Staging Indigenous Heritage: Instrumentalisation, Brokerage, and Representation in Malaysia.
Yunci Cai.

Yunci Cai’s *Staging Indigenous Heritage* pushes back against the universal concept of “culture for development,” which is promoted among Indigenous peoples around the world as a means for economic improvement, by discussing four case studies of Malaysian Indigenous museums. Although this work is geographically centered on Malaysia, the arguments Cai makes throughout the text make it clear that this work has global relevance for Indigenous peoples, museum professionals, and academics alike. Influenced by non-Western museological practices, Cai invites scholars of museum studies to reconsider their approaches to produce a more equitable museum and museum experience.

To illustrate the goals of this work, Cai presents the following case studies: Mah Meri Cultural Village in Carey Island; Orang Seletar Cultural Center in Johor Bahru; Monsopiad Cultural Village and Linangkit Cultural Village, both in Sabah. The first two museums are in Peninsular Malaysia while the latter are in East Malaysia. The locations of these case studies are important, according to Cai, because of the makeup of the local population: 0.6 percent Indigenous in Peninsular Malaysia compared to 65.5 percent Indigenous in East Malaysia. This difference accounts for the varying ways in which the Indigenous populations of these areas have experienced marginalization, political autonomy, and have been represented locally and abroad.

Cai’s methodologies are fitting for a project that focuses on Indigenous representation and identity. Data was primarily collected through ethnographic approaches, including participant observations, various interviews, and focus groups. Although Cai does not specifically indicate that Indigenous methodologies were employed in this work, a careful reading of the author’s activities suggests that they are indeed present in some respects. In particular, and following the work of Indigenous scholars like Shawn Wilson, Kathleen Absolon, and Margaret Kovach, the importance of relationality is present in Cai’s work and likely played an important role in how the author created relationships that resulted in the data collected. Carrying out duties such as daily administrative work and exhibition cleaning at the cultural villages, as well as household chores such as cooking and cleaning while staying with host families, are important aspects of relationality that also help to position Cai in a less dominant position as a researcher.

As Cai moves through the case studies in this work, it becomes apparent that one of the biggest issues that threatens the success of these museums is the role of the broker in these institutions, varied as they may be. In each case study, true autonomy for the Indigenous group represented at each respective museum is hindered by the presence of a broker who maintains the power to determine what the museum ultimately depicts. The presence of
an “authorized heritage discourse,” as articulated by Laurajane Smith, is clearly present at these sites, and problematic, although Cai does indicate that in some cases the broker is an Indigenous person themselves. It becomes clear that these relationships are not that simple and speak to the heterogeneity that is present in Indigenous communities, despite attempts to depict them as homogeneous.

Although there are flaws in this system, Cai writes that in many cases, a broker is necessary for the creation of cultural museums, often acting as the intermediary with an outside investor. As a result, Cai concludes that this produces complicated relationships that ultimately call into question “the predominant academic and museological discourse on the positive and transformative role of culture in development” (184). The author goes on to indicate that the broker relationship perpetuates “continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples in the predominately Malay-Muslim Malaysian society [of Peninsular Malaysia] by entrenching a culture of dependency” (187, emphasis mine).

This concept of “Indigeneity” is discussed at length by Cai, who makes connections to the ways in which historical, anthropological depictions of Indigeneity continue to be problematic for contemporary Indigenous populations. These connections draw greatly on the work by Margaret Bruchac to uncover the realities of the broker-anthropologist relationship in early ethnographic work of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the context of the case study sites, the choices that are made in terms of depicting Indigenous peoples (both statically in displays and through personal interpretive programming) can have negative impacts on contemporary Indigenous peoples who are depicted as “primitive” or “backwards.” These decisions are further complicated by the role of local Indigenous peoples who choose to participate in these depictions using historic dress or the reenactment of historic activities, as well as through the construction of historic dwellings and their associated paraphernalia. These “staged arenas,” as Cai refers to the cultural villages, function as spaces of contestation, transformation, commodification, and self-representation that ultimately conform to the preconceived notions of tourists “based on their historically constructed stereotypes” (187).

Cai’s work in Malaysia is reminiscent of Bryony Onciul’s work considering the role of Indigenous peoples in heritage sites in Alberta, Canada, which looks at several relationships that include brokerage as well as full autonomy. While Onciul’s examples present the hopeful possibilities that culture for development is touted for, they create a sharp contrast to the reality of the Indigenous museum case studies presented by Cai. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this work is that the reality of Indigenous identity, communities, and politics is messy, which in turn impacts the way heritage institutions like the cultural villages in the case studies operate. Ultimately, what is highlighted in this text is the problem that has become more pervasive in the past decade or so, in which various forms of tourism (cultural tourism, ecotourism, etc.) are presented to Indigenous peoples as their best option for economic development and autonomy. Cai’s case studies highlight the potential downfall of these kinds of development, recognizing that even under the “best circumstances” (that is, cultural development that is initiated from within Indigenous communities and carried out by Indigenous peoples), the tendency to reproduce stereotypes that conform to the expectations of tourists (because of a problematic history of representation) leads to inaccurate representations that can be just as harmful as those produced by outsiders.

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"A Representation of Nationhood in the Museum."
Sang-hoon Jang.

Sang-hoon Jang’s "A Representation of Nationhood in the Museum" examines a modern and contemporary discourse of material culture in South Korea and its main repository, the National Museum of Korea, leading us through a knowledgeable, pleasant, dynamic, and at the same time complicated, intertwined, and demanding journey into the history of South Korea, especially of the twentieth century. Many South Koreans of the present generation have a sense of pride instilled in them in their formative years as citizens belonging to a single ethnic group, thus emphasizing the uniqueness of the nation. The leaders of the country, regardless of their political backgrounds, have always used this characteristic as a strategic tool to achieve their political goal of uniting the citizens. In this context, the material culture of Korea and the National Museum of Korea have been key instruments to assert the independence of South Korea, not only geo-politically but also culturally, and even to affirm the superiority of its culture. This monograph narrates the underlying story of the desperate struggle of South Korea to establish its own identity. It highlights how national identity remained a primary concern throughout the development of national museums in South Korea, overcoming the shadow of Chinese culture, surviving the Japanese colonial period, and establishing new relationships with the US. Two of the most significant contributions of this monograph are as follows: first, it investigates the complex process of building material culture in the country; and second, it clarifies the relationship between material culture and the national political agenda.

First, the book describes the complicated and long-drawn-out process of national identity construction in the modern Korean nation-state, which was closely related to a renewed understanding of the connections linking Korean culture, Chinese culture, and the Japanese colonial period. The National Museum of Korea, ever since its establishment, has made enormous efforts through its studies of material culture to distinguish Korean culture and its distinct identity from Chinese culture. The notion that living outside the realm of Chinese means to live as “barbarians” (in particular during the Yi dynasty) reveals the perception of the Korean elites about the strong influence of Chinese culture on Korea (108). Interestingly, this was the very point used to advantage by the Japanese colonial government when ruling Korea; this perspective was evidence of the country’s inability to create its own culture and thus justified Japan’s colonial policies that required Koreans to simply obey the new, emerging power of Japan. In this context, Japanese scholars strove to construct a colonial view of Korean history and instill this among Koreans. The Yi Royal Household Museum and the Government-General Museum were used to demonstrate this Japanese perspective with material evidence. Under these circumstances, the urgent mission of Korean nationalist intellectuals was to prove that their culture was different from that of the Chinese and Japanese, and to highlight the uniqueness and excellence of it. This was not an easy task until the country gained independence from Japan. After its liberation from colonial rule, this endeavor became more vigorous, and the National Museum of Korea was at the heart of this movement towards identity construction; this was also the time when modern museum studies began to proliferate in the country.

It was during the Japanese colonial period that Korean people became aware of their material culture and began discovering its value, especially when they found Japanese showing great regard for cultural objects in Korea (Chapter 1). However, it is also somewhat ironic that the museum experts acknowledged the achievements of Japanese scholars during the colonial period. In Chapter 2, the author points out the earlier perspective of the National Museum of Korea on this issue and maintains that Dr. Kim Chewon’s leadership at
the museum showed his appreciation of Japanese scholars’ academic activities. Indeed, the National Museum of Korea gave the Government-General Museum considerable credit for (a) engaging the best scholars for excavation projects to identify the cultural relics of Korea, and (b) publishing the excavation reports for the academic world (31–32), when Koreans were unwilling to acknowledge colonial rule. In fact, the contribution of Japanese scholars has remained a point of controversy in Korean academia. Their activities, although appreciable from a purely academic perspective, have not been easily accepted by Korean academics. Jang critically examines how this issue arose from the very early stages of museum development in Korea.

The second significant contribution of the book is its thorough examination of the strong support for national identity and national museums lent by national leaderships. Emerging from unstable geo-political circumstances and the experience of the war, each regime in South Korea was strongly driven to promote a unified national identity through material culture. For example, President Park Chung Hee emphasized strong nationalist policies during his eighteen-year-long regime, one of which was to identify Korean ethnic national culture and promote it. He desperately hoped that cultural objects could be unmovable evidence to reveal the possibilities for reconstruction, innovation, and creation of a Korean ethnic nation (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 illustrates one of the most controversial moves at the heart of this nationalist, political approach to history and culture: the demolition of the Government-General Museum building, a remnant from the Japanese colonial period. This decision by President Kim Young-sam stoked immediate controversy in Korea but, despite numerous concerns, he ordered the demolition in 1995. Jang interprets this as the government desperately needing a symbolic event to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the country’s liberation, and hence, they proceeded with the demolition of the building on 15 August 1995 (99–100). The speech made by the Minister of Culture and Sports at this time, emphasizing the bringing back of a unique, ethnic spirit, reflected the resolute determination to establish national identity. I believe the demolition leaves us much to consider. Do we lose our history if we lose material culture? In other words, if we don’t have any material culture left, do we not have a history at all?

In line with this instrumental approach to material culture by the government, Chapter 3 also investigates the early stage of cultural diplomacy in Korea in the 1970s, wherein an international travelling exhibition to Japan and the US, titled 5000 Years of Korean Art, was introduced. Government officials and museum curators of this period felt that the exhibition would be effective in educating the public about the values inherent in the ethnic nation, or in ethnic national cultural objects, and in internalizing these values in their collective consciousness (74). Although the government declared that the aim of the exhibition was to extend friendship with both countries, Choi Sunu, the director at that time, stressed the superiority of Korean culture (particularly in comparison with Japanese culture) and the recovery of its national ethnic pride through a display of its material culture. Anyway, the Korean government and academia were encouraged and stimulated by the welcome received and the opportunities that the exhibition provided to promote the uniqueness and superiority of Korean art.

Jang states that nationalism is always attractive when it is considered a cause to compete with and confront others (107). He argues that ever since the concept of nationalism was introduced in East Asia, it has always been perceived positively, not only as a powerful weapon against Western imperialism, but also as an effective way to unite people under the flag of a nation-state. In Korea, particularly, ethnic nationalism has always been considered an important value owing to the challenging geo-political circumstances from which it emerged, such as the struggle for independence during the colonial period and nation
building after independence. *A Representation of Nationhood in the Museum* explores this story by explaining why and how material culture studies in Korea began and how they were explored and narrated through national museums. Despite the significance of this aspect of Korean history, it is an under-explored area that could provide academics and the public with an accessible introduction to the modern history of Korea. Finally, it would be great if the author could further explore this discourse in a more contemporary context in South Korea. It is a pity that this is rather quickly wrapped up at the end of the monograph.

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**Porcelain Pugs: A Passion, The T. & T. Collection**
Edited by Claire Dumortier and Patrick Habets.

*Porcelain Pugs: A Passion*, edited by Claire Dumortier and Patrick Habets, looks at the T. & T. Collection, a private collection of eighteenth-century objets d’art: porcelain pugs. By using the objects as a starting point, the contributors are free to explore a variety of perspectives ranging from the development of porcelain in Europe to the role of the pug in eighteenth-century culture. Topics relating to either porcelain or pugs are presented in nine short stand-alone sections. In the foreword, Antoinette Faÿ-Hallé, the honorary director of the Musée National de Céramique (Sèvres), introduces the collection, enticing the reader in, and confessing that she was captivated when she first saw it. Such praise sets the reader up for the stunning visual feast that follows.

In his introduction, Alfredo Reyes of Röbbig München, a leading dealer in Meissen porcelain, grounds the proceeding chapters by highlighting the importance of relationships built between collectors and dealers. Museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art benefit from these relationships when they receive significant collections from generous donors. Art historian and art advisor Hervé de La Verrie expands upon the dealer-collector association and introduces the reader to the couple who built the T. & T. Collection of porcelain pugs featured in the book. Their identities are not revealed, and their motivation for building a collection of porcelain pugs is only briefly explained as “their shared taste for one breed of dog: the pug” (15).

In the first chapter, Ulrich Pietsch outlines the history and significance of Meissen in the eighteenth century. The European desire, especially amongst royalty, for Asian porcelain stimulated a race among European factories to find a recipe for hard-paste porcelain, which alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger succeeded in producing in 1708. The Meissen factory near Dresden was set up by royal decree and led the production of porcelain until the late eighteenth century. The factory owed much of its success to Johann Joachim Kändler’s porcelain sculpting talents.

Approaching the topic from a different perspective, art historian Sarah-Katharina Andres-Acevedo investigates the cultural history of the pug from its origins in China to its popularity in Europe from the sixteenth century as a pet and subject for artwork. She looks at the use of the pug in Meissen’s work, exploring how the factory expressed in porcelain the pug’s cultural roles as companion, observer, and protector. A particular strength of this chapter is its analysis of objects held in the T. & T. Collection and included in the catalogue found at the end of the book. Andres-Acevedo also touches on the Order of the Pug, a female society explored more fully in the next chapter by Roland Martin Hanke. Hanke reveals the fascinating, little known history of this secret society that encouraged female membership from the noble classes and was formed in reaction to male-only societies. Why the pug was chosen as
the symbol is unknown, but Hanke suggests a number of possible explanations ranging from characteristics such as arrogance and loyalty to their origins as exotic foreigners from the East. Membership declined as Enlightenment ideas took hold and tradesmen’s societies, such as the Freemasons, grew in numbers.

Claire Dumortier and Patrick Habets consider the influence of Meissen in the production of pugs in other European factories. The popularity of Kändler’s early pug designs spurred other factories, such as Tournai, to copy them in other materials such as faience and earthenware for a more modest market. In some instances, reproductions became indistinguishable from the originals. Dumortier and Habets examine several non-Meissen examples included in the catalogue, comparing them with Meissen’s work. In the next chapter, Marie-Laure de Rochebrune probes the daybook of Parisian trader Lazare Duvaux, revealing how this manuscript records and reflects mid-eighteenth-century taste. Not only did Duvaux supply luxury goods straight from factories like Meissen, he also embellished and recombined wares and personally shaped Parisian taste. The clients and purchases recorded in Duvaux’s daybook demonstrate the passion that French aristocrats had for “Saxon” ceramics. The final chapter by Barbara Beaucamp-Markowsky looks at “gallantry” (galanterien), more commonly known as objets d’art. They are defined by the author as “small, decorative, personal accessories created by goldsmiths, jewellers, stoncutters and porcelain modellers” and were often given as gifts (84). Meissen was a leader in the production of these objects that included snuffboxes, perfume bottles, and tobacco pipes. Pugs became a particularly fashionable decoration for them. One illustration shows a cane handle by Meissen embellished with a pug’s head. Gallantry fell out of fashion with the end of the ancien régime in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

Although the subject of porcelain pugs seems to be whimsical, the contributors offer well-researched, scholarly essays on their topics and demonstrate the variety of approaches that can be taken when investigating material objects. In that respect, Porcelain Pugs is a satisfying read. However, the identity of the owners of the T. & T. Collection is never revealed. The ambiguity around their identities in the introductory sections by Fay-Hallé, Reyes, and de La Verrie produces somewhat confusing writing, leaving the reader to wonder whether they have somehow missed this vital piece of information. Further, de La Verrie’s introduction is a missed opportunity to explore fully the relationship between collector and dealer through the owners of the T. & T. Collection as a case study. It would also have given the book a stronger context for linking the chapters together. The book is lavishly illustrated, but the illustrations are also repetitive and each object is reproduced two to three times. The section “Collectors’ taste” offers no text or interpretation and appears to be simply a selection of objects that are already illustrated in the catalogue. These minor criticisms aside, Porcelain Pugs: A Passion is an informative, entertaining, and beautifully illustrated book well worth dipping into.

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Charles Darwin’s Barnacle and David Bowie’s Spider: How Scientific Names Celebrate Adventurers, Heroes, and Even a Few Scoundrels.
Stephen B. Heard.

No matter the platform, science communicators need skills in how to transfer niche, technical knowledge to a broad audience with curious minds. It looks like Yale University Press knew this when publishing Stephen B. Heard’s most recent book. Heard, a biology professor at the University of New Brunswick, has a mission to connect people to science, and Emily S. Damstra’s exquisite drawings make his superb storytelling more vivid.
The topic—the history and legends behind the people who gave eponymous names to organisms—caught my attention because I was researching a particular eponymous recipe’s origins. Just as natural history specimens need names, descriptions, and illustrations in order to be recognized, recipes have names so that they can be remembered (Westney 2007). However, those interested in tracing recipe title origins—a practice called culinary onomastics—must be comfortable applying a research method that combines folklore with fragmented historical evidence. Similar research methods appear in Charles Darwin’s Barnacle.

In fact, there are remarkable parallels between Heard’s history in naming organisms and culinary onomastics. In the 1600s, for example, the European social elite were giving recipes eponymous titles, much as for natural science specimens. By the 1800s, attaching recognizable names to new recipes was widely practiced in America, Europe, Great Britain, and the colonies. In the food world, using an eponymous title was a way to celebrate leaders (e.g., Napoleon Cake), monarchs (e.g., Victoria Sponge Cake), and famous soprano singers like Dame Nellie Melba (e.g., Pêches à la Melba, Melba Toast). Male chefs first created these recipes and their eponymous titles (Westney 2007: 277). However, evidence shows that, by the 1900s, women had adopted the practice.

A similar gender history appears in Charles Darwin’s Barnacle. First, women were the exception rather than the norm. Chapter 5 features botanical artist Maria Sibylla Merian, who was “born in Frankfurt in 1647” (39) to a wealthy family. Heard explains, “Merian was always obsessed with plants and insects” (41). She advanced scientific ideas, “connecting observations of eggs, larvae, pupae, adults, and host plants” (42), evidenced in her brilliant illustrations. In recognition of her work, flowering plants, butterflies, a spider, and a reptile—the Argentine giant tegu, Salvator merianae—have Merian’s name. The story behind Salvator merianae demonstrates Merian’s contribution to science; as Heard details, the “three French naturalists […] had no difficulty recognizing the species from her painting—on which they based their description” (48).

Overall, the nineteen short chapters address a singular theme re-told from a different angle. By reading this book, you learn about (Western) scientific naming since Carl Linnaeus’s binomial system was introduced in the early 1700s (Chapter 1), and the ways by which scientists have interpreted and changed the system since (Chapter 2). You also read about strong personalities, scientists’ passions, how expeditions are funded, Indigenous peoples (often on the margin) who held important local knowledge, and famous people’s engagement with science. For example, Chapter 6 features the long-legged, orange-haired spider, Heteropoda davidbowie, discovered in Malaysia in 2008 (50), and the Australian horsefly Scaelitia beyonacea, named in 2011; “conspicuous golden” and “rounded derrière” draw connections to David Bowie and Beyoncé’s physical attributes (51). Ferdinando Boero, the Italian marine biologist who wrote to Frank Zappa about his plan to name the jellyfish Phialela zappai after him, highlights courage. Zappa’s wife Gail wrote back to Boero on the singer’s behalf, stating, “There's nothing I'd like better than having a jellyfish named after me” (55).

However, there are problems with eponymous naming, such as the associated politics when names go on sale (Chapter 18). Likewise, Chapter 11 offers a thought-provoking narrative about two primates, the eastern mountain gorilla, Gorilla beringei beringei, and a tarsier, Tarsius dianae, named after two quite unlikeable, and rather controversial, people, Captain Robert von Beringe (1865–1940) and Dian Fossey.

If you read detective fiction, science history, biography, travel stories, or culinary onomastics, you will enjoy this book. The nineteen fast-paced chapters would transfer well into digital products such as a podcast, a blog, or audio-visual material. Most importantly, Heard has avoided just re-telling the traditional, Western, male-centered science history; he has pointed out the difficult aspects associated with science, colonization, and museum building. He also sees how the next generation
can fill in the gaps, by bringing in Indigenous voices, women’s stories, and making visible those hidden histories.

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Reference

**Exploring Emotion, Care, and Enthusiasm in “Unloved” Museum Collections.**
Anna Woodham, Alison Hess, and Rhianedd Smith, eds.

The concept of care and emotion are not foreign to museum practitioners. Indeed, much of the identity politics of curatorship is bound up in intense emotional connection with objects. Care for stored collections is the central subject of the recent book, *Exploring Emotion, Care, and Enthusiasm in “Unloved” Museum Collections*, edited by Anna Woodham, Rhianedd Smith, and Alison Hess. In the chapters, the authors grapple with the practical challenges of working with “unloved” collections through the lens of emotion—and in particular, the affective and meaning-making encounters that occur between expert users (curators, collectors, specialist groups, retired practitioners) and objects in storage. The phrase “unloved” was chosen by the editors as a provocation—exactly which museum objects garner this title is malleable, but they are generally stored collections which have been “deemed uninteresting” or have “little or no personal meaning” (3). Shifting focus from exhibitions and the public spaces of the galleries, the authors look to the stores as a way of “broadening our understanding of where and how museum-object relationships take place” (2). The book is a compelling contribution that brings together practice-based concerns about the care and use of stored collections with wider literatures on emotion and care.

By applying notions like “object-love” to museum practice (Macdonald 2002), *Exploring Emotion* aims to bridge a critical gap between the realities of museum work and academic theory. As the editors note in their introduction, the language around collections “care” is highly emotionally charged—and yet studies that connect collections management and emotions are few and far between (44). But the focus here is practical as well as conceptual. In particular, the book homes in on the stored collections “problem”—how to sustainably and ethically address the financial and resource burdens of “uncharismatic” (Wingfield 2010) or poorly documented stored collections. Through eight chapters, the authors explore how different enthusiast groups can be mobilized as “collection activists” to re-enliven and care for collections in storage (Glaister 2005: 9). However, not all the contributors equally engage with the theoretical richness of the emotional literature laid out by the editors.

In her chapter, Hess provides an ethnographic account of expert groups working with the locks collections at the Science Museum in London. She argues that the expertise of these groups is often overlooked due to “the blurred line between personal and professional worlds” represented by private collectors (33), and yet she argues that such encounters can bring new meaning to professional museum work. Smith delves into the open stores of the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) as a nexus for understanding visitor perception and intergenerational knowledge transfer around an unloved collection of hand tools. Perhaps the most uncharismatic objects of all, Woodham and Shane Kelleher consider slag (a waste product created from smelting ore), and the ways these unloved collections can be cared for through collaborative creativity and co-curation.

Alexandra Woodall’s chapter reflects on artist-driven exhibition projects in Manchester...
ter, York, and Sheffield. By allowing artists to “rummage” in the stores in an unmediated way, she demonstrates how “hands-on encounters and artistic interventions” challenge but can also extend notions of collections care (83). Mark Carnall takes a refreshingly pragmatic approach to the devaluation of expert knowledge in natural history collections, emphasizing the importance of documentation standards and subject specialist networks like the Natural Sciences Collections Association (NatSCA). Mark Macleod turns his attention to the emotive quality of medical collections, arguing that they “can become objects of universal enquiry and shared experience” (136).

The final two chapters of the book bring emotional research to the fore through Sheila Watson’s chapter on phenomenology and emotional fiction as a way to re-connect with objects from the past, and Francesca Church’s very personal meditation on the archival research process and its emotional vicissitudes.

The book really thrives where it focuses on the complex emotional range of museum work. Watson’s chapter on emotion in the context of museology and practice is particularly rich. She suggests that what makes museum collections “unloved” in the first place is the loss of their emotional context. Informed by recent work in the history of emotions, her suggestion is to place oneself in an (imagined) emotional relation to “lost” objects as they may have been experienced by their owners. Similarly, Woodall’s chapter on opening up stored collections to artists provides useful theoretical and pragmatic tools. Inspired by Caitlin DeSilvey’s (2017) work on curated decay, she imagines how museum collections might be used, moving beyond strongly held notions of safeguarding to create a new transformative museum practice. Woodall’s rummage facilitators, Carnall’s microblogging, Smith’s open stores, and Watson’s fictional phenomenology all present possible ways to foster care and enthusiasm for stored collections.

In the conclusion, the editors call for a “reinvigoration of stored collections as more dynamic, affective, and haptic resources” (202). Yet I can’t help but wish for a stronger manifesto for tackling the chronic under-use of unloved stored collections. Surely the very premise of a book on collections “care” through emotion implies a need for a dramatic reimagining of collections management and access guidelines? As Hess observes, visitors to museum stores are rare—according to one study, less than two per week in many institutions (24). However, this likely says more about the chronic underfunding of access infrastructure than a lack of interest. The question of de-accessioning or “de-growing” collections is never broached (Morgan and Macdonald 2018). Perhaps more than any other type of collection, the “unloved” object seems to cry out for a radical intervention—to be touched, researched, rummaged, shared, and loved by collectors, artists, and community groups. While staying “in the lines” of traditional museum practice, Exploring Emotion nevertheless provides useful practical and theoretical tools for finding new ways to work with collections in storage.

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References


Idea Colliders: The Future of Science Museums.
Michael John Gorman.

By just about any measure, Planet Earth is facing a difficult future of human-induced environmental disruption. The combined land and ocean temperature since 1981 has increased at an average rate of 0.18°C / 0.32°F per decade. At least eight million tons of plastic end up in our oceans every year, making up eighty percent of all marine debris from surface waters to deep-sea sediments. The human population reached seven billion on 31 October 2011, and is projected to reach eight billion in 2023, nine billion in 2037, and ten billion in 2055. One million wild species are currently threatened with extinction and the most numerous bird on earth, by a large margin, is the chicken. Avoiding the worst of the fallout from these and other impacts urgently needs a far greater public trust in evidence-based research than currently exists.

Science museums clearly have a role to play in engendering trust of science and research and an understanding of its relevance. But are museums of nature and science as effective as they could be? In his book Idea Colliders: The Future of Science Museums, Michael John Gorman argues that, by and large, they are not. Their specific failure, he contends, is an inability to represent the interrelationships between science and other branches of culture that would allow museums to tackle the complexities of the environment and shift the needle on the public understanding of science (20). To address this, Gorman introduces the concept of “idea colliders” (6), a model that puts non-traditional collaborators—principally scientists and artists—together to come up with unexpected juxtapositions and interventions, allowing people not only to engage with the results of science, but with their broader social implications. In this way, Idea Colliders is something of a disruptor, although Gorman points out that these ideas build on a history of activity, such as from the sixteenth-century Kunst- und Wunderkammern (13), and blend the topics of art and science in the same way that seemed natural to da Vinci a century earlier.

Gorman takes a somewhat iconoclastic view that science museums should be rethought to embrace a new model, one that is not based on giant buildings with hundreds of employees and thousands of guests. He presents three hypothetical scenarios (23): 1) The Megamuseum Mall, a large digitally-capacitized spaced that allows visitors to curate their own perspectives in an experience similar to a shopping mall; 2) The Cloud Chamber, which harkens back to seventeenth-century coffee houses, providing places for co-creation; 3) the Invisible Museum, which essentially does away with the concept of a museum entirely, being more programmatic and focusing on learning-by-doing through citizen science programs. In place of the traditional museum with its didactic exhibits, Gorman proposes experimental, entrepreneurial, and adaptive collaborations between scientists and artists that foster a “Cambrian explosion” of new ideas to engage the public with science (26).

The central sections of the book are devoted to a comprehensive exploration of different experiments, intersections, and collaborations between the arts and sciences across the decades. He describes, for instance, the art of artist Natalie Jeremijenko (48), who planted one thousand clones of a tree around San Francisco Bay to demonstrate the effects of the environment on tree health as a comment on genetic predestination. Some of these actions, such as those developed as part of the Science Gallery in Dublin, Gorman had a direct hand in creating or displaying.

As he begins to wrap up the book, Gorman makes a number of predictions about where science museums are heading, for example, that our institutions will move from large, slow, stable providers of content, into smaller, more nimble platforms for participation creativity (103). Most importantly, he sees science museums beginning to enhance their social capital, brokering connections throughout
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society, providing “rhizome like” (146) action outside the walls of the institution.¹

*Idea Colliders* is highly relevant for museum professionals, artists or researchers who are interested in exploring the potent interactions between science and the arts in a museum context. After reading it, you may feel that they are not two distinct disciplines at all. There are just two points in the book on which I differ with Gorman. The first is the contention that the physical collections of natural history museums could be as effective if they were “digitized and dismantled” (24), replaced by experiments conducted with public mobile devices. While considerable digital data exists in natural history museums (e.g., bird song and photogrammetry), a billion physical specimens are kept by natural history museums in the United States alone. These are of critical importance, providing evidence for ecological change, biodiversity, genetic relationships, pollution and many other topics, some of which have not yet been developed. Working with specimens is also a direct component of art-making for many artists (e.g., Ashley Cecil, Tessa Farmer, Damien Hirst), either leveraging them directly through drawing, painting, or photography, or by incorporating the specimens themselves into the piece. With some artists (e.g., Richard Pell), the specimen, its digital data, and the artwork are, arguably, inseparably linked.

My second issue is Gorman’s contention that the actions he describes are entirely predicated on a rewriting of the DNA of natural history museums and that a full disruption of the status quo is required. “Rather than simply modifying these existing museums, and their vast dinosaur halls and biodiversity walls,” he writes, “we have an urgent need to invent new, more dynamic models for spaces to engage the public with life sciences” (125). The veracity of an object is a significant draw to those interacting with natural history museums, and the physicality of a specimen, especially on the scale of a dinosaur or whale, is not something that can be recreated on a digital device. There is space within the structure of existing museums to create interventions without ceasing the entire enterprise. Our institutions as they are currently imagined can champion spaces for visitors to delve into deeper meanings, to be makers, and to have personally transformative experiences that combine cultural and social capital.

With that said, the concepts in *Idea Colliders* spur the kinds of conversations that we in the science museum sector want to have, indeed that we critically must have, if our institutions are going to be effective in addressing the existential issues that we will face in the decades to come.

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**Note**


*Exhibitions as Research: Experimental Methods in Museums.*
Peter Bjerregaard, ed.

The thesis of this book is refreshingly clear: exhibitions represent “knowledge-in-the-making rather than platforms for disseminating already-established insights” (i). Though some are more convincing than others, the eleven chapters admirably unfold and demonstrate the point.

As Peter Bjerregaard’s introduction acknowledges, this is not a new idea. In the world of art, its currency is at least a century old, and today museums of many stripes assert an independent role in exploring their chosen fields of research. But something new, or at least mature, is being attempted here: a theorization to elaborate just how—plus a bit of why—exhibitions “know things differently.” Less successfully, it also attempts to explicate quite what their “research surplus” amounts to (95). Spoiler alert: Bjerregaard’s answer is
to gesture at the interpretive space opened up by their “vagueness” (95), and their ability to introduce mythological thinking into science.

Part of the book’s richness lies in reading about a wide range of inventive projects spread across Scandinavia and the United Kingdom: from a Viking Garden at Oslo’s Natural History Museum to an exploration of former day center users in Croydon, studiously presented in their own words; from museum objects replacing sales products in a Bergen shopping center to a wolf in Trondheim.

Jacqui Mulville, in her chapter, rather usefully defines exhibitions as events that essentially “bring the public and material culture together in a physical space for a fixed time” (131). The book’s overarching thesis is constructed around another essential combination, that between practice and theory. Most chapters suggestively weave together project descriptions and methodological accounts, overlaid with theoretical concepts borrowed variously from philosophy, anthropology, economics, and cultural theory. The range of theoretical props amounts to a veritable cornucopia.

Bjerregaard suggests a model “that we may term ‘collapsology’: [in which] conceptual knowledge is shattered and we are asked to construct a new set of relations” (95). In fact, collapsology is his own de-and-reconstruction of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s “savage mind,” where direct perception and imagination are prioritized over abstract concepts to arrive at an “aesthetic systematization” (96). What results is exhibition-making as a sort of “bricolage, do-it-yourself-work,” adding “to what we may know by transgressing our everyday understanding of how the world is constituted” (95). In his chapter on Medical Museion’s Mind the Gut exhibition, Adam Bencard favors instead “philosophical carpentry,” an evocative notion adopted from Ian Bogost’s efforts to think deeply about “What It’s Like to Be a Thing” (72). Here, putting on an exhibition becomes an opportunity to “experiment with speculative [and non-anthropocentric] philosophical research about things” (68). In less everyday language, he also urges museums to host an “object-oriented ontology,” where thinking about “thingness itself” can focus on the material qualities rather than informational value or symbolic significance of exhibits (69). Though, as Natalia Brichet and Frida Hastrup remind us, an object’s symbolism is itself fascinatingly unstable: “always provisional and formed through intersecting concerns … beyond the exclusive domain of museum professionals” (53).

In their own chapter about some contemporary Londoners’ thoughts about things they carry that might be “amulets,” Brichet and Hastrup introduce another theoretical tool: an “unorthodox version of ethnographic practice that generates subjects and objects along the way” (54). The resulting undisciplined (de-colonialized) version of curation generates novel perspectives by “decommissioning any claim to representation” (61). Economics—specifically Pine and Gilmore’s theory of the “experience economy”—is the theoretical lens through which Kari Aarrestad analyzes a project in which museum objects were introduced into a marketplace, “The Lagoon” mall in Bergen (80).

One other theoretical concept makes several appearances: the laboratory. Bjerregaard explains that this “knowledge-producing technology” challenges the authority of museums to be “inserted within processes inspired from and affecting the world outside” (4). Ironically, of course, enormous effort is spent in science vigorously keeping most of the world outside the laboratory, for fear of contaminating experiments. Another crucial difference with scientific laboratories is that the public—a required ingredient for museum labs, of course—is invariably excluded. Nonetheless, this bit of terminological appropriation from science has, time and time again, been fruitfully suggestive for adventurous exhibition-thinking. In this volume, Henrik Treimo’s chapter persuasively describes a “LAB-method” in which scientific and technical objects provide “gathering points of enquiry” and where text-based approaches of
academic curators can meet and mingle with aesthetic practices of art and scenography (23).

Cumulatively, this theoretical soup thoroughly enriches the book’s central claim for the knowledge value of exhibitions. But to pay their way, theories ideally do more than just supply alternative perspectives and colorful metaphors. And I couldn’t help wondering how deeply some of these theoretical insights were actually imbedded in the described practices; or indeed how well matched the lively new understandings were with genuinely new practices. There is no doubt that projects like these do support knowledge-making of a different register, both through fresh curatorial concern with real stuff and in relational methodologies involving non-traditional “knowledge-workers.” And as Bjerregaard has it, “if we want to turn [it] into research, the exhibition will not progress according to the most efficient plan, but according to the curiosity and serendipity involved in finding out” (12). But, in truth, maybe that has always been the case for the best of curating, even if it has, until now, been under-theorized.

Exhibitions as Research might, then, fall short of the “destruction of existing orders and the creation of new ones” central to Bjerregaard’s collapsology method; but it nonetheless provides a welcome boost to thoughtfully original exhibition-making (105). Along with bold theoretical claims, some accounts pause engagingly to reveal moments when projects stumbled and didn’t go to plan. The volume is enhanced by this unusual mixture of confidence and humility, one which Helen Graham captures at the end of her chapter: “in the most ambitious and in the most modest and everyday sense—we were just trying to work out, at times together but always in relationship to each other, what it means to be alive in the 21st century” (192).

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