an old house on the same site (Phelan 2001). The skulls were first moved to the family's granary through a ceremony that lasted for a night and were returned to the newly constructed ritual house through a Magang ceremony (Phelan 2001). The ceremony was conducted by a group of nine bobohizans, led by a chief bobohizan – Bianti Gindal – known as the

bohungkitas, and was attended by some 500 family members and guests. Biandi Gindal was also the mother of the then-caretaker of the human skulls, Dousia Moujing, and the grandmother of the current caretaker, Wildy Moujing. The photographs and newspaper reports on the Magang ceremony, costumes and ritual paraphernalia used by the bobohizans who conducted the ceremony, as well as a replica of the sword used by Monsopiad to take down the human skulls, are put on display in the ritual house.

After the Monsopiad Cultural Village was set up, the family conducted a Momohizan ceremony lasting three days and two nights in January 1997. Taking place at the ritual house, the ceremony appeased the human skulls and strengthened the working relationship between the spirits and the people. During the Momohizan ceremony, a team of four bobohizans paid homage to the spirits of the ritual house, the human skulls, and the nibong plant, a sacred plant in the ritual house, with feasting, dancing and sacrifices of animals. The spirits also participated in the proceedings by possessing the bobohizans who entered trances. Due to the expensive and laborious process of organising rituals and the challenges of finding ritual specialists to perform them, the family intended that this would be the last ritual ceremony for the spirits. Hence, during the ceremony, the bobohizans informed the spirits that there would be no further appeasement ritual and they were to look after themselves in the future. The spirits were also told that they would be free to attend weddings and other celebrations to amuse themselves but that they should not disturb people.

Since the 1970s, due to the conversion of many Indigenous people from their animist religions to Islam or Christianity, neither of which condone the ownership and valorisation of human skulls, families with inheritances of human skulls have sought to dispose of them either by burying them or donating them to museums. In such cases, a ritual ceremony is performed by the bobohizans, so as not to offend the spirits of the human skulls. They believe that human skulls that are disposed of unceremoniously will seek revenge by bringing bad luck to the descendants of their owners, contributing to the downfall of their families. One account I collected tells of how the descendants of a Kadazan warrior, who disposed the family's inherited human skulls into a river, without conducting any ritual ceremony, had all either killed themselves or died suddenly in accidents, or had experienced mental health crises (Cai 2020). Belief in the efficacy of these ritual prohibitions, especially the consequences for breaking them, continues to influence local attitudes towards human remains, and how they should be treated in contemporary Malaysia.

According to Dousia Moujing, who agreed to the establishment of the Monsopiad Cultural Village in the 1990s:

> I told them [my children] jangan kacau (don't disturb them). They cannot surrender them to the museum, church or even bury them when I am gone. What they can do if they are sick of seeing the skulls or feel it in conflict with their new beliefs is to build a separate house and hang them there. After all, the skulls have accepted getting used to the rituals not being held regularly. So the question of feeding them does not arise. It is important to keep passing them down to future generations. The moment anyone in my family tree in future surrenders them, our honour and that of Monsopiad will be no more (Sarda 1994 quoted in Phelan 2001, 55).

To the late Dousia Moujing and his family, the incorporation of the human skulls as an attraction at the Monsopiad Cultural Village, and the performance of the Momohizan ceremony to appease the skulls and inform them that there will no longer be any appeasement ritual for them, is a culturally appropriate treatment for the skulls. Furthermore, he regarded the incorporation of the human skulls in the cultural village as a better spiritual settlement than other available options, such as donating them to museums or churches, or burying them, as they remain within the ownership of the family. To him, the commodification process serves as a means of safeguarding his family's legacy and cultural heritage for future generations. Tourism is perceived here as an avenue for sustaining Monsopiad's legacy and the Kadazan headhunting heritage.

Although the human skulls are subject to museumisation by virtue of their display at the Monsopiad Cultural Village, the direct descendants of Monsopiad request that respect is shown to the skulls, or rather, the spirits of the skulls, whom the local communities believe are their spiritual guardians. For example, tourists are required to take off their shoes and politely ask for permission to enter the ritual house as a mark of their humbleness and respect. As Moujing advised:

> Before entering the ritual house, just greet the skulls: 'How are you? Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, or something.' Don't say anything that is offensive. You must not be rude, and respect everything. Go with the respect intention, and you must not have any intention for disrespect.

Through this simple act of greeting, as a ritual observance that is clearly conveyed to visitors during the cultural tour, the spirits of the human skulls on display are humanised as living entities and are accorded the respect and dignity they rightfully deserve.

Decolonising collection care and management in Sabah

Unlike in Western museums where human remains were either depersonalised as museum specimens or treated as human curios, the human skulls that were historically collected by communities were valued as prized possessions embodying spiritual beings which could exert control over the destinies of their owners and were actively collected as symbols of wealth and social status. In addition, the human skulls that were collected belonged to slaves, enemies and neighbouring tribes, and were not genetic kin to the Indigenous families or communities who own them. As the Indigenous peoples of Sabah do not attach familial sentiments to human remains of genetic kin acquired by other groups, they do not actively seek the return of skulls belonging to their genetic kin for burials.

While some jurisdictions do not recognise rights to ownership of human remains, rights to ownership is actively ascribed to the human skulls in the collection of Indigenous communities in Sabah. Rather than conceiving such rights to ownership as a dehumanising act for these remains, they are actively ascribed to acknowledge and attribute responsibilities of care and management over these remains. Cultural taboos that connect the care and management of human remains to the destinies of the families and communities of the descendants who own them serve as an effective deterrent against the neglect of these human remains. Phelan (2001) documented an account where the caretaker of the House of Skulls in Kampung Karanaan in the District of Tambunan, Sabah, suffered various ailments, including a temporary loss of eyesight, due to a failure to safeguard the human skulls under his care from mischievous acts by children. This encounter motivated the caretaker to take steps to prevent outsider interference of the human skulls under his ownership.

A good practice that is widely lauded in Indigenous museology is the incorporation of Indigenous concepts of collection care and management practices within museums. Te Papa Tongarewa, for example, employed Maori concepts to rethink collection care and management by drawing on Maori cultural practices, including smoking rituals, to rehumanise

the Maori objects and maintain their efficacy (McCarthy 2019). In the case of the Monsopiad Cultural Village, the direct descendants of Monsopiad have converted to Christianity and no longer conduct animist practices. Therefore, these human skulls are displayed as relics of a past cultural practice, rather than as a living practice, within the ritual house. However, this portrayal of human skulls as museum relics is in no way a less authentic representation of the Kadazan cultural heritage, as it offers a true representation of the community's contemporary stance on its headhunting heritage.

While contemporary museum scholarship and practices tend to criticise and decry approaches that portray Indigenous cultures as the exotic, primitive, Other, the direct descendants of Monsopiad seem to relish in this exotic, warrior-like portrayal of their ancestor, Monsopiad, and the human skulls he has captured in the Monsopiad Cultural Village. Rather than rejecting the headhunting heritage as a symbol of their backwardness and barbarism, they have appropriated and reconfigured it to maintain their distinct cultural identity as a way of asserting their Indigenous identity and resistance against assimilation into the dominant Malay-Muslim society. To humanise these human skulls, visitors are invited to greet the human skulls, or the spirits of the skulls, as a mark of respect. By laying down ground rules on expected behaviour for its visitors, onus is placed on the visitors to exhibit sensitive and respectful behaviour to the spirits embodied in the human remains, rather than on the display and interpretation techniques adopted by the museum. This can offer an alternative manner of contemplating what is considered to be respectful treatment of human remains, which is through the stipulation of ritual observances for visitors.

Unlike in Western museums where Indigenous remains are frequently returned for proper burials, the establishment of the Monsopiad Cultural Village serves as a means of preserving family pride and legacy. The direct descendants of Monsopiad are actively embracing such essentialised self-portrayal as the exotic, primitive Other and are willing to be exoticised for the assertion of their Indigenous identity (Gingging 2007). By actively refashioning their headhunting heritage to serve the present needs of the communities, the descendants of Monsopiad are actively pursuing a path of 'survivance', a concept that is put forth by Vizenor (1999) to express the continuity of the past with the present and emphasise the living vibrancy of Indigenous culture in contemporary societies. As Vizenor (1999, vii) notes, 'survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name'.

The Monsopiad Cultural Village can also be conceived of as a safe house for keeping ritually potent objects by removing the risks posed by these deadly objects. There are presumptions that the museum, as a secular institution, has the capacity to strip any religious object of its sanctity through its collection, interpretation, storage and treatment processes (Wills 2015). As Davis (1999) and Tythacott (2011) have shown, religious objects that were once worshipped as sacred in temples are recontextualised and revalorised to take on secular values when they become museum objects in their later lives. Furthermore, Indigenous communities are known to offer ritually powerful or dangerous objects to missionaries and art collectors during the early colonial period as a way of removing them, with many of these objects eventually finding their ways into museums. In Papua New Guinea, communities have disposed of powerful objects used in ceremonies from the carved Malangan figures through missionaries and art collectors (Kuchler 1987) and offered up ritually dangerous objects to missionaries to neutralise the threats posed by these objects (Barker 2001). It is conceivable that the Indigenous owners of the human skulls in the Monsoipad Cultural Village may have drawn on the museumisation process to neutralise the risks posed by these powerful objects, since there are deep-seated cultural taboos against neglectful treatment or un-ceremonial disposal of these remains.

Conclusion

Drawing on the treatment of human skulls in an Indigenous ritual house at the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Sabah as an example, I make a case for the need to recognise different forms of museologies that exist in the non-Western world, including those that do not conform to the Indigenous counter-narrative promoted in settler contexts. Specifically, I draw attention to alternative perspectives and approaches to the understanding of human remains that challenge museological approaches that privilege the genetic kin and the re-humanisation of remains in museums. Through an examination of Indigenous beliefs and practices around the cultural practice of headhunting in historical Sabah, and how they continue to influence the attitudes towards human remains and their treatment in contemporary Sabah, I show that there exist alternative approaches to contemplating and treating human remains which can also be meaningful to the local communities who own them.

The concept of survivance can offer a useful framework for us to contemplate the perception, use and treatment of human remains in museums, in ways that can challenge the dominant Western approaches and discourses around human remains. For the direct descendants of Monsopiad, the exotic portrayal of the human skulls in the Monsopiad Cultural Village has offered them a means to preserve their family legacy and pride, as well as a route to self-representation and self-determination in contemporary Malaysia. While conventional discourses around the care of human remains in museums tend to advocate for their re-humanisation in their care, storage, display and management, my case study shows that such humanisation can alternatively be contemplated from the perspectives of visitor behaviours.

Furthermore, my case study challenges conventional thinking around the principles for contemplating and managing human remains in museums. First, the collection of human skulls is not necessarily a museum practice originating from the West, as human skulls have historically been collected and handed down as heirlooms in Borneo and can thus be understood as an Indigenous museum practice. Second, the privileging of genetic kin may not be meaningful in the context of Indigenous communities in Sabah, and the wider Borneo region due to the specific socio-historical contexts about slavery and headhunting that exist in the pre-colonial period. Third, ascribing ownership of human remains can sometimes play a positive role in collection care and management by ascribing responsibilities for their care and management. Finally, there are alternative approaches of rehumanising of human remains, such as through stipulating respectful visitor behaviours towards these remains, instead of reviving lost ritual practices around these remains which may not be meaningful if the communities themselves no longer practice these rituals.

Over the last two decades, growing awareness about museum ethics and human dignity have transformed public attitudes towards the care and treatment of human remains in museums. Museum policies on the care and management of human remains are also changing in response to these public attitudes. As we do this, we need to recognise the myriad forms of perspectives, approaches and practices of contemplating and managing human remains in museums, so that we do not impose a hegemonic discourse and approach, based on either Eurocentric or dominant non-Western experiences, about how human remains in museums ought to be managed and cared for.

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Part III Response
'Collections should reflect the relationships we hold'[1]
Nathan Mudyi Sentance

In the bottom draw
I toss, I shake, missing them
Waiting for their hug

Reflection

Breathe in. Feel my chest. Raise my chin. Shake anger and stress out of my head. Strengthen hand. Enter. Flick the switch because in darkness the breath gets drained quicker, my head gets squeezed more intensely. I apologise, state what I want to do, how I want to be of service and ask for guidance. This is how I enter collection storage. This is part of me trying to care for the Indigenous cultural belongings in the museum custodianship. Me trying to be of service to them and their connections to their communities and homelands. This is also part of ensuring safety for myself.

I know this can get me funny looks from my non-Indigenous colleagues. But Indigenous peoples, in my case Wiradjuri traditionally from Mudgee (about four hours northwest from Gadigal land now often referred to as Sydney), working with Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum (GLAM) collections can often get these looks. Like when I warn source communities before we enter a collections storeroom that they may feel intense grief, anger, joy or many other emotions when reconnecting with their cultural belongings and that it is okay to feel them in the space or to leave if they need to. Many of the colleagues giving these looks never have considered collections as a site that could cause grief or anger.

Or when discussing a notebook written by a non-Indigenous missionary that contains Indigenous languages and a colleague states, 'Isn't it good this is being saved in the library collection or the language could have been lost forever?' and I reply, 'Kind of,' launching into a diatribe about how for Indigenous languages to be preserved or 'saved' the language needs to be controlled by the Indigenous community – something that the notebook may prevent because of copyright law or library policy.

We also give our non-Indigenous colleagues funny looks when they say we have to wear gloves when handling our cultural belongings. Or when they use possessive language like 'our boomerangs' when referring to Indigenous cultural belongings taken from their homelands.

These funny looks stem from different ways of viewing collections. As many non-Indigenous people may see them as things, however many Indigenous peoples may, as Jessie Loyer (Cree-Métis) writes, see them as our living relatives (Loyer 2021). Therefore, how we consider care has a strong emphasis on the relational rather than the physical.

Additionally, we can see that seemingly impartial practices like storage and record-keeping are actually not impartial at all but are entrenched in colonial ideologies that have erased and denigrated Indigenous peoples. As such, we challenge these standard practices. This can get many Indigenous peoples working with collections called 'critical theorists' or 'practitioners' without them knowing what that means.

These were the themes that reached out to me while reflecting on the generous writings of the preceding chapters. I did this reflection mostly on Dharug Country, considering what these writings could mean for the practices of the Powerhouse (PH) where I work in my role as Head of Collections, First Nations.

With several colleagues, I am currently reviewing and revising the Powerhouse's Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) policy, which will guide how the institution will care for Indigenous knowledges, tangible and intangible in all its activities. This is building on the previous policy from 2016 co-created by ICIP lawyer Dr Terri Janke (Wuthathi/Meriam) which I believe was and still is ground-breaking in many regards. The preceding chapters reaffirmed to me that self-determination, agency and sovereignty need to be at core of this policy revision.

Furthermore, the preceding chapters have helped me to articulate the policy's importance as a method to redress the harms caused by past museum practices. For example, it is clearly shown through the writings of Abiti and Mbewe in regards to the Moto Moto Museum Zambia and

the Uganda National Museum, and with Russo in regards to the South Australian Museum, how, historically, some museum collections of Indigenous cultural belongings and Indigenous Ancestors are clearly tied to colonialism and have cultivated a dehumanisation of Indigenous societies through a disrespect of sacredness of cultural practices and disrespect of the human rights of Indigenous peoples. The policy could work, as Kuaiwa said in their conversation with Kapuni-Reynolds and du Preez, as a no to salvage ethnography.

Moreover, museums have caused harm by organising Indigenous knowledges through Western taxonomies (Smith 2021). This has changed cultural belongings' meaning, erased important context, simplified or in some cases demonised Indigenous culture and delegitimised Indigenous peoples as experts on their own culture (Turner 2020; Thorpe 2022; Smith 2021). As discussed in Kapuni-Reynolds, du Preez, and Kuaiwa's conversation, this is a severing of relationships, of connections. This is why I agree with Fortney who states we may need to rethink calling them 'storage areas' because then we see them as functional spaces rather than the political spaces they are, or ceremonial spaces they need to be.

McCarthy, Sadlier, and Parata, and Fortney also show how integral and valuable it is having Indigenous worldviews shape the organising of cultural belongings. In physical storage as well as in record-keeping. Databases too, in my opinion, are also political spaces. The work that Kapuni-Reynolds, du Preez, and Kuaiwa, and McCarthy, Sadlier, and Parata, discuss about returning Indigenous languages to cultural belongings is something to be highlighted as returning honour to cultural belongings as well as making them more accessible to communities.

In terms of the collection access implications of the ICIP policy, a consideration that will be a foundation to its formulation will be what Fortney said in their chapter, which is how easy it is to host an unscheduled visit from an Indigenous Community within your storage area. This is something I will continually pose to myself and my colleagues. Are we making it harder or easier for Indigenous communities to access their own knowledges, and therefore are we making it harder or easier for them to assert their self-determination and sovereignty over how their knowledges are protected and maintained? As McCarthy, Sadlier, and Parata state in their chapter, collection managers should be guardians, not gatekeepers.

A key part of embedding Indigenous agency in the care for their knowledges, and a key part potentially of the ICIP policy is listening to and centring Indigenous communities in regards to the preservation of cultural belongings. As Abiti and Mbewe show through a couple of

examples, communities can have their own methods of preservation which are more culturally appropriate and are beneficial to the community and the belonging.

Cai's chapter served as a reminder to myself that while colleagues and institutions want them, overarching uniform Indigenous collections standards and guidelines can be unethical, considering the diversity of cultural protocols and practices of the Indigenous communities across the country and internationally. Flexibility is needed; agency is needed, or standards, even with the best of intentions, will replicate the colonial practices of the past by imposing foreign protocols on cultural belongings. This disrespects their connections to their communities and homelands. Therefore, much of the ICIP policy must be asking communities how we should care for their cultural belongings and understanding that just because one Indigenous community has this important protocol does not mean it applies to all Indigenous communities.

Russo's chapter demonstrates how powerful good policy can be in shifting organisational culture and fulfilling community wishes. What I believe is integral to this is having a collaborative approach in designing policy and centring Indigenous priorities which was done through their Aboriginal Ancestral Remains Reference Group. This type of consultation and community involvement is something all museums, the one I work in included, should emulate with regards to ensuring policies focus on Indigenous self-determination. This also alleviates what Fortney discusses in their chapter, which is the unfair burden of placing decision-making on one individual, such as an Indigenous curator.

Furthermore, in terms of research, I believe that any research that is conducted on Indigenous cultures should be led by the relevant Indigenous community or done in collaboration with them. Something that is reflected in the Indigenous data sovereignty movement and something I hope the ICIP policy indicates (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2023). It is empowering to hear that the South Australian Museum is advocating for this as well. Australian museums being united in this could assist, along with the many great Indigenous community members outside of GLAM, a shift in scientific expectations in terms of researching Indigenous culture away from purely academic, potentially exploitative endeavours to one that benefits the communities being researched.

The preceding chapters are powerful ammunition in disarming the funny looks I spoke of earlier. They are also powerful ammunition in ensuring that policies like the ICIP one I am working on and similar policies in other collecting institutions are understood. That they are

living practices rather than PDFs that sit on different websites gathering proverbial dust. They will assist the critical mindset shift that is needed to ensure that the ICIP policy is seen as work that needs to be done rather than should be done. That it is the key to building trust with source communities. I am thankful for this ammunition, and I am honoured that I get to build on the fantastic work of my colleagues in this book.

> *Ancestors guiding*
> We work with love in our hands
> Smashing the gate free

Note

1   Emily McDaniel (Wiradjuri) 100 Climate Conversations. (n.d.). Action Plan [Audio podcast episode]. In 100 Climate Conversations. from https://100climateconversations.com/action-plan/

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Part IV
Collection management's publics

18

Decolonising the registration and documentation of the Dutch ethnographic collection

Cindy Zalm

Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of the major ethnographic museums in the Netherlands with questions of decolonisation, and its shift from focusing on exhibition practices to change processes focused on the more internal processes of collection documentation and registration. To understand how deeply embedded colonial history is in our institutions, it is important to understand its history. Although decolonising museum practice seems a topic emerging only in recent years, in the Dutch museum world as well in other regions, ethnographic museums have a much longer history of critically reflecting upon their colonial pasts and museological practices. While it may be impossible to pinpoint the start of changes in our museums as a result of those critical reflections, I will describe some events that I believe to be important in the museum's recent history.

Less than a decade ago, the museum invited a diverse group of young people from outside the institution to share their thoughts and opinions, to think together collaboratively about a different kind of future for the museum. In that phase of change, the focus was on the museum as a public institution, its representational practices, on its exhibitions, on its public programmes and the impact this may have had on diverse visitors and the role history played in these practices. It focused on what we would describe as 'front-of-house'. However, the colonial history of our museums also requires a more thorough investigation of methods used in the 'back-of-house', since those methods are the fundamental bases of

the knowledge presented in our exhibitions and object labels. Addressing our colonial past and creating more inclusive methods for the future has proven to be a laborious process during which we kept discovering new layers. The process is still continuing and is driven by the desire to share our collections with as many people as possible in order to create a more equal society. This requires new directions that we are currently putting in place, directions that are informed by the past, but also by the spirit of collaboration developed together with our various collaborators.

History of Dutch ethnographic museums

The National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, NMVW) is a museum that does not exist as a single physical entity. Resulting from a merger in 2014 of three main ethnographic museums in different parts of the Netherlands, the NMVW comprises Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, Afrikamuseum in Berg en Dal (near Nijmegen) and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Additionally, since 2017, the NMVW entered a structural collaboration with the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam. Whereas NMVW is responsible for the Dutch National ethnographic collection, the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam manages the ethnographic collection of the city of Rotterdam. Nonetheless, they function as a single entity, as custodians of a joint collection that numbers almost 450,000 objects and around 750,000 images on a wide variety of platforms. As ethnographic museums, all four institutions have their roots deeply embedded in Europe's colonial history in general, and Dutch colonial history in particular. They are part of a specific European category of museums, even while sharing an intellectual history with their American counterparts, with the largest part of its collections originating at a time when European nations started to explore and colonise the world, to categorise and study other cultures from their own perspective, needs and interests (Plankensteiner 20018, 26).[1]

Museum Volkenkunde is arguably one of the oldest scientific ethnographic museums in the World, having been founded in 1837 under the name Rijks Etnografisch Museum. Some of the earliest collections consisted of objects collected by Dr Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866), who worked at the Dutch trade post of Deshima in Nagasaki, Japan between 1823 and 1830. Numerous other objects were to come into the collections in the years to follow, including collections from private collectors J. Cock Blomhoff (1779–1853) and J.F. van Overmeer Fisscher (1800–1848). In 1883, the collection was expanded largely through the

acquisition of the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (the Royal Cabinet of Rarities) which ceased to exist thereafter. This Royal Cabinet was the successor of the Cabinet of Chinese Rarities that housed objects brought to the Netherlands by scientists commissioned by the first king of the Netherlands, King William I, to collect objects in China, Indonesia and Japan. While the focus in the mid-nineteenth century was on objects from Asia, by the end of the century the focus would broaden to include objects from the Dutch colonised territories as well as other places overseas. It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that the museum acquired objects such as the Benin bronzes, Peruvian ceramics, objects resulting from expeditions to Aceh, Bali, Central Borneo (Indonesia) and western New Guinea, as well as from Tibet and Siberia, diversifying its collections to cover most parts of the world (for a more detailed history of the museum and its collection see Van Dongen et al. 1987).

Just three decades after the foundation of the museum in Leiden, the Maatschappij ter bevordering van Nijverheid (Society for the Promotion of Industry) decided to start collecting objects that could form the collection for a new museum about Dutch colonised territories overseas. The Society's secretary and amateur biologist and writer Frederik Willem van Eeden (1829–1901) was given the assignment to build a collection. He used the attic of his house in Haarlem to store his acquisitions. This would eventually lead to the opening of the Koloniaal Museum (Colonial Museum) in Haarlem in 1871. In 1910, individuals, governments and companies decided to transfer the museum to Amsterdam and expand it with an institute in order to create a place for stimulating trade, agricultural and industrial interests in overseas territories (see also Van Duuren 1990). Funding for the creation of a new building that could accommodate this new institution and the museum was raised from trading associations, oil and gas companies, among others and the governmental department responsible for the Dutch colonies. A building was designed, purpose-built, to reflect the importance of Dutch colonised possessions overseas and had to emphasise the importance of the work done by the institute. An extensive decorative programme for the building focused on colonial production and trade, the arts and religion, missionary activities and science. In 1926, the new Koloniaal Instituut (Colonial Institute) was opened by the Dutch Queen, Wilhelmina of the Netherlands.

Throughout its history the name of this new institute and the museum as part of it has changed on several occasions. Those changes reflect the changing relation of the Netherlands with its colonies. In 1945, the Colonial Institute changed its name to the Indisch Instituut

(Indonesian Institute), and five years later into Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Institute of the Tropics). With Indonesia declaring its independence in 1945, the mission to stimulate interest in overseas territories seemed less relevant, and the institute and its museum with the name Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics) shifted its focus away from the colonial toward development cooperation in what was then called the Third World. In 2014, at the time of the merger, the institute and the museum separated after the decision made by the central government in 2011 to terminate funding by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This restructuring has led to the merger of the three Dutch ethnographic museums funded by the central government trough the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In those years the central government also executed severe budget cuts in the cultural sector leading to the re-evaluation of the museum landscape.

The Afrikamuseum in the small village of Berg en Dal has a much shorter history and its roots in missionary activities. The museum was founded in 1954. The founding exhibition by Father Piet Bukkens was mounted in a villa belonging to the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (Congregation of the Holy Spirit) and intended to inform the public about the importance of the mission in Africa to persuade them to donate or to join the congregation. This exhibition was a success, and the villa soon became too small to accommodate the growing visitor numbers. With support of the congregation in 1958, a new museum was built. Not only was the museum enlarged, but the ambitions of the museum also grew. Its mission now was to create religious and scientific interest of a broad audience into the African continent south of the Sahara. The objects on display were mainly collected by fathers during their missionary work across the African continent. They brought objects back to the Netherlands when they returned from retirement. As part of their strategy to increase the audience of the museum, the fathers created copies of architectural structures from Ghana, Benin, Mali, Cameroon and Lesotho, among others.

Its religious origin was strongly present in the museum during its first decades. The resistance and independence movements, together with decolonisation across Africa was to influence the ideas of the fathers. Initially, the museum mainly focused on differences between the Netherlands and the African continent, but by the 1970s and 1980s the similarities were shown more and more. In the 1990s the museum started to collect contemporary art by African artists and artists from the African diaspora, as an attempt to also include the African perspective (Grootaers and Eisenburger 2002, 46).

In 1883, the government of the city of Rotterdam decided to establish an ethnographic museum in the same building as the maritime museum that opened 10 years earlier in the Koninklijke Yachtclub (Royal Boat Club), following the example of Leiden and Haarlem. As a major port city Rotterdam had many companies with trade contacts in overseas territories and was the port of entry for many goods used in the rest of the country. From the beginning private donors and collectors were important for the museum and its collection. As a result, the Rotterdam ethnographic collection contains many objects originating in countries that were tied to the Netherlands as colonies, or having trade, diplomatic or Dutch missionary connections. Only in the second decade of the twentieth century did the museum develop a more scientific approach to collecting and to describing the collection. After the Second World War, ethnology shifted toward cultural anthropology following the shift in scientific debate. It was the start of planned collecting journeys.

First steps towards change

After the decolonisation of the Dutch colonies, all four museums shifted their goals and activities. The idea of displaying foreign cultures form the perspective of the all-knowing museum curator became increasingly troublesome both outside and within the museum. The historical and contemporary role of world culture museums in society was up for growing debate. In response, the Tropenmuseum opened a new permanent gallery in 2003 with the title Oostwaarts! Kunst, Cultuur en Kolonialisme (Eastward Bound! Art, Culture and Colonialism). Considered by some, and certainly by the museum, as a post-colonial exhibition, its purpose was to establish on the one hand a form of institutional critique, but also on the other at challenging audience views on colonialism and contributing to the public debate about national and cultural identity (Legêne 2009, 22). This approach was considered innovative at the time (Van Capelleveen 2003), and coincided with a broader trend of critical reflective practice occurring in many museums globally. Still, this new approach towards colonial history did not prevent broad discussions around the legitimacy of museums displaying colonial history, for example in the Netherlands and in Belgium. During this period, whether ethnographic museums across Europe should have a future became a topic of much academic and public debate.

While the Tropenmuseum had been part of these discussions, in 2012, severe budget cuts also had an impact on its future. Until that moment the Tropenmuseum was financed heavily by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT), which reflected the longer history of the museum's role as part of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. The ministry's decision to discontinue funding the Tropenmuseum was justified by saying that the museum, which had a very local function, no longer fitted within the framework of international cooperation and especially within the funding stream of development cooperation, from which the KIT received its funding. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was prepared to step in on the condition that the Tropenmuseum would merge with the Leiden-based Museum Volkenkunde. It was the start of a two-year process that has led to the creation of the new umbrella organisation Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, funded by the central government. Concurrently, as part of the debate around the decolonisation of museums, museum staff themselves asked whether a process of change, of addressing its colonial past, could happen from within the organisation or whether renewal should come from outside the institution.

Beyond these national projects, at the European level in the 1990s, ethnographic museums had already begun to collaborate, to rethink their histories, role and futures collaboratively. In 2008, this resulted in the formation of an EU-funded network of 10 major ethnography museums across Europe to 'propose to unite their experiences to organise scientific workshops on social questions related to the perception of populations of other continents and focusing on two major themes ('modernity' and 'first encounters')' (RIME, n.d.). The project ran until 2013 but the network still exists, and the initial project, RIME, was followed by others. The project SWICH (Sharing a World of Inclusion, Creativity and Heritage (n.d.)), was intended to think through the relationship between ethnographic museums and (post)migrant citizenry across Europe and to critically rethink the history of museums embedded in colonialism in relationship to the narratives and politics of citizenship and belonging in Europe today.

And yet, the question of decolonisation emerged not within SWICH, but in another project: the FP7 research project RICHES. In 2012, Laura van Broekhoven, then head of the curatorial department of Museum Volkenkunde, invited Hodan Warsame and Ilias Zian to critique the working methods of the museum and help create awareness among the museum staff and its public of the Eurocentric and colonial views and practices in the museum (Warsame 2018a, 12). It proved hard for

them to gain access to the institute and the people working there but the cooperation did not stop. After the merger of the different institutions to create the NMVW in 2014, the collaboration was continued under the umbrella of the newly founded Research Centre for Material Culture (RCMC) and the invitation to critique existing working methods expanded to the other institutes in the merger.

Following on the earlier work, Warsame formed a collective with Phoenix and Simone Zeefuik that would later initiate #DecolonizeTheMuseum. They invited people of diverse genders, sexual and social backgrounds and abilities to work with them. They amplified the voice of criticality to intervene in the museum. All together, they invited around 50 people to share their views on the museum, to critique the museum's representational practices, and to propose new texts for the museum. The group mainly focused on how the museum represented different marginalised groups throughout its exhibitions, and the language used in text labels, both historically and in the present. As Zeefuik has pointed out, it is not just about identifying troublesome words used in texts, but it was important 'to present the (re)imaginations and (re)thinkings that produced those words' (Zeefuik 2018, 15). Although it was obvious that there strong indicators of perspectives that had their origins in our colonial past (for example, images that exoticised non-western people, and the celebration and trivialisation of colonialism), the absence of perspectives of women, non-normative gender identities and the perspective of resilience of the colonised and their fight for independence confirmed the colonial imagination of the museum.

Shortly after the 'decolonize the museum' project ended, the Tropenmuseum prepared an exhibition under the name *Afterlives of Slavery* to explore how best to tell the history of slavery in the present. Done as part of the SWICH project, the exhibition took an experimental and multivocal approach that elicited input from the public. *Afterlives of Slavery* was created through a process of collaboration and partnership with diverse stakeholders and people most affected by the afterlives of slavery, in order to bring together different viewpoints from inside, and especially outside the institution. In this process, thinking about how to do the text was also important. Mindful of our earlier work with #DecolonizeTheMuseum, we invited its members to read and critique the text. They were also invited to discuss the texts with the team involved in making the exhibition, in order to understand the critique more deeply and discuss alternatives. The *Afterlives* project was a valuable first step for the development of a new semi-permanent exhibition called Onze Koloniale Erfenis (Our Colonial Inheritance), which opened in 2022.

With all of these projects in mind, the museum decided to share its experiences with the broader public, through publications and in conferences and workshops. This was not intended as a way to share knowledge, but rather as a space for further learning, to invite even more critical reflections as a way to test its conclusions.

Words matter

It was at the same time that there was growing discussion in the Dutch museums sector about the use of specific words in museums. This aligned closely with the approaches adopted by #DecolonizeTheMuseum to look at the ways in which specific words help to continue an Eurocentric perspective within museums. It also coincided with a longer term project within the Tropenmuseum and in Museum Volkenkunde. Already in 2011, the Tropenmuseum had generated a small writing guide to support its staff in writing exhibition text. While this never reached the level of official publication, it highlighted the need for staff to confront the troubled history of words in the ethnographic museum. There was a similar interest in Museum Volkenkunde, struggling as they were with words such as 'Indians', used to describe Indigenous peoples across the Americas. These were the beginnings for conversation among Dutch museum professionals under the name *Words Matter*. Fifty-four words, most of which were in general use in the museum, were listed with a description of their basic meaning, history, use and potential sensitivity and, where possible, also suggestions for alternatives (Modest and Lelijveld 2018). While the focus of the project was mainly text labels, these words were also used in the collection database of the museum. This initially led to an effort to identify the same words in our titles and descriptions in the collection database. But eventually grew into a much bigger endeavour.

Warsame (2018b, 82) identified five mechanisms of colonial narratives reflected by the language used in our exhibitions: (1) Frozen in time and place; (2) Exoticisation; (3) Heroism (portraying the white male as explorer, scientist, missionary or artist); (4) Euphemistic use of language and erasure (e.g. describing colonial industry as progress and the abolition of slavery as a step taken by Dutch government instead of the result of many years of struggle for freedom by enslaved people); (5) Authoritative with the illusion of objectivity and neutrality. Warsame's last point is an important one to understand: society tends to perceive the knowledge produced by the museum as reliable and objective although

the institute itself is deeply rooted in a colonial past, reproducing colonial narratives. *Words Matter* could easily be considered an invitation to search for those words in texts and catalogues of museums and replace them, but by doing so one ignores the system represented by the use of those words. Such a warning has also been made by Dalal-Clayton and Rutherford (2022) based on their experience in the Provisional Semantics project. They state that 'specificity of context, transparency of purpose, and research are crucial to making meaningful change in cataloguing' (Dalal-Clayton and Rutherford 2022). We also should be aware that language is continuously developing and that there could be a difference between the language used to describe objects and the language used by audiences to search for objects. The difference between the two are responsible for collections being less findable and accessible. The system that is represented by wording that today is considered contentious is more visible when you research the history of collecting and cataloguing within your own institution.

Behind the data: the origin of data in our collection management system

Hannah Turner (2020) clearly demonstrates the presence of colonial legacies in the cataloguing system of the Smithsonian Institute in the US. She describes how the original paper system used to catalogue objects was developed and reflects scientific knowledge systems that were common among the people working with those collections. By default, cataloguing systems are not neutral. By analysing the history of documenting the collection, Turner shows how the catalogue was part of a classification system that is deeply rooted in the colonial past. She describes how collections were brought to the institute based on clear instructions on what type of objects the institute wanted to collect and which information should be provided together with those objects. Although we consider European ethnographic museums as a type of its own with a specific background, the development of the cataloguing system of the Smithsonian anthropological department shows many similarities to the development of cataloguing systems within European ethnographic museums. Initially, it comprised inventory lists and ledgers that were being used to keep track of individual items within collections. The display of those collections was usually arranged according to the preferred classification system. For ethnographic collections the display would be mainly classified by region. The labelling of those regions was

determined by the common geographical categorisation of that time. The retrieval of objects in storage was then made possible by the use of the same classification system that used region or culture, material and type of object as a means to structure the collection. Storing objects by a strict ordering following taxonomical systems is still common in museums of natural history, where anthropological and ethnological collections are often located.

Due to growth of the collections in the Netherlands, their management became more and more complex. For the purpose of knowledge production and preservation, card systems were developed. The index cards contained data like acquisition information, descriptive entries, information about the physical properties of the object and a unique number for identification purposes. The sort of information and the way it was recorded was the result of a selection process. The staff of the institute used their scientific knowledge about the collections to make choices for the layout of the index cards. The layout of the cards was the same for every index card and therefore allowed for some form of structuring and standardisation. Selection lists for certain entries could be compiled and contributed to the structuring of the collection. Making copies of those index cards created the opportunity to sort them in different ways: for example, by region as well as type of object. With the introduction of the computer in the museums' working environment, databases were created. The records of those systems mostly follow the structure of the physical inventory cards from the past but allow for far more information fields and, most importantly, also more sorting methods than the physical card systems could ever provide.

In order to use the database, the data from the card system and ledgers needed to be copied into the computer system. In most institutes that meant that a selection was made of the available data fields on the cataloguing cards and entered into the digital system. For data entry, most museums used criteria for hiring staff that was focused on typing skills and not on scientific knowledge of the collections or the regions where those objects came from. This choice was made to allow cost efficiency. It meant that most data were transcribed literally from the cards and inputted into the system without making any corrections to the words used in the original descriptions and titles. The digital system also allows museums to keep far more data than the card systems could, but this potential was initially not used in many museums. Both those databases and the card systems were developed for the curatorial staff of the museum and for both collection management purposes as well as knowledge production (scientific use). They were never meant to be a source of information

for the audience of the museum. The museum audiences were informed through other means like exhibitions, printed catalogues, and books, products that were published after a careful process of curation. That changed dramatically with the introduction of digital photography and the web in the 1990s. Museums started to develop webpages where they published collection data directly exported from their collection databases. Suddenly the cataloguing system developed for internal use became widely available. Initially museums only published a selection of the objects considered to be the masterpieces of the museum on the web after a careful process of fact-checking and text review – a process that more or less reflected the traditional working procedure for compiling printed catalogues for the audience. But under pressure of open access policies and the desire to become transparent about the span of the collections, museums nowadays often publish the entire content of their cataloguing systems. Without understanding how this vast quantity of information has been developed and structured throughout the history of the institute, it is very difficult to fully understand how the colonial past in general and of the institute in particular has affected the content on offer in their collection websites. A visitor can easily question the transparency of the data provided through the website. Which selections are made? Which data is available but not represented? Which objects were digitised and which were not? What is the quality of the metadata provided? With the development of the internet towards the semantic web and the use of linked data, questions of data quality and transparency will become even more important. In the GLAM sector researchers in the domain of digital humanities tend to combine data sets from different sources. Without creating a proper description of those datasets and its source it will become impossible to properly interpret the results of computational analysis of those combined datasets.

In the case of NMVW the card system as well as the database are both filled with information in the Dutch language. Providing the translations of the information labels in English reflects a meagre attempt to make the cataloguing information available for non-native Dutch speakers. Region is traditionally the dominating classification method for accessing the collection. The numbering system in Museum Volkenkunde has been structured around the accessions of groups of objects from a common source, while in the other two institutes numbering took place in order of entry within the collection. The order-based system remained in place after the 2014 merger, when not only were the three institutes merged, but the three collections were also combined in one collection database. Luckily the ethnographic museums in the Netherlands had already

collaborated since the 1990s in developing a documentation system standard and creating a specialised thesaurus for the ethnographic domain.[2]

All member institutes within this collaboration use a database system from the same provider (TMS by Gallery Systems). Because of this collaboration, the three databases of the museums were structured in the same way and filled with information based on more or less the same working methods and conventions. After a major correction process the data was made available through one mutual collection website. Published records had to comply with a policy dictating that a minimum number of fields should be completed and what object categories were not allowed to be published based on potential offense, ethical restrictions or intellectual property legislation. It was also necessary to have a digital image of the object in order for the record to be published. Most importantly, the content of a record needed to be reviewed and approved by a curatorial staff member before it was published, reflecting the process used in times where collections were shared with the audience through printed catalogues. This policy changed after 2017 as we re-thought our own working methods as part of the decolonisation process underway in our institute.

By understanding the complexity of our cataloguing system, we felt the need to be as transparent as possible about what we have been collecting throughout the history of our institutes. Countries formerly colonised by the Dutch continuously inform us that they feel Dutch heritage institutes are not being transparent about the objects taken from the Colonies, what it is we have been collecting, and how we have collected. By publishing all objects in our collections, we hope to have made a very small first step in the right direction to address their criticism. Currently we are developing an online research tool in which we made the requirements for publishing data as transparent as we can. In order to be able to do this, we are organising a user panel with non-European representatives. Images of material we do not possess the intellectual rights to are being replaced by an information sign, but the metadata about the item is available. We took the same approach to objects that we did not want to share images of for ethical reasons. But this transparency around what our collections consists of does not necessarily mean that all this data is usable for every member of our audience. Lack of content in multiple languages and basic understanding of the way museums in Europe have built their catalogues makes the information far less accessible for people living in formerly colonised areas. The words they want to use to search the collection are not necessarily part of the vocabulary we have been

employing to describe the objects or used in the thesaurus that has been developed over many years. We are only beginning to address this gap and starting to understand that our databases are primarily focused on the individual objects, while the countries of origin are much more focused on the context in which those objects have functioned. Intangible culture has a much higher priority in their desires for documentation. Our data systems and our standards hardly facilitate the documentation of (immaterial) context together with the object(s).

Taking Words Matter further

Compiling the list of words published in *Words Matter* led to the examination of the use of language within our collection management system. The focus initially has been on word use in titles and descriptions. Museum staff questioned what it meant to erase certain words from the database. Are we hiding certain elements of our institutional past by doing so (Kunst 2018, 30)? Our collection website only publishes a selection of the information collected in our database. For instance, only the currently preferred title of an object is shown, while the internal record of the same object in our database also shows previously used titles and titles as visible on the object itself or contributed by previous owners. Titles visible on the object itself are considered 'original titles' and are recorded between brackets in a different database field allowing us to share those original titles with the online audience while making clear that they are titles inscribed on the object itself. In so doing, original titles are still available for research. This method of working allowed us to present titles online that no longer contained the sensitive words included in *Words Matter* while the institutional history could still be reflected and made available for research.

The second phase in the analysis of words used in our database was focused on the thesaurus. The thesaurus used by NMVW has its origins in the collaboration of the main Dutch ethnographic collections prior to the merger. In the 1990s these institutions collaborated to create uniform methods for describing objects. Museum staff set themselves the goal to standardise and structure terminology for describing objects. They created a thesaurus containing preferred terminology for describing objects as well as synonyms, homonyms and antonyms. Those terms or concepts are being structured hierarchically within the thesaurus by providing broader and narrower terms. Homogenous groups of concepts are brought together in a facet. For example, concepts describing the

physical substance that an object is made from are grouped in the facet labelled 'materials'. The thesaurus also provides alternative terms like synonyms that can be used to provide Indigenous terms. By referring to other terms it allows, to a certain extent, documentation of changes in the use of language.

The thesaurus Wereldculturen initially contained terminology that was already in use for many years in the card systems of the museums. Terms reflected viewpoints on categorising objects in the collections. For example, they reflected the desire to study cultures by reconstructing social or cultural evolution or were used to retrieve objects and object-related information. The thesauri created by the Getty Research Institute were used as a source and inspiration. Many terms collected in the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) were copied into the world cultures thesaurus and translated into Dutch. Between 1994 and 2007 the huge undertaking of translating the AAT into Dutch had been carried out by the Rijksdienst voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD) with the help of many museum professionals. The AAT is a polyhierarchical thesaurus meaning that one term could be related to multiple fields. The many translations now available make it a powerful aid in projects like Europeana to search collections in multiple languages and make collections more accessible. But discussing terminologies and words with source communities outside Europe made it clear that often colonisers used words to describe an object that were not translations of the original word used by the colonised. Because of this an extra layer of complexity is added to the translation of thesauri. This complexity also makes it impossible to use current translation tools like Google translate to create better accessibility. A joint project with formerly colonised countries is necessary to further investigate possibilities to facilitate searching by using terminology from multiple cultural origins.

It is only recently that our database system supports the polyhierarchical aspect that is part of AAT. The use of a database system no longer requires terminology that has as its main purpose the reference to physical locations. The first polyhierarchical facet in our thesaurus is the new group of concepts labelled 'Function and context'. It replaced the original facet 'Functional category'. This original group of concepts was based on the categories listed by Sturtevant for the Smithsonian Institute (Turner 2020, 129–130) because this was used by many other museums as well. Sturtevant's categories were based on lists compiled to share wishes for expansion of the collection between 1880 and 1930, a period in history where people thought that native communities and their material culture would soon disappear. As Turner (2020, 127) also

describes, we can only see the viewpoints behind the creation of those lists as colonial. Replacing the facet known as 'functional category' and rethinking the terminology used for creating our new facet 'Function and context' therefore is an important step forward in the process of rethinking collection management in our institute. The polyhierarchy allows us to connect terms from different facets to one object description, providing the possibility to connect those objects with far more context than previously possible. In the new facet we see, for example, the term sports and competition events. This term is related to two different terms placed hierarchically higher: gatherings, events and parties and competition and sports. Connecting terms related to multiple facets helps us to incorporate more than one viewpoint on objects or phenomena. We recently have formulated a few starting points for compiling and assessing thesaurus terms: we try to avoid dichotomies like modern/traditional or Western/non-Western; we try to make space for local concepts like festivities, calendars and object names; we try to pay attention to the hierarchical order of terms, especially when terms describe local names and concepts; and we avoid sensitive terms as listed in *Words Matters*.

By analysing the words used and then changing them, we make our thesaurus and descriptions more inclusive. Yet colonial viewpoints are also often revealed by words that are missing. We previously had no term for 'donating' or 'hospitality', but we did have terms like 'trade' and 'service'. We described the circulation and exchange of goods and services merely on the basis of capitalistic principles. Therefore, in our new terminology we chose to use the more neutral top term 'circulation of goods and services'. Using the method of polyhierarchy, the facet now also includes concepts as 'human- and slave-trade' and 'dowry and bride price'. Many terms were previously created with a specific object-oriented focus where the objects were described as a specimen and not for the description of the context or function of the object. Other terms existed as an enumeration creating problems in those examples where objects fitted one element, but not all, resulting in a category 'other', which did not help to understand the context of the object at all. In order to create the new facet 'circulation of goods and services', staff analysed literature used as an introduction to first year students' anthropology. Thomas Eriksen's introduction from 2015 proved especially helpful since its table of contents already outlines a rough structure of concepts. A new hierarchy was being created and broader concepts used. For example, the concepts 'cultural heritage' and 'cultural identity' were merged since they are strongly intertwined. It took our staff about a year to create the new facet containing about 1,200 concepts. Where previously categories

contained on average three levels, this was expanded to an average of five to six levels in the new facet. At the moment staff are still rethinking certain aspects of the new facet. Those questions are mainly related to the current hierarchy. The term wampum, for example, is now related to the concept of 'money chain' while its main purpose within the pre-colonial Indigenous northeast of North America was to record alliances and to signify spiritual beliefs through adornment. Wampum has also been used as an element of trade, a fact that was later mobilised by European colonialism who used it as currency. This use has been the basis for including wampum in the facet related to means of payment while we now prefer to include it in the facet related to governance and power.

Another challenge that is still a work in progress is the replacement of names used for nations, communities, cultures and places. In this type of issue, we also recognise that nations sometimes are used in relation to styles and periods. For example, the term 'Mayan periods and styles' falls under 'pre-Columbian styles and periods', implying that current Mayan styles are non-existent or not related to the pre-Columbian styles. Region and identity are important elements for accessing collections. For instance, we were approached by researchers based in Rapa Nui or Easter Island as we know it in Europe. They asked after objects related to their culture in our collection. Searching the term 'Rapa Nui' brought up results for two objects, while we have about 50 in our collection. It immediately led to a correction of the 50 records and related terms in our Thesaurus, but we expect that many more examples can be found in our collection descriptions. There is also too little attention to cultural origin based on religion, ideology or philosophical world views. Our Western world view appears clearly in our former approach towards the concept of religious spaces and representations of the supernatural. We now make a distinction between the concept of representation and manifestation of the supernatural. We recognise an essential difference between the two. To see an object as only a representation of something supernatural instead of a supernatural object is a dismissal of Indigenous world views.

One of the main representations of colonial viewpoints in the description of museum objects is the anonymity of most people of colour depicted or represented otherwise, for example as the maker of an object. In contrast, the Dutch people represented in our collections are usually named. People in images were always described based on the list of people and groups. In many cases it is not possible to name people depicted. To minimise their anonymity, a good start would be to create a field 'actors' that helps us to connect those people depicted in certain roles.

By addressing issues related to colonial viewpoints, we keep uncovering new problematic concepts and ways of working. What started as a rather short list of problematic words used often in our text labels, resulted in an endeavour of several years to rethink our ways of describing objects. It means that our thesaurus managers will continue to work on our thesaurus for the coming years. Recognising the enormous labour connected to changing descriptions of all objects in our collections, we started to explore the potential of AI and computational learning in a project named SABIO, together with science partners and with funding of the Network Digital Heritage. In this project Vogelmann experimented with the use of computational methods to explore bias in metadata of museum collections. The aim is to create a tool to help collection managers to explore their collections from different perspectives, opening up new ways of contextualising outdated and potentially biased descriptions. The work for SABIO is strongly related to the CONCONCOR project in which an annotated dataset has been created of 2715 unique terms in context drawn from a Dutch historical newspaper archive (Brate et al. 2021). The annotation has been done through both experts and crowd-sourced volunteers. The urgency for improvement of the quality of metadata is increasing. The digital transformation is taking place fast within museums and other institutes. More and more source communities are starting initiatives to collect metadata relating to objects scattered around the Global North in new databases or aggregation platforms. Those new databases and platforms are considered an 'opportunity for the museum and cultural space to correct the inaccurate narratives that spill over into history classes, racist rhetoric and the imbalanced power dynamics of daily life' (IIP 2021).

Because we now recognise how deeply our colonial past defines our working methods, we also feel the need to shift our attention towards the more physical representations of dated classification systems like the system we use in our storage facility. The NMVW is planning a new collection centre to be built by the end of this decade. In planning this facility, we would like to rethink access to our collection. Not only access in the sense of findable and usable collection data, but also access to the many objects stored. In our galleries, we tend to put only an extremely small percentage of our collected objects on display. Visitors representing source communities or members from diaspora communities living in the Netherlands seem to have more interest in the variety of objects that we store and the variety in technique, use of material and decoration that is revealed by the huge numbers of objects that we keep than the one or two objects selected for display in our exhibitions.

But what does it mean to provide access to our stores to those guests? Do they consider the stored collection as a welcoming place that shows respect for the objects we keep or does it represent a warehouse where objects are stored in the most efficient way? What does it mean to encounter statues representing your gods laying on their back on the bottom shelves because we consider them heavy objects instead of the deities they are? We would like to investigate over the next two years the concept of cultural care. What could that mean for the objects in our collections? How can we create guidelines for objects originating in so many different cultures? Do we need to put limits to the principles of open access so common in the European academic world when it comes to the information stored within our collections? Can we combine transparency around what it is we keep in our collections with limitations on access common within cultures of origin? Should we work together with other institutes within and outside Europe to understand cultural care better? Many of these are questions that we cannot answer today but hopefully will result in changes to our working methods in the future. A change towards methods and principles based on respect for cultures that are not ours allow us to make space for relevant knowledge kept within Indigenous knowledges systems. We hope by doing so we can potentially contribute to the reconnection of people with the objects kept in our collections and add more meaning to them. But maybe more importantly, it helps us to cooperate on equal footing with the people that are interested in accessing those collections, and re-interpret them.

Note

1   Since the end of 2023 Museum Volkenkunde, Tropenmuseum and Afrikamuseum will continue to operate together with Wereldmuseum Rotterdam under one name: Wereldmuseum. The Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen is the legal entity that governs the Wereldmuseum.
2   Thesaurus Wereldculturen, see: https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/thesaurus.

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19

Rebuilding collection infrastructure: thinking beyond best practice collection care

Alice Beale

Introduction

Collection Managers, registrars, curators, conservators and many other museum professionals will have all been asked, at least once but likely many more times, why not everything in the collection is on permanent display. The obvious and increasingly tired responses of collection care principles, space and funding restrictions or just the logistical mountain that would need to be overcome often falls on deaf ears. There is an assumption in this question that collection storage spaces are only for museum staff and then only a subset of them. That we keep collections under lock and key and frequently in the dark. That we are probably hiding away the truly remarkable, valuable, or significant pieces for our own enjoyment. This ignores the fact that not everything can be displayed, not everything is appropriate for display and that collection managers are regularly called upon to provide access to collections in storage.

Perhaps this misnomer is unsurprising however as collection storage is rarely designed with access in mind. Collection managers often need to 'make do' when providing safe and culturally appropriate access for First Nations, Indigenous and descendent communities who already often feel unsafe or uncomfortable interacting with museum collections. Using a recent storage project at the South Australian Museum as a case study this chapter considers rebuilding collection infrastructure in a way that both protects the collections but also improves the experience of physically accessing collections for First Nations communities.

The South Australian Museum holds more than four million items of cultural and natural history significance and at any one time less than one per cent of the collection is on display. These collections are divided into three main disciplines – Humanities, Earth Sciences and Biological Sciences – with further subdivisions existing under these disciplines. The museum's collections are regularly accessed by researchers, curators from external institutions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other First Nations peoples from around the world as well as descendants of donors. The Museum's collections also travel as part of research or exhibition loans or are returned to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of the Museum's active repatriation programme. In the 2021–2 financial year, 550 people visited the collection and 3,470 items travelled beyond museum walls on loan. Pre-COVID-19 these numbers were only slightly more with 2018–19 having 706 visitors to the collections and 3,866 items travelling on loan.

The collections at the South Australian Museum are stored across four main locations. The Science Centre located directly behind the Museum galleries holds the bulk of the Natural Science collections including Archives, Palaeontology, Minerology, Mammalogy, Marine Invertebrates, Marine mammals, Parasitology, Entomology, Arachnids, Ichthyology and Ornithology. The location of these collections in the centre of the city, while many museum collections have moved to the outskirts, speaks to the historically strong links, that exist to the present day, between the Museum and researchers at the University of Adelaide, who are regularly accessing collections for research projects.

The other three locations are off-campus and spread across greater Adelaide. The whale maceration facility is logically located far from populated centres due to the size but mostly because of the smell. The Humanities collections numbering more than two million items are currently located approximately 20 minutes from the city in two warehouses that are leased rather than owned. These collections are heavily accessed by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as other First Nation communities and yet are dislocated from a major archival collection that provides essential provenance. Provenance is powerful: it can take an item from a beautiful piece of material culture made by a member of the same community to a beautiful piece of material culture made by a direct relative. It is common for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who have already had to travel great distances to access their cultural heritage to have to shuttle between the city and the offsite collections to gain a fuller understanding of material relevant to them.

Creating better access

Collection storage in Australia is generally pragmatic and concerned almost entirely with collection safety. With some exceptions, collections are frequently located out of the central business district (CBD) and stored based on Western disciplines. This leads to a disjointed experience for some collection visitors. Stone tools from the same community as objects made from organic materials are separated according to the disciplines of Archaeology and Anthropology. Documents, images and even footage of artists making an object are frequently stored separately. Some of this is practical as different types of collections require different expertise and care. Some of it speaks to issues of funding; leased facilities with a smaller footprint have a lesser initial outlay than a purpose-built facility designed to house everything.

Best practice for collection care in Australia is guided by The National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (National Standards Committee 2016). In their words the National Standards 'are focused on key areas of activity common to organisations that care for collections and provide collection-based services to the community' (National Standards Committee 2016, 8). The standards are broken into three areas of activity: Managing the Museum, Involving People, and Developing a Significant Collection. These areas are further broken down into a series of principles which are supported by the standard criteria that needs to be met by a museum to address the principles (National Standards Committee 2016, 14–15). The standards advise on making collections accessible through exhibitions and displays or via digital platforms, however they are silent on physical behind-the-scenes collection access. On the matter of collection storage, they advise making adequate space available and that the space is 'suitable and safe' for collections (National Standards Committee 2016, p. 35).

The incredible, well-developed procedures for collections care *reCollections: Caring for Collections Across Australia* (Heritage Collections Council 1998, 1–9), specifically the *Managing People* volume, does touch on the benefits of access and provides tips and procedures for reducing handling risks. Mostly, however, this volume similarly advocates for access through display rather than back-of-house, mentioning only briefly procedures for providing collection access for researchers.

Increasingly, the nature of access requests to 'back-of-house' collections is changing and old ways of managing collections based on disciplinary structures is becoming increasingly less relevant. There needs to be a shift towards creating more culturally relevant storage

with culturally safe access. In 2018, Terri Janke published *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries.* Commissioned by the national advocacy body Australian Museums and Galleries Association, the roadmap seeks to improve engagement with and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Museum and Art Gallery sector in Australia.

Janke (2018, 21) advocates that museums should create spaces for the Indigenous community to access collections or research materials held by museums. I wholeheartedly agree with this statement but would take it one step further and amalgamate cultural collections onto a single campus so that staff do not have to unnecessarily move fragile collection material. Of course, while ensuring culturally safe access to cultural collections is an essential task for museums, it is an essential task that needs to be supported by collection storage and housing solutions that considers the safety of the object and its access requirements – a point often overlooked in 'best practice' guidelines.

The challenge

Collections at the South Australian Museum are stored like most other museum collections in a conglomeration of storage furniture of varying ages, flexibility and levels of repair. Like any collecting institution, the museum has struggled to attract enough funding to improve all its collection storage at one time. However, it has been able to gain funding to upgrade sections of the collection infrastructure. This has usually come in response to an impending or actual collection disaster. When the Museum's significant entomology collection was being rapidly eaten by carpet beetle in 2012, $2 million in funding was made available to freeze the entire collection and completely replace the old wooden drawer systems with new, better-sealed compactus units.

More recently another series of disasters and near misses catalysed a major storage upgrade in the Museum's culturally important Australian Aboriginal Cultures Collection. The resulting project, which is the subject of this chapter (see also Beale and van Mourik 2022), began initially to protect irreplaceable collections from the ravages of inadequate facilities but was refocused based on changing access patterns in the collections. The Museum's impetus to improve access was further supported by the timely publication of *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* (Janke 2018) and the storage project as a whole became a first step towards improving the accessibility of these important cultural collections.

The Australian Aboriginal Cultures collection is said to be the most representative of its kind in the world and is of immense importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia. Holding approximately 30,000 objects and artworks dating from 1788 to the present day, this collection is an irreplaceable resource for communities. People visit from all over Australia to learn from the tools of life that were once used by their ancestors. They study weaving and carving practices and reconnect with cultural heritage that has been lost due to repressive government policies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This collection was originally housed in the Museum's main city campus but was moved more than 20 years ago to make way for expanding permanent display spaces. The move to an old government warehouse was originally designed to be a temporary one with the expectation that it would be a short stay. This meant that investment in necessary infrastructure to store the collection safely, efficiently and according to best practice has always been lacking.

In 2018, the South Australian Government recognised the need for urgent remedial work to protect this collection and provided funding to upgrade storage furniture, object housing and the trackability of the collection. This funding and project were only possible with the staunch support and effective lobbying of the Museum's Aboriginal Partnership Committee who were deeply concerned by several flooding incidents from extreme weather events and malfunctioning sprinklers that had damaged storage and building infrastructure as well as collection material. The worst of the incidents resulted in acrylic paintings being caught under a deluge. The same deluge also came precariously close to a significant collection of bark paintings stacked on pallet racking in cardboard boxes. While painting conservators were able to save the damaged acrylic paintings, there would have been little they could do to save the fragile collection of barks with their friable ochres and minimal binders.

Prior to the project, the collection had been stored on substandard storage furniture that meant the collection was overcrowded and inefficiently stored. Collection managers and conservators had worked tirelessly to bring order and improve the situation but there was only so much that could be done within the existing system. Impact damage was occurring due to wooden objects having to be stored on top of each other with only minimal barriers between the layers. Standard museum pests were able to easily access feathered material on open shelving as existing cupboards were over full and acrylic paintings that had to

be stored leaning against shelves due to flooding were constantly at risk of overhandling when staff needed to access the shelves they were leaning against. Access to the collection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and researchers was severely limited and ran the risk of damaging collection items during retrieval. This was often a distressing time for staff who had a fierce dedication to collection
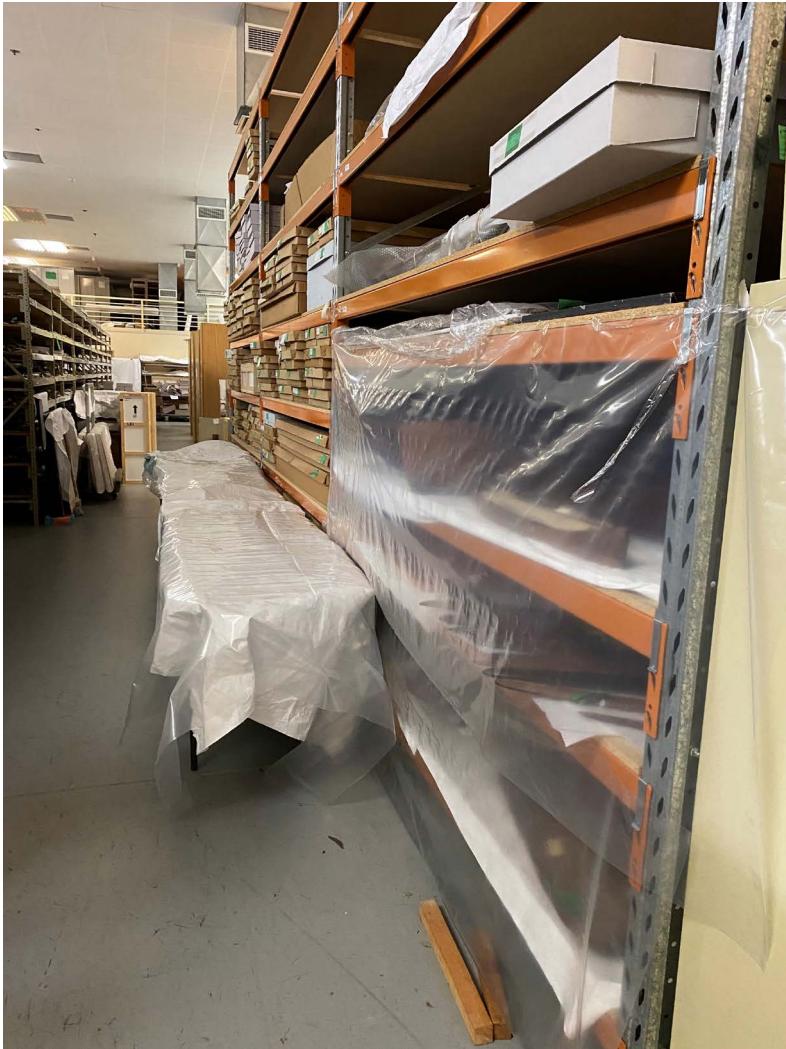
Figure 19.1 The collection store prior to the storage project. Note the stacking of objects in aisles, acidic cardboard boxes and plastic coverings to protect collection material from water ingress. © South Australian Museum.

care and accessibility, particularly when they were forced to say no to certain requests. Furthermore, a system of storing via object type then by collection location had started to break down due to lack of space. These conditions, combined with an inadequate internet facility to run the collection management database, meant the Museum was heavily reliant on corporate memory to locate aspects of the collection – a fact that was putting collection items at risk of being unlocatable and even disassociated from their essential provenance information.

The project therefore had to address the issues of inefficient and unsafe storage, lack of trackability of collections and provide extra layers of protection to particularly vulnerable items (Figure 19.1). The project had three streams of work and was supported by staff at the South Australian Museum, conservators from Artlab Australia (South Australia's premier conservation institution), the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Infrastructure and Transport. The three aims were: upgrade existing storage furniture; rehouse approximately 12,000 collection items into bespoke, archival boxes with internal support systems; and implement a barcoding system linked to the museum's collection management system. While access was not one of the core requirements the team factored access needs into every decision.

There were numerous logistical challenges that had to be overcome as part of the project, most of which we had some idea about, although perhaps not the extent of them. Going into the project we knew one of our biggest problems was that we could not change the shape or size of the room the collection was stored in. We also knew our data about the collection was far from adequate and that we did not have the physical space available to decant the entire collection while the new furniture was being built. This also meant we lacked workspace that would have allowed us to pre-organise the collection and then the COVID-19 pandemic threw one final curveball with global implications that nobody expected.

Data woes

The project began in earnest in 2019 with the employment of Architects, Swanbury Penglase, to assist with building works and design. At the same time, we set to work refining the data used to support the original business case. One of the first hurdles that we encountered was how woefully inadequate the collection data was for the needs of the project. There was an assumption that decisions about storage furniture and

housing requirements could be made with high-level information collated through sample surveys. However, the reality was we were working with cultural collections made largely from organic materials, and while there were broad categories to help guide the work, these objects were unique and frequently required a case-by-case assessment.

Over a six-month period, the collection was grouped into broad categories and a storage furniture solution assigned, whether that be cabinet, open shelving, or drawer unit. In parallel, bespoke packing solutions to be implemented by conservators at Artlab Australia were devised. Each object was assessed against known access requirements and frequency. These were then factored into decisions about storage types. Throughout the planning, in addition to collection safety and access, we also had to keep in mind that we were still in our temporary home. The buzz phrase 'non-regrettable spend' became the mantra for helping to make decisions. Everything we did had to fit the existing space, but still be flexible enough to be picked up and moved to a new site, albeit one that did not exist either in reality or plan.

A survey was completed of collection groupings to determine size of shelf, drawer, or cabinet. Where an object was to be boxed, the individual items were measured for their box size which then determined the shelf size. Where items were to be put directly in drawers, we relied on sizes of existing shelving, existing data, and random sampling to check for accuracy of method. The hardest part was determining how much attention to pay to the non-standard sections of these sub-collections. In part this was because preconceived notions about the general size of an object such as a boomerang made it hard to convince the storage company that the collection held boomerangs greater than two meters long and that they required a bespoke solution. Consequently, sampling of the minority became more important than sampling of the majority.

Where a collection category was small in number but likely to have great variety in size and storage needs, detailed surveys were completed of every object. Woven mats, for example, vary greatly across Australia with a variety of purposes, sizes and materials. It was not initially possible, based on data, to tell whether a mat was made from sedge, pandanus or had elements like wool and feather woven in or applied. Some mats were pigmented, while others had extensive fringing or were formed in a way that did not allow for flat storage.

To box or not to box

To improve collection accessibility there was also a great deal of work to be done grouping object types by location. Over the last few decades of people accessing the collection there had been a sharp shift in which sections of the collection were requested for access. To a certain extent, access requests used to be predictable based on research ideas and projects that were in 'vogue'. One year it would be ochre samples, another year it would be spears and the following year it would be items from a particular collector. However, as research practice and the museum has changed so too has the nature of the requests. Now requests focus predominantly on community groups.

Where multiple items were going into a box it was important to get the groupings right. The original plan was to group using available data then have collection managers locate the items for boxing, however again the unreliability of our data became an issue. Much of the collection information regarding collection location was vague, incorrect, or missing entirely (Figure 19.2). It was again apparent how much we were relying on the knowledge of individual staff. In the end we compromised by combining available data with staff expertise.

The spears collection is the largest sub-collection within the Australian Aboriginal Cultures collection and was the main section that had to be grouped by location. Prior to the project the spears were the most difficult to access. They were stored on tall open shelving in dark corridors. Their registration numbers were frequently indistinct in the low lighting and due to the way they were crammed together on shelves it was difficult to find individual examples without inadvertently damaging the spear in question or one of its neighbours. If they were on a top shelf, it became an occupational health and safety issue to access them. Recognisance work to see how other museums were managing these types of collections gave us some insight into how to manage such unwieldy items. At the Australian Museum, long objects had been secured to long handling boards and then moved from one location to the next in batches using a stackable version of a stretcher. This seemed like a good option, however we did not have the space for the drawer systems the Australian Museum were using for permanent storage, and we needed to be able to store the entire collection as efficiently as possible outside of the store while the new furniture was being installed. In the end it was decided to box the entire collection of 5,000 spears. On average, eight spears were grouped in a box. Each spear was secured using foam, cotton tape and jeweller's pins. Groupings were determined based on available
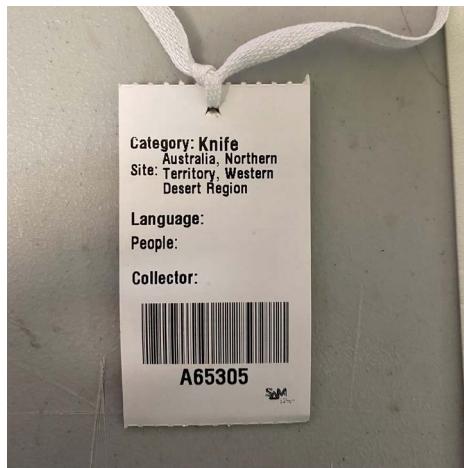
Figure 19.2 Barcode for attaching to collection object. Barcode is missing key information reflecting data issues surrounding the collection. © South Australian Museum.

database information and then by a stylistic analysis done in real time by the collection manager delivering the spears to be packed (Figures 19.3 and 19.4).

In total there were 591 boxes made to contain the spear collection. The boxes were stackable to 10 high and were easily moveable in and out of the collection as required for the installation of the storage furniture. In their new homes they are technically less visible, however they are more accessible. Individual spears are easy to locate and are grouped in such a way that addresses the needs of the most common access requests now received by the Museum. As an extra effort to increase accessibility, the diagnostic aspects of a box of spears was photographed. These images were then printed and attached to each box. A future project will be to load each image into the collection management database to allow for remote access.

While boxing the spears collection made them more accessible, there was another part of the collection that had been boxed – poorly, but still boxed – which combined with its storage furniture had led to the collection being less accessible. The museum's collection of 500 bark paintings from the Northern Territory had been stored in acidic cardboard boxes without internal supports on tall pallet racking. The boxes which were for the most part ill-fitting offered little protection from water ingress or handling damage and the too tight corridors between the

Figure 19.3 Spears having been grouped and packed into archival boxes. © South Australian Museum.

racking meant bark paintings on the opposite shelf had to be moved to have enough space to remove specific barks. Many of the bark paintings were very old with some being collected as early as 1884. In addition to their paint surface being fragile, the bark on which the paint had been applied had often become floppy, had started to crack, or was trying to return to the shape of the tree it had been removed from. Holes were appearing in some of the surfaces, bark edges were increasingly fragile, paint was actively flaking, and, in a few cases, cracks had travelled the length of the bark and now two pieces existed where once there was one.

Figure 19.4 Spear boxes stacked on new shelving units. © South Australian Museum.

To protect the collection, we needed to provide each bark with adequate support and reduce the amount of handling required. Early on we had decided barks should be stored in single layers in drawers. This would protect the barks from unnecessary double-handling when it was always the one underneath that was needed. From there conservators at Artlab Australia developed a system of modular handling boards with woven polyester-satin–covered cushions filled with dacron. These pillows moulded to the bark and allowed it to move freely while in storage. Ultimately, it is hoped that the bark paintings don't need to be removed from the drawer to be viewed, however the handling tray provides a

safe system for managing this without having to handle the bark. As a final step, the boxes were given lids which the tray could nestle inside. These lids were a late addition to assist with the inevitable safe move of the barks.

Unexpected curveball

On 11 March 2020, just as all our planning was starting to be put into action, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organisation 2020). The impact this announcement and the pandemic was having was devastating – people were dying or becoming seriously ill and huge changes were happening to the way people worked and lived. Global supply chains were shutting down, international travel was cancelled and within Australia state borders were closed. People were confused, scared and reassessing what was important to them. The South Australian Museum, like museums all over the world, closed and most of the staff during this period worked from home.

The exception was the Australian Aboriginal Cultures collection project team, who throughout it all kept the project running, albeit with room capacities and sanitation regimes. Our team felt both protected from it as we were still able to go to work, and in the middle of it as so much of our work felt dependent on what the pandemic would bring next. The storage furniture suppliers came on board in mid-2020, however they were based in Western Australia where the border was closed for the longest time and with the strictest rules. As a result, the company designing and installing the storage furniture did not see the collection until the new system was almost completely designed. The design was completed entirely via video conferencing and email, with the team on the ground collating most of the essential data to feed into the process. This situation, while unavoidable, was detrimental to the project. There will never be a suitable substitute to taking the time to learn a collection. You have to spend hours opening drawers looking for particular items but finding others, untangling confusing records and understanding the personalities of those who built or managed the collections before you. Failing that, you need to spend as much time as possible in a collection with a collection manager who has the above experience. Anything less leads to important detail being lost in translation. We did everything we could to overcome these problems, sending data and reference images, and having long discussions about the physicality of objects. This

alleviated some of the issues but not all, and has meant that some of the storage solutions aren't as seamless as they should be. To make matters worse, our main supplier for archival materials was based in Victoria, one of the states who felt the impact of the pandemic most keenly with case numbers and lockdowns.

In the early days of the pandemic, while people were still learning how the virus was transmitted, we worried about how to manage if we had a case in a collection store. Standard process in other industries at the time was to initiate deep cleaning of spaces where an active case had been present, but this would put the collections at risk. Instead, it was decided that collection areas would be closed for a specified period with only hard surfaces cleaned under supervision. As this then put the project timeframes at risk, we had to be able to run sections of the project simultaneously and be ready to divert non-infected staff on to other tasks. In the end, Adelaide only faced two short lockdowns where people were prevented from leaving their homes. During this time, staff were diverted on to procedure development or catching up on essential data entry.

One of the biggest impacts of the pandemic was the loss of our volunteer team. To reduce the numbers on site and to protect in some cases the most vulnerable parts of the Museum family, volunteers had been asked to stay home. While a sensible decision, this had a huge impact on the barcoding aspect of our project. It had been our intention to use our volunteer digitisation team to apply the approximately 30,000 barcodes to the collection. This team had been running for seven years and in that time had been expertly trained in collection handling and had spent two years auditing the collection – in reality, they had a better hands-on experience with our collection than some of our paid staff.

Overnight they were gone, however the barcoding process was too critical to both tracking the collection during the move and to increasing access to the collection to write-off this part of the project. In place of the volunteers, collection managers from other parts of the institution were redeployed to assist. Most were working from home due to the need to reduce the number of people in the Adelaide CBD, however the offsite store allowed for social distancing and was a welcome relief to the isolation and cabin fever being experienced by many who were working from home. We eventually extended the invitation to colleagues at our sister institution the History Trust of South Australia (HTSA), setting up a one-day working bee with HTSA staff to audit and barcode the raw materials collection – a collection of plant, animal and pigment samples, which due to being without active research priorities had been left to gather dust for quite some time.

Barcoding the collections was designed to increase trackability, but in the end it became the vehicle for reconnection with colleagues. Despite being part of the same institution or cultural precinct in the case of the HTSA, there are often natural silos between departments and institutions with such multi-disciplinary teams of people. While formal structured programs to address this go some way to alleviating these issues, in the author's experience it is the projects that have people work to a common goal or solve a problem in the heat of the moment that often have a greater impact. Never underestimate the bonding potential that working out difficult registration problems or moving collections during a flood will have. Or the importance of those relationships when the next disaster strikes. To reduce natural errors stemming from lack of familiarity with collection idiosyncrasies, we introduced a protocol that every time you moved an object you confirmed the correct barcode had been applied.

Parallel projects

Running in parallel with the main project was a smaller but no less important project to support both the care and repatriation of the Ancestral Remains for which the museum is the custodian. The South Australian Museum like museums around the globe has a racist legacy of collecting the remains of First Nations people. Today this abhorrent practice no longer occurs and Ancestors already in museum care are part of active repatriation programs guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This process is a long and difficult one for community, and museum storage spaces that communities are often forced to complete this important work in compounds the harm.

As a result, and with the Indigenous Roadmap (Janke 2018) in mind, we set about creating a space inside the building complex, separate from the hustle and bustle of the main collections where communities could meet in peace and discuss the important work of returning their Ancestors to country. The space is not complicated, it is calm and clean. It has a door that leads directly to the outside so that people can step away to gather their thoughts. Finally, it is reserved only for the purpose of working to return Ancestors home.

Lessons learnt

Having managed the project through the complexities of a global pandemic, it is sometimes hard to see which lessons will be applicable to future projects. That being said, these lessons were learnt in particular:

- Data is key, both for helping to facilitate a smooth design process and to assist with access for community.
- The company designing the storage furniture needs to have a firsthand understanding of the collection. While both the Museum team and the storage company did their best to bridge the gaps in knowledge virtually, there were many misunderstandings which led to key errors being made.
- Too heavy a reliance on the corporate memory of existing staff puts collections at risk and does a disservice to community.

Future projects

In 2021, while the project was still running, we received the welcome announcement that our temporary home of more than 20 years really was just a temporary home. The South Australian Government announced they would be building a new collection facility to house the collections of not only the South Australian Museum, but also our sister institutions including the History Trust of South Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, and State Library of South Australia. At the time of writing, we are deep in the design phase and beginning survey work for the other collections housed at the offsite storage facility.

While the focus has moved away from the Australian Aboriginal Cultures collection, for the moment at least, there is still much to be done in this collection to increase its accessibility and to continue to ensure its long-term wellbeing. First and foremost, there needs to be significant improvement in the data surrounding these collections. They need to be reconnected with their companion collections and more spaces need to be created for safe and respectful access. While we work towards this, we are taking the lessons learnt from this project and applying them to our significant collections from around the world, with the hopes that the same level of commitment to access and care can be given to the global First Nations communities whose material culture the Museum also holds.

Collection managers must be tenacious problem-solvers and gentle caregivers when it comes to managing collections and they need to extend these abilities to the people with whom they interact. Access protocols are

important for safeguarding the collections, but perhaps we need to think a little less about security of objects and more about the wellbeing of the people who engage with those objects.

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Methodologies for international access and collaborative collections research in museums: challenges and opportunities

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Taking the format of a conversation between three curators based in the UK (JC, Johanna) and Kenya (Juma), this chapter explores methodologies that allow for international collaborative research, with a focus on museum documentation practices. It critically unpacks the museum as an institution alongside its protocols and terminologies, drawing on experiences of collaborative research between researchers based in Britain and Kenya. The methodologies were guided by a reflexive practice given that JC and Juma are both heritage professionals and Kenyan community members themselves, and all three authors have experience working with and providing access to collections and collections data.

This conversation emerged as a reflection on the barriers to community access to collections data that were identified over the course of two projects based at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London. The first of these was 'Rethinking relationships and building trust around African collections'[1] which sought to develop methodologies to build new equitable futures for the collections. The COVID-19 Pandemic meant that much of this work had to shift online, and the team responded by using budgets ringfenced for travel to support researchers based in Nigeria and Kenya. The second was Community Action Research[2]; a project that sought to support African and Caribbean diaspora members in the UK to undertake collections research they wanted to do in order to initiate structural change at the museum in response to both research findings

and the research process . In both cases, community members defined the research they wanted to undertake and had freedom over their research outputs.

Neither project was conceived of as a digital documentation project, however the significance of this became clear in the recognition that the primary route to collections access for researchers based on the African continent is digital. Web-based access also proved itself to be an important way in for community members who may not feel that museums are spaces for them, but for whom the collections are personally significant. In both cases, the museum's collections online provision mean that researchers could access collections data and images. However, while this platform offers transparency around collections data, conversations held throughout both projects demonstrated that there remain significant barriers to access. These included unfamiliarity with the terminologies museums use to organise data, as well as the absence of information that community members expected they would find when searching and working with the collections. In response we worked with community members to collaboratively develop a toolkit to facilitate the navigation of questions online that prioritised their concerns.

It is worth recognising that the digital access that is available has emerged from two decades of work that has already identified digitisation of collections data, including photography, as a priority (Parry 2007; Marty 2009; Geismar 2018). What became clear, however, was that this digitisation has not been undertaken in a way that prioritises access for community members whose heritage museums like the Horniman holds (Christen 2006; Were 2014; Srinivasan et al. 2009a, 2009b, 2010). In addition, significant collaborative work undertaken since the 2000s has foregrounded Indigenous and community-held knowledge in the ways in which collections are organised and accessed digitally. The focus of this work has been building bespoke platforms, such as those developed through the Reciprocal Research Network (Phillips 2005; Rowley 2013), Sierra Leone Heritage.org (Basu 2013), and more recently, the Nomad-Project.[3] This work identifies many of the same barriers to access discussed below, including terminology as well as the difficulties of working with museums categories. What this chapter addresses, however, is how to reorientate these conversations towards core digital collections access provision through existing museum websites and other museum processes for sharing information. While bespoke external platforms serve an important purpose, the projects discussed below underline the importance of addressing centralised museum practice. As became clear, enabling the possibility of more equitable collections futures demands

that core museum priorities and protocols are challenged and addressed, alongside building more truthful and relevant datasets.

JC: Juma, what challenges have you found working as a heritage professional with databases and museum websites in Europe?

Juma: Most databases have very scant information, and the information that you do find is often incorrect or not representative of the way community members understand or would describe the collections themselves. At times, photographs are missing and often object records have very little data that can tell you more about them. It is frustrating to find how little information there is.

Working as a researcher with IIP (International Inventories Programme)[4], for example, we have gathered around 30,000 objects from collections across Europe into a database. But then when you start going through the data, even basic information such as which community the object came from or what the object was used for, is missing. This means we have had to go back to museums to request additional details. Another point of frustration is that collections data does not cross-reference across museums, so you cannot get a sense of the history of collections between institutions.

JC: Could you tell us a bit more about the language and terminology of the databases and how you and the community members you worked with navigated this?

Juma: There was a lot of frustration with the kind of language used by museums, with both professional museum terminologies and the object data that was recorded. That was a particular problem for community members without an academic or heritage background. To overcome this, they had to consult widely with their own communities just to understand what was there.

There was also a lot of confusion around place names and community[5] group names, especially when the names that have been recorded were those used in colonial times. An example from Kenya is the term 'Lumbwa', a colonial-era term used incorrectly to describe people from the Kipsigis community. Lumbwa is not a term that is used today, so a community member finding an object with this term may not even be sure that that is from Kenya. This means that a Kipsigis community member may think that there are no objects from their community in the museum, even though there are, listed under the inappropriate colonial name.

Some of the objects that community members were researching were objects that they have no lived experience of, even though the objects may

be from their own communities. So, the information that they come across in the database is critical in helping them to understand the collections. Without photographs and with outdated or incorrect information, this becomes very difficult.

Johanna: Juma, you mentioned that you had to go back to museums to request additional details. Could you tell us a bit more about what you found was missing and how museums followed up on your request?

Juma: Information about collectors was often missing. For example, in the database sent by the British Museum, they often included the name of a collector associated with an object, but not how that object left Kenya, or how the collector got in possession of the object. But when we got in touch with the museum, they follow up with letters of correspondence, for example, that provided important context.

Johanna: We also have archives at the Horniman that are related to collectors and donors, and their correspondence with the museum, but these have not been digitised as part of our collections online. What this indicates is that although collections online is an access resource for researchers, there is an assumption that a researcher is someone who will know what kinds of archives museums might hold, and feel confident in following up to ask for further information. Additionally, there is a bias towards researchers who can visit an archive in person by having both the resources and visa requirements to make the trip.

Juma: Part of what we are interested in is the collections history, which we don't get through the database or collections online. This information is important for community members and local researchers because it helps us understand where an object came from, and under what circumstances. There are some collectors who feature across organisations, such as Evans-Pritchard who collected for both the Horniman and the Pitt Rivers Museum. Knowing he was working in Luoland is important information that can help us piece together ideas about where the objects that were collected came from. Evans-Pritchard's diaries[6] can even give you ideas of which families the objects came from. It all adds up to give you more information about the collections, but archives and collections are rarely linked in online spaces.

Johanna: Did you find that working with the information you gathered from collections online presented similar challenges to that extracted from museum databases and sent to you by curators?

Juma: Often when you contact a museum, they will tell you that everything is online. But you meet the same challenges with regards to

missing and incorrect or outdated information. There is always something missing.

Johanna: Missing knowledge or information is common. It is often a result of either information missing from the museum archives, or the curators and staff who are responsible for updating information in the database lacking the time and resources to find and input that information. But it is also important to note that this absence is rooted in both the interests and values of collectors that have brought the collection into being, and the priorities and practices of museum professionals who have come before.

For example, when coming across an object record at the Horniman it is rare to find the dimensions field or the materials field empty. These fields take time to populate: objects need to be measured, and research is undertaken by conservators regarding materials. You are also much more likely to find a physical description of an object than information concerning the way an object is used, how it was acquired or what it smells like.

These fields are populated because the material care of objects has historically been prioritised by museum professionals; this information is required for core archival practices that relate to collections care, such as storage, conservation and exhibition. Museum catalogues and databases were never created to record and manage knowledge relating to object provenance, or significance for the object's community, and so structurally they do not easily hold this knowledge. Research undertaken by museum curators has also failed to make it into the database, partly because the database has not been regarded as the right place, with the emphasis being on academic publications or conference papers which are not about collections access, but the development and recognition of curatorial specialisms.

Where fields are populated with outdated or incorrect information, however, this also tells us something important about who has been responsible for recording information about objects, the way they understand the collections, and what their research priorities have been.

In both cases, it is clear that the end-users of object and collections data were never imagined to be the community members whose heritage museums hold, but rather museum professionals and European researchers.

Juma: Your explanation is logical. But I'm also thinking about how community members take it, where the perception of absence is always that something is being hidden from them.

JC: I have very low expectations of the information I expect to find in museum records because of the violent means through which the objects were often collected. The ways in which objects were collected are unlikely to end up in information that's going to be carefully recorded in a way that would be useful to community members. Most recently, for example, I was looking at some collections taken off battlefields in what is present-day Sudan. It was a collection from a historic house, which are much less considered than museums as places where these kinds of collections are held. If someone is stealing objects from a battlefield, how much are they going to care about what they note down about them? Who are they going to ask?

When working with such violent collections, I wonder how do we inform community members in a way that's also not re-traumatising? How do we explain the absence?

There are other circumstances where recording information might have been of greater interest to collectors. In Kenya in 1925 a Witchcraft Act was introduced which meant colonial officials could forcibly remove material cultural heritage that related to the practice of spiritual beliefs. There is often more information about such collections because of the interest it held for colonial officers and anthropologists. However, much of the information is questionable, because how do we know they were able to differentiate between what they labelled as witchcraft and what were, for example, medical or religious objects?

Johanna: It is also important to think about the absences that occur at the point an object enters a museum collection. For example, the Horniman cares for collections donated or sold to the museum by missionaries who may have served for 30–40 years with the community they collected from. I have recently been working with a collection donated to the museum in 1970 by Rev. Lionel West who ran the Baptist Missionary Society's mission station in Lukolela, in what is today northern Democratic Republic of the Congo, from 1930 to independence in 1961. West's diaries are located at the Angus Library and Archive[7] and demonstrate a deep relationship with the community who made up his congregation, and whom he collected from. Yet this collection at the Horniman is full of absences. For example, West spoke Lingala fluently, yet none of the objects has its Lingala name associated with it. Despite spending a great deal of his time talking with his congregation about their spiritual practices and faith, the objects in the collection associated with their non-Christian religious practices have little information about how these objects were used and in what circumstances.

This tells me that when the collection came into the museum, the questions that would have resulted in this information being recorded were not asked. It was not information that was considered important enough for it to be recorded in the catalogue.

JC: I think that's the thing that I keep coming back to. The collections contain objects that are important and valuable, and therefore, as a community member, it's impossible to understand that somebody else would not value these objects in the same way. This includes the basic care of noting down information about objects when it is available to you.

Something I am wrestling with is if we were to have an exhibition on absence, what would it look like? How do you talk about absence in the database and in our museum spaces?

Juma: It's quite a challenge for us. In terms of representing it in an exhibition,[8] we have used empty show cases at National Museums of Kenya. We have also worked with artists, who have listened to our stories and created representations of absence reflecting what such absence means to the local communities.

A good example of the kind of absence we face working with European museums concerns Kikuyu dancing shields, which are common in European museum collections. One of our community researchers found that Kikuyu shields were in use until the early 1940s.[9] After the state of emergency was declared in Kenya in the early 1950s,[10] Kikuyu people were persecuted and detained in concentration camps, unable to practise their culture, including the use of the shield. There were wider consequences of this for Kikuyu people, including a story of absence relating to shifts in Kikuyu circumcision ceremonies, the loss of comradeship within the age set, and the Brotherhood that came with it. We would like to talk about the absence of both the shield, and how this relates to a wider contemporary absence within our communities initiated by the colonial state of emergency and the detention of Kikuyu people. But it is quite a challenge.

JC: To come back to unpacking museums and their terminologies, something that can be difficult is trying to unpack the very things that we don't have a language for. How do you convince a community member that information is not there, without having to go through a traumatic process explaining how their culture has not been valued? Worse than that – their culture has been denigrated within the very institutions that their material cultural heritage is now being held. You can explain core museum practices and our professional

terminologies, such as accession numbers, or how the place field has been used by curators, but it is still very difficult to explain the things that are missing.

When developing the toolkit for Rethinking Relationships I was hoping that we would have conversations that would help us understand this better. This includes understanding better what community members want in terms of information from museums, what is needed with regards to capacity and resources to make this information available, as well as the limits of what museums can offer in order to manage expectations.

Johanna: From my experience, one of the most difficult aspects of sharing collections information and inviting access is (well-placed) mistrust. The historical failure to value people's treasured belongings can be difficult to convey – we cannot repair the legacy of disrespect that comes with it. Whilst transparency about the professional failure to care for collections appropriately is important, it's important to recognise that this transparency can also be harmful, as JC mentioned. Institutional disregard in the past also means it can be difficult to earn trust in our commitment to doing things better in the present. This can be particularly difficult to negotiate when communicating limits of present resources and capacity, as well as the fact that the information that is required by community members about collections is in many cases unrecoverable, rather than being withheld. All this is made even more difficult when conveyed at a distance, through for example toolkits or trigger warnings and explanatory text online.

JC: If we use Kenya as an example, we know that when the British colonial forces were leaving, they burnt and destroyed records, and that national archives relating to colonial governance was changed and mishandled.[11] Museums are associated with the nation state. How do you trust an institution built with the same structure as institutions that you know are not trustworthy with information about your history, particularly from the colonial era?

Johanna: Trust is built, earned, and maintained between people. It is very difficult to establish trust between an institution and a community. This is particularly acute with collections online, where community members are likely to find information, or a lack of information, that is difficult to encounter. Collections online is an impersonal space; there is nobody there who represents the museum to explain and talk through the things you find, or don't find.

Juma: In IIP, the most useful information we have acquired about collections came from moments where there were faces at the other end. In museums where we knew people, we got more support and information. In museums where we didn't know members of staff, we were mostly referred to their online databases which were shallow and unhelpful.

Johanna: People who work in museums often have skills and experience that enable them to read their institutional museum records and archives. They can often extract information from them that is very difficult to translate if you are not familiar with that particular institution, or archive and its associated quirks.

Juma: For example in Germany, we were researching an individual called Oldman who was a dealer in antiquities. His correspondence uses two different letterheads which can help identify records that related to his collections. I would not have gotten the kind of information we needed from these letters without being supported by individuals who worked in the museums and knew the archive.

JC: Recognising the importance of engaging as an individual and not as an institution is very important to building trust. But I also feel that part of the difficulty is that we're not dealing with analogous institutions. British museums have, for example, historically worked more with First Nations communities in the US than many African communities. A First Nations council of elders is a body that British museums have been willing to recognise, and part of this is because they share a language and structure that is aligned, even though this is a relationship that is still fraught. First Nations cultural bodies have a long history of using museums as sites of action.

In February 2020 a group of Maasai visitors from Kenya and Tanzania visited the partners in the Rethinking Relationships project to discuss the future of the Maasai collections. We had a meeting at the Horniman with curators and the museum director and towards the end of the meeting the group made it clear that they wished to meet the Board of Trustees; they needed to meet with the people who actually held the power. I think some of the imbalance comes when you have a weighty institution that is establishing a relationship with a group of community members who are on the one hand regarded as representatives of their communities, yet on the other are not accorded with the authority of a council of elders or an analogous cultural institution to the museum.

I am not sure British museums are even ready to recognise traditional African institutions. It is a continuation of colonialism; traditional African institutions have historically never been recognised. So, it would take an institution to truly break with colonialism to be able to recognise them.

Johanna: What sorts of things can museums do better in order to remove barriers to accessing the collections for community members whose material heritage is in the collections? We have discussed ensuring as much information is available as possible, working through inappropriate or colonial terminologies in the database, being transparent about absence and understanding the importance of trust and recognition – personal and institutional.

JC: We also need transparency around the museum processes that are still colonial, but where museums need to engage in deeper work to embed real change. Museums are increasingly quick to say that they're decolonising without admitting to or recognising what is not decolonised. This makes it very difficult for a community member to be able to anticipate where they going to meet a problem, and to communicate it to museum professionals. What does it actually mean when museums say they are decolonising? If museums were more upfront, for example by being honest that we're still not ready to recognise African institutions, community members can know where they might be likely to hit resistance.

We still do not know, for example, if our museums would recognise African traditional ways of divination as a means of provenance. When Maasai community members visited the Pitt Rivers Museum for example, they came with a Laibon, a spiritual leader. Community members came across olkataar in the collections, traditional bracelets that were likely collected through violent means during the colonial era. The Laibon used divination to find out facts about the olkataar (referred to in museum catalogues as orkatar) – would a board of trustees or university council recognise his findings as provenance research? Despite a good deal of publicity concerning the need to respond to the historical facts identified by the Maasai community members,[12] the olkataar remain in the collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum. I think the transparency also has to be about process, which is highly uncomfortable, but I think it's necessary.

Johanna: Clear examples or case studies that communicate how decisions were made, and where barriers were encountered in previous projects relating to collections futures or access might help with this.

JC: I think case studies are critical. Museums need to be able to articulate where things got stuck, because the sticking points often overlap with the places where decolonisation is not happening.

Juma: We have had cases in the past where the interaction between IIP and European museums has not been as equals. For example, in the restrictions placed on how collections are best researched and understood. It was like people were totally blank, and that the only knowledge that mattered was domiciled in the north.

If we increase access to the archival information Western museums have historically valued, we will be more able to recognise local knowledge with regards to provenance. We should be able to know more information about collectors for example, because that helps people to determine both how their communities lost objects, and how their own knowledge of history sits with or comes up against institutional knowledge.

Museums have a way of sanitising their collection and creating legitimacy around them, even in cases where local people know how an object was taken, using their own understanding of the past and their culture. A good example, is the ngadji drum that Pokomo peoples are demanding be returned from the British Museum.[13] In this case, the British Museum is not recognising the community as a legitimate authority, by prioritising their own interpretation of the archive in determining how the drum was acquired and what its present value is. This interpretation of the ngadji means the Museum has not been able to listen to the story of the Pokomo, how the drum was taken from them, and the importance of the return of the drum to them.

Johanna: Juma, I am reflecting back on the letter we received by IIP in 2018 asking for information about the collections from Kenya at the Horniman. My response was to extract collections information from our content management system, MIMSY, into a database, and email it to you. Working on this project with you and JC has taught me the importance of responding to requests like these in a different way. Committing to transparency demands more than sharing the information and knowledge we have, in the formats we use to archive it as museum professionals.

First you have to have a conversation about what access is needed, and what does this access need to achieve. Today, I would answer your request with a phone call and find out more about what information you need, what format would be most helpful in support of those needs and what kind of support we can offer by using the skills and expertise we have available to us (reading information from object numbers or navigating

absence, for example). This would enable me to understand how best to support what the community is asking for, rather than what is easiest for me to share.

JC: What we're all saying is that museums have to be willing to be changed by the interaction they have with community members: you cannot have an equitable interaction with community members without the museum changing. I think that somewhere, subconsciously, the institution knows that. And so they resist; they resist the whole way, because they know that to commit to change in practice also means a change to core process.

Johanna: It is easy enough to open our doors, to share information, and to create a bit of space for community members to handle and have a conversation about their belongings that are located in our museums. Access imagined in this way fits easily within the kinds of academic researcher access that we are set up to facilitate through information sharing, organised stores visits and knowledge capture.

What we are talking about here is the kind of access that is anchored on an invitation to community members to access the collections on their own terms. This is never going to align smoothly with the processes we have in place, developed to meet historical priorities that have never seen community members as the primary people we need to enable access for. If this is to be the priority, we need to develop a new set of professional processes that are honest and upfront about the parts we feel we can't change, and push for change where we can. As museum professionals when we feel compelled to say no to a request, we should ask ourselves and each other, why not yes? Whose priorities am I actually foregrounding? And am I ok with explaining and defending this decision to those making the request?

Juma: Key obstacles for change are also the governance structures in museums of the global north. While curators from Western museums are increasingly more open, accessible and willing to engage, policy regulations created by trustees and laws governing museums don't make it easy and can be a hard, non-negotiable barrier. What I'm wondering is whether at the top things will change, including the Boards of Trustees, relationships between ownership and the law, and the ways in which museums are funded.

Since this conversation, certain changes have happened. Museums across the UK including the Horniman Museums and Gardens in London, Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge and Liverpool World Museum, have written and published new Repatriation Policies which outline

in greater detail how decisions are made, what community members can expect from the museums in terms of timelines and support, and what information museums need from community members to make their decisions. Repatriation requests from the National Commission for Museum and Monuments in Nigeria for items looted in 1897 from Benin City were presented to the Pitt Rivers, MAA and the Horniman in January 2022, and museum directors at each museum agreed to these requests in August 2022. This process involved changes to the ways in which institutional priorities are assessed at both the highest levels of museum governance and the Charity Commission, the governmental regulator that oversees the decisions made by charities about their assets (collections are within the legal framework of ownership considered as assets). While the process of the recognition of legal title to ownership for the Nigerian Government remains in progress at the Pitt Rivers and MAA, the announcement demonstrates a willingness to recognise that prioritising access for museum visitors and researchers in the UK is a decision that can and should be challenged. In the case of the Horniman, ownership of 72 objects held in the collections has been returned to Nigeria. In this instance, repatriation has historically been foregrounded as the only appropriate response to the violent looting in 1897. However, museums also need to be open to different kinds of access, requiring different changes to process as led by the communities whose belongings are in the collections.

There continue to be a plethora of museum collections-based projects that in various ways attempt to address the issues that this conversation explored, none of which are new to community members who must work with museum processes in order to access what is theirs. One of the key challenges of these projects is that they are usually funded in the short term and so the more demanding changes to museum practice that are needed to rectify the absences in databases, for example, are not sustainably funded. The arc of progress is long, even as steps to measurable improvement are noted along the way.

Notes

1   Rethinking Relationships ran between 2019 and 2021, taking place across three UK Museums in addition to the Horniman: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford and World Museum, Liverpool. More information can be found here: https://www.horniman.ac.uk/story/where-do-you-start-rethinking-relationships/
2   Community Action Research was funded by the Arts Council England Designation Development Fund. More information can be found at https://www.horniman.ac.uk/project/community-action-research-african-and-caribbean-collections/ (November 2022)
3   The Nomad Project. 2018. https://nomad-project.co.uk, website accessed 09/11/22

4   IIP website https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org International Inventories Project is a research and exhibition project led by academics, artists and heritage professionals, funded via the Geothe Institute. The main objective is to collect and develop a database of objects of Kenyan origin in the global North. The database can be accessed here: https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org/explore (August 2022)

5   Terminology is still evolving and in Kenya the preferred term is community though it is worth noting that ethnic group is still also widely used.

6   Evans-Pritchard Papers, Pitt Rivers Manuscript Collections: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/evans-pritchard-papers

7   The Angus Library and Archive is located at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford: http://theangus.rpc.ox.ac.uk

8   IIP had an exhibition, *Invisible Inventories: Questioning Kenyan Collections in Western Museums*, which was exhibited in three venues in 2021 in Nairobi, Cologne and Frankfurt. The exhibition at the Nairobi National Museum was themed around the absence of objects and what it meant to the Kenyan people because the objects were in Germany: https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org/exhibition

9   Kikuyu dance shield – ndoome – was a compulsory costume for the great dance (practised in this form until the late 1940s) done on the maraara nja (vigil night) before the physical cut (the circumcision) was done in the morning.

10   The Colonial government declared a state of emergency on 20 October 1952 after Mau Mau insurgents killed Chief Waruhiu on October 7 1952 in protest against land alienation. During the state of emergency, Kikuyu communities were put in detention camps which negatively impacted on their cultural practices including rites of passage such as circumcision in which the shields were used.

11   These archives are known in the UK as the Migrated Archives, archives user reference number FCO 141 at the National Archives. https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C12269323. For useful context, listen to 'Whose History? The Migrated Archive and Britain's Colonial Past' by David M. Anderson: https://soundcloud.com/tlrhub/tlrh-iwhose-history-the-migrated-archive-and-britains-colonial-past

12   For example, Koshy. Y. 2018. Hey that's our stuff: Maasai tribespeople tackle Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/dec/04/pitt-rivers-museum-oxford-maasai-colonial-artefacts

13   The demand for the restitution of the *ngadji* drum by Pokomo peoples was made to the British Museum in 2019. The Nest Collective, one of the partners of IIP, recorded a podcast detailing the violent history of its seizure: https://soundcloud.com/thisisthenest/iip-ngadji/s-WGGCK0tT77A

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21

Public art and artefacts – who cares: caring for art and artefacts in the public realm; ethical considerations

Susan L. Maltby

Introduction

All responsible for the care and management of collections understand and know firsthand how challenging the preservation of those objects can be. Preserving public art and artefacts offers even more challenges. Being in the public realm – essentially an uncontrolled environment – these objects face greater risks than those maintained within traditional collecting institutions. Most are in an uncontrolled environment, often outdoors. We have almost no control over the risks to which the art and artefacts are exposed. We can mitigate but not completely prevent the risks they are exposed to. This is a difficult but important reality to come to terms with. Caring for public art and artefacts requires a pragmatic risk-management approach. Their preservation requires balancing public safety with the long-term preservation of the object and the desire to respect the object, its original purpose, and/or the artist's intent. Decades of neglect and/or regular maintenance can lead to treatments far more interventive than a conservator would normally ethically desire. Ethically, as a conservator, I strive for minimal intervention using materials that, wherever possible, are reversible. With the aid of three case studies – Drummond Hill Cemetery, Oakville Basket Company steam flywheel and Richard Serra's *Tilted Spheres* – this chapter explores the many challenges faced when caring for public art and artefacts. These case studies were chosen as they reflect the breadth of issues that those who care for these resources, the conservator, collections manager and/or curator, deal with on a regular basis.

The case studies

a) Drummond Hill Cemetery, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

Drummond Hill Cemetery (Figure 21.1) is an important cultural resource having both local and national significance. In addition to being a historic cemetery, it was the site of the Battle of Lundy's Lane, a pivotal battle in the War of 1812. The cemetery's significance as a battlefield was recognised in 1937 when it was designated a national historic site of Canada. In 2000, the city commissioned a conservation masterplan to: identify the conservation issues facing this cemetery; recommend appropriate interventions and conservation treatments; prioritise the work that should be done to stabilise the monuments/cemetery markers; and provide costing for this work. I undertook this project in association with my colleague, stone carver and stone conservator, Per Neumeyer.

The cemetery dates from 1799, covers four acres, and has close to 1,500 markers. With few exceptions, the monuments are made of stone using granite, Queenston limestone and grey and white marble. Each monument was examined to assess its condition and determine its preservation needs. Many condition issues and conservation concerns were fairly consistent throughout the cemetery. These included: weathering; cracks; unlevel monuments; fallen monuments; unstable monuments (i.e., at risk of falling); inappropriate prior repairs; lawn mower damage; and vandalism.

Vandalism is a serious concern with most cemeteries. Historically, we know that most of the vandals at this cemetery were children who appeared not to understand the consequences of their actions. Case in point, during one site visit we witnessed several children playing on large, multi-component monuments. They climbed on the monuments and set about trying to rock the components back and forth, which put them at risk of toppling, taking the children with them. Fortunately, no one was harmed. This observation was even more frightening when our survey showed that a number of the large monuments were not pinned together but were held in place purely by their considerable mass. In addition, the urns on top of some of the obelisk-style markers were loose and at risk of falling to the ground, an obvious public safety issue not normally faced within a traditional museum setting.

Two main criteria were used to evaluate each monument and define its treatment priority. They were: 1) could it cause physical harm in its present state (for example, could it be easily pushed over); and 2) was its physical condition such that lack of immediate treatment would cause its
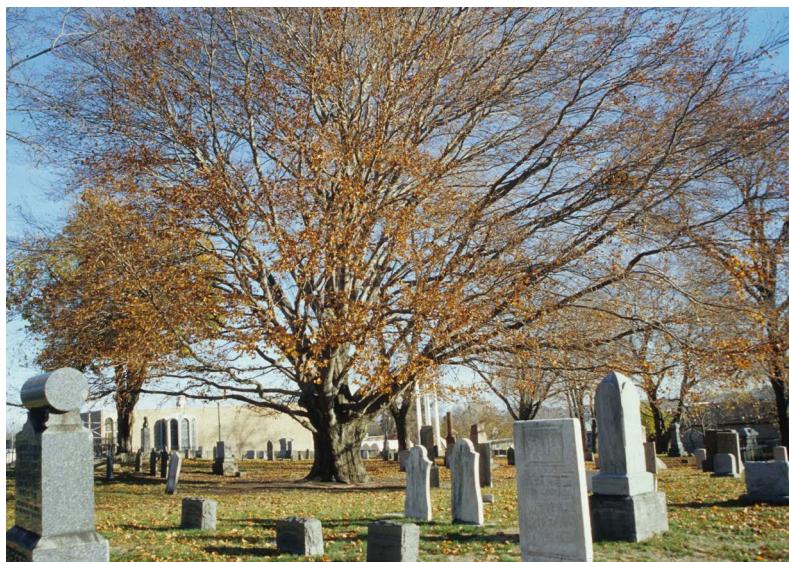
Figure 21.1 Drummond Hill Cemetery, 2000. © Susan L. Maltby.

demise? Three levels of priority were assigned. Priority I referred to work that should be done as soon as possible; priority II recommended within a year; and priority III was over the next five years. Public safety was paramount. Any monument, large or small, that was at risk of toppling was made priority I.

Monuments at risk of toppling were stabilised by pinning the monument to its base. If the monument was made up of several components, each component was pinned to the component above or below it. As per standard conservation practice, the pins were fabricated from stainless steel threaded rods. The pins ranged from 3/16 to 3/8 of an inch in diametre. The size and number of pins needed depended on the size of the stone being pinned, but a minimum of two pins was used. Installation involved drilling a hole in the stones to receive the pin. The pins extended three inches into each piece of stone and were adhered in place with a gel epoxy. Pins were also used to repair broken cemetery markers.

As a conservator, I strive for minimal intervention using materials that, wherever possible, are reversible. Drilling holes in a historic object is interventive and epoxies are not reversible. The choice of materials and level of intervention reflects the fact that the monuments live outdoors in a completely uncontrolled environment and in a public space that is

accessible to all, 24 hours a day. Epoxies are the only adhesive suitable for this application. Pinning prevents toppling, reduces the risk of damage to the monument and helps address the public safety concerns. If the same monument were inside a museum and behind a barrier with staff oversight, the treatment options/materials available to the conservator would be considerably larger.

Wherever possible, we specified fallen markers be repaired and re-erected in place. Doing so brought the historic landscape back closer to its original appearance and respected the original intent of the cemetery to commemorate the lives of those buried there. With few exceptions, cemetery markers are meant to stand up rather than lie down on the ground. In the past, well-meaning custodians of historic cemeteries have laid markers down on the ground so that they could not be pushed over by vandals, thus believing that this would protect the markers and deal with public safety issues. Consequently, markers treated this way weather and degrade far faster than those that remain vertical and are more susceptible to damage from lawnmowers, vandals and visitors.

The City implemented our five-year preservation plan and, to this day, continues to allocate monies on an annual basis for the preservation of Drummond Hill and other historic cemeteries for which they are responsible. This funding covers the ongoing maintenance of the cemeteries and the markers. The preservation of historic cemeteries is often not well funded; within the municipal realm, as is the case with Drummond Hill, cemeteries are competing for a finite number of tax dollars. Without strong advocates in the community and the municipality, their preservation needs can easily be ignored. The cemetery's designation as a national historic site of Canada makes it more likely to receive funding, and thus care, than most historic cemeteries.

b) Oakville Basket Company steam flywheel, Oakville, Ontario, Canada

The Oakville Basket Company steam flywheel's fate is similar to many industrial artefacts. Originally, it powered the machinery that fabricated wooden baskets designed to safely transport one of Oakville's historically important exports, strawberries, by ship and rail across Canada. The flywheel was manufactured by the Galt, Ontario, firm Goldie & McCulloch Co. Ltd. in the late nineteenth century. The flywheel is all that is left of the Oakville Basket Company, which finally closed its doors in 1984. Archival photographs from the late 1980s show the flywheel marooned outdoors in what appears to be the ruins of the factory. In 2002 the flywheel was

Figure 21.2 Oakville Basket Company steam flywheel: a) before treatment (2011); b) after treatment and annual maintenance 2015. © Susan L. Maltby.

moved to its current home, a public park not far from its original location. The park and the flywheel are an homage to the town's industrial heritage. The park contains interpretive panels that recount the town's agricultural origins and significance of companies like the Oakville Basket Company. In 2011, I was retained by the Town of Oakville to undertake a conservation assessment of the flywheel and make recommendations for its long-term preservation.

Time outdoors in an uncontrolled environment took its toll (Figure 21.2a). Little of the original paint remained and what was there had faded significantly. The nickel-plated components, such as the dash pots, had lost their original plating. The flywheel was missing components including the governor, nameplate and jacketing that would have encased the cylinder. Not all of the components were originally painted. Unpainted areas included the flywheel's edges, the top of the wheel (where the belt ran), the cylinder, connecting rod and piston. When the engine was running and maintained, the unpainted surfaces – that are now corroded – would have been bright and well-polished.

The overall condition issue was corrosion. In cases like this, the most common conservation approach is to paint to protect. There is a long-standing tradition within the industrial, architectural and public art realm of maintaining historic paint coatings as a means of preservation. Although the extant paint was faded, we were able to establish that the flywheel itself had been painted red, for safety, and the body green. A comparable engine at the nearby Hamilton Museum of Steam & Technology helped confirm our findings. I was fortunate to be able to consult curators and conservation colleagues with considerable experience preserving and interpreting industrial heritage. Their input was invaluable. Another bonus was having access to comparable engines that had their original paint and had spent their entire lives inside, either in a factory or a museum. The red and green colours chosen to paint the flywheel were historically accurate.

The question remained: How do we protect the components that were never painted? We needed to paint them for their protection, but deliberated about the colour. Ultimately, it was decided to paint these areas black. We felt that black was fairly neutral and would not distract from the original colours. The decision to paint components that would never have been painted when the flywheel was running was made jointly by myself and the curators with whom I consulted. We all agreed that the need to paint these components for their protection far outweighed any curatorial concerns. If the flywheel had been exhibited indoors, our approach would have been quite different.

In its outdoor location, the wheel captured debris and standing water, none of which were acceptable from a conservation standpoint. The debris could be managed through regular maintenance. The standing water was dealt with by drilling 'weep holes' in the lowest part of the wheel where the water collected. Weep holes allow water to drain away from the area. Weep holes are only effective if they are kept clear of debris and become part of the maintenance regime. Drilling weep holes is a

common conservation solution for outdoor art and artefacts. Although drilling holes in an object or original work of art is interventive, as with the grave markers in Drummond Hill Cemetery, it is sometimes necessary for the long-term preservation of the object. This approach is unique to objects in an outdoor environment; as a conservator, I would not consider it for an object protected from the elements inside a museum.

During the condition assessment, I further determined there were asbestos gaskets on the engine and lead in both the red and green paint. This toxic legacy is not uncommon with industrial objects. Protecting the health of the public and those carrying out the work on the flywheel was not only best practice, but the law. The first phase of the conservation treatment involved bringing in qualified abatement contractors to safely remove and dispose of the lead paint and residual asbestos. Once completed, weep holes were drilled and then the engine and finally the flywheel were painted. The engine was painted in phase II and the flywheel in phase III. The work was phased over three years to spread the costs and lessen the burden on the town's budget. In Figure 21.2b, we see the flywheel after the conservation treatment is completed.

Traditionally, most public art and artefacts were designed and fabricated for their life outdoors, or in the public realm. The steam flywheel was not designed for a life outdoors; it was an accidental public artefact. The years that it sat derelict took their toll. The flywheel's conservation and subsequent ongoing maintenance starting in 2011 have stabilised it and, provided the protective paint coatings are maintained, it will last a very long time. Regular maintenance is key for the preservation of the flywheel. The Town of Oakville is committed to the long-term preservation of this historic artefact and allocates annual funding for its maintenance. On an annual basis, the debris is cleaned out of the base of the wheel and the weep holes by Town staff. I annually inspect the flywheel to determine what areas need to be repainted that year. The flywheel is adjacent to a busy roadway. As such, the flywheel is bombarded with de-icing salts throughout the winter months. The de-icing salts are corrosive and abrasive, causing the metal on the road side of the flywheel to corrode faster. Unfortunately, we cannot move the flywheel away from the road as it is part of the landscape; we can only respond by ensuring that the protective layer of paint is maintained. As one would expect, this side of the flywheel is painted more often than the one on the park side.

c) Tilted Spheres, Toronto, Ontario, Canada:

Toronto Pearson International Airport has a significant permanent art collection displayed in public spaces throughout the airport. When Terminal 1 was designed, the airport commissioned Richard Serra to create and fabricate *Tilted Spheres*, a monumental[1] 120-ton Corten steel sculpture, to act as a focal point in the International Departures lounge. A short time after its unveiling in 2007, the curator got the call that no curator wishes to receive. *Tilted Spheres* had been vandalised; passengers were writing on the sculpture. On close examination it became clear that the anti-corrosion coating applied to the sculpture when it was installed was failing. When scratched, the surface lifted leaving the area lighter in colour, in contrast to the dark steel. Light pressure from a fingernail or a key was all that was needed to scratch through the coating. Failure of the coating made for a highly satisfying mark-making experience for the visitor and a nightmare for the curator. The sculpture essentially looked like a big chalkboard covered in white graffiti (Figure 21.3a). The public saw this as an interactive art experience. This view was not shared by the artist; he wanted it returned to its original state. I was retained (Maltby and Petrie 2016, 293) to develop a treatment plan for *Tilted Spheres*. The sculpture offered many challenges: it was immovable, in the middle of the busiest airport terminal in Canada, and in a highly secure area.

Serra commonly works in Corten steel. Normally he leaves the steel in its native state, allowing it to corrode with time and exposure to the elements to create a stable corrosion layer. It was decided by the architects and the artist that the rust colour of Corten would not be compatible with the white and grey colour palette of the terminal. The artist felt that black was a more suitable colour. As such, the sculpture was allowed to corrode lightly and then coated with Fertan, a commercial rust converter, prior to shipment. Rust converters use tannic acid to convert iron oxide (i.e., rust) – both ferrous (Fe^{2+}) and ferric (Fe^{3+}) – to a stable blue/black iron tannate corrosion product. Many commercial converters are designed to be primers and, as such, include a polymer.

Tilted Spheres was fabricated at Pickhan Heavy Fabrication in Siegen, Germany. Pickhan had a facility and machinery large enough to accommodate the artist's sculptures and the skill and attention to detail needed to form the steel to his precise specifications. The sculpture travelled from Germany to Canada by ship arriving in the fall of 2004 and was installed at the airport in January 2005. Due to its size and mass, it was installed before the walls and roof of the terminal were constructed. The terminal was literally built around the sculpture. Conditions *en route*

Figure 21.3 *Tilted Spheres*, 2007: a) before treatment; b) after treatment. © Susan L. Maltby.

from the fabricators in Germany to the airport in Toronto had been such that the converted surface of the steel had failed in localised areas causing the steel to corrode. This was considered unacceptable – the sculpture was meant to be black. On the advice of a conservator and a corrosion specialist, Fertan was reapplied to the entire sculpture followed by four coats of the rust inhibitor Dinitrol. This work was carried out in late summer and fall 2005.

On 30 January 2007, the international pier of Terminal 1 opened to the public. Then, in less than a month and a half, came the graffiti. In a short time, the amount of graffiti had snowballed and a substantial portion of the surface was covered in writing. The height of the marking

coincided with the annual student spring week off school, referred to by Canadians as 'March break'. References to 'March break' in many of the inscriptions clearly indicated that students were among the perpetrators. How could such a thing happen? The curator's theory was that the first few people who made marks were being malicious, but once the writing was there, people genuinely thought that this was an interactive experience and that you were welcome to leave a message. Many wrote their full names and where they were from, something rarely done by vandals.

Once the curator became aware of the situation she responded quickly. As is best practice, the damage was fully documented and the artist and his studio were contacted. In addition to advising the artist of the damage, the curator asked for permission to hire a conservator. Serra agreed that it was somewhat interesting that people responded to the work by mark-making, but was clear that was not his intention and told the curator to keep him informed and to do whatever was needed to return the sculpture to its original state. At this point, I was retained to develop a treatment plan.

Tilted Spheres offered a number of challenges both to the curator and the conservator. The sculpture is a focal point for the International Departures lounge. It is the first thing that passengers see as they descend down into the lounge from the level above. Its size and form invite passengers to pass through the sculpture and experience it. From the beginning there was an expectation that children would find it an entertaining playground. The four ellipses that make up the sculpture are complex curves designed to throw sound. A whisper uttered at one end of the sculpture can be heard clearly at the other end. The airport wanted to keep the sculpture open and accessible to passengers throughout any testing and treatment, which was in keeping with the artist's original intent. The International Departures lounge is a high security zone. All passengers have been screened by airport security and are literally steps from boarding their flights. While in the lounge, I was always accompanied either by the curator or security staff. My tool kit proved to be a challenge as well. Scalpels and other sharp objects are not normally allowed in this area. The whereabouts of my tools was a constant worry given that there was little separating me from the passengers. The sculpture's size and the fact that it could not be moved was a challenge that limited treatment options.

The sculpture's size and location helped define the treatment approach. *Tilted Spheres* sits in the middle of one of the busiest airports in North America. It is surrounded by high-end retail including restaurants, duty-free shops and bars. The airport rarely sleeps; there are only a few

hours in the middle of the night when no planes fly in or out. Thus, the treatment had to be nontoxic and applicable in situ. Excessive noise in the terminal was also not acceptable – in addition to being a nuisance and a health concern, noise affects the operation of the airport – if noise levels are too high, passengers cannot hear announcements. The level of intervention was limited to what needed to be dealt with. The anti-corrosion coating had failed and needed to be removed. The underlying rust converted layer was intact and in good condition. We wanted to remove the anti-corrosion layer and retain the black converted surface below, which presented yet another challenge.

With these criteria in mind, testing was carried out. A number of solvents and mechanical techniques were tested. Testing was carried out according to the wishes of the airport leaving the sculpture completely accessible to the passengers. This proved to be problematic. Passengers' rolling luggage constantly ripped up the duct tape used to secure the extension cords to the floor. In the end, dry ice, or CO_2 blasting, proved to be the most effective treatment removing all of the anti-corrosion coating while leaving the converted layer completely unaffected.

Once the decision had been made to use dry-ice blasting, it was time to have a serious discussion about access to the sculpture. Dry-ice blasting is loud and dusty. Carrying out the treatment in the middle of the night would take care of the noise issue, but not the dust. The dust, essentially tiny particles of the corrosion inhibitor, needed to be contained. This was important for the health and safety of the passengers and airport staff. The dust would also not be welcomed by the retail outlets in close proximity to the sculpture. As a result, the airport allowed the sculpture to be completely hoarded and the dust contained with polyethylene sheeting.

As a conservator, I abide by a professional code of ethics. One of the principles of ethical behaviour included in the code of ethics is respecting an artist's original intent. Denying access to *Tilted Spheres* is contrary to Serra's original intent. In this situation we had to balance the artist's intent with his desire to have it returned to its original condition with the operation of the airport, the health of the staff and visitors and the expectations of the adjacent retail. A brief, temporary closure was deemed acceptable.

The curator asked that an anti-graffiti coating be applied once the anti-corrosion coating was removed. With the treatment approach chosen all that was left was to decide upon an anti-graffiti coating. Most commercial anti-graffiti coatings are not reversible. They are designed so that once they have outlived their usefulness, the coatings are completely

removed by sandblasting and then a new coating applied. Obviously, this was not acceptable for *Tilted Spheres*. In addition to damaging the surface of the sculpture, the thought of sandblasting within an active terminal was untenable. The search for a reversible coating led me to the anti-graffiti coatings used on outdoor murals. Clearly, the coatings used to protect murals need to be reversible without harming the paint layer below. A commonly used, commercial paraffin wax-based emulsion product, Graffiti Melt, was chosen. Graffiti Melt is designed to be applied using an airless paint sprayer making it easier to coat such a large sculpture. Spraying on the coating also cut down on the application time and cost. An additional plus is the fact that it can be applied by any skilled painter. As a wax, Graffiti Melt can be removed with mineral spirits and touching up damaged areas is easily done.

The treatment was considered a big success. All agreed that the sculpture looked better after treatment than at the time it was installed (Figure 21.3b). The four layers of the anti-corrosion coating had masked the surface, making the sculpture appear dull. The thin coating of Graffiti Melt enhanced the surface of the metal allowing the nuances of the metal's surface to be seen. The appearance of the sculpture now more accurately reflected the artist's original intent. Time has shown that the sculpture is easy to maintain. Birds periodically make their way into the terminal. The coating of Graffiti Melt repels their droppings and makes clean up easy.

Although this project presented many challenges, none were insurmountable. The curator and conservator worked together throughout, ensuring that treatment of *Tilted Spheres* was effective, respectful and as cost effective as possible bringing it back to its original appearance.

Vandalism is a reality with public art. In addition to being unsightly and often offensive, graffiti is disrespectful of the artist and makes the work look uncared for. Graffiti and tags are usually removed as quickly as possible. Graffiti removal is time consuming and can be difficult depending on the material. Removing graffiti from a bronze sculpture is much easier than a soft absorbent stone. Conservators commonly use sacrificial coatings such as the Graffiti Melt to make removal easier and safer for the substrate. The protective wax coating on an outdoor bronze sculpture also acts as a sacrificial coating; the graffiti sticks to the wax and not the bronze. Once the graffiti 'artists' strike, the wax and attached graffiti are removed from the sculpture and a fresh coat of wax applied.

Unlike annual maintenance, budgeting for vandalism response can be difficult. In the case of *Tilted Spheres*, the airport had not budgeted for a major treatment of an artwork that had only recently been unveiled.

The airport's insurance proved to be of little use as the insurance adjustor treated each piece of *Tilted Spheres* separately applying the $25,000 deductible to each segment, making filing a claim pointless. The curator was charged with trying to keep conservation costs as low as possible while providing the sculpture with the treatment that it needed to fulfil the artist's wishes. Although technically not vandalism, the failure of the anti-corrosion coating and the public interaction with the artwork made it appear to have been vandalised.

Discussion

The care and preservation of public art and artefacts often falls to a collections manager with or without the input of a conservator. Collections managers tend to focus on preventive conservation, concentrating on reducing harm and risk rather than having to respond through an interventive treatment. As a conservator, I deal with both preventive and interventive conservation. I work with collections managers to identify the conservation concerns and develop mitigative strategies for dealing with those concerns. Although an interventive treatment may well be necessary, my practice focuses on preventive care. I see conservators and collections managers as partners in collections care.

Regular maintenance is key for the preservation of art and artefacts in an uncontrolled environment. In my practice I have dealt with a number of bronze sculptures, mostly public monuments, which have sat outside for decades without any maintenance and/or protection from the elements. Maintenance involves washing and application of a coating of wax. The wax layer protects the original patina from corrosion. If this maintenance is not carried out, the original patina is lost over time to corrosion and the sculptures take on the green and black streaky look so many associate with outdoor bronzes. In this corroded state, their appearance no longer reflects the artist's original intent. Why have these sculptures not been maintained? Is it because there was neither the will nor the budget to undertake this work or was it because of ignorance? Many in the general public are under the misconception that bronze sculptures, like copper roofs, are meant to go green with age. This is not true. On several occasions I have had to walk stakeholders through a treatment from beginning to end to demonstrate how the corrosion products mask the original detail of the sculpture. During cleaning, the sculptures come alive. We see the sculpture the way the sculptor meant it to be seen.

The standard conservation treatment for heavily corroded outdoor bronze sculptures involves pressure washing to remove the corrosion followed by repatination. Repatination is a fairly interventive treatment, raising questions as to whether it is ethical to do so. I would argue yes, as in an unpatinated state we are not respecting the artist's original intent. When repatinated it reads as close to its original appearance as possible though we do not know what the original patina looked like as it is gone. The age of the sculptures often means that the artists are no longer living and rarely do we find documentation of the piece when it was first unveiled. Photographs are usually in black and white. Patinas were often applied at the foundry and were closely guarded trade secrets (Hurst 2005, 262). Historic descriptions refer to the bronzes as being 'statuary brown', a phrase open to considerable interpretation. The other consideration is that the metal's surface is corroded. The surface is rougher and will never look the same as the piece did when it was fabricated. Old, weathered bronze can be a challenge to patinate; the metal's response to the patina solutions is often enigmatic. Patina solutions that work well on freshly cast and finished bronze tend not have the same effect on weathered bronze. Or, a solution may work on one part of the sculpture but not on other parts. Extensive testing and tweaking of the patina solution is often required to create a uniform patina, one that allows the viewer to see the sculpture as whole and not a sum of its parts.

Due to their size, industrial collections are often housed outdoors. Although this is not an ideal solution it is the reality of many collecting institutions. Much of the historic rolling stock that we see in museum collections tends to be stored/exhibited in an outdoor setting with little to no protection. The reasons for this include the size of the objects – they are simply too large to fit inside most museums; lack of resources – they are competing with other objects for care; and/or the desire to see them in an outdoor setting as they were seen when they were operational. Protecting these objects from the elements is a challenge. Maintaining historic rolling stock is comparable to maintaining a historic structure. As with historic structures, it is important that they shed water rather than retain it. Water is the enemy of most outdoor objects. Ensuring that roofs and windows do not leak and applying and maintaining a protective coat of paint are key preservation strategies. Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pennsylvania, has taken this approach for decades. When a piece of rolling stock comes into their collection they do not always have the time and resources to write a full Historic Structure Report (HSR) for it. An HSR is an extensive

report outlining the curatorial background of the object, its condition and the planned intervention/restoration. They are mandated to write these reports before full restoration can begin. Knowing that the objects were at risk of deterioration awaiting the production of an HSR and subsequent restoration, they take initial steps to help ensure the preservation of the object. This involves writing a 'Paint and Park' report for each (McKnight 1999, 47). Research is carried out to determine how the object looked in the time period to which it will be ultimately restored. The object then undergoes basic maintenance and is painted with the appropriate paint scheme. Once painted it is stabilised and better protected from the elements awaiting its ultimate restoration.

Establishing and funding a maintenance programme for the preservation of public art is now considered best practice by many, particularly those entities that are actively acquiring works. They are more likely to have policies and procedures in place and budgets allocated to care. Making the case for maintenance can be difficult: capital projects garner much more interest than ongoing maintenance. Regular maintenance just does not have the same cachet. Many find it easier to make the maintenance argument for public art, considered a financial asset, than for artefacts. Thankfully, both the City of Niagara Falls and the Town of Oakville recognised the historic value and significance of the cemetery and the flywheel. Both initiated a conservation assessment of these assets, undertook treatment and are committed to annual maintenance.

Planning for the preservation of a piece of public art is now common practice beginning from the moment it is commissioned. The details and designs are often closely vetted to try and minimise risks. As a conservator, I have been involved with these technical reviews, assessing the proposed materials and considering their longevity and maintenance needs. I look at how a piece is detailed, in particular whether it will shed water or not. We prefer to design a piece so that it will never need weep holes in the future. Pooling water can cause corrosion and/or organic growth. The subsequent ice that forms in the winter is a big conservation concern for those living in cold-climate countries like Canada. When water freezes it expands. If the water is trapped within the artwork with no place to go, ice jacking can occur. The force of the ice on the materials can be significant. I have seen bronze split and deformed due to ice jacking. Other issues I look at are the artwork's susceptibility to vandals; public safety concerns (e.g., is it easy to climb or a trip hazard); ease of access for maintenance; whether it is at risk of becoming a target for skateboarders; its physical location;

and how the site is landscaped. It is now standard practice, as part of the artist's contract, that they provide maintenance guidelines and the materials to be used. A warranty period is also commonly included.

The Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA), which 'cares for the State Art Collection with partner agencies (public schools, colleges, universities, and state agencies), who present the artwork in public spaces' (ArtsWA 2014, 5), has gone to great lengths to make the commissioning process as transparent as possible and has produced a comprehensive guide, *Materials and Fabrication Handbook,* for artists. In their words, the 'handbook is provided to aid artists in designing their projects from conception through installation, while considering long-term maintenance and future conservation issues' (ArtsWA 2014, 5). Their 'Artwork Acquisition' page (https://www.arts.wa.gov/artwork-acquisition/) clearly outlines the commissioning process and includes access to the 'Detailed Artwork Report'. Artists are required to submit the completed form when their artwork is submitted. The report ensures that the Commission has all the necessary technical information for future care of the artwork.

The care and preservation of public art and artefacts rests with a variety of entities, municipalities, universities and private individuals. Although it is now common for public art programmes to have professionals in place to manage their collections, this has not always been the case. Many deal with legacy collections, items that came into the collection long before collections management policies and procedures were in place with little to no documentation. Establishing conservation and maintenance programmes often comes years after a public art programme has been in place. Lack of staffing, funding and infrastructure to support public art programmes is a common lament.

Ethically, as a conservator, I cannot make curatorial decisions. Conservators look to curators for their curatorial input. We have a shared responsibility in the care of the object we deal with. I was fortunate in the case of both the Oakville flywheel and *Tilted Spheres* to have curatorial input. My experience with public art and artefacts has been that there is often no curatorial presence. This is an ethical dilemma I wrestle with on a regular basis.

The conservation of contemporary public art has become more challenging for the conservator, as Christine Haynes and Rowan Geiger point out (2022). They have noted that a number of large urban cities in the US have embraced the inclusion of public art making it a requirement for new building projects and found that:

The increase in public art also broadens the types of artwork from memorials and statues to multifaceted installations by emerging contemporary artists. These public art installations can become high value artworks due to growing fame of emerging artists. Simultaneously they often have complex degradation issues related to nontraditional materials and the outdoor environment involving harsh weather, pollution, and public interactions. This degradation often results in reactionary conservation treatments requiring invasive and costly repairs. (Haynes and Geiger 2022).

They found that they were able to 'mitigate reactionary treatments in favor of regular maintenance and long-term preservation planning' (Haynes and Geiger 2022). In their presentation, Haines and Geiger discussed how the size, scope and complexity of contemporary public art require a multi-disciplinary team approach. In addition to conservators, collections managers and curators, the team often includes engineers, riggers, fabricators and skilled trades. This mirrors my own practice.

The exhaustive online preservation resource, *Preventive conservation guidelines for collections* produced by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), presents key aspects of managing the care of objects in heritage collections in an outdoor setting based on the principles of preventive conservation and risk management' (Harten et al. 2018, 1). In addition to clearly outlining the conservation concerns faced by those who preserve public art and artefacts, it offers a series of recommendations that reflect preservation best practice.

Best practice versus 'real practice' is something that many collections care professionals struggle with. Does best practice help or hinder preservation? I personally think it helps. As a conservator, I feel that one should strive to the best they can for the collections in their care based on the resources available. As such, I see best practice as aspirational. Best practice also helps make the case for preservation within an organisation where collection care is competing for their fair share of the institution's budget. Referring to best practice helps bring *gravitas* to a staff recommendation. In CCI's *Caring for outdoor objects* they recommend erecting permanent or, at the very least, seasonal structures over sensitive outdoor objects to provide them protection from the elements. Understandably, implementing this recommendation may seem to be far outside the resources of many museums. It could, however, be seen as a long-term goal; one for which fundraising may be necessary.

Conclusion

Conserving public art presents different challenges than most museums generally face due largely to our inability to control the environment. One must be open to different but still respectful conservation approaches to find pragmatic solutions. But doing so successfully can be very rewarding. Public art and artefacts are often local 'landmarks' in their communities. People feel pride and a sense of ownership. In my experience, it is not uncommon for a complete stranger to walk up and say 'thank you' for the work that we are doing.

Note

1   Each component is 4.5 metres high and 13.9 metres long.

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Part IV Response

Letting people in, letting objects out: countering the dislocations of collections management practice

Ananda Rutherford

Introduction

In exploring the notion of the publics of collections management, the professional language of the day requires us to consider impact and engagement, inclusion, audiences, access and outreach. But how can these ideas be made explicit and fully embedded when considering the practices of conservation and preservation, storage, documentation and digitisation? Are carefully mediated handling sessions enough and do they compromise both public engagement and the collection objects? How do we balance care of and risk to purportedly fragile artefacts against the human need for connection and contact with objects of cultural significance? What barriers does collections care uphold, inadvertently or otherwise? These four chapters and the projects they describe go a considerable way towards interleaving understanding of human-centred approaches more usually associated with the public-facing display and learning elements of museum work, with the practices of collections management.

As a former collections and documentation manager, the detailing of the myriad tasks that the organisation and care of artefacts requires is both familiar and heartening to see set out in these chapters. There is real labour, careful consideration and thought in this work. But the resource limitations of space, time and staff, of conflicting priorities within institutions with budgetary concerns and differing agendas described, are also dispiritingly recognisable. More compelling are the accounts of the impact that adjustments to collections management practice can

have on the relationships between people and things, and the recasting of collections management as an area where contact with publics can and must be renegotiated.

These essays are an important extension of the recurrent moves towards more equitable and ethical museum practice. They expose the tensions that operate within museums, where traditional notions of preservation have been allowed to perpetuate controls around access and ownership.

In the first chapter, Cindy Zalm's welcome account of the work taken forward from the much-lauded *Words Matter* project (2018), *Words Matter: Decolonizing the Registration and Documentation of the Dutch Ethnographic Collection,* we gain an insight into how the initiatives to address racist and colonial language have been extended and continued into various aspects of collections management in the National Museum of World Cultures, a consortium of four museums in the Netherlands.

Zalm charts the trajectories of these Dutch ethnographic museum collections, from early establishment, through more recent bureaucratic, politic reorganisation, to the current fundamental reassessment of how museums created by and in the service of empire and colonisation should be engaged with today. In giving a detailed account of each of the museums' histories and ambitions over time, she not only expands understanding of the contexts of the Words Matter project and the urgent need for the work it proposes but shows how Dutch colonialism and museums are intertwined in an undeniable, ongoing and explicit relationship.

This exploration of and accounting for a museum's institutional history is crucial, though often overlooked, in unpicking why a collection is as it is. Engaging with the changes in priorities, purpose and collecting focus during a museum's history helps to deconstruct public perception of the immutable monolith of the museum as institution. Destabilising the idea that things have always been done this way, that traditions of collections practice may evolve, but only as far as they maintain a highly controlled access route for the museums' publics, require challenge and critique. Zalm's account explores the moves within the NL museum sector to reflect on the legitimacy of ethnographic museums and the projects initiated to make change. The best known, internationally, of these projects is Words Matter, which came out of the work of Hodan Warsame and Ilias Zian at Museum Volkenkunde and addressed colonial language in descriptive and interpretative display texts. The publication that resulted from the project has been a benchmark for addressing the issues of interpretation texts and object description.

Zalm uses this combination of institutional histories and the problematisation of language to draw a line between colonisation, museum documentation and the collections database. In detailing the process around the recording of information within the museum and the various recordings of information from card index to database to online catalogue, she shows how the language of colonial capture (both literally and in terms of information) is repeated and embedded in institutional practices of collections management, and via the Internet, subsequently exposed, established and repeated to the public.

In the second chapter, *Rebuilding Collection Infrastructure: Thinking Beyond Best Practice Collection Care*, Alice Beale describes her experiences at the South Australian Museum and addresses the barriers that face communities of origin, in this case Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other First Nations peoples, when their own cultural heritage must be accessed via the museum. She describes how the prioritisation of economy of cost and space, the practical expediency of both physical storage and the implementation of material or geographical categorisation can undercut the personal, religious or cultural significance of the artefacts.

The essay highlights how stored collections, like museums themselves, are not neutral, safe or without power dynamics as a space of encounter. As Beale observes, the physical safety of the collections has often been prioritised over a cross-culturally, informed response of a wide range of potential publics. How then do we shift from a preservation mindset to one of meaningful encounter that respects the agency of the artefacts and their significance? Beale continues to extend notions of cultural awareness and reparation to the practicalities of achieving 'safe and culturally appropriate access' as she explores storage methods and housing as a barrier to engagement for those people with pivotal historical and current connection with them. However, practitioners need to consider what constitutes appropriate access, and who and how the decisions around this are made.

This chapter addresses both the impetus to provide as much access as possible to a collection's publics, and especially to specific communities of origin, and the predictable institutional resource limitations needed to make this happen. It is a very recognisable quandary. Beale details the barriers that pragmatic divisions and organisation by material and environmental needs throw up, and further the dislocation and decontextualisation that occurs for those whose material culture and heritage is contained and classified through scientific method and conservation priority. How do we now balance a more human-centred

approach to access and collections that requires contact, use, values, respect and presentation that may directly conflict with the scientific precepts of preservation and risk, and the practicalities of space and cost limitations? Beale observes how display and digital presentation are routinely presented as solutions to this issue, but these methods are already highly selective, mitigated by a set of criteria that are based on western concepts of worth and significance and further moderated through the interpretative agenda of the museum as institution. Beale's observations on the patterns of academic research enquiry and changes towards more community requests are also worth considering. Are they the result of more appropriate access provision within the organisation or is the provision changing to answer and respect this type of engagement?

Beale gives a meticulous account of the invisible labour and logistical complexities of dealing with a vast array of artefacts, and details coping with the impact of a variety of worrying environmental disasters on stored collections. But while the focus on access is woven through all decisions, resulting in a concerted effort to make a shift from physically to culturally safe access and what that might look like, further exploration of the process of decision-making and the positionality of staff involved in this process is needed. This type of co-working approach in collections care can only enrich mutual understanding and greater collaboration around collections work.

The enrichment of object information through genuine co-production and active challenges to collections gatekeeping is also addressed in Chapter 20, *Facilitating Community Access to African Collections: Developing Collaborative Practice to Unpack Museum Protocol and Terminologies* by Johanna Zetterström-Sharp, JC Niala, Juma Ondeng, Horniman Museum and Gardens. As with the first chapter in this part, the thinking behind the Horniman's projects starts with consideration of the language used in museum collections cataloguing and how this limits access and distorts understanding. The introduction contains a brief but invaluable framing and selection of recent literature on the specific intersection of museum object information, digital remediation and ethnographic museum collections.

Their discussion around the pros and cons of digitisation and digital access moves away from the polarities of the usual arguments of digital solutionism or digital limitations to an approach that recognises both, additionally incorporates user preferences and embraces varied routes into the collections and diverse ways of thinking about the collections. The inadequacies of much collection information, despite a generation of work digitising objects to facilitate access, is highlighted across all these

chapters and the Horniman team explore in detail the harms it causes. Absent, incomplete and incorrect information (especially the misuse of names, places, peoples and things) is repeatedly, and rightly, identified as a barrier to access, but the work at the Horniman attempts to address the specific issues this causes for communities of origin, (here researchers and community groups from Nigeria and Kenya) not least the devaluing and disregard it implies by the holding institution.

This, as their discussion carefully details, is especially true for diverse publics who have been made to feel uncomfortable when attempting to navigate the archaic vagaries of museum and archival conventions. But rather than problematising the existing colonialist tropes and racist pejoratives pervasive in Western systems of classification and descriptive texts, the Horniman team look towards accurately using the source or local language, when naming or describing art and artefacts and the direct affect this has on understanding, retrieval and connection.

This concern that there are publics 'who may not feel that museums are spaces for them, but for whom the collections are personally significant' (p. 386) is also articulated by Alice Beale in the previous chapter. It may seem counterintuitive that collections care is a space in which this can and should be addressed, but as we see in the South Australia Museum and at the Horniman, a concerted response to less mitigated and museum-directed access is becoming increasingly recognised and enacted as key to understanding and facilitating public engagement.

In the last chapter of this part, *Who Cares: Caring for Art and Artefacts in the Public Realm, Ethical Considerations*, Susan L. Maltby describes an ostensibly different type of encounter between objects and their publics, and looks at what happens in collections care when the object is placed in an environment beyond the control of the museum. Maltby exposes the complexities of the practical conservation of large-scale sculpture and monuments in the public realm, without the protections of a managed space and controlled environment. She describes the real and destructive impact that unmediated physical encounters between unmanaged publics, uncontrolled environments and objects in the space of the public realm can have.

This essay is perhaps a pragmatic counter to the impetus to allow greater, potentially more risky access to the art and artefacts of cultural heritage, but the key element is the articulation of how we need to navigate this conflict of interest around ownership, preservation in the public realm, interaction with the built environment: is it vandalism or extreme engagement? Whose good is preservation for?

Conclusion

One of the persistent themes which runs through these four chapters is one of dislocation and disconnection: artworks and artefacts separated from people and places, their meaning recontextualised and their value reconstituted within the museum setting or on contact with their potential publics. This separation can be physical, metaphorical, linguistic, organisational or spiritual, and as demonstrated in these perceptive accounts of past and present practice, is hard-wired into the traditional methods and structures of collections management.

In museum collections care, decay and deterioration are inevitable and constant, organisation of space and storage has been ostensibly practical not performative, documentation was about keeping order and digitisation is essentially image capture. These are all just issues of housekeeping surely, but as evidenced in these essays these behind-the-scenes decisions have a significant impact on the potential publics of the museum. The accounts of work recognising and grappling with these impacts as presented in this part crucially map the complicated path from the supposedly neutral practicalities of collections management to the highly determined, dominant ontologies of the museum collection presented to its audiences as definitive cultural knowledge.

Each of these chapters evidences the barriers that well-meant, but resource limited 'best practice' creates, be it the physical distance of storage facilities or the imposition of culturally inappropriate systems of categorisation. This seems counter-intuitive when surely at worst collections management is simply keeping things with a semblance of order, and at best its purpose is to preserve material culture in a notional perpetuity, and thus ensure access to now and future audiences. Yet the concern of the work described in these case studies is to acknowledge and account for these disconnects, and to remake the lost or broken relationships between people and things by exploring and reflecting on the effect that collections care and management practices have on the professional treatment and perception of objects, and by extension the treatment of the humans who relate to them.

Part V

The ethics of sustainability, preservation and stewardship in collections care

22

Eastern Mediterranean perspectives on eco-conscious, resilient and sustainable preservation of museum collections and heritage sites in Greece

Vasilike Argyropoulos, Dimitrios Karolidis and Paraskevi Pouli

Introduction

Greece has been active in research regarding sustainable practice for the management and care of museum collections and heritage sites, often using international guidelines and standards as a basis (Papadopoulos et al. 2003). However, these guidelines and standards can be unsustainable in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean, since they do not offer ways to incorporate local and traditional knowledge related to specific needs of climate and culture to ensure their sustainability. 'Sustainable' in conservation practice is often defined in terms of the environment, and mitigating consumption of energy, resource use and production of waste, as well as adapting attitudes to extend the useable life of materials (De Silva and Henderson 2011), which is often incorporated in conservation projects in Greece. Today, worldwide events impact museums and heritage sites in the Eastern Mediterranean where governments often issue new policies that affect their management. In Greece, for example, there is a requirement for museums to introduce natural outdoor ventilation to improve the museum environment and fight against COVID-19; and the energy rationing in response to the war in Ukraine requires public museums to set the indoor temperatures during cooling and heating

cycles to 27°C and 19°C respectively (Government Greek 2022). What effects this will have on museum collections is not known. There has been discussion that standards and guidelines must evolve over time with a green thinking approach for heritage institutions to adapt to a changing climate or effectively mitigate actions through less energy-intensive preventive conservation policies (Bertolin 2019). However, there are few published case specific studies on such adaptation (Karolidis 2013; Luo et al. 2016).

This chapter discusses collection management approaches that are indigenous to Greece or the Eastern Mediterranean region, the challenges facing collections/monuments, and their sustainability for the region using case studies related to: museum environment and climate, including monitoring; effects on remedial conservation practice in terms of materials used; and non-invasive portable analytical techniques for in-situ analysis and diagnosis of objects and surfaces. More specifically, it highlights a number of research projects in Greece that within the past 20 years have led to specific preservation approaches as well as understanding Greece's indoor/outdoor environments. Furthermore, it will highlight the state-of-the-art facilities that serve as a research base for Cultural Heritage (CH) at the South Eastern corner of Europe and within the Eastern Mediterranean region, as well as ongoing research interests and collaborations. The innovative tools and technologies developed over the years provide reliable and case-specific data to better understand the sensitivities of local climate and their impact on CH monuments and collections resulting in better decision-making with regards to sustainable preservation strategies.

Background

Greece lies between a latitude 35–41°, in the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, and with its dry summers is classified in the subtropical climatic zone (Kottek et al. 2006). The climate change (CC) scenario between 2021 and 2050 for urban areas in Greece published in 2011 has proven so far to be true, which predicted warmer temperatures, more days and nights with a maximum of 35°C and 20°C respectively, and more frequent flash floods related to increased fires (Giannakopoulos et al. 2011). A European study has determined the future impact on climate-conditioned museums, showing an increase of 20 per cent in Southern Europe as opposed to 10 per cent reduction in Northern Europe in terms of relative total energy use (van Schijndel and Schellen 2018).

Greece's history makes for rich archaeological collections and sites from prehistory to Byzantine periods, with its sites and museums represented in varying climates from coastal (Delos, Thera), mountainous (Delphi, Messene), urban (National Archaeological Museum), or both types of environment (urban and coastal: Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Archaeological site of Knossos), including many underwater sites (Alonissos). Moreover, the types of microclimatic conditions for museums in these regions can vary from controlled, to no significant differentiation of the indoor and display cases microclimate, to no control with natural ventilation (Lazaridis et al. 2015). A follow-up study determined that for such Greek museums a lack of regulating the indoor museum environment greatly influences the indoor emission sources of airborne contaminants (Lazaridis et al. 2018); with certain elemental markers indoors reflected by the type of outdoor environment, such as sea salt aerosols, high vehicle traffic and biomass burning (from fires), to name a few, which can also vary seasonally.

Greek culture has supported 'open' museums where ancient sites with monuments are visited with artefacts found in their context either as security protected (ancient Messene) or vernacular architecture with monuments and artefacts that are accessible without security protection (Chlouveraki et al. 2019), or housed in renovated historic buildings (the Numismatic Museum of Athens). Among the many ongoing excavations in Greece, state archaeologists spend a great deal of their time working in rescue excavations. Sampling museum artefacts and monuments requires official permission, which in some cases is very difficult to obtain, putting the application of non-invasive and portable diagnostic analytical techniques in high demand for conservation assessments. Indoor climate control of museums, preservation of archaeological sites and collections is very difficult to sustain due to the high costs, and especially when such costs are needed for other types of risks, such as from theft (security), earthquakes, rockfalls, fires, flash and coastal flooding (Ravankhah et al. 2019; Konstantinidis et al. 2021). Given the age of sites and the nature of burial conditions, finds like ceramics and stone-like materials are stable, while metals and organics are often found in a mineralised state with no original material remaining (e.g. iron metal, textiles).

The conservation practices established over the century for collections in Greece are effective at keeping them stable long-term in Greek museums. These practices started in the early twentieth century with the stabilisation treatments for the bronze antiquities from the Antikythera shipwreck by chemists, such as Othon Rhousopoulos (Moraitou 2020). Moraitou (2020) describes the history of conservation

of antiquities in Greece directly associated with Greek and foreign excavations at various stages over the century: initially offering technical support to field archaeology at famous sites such as Knossos and Delos, chemists then became involved, followed by large museums setting up laboratory infrastructure for conservation, and the final stage involving the establishing of the conservation field as a discipline taught at a level of tertiary education by 1985. By 1997, the conservation profession became protected by the Greek state (Argyropoulos and Panagiaris 2006), and most major museums/sites have professional conservators working full time with permanent positions to be able to care for and monitor their collections/monuments over time. As such, all artefacts on display have undergone some sort of remedial conservation treatment, and metal artefacts are often displayed in museum collections at higher relative humidity values (RHs) and temperatures than international guidelines and standards. For example, English Heritage has recommended RH values of 30 per cent for iron alloys and 35 per cent for copper alloys while on display, and 16 per cent for both archaeological metals in storage, to manage losses of value (Lankester et al. 2022); but it should be noted that these values are for archaeological metals that have *not* undergone any remedial conservation treatments.

Finally, the museum experience in Greece is generally presented in very traditional ways (e.g. objects presented in chronological order and typological groups) (Mouliou 2008), with the contextualised narrative relating an archaeological site or period. As Mouliou (2008) states, even travelling exhibitions to the West have been based on narratives of 'classical value and quality' including classical humanism, Athenian democracy and classical education, or the Aegean Sea and its grandeur as the cradle of Hellenism and of European culture.

In parallel, despite its size, Greece shows a very strong research profile in the field, with many examples of innovative research and pioneer applications related to the analysis, diagnosis and conservation of CH objects/monuments. Among the highlights is the laser-assisted removal of pollution encrustation from the Athens Acropolis sculptures. This project, which was initiated in the late 1990s between IESL-FORTH and the Acropolis Restoration Service, has been developed as a unique example of frontier research successfully applied in situ and openly demonstrated to the public.

The prototype laser cleaning methodology that was tailored by IESL-FORTH for the needs of such an important monument was proved scientifically as the only means to clean such delicate and sensitive surfaces while respecting the chemistry, colour and micro-morphology of

these highly-curved and intensively-weathered marble sculptures (Pouli et al. 2005; Frantzikinaki et al. 2005; Pouli et al. 2016). The particularly complex nature and morphology of the pollution accumulations and crusts, in addition to other factors such as the presence of historic monochromatic layers, including paint remains, form a dynamically complex and demanding conservation case study. This case could not be tackled by traditional remedial conservation methods without negative effects with regards to the preservation of the original surface as well as the safety to the conservators and the environment. Laser cleaning was approved by the Committee for the Restoration of the Acropolis Monuments and introduced into the Monument's conversation practice in 2002, while in 2011 the Acropolis Museum, in a ground-breaking decision, launched an open-to-the-public laser cleaning laboratory within its exhibition. This temporary but safe installation enables millions of visitors to follow live the conservation of these unique sculptures by the conservators of the Acropolis Museum.

With all of Greek specificities in how its CH is exhibited, managed, preserved, and protected, some have stated the milestone reached is the Greek law passed in 2002, 'Law for the protection of antiquities and cultural heritage in general (3028/2002)' and today strengthened by law 4858/2021 (Mouliou 2008; Sakki et al. 2022). This Greek law broadened the scope of CH providing protection from all historical periods, defined what a museum is, and stated the remedial conservation must be carried out by the public service or by licensed professional conservators.

We turn to case studies to further explore the unique challenges museums and heritage sites face in Greece for the overall sustainable preservation planning of their collections and monuments.

Existing standards and trends in the Heritage sector

Heritage management of collections and sites is affected by many global challenges, such as climate change, and the Mediterranean region is one of the most highly-rated hot spot regions in the world in this respect (Argyropoulos and Stratigea 2019). Worldwide, many conservation organisations and non-profits are taking up the cause of promoting sustainable practices in the field for climate action (e.g. www. yococu.com; www.kiculture.org; stich.culturalheritage.org). These organisations carry out various activities such as hosting conferences on green conservation practices, or providing tools to increase awareness and to help conservation professionals determine the carbon footprint of

the materials they use to help reduce their impact on the environment. The heritage field is starting to understand that one of the key issues in promoting a green 'holistic' approach in the field is to apply sustainability methods to quantitatively determine the impacts on the environment: Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for products; Life Cycle Costing (LCC) for the process and service for the economy; and the Social Life Cycle Assessment (SLCA) for impacts on society (Balliana et al. 2016; Tomasetta and Zucchella Anna Maria Ferrari 2017; Settembre Blundo et al. 2018). This management approach is being applied to the restoration of historic buildings (Endo and Takamura 2021; Serrano et al. 2022), but also to museum collections, loans and exhibition of objects (Lambert and Henderson 2011; Nunberg et al. 2016). From a collections management perspective, sustainability is addressed through the careful planning and control of the consumption of energy and resources when creating and maintaining a protective environment for the collections, whether on display, storage, or in transit (National Museum Directors' Council 2009). Today, most collection managers in museums are using well-established international environmental standards and guidelines to safeguard their collections (Ankersmit and Stappers 2017), while they are often held responsible to manage CH in environmentally sustainable ways (Matassa 2011). The 2014 joint declaration by the International Institute for Conservation (IIC) and ICOM-CC (Committee for Conservation) on environment guidelines for museums stated that conditions for permanent display and storage should be achievable for the local climate (ICOM-CC and IIC 2014).

The long-term stability of collections/sites are also greatly impacted by remedial conservation measures and the materials used to stabilise and/or coat them. The materials used in the field often follow industry trends. Thus, when products go off the market due to changing regulations or directives for safety and waste disposal, the conservation field must find alternatives. Today industry trends for cleaning products encourage replacements for the use of solvents such as Volatile Organic Compounds since they pose health and environmental risks. As such, companies have realised the advantages of using safe and sustainable operating practices, and have started to produce green alternatives with the means to protect the environment and workplace, and reduce industrial waste and operating costs (Markets and Markets 2022). Green chemistry was born from the pharmaceutical industry, which came up with many tools and guides to choose alternative solvents; today, these tools are being applied to conservation, but require time consuming research and testing before application on real CH objects (Fife 2021). These new greener

conservation materials must consider conservation principles, i.e., reversibility of the treatment and the visual aspect of the modification of the treated surface, but also important is their long-term effectiveness in the environment the CH object/monument is located within.

In the case of CH metals, there has been much research in the last decade into the application of green corrosion inhibitors or eco-friendly substances that have biocompatibility in nature (Argyropoulos et al. 2021). A published survey in 2007 on the use of corrosion inhibitors and coatings by conservators for metal museum collections in the Mediterranean region found that benzotriazole (BTA) in ethanol as a corrosion inhibitor, and Paraloid®B72 as a coating, were the most popular in those countries, but Incralac coating for copper alloys was most common in Greece (Argyropoulos et al. 2007b). There are published cases where the application of these coatings resulted in complete failures and disfigured the metal collections since the museum environment had high and fluctuating temperature and RH including the presence of salt aerosols from close proximity to the sea (Degrigny et al. 2007a). However, the protection of metal collections from active corrosion is often the main concern both for archaeological and historical metal indoor and outdoor collections, making the use of corrosion inhibitors and/or coatings essential in the Mediterranean region along with the necessary stabilisation treatments (Argyropoulos et al. 2005). Today most Greek museums apply BTA followed by Incralac or Paraloid to their copper alloy artefacts on display indoors or sent out on loan. Research was carried out on the effectiveness of the coating protocols using Incralac for bronze artefacts on display and coated between 1976–2003 at the National Archaeological Museum and Numismatic Museum, both in Athens (Boyatzis et al. 2017). Boyatzis et al. (2017) demonstrated through scientific analysis that the long-term performance of the coating on the bronze artefacts did not always give consistent results. Some coated artefacts showed little chemical changes after 25 years of coating, while others showed significant chemical changes after 15 years of coating. The technique used was Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy, which is successful at detecting chemical changes to Incralac coatings not yet visible to the naked eye, serving as an early warning tool, but the method requires sample removal of the coating. Thus, monitoring the sustainability of these coatings on metals requires user-friendly, non-invasive analytical tools so as to detect their chemical degradation on objects in remote places without the need for sampling.

In the CH analytical and diagnostic field, within the past 30 years, extensive research has focused on the implementation of a number of spectroscopic (Zarkadas and Karydas 2004; Giakoumaki et al. 2007) and imaging (Fischer and Kakoulli 2006) techniques and instrumentation (Siozos et al. 2017), originally developed for use in industrial and medical fields. Their adaptation and fine-tuning in order to cover the specific needs and limitations posed by the multitude of CH objects and monuments had a vital role in advancing archaeological and art history research, as well as in enhancing conservation work by supporting conservators to take informed decisions on necessary preventive, emergency or scheduled interventions.

Surface-specific analytical techniques enabled the chemical identification of archaeological findings (Sokaras et al. 2009), painted layers on wall-paintings (Aloupi et al. 2000) and artworks (Nevin et al. 2012). They played a major role in the investigation of provenance (Hein et al. 2002) and the study of different historical eras by comparing materials and practices (Westlake et al. 2012). They also greatly assisted conservators in the early diagnosis of structural problems and defects (Tornari 2007), and determining the necessity of acting against deterioration phases and crusts (Kapsalas et al. 2007). Finally, they assist in monitoring and assessing cleaning interventions (Tserevelakis et al. 2020).

To this end, it is important to be able to produce versatile, user-friendly tools that enable archaeologists, art historians and conservators to easily and effectively obtain information about CH objects and monuments in situ. A major concern in this respect is to develop compact and portable instrumentation, which will enable reliable analytical studies on-site and/or in remote locations (Tornari 2019) without the need of moving the studied objects to the laboratories and minimising the need to take samples. In Greece, like other countries in Europe, the procedure to get permission from CH authorities to transport an object to an analytical laboratory or to acquire samples for material analysis and study is a very demanding procedure, which can be particularly lengthy, costly and laborious. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that all analytical and diagnostic actions follow the current trends for CH, which is non-invasive methodologies, in order to guarantee that the surface under examination will not be affected, while enabling re-examination of the same area with similar or complimentary techniques.

The concept of compact, portable analytical instrumentation was achieved under the framework of the FP6 EC funded project PROMET: Innovative conservation approaches for monitoring and PROtecting

ancient and historic METals collections from the Mediterranean basin (INCO-CT-2004-509126), through which important ancient/historic metal objects from the Mediterranean basin were studied by means of a portable Laser Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) and a (trans) portable micro-X-Ray Fluorescence (μXRF) instrument (Argyropoulos et al. 2007a; Kantarelou et al. 2007). PROMET was one of the first EU projects to focus on the building/construction of compact instrumentation to make analysis on site possible and at the same time invest in developing multi-analytical and complementary methodologies to systematically study CH collections (Argyropoulos et al. 2008). A series of analytical campaigns to test and optimise the instruments were performed in several CH sites and museums in the Mediterranean: ancient Messene in Greece (Giannoulaki et al. 2007), Damascus, Syria (Kantarelou et al. 2015), Valetta, Malta (Degrigny et al. 2007b), and Irbid, Jordan (Arafat et al. 2013), highlighting that such approaches are particularly essential for countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, rich in CH objects and monuments, but also particularly cautious and strict with regards to sampling and out-of-the lab/museum transfer permissions.

Simultaneously, driven from the same need to develop portable non-invasive instruments, the FP6 Infrastructures project 'EU-Artech' (Access Research and Technology for the Conservation of the European Cultural Heritage, 2004–2009) (Boutaine 2016) was also initiated in Central and Northern Europe and was focused mainly on techniques dedicated to the study of easel paintings and painted surfaces. The continuation and expanded schemes of this project brought together an increasing number of European Institutions involved in CH in order to support joint multi-disciplinary research, ensure harmonisation and standardisation of conservation and analytical procedures through networking activities and facilitate young scientists' training. Furthermore, one of the major tasks of these projects was to initially optimise the use of infrastructures through a coordinated programme of transnational access and eventually establish a pan-European research infrastructure in Heritage Science: CHARISMA (Cultural Heritage Advanced Research Infrastructures: Synergy for a Multidisciplinary Approach to Conservation/Restoration, 2009–2014), IPERION-CH (Integrated Platform for the European Research Infrastructure ON Cultural Heritage, 2015–2019) and the currently on-going, IPERION-HS (Integrating Platforms for the European Research Infrastructure ON Heritage Science 2020–2023), have greatly contributed towards the development of a European Infrastructure for Heritage Science, E-RIHS. Greece plays a core role in this scheme.

These examples outline how the field is working towards green and sustainable practices within international museum standards and guidelines for collection/site management, and the ways CH research projects led by Greeks or with their collaboration contribute to the museum sector in the Mediterranean region with its specific problems and needs. The case studies presented below outline more clearly how these international standards are addressed in practice in a major Greek museum, and how state-of-the-art, non-invasive analytical tools are used to monitor climate change impacts on monuments in Crete.

Collection Management at the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki

The challenges associated with collection management of museums in Greece, such as the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (AMTh), are very typical of the problems and needs for museums in subtropic climate zones located near the sea. The AMTh houses artefacts from terrestrial excavations from the Prehistoric to Roman periods mostly from the city of Thessaloniki but also from the Greek region of Macedonia. The museum was built in 1962, with an additional wing in 1980, and with the 2004 Athens Olympics, the museum was extensively renovated. The museum has a total of 2453 objects on permanent display. Out of these, 301 are presented on open display (such as big sculptures), and the remaining 2152 inside display cases. The 163 sealed display cases of the permanent exhibitions at the AMTh were purchased in 2004. Although they were designed from high quality hardware and materials, no airtightness specifications were requested at the time of their manufacture. All of the artefacts on display have undergone remedial conservation, and the majority of these objects are made of inorganic materials such as stone, ceramics, glass and metals. The majority of the metal objects are mainly nonferrous, such as gold jewellery, masks, diadems and copper and silver alloys such as helmets, kraters and coins. Although the inorganic materials have been treated to remove soluble salts, RH is a primary concern for the objects' care. The recommended RH for treated copper alloyed artefacts depends if the objects still have bronze disease with chlorides; below an RH of 42 per cent active corrosion is unlikely but above 68 per cent RH there can be risks of outbreaks (Rimmer et al. 2013).

The micro-climate within the museum galleries is controlled by a Building Management System (BMS) with programmed temperature and RH levels throughout a 24-hour cycle. This system divides the museum

building into distinct climate zones. These zones include the exhibition galleries, administration offices, conservation studios and storage room. The environmental control targets as reflected in the museum's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) regimes, using temperature and RH were agreed and set collectively by the museum collection managers and HVAC mechanical engineers to support preventive conservation of the objects, and the comfort of museum employees and visitors. Micro-climate optimisation criteria underwent a process, in terms of understanding the local climate of the museum's location. For example, in 2021–22, the external environmental conditions of the museum during the heating (winter) and cooling (summer) seasons were on average 12°C RH 58 per cent and 27.8°C RH 60.1 per cent respectively, and during the mixed season (spring and autumn) 19.3°C and RH 59.9 per cent. The data shows a greater variation in annual local temperature as opposed to the RH which remains stable all year around, with the yearly average at 19.7°C and RH 59 per cent. It is a common belief that these yearly averages should act as guidelines for setting the control targets of the museum's HVAC system to ensure the best possible performance (see for example American Institute for Conservation [AIC] 2020; Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material [AICCM] 2014; International Group of Organizers of Major Exhibitions 2022 (The Bizot Group)(National Museum Directors' Council 2022)). However, setting one fixed museum HVAC point all year around will lead to heavy energy usage during the extremely hot Greek summer months (heatwaves are common and can easily reach temperatures around 40°C) or during winter where temperatures can be as low as -5°C.

The current HVAC regime at the AMTh Museum includes two set points for heating and cooling seasons: 19°C RH 50 per cent and 26°C RH 50 per cent respectively (when there are extreme temperatures, either extra heating or cooling of the air inside the galleries may be needed). During the mixed season (spring and early autumn), fresh outside air is brought in from a time-scheduled opening of roof windows.

Beginning in 2004, after the museum's renovation, the microclimate in the AMTh museum is monitored continuously with the use of 70 remote wireless sensors placed in every gallery and inside selected sealed display cases. This monitoring system allows the collection managers to better understand the climate control, and in parallel they acquire an increased awareness of green/sustainable collection management practices. The relevant environmental monitoring data is gathered and processed with a state-of-the-art software platform for accessing and evaluating real-time information. The collection of data was aimed at specifically addressing the challenges of international standards.

The environment within the museum galleries and display cases were assessed for temperature and RH data collected during three distinct periods, the months as mentioned above. The periods selected were typical and distinct time periods of the heating, cooling and mixed seasons, and accordingly can be related to the energy demands for heating and cooling within the museum galleries. The collected data was assessed with statistical regression analyses for the temperature and RH to better understand the relationships between the external museum climate, the micro-climate within the galleries and inside the display cases. The statistical analysis shows the relationships between the temperature and RH for the external museum, galleries and inside the display cases are significant; the climate of Thessaloniki affects the micro-environment inside the museum, which, in turn, affects the micro-climate inside the display cases. The data assessment showed that the museum building envelope forms some sort of an effective barrier to the external environmental climate conditions. For example, the results indicate that during the heating season, the external climate accounts for 14.5 per cent of the variance in temperature in Gallery 2, and for 22 per cent of the variance in Gallery 2's RH. This variance can be attributed to different factors such as the orientation of the building (e.g. whether galleries are north or south facing), and the positioning of sensor-loggers within the building, however there are no anomalies here – just slight variations in variances. During the mixed season, when no hot or cold air is sent into the galleries, only fresh air is brought in (i.e., natural ventilation), the outside temperature and RH had only a small effect on the indoor climates. Furthermore, during the heating season, although the cold air that is brought in is dry, the museum building envelope retains the humidity. The same happens during the cooling season as well, when the warm and humid outside air is dehumidified through the building management system; the building envelope retains a fairly dry indoor climate compared to the outside. Essentially, what is happening outside the museum does not greatly affect the microclimate inside the galleries; the building envelope becomes a barrier to outside conditions.

While the external temperature and RH have a modest effect on the galleries' environment, the galleries' environment greatly affects the temperature and RH inside the display cases. This can be attributed to the air exchange rate between the display case's interior and its surroundings (Thickett et al. 2005; Thomson 1977). One of the galleries scored a mere 2.2 per cent and 3.3 per cent in meeting the AIC/AICCM and the Bizot guidelines respectively. The daily averages of the second gallery failed to meet any of these guidelines during the cooling season. With these

environment conditions in galleries and display cases, the microclimate and objects on display are inspected every week to determine if they are stable, i.e., no formation of soluble salts on inorganic materials, such as bronze disease. It should be noted that the majority of copper and silver alloys on display from excavated sites in the 1980s have been coated. To date, the coatings have not needed to be maintained (e.g. recoating), and still show no visual signs of failure. This may be due to the fact that the RH fluctuations inside the museum galleries during the spring–summer season of 2022 were daily ±2%, and overall for the beginning of the spring period and later spring/summer ±10% and ±5% respectively. Michalski (1993) confirms that the risk of fracture growth on polymers is non-existent for RH fluctuations within a season and in the range of ±5–10%, while it is very small in the range around ±20%.

The results reveal an interesting paradox that elucidates the opportunities and restraints related to indoor museum climate control. The AMTh Museum does not meet the environmental conditions for the museum collections according to the Bizot Group, AIC, and AICCM guidelines. However, when the museum is assessed under the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers classes of control (ASHRAE 2019), it provides adequate environmental conditions that minimise the risk of mechanical damage to its museum collection. The approach for microclimate optimisation was pragmatic, tailored to the specific context of the local area of northern Greece where the AMTh is located and the type of museum collection it houses. Many are starting to agree that there is no ideal standard (Kirby Atkinson 2016). Instead, there are complex relationships between the museum practices that include the proper care of collections, the carbon footprint of our daily operations that includes the museum microclimate control, and the needs of all of the stakeholders that include the visitors and the museum personnel.

Risk assessment of monuments: the Minoan Palace of Knossos and the Venetian sea fortress of Koules in the Heraklion, Crete

In recent years, scientific and public awareness of the direct and often disastrous effects of climate change to CH monuments and collections is increasing worldwide. The European research community is seeking holistic approaches that involve experts from various scientific backgrounds and disciplines in order to protect CH assets from climate

Figure 22.1 On-site analytical campaigns within the HERACLES project at the Venetian seaside fortress of Koules in Heraklion port. A portable Multispectral Imaging system mapped the extent of efflorescence salts on a seasonal basis.

change while ensuring appropriate solutions for their effective resilience. Along these lines, the projects HERACLES (HEritage Resilience Against CLimate Events on Site)(Padeletti 2019) and STORM (Safeguarding Cultural Heritage through Technical and Organisational Resources Management) (Resta et al. 2019) were successfully realised within the H2020 EU framework, with a strong Greek participation. These projects played a crucial role in the design and validation of a series of manageable operational procedures and guidelines that would prepare professionals from different backgrounds involved in the safeguarding of CH assets to better manage and mitigate risks with emphasis on the phenomena associated with climate change (Siatou et al. 2022).

In HERACLES, specific attention was placed in developing and adopting portable analytical and diagnostic instrumentation which in combination with data collected from environmental data loggers and meteorological stations installed at monuments, would allow
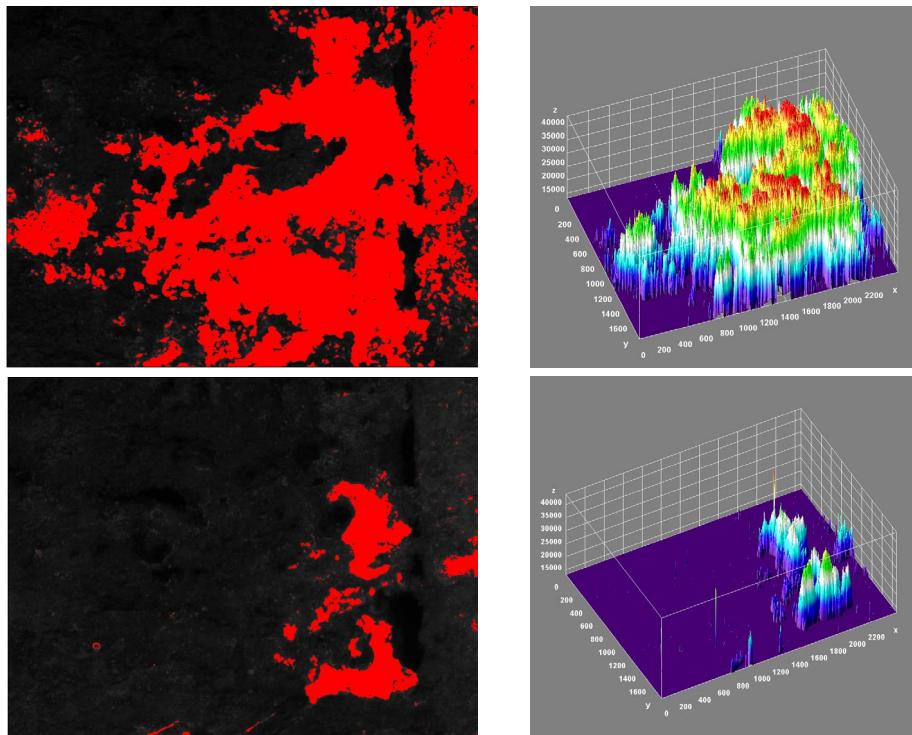
Figure 22.2 Images of data generated by the HERACLES project. 22.2a (top left) and 22.2b (top right) correspond to areas studied in June 2017, while 22.2c (bottom left) and 22.2d (bottom right) refer to the same areas studied in November 2017. Figures 22.2a (top left) and 22.2c (bottom left) refer to the pseudo-colour representation of the post-processed data recorded at 380nm (this wavelength ensures maximum reflectance difference between the substrate and the crust materials) at a studied area. The 3D representation of the encrusted area is presented in 22.2b (top right) and 22.2d (bottom right).

conservators to put forward protocols and guidelines to better respond to unusual changes and critical circumstances due to climate change effects (Hatzigiannakis et al. 2019). The validated and optimised methodologies were incorporated, together with multi-source information and analytical data, into information and communications technology platforms (Hellmund et al. 2018) to provide situational awareness in a complete and updated mode, supporting effective decisions for CH resilience.

Within the HERACLES project, the Minoan Palace of Knossos and the Venetian sea fortress of Koules in the Heraklion port were the two monuments studied in Crete, in southern Greece, as they represent

important historical eras and involve a number of construction materials, while being subjected to different climatic conditions. In a first approach, a diagnostic methodology was developed and tested to closely observe the generation and evolution of surface deterioration products, i.e. salts, on the basis of remote monitoring and mapping, as well as in correlation with environmental data and in-situ characterisation of materials (Hatzigiannakis et al. 2019) (Figure 22.1). The diagnostic approach involved imaging spectroscopy and the recording of areas of interest at specific wavelengths. Seasonal recording of spectral data in-situ enabled the monitoring of the spatial evolution of the studied pathologies, which were further characterised chemically by means of in situ Raman and LIBS spectroscopic measurements. The environmental conditions were continuously recorded and the data acquired were cross-correlated to elucidate the nature of the alteration products, understand the deterioration mechanism, and determine their correlation with climatic changes. In a second phase, these data, which are connected with the HERACLES platform, are linked with operational procedures to support organisationally the actions of the conservators and the people-in-charge of these monuments for effective responses to any changes or unforeseen circumstances that may occur to the monument due to climate change (Figure 22.2).

Conclusions

In the last 30 years, Greek institutions through research and practice have established approaches for the CH management of their museum collections and heritage sites that are specific to the region and culture. Changes in the national laws for the protection of CH, research and practice by Greek professionals from related institutions, as well as European financing, have contributed to the development of these approaches. Furthermore, CH professionals are well aware of international standards and guidelines for preservation, but their research and practical studies have determined which of these are sustainable in Greece and resilient to its society and economy. The future directions for research in the field are linked with European directives – the European Green Deal (European Commission 2019) to combat climate change and with the European Bauhaus initiative (European Commission 2022) to bring cultural and creative dimensions to it. These challenges must be faced through multidisciplinary teams using strategies and actions which incorporate aspects linked to community resilience and stakeholder governance to the local climate risks related to

CH. However, CH professionals must also be open to testing and adapting to new greener conservation practices than their traditional ones so as to reduce the carbon footprint and to minimise the amount of hazardous waste – but more specifically determine if in fact they are sustainable practices according to their local environmental conditions.

Acknowledgements (Grants)

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23

Object stories in support of sustainable futures: tackling climate change at the Australian Museum

Jenny Newell and Zehra Ahmed

If putting the future of life at the heart of everything we do is not central to our purpose … why are we here?

– Paul Hawken, *Regeneration*

In the midst of the rising climate crisis, the Australian Museum's materialities – its collection and its building – are good for conveying stories that our communities need to hear. Whether a historic cultural object made of the shells of a now-extinct species or the rooftop's gleaming bank of solar panels, there are many things we can deploy to help people recognise, reflect on and respond to the profound challenge of climate change. There are many ways our object-centred storytelling helps to empower people to take effective action.

The Australian Museum (AM) has a mission to ignite wonder, inspire debate and drive change. The vision is:

> … to be a leading voice for the richness of life, the Earth and culture in Australia and the Pacific. We commit to transform the conversation around climate change, the environment and wildlife conservation; be a strong advocate for First Nations' culture; and continue to develop world-leading science, collections, exhibitions and education programs.[1]

The vision is elaborated with a further statement about the AM's role in the world, as 'a dynamic source of reliable scientific information

and a touchstone for informed debate about some of the most pressing environmental and social challenges facing our region: the loss of biodiversity, a changing climate and the search for cultural identity.'[2]

The museum has recently established a Climate Solutions Centre (CSC), an updated Sustainability & Climate Action Plan (2023–2025) and has been certified Climate Active (Carbon Neutral) since 2020. The AM is not only reducing its emissions but also gathering and sharing diverse perspectives on tackling climate change, broadcasting powerful stories for positive futures. The museum's spaces provide safe places for recognising and reflecting on the climate and biodiversity crises, as well as grieving for losses, often through meditative, creative, artistic modes of engaging with these tough realisations. The museum's collections and exhibitions can also support the imagination of positive future possibilities – something which we humans tend to find challenging. How we care for and deploy these material things enables or disables our capacity to reduce our carbon footprint and encourage public engagement in positive action, determining the success of a key part of our museum's mission.

To deliver the components of the vision that attend to climate and environmental change, a Corporate Strategic Priority has been established, to advance action on climate change and sustainability. This comprises a suite of actions that have been drawn up by a working party of representatives from each section of the museum. The resulting targets for action are reported to the Executive and Trustees quarterly, with a 'traffic light' system indicating which goals have been reached, on track or needing additional support.

As Australia's first museum, the AM is understood to hold and convey cultural and natural history, but is also increasingly recognised as a supporter of people and nature now and into the future, in the face of the rising climate and biodiversity crises. Staff across the museum recognise and act on a duty of care for the living world – the world that our collections represent.

There are two key questions to explore: first, how can we best use the museum's specific materiality – its collections, exhibitions and building – to grab attention and build understanding of the climate crisis? Second, how can we best care for these material things, our visitors and ourselves, ensuring we are responding to the need to mitigate, protect ourselves from and adapt to climate change? Using a range of key objects, we, the AM's Sustainability Projects Co-ordinator and the Curator for Climate Change, will explore answers to these questions.

Realising climate change's rising impact: the building and the stethoscope

We invite you to step from wherever you are reading into an exploration of this museum in the heart of Sydney. Imagine that you are stepping out to join us, onto the land of the Gadigal – the beautiful, beleaguered land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Taken, built over, now holding so many new people, new plants and animals, tracked across by vehicles, but still breathing below and through the spaces in-between. It remains Aboriginal land, always. Now, walk through the clipped grass and dense tree canopy of Hyde Park, with the skyscrapers behind you, the Opera House nestled down by the water to your left. Wait at the traffic lights ahead, at the corner of College and William Street, double lanes of cars, buses and taxis swarming by, still far too many of them roaring with noise and noxious gases and particulates. Don't breathe too deep. Look up at the honey-coloured sandstone of the two storeys, the columns and imported Grecian style of the Australian Museum's first, colonial, façade. Built of stone cut from Gadigal country and, all without permission, laid out in heavy, straight walls and floors, weighing down on the soft curves below. Privileged spaces now created behind ornate doors. As the traffic near you stops, cross over and come up the ramp that runs along the sandstone side, with the gleaming glass box of the entry hall ahead of you.

Coming in through the sliding glass doors, the welcome desk and smiling staff ahead, you can see on your left a grid of angled squares of glass, in opal colours, shading the double-glazed glass sides of this space. This floating glass box, 'Crystal Hall', unites the old heritage sandstone buildings with the carbon-neutral designed entrance (Astley 2016). This new building can be seen as a metaphor for how we can learn from the past and build an innovative, sustainable and inclusive future that combines both the old and the new. The Crystal Hall's glass pleats support environmental management as the double-glazed glass selectively allows daylight in while reflecting short infrared waves out, venting the captured heat up and out through the ceiling. The 48 glass panes are positioned internally along the north façade and can be angled to block or allow more light to enter depending on the time of day and year. This passive-solar design reduces the need to blast the space with artificially-cooled air. Above are solar panels, contributing to the reduction of the museum's substantial scope 2 emissions.[3] New entrance flags make the contemporary face of the museum apparent and the ramp provides an accessible, step-free path of travel.

In the Crystal Hall entry foyer you are met by the Sustainability Projects Coordinator, Zehra, and she leads you into the high-ceilinged spaces of the newly-renovated building. As she explains, the Australian Museum is the first natural history museum in Australia to become Carbon Neutral (Climate Active) under the Federal Government's certification programme. It may seem like this is the end of the accomplishment, but rather this is the starting point for the AM's journey. The objective is to eliminate all avoidable emissions in every aspect of our organisation (approximately 80 per cent of all emissions from scope 1, 2 and 3 by 2030). The ideal is to become Climate Positive, going beyond net zero and removing more emissions than the institution emits, thus creating additional environmental benefits. This means leading the emissions reduction charge aggressively.

Zehra explains the museum has achieved carbon neutrality through offsetting, which may seem contentious, but was a deliberate choice, for a few compelling reasons. 'Firstly,' she says, 'none of us has time to gradually reduce our emissions. We need to act with urgency and acknowledge that while it is imperative to radically reduce emissions now, global emissions are continuing to rise.' The solutions that exist out in the world – such as regenerating ecosystems or supporting First Nations cultural burning and other initiatives that are used in off-setting programmes – are highly important and need resourcing now. Taking this path requires a certain amount of vulnerability, as it entails an organisation acknowledging it is still on a journey towards entirely eliminating emissions. While there is a lack of formal benchmarking in Australia for net zero, the AM's ambition is to reduce emissions by 80 per cent and to only offset what is truly unavoidable. The AM is doing as much as it can as fast as possible, with projects underway or in planning, such as working towards switching the fleet to electric vehicles. Secondly, as one of the largest museums in Australia, the museum needs to signal to the public, its partners and stakeholders that this is an emergency that warrants drastic steps now. It requires the museum to stop the unhelpful rhetoric of climate change being in the future, something we can defer acting on. By being carbon neutral now, albeit an imperfect solution, we are embodying our message of immediate action being necessary. Offsetting also allows the AM to talk about climate justice and the solutions that mitigate climate impacts and help to draw down carbon.

The AM supports a renewable energy project in India which assists the community's wellbeing as well as providing a way to speak to the inequality of emissions and impacts between developing and developed nations. Developing countries struggle to implement changes without the

support of enabling infrastructure and resources; projects such as these give the AM the platform to call for Australian organisations to bolster the collective race to net zero. Offsetting also permits the AM to educate about and elevate projects that align with our corporate strategic goals. Offsets purchased by the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, an organisation that works with farmers to implement First Nations-led land management, is a project that not only helps to avoid the carbon released from large scale bushfires, it also ensures the land being managed protects old growth-forests, supports new vegetation to grow and ecological health to be bolstered, including soil health, all of which sequesters more carbon from the atmosphere.

It is also worth noting that most museums will find that the bulk of their emissions come from energy use to light galleries and keep collections at the correct temperature and humidity levels. For the AM, 60–70 per cent of emissions come solely from energy use. Once government approval to switch to 100 per cent renewable energy is secured, the museum will have few remaining emissions.

As you walk past the stories being told through moving image, historic and contemporary works in the Garrigarrang: Sea Country gallery, you pass under a giant groper made in the Torres Strait Island of discarded, otherwise destructive 'ghost nets' pulled from the sea. Zehra tells you more about the ways the museum is managing its waste and emissions (Figure 23.1). The AM has undertaken a carbon footprint calculation annually since 2015. The institution's average yearly emissions are between 5,500 to 6,000 tonnes of CO_2. Knowing the carbon footprint has meant that the museum can map and identify its emissions sources and plan and implement solutions. It is worth noting that the AM, like many publicly funded institutions, sits within a governance and funding framework which means it is not always possible to implement changes quickly. Driving change often requires advocacy, persistent conversations and uniting efforts with other cultural institutions who are also seeking to reduce emissions.

As you walk, Zehra points out the architecturally distinct parts of the building, from sandstone to steel, 13 additions to the original 1857 museum. One of the more recent projects designed to reduce emissions that she is glad to highlight is a HVAC upgrade and change-over to LED lighting, front and back of house, including the collections storerooms. Also, a strategy for construction waste was implemented for the $58 million rebuild completed in 2020. Materials such as timber floorboards from old collection storerooms were recycled in the new exhibition spaces, helping achieve a more than 90 per cent diversion from landfill for all

Figure 23.1 First Nations educator with students in the Garrigarrang: Sea Country gallery, about First Nations coastal communities. Australian Museum, Sydney. Photo: Anna Kučera.

demolition waste. Throughout the renovation, key targets within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals framework were advanced, designing the building for accessibility (removing uneven floors and creating seamless, accessible pathways around the museum).

Zehra points out the recycling bins in the public areas and, coming through the heavy doors to the back-of-house area, walks you past the further recycling stations in staff kitchenettes and the loading dock. She explains that the collection points manage all the usual recycling streams (paper, cardboard, glass, plastic and aluminium) as well as fluorescent lights, print cartridges, batteries, e-waste, mobile phones and organics. Compostable waste was added to the public waste streams in late 2020. The on-site café and shop phased out single use plastic in 2019 and the café replaced plastic bottles with glass. The museum has increased its on-site diversion of waste from landfill to 50 per cent and the aim is to increase this to 90 per cent by 2027.

The loading dock is small, and this, combined with other challenges with the site, causes difficulties for waste management. Despite this, the museum is continuing to look at implementing new streams of recycling and procurement solutions. Zehra mentions that the AM is trying to make these kinds of operational wins for sustainability visible to visitors. The actions the museum is taking are flagged in a wall text in our permanent

climate change exhibition. There may be options in the future for a more captivating, live-feed display for the public about the museum's energy use and waste management.

As you return back through the heavy doors into the central hall, sunlight gleaming in through the glass panels in the roof, Zehra tells you about the temporary exhibition that was held here in 2021 about Australian inventions tackling climate change. One section dealt with environmentally-responsible building materials such as Earth Friendly Concrete and the new materials developed by Professor Veena Sahajwalla (SMaRT Centre, University of New South Wales). Sahajwalla 'gives waste new life', and has developed ground-breaking Green Steel (in which old tyres replace coking coal) and decorative tiles made from broken glass and fabric scraps. Sahajwalla's approach of viewing waste as an opportunity has informed not only how the AM talks about waste internally, but the targets the museum sets and the solutions it seeks to align with.

As you come up the curving wooden staircase to the museum's second floor you arrive in the *Surviving Australia* gallery. It deals with the ways Australian animals have adapted to survive the continent's challenging climate. You're met by Jenny, the Curator for Climate Change, who takes you to see a display in a large alcove with text panels, photos, a tall digital screen stack, videos and objects mounted on three walls surrounding a central touch-screen table. The display is called *Changing Climate*. The central table is an interactive map of Australia, full of animated graphics of animals, farmers, electric vehicles and wind turbines, surfers, ships and more. As you touch one of these features, the characters respond, and a digital 'card' pops up with questions and answers addressing changes underway. Questions also head up sections of the exhibition, including 'What on Earth are we doing?', 'How is Australia changing?' and 'What can we do?'. You can see other visitors around you exploring answers, through short text panels, video interviews, quizzes about carbon footprints and recent actions they have taken.

Along the main wall of the exhibition you can explore five key ecologies in eastern Australia. There are images, text blocks and objects reflecting on the impacts of climate change on each environment. Jenny explains she asked people in several of the environments featured if they would like to donate an object to the exhibition that summed up the impacts of climate change they were witnessing. Dr Anne Hoggett, marine biologist and Director of the AM's Lizard Island Research Station in Queensland, donated one of her sets of mask and snorkel. This set, blue and black and with marks of wear and tear, sits in a display box with her

photo and her words. She says corals are 'the global canary in the coal mine. During the 2016 bleaching event it was devastating to watch corals bleach and die in droves on reefs that I've known and loved for years. My mask and snorkel allowed me to bear witness' (Hoggett 2020).

Ecological impacts are not the only story covered. A General Practitioner in Western Sydney, Dr Kim Loo, donated the pediatric stethoscope through which she tracks the impacts of burning fossil fuels on the hearts and lungs of her most vulnerable patients (Loo 2020). Charlie Prell, a farmer of sheep and energy, donated fleece from his shearing shed and the model wind turbine that a sales representative gave him. In the wall text and short video he talks about how important the steady income from his turbines is for the mental health and wellbeing of his family and two others whom he can now employ, keeping them going through droughts and other climate extremes (Prell 2020). The objects have been registered into the collection, with their associated stories and imagery.

With these objects – tangible expressions of relationships to climate change – the emotional impacts of losses, challenges and transition underway for people in diverse places within our societies become more apparent. The audience can glean up-close-and-personal, lived experiences of climate change in this country. A new collection area is being established, for objects that speak particularly to the relationship between people and the Anthropocene. The AM is acquiring (on donation as a collections fund has not yet been secured) specific objects for exhibitions and is accepting a few offers of artwork that speak to these themes. To date, photographic and video works by Tim Georgeson in the wake of the bushfires,[4] and a set of Perspex 'totem poles' filled with found ocean plastics by John Dahlsen,[5] have been accessioned into the AM's Historical Artefacts Collection, awaiting transfer to the new collection area once it is formally established.

As work within the Climate Solutions Centre goes forward, there will be more exploration of the ways that the AM's existing cultural and natural history collections can be used to tell potent stories of the Anthropocene. Relationships to nature within the Anthropocene – the age of humans, the time in which human activity has been the dominant influence on the environment – needs more contemplation, more storying and more response. The collections of a museum of nature and culture are potent resources for such reflections. It is critical that our narratives about ourselves work more consciously to create bridges of connection between the natural and cultural objects. These conceptual foundations are built into the organisational, material and conceptual composition of the museum.

A sense of the experience of living in our climate-changed world is a particularly important set of realisations for a museum to open up. This is especially so for metropolitan museums, considering the high proportion of people in urban settings who – for no doubt only a short remaining time – tend to be living relatively sheltered from the broadest range and deepest impacts of the climate crisis. Museums around the world commonly use personal objects to create empathy and boost engagement in a subject. However, telling and documenting personal stories of living with the climate and ecological crisis is still relatively rare. The subject is often still rendered as a scientific explanation or broad-brush explanation of generalities, with the images we are all accustomed to seeing of black smoke billowing from industrial smokestacks, packed motorways and stranded polar bears. Re-assessing collections to consider the climate stories and themes within them, to open up specific stories of specific places, particularly those close at hand, will help our audiences connect to the local, lived realities of our changing places. Stories that are wrapped around the objects in our collections give our audiences things to think with – especially important in an area that is often spoken of in overwhelming abstractions: 'saving the planet' and other unwieldly tasks.

Objects of power

There are things in the AM's collection that are particularly good for broadcasting stories about the urgency of tackling climate change and the ecological crisis. There are ways we can use these stories powerfully to light pathways for individual and collective action.

The AM's First Nations team has been using cultural objects to bring histories to light, providing much-needed truth-telling about legacies of colonial violence. The museum is also bringing material objects into engagement with climate change and regeneration of nature.

Solid, personal-scale things, similar to things we might own or feel connections of significance to, presented with their evocative stories, can help us see how others are navigating the climate crisis and open up accessible pathways for ourselves. Objects of all types can be deployed as powerful narrators of the lived experience of the degradation of the world's systems. With a little reflection any of us could create a list of material things: objects that reflect on deep changes or losses in our natural world; cultural objects revealing potent models of stewardship; objects bearing the scars of extreme weather events; objects embodying the energy transition underway; personal, precious things kept by climate

refugees; objects of protest; works of technological, nature-based or community-based solutions; artworks reflecting on the individual or collective psychological and emotional burdens of our climate-changed world. All these things in collections can spark a break-through realisation about what is at stake, leading us to greater care of our own webs of significant things.

Stories, we all know, are at the heart of how humans create and share meaning. Museums are important places for telling powerful stories that reach our heads, hearts and can inspire hands to be involved too, taking the action that's needed.

Presenting solutions: olivine and flexible solar strips

We can occasionally find objects that actively support climate repair in our collection. When the AM asked their Distinguished Fellow in Climate Change, Professor Tim Flannery, a well-known Australian scientist and climate spokesperson, to choose an item from the collection to write about, he chose two things. First, the Bramble Cay Melomys, the first mammal extinction documented due to climate change (the entirety of its habitat being lost to sea-level rise) and second, a specimen of green, crystalline olivine. Olivine is a silicate rock, created when molten rock is thrown out of a volcano. Silicate rocks, Flannery points out, are 'important in the fight against climate change' because in the process of decomposition, the surfaces absorb atmospheric CO_2 and 'bind it to carbonates in the soil, thereby removing it permanently from the atmosphere' (Flannery 2024). The process of crushing large quantities of silicate rock, to expose more CO_2-binding surfaces and spreading it onto soil or sand, if done using renewable energy, could boost the race to achieve drawdown; the point at which the amount of greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere stops rising and starts to drop (Flannery 2024; Hawken 2017).

Presenting the drawdown potential of a piece of olivine is a useful awareness-raising tool. Bringing a powerful nature-based method to light, the olivine can also be used to augment understanding of the carbon system. Reading specialist works about working silicate rocks is another way to learn about these carbon-catchers but, for many, a physical rock specimen would be more compelling and provide a memorable image, good for absorbing and retaining new information.

In time, it is likely that climate narratives about objects such as these will be added to their entries in the collection database.[6] Flagged with

keywords, this additional content will support new conceptual pathways through the collection.

Few 'good news' stories about climate solutions receive sufficient airplay in the media to gain momentum. Drama and disaster are still generally prioritised over encouraging news in climate reporting. Presenting the olivine as Flannery has done online or in a physical display gives the museum's audience a chance to learn about a positive, nature-based solution.

Other solutions that museums can present are particularly effective at supporting our audiences to recognise the action they can take themselves at home, in their gardens, in their neighbourhoods and workplaces. Objects, displays and public programmes that support this kind of learning directly support Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) (UNFCCC 2021a) – a key tenet of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Article 12 of the Paris Agreement (2015, and Article 6 under the original convention, 1992). This commitment was further strengthened in the 2021 'Glasgow Work Programme for Action on Climate Empowerment', highlighting six areas of action that can guide museums in their work on public education and engagement in climate change (UNFCCC 2021b). The goal of ACE is to 'empower all members of society to engage in climate action, through education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation on these issues' (UNFCCC 2021a). More museums are taking their national commitments to ACE seriously, enabling more of their staff to engage in climate action, and ensure these actions and creative programming are made visible to the public, as a good guide to follow. They are supported by resources such as Henry McGhie's *Action on Climate Empowerment*: *A Guide for Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums* (McGhie 2022) and his museum handbook for measuring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions (McGhie et al. 2022).

The Glasgow work programme reaffirmed the 'key role that a broad range of stakeholders', including government and 'educational and cultural institutions, museums', and others 'play in ensuring Action for Climate Empowerment'. As part of advancing ACE and the broader UN Sustainable Development Goals, the AM has established the CSC. This is an initiative to increase understanding and engagement in climate solutions, bringing together social researchers, climate communicators, First Nations knowledge holders and experts in climate solutions across many fields. The outputs the CSC creates range from exhibitions to events and web resources. The CSC is headed up

by the Curator for Climate Change, working to design more effective ways to create engagement, carrying out audience research, designing and evaluating touring exhibitions and programmes out in the regions, creating on-site exhibitions, talks and film screenings and a website for sharing powerful stories for positive futures. Drawing together a strong network of peers in Australian museums is another initiative, and the annual Australian Museums and Galleries Association conference is one valuable avenue for unifying and strengthening Action for Climate Empowerment within Australia's museum sector.

The temporary exhibition, *Spark: Australian Innovations Tackling Climate Change*, was designed to advance ACE. Opened in June 2021, to mark World Environment Day, the exhibition was object-focused and accessible, full of learning options in a variety of styles, and showcased collective action and 10 top solutions (from regenerative agriculture to high-tech printed solar films), an object-focused and accessible exhibition, full of learning options in a variety of styles. It is accessible on the AM's website as a 'digital twin' – a virtual tour, with some audio description, including the exhibition's AV components and with deeper-dive information available about powerful local solutions that people can help to advance (Australian Museum 2021). The exhibition presented nature-based, community-based and technological solutions, with 'Action points' for people to take forward themselves and QR codes for more in-depth information.

Providing easy pathways was a priority throughout this exhibition. The Climate Solution Centre's many strands of work are designed to make clear that to respond to the ecological and climate crisis we need everybody, everywhere – and that everyone has the power to make a significant difference. The *Spark* objects, all created by collectives of researchers, cultural experts or volunteers, were selected for their ability to highlight ways of supporting climate action that branches out from beyond their the viewer's everyday track, leading them to new connections with fellow humans and fellow species. With the objects providing a way to cut through the complexity and overwhelm, the AM is working to enable individuals to find something that resonates with them, opening up a promising way through to action.

Confronting loss and the challenge to thrive: the extinction cabinet, the video requiem and the handbag of disappearing seeds

Museum objects, in their reflective, slowed-down, out-of-the-everyday, quiet museum spaces, can help us connect to tough realisations and difficult emotions (Newell, Robin & Wehner, 2016, 5, 15–16). We often don't let ourselves fully consider the alarming implications of trying to live in a very climate-changed future. We often don't let ourselves fully think through and feel the ever-increasing losses of fellow species. For many of us, it is too terrible to sit with and our minds slip quickly away from it. Some aspects of these threats and losses can perhaps be approached in what could feel to many an emotionally 'safer', more supported way through the slightly abstracted standing-in for living, breathing situations and predicaments that artworks and other museum objects can provide us. These materialities can help the museum's audiences see and feel the value of the species, cultural productions and equilibriums that are threatened or already lost. As Olafur Eliasson reflects, 'Some communication has to be very slow, like philosophy, somehow. … I think what culture and art can offer is this slowness that also allows you to ask the bigger questions' (Doran and Page 2019). Museums are a form of 'slow media'. Our visitors enter in through the doors expecting to spend time wandering, seeing intriguing things, learning something new, reflecting. And, while sitting with these realisations, some may find a place to approach grieving for losses that have taken place and are to come. The progress of climate change has been until now a slowly creeping background of increasing disaster. Rob Nixon has spoken of its 'slow violence' wearing away at the foundations of the lives of those who have the fewest resources to shore them up (2013). But now we are increasingly thrust into sudden, wide-scale disasters – heatwaves, mega fires, monster floods, wild storms, long droughts – looming up, unexpected by many (because of the under-reporting of scientists' predictions). Museums are important channels for communicating forecasts and for acknowledging the change from our previously comfortable climate.

Venturing into the collection storerooms at the AM, we can explore the ways three sample objects help us recognise, understand and respond to losses around us. In the Mammalogy Department of the Australian Museum Research Institute there is a cabinet of extinct species. Several years ago, when she was working on climate risk and adaptation planning, Zehra asked to see the cabinet. She reflected afterwards on the difference between this cabinet and the Entomology cabinets she visited

in her first week at the museum, when she fell in love with the collections: 'There were butterflies from Papua New Guinea as large as my face with iridescent wings, they left me with a childlike excitement where I could imagine these butterflies in their time and place and I felt like a time traveller exploring the PNG jungles.' The extinction cabinet looked identical to the other cabinets but faced with these still bodies with no living counterparts, she was 'running the statistics that 200 species go extinct every day'.

> I was at a loss for how to make sense of this data, this cold quiet fact. As I looked at the animals in the extinction cabinet my stomach turned, I regretted asking to see them. I tried to imagine them animated in time and space but failed. In that cold quiet room with metal cabinets, I felt the creeping violence of the climate emergency and I just wanted to run.

There are ways we can use these objects that embody loss – with narratives, images and other ways of experiencing them in a shared space, to create for any one of us a personal 'facing up' to the reality. They help us to recognise what is gone already, paying quiet homage internally and working through to a commitment to not run away from the problem but to take positive action. Despair can come from feeling that we can't create change; that we lack the skills, knowledge, resources and reach. In the words of Raymond Williams, in *Resources of Hope*, 'to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing' (1989, 118). Through the stories we open up with the material things in our museums, spaces to sit with despair and hope are created – an important offering with the potential to inspire transformation.

Artworks are an important medium for creating connection to wicked problems like climate change. As Olafur Eliasson says:

> One of the greatest challenges today is that we often feel untouched by the problems of others and by global issues like climate change, even when we could easily do something to help. We do not feel strongly enough that we are part of a global community, part of a larger *we*. (Eliasson 2016)

Feeling ourselves as part of the larger *we*, feeling some sense of connection and responsibility not just to other people in other places but to other species, is an achievement that art works can help us to experience. One

example is Angela Tiatia's 'Tuvalu', a 3-channel video work (20:32 mins, 2016) purchased and accessioned by the AM in 2018. It is a requiem for Tuvalu. This precious atoll in the middle of the Pacific Ocean is in the process of being lost to rising seas, now that human-caused planetary warming since pre-industrial times is approaching 1.5°C. Locals manage an increasingly flooded existence as tides already over-wash a large part of the island chain twice every 24 hours. Tiatia's graceful, mesmerising scenes of everyday life – council workers sweeping off coral debris from the main road on the thin strip of land each morning, waterdrops on taro leaves, kids riding bicycles past patched houses raised on stilts, women carrying produce home through knee-high water: all are captured and revealed in meditative sequences over three screens. On display as part of the Oceania Rising: Climate Change in our Region public programme (2018), visitors could sit on benches to watch 'Tuvalu', gathering some concept of the place. They could gain a hint of what it might be like to live there, providing an avenue for recognising the lives being lived, the value of what is being lost, opening up a path for empathy. Tiatia's own story about the work, the process of its creation and her concerns for the future are archived along with the video (in digital storage as well as on USB in a presentation box in the Pacific collection storeroom). This kind of work advances the AM's commitment to amplifying voices that need to be heard on climate change. It also brings to mind David Attenborough's well-known statement: 'no one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.'

Visiting the collections storeroom where the Pacific collections are housed, there are works by specialist makers and artists across time. An old work from a Tongan maker that helps us connect to climate realities can be held in the hand. It is a handbag, made of cowrie shells, white hana seeds and bright red lopa seeds (*Adenanthera pavonina*), threaded in rows. Lady Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, an expert practitioner of Tongan cultural traditions, visited the AM's Pacific collection storeroom for a week in November 2011. During her visit to Sydney she spoke to Tongan community members and to the collections staff about changes in Tonga, including the impact of climate change on the capacity of Tongans to continue cultural practices. She drew attention to the growing scarcity of traditional materials for cultural productions. Holding up the bag, she spoke of the hana and lopa seeds that are 'disappearing; not many people are aware of that …' She continued: '… I have also noticed the scarcity of cowrie shells or indeed any shells to be found on the beaches' (Fielakepa, 2012). She spoke of how important it is to instruct young people in making traditional handicrafts and artifacts, 'so they don't die out. They

should feel that is part of them. For that to disappear – then what are we in this world, with no identity of what we are? (Fielakepa and Perkins, 2012: 06:30-07:03).

Historic collections help us recognise and comprehend the many, multi-layered losses that accompany climate change. Losing a species from the world has effects that ripple outward, through ecological and cultural communities, hard to comprehend, needing time to encompass. Visiting or viewing objects in a museum environment that speak to loss can create powerful moments of recognition and, when framed well, whether through a museum-crafted public programme or a more open-ended opportunity for collective experience, to support and potentially move forward through grief. It seems anyone dedicating significant energy to tackling the climate and biodiversity crises has a story of the moment they suddenly realised they could no longer stand idly by. Museum objects have potentials: as their stories are told, they can let us feel the accelerating state of peril our home is in and help us to recognise our duty of care.

Imagining positive futures

Finally, the fourth body of work that museum objects can do is the powerful, optimistic work of supporting the imagining of positive futures. This visioning work is something that cultural institutions are particularly well-placed to carry out, being accorded a role in the creative, reflective, idea-generative space of a society. Museums are designed, of course, to help us not just learn at arm's length, but to immerse ourselves in other ways of being. Recreating the past is relatively common. We are given fewer opportunities to see credible evocations of our possible futures. But this is crucial. Humans are not well-equipped to imagine into the future to any great distance (Marshall 2015). We were given an evolutionary advantage to deal with present threats and sort out the immediate future; less for imagining a world we might be able to create. There is suddenly, now, a distinct existential advantage in imagining these futures. There is a need to create sensorially-rich evocations of a world we could achieve together if we manage the transition to a low-emissions, biodiverse, just, regenerated world.

To see an example of how a museum can do this, we can travel out of the AM to a shopping mall in one of the regional centres near Sydney, to see the *Future Now* travelling exhibition. *Future Now*, created by the AM's Climate Solutions Centre, uses dioramas of ideal human-nature

landscapes (urban, rural, domestic) to show how we already have what we need to create the future we want: clean, safe and flourishing. Three easily-transportable 'pods' each have a landscape diorama skirted by a label rail with text, illustrations and a video with people advancing sustainability in key ways. The exhibition is highly accessible and engaging for people across a wide range of ages, interests and linguistic and physical parameters. The exhibition's text includes the ways that living sustainably helps to tackle the climate crisis, but key messages are around things that research has identified as chiming well with the values of the audiences the exhibition is meeting: showing approaches that save money and create clean air and water.

People have responded to the dioramas in ways the Climate Solutions Centre had hoped: on seeing the tiny, very well-vegetated city (Figure 23.2) with plenty of electric transport and community gardens many people exclaim that they 'would love to live there'. They want a house or apartment like the ones modelled: with their own food production on hand, pockets of habitat for wildlife, solar passive designs, batteries and electric cars.

In the 'Caring for Our Country' diorama the regenerative farm, seaweed farm and Indigenous cultural burn in progress provide ideas that have often not been considered seriously by large portions of the audience, including traditional farmers. As one person commented,

Figure 23.2 Visitors enjoying the 'Smart Towns' urban diorama, one of three mobile pods in the *Future Now* touring exhibition. On site at the Australian Museum, January 2023. Photo: Abram Powell.

'it's nice to see that sustainable living can be done in a country context'. Audience research has shown a high proportion of visitors understanding the exhibition's key messages: 'sustainability, bringing in nature'; 'looking after the country we live in, sustainability, green energy' and felt it was a positive vision: 'we should have been moving this way 20 years ago'; 'it's something to fight for'. Many people said they were already doing some of the things represented; some explained the reasons why they aren't. When asked for their favourite aspect of the exhibition, a common answer was the green city, appreciating it being 'beautiful' and its 'connection between modern living and nature'. Others spoke about the exhibition itself: 'my favourite things are that it is informative and the space it's in, a shopping centre' (FiftyFive5 2022).

At least 102,000 people engaged with the exhibition in its first four months and it will continue to reach wide audiences as it tours to regional towns over the next three years, helping people to see how taking action now helps to create a more positive future.

Talking about climate proofing our collections is, for the AM's staff, a key part of the practice of imagining and preparing for the future. During heat waves in Sydney, there are increases in visitor numbers as people take refuge from the scorching temperatures, spending the day in the large air-conditioned spaces. This new level of use needs to be acknowledged and accounted for, as the additional warmth and activity that visitors bring increases the energy load for the museum, at a time when power outages could occur. Loss of power risks the safety of collections, especially DNA collections and other specimens that require freezing or refrigeration. Extreme storms have caused problems with leaks at the museum's main site and a careful watch is kept for flooding of collection storerooms. The AM's conservators have provided advice to help save collections in the line of bushfires in public and private collections on the east coast. The AM is currently developing the Climate Change Risk and Adaptation Planning for all aspects of the AM's operations. This process started with assessing the expected extreme weather events and mapping them to the museum's buildings, businesses and stakeholders. Workshops for key staff across the museum's operations, with a climate risk consultant, centred on listing the risks the AM faces to its collections, buildings, visitors, staff and operations. Methods of preparing for climate risks are being identified – for example ensuring roofs are well-sealed against more intense storms, ensuring collections in ground-level storerooms are stored on shelves raised off the floor to avoid flood damage, including higher levels of insulation, air filtering and fire protection to cope with the intensifying

heat waves and bushfires. Adaptation reduces the financial, physical and emotional fall-out of expected events. It is sobering work mapping the projection for the museum's risk over the next ten years to the next 100. How cultural institutions will survive the challenges of the climate emergency are uncertain. Planning, preparing and ensuring we are of service to our communities during a crisis is critical to our relevance and survival.

Conclusion

As you leave the Australian Museum's building you might be reflecting on your next steps. Cultural institutions of all sizes and subject specialisations have a role in advancing Action for Climate Empowerment, ensuring public engagement in protection of the things our institutions are designed to care for. Any of us caring for a museum's materialities has an important role, connecting with communities around us and making the potentials and imperatives for collective action more visible. Supporting people to imagine and create a positive future, together, is a powerful function for cultural institutions at this juncture of planetary history. In the words of Paul Hawken in *Regeneration*:

> 'This is a watershed moment in history where all of humanity has come together, whether we realize it or not. The heating planet is our commons. It holds us all. To address and reverse warming requires connection and reciprocity … It means listening intently and respectfully, stitching together the broken strands that separate us from life and each other.' (Hawken 2021, 9)

The climate emergency is hard to live with. The AM, through careful documenting and storytelling about solutions, is communicating and supporting active hope. As museums we have the chance to try to reframe the dominant narrative around climate change. We get to pose new questions and show, through sharing diverse stories circling around potent objects, the vast array of solutions that already exist. We can guide people through disengagement and despair and provide the tools to demand and build a better world.

Notes

1   Australian Museum, 2020. 'Our Organisation', https://australian.museum/about/organisation/ Accessed 10 January 2023.
2   Australian Museum, 2020. 'Our Organisation', https://australian.museum/about/organisation/ Accessed 10 January 2023.
3   Scope 1 emissions are those that an entity makes directly (such as a company running boilers and vehicles). Scope 2 emissions are indirect; from consuming energy produced elsewhere (such as using electricity produced at a coal-fired power station). Scope 3 emissions are those that an entity is indirectly responsible for, produced by others up and down the company's value chain (such as buying and shipping plastic products from suppliers) (Australian Government 2023).
4   Tim Georgeson, *Requiem for a Forest,* 2020. Edition 3 of 4 + 2AP . Video and sound installation: 1 channel film, and *Renaissance*, 2020. Edition 2 of 6 + 1 AP. Archival pigment print, 70 x 120 cm. Donated to the Australian Museum 2022.
5   John Dahlsen, *Echoes Totems*, 2014. Six totem poles. Perspex, ply, found objects. Donated to the Australian Museum 2020.
6   An EMu database. While the database as a whole is not currently accessible online, as a period of reworking is underway, the natural history records are available online through the Atlas of Living Australia. https://biocache.ala.org.au/occurrence/search?q=institution_uid:in4#tab_recordsView.

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24

Making and stewarding digital collections: case studies and concerns

Hannah Turner, Reese Muntean and Kate Hennessy

Introduction

Museums and cultural institutions have been working with and collecting born digital and digitised object data for nearly 50 years. Discourse in academic communities that study the management, access to, and return of collections and their documentation has engaged with issues in both the practical work of the care of collections and digitisation, and how this intersects with repatriation or the return of objects and belongings to communities of origin (Bell 2015; Bell, Christen and Turin 2013; Christen 2011). The practice of making and remaking copies is not new (Frazier 1973; Hollinger 2022; Risdonne et al. 2022); but the amount of data management and questions for stewarding digital collections is. As museum practitioners and scholars we are interested in the questions that the management of this digital information raises about the kinds of objects that are created – in anthropology, museum practice, contemporary art, and beyond. We contend that this is a reframing of old ideas about 'digital preservation' and 'documentation' toward an ethic of how we can care for digital cultural heritage, digitised belongings, and all of the ways in which our institutions, technologies and awareness must continue to shift practice (Hou et al. 2022). These debates are closely connected to concepts of intellectual property (especially the intellectual property regime imposed by a colonial, settler-state) and digital sovereignty, a call to extend the boundaries of Indigenous protocols and rights into web-based or computerised spaces (Fragnito et al. 2019; Sharma 2022; Wemigwans 2018).

This paper plots one case study, the digitisation of a mask at the MOV in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, to address the complexities of what is at stake when museums are tasked with caring for the mp3 files, full-size digital images, rendered models and metadata that make up digital records. We, three settler academics and a digital designer, were tasked by the museum to help the museum capture a mask as a document of its condition at a point in time. We provided the technical services as the museum worked through their own process of repatriation and shared stewardship of digital records, work that is always ongoing (Fortney 2020). We encourage readers to view this not as a laudation of museum methods or the inherent right of institutions to keep objects, belongings and data as records; but rather a document of a moment in time in the history of what we hope is a trajectory toward more examples of transferred ownership and control. We also want to suggest that museum work is moored in colonial relations which extend far beyond the control of individual museum staff: colonial structures like capitalism, extraction, and pollution run very deep and are harmful (Liboiron 2021). We do believe however, especially as settler academics, that we are responsible for understanding and doing the least harm we can in these reparative processes, but acknowledge this is a difficult and nearly impossible task (Moreton-Robinson 2015). We want to acknowledge that our careers, and hopefully other scholars and practitioners, will benefit from the shared analysis in the publication of this book.

Approaching digital stewardship

The concept of digital stewardship comes from much earlier care of collections literature that focuses on the fact that museum objects or belongings do not exist in a vacuum; more directly, because of the history of unethical collecting and stealing, many items in ethnographic collections rightfully belong to, for example, a tribal nation, Indigenous community, or band (Clavir 2002). The goal of contemporary collections and museum work, as it has evolved after decades of activism and collaborative planning, should be to arrive at a way to transfer ownership back to community. As Fortney (2020) argues, using the term 'stewardship' respects this legacy, and can serve as a reminder that museums are not the responsible owners they are made out to be, and can perhaps be seen as stewards of belongings *in the meantime* (Sharma 2014), instead of *in perpetuity*.

When working at the intersection of museum care or preservation of material heritage, museums and Indigenous researchers and cultural knowledge holders (particularly in North America) have worked together to define and take into account other ways of caring for belongings. Often described as preserving or recognising differing ontologies or alternative ways of knowing, these models take into account the lived experience of seeing ones' belongings in collections storehouses, as well as the shared difficulties in navigating access to belongings from institutions around the world (Clavir 2002; Duffek and Wilson 2021; Fortney 2020). Digital care, as we will discuss throughout, is the preservation or care of digital representations of museum collections (Clavir 2002). This includes respecting belongings and originating community desires, wishes, and ways of knowing during the design and implementation of any digitisation project – from respecting which images can be taken to ensuring that certain belongings are protected. As we will elaborate upon here, it also concerns how digital objects, in particular 3D scanned representations, can afford new interactions or relationships between institutions and communities. This technology has only highlighted longstanding issues such as ownership, intellectual rights, the repatriation of the belongings themselves, and the representations of the traditional knowledge of that belonging.

We want to explore some of the questions that have arisen about the scanning and construction of digital 3D scanned models in museums and interrogate how media and software affordances may limit (or alternatively, enable) other forms of engagement with digital objects that do not conform to Eurocentric ontologies or ideals. We are proposing to extend a theory of a relational performative digital affordance that expands Gibson (1979), Hutchby (2001) and Nagy and Neff's (2015) work and explores how people – desires, cultural protocols, skills, knowledges – can shape the outcomes of new digital tools to create objects that are emancipated (or not) from current power structures. Principally, this work challenges specific digital affordances in the context of repatriation and ethical digital object management (a subject that mixes technologies, designers, museum professionals, cultural knowledge safe-keepers and artists) to plan for future generations.

Despite the global infrastructures that connect our digital networks, caring for records and digital documents is also always a local issue, and is always intimately connected to the specifics of individuals, institutions and lands. The work for this chapter was conducted in the Making Culture Lab at the School of Interactive Art and Technology at Simon Fraser University, in 2017 in collaboration with the MOV.

As a research group, we sought to work in collaboration with museums and communities in Vancouver, engage with our questions concerning digital care, affordance and the potentialities of good relations and ethical standards when it comes to digital representations in museum collections. We would also like to share our use of the term 'belongings' throughout this paper. This is gifted through previous work by xʷməθkʷəy̓əm curator Jordan Wilson, on collaborating with the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Indian Band and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia as part of the exhibit, 'c̓əsnaʔəm, the city before the city'. In that work, curators adopted the language of the exhibit advisory committee for speaking about what was removed from c̓əsnaʔəm, a xʷməθkʷəy̓əm ancient village site that is now part of what we know as Vancouver. Instead of referring to artifacts or objects, the term belongings is a reminder they still belong to the ancestors who crafted them and used them in their everyday lives (Duffek and Wilson 2021; Muntean et al. 2015; Wilson 2016). Antithetical to belongings, museum objects or artefacts collected and stored in North America are settler-colonialism inventions of evidence.

Alongside the critical historical approach to understanding collections documentation, there has been at least a decade of experimentation in the use of 3D imaging, scanning, modelling and printing used to document cultural heritage all over the world. Because of this, there is a growing interest in the practices and processes required to build digital 3D reproductions, and how values are encoded into digital systems (Hollinger 2022; Limp et al. 2011; Sharma and Singh 2022). Digital representations, scanned and modelled in 3D, are now seen not just as experimental media, but as useful for preservation and long-term care for museum collections. With these new attitudes towards technologies that are used to document and represent both material and intangible heritage, there is also increasing care being taken in designing digitisation projects. These issues come most into relief when working with traditional or proprietary collections from Indigenous or originating communities.

Affordances and relationships

This shared work has become a chance to critically reflect on the concept that technologies are, or can, afford new relations between museums and their communities. Is this different from earlier media forms, and how have representational media changed or affected our

understanding of cultural heritage and the requirements needed to preserve and document it? There are a myriad of examples of recent digitisation of cultural heritage in museums.[1] Yet, collaborative digitisation projects that also seek to repatriate collections are less common.[2] One example of an institutionalised relationship is at the Smithsonian Institution and the Repatriation Office, where the team has been engaged in several experimental and successful 3D scanning projects with collections that were repatriated under US NAGPRA (1990) law and the NMAI Act (1989). The first, a Tlingit hat, the Kéet S'aaxw Killer Whale hat produced by the Smithsonian's Repatriation Office and the Office of Exhibits Central is a remarkable example of the use of scanning and manufacturing technologies to create a high-quality facsimile of a clan crest belonging (Hollinger 2022; Hollinger et al. 2013). The original hat was returned to its rightful clan leader, Mark Jacobs, Jr., of the Tlingit community in 2005, but the community later gave permission for the museum to laser scan the hat and display its reproduction. The replica was presented to the community in 2012 for feedback and to show them the technology firsthand. They scanned more hats in a workshop over the course of the four-day conference, offering the community a close look at the technology and the process. The original and replica hats were danced together 'to put life into the hat by dancing it at least once' (Hollinger 2013, 212) before the replica was taken back to the museum, though the replica could be checked out of the museum to be danced by community members when properly authorised by the Tlingit community. From the process and feedback received, the community saw the value of digital scanning as a way to safeguard an important belonging by having a backup and detailed replica, and the museum could display replicas of belongings that might be spiritually sensitive or requiring climate control or additional security. Community members' concerns were also eased by seeing the scanning process, and they recognised that the scanning technology was just another tool like the knives that were used to carve the hats before.

The Other Nefertiti, a digital scan and artistic intervention by the artists Nora Al-badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles, is another example of 3D scanning that brings attention to the absence of discussions around colonialism, belonging, and ownership The artists reportedly surreptitiously scanned the Nefertiti bust in Berlin's Neues Museum and released the 3D scan data, a video of their process, and made a printed replica available for view in Egypt (The Nefertiti Hack, n.d.

https://nefertitihack.alloversky.com/). Anthropologist Haidy Geismar wrote about this project as

> a double hack: drawing attention to museum hoarding not just of ancient collections but of their digital doubles and using the tools of data collection and presentation to undo the regimes of authority and property over which the museum still asserts sovereignty, mocking the redemptive claims of so- called 'digital repatriation' (Geismar 2018, 111).

Al-Badri and Nelles argue that the project interrogates what happens when one releases museum intellectual property, the 'data' of the collection, to the public. For institutions, who purport to call themselves public, like the Neues Museum in Berlin where the scan was taken, releasing this information for 'free' over the internet and allowing others to 'mod' the results is – according to Al-Badri and Nelles – an ultimate expression of pure public knowledge. Whether or not this is true, the project has since aimed to narrate the experience of the Nefertiti bust through using a simple AI Chatbot system – NefertitiBot. Nefertitibot, as Al-Badri writes, is a bot:

> through which material objects of other cultures in museums of the Global North will start speaking for themselves shaking off the violent colonial patina by deconstructing the fiction inherent in institutional narratives and challenging the politics of representation (Al-Badri 2019).

Objects and belongings who literally and actually 'speak for themselves' are rare, and this project, at least for a moment, disrupts this. It highlights the need for activists and members of communities who own belongings to continue critiquing and speaking on behalf of their tangible and intangible heritages. The permutations and responses to the Nefertiti scan online show a small but interested group of people have printed the bust in their homes or workplaces, and have made videos and remixes of the bust. Further, Al-Badri and Nelles printed the bust and buried it in the sand outside of Cairo. Although different in terms of their goals, (the Kéet S'aaxw scan to enable and further education about repatriation of the original hat, and the Other Nefertiti created to raise international awareness about the continued power of institutions to maintain their voice and privilege), both raise questions about how 3D scanning as a technology can enable, or afford, other relations.

The philosophical concept of affordance connotes how epistemologies are encoded into technological infrastructures. In the age of digital reproduction, the age of virtual scanned models and algorithmic representations, the concept of affordance has gained credence as we consider not only the representation itself but the reproduction technology, the modelling software, and the individuals who code, scan and produce the representations. Indeed, all of these are immaterial, and illusive materialities afford new relations. As a general concept, affordances and constraints define the material bounds of the object or technology, where the technology in conjunction with a user allows for a specific engagement. Affordances do not necessarily prescribe this engagement, but rather they are the loose bounds wherein human action can shape or change the outcome. Much of this thinking arose from ecological psychology (Gibson 1979) and its application to domains of human–computer interaction (Norman 1988; 1998; 1999), sociology, and information and science studies. In studies of technology, it has been common to assume a stance that suggests inanimate technical devices are the reason for change itself; or the alternative, that humans are the only actors in complex webs of human–technology relationships. For Gibson, as Hutchby (2001) explains, the concept of affordance can reconcile this, where technologies are not seen to have what he calls 'essential technical' properties but affordances. That is, they have the 'functional and relational aspects that frame, while not determining the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object' (Hutchby 2001, 444). This concept of affordance suggests that technological objects can afford certain ways of being and acting around them, and that this is a kind of active participation, but they are not solely responsible for human relations. In the context of work in materiality (or the renewed Western interest in object–human relations), affordances 'can and should be defined to include properties of technologies that are "imagined" by users, by their fears, their expectations and their uses, as well as by those of the designers' (Nagy and Neff 2015, 4). While Nagy and Neff are interested in defining the term affordance, they also complicate its use, attending to the 'latent, assumed, false, hidden, masked, and blackboxed muck of socio-technical systems', and that these theories have often overlooked our effectual and emotional aspects of engagement of technologies (Nagy and Neff 2015, 4). These issues are not necessarily new or a product of computing environments, but they do take on resonance when considering digital model-making, and as Christine Hine has said, they act as a technology that can bring to light the uncomfortable practices of the past (Hine 2005, 7).

New technologies, new relations? Scanning a mask at the MOV

In 2017, we were contacted by Sharon Fortney, Curator of Indigenous Collections and Engagement, at the MOV in Vancouver, BC. We were asked if it would be possible to make a high-resolution digital model of another belonging, this time a set of carved, wooden masks. Fortney was working closely with a family from a local nation to return some family property that was used in a secret society context. The repatriation was preceded by a community loan, and as many of the typical requirements of a loan agreement had to be nullified – such as those related to handling and modification of objects, the family and museum staff jointly agreed to create a digital preservation plan that involved new digital photographs and 3D scans. The Making Culture Lab was contacted by MOV, with consent of the family, to determine if this work was feasible. The museum and the family were both thinking about the long-term preservation of knowledge related to the belongings, which were about to be modified for re-activation, and wanted to have a full digital model available as the belonging had historical significance for its source community, in addition to its role within the secret society. The hope was that the museum could retain better digital 'copies' of these originals to fulfil its duty of long-term preservation to the Indigenous nation, while returning the actual belongings to the appropriate family. This was the first time the museum repatriated to a family, and not a community, and the masks were first returned through a long-term loan. As the masks would be modified for use, there was a desire to document them in as much detail as possible. Another complexity was that the belongings were from a secret society, and therefore not to be shown outside of ceremonial contexts, and there has since the 1980s been a ban on photography of such material at MOV. This raises many important issues around the protection of the 3D scan data as well. When working at the intersection of museum work to return and the publishing requirements of academic positions, how do we, or how could we, speak about the process and the possibilities while retaining the secret and private nature of both the repatriation and the final digital models? Our solution was to scan another belonging – a mask for public performance – that exhibited some of the same physical qualities (wooden, painted) and could be used as a test object. It is this belonging that is shown below, and which we describe in more detail. In our conversation about the original belongings, we discussed beforehand that the Indigenous nation and
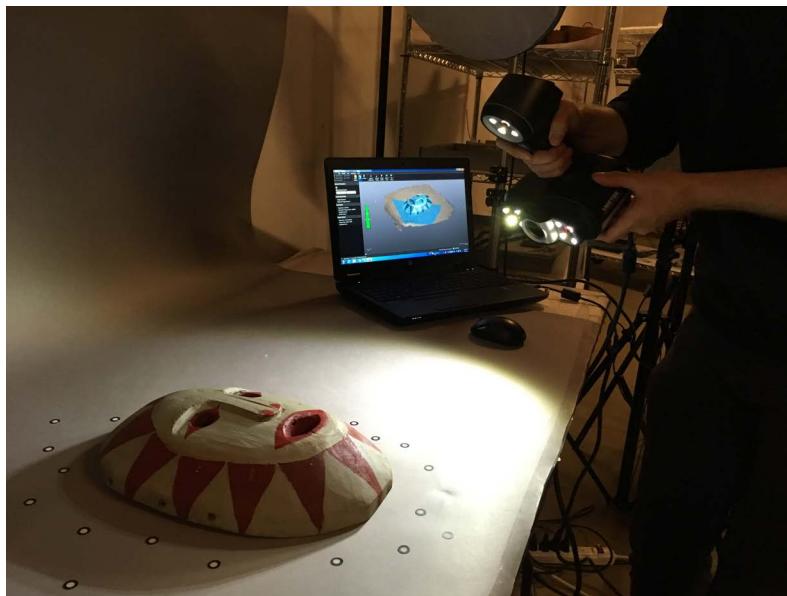
Figure 24.1 Mask, prepared for 3D Scanning, MOV. Photo courtesy Turner, Muntean and Hennessy.

the family would retain the rights to all the digital images and scan data created, despite the involvement of both the museum and the digital modeller.

The mask shown in Figures 24.1 and 24.2 is a Northwest Coast public performance or festival mask from the MOV collection. This mask, and several other wooden pieces in the Northwest Coast collection, were repainted in the mid-twentieth century by museum staff to 'conserve' them. At the time, painting over belongings in the collection was a common way that items were preserved. This history of the belonging within the museum is part of the reason the community and the museum found it beneficial to have the mask documented with photogrammetry or a scan to document the layers of paint and the physical changes over time. We began by scanning the mask in situ in the museum with a Creaform scanner. With the help of the Centre for Digital Media (CDM)[3], we worked with designer Conrad Sly to use the scans to create a digital model. During our previous work with digital scanners, we attempted to achieve the most accurate scan with the scanner itself and the accompanying software; here the digital model that was created was more of an interpretation by the modeller and artist. We had this sense that the scanner is 'capturing' or 'recording' the information of the
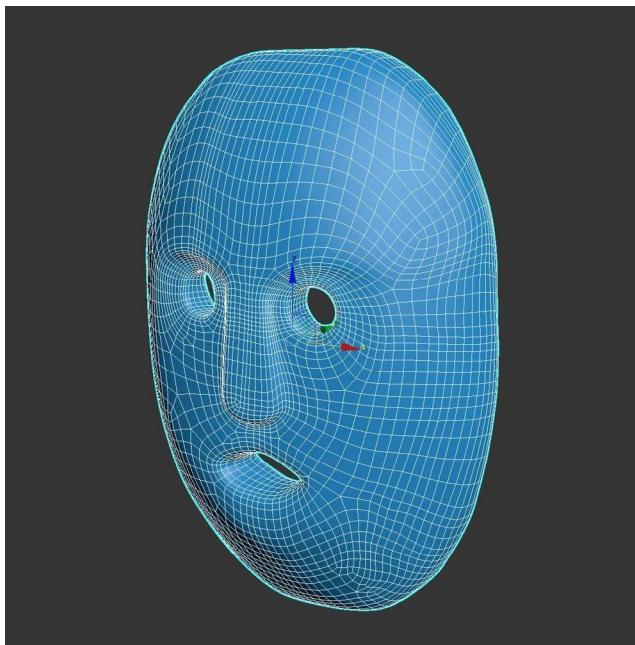
Figure 24.2 Mask, Screen capture, Re-topologised after scanning, MOV. Photo courtesy Conrad Sly.

mask, and to some extent it is, but perhaps it is more helpful to think of this as the raw data from the scan that must be processed. Once the scan was made, Conrad used the raw data to craft the topographic map of the mask; he digitally drew over the scan data to create a map that would allow for different lighting and texture effects to be applied. When we see the resulting 3D digital model, we imagine it to be 3D, but it does not actually exist in three dimensions, it is a 2D image rendered to incorporate these lighting and texture effects. The scanning and artistic 3D modelling processes raise questions about intellectual property. It might be simple enough to agree that the scan data belongs to the same family or community as the belonging it represents. But who makes the decisions around how the 3D digital representations are made? Because of the kinds of values we place in new technologies – that somehow technological devices are neutral, based on the affordances of the technology – we may assume that this question does not even warrant asking. Digital documentation is often created both by individuals and contractors, but that which is being represented can still participate in protocol regimes and responsibilities tied to the belonging in community,

which is why considering transferring the ownership of images and documentation in repatriation requests, even if this idea is moored in Canadian-centric approaches to intellectual property law, is important as well.

The process and practices of scanning raised many questions for repatriation that are important to plotting trajectories for digital stewardship that move beyond digital preservation models as well (Cronin 2015; Magnani, Guttorm and Magnani 2018). How do we respect original knowledge holders in the creation of 3D models? Should we, and how can we, assign proper data rights to digital models? To what extent should we modify original scans for the purposes of education and sharing? How do we safely and properly scan belongings – in what instances should this work take place? An important part of the work is the structuring of a useful data asset management or digital preservation plan. Working through the complexities of property rights and management is of current interest so that digital models can be cared for, similar to the belongings themselves, when the original belonging is returned to the family or community (Younging 2016; Roth 2018). This work should be carefully documented, like the Kéet S'aaxw mask, to ensure that the digital rights and protocols can be protected, and the intellectual property still remains with the original maker's family rather than with the museum or model maker. Yet, the standards that exist for safeguarding digital representations or 3D models when a belonging has been repatriated are not well established (Hollinger 2022), and in many cases the digital and physical records of repatriated belongings are kept in the museum. If museums continue to act as custodians of these models, photographs, or other documentation and data, scanning could prove to be a way forward to returning more belongings back to their communities when requested and when appropriate. And yet, the handheld scanners that we use also have constraints: they do not work very well for scanning furs and textiles. In a way, this technology actually privileges the material outputs of male labour (like stone and bone) while refusing to scan the textiles that highlight the skill and work of women. While furs and textiles may be more difficult to conserve than stone, for example, the process for digitally safeguarding textile-based belongings is similarly problematic for attempting to preserve a digital representation. Quality also came into play when questioning whether 3D scanning was truly offering something more than could be achieved with photographs.

Ultimately, the process of creating a digital model is not a neutral process. The MOV is one example of an institution that is looking to return belongings but has been asked to safeguard the digital data. The museum

has conflicting mandates from the community to both preserve certain items, while letting them be used by the rightful individuals. Creating a 3D model is one option, and everyone in the community expressed interest in exploring this form of preservation. The hardware, software and human factors of the scanning process all impact the final model. If the scanning and modelling process is seen as subjective, perhaps including information about the scanner and software used along with the scanner technician and 3D modeller in the metadata or collections database could be a way to have a fuller picture of the model. When doing this work with communities, it remains worth asking: Does this information even matter, or could it be seen as detracting from the belonging itself? If we want to ensure the safety and longevity of a digital representation, can we guarantee that we will never lose a file even when following best practices? For digital models of belongings, who will care for this data should also be considered (the community and/or a museum) and where the data will be stored.

Digital Affordances, Stewardship and Collections Care

In this praxis, we are asking how we care for this digital representation and respect it as both a belonging and preservation practice, much akin to Alpert-Adams, Bliss and Carbajal's notion of archival Post-Custodialism (2019). How do we – or how should we – care for collections now, when there are no longer just physical belongings or audio recordings in our museums and archives but immeasurable data points, and unruly, large databases. In this case, we saw the possibilities in having a digital representation stand to be important for both the family and the museum and fulfil shared goals. Yet, there are always issues when working with museum budgets and capacities. This project was very low budget, in part due to the already existing resources at the Making Culture Lab like the 3D scanners. Other institutions certainly do not have resources like this. However, photogrammetry is another option that is much more lightweight and produces similar (if not better) results. Further, the control and the protection of the data itself is still under question. Aside from hard disks that are password protected, the museum does not have a shared strategy to protect it long term, outside of their regular institutional norms. Do new metadata categories need to exist to ensure these digitised objects are protected yet preserved? Managed properly yet controlled (ultimately) by individuals external to the institution? What are the other issues that might potentially arise? All of these questions

are important, and speak to the necessity of developing digital care frameworks for similar projects and institutions.

Digital affordance comes to mean the infrastructure of the technology – from concept to design to the actual and practical work of making it. As information scholars, media-makers, and anthropologists, we are interested in both the political-ethical ramifications of new digitisation technologies, but also the embodied and lived practices of those who create these representations. Digital models do not simply appear on a machine – they are crafted by human beings. From the impossible-to-count number of individuals who coded the original scanning software, to the individuals who originally created the object being scanned, to the photographer conducting photogrammetry or manipulating the code through the software of how light should look in a particular digital setting, these are all issues of digital affordance. They are importantly about process and relationships, and about the shared responsibility when designing digitised belongings with care. Reframing objects as belongings is an attempt to extricate them out of the evidentiary regimes of science and colonialism. Without repatriation, dismantling these regimes is even more difficult. Perhaps digitisation can be of further help in repatriation efforts, but technological solutions are often caught within the same regimes of value in which 'artefacts' were produced. In this sense, the affordances of digital representations have the potential to emancipate but equally to re-entrench historical inequalities.

Notes

1   Mukurtu Content Management System, mukurtu.org, active 25 November 2022; Reciprocal Research Network, rrncommunity.org, active 25 November 2022; Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures, grasac.artsci.utoronto.ca, active November 25th, 2022; The Inuvialuit Living History Project web portal, inuvialuitlivinghistory.ca, active November 25th 2022; The Plateau Peoples' Web Portal, plateauportal.libraries.wsu.edu, active November 25th 2022.
2   Exceptions to this are outside of North America, like the recently launched Digital Benin project (https://digitalbenin.org/).
3   Centre for Digital Media is a multidisciplinary graduate institute in Vancouver, BC.

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25

Responses in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake: a conversation

Fuyubi Nakamura and Hiroyasu Yamauchi

Introduction: March 11, 2011

On 11 March 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake hit Japan. Combined with the subsequent tsunami and nuclear disaster, it caused unbelievable damage to the Great Eastern region of Japan, especially the northeastern region known as Tohoku.[1] This triple disaster is officially called the Great East Japan Earthquake (Higashi nihon daishinsai; 東日本大震災), or commonly referred to as 3.11 (san ten ichi ichi) in Japan. Since 3.11, both authors have been involved with various activities including, but not limited, to museum works (see Nakamura, 2012, 2021; Yamauchi, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022).

The Rias Ark Museum of Art in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture where Yamauchi works suffered damage by the earthquake, but survived the tsunami. The structure was distorted, and the walls and floors sustained cracks. Four sculptures in the collection were damaged but were repaired, while the rest of the collection was unaffected. As of March 2011, the museum had 12 staff with five other people working on-site in security, cleaning and restaurant roles. In the aftermath of the disaster, three curators, one of them being then the deputy director, initially stayed on and lived at the museum for 10 days, and then, the deputy director and Yamauchi for 25 days and then only Yamauchi, for 40 days in total. The school gymnasium next to the museum served as an evacuation centre for local residents, but as civil servants, Yamauchi and his colleagues were asked to stay and manage the museum. The deputy director and Yamauchi lost their home, so the museum became their

Figure 25.1 Hisai-butsu and photographs on display in the *Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and History of Tsunami Disaster* exhibition at the Rias Ark Museum of Art, Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. Photo by Fuyubi Nakamura, January 2023.

shelter. The museum served as a distribution centre for a while. It kept some food and clothing temporarily until around 16 March, and then heating equipment and other emergency supplies until early May that year. In addition to the storage areas, the backyard and loading bay were used to store objects rescued across the disaster areas by a team from the Committee for Salvaging Cultural Properties and other Materials, initiated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and led by the National Museum of Japanese History. The deputy directly was involved with this project, but Yamauchi was not.

The curators started to document the disaster areas by taking photographs soon after, and also collected what Yamauchi calls hisai-butsu, literally meaning 'victim object,' following the Japanese word for a victim, hisai-sha (Yamauchi 2016, 127; 2022, 24–27). Hisai-butsu 'are not just remains that show how objects got destroyed, but they are inevitable sentences that make up a story called life … Even when the remaining objects in the disaster area have lost their original meaning or function, they embody many memories that evoke imagination of what life in that location would have been' (Yamauchi 2018, 8). These photographs and hisai-butsu make up their powerful and poignant permanent exhibition, *Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and History of Tsunami Disaster*, which opened in April 2013 (Figure 25.1).

Deriving from the past 10 years of her engagement in the disaster region since 2011 (see Nakamura 2012), Nakamura curated an exhibition entitled, *A Future for Memory: Art and After the Great East Japan Earthquake* at the Museum of Anthropology, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada[2] in 2021 during the tenth anniversary of 3.11 (Nakamura 2021).[3] Nakamura first met Yamauchi in December 2016 sometime after she had started preparing for her exhibition. Apart from COVID-19 in 2020, the authors have met each other in Kesennuma every year since. As the exhibition took place during the pandemic, none of her collaborators could travel to Canada from Japan, thus Nakamura organised an online tour and a series of online conversations with them. The following is an extensively abridged and edited version of the conversation Nakamura and Yamauchi had in Japanese on 23 June 2021 and its recording published online with English subtitles on 3 August 2021 during the exhibition.[4] Our conversation offers insights into the complexities and responsibilities of caring for both people and objects – as well as the natural world – before, during, and after life-changing and region-shaping events.

A Conversation for *A Future for Memory*

Nakamura: Among the works at *A Future for Memory* are 32 photographs and one illustration from the *Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and History of Tsunami Disaster* exhibition at the Rias Ark Museum of Art. On 11 March 2011, Kesennuma was violently shaken by the earthquake, and its coastal region was then devasted by the ensuing tsunami. To begin, could you tell us what you experienced that day?

Yamauchi: First, we were hit by a massive earthquake. Earthquakes are not uncommon for us living along the Sanriku coast.[5] I had experienced many major earthquakes prior to 3.11. The one on 11 March, however, was rather different. What made it different was its magnitude – over a nine on the magnitude scale. The earthquake's magnitude was, using the word deliberately, absurd. There have only been three such earthquakes in recorded history. It can only be expressed as part of this scale. I was at the museum that day. Structurally, the museum is a three-floored building, steel framed and filled with reinforced concrete. Each floor's ceilings are rather high, so the building's height is comparable to a five-floor apartment building. I was in a storage room on the first floor. It first

came as a terrible rumbling sound from the earth. Hearing that deep bass groan, I knew something bad was coming.

Nakamura: You knew right away.

Yamauchi: You could say we're well-versed in earthquake rumbles. We can get a good idea of the hypocentre of an earthquake just from the sound. We had an earthquake on 9 March, which sounded similar, something that came deep from the plates under the seafloor off the coast of Miyagi. We knew this rumble, one we hadn't heard in a while, usually preceded a large earthquake. And, a tsunami came also, several dozen centimetres high. In 2010, we had the Chile earthquake and tsunami, which devasted the Sanriku coast's aquaculture industry. Terribly destructive, a real catastrophe. I remember feeling in my gut something even more terrible was coming. It was in the way it shook that told us something bad was about to happen.

Nakamura: Somehow you all knew.

Yamauchi: I felt that way, at least. But this expectation wasn't made in isolation. Twenty years ago in 2000, the government made public a prediction. The prediction stated that within the next 30 years there was a 99 per cent probability that an earthquake exceeding magnitude eight would occur with an epicentre off the coast of Miyagi and cause a large tsunami to inundate regions along the Sanriku coast.

Nakamura: Experts had long advanced this hypothesis.

Yamauchi: This was an official predication submitted by the pillars of Japan's scientific community. We'd been forced to live with the weight of this prediction on our backs for a decade. That's why I felt so frightened after the earthquake on 9 March. The rumbling that day sounded like a low groan, like it came from a long distance away. Then the shaking began, massive shaking. And then came 11 March. We'd never heard that kind of rumbling before. It was a rumbling from deep in the earth. I don't know how else to put it, but this sound … It was like the thunder after a massive lightning strike. A crash that makes you plug your ears. It was a deep bass *grrrr* emanating from the ground beneath your feet. And then the shaking began.

The shaking doesn't come all at once. It's not like a sudden shift. They come from a moving plate. It builds. Slowly but unerringly. The first big shake came with a jolt. After that the whole world swayed. The increments between massive jolts began to shrink. In a word, it felt like the world went from swaying to falling apart. And it sped up. It was like the width of the swaying was the same yet sped up. It felt like everything was over.

Standing was out of the question. Maybe this is metaphorical, but I could swear the concrete around me turned to jelly before my eyes. Maybe my eyes couldn't process what was happening properly.

After that, the shaking sped up even more. Put bluntly, I expected the museum to collapse. I was on the first floor and knew in that event I would be crushed. There was nothing I could do against that unrelenting shaking except resign myself to the possibility of being buried alive. Then the most frightening part of all. Typical earthquakes tend to last one to two minutes. This one didn't let up. On that day, that incredible shaking lasted six minutes. This kind of shaking told you it was ripping everything apart. I thought an earthquake this size would surely be the end of me.

Nakamura: And this was even before the tsunami hit.

Yamaichi: Before, yes. The first thing I remember thinking was, 'OK, we're having an earthquake.' Then, 'Wow, now this is an earthquake.' Halfway through, I wondered whether this was something entirely different.

Nakamura: You'd never experienced something like that before.

Yamauchi: It was so extreme that I began doubting it was an earthquake at all. This went beyond what we commonly call 'earthquakes'. This was a seismic shift. I expected to see the whole city swallowed by a massive fissure in the earth's crust like something out of a movie. The shaking was just that bad … We could finally spring into action once those terrible six minutes passed and the earthquake subsided. The museum's fire doors, however, had been automatically locked. And we had no electricity. Luckily, there were few public visitors that day. We guided the ones there out of the building. Our museum is built on a mountain and we knew the museum would most likely avoid a direct hit no matter the tsunami's size. When I finally managed to exit the museum to check on the situation outside, I saw the parking lot filling up with cars. The emergency broadcasts over the city loudspeakers from city hall and the fire department had already begun. I strained my ears to hear the announcements. But perhaps since our area was considered a safe zone, the acoustics were not designed with us in mind. I couldn't hear what the announcements were saying. All I heard was echoing feedback.

Nakamura: You couldn't make them out.

Yamauchi: According to the people fleeing from below, they were calling for a six-metre tsunami. I immediately thought, 'No way.' Six metres? What I mean is, it was far smaller than I expected.

Nakamura: At that point.

Yamauchi: I wouldn't have been surprised if they said a 20-metre tsunami was coming. Because I knew such a tsunami had already occurred in this region's history. A tsunami in 1896 had reached over 20 metres here. I knew six metres wasn't close to what we should expect. I had poured over records of the 1896 Sanriku earthquake tsunami and knew its history inside and out. But somehow people today hear and learn these same things and arrive at the opposite judgement, saying, 'Such a thing couldn't happen today!'

Nakamura: They'd taken the opposite conclusion, assuming such a tall tsunami could never happen again.

Yamauchi: You know what made it worse? After the 2010 Chile earthquake and tsunami occurred, predictions said a three-metre tsunami would reach our shores, but only a one-metre tsunami arrived. Complaints were levelled against the Japan Meteorological Agency, 'How could you make such an overblown prediction? We had to close our factories.' The Agency even held a press conference to formally apologise.

Nakamura: You'd think people would instead be relieved knowing the tsunami had been smaller than expected…

Yamauchi: Why didn't the Agency firmly stand behind their decision and say that their predictions were made for nothing less than the protection of the people's very lives? If there was a possibility of a three-metre tsunami on its way, then they should sound the evacuation order and tell people a three-meter tsunami might be on its way! That a smaller tsunami arrived with less damage than expected. I wish one of them had risked their neck, stood up in anger, and said, 'You've got to be kidding!'

Nakamura: I completely agree.

Yamauchi: But no. They had to apologise. And so, on that day, 11 March 2011, many heard the announcement and turned up their noses. 'Six meters, no way. Another exaggeration!' they said.

Nakamura: They felt this way even after that unbelievable earthquake?

Yamauchi: Unfortunately, yes. Frankly, I couldn't believe it. Many of these people had experienced the 1960 Chile tsunami. Especially the elderly. Many people of that generation simply didn't evacuate. A staggering number felt the second floor of their house was enough despite the evacuation order. At least, this is what I've heard from people who experienced that earlier tsunami and realised this would be more serious. They said many people argued, 'I was fine upstairs for the last one, so I should be fine upstairs for this one too.' I expect that if people had been exposed to better information and clearer perspectives, then

11 March would have unfolded very differently. And then the tsunami came. It arrived at Kesennuma around 3:30pm. People the world over had begun seeing it hitting the other coastal areas since around 3pm over the news on the television. But there we were. The electricity was out. No TV. We had no information.

Nakamura: Right, there was no real live information.

Yamauchi: Still, I did manage to catch the emergency announcement from the city. I went up on the museum's roof. The rooftop overlooks the city. Looking down, I saw something like a white cloud about 100 meters high churning over the city. I was watching the scene with my boss at the time. He stood dumbfounded. All he said was, 'Oh no. It's ocean spray. This is bad.' It's difficult to say whether this was a cloud of dust or a spray of water. It's like when a cloud of dust rises up when a building falls. Even more spews up after an explosion. Essentially, this cloud of dust and water spewed up as buildings were mowed over. It was white. Dust from the entire town was being ejected into the air. If you looked closely, you could make out 400-ton tuna fishing boats bobbing about around what you could've sworn was the harbour.

At first, I thought the ships were being driven to deeper ocean. Ship workers sometimes do this to avoid the worst of the tsunami, saving the boats. The idea, very much like a surfer paddling over a smaller wave, is that you can ride over the smaller waves out in the deeper ocean. After 3.11, this practice is no longer recommended. Many sailors were lost in their attempts. But these boats I saw were unpiloted. They were already at the whim of the tsunami, flinging left and right. I then realised that these massive boats were not moving in from the ocean at all but were careening over the city submerged under 10 metres of water. You could just make this out from our vantage point. The boats were travelling backwards. You can tell from their shape. The wheelhouses protrude out of the back of the ship's hull. The front side is flat. So, if you see boats moving with the cabin this way you know they're moving backwards. This was an absolute catastrophe. To make matters worse, the sun was going to set soon. This was late winter. March, you know?

Nakamura: March is by no means warm.

Yamauchi: It started snowing. Kesennuma saw a light snow. It was just as the light snow began, just as the sun was setting, when Kesennuma became engulphed in fire. The white cloud of dust and spray turned into a black cloud of smoke as we watched. We watched the fire spread across the bay. We could see the fire moving about this fast with the naked eye.

That was from our vantage far away, up on our museum. We were five to six kilometres away. Maybe more. Less than 10 kilometres. But we could see the flames creeping along. I watched in disbelief. How is it spreading so fast? An inquiry later found out.

The houses had been split apart and large pieces of lumber were floating on the ocean surface. The wooden houses broke down, and fuel oil drums had been split open at the harbour, the fuel spilling across the surface too. Barrels, probably of kerosene oil were kept there. They'd all been swept up. So, the ocean surface became an oil slick. The broken lumber and the oil mixed up and something caught fire. The lumber was like one candle wick after another. Apparently, fuel oil is hard to ignite by itself. But soak the lumber in the oil and it'll light up no problem. Apparently, after absorbing the oil these lumber pieces can just burn and burn. The surface of the ocean was on fire. What's more, each time a tsunami rolled in, the fire would be lobbed further in. At least that's what it looked like was happening. Apparently, we were hit by a tsunami nine times that night. Each time, the burning surface would spread the flames. In no time, the bay, the quay, and everything along the bay were engulphed in flame. It was a sea of fire. I watched this spectacle unfold the whole time, from the earthquake until sunrise the next day.

Nakamura: Yes, Kesennuma's case was unique in that, on top of the earthquake and tsunami, many people also died in the fires…

Yamauchi: I visited Shishiori in Kesennuma some days later to conduct a survey, and judging from the depth of the water the tsunami caused, there was an area where residents would have survived the tsunami if they were on a second floor. However, that area was almost entirely engulfed by flame. I've heard testimonies of people who watched the events up close. They said they could at first hear people calling for help from the other side of sea of fire. Eventually, they said, their voices ceased completely. I learned later that these hellish scenes were both common and commonly witnessed. I expect many people died in the fires.

Nakamura: Still, immediately following your own difficult 3.11 experiences, you and other Rias Ark Museum curators began documenting the situation of the city. We have some of the photos you took displayed here at *A Future for Memory*. Could you explain what your motivation was for beginning this work? Could you also explain what kind of planning you undertook to put together the *Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and History of Tsunami Disaster* exhibition so quickly? The documentation of the disaster situation and creation of this

exhibition are fundamental to what you have carried out as a museum curator in the aftermath of 3.11.

Yamauchi: Why did we begin documenting so quickly? First, the damage was so great that I feared the city would never be rebuilt. My initial prediction was that at least 30,000 people had perished. It turned out 1,350 people lost their lives in Kesennuma. The casualty number was not as high as I predicated because it happened in the afternoon.

Nakamura: As it was the middle of the afternoon, most people were up and about.

Yamauchi: If it had struck in the middle of the night, we could have seen a loss of life comparable to what I initially imagined. Incidentally, I probably wouldn't be here either. My house ran along a coastal fish market. It was a four-story, steel-framed apartment building. It had been designated the area's evacuation centre. I knew this was an area that would get a direct hit from a tsunami. I made plans with my family in the event of such a disaster. I decided, given we lived along the Sanriku coast and would likely only have 20 minutes before the tsunami reached us and given that our area would be crowded with evacuees, that we should remain in our building as the designated evacuation centre. I figured we'd gather on the rooftop or top floor. It turned out that that building, my home, was ripped away to its foundations. A steel-framed, four-story building was completely swept away. If we'd been at home, there would have been no helping us.

After the disaster, we spent days and days with no way of knowing the extent of the situation. I really thought tens of thousands had died and that it would take a ludicrous amount of time for Kesennuma to come back as a city, to have a chance of existing at all. I thought it was the end of the museum, too. Re-establishing the museum would be impossible. If this wasn't an art museum but some other facility, then maybe there was hope. But an art museum? In Japanese society, when the money dries up the first things to go are the culture-oriented facilities. There are still people who think art is some kind of extravagant luxury, a hobby for people with too much time and money on their hands.

Nakamura: Unfortunately, I think you're right.

Yamauchi: We have such an underdeveloped understanding of how art, fine art, any art contributes to our experience beyond 'everyday life.' So, you can imagine, in such a context, people getting angry at what they called an 'art museum' would reopen amid the disaster. And what this amounted to personally was that I figured I'd lose my job. I thought,

'It can't be helped if we can't reopen the museum.' And yet, even if the museum faced permanent closure, even if I couldn't remain in this job, as someone who had been living here and researched and studied the history of tsunami, who had put on an exhibit about that history – by some unfortunate providence, I became one of the affected. I was, in a sense, a disaster victim. The first thing I understood was that I was lucky to be alive. As I said, if I'd been anywhere else, I'd probably be dead.

Nakamura: If you'd been at home, if it had occurred in the middle of the night … It's a real possibility, right?

Yamauchi: I've studied tsunami for years. I'd been telling people for five to six years before 2011 that another big one was just a matter of time. After all that, I've watched one with my own eyes. The thing that gets me is that I knew it was coming on some level. But it simply didn't occur to most others. I'd been doing everything in my power to try and convince people it was on its way. But, in terms of the result, I failed. Watching that disaster unfold was like watching my failure too. But I wasn't only saddened by this. I was angered, absolutely livid. I was angry that my efforts to communicate what would occur had fallen on deaf ears.

Nakamura: You had held an earthquake and tsunami exhibit at your museum long before 2011.

Yamauchi: I organised an exhibition on the 1896 Sanriku earthquake tsunami in 2006. The local people were indifferent. Only a few came to see it. I was disappointed, to say the least. Despite living in this area, in the very area whose name is writ across the annals of history as a place where hundreds died. To see that presentation met with apathy. Well, we know the result. And in that terrible moment, what did our society say? '3.11 was beyond expectations.'

Nakamura: This was a popular phrase at the time, wasn't it?

Yamauchi: 'It was unprecedented' was another. 'It was a once-in-a-thousand-year event,' they said. My blood boiled every time I heard one of those phrases. They are lies. This was a few days after the disasters, the evening of 15 March, and we the curators were the only ones left at the museum. I learned my home had been completely flattened, so I spent 40 days at the museum. After sleeping over at the museum, we discussed, 'Alright, what's the plan?' Some curators had asked to be let go.

Such was the context when I proposed to begin documenting. Now, the disasters saw the arrival of journalists and news media outlets from across the world. There was news coverage. But, we were the local residents and experienced the disasters. It was up to us to begin documenting

Figure 25.2 23 March 2011. Photograph of situation at Naka-machi, Kesennuma City. As I saw by foot during the fieldwork, the whole area was inundated by water. Seawater spouted out from sewer manholes and the street gutters. The further distance from the sea does not mean the situation was better. The moving, draining water created floods in unexpected places, to such an extent that it made it difficult to walk. We quickly escaped from it. The beautiful sky and the inverted wreckage of the 'town' are reflected on the surface of the water. Photo by Shiryū Okano and text by Hiroyasu Yamauchi. Courtesy of the Rias Ark Museum of Art.

everything (Figure 25.2). No one else would do it in this terrible situation. It was now or never. It was entirely possible that, if nothing was done, there would be no royalty-free records at all. If nobody gathered material free for us to use, then how could we carry out educational programmes about natural disaster protection? How could we pass down the memories of disasters? If anyone, it would have to be us. We're supposed to be the best at keeping records. We know the local history best. We're locals too. If we don't do it, who will? I proposed this on the evening of 15 March to pretty much everyone's assent.

Nakamura: The Rias Ark Museum of Art is an art museum, but you are also deeply involved in researching and exhibiting local history.

Yamauchi: That's right. We are concurrently a kind of folk history museum. We always have curators of art and local folk history. My job has straddled both worlds from the beginning. So, we started. But, there were actually some people who criticised us for it.

Nakamura: Some people suggested you shouldn't be taking photographs of the wreckage.

Yamauchi: As all the city officials were assisting at evacuation centres, some complained that we shouldn't be taking photos. Some people implied we were just fooling around. I knew we'd be misunderstood, so I asked the city's education board and the mayor to issue an official appointment letter. On 23 March, we received an appointment letter to work on a special assignment. We're actually run by both Kesennuma City and Minamisanriku Town, so the assignment was to work as the investigators and documenters of the two areas' post-disaster states. The appointment was for two years. We even designed and printed our own ID cards.

Nakamura: So, you made your ID card stating you were appointed to your roles.

Yamauchi: I put the appointment letter in the car, but then I hung an ID around here that said I was on the special assignment, on official duty. So, we did our documenting for those two years. To tell you the truth, we didn't really know what we'd do with the materials. We just knew we had to do it.

Nakamura: You knew you had to leave some trace of what happened behind.

Yamauchi: Right. And actually, more than the damage itself, what really mattered to us was documenting the final state of the place that had been damaged. Without photographs showing the final state of various locations, it would be difficult to truly recall what the city had been like. Everything would be collected and removed. These were the final traces of what the city had been like before it was destroyed, even as they were underneath piles of rubble. We knew that we had to act fast. The cleanup efforts, the removals and body searches, would affect these traces. That's why we started right away. The destruction itself, of course, was also something we documented.

It was around late summer to fall in 2011, I proposed we should put on a permanent exhibition, using these materials at our museum in two years. My proposal was unanimously accepted. In the last 10 years many disaster memorial museums and related facilities have been established

in the affected areas. But our museum was already there. And we started documenting the disaster in the immediate aftermath. We were the first museum, which is categorised as an education facility in Japan, to incorporate a permanent exhibition on the disaster acting like a memorial facility.

Nakamura: To the best of my knowledge, you're the first. The exhibit opened in April 2013.

Yamaichi: There were several small private exhibits on the disaster, showcasing what they had collected or displays at some tourist venues outside museums. But we were no doubt the first museum to officially organise and open an exhibition on this disaster. Disaster memorial museums are not classified officially as museums in the Japanese system, that is to say, as educational facilities.

Nakamura: The framework is completely different, isn't it?

Yamauchi: Yes, I think it's safe to say we're a unique case. So, why did we curate and open an exhibition on the local disasters? Returning to what we previously discussed, I didn't think most residents would respond enthusiastically to the suggestion that an art museum should reopen as it was. So, I knew I had to come up with some new way to create something that our disaster affected society would still consider crucially important, something that would last for decades to come.

So, why would a museum that deals with everything local – from its history, folk practices, everyday life and culture – have gone to such lengths to present tsunami-specific history even before 3.11? Precisely because the history of tsunami is so deeply interconnected with the history and culture of the Sanriku area. Our museum's dealing with these matters is itself part of our museum's prolonged history. It would be incorrect, then, to say our museum simply took advantage of the opportunity to collect and present materials of this recent tsunami. Everybody in the museum agreed this was the case when I presented this argument. I thought, let's make the exhibit permanent, a fixture of the culture. There's a second reason I decided on this permanent exhibit. Thinking back to the immediate post-disaster moment, I simply couldn't tolerate the set of lies peddled about in our society – 'unexpected', 'unprecedented', 'once in a 1,000 years'. I was determined to disclose such lies.

Nakamura: You were determined to reveal the correct disaster information.

Yamauchi: Frankly, I was deeply motivated by anger. I wanted to destroy those lies. Today and forever, I will explain these lies to our

visitors and present the truth every time they come. I tell them, 'You don't really believe the disaster was "unexpected" or "unprecedented", right?' Everyone agrees before leaving. Why were we the first to open this permanent disaster exhibition? Because we felt it was imperative to disseminate better ideas into society as fast as possible. This is the main reason.

Nakamura: I was constantly checking news at the time for information about what was happening in Tohoku, so I knew exactly when your exhibit opened. The first time I visited was in September of that year in 2013. I even arrived before the exhibition catalogue was ready. I remember clearly registering the strong sentiment behind the design as I looked at the displays and read the captions.

Yamauchi: Maybe it's a little too direct.

Nakamura: Maybe, in a sense. It might be rather shocking to those first visiting a disaster-affected area.

Yamauchi: Yes, from a certain common-sense perspective, it is unusual for a museum to forward such a strong personal message through its exhibition. But these aren't usual circumstances.

Nakamura: True. The events of 3.11 were not normal.

Yamauchi: What happened was beyond 'normal.' Why am I so determined to forward that message so strongly is that if I don't do the unusual, the 'usual' narratives won't be overturned. I refuse to peddle the normal. I'm determined to be someone who acts outside the purview of normal.

Nakamura: This is certainly an extreme perspective. But we have 32 of your photographs at our exhibit, out of thousands. We've left untouched the captions that came with them, apart from the English translation. I wanted to make certain the message from you would directly be conveyed here too. I had heard your goals and sentiments. I didn't dare to touch your writing, and it has had its intended effect on visitors here also. Many come away from the photographs and captions deeply troubled. I decided to section off the Rias Ark photographs behind a large wall, to give them their own space. I think people need that more private space to take in the photos and captions. All visitors, regardless of age, spend a great deal of time in that section. I believe Rias Ark Museum's exhibition is doing something crucially important. And you've really been working tirelessly, especially in terms of disaster recovery.

Conclusion

The rest of our conversation was about the other projects Yamauchi has been involved in, namely the Ruins of the Great East Japan Earthquake | Kesennuma City Memorial Museum[6] and Reconstruction Park for Memory and Hope in Kesennuma City.[7] Yamauchi was a member of Kesennuma City's Disaster Ruins Preservation review committee and Disaster Memorial committee among others. The summer of 2011 already saw discussions about what do with the disaster ruins. After consideration, they realised that the Kōyō High School building was what was left to preserve as the rest of the ruins had been in areas where, as part of reconstruction plans, the sea walls would be built, and therefore would be removed. Nobody had died in this school building, which had been left completely untouched. Additionally, the area where the school was built had endured the other past tsunamis that hit the Sanriku coast. Yamauchi calls it the perfect symbol for their stupidity. The school was built on an area that had seen tsunami after tsunami; stupid that they built the school there. The people had been saved this time, but showing the history was important – the school ruins are thus not only about what happened in 2011. The Memorial Museum was built next to the school ruins. In preserving the building, they also kept a cluster of hisai-butsu or victim objects. There is still no legal criterion nor agreed upon value system for the preservation of these objects or managing disaster ruins. If they are considered cultural property, they can be managed under the Cultural Properties Protection Law. If they are classified as a building, they will need complete repair to conform to Japan's Building Standard Law Act. The school ruin is thus registered as 'a concrete pedestal'. It is ambiguous whether people are actually allowed to enter the spaces. This is one of the most complicated aspects of their management.

The Kesennuma City's Reconstruction Park for Memory and Hope was thus built in an elevated area in the city, and has a clear view of the heavily affected areas, the reconstruction process, and the sea all from this spot. It is a place to pray for the revival. It is a place to mourn those they have lost. It is a place to fix this future in their sights, to manifest it. It is a place to transmit knowledge of the tsunamis to the next generations. The Park was designed by Osamu Tsukihashi, the Kobe university professor and architect who also started the 'Lost Homes' Project[8] in the aftermath of 3.11. One of the project's scale models was featured in *A Future for Memory*. The Kesennuma mayor suggested bringing in impactful artworks for transmitting memories. Yamauchi thus selected sculptor Yoshihiro Minagawa based in Akita Prefecture, and asked him

to create what Yamauchi calls 'Memorial Sculptures'. The works are highly symbolic with titles, 'I'm Sorry', 'I'm Glad', and 'To the Sea'. The sculptures are on their pedestals with QR codes. Scanning the code with a smartphone, you can read a short, poetic story. The story discusses the meaning of the sculptures, which depict people in various poses. There are links after the initial story if visitors want to know more about what happened on 11 March.

The Rias Ark Museum of Art organised their tenth anniversary exhibition in 2022 after the pandemic had forced them to delay the opening.[9] Entitled, *That time, now and the future* (Ano toki, genzai, soshite korekara; あの時、現在 そしてこれから), the exhibition focuses on the changing physical and psychological landscapes. The familiar landscapes filled with memories disappeared. The changing landscapes are about the shifting relationship between the society and people. Their tenth anniversary exhibition showed the reconstruction process of the past 10 years since 3.11 as they decided not to make any changes to the permanent exhibition, *Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and History of Tsunami Disaster*, because they consider this exhibit itself as a valuable archive.

People in Kesennuma continue to declare their affinity with the ocean and proceed with reconstruction accordingly. Yamauchi says many other affected areas express a strong resentment towards the sea. But people in Kesennuma would not be who they are without the ocean. The ocean sometimes tosses a tsunami towards them, but it also nurtures them. They are determined to preserve that strong relationship. They want to make a city that will ensure not a single person will be lost in the next tsunami. Yamauchi considers that 'tsunamis are natural phenomena that are not necessarily a hazard in and of themselves. They become disasters only when our life and culture are not equipped with a deep understanding of/tolerance for tsunamis in areas prone to tsunamis' (Yamauchi 2021, 14). At least, the Rias Ark Museum of Art was well prepared for managing their collections and had earthquake mitigation procedures, and their procedures have not changed since 3.11. If the museum building collapsed, they would rely on the network of museums for assistance. As this disaster devastated the city beyond the museum walls, Yamauchi started thinking about what they could do if the city collapsed completely, but has not come up with any concrete ideas. All he can say now is that, in his view, the Great East Japan Earthquake was a human-made disaster and we need to change our values as we cannot change nature. Earthquakes and tsunamis will happen again. We need to be prepared by learning from

the past to think about the future, and learning to live in harmony with nature in order to preserve cultural heritage including museum collections.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Fifteen prefectures including many outside Tohoku such Tokyo and Ibaraki in the Kanto region were also affected by this disaster.

2   The Museum of Anthropology at UBC is located on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) First Nation, and is currently rebuilding its Great Hall in order to upgrade the seismic resiliency of the museum and protect its irreplaceable collections in the event of a major earthquake (as of March 2023).

3   *A Future for Memory: Art and Life after the Great East Japan Earthquake* was held at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC on 11 February–12 September 2021, and was accompanied by a bilingual publication and a series of events: https://moa.ubc.ca/exhibition/a-future-for-memory/.

4   A full version of the conversation in Japanese with English subtitles, "A Future for Memory: A Conversation with Hiroyasu Yamauchi/『記憶のための未来』展: 山内宏泰対談": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzDaqgwUq9Y.

5   The Sanriku coast (Sanriku kaigan; 三陸海岸) is a rocky shoreline with many bays, cliffs and coves along the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region, from Aomori through Iwate to Miyagi prefectures. Known for its beauty, it has been a popular tourist destination.

6   The Ruins of the Great East Japan Earthquake | Kesennuma City Memorial Museum (Kesennuma-shi higashi nihon daishinsai ikō and denshō-kan; 気仙沼市東日本大震災遺構・伝承館) opened in March 2019.

7   The Reconstruction Park for Memory and Hope in Kesennuma City (Kesennuma-shi fukkō kinen kōen; 気仙沼市復興祈念公園) opened on 11 March, 2021. The Japanese word, "*kinen*" in this case is written as 祈念, which literary means "prayer", but in this context, after discussing with Yamauchi, memory and hope is what this park is about. "*Kinen*" can also be written as 記念, and in that case, it means "memorial" and this word gets used more regularly for this type of memorial museums and parks.

8   The Lost Homes Project: https://www.losthomes.jp.

9   The exhibit was held on 5 February–21 March, 2022.

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Part V Response
The best practice of sustainability and the sustainability of best practices
Josh Yiu

The chapters in Part V suggest that there are considerable tensions between best practices of museum operations and sustainability efforts pertaining to the effects of climate change. Best practices in collection care tend to be energy-intensive, as cultural relics of significant historical value need to be preserved in a stable environment without contaminants or fluctuations in temperature or humidity levels. Climate-proofing the collection requires substantial resources to upgrade the museum's storage facility and exhibition galleries, and the economic and environmental costs of creating and maintaining a 'perfect' venue may not be sustainable.

Resourceful museums clamour for conservation-grade materials such as specialty boards and fabrics from which artworks are hung and displayed; apparatus that are now considered harmful to artefacts need to be phased out. For museums, preserving artefacts for perpetuity takes precedence over the recycling of materials and waste management. Yet the environmental impact of phasing out those facilities, display cases and hanging devices are seldom asked or acknowledged. Similarly, spectacular exhibition staging is preferred to bare-bone exhibition design in the name of audience development and engagement. The carbon-footprint of such spectacles is conveniently forgotten or forgiven.

These inconvenient truths reflect a conventional mindset whereby collection care in the museum facility is within our control, whereas the environment outside the facility is, until recently, thought to be beyond our control or responsibility. Bearing responsibility of the macro-environment institutionally will fundamentally change our thinking about

best practices, because preservation efforts may now be weighed against their carbon impact. When the need to preserve our planet becomes a basis of preserving the collection, waste-reduction will become a focal point of consideration in museum management. The destiny of societies hinges upon the destiny of Earth. As the conversation between Fuyubi Nakamura and Hiroyasu Yamauchi on museum and gallery responses following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 makes plain, 'the first things to go are the culture-oriented facilities'.

Adaptations to a changing external environment, including but not limited to warfare or climate change, is the theme of Vasilike Argyropoulos, Dimitris Karolidis and Paraskevi Pouli's chapter on the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a telling case study because of the wealth of heritage sites in Greece and the cultural preference for 'open' museums with artefacts shown in context. As such, the impact of climate change on Greek museums cannot be ignored and deserves critical examination, and highlights the false dichotomy between 'outside' and 'inside' environments.

Specific approaches in preserving Greek heritage sites entail, first and foremost, an understanding of localised climate change and evolving environmental risks such as flash floods and fires. Yet climate change may be less pronounced or problematic in some regions. Argyropoulos, Karolidis and Pouli cite van Schijndel and Schellen's 2018 study that Southern Europe faces an increase in energy consumption and Northern Europe a reduction. Museums in the Global South, which are more susceptible to the damage wrought by climate change, fare worse. In other words, climate change has exacerbated inequality. Nevertheless, museums located in places with drastic seasonal changes can find ways to mitigate risks and streamline operating costs.

The study by Argyropoulos, Karolidis and Pouli provides a compelling example in which Greece had to ration energy consumption and set indoor temperatures to a greater range than commonly accepted for preventive care, per the guidelines set by the American Institute for Conservation, Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material and the International Group of Organizers of Major Exhibitions. However, based on an earlier study on the microclimate conducted at the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki in relation to the external museum climate, the museum found that 'what is happening outside the museum does not greatly affect the microclimate inside the galleries; the building envelope becomes a barrier to outside conditions'. Therefore, sparing the museum from setting one fixed HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air-conditioning) point reduced

energy usage substantially. More importantly, the objects on display remained stable. This is a case in which prudent cost-cutting measures achieved optimal results.

Even so, one is reminded that the adverse effect of a reduction in regulating indoor museum environment left airborne contaminants unchecked. Argyropoulos, Karolidis and Pouli point out that major museums and sites have professional conservators supported by the Greek state, and hence many artefacts have had remedial conservation treatment, which can be openly demonstrated to a curious and appreciative public. In other words, the 'software' of remedial care makes up for the 'hardware' of facilities not climate-optimised for preventive care. If this approach reflects budgetary concerns – supposing that the cost of paying for conservators and their tools is lower than running climate-controlled facilities over vast archaeological sites, then the Greek approach may hold a valuable lesson for museums. Training of specialists and conservators, especially in using greener and non-hazardous conservation materials, will be of paramount importance to preserve artefacts in situ and to engage the public.

Perhaps a more proactive approach against climate change in the museum is brought forth in Jenny Newell and Zehra Ahmed's chapter. Admirably, Australia's first museum 'has a mission to advance action on climate change and sustainability … not only [through] reducing its emissions but also gathering and sharing diverse perspectives on tackling climate, broadcasting powerful stories for positive futures.' By extending the 'duty of care' to the world that 'our collections represent', the Australian Museum has on its staff a Sustainability Projects Coordinator and a Curator for Climate Change, the authors of the essay who assess climate change risks, such as the receding coastline and increasing bushfires. Newell and Ahmed collect and use artefacts bearing the traces of weather events to demonstrate 'the degradation of the world systems'. Perhaps more importantly, they draw attention to the museum emissions from energy use in order to strategise a plan to convert to renewable energy, as well as an institutional plan to recycle and reconsider construction waste with a goal of achieving net zero. The actionable examples of the Australian Museum provide a model of paradigm shift for museums to acknowledge the urgency of the climate crisis and to proactively combat it in order to preserve humanity, of which museum collections are an integral part.

The vulnerability of humanity in the face of climate crisis calls forth the preservation of knowledge and memory that collections represent. In their chapter, Hannah Turner, Reese Muntean and Kate Hennessy present

an alternative viewpoint of an artefact as 'a document of a moment in time'. Implicit in this suggestion is the de-prioritisation of an object's ontological materiality and the characterisation of an object as *a* source and a portal of knowledge and information rather than *the* embodiment of that knowledge or information. Turner, Muntean and Hennessy thus believe that digitisation has the potential to fill that vacuum, meaning that the digital data of an artefact may no longer simply be a source of information, but *the* source of information that warrants stewardship in its own right. By reducing artefacts as a means of knowledge preservation and production rather than an end to be preserved in perpetuity, Turner, Muntean, and Hennessy 'take into account other ways of caring for belongings' – 'belongings' being a term for museum objects that the authors prefer to artworks or artefacts. 'Belongings' also highlight the relevance of rightful ownership and the objects' function in their originating community and context. This line of thinking paves the way for repatriating objects that were accessioned under questionable circumstances. In other words, digital simulacra achieve two purposes at once: to relieve the institution of the burden to care for high-maintenance artefacts and the burden to defend holding onto proprietary objects from Indigenous communities. Even if a museum were to relinquish ownership of the objects (and I shall refrain from commenting on this issue, since it is not the core of this part), there is a drawback to the approach of replicating an object digitally, in my opinion. Not only does the digital simulacrum date the technology at the time that it was made, 3D scanning or other forms of digitisation represent but a fraction of information pertaining to the objects that the digital steward deems relevant. It is unclear if a digital model or database assembled at a given time can be assumed to contain comprehensive information regarding an object.

The fact that these papers have provided both innovative and actionable ideas to revolutionise museum operations in the age of acute climate awareness is just a beginning. Museums of different scales and under different degrees of natural threat will no doubt respond differently. As complacency is no longer a viable option, and as few museums are endowed with funds to deal with climate-related issues, two conventional practices may be subject to further scrutiny and lead to more discussions. First, the penchant for museums to build and expand collections may be unsustainable, given that major museums only display a small fraction of their collections at any given time and that many collections are kept in off-site storage. Museums and the environment will benefit from prudent accessioning and deaccessioning procedures (see Durrant, this volume). Second, the exorbitant requirements for crating and shipping artworks

leaves meaningful cultural exchanges with much undesirable waste. Assessing acceptable risks and building trust with institutional partners and insurers will go a long way to offset both shipping costs and carbon-footprints. Sustainability officers may consider quantifying the positive impact of trimming collection growth and exhibition- and shipping-induced wastage on our goal towards net zero.

26
Conclusion

Cara Krmpotich and Alice Stevenson

As editors of *Collections Management as Critical Practice,* from the outset we sought to create a volume that achieved three related goals: 1) generate materials for teaching collections management within Museum Studies and Heritage Management programmes that are critically engaged *and therefore* better reflect the work of collections management; 2) create an enduring professional development resource that makes visible the intellectual, critical and political work of collections management; and 3) contribute and catalyse a body of scholarship that situates and recognises the significance of collections management within wider critical discourses.

Through our collective experience as collections managers, researchers, professors, consultants and volunteers in the cultural sector, we witnessed paradigmatic shifts happening in the ways our museum peers approached their responsibilities of care. What this volume seeks to articulate first and foremost is how collections management is not a 'back-of-house' pursuit disconnected from museum publics; it is a critical facet of museum work that is in dialogue with societies' concerns including human rights, decolonisation, governance, climate change and accessibility.

Collections management has been presented as the formation and application of best practices, universal standards that reinforce and reproduce the modern museum. The chapters and critical responses in this volume, we maintain, better reflect collections management in their development and application of locally-relevant and/or pluralised strategies in support of desires for preservation, access, documentation and use of collections. Such plurality in approaches is neither haphazard nor inward-looking. Rather, it illustrates the ways in which museums

are increasingly seeking to operate in dialogue with the complexities of communities' diverse needs. Transparency and public engagement do not happen in exhibitionary spaces and practices alone; back-of-house spaces are opening up physically and conceptually. The result is the development of a collections management practice that is in a recursive relationship, where use shapes the parameters of collections practices, rather than collections standards delimiting the possibilities of use.

For some museums, the application of best practices remains a source of external validation – especially from peer institutions, national accreditation bodies and international organisations. However, the chapters presented here provide a clear indication that museums, and collections management more specifically, are seeking validation from other sources (communities, Indigenous nations, artists, governments) who bring other criteria for measuring 'access', 'preservation', 'value', 'care' and 'ethics'. Perhaps most powerfully, Newell and Ahmed articulate that meeting the needs of museum-mandated standards are dwarfed by the pressing responsibility to meet the needs of our planet.

The authors assembled here do not throw out the accumulated body of knowledge that traditionally made up collections management best practices. But they frequently name and recognise plural knowledge practices, including tacit and embodied, Western scientific, Indigenous, critical, spatial and self-reflective knowledge practices. Museum studies and even museum management has tended to foreground curatorial work as the realm within which conceptual, theoretical, and ethical change happens. In contrast, collections management is imagined as mundane, routine, even boring, with little to contribute to the change-work and socially engaged practices of museums. And yet, collections staff are essential to a museum's relationships. As the chapters here attest, collections management staff and their associated responsibilities are integral to repatriation; digitisation; forms of access; decolonial, anti-racist and anti-oppressive work; sustainable operations; preservation; collective memory; cultural revitalisation; reconciliation; equity and inclusion. This underscores the importance of the third goal for our volume: to validate and recognise this emergent form of collections management work in scholarship and discursive practice. Too often, professional growth in the field of collections management is framed simply as 'training', in the sense of the acquisition of a specific skill or the replication of practice. Yet as a field of practice within museums and heritage institutions – and as a focus of museum studies, critical cultural heritage studies and adjacent research – there is also a need for debate, conceptualisation, modelling and discourse. Collections managers

seeking to push the boundaries of 'best' practices need precedents and perspectives – perhaps even therapeutic spaces – that encourage pluralised approaches to their professional responsibilities and ethical frameworks, ones that can feed back into curatorial work and sector research.

Most importantly, it is precisely in the day-to-day work of collections management that change can happen at an institutional level. This is distinct from current trends where the museum is treated as a venue for social commentary and critique. We are cautious about the capacity for temporally-bounded interventions to change institutional practice in meaningful ways. Collections management, we offer, is the opposite of museum-as-venue: collections management recognises that museums are enduring places and as a result grapple with notions of responsibility and the consequences of actions within longer timeframes. And those spaces of activity, the database, the store, or archive, are equally where museum identities, purposes and publics are created and engaged. While museums are enduring social institutions, they are not permanent nor unchanging. *Collections Management as Critical Practice* draws our attention back to the day-to-day work of museums and the ways change happens. Rather than see operational museology as distinct from critical museology, the chapters here illustrate how the critical, political, intellectual and social work of museums can and does happen within routine practices, as readily as it happens in exceptional, pivotal or illuminating moments.

To close the volume, we return to our definition of collections management as offered in the introduction:

> Collections management is a set of practices that considers, enacts, and reappraises practices of documentation and care. These practices help to navigate the needs of communities, publics, and professionals in responsive ways that enable collections to actively and meaningfully contribute to individual and community life.

We remain passionate advocates for the value of collections management within cultural heritage organisations and within museum studies, precisely because of its potential to recalibrate people's engagements with their heritage and transform the museum in the process.

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There is a common misconception that collections management in museums is a set of rote procedures or technical practices that follow universal standards of best practice. This volume recognises collections management as a political, critical and social project, involving considerable intellectual labour that often goes unacknowledged within institutions and in the fields of museum and heritage studies.

Collections Management as Critical Museum Practice brings into focus the knowledges, value systems, ethics and workplace pragmatics that are foundational for this work. Rather than engaging solely with cultural modifications, such as Indigenous care practices, the book presents local knowledge of place and material which is relevant to how collections are managed and cared for worldwide. Through discussion of varied collection types, management activities and professional roles, contributors develop a contextualised reflexive practice for how core collections management standards are conceptualised, negotiated and enacted. Chapters span national museums in Brazil and Uganda to community-led heritage work in Malaysia and Canada; they explore complexities of numbering, digitisation and description alongside the realities of climate change, global pandemics and natural disasters. The book offers a new definition of collections management, travelling from what is done to care for collections, to what is done to care for collections and their users. Rather than 'use' being an end goal, it emerges as a starting point to rethink collections work.

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