

Carvill Schellenbacher, Chapter 33), and the press's approach to activism (Jenny Kidd, Chapter 34) among other related topics. These papers and the cautions they contain, however, will not deter most readers from joining the momentum and thinking 'Yes, I can be part of this.'

For me, however, two critical and intertwined questions remain. First, as was (and still is) the case with "visitor centeredness," will "activism" become performative? And, how can the museum community be motivated to critically assess the impact of 'museum activism'? Bernadette Lynch (Chapter 10) tackles performative vs. operational activism and encourages museums to 'do something.' Diana I. Popescu (Chapter 28) would undoubtedly support me in urging the museum community to take the risks inherent in any critical exploration of impact as a necessary step in moving forward.

A colleague's recommendation, the unusual title, and familiar authors motivated a reading of the next book. It is also an international selection of case studies.

ADELE CHYNOWETH, BERNADETTE LYNCH, KLAUS PETERSEN, AND SARAH SMED (Eds.): Museums and Social Change: Challenging the Unhelpful Museum. Routledge. 2020. 190 pp.

In the introduction, Bernadette Lynch lucidly explains the title, and the premise of the book "that the role of the museum is not to be *helpful* – by 'doing for' or 'on behalf of', which turns out to be markedly *unhelpful*. Rather, it is to help create the circumstances by which people can help themselves." Lynch makes a persuasive case that museums now practice a (decidedly ineffective) theory of change, based on a 'therapeutic model' that people who visit them are somehow defective and need help. Instead, she presents the useful museum in action as an approach that "is about promoting people's freedom to choose, fostering their resilience and capability – not 'aid', but self-help, self-empowerment, the empowerment of group solidarity and action towards bringing about change." (p. 3).

The case studies used to illustrate this proposed shift are from Denmark, the UK, Norway, Netherlands, Taiwan and Australia. As in the Janes and Sandell volume, the authors either have key roles or are participant observers in the case studies. Consequently, they are realistic about challenges, roadblocks, and the fatigue that often result from

co-curating with vulnerable and marginalized communities. They also, I suspect, frequently underestimate their formidable achievements.

The most extensive discussions in the volume are in five (of 12) chapters based on the work of the Danish Welfare Museum (DWM), located in the historical setting of a preserved poor- and workhouse complex in Svendborg (on the island of Funen in south-central Denmark, closer to Copenhagen than Oslo).

In the first DWM chapter, Sarah Smed shows how the museum uses the historical setting as a platform from which to discuss contemporary issues of the Danish welfare state. Created in part to reconstruct the social history of welfare, the museum evolved a unique and 'useful' form of collaboration. The museum undertakes co-creational initiatives with men and women who have personal experience of institutional life in the welfare state system. These members of a 'Panel of Experience' propose new ideas and critique them and, more generally set the direction and areas of focus for the museum's work. Its interns can be former drug or alcohol (ab)users, homeless, psychiatric patients, or socially vulnerable and marginalized young people.

The remaining DWM chapters describe work related to humanizing past institutional members through the experience of its Panel, a project that explored and implemented a role for the museum in the construction of memory on the part of Care Leavers (former institutionalized children), the release of case records to Care Leavers, and a writing workshop that enables (formerly) institutionalized people to express themselves, share their work, and get insights by discussing each other's experiences.

Another case study deals with the Vest-Agder Museum in Norway, focused on giving voice to members of the community with sensitive narratives (e.g. poverty or abuse). The creation of the Museum of Homelessness is a story of a group of people, many of whom have direct experience of homelessness, collaborating to shift wider social attitudes and perceptions of homeless people. DisPLACE, is a digital platform for the collection and interpretation of experiences of disability in the Netherlands, developed by and for people with a wide variety of disabilities. A final, challenging chapter covers the creation and aftermath of *Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions at the National Museum of Australia* (NMA). This exhibition was based on the personal histories of those who, as children, were in an orphanage, residential home, or institution. These people were non-Indigenous, domestic Australian children, known as the 'Forgotten Australians.' A major challenge faced

here was the reluctance of NMA, in spite of a governmental dictum and funding, to tell this story. This story brought home another aspect of museum activism, namely the porous boundary between museums and other societal institutions.

As a final word, Laura-Edythe S. Coleman and Porchia Moore's chapter in the Janes and Sandell anthology highlights the importance of grassroots museum professional voices in response to episodes of social injustice. The *polyphony* of voices has increased since the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. In considering books for this column, it became apparent to me that the most current, unfiltered and unedited conversation about the role of museums and the calls for activism lives on social media. Here is a selection, filtered by my personal biases, as a way to maintain the motivation to 'do something':

- 'Art + Museum Transparency' [<https://www.artandmuseumtransparency.org/>] is a group of art workers and museum workers agitating for transparency and change in U. S.-based organizations.
- 'MuseumHue' [<https://www.museumhue.com/>] supports the advancement and role of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color in cultural institutions.
- 'Museum & Race' [<https://museumsandrace.org/>] has promoted change and challenged institutional policies and systems that perpetuate racism in museums.
- 'Museum Workers Speak' [<https://museumworkersspeak.weebly.com/>] is forum for emerging museum professionals, graduate students, and museum staff members to counteract the taboo about discussing museum practices, such as hiring, leadership, and working conditions.
- '(MASSAction) Museum as Site for Social Action' [<https://www.museumaction.org>] is a platform for dialogues on topics and issues affecting our communities locally and globally, leading to actionable practices for equity and inclusion in our institutions.
- 'On Display' [<https://allarts.org/programs/on-display/>] is a series of short, documentary-style videos led by Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham (co-founder of Museum Hue). It explores equity in museums through the lens of antiracism.
- 'The Inclusion' [<https://incluseum.com>] is a project centered around inclusion in both museum culture and its spaces.

Museum Twitter includes considerable important dialogue by proponents of new museological perspectives and approaches. Below are some important accounts: @MuseumWorkersSpeak, @Museum_Detox, @AMTransparency, @Incluseum, and @museumhue

In a review of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum mentioned above, Holland Cotter, co-chief art critic of *The New York Times* for over twenty years, wrote that this museum “privileges truth-telling, messy facts over clean-cut aesthetics” and offers no closure, as its story is still happening (2017). He ends with “That the new museum says this outright, and leaves us upset, its story unresolved, is what makes it work. We don’t need our museums — any of them — to calm us down; we need them to sound alarms.” The three books discussed here, and the social media links, outline our work in response to those alarms.

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