

MUSEUMS, MORALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

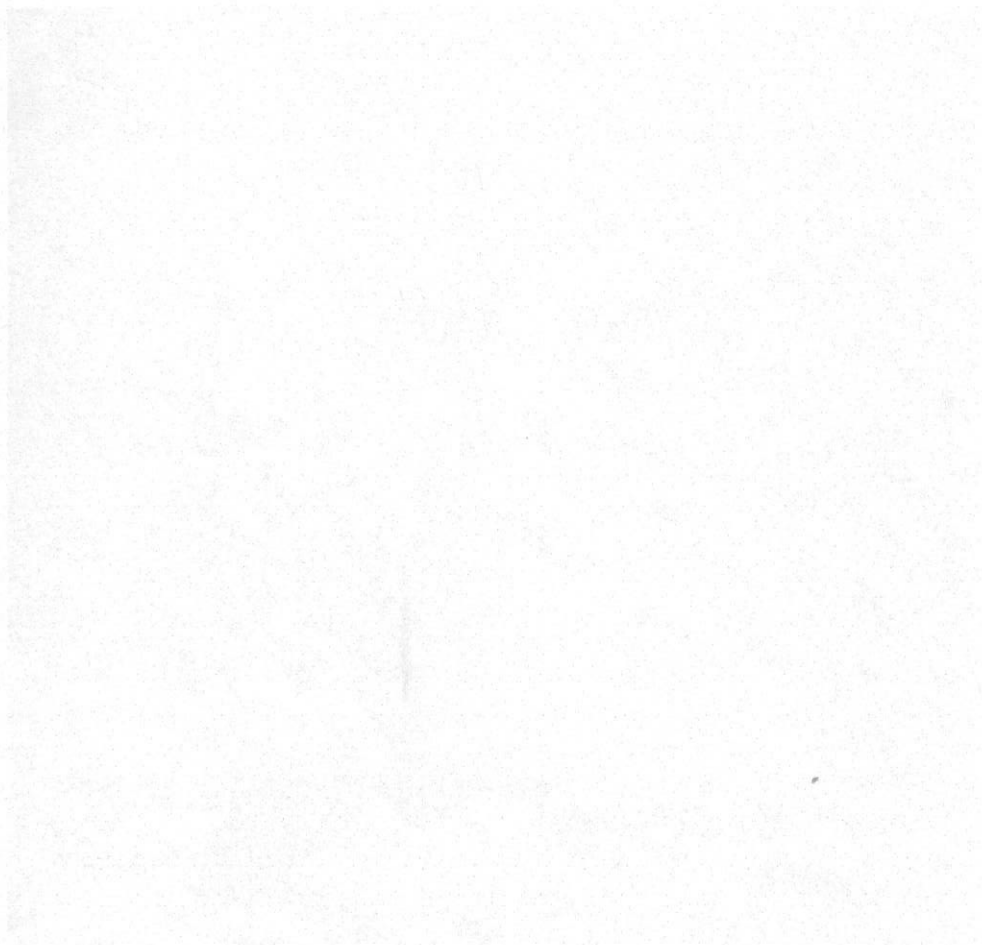
RICHARD SANDELL

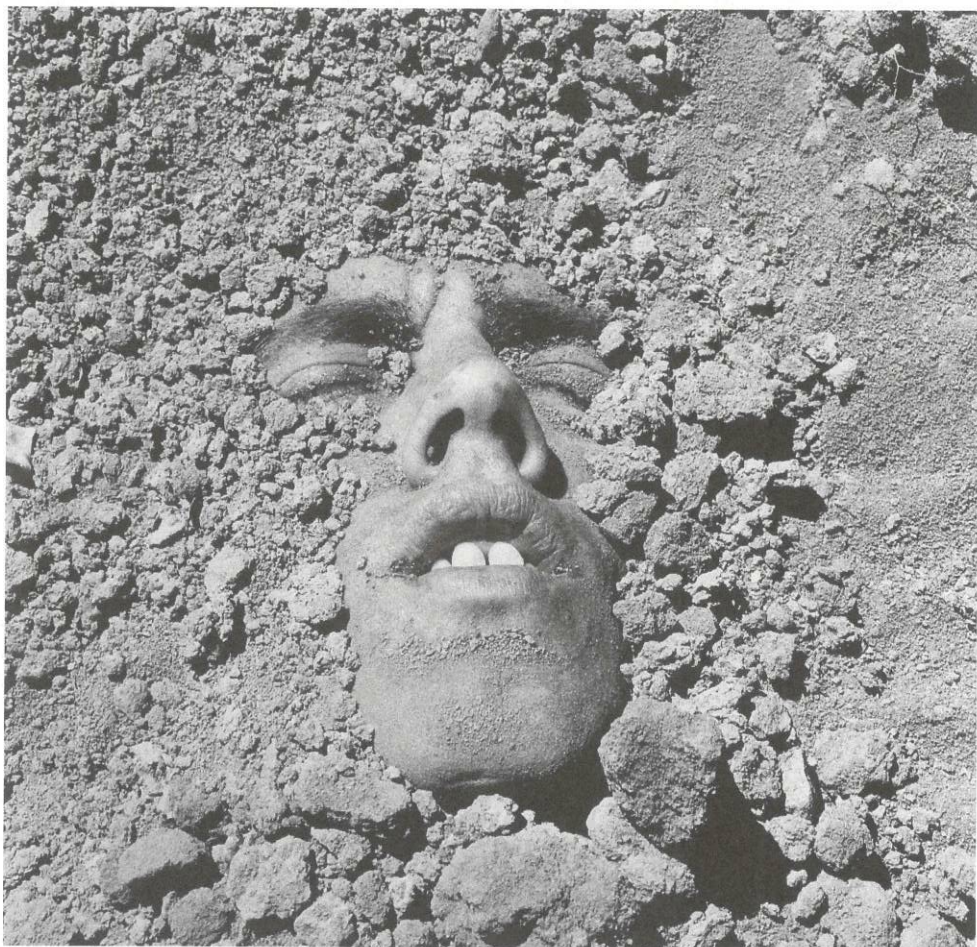
MUSEUM MEANINGS

MUSEUMS, MORALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Richard Sandell

*For Mike and Mike, Sally and Arnie, Kristi
and Chris – for speaking up*





FRONTISPIECE David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Face in Dirt)* (c. 1990). Silver Print. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.

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PREFACE

In 1993 when Neil Milner, manager of the contemporary craft shop at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery where I worked, passed away, friends and colleagues collected funds to commission a piece of work that would be donated to the museum in his memory. With the agreement of Neil's partner Andrew, ceramicist Karen Atherley was approached to create a beautiful bowl (Figure 0.1, Plate 0.1) that was subsequently given to the museum to become part of its rich decorative arts collection. Around the same time, plans were underway to radically transform the museum's displays. Galleries of ceramics, silver and glass – which had long been displayed in ways that appealed mainly to visitors with a specialist interest in and knowledge of decorative arts – were to be replaced with new displays that, by focusing on the diverse stories linked to objects, would be designed to appeal to a broader range of people, especially family audiences.

The first of the new galleries to be redeveloped – *Every Object Tells a Story* – opened in 1998 and re-presented objects from the decorative arts collections in a variety of new ways. The museum invited film makers Julius Ayodeji and Dan Saul to explore the wider history behind silver candlesticks depicting African slaves (exploring connections that had previously been neither acknowledged nor interpreted in the museum's displays); brought together numerous objects featuring birds and animals in an interactive Noah's Ark designed for young children; and commissioned a children's author to create a fictional tale inspired by one of the most popular objects in the collection, an eighteenth-century ceramic salt-glazed bear. At the heart of the gallery was a section entitled *Stories of Love*, introduced by a text panel that read:

Objects have the power to evoke strong emotions in people.

The objects in this section are symbols of the most powerful human emotion – love.

Different objects – different kinds of love.

Presented in the same case were just three objects: a pocket watch and love poem belonging to Private John Batty who died in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815; a child's jacket made by

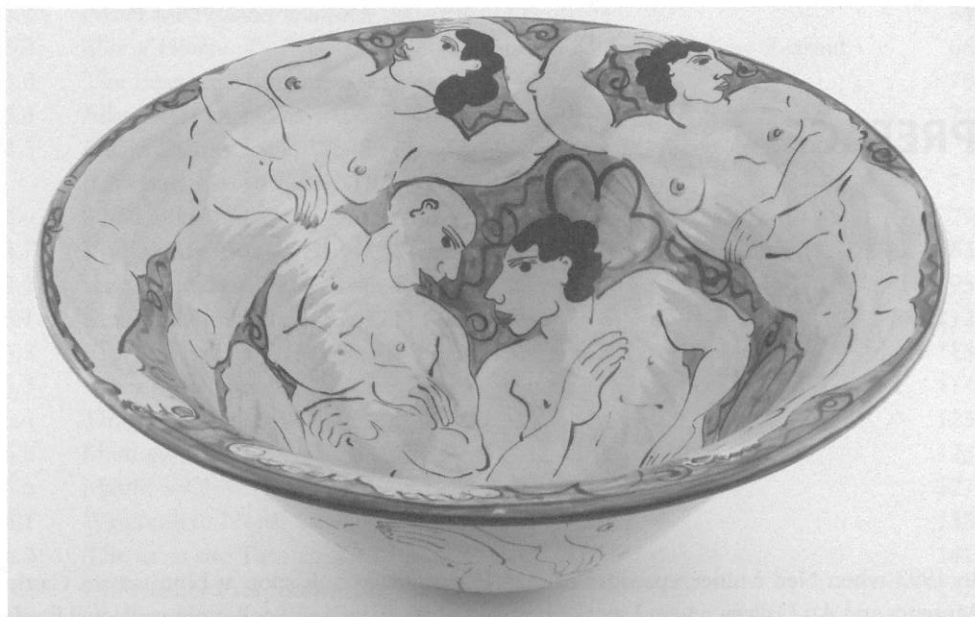


FIGURE 0.1 Karen Atherley, Ceramic bowl

Source: *Every Object Tells a Story*, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery. With kind permission of Nottingham City Museums.



FIGURE 0.2 Karen Atherley, Ceramic bowl

Source: *Every Object Tells a Story*, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery. With kind permission of Nottingham City Museums.

the Rabari people from the Kutch area of Gujarat; and the memorial bowl by Karen Atherley, recently acquired by the museum (Figure 0.2), that was interpreted through Andrew's moving testimony.

The design of the bowl really came from myself and what I got to know of Neil over the five years that we were together – the fact that he loved ceramics and Karen Atherley's work . . .

My definition of real love? Neil was the love of my life and we were very close and shared a hell of a lot. I used to work in my shop a lot more than I do now, but I had other things to look forward to then, so that didn't seem so bad. I used to work until 5 o'clock and Neil would come to the shop whenever he could. I just remember the happy hours at the end of the day, and Neil's little face coming past the shop window.

In the two decades since Neil's bowl first went on display a lot has changed. Narratives of same-sex love and desire have appeared in numerous museums around the world although these have very often been temporary and, sadly, relatively few have been integrated into spaces particularly designed for families (an issue I return to Chapter 6). Nevertheless, references to LGBTQ lives and culture in heritage sites, museums and galleries are, today, far more widespread than in the 1990s.

My experiences, as part of this small team concerned to present more inclusive stories that could reflect the lives, experiences and interests of diverse audiences, have proved influential in shaping my thinking and practice over the past twenty years and, similarly, have informed the research I have carried out for this book.

Terminology

Deciding upon which terms to use in a study of this kind is, as others have noted, fraught with complications (Stryker 2006; Historic England 2016). As Susan Ferentinos notes:

The words used to describe variant gender expression and sexuality are by no means universally agreed upon, nor do they even necessarily carry the same connotation from one region of the country to another (2015: 5).

Although the acronym 'LGBT' (to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) is widely found today, historians have highlighted the challenges involved in its use to refer to lives that predate the emergence of LGBT identities (as we understand them today) in the later decades of the twentieth century. Some communities have expressed a strong preference for the use of 'LGBTQ' (where the Q stands for queer) arguing that expressions of same-sex love and gender variance cannot always be neatly captured by the four familiar identity categories. Indeed, the reclaiming of the (once pejorative) term 'queer' and the flourishing of queer theory in the twenty-first century brought with it a rich potential to adopt language and ideas that directly challenged the limitations and essentialising tendencies associated with the categories lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. 'Queer' is helpful both for its capacity to unsettle these rigid identity markers – l, g, b and t – and for the radicalising possibilities inherent in its rejection of binary, either/or ways of describing sexuality and gender. Indeed, at key points in the book, I have found queer theory invaluable for exploring the challenges

posed by attempts to make gender and sexual diversity visible (in all forms) and yet unrestricted by narrowly defined labels.

At the same time, however, my central concern with exploring the museum's relationship with social movements makes reliance on the term 'queer' problematic; lawyers and policy makers as well as campaigners and activists throughout the world are much more likely to talk of 'LGBT rights' than they are of 'queer rights'.

Given these difficulties, I have adopted a variety of terms throughout the book. I use 'same-sex love and desire' when referring to the lives and experiences (past and present) of people who, today, we commonly refer to as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Drawing heavily on the language used by activists working across national boundaries, I use 'transgender' and 'gender diversity' when referring to

those with a gender identity that is different from the gender they were assigned at birth, and those who wish to portray their gender in a way that differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. Among them are those people who feel they have to – or who prefer or choose to – present themselves in a way that conflicts with the social expectations of the gender role assigned to them at birth, whether they express this difference through language, clothing, accessories, cosmetics or body modification. These include, among many others, transsexual and transgender people, trans men and trans women, transvestites, cross-dressers, no-gender, liminal-gender, multi-gender and genderqueer people, as well as intersex people who relate to or identify as any of the above.

(Balzer and Hutta 2012: 18)

Although mindful of the limitations inherent in their construction I often use the 'unwieldy, please-everyone/please no one mouthful of letters' (Gabriel 2008: 54) 'LGBT' and 'LGBTQ' because of their widespread presence in debates surrounding the themes and issues that are the focus of my research. For the most part I use LGBT when specifically discussing human rights and LGBTQ when discussing lived experience and identity – although these distinctions are not always possible. Although relatively few museum projects have included reference to intersex identities, I have also sometimes used LGBTI, where appropriate, in an attempt to acknowledge and lend support to the growing visibility of an intersex rights movement.

Despite my efforts to adopt language that is inclusive, as far as this is possible, I am aware that preferences differ from context to context and not all readers will be entirely comfortable with the terms I use.

Position and perspective

Any project that attempts, as mine does, to explore human rights issues that continue to provoke widely differing opinions among groups and individuals, across different settings and in different parts of the world, demands reflection and a degree of openness and transparency on the part of the author. The investigation of predominantly Western settings and cases linked primarily to LGBT equality struggles has inevitably produced a partial account and one that I have approached from my own particular view of the world.

Although I have been influenced by museum projects and rights struggles in many different parts of the world over the past decade or so – and include reference to these throughout

the book – the museums I have investigated in greater depth are all based in the United States or United Kingdom. Discussing these examples with students who come from very different cultural and geographical backgrounds, I am constantly reminded of the particular perspective through which I have approached the sites and subjects of my investigations. Mindful of these particularities, my aim has been to generalise, not to other settings but to a theory of the museum's relationship to human rights. While this theory emerges from highly localised investigations, it will nevertheless, I hope, speak to and hold relevance for museums engaging with diverse human rights themes and operating in wide-ranging contexts.

My decision to focus on same-sex love and gender variance is explained, at least in part, by my personal and professional experience as a museum practitioner and researcher who is gay, British and whose practice around wide-ranging equality issues has been informed by a concern for rights and social justice. I also write from a privileged position of someone for whom openness in professional life has been largely unproblematic. In twenty-first century Britain, with significant formal protection against discrimination for gay people and greater visibility in many areas of public life it is sometimes argued that disclosure is no longer necessary. Nevertheless, it seems important to me here, not least because my approach to the field of human rights is inevitably informed by my own identity and personal experience.

At the same time, although these are topics in which I have *personal* interest and experience, I would also argue that – beyond this – I have been drawn to investigate museums' engagements with these issues because they present particularly productive opportunities for researching the part that museums might play in relation to contemporary social movements and the moral and political climate within which such movements are advanced or constrained.

In many countries, not least the US and UK, the past two decades have seen enormous advances in equality on a number of fronts, resulting in significant legal changes affording protection from discrimination coupled with greater freedom of expression and respect for LGBT people in many aspects of life. At the same time, attempts to secure equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people have proved to be particularly contentious across many different parts of the world and, as I write this, the conflicts surrounding them remain a daily feature of international news.

While formally conferred equality has been achieved on a variety of fronts and become enshrined in legislation in many countries, prejudice and discrimination – as experienced by LGBTQ people on a daily basis – remain stubbornly persistent in many settings. Protests opposing efforts to secure marriage equality for lesbians and gays, for example, which have been staged across different parts of Europe and North America in recent years, have often given a public platform for extraordinarily hateful views. In recent years, a growing number of reports have revealed the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying in British schools (Guasp 2012; Guasp, Ellison and Satara 2014), and researchers in the US, Europe and beyond have consistently identified the negative impact of such experiences on young people's lives. The terrible consequences of this persistent and pervasive prejudice are, sadly, reflected in the findings of study after study into the high levels of suicide among LGBT youth (Haas *et al.* 2011; Strudwick 2014).

I have found analysis of the ways in which cultural organisations have portrayed transgender lived experiences particularly valuable as a way to explore the opportunities and potential challenges likely to be encountered by those museums engaging with rights-related issues that are especially current, unsettled and contentious and around which there may be limited public understanding and political consensus. Examples of museum projects giving particular

attention to transgender individuals or communities remain relatively rare although these have undoubtedly increased in recent years. In some countries – thanks to the efforts of trans activists and their allies – important gains in legally conferred rights for transgender people have been achieved yet, in many contexts, public awareness and support for trans equality significantly lags behind many other equality issues (Balzer and Hutta 2012), posing particular challenges for museums that have sought to portray gender variance in more progressive and respectful ways. It is only in the past two years that campaigners have raised the possibility of a ‘transgender tipping point’ – a fundamental shift in the way trans issues and trans rights are viewed by the public at large, opening up greater possibilities for equality and respect. Given this uncertain and fast-changing context, how might museums and other cultural organisations utilise their unique assets and capacity to shape and inform conversations around difference in building greater public awareness and political support for transgender equality?

Carrying out research with transgender community members, artists and activists in Scotland, during 2009–10, proved to be a tremendously impactful learning experience, through which I realised how little I had previously been aware of the impact of persistent and profound inequalities on the lives of transgender people. It is my hope that, by highlighting the role that museums potentially play in the advancement of rights for groups engaged in highly contested struggles, more museums will be encouraged to lend their support to efforts to advance transgender equality and respect.

The subject of human rights, as the examples throughout this book amply demonstrate, tends to provoke strong opinions on all sides. Those engaged in efforts to secure rights as well as those committed to withholding them are invariably convinced of the rightness of their own position, unable or unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of opposing arguments. As Signe Howell comments, ‘We appear unable to stand completely outside our core moral values, values so naturalized, so intellectually and emotionally embodied that they are integral parts of our sense of self’ (1997: 9). In the chapters that follow I attempt to confront and begin to work through the numerous ethical dilemmas posed by the presence in contemporary social and political life of these deeply entrenched competing world views, opposing moral agendas and contested human rights claims. Through this work, I hope to produce insights that assist museums in the extraordinarily difficult but critical task of nurturing a more respectful, fair and equitable society.

Richard Sandell
Leicester, May 2016

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PROLOGUE

29 January 2016

Hello Richard,

Thanks so much for getting in touch. I actually haven't thought about the Museum of Censored Art (Figures 0.3 and 0.4) in a while. It's funny to be reminded that five years ago this month Mike and I were huddled in an unheated trailer with so many people helping us in so many ways. Aside from actually putting the art on display, I think all the help from friends and strangers was the best part of the entire experience.

It was also amazing to have met some guys from ACT UP who knew Wojnarowicz when he was with the group back in the 80s and 90s. I was lucky to get that personal exposure to a part of gay history nobody seems to remember, or wants to remember. Those ACT UP guys don't put up with any shit. They ran several protests alongside our own. The Museum of Censored Art actually ended up as the informal headquarters for multiple branches of anti-Smithsonian activism during our short run.

I didn't know you teach curators. While one side of me is glad that someone is still watching the protest video, at the same time I'm still incredibly ashamed that a thing like this happened in the flagship American museum system, exactly the kind of place it shouldn't. Shame was (is) one of the main feelings I had about this whole episode. The other was disappointment.

I heard about the censorship at work when I was surfing the news at my desk. When the exhibit had opened about a month before, it was somewhat of a big deal in the news because it was the first gay and lesbian themed exhibit at a major US museum, and at the Smithsonian no less. As a gay person I was thrilled. I remember joking to my roommate that I'd better go see it before Congress yanked it out but, since it was already a reality, I let myself think it wouldn't happen. So when I read the news, I felt like crying. My face was hot, my stomach was in a knot. I felt like an official sign of acceptance and equality from my country had been taken away so that I could be put back in my proper place. I was despondent. Which seemed odd to me since I'm not an 'art guy' and hadn't even seen the exhibit, but I was despondent all the same.



FIGURE 0.3 The Museum of Censored Art, Washington, DC

Source: photographer: Ben Droz.

My main motivation was to refute the idea that gay people were not just as much a part of this country as anyone else. The Smithsonian isn't just a museum – it's the 'official' museum of the United States for better or worse. To be included in the Smithsonian is finally to have 'made it'. It's official – you deserve to be included and seen on an equal footing with everyone else in this country. That's what the religious bigots objected to, and that is why I was so devastated when the exhibit was censored. So I wanted to keep us there, every one of us, and if Wojnarowicz got kicked out, then I wanted him to be as close to the rest of the exhibit as possible. I also wanted people to be able to see the work and make their own minds up about it instead of having Congress or fundamentalist bigots do it for them. Plenty of people didn't care for it, but that was fine with me. We weren't there to make them like it; we were there to let them decide for themselves. What could be more American than that?

So since you teach future curators, could you tell them something for me? If they ever happen to be stuck between a rock and a hard place, and things are going to end up a mess no matter what, please tell them to have the courage to at least try.

Wow. I guess it doesn't take much to bring this all out again. Anyway, I hope you don't mind a little bit of the gay perspective. Somehow the Museum of Censored Art wasn't embraced by the gay community as much as by the art community and, as a non-artist, I sometimes feel like I have to explain that I'm just a gay who can't draw.

Well, enough with the walk down memory lane. Thanks for getting in touch, and good luck with your book.

Best,

Mike Blasenstein



FIGURE 0.4 Mike Blasenstein and Mike Dax Iacavone in the Museum of Censored Art, Washington, DC

Source: photographer: Ben Droz.

PROGRESS AND PROTEST

The iPad protestors take a stand

On Saturday 4 December 2010, Michael Blasenstein and Michael Iacavone entered the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, to protest the removal, a few days earlier, of a film by artist David Wojnarowicz – entitled *A Fire in My Belly* – from the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. The ‘iPad protestors’, as the media later referred to them, positioned themselves within the exhibition galleries, close to the entrance. Blasenstein played the four-minute video – removed by the Smithsonian’s Secretary, Wayne Clough, in response to a sustained campaign mounted by opponents including the Catholic League and Republican House Speaker, John Boehner – on an iPad, hung around his neck. Intrigued and sometimes bemused gallery visitors were handed flyers explaining the motivation behind this attempt to reinstate the censored artwork (Figures 1.1–1.3). Iacavone stood nearby, filming events as they unfolded amidst the visible and growing unease of the gallery’s security guards, until police officers arrived to remove the protestors¹ (Capps 2010).

As Iacavone (2016) recalls:

Mike Blasenstein was smart enough to come up with the idea of putting the video back where it belonged, and he asked for my help. Living in D.C., you become numb to protests, they happen all the time. I didn’t think that marching in the street and yelling at a building was going to accomplish anything. Putting the video back in the museum is exactly what needed to happen and, if the Smithsonian wouldn’t, then we would. We figured that this would get media attention, and that would lead to public awareness and that was what we wanted.

Hide/Seek, featuring more than one hundred artworks and spanning a century of portraiture, was the first large-scale exhibition in the Smithsonian’s history to explicitly explore gay and lesbian themes (Sullivan 2010). The exhibition had attracted critical acclaim and proved popular with visitors to the gallery since its opening on 30 October. However, when

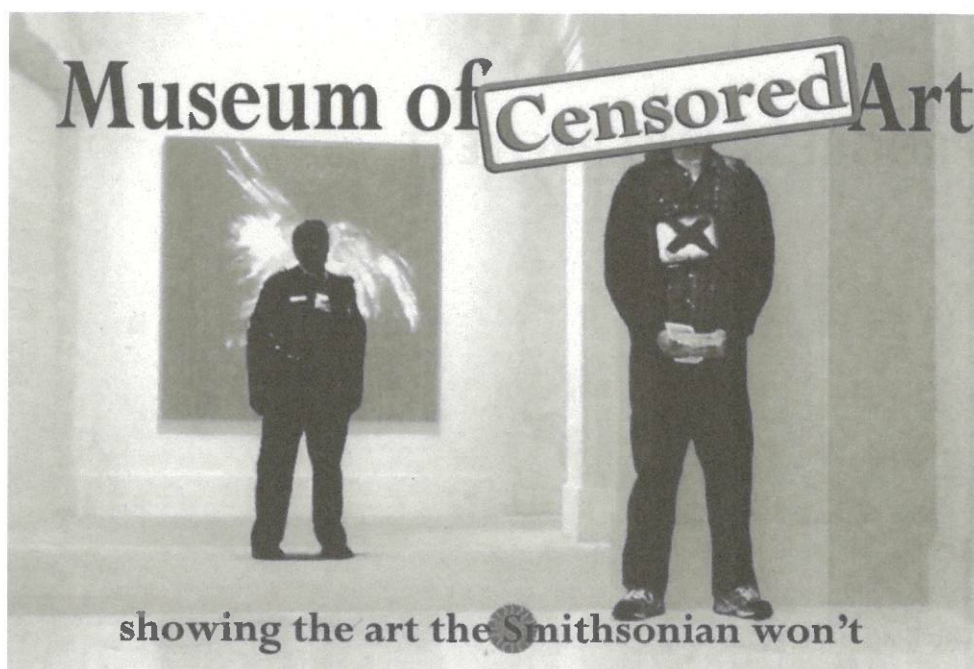


FIGURE 1.1 Postcard for the Museum of Censored Art.

Source: Image courtesy of Michael Dax Iacavone

Hide/Seek attracted the attention of the Catholic League,² which focused its objections on an eleven-second scene in Wojnarowicz's film of ants crawling on a crucifix, describing it as 'anti-Christian' (Catholic League 2010),³ reporting by conservative media soon prompted open and wide-reaching criticism of the gallery as well as questions from members of Congress over the gallery's funding:

'Absolutely we should look at their funds', Georgia Rep. Jack Kingston, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, told Fox News. 'If they've got money to squander like this – of a crucifix being eaten by ants, of Ellen DeGeneres grabbing her breasts, men in chains, naked brothers kissing – then I think we should look at their budget.'

(Fox News 2010)

Pressure quickly mounted for the Smithsonian to respond. 'Secretary G. Wayne Clough', *The Washington Post* later reported, 'immediately capitulated, overruled his own curators and forced the video's removal' from the exhibition, a decision later described as 'tactically, strategically and historically a disaster for the institution' (Kennicott 2010). Clough's decision, in turn, provoked anger from members of the public, the art world and LGBT activists, prompting a series of high-profile protests. Less than twenty-four hours after the video was removed, artist Adrian Parsons picketed the steps of the gallery with a handmade placard on which he had written 'National Censor Gallery'. Soon afterwards, the nearby independent,

I am standing here with this iPad around my neck...

...because politicians and pressure groups **don't want you to see** this work of art

...because this work's detractors **have every right** to interpret it any way they want

...because **so do you**

...because I'm tired of **people who know better** caving in to the hysterics of the misinformed

...because the time our politicians waste vilifying a dead man is time they should be seizing to **fix the problems of the living**

...because I never believed that the same forces that marginalized this artist **twenty years ago** would try to silence him today

...because I was **wrong**

...because by marginalizing the work of the marginalized from an exhibition about marginalization, **the censors themselves** have provided the **ultimate validation** of the artist's work

...because too many gay people—myself included—too often forget that any acceptance we enjoy today was paid for in **blood, bruises, and unimaginable suffering** by those who came before us

...because suffering is **human**

...because we are **human**

...because there are those who will **stop at nothing** to suppress that truth

...because I **refuse** to let them

...because **silence still equals death.**

FIGURE 1.2

Flyer (front) handed to visitors to the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, by the 'iPad protestors'

Source: image courtesy of Mike Blasenstein.

A Fire in My Belly, 1987 (excerpt). David Wojnarowicz. Music by Diamanda Galás.

The Images

David Wojnarowicz created this video in 1987 as a tribute to his colleague and lover, Peter Hujar, who died of AIDS that same year. The video contains some grisly images: Mummified bodies, bloody icons, lips being sewn shut, and 11 seconds of ants crawling on a crucifix. These images represent Wojnarowicz's feelings of isolation and marginalization as an openly gay man living with AIDS in the 80s — an era in which carriers of the virus were demonized. They are a *memento mori*, or a reminder of our mortality.

Adapted from <http://www.tbd.com/blogs/tbd-arts/2010/12/national-portrait-gallery-censorship-controversy-who-was-david-wojnarowicz-5383.html>

The Music

The music heard on the video is an excerpt from *The Plague Mass* by Diamanda Galás, which she composed in response to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. The words for the piece heard here, "This is the Law of the Plague," are taken from chapter 15 of the biblical book of Leviticus:

When any man hath an issue out of his flesh,
Because of his issue he is unclean
Every bed whereon he lieth is unclean
And everything whereon he sitteth, unclean.
And whosoever toucheth his bed shall be unclean,
And he that sitteth whereon he sat shall be unclean.
And he that toucheth the flesh of the unclean becomes unclean,
And he that be spat on by him unclean becomes unclean.
And whosoever toucheth anything under him shall be unclean.
And he that beareth any of those things shall be unclean.
And what saddle soever he rideth upon is unclean
And the vessel of earth that he touches, unclean.
And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, he is unclean.
Every garment, every skin whereon is the seed, unclean.
And the woman with whom this man shall lie with will be unclean.
And whosoever toucheth her will be unclean.
This is the law of the plague,
To teach when it is clean and when unclean.
And the priest shall look upon the plague.
For a rising and for a scab and for a bright spot.
And the priest shall shut up he that hath the plague.
He shall carry them forth to a place unclean.
He shall separate them in their uncleanness.
This is the law of the plague:
To teach when it is clean and when it is unclean.

Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diamanda_Galás

FIGURE 1.3

Flyer (reverse) handed to visitors to the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, by the 'iPad protestors'

Source: image courtesy of Mike Blasenstein.

artist-run Transformer Gallery showed *A Fire in My Belly* in their storefront window, followed by a silent protest march to the National Portrait Gallery (Figure 1.4) where Parsons projected the video on its façade (Trescott 2010).

Several weeks later, the iPad protestors returned having raised \$6,000, this time with permits from the city's authorities granting them permission to park a trailer outside the National Portrait Gallery that would house the *Museum of Censored Art* which, as the banner strapped to the side of the trailer prominently proclaimed, would be 'showing the art the Smithsonian won't' (Capps 2011). The temporary museum remained in place until the closure of *Hide/Seek* in the adjacent gallery and featured, once again, the removed Wojnarowicz video accompanied by information detailing the story of the censorship, a time line and discussion of the roles played by the Smithsonian Institution and various pressure groups. The opening panel that greeted visitors inside declared the temporary museum's purpose and the position of those who had created it:

What is the Museum of Censored Art?

This museum exists to:

Restore the art censored by the Smithsonian to the exhibit from which it was removed

Keep art censored by the Smithsonian visible and accessible to the public

Hold the Smithsonian accountable for its actions. [. . .]



FIGURE 1.4 Protestors walk across town and gather outside the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

Source: photograph by The Washington Post. Getty Images.



FIGURE 1.5 Visitors inside the Museum of Censored Art

Source: image courtesy of Mike Blasenstein.

We feel that Clough made a wrong and shameful decision to marginalize the work of an already marginalized gay artist from an exhibition whose very theme is marginalization. We are showing the video here so visitors to 'Hide/Seek' will still be able to see the exhibit in it's entirety. We also encourage you to see the rest of the Hide/Seek exhibit in the National Portrait Gallery right outside this museum.

The tiny but prominently positioned Museum of Censored Art attracted many visitors (Figure 1.5) who had heard about the controversy in the media. On 6 February 2011, the Museum's Twitter feed stated:

Smithsonian info desk guy came in to find out where the 'trailer art' is, b/c museum visitors keep asking where to find us!

And, on the day the exhibition closed, further announced:

Feb 14 was our last day – we were thrilled to have welcomed 6,476 visitors over 4 weeks. Thanks for the ride everyone and stay tuned!

News reporting was extensive throughout the run of *Hide/Seek* (and the Museum of Censored Art) as regional, national and subsequently international news journalists followed the numerous twists and turns in the tale and continued long after it closed in Washington in February 2011. The story received renewed impetus when *Hide/Seek* later opened at the

Brooklyn Museum in November 2011 (with the Wojnarowicz video work reinstated)⁴ and again when Clough's departure from the Smithsonian in 2014 was announced (Scott 2013).

Reflecting on the long-standing silence within US museums and galleries on the topic of same-sex love and desire and the many obstacles he faced in developing *Hide/Seek*,⁵ the exhibition's co-curator, Jonathan David Katz, lamented the Smithsonian's censorship in an interview in the UK's *Guardian* newspaper, shortly after the video was removed. 'When', Katz asked, 'will the decent majority of Americans stand against a fringe that sees censorship as a replacement for debate?' (Logan 2010).

Ironically, while those who called for and sanctioned the removal of Wojnarowicz's film may have hoped to contain the controversy, the events surrounding *Hide/Seek* – fuelled by the extensive media coverage – stimulated and animated public debate. News websites reporting on the events were host to extensive, often heated, discussions among audiences. The comments posted after some news articles ran into several thousand in number and page after page of commentary as readers, viewers and listeners argued (with varying degrees of passion and eloquence) about the exhibition's perceived merits and failings, the dangers of (and need for) censorship and were prompted to share their own thoughts on such topics as gay and lesbian equality and the rights of religious groups to freedom of speech.

The scale and tenor of the discussions between participants in these online forums, it might be argued, is suggestive of the strength of public feeling surrounding the issues posed by the *Hide/Seek* censorship. It might also be argued that these extensive debates are evidence of the museum's capacity to reach, engage with and stimulate responses among much larger and more diffuse audiences than those who visited the exhibition in person. This potential for the museum to potentially influence audiences beyond those who visit – to ignite debate and inform public opinion – is an important issue and one to which I will return.

Museums, moralities and human rights

My argument throughout this book is that museums, heritage sites and galleries are entangled with human rights in ways that are often unacknowledged and poorly understood. Through their displays and exhibitions, their interpretation, promotional activities, educational programmes, events, tours and other forms direct engagement with visitors, they construct, publicly present and disseminate narratives that have implications for the ways in which human rights are experienced, continually sought and fought for, realised and refused. These narratives are encountered not only by visitors but by diverse constituencies beyond the institution's walls, circulated through the media, informing public opinion and stimulating debate. By bringing together the perspectives and experiences not only of those who work in, govern, fund and visit museums but also those of rights activists and campaigners, I show how these museum narratives have influence on human rights processes and impact the lives of those engaged in rights struggles. By tracing the social and political consequences that stem from decisions made in every day museum work, I argue that museums, galleries and heritage sites of all kinds have opportunities and obligations to support the advancement of human rights for all.

Recent decades have seen significant advances in LGBT rights in many parts of the world and museums have become increasingly open to including narratives of gender diversity and same-sex love within their exhibitions and interpretation. At the same time, the issue has very often inspired fierce opposition, frequently, though not exclusively, from groups who

base their resistance to greater rights for LGBT people on the basis of their religious beliefs. As a result museums increasingly face situations in which competing moral visions of the good society must be negotiated. Where human rights claims revolve around these fundamentally clashing moral positions, it is no longer appropriate, I conclude, for museums to operate as impartial observers or spaces for dialogue in which alternative viewpoints are respected, aired and debated. Rather they must, as far as is practically possible, be prepared to take sides and speak out unequivocally against attempts to justify unequal treatment of people on the basis of gender or sexual differences.

In the remainder of this opening chapter, I explain the particular ways in which I am using key concepts – activism, human rights, moralities and ethics – that underpin my overarching aims, arguments and approach as well as present a rationale for the methods and cases I have used in my investigations.

Activism and the museum

I chose to open with *Hide/Seek* since it vividly illustrates many of the key concerns of this book. While the exhibition – and the controversy surrounding it – represents an especially high-profile and well-known case, the challenges experienced by the staff of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery will nevertheless resonate with many practitioners in museums across the world who have, over many years, been involved in projects (addressing diverse themes and topics) that have proved challenging to either locally defined normative moral values or to powerful interests with competing agendas. Although more than twenty years ago, I vividly recall the anxieties my colleagues and I at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery experienced surrounding the lead up to the opening of an exhibition of work by contemporary artists exploring the impact of HIV when local news journalists contacted conservative church leaders and politicians in a purposeful, though ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to prevent the exhibition from opening to the public.

As museums have increasingly sought to take on contemporary, social justice-related issues – and to (explicitly and implicitly) take up particular moral standpoints in place of seemingly neutral and objective commentary (Janes 2016) – so these kinds of experiences, in which staff find themselves at the heart of moral dilemmas and negotiations marked by controversy, contestation and sensitivity, have become more commonplace though, for those caught up in them, no less difficult to deal with (Bruce and Hollows 2007; Hollows 2013).

This book then, investigates how museums – through the decisions that are made regarding the narratives they construct and publicly present – play a part in shaping the moral and political climate within which human rights claims and entitlements are continually negotiated, secured and denied. Museums, I argue, have moral agency as sites within which the ethical norms that frame human rights negotiations are articulated, continually recast and disseminated – a capacity to contribute to broader processes of social and political change that is relatively underexplored and poorly understood in both museum studies and the field of human rights.

Through an empirical focus on gender variance and sexual diversity – specifically the ways in which museums have presented (as well as overlooked, marginalised, erased and misrepresented) the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people – the book has two overarching and interlinked aims.

1. First, it seeks to shed light upon the complex negotiations through which narratives pertaining to gender variance and same-sex love and desire have come to be constructed and presented in museums; and
2. Second, it attempts to trace the social, moral and political consequences of these portrayals for both those engaged in attempts to secure LGBTI rights and for society at large.

While a number of the cases explored in this book have generated intense media and public debate, the starting point for my inquiry is not controversy per se (although, as we shall see, news reporting and public engagement with media reports are important for thinking through the ways in which museums might be understood to exercise and extend their social and moral agency). Rather, I am interested in examining how museums – through the decisions that are made regarding the narratives that are constructed and publicly presented – can reinforce, challenge or potentially reconfigure prevailing normative ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, fairness and injustice.

Such decisions are frequently made in museums of all kinds, whether they concern which social groups are included and highlighted in the museum's collections and displays and which are (purposefully or unwittingly) omitted or marginalised; how groups engaged in attempts to secure equal rights are portrayed; or how competing claims between groups are acknowledged and mediated. Although the consequences that flow from these decisions are diffuse and challenging to capture and measure, museums – I aim to show – are nevertheless caught up with and importantly *contribute to* a complex mix of human rights talk and processes. These contributions constitute a form of social and moral agency through which museums play a part in shaping societal values, normative ideas about fairness and the political conditions in which marginalised and oppressed groups' attempts to secure equal rights can be negotiated, enacted, granted and denied.

I am interested then in exploring the idea of the museum as a site for activism, a staging ground for efforts by a range of different groups with wide-ranging (sometimes conflicting) agendas and interests, to bring about social and political change or to advance and seek to elicit broader support for a particular standpoint. Understood in this way, activism – in the case of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition – might be used to describe not only the actions of the iPad protestors (whose creative interventions sought to both highlight censorship and to assert the rights of LGBT people to recognition, respect and fair and equal representation in the public realm) but also the Catholic League (whose actions might be understood – depending on your personal and political standpoint – either as an attempt to protect the rights of Catholics or a determined strategy to undermine gay rights). Importantly, I also include in this definition of activism, the actions of the staff of the National Portrait Gallery. The efforts behind the decision to mount the Smithsonian's first major exhibition that highlighted and celebrated same-sex love and desire can also be understood as activist – part of a broader trend within museum thinking and practice to purposefully deploy the resources of the museum to effect positive social change (Sandell and Dodd 2010; Orange and Carter 2012; Janes 2016).

As we shall see in the examples that are threaded throughout this book, it is not uncommon for all parties involved in controversies, whichever side of the argument they support, to view themselves as occupying the moral high ground – as fighting to maintain or advance that which is inherently and unquestioningly right and for the collective good. One of the challenges for museum staff engaging with social justice and human rights issues concerns the process of arbitration in situations where rights claims are competing and where different constituencies hold conflicting visions of the good society.

For many museum professionals and commentators, the term 'activism' has unwelcome associations with bias, campaigning, advocacy and forms of direct action that are perceived to be entirely at odds with the museum's position as an institution trusted for its balanced and non-partisan presentations. However, I have found the concept helpful for understanding and analysing the processes at play in contemporary museum practice and, particularly, for shedding light on the multiple influences that inform the narratives shaped and publicly presented by museums. The concept of activism highlights the inherently political character of the processes through which moral standpoints – on a variety of issues – become embodied in museums. It directs us to examine not only the finished product – the exhibitions, displays and galleries that ultimately open to the public – but also the complex of 'behind the scenes' negotiations inevitably bound up in the messy process of exhibition-making (Macdonald 2002; MacLeod *et al.* 2012).

Finally, understanding certain events and episodes as forms of activism encourages us to look behind the anonymity of the authoritative institution to see the individuals that participate in those processes as purposive agents. It enables us to begin to understand how these individuals' personal values, beliefs and agendas intersect with broader structural and social forces in shaping the exhibitions – and the moral standpoints those exhibitions embody – that visitors (and larger secondary audiences reached via the media) subsequently encounter, engage with and respond to.

The social, political and moral agency of museums

Over the past few decades, a growing number of museum and heritage organisations and projects throughout the world have developed exhibitions and experiences that individually and collectively 'make a resounding appeal for the protection of human rights' (Duffy 2001: 10). In varied ways, these sites have deployed a discourse around human rights, equality and social justice to frame their approach to, and interpretation of, wide-ranging contemporary and historic events, including the Holocaust, the transatlantic slave trade, South African apartheid, periods of political oppression in Argentina, Taiwan, Chile and other topics inspired by the experiences of individuals and groups active in the new social movements that emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century. As Jennifer Carter observes, a new form of museum has taken shape comprised of institutions that, 'make human rights concepts, stories and practices the core of their institutional mission, curatorial praxis and exhibition and programming initiatives' (2015: 208). These new museums have appeared in many different parts of the world.⁶ The global interest in the potential for museums to explore human rights themes (and to potentially lend support to human rights causes) is reflected in the rapid growth in membership of networks such as the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the Federation of International Human Rights Museums.⁷

Against the backdrop of these newly emerging museums, it is also possible to discern increasing interest among existing diverse museums of art, science and history in projects or practices that reflect a more active engagement with rights-related issues – a trend that suggests a growing openness, at least in some organisations, to developing narratives that take account of contemporary rights struggles (Sandell 2007; 2012; Message 2012, 2014). Exhibitions and displays, purposefully designed to engage audiences in debates around rights-related issues pertaining to women, indigenous and minority ethnic communities but also to faith groups, disabled people, sexual minorities and, more recently transgender communities, have appeared in wide-ranging museums.

The potential of museums to operate as sites for presenting human rights and social justice-related themes and material, and engaging audiences in debates related to these, has been subject to considerable professional and academic attention, including conferences that have provided opportunities for reflecting on the challenges inherent in such work and a growing body of empirical research that has analysed the ways in which audiences respond to such initiatives (Cameron 2007; Dodd *et al.* 2010).

While numerous accounts have revealed the inherently political character of museums (Karp and Levine 1995; Macdonald 1988; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Luke 2002) and the capacity for museums to inform visitors' thinking and attitudes related to contemporary social issues (Sandell 2007; Dodd *et al.* 2010), relatively less attention has been given to exploring the relationship between museums and contemporary social movements and, more particularly, the potential for museums to not only reflect but also *to act upon* – to influence – the moral, political and social climate within which human rights struggles unfold.

More recently, research attention has begun to shift away from an internally-focused concern with museum practice (the processes and inherent perils of contemporary collecting, exhibition-making and visitor engagement around social justice themes) towards a greater concern for understanding the political, ethical and moral work of the museum within a broader social and political landscape (Barrett 2011; Carter and Orange 2012; Gouriévidis 2014; Message 2014). Sandell and Dodd (2010), for example, through their analysis of the ways in which museums have sought to respond to shifting conceptions of disability arising from a global disability rights movement, highlighted the emergence of an 'activist practice' in museums – an increasing awareness among practitioners that museum activities have social effects and political consequences coupled with a growing concern to harness the museum's agency to lend support for a range of human rights-based causes. Dodd *et al.*'s empirical study of audience responses to a range of museum projects intended to influence attitudes towards disability found that, while visitors engaged with the ideas they encountered in diverse ways, it was nevertheless possible to discern patterns in how visitors were prompted to speak about physical and mental differences, informed by the rights-based narratives they found in the museum. Studies such as this support the notion that museums can not only be sites that host and stimulate conversations among and between visitors pertaining to human rights themes, but they can also shape and inform those discussions (Sandell 2007).

A small number of studies have attempted to draw links between museums and the potential for their practices to impact broader rights-related activities by marginalised groups. For example, anthropologist Howard Morphy's (2006) analysis of exhibitions at the National Museum of Australia reveals the ways in which they are tied up with claims by Aboriginal groups for basic rights including access to the land and sea. Similarly, Marzia Varutti's (2012) account of Taiwanese museum practices considers their relationship to broader attempts by indigenous groups to secure governmental recognition. Kylie Message's ground-breaking study of the National Museum of American History (2014) is a further example of this recent interest in exploring the entanglements between museums and political life beyond the institution. Her analysis reveals the story of curatorial activism within the Museum's Division of Political and Reform History that evolved in response to the African American and American Indian civil rights and social reform movements that took place on the Mall in Washington, DC in the 1960s and 70s. Her historical analysis of change within the Smithsonian (and of shifts in museum thinking and practice more broadly) offers new insights and suggests new lines of inquiry into the contemporary political significance of museum and heritage institutions.

Indeed, Message argues that while museum studies has been increasingly preoccupied with the relationship between culture on the one hand and politics on the other, the field has nevertheless struggled to 'identify and then conduct research at the actual interface between politics and museums' (ibid.: 23). In other words, while there is widespread agreement that museums are inherently political, there is rather less understanding and consensus around their political agency and significance – the ways in which museum activities *actually impact social and political life*.

This book seeks to contribute to this emerging area of investigation through interdisciplinary analyses of a series of empirically grounded cases. I am concerned with both the ways in which ideas about human rights are negotiated and realised in museum exhibitions and other forms of public communication and, crucially, in tracing and seeking to understand the effects and consequences of these negotiations *beyond the institution*. I aim to understand how activists, visitors and audiences more broadly perceive and engage with museums and to trace the moral, social and political implications that flow from decisions made in museums that pertain to ideas about right and wrong, fairness, equality and justice.

The choices we make

Sometimes museum staff make these decisions with an awareness of their larger significance and import, with an appreciation of their potential to confront widely held and deeply entrenched values and beliefs. The staff of human rights museums, sites of conscience and other heritage sites linked to contested histories, for example, must generally consider their actions with full awareness that the institutional context within which they operate brings with it a degree of scrutiny by governments, interest groups and the media (Busby *et al.* 2015). For this reason, they have also attracted increasing attention from researchers interested in exploring the museum's engagement with human rights themes and issues. However, the danger with focusing on the specialist and unusual is that it directs attention away from the everyday and ubiquitous.

Human rights museums, heritage sites of conscience, and museums that tell the stories of marginalised and oppressed groups are undoubtedly experimenting with some of the most exciting approaches to audience engagement in the museum world internationally. However, I have chosen to focus my research on the human rights implications bound up with the daily practices of art, history and science museums that do not have a specific human rights mandate – institutions ranging in size, presenting diverse collections and stories and located in a variety of political and cultural settings. Through the particular blend of case studies and examples I explore throughout the book, I aim to show how it is not only those institutions that are directly engaged in addressing histories with clear social justice and equality-related implications whose actions will impact upon groups and individuals engaged in contemporary struggles for equality. Rather, as we shall see, museums of all kinds are engaged in 'human rights work' irrespective of intention and institutional mandate.

Understanding and investigating human rights work in the museum

To assist with the considerable challenge of tracing and analysing the social and political effects and consequences of museum actions, my approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on and

synthesising theory from social anthropology; philosophy; cultural, media, social movement and museum studies. I bring together concepts and methods from these fields that, I propose, hold rich potential to illuminate and critique the moral and ethical work of museums. In conducting the research for this book, I have been particularly inspired and heavily influenced by social anthropological studies that have generated grounded, richly detailed investigations of the complex ways in which global and local conditions combine to shape how political struggles are framed and human rights are claimed, including the relationship of these processes to localised moral norms (Wilson 1997a; Wilson 1997b; Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001; Wilson and Mitchell 2003). Borrowing and adapting the methods used in these social anthropological studies of human rights I attempt – through a variety of case studies and contextual examples – to unravel and make sense of the myriad forces and factors that shape the museum, to better understand the institution's significance in social and political life.

Museums of all kinds, I argue, are part of the political and moral apparatus through which human rights claims and entitlements are continually sought and fought for, realised and refused. Their significance, however, as places within which the moral and ethical norms that frame such negotiations are forged, continually recast and disseminated, has been largely overlooked in the broader human rights literature.

Human rights in the everyday

Recent decades have seen the development of a vast literature on human rights emerging from a variety of disciplines from philosophy to education, political science to law. This body of work engages with human rights through a variety of lenses generating, for example, historical accounts of the emergence of conflicting visions of rights across time and space, analyses of how such visions have come to be translated into national and supra-national legislation and policy, and sociological perspectives on the new social movements of the last sixty years. Across this extensive interdisciplinary field, rights have often been treated as abstractions; decontextualized from the settings in which they are negotiated, applied and experienced. The macro-theoretical and legalistic accounts that have predominated in the field have tended to focus attention on the instruments (conventions, treaties, laws and policies) and institutional apparatus (for example, nation states and supra-national agencies), through which rights are formally conferred. Such approaches, as Wilson (1997a: 15) has argued, have a propensity to obscure 'the untidiness of everyday life', neglecting to grasp the complex ways in which rights are negotiated and realised 'on the ground' and overlooking the lived experiences of individuals and groups whose rights are denied and violated.

A focus on the ways in which rights are formally articulated and conferred (for example, in legislation or policy) neglects the everyday experience of social groups for whom such formal recognition constitutes only a part of the struggle for equal rights. For example, while rights regimes at a supra-national level and in many nation states have evolved to *formally* recognise the entitlements of women, indigenous groups and minority ethnic and religious groups, such formal recognition does not, of course, preclude rights violations, the denial of opportunities for individuals to exercise and enjoy the full range of rights, and the myriad manifestations of discrimination that mark the lived experience of members of these groups on a daily basis (Wilson and Mitchell 2003).

In response, over the last two decades some social anthropologists have set out to generate new insights through studies that attempt not only to capture the complexity of rights

talk and processes in specific settings but also to recover real-life experiences of everyday struggles. These 'ethnographies of rights' have sought to generate rich and nuanced accounts of the ways in which rights are negotiated, drawn from multiple sources and feature a plurality of voices and perspectives. As Wilson states, these accounts '[show] humans replete with feelings, engaged in their brute material existence and enmeshed in the complexities of their social world . . .' (1997a: 15) and, in doing so, they powerfully reveal how rights are not simply abstractions, codified in a variety of legal instruments, but rather can be understood as 'grounded, transformative and inextricably bound to purposive agents' (Wilson 1997b: 155).

In-depth studies of rights processes within specific settings are valuable, as we shall see, for their capacity to reveal the ways in which human rights are *experienced in everyday life* and how they are produced out of a process of ongoing negotiation between *local* agendas and interests on the one hand and, on the other, a *global* rights discourse that transcends local and national boundaries (Cowan *et al.* 2001). Grounded, in-depth investigations, as social anthropologist Richard A. Wilson (1997b), has argued, are both helpful and necessary for capturing the richness and complexity of rights talk and processes that legalistic accounts have tended to neglect (1997: 170).

The field of anthropology has also proved useful to my analysis in other ways. The contradictions and tensions within human rights as a set of ideas – that have provoked and sustained fierce debates among anthropologists for more than half a century (including, for example, the tensions between universalism and cultural relativism, and between individual and collective rights) – have proved to be valuable tools with which to explore how museums have operated, how they have been viewed by different groups engaged in rights work and, importantly, how they might arbitrate in situations involving competing rights.

I should make clear at this stage that despite their prominence within the arguments I present in this book, I am not wedded to the notion that human rights are the *only* way of achieving fairness. Discussions with students and practitioners from many different parts of the world have served as frequent reminders of the cultural specificity, the limitations and flaws of the human rights project. As Marie-Benedicte Dembour (2001: 70) points out:

We must accept that there are a *number* of worthwhile visions of how to achieve human dignity. The problem is that the human rights discourse tends to think of itself as the only one.

However, despite the limitations of the human rights project and mindful of the presence, in every culture, of alternative ways of conceiving of justice,⁸ I have found myself repeatedly drawn back to the concepts, frameworks and language of rights as a productive means of making sense of the moral imperatives caught up in museum work.

Universalism and cultural relativism

Over the past few decades, human rights have become 'one of the most globalised political values of our time' (Wilson 1997a: 1). Imbued with an 'emancipatory aura' (Cowan *et al.* 2001: 1) and capable – at least at an abstract level – of engendering remarkable levels of support among diverse social groups, political constituencies and agencies at local, national and supra-national levels, the language of human rights has found its way into almost every aspect of

daily political, social and cultural life throughout the world. At the same time, although the language and idea of human rights can be found virtually everywhere, it is worth remembering that human rights violations are similarly ubiquitous (Lukes 1993).

The abstract idea of human rights – as a set of values, norms, beliefs and an ethical framework through which equality, respectful co-existence and fairness can be pursued – enjoys almost universal support (Mahoney 2007), with explicit denials of the value and importance of supporting human rights appearing with relative rarity in the public sphere. However, despite this support, efforts to claim or confer rights at the local level are invariably fraught with complexity and rarely proceed uncontested. Attempts to redraw the boundaries that distinguish those on whom rights are conferred and those from whom they are denied – whether formal and explicit (for example, in equality legislation and government policy) or tacit and implied (for example, in the decisions made regarding whose histories, cultures and lives are publicly celebrated in cultural institutions) – frequently provoke fierce debates. The tactics and counter-strategies employed by staff within the Smithsonian Institution, the Catholic League and LGBT activists around the *Hide/Seek* exhibition – and the public and media attention they generated – reflect the (often overlooked and underestimated) significance of settings – such as museums, galleries and heritage sites – within which rights might be symbolically or implicitly conferred.

For political theorist Jack Donnelly, the broad appeal of human rights across cultures and their capacity to generate support between groups with potentially competing moral value systems is explained in large part by their ‘moral universality’ (2003) – the idea that a shared set of universal rights are naturally held by all human beings irrespective of the conditions in which they live and the institutional structures (legal, political and social) which may govern their lived experience. This universal appeal is, no doubt, an important factor in explaining the global proliferation of museums and heritage projects that explicitly adopt the human rights frame to present their diverse subjects (Sandell 2012).

While claims regarding the moral universality of rights have undoubtedly wielded considerable influence, they have also prompted vehement debate among rights activists and researchers. Within social anthropology, sustained support for a cultural relativist position – one that advocates a respect for cultural differences and insists that moral standards and values only be judged within their own particular context (Donnelly 2003) – has been used to challenge the universal human rights project. Indeed, during the second half of the twentieth century, many anthropologists explicitly argued for a relativist standpoint – understood as an ethical position that expressed ‘solidarity with the weaker populations of the globe’ (Hastrup 2003: 18) – one that privileged respect for cultural differences and rejected the very idea of universal standards of justice. Some proponents of cultural relativism further argued that efforts to assert the universality of human rights and advocate their global application could, in fact, be viewed as an imperialist project; an attempt by the West to present – as natural and morally superior – a highly particular set of values and to impose them onto other cultures⁹ (Rapport and Overing 2000; Wilson and Mitchell 2003).

More recently, however, the last two decades have seen growing criticism of cultural relativist standpoints. Increasingly high-profile instances of human rights abuses in many parts of the world, accompanied by growing global interest in social justice, has fuelled support among anthropologists for the view that a pure relativist position is morally indefensible. Critics have argued that attempts to maintain a cultural relativist perspective on situations in which rights (as understood from a universalist standpoint) are being violated, ‘has morally nihilistic,

politically conservative and quietist consequences' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 166). Indeed, critics of cultural relativism have highlighted numerous instances of appalling rights violations to support their argument that 'the noble anthropological goal of seeking to understand others in their own terms' (ibid.) cannot and should not be used to sidestep the making of moral judgements regarding the cultural and social practices of some groups that unquestionably oppress, harm and disadvantage others.

More recently, developments within social anthropology have challenged the binary of universalism versus relativism that has typically divided researchers into two polarised camps. Progress has been made to move beyond the impasse created by the view that these positions are inherently irreconcilable and instead to view the tension between them, 'as part of the continuous process of negotiating ever-changing and interrelated global and local norms' (Cowan *et al.* 2001: 6). As a result, even the most ardent supporters of the idea of rights as universally held must acknowledge, engage with and attempt to understand the basis of localised moral value systems that potentially work against the securing of rights and which influence the local conditions that shape both the process and outcome of political struggles. Similarly, supporters of a relativist position must recognise the value of seeing equal rights for all as an ideal standard towards which efforts can be directed, even where such claims inevitably clash with local traditions and long-established norms.

This constant interplay between universalism and relativism is important for our understanding of the part that museums might play in the processes through which rights are claimed and resisted. Indeed, many of the controversies examined in this book can be explained, at least in part, by attempts made by museum practitioners to align their institutions with a progressive understanding of rights (shaped by support for the idea of universal values) which confronts local (typically more restrictive, sometimes discriminatory), normative moral standards and prevailing ideas about which select groups are deserving of full and equal rights.

Rights as mutable and dynamic

Enshrined in numerous laws and international conventions, human rights possess an aura of enduring immutability; an impression of relative stability, an uncompromising resistance to negotiation and a rhetorical capacity to reject any efforts that threaten to question their intrinsic value or undermine their claim to universal relevance and application. However, despite the rhetoric of universalism and immutability, human rights – as experienced by those engaged in everyday struggles to secure them – are, of course, shifting and dynamic, continually shaped and reshaped by an ongoing interaction between a global discourse of shared and inalienable rights for all, on the one hand and, on the other, local interests, agendas and moral norms. Indeed, on a daily basis throughout the world, attempts by marginalised groups to claim rights that have previously been denied frequently stimulate counter claims and protests. For example, soon after supporters of the LGBT rights movement in the United States were celebrating the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that awarded same-sex couples the right to marry, news soon emerged of a backlash and a suite of efforts that questioned the validity of the ruling and sought to undermine it. This is but one example; we only have to look at the news every day for situations that reflect this constant push and pull of rights negotiations. Human rights, for some at least, are always in play and never to be taken-for-granted. As Theodore Downing (1988: 13) states:

At every level, people continuously codify and modify, clarify and obscure, adopt and reject, interpret and reinterpret propositions concerning what ought to be proper human interaction.

This understanding of human rights, as not cast in stone but rather as subject to shifting negotiations and interpretations, highlights the situated and contingent nature of rights processes and language. Although the abstract idea of rights as held universally by all human beings across space and time represents an alluring *ideal* – which nation states, individuals from differing backgrounds and groups with diverse value systems can potentially support – any attempt to claim, inscribe or exercise rights is necessarily both temporally and geographically situated (Donnelly 2003). Donnelly's historical account of the evolution of specific rights regimes¹⁰ helps to illustrate their shifting character:

women and nonwhites were until well into [the twentieth] century widely seen as irreparably deficient in their rational or moral capacities and thus incapable of exercising the full range of human rights. These racial and gender distinctions, however, were in principle subject to moral and empirical counterarguments. Over the past several decades dominant political ideas and practices in Western and non-Western societies alike have been transformed by national and international movements to end slavery and, later, colonialism; to grant women and racial minorities the vote; and to end discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and gender. A similar tale can be told in the case of Jews, non-conformist Christian sects, atheists, and other religious minorities.

In each case, a logic of full and equal humanity has overcome claims of group inferiority, bringing (at least formally) equal membership in society through explicitly guaranteed protections against discrimination. Signs of difference that previously were seen as marks of moral inferiority and grounds for justifiable subordination have been excluded from the realm of legally and politically legitimate discriminations (228).

The logics and legitimation of rights

The 'logic' to which Donnelly refers – the basis on which rights claims are made and the means through which such claims gain ground – is another important concept and one that, I would argue, holds relevance to our investigation of the moral work and ethical agency of museums. Legal scholar, Richard Falk (2009), identifies a number of 'competing normative logics' that form the basis for identifying and conferring rights. Under a *statist* logic, for example, individual nation states assert the right to their own sovereignty in determining how rights are applied and to whom. Under a 'supra-national' or transnational logic, the power to determine rights is claimed by or placed with institutions that cross national boundaries, such as the European Union or United Nations.¹¹ A 'populist' logic, on the other hand, 'rejects the necessary authority of states – if not all such self-perpetuating institutions – and seeks to derive rights instead from "the people"' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 163). Finally, there is what Falk refers to as a 'naturalistic' logic of rights, which bases its authority on the claim that rights are integral to human nature and should, therefore, be universally applied and recognised. The interplay between these various competing logics can be detected in several of the cases explored throughout this book.

Understanding these various logics – the foundational basis for authority that each makes – is helpful in thinking through how museums in different contexts might justify their standpoint on contested rights claims. How might an exhibition exploring sexual diversity and gender variance navigate between rights formulations produced out of statist and supra-national logics where, for example, the former excludes transgender people and the latter includes them? What challenges and opportunities are presented by attempts by a museum to lend support for the rights of a group that may be recognised by national or transnational laws but which might not enjoy popular support at a local level? Such distinctions direct our attention towards seeking to understand the relationship that particular museums have with public opinion – mainstream, popular or dominant moral values and sentiments. What importance, in deciding which groups are granted rights and which are denied, should institutions engaged in rights processes place on public opinion? To what extent might museums be understood to reflect these populist values and in what circumstances might they seek to challenge and reconfigure them? Such questions are highly pertinent to our discussion of museums – and the positions they adopt on human rights issues – at a time when more consultative, democratic, participatory and co-creative ways of working are increasingly highly valued and pursued by professionals in the cultural sector.

If (as I have previously argued) museums might sometimes seek to adopt a position of ethical leadership on rights-related issues (Sandell 2007) – one which attempts not to reflect dominant public opinion but rather to build support for rights struggles that may enjoy limited popular support – what forms of authority and legitimacy can potentially inform such a position? How might museums arbitrate where human rights claims clash? How might a seemingly arrogant position – one that rejects a populist logic of rights – be defended and how, in very practical terms, can it be reconciled with genuine attempts in many institutions to move away from didactic modes of presentation and to build more participatory relationships with visitors? I return to these difficult questions throughout the chapters that follow. First, however, it is necessary to consider how the museum's role in relation to the negotiation of constantly evolving rights language, discourse and processes might be empirically investigated.

Moralities and everyday ethics

Rights, as we have seen, are always in play, contested and emergent. As ethnographic accounts reveal, the processes through which rights are negotiated are not confined to or solely governed by those institutions that have the capacity and status to formally confer, deny or withdraw rights. Rights processes are framed not only by the apparatus of national and supra-national rights agencies (through equality laws, conventions, policy statements and the like) but also by the far less visible moral codes and ethical norms; the everyday claims and counter claims through which notions of fairness and equality are negotiated by individuals in daily life. It follows, therefore, that to understand the effects of human rights (and their absence), we must direct attention not only to legal, governmental and public policy arenas (where equality laws and policy statements can be readily identified) but also to the lived experiences of those for whom rights are denied, contested or uncertain.

As Richard Falk (2009: 8) has argued:

It has always been important to distinguish the discourse of law from complementary discourses of politics, culture, ethics and religion. The legal architecture of international

human rights has been established by formal legal texts negotiated and ratified by governments and sovereign states, as well as by the institutions and procedures for implementation that have been given an intergovernmental role within the United Nations or elsewhere. Politics and culture plays a large part in exerting pressures for and against implementing particular norms contained in these texts, as do ethical standards and religious attitudes.

It is necessary here to briefly clarify my use of the overlapping terms 'morality' and 'ethics'. While efforts are sometimes made (notably within philosophy) to use the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in rather different ways, these distinctions are rarely applied in a consistent manner, leading to considerable confusion (Lambek 2010: 9). For some, morality is more closely associated with rules, conventions, prescriptions and propriety – with how people *ought* to behave. In contrast, ethics has tended to have a greater association with freedom of individual thought, action and conduct – with 'the good' rather than 'the right' (ibid.: 9–11). This distinction is sometimes extended to associate 'ethical' with the emancipatory work of progressive thinkers and activists while 'moral' is linked with the hegemonic and the oppressive domain of political institutions (Dave 2010: 370–1). While mindful of these associations, for the most part I follow Lambek and others who use the terms interchangeably to refer to the multiplicity of ways in which notions of right and wrong, fairness and injustice are imagined, expressed and enacted.

I have found Signe Howell's use of the term 'moralities', in its uncommon plural form, particularly valuable in framing my approach to the cases, settings and situations explored in this book. If morality can be understood to refer to the 'the moral order, values and practices [in a] particular given socio-cultural setting' (1997: 11), use of the term moralities, points to the presence of multiple (sometimes conflicting) ways of understanding and expressing right and wrong, good and bad, just and unfair that co-exist in any society. These different visions of the good society and the correct way to live can be detected in not only the instruments and apparatus through which human rights are formally determined but also in the everyday acts of individuals trying to do what they believe is right. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the ways in which these moralities comingle, interact and collide in and around the museum are illuminating for our understanding of the role that museums play in human rights processes. Identifying and making sense of these competing ideas of fairness, Howell acknowledges, presents significant methodological challenges, that no doubt help to explain the relative dearth of in-depth empirical studies of moralities in different settings.¹²

As Wilson (1997a, 1997b) has argued, explorations of the ways in which rights come into being might productively resist a narrow and discrete focus on legal or political domains (for example, assessing how rights are inscribed in anti-discrimination laws or government policies), where their ethical rulings are relatively explicit, highly visible and easy to access. Rather, as Michael Lambek and Signe Howell have both persuasively argued, it is necessary to appreciate the ways in which ethics and morality are also profoundly *ordinary* and *pervasive*, stitched into our everyday lives. If we seek to understand the ways in which morality is constituted and brought to bear on the circumstances in which human rights struggles take place, then it is necessary to look not only at those domains within which ethical ideas are explicitly and formally articulated but also to attend to those everyday settings and interactions that are often overlooked, to examine 'the ethical entailments of speech and language, to the fine discriminations among, and weighty consequences of, what we say and do' (Lambek 2010: 6).

In the museum settings I explore, therefore, I am less concerned with the formal ways in which the moral and ethical is inscribed by the institution (ethical codes of conduct, mission statements, policies and so on) and instead focus attention on the informal, sometimes intangible, ways in which moralities are exercised. Responding to Lambek's call for an acknowledgement of 'the ubiquity of the ethical', I explore the everyday interactions, utterances and pronouncements that occur in and around the museum to examine their ethical implications. I attend to the things that individuals (museum practitioners, activists, visitors and so on) say and do in their everyday lives and attempt to trace the consequences (sometimes slight, sometimes profound) that flow from these words and actions. Placing the spotlight on the everyday is also useful for its potential to reveal 'underlying moral assumptions and premises' (Howell 1997: 4); tacit and dynamic understandings of right and wrong that may be hidden from view and harder to capture than those moral positions and values that are formally, explicitly and publicly expressed.

I look behind the frequently anonymous institutional façade of the museum and expressions of morality embodied in policy, public programmes and exhibition narratives to better understand the multiple moral positions that come together to influence such formal articulations. This concern with the myriad ways in which human rights potentially imbue daily working life in the museum reflects Falk's call for 'personalizing the practice and protection of human rights by locating freedom and responsibility in the countless daily decisions each of us makes about the treatment of others' (2009: 8).

My intention is to investigate the ways in which expressions of rights take shape and come to be publicly communicated in the museum, for example, through decisions made about exhibition programming, object selection and placement, the words used in labels and interpretive panels, public and media engagement and so on. Similarly, I look at the ways in which diverse constituencies engage with and respond to these expressions of rights. By including the perspectives, experiences and personal testimonies of individuals within and outside the museum I aim to shed light on the ways in which museum actions impact lives. Including and making use of these highly personalised accounts, as we shall see, also begins to open up the possibility for understanding the role of emotions in human rights processes. As Craig Calhoun (2008: 291) has argued, attending to the sometimes highly emotive language such accounts contain, enables us to better see how 'moral norms and injunctions come to have force' and how, in some settings, efforts are made to utilise and appeal to emotions to make certain ethical and moral positions more compelling and persuasive than others.

Tracing influence beyond the visitor

Any attempt to understand the potential influence of the museum on human rights processes, and the conditions within which rights are continually negotiated, cannot be restricted solely to studies of exhibition visitors. As Corinne Kratz has argued, the ideas embodied within exhibitions are widely disseminated beyond those who visit and experience them first hand, 'through visitors' interactions, conversations, press reviews, influences on future exhibitions, and other traces that stretch far beyond the exhibition itself' (2002: 96).

In response to one of the first hostile news stories to be published on the *Hide/Seek* exhibition – an article on conservative news website, CNSnews.com, entitled 'Smithsonian Christmas-Season Exhibit Features Ant-Covered Jesus, Naked Brothers Kissing, Genitalia, and Ellen DeGeneres Grabbing Her Breasts'¹³ – readers were quick to respond and comments

(reflecting wide-ranging opinions) soon numbered more than 3,000 as views were heatedly exchanged:

this is what our taxpayer dollars pay for??? It sucks . . . and it's not art . . . it's satanic! I wish Americans could fill out a ballot every year and vote on which organizations we REALLY want to fund with our tax dollars. Can you imagine our politicians having to vote exactly as the majority says! Now THAT would be a miracle!

(Narniagirl55)

I can say as a fairly conservative individual that I find these controversial images fairly disturbing. However, as a citizen of a democratic, non-totalitarian nation, I can say that I do not believe it should be censored. The artist was trying to make a point about society and to raise concerns about an invisible group of struggling people with AIDS. Ironically, while his film has become widely known for its pornographic and religiously offensive portions, it seems that all of the people who are reacting so violently to it are forgetting its point and continuing to not notice the group he's trying to bring awareness to. Do I think this film should be shown on TV? No. Do I think that it is inappropriate for children? Absolutely. However, that is no reason to suppress it from a museum or to criticize it in a blatantly homophobic and fundamentalist fashion.

(UW)

The culture wars have returned! I'm SOOO excited!

(Bee)

The extent to which audiences took up opportunities to discuss the Smithsonian's actions is a reflection of the enormous changes in the mediascape that have taken place in recent decades. A proliferation of media forms arising from digital innovation has produced media-saturated environments offering myriad, seemingly limitless opportunities for audiences to access information (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). At the same time, our understanding of media-audience relationships – of how people experience media – has undergone dramatic transformations. In our media-saturated world, it would be misleading to situate audiences as bombarded by media and passively consuming whatever they encounter. Rather, we know that audiences are selective in the way that they attend to different media, paying close attention to some sources while ignoring or questioning others (*ibid.*).

Moreover, audiences are increasingly active in their engagement, expecting and sometimes demanding opportunities to participate; to not simply read, watch or listen but to interact with media, sharing their own responses and exercising their own (sometimes morally loaded) judgements of events as they unfold. These shifts in media-audience relationships and, in particular, the turn towards more participatory, co-created media experiences through which audiences are encouraged to contribute as much as they consume, as we shall see, have considerable implications for our understanding of the part that museums might play in shaping the climate within which human rights are claimed, challenged and denied.

For most museums, audiences are understood to comprise not only the people that walk through their doors but also those visitors who access their experiences through the museum's website. What is perhaps less well understood are the ways in which more diffused audiences encounter the museum and engage with the moral standpoints embodied in its narratives,

for example, those hearing about an exhibition through word-of-mouth via friends and family or through media reports on television and radio as well as the online discussions these encounters might prompt. Individuals who may have never visited the National Portrait Gallery nevertheless have easily accessed opportunities to participate in online discussions debating the Smithsonian's first exhibition in its history devoted to the theme of same-sex love and desire – and the subsequent decision to bow to conservative opposition to the exhibition. It can be argued that the museum's influence – the institution's capacity to stimulate and potentially inform individual conversations and the tone and content of broader public debate – extends beyond visitors to the gallery to larger and more diffused audiences.

These online forums offer a potentially fruitful data source for exploring audience responses to museums and the moral positions they adopt, capturing and making publicly available conversations that might otherwise be lost or difficult to elicit by researchers. At the same time, a degree of caution is required. While we have a good understanding of the ways in which museum visitors respond to and engage with the moral positions embodied in the exhibitions they *physically* encounter within the museum (Cameron 2007; Sandell 2007; Kelly 2010), we know rather less about the museum's capacity to inform the ways in which these more diffused audiences (who hear about and engage with museum projects remotely through word-of-mouth, news reports and so on) perceive, think and talk about moral issues. Nevertheless, the public discussion boards of internet-based media offer a tangible glimpse of the many ways in which museums' morally invested practices become stimuli for both media and public debate.

Questions and chapter outlines

My central concern is to explore what role museums might play in the advancement of human rights, in contributing to the good society – one based on principles of equity, fairness and justice for all. The more specific questions I aim to address throughout the chapters that follow are ones that have come to increasing prominence in museum practice in recent years. Some concern the internal workings of museums, heritage institutions and galleries, for example:

- What factors shape the processes through which rights are negotiated and made publicly visible in cultural institutions through displays, exhibitions, events and other forms of communication?
- How do museums respond to the differentiated (morally invested) interests of diverse groups in society and, more particularly, the grievances and conflicts that can arise from these?
- Should museums attempt to assess the relative merit of different moral standpoints and choose between competing rights claims? If so, on what basis might such decisions be made and defended?
- How can museums negotiate the difficult territory between globally framed (often more inclusive and cosmopolitan) understandings of social justice and locally inscribed (frequently more exclusive and conservative) rights regimes?
- Why, at a time of increasing visibility in the public realm, are some LGBTQ lives and experiences less visible than others in museums, particularly those of Black and minority ethnic gay and transgender people who continue to experience some of the most pernicious forms of discrimination? What might be the implications of these biases and how might they be addressed?

Other closely related questions that have received relatively less attention are concerned primarily with exploring the impact, implications and consequences of museum practices *beyond* the institution.

- What social effects and consequences stem from the ways in which different audiences engage with the moral positions they perceive and encounter in the work of museums?
- What influence – if any – can museums be understood to have on public opinion and debate, on the kinds of conversations that society has about equality, fairness and justice?
- More concretely, how might museums contribute to the reconfiguring of boundaries that distinguish those who enjoy full rights from those engaged in contemporary, everyday rights struggles?

These questions are pursued through a series of grounded, in-depth investigations. I use a variety of sources – archives, interviews and audience responses – to explore the agency of museums, galleries and heritage sites not only from the perspective of the institution (staff, governing bodies, funders and visitors) but also, importantly, from the perspective of activists and community members engaged in efforts to advance LGBTI rights, whose perceptions of museums, and experiences of engagement with them, have rarely been examined.

Chapter 2, 'I am he that aches with love', looks in depth at a small museum in the United States – the Walt Whitman Birthplace in Huntington, Long Island. I focus on the events leading up to the controversy that surrounded the opening of a new interpretive centre in 1997 and, in particular, a single exhibition panel that considered Whitman's personal life and relationships. I use this case to develop my argument that it is not only specialised institutions with an explicit and purposeful concern for human rights that find themselves caught up in – responding to and impacting – broader struggles for equality. Rather, as the case study reveals, numerous acts, choices and decisions that have social and political implications for human rights are sometimes tucked into the daily working lives of practitioners in museums with diverse collections, locations and purposes.

Chapter 3, 'Coming out stories', considers the changing ways in which museums, galleries and heritage sites have treated LGBTQ experience and identity. I am interested here in exploring how decisions come to be made in museums regarding whether and how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives are disclosed and discussed in their displays and public programmes and in understanding the factors that influence such decisions. Through this discussion, I also attempt to draw out the political implications that potentially stem from different interpretive treatments, for LGBTQ communities and rights activists as well as for museum visitors.

In 'Taking sides', Chapter 4, I turn attention to institutions that have explicitly sought to explore – and lend their support to – LGBTI rights. I look, in particular depth, at the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland and a major project intended to stimulate and shape public debate around the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people to explore how globalised ideas of human rights were appropriated, resisted and recast by the museum's staff in relation to (and through negotiation with) more conservative, locally situated, moral norms and conventions.

Chapter 5 – 'Museums and the transgender tipping point' – opens with the example of a recent exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool in the North West of England – *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady* – that represents a still-rare example of a museum project that attempts to

offer visitors a nuanced and substantive exploration of transgender lived experience; one that takes full account of the contemporary struggle for transgender visibility and awareness.

Although such progressive representations of transgender lives – told from the perspectives and through the voices of trans people – remain rare in museums, there have been a small but growing number of examples in recent years, reflecting an increasing trans-visibility across many areas of public life. How might these positive portrayals of transgender lives within museums be understood in relation to broader efforts to secure the rights of transgender people? How might museums be viewed and utilised by activists seeking to bring about change? To what extent might such representations be understood to not only inform the ways in which visitors perceive, think and talk about transgender phenomena, but also to act, more broadly, upon coercive and restricting gender norms that are deeply rooted in the everyday contexts within which transgender people attempt to claim and exercise their rights as equal members of society?

This chapter addresses these questions by drawing on the perspectives, insights and lived experiences of transgender individuals during a period that, many have argued, has been especially critical in the ongoing battle for trans equality. This attempt to privilege trans perspective and experience constitutes an attempt to resist a narrow, museum-centric concern with matters of representation (how people and groups are portrayed) in favour of a perspective that is grounded in the lived experience of those engaged in a struggle for rights (how individuals might perceive and use museums in their broader efforts to secure equality). These highly personalised narratives – so often absent from legalistic accounts of human rights struggles – are important for understanding how rights are negotiated and experienced.

This chapter reveals how museum actions can involve the drawing of symbolic boundaries, marking inclusions and exclusions, legitimating the rights claims of some groups and potentially occluding or denying those made by others. As the chapter shows, museums have a unique capacity to lend weight and legitimacy to highly personalised narratives and to give them visibility within the public sphere. Moreover, an analysis of visitor responses reveals the capacity for such personalised life accounts to prompt emotional responses in museum visitors, responses that as theorists are increasingly arguing – are important means through which new social movements gain ground.

The final chapter, 'Museum work as human rights work', draws together the insights generated by the case studies in previous chapters to discuss the ways in which museums are implicated in the construction and ongoing negotiation of moralities. Museums emerge as institutions with particular features – including high levels of public trust and visibility within the public realm – that shape the climate within which equal rights for all can be envisioned, enacted and realised. Museums do not simply reflect and respond to normative ideas about rights-related matters. Rather, the narratives they present through their exhibitions and displays are generative – capable of shaping the conversations that society has about difference and also helping to establish and challenge the ever-shifting moral and ethical climate within which actions and behaviours towards minority groups engaged in human rights struggles are sanctioned and permitted.

I focus in on questions posed by museums' increasing engagement with and attempts to support LGBT rights. How should museums respond to situations in which moralities clash where, for example, LGBT rights are contested by religious groups? What principles might be used to navigate such situations and how might these be applied in practice? How is museum practice reconfigured by collaborations with activists and the development of

purposeful attempts to build public support for new ways of seeing and thinking about gender variance and sexual diversity?

Conclusion

Across the diverse cases I explore, I aim to show how it is not only those museums with a specific mandate to address human rights whose actions have implications for groups and individuals engaged in struggles for equality. Rather, as we shall see, human rights are implicated in the work of *all* kinds of museums – of different sizes, with diverse collections and operating in a variety of social, political and cultural contexts. In these numerous museums of history, art and science, everyday decisions made in the course of museum work have social consequences – effects that may be unanticipated, perhaps less apparent and, in some situations, less likely to be scrutinized by rights activists but are nonetheless as powerful as those made in high-profile human rights museums, memorial museums and historical sites of conscience.

Notes

- 1 A film of the events, later posted online by the iPad protestors, began with the following introduction; 'On Nov 30, 2010, the Smithsonian removed a video by gay artist David Wojnarowicz from the National Portrait Gallery, caving in to pressure from anti-gay groups and threats of "budget scrutiny" by incoming House speaker John Boehner. We believe that Americans should be free to form their own opinions about art – and everything else – without the "help" of politicians or pressure groups. On Dec. 4, we brought the now-censored art back into the museum so people could make up their own minds about it. This is what happened . . .'
- 2 The Catholic League describes its purpose as defending ' . . . the right of Catholics . . . to participate in American public life without defamation or discrimination' (Catholic League 2016).
- 3 The Catholic League's decision to base their protest around the inclusion of an artwork they deemed to be anti-Christian, rather than to explicitly oppose an exhibition themed around (and sympathetic towards) same-sex love and desire, was widely viewed as a strategic move to enhance support for their campaign. In a press release issued on 30 November 2010, the Catholic League President, Bill Donohue, stated:

According to Penny Starr of CNSnews.com (2010), David C. Ward, co-curator of the National Portrait Gallery, says the video, "A Fire in My Belly," is one of the "masterpieces" of this exhibit. We call it hate speech. Perversely, there is a plaque at the entrance to the exhibit that says the gallery is committed to "the struggle for justice so that people and groups can claim their full inheritance in America's promise of equality, inclusion, and social dignity." Somehow Christians didn't make the cut.

- 4 Writing following the opening of *Hide/Seek* at the Brooklyn Museum in 2011, Culture Critic for the *Washington Post*, Philip Kennicott, contrasted the exhibition's reception in Washington, DC and New York and reported the ultimately failed attempts by opponents to have the Wojnarowicz work once more removed.

What a difference a year, and 230 miles, makes. On Nov. 18, "Hide/Seek" reopened at the Brooklyn Museum, with the Wojnarowicz video reinstated . . . The usual people made the usual noises before the Brooklyn opening, but the drama played out very differently. A back-channel effort to censor the show by Brooklyn Catholic Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, who wrote a private letter to the museum's board president asking that the video be removed, failed to gain traction. The Catholic League issued increasingly vitriolic statements about the show, saying that Wojnarowicz, who succumbed to AIDS in 1992, "died of self-inflicted wounds." But unlike Clough, the Brooklyn Museum's Director, Arnold Lehman, refused to take the bait.

(Kennicott 2011)

- 5 For example, Katz reported that securing exhibits for loan to the exhibition has been especially difficult 'because neither museums nor collectors want their artworks associated with homosexuality – which would (it is assumed) detract from their dollar value' (cited in Logan 2010).
- 6 As Carter identifies, 'There are now institutions either newly inaugurated or in the planning stages, that self-identify as human rights museums in Chile, Paraguay, Belgium, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Pakistan and Indonesia, in addition to a Federation of International Human Rights Museums (FIHRM) in Liverpool, United Kingdom, with an even broader membership base' (2015: 208), which includes major national museum institutions such as Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of New Zealand alongside a rich mix of smaller sites across the world (Federation of International Human Rights Museums 2015).
- 7 The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience was formed in 1999 with nine members and, by 2014, had nearly 200 members – historic buildings, heritage sites, museums and initiatives concerned with memory and remembrance – in fifty different countries. Members sign up to a collective vision that states; 'We are sites, individuals, and initiatives activating the power of places of memory to engage the public in connecting past and present in order to envision and shape a more just and humane future' (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience 2014). The Federation of International Human Rights Museums, 'encourages museums which engage with sensitive and controversial human rights themes . . . to work together and share new thinking and initiatives in a supportive environment. The ethos underpinning the FIHRM initiative is that all types of museums within these fields of work, regardless of size or resources, share similar challenges in dealing with difficult, politically-loaded, and controversial subjects' (Federation of International Human Rights Museums 2015).
- 8 See, for example, Pannikar (1982).
- 9 For a fuller discussion of this argument see, for example, Mutua (2002).
- 10 Such regimes are comprised not only of the formal apparatus through which rights are constituted such as legal frameworks and government policies but also, for example, the cultural and social norms that frame the ways in which minority interests and perspectives appear in and are excluded from museums, galleries and heritage sites.
- 11 As Rapport and Overing (2000: 163) point out, 'there is also a "transnational" logic pertaining to non-state, non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, or the Worldwide Fund for Nature, which yet claim the right to monitor behaviour on a global scale whoever the protagonist'.
- 12 A notable exception is Arlene Stein's (2003) extraordinarily rich account of the conflict over sexuality, faith and civil rights that emerged in a small US town in the late 1990s.
- 13 See Starr (2010).