Connecting Collecting
Edited by Eva Fägerborg & Elin von Unge

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Preface

During two intensive days, 15–16 November 2007, delegates from nineteen countries gathered for the conference *Connecting Collecting* at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. With the conference we also celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Swedish museum network Samdok. This was founded in 1977 by the museums of cultural history who wished to cooperate on the collection of material geared to the present day. There is great need today for dialogue and collaboration in the international museum community, and we found it important not just to celebrate Samdok’s anniversary with an international conference but also to use this as an opportunity to initiate cooperation across borders. It was possible to hold the conference thanks to financial support from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, and an international network for the museums’ collecting issues has also been formed.

When we now publish the papers from the conference, it is in the hope that this contribution to international exchange of experience will give rise to new – and necessary – discussion and collaboration.

*Christina Mattsson*
Director, Nordiska Museet
Chair of the Samdok Council
## Contents

*Eva Fägerborg & Elin von Unge*
Introduction ................................................................. 7

### Opening and welcome addresses

*Birgitta Dahl*
Connecting Collecting – in a spirit of mutual respect ................................................................. 9

*Hans Manneby* ........................................................................ 12

*Christina Mattsson* ................................................................. 13

*Eva Fägerborg*
The Swedish Samdok network ................................................................. 14

*Elizabeth Ellen Merritt*
Beyond the cabinet of curiosities: Towards a modern rationale of collecting .................................................. 17

*Ciraj Rassool*
Museum and heritage documentation and collecting beyond modernism:
Lessons from South Africa for the future ................................................................. 26

*Lykke L Pedersen*
Celebrating in the public, private and virtual space. Contemporary study of the Danes and the Crown Prince’s Wedding in 2004 ................................................................. 34

*Rebecca Thomlinson*
Collecting the here and now: Contemporary collecting at the BPMA ................................................................. 40

*Inger Jensen & Thomas Michael Walle*
Norwegian yesterday, today, tomorrow?
A presentation of a project on recent immigration to Norway ................................................................. 46

*Christine Fredriksen*
Youth across the border ................................................................. 52

*Kylea Little*
Contemporary collecting at Tyne and Wear Museums: An overview focusing on outreach work ................................................................. 58

*Katty H Wahlgren & Fredrik Svanberg*
Archaeological collecting, the contemporary and public involvement ................................................................. 62

*Jan Garnert*
When old collections are renewed.
Exploring cultural meanings of radio receivers and satellite dishes ................................................................. 70

*Anna Kotańska*
The photographic collection in the Historical Museum of Warsaw ................................................................. 75
Thomas Ulrich
A changing approach – a changing identity: Evaluating collection and collecting strategies at the Norwegian Telecom Museum .............. 82

Eva-Sofi Ernstell
Who is the keeper? Collecting and storing in the National Swedish Museums of Military History ................................................. 87

Catherine Marshall
Putting collections to work. Some strategies from the first decade of the Irish Museum of Modern Art ........................................... 91

Zelda Baveystock
Relevance and representation. The state of contemporary collecting in the UK ................................................................. 96

Riina Reinvelt
The collections of the National Museum and stereotypes ........................................................................................................ 101

Leif Pareli
The future of Sami heritage in museum collections .................................................................................................................. 105

Jan Dolák
Documentation of the recent period in the Czech Republic ................................................................. 108

Ilze Knoka
Collecting contemporaneity in Latvia: Communicative and professional aspects ......................... 110

Anna Żakiewicz
Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. The problem of wanted and unwanted donations to the museum collection ......................... 113

Tanja Roženbergar Šega
Contemporary society in Slovene museums .......... 119

Author presentations ........................................................................ 123

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Appendix:
Connecting Collecting conference programme
Introduction

Eva Fägerborg & Elin von Unge

The reality of everyday life is, to a large extent, depending on who we are, what we do and where we live. For this reason, historical and contemporary contexts are essential for museum work all over the world. Present day as a specific field of study within the museum sector therefore evokes new and shared questions. The global economy, migration issues and climate change are just a few examples of universal concerns that affect the societal context in which people today live. Subsequently, these matters are of the utmost importance in contemporary museum work.

Now, at the start of the twenty-first century, we are facing changes and inventions that directly affect our opportunities to communicate. It has become easier to learn about other people’s outlooks, experiences, and working methods. Not only has it become easier to travel physically around the globe, we can also travel in just a few seconds within and between different virtual spaces. This means that our perceptions of dimensions such as time and place are drastically changing.

The global society enables a flow of people, products, and ideas, but at the same time it creates new antagonisms. Museums are thus faced with the shared challenge of problematizing the work of collection in relation to the world and the conditions in which they act. It is becoming increasingly important to develop our activities through international dialogue and cooperation. This is an issue for the future for museums in all countries.

In 1977 the Swedish museums of cultural history established Samdok, as a collaborative body for organizing the collecting of artefacts in the age of mass production. Samdok has, of course, constantly gone through changes. During these thirty years, different issues have been in focus, and the working methods have varied. In international terms Samdok was an innovation in the museum world, which attracted attention at an early stage, both for the focus on the present and for its methodology. Nowadays contemporary issues are on the museum agenda all over the world, and in many countries collection work reflects society of today. It therefore felt natural that Samdok’s thirtieth anniversary should be celebrated by looking forward and looking beyond the borders of Sweden, hence the decision to arrange an international conference.

One idea behind the conference was that it would be the starting point for an international network with the focus on collection issues. The aim of the conference was thus highlighted in its title – Connecting Collecting. By regarding collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community and by bringing together experiences and perspectives from different countries, the conference aimed to lay the foundation for international collaboration.

Advance information about the conference was distributed in the autumn of 2006, followed by an invitation with a call for papers in March 2007. The initiative aroused considerable interest around the world, bringing delegates from nineteen countries. Besides lectures
by the two specially invited keynote speakers, Elizabeth E Merritt and Ciraj Rassool, there were sixteen presentations. With illustrative examples and different perspectives, they discussed both how museums collect and how the collections are used today. Meeting in an international context and talking about one’s own specific experiences and circumstances reveals both similarities and differences. A range of theoretical, methodological, and empirical examples and attitudes came together, clearly showing how views of collecting issues are related to national and political contexts and are simultaneously part of an ongoing international discussion about the museum as both a part of and a creator of cultural heritage.

In the final session of the conference a network was established and a working group was formed. The network has been given the name Collectingnet and will initially communicate through a newsletter. In the forthcoming process of developing the aims and objectives and initiating a dialogue with ICOM, the network faces its first challenges. The dialogue has begun by raising questions about how international cooperation on collecting and collections should be demarcated. The interests and contributions of the members will subsequently guide and decide the shape of the network.

In this publication we have assembled the majority of the conference papers, revised as articles suitable for the print medium. There are also three contributions which did not feature in the conference proceedings. This introduction is followed by four opening addresses about the purpose and context of the conference, and a brief presentation of Samdok. Then come the in-depth articles of the two keynote speakers, with a difference in character which also reflects the wide span of approaches to the conference theme. The subsequent papers are structured in three loose groups: presentations and discussions of contemporary studies and collecting projects, with examples from Scandinavia and Britain, represent the first group. Next come contributions exploring different attitudes to the work associated with the museums’ existing collections. The papers in the final section concern both collections and collecting, emphasizing how museums’ work with these is governed by prevailing political conditions and traditional academic structures; they also show how the museums themselves create stereotyped ideas in the public concerning what the collections should contain.

All in all, the texts display a diversity of approaches to the museums’ work with collecting issues in the present day. The publication will thereby, we hope, contribute to intensified discussion of these issues – which are so relevant to the core of the museums, now and in the future.
Opening and welcome addresses

Connecting Collecting
– in a spirit of mutual respect

Birgitta Dahl
Chairman of the Board, Nordiska Museet
Former Speaker of Parliament, former Minister of Environment

Honourable audience, distinguished guests, speakers and contributors, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends!

A warm welcome to Nordiska Museet, to Stockholm, to Sweden on this beautifully sunny November day! I hope you will have time to enjoy our beautiful city! Above all welcome to this international conference on collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community: Connecting Collecting – in a spirit of mutual respect!

We have taken the initiative for this conference as a relevant way of celebrating that Samdok – the Swedish museum network for contemporary studies and collecting – has now been in operation for 30 years. This year we are also celebrating that this building has been in operation as a museum for 100 years – although the Foundation Nordiska Museet was established already in 1880 by Arthur Hazelius. We do believe that nothing could be a more appropriate way of celebrating our anniversaries and cultural heritage than to initiate a new international forum for dialogue and collaboration on collecting issues.

We are indeed very proud of our staff for their excellent work in preparing for the conference. Thank you! And we are deeply grateful to the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation for their generous financial support to our Conference and to our Research School. Thank you!

In our presentation we wrote:

We invite museum professionals and scholars to …
... discuss and share experiences on collecting in contemporary society.
... discuss and share experiences of contemporary use of collections acquired in earlier scientific, ideological and political contexts.
... discuss, and hopefully agree on, establishing an international museum Collecting Network, which may develop into a new international ICOM committee. Objectives and scope, initial planning.

Dear friends, we are indeed very happy to see so many prominent participants from so many countries and museums! Once again – welcome!

In our letter of invitation a year ago we wrote:

“Today, many museums of cultural and social history around the world are engaged in contemporary issues and also devote part of their research and collecting to the society of today. New museums are established, facing rapid structural changes, migration and trans-local social life. How should they act when building collections? Most museums also house old collections acquired in earlier scientific, ideological and political
Opening and welcome addresses

contexts. How can they use these collections to discuss issues of relevance for people today, and how should new acquisitions correspond with already existing collections?---

We believe that an intensified and extended dialogue and collaboration across borders would be beneficial for the development of museum practices, and we therefore invite museum professionals and scholars to the conference in November 2007 and to initial discussions on the formation of a Collecting Network for museums of cultural and social history.

And here we are together looking forward to two days of intense dialogue and, hopefully, future cooperation!

Many of our old museums, like Nordiska Museet, were founded under the impression of the flourishing patriotic movements of the nineteenth century. Many old and new nation states wanted to establish and express their cultural identity after centuries of wars, occupation, maybe disruption. There was a strong wish to preserve the cultural heritage for future generations.

Many times, as here in Sweden, this was achieved at the last minute in the period of industrialization, urbanization and emigration – 20 per cent of our population emigrated because of poverty and lack of freedom. Strong actors in this struggle for our national culture were popular movements, the homestead movement and the handicraft movement – along with our schools and universities.

Today we see a similar movement in the nations that have achieved independence during the last 50–60 years. When the United Nations was founded in 1945 it had 51 members – today nearly 200. Many of these ‘new’ nations have experienced colonialism, oppression, exploitation, poverty, maybe also civil war and cruel dictators. It is evident for many reasons that they want to manifest their cultural heritage and identity. Many of these countries are also in the process of radical economic and social changes creating economic development and threats to their cultural traditions.

Today we live in a new world where cultures meet in countries and across boarders. Many nation states include many peoples with different languages, traditions, religions. Some peoples live in different states, as the Sami people here in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia or the Kurds in the Middle East. Most of us live in a multicultural environment.

This has not always been the case. When I was a schoolgirl and a young woman, Sweden was still an extremely homogeneous society. The outside world was unknown and foreigners very rare. Less than 10 per cent could speak any other language than Swedish. We had a Lutheran State Church and its faith was taught in our schools. Other religions were detested. There was nothing like rights for minorities.

This has all changed. Today all children learn English in school – most of them two or more languages. Twenty per cent of our inhabitants are immigrants from all parts of the world. More than 100 nationalities live in Sweden. Their children have the right to learn their mother tongue in school – together with Swedish and English. The rights of the minorities – the Sami people, the Swedish Finns, the Tornedalers, the Roma and the Jews – have been protected by law since 1999 when we became partners of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. It was one of my most rewarding experiences as Speaker of the Swedish Parliament to preside over the session where these decisions were taken with representatives of all these groups in their traditional dresses present in the galleries of the plenary. Just now our main exhibition SÁPMI tells the story of the Sami people. We do not have a state church. Religions live side by side. The Catholic Church is our second biggest denomination, Islam the third. Three of my grandchildren live in a suburb of Stockholm, Rinkeby, where 90 per cent of the inhabitants are immigrants and the Muslim children an absolute majority in the schools.

This is a new reality, a major change that has taken place during two generations. We cannot ignore that we do have some problems with relations and integration. But none the less, there is no doubt that our ‘new Swedes’ and our new contacts with the rest of the world, with other cultures and religions, have greatly enriched our life – in daily details as well as in the perception of the world. This has given us new chances, new experiences, and new challenges to form our identity.
Opening and welcome addresses

This new reality has also changed, renewed, and transformed the commission for the museums of cultural and social history. Our task is, of course, to preserve, document and display our cultural heritage. But it is also to present the meeting between cultures and religions in our countries and between countries and continents. It is to evidence the process of change in and between our societies. It is to show the realities of our societies – this world – today.

In this work we need cooperation and dialogue, we need to learn from each other, we need to stimulate and encourage each other. I – we – do hope that this conference Connecting Collecting will be the starting point of such a process. I wish you much success in your important endeavours.

Distinguished guests, with these words I declare this international conference Connecting Collecting opened!
Opening and welcome addresses

Hans Manneby
Director General, Västarvet,
Chairman of ICOM Sweden

Dear colleagues and friends,

In my short speech, I will go straight to what is coming up at the end of this conference, or rather, what might come up after this conference, and briefly comment on a paper included in the document file given to all delegates: Formation of an international museum network for collecting issues.

Last year Samdok introduced ICOM Sweden to the idea of celebrating 30 years of Samdok activities, with an international conference on collections and contemporary issues. The idea from Samdok was, and still is, to broaden the discussion on collecting issues, and to open up for more international perspectives and more international dialogue within this field.

The idea is also to work for the establishment of an international museum network, for the fundamental museum mission of collecting. If this proves to be a good idea that meets real needs and demands from professionals in the museum world, the next logical step would be to try to develop a new International Committee on collecting issues within the ICOM system.

The board of ICOM Sweden found this idea great and we have supported the project from the first day, not least the tempting prospect of seeing an International Collecting Committee within ICOM in the near future. We support the idea because we simply think that members of ICOM will benefit greatly from committees dealing with fundamental museum tasks in an international, problem-oriented, theoretical, context of principal and practice – in this specific case, collecting.

Today there are 30 International Committees within ICOM, each devoted either to the study of a particular type of museum, for example City Museums, Regional Museums, University Museums, Modern Art Museums, Historic House Museums, or devoted to a specific museum-related discipline such as Conservation, Documentation, Exhibition Exchange, Security.

Many specialized committees are of course from time to time also concerned with the challenges facing collections within their own special field, or their own special kind of museum. But strangely enough, there is no International Committee with specific focus on the type of questions that will be discussed at this conference.

Well, we will see after the conference what will happen with the idea of creating an international museum network for collecting issues. First we have two full Connecting Collecting days with many interesting papers and perspectives on this theme, and this is what we all are looking forward to right now.

Thank you!

Hans Manneby passed away in March 2008. The Swedish museum community has thereby lost a person who meant a great deal for the furtherance of international museum issues.

The editors.
Opening and welcome addresses

Christina Mattsson
Director, Nordiska Museet,
Chair of the Samdok Council

Dear friends,

The Nordiska Museet has over a million objects in different stores. The objects are arranged in a practical way, so that textiles are in one space, chests in another, glass in a third, and so on. This also means that we have a reasonably good idea of what we have in the different categories. What we see is above all our ancestors’ history, our grandparents’ history. We can also see our parents’ history. But where is the history of our own time and our children’s history?

Our museum collections are already very large and we are hesitant about the thought of collecting even more. But we also hesitate for other reasons. What are we to collect? Should we collect everything or should we choose? And if so, how do we choose? This was how Samdok first came into existence.

Samdok is an association involving the Swedish museums of cultural history. Samdok was created to direct the museums’ attention away from the old agrarian society and towards the rapidly changing industrial society.

With the aid of Samdok, the idea was to fill a gap in the museums, the gap that represents perhaps the most dramatic period in the life of individual people in Sweden: the whole transition from self-sufficiency to the information society. Samdok distributed responsibility for the work of documentation, but it was also interested in developing the continuous study of everyday life in Sweden.

Samdok is a shared resource for museums in Sweden. It has been the task of the Nordiska Museet, as the largest museum of cultural history in the country, to be the backbone of the organization. Now we want to share ideas and experiences with the international museum community.

I would like to bid you all very welcome.
Opening and welcome addresses

The Swedish Samdok network

Eva Fägerborg
Samdok Secretariat, Nordiska Museet

It is a great pleasure to see you all here, and I am glad to convey greetings from colleagues from other countries, in different parts of the world, who have taken an interest in the conference but could not attend.

With increasing awareness of the power of cultural heritage, museums as creators of cultural heritage are now intensely debated as actors in society. They are producers of images of reality that are exhibited, preserved and stored in artefact collections and archives. This forces museum professionals to reflect continuously on the impact and consequences of their work. In Sweden, Samdok – the cultural history museums’ network for contemporary studies and collecting – is a forum for such reflections and discussions. In the latest issue (no 2, 2007) of our periodical Samtid & museer, also available on-line, you will find a more detailed presentation; here I shall just give a brief orientation about our work.

Samdok currently has about 80 members – county museums, municipal museums, central museums, specialist museums, along with some other institutions. The members get together in working groups, known as pools, and the core of Samdok work is the studies and collection carried on in the pools by the respective museums.

The work is supported by the Samdok Secretariat located at the Nordiska Museet, the Samdok Council with representatives of different kinds of museums, and the Research Council which is integrated in the Nordiska Museet’s Research Council.

The pool system is perhaps the best-known characteristic of Samdok. In eight groups, representatives from the member museums meet regularly around contemporary issues and the task of investigating and collecting material concerning contemporary phenomena. The pools ventilate museum projects, theoretical, methodological and ethical questions; they invite researchers from universities, organize field seminars and study visits. These recurrent meetings give museum professionals specific opportunities to develop their work mutually.

I wish to emphasize that Samdok is not a unit or a centralized body, it is its members. And the Samdok family is a heterogeneous crowd of museums with different aims and directions, different needs, competences and working conditions.

What is common is the mission to contribute to a deeper understanding of human beings, of people in society, through contemporary studies and collecting. In Samdok, the focus is on people’s lives, activities, experiences, conditions and values related to time, space and social contexts.

Generally speaking, museum collecting is a matter of exploring relations between human beings and objects, settings and issues/phenomena in society and creating material that can be useful for many purposes. Museums apply various collecting methods and perspectives, depending on the aims in the specific cases. Within Samdok, the acquisition of objects is mostly a part of the ethnographic fieldwork, with the research questions as the guide to the choice of objects. This contextual col-
lecting provides good opportunities to combine material and immaterial aspects, and to develop different forms of dialogue and cooperation with people in society.

The projects generate a variety of material: interviews, field notes, artefacts, photographs, sound and video recordings, and documents.

This broad approach to collecting has dominated for a long time, although Samdok arose from the need to support the collecting of contemporary, mass-produced objects. It started as an organization for co-operation in collecting present-day artefacts and continued with documenting present-day life. These basic tasks remain. In the course of time, Samdok has also become a forum for scholarly discussions on contemporary culture and society, a forum for reflections on cultural heritage as a product of collecting, a forum for sharing experiences, professional development and further education. And the network is continually exploring new fields of study and trying new working methods.

For the future, museums in Sweden, as in other countries, need to develop their work on a global basis, theoretically as well as in museum practices. Global perspectives involve collaboration, and I can promise that Samdok museums are ready to take part.

I will finish this short introduction by presenting a visual tour around Sweden, consisting of photographs that are part of a number of Samdok museum studies on different themes and belonging to different projects, carried out for various purposes. This is a small selection, to give you an idea of how present-day life in Sweden is depicted through the lenses of museum photographers.

From the slideshow Images of contemporary Sweden, consisting of 143 pictures, a few are presented on the next page. The slideshow themes were: Ways of life, Traditions and rituals, Coffee break, Rooms for life, Enterprising spirit, Large-scale industry, Tracking industrial society, At the end of life, The use of nature, and Celebrating Sweden.

connecting collecting: introduction
Connecting Collecting: Merritt

Beyond the cabinet of curiosities: Towards a modern rationale of collecting

Elizabeth Ellen Merritt
American Association of Museums

There is an emerging consensus in the United States that museums ought to have formal, written, board-approved collections plans that create a rationale for how they shape their collections. The impetus for this comes in part from increased awareness of the additional resources needed to care responsibly for the vast collections museums hold in the public trust. Dialogue in the museum field has led to the conclusion that sound collections planning begins with the creation of an intellectual framework to guide decision-making.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services estimates there are approximately 17,500 museums in the US — about one museum for every 17,500 residents. This diverse assembly includes zoos, aquariums, botanic gardens, science museums, art museums, children’s museums, transportation museums, history museums, historic houses, as well as specialty museums focusing on a wide variety of subjects from clocks, quilts, and typewriters to dentistry and funerary customs. Almost three quarters of US museums are privately governed, non-governmental, nonprofit organizations, meaning they have been granted tax-exempt status by the federal government. Most of the rest are government museums, city, state, or federal institutions, or a mixture of both (a private organization cooperating with a government entity to run a museum.)

A typical US museum has:

- annual operating expenses of $783,000
- 6 full-time and 4 part-time paid staff, and 60 volunteers
- a building of nearly 23,000 square feet, which costs $3 per square foot to operate
- almost 34,000 visitors a year
- a $6 admission fee (though the vast majority offer free days or other methods of providing free admissions)

More than one fourth of these museums were founded in the last quarter of the twentieth century, many spurred by the US bicentennial in 1976. AAM’s data suggests that more than 500 museums opened in that year, and as many as 3,000 museums were founded in the 1970s overall.1 This proliferation has resulted in increased demands on sources of funding. For private, nonprofit museums, only 13 percent of their support comes from local, state, or federal government, and 40 percent comes from private and corporate philanthropy. On average, private nonprofit museums earn more than a third of their income from activities such as membership and admission fees, space rental, museum store sales and food services. The median amount contributed to annual operated expenses from draw on the endowment is about 12 percent.

1 Unless otherwise noted, data cited in this paper come from AAM’s published research, primarily Meritt, ed (2006).
Somewhere between $4.5 and $6 billion dollars in private charitable and public support is provided to US museums each year. This charitable support, like tax exempt status, is given with the understanding that museums are educational organizations that operate in the public interest. Each museum identifies in its mission statement whom it serves and how it spends its money delivering on this mission. A museum must constantly prove that this mission is worthwhile and that it is effectively fulfilling it. Neither government nor philanthropic support is guaranteed.

The cost of caring for collections

US museums hold roughly 986 million items in the public trust, and spend about $1 billion each year on collections care (a little more than one dollar per object). The museum community is making the case that this is not enough, that it actually needs significantly more support to fulfill these stewardship responsibilities. And there is, certainly, documented need:

- 89 percent of US museums do not have adequate storage facilities for all their collections
- 80 percent have no emergency preparedness plan that covers collections or trained staff to carry out such a plan
- 63 percent have no paid staff to perform conservation or preservation work
- 45 percent do not have collections management policies
- 14 percent have no environmental controls

(Public Trust at Risk, 2005)

Collections do not generally earn their own way – more collections do not, as a rule, bring more earned revenue into the museum. And donated collections are rarely accompanied by endowed support. So increased support for collections care will have to be philanthropic – either government or private. But by asking for more money to care for the artistic, cultural and natural heritage they hold in the public trust, museums open themselves up to close scrutiny regarding how well they are fulfilling their stewardship responsibilities. What is each US citizen getting for his or her $3 per year?

The primary justifications that museums give for collecting, as expressed in their mission statements, are to preserve these resources and make them accessible to the public. But is ‘the good’ of the public really what drives collecting? Do museums accomplish these goals well enough to justify the support provided by the public? And are museums the most efficient way to fulfill these functions?

Museums’ role as protectors of collections

First let us examine preservation, starting with the basic function of protecting collections from risks. This subject is getting a lot of attention right now, both because of recent natural disasters, and because of the appalling statistic cited above regarding the lack of emergency preparedness planning in US museums. Museums present themselves as bank vaults for cultural, scientific, and artistic resources – if the public entrusts this material to them, they will keep it safe for them. But is there a downside to this model? Sometimes it seems as if museums are simply herding together important material so it can all be threatened in one place. (An entire collection – if not properly stored and cared for – is in danger if a disaster occurs.) Museums may (or may not) do a good job of mitigating the smaller, day to day and month to month risks like fluctuations of temperature and humidity, light, etc, but often do a bad job of contending with rare catastrophic events that can’t be prevented and only imperfectly mitigated.

Let’s examine this point. Museums tend to concentrate collections, and therefore risk, a questionable strategy in a world of increasingly common (and hard to predict) natural and man-made disasters. A number of museums in the United States either house the majority of a given artist’s work, or constitute the largest single publicly displayed collection of that person’s work. In

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2 Unpublished data from AAM’s Museum Assessment Program participants.
either case, they hold the archives and documentary material that provide invaluable context for scholarship on any of the artist’s oeuvre, wherever it is housed. And these institutions – for example, the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, Colo, the Andy Warhol Museum, in Pittsburgh, Pa, the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass, and the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, N Mex – are quite proud, justifiably so, of having built such powerhouse collections.

A striking example is the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum in Biloxi, Miss, which houses more than 300 works and the definitive archives of George Ohr, the ‘Mad Potter of Biloxi’ In fall 2005, the museum was in the midst of building a new campus designed by Frank Gehry, consisting of a cluster of small buildings, on a scenic piece of land a couple hundred yards from the Atlantic Ocean. On the morning of August 29, Hurricane Katrina picked up one of the enormous casino barges moored off the coast, and deposited it on top of the museum’s campus. Fortunately, the building was unfinished and therefore no collections housed in it were destroyed. In light of this experience, the museum is collaborating with other local institutions on plans for off-site storage several miles inland from the coast. Nevertheless, this incident dramatizes the risks inherent in concentrating collections and records in risk-prone areas.

If the ultimate public benefit is continued access to these collections in the long run, perhaps it would be more responsible to assess risk and distribute works collectively rather than collecting in service of individual missions. Certainly there is an advantage to scholars being able to examine such comprehensive works in one setting, but they cope with not having this advantage with the works of many artists. Perhaps it is not responsible for a museum to hold the comprehensive collections or archives of a given artist. For some museums in particularly high risk areas, maybe it is not responsible for them to have certain works at all, if they cannot adequately mitigate the risks.

Besides the possibility of natural disaster – flood, fire, earthquake, mudslides, hurricanes, tornados – there is the danger of simple extinction. Museums can go broke, and close. AAM’s list of museums that have closed in the last few years, which is not comprehensive, contains more than 80 institutions. What happens to the collections in such instances? In the case of art museums, it is likely that the collections, if seized by creditors, would go on to new owners with a vested interest in protecting them, even if they were no longer in the public domain. With natural history collections, this is not necessarily the case. There is at least one infamous case of a major US university that decided to deaccession its natural history collections, many of which ended up in dumpsters.

A museum does not even have to close to put its collections at risk. In the US, there has been a spate of university museums in the news because their parent organization, the university itself, decided that it wanted to sell collections to add to the university’s endowment. For example, the Maier Museum of Art is wrestling with its parent, Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va, over the sale of four important works. The school was put on notice by its accrediting organization that it had an unacceptably high draw on its endowment (though the endowment itself is quite sizable) and it seized on selling works from the museum as a way to shore up its finances. Given that parent organizations may always put their overarching mission above that of the museum, one might argue that any collections belonging to museums in parent organizations (and 35 percent of them do) are inherently at risk. Museum’s role as gatekeepers to collections

So much for some weak points in museums’ claim to be uber-preservationists. What about their role in making collections accessible? Public museums evolved in a different age when:

- The only easy access to their collections was physical and in-person (with the laborious alternative of snail mail correspondence with the curator).
- There was functionally no good way for an individual to conduct a global search across institutions.
The Internet has provided a way to separate physical from intellectual access in a way that really is a paradigm shift — one museums have not fully incorporated into their thinking and ways of operating. Research and interpretation increasingly start with electronically available data and images. Thus these activities can be partially divorced from the issue of who actually cares for the material. Museums mount digital information about their collections on the Web, and frequently mount digital exhibitions. Recent research by the Media and Technology Committee of the AAM shows that museums typically have twice as many visitors to their websites as they do to their physical museums. For some museums in the survey, the online audience was ten times more than their physical audience.

And, if the main issue is to know where collections are and be able to access them (or access relevant information) would not this goal be as well served by putting a large chunk of these resources into electronic catalogues, metadata, search tools for knowing where this material is (whoever holds it), and then leverage access in other ways? Typically a museum only has 4 or 5 percent of its collections on exhibit. (Less, at a natural history museum with large research collections, more at an arts center with relatively small collections.) If museums are desperately overcrowded, as they say, perhaps there is a role for encouraging private owners of collections to make them publicly accessible. Such an alternate system or preservation and access could release museums of the sole responsibility of housing collections that benefit the public. As long as an object is accessible to exhibit designers, educators, and researchers, does it actually need to be owned by the museum? Particularly when museums report an acute dearth of adequate storage?

This might be achieved through a system that encourages a donation of rights similar to land trust or building preservation easements. In such systems, the private owner gives up certain rights in return for a tax benefit. An organization, such as a land trust may exercise oversight or stewardship of such easements. Perhaps private collectors of art or antiquities could donate access rights to the public in return for tax breaks. A certified conservator and registrar could assess the works, their storage conditions, and documentation periodically, as prerequisite of the arrangement. The private owner would make information on the work publicly accessible via the Internet, perhaps on a national database of collections resources. And the owner would make the works accessible to scholars on a regular basis, as well as for public exhibition through loan to museums.

Are museums caring for the right collections?

The data cited above reveals the vast gap between the resources museum have and those they need to adequately care for this material. Before we can ask private donors, foundations, or the government to pour more money into taking care of these collections, they can rightly ask: does it all belong in a museum, is it worth our money to preserve? Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding ‘no.’ Anyone who works in a museum, in the course of browsing through the storage rooms, or participate in an inventory, comes across something, probably a lot of somethings, which elicit the reaction ‘What in the world was someone thinking when they accepted this?’ Sometimes the thing itself does not belong in a museum; sometimes it is simply out of place in that particular museum. In fact, the US Accreditation Commission finds this is a widespread problem, even in high performing museums, and is collectively a huge drain on museum resources.

This situation makes a certain sense. Many museums, in their founding and their operations, are driven by private goals, not a desire for the public good. Founders, donors, directors, curators, have their own motivations for building collections. Private collectors and museum founders often look for some form of immortality. Directors and curators gain professional status and the intellectual satisfaction of pursuing a private vision. None of these motivations are bad, but they do not necessarily best serve the public good. Look, for illustration, back to our examples of museums concentrating risk by holding comprehensive collections of individual artists. Definitely good for the museums’ reputations, maybe not so good for the public. Also, while sometimes the curato-
rial vision of individual collectors is excellent – Isabella Stewart Gardner is a case in point – many other founders had, shall we say, less than stellar judgment regarding what deserved to be preserved in a museum.

To further complicate matters, there is now in the US an explicit expectation (codified in national standards) that the community the museum serves should have a meaningful voice in how the museum serves their needs. Logically, this expectation includes input into key decisions, including how the museum uses their resources, and what it will collect. That throws into question the sacrosanct nature of the existing collections, which were shaped by different expectations, and may not do a good job of meeting the community’s needs.

The reasoning that drives these decisions is not peculiar to founders or curators. It is deeply embedded in human psychology. To illuminate this, I would like to digress briefly to the field of economics – the study of how people interact with resources in general. Sometimes we assume that bigger is better, but actually collections often adhere to the law of diminishing returns. Once available resources of space, staff time, or money are exceeded, adding material to the collection actually diminishes its overall utility by contributing to overcrowding and a backlog of documentation. This perspective casts the decision to acquire a new item, even a ‘free’ donation, in a new light. All museums, no matter how wealthy, have a limit to their resources. Any given choice to add an object to the collection may preclude later, better choices.

What do I mean by this? Let’s look at another economic concept: sunk costs. This is easiest to explain by example. Someone buys a movie ticket, then realizes that rather than being the documentary biopic she thought it was, it is actually a low-brow slasher flick. (Or visa versa.) The cost of the movie ticket is a sunk cost – she asked but the movie theater won’t refund it. At this point she can either sit through the movie, which she hates, and waste time in addition to money, or she can go do something else, like have a nice walk in the park, and ONLY waste the money. The sad fact is, most people will sit through the movie so that the purchase price was not ‘wasted.’

With collections, there is also a tendency to continue to throw resources at bad choices. Because the museum has curated a costume collection for decades, they continue to do so. Because they have a collection of 355 historic typewriters, they accept the 356th. The staff may realize, in fact that the costume collection no longer fits the museum’s focus, or that the typewriter collection fills no existing need, but they are constrained by tradition.

It is also useful to examine a related concept: opportunity costs. In economics, this term refers to the cost of something in terms of an opportunity forgone (and the benefits that could be received from that opportunity), or the most valuable alternative that was not chosen. The appropriate question to ask, when allocating scarce museum resources, is not ‘Is this a good acquisition?’ but rather ‘Is this the best thing I could add to the collection?’ These are not neutral decisions, because accepting one thing, and using up space, time, and resources to take care of it, may well mean you can’t accept something else later. This is particularly true because deaccessioning itself is time and labor intensive (not to mention its potential for generating bad publicity).

To conclude so far: Sometimes we get trapped into calculating how much time and effort and money we have already spent acquiring and taking care of material – but these are sunk costs. The appropriate question is, what are the opportunity costs of maintaining exactly what you have, or adding more collections of the same kind, versus making different choices? Which choice has the largest benefit in terms of mission-delivery, service to your community, economic stability, etc?

The great leap forward: from collecting to collections planning

How do we incorporate these concepts into shaping our collections? How do we avoid the traps of sunk costs and lost opportunity costs? There needs to be a structured way of measuring costs and benefits and making conscious choices about how to build a collection that maximizes the utility of the collection however you measure it. If the collection is not to be formed by the individual vision of one person, or a compilation of the individual visions of a bunch of people, what will guide collecting?
If not everything in the collection now belongs there, what criteria guides the choice to deaccession? How do we provide a common framework for decision-making that reflects an institutional, not an individual vision, and that consciously strives to serve the public good? In the United States, we are moving towards consensus that this should be done through the creation of a collections plan that establishes the institutional vision guiding the content of the collections.

To explore the issue of collections planning in more depth, in 2002, AAM partnered with the National Museum of American History to hold the National Collections Planning Colloquium, which brought together 80 people representing 36 museums of all types and sizes from across the country. Much of the material I present in the last half of this paper comes out of this convening and subsequent discussions with the field. And this is a good example of how the museum field comes to consensus about standards and best practices – people from diverse museums talking to each other, comparing notes, and seeing where we can agree.

Colloquium participants identified a collections plan as:

... a plan that guides the content of the collections and leads staff in a coordinated and uniform direction over time to refine and expand the value of the collections in a predetermined way. Plans are time-limited and identify specific goals to be achieved. They also provide a rationale for these choices and specify how they will be achieved, who will implement the plan, when it will happen, and what it will cost.

A collections plan is distinct from a collections policy, which US museum standards have required since 1999. Policies establish general guidelines for behavior and delegate authority for implementation. While they are reviewed on a regular basis, they are not inherently tied to a timeline, and do not become out of date on a particular schedule. They change as they need to with changing circumstances. Unlike plans, they are not inherently tied to schedules or resources.

Well, don't museums already have collections plans? One might think that museums, having hundreds of years of collective experience, would at least know what they are taking in, and why. And in fact, some filters regarding what comes in the door do exist. The first of these is the mission statement, which defines who the museum serves and how. However, mission statements are typically very broad, offering minimal guidance in making choices about the contents of the collection. A classic example is the mission of the Alaska State Museum: ‘To identify, collect, preserve and exhibit Alaska’s material and natural history.’

This would practically justify accessioning the whole state. The mission is only the first, very broad filter. Museums may typically have vision statements outlining what they want to achieve in the future that refine this further. For example, a museum’s vision statement that sees the organization becoming the most important resource for local historical research in its state might encourage strengthening its archival collections. And a museum may have specific goals in its institutional plan, like ‘open a major new permanent paleontology exhibit’ that drives collecting as well. But generally these filters still fall short of providing sufficient guidance to decisions about collecting.

Collections planning fills this gap and truly institutionalizes the process of making decisions regarding collections so that they are no longer individual choices but part of a unified vision for the collections. One of the reasons it is so important for museums to create written plans is to make sure that everyone is, literally, on the same page – that everyone understands and is guided by the institutional decisions the museum has made.

At the heart of the plan – the intellectual framework

The core of the collections plan is the intellectual framework, the underlying conceptual structure that focuses the museum’s collecting efforts. It is built around the mission and the needs of users, often organized around ideas, concepts, stories, or interpretive themes that

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3 The conclusions of the colloquium are reported in depth in Gardner & Merritt 2004.
guide exhibits, programming, research, and collecting. It is specific enough to guide decision-making regarding collections.

Sometimes conceptual frameworks that guide whole disciplines shift, changing the nature of the collections held by such institutions. Such a shift, for example, provoked the metamorphosis of natural history museums from ‘Wunderkammers,’ cabinets of curiosity holding individual specimens exemplifying the diversity of creation, to comprehensive collectors of thousands of taxonomic specimens illustrating genetic diversity. This profound change in collecting was prompted by a new world view based on Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection. Suddenly, species are not seen as immutable, special instances of creation, where one specimen can exemplify the whole. Now species are seen as collections of individual variation on a theme, being acted on by natural selection. Any sufficiently distinct and advantageous variation can be the basis for evolution of a new species, under the right circumstances. Viewed in this framework, it is important to have hundreds of individuals of a given species, from as many different localities as possible, to document and study the relevant aspects. A different way of seeing leads to a different way of collecting.

A similar example exists in the realm of history. Historic house museums in the United States traditionally presented history from the point of view of the prominent white, male inhabitants of the household, focusing on their achievements in the realm of politics, war, and commerce. In the late twentieth century, however, there was a growing discontent with the narrow vision of history this presented. What of the many other stories that could be told of the inhabitants of the house? What of the women, and the simple everyday history of what it was like to live, and dress, and cook, and entertain? Or raise and educate children? What of the many, many people, often slaves or indentured servants, who were needed to support the lifestyle of these households? What did they experience, and what stories would be told from their points of view? Colonial Williamsburg, in Virginia, started its life telling a rather sanitized and idealized version of US history. Now its interpretation includes recreations of slave auctions. These stories, in turn, require new areas of collecting to bring them to life.

This intellectual framework then shapes the rest of the plan, which applies the framework to a close look at the existing collections, and whether it needs to grow, or shrink, and how. A very important next step in planning is an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the current collection, and a gap analysis of what the museum has versus what it would need to implement the intellectual framework. Note that this step may involve identifying material the museum should not have, as well as material it lacks. This is an approach that differs, culturally, in US museums from their European counterparts. ICOM ethics stipulates that ‘there must always be a strong presumption against the disposal of object to which the museum has assumed formal title,’ while the AAM code of ethics for museums takes a more proactive stance, stating that ‘museums are free to improve their collections through selective disposal ... and intentionally sacrifice objects for well-considered purposes.’

Setting priorities

When asked about a collections plan, museums often present a wish list of everything the museum wants to acquire. One way that a plan differs from such a list is that it ties potential acquisitions to a broader vision of why the museum wants them and sets priorities. Setting priorities is something museums often do very badly, and collections planning is an opportunity to do it more systematically, avoiding the dangers of lost opportunity costs. There may be a very good reason not to take something ranked a low priority on your list just because someone offers it to you if you have the prospect of conserving resources for a high priority item instead. These conversations are very difficult for staff to have outside the context of a unified vision and planning document. If opinions regarding priorities are subjective, then it is hard to have a rational discussion and come to mutual agreement on the best use of the museum’s resources.

Speaking with a unified voice regarding priorities can be extremely compelling. If the board understands why a given work is the most important thing the museum
could acquire, and why, they will be more likely to find the funds to make the purchase possible. Similarly, a well-articulated case for why the museum wants this object, and how it will help the museum deliver on its mission, and interpret its chosen themes, can help the museum convince an individual donor to support its acquisition.

Another important decision made in the process of collections planning is the strategies the museum will pursue in building its collections. Some museums aggressively raise funds to purchase collections, and if this is to be their approach, it has to be integrated into their development and financial planning. Other museums don’t have such resources and build their collections passively, by accepting donations. But without an effective filter, such a strategy is likely to result in the modern equivalent of a cabinet of curiosities – an interesting assemblage of objects that fill the storage room to capacity but don’t support the thorough exploration of any coherent stories or themes.

Participants at the National Collections Planning Colloquium discussed how these strategies might explicitly include collections sharing or niche partitioning – effectively, joint planning by two or more museums. Maritime museums, in particular, are ahead of the curve in recognizing that they cannot each take on huge collections, perhaps because the collections they care for are so inherently unstable and expensive to care for. And they have led the way in their plans in identifying what they will not collect – areas that may be covered by sister institutions. Joint planning might mean a museum can obtain these collections by loan when they need them, or it may mean they actually partition areas of interpretation, so they are not addressing stories or issues covered by other museums serving the same audiences.

And last but not least, because a collections plan is actually going to be implemented in real time and not just a vision or a wish list, it has to be translated into concrete action steps. One of the most important steps is assessment of needed resources – and not just the money to purchase collections. A museum might need to assess the available storage space and find out if it needs to be expanded, or if other collections need to be deaccessioned to make room for higher priority material. An assessment may reveal the need for new conservation facilities or training, for specialized preparation equipment, or increased security. And, if planning shows that these resources cannot be obtained, then the museum may have to circle back and modify its goals regarding the content of the collections. They are not theoretical, they are real physical object with real needs that have to be met, and the museum has to think ahead regarding whether it can meet these obligations.

Collections planning in the real museum

This process is not without challenges. For one thing, we rarely can simply abandon our past. Many museums find that they have legacy collections from a founder or major donor that it is politically impossible for them to deaccession. The founder or donor may still be alive, or the public may be so enamored of something you own that they will never, ever let you get rid of it. It is too deeply associated with their memories of your institution and rational thought has nothing to do with it.

For another, it is extremely difficult to project future needs. If your museum undertakes collections planning, at some point someone on staff, probably a curator, will say ‘How could we ever turn anything down? It might be useful in the future.’ Well yes, it might, but there is possibility and probability, and with good data and hard thought it is possible to distinguish one from the other. And it is reasonable to assume that a museum, by trying to project future need is not going to do any worse than random chance (accepting everything that comes in the door) and may well do better.

The most difficult challenge, however, is cultural. Collections planning calls for profound change in the culture of how decisions are made in museums, and therefore the power structure, and status, and everything that goes with it. Traditionally, decisions regarding what goes into the collections were made by curators, and maybe by committees of the board. This new model of collections planning is based on truly institutional decision-making, involving all relevant stakeholders. The community the
museum serves may want a voice in what the museum collects to serve their interests. Conservators, registrars, and collections managers have expertise in what it will take to care for these collections. Development and finance staff can assess the potential for gathering the necessary support to obtain and care for the material. Exhibit designers and educators have an equal stake in the intellectual framework that shapes not only the collections, but the stories the museum tells through all its interpretive activities. It may involve expanding the scope of planning to include not one, but many institutions, in order to share resources, distribute costs, and partition risk. Only by working together can the staff within museums, and the community of museums as a whole, make wise decisions that serve the public interest.

References
Museum and heritage documentation and collecting beyond modernism: Lessons from South Africa for the future

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This article is concerned with the lives and worlds of museum objects, heritage sites and oral history collections in the contradictory setting of cultural transformation in South Africa, in which new heritage frameworks have been created, but where old categories and systems of classification have proved enduring. While colonial ethnography reasserts itself in the name of indigenous recovery, heritage systems of documentation, inscription and knowledge formation continue to be marked by a politics of paternalism and cultural atonement. While these features continue to mark the main frames of national heritage, seeking to make the nation ‘knowable’, important cases have emerged where these modernist forms have been contested and transcended. Chief amongst these is the District Six Museum, where a transactive model of museum as forum has sought to draw the work of collecting and documentation into the project of constructing a critical citizenship.

In South Africa today, the notions of ‘heritage’ and ‘museum’ are used in different ways. ‘Heritage’ and ‘museum’ are used firstly as ‘document’, where you have a frame-work of ‘documentary realism’ applied to objects and sites and which is also now being extended to the domain of the intangible, such as oral history collections. Here the main emphases are on inscription, documentation, listing and taxonomy, where objects are seen as having objective, fixed and knowable meanings. Once they have been placed in taxonomic systems, and conservation plans have been devised, these artefacts, sites and collections come to be wielded in the service of national heritage.

Connected to this is the idea of heritage as ‘development’, where fixed meanings of society and the past are marshalled for institution building. Here as well, new museums are being developed to showcase the new nation of South Africa, and to deliver services to the assembled nation as well as to tourist visitors in search of the story of South Africa and the miracle of the new nation’s birth after the ravages of apartheid. This is heritage transformation seen as the product of central planning, and where expert consultants create instant themed environments (sometimes described as ‘museums’ – such as the Apartheid Museum) where the story of the nation is revealed and told. Having been forgotten, the people are asked to participate in the museum almost as an afterthought, usually to donate their memories in oral history projects.

We are living through a time when you can actually see the logics of this modernism in operation. At Freedom Park, being created on a hill in Pretoria, we can see how
the new nation seeks to fix verified lists of heroic biographies into the national pantheon. All over the country, different projects are geared towards the digitisation of liberation archives and the collection of oral histories as the basis of conserving, documenting and recovering a national history. Intangible heritage is being recorded and listed, resulting in their consequent tangibilisation, involving a conflation between archive and repertoire (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). What is happening here is that we are seeing a new attempt to give a sense of order, coherence and knowability to society through making inventories, devising conservation plans, creating institutions and installing processes of knowledge formation.

I want to show how colonial ethnography has reasserted itself in the name of indigenous recovery, and how heritage systems of documentation, inscription and knowledge formation continue to be marked by a politics of paternalism and cultural atonement. I also want to introduce some of the approaches to collections in the District Six Museum in Cape Town, where a transaction model of understanding ‘museum’ and ‘heritage’ has emerged, in which the museum is understood primarily not as collection but as ‘forum’, where the museum is a space for the promotion of a critical citizenship.

Thirdly, I want to suggest that it might be far more beneficial to transcend the documentary paradigm by approaching sites, objects and collections through a concept of contestation and a struggle over meaning, in which we need to understand the complex social lives of things in museums. In the District Six Museum, the work of collecting and documentation has been drawn much more purposefully into the project of constructing a critical citizenship. I want to make an argument for a much more nuanced, critical approach to heritage practice that goes beyond the technical and the documentary.

The cult of Bleek and Lloyd

Over a 14-year period between 1870 and 1884, a set of research encounters took place in Mowbray, Cape Town, between the European philologist Wilhelm Bleek, his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd and a group of Khoisan /Xam-speakers from the Karoo region. Convicted on charges of stock theft and other crimes arising out of defensive acts against colonial encroachment, the /Xam-speakers had been incarcerated at the Breakwater Prison, where they had also been subjects of racial research and anthropometric photography.

Those late nineteenth century encounters and engagements, mediated by the efforts of Lloyd and later Bleek’s daughter, Dorothea, gave rise to a material assemblage, a collection of testimonies, transcripts, translations, traces and artefacts. These took the form of letters, glass photographic plates, numerous notebooks and more than 450 printed pages of Specimens of Bushman Folklore (Bleek & Lloyd 1911, see also Deacon 1996; Hall 1996). These materials came to be held across three collecting institutions: the National Library of South Africa (then the South African Public Library, where Bleek and later Lloyd worked as librarians on the Sir George Grey Collection), the Iziko South African Museum and most importantly, the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the University of Cape Town (UCT) Libraries.

The /Xam testimony and folklore recorded by Bleek and Lloyd achieved importance a century later, in the 1970s and 1980s when selections thereof were marshalled in the interpretation of rock art in southern Africa. Out of these interpretations a dominant view of the significance of these records has sought to understand rock art in southern Africa by recourse to theories of shamanism. Much of this work has centred on David Lewis-Williams and his interpretations, and there are a host of associated representations in the academy and the field of heritage that draw upon this work. This dominant perspective is to be found in books published since the 1980s (Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999) in the work of a major rock art research centre as well as in a range of museums and exhibitions.1

1 There are Bleek-Lloyd exhibitions at the Iziko South African Museum (in the form of an exhibition on rock art, ‘Qe: The Power of Rock Art’, which opened in December 2003) and at the new Museum van de Caab at the Solms-Delta estate in Franschhoek, as well as at the new Origins Centre in Johannesburg, whose first and founding section is the South African Museum of Rock Art (SAMORA). This last was formed partly out of the work of the Rock Art Research Institute (formerly ‘Univ’) at the University of the Witwatersrand, which was headed by David Lewis-Williams until his retirement a
Generally following this dominant perspective initiated by David Lewis-Williams, Janette Deacon has been one of the main scholars who studied the Bleek-Lloyd records to understand rock art as the physical signs of a San spirit world and religious belief. Perhaps Deacon’s most significant contribution has been her efforts to identify and map the actual locations from which the /Xam speakers came and to which they refer in their stories. Her work, which was inspired by that of David Lewis-Williams saw her undertake various fieldtrips to the Northern Cape. What followed was an archaeological study of the rock engravings in the area of the ‘Grass’ and ‘Flat’ Bushmen which tried to draw connections with /Xam beliefs and customs as contained in the nineteenth century records. For Deacon, the Bleek-Lloyd collection were records of the /Xam cognitive system which also recorded valuable information for understanding ‘such elements as the metaphors expressed in the rock art of southern Africa and the close bond that existed between these indigenous people and the landscape in which they lived.’ (Deacon 1996: 113; see also Deacon & Dowson 1996).2

David Lewis-Williams suggested that Wilhelm Bleek had been a man before his times for whom Bushman and European languages were equals. In a similar vein, Janette Deacon argued in 1996 that what had unfolded in Mowbray had been ‘a remarkable relationship between two families’ who were drawn together in a ‘joint effort’ to record the language and folklore of the /Xam, the ‘descendents of the indigenous San of the northern Cape’. The Bleek-Lloyd records, she suggested had been ‘the result of remarkable mutual respect and co-operation between interviewers and interviewees’ (Deacon 1996: 93–113; Skotnes 1996 and 2001).3 The Bleek family of scholars were ‘committed to a cause that must have seemed esoteric in the extreme to many of their contemporaries’. Without the ‘personal sacrifice’ on the part of the two families, ‘we would know virtually nothing of the /Xam and their cognitive system’ (Deacon 1996: 93, 113). The archive was described as the closest thing we had to ‘a Bushman voice’ from the nineteenth century (Skotnes 1996: 18).

Alongside David Lewis-Williams, Janette Deacon’s scholarship has been central to ensuring that shamanist and neuro-psychological interpretations of rock art have been combined with understandings of rock art’s main interpretive archive - the Bleek-Lloyd records - that have stressed remarkable equality and cultural salvage. This paradigm has come to dominate the field of rock art conservation in South Africa and beyond through the influence of the work of the Rock Art Research Institute in Johannesburg (Lewis Williams & Dowson 1989 and 1994).

Here I want to suggest that these notions of cultural salvage and remarkable equality have served to create a kind of cult out of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd whose archive has been understood in a very limited way as a system of linguistic and cultural documentation and which has been mined for a lost, extinct authenticity. These dominant meanings and idealised notions of significance were incorporated into world heritage when the Bleek-Lloyd Collection (UCT & South African Library) was inscribed on the register of UNESCO’s ‘Memory of the World’ Programme in 1997. According to the nomination form, Bleek and Lloyd’s notebooks served as a “Rosetta Stone” which has enabled scholars to decipher the meaning of southern African rock art (<www.unesco.org/webworld/memory/committee_tashkent_report.doc>; <www.unesco.org/webworld/nominations/en/)

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2 Deacon was one of the organisers of the landmark international conference on the Bleek-Lloyd collection held at UCT in 1991 from which Voices from the Past was produced.

3 Pippa Skotnes (1996) presented a similar understanding of the ‘series of relationships’ between the European scholars and the /Xam individuals who had a ‘common aim’ to ‘preserve the memories of cultures and traditions which were fatally threatened’ (23). Elsewhere (Skotnes, 2001) she referred to the ‘folklore that was created through a unique collaboration between settler and native’. In the exhibition, Miscast, this relationship was counterposed with colonialism’s savage violence.
As the main researcher and thinker behind Iziko South African Museum's rock art exhibition, ‘!Qe: The Power of Rock Art’, that opened in December 2003, Janette Deacon took her perspectives into the field of museum display. The production of this exhibition saw the dominant shamanist and neuropsychological paradigm, and the Bleek-Lloyd cult of salvation and remarkable equality being combined with a politics of consultation that sought authority in authenticity. The main voices of authentic indigeneity were N/u-speaking elders from Upington and Witdraai, with whom the linguist Nigel Crawhall had been working on behalf of the South African San Institute (SASI) on projects documenting N/u language, mapping personal and community histories and place names, and compiling a ‘biodiversity resource history’ (Crawhall 1998). While Crawhall’s language research showed enormous potential for transcending ethnic paradigms, his participation on the exhibition’s academic committee saw him become the deliverer of indigenous participation and authenticity. The assembled indigenous in turn would be able to reflect with a sense of gratitude upon the implied chain of salvation and benefaction, beginning with Bleek and Lloyd’s documentation and culminating in the museum exhibition itself.

The problem with all of this work is that in spite of its mushrooming in the post-apartheid era and its deep concern with indigenous heritage, it is remarkable that almost nowhere do you find an engagement with the blood and brutality of the Khoisan experience. In addition, despite a growing corpus of scholarship on collections, mediation and the production of knowledge, including serious postcolonial scholarship on archives in South Africa (Hamilton et al 2002), the approach to the Bleek-Lloyd records in Deacon’s work, and the Bleek-Lloyd canon more generally, remained couched in the language of recovery and authenticity (see Weintroub 2006 for an important recent exception). Nowhere in the Bleek-Lloyd canon is the archive engaged with from the point of view of its mediations, except for the idea of salvage.

Deacon’s book, *My Heart Stands in the Hill*, produced with the photographer Craig Foster, is the one of the most recent renditions of the Bleek-Lloyd canon that reproduces all of its discursive characteristics. Foster had previously made the acclaimed film, *The Great Dance* that reproduced the idea of the Bushman as hunter-gatherer (Douglas 2001). This book, referred to as the product of a ‘pilgrimage of a modern archaeologist and film maker’ is at the same time hauntingly beautiful and deeply troubling. It draws on Deacon’s knowledge of the landscape based upon the references in the Bleek-Lloyd archive. The book is an attempt to ‘reunite’ photographic images of the /Xam and the /Xam ‘voices’ of the texts with the landscape they left behind, including the rock art. For Foster, the book was a means ‘to celebrate the rock art and the people who made it’ (Deacon & Foster 2005: 36 and dustcover).

In the book, another version of Deacon’s interpretations of the Bleek-Lloyd archive and her accumulated knowledge of the /Xam landscape have been combined with Foster’s enlarged photographs of the region and its rock art in all its detail and beauty and archival images of the /Xam that have been ‘reunited’ with that landscape. All the elements of the Bleek-Lloyd canon are restated and re-explored, including detailed discussions on shamanism and trance, and there are explanations of the neuropsychological approaches of David Lewis-Williams. The photographic images that have been ‘reunited’ with the landscape are the well-known Breakwater and studio photographs of the /Xam.

Foster, in using a generator, slide projector, stands, lighting and three cameras, was able to project images of photographed /Xam faces on a 35 mm slide film ‘back into the landscape that they had lived in 150 years previously’. Images of ‘old shamans and hunters’ were superimposed on to trees, waterfalls, grass and hillsides, each with their peculiar textures and visual effects. Importantly, images were also projected onto rock surfaces containing engravings. For Deacon, what has been achieved is a layering of ‘history, memory, spiritual experiences and landscape’. For both, this project was an
act of symbolic return. The photographs were no longer “scientific” photographs of representations of a lost linguistic group, but had been given ‘individuality, colour, texture and a place of their own’ (Deacon & Foster 2005: 143-144). Once again, Deacon drew upon Nigel Crawhall and the South African San Institute to engage with N/u speakers and to get their approval.

Although only listed in the bibliography, the inspiration for this book was no doubt the work of Finnish photographer, Jorma Puranen, Imaginary Homecoming, in which he embarked upon a ‘metaphorical return’ of Sami images to the land of the Sami. These images were from the 1884 Roland Bonapart expedition that were in the collection of the Musée de L’Homme in Paris. This was achieved in Puranen’s work not by projection, but by reinstallation and reinsertion. Here, anthropological photographs had been rephotographed in positive and negative forms, enlarged on large plexiglass panels, then reinserted into the landscape, or reproduced on polyester sheets which were then hung in bushes or wrapped around trees. In a powerful accompanying essay to the catalogue, the scholar of photography, Elizabeth Edwards, argues that the rephotographing of these installations created an ‘imaginary, metaphorical homecoming’ (<www.finlit.fi/booksfrom-finland/bff/199/puranen.htm> and <www.artmag.com/museums/a_danema/adkoebk1.html>, both accessed April 17th 2008) (Puranen 1999; Edwards 1999: 43).

Puranen’s photographs, Edwards argues, move from the archive, the ‘symbolic space of appropriation’ into the land, ‘the symbolic space of belonging’. The living and the dead are brought together in the ‘stylistic re-enactment of historic ways of photographing’. When plexiglass panels are held by living hands, the ‘boundaries between the past and the present’ are ‘intentionally blurred’. Puranen ‘reuses and juxtaposes’ historical representations of the Sami.

More broadly, he enables positivist realist notions of photography to engage with expressive photography as part of ‘reflexive visual exploration in the late twentieth century’. Puranen’s images ‘form dense networks’ which allude to ‘the networks of memory and its mapping on to the land’. They destabilise the categories and genres of art, landscape and documentary as they attempt to reposition the ethnographic image. The project works, Edwards argues, because they ‘confront the cultural stage on which the performance of photography was played out’. Far from romantic, ‘cultural atonement’, in ‘Imaginary Homecoming’, the photographs ‘confront the viewer with their own history’ and the nature of photographic appropriation becomes an ‘act of translation’ (Edwards 1999: 43-76).

In contrast, in spite of being inspired by Puranen’s work, Deacon and Foster’s project in South Africa fails to examine the complex visual histories of ethnography and archive that are related to the /Xam photographs. Instead, Deacon’s project with Foster seems extremely undertheorised, and is located within a profoundly different paradigm of liberal paternalism, authenticity and cultural atonement. Any project of rehumanisation of ethnographic images must proceed from a detailed understanding of the history of photography’s violence and the evolutionist frames through which they were made.

The museum as forum

At the well-known District Six Museum in Cape Town, the core of its work may focus on the history of District Six and national experiences of forced removals. But the key features of the District Six Museum are methodological. Since its inception as a museum of the city of Cape Town, the District Six Museum has been an independent, secular site of engagement and a space of questioning and interrogating South Africans society and its discourses. Far from being a site of museum services, it has operated as a hybrid space of research, representation and pedagogy, which has brokered and mediated relations of knowledge and varied kinds of intellectual and cultural practice between different sites, institutions and sociological domains. Annunciation, conversation and debate formed the lifeblood of its creative and curatorial process and memory politics as former residents inscribed their biographies into the materiality of the museum on the memory cloth and the map (Delport 2001: 34-38; Rassool 2006: 290). The museum’s relationship with community is not just through reference groups or through limited attempts at ‘audience development’.
Life history was a key feature of the District Six Museum's memory work from the beginning. At first, rows of large-scale portraits of former residents, printed on transparent architectural paper, and hung from the balconies, gazed down upon visitors on the map. These portraits of prominent District Sixers and ordinary residents seemed to give the exhibition a sense of being protected by the area's ancestors. Later these were replaced by enlarged portraits which were created this time from prints on a delicate but durable trevira fabric, a light and transparent material. Unlike previous enlarged portraits, these enabled a quality of airiness that did not block the flow of light or interfere with the unity of the museum space. Enlarged images of political leaders mingled with those of writers and dancers and those who were seen as 'not as well known' to create a representation of 'a broader layer of social experience as well as the agency of ex-residents in the development of the museum project and the collection' (Fig 2) (Smith & Rassool 2001: 141; District Six Museum Brochure 2000).

The scale, placement and arrangement of the enlarged portraits created a presence as visual biographies that acknowledged the importance of individual lives in District Six. But their lightness, airiness and movement also suggested a move away from hard realism, heroic depiction and images as evidence of the truth of lives. This was a medium that lent itself to posing questions about lives rather than celebrating them. These qualities had the effect of enabling life histories to be seen in more complex ways than as fixed, given and uncontested, or as mere illustrations of historical processes and social structure.

These questioning modes of display were found elsewhere in the museum as opportunities were sought to pose questions about how the museum had acquired images of people, what the history of these images had been and the ways the museum's knowledge of people's life histories had been preceded by prior mediation. These forms of representation were part of a desire to ask deeper questions about lives and biography by opening up issues about production and their mediated, storied nature as well as how these life stories came to be told. In the District Six Museum, challenges began to be posed for museum transformation in exploring methodologies for the representation of public pasts that transcended the limited recovery frames of social history.

An example of this approach was the 1941 Ann Fischer image of I.B. Tabata that hung on transparent trevira cloth as part of a reconceptualised gallery of 'translucent' portrait images, found its way on to the Resistance panel (Thorne 2003). This time, the image was depicted in the makeshift frame in which the museum had acquired it to indicate that it was based on a photograph that had a biography, and to pay attention in the exhibition to the process of collecting. More critically, the image of Tabata had been deliberately placed adjacent to an image of Dora Taylor, as a means of indicating a biographic relationship and to connect the political with the personal. Tabata and Taylor had been comrades and lovers for 40 years, in a political relationship that was underground and a personal relationship that was illegal. And it was Tabata's relationship with Taylor that was the most formative in his development. In choosing to depict the intricacies of the personal and the political and to focus on biographical production in the case of Tabata and Taylor, the Museum had gone beyond mere celebration and documentation as the heritage impulse (Fig 1).

Beyond atonement

Finally, in calling for attention to the social biography of things and to contests of meaning in museums and collections, I want to propose a modest beginning: that we dispense with the ease with which we refer to our work as involving some sort of ‘capturing’ of people, moments, voices and artefacts. We need to think more carefully about the terms that we use to for our collecting and heritage practice. We refer sometimes too easily and unthinkingly to the importance of ‘capturing’ voices, or about how photography ‘captures’. We do so almost incidentally and we don’t realise the extent to which that ‘capturing’ is in fact a capturing. Instead we have an opportunity to think about the contested meanings of artefacts, documents and images, as we find new ways of widening spaces for public conversation for social criticism and the enhancement of citizenship. As Jorma Puranen has shown, it is indeed possible to transcend the politics of atonement.
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Image captions

Fig 1. Portraits of I B Tabata & Dora Taylor displayed in the District Six Museum, c 2006. Photo: Patricia Hayes.

Fig 2. District Six Museum interior, c 2000. Photo: Paul Grendon.
In 1941, Isaac Bangani Tabata, then in his early thirties, was photographed by Anne Fischer in her studio in Cape Town. At this time, Tabata was a member of the Worker’s Party in Cape Town. He had been influential in the intellectual debates and cultural activities of the Spartacus Club and New Era Fellowship, both of which had
Celebrating in the public, private and virtual space. Contemporary study of the Danes and the Crown Prince’s Wedding in 2004

Lykke L Pedersen
The National Museum of Denmark

Over two thousand people participated in a project where ten cultural institutions collected and recorded contemporary popular expressions surrounding the celebration of the wedding of the Danish Crown Prince in the public, private and virtual space. Our focus was on what ordinary people were doing that very day and on what the celebration meant to them.

On 14 May 2004 the Danish Crown Prince Frederik married Ms Mary Donaldson, a citizen of Australia. This historic event turned Danish society upside down for several weeks and possibly months. During that period national and international media were continually producing new stories of the wedding as a romantic and national event showing how a commoner from Australia was transformed into a modern princess by marrying a prince of one of the world’s oldest monarchies. Media interest was overwhelming; it seemed as if everybody was celebrating. On the very day of the wedding 180 million people watched the event on television. Broadcast coverage lasted from dusk to dawn and was the largest ever television transmission in Denmark. Three hundred and seventy-six million people were watching during the wedding week. In the streets of Copenhagen hundreds of thousand of people gathered. The nation more or less went crazy during the wedding celebration. Some even called it ‘wedding hysteria’. Denmark was turned upside-down for weeks. What was going on?

Documenting one day worldwide

A number of cultural institutions, with the National Museum at their head, conducted an investigation of the many different ways in which the Danes related to the event. Eight museums, two archives and two university departments decided to coordinate a research project documenting this day in the public, private and virtual space. The fieldwork was not at all focused on what the royal family was doing, but rather on how this *rite de passage* in the royal family was interpreted by ordinary people at various locations in the Danish kingdom, from Arctic Greenland and the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic to the southern parts of Denmark; and even including Danes abroad, as far away as Tasmania and Brazil.

The starting point was a joint investigation carried out by a group of researchers, combined with laymen at many different locations. The fieldwork took place during a very short space of time – actually only one day – at many places all over the world, connected by electronic media, television broadcast and the Internet. I shall present a very few aspects of the whole project. The point is also to emphasize how the Internet is important not only in contemporary society in general, but also to show that it has great potential as a democratic modern collecting tool for use by museums.
Focus

The overall focus was to show the meaning of the royal wedding not only in the lives of ordinary people, but also that it had a general cultural historic purpose, specifically how the role of the monarchy in democratic societies of Europe is changing. Almost everywhere the role and function of the monarch has developed from one of absolute rule towards one that is more symbolic and with a consultative function. By studying how an anachronistic, and in many ways undemocratic, institution – the monarchy – is well integrated and a vital part of democratic welfare societies, one has a possibility of studying cultural changes in modern European life. The royal wedding and other broadcasts of this type can be understood as modern invented national tradition giving royal families and monarchies a new public setting – an electronic ritual. Furthermore, the organizers of such events – the royal court – are very conscious of the important role of public ceremonies in public perception of the monarchy.

Monarchies today have no political power but continue to wield huge influence as role models of 'the good life'. One might think that the rather banal aspects of royal life dominate and that royal figures have become merely celebrities as presented in lifestyle and fashion magazines, but there is more to it than that. At one point the monarchy has been transformed into a core symbol of the nation state with a unifying function in the Scandinavian societies. Very few institutions have this unique quality. It is also interesting to observe how people at a personal level relate to royal life in many different ways, and how people attempt to connect their own lives with the royals. Many Danish people chose to be married on the very same day as Crown Prince Frederik and Mary Donaldson and to have their own wedding party at the same hour as the 'big' wedding.

Perspective (upside-down)

The popular experience of the Crown Prince's wedding was documented in private, public and virtual space, where everyday routines were set aside. The challenge for the collecting project's Danish researchers was to document what ordinary people were actually doing on that very day through a combination of many different collecting methods. Over 2,000 people participated in the project. The project itself became quite popular and actually became a part of the whole wedding event – a magic moment in May. Through fieldwork (interviews, participant observation, video filming, audiotapes and photos) the public sphere was documented. Coverage included decorated streets and shops all over the Danish kingdom, the choreography of the crowds in the streets of Copenhagen where the wedding took place, and also private parties at which people gathered for hours around the television. All of this served to create new festive patterns of celebration with television dinners, champagne, and planned activities. The Internet also played a very large role, and collecting activities tried to capture these new virtual expressions and possibilities to participate. Written and e-mail diaries and photo diaries were collected where people documented their private celebration(s). Another important part of the project was traditional museum collecting of all kinds of objects, ranging from dinner plans and costumes to trash from the streets, and not least Internet websites and chat rooms were preserved.

In the streets

The Copenhagen inner city was a central part of public space where official and private celebrations took place. At times the celebration merged into new forms, for example when people took photos of themselves kissing in front of the official decorations of the city. The street scene was typified by activities with carnivalesque features; people dressed up amusingly with things like toy diadems, and both Danish and other national flags were displayed creatively. In the contrast to everyday norms it was permissible to talk to strangers and join in their conversation as long as the subject was the shared, uniting event of the royal wedding. In this 'national parlour' the big outdoor screens were a unifying element and a different, simultaneous reality. On the city squares one had the advantage of being close to the church and the coach route, while at the same time the media remained close at hand. One was physically present in the 'ritual' space,
but could also follow the event in close-up on the big screen. Unlike the Royal Family and the other guests in the church, one could also see the tears of Crown Prince Frederik close up.

The police formed a visible part of the urban security scene and were at the same time visible evidence of how the event turned everyday life topsy-turvy: several police cars and officers were decorated with crowns and flags and people were observed addressing the policemen in an informal, playful and teasing way.

Celebrating at home

By means of questionnaires and disposable cameras distributed by researchers to ordinary Danes, celebrations in private space were documented and described. There were many hours of broadcasting – ranging from the traditional coverage of the major national television channels to the alternative channel, Zulu Royal, which interpreted the wedding in an ironic light. The monolithic TV wedding programmes put all the ordinary programming, such as news reports, aside. The event itself became an ‘electronic monument’ in the public’s consumption of an historical event – remembered and shared through the media.

Television became a structuring element for the day and for private celebrations, including the many groups of (mainly female) friends who planned to meet and enjoy the day together. The feasting in front of the screens ranged all the way from elaborated ‘royal gala dinners’ to easy takeaway pizzas. In this way people could satisfy their hunger without having to miss any of the wedding transmission. Many people told how they were carefully planning the day, so they would have absolutely no disturbances! Many Danes planned to take the day off from work. One argument for staying at home was that the television offered a better overview of the entire affair – all the different places where the wedding took place, as well as offering a better view of the fashionable dresses and close-ups of the emotional faces of the royal couple than would have been possible outside.

Internet celebrating

The wedding became the first event in the Danish Royal Family that seriously monopolized part of the Internet and set new records for the Danish use of the Net. There were many options to choose from: traditional, informative pages with images and text, webcasts of the actual ceremony (i.e. transmissions over the Internet so that the event could be seen simultaneously on the computer), interactivity, games etc. The Internet portal Jubii set up a page where the users could post their own film clips with greetings to the bride and groom and congratulate them along with like-minded well-wishers in a virtual collectivity. In the chat room forum in particular it was clear that an Internet community was created in connection with the television transmission and was used alongside it.

Early in the project an information and information-gathering homepage was established, and it became very important to the entire teamwork, which spanned an immense geographical area. One of the project’s conclusions was, for example, that this kind of collaboration where informative work is combined with information gathering offers promising perspectives for future contemporary studies.

Some conclusions

The investigation showed that Danes took anything but a passively consumerist approach to the event. Rather, the royal wedding constituted a framework for creative popular expression and helped develop both old and new social collectives. Such a national event offers an opportunity for norms and behaviour in everyday life to be suspended for a short period. Thus it becomes possible to be personally involved in rituals and celebrations on a national scale that allow one to put one’s own life situation and choices into new perspectives.

One important question is: What does such a royal celebration signify for the ‘ordinary’ participants? It is too simple to interpret the event as just one big national party. Such modern usage can be either just for fun or deeply serious, or it can be both at the same time. Within the diversity of meaning the event can create both an individual and a collective identity.
This extraordinary event gives an opportunity to glimpse into the structures of everyday life as new festive patterns centred around the media, but it also demonstrates the use of different symbols (flags, hearts and crowns) in a new context, as well as so-called natural routines, i.e. media use and creation of meaning. It is interesting to investigate how people themselves define what is important in their lives and how they themselves comment upon the contradictions of contemporary life – distance and involvement at the same time – as a part of a reflexive practice. In that way the Internet offers space for confessions and testimonials expressing very strong emotions. Despite its public nature, the Internet creates private rooms.

The mixed use – both of the ceremonial rituals and of the carnival-type displays – can live side by side, not only in the streets, but also inside the individuals: as one of our informants (a man in Copenhagen, born 1948) said: ‘First I was just watching for fun, but suddenly when the Crown Prince had tears in his eyes, I started crying myself. I cried four times and I was very surprised with myself. I haven’t cried so much since I watched Shoah 20 years ago.’ (Shoah is the famous French television documentary from 1985 that interviewed surviving witnesses from Auschwitz.)

In Australia where the bride was born, 5,000–10,000 people celebrated in the streets and watched television broadcasts. A woman in Melbourne, born 1959, wrote: ‘The boys fell asleep on the couch and Mum and I cried our eyes out watching lovely Prince Frederik. There were so many celebrations all over Australia – in Melbourne they had a party in the City Square and lots of people went dressed as princesses and Vikings.’

Many people reacted to these rituals not in an analytical or logical way, but rather irrationally, expressing strong emotions and contradictions. Many people reflected in their diaries how important a happy national moment made them feel, in contrast to everyday life with its often overwhelmingly violent news and never-ending wars on television. During the royal wedding week the other headlines in the news dealt with the American Abu Ghrab torture scandal in Iraq, as an extremely bizarre contrast to this fairy tale love story.

The source material collected by the research team is now available in the participating museums for further interpretations and discussions. Comparison of this public event with others like it may offer ideas for further research. In the continuation of this project further interesting assessments and analytical tasks will be carried out in a Nordic or even European and global context. The Internet is opening up the democratic possibility of everyone joining in with their stories; many people may choose to contribute as historic witnesses to a public event. The popular use of rituals and national symbols gives a view into modern lives, the contradictions and breaking down of the boundaries between public and private spheres and also between local and global scenes.

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Footnote
The quotations and photos are all from The World Upside-Down: The Danes and the Royal Wedding 14th of May 2004, Ethnological Research no 60, 2004. The National Museum of Denmark. The following institutions participated in the project: The National Museum of Denmark, Department of Modern Danish History; University of Copenhagen, Section of European Ethnology; University of The Faroe Islands; The Museum of the City of Holbæk; Vejle Museum; Vejle City Archives; Narsaq Museum and Qaqortoq Museum; The City Museum of Copenhagen; Danish Historical Association; www.historie-online.dk.

Image captions
Fig 1. The wedding took place in the Church of Our Lady, the cathedral of Copenhagen. Many spectators chose to have the advantage of being close to the church and the coach route, while at the same time the big public screens were close at hand. There one could see Crown Prince Frederik’s tears in close-up, while the guests in the cathedral could not.
Fig 2. Friends partying in the street with beer, flags and layer cake while they wait for the wedding party to pass by.
Fig 3. In the world’s northernmost settlement, Siorapaluk, which is located north of Thule, Greenland, a bride and groom linked their own wedding celebration to that of the Crown Prince and his bride. The couple is seen standing in the snow in front of their house with a giant wedding candle displaying the royal couple’s monogram.
Collecting the here and now: Contemporary collecting at the BPMA

Rebecca Thomlinson
The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA)

Contemporary collecting is relatively new at the BPMA though this paper will give you an overview of how we have been addressing the issue of collecting the postal service today and what type of material we have been collecting to date.

The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) was established as a Charitable Trust in 2004 and is the leading resource for all aspects of British postal history, covering over 400 years. Before 2004, the BPMA existed as part of Royal Mail, the main mail provider in the UK. It is a combined archive and museum collection, with the archive being based in Central London and the object collection in accessible storage on the outskirts of London. The BPMA holds a large number of events, exhibitions and outreach projects around the country. Its main priority at present is to find a new location to open a museum permanently.

Background on contemporary collecting at the BPMA

Before November 2006, contemporary material had been collected on an ad-hoc basis and had been opportunity driven by Post Office closures, chance donations, specific projects, and the occasional purchase. Reliance on donations rather than actively going out and seeking material meant that acquisitions generally tended to be historic. The public don't really understand the importance of collecting contemporary objects and are not keen on donating objects to museums that they are still using. As the BPMA had previously been a department of Royal Mail, material was limited to representing Royal Mail Group and not other mail companies. There was no defined contemporary collecting strategy so we didn't really know what we were collecting or how we were collecting it. This resulted in large gaps in the collection.

Eventually came the realisation that we needed to start collecting the contemporary in a more structured and proactive way, so I was appointed as curator with emphasis on contemporary collecting in November 2006.

The first thing I did was to develop a policy that outlined clear objectives and a structured methodology for routinely targeting and collecting contemporary material.

Why is it important to collect the contemporary?

It is important to collect contemporary material to build collections for future generations so they can have museums and collections about our time. Living in what is often termed a 'throw away' society, things are not made to last as long now as they used to be. The danger is that...
if we don't collect things now there will be nothing left of our society for future generations to enjoy. After all, if no-one had collected contemporary objects in the past, we would have no museums today.

Contemporary material builds comparisons between the past and the present. It makes collections more relevant to today's society and people can better identify with the contemporary as it provides connectivity to their lives. It is easier to learn about the past if we can compare it to the present.

Contemporary collecting also revitalises research and provides greater depth of knowledge for both researchers and staff. It shows how diverse and different our society is today and encourages different visitor groups to visit museums. Contemporary collecting keeps our collections dynamic and forward looking and stops them from stagnating.

Many museum bodies and government departments are starting to realise the importance of contemporary collecting. A report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2006 outlines this recent awareness:

*Collections are the defining resources of museums; museums need to continue to collect, especially the varied contemporary material record of the communities they represent. If they do not, the museum's raw material will decline in relevance. They will struggle to represent the world today. And their versions of our common stories risks becoming static and backward looking.* (Understanding the Future: Priorities for England’s Museums 2006).

**Why is contemporary collecting important at the BPMA?**

Additionally it is important for the BPMA to collect the contemporary to reflect the major changes happening in the postal service at present. Royal Mail used to hold the monopoly on mail in the UK for over 350 years, but in January 2006 the mail market was opened up to competitors. There are now 18 licensed mail operators and so it is important to reflect the new competitors in what we collect so we have a representative sample of postal communication in general and not just Royal Mail.

Contemporary collecting fits in with the BPMA's key aims of increasing access and preserving and sustaining the collection for the future. It also fits our aim of having a fully representative, national collection of postal history.

Contemporary objects provide potential for learning, education, research and exhibitions at the same time as building collections for the new museum. Collecting ‘people’ has always been very important at the BPMA; people are what the postal service is about. It is important to represent the stories of people of our time and engage them in collecting their lives today.

**How does the BPMA define ‘contemporary’?**

The BPMA Contemporary Collecting Policy defines contemporary collecting as

*accumulating material belonging to the present time, that which reflects the postal service today. This means generally things that are in use until they are superseded by something new... the BPMA aims to collect a representative sample of all that is current, new and that reflects changes or innovations in the postal service.*

Unlike other museums, the BPMA decided not to put a time boundary on what we term as contemporary.

**How does the BPMA collect contemporary material?**

The BPMA collects the contemporary in a number of different ways. The first way is to make new contacts, not just with Royal Mail but also with competitor companies, relevant specialist groups, private collectors, other museums, school/community groups, Unions, related federations and the general public. The new contacts help us collect contemporary material and keep us up to date with latest developments. We do this by writing letters to senior people in Royal Mail and in competitor companies and meeting up with them if possible.
We also run a regular programme of visits to Royal Mail and Competitor sites (sorting, delivery, sales areas, Post Offices) to look for possible acquisitions and take photos of the buildings, people and equipment. This is especially important when these Post Offices are due to close so we can collect material before it disappears.

Oral history is a very important part of contemporary collecting. We must collect the social aspect of the postal service by capturing the lives and stories of those who work for the postal service. We have an active oral history project going on that looks at the many different aspects of the postal service at work.

The BPMA Collections Review fits in with contemporary collecting. A strategy has been produced for reviewing the collection, whereby the collection has been split into subject groups and a timetable produced for the next few years covering all these groups. The reviews identify gaps and duplicates in the collection so that we can target contemporary collecting around these strengths and weaknesses. We often involve external experts in the subject areas to identify types and importance of objects and help decide what’s missing.

The curatorial team works with our Access and Learning Department to develop projects that involve community groups and schools in collecting their lives today, especially groups that are underrepresented in the collection.

‘Snapshot collecting’ means capturing a ‘snapshot’ of the postal service at a given point in time. As well as oral history snapshot projects, the BMPA runs projects to regularly collect a sample of mail from private individuals and businesses around the country during a specified period of time, especially to reflect changes in the delivery of mail. We also annually collect a ‘snapshot’ of Post Office products and services by collecting a sample of leaflets on display from a specific Post Office on a predetermined date.

The BPMA tries to keep up to date with changes and developments in the industry by regularly reading relevant national newspapers, business/staff magazines and newsletters.

The BPMA uses the Internet to collect the contemporary through discussion sites, chat rooms and photo and video websites. This is a good way of showing the social impact of postal service, for example there was a lot on chat rooms, Flickr and You-Tube relating to the strikes that occurred in 2007.

Unfortunately museums can’t collect everything due to size, expense, availability or security issues. However, the BPMA wants to record the things that they can not collect in some form, so film or photographs are taken of these objects.

BPMA staff visit trade shows, fairs, conferences, auctions on a regular basis to purchase new acquisitions and make new contacts. I recently visited ‘The Mail Show Conference and Exhibition’ and made many new contacts through this. We also try to keep an eye on Internet auctions and companies.

Case Study 1

With the Government’s plans to close 2,500 Post Offices in the country in the next few years, the BPMA were keen to capture a snapshot of the situation as it is now. An oral history project in 2006 visited a rural location already affected by Post Office closures and with more imminent. Bringsty Common Post Office covers a scattered community and the BPMA aimed to record how this Post Office interacts with its community. My colleague Julian Stray and a volunteer spent a week there undertaking interviews and doing location recordings.

The interviews included recordings with the Postmistress, Sue Buckley, whose husband built a new building on their land to incorporate the Post Office. They also interviewed all the other staff of this small Post Office, including two whilst on their delivery rounds, one by van and one by foot. Rob Jones, who does the walking duty across the common, covers nine miles a day. He knows just about every inch of the common, all the short cuts and where to walk in rougher weather. He was unwilling to be interviewed at first but eventually agreed to let Julian accompany him on his walk. Interviews also included those with the local users of the Post Office to see what impact the Post Office has on their lives and to get their views on Post Office closures and see how they would cope without their local Post Office.
The last group of people that were interviewed were a couple of retired postal workers that still lived in the area. Don Griffiths, now in his 80s, used to be landlord of the local pub and postman at the same time. Don used to do the walking duty now carried out by Rob Jones. When he reached 48 years service as a postman, the Royal Mail told him he had to retire. This sparked off considerable support from those on his round and attracted a fair amount of media interest. Letters were sent to the Queen and the Prime Minister, a campaign was started. Eventually Royal Mail caved way and fifty years service was completed. Don is very proud to have been the postman on the common for so long. Former Postmistress 93 year old Kathleen Roberts also kindly agreed to be interviewed.

Overall the project interviewed eleven people and made six location recordings. This gave a pretty good ‘snap-shot’ of the Bringsty Common Post Office, the people that work in it, out of it and some of those that use it. It was important to catch this whilst we could, Sue Buckley is likely to retire soon and no-one knows the future of the Post Office after this.

Case Study 2

Last year we held a community project with Royal Mail staff at a sorting office in Central London. This gave the participants the opportunity to express their experiences of their every day work in the postal service. The participants, with help from a professional photographer, took photos of their working life today and produced an on-site exhibition which is now travelling to libraries and community groups around the country. We hope to have similar projects in the future.

Case Study 3

An example of recording what we can not collect in some way is a film we took of a sorting machine that sorts mail into the correct order for delivery. This is too large to collect and is currently on trial at the moment around the country and may never be introduced for general use. The machine is only in operation during the night, so two BPMA curators visited the London Delivery Office at 1 o’clock on a September morning to film it in use for half an hour. It was very important to capture this while we could, in case it disappears from use.

What is the BPMA collecting?

As I have mentioned, the BPMA collects items that represent not just Royal Mail but also the other 17 mail operators in the UK. This includes anything branded with the companies’ logo that represents the collection, sorting and delivery of mail.

The BPMA believes it is important to collect contemporary trials and experiments in case they never come into general use. We have many prototypes in the collection that wouldn’t have survived otherwise. Examples at present are trials with a range of electric delivery vehicles in an attempt to promote environmentally friendliness, and trials of automated postal services which print postage stamps for letters and parcels and save you queuing at the counter. All these are very advanced technically.

The BPMA collects the latest in modern technologies and anything that is innovative and new. An example of this is a computer kit we have just acquired for the collection that is used behind Post Office counters.

The BPMA also must represent things that are going out of use before they disappear without a trace. An example is the Travelling Post Office (TPO) that ceased to run in 2004. TPOs were railway carriages used to sort mail en route whilst transporting it. As the BPMA already has a TPO carriage that has just been restored in the collection there was no room for another, but two BPMA staff visited Rotherham in Northern England in 2006 to acquire some material from some TPO carriages that were awaiting scrapping at a scrap metal dealers. In 2003, Mail Rail, a small underground railway that carried mail between sorting offices and the main railway stations in London, ceased operating so we are also currently collecting to reflect this.

It is also important to reflect the changes and developments in the postal industry in what we collect. We do this by keeping up to date with news of the industry and finding out information from our new contacts. A topical
example at present is the stopping of Sunday collections. There has been a lot of coverage in press on this and the BPMA are currently collecting to reflect this.

The BPMA also collects the topical/political issues of the contemporary postal service. This type of material is particularly good for displays and events in the future. Examples include material donated recently from the National Federation of Subpostmasters (NFSP). In 2006 they organised a rally and a petition against the Government taking vital business away from Post Offices and their plans to close a large number of Post Offices. The petition presented to the Prime Minister on 18th October 2006 was the largest ever presented to the Government and consisted of four million signatures. It was so big a double decker bus had to be hired to transport the petition! Protests in Westminster and a lobby of Parliament followed.

Another example is of material donated by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) that was used during the national postal strikes that have occurred with Royal Mail staff between June and October 2007 over pay, pensions and Royal Mail’s modernization plans. The material consisted of posters, leaflets, armbands, T-shirts and stickers produced by the CWU for use on the picket lines during the strikes. Two staff from the BPMA also filmed and made oral history recordings at the picket line of Mount Pleasant on the day of the first strike, 29th June.

It is important to collect the people of the postal service. Oral history is one way to do this but there are a number of other ways too, such as through photographs, chat rooms and discussions blogs, staff magazines, diaries and objects associated with them (e.g. medals).

Conclusion

This has given you a very brief overview of what the BPMA has been doing to collect contemporary material. The policy has meant that contemporary material is being collected in a more structured way and as a result collecting has become wider and far more representative of the postal service as a whole. Continued monitoring and research means we do not miss out on new developments and can tell a fuller story of the postal service of our times to future generations. A proactive approach means collecting the contemporary is no longer left to chance and hopefully means we are collecting now what is important for future generations to come.

Reference


Image captions

Fig 1. National Federation of Subpostmasters’ rally, October 18th 2006. Photo & copyright: NFSP.

Fig 2. BPMA volunteer interviewing postman Don Burrett prior to going out on delivery. Photo: Julian Stray, BPMA.

Fig 3. BPMA Community Project with Royal Mail staff, February 2007. Photo: BPMA.

Fig 4. Sue Buckley, Postmistress at Bringsty Common Post Office, hard at work behind her Post Office counter. Photo: Julian Stray, BPMA.
Migration has been a dominant feature of Norwegian society since the late nineteenth century. Today we are seeing a growing number of Norwegian museums that in various ways focus on contemporary history and society. This article will describe a project on immigration recently completed by the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History (Norsk Folkemuseum), and present the collected material, the temporary exhibitions we offered the public, and a new website we have established.

Second to Ireland, Norway saw the world’s largest emigration in proportion to population size in the nineteenth century. About 900,000 Norwegians emigrated from Norway to America in the period 1860–1920. At the same time and throughout the twentieth century, migration from the countryside to urban areas increased as well.

During the last decades of the twentieth century the migration pattern in Norway and in the Nordic countries changed. There has been a growing population of immigrants since the 1970s. The changing Norwegian population is part of an international migration wave. Today about 150 different nationalities live together in Norwegian cities and towns. Approximately 415,000 people with immigrant and refugee background are living in Norway today, constituting almost 9 percent of the total population of 4.7 million. This has changed Norwegian society and the perception of what it means to be Norwegian. Today’s multicultural society demands a re-evaluation of that concept.

Norsk Folkemuseum, when established, was assigned a particular responsibility in the nation-building process by interpreting and presenting national identity and history. Due to the above-mentioned demographic changes, the museum has recently found it necessary to review its work and objectives as a national institution of cultural history, and not least to question and discuss what we define as ‘Norwegian’. In the conclusion of this process we chose to amend our statutes and include recent migration as an integral part of Norwegian culture when presenting Norwegian society. The lifestyle of different groups within the immigrant population should not, in our view, be regarded as extraordinary or uncommon, but as varieties of that which is defined as Norwegian. Accordingly, our museum and our collections must focus on and reflect all the ethnic groups and cultures that constitute our nation today.

Documenting immigrant experiences – the project

The emphasis on what we define as ‘Norwegian’ is important for our understanding of Norway’s changing society.
By working out a new definition, the focus is placed on a broadly defined national community rather than on an exclusively defined ‘Us’ that opposes the ethnic ‘Other’, thus the title of our project: *Norsk i går, i dag, i morgen?* (Norwegian yesterday, today, tomorrow?) The question mark in the title is important. It encourages thought and reflection.

Since the late 1960s, when the first major waves of immigrants with a non-western background came to Norway, public and private research institutes have looked into what has been named a multicultural society. Much of this research has primarily focused on problems and defects, and they often nourish the mass media’s unilateral emphasis on the negative consequences of a culturally diverse society.

Research on the history of migration to Norway reveals that the official archives have collected and preserved only the official story of immigration (Kjeldstadli 2003). The archives document how the authorities viewed the non-western immigrants and what measures were taken as a consequence of the early encounters, but no information about the immigrants’ own experiences were recorded. We have also seen that public and private research institutes lack the in-house infrastructure to administer qualitative research material, as they do not have the archival routines of museums, libraries and public archives.

In 2002 Norsk Folkemuseum and Internasjonalt Kultursenter og Museum (IKM) commenced a large documentation project with the ambition to incorporate contemporary society’s cultural diversity in the museums’ regular undertakings. The project was based on the perception that everybody has a right to the nation’s history. It is the first major project to document the way immigrants live in their new homeland, their thoughts and their experiences. The methods we chose to use were interviews and participant observation.

The project’s main objectives have been:

- To document real-life experiences within Norwegian contemporary multicultural society.
- To establish and build a collection and archives consisting of various sources that will shed light on recent migration to Norway. The core of these archives consists of immigrants’ personal life stories.
- To encourage the participation of immigrants as project assistants, interviewers and informants.
- To interpret the research material in terms of the various aspects of contemporary immigration.
- To examine and challenge ‘Norwegian’ as a concept.

We used the following means and methods:

- Life story interviews
- Field visits to countries of origin
- Photographs
- Exhibitions
- Publications
- Seminars

The catch phrase ‘Right to history’ was a significant motivation for this project. The possibility to have one’s own personal history preserved for the future was an important element in the process. It provides minority groups with a sense of political recognition and a possibility to confirm that they are part of contemporary Norwegian society. An additional aspect is the possibility for insight and understanding it offers both to our society and future generations about what it was like to come to Norway and establish a new life as labour migrant or refugee.

The project work commenced by focusing on three different groups of immigrants: Pakistani and Turkish labour migrants, and Bosnian refugees. Granted, such a project does require thorough knowledge about the cultural and geographical background of the people targeted for research, we preferred to start with a rather narrower focus than a broad review of the vast variety of ethnic groups in contemporary Norway. The latter will have to be addressed in subsequent projects, which will also benefit from the experience gained during the initial project.

The project went through several phases, mainly conducting interviews within one immigrant community at a time, and thus building on the experiences made in the previous phases. We chose male migrant labourers, who
came to Norway from Pakistan in the 1970s, and their wives and children, as the first group to be interviewed. The Norwegian Pakistani population is the largest non-western immigrant group in Norway, making it an obvious choice for a project of this kind. Secondly, the men that came in the 1960s and 1970s are beginning to grow old. We needed to record their stories before it was too late. Turkish people constitute another large group that came to work in Norway in the 1970s, and for the same reason as mentioned above, we saw an urgent need to document the life stories of an ageing first generation. Contact had also been established between museum staff and the Turkish community before the project, thus facilitating the process of recruiting people for interviewing. As people migrate for various reasons, we also wanted to interview refugees and chose Bosnian refugees as a third group. While this group came to Norway much later, they reflect the changing pattern of migration to Norway after restrictions on non-refugee immigration were introduced from the mid-1970s onwards.

We have realised that in order to understand what it is like to be an immigrant, it is necessary not only to understand how people experience life in Norway, but also understand what life was and is like in their country of origin. It is important not only to get a selection of stories from various ethnic groups, but also to secure a range of material concerning the individual reasons for breaking away and travelling to Norway. The motivating forces behind migration will also affect how you experience your encounter with Norwegian society and how you behave accordingly. While the recorded life stories centre very much on the early phases of life and thus are rich in information about people’s countries of origin, we also found it imperative to visit these places.

The research material

Interviews

The purpose of a life story interview is to cover the interviewee’s life span from childhood to the present. The informants tell about their childhood in their native countries, the experience of breaking up and settling down somewhere new and very different. They relate how they cope with a new language, the upbringing of their children, with matters such as education, religion and family, and negotiate between different cultural values. Interviewing as a method is time-consuming, as much staff is needed and the processing of these interviews for archive purposes also takes time. We still find it, however, the best method for our work, and the interviews will also be an excellent source for future researchers.

Private photos

Private photos enlighten and reinforce the informants’ life stories and are also important memory-keys to be used during interviews. They are valuable sources in understanding an individual’s personal life at different times and places, and as illustrations of the past. Much energy and time were used to select, duplicate and administer the acquisition of this valuable material.

Field observation

For each interview, a small contextual report was written as a guide for future use. Some interviews were supplemented with pictures taken by the museum’s in-house photographer. In addition, the field trips to the country of origin were documented by long reports, by diaries, and an abundance of photographic material.

So how did we approach the various ethnic groups? For the interviews of people of Pakistani descent, an early immigrant from Pakistan was engaged to function as a ‘door opener’ and as an interviewer alongside the museum’s curators. He had a wide range of acquaintances, but being a Pakistani man, his circle of female acquaintances was more limited. Furthermore, we realised that the people we interviewed came from the door opener’s personal network, thus reducing the potential for variation that could otherwise have been achieved.

Partly due to this experience, and inspired by other projects on oral history, we chose another method for the interviews within the Turkish and Bosnian ethnic groups. People recruited by the curators alongside voluntary amateurs were trained in personal one-to-one interviewing and in private photo collecting during a three-day
Connecting Collecting: Jensen & Walle

In addition to the above-mentioned material, other projects emerged from this process, giving valuable supplements to the varied collection that has been initiated through the research.

Children’s own documentation
As a means to understanding children’s experiences, we invited 500 schoolchildren to document their daily life during a given week by asking them to take pictures and comment on them. This material represents an example of contemporary cultural diversity in Norway, as it was not limited to the three ethnic communities originally chosen for documentation.

Autobiographies
We have also explored the method of having people write their autobiographies. As with children’s own documentation, this part of the project was not restricted to selected ethnic minorities, but was aimed at the vast group of people who saw themselves as part of the immigrant population in Norway. Invitations were sent out nationwide and resulted in valuable material shedding light both on everyday practices and on people’s thoughts and reflections. This method allowed people to decide themselves what to emphasize.

Communicating our research
During the process we found it important to share our knowledge and experience through exhibitions about the immigrants’ encounter with Norwegian society. Equally important to us was to show how changes in the population have altered everyday life in Norway. Only in this way can we as a museum contribute to building understanding and motivating further participation in subsequent projects.

The project to date has resulted in 200 interviews, approximately 4,000 photos, 28 video films, a number of autobiographies, and more than 12,000 photos taken by schoolchildren in Oslo documenting their everyday life. Every part of this material has been included in the museum’s database system PRIMUS, and is available to the public and to researchers with the necessary restrictions related to the Norwegian Personal Data Regulations. We have put together more than ten exhibitions, published two books, one article and several exhibition catalogues. Descriptions of the methodology and the material are available in two separate publications (Boe, Gaukstad & Sandrup 2005; Boe & Gaukstad 2006).

Through this migration project, Norwegian museums have established competence in an increasingly important field within the culture sector, a field highlighted by the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs declaring 2008 as the Year of Cultural Diversity. The museums’ staff has communicated the findings and the experiences they have made to a wide audience through seminars and publications and will continue to do so.

Furthermore, in order to open up the new archives we are building, and to share our experiences with other researchers and present the exhibitions, we have also established a website called www.nyenordmenn.no (New Norwegians). This website will contain the results of the completed project, and serve as a resource for the public and for future projects led by the two host museums and other institutions. A recently established Network for Minorities and Cultural Diversity has members from smaller and larger museums throughout Norway, and may form a pool from which relevant activities can be selected as part of the website presentation.

The way ahead
After four years of establishing and building these archives and collecting life stories, we are reconsidering our methods and discussing how to proceed. We certainly will continue documenting immigrant experiences. We will go on collecting life stories. We will also collect information focusing on other relevant subjects.

One important result of growing immigration is that society changes and not merely at the receiving end in our country. Due to migration, emigrant countries also
change. We find it important to document and get a better understanding of how migration affects both sending and receiving countries as well as their respective populations. We are therefore currently planning to do fieldwork among Pakistanis living in Norway and follow up their relatives in Pakistan. This follow-up project will be run in cooperation between Norsk Folkemuseum and Lok Virsa in Islamabad, Pakistan.

There are strong connections between the Pakistanis living in Norway and their families in their country of origin, but we also register that bonds are changing. Thus we want to study the symbolic and emotional impact of transnational links in both Pakistan and Norway. Important aspects of this research will be:

- Continuity and change in gender patterns
- Relations between generations, which may be transnationally dispersed or reside within the same locality

We wish to conduct the project as joint fieldwork in both Norway and Pakistan, following kin networks across the borders. The team will consist of researchers and trainees both from Norway and Pakistan, including both women and men.

Life story interviews and documentation of people’s homes and domestic interiors through observations, descriptions and collection of key objects will be our chosen methods. Not only do we hope to obtain valuable information and further increase our knowledge within this field, we also hope to gain experience from the collaboration with Lok Virsa in working on a bilateral project.

We will continue to train interviewers, in the manner that was developed during the above-mentioned project period. We will train personnel of immigrant background, both first- and second-generation immigrants, by offering training courses in interview techniques. To improve these interviews, we plan to spread the seminars over several days. The introduction course will be followed up by courses where we comment on the interviews held, before they conduct follow-up interviews. Our aim is to build competence within designated groups, and subsequently engage them in future projects. Considering the changing interests of museums and in culture politics, it is important to have competent personnel available for different projects. On a longer time scale, this will also improve the possibilities to recruit people with minority backgrounds for regular positions in museums.

During the initial project described above, we saw that it was difficult to collect objects to be included in the museum’s collection. There were various reasons for this, but partly because the initial project emphasised immaterial culture when obtaining information as a basis for future analysis. A second impediment was deciding what kind of objects to select and collect, and whether suitable objects were available. During the upcoming project we will take measures to enable the collection of objects, by focusing on key objects that are ascribed symbolic importance by the people being interviewed.

This will be a continuing focus on similar future projects, and on systematic documentation of the material realities of people’s lives through photography and film, an approach used by both Norsk Folkemuseum and IKM. There are also plans for both indoor and outdoor exhibitions.

While the project Norsk i går, i dag, i morgen? originated from the governmental call to include new groups of people in the undertakings of culture institutions and acknowledge the emergence of a multicultural society (NOU 1996:7), demographic developments during the last decade have resulted in a stronger emphasis on cultural diversity as a whole. Based on this, we chose to re-define Norsk Folkemuseum as a multicultural museum. Rather than merely focusing on immigrant and ethnic minorities as particular segments of society in opposition to a ‘general’ Norwegian population, which tends to emphasise discrete divisions between relatively homogeneous groups, we should now consider contemporary society as a meeting place between individuals. These individuals may differ along a number of variables, such as gender, ethnicity, class, age etc, but will also share experiences and values. Cultural diversity at the museum thus needs to have an intersectional perspective on contemporary society.

A further challenge will be to include cultural diversity in all aspects of the museum’s activities, and not only regard multicultural society as a theme for the museum’s
exhibitions, but also keep a critical eye on how and to what extent our public perceive the cultural diversity we present. While an important task for the museum in the future will be to portray cultural diversity as a set of meetings, there is no doubt that we also need to regard the museum in itself as such a meeting place. As a nation-building institution assigned a particular responsibility in order to interpret national identity and national history, we are in a unique position to draw up new directions for social interaction in our constantly changing society.

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Youth across the border

Christine Fredriksen
Bohuslän Museum, Västarvet

Young people, identity and border-related issues – during the last few years this has been the focus of the ethnological studies at Bohuslän Museum. The museum has developed collaboration with schools, youth associations and Nordic organizations. These projects have mainly been based on the involvement and interest of the young people themselves. In these studies Bohuslän Museum has collected an interesting body of contemporary material in a Nordic and international borderland perspective.

Bohuslän is a Swedish borderland county that has frequent contacts with Norway. Traditionally there has been great mobility in this region. Over the years the Swedish–Norwegian border has been defined in different ways. Mobility and exchange in this area is thus an interesting field for research. A border region also gives the people living there particular opportunities.

Historical studies show how people crossed the border from the Swedish counties of Bohuslän and Dalsland to find work in the south of Norway, a densely industrialized area, with brick making and textile industries. This is a well-studied example of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century border mobility (Norheim 2004). During the Second World War the border was closed and the traditional local contacts were broken. Later, during the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, the changes in society with increasing trade implied new possibilities in the region. The close vicinity of the border and the differences between the countries contributed to economic growth in the area (Fredriksen 1999; Gustavsson 2006). The border has also formed a cultural and social marker up till our times. One example to be mentioned, in the contemporary history of groups moving over the border to improve their circumstances, is the minority group the travellers (Andersson & Jonsson 2007).

Conditions in the border regions have changed over the last thirty years, and the significance of the Nordic community now has a stronger meaning. Politicians on different levels have been working to minimize legal and administrative impediments. In 1977 the Nordic Council of Ministers decided on regulations to make it easier for the local authorities on both sides of the border to work together. This was the starting point for the exchanges we see today in these regions. Gränskommittén, an inter-regional organization, was founded in the 1980s in the regions of Bohuslän in Sweden and the Norwegian county of Østfold, bordering to the south on Bohuslän. The purpose was to promote cooperation by the local authorities over the border. Since the 1990s the cultural and heritage work in the Swedish-Norwegian border regions has also been supported by funds from the European Union (Interregsekretariat 2007).
Youth and globalization

One group, which is characterized by considerable mobility and interest in international matters is Nordic young people. The world is changing and foreign countries are coming closer to us through the Internet and other media. With increased globalization, we focus today on other issues than previously. Young people are socially and culturally flexible, and many of them want to make long-distance journeys. Exploring new ‘worlds’ and being geographically mobile becomes part of their self-image. What the young people do in their spare time also makes up an important part of their identity. To be able to spend time with things they are interested in and also to find places and arenas where they can express their identity is essential (Forsnäs 1994; Mörck 1998).

Considering the increasing globalization, we at Bohuslän Museum and the heritage management Västarvet are interested in how the presence of borders is reflected in a Nordic perspective. We also want to study the attitudes of a younger generation towards questions concerning the border regions and mobility. During the last few years the ethnological studies of Bohuslän Museum, have focused on youth and young people’s culture. Several studies have been carried out on themes concerning young people: identity and mobility, inter-Nordic contacts and international exchange. A considerable and interesting body of material has been collected on young people’s culture and on Scandinavian borders. The projects have been carried out in close collaboration with schools and youth associations, they are mainly based on the young people’s own interest and involvement. Two projects can be mentioned.

Swedish young people working in Norway

A relatively new occurrence in the region in question is young Swedes travelling to Norway to work and be part of an expansive Norwegian labour market. This study is about young people on the point of entering adult life. Because of the difficulty of finding work in Sweden, their first proper job and the first place of their own to live may be in Oslo or in other Norwegian counties.

Approximately 10,000 Swedish citizens under the age of 30 live in Norway. Two thirds of them are under 25 (Andersson & Jonsson 2007). According to statistics from 2001 there were 28,000 Swedes earning a salary in Norway. This number does not include those who are employed in Swedish companies and working in Norway on contract (Nordisk pendlingskarta 2005). These contracting companies are common in western Sweden, particularly in the building and engineering business. There is a great demand for labour in the developing border regions and in Norway in general. To recruit Swedes for the Norwegian labour market, Norwegian employment offices have opened in the west of Sweden.

On the Internet there are also a lot of sites with practical advice about working in Norway and the advantages of applying for work in Norway. Several of these are aimed directly at young people. There are titles like ‘Find your dream job in Norway’. They present practical advice such as ‘Things to remember’ and ‘Money saving advice’ and instructions such as:

*Bring as much food as you can from Sweden, particularly meat.* You can keep the meat frozen in a cool-bag during the journey. Also bring beer, spirits, cigarettes and tobacco, as they certainly are not very cheap in Norway. Cook a good meal every evening, enough for lunch the next day. If you eat properly you can manage more overtime work. Make sure you get as much overtime as you can. Show willingness so your employers understand that you do everything to earn your Norwegian money. (www.ressidan.com/norge/)

In the study Swedish Young People Working in Norway, we have been interested in the conscious decisions the young people make; how they build their identity and self-image during their time abroad. What new experiences have they gained by crossing borders? How do they view their own mobility? What are their expectations of the big city of Oslo? The conditions of the time abroad model the young people’s lifestyle and their contacts in the new country. They live close to Sweden, but still the conditions and expectations are different. They work in restaurants, shops and storehouses and are com-
paratively well paid. They change jobs often and they are expected to do a lot of overtime work. To start with, the work in Norway is seen as temporary, but later this view changes.

These young Swedes have a flourishing social life and spend most of their spare time with friends. Mostly they keep company with other young Swedes. To be able to afford living in central Oslo they share apartments with friends and others in the same situation. Living collectively, they share a sense of togetherness with their flatmates. Quite often though, they move around and change apartment. The opportunity to find work and a place to stay greatly depends on mobile telephones and digital communication; websites and sending text messages are important ways of keeping in touch and finding information. Tips from friends about a better-paid job or good lodgings are invaluable. Through time the city of Oslo, with all its amusements and activities, becomes their home. Nevertheless many of them wonder about the future; where will they settle down and make a living? Do they feel Swedish or do they feel Norwegian? (Andersson & Jonsson 2007).

The Nordic Sailing Race

Another ethnological youth study concerns sailing and Nordic maritime culture. The project is run in collaboration between Bohuslän Museum and the Museum of Natural History in Gothenburg. This study has already shown an exciting potential. Every summer since 1990, races have been organized for traditional sailing ships from the whole of Scandinavia. The course of the race is between a Swedish, a Danish and a Norwegian port. The crews of the sailing ships are mainly young people. They are given a chance to learn how to sail and navigate, and also to assimilate older coastal traditions. At the same time they get together with other persons interested in sailing from the whole of Scandinavia. The sailing races are characterized by hard work and a strong sense of community and commitment. In this project we want to study the processes that determine the identities of the young people and their attitudes towards contacts between the countries. We are also interested in the significance of the maritime culture; and how the young people value the sea as a natural resource and as a way to experience nature.

During the documentation of The Nordic Sailing Race in the summer of 2007 each crew was to write a diary. A photographic competition was also arranged. The themes were ‘the most dramatic moment’ and ‘the best nature picture’. The idea was to capture the impressions and memorable moments of the journey. In connection with the photographic competition and the writing of the diaries there was plenty of discussion among the participants about which material should be a part of the documentation, how it should be done and what should be collected by the museum.

In the diaries the young people have written about their impressions and experiences of the sea and the sailing and about their appreciation of the awe-inspiring nature:

The sea is freedom, the feeling of sailing wherever you want to, happiness...

Sailing for me is being closer to nature and seeing new places. My best memory was one late evening when we were on the night watch. It was calm, the sun was setting, the air was warm and there were newly baked scones on the after-deck.

We were fishing for mackerel, taking things easy and listening to wonderful music; a memory never to be forgotten.

Challenges and new friends were other ingredients of the sailing tours:

Sailing at night was very dramatic with strong winds. The seasickness was unbelievably troublesome, but afterwards it was cool to have managed it.

Sailing for me means having fun and meeting new people from other places. The sense of community onboard is hard to find anywhere else...

Being young in the society of today, a major issue is to create an identity and to find out who you are (Henriksson 1991; Ring 2007). In this study we are interested in what impact the encounters with nature and sailing have had on the minds of the young people. During the weeks of sailing, close acquaintances developed between the crew onboard the ships, often lasting for many years. The in-
ternational exchange in the sailing race gives another dimension to the activities, in which meeting friends from the other Nordic countries is the most appreciated part.

**Border-related projects and cooperation with the community**

At the transition between adolescence and adult life, new experiences are made and new ideals are formed. When I initiated these projects about young people and their culture I was interested in what it means to be young today. It was the young people living in the border regions, or those who for different reasons have a relationship to a borderland, that caught my interest. What experiences do they have and how can the lifestyle of young people be seen in a Nordic perspective?

Both projects mentioned above are pilot studies; the work is not concluded and will be continued. The work of documentation has involved gathering information in other Nordic countries together with youth organizations and schools. The collaboration with these has been important and instructive. The stories of the young people have constituted a great part of the documentation. In some of the projects carried out by Bohuslän Museum, the participants themselves have been able to base their schoolwork in the collected material. They have been able to work with the oral and photographic material about historical and contemporary conditions in the border region. It has been interesting to learn about their ideas and views on issues concerning this topic (Fredriksen & Norheim 2006).

Questions that are not unimportant in this context are: what advantages are there in a project working over the border? How can the production of knowledge in museums be reinforced by international exchange? A conclusion that can be drawn from the border projects already carried out is one of development of knowledge. The various experiences of the participants and colleagues from museums and other institutions abroad generate new models of collaboration and new ways of planning the collections. New methods need to be developed in the cooperation with the community, to involve the members of the community in the work. New aspects of local themes can also be seen with an international perspective in the research. Another consequence of working with an international project is that it creates an incentive to communicate the results – to show the public the outcome in the form of exhibitions and publications.

Regional museums as well as town museums all work towards their own goals, usually with a local or a regional perspective. The development and history of their own local community is a major issue. With this in view, we also need to take a more global responsibility in collecting and documenting our contemporary society. Which global contexts and questions of today are important to record? Which significant artefacts and which narratives are interesting to collect in an international perspective?

Bohuslän Museum will hopefully in coming years be able to carry on the international collaboration in ethnological research. We particularly want to study and gather information about young people in a Nordic and international perspective. It is also a good way to establish contact over the border with schools and youth associations. In addition it is inspiring to work together across the border. We would therefore like to invite other museums of cultural history from different countries to future cooperation with us on these themes.

**Västarvet** is the body responsible for heritage management in the region of Västra Götaland. Bohuslän Museum in Uddevalla and the Museum of Natural History in Gothenburg is part of Västarvet.
Footnote

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Image captions

Fig 1. The Dramatic Sailing Race - The second-prize winner of the photographic competition. The race starts off the island of Gullholmen on the Bohuslän coast and they finish at Tønsberg on the east side of Oslo Fjord in Norway. Photo: Peter Ljunggren, Uddevalla, 2007.

Fig 2. The Oslo express coach is a quick and cheap way of travelling from Bohuslän in Sweden to Oslo in Norway. Photo: Sigfrid Carlsson, Bohuslän Museum 2007.

Fig 3. A show at Fredrikshald’s theatre in Halden, Norway 2005. The project ‘Youth in a borderland community’ was carried out by Bohuslän’s Museum together with several other Swedish and Norwegian folk high schools, museums and associations in the region. Photo: Jan Palmblad, photo ed: Mats Jacobsson.
Contemporary collecting at Tyne and Wear Museums: An overview focusing on outreach work

Kylea Little
Tyne and Wear Museums

This paper will provide an overview of the curatorial and outreach methodologies of contemporary collecting employed by the Keeper of Contemporary Collecting (KCC) at Tyne and Wear Museums (TWM). It will conclude with two questions; what is the key to successful community collecting projects and what issues are involved in the future of contemporary collecting at TWM.

TWM is a federation of eleven museums and galleries in the North East of England. It is the largest regional museums service in England. The post of the KCC was created in 2005 with the aim to strategically and actively collect contemporary material, particularly from diverse groups who have not traditionally been represented in the museums' collections. To date the KCC has worked with Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Gay and Transsexual groups, members of the disabled community and people from black and minority ethnic groups. The post is funded by the North East Regional Museums Hub (NERMH). The KCC works between the History team and the Outreach team at TWM using numerous methodologies for collecting contemporary material, depending on what or who we want to represent and how much time and resources we have.

Methodologies – the curatorial approach

One approach to collecting led by the KCC, involves looking at local newspapers and statistics to identify significant events or trends in the region and this has led to collecting various objects. We have collected material from the local rugby club (Newcastle Falcons) and from one of the numerous casinos opening in the region. We have collected recycling boxes that have been given to most homes in the region and from the Make Poverty History campaign we collected oral histories, wristbands and placards. We also collected the most expensive bottle of champagne on the menu at a local bar (it was empty of course!) to demonstrate the fact that the region consumes more champagne per head than any other region in England!

1 The NERMH is a partnership established in 2003 between TWM (as Hub Leader), Beamish: the North of England Open Air Museum, The Bowes Museum and Hartlepool Museums. There is a similar partnership in each of the eight other English regions, established under the Renaissance in the Regions scheme which is funded through the Museums Libraries and Archives Council.
Methodologies
– the outreach approach

A more time intensive methodology is working with communities, where decisions about collecting and representation are made by the community. TWM has an Outreach team which aims to engage hard to reach people in the processes of the museum, its collections and other activities. The Outreach team and the KCC have carried out a lot of collaborative contemporary collecting projects. We have worked with skaters, people involved in the punk music scene in the North East, looked after young people, disabled people and older people. These have resulted in various outputs such as exhibitions in our community gallery, websites and publications.

This paper will now analyse two case studies that were both part of a larger project aimed at collecting material from black and minority ethnic groups to increase their representation in the museum. These projects ‘evolved’ differently, and by comparing them, it is possible to learn more about how contemporary collecting works.

Case studies – Jewish lives and the Gowya group

The Jewish Lives’ project started through the synagogue and was a successful project in terms of collecting a large amount of new and varied material. A group of five women started by working with an artist to create a textile piece. Immediately the group decided to focus on their faith and everything incorporated in the textile piece is representative of Judaism.

At the same time the project developed, over the course of a year, into a contemporary collecting project due to the group’s understanding and commitment to ‘capturing’ their heritage. Twelve oral histories were recorded, numerous digital images of family photographs and many objects representing the Jewish religion were taken into the collection. The final output was a website incorporating clips from the oral history and the digital images. Increasingly TWM Outreach projects are taking on a more public final output, this is a shift from the past when Outreach projects were more inward looking and the audience was considered to be primarily the group itself.

The self named Gowya group (Gowya meaning strong in Amharic, the language of North Central Ethiopia and one of the languages used in the group) was made up of local people, refugees and asylum seekers and developed very differently. It was slower to progress in collecting terms and resulted only in the collection of digital photographs. (However it was successful in different ways; a good relationship built up between the group and TWM and the group enjoyed the experience). The project started in a similar way to ‘Jewish Lives’ with the group working on a creative project involving felt making and printing, however, it remained purely creative. We continued to work with the group and we asked them how they would represent themselves in the museum hoping we could record their heritage. They found this a challenging question in contrast to the Jewish group. Finally, they focused on an Eritrean coffee ceremony which was a tradition amongst some of the women in the group. Images of the coffee ceremony were added to the collection. After this they worked on a creative writing class in which they told their stories of living or moving to the region. This became a publication – again a public output.

The group often seemed to be more interested in learning about their new environment in England. One person even commented that the thing they enjoyed the most about the project was the English sandwiches they had for lunch! This demonstrates that the ‘success’ in collecting terms is dependent so much on the group’s priorities, on their understanding of museums and their concept of heritage and the role of material culture in their lives.

Key questions

This paper concludes with two key questions which TWM is considering. What is the key to successful community collecting?

For TWM there are three key issues. Firstly working through an established organisation provides museum
staff with a venue to meet with groups, such as a community centre or synagogue that they are comfortable in and that does not seem alien and imposing. The organisation can provide contacts with people who might be interested in museum projects too, although of course this impacts on who we are then representing.

Secondly, projects take longer where the group has little or no prior knowledge of the museum or where the group has competing demands for time. It is therefore important to build up trust and a sense of what the museum is about before embarking on collecting. Often craft based projects are used as starter projects to build up this relationship.

Thirdly, having staff that understand all of the issues is essential. Our Outreach staff work to engage groups, to help them to think about representation and the museum collections. By working through established organisations TWM has also built up support and understanding with workers or representatives from those organisations so that they also engage groups in museum projects.

What next for contemporary collecting at TWM?

TWM is committed to contemporary collecting and to working with the community. TWM aims to continue to critically consider the work that we do and look for areas to improve upon. This leads us to consider issues that have arisen in the past three years.

The TWM History team is assessing documentation procedures, specifically discussing how to record these community projects within the objects’ official MODES records. MODES is a collections management system in British museums. In the past data held on the objects’ MODES records has been limited to physical information about the object, such as dimensions and condition of the object, and to information on the donor rather than capturing the story behind the object.

The Outreach team will continue to work with ‘non traditional’ museum audiences, however, museums must not neglect ‘traditional’ audiences in our collecting activity.

We must continue to understand how difficult it can be to be representative even when communities decide how to represent themselves; there are always some people who are more forthcoming than others for a variety of reasons. Choosing an object to represent identity is a snapshot of one person’s life at one specific time usually around one issue.

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Image captions

Fig 1. Tyne and Wear Museums Logo
Fig 2. The Gowya group working on a creative writing project
Fig 3. One of the most expensive bottles of champagne available in Newcastle
Fig 4. Rugby ball donated by the Newcastle Falcons
Fig 5. Coffee ceremony performed by the Gowya group
Fig 6. David Goldwater with objects donated to TWM
(All photos: copyright Tyne & Wear Museums)
Archaeological collecting, the contemporary and public involvement

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The Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm

New directions in archaeology, dealing with the contemporary and with the public relations of archaeology, have great potential to affect the collecting practices of archaeological museums. Three recent projects at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities may illustrate this. In this paper we briefly present and analyse these projects.

The grand structures of archaeological collecting in northern Europe were mainly set up in the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. These structures, and the creation of those national historical museums which function as the core of the collection system, were very much shaped by the evolutionist, nationalist and racist beliefs of the time. Although the ideas about what a museum is and its role in society have changed profoundly since then, the practices of collecting that were established more than a hundred years ago remain rather similar today and still structure current museum exhibition work, research and other practices. In order to enable new visions of historical museums and to really break with evolutionism, nationalism and other ghosts from the past, it is not enough just to change policies and the contents of displays. The deep structures of historical museums in the form of collecting practices must also be reconsidered.

Relatively new, and increasingly influential archaeological directions, dealing with the contemporary past and the public dimensions of archaeology, have great potential to function as catalysts for new collection practices. The area of archaeologies of the contemporary inevitably brings new kinds of artefacts to collections and raises ethical and political questions, since it must interact with the world of the living. Public archaeology, on the other hand, strives to involve people in the making of history, with an aspiration for more inclusive, and even democratic, pasts and collections. A series of three recent research projects at the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities have dealt with these issues.

In the collection and exhibition project Future Memories the public decided what was to be exhibited and collected. Their descriptions and ideas about the chosen artefacts were registered in the museum database. Such public involvement in creating a new part of a collection gives us a perspective on traditional museum practices and how we deal with exhibited archaeological objects. As it turned out, these personal reflections on memories chosen for the future influenced the perception of other exhibited objects and their histories in the museum. In addition, the project shed light on current collection practices.

The project Archaeologist for a Day consisted of a public archaeological excavation of the Museum of National Antiquities itself. The summer audience of 2007 was invited to take part in the excavation of the central courtyard of the museum. A great number of artefacts from the last
350 years, relating to the history of the area as well as of the museum, were found and collected. The project demonstrated the learning possibilities of involving people in the archaeological process as well as the limits to accessibility and public use of the collection database system.

The third project, Public Contract Archaeology, explored the public relations of Swedish contract archaeology through the engagement of museum staff in a major archaeological project. Here, we worked with the otherwise radically neglected contemporary and public dimensions of this type of project. A possible growing future general engagement with these dimensions will undoubtedly result in a very different archaeological system and different museum collections.

These projects are part of a general developmental strategy at the museum, based on current research (Merriman 2004; Buchli & Lucas 2001). We have also been most inspired by a keynote paper by Nick Merriman at the conference Curating for the Future at Manchester Museum (Merriman 2007). The aims of an inclusive archaeology, taking a serious interest in these new directions, are to involve the public in the practices of archaeological investigation and to engage people in interpretation processes. It also opens up ways for the professional archaeologist to advance ethical awareness and self-reflection within the archaeological community. Thus, working towards greater public interaction in the museum, and with archaeology reflecting on its contemporary context, traditional collection practices will inevitably be challenged. New kinds of artefacts, collected in new ways, are just one aspect of this. The projects referred to above, which will be more fully presented below, question artefact categorizations, policies for storage and display practices, as well as database organization, design and accessibility. These projects thus incorporated frictions of traditional museum practices in several ways. The revealed points of friction are excellent starting points for the reconsideration of outdated ways of doing things and initiating processes of change.

Future memories
The concept of future memories plays with the established idea of memorabilia from ancient times. It turns the concept on its head. This twist becomes a work of contrast, which focuses on issues such as the significance of things, the assembling of the collection and the stories that are put forward. The museum contributed the framework, consisting of an exhibition form, and the public created the content by choosing the objects and stories that were to be sent on to the future. This worked at several different levels. The museum was enriched by new stories and knowledge about the public comprehension of artefacts and their choices of historical focus. It also got attention in unexpected media contexts. The idea of future memories provoked reflection on archaeological collecting within the museum and was the core issue of a professional debate among archaeologists on why certain objects are perceived as bearing information about the past, while others are dismissed as not being museum-worthy (Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007).

Setting up an incavation
The setup allowed people to deposit their chosen future memories in a case in the museum entrance hall during the spring of 2007. The objects were tagged with reminder notes with written stories and left on display until the end of the summer, when they were finally incavated in a pit in the museum courtyard. Each future memory was photographed and registered in the museum database. In this way, the source information about the objects and their stories are preserved for future studies even though the things themselves are buried in the ground.

On the incavation day, all of the objects were placed in a disorganized manor on a long table out in the museum courtyard – a museum exhibition or a flea market? In the afternoon a solemn ceremony was performed where the public assisted in placing objects in the pit and shovelling soil to cover them.

This is not a time capsule. The difference between an incavation and a time capsule is that the incavation focuses on the connection between concepts of the past in relation to perceptions of the contemporary period and the future, rather than on preserving deposited objects for future generations (Holtorf 2001; Wahlgren 2006).
This may be the point of departure for engaging in questions on our role in history, for example, and what traces our time will leave behind, but it is also a way of reflecting on what is left from past times and what has disappeared. These are core issues for a historical museum.

The objects and their stories
A total of 560 objects were handed in and the collection consisted of all sorts of things, from what people happened to have in their pockets, to carefully thought out items that were brought especially for deposition. The scope included train tickets, hair ribbons, make-up and sanitary towels as well as irons, telephones, cycle pumps and typewriters. Several people left photographs, either a portrait of themselves or of someone closely related and beloved. There were jewellery, ties, cuddly toys, newspapers, key rings, coins from all over the world and compact disks with favourite music or home videos. Some objects were also sent in by post from people who were unable to come to the museum.

Many of the objects may seem ordinary or even trivial to those who do not make an effort to read the reminder notes. It is quite clear that the content of the story is not directly related to the material value of the object. Some of the most intriguing thoughts were attached to papers, simple gadgets or plastic toys. Mostly people wanted to tell about common issues such as what makes them feel at home, often about love and loved ones. Since the objects could be left anywhere in the case and could later be moved by other visitors, they also became comments on each other when placed in different combinations. A rough categorization might look like this:

- **Changing times – out-of-fashion stuff.** Examples: dial telephone, typewriter, computer floppy disk, alarm clock.
- **Environment and politics.** Examples: bicycle pump, train ticket, EU tie, bird feeder, badge.
- **Love and friendship.** Examples: make-up, hair ribbon, tampon, photograph, letter.
- **Me and my home.** Examples: iron, potato peeler, keys, dishcloth.
- **Leisure.** Examples: cuddly toy, music player, CD, game.
- **Tourist greetings.** Examples: coin, keyring, leaflet, badge.

The most shocking contribution to *Future Memories* was neither a ticket or love letter nor a useful tool. In the case we found a small plastic zip-lock bag with some of the ashes of Nathan, who died in a motorcycle accident in Canada in 2005. Together with these remains was a message of remembrance from his best friend. Nathan loved to travel but did not manage to visit all of the places that he had hoped to. In honour of his memory, the family and a few close friends are spreading his ashes in beautiful places all over the world. His mother told us that in addition to Sweden, Nathan is present at the Mount Everest base camp in Nepal, in Hawaii, South America, Germany, Scotland, Belize and at several places in Canada. She considers *Future Memories* to be a nice way of keeping and spreading his memory, which makes it easier to live with the loss of a much-loved son. The museum chose not to bury Nathan’s ashes together with the other objects in the courtyard. In consultation with his mother, we have registered the deposition in the museum database and, according to her request, applied for permission to spread the ashes at sea in the Stockholm archipelago.

Garbage or treasure?
*Future Memories* started processes in which the museum was forced to reflect upon collection and exhibition practices. Due to the rules governing the treatment of accessioned objects, it was not possible to give the future memories real inventory numbers and they were only given an identity code in the database. This clearly illustrated the current limit for which objects are acceptable in the collection and what kind of preservation conditions current policies force the museum to offer accessioned objects. The greatest stumbling block was the question of how the incavated objects, without preparation or conservation against decay in the ground, could be accounted for from the perspective of collecting. This offered interesting insights, as the collecting practices and the regulatory framework for the retention of collected
objects were revealed to have major implications for the
possible uses of, and public interaction with, the collec-
tions. A serious aim to create exhibitions with greater in-
teractive possibilities must thus include serious attention
to, and reconsiderations of, the practices of collection
work.

The fact that the future memories were not acces-
sioned to the collection is decisive for their status as mu-
seum artefacts. Admittedly, the objects and their stories
are accessible and searchable in the database, but their
usefulness for research as well as for the public would
be considerably improved if they had received full status
as museum objects. The documented items will still be
saved for future use, even though the objects themselves
are buried and will decay in the ground.

Archaeologist for a day

The current building complex of the Museum of National
Antiquities was constructed in 1934–1939. The collec-
tions were moved there from an older nineteenth-cen-
tury building (now the National Museum of Art), and the
first exhibition, *Ten Thousand Years in Sweden*, opened in
1943. From this starting point the policies of the museum
have gradually changed, partly in line with changes in
archaeology as a discipline. Of course, general museum
policies have also changed. Museums currently strive to
work with pluralism, and more involving and interac-
tive relationships with audiences – as a kind of forum.
They want to become more ‘responsive’ (Ågren & Nyman
2002; Lang, Reeve & Woollard 2006).

In this climate of willingness to change, there are
good reasons to look back on how institutions have de-
veloped historically. To be able to change, new perspec-
tives are needed on current museum positions and the
roads that led to them. The history of how ideas and
policies change over time is certainly interesting, but
when it comes to museums, they are only half the story.
The 150-year history of the modern cultural historical
museums also needs to be seen and analysed as a his-
tory of changing practices. How and why were they set
up, what have they done and how were they structured?
Furthermore, to what extent do old practices linger on
and continue to reproduce only slightly modified struc-
tures, which on second thoughts are not in line with
current ideas? In particular, the practices surrounding
collecting and classification systems, the selections and
hierarchies of artefacts and the changing interpretations
of the objects themselves, are areas that most museums
need more knowledge about. What has been collected,
and based on whose perspective? What stories have been
told and not told?

If new aspects of the output of museums, and whose
(hi)stories are told, are to come forward, then sources
other than the traditional ones must be sought. These may
consist of photographic archives, exhibition documenta-
tion, the archived parts of collections, and relationships
between the composition of the collections as wholes,
and the selections made for exhibitions. The modern his-
tory of artefacts in their new and very artificial museum
contexts can also be analysed. What has been hidden in
the museum cupboards? Such investigations might well
be seen as archaeology of sorts.

Archaeological investigations as
catalysts

Archaeological investigations may have different aims.
In the summer of 2007 an archaeological investigation
of the inner courtyard of the museum was initiated.
Professional archaeologists led it, but the museum au-
dience was invited to take part in the investigation and
interpret their finds. The artefacts were accessioned
and the interpretations registered in the museum database
(inventory no 34 759). The aim of the excavation was to
investigate the history of the museum itself as reflected
in the material remains in the courtyard, and to catalyse
an internal discussion of the museum’s own history and
collection practices. Another important aim was to study
the situation itself, and to make the museum more com-
petent at handling an interactive audience in an excava-
tion context.

In an earlier study of the museum’s photo archive, it
became obvious that the educational activities of previ-
ous decades were next to invisible in the preserved ar-
chives. A probable reason for this is that this work was seen as low status. Artefacts from more or less all exhibitions have been documented, compiling a collection of thousands of pictures, while there are less than a handful of pictures of the educational work. The excavation of the courtyard, the site of numerous learning activities since the 1940s, might in that perspective actually provide a supplementary historical record. As it happened, thousands of objects from the time when the complex was built, and from some 300 previous years of neighbourhood activities and history, had also been deposited in the few cubic metres of excavated courtyard soil.

The public excavation, as a form, is a rather obvious platform for getting audiences involved in the exploration and making of history. The archaeological process is demonstrated, gives a sort of understanding, which at least in theory makes people see archaeological exhibitions differently – they now know how those objects ended up in glass cases. At the same time, letting people excavate and interpret objects that became part of a collection, to be curated for eternity by the museum, turned out to be very popular. Many people later searched, and are still searching, the database for ‘their’ artefacts, knowing they themselves have taken part in making the museum.

This work with public involvement clearly outlined the possibilities and limits for public work/public availability of various dimensions of the museum’s collection and registration system. It turned out that this system, and primarily the database, was very much made from the viewpoint of museum specialists, making it hard for audiences to access and use it. This was indeed true for the ‘public’ search application, although the finds from the courtyard held, and still hold, high rankings in the search statistics. The database is otherwise more or less only accessed by researchers.

Authenticity and collection practices

During a test excavation in the courtyard, in the autumn of 2006, a reconstructed Viking Age cremation burial was found and investigated. The (previously employed) educational staff, having made it in the 1980s, or possibly 1990s, had deposited some replicas of cremated bones, a large mosaic bead, an object made from iron thread and a copy of an oval brooch.

The oval brooch was accessioned and registered as a regular object, an act that stirred some controversy among staff, and three different positions rapidly formed. Some thought that the brooch was an object – end of story, and some thought that it was a copy – not to be raised to the status of a ‘real’ collected object. Finally, some people held the opinion that it was originally just a copy, but that its time in the ground and its subsequent rediscovery and collection, through the process of an archaeological excavation, had in fact ‘made it’ into a real object. In other words, it had passed through a process which lent it authenticity.

The questions raised by the discussion about the oval brooch, as well as the discovered limits to public access and use of the database mentioned above, relate to and may illustrate more or less unconscious museum positions on bigger issues of classification, authenticity and the unspoken values behind (and generated by) the collection practices of the museum. These positions, and the competence to actively make choices in this context, will become more and more important as public interaction increases and the area of archaeologies of the more or less contemporary becomes interesting to more archaeologists (which will in turn generate more such material in the collection).

In a global context, the idea of fixed criteria for authenticity and the value of cultural objects is gradually being abandoned. UNESCO sponsored major research work in the 1990s in order to try to find a globally acceptable definition of authenticity. One of the most important results, the Nara Document on Authenticity, states that all judgements on the value of cultural heritage vary between cultures, and may also vary within the same culture. Thus it is not possible to base judgements of authenticity on defined universal criteria (Larsen 1995; Myrberg 2004; Holtorf 2005). This means that a view of authenticity is dependent on the context of the viewer. The status of the oval brooch mentioned above depends entirely on the dispositions of its collector.
However, if this is true, the converse is also true – that the position of the collector is constructed by the status and classification system of the collection. Not only does the collector make the collection, but the collection system and practices also make the collector in an intriguing interplay. The question of the authenticity or non-authenticity of the oval brooch is not a question as to whether it has some essential qualities or not. The question of where the borderline between public interaction possibilities and professional collection practices should be drawn is not a question of finding a ‘natural’ system. These questions can only be answered by making decisions about what the museum wants to be – that is to say, its identity and value system. The oval brooch can be seen as authentic and valuable or as a worthless copy – but that makes two different museums.

Public contract archaeology

The collecting activity of archaeological museums is most often dependent on what archaeological projects, staged by other institutions, choose to excavate or are commissioned to excavate, in a given landscape section which is to be utilized by modern society. In countries where rescue excavations are legislated, this context thus becomes the most important one for the selection of material remains to be documented and brought to museums.

The structure of the Swedish contract archaeology system seldom allows for any higher degree of public interaction with the process or for the excavation of the material remains of later periods. The project Public Contract Archaeology explored the public relations of Swedish contract archaeology through the engagement of museum staff in an archaeological project in the suburb of Hjulsta, north of Stockholm. Major highway construction work was underway in the area, and archaeologists had evaluated the landscape section, focusing their attention on the large-scale remains of what had formerly been Hjulsta village. As it turned out, settlements from the Iron Age until some time in the 1970s had been located on the site; it had also been a burial site during the Iron Age. The archaeological project, however, was commissioned to investigate all of the older remains, but no remains younger than those from the seventeenth century. They were also not allowed to do any public relations work.

The museum project first undertook an investigation to identify the people who might be interested in taking part in the archaeological project and to find out what would then be interesting for them to investigate. This was based on interviews and visits to institutions in the area. It turned out that local schools were very interested and that their obvious starting point was the recent history of the area, in other words, twentieth-century events and actions, which could easily be related to their history curriculum.

The project aimed to excavate, document and collect objects from part of one of the main twentieth-century farm buildings of Hjulsta, in cooperation with three classes of teenage school children. This was done in the autumn of 2007 and proved to be an interesting complement to the ongoing contract archaeological project, which was not allowed to direct its attention to these remains.

In this project, the museum thus reached out to explore the initial stages of the collection process, a point at which, under normal circumstances, other institutions make the most important decisions in relation to what later becomes the collection. As the project progressed, it became clear that the growing interest within archaeology for contemporary history and public engagement would lead to changes in the selection of sites and materials for excavation and collection work. It also illuminated the need for development of strategies to promote museum engagement in the beginnings of the collection process, and usually that is in the contract archaeology situation. Otherwise the archaeological museum will never be able to gain further control of its collection system.

Lessons learned

To deal more intensively with the public relations of archaeology, and to be more engaged in the contemporary, has definite consequences for the collections and collection practices of archaeological museums such as ours. As it turns out, the converse also holds true. The way museums work with collections will structure and
limit the ways in which they may engage with audiences. These limits and structures may only become visible if actively explored. We believe that such active project work, though it will most probably generate some frictions, is the best way to institutional self-discovery and development. (Fig 5)

References


Image captions

Fig 1. Archaeologist for a day. An archaeological investigation of the inner courtyard of the museum itself in the summer of 2007. Photo: Christer Åhlin, Museum of National Antiquities.


Fig 3. The future memories are accessible through the website www.historiska.se.

Fig 4: Public engagement and a more thorough interest in the present may take archaeological museums and collection practices out of their traditional frameworks.

Fig 5: The collection of future memories was in progress from April until the end of August 2007. Anybody could leave an object in a case in the entrance hall, see what others had left and read their stories. Photo: Andreas Hamrin, Museum of National Antiquities.
1. Reaching out in new arenas, engaging with the contemporary

2. More activity exhibitions

3. Public interaction as a way of self discovery

4. Effects on collection practices and contents

5. The museum
Is it a common thing for museums to try, in their contemporary studies and collecting, to make connections with equivalent, older studies and artefact collections? Such a linkage, by applying new ways of interpretation to earlier projects, would probably make both gain in value considerably.

In 2006 the National Museum of Science and Technology engaged in a contemporary study. It took place in Botkyrka, an ethnically diverse suburb of Stockholm. In focus were satellite dishes and their use. The museum also acquired a satellite dish that is now an artefact in its collections.

This contemporary study is one part of a two year project called *Radio Receivers and Satellite Dishes*, which has been co-funded by the Swedish Arts Council, and the National Museum of Science and Technology. The second part of the project is a survey of the museum’s collection of radio receivers from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

The museum curators Sonja Fagerholm and Emma Kleman have from the beginning been running the project, which in Swedish is titled *Riksradio och parabol*. They explored the radio collections, conducted the interviews, and are currently making some of their results available on the Internet (see www.tekniskamuseet.se). These texts and pictures are to be published in the spring of 2008, in Swedish. The project was initiated and is managed by senior curator Helene Sjunnesson, and Jan Garnert, research coordinator.

Radio receivers have been an important cultural experience in Swedish everyday life since the mid 1920s, while satellite dishes are a fairly new experience. They belong in the here and now. We regard this study as complementary to the collection of radio receivers even though, technically speaking, we are not collecting and documenting the same kind of technology. Instead we chose a contemporary artefact which holds cultural meanings similar to those of the old radio receivers. That is, we mainly paid attention to how people actually use satellite technology, and to its cultural and social meanings.

Presented above is the background to this short article, which I will finish by raising a question directed to museum professionals: How many of you try to make connections in your contemporary studies and collecting to equivalent older artefact collections by applying new ways of interpretation to them? To what extent is connecting collecting to the older museum collections on your mind, and on your agenda?

**Fieldwork in Botkyrka**

Until last year the National Museum of Science and Technology had never before attempted to document satellite dishes and their use. During the museum’s project in Botkyrka one was collected, which is enough,
from a technological point of view. It used to belong to a family of Serbian origin.

The aim of the fieldwork in Botkyrka was to investigate how members of ethnic minority communities use satellite dishes. The methods were mainly interviews, field observations, and photography. Along with the satellite dish we now have about 30 interviews with satellite dish owners. Family names like Khan, Savic, Hoshyar, Baryawno, Hadjiomar, and Gelal indicate the rich variety of life experiences to be met in Botkyrka.

One reason for recent Swedish citizens in this suburb to use satellite dishes, is their wish to stay in touch with events, people, places, and cultures in countries they once left, some of them for good.

The interviews focused on what people actually watch, considering aspects such as age, class, gender, and context. Are, for example, certain programmes as a rule watched in the company of other family members or alone? Aspects such as time and change were also important. What the interviewees watch might change with time. Cultural diversities, and indeed cultural identities, are processes. A thorough discussion of the concept of self-identity and self-identification would most certainly be applicable, if this had been a research project.

Contexts, acquisitions, and collections

From the late 1920s onwards, another media technology, namely broadcasting and radio receivers, increasingly connected people with distant places. Radios were quite common in Sweden in the 1930s, but being a radio listener in those days usually did not mean staying in touch with old home countries. The vast majority of people living in Sweden in those days were, and had been since way back in time, native Swedes.

Thus, when radio receivers were a novelty Swedes tuned in to radio stations like Hilversum, Oslo, Berlin, and Luxembourg primarily out of curiosity about music, politics, and maybe just spoken languages in other cultures and countries. The technology enabled mediated cultural meetings. The world came closer, and it could do so regardless of whether you lived in a city like Stockholm or in a remote, rural area.

These new audio-transmitted opportunities for cultural blending have even inspired song writers. Van Morrison is one of them, recalling good memories from radio listening in his song ‘In the Days before Rock ’n’ Roll’, one of the tracks in his album Enlightenment (1990). In the lyrics he is down on his knees, ‘going over the wavebands’, tuning in radio stations like ‘Luxembourg, Athlone, Budapest, AFM, Hilversum, Helvetia’ on his Telefunken radio.

There are about 900 radio receivers in the collections of the Museum of Science and Technology. Among the oldest ones are those that date back to the early 1920s, when national broadcasting started. In the project a special effort was made to explore receivers from the 1930s to the 1950s and to understand the use of them from the point of view of cultural diversity.

So far, most of them have been lacking contextual information. Disturbingly well known to museum professionals, I dare say, is the sad fact that this kind of information often is missing about artefacts in museum collections. Far too often the only information you can expect to find, at least in my museum’s collections, are the donor’s name, the date and year when the artefact was acquired, its size, the material it is made of, and ‘what it is’, here meaning the basic function, for example light bulb, bicycle, lorry, or washing machine.

Parallel lines

There are two points to be made here. Firstly, encouraged by the wealth of information available about contemporary satellite dish use, we have tried to enrich the collections of old radio receivers with more information, and with more meanings. This, we believe, will make the old collections more meaningful to museum visitors, and also more meaningful to scholars.

Secondly, we believe it is of future and crucial general importance that the old artefact collections are renewed by becoming more socially and culturally meaningful in contemporary society.

Our way of documenting a contemporary technology
and, in parallel, exploring an older technology with some similar cultural and social meanings, can methodologically be compared to the concept of ‘research stations’. In Sweden this concept was introduced and included in the professional vocabulary of museums of cultural history in the 1960s. It means that a museum chooses to return repeatedly to one or several places for field work, sometimes even decades later.

In 1937 the Nordiska Museet engaged in what is since long considered a classical example of cultural-historical fieldwork, in a village in Dalarna, some 400 km north-west of Stockholm. The published result was the book *Gruddbo på Sollerön, en byundersökning*, which if translated would read *Gruddbo on Sollerö Island: An exploration of a village* (1938). It's a coffee table sized publication, partly, I suspect, because it was a Festschrift to honour Professor Sigurd Erixon at the Nordiska Museet. In 1997 a new research team from the museum returned to the very same village, and a second report was published, called *Åter till Sollerön (Return to Sollerö Island)* (2002).

From the early 1970s onwards the Maritime History Museum in Stockholm engaged in a number of fieldwork projects among dockers, in fishing communities, and on board icebreakers and other kinds of vessels. In 1976 the museum hired architects, a social anthropologist, and an ethnologist to document old and recent vernacular architecture, holiday makers’ attitudes and activities, and the living conditions and everyday life of permanent inhabitants of a maritime community north-east of Stockholm.

Sixteen years later the museum returned for a new investigation. The intention was not to follow up on recent events, but to approach the community with a new set of research questions. In focus was the local maritime history, and above all how familiarity with local history can be understood as one expression of cultural belonging to a community.

These are just two examples, both pointing to an irresistible reason for returning – by adding a new study to an old one, both gain in value. In a similar way, I believe the parallel studies of radio receivers and satellite dishes add value to each other.

It is my wish for the future that curators at the National Museum of Science and Technology, when doing contemporary research, will search the museum collections for old technologies that once met human needs similar to those that contemporary technologies meet today.

Such a strategy would be like drawing parallel lines, lines of understanding that link together artefacts from different ages, but artefacts serving similar human efforts and needs. Two parallel studies, meaning two ways of approaching an interesting issue, are probably more productive than simply a contemporary study. Such a way of working probably also enables us to ask more qualified questions.

But, how many museum professionals are today already working in this way in their contemporary research and documentation projects? How many are dedicated to a strategy of parallel returning to old artefact collections, with the aim of culturally and socially contextualizing them?

Or, was perhaps Zelda Baveystock only too well informed when she claimed, at the conference Connecting Collecting, that ‘we’re not obsessed enough with using what we have already documented.’ I hope she will be proved wrong, eventually.

**References**


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**Bibliographical notes**

The book *Gruddbo på Sollerön, en byundersökning* was published by the Nordiska Museet in 1938, regrettably without a summary in English. Neither does its follow-up, *Åter till Sollerön*, published by the Nordiska Museet in 2002, carry a summary in English. The Maritime History Museum’s contemporary fieldwork projects are discussed by Anders Björklund and Lotten Gustafsson Reinius in the Nordiska Museet publication *Samtiden som kulturav* (2006). The introduction by the editors, Eva Silvén and Magnus Gudmundsson, to this Swedish language book is published in parallel in English.

**Image captions**

*Fig 1.* A satellite dish on the outlook in Botkyrka. Photo: Anna Gerdén/The Museum of Science and Technology, 2006.

*Fig 2.* Orion radio receiver, model 100, manufactured in 1932. In the collections of the Museum of Science and Technology this artefact is identified by the number TeM 47041. Photo: The Museum of Science and Technology, 2007.

*Fig 3.* Taking part of visualised telecommunitaions in Botkyrka with the help of hand held remote controls, satellite dishes, TV sets, some more technology, and knowing how to handle the technology. Photo: Anna Gerdén/The Museum of Science and Technology, 2006.
The photographic collection in the Historical Museum of Warsaw

Anna Kotańska
The Historical Museum of Warsaw

In spring 2007 the Historical Museum of Warsaw finished the celebration of the 70th anniversary of its existence. It is the main institution collecting, preserving, researching and showing objects connected with Warsaw and its inhabitants. The museum is sprawled out over 11 tenements in the heart of Poland’s capital – in the Old Market Square – which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Here you can see unique objects: paintings, prints, coins, medals, furniture, artefacts etc, referring to the history of our capital. This article describes the biggest collection of the Historical Museum of Warsaw – the collection of 160,000 photos, negatives and postcards in the Iconography Department. (Fig 4)

The collection preserved in the Iconography Department was created thanks to purchases and donations. A significant value of this collection is the fact that the objects represent consecutive phases of the development of Warsaw and Polish photography and they are an invaluable source for learning about the history of Poland’s capital.

Priorities in the collecting policy (purchases and donations)

What are our priorities in acquiring exhibits? Generally speaking we are interested in photos on the subject of Warsaw – the city and its residents. We collect photographs depicting historic buildings and other architectural objects, views of streets and squares, pictures illustrating all the changes in the city’s appearance over the years.

It is important to have as many photographs as possible showing all aspects of the city’s everyday life, for instance public transport, trade, industry and craft and of course political and cultural life, because they provide an insight into the real Warsaw of decades ago. Photos presenting interiors of Warsaw institutions, palaces, shops etc. are of special value for us, because they are rarely put on the market.

Photographs of persons whose life or activity were connected with the capital city of Poland constitute the second aspect of our searches. We have many photographs both of people who rendered great service to our city and anonymous Varsovians.

As important as the subject is its authorship and place of birth. Therefore we look for photos from Warsaw studios. Our main aim in this field is to reconstruct the panorama of firms, also including ephemeral ones. Next to the works of outstanding masters of the camera we collect works taken by unknown photographers.
On this basis we are creating a collection containing excellent and valuable material for researching history of Polish photography, which – I would remind you with pride – significantly influenced the development of European art.

Decisions about purchases of new exhibits are made by the Board of Purchase, which is a special body of curators representing individual departments of our museum. Then we assess submitted earlier offers, taking into account the essential value of the exhibits, price and usefulness for our collection. We also systematically track the flow of Varsoviana and sometimes we attend auctions of works of art.

Donations are the second form of acquisition of exhibits. Every decision about handing over a memento to our museum shows that the function and role of our institution is fully approved. They are often unexpected gifts and among those which have come to the museum over the last 70 years, photos play a special role – not for their market price although sometimes we receive exceptionally precious objects, but because photographs belong to the most personal mementoes, parting with which is very difficult.

The culmination of the 70 years of our museum’s existence was the major temporary exhibition entitled Donations and Donors. It showed, among other things, the most interesting Varsoviana which the Historical Museum of Warsaw has received during the seven past decades. In this way we also wanted to honour the most generous donors.

Donations come not only from Warsaw and Poland but also from all corners of the world: from European countries, the United States of America, Canada, the Republic of South Africa, and Israel. For instance: one day an unexpected donation came from the USA thanks to Mr Alexander Allport, who decided to send to Poland photographs taken by his father a few years after the end of World War I. Mr Fayette Allport was in Poland in 1922 as a representative of the Department of Commerce in Washington, and the result of his business trip was both the report Can Poland Come Back? and pictures of Warsaw. It is a very interesting material, showing the city in the first years after the reborn Polish state, taken from a foreigner’s perspective.

I will also mention the donation of a German, Dr Gerhard Wiechmann (who donated through a third person). During the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 he was in Warsaw doing military service as a doctor in a field hospital. He took then a series of colour (!) slides and decided in 1976 to give a part of copies to the Historical Museum of Warsaw. Colour photographic material from 1944, taken in war circumstances, is of course a rarity, the more so because its author was a German who could move in the occupation zone, inaccessible to Polish photographers from the Information and Propaganda Office of the Home Army (the Polish military formation of the Polish Underground State).

We can describe these objects not only from their artistic and iconographic point of view, but also paying special attention to the donors’ interest and passion for collecting. We cannot compare donations mechanically, because numbers sometimes do not speak for themselves. Do 88 photographs mean a lot or not much? If we are talking about museum’s standards it is quite a lot, but if we are talking about the Kronenberg family – a well-reputed assimilated family of Polish Jews – it is very little. But these are the only photos (next to other mementoes) which remained of the influential Kronenbergs and their fabulous fortune.

Review of the collection

Our rich and diverse collection cannot be described in a short article. But I will mention the most important and unique sets from the artistic, formal and iconographic point of view.

One of the most interesting sets kept at the Iconography Department is the collection thematically connected with the January Uprising of 1863 and the period before it. The Uprising was a big rebellion for independence against Russian invaders. We must remember that Polish land was then since 70 years under Russian, Prussian and Austrian rule. And Warsaw, which was included in the so-called Kingdom of Poland – a state organism entirely subordinated to tsarist Russia, had to suffer the hated invader’s yoke. The unique photos taken...
140 years ago have a value of an exceptional document of these times. There are portraits of political and patriotic activists, insurgents, Siberian exiles and exiles to distant Asian regions of Russia, women in so-called dress of national mourning, as well as views of Warsaw with clearly visible tents of the tsarist army ‘keeping order’ in the occupied city, scenes from religious processions which have patriotic overtones. (Fig. 1 & 3).

This collection is a perfect example of using photography – which was a young art at that time – for the purposes of propaganda. Photos taken mainly by Karol Beyer (1818–1877), a pioneer in the field of Polish photography, were reproduced in thousands and purchased on a large scale by inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland and by countrymen from the other two annexed territories. They propagated a fight for independence and the ‘Polish issue’ in Europe, cementing society around a dream of freedom. And one more thing: among 1,300 photos devoted to this subject which we possess, nearly half are donations from among others relatives of exiles and insurgents. This fact is both moving and inspiring because it proves that the memory of heroic ancestors is still alive.

In comparison to the static views taken by Beyer, Warsaw in the 1880s and 1890s, presented by Konrad Brandel (1839–1920) is city vibrant with life. These scenes from different celebrations, events and sights from markets, parks, horse races, popular festivities, were an effect of his important invention of the photo revolver, i.e. a camera for shutter photos. Thanks to it, the unique flavour and staffage of the city – the essence of Warsaw everyday life – was recorded.

Many of the treasured objects in our collection connect thematically with the period between the World Wars. After 123 years of national bondage Poland regained independence and Poles started with unprecedented enthusiasm and energy to build a modern, democratic state. Photographs, negatives and postcards in our collection illustrate various spheres of Warsaw life in 1920s–1930s: important political events and national celebrations, diplomatic and artistic life, everyday life and of course architecture (for example housing-estate buildings).

This is very important documentation giving a notion of the character and ambience of the Polish capital, called the Paris of the North, and at that time developing dynamically after the years of bondage. The city architecture, views of its streets and squares, most of all are presented in two leading sets: photographs taken by Zofia Chomętowska and Henryk Poddębski.

One of the most famous Polish art-photographers, Zofia Chomętowska (1902–1991), significantly influenced our collection, as both author and donor. She handed over to our museum an impressive set consisting of about 3,000 negatives representative of her rich artistic work. Zofia Chomętowska, a woman of aristocratic background, thanks to her family connections and a busy social life, made a series of photographs, whose value – in the context of war losses – cannot be overestimated. I am thinking of a cycle presenting interiors of Warsaw palaces – Potocki, Radziwiłł, Czapski, Blank, Przeździecki and others. Although most of them were rebuilt, all the wealth of their furnishings and first-class art treasures collected by generations of Polish aristocracy and entrepreneurs was lost.

An excellent complement to the theme are works of Henryk Poddębski (1890–1945). His perfectly arranged photographs convey both the classic beauty of Warsaw monuments and the elegant simplicity of newly-built objects and layout in the 1920s–1930s.

The period of inter-war prosperity years was brutally disrupted by the outbreak of the World War II. There is no space here to describe the trauma of Poles during 1939–1945, caused by Nazi Germany, but I would like to quote some numbers concerning Warsaw: about 650,000 Varsovians died, the entire civilian population of 600,000 was expelled. Warsaw lost 90% of its places of worship, 80% of its museums and theatres. Overall, only 34 of 957 listed buildings came through intact. In 1945 more than 20 million cubic metres of the stuff was ultimately taken away.

We have a shocking corpus of material testifying to the damage of Warsaw in 1939 and daily aspects of life in occupied Warsaw and finally the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. (Let me remind that Poland was the first country which came under attack from Nazi Germany and
Warsaw was the first capital city brutally bombarded, starting on the 1st of September.)

To describe in the shortest way the phenomenon of the Warsaw Uprising I will quote a few words of the current president of Poland, Mr Lech Kaczyński, spoken when he was mayor of Warsaw. On the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Rising, at the opening of a photo exhibition (organized by our museum) at the Jeu de Paume – Site Sully in Paris, he said: 'It was, no doubt, the biggest battle, fought by a guerrilla army during World War II on any city streets.'

One of the most famous photographers of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 was Sylwester Braun, alias ‘Kris’ (1909–1996), who has taken more than 3,000 negatives, recording day-to-day events and scenes which took place in the fighting city. Half of them have survived to the present. The uniqueness of this collection, apart from its unquestioned documentary value, consists in the fact that Braun in a masterly fashion transmitted the ambience of the days of September and November 1944. That is why his photographs showing the scale of damage to Warsaw just before the Uprising surrender make such a shocking impression on spectators.

But we also owe him another extraordinary document from the beginning of 1945, which is composed of 300 negatives. They present not only the infinity of ruins, which were left after the metropolis of 1.3 million people, but also the return of the first inhabitants.

The photographs taken by the previously mentioned Zofia Chomętowska in 1945–1946 have a slightly different character. On one hand they show the enormity of the damage, on the other hand semblances of normal life in the capital just after the war. (Fig 5).

Sixty years have passed since the end of World War II, but still our museum receives new, priceless donations, referring to these dramatic events. In 2004, Mr Wincenty Szober handed over original microfilms taken by himself during the Warsaw Uprising. Overall only 85 shots came through intact.

We also possess a very interesting set of many thousands of photos presenting the period of Warsaw reconstruction. Photographs taken by A Funkiewicz, L Jabrzemski and S Leszczyński show the city rising from the ruins and coming back to normal life.

Our collection is systematically and consistently enriching in digital photos. For example, an exceptional set is dated from the days when Poland and Warsaw were in mourning after the death of Pope John Paul II in April 2005 and the entire city, especially places previously visited by the Holy Father during his pilgrimages to his homeland, were covered with flowers and candles. (Fig 6).

The photographic portraits of Varsovians

The Historical Museum of Warsaw can boast an impressive collection of photographic pictures of inhabitants of Warsaw. These photos represent the output of the major photo studios acting in the city since the second half of the nineteenth century.

There are, among others, works of Karol Beyer, Grzegorz Sachowicz, Maksymilian Fajans, Jan Mieczkowski, Stanisław Bogacki, Anatoliusz Masłowski, from the studios Kostka & Mulert, ‘Rembrandt’, and ‘Leonard’. They fully characterize the evolution of this branch of the art of photography since the first static and meticulously posed portraits from the start of the 1850s, up to the later shots, which are relaxed and have more psychological sketches.

During the subsequent decades not only the approach to the model was changing, but also the enourmousness of the damage, on the other hand semblances of normal life in the capital just after the war. (Fig 5).

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and professional groups, which excellently describe old Warsaw. It is also a specific historical context, a recording of the fleeting moment, evidence of presence in certain togetherness.

A special kind of compositions in the art of portrait is the tableau. Prepared for special events (jubilees, the end of professional or social activity, name-days or birthdays), they connect elements of photography and painting, which symbolize the domain of the person to whom they were dedicated. For example, among 25 portraits in a tableau from 1918 of graduates of the High Commercial School we can easily find the familiar figure of young Stefan Starzyński, later outstanding mayor of pre-war Warsaw, who was the commander-in-chief of the city’s civil defence in September 1939. (Fig 2).

Very interesting in our collection are also unique albums with or without photos. Some of them bound in leather, velvet, saffian or wood, with exquisite ornaments, are truly works of art. Especially meaningful are family albums with portraits of members of many Warsaw generations, eminent as well as little known families. Our ancestors prepared them with great care, in an enviable and exemplary way.

Apart from the images of relatives there are portraits of outstanding personalities at a given period, views of places with patriotic associations or reproductions of art works. They constitute altogether exceptionable evidence of customs and tastes of past times. They stimulate reflection on the flow of time, changing fashion and – despite everything – the continuity maintained between past and present.

We have albums formerly belonging to persons of different social and professional status, such as building company owner, musician and music teacher or pharmacist. While these sets of photos bear the trace of individual owners’ marks (because albums were usually added to for years), so-called school albums from the formal point of view are very much alike. Simple and modestly bound, they deliver a lot of information about the Warsaw educational system. They contain portraits of the teaching staff and pupils, but unfortunately rarely views of classroom interiors.

The albums presenting industrial companies and infrastructure firms operating in Warsaw have other cognitive values. They exceed the dimension of simple documentation of dull activities, machines and devices.

It took many years to shape our collection of postcards. They were very popular since their invention. It is a pity that we now keep in touch by phone or Internet, forgetting about postcards.

Conclusions

In the last few decades the interest in photographs as a historical source has been growing, which is proved by the increasing number of visitors. Our collection is very useful for Warsaw researchers, university teachers, students, the movie industry, the press, publishing companies, and private people.

Photographs illustrating the dramatic period of World War II arouse special interest. Pictures showing the city in almost total ruins are valuable for authors of documentary films and movie designers, who want to reconstruct the realities of these years (for example I can mention a member of the team on the movie The Pianist by Roman Polański, who was looking for photos presenting the demolished sculpture of Jesus Christ in front of Holy Cross Church in Warsaw). Documentation of pre-war Warsaw often formed the basis for reconstruction of buildings demolished during the war.

As far as the collaboration with other museums and cultural institutions in our country and abroad is concerned, we make our collection available mainly for exhibitions on historical topics or devoted to history of the art of photography, and for scientific publications.

In our own exhibitions we very often show material from the Iconography Department, concerning specific monuments, places, historical events or persons connected with Warsaw. Photo displays, based solely on photos, are very popular with our guests and draw huge audiences. Photographs from our collection can also be found in scientific papers and catalogues as well as publications and albums published by our museum etc.

We are aware that there are still many undiscovered sources which could essentially expand our knowledge of the past and which should be preserved for the next
generations. The museum’s activity cannot be overestimated in this question. We spare no effort to supplement our temporary exhibitions of objects borrowed from private owners to make them available to the public. We also attend many undertakings, focused on introducing the amateurs to get to know the museum from the inside and to enable the visitors to have direct contact with exhibits, to sensitize them to the historical value of the objects in their nearest surroundings and to persuade them to collect mementoes of the past. One example is the meetings during the Warsaw Science Festival, when we prepare small exhibits of objects seldom shown to the public, combined with speeches popularizing the history of the art of photography.

Our team from the Iconography Department takes great responsibility for preserving the rich collection in the Historical Museum of Warsaw. At the same time all of us are aware that we are privileged to have direct contact with mementoes of the past. Our main aim is to share this privilege with the public, to help the visitors understand that our collection is the core of knowledge, a kind of treasury of memory and a common pass to the future.

Image captions

Fig 1. Woman in so-called dress of national mourning. Photo: Jan Mieczkowski, after 1861.


Fig 3. Krasiński Square with visible tents of the tsarist army. Photo: Karol Beyer, 1861.


Fig 5. The Old Market Square in 1945 (the northern side – now the seat of the Historical Museum of Warsaw). Photo: Zofia Chomętowska, 1945.

Fig 6. Warsaw during the mourning after the death of Pope John Paul II. Photo: Halina Niewiadomska, April 2005.
A changing approach – a changing identity: Evaluating collection and collecting strategies at the Norwegian Telecom Museum

**Thomas Ulrich**
Norwegian Telecom Museum

An effort to become more active collectors requires a new focus on argumentation in favour of decisions. To a museum with an established view of collecting and collections, a new approach can be a challenge to its identity and mentality.

Our museum has at this point arrived at a time for changing perspectives on collections and collecting. This article conveys some experiences and thoughts from this process. My role at the museum is to suggest new strategies for the future and to critically evaluate the collection and give my opinion as to whether reducing storage space is an option.

The museum has come to the conclusion that the size of the collection is a problem and an obstacle to more preferable projects, such as recordings of associated information, research and exhibits. One thing is that the number of artefacts is conceived as overwhelming and a hindrance to having the overview and the desired knowledge of the collection. A main problem is that the rental fees for the stores drain a large part of the budget.

First, to get an impression of the collection, I have had talks with the staff and guided tours in the stores on several occasions. As a first approach it was necessary to get an overview of what the collection contained. I found that the telecom history of Norway was very well represented regarding artefacts. All the generations of equipment were represented – in most cases in ample numbers. There were also collections within the collection. These were regional collections – collected locally – and later moved to the central stores. Here we arrive at my second approach, namely how the collection happened to be collected – the history of the collecting. This has come to be the main focus in the evaluation.

**Background**

The museum registered its first item in 1989. The newly established museum had an enormous task to put together a collection. To undertake this, the museum employed technical staff from the National Telecom Company (Televerket). In this early stage the museum was a part of the Telecom Company, which then was in a phase of privatization and rationalization, shuffling its staff about. With great enthusiasm they attacked their task. Steadily the collection grew and the stores got filled up, first one – then one more ...

At the same time one strategy was to engage local enthusiasts in the regional districts. Many were retired personnel from the National Telecom Company, and their task was to collect the local collections mentioned above. In this phase the collecting depended on this local enthusiasm and the enthusiasm depended on the link to local and personal history. Later the museum had to rationalize and relocate most of the collected items in central stores. In this process a large part of the collection was deemed to be surplus and tons were put in containers.
and dumped – often to the resentment of the energetic collectors. Many were not happy their history was torn apart – or just as bad – taken away to the capital.

Throughout much of the museum’s lifetime it has been offered material from former local divisions of the Telecom Company. It turned out that employees had put things aside over the years, considering their historical value. For a long time this was accepted to a large extent. This was understandable as long as the museum was in a phase of establishment. The goodwill and trust of these people were also important to the museum. It was however, on the museum’s part, an aim to fill the gaps – maybe also a fear of missing something. I dare also say it was in many cases collected with the complete collection as an ideal.

Selection principles

Even though a lot had already been done, in my opinion there were possibilities to free even more storage space. My starting point was a scrutiny of the making of the collection. Here I found the main argument to move further on. As directions for collecting, the museum has defined criteria for priority as follows: a local connection, production in Norway, extensive use and educational value. As it turns out these directions have been formulated too loosely. The museum’s field of interest and responsibility has been defined, but how to draw the line and make restrictions within these fields could have been formulated more clearly.

A part of this story also involves all the non-professional enthusiasts working for and helping the museum. Their perception of what a museum is and what collections are, and the museum’s dependency on what they had to offer, have in many ways shaped the collection. I ask whether the right questions have been asked about the items. There is a huge difference between asking ‘Is this item relevant for the collection?’ and asking ‘What can this particular item do for the museum?’ Another question is whether the collectors actually have followed the required criteria. As a result there is an overrepresentation of some items and some groups of items. With the history of the collection in mind, it has a somewhat arbitrary character. This is my chief objection regarding the composition of the collection.

Criteria for evaluation

Evaluating the collection further, I operate with defined criteria. The take-off question is about definition:

Definition

Where to draw the line, what is on the fringe and what is outside? The collection should reflect the defined goals of the museum. If necessary, it can be useful to define the field of the museum more strictly.

Representativity

What story is the artefact a part of, or better; what artefacts can represent the story? For example: How many manually operated switchboards do we need to tell a story about manually operated switchboards in Norway? Glancing at the directions for collecting, we make sure we have representations of: boards customized for local use, boards produced in Norway, types of boards we find have been used extensively and types of boards we actually utilize in exhibits and education. It may be a question of representing as opposed to the ideal of the complete collection.

Associated information

Besides the mere facts adhered to the item, it is also a question of contextualization and references, which enhances the value of the items. This includes all records related to its history, such as interviews, research, manuals, pictures, relevant literature and so on. Everything that can provide for an understanding of the material is relevant. A lack of contextual information can be an argument for disposal.

Provenance

Is the provenance satisfactory? Information regarding the origin, custody and previous ownership is highly significant contextualization. A shortage of such information reduces the value of the material.
**Number**
Is there an overrepresentation of some items or groups of items? For instance, the Telecom Museum has 374 registered manually operated switchboards of various kinds. Get to know the collection before disposing of anything!

**Size**
How should we view the museum’s 1500 mobile phones in comparison with 374 manually operated switchboards? Considering the use of limited resources, size does count. (Fig 2)

**Educational value**
Does the item have qualities that make it a handy tool for passing on knowledge to the public? Some items are more applicable than others for this purpose. By experience we know that manually operated switchboards is a good example.

**Use and popularity**
Does anything happen to the item or does it live its life in the darkness of the stores? Some groups of artefacts are exposed to more light than others. It is a good idea to have a reserve of these things. For instance, nineteenth-century telephones are quite popular. They are often used in exhibits and are borrowed as props in movies etc.

**Additional qualities**
Qualities like rareness, age, aesthetic and market value make some items stand out. If the material fails in all the former evaluations, it still might have qualities that can justify its presence in the collection.

**Summing up**
Taking on the delicate task of evaluating a collection with the goal of reducing it considerably, and with the final aim of freeing resources and storage space, a professional approach — grounded on museological ideals — can be valuable as a start.

Yet there are other considerations to take into account. The museum has a history and an identity. The museum and its staff have established ways of working. These ways are a part of forming the identity of the museum. To some extent the museum belongs to the people that have shaped its practices. As mentioned, many are technical personnel recruited from the former National Telecom Company. Their professional, technological competence, most clearly, is a great invaluable asset to the museum, together with knowledge about telecom history acquired in their work. The same story can be told about their nearness to the material and to the near history of the Telecom Company. However, their ways of collecting were inspired by their enthusiasm and an interest in the telecom history related to their own work, and not based on museological ideals. This article, on the other hand, deals with museological ideals, as expressed by the criteria for evaluation of the collection, in encounter and argument with the museum as it is — you may say ‘the real-life factors’.

Still, a large part of my work is taken up with arguing in favour of my view. In this process I ask for arguments about the role of the collections in both the present and the future. What will be of interest for people in the future is in general impossible to foresee. Our history will be told later. By collecting, documenting and selecting we can prepare a part of this history based on our own understanding and preferences. Future interpretation of our actions, though, is not in our hands. But, in my opinion, a fair question to ask is whether the collection can be understood by someone from outside the museum and without the insight of the specialist. To prepare for better understanding is about more than a collection of items and a presentation of a minimum of facts about them. It is also about why we do what we do and why we do it in this particular way. The museum’s large number of ‘grey boxes’ containing analogue or digital technology, mostly used in the process of transmitting dialogues in one way or another, is material only experienced specialists can understand instantly. To most of us the functions are hidden in the electronics. How meaningful is it for instance to know something is a: ‘Measuring instrument; FL-4B/m0-2 for relay adjustment?’ (Fig 1)

The single item should be clearly embedded in both the larger and the smaller histories. It should be thoroughly contextualized. Why the item was important
at some level to some people at some time should be conveyed in an easily understandable matter. At the same time it shouldn’t rule out recording and imparting knowledge that is interesting for the specialist or for persons with prior knowledge.

Not least of all, contextualization is about the reasons why the item was selected to be transformed into a museum item, to serve a purpose so different from its initial one. In most cases the artefact has lost its intentional function forever. In many cases these artefacts can no longer be experienced in our daily life. We are simply losing the connection. Randomly, a museum decides to do something about it. That means a new purpose has to be provided. To choose an understanding of the material (not necessarily the correct understanding) that, according to arguments produced at the museum, make the material interesting can turn out to be a good idea. This I believe will generate very important contextual information that unfortunately often is missing. If it is made obvious why the material exists in the collections, understanding it and evaluating it will be a lot easier later on.

In what ways can a collection of 374 manually operated switchboards be understood? An argument in defence of this collection is that ‘they are all unique’. A counter-question is, how can it be understood that they are all so unique? Is uniqueness something inherent or do we have to ascribe it? If arguments defining the uniqueness are good and convincing, maybe an answer to the problem ‘374 manually operated switchboards’ is – why not? In the end this can be conceived as the collector’s attitude in conflict with a demand for a clearer purpose that the collected material may serve, for instance in research, education and in exhibits.

A purpose has implications. It is hard to imagine a purpose without interpretation. When a material is under scrutiny, the purposes of the museum itself are raised. If an important purpose for the museum is to deliver interpretations of material in a way that can provide the public with ways to understand their surroundings better and/or understand connections between the past and the present, it is clear that the museum is a producer of messages. The messages are connected with purpose and interpretation! Collectors can be aware of this already in the process of collecting and registration. This underlines the importance of collecting information associated with the object, since interpretation is close to impossible with only an item as a source. To ensure that material does not end up as curiosities in the stores, the museum must take an active approach and make sure that an understanding of the material goes side by side with the items.

Final words
What about future interests? The one who enters the store, or the database on the Internet one bright morning some time ahead and exclaims, ‘Behold you really kept them all!’ is rather illusionary. Can we really expect and prepare for this? On the other hand, can some value of the uniqueness come into play? Might we in the near future experience that what we discarded is conceived as something close to archaeological artefacts? For example, did we just recycle a genuine and perfect piece of ancient Greek pottery? Keep in mind the importance of telecommunication in modernity – what it means to power and politics, how it has been part of everything going on in society, how it is a symbol of an age.

However, to be an active collector means, in my opinion, that the collector has a clearly defined purpose for why he chose to collect exactly what he is collecting.

A new approach has many implications for the Norwegian Telecom Museum. For instance, a need and a willingness to turn the focus from collecting objects to recording contextual information must follow. In this regard we have for some time implemented the strategy of generally collecting in connection with projects. For us at the Norwegian Telecom Museum, as a collective entity, this implies a shift in identity and a changing mentality about collections and collecting.

Image captions
Fig 1. TELE ASK-162
Fig 2. A manually operated switchboard made in Norway by Electrisk Bureau: TELE T-31.
Who is the keeper? Collecting and storing in the National Swedish Museums of Military History

Eva-Sofi Ernstell
The Army Museum, Stockholm

This article is about how to make collecting into an integral part of museum work of today. I think the connection should start within the institution itself, as we all are keepers of museum items. First of all: make an inventory and identify your UFOs, find keywords — connect the collecting with the collection and people outside the museum.

The Army Museum in Stockholm does collect contemporary items. At this very moment we are collecting a warhead from the former Soviet Union. This warhead could have been loaded with power, bigger than the Hiroshima bomb. It could have had Stockholm as the target and it could have destroyed the entire area within a radius of 100 kilometres. One of our missions is to focus on the Cold War. This is an object that holds a lot of Cold War tension — even though the missile was never launched. The warhead symbolizes, among other things, fear. Fear can be visualized in an object like this, and no one passes by such an exhibit without being affected. A film producer is making a documentary film about this warhead, and in the film the so-called executor, who is still alive, is being interviewed and telling us what his mission was in case this missile was fired.

A museum item is a society’s memory

This raises many questions. What should we collect? Should we collect items that make us remember episodes from history that never happened? And should we collect items that were used by foreign armed forces? To me the answer is yes, we should. We must keep in mind ideas from previous periods in history, even though they were never realized. This item is not elegant or expensive but carries a variety of feelings. It makes us ask questions, it makes us think and reflect. We don’t need every such item, but this piece might be enough to keep the Cold War in mind. Items are a kind of souvenirs, they help us to remember. The museum staff, the keepers, are souvenir hunters whose most important issue is to collect the right one.

The twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, was a time of uprooting. The National Swedish Museums of Military History have a very big collection. Big in the sense of huge objects, such as airplanes and tanks, but also big meaning a large number of objects. The collection consists of everything a society needs. Places to live in, things to wear, systems for cleaning water and preparing food, machines and technical equipment for the infrastructure, for example building bridges, and information technology and communication.

The National Swedish Museums of Military History have two main arenas, the Army Museum in Stockholm
and the Air Force Museum in Linköping. Due to changes in the Ministry of Defence from 2008 we are also a centre for many local military museums in Sweden and are supposed to take charge of the collecting of such items. We support exhibitions all over the country with loans on a long-term basis. Since the Armed Forces are being reorganized and regiments and all kinds of military equipment are not needed militarily, we are collecting contemporary things at a very high speed at the moment. We must decide very quickly what to keep or it will be destroyed forever. We have therefore created a collecting committee.

The collecting committee

This is a committee dealing with collecting issues as well as sorting-out issues, as both these issues are the questions ruling what to have in the museum collection. I run the collecting committee consisting of one president, one secretary, one staff member from the Army Museum, one from the Air Force Museum, one from the Armed Forces and one from Local Museums. We represent different sexes and ages, with three women and three men between the ages of 25 and 65 on this committee. We also collaborate with other museum professionals from our own staff, such as conservators and historians and people from the army and air force, colleagues from other museums, private collectors, and various specialists. We strictly follow the ICOM code of ethics as we sort out items.

The collecting committee also puts objects on long-term loan. Our aim is to have most of our items on display or on loan and to minimize our storage space. What we do here is in fact connecting collecting, again. We collaborate with other local museums; we collect ‘objects of national importance’ and give them high status. Objects that have a local value are not part of our collecting field and we give such objects to the local museum. The choice is made by the collecting committee and the final decision whether or not the item should become a museum piece is made by our director general.

To connect our collecting there must be a broad understanding of the collection that we already have. The issue in the heading – ‘who is the keeper?’ – is also part of my discussion, as this is of great importance to the collections and the collecting. To me the collecting, registering, storing, and caring should be done by the same staff member, or by staff members in close collaboration with each other. There are many people who care about collecting. For example, there are specialists in different categories such as car specialists or sword specialists who have the idea that a museum should collect one of a kind without any reflection on its importance in society. Some people believe that all objects in a museum are economically valuable, and that ‘ordinary things’ have no right to occupy expensive space in museums.

Connect collecting

My most important contribution to the conference theme ‘connecting collecting’ is this: You must find out what you have, before you start to collect. Take control over the collections – get rid of unidentified objects in the collections, make sure the register works and make sure all items are included. I don’t mean that we should throw items away, but register them and find out what they are. Over and over again I have asked the question to museum colleagues: ‘How many items do you have in your museum?’ The answer is always the same: ‘Well, it all depends on how you count.’ This answer is too vague. We must be able to answer the question properly. Maybe it is more convenient to collect and register new items than to find out what’s in storage. I would say: Connect the collecting with the collection.¹

In the Army Museum we started to take an inventory at high speed, whereby all museum objects were registered with key words, short facts, and photograph. The average speed was two hundred items a day, as the purpose was to get a quick overview. Fifteen persons worked together – moved and controlled and checked 60,000 items at a rate of 4,000 items each month. The registration including all photographs will be published on the

¹ At the conference Connecting Collecting I showed a film about how the Army Museum managed to take control over its collection. The film can be ordered by e-mail from eva-sofi.ernstell@armemuseum.se.
web during 2008. This work was possible to accomplish thanks to extra money within the framework of the national Access project (with the aim of supporting the work of preserving and conserving collections, artefacts and archival material in the whole field of culture and making them accessible) but also through very strict work. We only registered what was absolutely needed. If we had added one minute extra to each object the project would have needed an extra eight months in the end.

An international museum network for collecting issues

The warhead mentioned earlier is a good example of contemporary collecting. Many of our items are made out of fear for an intruding enemy. If we search for common denominators for all our items – apart from the one that we collect items that illustrate the military cultural heritage – fear could be the connecting word in our collection. Perhaps we can find concepts to use as keywords or filter when we collect instead of collecting and classifying a specific category.

Let us say that fear plays an important role when one organizes the armed forces in a country. (Perhaps fear plays an important role in society all the time; we have fear of illness, fear of death, fear of being unlucky etc) Out of the keyword fear we can collect war heads from the Soviet Union or items from the Swedish armed forces, and we don’t necessarily need one of each kind. We need examples to help us remember. One key to collecting today’s items can be to let them pass through the ‘gate of fear’ and to use this gate as a collecting filter. If it passes, it is an item for our museum. Finding such keywords would be of great help, and, in my opinion, a task for the new international network on collecting issues.

Image caption

The recently collected warhead. Photo: The Army Museum.
Putting collections to work. Some strategies from the first decade of the Irish Museum of Modern Art

Catherine Marshall
Arts Council of Ireland

The debate within museums about ownership of collections goes on. Do we collect so that a handful of professionals can glean inordinate amounts of specialist knowledge from the objects in the Museum’s holdings or do we collect, with public money for the benefit of the many publics that enter the building daily? Should we collect at all anymore since the largest part of the collection in most museums spends most of its time in storage? ¹

When it was established in 1991 the Irish Museum of Modern Art pondered these questions very seriously before deciding that the purpose of a museum collection was to keep important works in the public domain. This means to collect not just to own and store artworks for some unforeseen future when they can emerge and take their place among the firmament of other great museum objects. It means collecting to show, rather than to own, and to show the work in a very active way. The collection was also seen as a part of a process to interrogate the whole concept of the museum and the ideology of collecting. As a post-modern Museum that belongs more in the tradition of the forum rather than the hierarchical model of the temple of high art, this meant a deliberate policy of also collecting artwork that is not automatically part of the mainstream culture for Museum collections. It was this fundamental approach that led IMMA to take on long-term loan the Musgrave Kinley Collection of Outsider Art in 1998 and to show it alongside more mainstream cultural icons. That same approach led IMMA to acquire a number of artworks arising from collaborative projects between artists and members of community groups.

Within that first decade IMMA embarked on a number of strategies and individual projects that opened the way to a very active engagement with the collection for a wide cross section of the museum’s publics, to keep the collection in use and to help to attract new audiences.

The role of collections in post-modern museums

It is important to contextualise the collection at IMMA at the outset. The museum opened its doors in May 1991, becoming the first national institution in Ireland with responsibility for the display and collection of Modern and Contemporary art. There was no inherited collection and the budget for acquisitions was extremely small by international standards in the early years. Strategically the new museum needed to establish itself nationally and internationally as quickly as possible – to hit the ground running – in the words of founding director, Declan McGonagle. A major plank in this process was the emphasis on a high

¹ These and other questions were addressed at the conference Connecting Collecting, Nordiska Museet, Sweden, November 15-16, 2007, by Elizabeth Merritt in her keynote address, ‘Beyond the Cabinet of Curiosities: Towards a Modern Rationale of Collecting’. 
quality exhibition programme, including but not led by, rotating displays of work from the emerging collection, developing simultaneously through modest purchases, donations and long term loans.

The Museum’s mission to foster excellence and inclusiveness in relation to contemporary art was implemented from day one through the exhibition and collection policies and especially by an education and community programme, headed up by a senior curator, with the power to curate and participate in the exhibition programme as an equal player. The initial emphasis of the education programme at IMMA was on practice rather than on history and theory. This was made visible by an integrated workshop programme that is inclusive of non-museum specialists/visitors, aimed at creating opportunities for artists and the public to work in collaboration and to create artworks. The education programme works with a cross section of society including families, schools, older people and specialist community groups, includes the on-site artist’s residency programme and links to well-informed mediators in the galleries in place of more traditional museum attendants.

As far as showing the collection was concerned, the founding Board and Director held firmly to the view that if an artwork was not on display at the museum it should, whenever possible, be on show elsewhere, rather than consigned to storage. In 1995 the museum announced its intention to establish a National Programme to disperse the assets of the museum throughout Ireland. While the most obvious asset was the growing collection, there were also requests for a sharing of the skills and expertise held within the museum. A number of projects arising from this were to prove central to the use of the collection and to provide a platform for combined education and collection projects in various places and with different communities all over the country.

Promoting ownership and engagement with the collection

The IMMA National Programme began informally in 1995 when a curator was appointed to look after the collection. The Museum held very strongly to the view that the National Programme should not become a means to colonise the country with offsets of IMMA. Instead the intention was to promote a relationship between the regions and the museum and to create a sense of public ownership of the collection. The Head of Collections invited arts officers from all over Ireland to a meeting to state their needs in relation to contemporary art and to see how they and the institution could work together for their mutual benefit. In 1996 the first of a series of exhibitions, developed as a result of this partnership process, was put in place and this was followed by the appointment of an Assistant Curator to co-ordinate the National Programme. Within two years the National Programme was putting together approximately 20 exhibitions a year, each one tailor made to suit the specific requirements of local arts centres and this process continues now with a slightly reduced number of exhibitions but with an enhanced education component.

One of the first requests to come in under the National Programme was an invitation to the Head of Collections to mentor a project with a group of young teenagers (ranging in age from 13 -17) to curate an exhibition in Waterford, in the south of Ireland, from the collection of a major Irish banking company, Allied Irish Banks. The energy and initiative that came out of that group and their iconoclastic exhibition *Blah! Blah! Blah!* led directly to a similar scheme at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1997/8 - the touring exhibition *Somebodies.* This time, eight teenagers from different parts of Ireland came together to form the IMMA Young Curators and they worked closely with the Curator and staff in the collection department, and with support from the Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford, to curate their own exhibition from the national collection. Three of the Young Curators came from the *Blah! Blah! Blah!* project in Waterford but

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2 *Blah! Blah! Blah!*, City Hall, Waterford, 1997 was the brain child of Mary McAuliffe, Arts Officer, Waterford, Catherine Marshall, IMMA and Annette Clancy, Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford.

3 *Somebodies*, IMMA, Garter Lane, Waterford, Cavan County Museum, July 1999 to January 2000. It was curated by Marc Corrigan, Barry Gavin, Lisa Hannigan, Andrew McLoughlin, Catriona Moore, Margot Phelan, Peter Symes, Susan Williams and mentored by Catherine Marshall.
Developing a shared curatorial process

The teenagers came from different parts of Ireland, from Waterford, Dublin, Cavan and Meath, and the initial meetings were as much about getting to know each other as getting to know the collection. Over a period of nearly a year, involving collective train journeys, visits to exhibitions and away from home meetings either in IMMA or at Garter Lane they formed a tight and friendly group, with a growing knowledge of the IMMA collection and a disturbingly honest eye for its strengths and shortcomings. The group shortlisted and selected artworks, attended hanging and art-handling sessions at the Museum, observed exhibition installations, and talked their way towards a common theme that still allowed for the widest variations in individual choice. They learned to match the selected artworks to the exhibition space or to find effective alternatives, to lay out the work in the space and finally, and with steadily increasing confidence, decided on the kind of signage and imagery they wanted to promote their show. They met with a designer and worked out an idea that perfectly expressed their sense of identity, for the invitations, poster and a fold-out exhibition guide. They researched and wrote the guide and the captions for each artwork and finally, chose the artist, Nigel Rolfe, to open their exhibition. The exhibition was a great success at IMMA, with an opening attended by several of the Irish artists whose work was shown, and considerable media coverage, all of which was handled comfortably by the group members, themselves.

One of the immediate outcomes of the Young Curators projects for the Museum was that it provided an immediate and effective model for a similar project *Come to the Edge* with older people from a local active retirement group, the St Michael's Parish Active Retirement Art Group, Inchicore Co Dublin. Just as the young people had met with and talked the older people through their experience of curating at IMMA, the St Michael's Parish group mediated their exhibition for peer groups and the general public. *Somebodies* went on tour throughout 1999, as part of the Museum’s National Programme, to Waterford, Cavan and Co. Meath with those of the group who lived in those areas mediating it as it travelled. The St Michael’s Active Retirement Group travelled their experience and their new sense of ownership of the museum collection to other groups of older people around the country under the auspices of the museum's education and community department. They repeated this internationally when they participated in a trans European learning partnership under the Socrates scheme with partners from Stockholm, Vienna, Lisbon and London.

The expansion of the process

The Museum’s National Programme looked to the successful model of the Young Curators show as a paradigm for future programming. The offspring of *Somebodies* include *Stitches and Ditches*, a cross-border project between the National Programme and women’s groups in Cavan and Fermanagh, *Smidiríní*, an excellent project with students from a second level school in Dingle, a Gaelic-speaking town on the extreme western seaboard, to name some of the better publicised examples. *Hearth*, an exhibition on the theme of Home in 2006/7, was a similar curatorial initiative, developed in conjunction with Focus Ireland and the IMMA’s Collection and Education and Community Departments.

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4 *Come to the Edge*, IMMA, September 1999 to March 2000, curated by the St Michael’s Parish Active Retirement Art Group, mentored by Ann Davoren and Catherine Marshall, IMMA.

5 *Smidiríní*, Feile na Bealtaine, Dingle, Co. Kerry, May 2002, curated by Transition year students from Meanscoil na Toirbirte, Dingle, mentored by Johanne Mullan, IMMA. *Smidiríní* will be shown again by Udaras na Gaeltachta as part of its 10th anniversary celebrations in November 2008.

6 *Hearth*, an Exhibition on the theme of Home from the IMMA Collection, curated by Clients of Focus Ireland and Helen O’Donoghue and Catherine Marshall, IMMA at IMMA, November 2006—May 2007. Focus Ireland is one of the leading non-profit agencies in Ireland working with people who are out-of-home. Founded by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy in 1985, Focus Ireland has, as a result of its research and policy analysis both proposed solutions and provided
Of course the collection philosophy and the curatorial practices outlined above come with a cost. It is extremely labour intensive to constantly rotate displays and to take artwork out around the country on a regular basis. It requires significant technical support and contextual information to be constantly re-considered and re-written for the specific exhibitions and locations. It is also true that the greater movement of artwork puts greater pressure on the artworks themselves, and this must be carefully explored by curators and conservators before agreement is given to travel the work, but the benefits of responsible sharing of collections far outweigh these challenges.

The impact

The positive outcomes of the IMMA National Programme and the emphasis on community based curatorial projects such as Somebodies and Smidirín are too great to encapsulate in detail but can be briefly listed. The National Programme has established the name of the Irish Museum of Modern Art throughout the length and breadth of Ireland, going into schools, hospitals, festivals, community halls and art centres. It quickly revealed a need for greater professional standards at all levels of provision for exhibiting, from basic art-handling to mediation and copyright clearance procedures. The National Programme joined with the Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in Ireland to put on occasional short courses in aspects of collection care and management to fill this need and there is now visible improvement in awareness of the needs of the art object on a national level. Most of all because the process requires considerable discussion with the local communities to agree what kind of material is suitable or desirable for them, there is far greater active engagement with and appreciation of contemporary and modern art all over the country, in rural and maritime as well as urban situations. The range of alternative contexts that the National Programme offers for artworks often brings out surprising qualities in the work, even for the artists themselves. More interestingly, seeing a work of contemporary art in a familiar community context transforms that context for the viewers while allowing them to assess the artwork on their terms without the often-intimidating experience of the white cube museum. There is an international dimension too. An example of this is H20 in which the sustained backing of the museum’s National Programme over a period of years has given the confidence to artists working in the Dingle area to develop a project uniting artists from marginal contexts around Europe, from Norway, and Poland as well as Ireland.

The curatorial projects have empowered those who participated in them to deal with the Museum as comfortably if it were their local post office and to think about contemporary art with considerable critical confidence. In the most in-depth of these projects, e.g. Somebodies, the teenagers offer visible testimony to the benefits to be gained from acquiring the language, the handling skills of meeting with artists and museum staff and knowing the museum from the inside. Ultimately and when repeated over time, these experiments will help to develop the critical audiences that we all need to sustain museums in the future. Of the eight people who took part in the Somebodies exhibition, six are still directly engaged in the arts ten years later while the remaining two continue to be interested.

From having no collection at all at IMMA in 1991 there is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that by 2001 there was not only a substantial collection but a growing sense of national ownership of it.

Image caption

Somebodies, fold-out catalogue with text on reverse, written and designed by the Young Curators.
Relevance and representation.
The state of contemporary collecting in the UK.

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This paper questions what the purpose of contemporary collecting in history museums is by examining a range of current methodologies. It argues that the true value of community-led collecting projects is in the relationships they forge between individuals and museums. It also suggests that the ongoing quest for wider representation in collections could be ameliorated with a greater degree of partnership working and collections sharing amongst social history museums.

Outside of the ongoing discussions of the importance of contemporary collecting amongst social history curators, there has been a feeling for a number of years that collecting has become a low priority activity in museums in the UK. Perversely this may be partially the result of a ten year boom in the sector: the combination of new funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund since 1994 and a broadly pro-arts government in the form of New Labour since 1997 has seen increased investment in museums, but principally in terms of improving access and engagement with existing collections through new buildings, new displays, and extensive new learning, outreach and digitisation programmes. While undoubtedly providing enormous benefits for the sector as a whole, some have felt that this has been to the detriment of old-fashioned curatorial concerns: scholarship, research and collecting are all perceived to be in decline (Art Fund 2006; DCMS 2005, 2006; Museums Association 2005). Only in the last couple of years has the pendulum started to swing once more back in the direction of advocacy for collections. This swing has been principally spearheaded by the Museum Association’s influential 2005 report, Collections for the Future, followed up in 2007 with a second report on Making Collections Effective. Collections for the Future two years on.1

The dynamic collection

Collections for the Future aimed to show how museums could make better use of their collections without shifting the focus away from the needs of museum users. It presented the notion of the ‘dynamic collection’ which lies at the heart of all museum operations. The dynamic collection is conceptualised almost as a living entity, needing care and attention to remain viable. This care revolves around a tri-partite process: 1) growth through collecting; 2) engagement with audiences through displays, loans and learning programmes; and 3) disposal of those parts of the collection which have become redundant or could be better used in other museums or public bodies. The collection that is fixed or static (or undynamic) might thus

1 The Museums Association is an independent membership body, representing the interests of museums professionals and institutions. Amongst its activities, it lobbies government on behalf of museums and galleries in the UK.
be perceived to be moribund, unhealthy and ultimately unavailable. The report was broadly welcomed by those involved in collecting professionally, as it recognised that continued development of collections is an essential activity, rather than one, which is fundamentally unsustainable. This paper concentrates on the first two aspects of the dynamic collection: growth and engagement.

Underpinning much of the thinking behind both the collecting and engagement part of the process is the critical idea that a collection must be made relevant to contemporary audiences. But what does relevance in a collection actually mean? Although it is understood that there are rich and varied ways in which visitors can personally respond to material culture in museum settings, one idea which has firmly taken hold is that a relevant collection is a representative collection; that to be interested in a museum display you must in some way be able to see yourself or your life reflected in it, or connected to it. Some of this thinking has been developed from broader museological debates about the representation and participation of minority groups in museums. It is supported by research into encouraging ethnic minority participation in museums: the influential report *Holding up the Mirror*, for example, took the metaphor of the museum reflecting back the life of its users as its title (Helen Dennison Associates 2003). The idea is further supported by research into non-visitors to museums, which states that the reason some people don’t go is because there is nothing there for them. But ‘there’s nothing there for me’ is often taken to mean ‘there’s nothing there about me’ or ‘there’s nobody there like me’, leading writers such as Graham Black to comment that:

*The attitude among communities that a museum ‘doesn’t relate to me’ will only fully disappear when those communities are not only welcomed into the museum but also properly represented in it - in the collections, in the histories presented, in the programming, in the development of multiple perspectives within exhibitions, and in the staff.* (Black 2005:59)

In this way relevance and representation are thus seen to be co-joined and inseparable, at times almost synonymous.

Targeting the under-represented

One approach of contemporary collecting which has developed is to target those people or stories perceived to be under-represented in both existing collections and existing audiences. As illustrated in this publication by Kylea Little’s paper, these projects typically work with a small number of people from a community group to help them identify what objects they think should be in the museum (Little 2008). This approach results from an understanding of how older collections have been formed: by donation or purchase from archetypal white, educated and essentially middle class museum curators or museum visitors. The ongoing reliance on donation from those who understand the museum merely works to perpetuate the museum’s unwritten codes (or put another way, confident museum visitors see a particular history interpreted by the museum in a particular way, and then offer donations of very similar material in the belief that this is what the museum is interested in, and what it ‘should’ be displaying).

In response to this a contemporary collecting methodology has been developed by numerous museums, which is both more proactive and more focussed. It involves going out of the museum to seek targeted involvement from those who have previously had no thought of what should be kept in the museum’s collections. Critically, it is the participants of these projects who decide what should be collected, and not the curators or outreach workers. Such projects have multiple objectives: they seek to collect material for the future, certainly, but they also aim to build relationships with people, giving current audiences a voice or a means of self-expression. In working with the museum, they seek to build up cultural capital by demystifying what the museum is about and why it collects the material it does; in other words, to make the institution relevant to people’s lives as well as having the contents reflect them.

It is questionable in these types of projects as to which is the more important act in making the museum relevant - the gathering of material or the relationship with the project participant - but limited research suggests that it is the latter that counts as much if not more
than the former. For example, some participants involved in Tyne and Wear Museums’ *Making History* project, which ran from 1999-2001, said that they felt a greater sense of ownership and control over the collections by the end of the project (Tyne and Wear Museums 2001). But in longer-term research and evaluation, carried out three to four years after the project ended, participants additionally remembered and valued the social occasions the project afforded, the opportunities to learn something new, and the sharing of their experiences with project staff and other participants (Newman & McLean 2004; AEA 2005). Looking back, it was the process that participants valued as much as the idea that parts of their life had been memorialised in a museum. Conversely, when projects are less successful, as documented by Laurella Rinçon in her examination of the *Voices from the Horn of Africa* exhibition at the Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg, it is because the relationship with the museum and its staff has not developed sufficiently. Participants in this project remained suspicious of the museum’s motives and felt ‘ethnologised’ rather than included. As a result, they were unwilling to hand over copyright in the materials generated from the project to the museum for future use (Rinçon, 2005).

But if the importance of these projects lies in the personal relationships forged with the museum, a question is therefore raised as to what is the value of the collections formed? Can they genuinely be said to produce collections which are any more representative of, or relevant to, society at large than the older methodologies? As already hinted at, much project funding is aimed at increasing audiences or increasing audience engagement, thus slanting projects towards audiences perceived to be hard-to-reach, potentially socially excluded, or under-represented. This has led to an important spate of projects documenting ‘lesser known’ (or ‘hidden’) histories, particularly those of ethnic minorities in the UK, and more recently around disability and lesbian and gay sexuality. These are indeed areas which were poorly covered in many history collections, and the projects have made a valuable contribution to addressing gaps in our understanding. However, despite their historical value, there is no sense that together these projects add up to a fully ‘representative’ collection, merely a more diverse collection.

### Traditional methodologies

As project funding is rarely available for proactive collecting approaches with more traditional audiences, curators are thus still forced to rely on older methodologies of collecting to ‘round out’ collections. These methodologies are typically reactive and unplanned — either responding to a chance donor, or to the closure/demolition of local industries and buildings, or to chance opportunities on the open market. Often, both methodologies co-exist within the one institution at the same time. Thus whilst the Museum of Liverpool is proactively engaging diverse audiences in its project *800 Lives*, collecting oral histories of contemporary Liverpudlians, it also seeks out significant social history items for purchase. For example, in 2005 the museum obtained grant funding to buy Beatles memorabilia at auction (National Museums Liverpool 2005, 2007). Similarly, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery sought audience involvement in collecting for its *Millenibrum* project[^2] (sic), but also continued curatorially-driven collecting to mark the demolition and redevelopment of the central market area known as the Bull Ring.

What this means is that history collecting in the UK remains a patchwork quilt of planned projects and opportunism, loosely governed by broad-based acquisitions policies. While it is hardly new or original to suggest that ‘total’ collecting is an impossibility, history curators nevertheless still appear to aspire to cover all areas of life at all times in their museum’s collections. This is reinforced by the rhetoric about relevance and representation, which suggests that a collection which documents things ‘as they really were’ in all its richness and variety is the ultimate goal. Few acquisition policies limit themselves to a single coherent story, meaning that it is always challenging to say ‘no’ to appealing opportunities as

[^2]: *Millenibrum* was a collecting project undertaken at the turn of the millennium. Like *Making History*, it targeted and worked with under-represented community groups to encourage donations to the Museum’s history collections.
they arise, particularly if they appear to plug a gap in an area previously uncollected. Overall, the spirit of much contemporary collecting is still frequently focussed on documenting some aspect of life for potential future use, rather than concentrating on finding innovative ways of working with the new collections formed.

One possible solution to the conundrum of wider representation through collecting might lie in a greater degree of co-operation and communication amongst museums. *Collections for the Future* has promoted just such an approach, and in the last two years a number of subject specialist networks (SSNs) have formed or reinvigorated. Much of the work of these networks has been in trying to understand better what museums collectively have or have not in their collections. Whilst there is a SSN for urban contemporary collecting, it does not have the reach of Samdok in terms of co-ordinating activity. However, there are a large number of SSNs, which focus on one theme only, such as maritime history or rural history, or even on one type of material collection, such as cartoons, or musical instruments. It may be in the future that SSNs offer a solution to the concerns over adequate representation by ensuring that a good spread of histories are recorded somewhere rather than everywhere – the concept of the Distributed National Collection. In this regard, the Rural Museums Network has been leading the field. A network of 55 museums, it has conducted detailed research on the distribution of single types of objects such as combine harvesters and tractors across its partner museums, with a view that a better understanding of existing collections may inform the decision-making process for collecting in the future (Rural Museums Network 2007).

As a final point, all of the methodologies I have discussed are based on the assumption that what we need to collect and document are objects and stories about people’s lives; whether that be representative of their working life, domestic life, community life, or something about some aspect of their personal identity, such as disability or sexuality. We understand that all of these things contribute to our understanding of the history of a particular time or place. However, there is one final strand of collecting which is increasingly popular which tries to wrestle with the knotty problem of how our relationships with material culture are unique and personal. An acceptance of constructivist thinking – which recognises that each visitor constructs his or her own meanings to a museum visit, even down to responses to an individual object – has led to attempts to collect these personal meanings or individual interpretations to objects, including responses which may be creative, for example, through poetry or song. These projects take the idea of personal relevance through representation to its logical extreme, by concentrating solely on the individual response. Thus the Victoria & Albert Museum invested huge resources from Culture Online on the *Every Object Tells a Story* project, in which people nominated objects and recorded their thoughts and feelings about them (www.everyobject.net). On a much smaller scale, but in a similar vein, is Durham’s recent *Museum of My Life* exhibition, which was billed in its marketing literature as ‘an exhibition of the personal heritages of ordinary people...which depicts the stories of individual lives and shows what makes them extraordinary’. These projects are interesting for charting the elusive and often tangential ways in which visitors really react to objects and museums. If anything, they show that our understanding of what is relevant to a person is much more complex than a straightforward reflection of a life or demographic category. But I would suggest that in terms of contemporary history collecting these projects are going in the wrong direction. By concentrating solely on the individual and extraordinary, the audience is left with precious little sense of the broader context, or the collective history from which a personal sense of identity may be forged (either in agreement with or in opposition to the collective). While the process of working may have been both meaningful and fulfilling for the project participants, the more general visitor is left with nothing more substantial to grapple with than a museum of multiple lives. These projects have limited value as they stand in building the historical record. If they wished to be used as a tool for collecting as well as a means of audience engagement, then much more work would need to be done in documenting fuller histories of the objects in question to place them in broader historical contexts.
Conclusion

In conclusion there has been much exciting work going on in the UK around collecting in the recent years, but it is still disparate and broadly unconnected. More research needs to be done to understand what the value of this work is, to understand the range of material that is being collected across different museums, and the impact it has on both donors and wider audiences. The notion of a representative collection requires further interrogation and definition, in recognition of the practical impossibility of preserving the complexity of society past and present in any one place. While the museum continues to be motivated primarily by the need to create a collection, which reflects everyone’s lives, it may become too blinkered in its appreciation of relevance. Let us not lose sight of the variety of ways in which relevance can be found, but rather continue to find ways for visitors to make their own meanings and connections to objects and displays, by building personal relationships with the museum and its staff.

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The impetus for this paper is a question that I very often ask myself in everyday work: Why is the Estonian National Museum considered a museum for handicrafts and traditional peasant culture? What impels me to ask such a question and what has led me to such an understanding?

As chief treasurer and head of the museum’s collections department, my duties involve responding to all the telephone calls, e-mails and letters offering various materials to the museum – above all, artefacts. The majority of the things that people offer us are from the early years or decades of the twentieth century and were made as handicraft products or for performing handicraft – i.e. tools. The objects most commonly offered are spinning wheels, woodworking benches, embroidered tablecloths, crocheted and knitted home textiles and overclothes. Why do people think that the museum should be more interested in an object made by an old handicraft than in a new mass-produced object? By ‘new’, I don’t mean things made in the present moment, but also, say, factory-made products from the 1950s.

A brief background to the Estonian National Museum

Founded in Tartu in 1909, the Estonian National Museum was dedicated to the memory of Jakob Hurt, one of the greatest Estonian collectors of folklore. The museum was to be such an authoritative and comprehensive institution that it could simply have been called the Estonian Museum (like the British Museum, the Russian Museum). The main emphasis was on the material side: ethnographic artefacts related to ancient times and the life and customs of everyday people. As in many other European countries, primary importance was attached to preserving the old, fading peasant culture. Over time, a number of other museums, archives and libraries were founded, and the Estonian National Museum came to concentrate mainly on folk culture. In the Soviet era, the museum was renamed as an ethnographic museum, but the old name was reinstated when independence was restored.

Early acquisitions and persistent conservative views among museum employees

Immediately after the museum was founded, a collection committee was established which made it its goal to systematically canvass the whole country, parish by parish. It was decided that all objects that reflected the everyday...
life of the people should be collected – clothing, furniture, tools, utilitarian objects. Folk art, decorative handicrafts and folk costumes were especially highly regarded. Through the press, people were called on to donate, and circulars were sent out, entitled *What the museum is collecting*. In the 1920s, the director of the museum was a Finn, Ilmari Manninen, who passed the following judgment on the museum’s earlier collection efforts:

*Taking into consideration that collections of antique items took place within a relatively short space of time in Estonia, with uncommon intensity, it is understandable that managing the collection process was to a certain extent difficult. As the collectors did not have ethnographic training, above all they collected things that in some way caught the eye. Thus there is quite a lot of typical folk art. And so we really do not need to be overly concerned about saving typical Estonian folk art: we can ‘catch our breath.’*

(Päevaleht 1925)

But Manninen does stress that it is necessary to obtain multiple versions of one artefact. This suited the methods used in ethnology back then, the goal of which was to identify the special regional character and compile maps showing the range of items. This approach would remain prevalent in the museum’s acquisitions work for decades. Tremendous collections of beer tankards, carpets, chairs, rugs, gloves and belts were amassed. It was as if the museum had programmed into itself the requirement that it had to have many similar things. I would stress the word ‘similar’, for as we know well, no two handmade items are ever alike. The museum’s employees often find it hard to change direction when they have been going one way for a long time. But museum collections are created not only by museum employees, but rather perhaps even to a greater extent by people who wish to donate items to the museum.

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The role of the permanent exhibition in creating and perpetuating stereotypes

By what yardstick does a person outside the museum decide what might be offered to a museum’s collections? It seems to me that ordinary people’s understanding of a museum’s collections and of the nature of museums is most influenced by the exhibitions on display, above all by the permanent exhibition. This is what is usually remembered and perhaps what makes a visitor come back a second time. The emphasis of guided programmes is usually on the permanent exhibition as well; the permanent exhibition is explained in greater depth to visitors.

Let us take a look at the Estonian National Museum’s permanent exhibition *Estonia. Land. People. Culture*. It is divided into four parts:

1. The first part presents the everyday life of Estonian peasants. The heart of the Estonian farmstead was the barn dwelling and the other outbuildings in the farmyard. Everyday life revolved around preparations for the winter and the efforts made to survive it. The household tools and farm equipment on display date mainly from the nineteenth century and are similar to much older implements. Visitors enter into what appears to be a simple farm dwelling, where they see numerous tools and household accessories used for working the land and tools for building.

2. The second part introduces festivities and holidays. The exhibition introduces holidays associated with the calendar as well as rites of passage from one status to another. This part begins with a wedding scene. Mannequins in folk costume sit around a dining table. Behind them hang lavishly decorated wedding tapestries. Mannequins in folk costume also appear in scenes in connection with holidays associated with the calendar. This part of the exhibition is like a segue into the next part, which is a true homage to the master craftsmen and -women of yore.

3. The third part focuses on the regional peculiarities of Estonian folk culture, mainly folk costumes
Connecting Collecting: Reinvelt

and beer tankards. The exhibition catalogue tells us that although Estonia is small in area, it is amazingly rich in variations of folk art and especially folk costumes. By the general and common features of its folk culture, Estonia can be divided into three regions – four if you go by the variations in its folk costumes. Indeed, abiding by this principle, the exhibition presents various sets of folk costumes and rows of beer tankards for each region. This tends to be the part of the permanent exhibition that people remember most vividly. Among the different museums, the Estonian National Museum is best known as the one with the great collection of Estonian folk costumes.

4. And finally, the fourth part, which the creators of the exhibition call a ‘story about being Estonian.’ It’s a story about how a peasant people developed into a modern cultured and civilized nation, accompanied by interiors and photographs from the late nineteenth century up to 1978.

Three of the four parts of the permanent exhibition present the story of Estonians as a peasant people, during a time when everything was made by ordinary people themselves or by master handicraftsmen and -women. The exhibition takes us back to a time that has personal associations for only the oldest visitors. Thus it is as if the exhibition is telling us about something mysterious that we really cannot understand. People come across stray relatives of the objects on display here in the deepest recesses of their closets or in houses bequeathed by their grandparents. They themselves do not know what to do with these things; yet they feel that the museum might consider them important, and so they end up offering them to the museum. But should the museum accept one more handkerchief into its collections, when it already has over 1,000 of them, or one more spinning wheel, when it already has dozens? People often do not understand why we do not accept an object that is ‘old’ and made by hand. Disappointment can be heard in their voices when we say that we already have several dozen or hundred analogous items.

Temporary exhibitions deal with culture and everyday life both in Estonia and elsewhere in the world. They very often deal with what we call ‘more modern phenomena’, but unfortunately this does not influence the general view of what a museum is for and what a museum does.

Conclusion

I believe that every museum, with its permanent exhibition, has the most direct effect on people’s understanding of their nature and, as a result, where the interest and emphasis lie in acquisitions. Thus it can be said that the museum itself is responsible for people’s stereotyped views about what the museum is for, about acquisition work and which fields are of interest. As long as the museum’s permanent exhibition tells the story of the traditional peasant culture, people will continue to offer to donate to our collections objects suited to this theme. There is a need to start a discussion about the subject within the museum, and hopefully the Estonian National Museum’s next permanent exhibition (which will be opened in 2012 in a new building) will tell a rather different story about Estonian culture. And after ‘reading’ this story, people will change their understanding of museum collections.

Reference

Päevaleht, March 27th, 1925. (newspaper).

Image captions

Fig 1 Festivities and holidays in peasant society. Photo: Arp Karm, ENM.

Fig 2 A modern Estonian home in 1939 shows the process of modernization. Photo: Arp Karm, ENM.
The purpose of this article is to discuss recent arguments concerning the future of Sami collections in major museums outside Samiland. I will go straight to the point and concentrate on the question of repatriation because this is a topic which has lately been much debated within Sami society, and also by some of the museums concerned.

The Nordiska Museet today holds the largest Sami collection in the world. The museum where I work has the second largest. Both these museums have for a long time collected, documented, preserved, published and exhibited Sami material, material which would otherwise no doubt have been largely lost. Still, it is a paradox that there is so much Sami material lying in the stores of these and some other large museums, while museums in the Sami communities have so little. Undoubtedly, much of these collections could be put to better use in exhibitions in such local Sami museums. In addition many Sami will mention an argument of a more symbolic but also political character: The Sami themselves should have control of their own heritage.

Repatriate or not?

I should immediately underline that, although my article will argue in favour of extensive repatriation, this should not be taken to mean that museums with Sami collections and activities should stop collecting, documenting and exhibiting Sami culture. I simply argue for a reappraisal of what our collections contain, and a comparison with what is available to the museums situated within Sami communities. We need an open-minded reconsideration of how the various parts of our collections can best be put to use for research and education for the greater public – including an international audience – as well as for the Sami communities where these objects originated, and in a certain sense belong.

Many of us museum people will automatically shudder at the very word repatriation, because we fear that by addressing this topic we may risk opening a Pandora’s box of claims from all directions, which could eventually strip us of most of our collections. This is a legitimate worry and I should therefore underline that I think each case must be considered against its own unique background. A decision in one case should not automatically be relevant for another case. The Sami, as an indigenous people, are in a special position. Repatriation of some of their heritage does not mean that we open up for all sorts of other claims.

During the last few years, many in the Sami communities have been voicing their wish to have heritage returned. This is both out of a concrete interest in having the objects at hand locally, for study and exhibition use, but also from the standpoint that the Sami must be in control of their heritage. As a result of these sentiments, various Sami museums in 2005 organized the
project *Recalling Ancestral Voices* with the aim of getting an overview of what material there is in museums outside Samiland, as a first step in a process to have such heritage returned to Sami communities. The project organized a seminar in October 2007 at Inari in Finland where many aspects of these issues were discussed. I am glad that both Norsk Folkemuseum and Nordiska Museet participated in the seminar and gave positive signals of a willingness to discuss repatriation.

Gain or loss

What can we gain from repatriation? Is it only a one-direction transfer, or could it imply some sort of exchange of knowledge and cooperation, or even of objects going both ways? Could both parties perhaps benefit from such a situation? Let us consider some cases:

As a first example I am happy to mention the large-scale repatriation of Norwegian material from Nordiska Museet to Norsk Folkemuseum which has taken place since the 1980s. This includes thousands of objects, including some very valuable or even unique examples of costumes, folk art and other objects, which certainly have a much greater value to a Norwegian audience and have been put to more active use in exhibitions in the Norwegian museum than was the case in Sweden. It is no doubt that the generosity of Swedish colleagues and authorities has been highly appreciated in Norway and has contributed to a generally positive spirit of cooperation from which we have all benefited in joint projects such as the large exhibition about the two nations produced in 2005 to commemorate the dissolution of the political union between the two countries in 1905 (*Norwegians and Swedes*, shown at Norsk Folkemuseum in 2005 and at Nordiska Museet 2005/2006).

However, the situation of transfer between two large national museums is in many ways quite different from the Sami case. I will therefore rather present two other cases that are more relevant to the Sami situation.

Another case, which is in many ways more similar to the situation of Samiland, is Greenland. Both have small indigenous populations that were for a long time subjected to a *de facto* colonial situation. Greenland obtained self-government in 1979 and soon the question arose of the need to create a national museum for Greenland and the wish to transfer to that museum material from Greenland that had been collected by the Danish National Museum. An agreement was worked out and during the years between 1982 and 1991 several thousand archaeological and ethnographic objects were transferred to Greenland. This included not only a physical move but also a transfer of the legal ownership of the objects to the Greenlandic home rule authorities. As far as I understand, the whole process of repatriation took place in an atmosphere of mutual goodwill and it has laid the foundation for extensive cooperation between the two museums in several fields of research and interpretation. This was demonstrated to me and others who participated in an international conference about repatriation, held at Nuuk in February 2007.

A third example can be taken from my own personal experience: Last year, I attended the annual meeting of the International Committee of Museums of Ethnography, ICME, in Miami, USA. As part of the conference programme, we visited the museum of the Seminole Indians in their reservation in the central part of Florida. Practically all the objects in this museum were on long-time loan from the National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington DC. The reason for this is that practically no older material has been preserved in the local community, and without these loans from the national museum, it would not have been possible to make such a presentation of authentic older material in the Seminole area. Rick West, the director of the National Museum of the American Indian, who participated in the conference (but not in the visit to the Seminole) argued strongly in favour of repatriation and return of material from the major institutions to local communities. He underlined the positive experiences of such cooperation and described them as, more often than not, a situation of win-win: Both parties will benefit from the mutual goodwill and the experience gained in such projects.
A process in progress

To conclude, in this short paper I have limited myself to presenting some of the arguments in favour of repatriation. I am of course aware that there are also many valid arguments against repatriation, and against the splitting up of collections that often have a specific overall character and a particular history, which may be important and interesting in itself. Still, I think the arguments against repatriation are less convincing than those in favour of such a re-consideration of old collections. From a historical perspective, as a scholar with a life-long interest in Sami issues, I find it overwhelmingly positive that the development of museum institutions within Sami society has reached a level where these institutions are now in a position to take over the care of major parts of the material Sami heritage. Needless to say, such a transfer of museum collections may be complicated to implement and certainly in some cases it will be controversial to the parties involved. But I am convinced that we can work out whatever disagreements will arise in a cordial and well-meaning way. If carried out in that manner, the whole process of repatriation may become, in the words of Rick West, a win-win situation. And to see this development in a wider historical perspective, we can paraphrase the famous words of Galileo: ‘It moves – and it moves forward!’
Documenting both contemporary society and the state of nature are extremely important tasks of most museums the world over. We should differentiate between the modern history and the present period. The first one is everything that happened and finished not many months or years ago. The present period is everything that started in the past, is happening at present and will probably last into the future. It is like the English expression ‘present perfect’ which means an activity that happened at an unspecified time before now but is still a part of the present. Hence Olof Palme’s assassination in 1986 is history, but the reign of the Swedish king Carl XVI Gustav, which started in 1973, belongs to the present period. From this point of view Czech museums have many objects that cover modern history (technology, photos, etc), probably more than in some Western European countries and other countries of the world. On the other hand, the representation of the recent period is fairly sparse.

Active selection

In the case of active selection we have to do with the selection of contemporary reality. This period gives us the possibility to preserve such reality in the most authentic way with regard to its major aspects. There are also optimal conditions for the accompanying documentation there. Active selection also permits us to preserve with appropriate media those phenomena which are not materially fixed (theatre, habits and dances). ‘The object of museology is the phenomenon of musealisation in the context of contemporary society. Its role is to unveil the motivation and importance of this process for an individual, a group, or a society, and to grasp the forms in which this process is realized’ (Stránský 1995: 27–28).

One of the most well-known efforts in this context is the successful Swedish network Samdok, which was presented at the general conference of ICOM in 1983. ‘The presentation of the program demonstrated that many scientists were aware of the fact that the traditional concept of museum collecting had been outdated and had to be substituted for a new one’ (Stránský 1995: 37). The effort has been reflected on, sometimes with a less understanding attitude, e.g. by the American G. Burcaw (1984), and sometimes with greater sympathy. Recording the present time has been done in many museums all over the world, but often without a fixed concept or programme. Samdok’s ideas were known in Czechoslovakia fairly early, especially thanks to the Czech magazine Muzejní a vlastivedná práce (Mudra 1987) and the bulletins of the Moravian museum (Stránský and Fuchsová 1985). But the Czech museum workers went a different way (Dolák 2006).

After 1945

The pressure on our museums started after the World War II and especially after 1948, when the Communist Party began to govern. Now, the first task for museums was to be useful, and to serve the people. Our museums
began to be filled with temporary exhibitions describing the evil imperialism, the fight against the so-called American beetle (the potato beetle), and the successes of the new regime. Museums under pressure and without any relevant collections were simply becoming notice boards for the promotion of the new regime. In the following period (the 60s and 70s) the official pressure became less aggressive, but more sophisticated; hence we cannot speak about ‘free’ work in the museums.

These institutions had to display (and therefore to collect) evidence of life improvements in the country. Working people could afford more television sets, washing machines, cars and other things than before, a proof of the fact that ‘socialism was superior to capitalism’. Later, in 1980, the government approved a general decree no. 234/1980, on the documentation of the socialist reality, the adherence to which was strictly supervised by the authorities and cautiously observed by museum staff. It could hardly be avoided but Czech people never identified themselves with the regime, and Czech museum workers did not perceive common life as ‘socialist’. So we collected photos of a visit to a twin city, some products from factories and so on, while we scarcely documented other things which formed integral part of our lives. If we collected, we did it feebly and insufficiently. The larger the museum, the smaller the amount of documentation of the contemporary society you can find in it.

After 1989

The Velvet Revolution in 1989 meant a great transition for Czech museums. They started collecting and recording topics that had been more or less prohibited before (Czech pilots in England during World War II, the activities of progressive priests, etc). Unfortunately, lots of museums turned away from the despised activity of ‘documenting contemporary society’. It means that we put a halt to the contemporary collecting of society, including such dramatic changes as the collapse of the communist regime, or changes in ownership. Now, many Czech museum workers feel that they cannot ignore recent issues, such as the urging issues of putting the minorities on record (Veselská 2006), and even though this is a time-consuming process, things are gradually getting better. In 2007 the fourth conference, which was focused on the documentation of contemporary society, took place in the Technical Museum in Brno (Stöhrová 2006). These conferences were prepared in cooperation with the Brno UNESCO Chair.

In my opinion there are two main reasons why Czech museums hesitate to collect and document the recent period. Firstly: previous political pressure, the absence of relevant methodology etc. Secondly: the absence of an effective deaccessioning policy. Many Czech curators see the moment of registration of an object in a collection as an irrevocable act. However, no museum can have ‘everything’ due to lack of storage space, registration clerks etc. Therefore, in my university lectures, I systematically point to issues of contemporary studies and collecting, including the Swedish Samdok. In fact, Samdok is quite a frequent question which comes up in both BA and MA exams in Brno museology studies.

References


Collecting contemporaneity in Latvia: Communicative and professional aspects

_Ilze Knoka_
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**Owing to the successful museum accreditation process in Latvia, public museums have defined their collection policies, and recent history is usually mentioned in them. Nevertheless, ‘the present day’ more likely means the limit of collecting span than an object of museological interest.**

In 1999 the Latvian museum community decided to organize a joint project, an exhibition devoted to the history of Latvia in the twentieth century. The idea was to use the holdings of all the museums that would agree to participate. The exhibition never took place, mostly due to financial problems, but the very phase of story-building for this exhibition also brought up some characteristics of our professional thinking.

As the idea was to show a whole century, we had to be very careful in choosing the events and facts to be mentioned within a single exhibition space and narrative. As long as this choice and story-building referred to the first forty years of the century, it was really clear; actually there were hardly any discussions on what to choose and which stories to uncover via the display. The closer it came to the 1950s and further, the more confused everyone was feeling. First, because we were not certain about the choice itself, and, second, we had no mutual perception of the facts and events picked for the story.

So, we faced the situation typical to museums – we were not capable of dealing with that part of our past which is so recent that we had not mythologized it. Even though we were not going to deal with the most recent period, the exhibition would have covered events of about ten years ago. The museums and the curators were not ready to deal with that close history – the museums because there were no objects accumulated yet to tell any stories about the period starting in about 1945. And this was because the curators or, to be more precise, the professional thinking, the understanding of the task museums should perform, had not involved any interest in recent periods.

Furthermore, the members of the work team realized that they were not ready to decide which events should be told about, what ideas and messages should be sent about the second part of the century, as our minds had not thought about it in museum or interpretative terms. If I do not go into detail about the discussions on each decade and difficulties of deciding among the wide range of cultural, political and economic events, then the museological essence will be as follows: The project group had a need to exhibit the recent period not canonized yet and therefore not covered with tangible and intangible pieces of heritage. If it had been a particular museum and not a project group, the next natural step could have been a list of activities directed towards accessioning the missing objects. Thereby the usual chain of activities, or the food chain usually employed in museums, would have been closed and launched.
Framework of collecting work in Latvia

The diagram (page 112) shows what I call a common food chain of contemporary collecting. According to the Museum Law, public museums and all the museums seeking public funding have to obtain accreditation for which there is a range of documents and a mode of operation to prepare. To put it briefly, the museums have to demonstrate their sustainability via policies of collecting, research and communication, by putting forward their strategic priorities in the three fields and a detailed activity plan for the next planning period (five to ten years). When reading these planning documents, one can evaluate not only the transparency and accountability of the management, but also the philosophy of museum work, the principles according to which the particular museum performs its activities.

As you can see from the diagram, the alpha and omega, the leading argument for every step is the mission statement upon which museums usually ground their choices. This mission statement is supposed to include thematic, geographical and temporal limits of a particular museum – what, where and which period? Having nominated the theme and the spatial span, nearly all museums have defined their temporal interests as covering their field ‘from the beginning till now’. This optimistically promises some role to contemporaneity as well. And that is really so – no museum has rejected the material evidence of the recent past. On the contrary – in their collection policies, most of them have mentioned a special interest in the tangible and intangible heritage of the recent periods. Consequently, we could argue that contemporary documenting and collecting is taking place and the museums are aware of the importance of that. However, this is the level of policy which expresses the overall interests and principles of operation. It does not show the real everyday performance.

If we look further, the priorities developed from the collecting policy are the next and much more influential part of planning. The priorities are certainly rooted in the policy but, as a list of particular tasks, it is closely connected and dependent on the museum activity plan – the programme of exhibitions, publications, educational products etc. Communicative activities, decisions on what issues to discuss with the audience, what themes to address, give the direction of the institution. And here the link, the connection between the contemporary society and the activity plan is much feeble. With a few exceptions, museum products and activities of all kinds, and exhibitions in particular, show very little interest in our recent past.

However, there are museums for which the temporal span is not that wide. For instance, the Museum of Occupation, as it is implied in the name, covers the period from 1940 to 1991 and aims to remind people of the wrongdoing during the Soviet and Nazi occupations. There is the Museum of Barricades of 1991 that covers the period from 1986 to 1998, from the establishment of the first anti-Soviet organization to the withdrawal of Soviet troops. This museum interprets the regaining of national and political independence. Compared to other museums, these ones are seemingly more involved in contemporary material. Still, in reality, they are somewhat further from it, since by using such precise time limits, they have drawn a strict border of interest. The year 1998 is the year when Soviet troops were officially and actually pulled out of the territory of our country, and neither research nor any programmes should be undertaken referring to events beyond these time limits. So, the never-ceasing flow of events, changing reality, or current mass activities, demonstrations or pickets against the government is not of interest.

Restoration tendency: looking backwards

If we look more closely at the activity plans, the line consisting of research – exhibition – educational programs, then the overall (again, of course, there are exceptions) approach can be characterized as calendar and chronology orientated. The choice of themes and stories is mostly connected with some kind of anniversary (that of a person or an event) or the museum has launched a set of displays following history period by period. Here some kind of restoration tendency can be spotted: Due to the historical and political restrictions, the periods before the
Soviet occupation used to be interpreted with a particular bias. Likewise, the Soviet age had a specific interpretation based on Soviet ideology. For about fifteen years now, museums have been trying to compensate for this by collecting missing materials about the period between the world wars. The other age undergoing reinterpretation is that between 1940 and the 1950s. Somehow museums have drawn a borderline in the 1970s. Some explain this with the age of Brezhnev as a particular period of history which has to be looked at separately, but it is more likely to have some connection with that unwritten rule of about 50 years which museums are not supposed to breach in their interest. Museums are somewhat certain they do not have any ideological task of interpreting the present; when setting the mission and the communicative goals, museums define themselves as those retelling history, not as those commenting on today.

Need for compensation – escaping the ugly past

One tendency is a kind of restoration. It is not just about filling gaps; accents and storylines are to be completely changed. The other tendency is a wish to forget, to block, and to isolate bad and ugly memories. Therefore both people and museums (where representatives of the same society perform) have been trying not to think about the second part of the twentieth century. For instance, it would be rather difficult to collect kitchen utensils of the 1960s–1980s like those we saw in the exhibition ‘The Megacollector’ at the Nordiska Museet, since people were so eager to get rid of them in the 1990s. They were not just utensils; they were part of the bad and ‘wrong’ history. Museums joined people in this feeling. This compensation tendency and necessity to create a story of positive history does not allow much space for interest in the present. The common trend to avoid unpleasant stories shows the understanding of the museum’s communicative tasks; museums do not put their feet into painful and fragile issues; they do not use their resources to deal with current social problems.

If we look at the exhibitions and research activities planned for the next ten years, most museums are not going to interpret any part of our lives closer than the 1970s. And – according to the principles museums have defined in their policy documents – if they are not addressing this theme, they are not doing any active collecting. So, although ‘the present day’ is mentioned a lot, collecting it is quite likely to be passive or reactive for a while.
Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.
The problem of wanted and unwanted donations to the museum collection

Anna Żakiewicz
National Museum, Warsaw

The Contemporary Prints and Drawings Department at the National Museum in Warsaw counts about 40,000 items. Many of them are donations – mainly by artists but also by other persons and institutions. This article discusses one special situation when an unwanted and unworthy-looking donation became quite interesting material for studying and even exhibiting.

In 1960 the National Museum received a very interesting donation of 1,211 prints and drawings from the Ministry of Culture. Most of them represented so-called social realism in pure shape. This artificial and unwanted style was officially decreed by the Polish government in 1949 – every work of art was to be ‘national in its form and social in its content’. The Short Dictionary of Philosophy (1955) defined it as ‘the most consistent and the highest form of realism in art’.

Some intellectuals tried to protest against this violence. Jerzy Turowicz (1949), editor of the main Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny, wrote:

A consistency of the order we are used to living in, is making all our life political [...] We Catholics also wanted people to have a philosophy of life and remember about the social function of each work of culture [...] but all that doesn’t mean that culture should be subordinated to politics [...] Politics is not the most important side of human reality, it is not a target for itself, the target is just culture.

The artists’ reaction

Alas, many artists preferred to obey all those officials’ regulations. The effect was horrible and sometimes downright grotesque. But the situation wasn’t as clear as it might seem to be. Recapitulating art of the fifties in the early eighties of the twentieth century, the famous critic of the time, Janusz Bogucki (1983: 64–65), wrote:

Looking from a distance of three decades for artists’ and theorists’ decisions at the beginning of the 1950s we have to remember a huge historical process impacting the imagination of the survivors’ generation wanting to live intensively again. Under the political and social revolutionary shock a new era was opening. The demanded social realism would be its determinant in art. That was the idea leading the artists out of an intelligentsia enclave, supported by the combative energy of new authorities, requiring pains and abstentions for more important historical reasons. Following all that was a great adventure of that time. It was a very difficult but also attractive game because of a chance to regain all those lost years. Artists also hoped to realize themselves through active participation in creating a new world movement [...] Of course, apart from various variants of an approval based on an ideology [...] there were also some other motifs: aspiring to achieve success on the waves of the prevailing trend, anxiety about ‘leaning out’ and an ordinary willingness to adapt to the situation.

We should also remember that not adapting to all the current ideology usually meant a public death – there
was no room in exhibition halls and museum collections for an artist not observing the rules of social realism. And of course it meant lack of money and means to live as well. For instance, Władysław Strzemiński, an eminent Polish avant-garde artist and theorist (in 1930s he created an original art theory of ‘unism’) lost his job at the Art School in Łódź in October 1950 (see Fik 1989: 146) and his works could not be exhibited for several years because he rejected the rules. So exclusions were rare.

Cultural authorities organized huge annual exhibitions of such an artistic production – known as All-Polish Exhibitions of Art. The first was at the National Museum in Warsaw (20 March – 7 May 1950), the next ones in the main Warsaw Gallery of Contemporary Art (Zachęta). The Ministry of Culture bought selected works as a kind of support for obedient artists and even awarded a special prize for their obedience and respect of the rules. Then all the works were donated to the National Museum to create the very specific collection.

Preferred topics

So let’s see what was on the list … Many of the items depicted traditional ‘neutral’ themes such as still-life and landscape, although all of them were executed as if their authors had never heard about new directions in art of the twentieth century – cubism, surrealism and particularly abstraction. Like the art works described by the Nazis in the 1930s as ‘Entartete Kunst’, such trends in visual arts were completely rejected by Polish officials supporting artists and selecting works for exhibitions and buying for museums. So quite a large proportion of authors preferred ‘safe’ topics and ‘quiet’ naturalistic style. But a chance for presenting and selling a work increased if an artist depicting a landscape had chosen Northern or Western Poland – i.e. Pomerania or Silesia – so-called Regained Lands, which were included in the Polish State after World War II following the Potsdam Treaty in the summer of 1945. The subject was needed to make the idea of the ‘Polishness’ of those regions popular. So our collection was enriched with some images of Gdańsk (Danzig), Olsztyn (Allstein), Szczecin (Stettin), Toruń (Thorn), Wrocław (Breslau), Zielona Góra (Gruenberg) and areas around.

The Polishness of those areas was also confirmed by historical scenes e.g. a visit of the Polish king Bolesław Chrobry (the Brave) to Szczecin at the beginning of the eleventh century or a famous Polish victory in the great battle with the Teutonic Knights near Grunwald in 1410, depicted by Stanisław Brzęczkowski. On the other hand, the problem of the eastern lands of pre-war Poland included in the Soviet Union or battles with the eastern neighbour did not exist at all. That subject was strictly forbidden, not only in art.

Also still-life had to be ideologically ‘correct’ and was supposed to include tools of work: musical instruments, elements of soldier’s outfit, gardening or farming tools, workbenches of craftsmen (a saddler, a shoemaker or a blacksmith). But the most preferred were bricklaying tools and materials (barrels of cement, bricks, implements, trestles, sand, buckets, etc). The latter were strictly connected with another preferred and ‘safe’ topic of that era: post-war reconstruction, especially Warsaw which was completely destroyed in the autumn of 1944, after the Warsaw Uprising. But the pride in rebuilding lovely ancient houses of the medieval Warsaw Old Town was quickly eclipsed by building something new – known as MDM, a district built in the 1950s in a horrible Soviet style. (Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa (MDM) translates ‘Marshal District for Living’; it comes from Marszałkowska Street – the main avenue of Warsaw.)

Another theme was the everyday hard work of all the ‘working class’ of the new socialist society, particularly of coal miners and villagers providing riches and food for the whole state. But the most appreciated in that category were art works connected with Nowa Huta (New Foundry) – a new suburb of the former capital Cracow, built since 1948 and during the 1950s. Besides being the new biggest foundry in Poland, giving jobs to hundreds of people, Nowa Huta was a new vast place for living in and also for entertainment – there was a theatre and even a museum (a branch of Cracow Archaeology Museum). The project was realized with the strong financial support of the Soviet Union, but has now completely collapsed and remained as a tourist attraction only. But in the 1950s every artist had to create at least one work de-
voted to the builders of Nowa Huta, for example Zofia Dębowska-Tarasin (Fig 1).

**Faces of the time**

Portraiture was another very important matter. The most preferred were, of course, portraits of the greatest – Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin and also Feliks Dzierżyński (founder of the Soviet Secret Police, a Pole by origin). So our collection contains three images of Stalin (two drawings by Aleksander Rak and Jan Tarasin and a lithograph by Walerian Borowczyk) (Fig 6). Sometimes artists depicted lovely and even moving scenes from the persons’ lives – e.g. *Lenin Talking with Highlanders* (a lithograph by Aleksander Rak; the scene was connected with the ‘Polish’ episode from Lenin's life – his stay in Poronin, a small village at the feet of the Tatra Mountains in 1912–1914).

Dzierżyński (who was known as a very cruel man and called the ‘Red Executioner’ because of blood of his numerous victims on his hands) was depicted at the bed of an ill revolutionary (Fig 2, a drawing by Helena Krajewska, one of the most important artists of the time), showing an equally human side of the man – spending vacation with the Russian writer Maxim Gorki on Capri (a drawing by Aleksander Winnicki) or writing his diaries (a drawing by Tomasz Gleb). But artists didn't forget about the hard revolutionary work of the hero: Tomasz Gleb depicted him speaking to workers in a coal-mine and Mieczysław Majewski as a carrier of illegal (in the tsars' era) prints. All these works devoted to Dzierżyński were done in 1951 and presented during the Second All-Polish Exhibition in Zachęta Gallery in December that year. Certainly it was a result of the erection of the Dzierżyński Monument in one of the main squares of Warsaw in July 1951 on the occasion of 25th anniversary of the Red Executioner’s death (Fik 1989: 155). Of course, the square was named after Dzierżyński until 1989, when the monument was destroyed and the place got its former pre-war name – Bank Square.

We also have a portrait of Mao Zedong (a woodcut by Bronisław Tomecki) and a woman revolutionary, Małgorzata Fornalska (a drawing by Barbara Gawdzik-Brzozowska) and a founder of Wielki Proletariat (International Social-Revolutionary Party established in Poland in 1882), Ludwik Waryński (a lithograph by Józef Pakulski).

Pablo Neruda, the communist poet, a refugee from Chile, visited countries of Eastern Europe in the 1950s (in 1950 he spent some time in Warsaw). He was especially popular there after obtaining the Lenin Peace Prize in 1953. His poems were translated into Polish by the greatest poets and published in 1950–1954, so also visual artists could not ignore him and two Neruda portraits (a drawing by Tadeusz Brzozowski and an etching by Janina Kondracka) came to our collection.

Some portraits also present ‘ordinary’ people – miners, founders, fishermen, farmers, tractor-drivers, builders, bricklayers, etc – as heroes of everyday life and patterns to follow for all of society (Fig 1 for instance).

**Friends and enemies**

Some artists paid an obligatory tribute of continuous demonstration of the friendship with Poland’s Big Brother by doing illustrations of Russian literature. Fortunately they chose nineteenth-century classics (Gogol, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Pushkin), not awful socrealistic prose – with one important exception, *Pedagogical Poem* by Makarenko (two etchings by Katarzyna Latallo).

One specific trend in socrealism was mocking and scoffing Western countries, particularly the United States, for their capitalism and imperialism. Many of the works exhibited at the All-Polish Exhibition of Art in Warsaw Zachęta Gallery entitled *Artists Struggling for Peace* in 1950 focused on the subject. An excellent example bought to our museum collection after the exhibition was a drawing by Bronisław Wojciech Linke entitled *Truman the Virtuoso* (or *Pianist*, fig 4) depicting Harry S Truman, American President (1945–1953) playing the piano with keys made from guns. The drawing was a counterpart to another very famous work by Linke in the late 1930s, well known to the Polish audience for presenting Adolf Hitler in the same way. Depicting the USA and Americans as the main threat to world security was appreciated by the officials, and such works were prized and willingly purchased for the state collections.
A similar portrait of Truman by Linke was reproduced in *Trybuna Wolności* ('Freedom Tribune', a popular daily paper in the 1950s) with a poem by Józef Prutkowski: ‘Truman thought he would die, / Truman's attack was hard, / but Arthur his Mac advised him / to take the Korean Pill / Truman couldn’t digest it / wanted to swallow and suffocated.’ The poem contains an offensive word-game. Displacing parts of the name MacArthur (American general in World War II and the Korean War) as ‘Arthur his Mac’ created a Polish equivalent of an insult – son of a bitch (literally: ‘a bitch (is) his mother’; ‘Mac’ sounds like Russian ‘mat’ – mother – popular also in Polish, especially in such a context). Another drawing by Linke, *A New Face of Capitalism* (fig 3), bought for the museum collection was also reproduced in *Trybuna Wolności* in 1952 and exhibited in the Warsaw Zachęta Gallery (1952/1953). The work presents a bust of a man in a top hat. The whole face of the man is covered with big, awful insects and worms.

‘Political caricature stands in the first line of the class struggle, it is an ideological weapon, reacting to every move of the enemy at once [...] with artistic means participates in the building of communism in our country,’ wrote Tadeusz Borowski (1950), a novelist and a poet and also a tragic man who committed suicide in 1951 at the age of 28, after he had become disappointed with all the ideology.

The ‘package’ of works bought this time for the MNW also contained several prints and drawings by Walerian Borowczyk (the artist mentioned above depicting Stalin). Some of them – similarly to Linke’s ones – were connected with the Western world. Lithographs such as *American Gifts* and *Free World* present malicious points of view to discourage Polish people from America and the western style of life. The first one (fig 5) depicts a man in a top hat pulling the striped clothing of a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp (with a big prisoner's number on it) out of a crate inscribed with MARSHALL in big letters (referring to the Marshall Plan). The second print presents a man tied against a wall with big corporate logos: Coca-Cola, Steelexport, RCA (fig 7). In contrast, Borowczyk did a drawing *Electrification of the Village* to show everybody the development of civilization in Poland... But times are changing ...

For many years all of us have found that part of our collection a *curiosum*, but now things are changing. We can distance ourselves from that problem and look at the works as a special historical documentation of a horrible time when the prevailing policy was able to dominate art and artists. Many people from Poland and other countries want to study all the material; articles and books are written and exhibitions are organized on this topic and present those works.

In the mid-1970s and early 1980s some books recapitulating the Polish art of the period since 1945 were published (Kowalska 1975; Wojciechowski 1975; Kępińska 1981; Bogucki 1983). It was significant that the authors usually omitted the embarrassing problem of socrealism. Wojciechowski didn’t mention it at all, Kępińska devoted only two pages to it (in a 280-page book!). Kowalska considered the first half of the fifties exclusively as a time of blocking avant-garde ideas. Only Janusz Bogucki (quoted above) at the beginning of the 1980s tried to describe and explain the phenomenon. But the first true synthesis was *Socrealism: Sztuka polska* (Socrealism: Polish Art) 1950–1954 by Wojciech Włodarczyk (doctoral thesis prepared at the University of Warsaw) published in Paris in 1986. In the autumn of the same year Maryla Sitkowska organized a huge exhibition *Oblicza socrealizmu* (Faces of Socrealism) at the National Museum in Warsaw. The curator showed many of the works mentioned above. The exhibition was very well received by the audience and much worse by artists, particularly those whose works were represented. Since that time many exhibitions have been organized in smaller museums all over Poland.

Quite a new arrangement of the Gallery of twentieth-century Art at the National Museum in Warsaw was opened in April 2007. It contains works executed between 1945 and 1955 (the next period will be presented later, perhaps next year) so a large part of the show presents socrealistic paintings (see Nowakowska-Sito 2007).

Currently David Crowley is preparing a major exhibition connected with the problem. *Cold War Modern* will be presented at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum in the autumn of 2008 and then in Rovereto, Italy, in the spring of 2009. Two prints by Borowczyk mentioned...
above (American Gifts and Free World) will be exhibited.

The whole situation described in this paper presents the case when a completely unwanted donation has become an interesting base for extending knowledge of twentieth-century history and its strange sides, sometimes so willingly forgotten.

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Turowsicz, Jerzy (1949), 'Kultura i polityka' (Culture and Politics), Tygodnik Powszechny. /Weekly./


Image captions

Fig 1. Dębowska-Tarasin, A Bricklayer’s Assistant, lithograph.

Fig 2. Helena Krajewska, Dzierżyński at the Bed of an Ill Revolutionary, charcoal.

Fig 3. Bronisław Wojciech Linke, A New Face of Capitalism, Indian ink.

Fig 4. Bronisław Wojciech Linke, Truman the Virtuoso, Indian ink.

Fig 5. Walerian Borowczyk, American Gifts, lithograph.

Fig 6. Walerian Borowczyk, Portrait of Stalin, lithograph.

Fig 7. Walerian Borowczyk, Free World, lithograph.

Photo: Mikołaj Machowski, National Museum in Warsaw.
This paper examines the interrelation between research topics examined by urban ethnology and visions pursued by the concept of modern museums. Since they share certain research topics, the importance of interaction and an opportunity for the development of urban ethnology within museums is emphasised.

The concept of the urban is thematically connected with two categories: with towns (cities) and town centres as the places that reflect the most intensive elements of urban lifestyle,1 and with the category of modernity with characteristics of the consumer society. Opening and emphasizing contemporary urban orientations in museology defines a new and meaningful role for museums in modern society. The insights into the changing nature and constant development of society, and besides that also the short duration of material culture, spread into the world of museums. Thus the collecting of contemporary objects is today a museum policy that is necessary and equal to others (Roženbergar 2000: 171). But here my crucial question arises, the question of how these topics are dealt with by ethnologists and museologists.

I will expose the problem of not including urban ethnological studies in contemporary Slovene museums.

Contemporary orientations in museology and urban ethnological studies

Diversity, industrialization and urbanization, cultural melting pots, disappearance of traditional rural characteristics, technological development, global economic growth, the forming of a consumer society, presentation of mass-migration trends, oppression and disappearance of differences are only some of the themes explored by modern museums.

Theoretically, ethnology in Slovenia was faced with these themes long before all other museum disciplines. Modern consumer society, and mainly urban culture linked with it and attached to the town system, the present, everyday life and modern cultural occurrences of towns, have become the themes of ethnological analyses and research. Theoretical and methodological pluralism, characteristic of town research (Brumen 1994: 29), therefore enabled research into urban life and consumer society from different aspects: the studies dealt with towns as areas with ethnic and social heterogeneity, urban identity and urban cultural processes, certain urban professional groups, and urban community as a whole.

The beginnings of ethnological studies of urban issues in Slovenia are linked with the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and Professor Slavko Kremenšek. Stressing the importance of ethnological research concerning this field and encouraging students to undertake small-scale

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1 The urban and town-like are not seen as one and the same, since some elements of urban lifestyle are also reflected in villages, but they are of course most recognizable in town centres.
research also in towns, with emphasis on modern phenomena, was even considered one of the characteristics of studying ethnology in Ljubljana. Within the research programme *The Lifestyle of Slovenes in the Twentieth Century*, a project called *The Ethnological Topography of Slovene Ethnic Territory* was carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s, which also presented a certain system for ethnological studies of modern lifestyle, since special stress was laid on the dissolution of traditional culture and the changes in it. These studies mostly treat urban areas as constituent parts of wider territories, since, with regard to the division of the researched region according to individual communities, urban areas are in the centre of the examined area (Kremenšek 1994: 10).

**Collecting and documenting modern society – the situation in Slovenia**

The most frequent museum presentations and research studies in general concern the field of working culture, mainly mining and iron industry. Already in the 1950s, under the guidance of the Technical Museum of Slovenia, special collections around Slovenia were created (Idrija, Jesenice, Kropa, Ravne na Koroškem) with the intention of preserving the industrial and mining heritage of the areas which became urbanized along with the development of these industries.

Today museum presentations are held in all formerly important mining basins. The central museum in the Zasavje region, in the town of Trbovlje, has arranged two ‘in situ’ miner’s apartments in a mining settlement. One shows a typical miner’s apartment from the first quarter of the twentieth century (set up in 1984), while the other reveals housing conditions in the same settlement in the early 1960s (set up in 2003). The characteristics of the miner families’ housing culture are also revealed through the collections and exhibitions in the Town Museum in Idrija and the Coal Mining Museum of Slovenia in Velenje.

Some Slovene museums have permanent exhibitions which also include modern society (Museum of Modern History Slovenia, Museum of Recent History Celje, City Museum Ljubljana, Regional Museum of Murska Sobota…). I should also mention a few other exhibitions. A temporary exhibition *Ljubljana in the Penultimate Fashion* prepared by Tanja Tomažič (in 1983) displayed the middle-class lifestyle in Ljubljana. The exhibition *Household Appliances and Lifestyles* (1997/98) also went beyond the traditional concepts of museologically-ethnologically treated themes. A more extensive periodical exhibition *The Memories of our Youth – Life under the Stars* (an ethnological overview of the post-war events in the Goriška region) was opened in 1997 in the Goriško Museum in Nova Gorica. The author of the exhibition Inga Miklavčič Brezigar starts the introduction to the catalogue with the following words: ‘ethnology in a different way…’ (Miklavčič 1997: 4) which clearly warns us about the position of collecting in the sphere of modernity and urban lifestyle. An important message is conveyed by the following piece of information: most of the exhibited material was collected during the setting up of the exhibition and was not brought from storage facilities. Later these objects were also acquired for the museum collection.

Another interesting project was carried out at the Museum of Recent History Celje on the initiative of an ethnologist (the author of this article), when over a period of one year all employees brought empty packaging they came across at home. ‘Instead of throwing it away – bring it to the museum’, could be the slogan of this project. All objects collected represent a unique source for research into the standard of living of a Slovene family, for establishing the ratio of domestic to imported products on the market, and for finding out about the genuineness of industrial products in Celje.

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum developed a methodology for collecting objects of the consumer society, which is based on three basic collecting criteria (mass production, typicality, and specificity) and a multi-level process of collecting and selecting museum objects (Keršič, Rogelj Škafar, Sketelj, Žagar 2001: 90). The new permanent exhibition shows only some objects from the consumer society as illustrations, mainly in the context of gradual development of a certain product or its modern antipode.
Reasons for the lack of collections on modernity in Slovene museums

We can say that Slovenia has still not established a continuous and systematic broadly organized way of working in the field of museum studies and presentation of urban life and modernity. But have Slovene museums themselves ‘identified the various challenges arising from global social changes in the last decade’ (Hudales 2005: 226)? Why is there such a split between theory and practice?

There are several reasons for this situation, and they reflect one basic problem, which is lack of adequate education and consequently lack of knowledge, since Slovenia still has no university heritage studies programmes. Certain individual educational projects, which bring select knowledge and individual foreign educational programmes only to a select group of professionals, are far from being enough to improve the overall situation. Precisely for this reason the ‘theoretical level’ or ‘museological idea’ is being formed and developed too slowly. If we knew the theory of modern museum orientations better, projects would be set up more quickly in practice, with stronger and greater engagement of the experts themselves.

Lack of knowledge and education as the reasons for the existing situation could be complemented by another far-reaching problem, which is little opportunity for employment in the museum profession. Inclusion of young experts equipped with up-to-date knowledge is possible only exceptionally, within project work, since the last permanent employments date back to the 1990s, when the first generations of curators retired, considering the fact that museums were founded in the 1950s.

The term urban ethnology is entirely unknown in Slovene museum practice. Related to it is the expression recent history, which also acquired its museum framework a decade ago in an unofficial special section of curator-historians for recent history. Thus those researching and documenting modernity were and still are mostly curator-historians. But did ethnologists and cultural anthropologists not talk about this long ago? It is indisputable that a curator-ethnologist is indispensable in research and setting up exhibitions which present the so-called recent history at the level of everyday life.

Thinking about this, we drifted to a wider problem of not accepting and not considering ethnology within museum expert circles, where a relatively stereotyped view mostly still prevails. Kremenšek says: ‘The notions of ethnology outside the ethnological profession, not to mention the notions of certain ethnologists themselves, were mostly not supported. Colleagues who started working in institutions outside Ljubljana were mostly busy with other urgent tasks imposed by their environment’ (1994: 10).

I believe that ethnologists-museologists all too rarely take advantage of the museum exhibition language to put up striking exhibitions, which would help diminish the doubts, guesswork and sometimes also negative standpoints about ethnology in museums, in professional as well as wider circles. Our profession would more easily pave the way also with the help of exhibitions meeting with a wide response.

Concluding thought

In the conclusion I once more stress the importance and the role of contemporary museums in society, mainly in the light of theoretical-practical reflections. The interrelation between research topics examined by urban ethnology and visions pursued by the concept of modern museum calls for interaction and opens many opportunities for the development of urban ethnology within museums. Moreover, the latter is becoming one of the leading orientations of modern museological trends. Therefore it is all the more important that certain tasks are handled precisely by curator-ethnologists, for the sake of both the science and the profession.

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Author presentations

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Thomas Ulrich, ethnologist, works at the Norwegian Telecom Museum, specializing in minority questions, mainly regarding the northernmost parts of Norway. His most recent work, Fra sentral til siste stolpe (‘To the end of the line’), is a movie documentary giving a backward glance at how telecommunication took shape in a scarcely populated Sami area. E-mail: thomas.ulrich@telemuseum.no

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Connecting Collecting
An international conference on collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community

Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
15–16 November 2007

Thursday 15 November
11.00–12.30 Registration
13.00 Opening and welcome addresses
- BIRGitta DAHL, Chairman of the Board, Nordiska Museet, former Speaker of Parliament, former Minister of Environment
- HANS MANNEBY, Director General, Västarvet, Chairman of ICOM Sweden
- CHRISTINA MATTSSON, Director, Nordiska Museet
13.20 EVA FAGERBORG
Samdok Secretariat, Nordiska Museet
The Swedish Samdok network.
Slideshow: Images of Contemporary Sweden
13.40 Keynote: ELIZABETH MERRITT, Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence, American Association of Museums
Beyond the cabinet of curiosities: Towards a modern rationale of collecting
14.30 Coffee & tea
15.00–16.00 Papers
- REBECCA THOMLINSON
The British Postal Museum & Archive, UK
Collecting the here and now: Contemporary Collecting at The British Postal Museum & Archive
- LYKKE PEDERSEN
National Museum of Denmark
The world upside down: Contemporary documentation of the celebration of the royal wedding 2004
- KATTY H WAHLGREN & FREDRIK SVANBERG
Museum of National Antiquities, Sweden
Archaeological collecting, the contemporary and public involvement
16.00 Short break
16.10–16.50 Papers
- INGER JENSEN & THOMAS MICHAEL WALLE, Norwegian Museum of Cultural History
Norway — a multicultural society: Documentation and presentation of recent migration to Norway through the project “Norwegian — yesterday, today, tomorrow?”
Objectives for a follow-up
- KYLEA LITTLE
Tyne and Wear Museums, UK
Outreach and contemporary collecting in Tyne and Wear Museums
- CHRISTINE FREDRIKSEN
Bohuslan County Museum, Sweden
Youth across the border — a Nordic perspective on activities over the border
17.00–18.00 Presentations of two new exhibitions in the Nordiska Museet:
- EVA SILVEN Sápmi
- JOHAN KNUTSSON The Mega Collector
18.15 Buses leave for the City Hall
19.00 The City of Stockholm invites you to a reception with buffet in the City Hall

Friday 16 November
08.30 Morning mingle and coffee
09.30 Keynote: CIRAJ RASSOOL, Professor, Department of History, University of Western Cape, South Africa
Museum and heritage documentation and collecting beyond modernism: Lessons from South Africa for the future.
10.15 Short break
10.30–11.40 Papers
- ZELDA BAVEYSTOCK
Newcastle University, UK
Relevance and representation: The state of contemporary collecting in the UK
- ILZE KNOKA
Latvia State Museum Administration
Collecting contemporaneity in Latvia. Communicative and professional aspects
- JAN GARNERT
National Museum of Science and Technology, Sweden
When old collections renew: On exploring cultural meanings of radio receivers and satellite dishes.
11.40–13.00 Lunch in the museum restaurant
13.00–14.00 Papers
- ANNA KOTAŃSKA
The Historical Museum of Warsaw, Poland
Photos collection in the Historical Museum of Warsaw
- KARI-ANNE PEDERSEN
Norwegian Museum of Cultural History
When we collect — meeting people and their things
- RHINA REINVELT
Estonian National Museum
Collections of national museum and stereotypes
- LEIF PARELI
Norwegian Museum of Cultural History
Sami heritage in museum collections: Its role in education and inspiration to the Sami and to the world
- EVA-SOFI ERNSTELL
The Army Museum, Sweden
Who is the keeper? Collecting and storing in the national Swedish museums of military history
14.00 Coffee & tea
14.30 Concluding discussions — formation of an international collecting network.
16.00 Closing of the conference

Moderator: Moa Mathis