

Appropriate museology and the “new museum ethics”

Honoring diversity

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Abstract: *This article focuses on what I see as two key movements in the museum world today: the emergence and adoption of a “new museum ethics,” and appropriate museology. I describe how these movements inform one another in both theory and practice; and how they manifest a growing respect for diversity – diversity in the ways different communities make sense of the museum as well as the objects that end up in museums, and diversity in actual practice.*

Keywords: Appropriate museology, museum ethics, indigenous and alternative museologies, inclusion, shared guardianship, source and indigenous communities, Native American museums, Indonesia, Canada.

Over the past few decades, relationships between ethnographic museums and indigenous peoples have changed dramatically as these communities have demanded greater voice in how their cultural heritage, in both tangible and intangible forms, is curated and represented in museums. These changes have led to increased collaboration between museums and indigenous, “source”, “originating”, or “descendant” communities, as well as the development of more mutually beneficial and culturally appropriate approaches to practice. Collaborative work, among other things, has revealed diversity in the ways people experience and understand their cultural heritage, showing us how what is seen as appropriate or “best

practice” in one context may not be in another. Changing relationships have also given rise to a “new museum ethics” that recognizes this diversity and reflects greater respect for people’s cultural and human rights.

While much has been written on collaboration and the changes taking place between museums and indigenous communities, for example in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States,¹ much less is known about the current status of relationships between indigenous populations in Europe, such as the Sámi and the Nordic museums. Similarly, the literature on indigenous peoples’ museums and cultural centers has expanded greatly in recent years but includes limited contributions about Sámi

museums. This dearth in the literature makes conferences on which papers in this issue are based especially important, and raises many questions. For instance: What is unique about the situation in the Nordic countries, but also how is it similar to changes occurring in other parts of the world? What influences are Sámi voices having on mainstream ethnographic museums? What new insights can be gained on both theoretical and practical levels from looking at how the Sámi are using museums to protect and represent their cultural heritage? What forms does collaboration take in the Nordic context? And relevant to my concerns in this article: How is Nordic museology reflecting what I see as two key movements in the museum world today, the “new museum ethics,” and “appropriate museology”?

In this introductory article, I describe how the new museum ethics and appropriate museology inform current museological theory and practice, and in general, represent growing respect for diversity – diversity in the ways different communities make sense of the museum idea as well as the objects that end up in museums. Although my examples are taken from my research and work in Indonesia and the United States and reference developments that have been taking place in these countries *vis-à-vis* museums and indigenous or local communities, I believe they speak to issues of diversity and ethics of relevance to Nordic museums of ethnography/cultural history and Sámi museums for a cross-cultural, international comparison.

Museums have now long been concerned with the need to more adequately represent cultural diversity in their exhibitions, in addition to broadening their audiences. However, today many museums are also changing curatorial practices to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives and approaches, and are

increasingly practicing “appropriate museology” (Kreps 2008). This trend is especially evident in museums working in collaboration with indigenous “source,” “originating,” and “descendant” communities.

The emergence of appropriate museology can be attributed to several developments that have been taking place in the museum world over the past few decades.

1. The post-colonial critique of museums that emerged in the 1980s on the part of the scholarly community as well as those whose cultural heritage has been collected and represented in museums, namely non-Western, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities. This critique has not only led to a rethinking of the museum idea, but has also dramatically transformed practice.
2. The growth in the scholarship on museums, and particularly, cross-cultural and comparative studies, has increased our knowledge of the different forms museums and museological behavior take in different national and cultural settings. Studies have also revealed how many societies have had their own means of caring for things that they value, long before the introduction of the museum idea. In other words, they have had their own indigenous or local museologies.
3. Greater collaboration and cooperation between mainstream museums and originating communities has cast light on the problematic aspects of many mainstream curatorial practices in respect to cultural protocol and ethics.
4. And finally, indigenous and ethnically specific community-based museums have become sources of new and alternative museological paradigms for theorizing and advancing museum practice.

6 Taken together these developments constitute a shift from a field dominated by universalist, Eurocentric, and hegemonic museology, to one that is recognizing a world full of museologies. I first describe the evolution of my thinking about appropriate museology, and how it has come to be informed by the tenets of the “new museum ethics” outlined by Janet Marstine in her introductory essay to the edited volume, *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics. Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-first Century Museum* (Marstine 2011). I then provide examples of appropriate museology as practiced in Native American museums and cultural centers as well as in mainstream museums housing ethnographic collections. My aim is to show how diverse perspectives and approaches to the curation of cultural heritage, in both tangible and intangible forms, can be reconciled through the practice of appropriate museology and the new museum ethics.

APPROPRIATE MUSEOLOGY

My approach to appropriate museology grew out of a concern for what I saw as a need to create alternative approaches to museum development and training in Indonesia, where I have conducted research and been involved in heritage work since the early 1990s (Kreps 1998, 2003). Up until relatively recently, museum and heritage work in Indonesia could be characterized as “colonial” in the sense that museums tended to be modeled after Western-style museums, and were set-up and managed in a “top-down” fashion with little involvement of local community members. Museum development in Indonesia as a whole has mostly been under the control of government officials, elites, and international experts.

I observed, over the years, that despite investments in numerous training programs

on the part of government agencies and international museum consultants, museum workers remained poorly trained and collections poorly cared for and managed. But more importantly, I also observed how the direct transfer and imposition of the Western museum model and practices was paradoxically erasing or undermining local curatorial traditions rather than preserving them as part of peoples’ cultural heritage. It was within this context that I began to formulate my ideas about appropriate museology, which were first published in the article “Appropriate museology in theory and practice,” in the *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* in 2008 (Kreps 2008). In this article I suggested that approaches to museum development and heritage work should be adapted to local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions. Ideally, it is a bottom-up, community-based approach that combines local knowledge and resources with those of professional practices to better meet the needs and interests of a particular museum and its community. Appropriate museology, furthermore, involves the integration of indigenous or local museological traditions into museum and heritage work where suitable.

In general, I envisioned appropriate museology as a method for making the museum idea more compatible with local cultural contexts, and for making museums more meaningful to local communities and thus sustainable in the long run. Over the years, I have also come to see how appropriate museology is congruent with the new museum ethics that at its core is informed by a social justice and human rights agenda, and is part of the movement to make museums more socially inclusive and responsible.

According to Janet Marstine (2011), the new museum ethics is not defined by professional codes, which have been the mainstay of

museum ethics discourse. Ethics codes and guidelines have historically defined appropriate behavior, established responsibilities to the profession and to the public, and offered means for self-assessment. They have been aimed at professionalizing individual practitioners and the museum profession in general through the promotion of standards and normative behavior.

But as Marstine and other authors have pointed out, ethics codes are culturally defined and in the Western context have been based on Enlightenment ideals of virtue. Marstine contends, however, that museum ethics should not be seen as a universal set of values to be applied indiscriminately, rather:

[...] it is important to differentiate between ethical principles – those ideals and values a society holds dear – and applied ethics – the practice of employing those principles to specific arenas of activity (Marstine 2011:6).

This applies also to museum work. While ethical principles such as individualism have shaped applied ethics in Western culture, other principles such as collectivism are operative in other parts of the world. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the relative and contingent nature of ethics. To Marstine, contemporary museum ethics, in contrast to the “old” museum ethics, is not a canon of ideas based on consensus and conformity. Instead, today’s museum ethics is marked by strong differences of opinion, contestation, and debate. She asserts that in twenty-first century multicultural societies that purportedly respect difference, consensus and conformity have come to signal exclusivity, like-mindedness, and a fixity of thought that inhibits change, risk taking, and moreover, the moral agency of museums. The idea that museums have moral agency is pivotal to the

new museum ethics, and rests on the premise that museums should participate in creating a more just and equitable society. The principles of diversity, equity, shared authority, and social justice are all integral to contemporary museum work and together they define the socially responsible museum.

Marstine defines three major strands of museum theory and practice through which museums assert their moral agency: social inclusion, radical transparency, and shared guardianship. Social inclusivity is dependent on developing new modes of democratic participation in the museum that invite “divergent or transgressive voices” (Marstine 2011:11). The socially inclusive and responsible museum also embraces the idea of shared authority and power in decision-making, curatorial work, and programming. It is also concerned with forwarding social justice and human rights, central to rethinking the terms of social inclusion.

The twenty-first century museum ethics is also built upon a new theory and practice of transparency in museums. Marstine asserts that social responsibility will not flourish in museum culture unless museums disclose what issues they are facing, the “how” and “whys” of their decision-making processes and the possible impact of choices made. She describes radical transparency as a mode of communication whereby accountability means acknowledging and assuming responsibility for actions. Radical transparency is thus declarative and self-reflexive rather than authoritative (Marstine 2011:15). It is also about being open with information and making it accessible to all who lay claims on the museum. However, Marstine stresses that radical transparency does not mean that museums share all information equally because there is some information that needs to be held private

8 to honor the wishes of certain stakeholders. Instead, radical transparency is defined by clear guidelines for what can and cannot be shared, developed in partnership with community stakeholders.

The idea of shared guardianship is Marstine's third strand of museum theory and practice through which museums can assert their moral agency and enact the new ethics. Shared guardianship is especially relevant to appropriate museology because it requires museums to relinquish control over the care and use of collections, as well as the special kinds of relationships people can have to objects in their collections:

In contemporary museum ethics discourse the concept of guardianship is a means toward respecting the dynamic, experiential and contingent quality of heritage and towards sharing in new ways the rights and responsibilities to this heritage (Marstine 2011:17).

In general, Marstine views the new museum ethics as ever changing, adaptive, improvisational, and deeply engaged with the wider world, but above all, a social practice. Her proposal for a new museum ethics and concepts of social inclusion, radical transparency, and shared guardianship provide a wider lens through which to examine appropriate museology. I now turn to my examples to demonstrate how appropriate museology and the new museum ethics are applied in practice.

NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

The Kwakwaka'wakw people of the Northwest Coast of the US and southwestern Canada have historically used finely crafted boxes made from steamed cedar planks to store tribal treasures such as ceremonial regalia and

other prized possessions since ancient times. They have been crucial to Kwakwaka'wakw emphasis on ranking and the accumulation of wealth, and are both a container and a symbol of a family's wealth. (Fig. 1.)

In their originating communities, boxes such as these have multiple functions, meanings, and values, and are perceived and experienced through multiple senses – smell, touch, sound, emotion, in addition to being visually stunning. As part of rituals and ceremonies, their intangible meanings and functions can be as or more important than their tangible or physical attributes. They embody and activate songs, chants, stories, and dances that bring people together, solidify family and communal ties, and commemorate important life passages. They are, in material form, representative of Kwakwaka'wakw ways of knowing and being in the world, and a means of communicating social, spiritual, and emotional connections.

Treasure boxes of different forms and from different Northwest Coast indigenous groups have long been of interest to anthropologists, art historians, and collectors, and can be found in museum collections throughout the world. Because they have been regarded as repositories for inherited artifacts, and symbolic containers for the transmission of ancestral privileges and the preservation of customs, treasure boxes are an appropriate Kwakwaka'wakw idiom for the museum. As a case in point, the U'mista Culture Centre in British Columbia, Canada, is colloquially referred to as "a Box of Treasures".

I selected the treasure box because it is likened to a museum, in an indigenous form. But I could have chosen a number of indigenous artifacts to illustrate some of the differences between how objects are perceived and used in their source communities in contrast to how they are generally viewed in Western museums where they are stripped of their multisensory



Fig. 1. Kwakwaka'wakw treasure box, the U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay, British Columbia, Canada. Photo: Courtesy of the U'mista Cultural Centre.

and intangible dimensions and reduced to “objects for the eyes.” As anthropologists Constance Classen and David Howes assert in the article “The museum as sensescape. Western sensibilities and indigenous artifacts”:

[I]n Western museum settings, artifacts are preeminently objects for the eye. [...] Within their cultures of origin, however, visual appearance forms only one part – and often not the most important part – of an artifact’s sensory significance. The sensory values of an artifact, furthermore, do not reside in the artifact alone, but in its social use and environmental context. This dynamic web of sensuous and social meaning is broken when an object is removed from its cultural setting and inserted within the visual

symbol system of the museum (Classen & Howes 2006:200).

Much scholarship has been devoted to the critical analysis of how anthropologists, art historians, and curators have attempted to re-contextualize objects that had been removed from their originating contexts. Such scholarship has shed light on objects’ iconography, ritual functions, and symbolism in museum displays, catalogs, and texts. And for some time, scholars and members of source communities have critically commented on how the meanings, values, and functions of objects shift when they are reconfigured within the context of Western museological paradigms

10 (Clifford 1988, 1991, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, Marcus & Meyers 1995, Vogel 1988).

It is now widely recognized that Western museology has rested almost exclusively on one knowledge system, or epistemology, which has dictated why and how non-Western cultural materials have been collected, as well as the ways in which they have been perceived, curated, and represented in museums. Within this knowledge system, objects have been systematically organized and reconfigured to fit into Western constructs of science, culture, art, history, and heritage. In museums, they become art objects, admired for their aesthetic qualities, craftsmanship, technological ingenuity; and ethnographic objects or “data” valued for what they can tell us about a people’s culture. In short, they have been de-sensualized, and diminished to visual metaphors.

As visual symbols, objects in museums are not only predominantly for the eyes, but are also primarily understood through the lens of object-based epistemology, or the view that objects embody and convey knowledge and information. Thus, museums are not only visual symbol systems but also information systems in which things become part of “object-information packages.” In the words of anthropologist Sandra Dudley:

There is a current, indeed dominant, view within museum studies and practice, that the museum is about information and that the object is just a part – and indeed not always an essential part – of that informational culture [...] objects have value and import only because of the cultural meanings which immediately overlie them [...]. The material object thus becomes part of an object-information package... (Dudley 2009:3).

Seeing objects as merely part of information packages, Dudley suggests, ignores the multi-

sensory and multidimensional qualities of objects – “the very materiality of the material.” She contends it is time to see beyond the narrow (but still important) focus on aesthetics and formal qualities of artworks or the technical analyses of artifacts and natural history specimens, and enrich an existing preoccupation with the symbolic, representational, and communicative dimensions of objects with emotion and physical sensation.

Objects in Native American museums and cultural centers can be family heirlooms, symbols of rank and status, sacred materials necessary for the perpetuation of religious beliefs and practices; documents of a community’s history, works of art, and mnemonic devices for evoking memories, biographies, songs, and stories. Objects stand for significant traditions, ideas, customs, social relations, and it is the stories they tell, the performances they are a part of, and the relationships among people and between people and places that are as important as the objects themselves.

But in addition to standing for or representing some aspect of culture, as they often do in ethnographic museums, it also can be true that objects simply are what they are. A figure or image does not represent a spirit or ancestor, but *it is* that spirit or ancestor. Its sheer materiality, presence, and singularity as an individual are what matters and what give it meaning and value. To many Native Americans, and other indigenous and non-Western peoples, objects are alive, imbued with a life force and spirit, and in fact, Karen Coody Cooper (member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and former staff member of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian) states that the term “object” is “patently offensive to many Native Americans because it refutes the idea of animism, or life within the materials” (2008:65).

Many other scholars have critically commented on how Native American views of Native-made things in museums are distinct from the views of most museum professionals and scientists. Kelley Hays-Gilpin of the Museum of Northern Arizona and Ramson Lomatewama (Hopi artist and scholar), have drawn attention to the problematic nature of museum terminology and the perceptions it reflects. They write:

... we use the term ‘artifact’ to refer to something made or modified by humans, because this term implies relationships in ways that ‘object’ does not... What Hopi speakers would do is call it what it is – a rain sash, a katsina doll, a water jar – not invent superordinate terms like ‘textiles,’ ‘carvings,’ ‘pottery,’ or ‘objects’ (Hays-Gilpin & Lomatewama 2013:261).

Artifact is still an imperfect term they concede, but a more suitable term does not exist in English. When it comes to how Native-made things are perceived in museums, the principal concern is that “we are not talking about passive, inanimate objects whose primary use is to serve as evidence or data for past lifeways” (Hays-Gilpin & Lomatewama 2013:260–261).

Instead, they state, so-called artifacts are enmeshed in social networks and are as living members of communities, even if they are now members of museum communities. Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama point out that Hopi and other Native people generally perceive the museum as privileging rational thought over emotion and secular over spiritual concerns. While these hierarchical dichotomies were constructed by science for science, Hopi and other Native Americans see this as “how science is, but not how the world is” (Hays-Gilpin & Lomatewama 2013: 261–262).

By looking at how objects are curated in non-Western contexts, for example in Native

American museums and communities, we can see how the emphasis on the visual, or ocular-centrism, in museums as well as object-based epistemology is one of the main differences between indigenous and Western or mainstream museums. In such settings we can also see how aspects of local culture and indigenous curatorial practices are mixed with Western, professional museum methods to create appropriate museology. The Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington State (USA), is one example of where indigenous and non-indigenous staff have worked together to develop culturally appropriate approaches to collections management and exhibitions.

The Makah Cultural and Research Center opened in 1979 to house artifacts taken from the Ozette archaeological site where some 55,000 pre-contact artifacts and 15,000 pieces of structural remains of four houses were uncovered. Patricia Pierce Erikson (2005), an anthropologist who collaborated with the Makah Cultural and Research Center for many years, writes that when staff members were developing a collections management system for the Center they used the traditional Makah system of property ownership that still existed in the community. Artifacts were separated and stored according to the household to which they would have belonged rather than according to conventional methods of classification, such as, material, function, time period, culture area and so on. Artifacts were labeled not only in both Makah and English, but they were also physically grouped and stored according to their Makah language roots and/or suffixes and the material and immaterial relationships these linguistic elements reflected. According to Erikson, this method provided insight into the connections between Makah language and thought.

12 Makah conceptual categories were used not only for organizing the collection but also for stimulating reflection on Makah worldviews codified in their language. This adaptation of the museum – to expand the preservation goals beyond artifacts to the preservation of living culture – is an essential component of the indigenization of a mainstream museum model (Erikson 2005:184). Exhibitions also reflected Makah conceptualizations of their world and what is important to them. For example, exhibitions were organized around the seasons and what kinds of activities take place during different seasons when the museum first opened.

Indigenous perspectives and approaches to the care and treatment of cultural heritage objects are also being integrated into mainstream museums, in the form of what many Native American communities call “traditional care” methods. This practice has not only been generating more appropriate museology, but it also has been challenging many of the basic assumptions behind Western, scientifically based museology. The integration of “traditional care” methods and other forms of indigenous museology into collections management has revealed how what is seen as appropriate in one cultural context may not be in another. In consultations with Native American curators, scholars, and spiritual advisors, we are not only being asked to repatriate or remove “culturally sensitive” objects from displays in museums, but we are also being instructed in how to store and care for objects in keeping with traditional cultural protocol, or ethics.

For example, one of the criticisms that Native Americans often have is that in the care and organization of objects in conventional museums, distinctions are not made between sacred objects that people rarely come into

contact with, and those objects that are part of everyday life. Consequently, many museums now separate objects identified as sacred into separate storage areas. They might also classify objects based on native classifications, such as male or female objects, those associated with death and those with life, and so on. Some objects might be aligned with the cardinal points, or exposed to sunlight and the elements during certain times of the year such as the summer and winter equinoxes. In most cases, strict protocols exist regarding who can or cannot handle or be in the presence of particular objects at particular times.

Traditional care is concerned with looking after the spiritual integrity and life of an object as much as it is with maintaining its physical integrity, reflecting the importance of the invisible, the immaterial, and the many ways in which objects can be sensed and make sense. As noted earlier, for many Native Americans, artifacts are living entities or contain living spirits. These spirits are believed to be conscious beings with emotions, which in some instances require feeding and human interaction to remain healthy (Hays-Gilpin & Lomatewama 2013:267). Some artifacts, especially those made for ceremonial uses, need to be ritually fed or smudged and purified with offerings of sacred plants like cedar, sage, tobacco, and cornmeal.

At the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology, which I directed, artifacts that are perceived as animate, imbued with a life force, and possessing spirits, have been removed from sealed containers or plastic coverings so they can breathe. The Museum also practices restricted access, which in this case means removing human remains and sacred and ceremonial objects from the main collections and placing them in special rooms that can only be entered by tribal representatives and

museum staff. It also means that research on these individuals is not allowed. Information about these individuals in databases and catalogs is also restricted, as are photographs on websites or other information.

Restricted access, in general, is another important aspect of indigenous curation that reflects tribal cultural protocol or specific rights and responsibilities related to particular kinds of objects. For many Native American groups, only certain individuals in the community or in a family or clan have the right to use, have knowledge about, and handle particular objects. Specialized and sacred knowledge is not for public consumption, and in fact, the public nature of museum collections and information about them is unsettling to many Native American communities since open access can be inconsistent with tribal traditions.

Although indigenous curatorial practices have been adopted in many museums, and respect for indigenous perspectives and approaches has increased, there are some who think that accommodating these beliefs and practices runs counter to the idea of museums as quintessentially scientific, secular institutions. Restricting access to collections, for research and educational purposes, furthermore, goes against the idea of museums as democratic, public institutions. Indeed, although many see respecting restricted access and other indigenous ethics as culturally sensitive and appropriate practice, to others it is nothing less than unethical and unprofessional.

These divergent concerns challenge us to reflect on the fundamental meanings and purposes of museums in democratic societies, and what we mean by the socially inclusive and responsible museum. Moreover, they force us to explore ways to reconcile what to some seem like irreconcilable differences. Under these circumstances, the basis of reconciliation can

be mutual respect. As many Native Americans have told me, they do not expect museum staff and researchers to feel the way they do about objects in collections or have the same connections to them. What they do expect and demand is respect for their cultures and their ways.

Museums, as social institutions and like the societies in which they exist, are constantly undergoing change, reflecting changing social values, needs, interests, morals, and ethics. Indeed, for Janet Marstine (2011:5), significant change in museum policy and practice requires a “museum ethics of change.” She states that:

Museums seeking change foster collaborative relationships on equal footing with diverse stakeholders and willingly assume the risks entailed by entertaining novel positions (Marstine 2011:7).

Entertaining novel positions can be read as challenging standard norms of practice and embracing new approaches that include “divergent and transgressive voices.” Many of the changes that have been taking place in American museums *vis-à-vis* indigenous communities reflect the principles of social inclusion, radical transparency, and shared guardianship of Marstine’s new museum ethics. But it should be noted that many of these changes did not come about voluntarily. Rather, they are some of the many outcomes of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) passed in 1990 by the US Congress. The Act, in addition to protecting burial sites, provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to repatriate human remains, sacred objects, and other items of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants and culturally affiliated tribes. NAGPRA requires museums to make inventories of Native American human remains

14 and cultural materials in their collections, and in consultation with tribal representatives to determine their “cultural affiliation.” Under the law, museums are then required to make these inventories and pertinent information available to tribes who, in turn, can make requests for repatriation.

The passage of NAGPRA was the culmination of decades of struggle on the part of Native American tribal governments, activists, lawyers and their supporters, to protect graves against desecration, repatriate thousands of ancestral human remains and return stolen or improperly acquired property to Native Americans. NAGPRA has been considered landmark legislation because it represented changes in the attitudes toward Native peoples on the part of the museum and scientific communities as well as the general public. Although some see NAGPRA primarily as cultural property law, others see it as human rights legislation designed to redress the flagrant violation of the human and civil rights of America’s indigenous peoples.

NAGPRA represents a profound shift in power relations between museums and source communities, and has led to a radical rethinking of museological practice and ethics. The law is an example of how a professional body’s code of ethics can be inadequate in addressing moral issues, and how a law, in turn can stimulate new ethical agendas. As Tristram Besterman (2006:431) has eloquently stated “ethics defines the relationship of the museum with people, not with things.”

NAGPRA and its many outcomes, including the emergence of more culturally sensitive and appropriate museology, exemplifies the concept of shared guardianship in that it requires museums to relinquish control over the care and use of collections as well as the special kinds of relationships people can have to

objects in their collections. It means respecting the dynamic, experiential and contingent quality of heritage and sharing in new ways the rights and responsibilities to this heritage. Furthermore, shared guardianship signifies respect for the ways different communities make sense of the museum and the objects that end up in museums, as well as diversity in museological practice.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have tried to demonstrate how appropriate museology and ethics are brought into sharper focus through the comparison of how objects of cultural heritage are perceived and curated in mainstream museums and indigenous contexts. As Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine suggested back in 1991 in their seminal work *Exhibiting Cultures*, we begin to see the artifice of our own practices when we look at them in comparison with those in other contexts.

The insights gained through comparison encourage us to question ideas like “best practices” that have become orthodox in the museum profession. Best practice not only runs counter to appropriate museology, but also to the cultural diversity it is intended to respect. Such diversity might be better served by a discourse of appropriate practice rather than standard or best.

Increased knowledge of Sámi museology and how the Sámi people are using the museum concept to meet their own socioeconomic needs and political interests has much to contribute to the growing body of literature in comparative museology, as does the past and present nature of relationships between the Sámi people and Nordic ethnographic and cultural history museums. Taken together, these two interconnected lines of inquiry

can give us a fuller and more inclusive picture of what constitutes contemporary Nordic museology.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Simpson 1996, 2006; Clifford 1997, 2013; Erikson *et al.* 2002; Kreps 2003, 2007, 2011; Peers & Brown 2003; Isaac 2007; Stanley 2007; Sleeper-Smith 2009; Phillips 2011; Lone-tree 2012; Silverman 2015.

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